Impact on Teaching and Learning Performance at University Level: Case Study; Role of the Experienced Teacher

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Abstract: In writing this research paper, I have used wide-ranging approaches to reflect on my practice in learning and teaching. My experience for the last forty years have comprised of using various methods that covers courses design, assessment and students feedback, research and delivery based on using 21st century skills. An ample research shows that the effect of experienced faculty in enhancing students’ knowledge and skills. Faculty performance in the classrooms are of paramount importance in achieving good delivery and better performance for their students. What make them even more effective is their research and other researcher’s work that they do, use and share during their classes. The significance of this research work is recognized through concentrating on the tasks performed by faculty, which is based on their experiences of learning and teaching. Believing that our students are in the circle of our interests is appreciated by the students and academic management and will create a healthy environment for teaching and learning.

Keywords: Effective Learning and Teaching, Assessment and Feedback, Continuous Professional Development, curriculum design,

INTRODUCTION

During my tenure at Applied Science University in Bahrain (ASU) of 3 years, my colleagues have had a significant impact on all aspects of my education as a teacher. A senior member of staff guided me as a mentor on all aspects of my design and planning of learning activities. In fact, the mentor was very helpful in putting things together and facilitated the start for designing and planning of learning activities. The following example describes ways in which I designed and planned-learning activities of the course covering research methods taken by MBA students which is expected to cover both qualitative and quantitative techniques for conducting research (Race, 2010).

I started the process of designing and planning learning activities by identifying teaching material from reliable resources such as textbooks. I discovered that depending primarily on textbooks was not enough, because this does not cover the required syllabus, so I looked at similar courses delivered in other universities and made some updates. Using these for benchmarking, I formulated a clear course specification. To assist with my reflection, I discussed the course specification that I developed with my colleagues to get their feedback for further improvement to the course, which was valuable to me (Brockett, 2016). Moreover, I attempted to get some feedback from the students in order to align the course outcomes with the students’ prior knowledge. I worked on creating the level that would fit their former knowledge. I conducted a mini survey where I distributed questions to know how students evaluated the course (Eland, 2011). I did this to minimize the likelihood of them being shy, and to make it possible to give genuine input, which could enhance the course. I additionally asked my students whom I taught before in previous years about the benefits of the course in their thesis preparation. I inquired from them what they found useful in the old course that made them ready for writing and to identify what were the things that we missed. Collecting information and feedback from students gave me some very good insights on how to enhance my delivery of the course. I also had conversation with teachers who had some expertise in different disciplines. The input from these conversations brought about the emphasis on doing more interactive work that concentrates on enhancing student’s skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork, and other skills.

I was also required to consider the assessment process and method to be utilized in the course, as it was a research methods course that needed to give students the basic knowledge and techniques that help them to do their research. I chose a Multiple Choice exam even though I was aware of the limitations of such exam types, (O’Farrell, 2002). This method of assessment helps in scoring answers objectively and it is easy to do some statistical calculations. In addition, we can get a reliable and valid indication on student learning. Simply it is easy to measure the outcomes and its validity keeping in mind the end goal to build up a profile of students’ progress through formative assessment. The external assessor agreed to this assessment type is suitable for the learning results of this course. I initiated multiple choice questions online tests using Moodle. This gave me the chance to check whether they were able to comprehend the course content. The online multiple choice questions included feedback on why their answers were right or erroneous and permitted them to test themselves at various times on every topic. This methodology gave good support to students to be completely informed about their achievements through Moodle and highlight their weak and strong points for further improvement. In the coming semester, I will try to get more feedback and comments from staff, students, and our external examiner to ensure that the course content meets the students’ needs.
LITERATURE REVIEW, DISCUSSIONS AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

I am keen to use all facilities that support my students. The course of Entrepreneurship for the Masters in Human Resources is a vital course where students are exposed to many types of educational environments. Resources such as space, whiteboards, data-show and Moodle facilitate the support of my students. I encourage my students to use these facilities in formal and informal learning. Showing my students YouTube clips related to the course, power point presentation presentations and forming debating groups in workshops reflects well in students’ performance.

As part of my commitment to effective learning, I highlight to students that all these resources are important to enhance their learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007). I also encourage them to deal and apply to all physical facilities. Creating a friendly environment always help in keeping up the morale of the students. This helps me to deliver lessons efficiently and be more effective for learners. I received positive oral feedback from the students by the end of the semester. In fact, my students told other students about the way I am supporting the learning environment. Later, my colleagues and the Program Coordinator, received positive feedback and asked to follow my model and I shared with them my views and expertise.

