

## **INTERROGATING QUALITY TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Very few topics in education have captured as much attention from regulatory authorities and practitioners as the connection between quality teaching and student achievement. Current research give emphasis to the continuous importance and influence of quality teaching cum lecturing on student satisfaction and achievement.

The major reasons to closely investigate the notion of quality teaching in Higher Education are:

- The teaching/lecturing process is driven by academics, who are experts in their field but not necessarily trained in pedagogy.
- The diversity of employment statutes within the institution (professionals, international teacher cum lecturers, part-time teacher cum lecturers, etc.) combined with an increasing variety of students might result in incoherence and in equity of the teaching process.
- Research enhances curricula development and the link between updated knowledge and teaching is crucial.

Highly successful pedagogies develop when teaches cum lecturers make outstanding use of their understanding of research and knowledge base for teaching in order to support high-quality planning and practice. Quality teaching arises when this research base is supplemented by personal passion for what is to be taught and for the aspirations of the students.

While assuring and enhancing educational quality and academic standards is viewed as complex and multifaceted activities, geared towards ensuring that graduates compete successfully in a global market it is difficult to maintain a balance between ‘quality as inspection’ and ‘quality as enhancement’ and what makes good sense in terms of effective teaching/lecturing practices.

Considering the strategic importance of quality teaching, this paper aims to among others, interrogate questions such as:

- What is quality teaching and why is it important in Higher Education?
- What are the implications of long term learning outcomes and short term goals?
- Does quality assurance embrace the complexity of teaching/lecturing?
- Has the culture of measurement trivialized teaching excellence and the language of business turned it into a product?

**Keywords:** Effective pedagogics, quality teaching, quality assurance, learning outcomes, quality enhancement

## **INTRODUCTION**

Very few topics in education have captured as much attention from regulatory authorities and practitioners as the connection between quality teaching and student achievement (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, Sherwood & Using er, 2008). Current research by Nicoladies (2012) and Phillips (2013) support earlier research studies and give emphasis to the continuous importance and influence of quality teaching on student satisfaction and achievement.

Higher education is becoming a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy. The imperative for South Africa to improve employment skills calls for quality teaching within educational institutions; direct state regulations or incentives, competition among private and state-owned institutions all prompt institutions to put quality teaching on their agenda.

Assuring and enhancing educational quality and academic standards is a complex and multifaceted activity, geared towards ensuring that higher education programmes and graduates compete successfully in a global market. At the center of these activities are the students and teacher cum lecturers and what happens in their classrooms. Student perceptions concerning learning and teaching processes affect how they think, feel and behave in the pursuit of academic excellence ((Hu & Kuh, 2002). The teachers cum lecturers are very important components in the pedagogic situation. They conceptualise academic excellence in terms of development of expertise by providing instruction about how sequences of simple tasks can allow students to master more complex tasks as well as assess to what degree the mastery of simpler tasks contribute to building blocks for more complex skills (Ericsson, 1998). Meaningful learning only takes place once the student is engaged in quality teaching social activities. These include developing the capacity and capability of students to interrogate and use information, assess learning activities, generate new ideas, facilitate personal development and development of a student's capacity to plan and manage their learning culture and experience. Moreover, quality assurance of higher education can never be overlooked. Hence, it

is difficult to maintain a balance between ‘quality as inspection’ and ‘quality as enhancement’ and between ‘requirements’ and what makes good sense in terms of effective teaching practices.

The three major reasons to closely investigate and interrogate the notion of quality teaching cum lecturing are:

- The teaching process is driven by academics, who are experts in their field but not necessarily trained in pedagogy (the “academic drift” is sometimes denounced).
- The diversity of employment statutes within the institution (professionals, international teacher cum lecturers, part-time teacher cum lecturers, etc.) combined with an increasing variety of students might result in incoherence and in equity of the teaching process.
- Applied research traditionally nourishes curricula and the link between updated knowledge and teaching is crucial.

## **CONCEPTS, TERMINOLOGY AND EXPECTATIONS**

Awareness of the concepts, terminology and expectations of all stakeholders concerned with quality, coupled with increasing competence and understanding of teaching and learning processes, can help the teacher cum lecturer and course team member to feel more engaged with and contribute more effectively towards the development and enhancement of a quality culture in higher education.

## **EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY AND QUALITY TEACHING (EFFECTIVE TEACHING)**

Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. It is a master plan that includes the details of what is to be done by the teacher cum lecturer, the instructional strategies, instructional teaching aids and equipment and the cardinal objectives of instruction including the appropriate set of activities (Masters, 2010). In effect it incorporates an array of teaching strategies that support intellectual engagement and classroom performance of both the teacher cum lecturer and the students. Effective teacher cum lecturers, therefore, use a variety of teaching strategies because there is no single universal approach that suits all students and situations. This requirement further stresses the importance of teachers cum lecturers being able to adopt a reflective teaching/lecturing approach if they are to become constantly responsive to student learning needs ( Effective Philanthropy, 2011).

**Interrogative Practice:**

Reflect on your teacher preparation??? What comes to mind?  
Are teachers trained in the art of pedagogy?

