Business Students’ Perceptions of Lecturer Teaching Skills

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Abstract
This study aims to examine the perceptions of university business students regarding the importance of lecturer teaching skills and learning environment related factors such as reference materials, class dynamics and assessments. The results show that lecturer teaching skills are central to teaching quality as viewed by the students. The results also show that the students’ perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills is affected by their perceptions on the importance of reference materials, class dynamics and the way their learning is assessed. The opposite relationships are also found where the students’ perceptions on the importance of reference materials, class dynamics, and assessments are affected by their perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills.

Keywords: Business students, Lecturer teaching skills, University

1. Introduction

Many discourses about pedagogic quality in universities have emerged in the last two decades (e.g. Baldwin & James, 2002; Blackmore, 2009). The main emphasis in the overarching implementation of quality assurance is about explicitness, in which evidence is sought to be tested against claims in policy statements (Power, 1994). One key aspect of teaching and learning management is student evaluation of teaching. Magnusson (1998) argues that student evaluation of teaching (SET) represents a conceptual basis for examining the ideological implications of policies. Hence, in practice, SET focuses on the means by which students are taught, rather than the outcomes in terms of students’ skills and knowledge (e.g. Strathern, 1997) or the outcomes in terms of the lecturers’ abilities to foster creation of learning (e.g. Emery, Kramer & Tian, 2003).

Bernstein (1990) argues that as education draws near to the labour market there is a need for a more visible pedagogy of performance which accommodates students’ perception of good teaching. Hence, effectively, there should be a balance between the implementation of pedagogical principles and the expectation of students regarding good aspects of teaching. These should also be reflected in the student evaluation of teaching to allow improvement of instruction and to refocus teaching effectiveness on outcomes.

The current discourses suggest that students know what they want (e.g. Blackmore, 2009; Vieira, 2002). However, so far there appear to be relatively few empirical studies into university students’ perceptions of teaching quality. A few available studies suggest that what
constitutes good teaching is contingent on the students’ anchored values and goals (e.g. Al-Issa & Sulieman, 2007; Hill, Lomas & MacGregor, 2003; Kember, Jenkins & Ng, 2003, 2004; Mitsis & Foley, 2009; Xiao & Dyson, 1999). Hence, different cohorts of students may perceive teaching quality in a different way.

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of business students at one of the universities in Australia regarding the importance of lecturer teaching skills and learning environment related factors such as reference materials, class dynamics and assessments.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

2.1 Lecturer teaching skills
It has been suggested that lecturer teaching skills stem from personality. Rushton, Murray and Paunonen (1983), in their survey of 400 professors, identified 11 instructor personality traits for effective teaching. These include traits such as liberal, sociable, showing leadership, extraverted, non-anxious, objective, supporting, non-authoritarian, non-defensive, intelligent, and aesthetically sensitive. Some of these traits were later studied and they were valued by the students as influencing factors to effective teaching (Buskist, 2002; Komarraju, 2013). There is also a comprehensive checklist of personality traits, with 28 items, which is regarded as a viable psychometrics instrument and is commonly known as the Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC) (Keeley, Smith, & Buskist, 2006).

Some other studies have also shown that instructor personality traits, which are regarded by the students as being important to effective teaching, depend on each student’s individual preferences. The students’ motivation and self-efficacy are two factors, among others, that can determine such priority. (Komarraju, 2013) found that students with a low self-efficacy prefer caring as their priority instructor trait, compared to extrinsically motivated students who view professionalism (e.g. knowledge and confidence) as their priority instructor trait. These findings are valuable in pointing out the need for the institutions and the instructors to address both commonalities and disparities that exist among the students, and to design suitable approaches to the teaching and learning processes.

Lecturer teaching skills are anchored to the way the knowledge is imparted from the presenter to the audience. In such case, presentation skills and good command language are important (Barth, 2008). Specifically within a classroom environment, the ability of a lecturer to appropriately design and organise a unit is also an essential aspect of effective teaching.

This study tries to see how business students perceive the importance of lecturer teaching skills and to investigate whether the students’ perception of lecturer teaching skills are affected by their perceptions on the importance of some learning environment related factors, and vice versa.

2.2 Reference materials
The availability of reference materials has been found to correspond positively with student performance (Wong & Webb, 2011; Yara, 2010). Reference materials might re-enforce students’ understanding of the subject matter and help students to prepare themselves for summative assessments with which their comprehension level was gauged. There is lack of studies that has focused on the links between reference materials and lecturer teaching skills. This study tentatively proposes the following hypotheses.
H1a: Business students’ perception on the importance of reference materials positively affects their perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills.

H1b: Business students’ perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills positively affects their perception on the importance of reference materials.

