

Psychological Perspectives on Teaching in Higher Education: Then and Now

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Abstract— Higher education systems are expanding at a rapid rate. As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes. One of the main challenges of the education system is the lack of means to measure the quality of teaching. This paper attempted to understand the prevailing quality of teaching in higher education in India from the psychological perspective and to suggest ways of enhancement. The present study had a mixed method design. It was primarily qualitative in nature, supplemented by descriptive data for support. In order to validate the qualitative data, the technique of methodological triangulation was done. The three sources for the triangulation process were focussed group discussions (FGD's), questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The total sample size in the study was 32 individuals- both male and female, 16 young adults and 16 middle aged adults. The purposive sampling technique was used with a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Findings indicated that the primary psychological processes involved in improving the quality of teaching in higher education were role modelling, attention, retention, mutual respect, motivational strategies, structural arrangements and adaptation to the environment. These findings have implications to teachers, youth, educational institutions and policy makers.

Keywords— *quality teaching, modeling, higher education, psychology of education/learner*

1. Introduction

Higher education is becoming a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy. The imperative for countries to improve employment skills calls for quality teaching within educational institutions. As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes. Much attention is given to public assessments and national rankings of higher education institutions. However these comparisons tend to overemphasise research and infrastructure, using research performance and sophistication as a yardstick of institutional value. If these assessments fail to address the

quality of teaching, it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging (Li & Kaye, 1998). This paper attempted to discuss the quality of teaching in higher education in line with its purpose and expectations. It also sought to highlight the differences in teaching between the past and present in order to suggest directions for the future.

1.1 Education

Education in its broadest, general sense is the means through which the aims and habits of a group of people lives on from one generation to the next (Dewey, 1944). Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. In its narrow, technical sense, education is the formal process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, customs and values from one generation to another, e.g., instruction in schools and universities.

The six main purposes of education (UNESCO, 2008) include:

1. To develop reasoning about perennial questions
2. To master the methods of scientific inquiry
3. To cultivate the intellect
4. To create positive change agents
5. To develop spirituality and
6. To model a democratic society.

As observed in the purposes of education, it is evident that each purpose requires a facilitator. Hence, the teacher becomes the means (of the many, but most importantly) to achieve the desired goals of education. Willard (2006) states, "Every teaching and teacher of humankind must deal with four great questions":

1. What is real, and what is not? What is the case?
2. Who is well off? Who "has it made" or has the good life?
3. Who is a really good person or lives a truly praiseworthy existence?
4. How does one become a really good person?"

The repeated emphasis is that education and teaching go beyond making people employable and capable of surviving. The goals are farfetched- aspiring to touch areas of moral development, spirituality, societal growth and harmony and sustainable development.

1.2 Higher Education in India

Education in India is provided by the public sector as well as the private sector, with control and funding coming from three levels: federal, state, and local. The Nalanda University was the oldest university-system of education in the world (Jeffrey, 2006). Western education became ingrained into Indian society with the establishment of the British Raj. Education in India falls under the control of both the Union Government and the states, with some responsibilities lying with the Union and the states having autonomy for others.

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China (WORLD BANK, 2006). The main governing body is the University Grants Commission, which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the centre and the state. Accreditation for higher learning is overseen by 12 autonomous institutions established by the University Grants Commission (NIC, 2010). Indian higher education system has expanded at a fast pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges and more than 8 million students in a decade from 2000-01 to 2010-11. The higher educational institutions suffer from large quality variation in so much so that a recent report (NASSCOM, 2005) has said that not more than 15% of graduates of general education and 25-30% of Technical Education are fit for employment. Since only a small number of Universities and colleges are eligible for funding by UGC and hence monitoring for quality by NAAC for ensuring quality standards set by it, a vast majority of institutions are under no quality monitoring and control except what is provided under university regulations and occasional university team visits. Teachers have the power to take small steps at the individual level which can have a cumulative effect at the global level. This can be compared to the analogy of how the ocean is after all made up of drops of water.