There is no one definitive model for ‘quality teaching ‘ or ‘effective pedagogy’, yet every Higher Educational Institution is obliged to reach a position on what constitutes good practice. While the term teaching is used on a daily basis in various contexts, its meaning and significance are very profound, necessitating various integrated activities in the teaching-learning environment. ‘Quality’ is a broader term used with different shades of meanings, referring, for example, to individual student performance, the outputs of an educational programme, the student learning experience or the teaching provided. A popular definition centers around ‘describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award’ ( Nagoba&Mantri, 2015). But is achieving an award a true reflection of the quality teaching and understanding? Consider out current grade 12 learners. For the majority of them, they have achieved their grade 12, but what of quality?

Therefore, to understand quality teaching it is necessary to understand how:

- contextual factors influence the dynamics of schools and school processes—and how quality teachers cum lecturers act thoughtfully and tactfully in engaging with and responding to these contextual factors—in order to enhance students’ learning outcomes;
- professional practices influence students’ learning outcomes, attributes and capabilities of teachers cum lecturers influence students’ learning outcomes

In Higher Education system teaching is a form of interpersonal influence aimed to produce learning and so change the behavior of the student. Husbands and Pearce (2012: 3) stress the following characteristics of effective teacher cum lecturers:

1. Effective pedagogies give serious consideration to pupil voice.
2. Effective pedagogies depend on behaviour (what teacher cum lecturers do), knowledge and understanding (what teacher cum lecturers know) and beliefs (why teacher cum lecturers act as they do).
3. Effective pedagogies involve clear thinking about longer term learning outcomes as well as short-term goals.
4. Effective pedagogies build on pupils’ prior learning and experience.

5. Effective pedagogies involve scaffolding pupil learning.
6. Effective pedagogies involve a range of techniques, including whole-class and structured group work, guided learning and individual activity.
7. Effective pedagogies focus on developing higher order thinking and met cognition, and make good use of dialogue and questioning in order to do so.
8. Effective pedagogies embed assessment for learning.
9. Effective pedagogies are inclusive and take the diverse needs of a range of learners, as well as matters of student equity, into account

Strong support, is offered by Bhowmik, Banerjee and Banerjee (2013) that effective teachers cum lecturers must:

- Be committed to students and their learning
- Know the subjects they teach and have the necessary pedagogical knowledge
- Be responsible for managing and monitoring student learning
- Think systematically about their practice and learn from experience

Effective teaching, therefore, entails holistic knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy and the student. It is aptly stated that before one can be an effective teacher cum lecturer, one has to be first and foremost a social worker! In addition, effective teaching through pedagogy displays skills at creating curricula designed to build on student's present knowledge and understanding and move them to complex in-depth abilities, knowledge and concepts (the scaffolding process). To be effective and produce quality teaching, teacher cum lecturers must also be critical and reflective about their own performance!

**Interrogating Practice:**

Do teachers cum lecturers have the time to become social workers?

Do institutions engage in research (not benchmarking) before identifying qualifications to suit the current students and the quality of their passes?

Research indicates that quality teaching is generally student centered. Hence, it is imperative that attention be focused not only on the teacher cum lecturer's pedagogical skills but also on the

learning environment that should ideally address the students' personal needs; (CHE, 2014) why are they studying, why they need to relate to other students, where to go for help etc. Adequate support to staff and students as reflected in the CHE 19 criteria for institutional evaluation (financial, social, academic support, support to minority students, disadvantaged students) also improves and enhances learning outcomes. Such infrastructure and support programmes build learning communities amongst teacher cum lecturers and students who learn collaboratively and create knowledge through intellectual interaction thereby enhancing student learning and stakeholder satisfaction (Soni, & Patel, 2014: 2). *However, mistaking good teaching with successful teaching has led policymakers to emphasize and place value on information that students can recall and put into practice on formal assessments.*

**Interrogating practice:**

Given the large classes in Higher education how realistic is it to create new knowledge when we already have a set curriculum, set time frames, set schedules of activities and set patterns of marking and measurements??

Has the culture of measurement trivialized teaching excellence and the language of business turned it into a product?

**LONG TERM LEARNING OUTCOMES AS WELL AS SHORT TERM GOALS**

In general teachers cum lecturer's effectiveness focuses on the planning and conduct of individual lessons as indicated in the teaching and learning policies of institutions. While the quality of individual lessons is very important, it does not necessarily imply that effective pedagogy is built in sequence of individual lessons. So what are the implications of effective pedagogies?

The implications are simple but require an overall strategic approach to student learning in order to focus attention on what both students and teacher cum lecturers will be doing and how they will be doing it (Montgomery, 2008; James & Pollard 2011). Consequently, considerable attention has been focused on medium term planning. This medium term planning emphasizes the teacher cum lecturer's ability to relate individual lessons to a planned sequence of learning with a focus on the overall intended learning outcomes: the lesson in the context of a scheme. The scheme in the context of the annual curriculum plan and the annual curriculum plan in the context of the intended learning outcomes!

**Interrogating Practice:**

Have we considered the issue of progression and outcome between short term cognitive gains and longer term educational goals during teacher cum lecturer training? Or do we use the traditional method – take a topic, plan, prepare, deliver and we are assessed on it.

