

**Independent higher education educators in England: Tutors  
behavioural characteristics preferred by mature students on business  
management courses**

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## **Abstract**

This research study focuses on identifying the behavioral characteristics desired by mature students from their educators/lecturers/tutors in an Independent Higher Education provider within the UK. The study utilises a mixed-method approach, employing a non-experimental and sequential explanatory design consisting of two phases. The first phase involves a questionnaire survey, while the second phase comprises semi-structured interviews with the students, aiming to gather both detailed and general insights into the students' perspectives on the expected behavioral characteristics of their educators. The findings of this study reveal both commonalities and differences in the attributes of lecturers as identified in the quantitative and qualitative findings. In both sets of findings, it is evident that students prefer personalised learning experiences, with an emphasis on lecturers recognising their unique strengths, valuing individuality and providing positive feedback. Additionally, the qualitative findings highlight the significance of patience, empathy, and problem-centered teaching as highly valued traits of a lecturer according to the students.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the complexities involved in educating mature students within the UK Higher Education sector. It emphasises the importance for Higher Education practitioners to comprehend the expected behavioral characteristics of these mature students from their educators. The study also highlights the scarcity of research in this area, as existing literature on adult education and andragogy is often generic and independent of specific contexts.

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**Keywords:** Independent higher education, Mature students, Behavioral characteristics, Educators, Personalised learning, Problem-centered teaching.

## **Introduction**

This article explores behavioural characteristics students expect of an educator, as there is paucity of research on this area and there are no training standards requiring adult educators to have certain behavioural characteristics and values. Uddin (2022) argues that the vast majority of Higher Educational professionals are aware of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for teaching and supporting learning in Higher Education (Higher Education Academy, 2011), however, the UKPSF is a framework for all higher education providers and it is not

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designed as a curriculum; therefore, it does not specify the most appropriate skills, competencies, capabilities, knowledge, values and desired dispositions required to be effective.

Research (Papé, *et. al.*, 2022) elaborates on a number of reasons students select educational preferences, from which a main theme to emerge is the high importance of personal attributes of tutors in the tutor-student dyad and particularly, how students characterise HE educators by personal attributes possessed (Efiritha *et. al.*, 2014). Teaching mature adults requires a special approach as they differ from young adults in relation to their sources of motivation, their social and professional circumstances, their reasons for seeking education and their experience and expectations (Uddin, 2023). Thus, this article addresses the behavioural characteristics and attributes expected of adult educators, so that as a mediator and facilitator for learning, adult educators can use the research findings allowing them to reflect on personalities, behavioural dimension of education in addition to curriculum and academic infrastructure.

Xerri *et. al.*, (2018) highlight the importance of developing tutor-student relationships and facilitating positive student-student relationships, so as to improve students' engagement. Research on key attributes of HE educators is conducted globally and findings are amalgamated in six key categories by Barnes & Lock (2010), as rapport, communication skills, dynamic delivery, organisation, preparation, knowledge and credibility of the educator, fairness. Granitz, *et al* (2009) suggests rapport hinges the relationship between an educator and a student profoundly and when well enhanced, ensues benefits including greater learning and engagement on the part of the learner as it affects class atmosphere and augments other attributes in turn (Chireshe, 2011). Further research (Lang, 2007) proposes an effective Higher Education educator is expected to be well-organised and each lecture is fully prepared with clear structure or plan how the lesson including course objectives will be formulated and conclude to augment transparency in teaching and learning, thus enhancing students' focus.

## **Methodology**

### *Mixed Method Research and Research Instruments*

As an output of an existing research project, the authors use a mixed-methods approach, with the explanatory sequential design in two phases of an initial quantitative instrument phase, followed by a qualitative data collection phase. The qualitative phase builds partly on the results from the quantitative phase and partly on any gaps that appear to be emerging

in the quantitative findings. For the quantitative phase, a survey questionnaire is used with four independent nominal variables to capture the age, gender, ethnicity, years of academic experience and previous academic qualification. There are seven dependent variables which enlist several attributes and behavioural characteristics of adult educators. To prepare the survey questionnaire, the researchers undertook literature reviews and listened to the views of adult educators to identify ideas, concepts and themes that help to generate a possible list of questions. We adapt the checklist provided by Cohen, *et al* (2007) in making decisions about question content and consider those questions that we found necessary, useful and relevant to our ideas and domain. Based on the Knowles, *et al's* (2015) findings and our own experience, we designed a questionnaire for our students with questions based on why adults decide to undertake Higher Education. We consider those questions that are necessary, useful, and relevant to our ideas and domain. Then we shortlisted and modified the questions so that they are sufficiently general but can be answered concretely and specifically by the respondents, based on their personal experience and they are not biased or loaded in one direction. Following the findings of Colton & Covert (2007), we undertook the review of selected literature to identify a list of questions which have a good chance of capturing the full range of possible responses.

