

Impact of Accumulated Teaching Experience on Supporting Learners In Higher Education: A Case Study From Bahrain

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Abstract

Studies confirm that learning together with experienced and qualified teachers let students realize how theory and practice connect. Teaching experience increases teacher's effectiveness and experienced teachers have a positive impact on the performance of their students and colleagues. As teachers gain experience, their students are more likely to do better on other estimates of success far off test scores, as their achievement gains increase. Therefore, in this paper, I have used a comprehensive approach to bounce back my teaching experience and learning support in higher education for about four decades relating to different areas as planning learning and teaching activities, assessing and giving feedback to students, developing effective learning environment and engaging in continuing professional development. Research proved that teaching experience increases teacher's effectiveness and it is very essential to highlight this positive relationship between teaching experience and teaching effectiveness in boosting students' achievement through offering knowledge, insight and wisdom whether directly or indirectly. The importance of this paper can be recognizes through focusing on the role of teaching experience in helping students to improve socially and academically.

Keywords

Teaching experience, Learning support, Higher Education, Academic advisory, Effective leadership, Learning environment

Introduction

I have a long academic experience in Business Administration field as I have worked as an academic in universities for about 40 years. After completion of B.Sc. in Business Administration, I began lecturing at High Polytechnic, Egypt. I did M.Sc. in Business Administration (Marketing), and lectured for six years teaching different modules such as Marketing, Principles of Management, International Business Administration, Methods of Scientific research, Total Quality Management and Logistics.

I worked then as a senior teacher, teaching business subjects in English at high schools for the ministry of education in Bahrain and as a part time lecturer at Bahrain University for 14 years. After that, I lectured at Delmon University in Bahrain for 17 years, as I was appointed as a coordinator of business department, then a manager of MBA program. I earned PhD in Total Quality Management and joined ASU in Bahrain in 2013 as an assistant professor in Business Administration and I was appointed as the director of community engagement office. I am an academic advisor guiding students choosing their learning schedules that suit their levels and capabilities, and a member of quality assurance committee. Furthermore, I participated in a lot of symposiums, research seminars, training courses, workshops and attended many conferences in Egypt and Bahrain in Business Administration issues.

All this experience in both governmental and private sectors has significantly shaped my academic performance

relating to designing and planning learning activities, besides expanding my mastery and leadership in higher education institutions. Ramsden (1998) suggests that effective leadership in higher education institutions entails leadership in teaching, leadership, fair and efficient management development and recognition of performance and interpersonal skills (P. 347). Leadership effectiveness in higher education institutions has dual purposes; on one hand, being effective leaders has to do with employment of the right resources for the right task as ordered by the level of importance. On the other hand, students can learn from the leaders' actions, hence enables them to develop a sense that being effective is not just theoretical Bryman (2007); M (2005). According to Davis (2003), the term leadership implies movement taking the organization or some part of it in a new direction, solving problems, being creative, initiating new programs, building organizational structures and improving quality (P. 4).

For me, my leadership reflects my personal values which are openness, honesty, integrity, passion, fairness, enthusiasm, respect and aspiration. Several styles of leadership exist in HE (i.e. democratic, Laissez – Faire, autocratic, transactional, transformational and situational).

Situational leadership is a leadership theory that merges both directive and supportive dimensions, and each of

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these dimensions is to be applied correctly in a given situation. Leaders operating under the situational leadership theory have to assess their employees through evaluating their commitment to accomplish a certain task. Situational leadership means that leaders have to change the degree of supportiveness and directness to their employees according to the given situation of subordinates and their level of motivation. This type of leadership demands that leaders vary their behavior and leadership style according to their subordinates' commitment [Kindle \(2009\)](#). Situational leadership is the mixture task behavior, worker commitment and relation behavior studies show that the success of situational leadership style is related to the combination of these three components must happen; it allows openness between leaders and member in addition to ensure an independence and competence in employees' decisions. A situational leader tries to discover the characteristics of their followers in order to know which leadership style to use with them [Farmer \(2012\)](#). Moreover, situational leaders are known for giving appropriate guidance and task support for their subordinates in order to accomplish the desired goals successfully. This type of leader must also handle problems innovatively and quickly in order to overcome them. This according to studies is highly correlated with the improvement of employees' productivity [Cnaff and W \(2014\)](#).

