

## **Students' Perceptions of Effective Teaching Characteristics in the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana**

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### **Abstract**

The study sought to investigate what students perceive to be effective teaching characteristics of lecturers in the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. A survey design was adopted to gather data from the study population (n=4,189) comprised of full-time undergraduate students of the five departments in the college. A multi-staged sampling utilising stratified, quota, and simple random sampling techniques was used to select a sample size of 495 students for the study. Data collected were analysed using means, standard deviations, and a one-way between-groups analysis of variance. The findings showed that the 39 teaching characteristics were perceived by the respondents as essential determinants of effective teaching characteristics. The respondents identified teacher preparation as the extremely important effective teaching characteristic. The study recommendations included conducting a similar study using both students and lecturers to ascertain if the instructor and the learner share similar perceptions with regard to effective teaching characteristics.

**Key words:** Teaching characteristics, Teacher preparation, Teacher appraisal, Quality assurance

### **INTRODUCTION**

The provision of quality tertiary education is driven by several key factors, prominent among them is effective teaching. With regard to school resources, effective teaching is identified as a significant factor in enhancing student achievement. Anderson (2004) points out that schools can make a great difference in relation to the achievement of students, and a greater portion of that difference is attributable to effective teaching. The concept of teaching in relation to education implies a kind of communication between a teacher and a learner with the intention of guiding the learner to acquire information, knowledge, and skill or attitude in order to aid the learner's total growth and development (Alorvor & el Sadat, 2010).

Effective teaching is teaching that brings about effective and successful student learning. It refers to the activities that first come to mind when we think of the teachers' work at the lecture hall or classroom. Penny (2004) indicates that effective teaching is teaching which creates a learning environment that promotes discovery, knowledge construction, creativity, critical thinking, and life-long learning skills among students. The most important aspect of effective teaching is the degree to which the lesson makes sense to students. For example, teachers must present information in an organised orderly way and lessons should be related to students' background knowledge by reminding students of previously learned material at

relevant points in the lesson. The essence of effective teaching lies very much in terms of whether the teaching is actually delivering the intended outcomes.

Effective teaching characteristics are relatively stable traits that are related to, and influence the way teachers practice their profession (Anderson, 2004). As teachers play a primary role in students learning, certain characteristics are deemed more effective when playing this role. A number of studies are found in the education literature following different methods to find out the characteristics of effective teaching. Evans and Abbott (as cited in Allan, Clark & Jopling, 2009) maintained that there can be no consensus about what characterises effective teaching until the aims of higher education are agreed upon. For the purpose of this study, there are 39 characteristics of effective teachers which are categorised under six teaching components derived from the literature: Preparation; Assessment, Motivation, Knowledge; Individual Relationships and Group Relationships (Suwandee, 1995).

The focus on what graduates from tertiary institutions learned in school has generated renewed interest in effective teaching. Tertiary institutions must be seen by society to be relevant in meeting stakeholder expectations. The desire to clarify the qualities that make university teaching effective has been revitalised as a renewed mandate to enhance teaching and learning, and this appears predominantly in the strategic plans of many universities and colleges (Delaney, Johnson, Johnson & Treslan, 2010). The quest to improve the quality of teaching in schools has become a source of public debate in many countries leading to the introduction of various measures, such as, the regular appraisal of teachers, provision of lists of teacher competencies, and statements about what should be taught and how.

Nonisand Hudson (2004) note that student evaluations of teaching have become a key indicator that is often used in determining teacher effectiveness. Various studies (e.g., Cullingford, 2003; Haydn, 2007; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007) of learners' perceptions of effective teaching show that learners have clear ideas about the teacher's role and the demands and expectations they have of a teacher who is fulfilling that role effectively. The authors point out that learners are good sources of information in determining effective teaching. Teachers and learners have constant interaction and relationship. According to Walsh and Maffei (1994) the relationship between the learner and the teacher is an important factor for determining effective teaching. Students thus provide an important perspective on teaching; they are the recipients of instruction and are in a good position to report on the extent to which a teacher prepares for class sessions, communicates clearly, stimulates interest, and demonstrates enthusiasm and interest in students. Most tertiary education institutions have adopted student evaluation of teaching as a measure of teaching effectiveness. Studies on how college teaching is evaluated have shown that systematic student ratings are the foremost method for tapping student judgement. According to Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) suggest that the primary indicator of effective teaching is located at the level of the student rather than at the level of the teacher.

The Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (DAPQA) at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana spearheads the Quality Assurance System of the university through monitoring and evaluation of all activities that directly or indirectly influence academic quality. Included in the mandate of DAPQA is the responsibility to conduct annual students' appraisal of courses and teaching. At the end of every semester, DAPQA conducts a survey of student's perception of effective teaching and the academic performance of lecturers in terms of meeting learning outcomes.

The DAPQA survey instrument covers items that address the following characteristics arranged in terms of weighted scores (i.e., from highest to lowest): evidence of advance preparation, assessment of learning, knowledge of subject matter, use of appropriate pedagogical strategies, class management and control, and teacher professionalism.

Though DAPQA sees students as important source of information about teacher effectiveness, the items on the survey were designed with no input from the students. If students had participated in identifying items on the survey instrument, would the items be different from what they are now? Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) believe that students are capable of identifying effective teaching characteristics from their perspective.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Teacher appraisal, particularly of their teaching characteristics is expected to lead to improved teaching effectiveness. Studies have shown that the quality of university teaching has a very strong effect on students' learning. Consequently, numerous studies and researches have tried to identify ideal teacher characteristics to provide educators with criteria for the development of valid, reliable and effective means of evaluating teaching performance as a means of improving teaching.

Various authors (i.e., Hillier, 2002; Skelton 2004; Yates, 2005) have indicated that assessment of effective teaching characteristics has been conducted with instruments that focused primarily on lecturers' perceptions of effective university teaching. The situation is no different at the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast. It is only the College of Education Studies whose students are allowed to take up courses from the other colleges and schools. Also, approximately 50% of students of UCC are admitted into the College of Education Studies.

In the College of Education Studies lecturers are appraised every semester by students to assess their effectiveness. This assessment is one of the tools that management uses to either confirm or promote the academic staff. The assessment tool used by the students was designed by the DAPQA and the items on the instrument were obtained from lecturers' perceptions of effective university teaching characteristics in tertiary institutions. The assessment does not include students' perception of effective teaching characteristics. Rather it measures student assessment of the perception of lecturers on what constitute effective teaching characteristics.

However, students can be in a better position to give credible information regarding the effectiveness of teaching in tertiary institutions since they are the final recipients of the knowledge transfer. This study sought to investigate what students perceive to be effective teaching characteristics of lecturers in the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast. The study was framed by two research questions.

1. What are the characteristics that students associate with effective teaching?
2. What differences exist between students' academic level with respect to the students' perception of effective teaching characteristics?

Understanding how students perceive effective teaching can give valuable insight in designing good and relevant professional development programmes for lecturers and also provide valuable teacher assessment information for administrators in situations such as strategic planning, curriculum improvement and faculty evaluation. The findings of the study may help enrich the student rating form completed at the end of each semester as evaluative criteria to assess teaching effectiveness.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey design was adopted for this study and was deemed most appropriate choice since the research was meant to collect data and report on the situation as it existed with regard to students' perception of effective teaching characteristics. The study population was made up of all full time undergraduate students offering Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programme from the College of Education Studies. These include students of: Department of Basic Education; Departments of Arts and Social Sciences Education (DASSE); Department of Vocational and Technical Education (VOTEC); Department of Science and Mathematics Education (DSME) and Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER). The total population of the study was 4,189.

A multi-staged sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. The number of respondents from each department was proportionally determined and this was followed by the quota sampling technique which sets a quota of respondents that are chosen from specific population groups. In this study, the specific groups were the academic levels. Finally, the simple random sampling technique, using the lottery method was employed to select a sample size of 495 students for the study. This sample size was in agreement with the recommendation by Krejcie and Morgan (as cited in Sarantakos, 2005) that a minimum sample size of 354 is ideal for a population of 4,500.

A questionnaire using a five-point Likert-type scale was used to collect data from the respondents. It consisted of 39 teacher characteristics rating items aimed at determining the degree of importance of each item and coded as 1= Not at all Important; 2= Could be Important; 3= Moderately Important; 4=Very Important; and 5= Extremely Important. A decision rule to interpret computed means (M) is as follows:

- 1 ≤ M < 1.5 depicts "not at all important"
- 1.5 ≤ M < 2.5 depicts "could be important"
- 2.5 ≤ M < 3.5 depicts "moderately important"
- 3.5 ≤ M < 4.5 depicts "very important"
- 4.5 ≤ M ≤ 5 depicts "extremely important"

The 39 items were grouped into six components namely: Preparation; Assessment; Motivation; Knowledge; Individual Relationships; and Group Relationships. The questionnaire also elicited from the respondents demographic information about the students' professional experience and academic level.