2.3 Class dynamics
Effective teaching and learning require a high level social interaction between humans with high level physiological brain activities (Wang & Castro, 2010; Yano, 2013). It has been found that quality of teaching is affected by a combination of physical, emotional and intellectual factors (Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, 2003; Lammers & Murphy, 2002), including in-class interactions between students and their instructor and peers. The overall student rating on a unit was largely influenced by how much the students felt involved (Kember, Jenkins, & Ng, 2003; Remedios & Lieberman, 2008). Class dynamics, which compose of in-class discussion and expression of ideas to allow knowledge sharing, could promote a conducive learning environment. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H2a: Business students’ perception on the importance of class dynamics positively affects their perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills.

H2b: Business students’ perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills positively affects their perceived importance of class dynamics.

2.4 Assessments
Remedios and Lieberman (2008) found that feedback on assignment is regarded as important in the student learning process. This indicates that appropriate designs of assessments commensurate to performance feedback-loop in enhancing students’ learning. With assessments corresponding to amount of work and results in grade, the effect of this factor on students’ perceptions on the importance of other aspects of effective teaching necessitate a further investigation. This study, therefore, proposes the following hypotheses.

H3a: Business students’ perception on the importance of assessments positively affects their perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills.

H3b: Business students’ perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills positively affects their perception on the importance of assessments.

2.5 Conceptual model
The composition and interactions of each construct are summarised in Figure 1.
3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and data collection
The sample used in this study is all business students enrolled at a university in Australia in 2013. An online questionnaire was sent to 4,560 students, and 359 responses were received with 45 responses which were later excluded from subsequent analysis because of missing values.

3.2 Indicators
The questionnaire uses a few indicators for each of the constructs as follows. Indicators for lecturer teaching skills include good command language, presentation skills and lecturer organisation of units (Barth, 2008). Indicators for reference materials include online materials and suitable materials (Wong & Webb, 2011), indicators for assessments include appropriate evaluation and assignment feedback (Remedios & Lieberman, 2008), and indicators for class dynamics include in-class knowledge sharing, class discussion and expression of idea ((Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, 2003; Kember, Jenkins, & Ng, 2003). The target respondents were asked to rate the importance of each of these indicators based on their perceptions on a Likert scale ranging from 1 for not important at all to 5 for very important.

A subsequent reliability test of the composite scales was later estimated with the result shown in Table 1. All four scales were highly reliable with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .731 to .866.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer teaching skill</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference materials</td>
<td>.737</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class dynamics</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Reliability statistics

4. Data analysis

4.1 Descriptive statistics
Descriptive statistics for the constructs from the collected data are as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer teaching skills</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4527</td>
<td>0.52252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference materials</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4459</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Assessments</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4634</td>
<td>0.58694</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Descriptive statistics
4.2 The perceived importance of reference materials, class dynamics and assessments on the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills

The first run of multiple regression analysis (MRA) was conducted to see primary effects of the importance of reference materials, class dynamics and assessments on the importance of lecturer teaching skills. On block 1 MRA 1, the reference materials construct was entered and it accounted for significant 20% variation in the view on the importance of lecturer teaching skills ($F(1,312) = 77.915, p < .001, R^2 = .200$). On block 2 MRA 1, class dynamics construct was entered, and it accounted for significant additional 6% of the variation in the view on lecturer teaching skills ($\Delta F(2,311) = 23.319, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .056$). On block 3 MRA 1, assessments construct was entered and it accounted for further 11% of the variation in the dependent variable ($\Delta F(3,310) = 51.656, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .106$). These results provide support to H1a that the perceived importance of reference materials positively affects the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills, H2a that the perceived importance of class dynamics positively affects the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills, and H3a that the perceived importance of assessments positively affects the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills.

4.3 The perceived importance of teaching skills on the perceived importance of reference materials, class dynamics and assessments

To see if there is any reciprocal effect of lecturer teaching skills construct on reference materials construct, the second run of MRA was conducted with class dynamics and assessments remaining as the other two independent variables. On block 1 MRA 2, lecturer teaching skills construct was entered and it accounted for significant 20% variation in the view on the importance of lecturer teaching skills ($F(1,312) = 77.915, p < .001, R^2 = .200$). This is similar to the result found in block 1 MRA 1. On block 2 MRA 2, class dynamics construct was entered, and the change in $R^2$ was less than 1% and therefore it was not significant ($\Delta F(2,311) = .021, p < .885, \Delta R^2 < .001$). On block 3 MRA 2, assessments construct was entered and it accounted for further significant 3% of the variation in the view on the importance of reference materials ($\Delta F(3,310) = 10.242, p = .002, \Delta R^2 = .026$). The overall results support H1b that the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills positively affects the perceived importance of reference materials.

