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Research Article

Investigation and Analysis of the Teaching Ability of University Teachers from the Perspective of Students*

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Abstract

The overall quality of university students is closely related to the teaching ability of university teachers. On the receiving end of education, the students directly experience and reflect the teaching level of their teachers. From the perspective of students, this paper investigates and analyses the teaching ability of university teachers, including teaching attitude, teaching philosophy, teaching design, teaching ability, teaching management and teaching effect. It is found that the university teachers keep a good teaching attitude, but need to improve their teaching philosophy, teaching design, teaching skill, teaching management and teaching effect. Several measures were put forward to improve the teaching ability of university teachers, such as renew the outdated ideas, improve the status of teaching, highlight students' learning achievement, promote the independent development of university teachers' teaching ability, perfect the evaluation system of university teachers, and improve the system of teacher training.

Keywords

University Students • University Teacher • Teaching Ability • Countermeasure

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Teachers are the subject of university education. Their teaching ability directly bears on the level and quality of education. On the receiving end of education are students, whose role in education is often overlooked. Being the object of education, university students directly reflect the teaching level of their teachers. From students' perspective, this paper investigates the current situation and problems of the teaching ability amongst university teachers, and develops a viable strategy to enhance their teaching ability, aiming to enhance the education quality in universities.

Research Design

Survey object

The students from 3 universities in China's Shaanxi Province were covered in our questionnaire survey on the teaching ability of their teachers. Among them, 511 (52%) were seniors and 472 (48%) were juniors (Figure 1); 40.5% were males and 59.5% were females; most of the students majored in engineering (43.6%), followed by literature (32.5%) and art (23.6%) (Figure 2). A total of 1,000 questionnaires were issued. All of them were recovered with an effective rate of 98.3%.

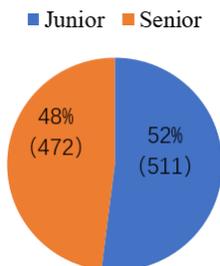


Figure 1. Survey object.

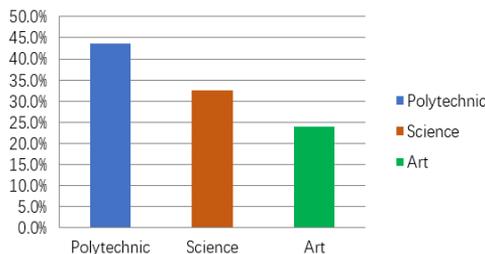


Figure 2. Classification.

Survey contents and methods

The questionnaire prepared by the author is named "Teaching Ability of University Teachers". It consists of three parts: instructions on the survey, personal information of students, and the evaluation of the teaching ability. The third part covers 6 aspects, namely teaching attitude, teaching philosophy, teaching design, teaching ability, teaching management and teaching effect. Several evaluation indexes were given under every aspect. The students were asked to rate each index on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being "poor" and 5 being "excellent".

Analysis of Survey Results

Teaching attitude

The teaching attitude of university teachers has a great impact on the students' learning effect. There are three indexes under this aspect in the questionnaire. The first index is "the teacher is responsible, proficient and devoted." In the survey, 40% of the students gave the index a score of 5, 30% rated it with 4, 14% gave it a 3, 14% assigned it a score of 2, and only 2% ranked it as 1. The survey results (Figure 3) show that university

teachers generally have a good teaching attitude; their serious and responsible teaching is well received by the majority of students.

The second index is “the teacher begins and ends class on time.” In the survey, 54% of the students gave the index a score of 5, 25% rated it with 4, 16% gave it a 3, 4% assigned it a score of 2, and only 1% ranked it as 1. The survey results (Figure 4) show that most of university teachers abide by the basic rules of teaching.

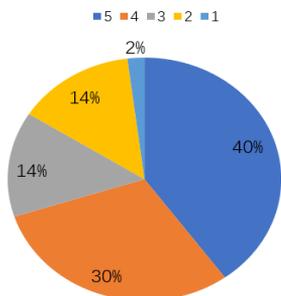


Figure 3. Responsibility.

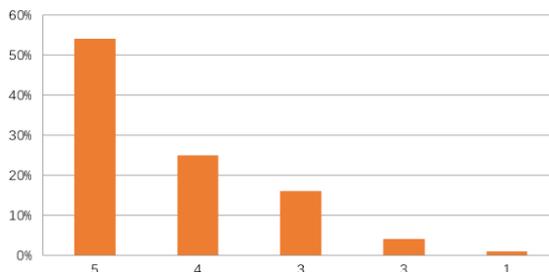


Figure 4. Finish class on time.

The third index is “the teacher patiently answers the students’ questions.” In the survey, 41% of the students gave the index a score of 5, 28% rated it with 4, 17% gave it a 3, 11% assigned it a score of 2, and only 3% ranked it as 1. The survey results (Figure 5) show that university teachers are patient enough to answer students’ questions.