For the qualitative research we select grounded theory methodology, with the non-deterministic method to discover a theory from data, systematically obtained and analysed in social research (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Although, grounded theory developed in several directions with variations (Tan, 2010), we followed the constructivist and interpretive approach as proposed by Charmaz (2006), to arrive at the '*unified theoretical explanation*' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) or a general explanation (Creswell, 2014). To identify the sample for our interview and to avoid tampering, we chose simple random allocation by using the MS Excel function RANDBETWEEN. Data collected for qualitative analysis consists of eight student's semi-structured face-to-face online interviews which are recorded and transcribed. The distribution of samples in respect of gender, ethnicity, age and educational backgrounds are fairly balanced and is broadly representatives of the College student population.

## **Quantitative Methods and Survey Items**

### *Methods*

We adopt a non-experimental research design covering the entire population, using nominal measurement scales for independent variables

and ordinal scale for dependent variables. The data has been collected via a survey instrument designed in the Google survey form; once the data is captured it was tested using non-parametric tests and analysed using bivariate analytical tools.

### *Population and Sample*

The population of our research comprises 152 students studying Higher National Diploma courses at the College during the 2020-21 academic year, being the number that responded positively to our invitation.

### *Data Analytical Tools*

The data collected via the survey questionnaire is recorded and analysed to explore any central tendency, association with other variables and as well as to identify variations and diversity, as the survey items and their response measurements were qualitative in nature. The data garnered was tested using non-parametric tests and analysed using bivariate analytical tools including Cross tabulation, Chi-Square Tests and Reduction in Error Measures (Lambda ( $\lambda$ )). The central tendency using median measure is calculated using the results of data from all 152 students. To explore bivariate relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables, we conduct the Directional Measures and Chi-Square tests. In the Bivariate Analysis, the directional measures guide the elimination process for data with error in the quantitative analysis phase of this study. The directional measure process identify data with minimum error and data within the guided acceptable range.

### *Survey Items*

To understand how adult educators can facilitate learning and what behavioural characteristics they should possess, we explore all major adult learning theories. Merriam and Bierema (2014) argue that the three major adult learning theories, andragogy, self-directed learning and transformative learning have roots in humanistic psychology and have a profound effect on adult learning theory.

Despite a plethora of literature on adult learning, there is a paucity of published research on adult educators teaching at Higher Education levels. We cite the work of some of these authors in this article, especially Malcolm Knowles (1913–1997), who wrote extensively on andragogy, i.e.,

the study of adult education, proposing six principles<sup>1</sup>, none of which directly covers the attributes of lecturers. However, these principles have important implications on behavioural characteristics of adult educators, most notably are adults who wish to be seen and treated by others as being capable of self-direction (principle 2) and adult orientation to learning is problem and role-centered (principle 5) (Knowles, 1975; 1978; 1980 pp. 44–45; 1984; 1989; 1990). Appearing at about the same time that Knowles introduced andragogy, is self-directed learning (SDL) advocated by Tough's (1971) research into the self-planned learning projects of Canadian adult learners; SDL focuses on the learner taking control of her or his own learning (Merriam, 2018), very much considered positively by the authors.

To summarise, using the above theoretical concepts and reflecting on our long experience in teaching, we have drawn up a list of seven questions (i.e., seven dependent variables) and analyse the responses provided by 152 students, using SPSS and Chi-Square Table, Reduction in Error Measures and Cross tabulation as quantitative data analytical tools.

### Qualitative Methods

To understand which characteristics and behavioural aspects adult students value among their educators, we recruited students at points in time (Kankkunen, 2001) in the course of their studies (in private correspondence Kankkunen (2004) suggests points are highly significant). As an in-depth study the numbers are necessarily limited. This approach is in-line with hermeneutic phenomenological research with participants who have living understanding and thus enabling rich and unique stories of the particular experience to emerge (Polkinghorne, 1996).