Data analysed for the study were based on 438 completed survey representing 88.5% return rate. The results and findings were presented and discussed under the following themes derived from the research questions: (a) characteristics associated with effective teaching and (b) differences between students' academic level with respect to perception of effective teaching characteristics.

Means and standard deviations were computed for the responses of students and ranked ordered from the highest to the lowest. The top 10 effective teaching characteristics were identified to determine which of the six typologies of teaching components they belong to. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted at 5% significant level to ascertain whether differences exist across students' academic levels as measured by perceptions of effective teaching.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Characteristics Associated with Effective Teaching

The results of the ranked-ordered computed means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Ranked Ordered Effective Teaching Characteristics**

Rank	Teaching Characteristics	Mean	SD
1	Is well prepared for class	4.56	.696
2	Explains Clearly	4.44	.756
3	Demonstrates mastery of subject matter	4.43	.785
4	Has the subject matter and the course well organised	4.38	.805
5	Has self confidence	4.34	.844
6	Makes difficult topics easy to understand	4.33	.855
7	Stresses important materials	4.28	.831
8	Supports ideas with examples, comparisons and facts	4.26	.824
9	Is a careful evaluator-his/her grading is impartial	4.22	.884
10	Is careful and precise in answering questions	4.21	.796
10	Motivates students to do their best work	4.21	.864
10	Respects students as persons	4.21	.899
13	Presents materials at students level of comprehension	4.20	.839
14	His/her tests are fair, sound, and complete	4.17	.841
15	Knows if the class is understanding	4.16	.855
16	Provides time for discussion and questions	4.14	.799
16	Has a lively Interest in and enjoys teaching	4.14	.870
16	Summarises major points	4.14	.903
19	Encourages students to express feelings and opinions	4.11	.875
20	Has an interesting style of presentation	4.09	.909
21	Encourages class discussion	4.08	.853
22	Give sufficient number of appropriate assignments and test based on materials covered	4.05	.937
23	Knows when students are bored and confused	4.03	.926
24	Presents facts and concepts from relates fields	4.02	.869
25	Inspires intellectual curiosity in students	4.00	.905
26	Prompt in returning tests and assignments	3.97	.910
26	Defines class objectives	3.97	.939

Rank	Teaching Characteristics	Mean	SD
28	Is enthusiastic about his/her subject	3.95	.956
29	Encourages independent thinking	3.94	.932
29	Is willing to help students in and out of the classroom	3.94	.970
31	Has genuine interest in students	3.93	.952
32	Gives references for interesting and involved points	3.91	.866
33	Discusses points of view other than his/her own or not	3.84	.918
33	Is friendly towards students	3.84	1.021
35	Has a sense of humour	3.81	.956
36	Relates to students as individuals	3.80	.986
37	Is a dynamic and energetic person	3.78	1.023
38	Invites criticism of his/her own ideas	3.62	1.094
39	Recognises and greets students out of class	3.37	1.152

Table 1 shows that the study respondents do not perceive any of the 39 teaching characteristics as being “not at all important” or “could be important.” This finding suggests that the 39 teaching characteristics, as perceived by the respondents, are essential determinants of effective teaching characteristics. The respondents, however, perceive only one item, “recognises and greets students out of class”, as a moderately important teaching characteristic. Majority of the teaching characteristics (94.9%) were identified as very important effective teaching characteristics. The respondents also perceive “is well prepared” as the only extremely important effective teaching characteristic. This finding of the respondents stressing on the teacher being well prepared as extremely important teaching characteristic is consistent with that suggestion of Amakyi and Ampah-Mensah (2014) that effective teaching and learning begin with the teacher being well prepared for class. They observe that the teaching characteristic of being well prepared enables the teacher to engage in reflective practice adopting reflection for class, reflection in class, and reflection on class (Schon, 1990). Spencer (2003) identifies preparation as providing the teacher with a structure and context for delivering the lesson, as well as the framework for reflection and subsequent evaluation.

Each of the 39 teaching characteristics belongs to only one of the 6 typologies of teaching components. Six out of the 10 most rated items were from the Preparation component, two from the Knowledge component, and one each from Assessment and Motivation components. Of the least 10 rated items, five were from the Individual Relationship component, two each from Motivation and Knowledge components and one from Group Relationship component.