Theoretical Framework, Literature Review & Discussion

All over my four decades in higher education, I have expanded my comprehension of how students learn, applying this to my own teaching, and in turn, to my colleagues and mentees reinforcing the whole college learning environment. I assessed varied literatures from distinct origins, observed colleagues with long experience in teaching and learning and invited peers to my lectures. This educational task has played an important part in developing my teaching, with reviews verifying my teaching and assist my students to be exceptional. My passion for effective teaching styles and students support has associated my in action research. For example, I faced a problem with my students of special needs in teaching the course of "Supply Chain Management". I noticed that my strategy in teaching quantitative problems needed some improvement as using the same teaching style for all the students didn't help those who suffered learning difficulties problems. I decided to conduct an action research to overcome this problem. An action research strategy purpose is to solve a particular problem and produce guidelines for best practice [Denscombo \(2010\)](#). I started the action research in 2015 for one month by designing an individualized plan with intensive remedial support before the lectures during my office hours to help those students with special needs to strengthen their confidence and enhance effectiveness of learning. I gave them simple learning activities with the same course objectives to develop their required skills, I provided them with training exercises to develop their abilities, also I gave them short and clear instructions and taught them problems' concepts from different perspectives. One month later, I measured the results of my experiment on students, I found that they

could grasp the ideas and actively participated. At the end of the semester, I observed that they overcame their leaning difficulties and gained a sense of achievement and recovered their confidence and interest in learning. Further, they passed with good grades (about 40% improvement in exam grades). Two years later, I was asked by the dean of my college to conduct a day training course for the new colleagues on how to deal with students of special needs. Eight new faculty members attended this workshop and their feedback showed that they got benefit in improving their skills when teaching students with special needs. At Delmon University, I was appointed as MBA program leader (A partnership between Delmon University and Arab Academy for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Egypt). I was influenced by pedagogic research as [Black \(2018\)](#) teaching teams effectively and influencing quality learning experience for students and colleagues is evidence of leadership in learning and teaching.

As a situational leader in HE, I search repeatedly to insure students and colleagues receive the very best experience through sharing the results of my action research. Accordingly, as reported by the head of my department, I initiated a new culture, within the department trying to develop my colleagues teaching style using evidence – informed approach. I lead by example to maintain this culture in the mind of students and colleagues. I like to have an integrated relationship with my students and I always ask them to give feedback related to the learning activities in my lectures and whether they find them useful or not, so that I can improve my performance to meet their needs in the future. For example, my students in the course of "Principles of Management 2" informed me that they needed to discuss the best answers for the case studies after correcting them to know the ideal answers in their next work. I found that discussing the key answers for the different course works filled the gaps between the correct answers and students' actual performance and in the other second half of the term, I found that such strategy was very useful in improving students' comprehension of any work assigned to them. Therefore, I have successfully implemented a new approach across my department which impacted on the practice of many colleagues who were having similar issues and developed a culture of sharing professional practice focusing on student needs which is now embedded and valued by my colleagues in the department.

I have written a book on scientific thinking, presented 3 research papers at conferences related to quality of education, have a research published recently in an international journal (Scopus) titled "Critical Success Elements for Small and Medium Enterprises' Perceptions of Entrepreneurs in Bahrain". Research has enhanced my ability and updated my knowledge and impacted on my colleagues who did not publish researches and need some help on how to publish a research paper in an international journal. Working for different Universities in different countries involved me in continuing professional development in teaching, learning, assessment, conducting research and leadership and has impacted on the development of my students and colleagues over the last four decades.