1.3 Quality Teaching in Higher Education

Quality teaching in higher education matters for student learning outcomes. But fostering quality teaching presents higher education institutions with a range of challenges at a time when the higher education sector is coming under pressure from many different directions. Higher education institutions are complex organizations where the institution-wide vision and strategy needs to be well-aligned with bottom-up practices and innovations in teaching and learning (Neumann, Parry & Becher, 2010). Developing institutions as effective learning communities where excellent pedagogical practices are developed and shared also requires leadership, collaboration and cooperation. Teaching needs to be developed within the context of the culture of the disciplines in which it is applied. Quality involves engagement with research into

teaching and learning, critical reflection of practice, and communication and dissemination about the practice of one's subject. This provides a challenging agenda for the development of subject-based teaching. Implementing this agenda includes applying the principles of good practice in the disciplines; developing the status of teaching; developing the complementary nature of teaching and research; and undertaking discipline-based pedagogic research (Healey, 2010). Findings from an exploratory study Leuddeke People normally try to follow the behaviour of those they value a lot and if they know that such behaviour produce good results for oneself and society. In this study, there were thirty-two individuals who told us who their role models were during their college days.

The respondents who shared their view regarding teachers of the previous generation were those who passed out of school before the year 2002. It was really good to find that only one out of sixteen adults had a negative remark to make about a faculty. This person experienced punishment to an extreme, 'I was told that I will never pass my exam or get my degree because I had difficulty in one particular subject'. This caused the student frustration and stress. All others remembered teachers only for positive reasons. Most of them recollected teachers who imparted values and taught by example. Some statements include, 'My science teacher taught me values of honesty, humility, integrity and hard work', 'helped me identify my potential', 'inspired me with spiritual values', 'had passion and devotion to teaching', 'kindled my interest in my discipline', and so on. The amount of positive impact that a teacher can have on a student's life is an opportunity to embrace. As we see, immense devotion to the profession helped students move forwards

From the discussion it was observed that, teachers have the power to shape a student's career, both positively and negatively. Another important point to be noted is that common man assumes that students at the graduate and post graduate level have sufficient intrinsic motivation to progress in their respective area of interest. But from the data, it is seen that most students expect motivation and guidance from the teacher. This is especially relevant in the Indian educational system where young adults have not yet resolved their identity crisis (Erickson, 1968) i.e. vocational identity vs. role confusion. The teacher can play a very powerful role at this stage of student's development. It was very interesting to note how teachers were remembered very well by students for different reasons, both positively and negatively. Most of the responses that were positive were because the student had received special attention, recognition and encouragement from the teacher. Some even stated how teachers went out of their way to help them when in need. Unfortunately, there were those who could not erase from their memory episodes that had caused immense pain and discouragement. One respondent said, 'I will never forgive a teacher in college who threw

my assignment instead of explaining to me what was wrong with it. I still get furious thinking of it'. Some others also stated how rude, sharp and rash comments instilled not just fear in the student but discouraged and demotivated them from even pursuing the discipline. It was fascinating to note that the teacher had the power to create or kill the interest of students in a particular subject. Concerning disciplining college students, somehow none of the young adults had fond memories except one who said, 'disciplines like punctuality and completion of assignments were easy because the faculty modelled it to us'. Observational learning surely seemed to be in operation. Others said that the insults they received caused a lot of anger and rebellion due to which they were held back from bringing out the best in them.

In higher education, the teacher plays an important role in stimulating students towards various psychological processes like motivation and attention. Which enhanced psychological motivation, the intellectual performance can be boosted. During the focus group interviews, the role of the teacher in higher education was discussed. It was also observed that the way of teaching has drastically changed over the last two decades. For this purpose, the responses were collected from young adults who have passed 12th standard in after the year 2002 and from middle aged adults who finished their schooling before that.