Is there any difference in our current teaching situation???

Effective pedagogy provides a means for considering longer term views of learning, revisiting critical ideas as required, enhancing and reinforcing others relating new material to what students already know and connecting the acquisition of new knowledge with understanding and appropriate teaching strategies.

**Interrogating Practice:**

While such an approach will provide teachers cum lecturers and students with coherence and secure long term progression in learning, how practical is it in terms of teacher cum lecturer qualifications, teacher cum lecturer workload, student ability and time frames?

**LECTURING-CUM TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES**

In addition to the quality of the lecture per se, Quality Teaching requires that attention be given to the “Personal learning Environment” of students. It has been established as early as 1997 that learning is enhanced for students in higher education settings that address students’ personal learning environment needs (Ellet, Loup, Culross, McMullen and Rugutt, 1997: 169). The CHE offers strong support for focusing on the teaching learning environment in Criteria 1-8 for institutional audits!

These criteria for institutional audit focus on varying shades of learning opportunities that must be provided for students. These ‘Learning opportunities’ include the provision of quality teaching, quality study, quality support, quality assessment and other aspects and activities that support the learning process.

The concept of quality in education can be subdivided into several categories (UNICEF, 2000; Bergman, 1996)

- Quality as excellence is the traditional (often implicit) academic view which aims to demonstrate high academic standards.
- Quality as enhancement emphasizes continuous improvement, centers on the idea that achieving quality is essential to higher education and stresses the responsibility of higher education to make the best use of institutional autonomy and teacher cum lecturers' academic freedom. All higher education evaluation procedures focus more on quality as enhancement than as standards and may be seen as a sophisticated version of the 'fitness for purpose' concept.
- Quality as transformation applies to students' behaviour and goals being changed as a result of their studies or to socio-political transformation achieved through higher education. The latter is more difficult to measure.
- Quality as threshold defines minimum standards, usually as broad definitions of desired knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates (e.g. subject benchmarking) higher education institutions are usually expected to surpass these minimum standards.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Quality assurance (QA) refers to the policies, processes and actions through which quality is maintained and developed. Accountability and enhancement are important motives for quality assurance. Accountability in this context refers to assuring students, society and government that quality is well managed, and is often the primary focus of external review. QA is not new in higher education; for example, the involvement of external examiners in assessment processes, and the peer review system for evaluating research publications, are well established QA processes. The effects of quality assurance evaluations (audits, programme accreditation or institutional evaluations) remain controversial (Szymenderski, Yagudina, & Burenkova, 2015: 26). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that national quality assurance systems foster institution involvement in supporting quality teaching (Pratasavitskaya, & Stensaker, 2010: 42). ***But Quality assurance hardly embraces the complexity of teaching.***

The learning process is very difficult to assess, as it combines various determinants, such as the skills of teachers cum lecturers, their attitude in class, students' experience, the quality of the relationships between students and faculty, etc. Some claim that quality teaching relies on a complex web of factors and gives rise to subjective judgements. (Szymenderski, et al., 2015:26) This might explain why most external evaluations emphasize the input-centered approach, using typically input and activity indicators. Because quality assurance e



mechanisms occur in complex organisations in which many changes happen at the same time, it is difficult to ascribe effects unambiguously to a single cause such as the quality assurance schemes (Stensaker, 2004: 26).

### **INTERNAL QUALITY PROCESSES**

Higher education institutions are responsible for the standards and quality of their provision and each has its own internal procedures for assuring and enhancing the quality of its programmes. Evaluation is a key part of quality assurance. Internal procedures include assessment of students, processes for the design and approval of new programmes and regular monitoring and periodic review of continuing programmes. Regular monitoring considers how well programmes and students are achieving the stated aims and learning outcomes, taking into account external examiners' reports, student feedback, assessment results and feedback from employers. Periodic programme review (typically five-yearly) may involve external reviewers and consider the currency and validity of programmes or services as well as achievement against stated aims and outcomes. All these processes contribute to **quality** enhancement which refers to the improvement of quality g. through dissemination of good practice as in promoting subject matter, pedagogical and staff development. (Szymenderski et al. 2015: 18).

**Interrogation Practice :**

Does Quality Assurance lead to quality teaching?

Does quality assurance embrace the complexity of teaching/lecturing?

### **CONCLUSION:**

Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning is a key strategic focus area in higher education. From a national perspective, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has identified the improvement of teaching and learning to be of critical importance for improving success rates and has acknowledged the strategic role of the monitoring, evaluation, and financing of teaching and learning (DHET, 2012). The importance of investment in teaching and learning is also underscored both locally and internationally by various research studies.

Internationally, public accountability demands on higher education institutions, especially in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, are increasing and higher education institutions have to find ways of providing evidence in concrete, observable and measurable ways of what they are doing to improve teaching and learning (McCormick, 2009).

This paper has argued that shared understanding of effective teaching is important to ensure the quality of university teaching and learning. This understanding must incorporate the skills and practices of effective teachers cum lecturers and the ways in which teaching should be practiced within multiple, overlapping contexts

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