Taking all the characteristics together, a ranked-ordered group means and standard deviations for the 6 teaching component typologies is depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Ranked Grouped Means and Standard Deviations**

Teaching Components	Mean	SD
Preparation	4.59	.543
Assessment	4.10	.626
Knowledge	4.09	.565
Group Relationships	4.05	.569
Motivation	4.02	.622
Individual Relationships	3.85	.682

The finding shows the order of ranking of effective teaching characteristics by respondents. The respondents perceived Preparation component (M=4.59, SD=.543) as being on top of the list and Individual Relationship component (M=3.85, SD=.682) at the end of the list. The order of ranking is consistent with the works of various researchers, such as, Allan et al., 2009; Fink, 2005; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; and Spencer, 2003. For example, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) opine that preparation enables the teacher to make successful adaptations in the classroom recognizing what is important and meaningful and committing themselves to teaching it. Allan et al. (2009) describe effective teachers as always preparing before they go to class to deliver and do not take their preparation as a joke. Walker (2008) observes that the most effective teachers come to class each day ready to teach because they have prepared. Walker further observes that it is easy for students to learn in their classes because they are ready for the day. Such teachers do not waste instructional time. They start class on time. They teach for the entire class period.

Additionally, the finding is congruent with Suwandee's (1995) study in which students rated Preparation and Assessment as the two most important teaching components. Preparation thus becomes a crucial foundation for planning what to teach and how to teach. Not only will good preparation ensure that teachers have thought carefully about what to present, but it also helps to boost teacher confidence.

The perception of the ranking by the respondents is consistent with the order identified by DAPQA. This finding indicates that the items identified to measure effective teaching characteristics have reliability. The order remains basically the same regardless of who is arranging them. Both teachers and learners have similar ranking for the characteristics.

**Differences in Students' Academic Level and Perceptions of Effective Teaching Characteristics**  
The study further examined whether academic level of students played a role in identifying effective teaching characteristics. The distribution of the respondents according to their academic levels is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Across Academic Levels**

Academic Level	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
100	96	21.9
200	90	20.5
300	128	29.2
400	124	28.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted at 5% significant level to ascertain whether differences exist across students' academic levels as measured by perceptions of effective teaching. Respondents were divided into four according to their academic levels (group 1: level 100; group 2: level 200; group 3: level 300; group 4: level 400). The results indicated that there was statistically significant difference in the overall perceptions of students for the four academic groups:  $F(3, 434) = 4.395, p = .005$ .

Post Hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for level 100 students ( $M = 4.23, SD = .512$ ) was significantly different from level 200 students ( $M = 4.00, SD = .543$ ) with  $p = .011$ , level 300 students ( $M = 4.01, SD = .524$ ) with  $p = .007$ , and level 400 students ( $M = 4.0$ ). However, there was no statistical difference between the other levels, that is, the perceptions of level 200 and level 300 students, level 200 and level 400 students, and level 300 and level 400 students. The study finding shows that once students are settled in the university environment, their perception of effective teaching characteristics remains essentially the similar. Years in school has not been found to be significantly related to students' evaluation ratings (Braskamp, Ory & Pepper, 1981). However, Aleamoni, (as cited in Badri, Abdulla, Kamali & Dodeen, 2006) observed that some pattern of variability existed regarding rating biases associated with various course levels such as freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior years.

### CONCLUSION

The emphasis and the weight put on the 39 identified effective teaching characteristics and the subsequent ranking of the characteristics based on the perception of the study respondents, provide valuable information to address issues of validity and reliability of the assessment instrument used by the Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (DAPQA) of the University of Cape Coast. The weighted ranking of the respondents' perception is congruent with that of the Directorate suggesting that the assessment instrument is measuring the key determinants of effective teaching characteristics at the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast. Also, the consistency in the ranking of items by both the study respondents and DAPQA, that designed the assessment instrument devoid of students' input, provides a support for a qualitative measure of the reliability of the instrument.

The study concludes that the College of Education Studies students' perception of effective teaching characteristics is similar to the list identified by the Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (DAPQA) of the University of Cape Coast. The students place greatest emphasis on teacher preparation and see the teacher being well prepared as extremely important effective teaching characteristic.

This study elicited information from only students of the College of Education Studies. The results are therefore limited in their applicability to other faculties and tertiary institutions. For this reason, similar research should be conducted for students of other colleges. Additionally, studies should be carried out with lecturers as the respondents. Literature reports that students and teachers sometimes have different opinions on what constitutes effective teaching. As a matter of fact, conducting a study using both students and lecturers in an educational institution as participants would be fruitful to help facilitate the organisation of better development programmes to improve teaching performance.



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