Furthermore, I supervise Master students who are preparing their theses. The process I follow is one-to-one guidance. I continuously use the research room, which is equipped with a computer and connected to the web. This room is located in the library and it is a very quiet room. Students feel well looked after and concentrate fully with the supervisor. Now, Master students are asked to meet me there because we enjoy no interruptions and it is an effective environment for work. We use the internet to search for topics or related materials. The research students’ feedback is so encouraging that they started to tell their classmates to do the same.

To develop core knowledge, I ask students to attend seminars delivered by our faculty in different disciplines. This gives the students a wider perspective and makes them more attached to the educational environment. The response that I received from them is shown in their desire to attend and their contribution in the discussions. It became a rule for other students to follow due to the benefits of their attendance. During my career as a professional university professor, I always make it very clear that individual learners should be respected and well looked after.

I am committed to professional practice and to the development of teaching communities. I acknowledge diversity and promote equality of opportunity. In addition, I am committed to continuing professional development and evaluation of my practice. I make sure students work to access and to study learning material and learn through inquiry, communication, collaboration and construction. Also, to follow learners’ assessment reflections and feedback. Finally, as an active member of staff and contribute regularly to academic meetings within the department and with ad hoc committees as required. In these meetings, I discuss with peer issues related to teaching and learning. Accordingly, I get reciprocal feedback, which reflects on all aspects of my delivery.

The process of finalizing my postgraduate studies has led to considerable changes in my teaching. I gained the skills to acquire deeper knowledge in a specific academic area. As far as continuing professional development (CPD) is concerned, I have attended numerous workshops, conferences, seminars, etc. related to my specialty and to my development of teaching, learning and conducting research. Some training sessions were, according to my needs and interests and others were based on the analysis of training needs of staff at my university.

For example, I remember well a very good session I attended dealt with course planning, teaching methods and exam setting, assessments & feedback. Based on that session, I was able to develop self-confidence in course planning, teaching methods and exam setting, assessments & feedback.

Another example is my participation in a workshop entitled, “Developing Program Course Aims and Learning Outcomes using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as a Tool for Quality Improvement”, arranged by the Directorate of Higher Education Review in Bahrain. It helped me to know the requirements for good teaching and learning practices. It also developed my teaching skills and made me reflect on my students’ learning outcomes. This participation, together with the knowledge and skills gained through practical application with students, enabled me to publish two papers on quality teaching, entitled: “Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the GCC Future Prospects,” and “Education and Human Capital Development in Bahrain”, (Darwish, 2014).

Thirdly, I have also attended many workshops related to the use of e-learning strategies to support the teaching and learning process. I have used this in my classes with the Moodle learning management system. This has been developed to have better learning outcomes of such activities that assessed, and mentioned in the student feedback. Moreover, I published a research paper on this method of learning that leads to more advanced ways of delivery by using new technology, for a special conference on e-learning (Darwish, 2006).

I used the outcomes of these sessions in updating my own work practice. Both kinds weaved together nicely to enhance my teaching performance, learning and the student learning experience. Other sessions, such class management, curriculum design, ILO’s, benchmarking, teaching methods, and many quality-training sessions, encouraged me to reflect and improve my teaching. For example, the class management session addressed issues such as dealing with students in class, time management and communication approaches. Based on such sessions, I was able to improve my knowledge of different approaches and techniques for teaching through utilizing both formal and informal talks with colleagues (Anderson, 1991).

The feedback from my students (on the Entrepreneurship course) through the survey conducted by the University
Quality Assurance & Accreditation Centre” (first semester 2015/2016) clearly indicated progressive improvement in the rates of satisfaction between 4.13-4.38 out of 5.

In addition, I regularly look for and share resources with other colleague's on this aspect of teaching. This has been a reciprocal learning experience for me, allowing me to develop my supervision practice (Levy, 2012).

At the end of the course, verbally ask my students about how I performed and they gave encouraging feedback. I felt my CPD program and research an effect on my students and this was confirmed by one of my colleagues who attended one of my classes. The feedback I got from him was very encouraging.

My additional contribution in this area is evidenced through the adoption of 21st century skills in teaching and learning. These skills, which are categorized in ways of thinking, ways of working, tools of working and living in the world, have been used to enhance students learning outcomes. I disseminated this approach to my university academic colleagues in a seminar and presented in a conference with a research paper in UAE International conference (Darwish, S., 2015).

REFERENCES