The authors examine the transcripts meticulously to identify the main thrusts as well as any emerging themes within the transcripts and then judiciously decide the extent to which these themes relate to the questions used in the quantitative survey instrument. Using open-ended probing questions allowed us to hear the views of the students. In addition to probing questions, we use some follow-up questions to assess what the

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<sup>1</sup> Adults want to know why they need to learn something; (2) adults have a strong self-concept and wish to be seen and treated by others as being capable of self-direction; (3) adults have prior experience and adult educators should tap into their experience; (4) adults have readiness to learn and are often motivated by things that can make their life better, easier and allow them to cope effectively and make progress in their life; (5) adult orientation to learning is problem solving and role-centered as opposed to subject-centered; (6) adult are motivated to learn and are responsive to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Knowles, 1975; 1978; 1980: 44– 45; 1984; 1989; 1990).

respondents think about the seven questions used in the Quantitative survey instrument. To classify the findings from the interview, we go beyond simply using the command verbs or their synonyms, as they may not provide a fuller picture; we decided to identify any signals/hooks/proxy words which can help us to determine the level of importance each of these seven attributes and characteristics the students value.

The analysis of the data starts with open coding and implements axial coding by organising the codes, drawing connections between codes and grouping them into categories. We then undertake selective coding to connect all categories into one core category, which ultimately represents the central focus of our research. To make comparison easier with other student interviews and as well as the survey results, we use some pre-set codes based on questions used in the quantitative survey instrument. This type of coding procedure helped us stay in tune with the students' views as we continually study our interview data (Charmaz, 2006).

To improve methodological validity and to establish strong integration between the qualitative and quantitative phases, we interpret the qualitative data using the various codes, many of which are strongly linked to the questions in the survey questionnaire. This helps data integration and increases the credibility of both quantitative and qualitative findings if the results are congruent (Onwuegbuzie, *et. al.*, 2010). The semi-structured interview is designed to elicit information which could signify the learners' motivation to study at our College. In the interview, we remain open-minded and allow students to say whatever they consider appropriate.

The data collected in the qualitative interviews with the mature students is quantified by frequency distribution of each code and we present them in a way to determine whether there are significant associations between different codes.

## Quantitative Findings and Analysis

**Table 1**  
**Dependent Variables (Qualitative Analysis)**

<b>Descriptor</b>
1. Have faith in adult students (i.e.- LCC students), offer them challenging opportunities by delegating responsibility to them (trust and delegate).
2. Encourage adult students to take part in learning decision (collaborate).
3. Involve adult students in every step of the planning process (teamwork).

*Contd...*

4. Provide positive feedback and use the power of self - fulfilling prophecy (positive feedback).
5. Highly value individuality and allow adult students to use their unique strengths, talents, interests, and goals (individuality).
6. Be committed to and be skillful in managing change (progress).
7. Encourage adult students to be self – directing (independence).

**Table 2**  
**Breakdown of Responses**

Responses	Mean	Median	Not important at all (1)	Not very important (2)	Somewhat important (3);	Very important (4);	Extremely important (5);
1. Have faith in adult students (i.e.- LCC students), offer them challenging opportunities by delegating responsibility to them (trust and delegate).	4.09	4	1	0	24	86	41
2. Encourage adult students to take part in learning decision (collaborate).	4.11	4	0	1	24	85	42
3. Involve adult students in every step of the planning process (teamwork).	4.13	4	0	0	20	92	40
4. Provide positive feedback and use the power of self - fulfilling prophecy (positive feedback).	4.19	4	0	0	18	87	46
5. Highly value individuality and allow adult students to use their unique strengths, talents, interests, and goals (individuality).	4.20	4	1	0	14	89	48
6. Be committed to and be skillful in managing change (progress).	4.16	4	1	1	17	86	47
7. Encourage adult students to be self – directing (independence).	4.15	4	0	0	20	89	43
Total responses			3	2	137	614	307
% of total responses			0.3%	0.2%	12.9%	57.8%	28.9%



## Quantitative Data Findings

Among 152 students who responded to the survey, we identify no evidence of strong or moderate levels of association between the independent variables (4 variables) and dependent variables (7 variables). The 7 dependent variables are listed in Table 1 and followed by responses accumulated against the dependent variables presented in Table 2. Although we have undertaken the tests of associations between the dependent variables and independent variables, our overarching aim is to ascertain the attributes and characteristics of lecturers that adult students value the most, regardless of identity and backgrounds (independent variables); therefore, we capture the central tendency of the quantitative data. However, measuring the central tendency using ordinal data, has many weaknesses, as the ordinal score itself cannot be measured objectively using an independent reference point (i.e., scale or ruler). However, it provides some guidance about the direction of adult students' own thought processes and the scale of their subjective views.