Focus group discussions were conducted on homogenous groups of students and educators. There were three groups in each category. The interviews were administered personally and the responses of the individuals were recorded. Five questions were framed and answers were filled up by the respondents. The questions were validated by 5 experts in the field of education and psychology

The total sample size in this study was 32 individuals, 16 young adults and 16 middle aged adults. The purposive sampling technique was used as individuals were selected based on the following inclusion criteria-

- For group 1 (young adults) the age limits were 18 to 30. For group 2 (middle aged adults) the age limits were 31 to 45.
- The individuals from group 1 should have passed out of school i.e. higher secondary over the last 12 years, since the year 2002. The individuals from group 2 should have passed out over 12 years ago, the year 2001 or earlier.
- All individuals should have studied up to the undergraduate level.

The present study had a mixed method design. It was primarily qualitative in nature, supplemented by descriptive data for support. The emergent format of qualitative research was used wherein, through a process of critical reflection during engagement in the research the design emerged. This approach was estimated to provide results and findings that were closer to lived experience and the realities of the actual situation in our society today. In order

to validate the qualitative data, methodological triangulation was done. Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). After data reduction, the focussed themes emerged. Implications were drawn from the themes that emerged. To understand the prevailing quality of teaching in higher education in India from the psychological perspective and to suggest ways of enhancement. Effective for other people; "they are more likely to adopt modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value than if it has unrewarding or punishing effects" (Bandura, 1977).

In the educational setting, the reward/punishment factors are important in bringing the student's attention to the teacher's behaviors. The vicarious observation of the consequences of the behavior in turn increases the observational learning experience (Bandura, 1977). In summary, the notion of modeling and vicarious experiences is typically the way human beings learn. In Social Cognitive Theory (1986), Bandura posited that children and adults operate cognitively on their social experiences; these cognitions then influence behavior and development. The influences of behavior, individual, cognitive, and environmental factors determine how people interact and learn from each other (Bandura, 1986). The main concepts of social cognitive theory explain human behavior as a dynamic and correlated interaction between the person and the environment. In the higher educational system, the interaction between the student and the teacher essentially contribute to the growth and development of the student. Hence, the need for quality teaching in higher education is absolutely essential at the individual, institutional as well as societal level., 2010) suggest that discipline and teaching conceptualization have the strongest influence on teaching scholarship, while qualifications and years of teaching have a moderate impact, and gender and post do not appear to play a significant part in higher education.

1.4 Role modeling and Higher Education: The Social Learning Theory

The term role model means any "person who serves as an example, whose behavior is emulated by others" (Holton, 2004). Individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy important social roles (Merton, 2006).

A good role model,

- Is self-assured and happy with who she is
- Handles stress positively
- Trustworthy in all situations

- A role model possesses integrity and does the right thing even if no one is looking or he does not receive acknowledgment for his act
- Displays perseverance and overcomes obstacles
- Listens to others and also considers opposing points of view
- Treats others how he would want to be treated and is considerate of them

This theory developed from experimental psychological studies, which demonstrated how children learn and imitate modeled behaviors. According to social learning theory, modeling influences learning primarily through its informative functions. Observers retain a symbolic representation of the modeled behavior, which then serves as a blueprint for the behavior. Observational learning incorporates four components: attention, retention, motor, and motivational processes that help to understand why individuals imitate socially desirable behavior (Bandura, 1977). Other factors involved in this component are the influence of social groups, and the structural arrangement of human interactions. Retention processes deal with the ability to remember the observed model, as well as mentally organizing and rehearsing the behavior. Motor reproduction comes through trial and error, observation of the behavior or skill, but the motor refinements also need to be present to emulate the behavior. Finally, motivational processes explains that people usually enact behaviors that seem to be effective for other people; “they are more likely to adopt modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value than if it has unrewarding or punishing effects” (Bandura, 1977).