MRA 3 was later run to test for reciprocal effects of lecturer teaching skills, reference materials and assessments constructs on class dynamics construct. On block 1 MRA 3, lecturer teaching skills construct accounted for relatively small significant 8% of the variation in the view on class dynamics ($F(1,312) = 28.458, p < .001, R^2 = .084$). On blocks 2 and 3 with reference materials and assessments constructs were consecutively entered into MRA, no significant $R^2$ were observed ($\Delta F(3,310) = 1.093, p = .297, \Delta R^2 = .003$, and $\Delta F(3,310) = 1.093, p = .297, \Delta R^2 = .003$). The overall results support H2b that the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills positively affects the perceived importance of class dynamics.

In the final MRA run, MRA 4, lecturer teaching skills, reference materials and class dynamics constructs were entered into blocks 1, 2 and 3 respectively with assessments as the dependent variable. It was found that view on lecturer teaching skills construct explained significant 25% variation in the view on the importance of assessments ($F(1,312) = 101.944, p < .001, R^2 = .246$), reference materials construct exhibited significant additional 2% variation ($\Delta F(2,311) = .024, p = .002, \Delta R^2 = .024$), while class dynamics construct was not significant ($\Delta F(3,310) = 1.093, p = .297, \Delta R^2 = .003$). The overall results support H3b that the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills positively affects the perceived importance of assessments.
The results of block 3 of MRA 2nd, 3rd and 4th runs also show that the perceived importance of assessments and the perceived importance of reference materials constructs significantly affect each other. The perceived importance of class dynamics construct, on the other hand, neither affect nor is affected by the perceived importance of reference materials and the perceived importance of assessments constructs. These are summarised in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MRA</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Lower bound</th>
<th>Upper bound</th>
<th>sr²</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reference materials</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.177</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Assessments</td>
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<td>0.354</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>0.106276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dependent Variable: Reference materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturer teaching skills</td>
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<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.536</td>
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<td>-0.087</td>
<td>0.062</td>
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<td>0.185</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.0256</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-0.02</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>0.053</td>
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<td>-0.034</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.002601</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Unstandardised (B) and standardised (β) regression coefficients, and squared semi-partial correlations (sr²) for each predictor on block 3 of each hierarchical multiple regression analysis (MRA) (N = 314)

5. Discussion and conclusion

Student evaluation of teaching (SET) instruments have been used extensively by higher education institutions, and the various aspects that are considered important to measure teaching and learning effectiveness have been defined and discussed in many literature (e.g. Keeley, 2012; Lammers & Murphy, 2002; McCarthy, 2012; Wilson & Ryan, 2012). Despite the stability of SET, little has been done to evaluate the instrument from the students’ perspectives to see whether the aspects defined in SET correspond to what the students perceived as important. The existing literature has well documented conflicting evidence supporting and against a viewpoint that the students know what they want (Blackmore, 2009; DiPiro, 2010; uz Zaman, 2004) while elements in a SET instrument to a certain extent generally represent what the institution thinks are important.
Nonetheless, on premises that SET in general is stable, valid and useful, and evidence suggesting both the students and the institutions agree on what constitute quality teaching (Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang, & Green, 2009; Marsh & Hocevar, 1991a, 1991b; Marsh, Tourón, & Wheeler, 1985), this study examines some of the aspects of SET measurement from a different tangent – students’ perceptions of elements of good teaching.

Lecturer teaching skills are central to teaching quality as viewed by the students. The results of the analyses show that the students’ perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills, which is measured through good command of language, presentation skills and lecturer organisation of units, is affected by their perceptions on the importance of reference materials, class dynamics and the way their learning is assessed. The opposite relationships are also statistically significant where the students’ perceptions on the importance of reference materials, class dynamics, and assessments are affected by their perception on the importance of lecturer teaching skills.

Regardless of the amount and quality of reference materials and the quality of assessments, the perceived importance of class dynamics construct only affects and is affected by the perceived importance of lecturer teaching skills. This effectively suggests that a lecturer must not only be capable of imparting the knowledge but must also be able to engage with the students and create a dynamic classroom environment. In such an environment, learning is promoted because it integrates knowledge into the learners’ world (Frymier, 2005; Merrill, 2002; Wang & Castro, 2010), which effectively translates into effective teaching.

This study also shows that the students’ perceptions on the importance of assessments and the importance of reference materials affect each other. An implication of this finding is that reference materials such as notes and presentation slides should support or at least indicate methods or sections on which the students will be assessed since this could also have an implied effect on the students’ perception of teaching quality (Vevere & Kozlinskis, 2011).

References