Using the mean and medium of the central tendency, we find that the quantitative data shows a reasonably low dispersion, as the mean and median are very close and the measure of dispersion is very low. The central tendency among our participants is that they find all 7 (seven) characteristics of lecturers' reasons listed in the quantitative questionnaire as being very important, as the average mean and median are both close to 4 (four) (Table 2). From the analysis the study finds no evidence of strong or moderate association between four independent variables and seven dependent variables.

## Qualitative Findings

### *Introduction*

The findings from the quantitative data do not provide a highly contrasting picture, due to the fact that responses were clustered around '4' (four), denoting that all seven attributes were given "very important" scores by our participants (Table 2). It is possible that we may have ignored some attributes which could attract even higher or lower scores. Therefore, in our reading of transcripts, we seek to codify the attributes students prefer, using a very long list of attributes identified in various literature reviewed.

### *Findings and Results*

The significant majority of responses presented in Table 2, rounded up to 100% of the seven survey questions, is either considered as extremely important (29%) or very important (58%) or somewhat important (13%). Among 152 students who responded to the survey, we did not find any evidence of strong or moderate level of association between the independent variables (4 variables) and dependent variables (7 variables). Using the mean and medium of the central tendency, we find that all 7 characteristics of lecturers' reasons listed in the quantitative questionnaire are very important, as the average mean and median are both close to 4.

Using mean as a determinant factor to decide the single most important attribute, we find (1) highly value individuality and allow adult students to use their unique strengths, talents, interests, and goals (4.20), (2) provide positive feedback and use the power of self-fulfilling prophecy (mean 4.19) and (3) be committed to and be skillful in managing change (4.16). If we use the frequency count of what the respondents consider extremely important, (1) Highly value individuality and allow adult students to use their unique strengths, talents, interests, and goals (48 frequency count), (2) be committed to and be skillful in managing change (47 frequency count) and (3) provide positive feedback and use the power of self-fulfilling prophecy (46 frequency count). Using both measures, we find the top three attributes are the same.

After reviewing the selected literature, considering the seven survey questions used in the quantitative phase and reading the transcripts of the students' interviews, the researchers produced a list of 14 categories of attributes and characteristics (Table 3), giving each category a code; among the 14 categories, one is classified as 'others'. We then analyse the data by manual coding based on the segmented categories, which are derived based on our provisional findings, list of questions used in the quantitative survey and important attributes highlighted by various authors. For ease of comparison, we provide a code as soon as an attribute or characteristic is highlighted by respondents in the transcripts; later these codes are counted and quantified by frequency distribution of each code against each individual respondents and as well total count for each code. The authors examine the transcripts meticulously to identify the main categories, which are then coded within the transcripts. For each category, we use various synonyms and proxy indicators to categorise the attributes with manual coding.

**Table 3**  
Coding of attributes identified by respondents:

Code and Attributes	St 1	St 2	St 3	St 4	St 5	St 6	St 7	St 8	Total	Average	SL 0
X01: Approachable and friendly (Sociable)	1	3	3	0	1	2	2	1	11	1.625	1
X02: Communicate and explain (Communicative)	7	3	1	0	1	3	1	1	16	2.125	1
X03: Equality, fairness, respect and treat students as equal (Respectful)	3	8	3	2	1	2	1	1	20	2.625	0
X04: Recognise achievement, encourage advancement (Giving Feedback)	0	0	1	3	0	2	1	2	8	1.125	3
X05: Teamwork and collaboration (Facilitative)	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6	8	1.125	4
X06: Subject knowledge and wisdom (Expertise)	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	5	0.625	3
X07: Organised and prepared (Professionalism)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.125	7
X08: Personalised learning (Passion to support learning)	3	3	0	1	5	4	2	1	17	2.375	1
X09: Describe reason and utility for the content (Motivation)	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	5	1	5
X10: Role and problem-centered teaching (Challenge)	0	11	0	2	0	2	2	5	20	2.75	3
X11: Other	4	3	6	1	2	3	1	4	23	3	0
X12: Patience and empathy	4	1	4	1	2	9	6	0	21	3.375	1
X13: Use examples	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	0.875	6
X14: interaction and dialogue	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	7	1.125	4

From Table 3 above, we highlight Code X12 as being the tutor's attribute of prime importance to students. The full list of the five important attributes is shown in Table 4 below, ordered by scoring:

**Table 4**  
**Attributes found to be important or very important:**

Attributes	Importance	Score
1. Patience and empathy (Rapport)	Very important (5 out of 5)	21/169
2. Role and problem-centered teaching (Challenge)	Very important (5 out of 5)	20/169
3. Equality, fairness, respect and treat students as equal (Respectful)	Very Important (5 out of 5)	20/169
4. Personalised learning (Passion to support learning)	Important (4 out of 5)	16/169
5. Communicate and explain (Communicative)	Important (4 out of 5)	16/169

Adult education needs to be personalised and their unique needs should be considered by adult educators. We note from other studies that mature students look for personalised instruction (MacDonald, 2018) or customised teaching strategies (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). According to Allport (1937), in addition to common traits, we all have personal traits or dispositions which is unique to the individual and that adult students develop significantly in an environment where students feel safe and supported, where individual needs and uniqueness are honoured, where abilities and life achievements are acknowledged and respected (Billington, 2000). These findings are also echoed in the transcripts of the respondents. These findings are also echoed in the transcripts of the respondents and presented through Table 4.