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2. Methodology

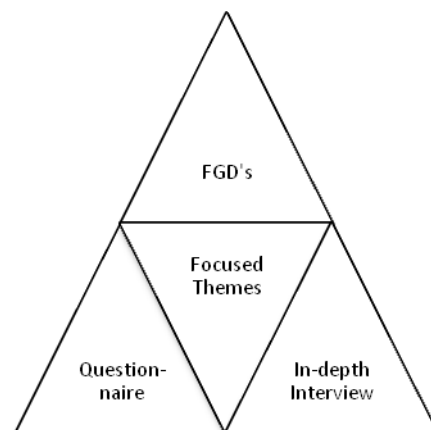
2.1 Objective of the study

To understand the prevailing quality of teaching in higher education in India from the psychological perspective and to suggest ways of enhancement.

2.2 Research Design

The present study had a mixed method design. It was primarily qualitative in nature, supplemented by descriptive data for support. The emergent format of qualitative research was used wherein, through a process of critical reflection during engagement in the research the design emerged. This approach was estimated to provide results and findings that were closer to lived experience and the realities of the actual situation in our society today. In order to validate the qualitative data, methodological triangulation was done. Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). After data reduction, the focussed themes emerged. Implications were drawn from the themes that emerged.

Fig.1: Method design



2.3 Sampling

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Table 1: Description of the sample based on Educational Qualification

Group	Educational Qualification		Total
	Under Graduation	Post Graduation	
Young Adults	9	7	16
Middle aged Adults	4	12	16
Total	13	19	32

2.4 Data Collection

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3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers as Role Models

In higher education, the teacher plays an important role in stimulating students towards various psychological processes like motivation and attention. Which enhanced psychological motivation, the intellectual performance can be boosted. During the focus group interviews, the role of the teacher in higher education was discussed. It was also observed that the way of teaching has drastically changed over the last two decades. For this purpose, the responses were collected from young adults who have passed 12th standard in after the year 2002 and from middle aged adults who finished their schooling before that.

3.2 In the recent past: Now

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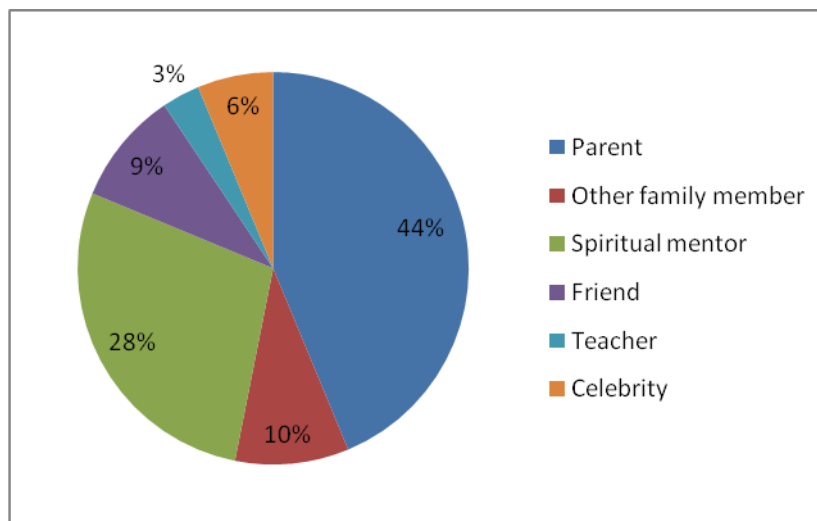
3.4 Sources of Role Models

People normally try to follow the behaviour of those they value a lot and if they know that such behavior produces good results for oneself and society. In this study,

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my life and helped me become a person of good character' and 'my mentor not only helped me do what s right but

Figure 1: Pie-chart representing various sources of role models



As noticed in the above pie-chart majority of the group i.e. forty-four percent mentioned that their parent, either their mother or father was their role model in life. Those who referred to mothers stated that, 'she was loving and disciplined,' 'she helped me find joy in my most difficult time', 'she taught me forgive and be strong', 'she disciplined me in many ways' and so on. About fathers, it was said that, 'he taught me perseverance and determination', 'his generosity to others has made me charitable', 'most of the values I hold today are because of my father' and 'in the most difficult times of life, he still never gave up and was always a strong and humble leader'. It is observed that parents have the ability to shape their children's future. The emotional bond was what shaped their lives. All these respondents without any hesitation decided that it was one or even both parents who had influenced their well-being and progress to the greatest extent.