Externally, I am an active member of Higher Educational Community and am a Fellow of HEA. I have been external examiner for Gulf University in Bahrain. This provided me with opportunities to provide support and consultancy on developing courses and research beyond my institution. I have taken on the role of mentor to new members of staff for more than 30 years. Mentoring is a process and a relationship between an experienced mentor and a less experienced one, that is primarily designed to support their learning, professional development and well-being and to facilitate their induction into the culture of teaching and the local school of context [Hobson \(2011\)](#). I have actively encouraged and supported a group of new colleagues who had less experience in higher education. This resulted in developing the quality of their teaching and support to students and even improved their self-confidence. My own teaching practice has greatly benefited from observing others and I hope to be a more effective leader and mentor in the future.

As a member of Curriculum Development Committee, I participated in revising and redesigning a number of courses, such as “Principles of Management”, “Total Quality Management” and “Methods of Scientific Research”, in light of the framework for Higher Education Qualifications and benchmarking with other national and international universities. In fact, my role enabled me to improve the process of course assessment, gave a balanced weight to the different elements of course work (assignments, real life case studies, problem solving exercises, quizzes, discussions, group and individual tasks) and connect each learning activity to the course learning outcomes. This connection assisted students to understand the purpose of the activity, stimulated and engaged them to develop knowledge, skills and abilities related to course learning outcomes.

Based on recommendations of the Higher Education Council for developing the Business Administration Bachelor program, I shared in re-designing the program plan through moving some courses from specific levels to others such as “Methods of Scientific Research” as I suggested that this course should be within the core subjects and not in the third level, because the aim of this course is to acquire basic knowledge of scientific paradigms and research methods to develop the students’ ability to conduct and in written form a report for a scientific study. This helped students a lot to conduct research projects in other courses effectively. Also, I shared in changing the prerequisite for the course of “Total Quality Management” to be “operation management” instead of “marketing” for the strong relation between Total Quality Management and the operational performance. I found that this change created more logical links between the courses of the program and students’ understanding and enhanced their abilities.

Further, I modified some of the learning activities of some courses of the bachelor level to provide students with more valuable tasks to develop their skills (group tasks like role-playing, real case studies and collaborating learning to develop team work skills, and problem solving exercises in order to improve their knowledge and intellectual skills as well as their active learning). I found that these strategies resulted in truly students’ interact with each other in completing their activities and provided the chance to practice skills and apply knowledge previously taught to

change passive learning of receiving information and ideas to active learning.

I always make every effort to facilitate any difficulty face students. For example, during my teaching of the “Strategic Management” course (level 8), I found that students did not understand the subject well because they were weak in English language, so I simplified the subject by using simple words in English and explained each concept in different ways, giving examples, changing some texts into diagrams or tables and repeated the explanation until they understood. I noticed that students started gradually to understand more and their performance improved a lot. During the second part of the course, I also noticed improved reflections of their overall grasp of course material and their grades became better.

As an academic advisor, I guide students about academic, social and personal issues. I give a lot of care to follow up process with students at risk to help them improve their performance to overcome the obstacles they face.

I usually use multiple teaching methods as group and individual tasks, assignments, problem solving exercises, case studies, and quizzes and lecturing to overcome the monotony of the traditional spoon feeding ways to teaching. This strategy makes students alert and share more effectively in the learning process.

I prefer to allow free discussions to get benefit of each other experience through peer-to-peer learning. I observed that students feel more comfortable and open when interacting with a peer as this strategy allows for greater understanding and team building spirit. The use of technology can enhance students’ learning [Gradfield et al. \(2000\)](#), and provide them with opportunities to become familiar with the technology that they may encounter in their jobs [Chance et al. \(2007\)](#). I prepare the course materials and upload it on the Moodle to make it available for my students to facilitate their learning process and to encourage them to use technology in their education. I found that this strategy helped students for higher achievement and greater productivity in terms of enhanced learning outcomes.

Empirical studies have shown that case-based or case method teaching is an effective pedagogical approach adopted in fields such as business, education, law, medicine and e-learning [Angeli \(2004\)](#); [Choi and Lee \(2008\)](#). I feel very proud when I see my students finding my lectures useful and interesting as I try my best to link the theory to reality. That’s why I give much care in my lectures, such as “Principles of Management” and “Total Quality Management”, to explain any theory at a level that can directly relate to the practice through group work to apply what was learned in real life situations.