#### *Patience and empathy (Rapport)*

Rapport is postulated as the key attribute of an effective HE educator, being defined as an '*...ability to maintain harmonious relationships based on affinity for others...*' (Faranda and Clarke, 2004: 24), who propose a positive association between rapport and communication skills. Involving students in interaction, encourages and allows students to share their ideas with peers (DeBacker *et. al.*, 2015) moderated by an educator with dynamic, charismatic, interesting and humorous delivery as identified by Barnes and Lock (2010) as essential attributes of an HE educator.

Empathy, which is contained in the bilateral relationship, includes the skills of insight and attunement, which the student expects from her tutor '*...I would expect a lecturer to understand the students, to have empathy and try to understand them, especially when they are not doing so well...*' (St 5)

offering the further explanation '*...to be understanding as well of people's strengths and people's weaknesses, he can empathise and be in-tune with them.*' (St 5). When empathy is missing there is a seeming barrier to learning '*... like few of them were very strict and [with little empathy] I didn't like their lecture...*' (St 4), so the preference is for '*...lectures to listen appropriately and empathise, to support learning...*' (St 7).

Having patience and empathy, which refers in both attribute to the way a tutor asks and answers questions, are chosen by respondents because they are ubiquitous and vital aspects of the tutoring process. '*... [I] would like the teachers to listen and understand [my] limitations and explain things [if needed] many, many times and be patient with the student...*' (St 6). Patience is again highlighted as being appreciated '*...Great teachers give us time and opportunity rather than being harsh or pushing us or rushing with us...*' (St 7).

Harkin (1998) makes a strong conclusion that that the affective dimension is by far the most important factor in the interaction between teachers and students; the constructs project in his research provides further corroboration of the importance of affectivity in the teacher-learner relationship. Indeed, our study confirms student relationships with teaching staff are identified as having high importance in learning, enabling students' engagement in managing their time to prepare for and participate in learning. In a theoretical lens of social support theory is student connectedness, for example, relationships enhance students' resolve, acuties and activities (Xerri *et. al.*, 2018). Any beneficial connectedness experienced in the past will act as a strengthening sense, then impacts upon student perceptions of study needs. As adult students, interdependence and reciprocity are expected '*...that's the symbiotic sense... as mature students, you should not expect your teacher to be spoon-feeding you...*' (St 2).

#### *Role and problem-centered teaching (Challenge)*

Research (Orley-Louis, 2009) evidences that entry students consider autonomy of decision less important than more advanced students, identified as '*...if you give me full freedom, of course I love to learn the way I learned, but it doesn't give me guarantee like it's going to be appropriate for me...*' (St7, Table 5) so not accepting responsibility for the mode of learning, nor allowing responsibility '*...I cannot take 100% decision and push to the teacher to change his entire procedure...*' (St7, Table 5).

The educator is seen as both facilitator and challenger '*...they help you on the path that you need to be on...*' (St2, Table 5) although stringency reservations exist '*...they was very helpful unless like few of them are very strict...*' (St 4). Being approachable and responsive is preferred as well acknowledging adulthood '*...the best lecturers were very friendly because we're mature students, they taught us like mature students...*' (St2, Table 5), another student was aware of individual preference '*...some lecturers will be very friendly with the student, some students are friendly to lecturers...*' (St7, Table 5).

**Table 5**  
Interpretation (extracts from Table 3)

Code and Attributes	St 1	St 2	St 3	St 4	St 5	St 6	St 7	St 8	Total	Average	SL 0
X10- Role and problem-centered teaching (Challenge)	0	11	0	2	0	2	2	5	20	2.75	3

Our judgement is this attribute is very important (5 out of 5), see Table 3 above.