Around twenty-eight percent of respondents stated that they tried to emulate the lifestyle and behaviour of spiritual mentors. These people were not just taught but inspired to follow their ways because of the convictions, values and goodness of the same. It is observed that most of these role models were inspirational leaders, who not just motivate others but who challenge them to bring out the best in them. They didn't just want their followers to be as good as them but would be genuinely happy if one of them out beat himself or herself in certain qualities and values. One stated, 'the changes that I saw in his life made me question everything about mine and challenged me to do my best, 'my spiritual mentor gave me a proper perspective of God and life. This brought about a complete transformation in

constantly followed up with me just to make sure I'm not alone in my decisions'. Indeed learning and changing can be a very painful and lonely process for most people but the benefits are rewarding to the individuals, the people around him and the society at large.

Relatives apart from parents and friends were also important role models for many. The impact of such individuals on the respondents was more at an affective level unlike the influence of parents and spiritual mentors that were primarily at a cognitive and behavioural level. This was followed by celebrities who were admired for qualities like courage, resilience and style. As observed, the behaviour of these celebrities were not emulated by the individuals but merely admired by them. There is a possibility that individuals who are influenced by certain personalities who they not personally know can only influence them at the surface but their characteristics may not deeply take root in the lives of their fans or followers.

According to the Social Cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), the influences of behavior, individual, cognitive, and environmental factors determine how people interact and learn from each other. The main concepts of social cognitive theory explain human behavior as a dynamic and correlated interaction between the person and the environment.

In this context it is surprising that just one individual had her teacher as her role model. She stated, 'the passion to teach and ability to connect with students has made me strive towards being like him. I am presently a teacher and trying to become like him in his area of excellence'. Here one can state that there is a lot of scope for teachers in

higher education to influence their students in their respective disciplines.

4. Findings and Implications - For quality teaching in higher education: psychological perspectives

From the discussion, certain psychological aspects of teaching in higher education emerged in this paper. Addressing these fundamental psychological issues would enhance the quality of teaching in higher education.

1. Students maintained a symbolic representation of their teacher and this translated itself onto the pursuit of individual student goals. A teacher who played a good role model inspired students.
2. The motivational process in operation among students in higher education seemed to be extrinsic contrary to expectations. Hence, using rewards and punishments was useful to the growth of the student.
3. The structural arrangement of human interaction i.e. the interaction of the institution, teacher and student was crucial for progress. This indicated that the primary learning environment was that which was created by the structure of education, quality of teaching and student's aptitude and interest. Infrastructure played a secondary role.
4. Expertise of the teacher in their particular discipline helped guide students to take up careers within the same discipline in the future. A teacher who has professional skills and subject knowledge is a big boon at the individual, institutional and societal levels.
5. Respect towards the student increased reciprocity. In higher education, the communication is between two adults (Transactional Analysis communication style). Hence, mutual respect improves the standard of teaching and creates a suitable environment for critical thinking and debate which are hallmarks of a good higher education learning methodology.
6. Most students, having already chosen their career path, display role confusion at the undergraduate level and sometimes sadly even at the postgraduate level. A good teacher should attempt to resolve this psychosocial crisis (Erickson, 1968) of identity vs. role confusion.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the primary

psychological processes involved in improving the quality of teaching in higher education are role modelling, attention, retention, mutual respect, motivational strategies, structural arrangements and adaptation to the environment.

Imbibing these topics into faculty development and imparting training in relevant skills will enhance the quality of teaching in higher education in the Indian context.

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