Assessment provides information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities [Black \(2009\)](#). I think that feedback to students should be accurate, transparent, fast and useful for helping them develop their performance, and learn from their mistakes. In all courses I teach, I always use formative and summative, formal and informal assessments. I depend upon formative assessment to provide students with feedback that can be used as an opportunity to improve their performance and increase their understanding on one side and help me to evaluate and improve my teaching style on the other side.

Assessment is probably the most important thing we can do to help our students learn Brown (2004), among the different types of formative assessment, I ask students to sit in groups and give them real cases from different organizations, as in the course of “Total Quality Management” which depends on practical work. I ask them to analyze the case, find the problems and the best ways to solve and overcome. I give feedback verbally and written, in the lecture or through email. I also give my students quizzes and challenging questions and allow free discussion to have an idea about their understanding, and observe the progress they achieve and communicate more with them. By the end of each course, I find that students can be engaged with the course material and able to meet the course learning objectives.

Moreover, in students’ presentations, I used to use peer-to-peer feedback and self-assessment to get them involved in the learning process, and to give them more confidence and develop their interaction with each other. I found that this strategy helps students to be involved in learning, think critically and develop collaborative skills. For Masters’ students, I use one-to-one verbal feedback during my supervisory meetings or in mock viva meetings in the university concentrating on the strengths and weaknesses to help them to improve their theses. Also I give written feedback when they ask me to read and revise their work. I benefited from discussing the objectives of different types of formative assessment with my colleagues during the department meetings and improved our performance through exchanging experience with them.

As I have a long experience in the academic field, I worked in different learning environments, physical and virtual ones. From the student’s perspective, effective classroom management involves clear communication of behavioral and academic expectations, as well as establishing a cooperative learning environment Davis (2009). I like to create a learning environment that optimize the benefits of using the two types of environments; physical and virtual, in order to be able to help and support my students. In all my lectures, I always give the priority to the arrangement of students, and according to the nature of the task, I plan to arrange students to sit in a circle or U shape or regular sitting to accomplish individual or group work. I use different teaching tools and aids such as the board, PowerPoint presentations, flip chart, case studies, online assignments, group activities, diagrams, pictures, video clips etc., to enhance students’ ability to understand and make the lecture more effective and interactive.

Realizing that virtual environment is very important to students and lecturers, ASU facilitates communication and knowledge sharing through an online platform. I use the ASU Moodle to upload lectures notes, assignments, problem solving, tasks, quizzes, case studies etc., hence, students can download any resources they need and respond back due to a specified deadline. This strategy proved to be very helpful for my students and save time and effort. I am trying my best to be a resident more than a visitor to the online environment with my students White (2011). Accordingly, I create groups on WhatsApp and let my students join, so that we can exchange information easily. Students also exchange information and communicate with me through

emails. Through such means of communication, students find it easy to communicate with me at their convenient times.

In addition, I supervised a number of master students with different topics of business studies such as “Total Quality Management”, “Strategic planning and organizational environment”. I guide them in the methodology, data analysis and writing theses. These researches enriched my knowledge which is reflected on my students’ skills.

As a partner in Al Manar Institute for training and consultancy and as a certified and accredited trainer, I conducted many training courses in different areas of Business Administration for different levels of employees in different companies in the Gulf region. I believe that I gained a lot of knowledge and experience through conducting such training courses which had a great impact on the trainees’ professional practices.

As I mentioned, reflection has showed how my situational style of leadership has influenced both students and colleagues to develop the quality of teaching. Examining the UKPSF according to Descriptor 3 is a turning point toward further Development in my leadership and mentoring roles in Higher Education. The subsequent case studies reflect on this in more depth.

Conclusion

This paper showed that teaching experience develops teachers’ effectiveness and also develops students’ socially and academically. In this paper, I have shared my long professional experience in Higher Education relating to different areas as planning learning and teaching activities, assessing and giving feedback to students, developing effective learning environment and engaging in continuing professional development. It was very beneficial for me, to have such a long professional life in both governmental and private sectors, and I hope to continue playing the role of effective leader and mentor as well. Hoping my paper is useful for other colleagues in inspiring them develop their teaching and learning activities.

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