*Equality, fairness, respect and treat students as equal (Respectful)*

Being respectful is highly preferred by respondents, evidenced by '*... the best lecturers were very friendly [and] they taught us like mature students and not like a child. At my age, [I do not wish] a teacher to come and say, 'you don't know'. That's not nice...*' (St2, Table 6) and '*...I am older than many teachers and I want to be treated with respect and I don't want teachers to imply that I do not know anything and the teacher is better than me...*' (KR). Equality in the learning dyad is sought '*...I don't want (educators) to force me to do anything and I do not like (this kind of) attitude...*' (St4, Table 6), simply summed up by '*...I would like the teacher to be respectful to adult students ...*' (St5, Table 6). The tutor's sensitivity to the student establishing a positive bond resulting from the tutor being friendly, supportive and respectful as a respondent seeks '*...a mutual respect for each other should be established...*' (St7, Table 6) defined by '*...[to] respect your experience and individuality...*' (St2, Table 6). However, power in the relationship is still important '*...you still want a lecturer to be respected, [even if] just because they're being informal you don't want them to be lower...*' adding '*...they should not pretend like they are superior to you...they should treat you as equal...*' (St2, Table 6). Olry-Louis, (2009) posits interpersonal transactions foster learning and bring

together cooperative collaboration, which in turn support the significant discourse.

Whilst the educators are responsible for a direct pedagogical responsibility by creating learning opportunities (DeBaker *et. al.*, 2015) through questioning, clarifying and by actively scaffolding knowledge (Wood *et. al.*, 1976) for the student, the adult educators should still respect the views and established opinions in a way that do not result in confrontation, and this can be ensured through making social investments in higher education (Tsamadias, 2013). This is captured by statements made by respondents '*...Yeah, we have matured by age basically but we still many of us behaving even like kids...*' (St7, Table 6) and the student can be awkward in engaging with challenge '*...sometimes we challenge teacher for nothing, we sometimes forget the teacher also having same elements from the family...*' (St7, Table 6). However, the preference for one respondent is a shared responsibility '*...sometimes I have to involve with my teacher, then I have learned more...*' (St1, Table 6), whereas being encouraged to be responsible is approved by another respondent '*...reflecting on responsibility, you're old enough now you should understand...*' (St2, Table 6). If the environment is built on trust and mutual respect, the student, in collaboration with the tutor, constructs and adult educators can '*...help you on the path that you need to be on...*' (St2, Table 6). Interviewee's example, '*...I came back to study after 20 years, I needed somebody to show and guide me through the way that I need to go...*' (St2, Table 6).

**Table 6**  
Interpretation (extracts from Table 3)

Code and Attributes	St 1	St 2	St 3	St 4	St 5	St 6	St 7	St 8	Total	Average	SL 0
X03 Equality, fairness, respect and treat students as equal (Respectful)	3	8	3	2	1	2	1	1	20	2.625	3

Our judgement is this attribute is very important (5 out of 5), see Table 3 above.

#### *Personalised learning (Passion to support learning)*

Pedagogical attributes include the need and ability to be flexible '*... tutor should understand the need of every student, to have their questions answered and provide one-to-one support when needed...*' [St 1] and to be considerate '*... We expect our tutors not to anger if we ask a series of questions...*' (St 1), with

comprehension '*...Being able to understand the students...*' (St 2), '*...know and understand who they are teaching and understand our situation...*' (St 3). It could be argued that this relational approach, which students understand as being essentials, is more difficult than a more interpersonally distant stance (Berk & Andersen, 2000), which perhaps underlies the appetite for teaching exhibited in the respondent's comment '*...he always had a very good example to go with whatever he's teaching. put in a reference or some real-life experience, I've got more chance of remembering that example...*' (St 2). When asked directly about the attributes of a best tutor, the respondent is emphatic '*...provides an example of a situation or a problem from life experience which makes me learn a lot more from him. Give example of things that we come across every day and then use it [to relate it to theories covered in the class] ...*' (St 2).

Individualising delivery is an important skill sought '*...I like the teacher to make sure that everybody understand clearly what is being taught and have a special talk to assess their level of understanding to support them when they lag behind and encourage them when they do well; the teacher should ensure no one is left behind ...*' (St 5). The expectation of the pedagogist is to be available extramurally '*...I should be able to go back to our lecturer if I don't understand and they should be accessible outside the classroom and should be available via email so that we get a good grade...*' (St 8), thus the teacher needs to be aware of boundaries within the educational dyad.

The pedagogist must be aware of this relational approach's inherent danger of giving advice and instruction to an over-willing student '*... [when] teaching us, rather than just be academic, give us more practical examples, for example, [how] to be investing [in] a business...*' (St 4) understanding the power imbalance in the educational dyad. However, this risk is ameliorated by the statement '*...If materials covered are not [linked to life], I tend to forget it after five minutes ...*' (St 7). The preference is for the tutor to support students by projecting learning with an application to life '*...he gives practical examples and the opportunity to explore the topic [and apply it] our-self ...*' (St 8), which is underpinned by the respondent's more comprehensive statement '*... I wish lecturers to provide opportunities for interactions, support the teaching with plenty of examples, allow students to work with each other and organise field trips to learn things...*' (St 8).

Our judgement is this attribute is important (4 out of 5), see Table 3 above.



*Communicate and explain (Communicative)*

Greiniel *et al* (2003) suggest communication in Higher Education relates to the educator's ability to explain complex concepts clearly and skillfully. Research (Greiniel *et. al.*, 2003; Faranda & Clarke 2004; Efiritha *et. al.*, 2014) posits the presence of a high level of ability to communicate is crucial in HE pedagogy and to the educator's ability to explain complex concepts transparently, clearly and skillfully. The transcripts also placed high or extreme importance of communication and explanation.

Further understanding emanates from clarifications '*...she explained to me the importance, see what I have to do...*' (St 6, Table 7) and '*...I want lecturers to explain to me how and make things understandable...*' (St 1, Table 7). This is more substantially encapsulated in the response '*... I come to College to understand the topics written in books with familiar examples so that we can understand it better and I need more background information than just the basic...*' (St 2, Table 7) and the request for simplification leading to an increased learning opportunity '*...Lecturers should make topics simple for us so that we understand...*' (St 8, Table 7). Tutors must respond to student requests for evidence or elucidation and to students' expressed confusion. Although these two activities are interdependent but distinct (Roscoe & Chi, 2007), both involve making inquiries of the material that may lead to learning and answering questions should also support both student and tutor learning. Sometimes questioning can be mis-managed and produce a counter-effect '*...they're asking you [me] questions, you just had one question and before you finish ask another question...*' (St 1, Table 7) and indeed can produce frustration '*...sometimes they get angry and behave like, how they're talking, like we just coming for learning and we have to like the right questions...*' (St 1, Table 7). Listening and explaining is identified as satisfying '*...at least you listen to me, I'm feeling good...*' (St 7, Table 7) and '*...how you talking to us, explain to me how it's really good...*' (St 1, Table 7).

Within general communication is the attribute of giving and receiving feedback. Cohen and Wills (1985) propose assessment support, informational support or cognitive direction, helps students define, understand and manage problematic events by providing evaluation and feedback '*... I like feedback to be positive...better I am mentally happy and [become] the positive person...*' (St 6, Table 7). Another respondent reflects on a reaction to feedback '*...I expect it basically is encouraging us than enforcing us...*' (St 1, Table 7) thus understanding the perceptions of progression (Ramsden, 2003) is validated by tutor feedback (Androutsopoulou, 2001). The preference for feedback has further life

application for this student '*...I need help on various matters and receive feedback. I want to set up my own business, I would like to approach my teacher to help me out with my calculation and get some feedback on it...*' (St 4, Table 7).

**Table 7**  
**Interpretation (extracts from Table 3)**

Code and Attributes	St 1	St 2	St 3	St 4	St 5	St 6	St 7	St 8	Total	Average	SL 0
X02 Communicate and explain (Communicative)	7	3	1	0	1	3	1	1	16	2.125	1

Our judgement is this attribute is important (4 out of 5), see Table 3 above.

## Discussion and Conclusion

After reviewing the major adult learning theories, techniques used by ancient philosophers and researchers long experience in teaching, we produced a list of seven questions for quantitative survey. When compared, the quantitative findings on these seven questions and the findings from the qualitative phase of the research, we find that there are some common themes between the quantitative and qualitative findings, however, there are also some important aspects of the attributes, we ignored or intermitted in the quantitative survey questions. The interpretations of our quantitative findings cannot determine which among the attributes are significantly favoured by the respondents, as the significant majority of responses considered each of these attributes as important. However, after the results were further sorted and the top three attributes were identified, the quantitative findings suggest that the students prefer their educators firstly to value their individual and unique strengths, talents, interests, and goals; secondly, to provide students with positive feedback and finally the educators to be skillful in managing change. In contrast, following the interpretations and ranking of the qualitative findings, the researchers found the top three attributes are namely (a) patience and empathy; (b) role and problem-centered teaching and (c) equality, fairness, respect and treat students as equal.

In reconciliation and an attempt to find common grounds in both the quantitative and qualitative findings, we notice that in both, students prefer to receive personalised learning and they would like their lecturers

to have due regards to their own unique strengths, individuality and provide positive feedback. In the qualitative findings, the students attribute patience and empathy as highest and extremely important attributes of a lecturer. The patience and empathy has an important connotation with the quantitative finding that the lecturers should be committed to and skillfully manage change. Although managing change has a wider implication, however, from learning and facilitation perspective, adult educators should be patient and skillful so that adult students with difficult personal and social circumstances are given appropriate support so that they can adapt to the changes required to adjust to the demands of Higher Education.

We can highlight four hypotheses which might apply to preferred tutors' attributes:

1. Highly value individuality with due regards to unique strengths and talents and offer personalised feedback.
2. Be patience, empathise, treat adults as equal and show respect.
3. Use familiar examples and real-life scenarios to communicate and explain topics and support learning.
4. Be skillful in managing adults and in communicating and supporting interactions.

Our findings echo well with other findings; MacDonald (2018) argues that adults should have personalised instructions and their unique needs should be considered or customised teaching strategies (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Billington (2000) argues that adult students developed significantly in an environment where students feel safe and supported, where individual needs and uniqueness are honoured, where abilities and life achievements are acknowledged and respected. Adult educators should use examples and real-life scenarios to communicate the complex topics, communication in Higher Education relates to the educator's ability to explain complex concepts clearly and skillfully (Greimel-Fuhrmann & Geyer *et. al.*, 2003). Research (Faranda & Clarke 2004; Efiritha *et. al.*, 2014) posits the presence of a high level of ability to communicate is crucial in HE pedagogy and to the educator's ability to explain complex concepts transparently, clearly and skillfully. In achieving these parameters, the higher education provider is required to create a diverse campus through innovative pedagogies, enabling student led research initiatives and create provision for new technological advancements, such as video

conferencing and webinars to facilitative student's learning experience (Sahasrabudhe, Shaikh and Kasat, 2020). The transcripts also placed high or extreme importance of communication and clear and effective explanation and the role of good examples are also cited by research (Young & Shaw, 1999; Hativa *et. al.*, 2001).

The findings from our mixed methods research validates some of the seven key characteristics in the adult learning environment as highlighted by Billington (2000), which are (a) students feel safe and supported, where individual needs and uniqueness are honoured, where abilities and life achievements are acknowledged and respected; (b) faculty treats adult students as peers-accepted and respected as intelligent experienced adults; (c) student and instructors interact and dialogue. Some key aspects where the findings differ are that adult educators should be utmost patient and be able to empathise and adult educators should be commercially pragmatic and use real life examples to support learning. For example, respect, care, approachability, empathy, concern, fairness and friendliness are also used as synonyms of rapport in describing the concept by many researchers (Altman, 1990). Citing Carl Rogers (1902-1987), Bates (2019) identifies three elements: congruence/rapport, empathy and respect as being an important part of effective facilitation.

There are limitations of our study, for example, we focus only on one institution in East London specialising on one type of qualification, with much narrower subjects (HNDs in Business, Health & Social Care and Hospitality Management). Almost all students surveyed are first generation immigrants without a wide variety of entry profiles. The instruments to use quantitative data have two design flaws, firstly it attempts to capture qualitative data in quantifiable format (Onwuegbuzie, *et. al.*, 2010), which resulted in us quantifying the qualitative information and subjective judgements. Secondly the survey instruments comprise seven questions only and therefore the question list was not long enough to allow a wide variety of responses. Another weakness we found is that the bulk of the data is centers in the 'very important' or 'extremely important' category and therefore our interpretation is that students consider all factors as important. Additionally, the particular factor of central importance to a student is unclear. The survey instrument neither requested students to rank the characteristics nor was the student asked to allocate a proportion or score out of a total maximum number. In relation to the qualitative findings, we realised that many students used a variety of weak synonyms to identify and describe their opinions. Language proficiency barriers in interviews affected students' ability to use the

appropriate vocabulary. Therefore, comparing the results often were difficult as they used loosely connected words to describe the same meanings.

Despite various limitations, our results provide some information to educators as what behavioural characteristics our students value the most. This could assist the lecturers to use appropriate instructional strategies and approaches to improve the student experience and how their teaching can be adapted to encourage the best performance among the mature students. Institution should be able to encourage their lecturers to remain abreast of what is happening around them, be aware of commercial news and employment markets and what the career entails, so that the educators can link the educational topics with the real-life examples. In order to keep them engaged in the class, educators should be conscious of the pragmatic needs of adult students and class discussion should make use of educational resources that concur with individual life experiences. This is particularly true for mature students who often have life experiences that are rich but complex.

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