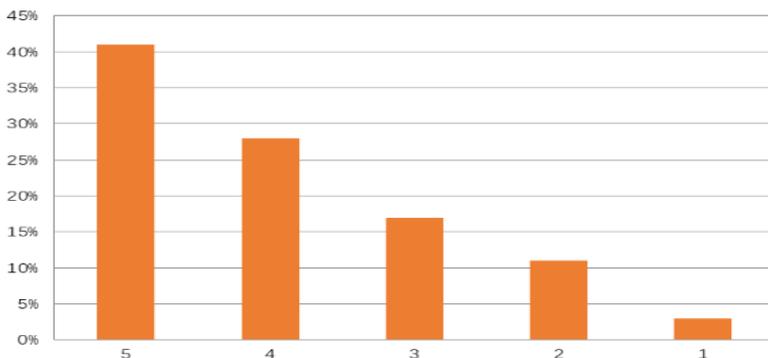


Figure 5. Answer questions.

Teaching philosophy

The teaching philosophy is fundamental to the attitude and layout of teaching activities. This aspect is evaluated against two indexes. The first index is “the teacher caters to the needs of students and keeps them motivated.” In the survey, 17% of the students gave the index a score of 5, 16% rated it with 4, 31% gave it a 3, 31% assigned it a score of 2, and 5% ranked it as 1. The survey results (Figure 6) show that a fraction of university teachers fail to teach students in accordance of their aptitude.

The second index is “the teacher treats students as equals and cares about the development of students.” In the survey, 13% of the students gave the index a score of 5, 15% rated it with 4, 26% gave it a 3, 34% assigned it a score of 2, and 12% ranked it as 1. The survey results (Figure 7) show that some university teachers do not treat students on a footing of equality or care enough about their students. In short, there is a problem about the teaching philosophy of university teachers.

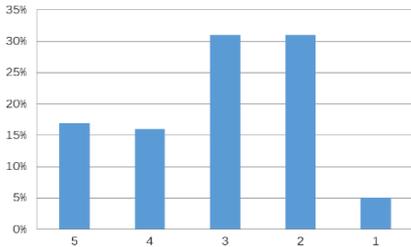


Figure 6. Promote people's progress.

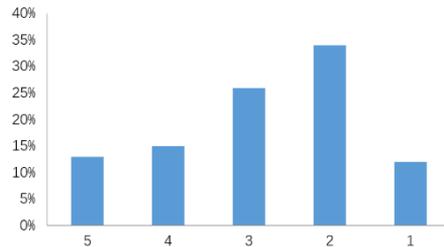


Figure 7. The equality between teachers and students.

Teaching design

The teaching design refers to the personal features embedded in the teaching plan (Gao, 2014). This concept reveals the teacher’s grasp of teaching contents, and lays the basis for teaching activities. In this survey, the teaching design is evaluated against three indexes.

The first index “the teacher develops rich teaching contents and adopts practical methods for classroom teaching” was rated with 5 by 35% of the students, 4 by 28%, 3 by 23%, 2 by 12%, and 1 by 2% (Figure 8). The second index “the teacher uses flexible teaching methods and stresses on the cultivation of students’ ability” was assigned a score of 5, 4 or 3 by 36% of the students, 2 by 58% and 1 by 6% (Figure 9). The third index “the teacher properly organizes the teaching contents and highlights the difficult focal points” was ranked as 5, 4 or 3 by 81% of the students, 2 by 14% and 1 by 5% (Figure 10). To sum up, quite a number of students considered the teaching design by university teachers as insufficient.

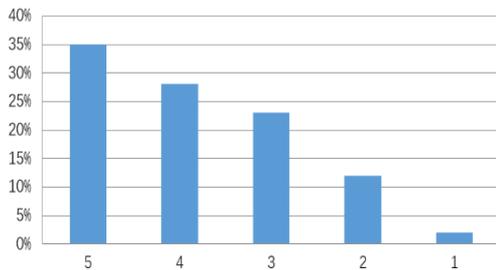


Figure 8. Rich teaching contents.

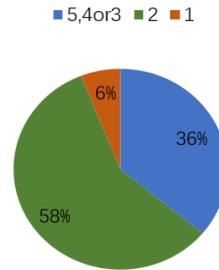


Figure 9. Flexible teaching methods.

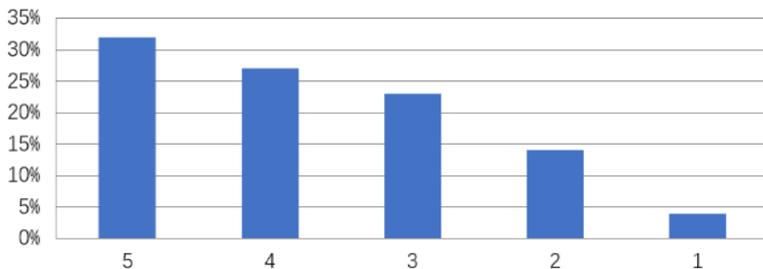


Figure 10. Properly organize.

Teaching skill

The teaching skill is evaluated against four indexes. The first index “the teacher writes neatly in a rational layout and clear structure” was rated with 5 by 5% of the students, 4 by 11%, 3 by 15%, 2 by 51%, and 1 by 18% (Figure 11). The second index “the teacher can use multimedia flexibly” was assigned a score of 5 by 17% of the students, 4 by 20%, 3 by 16%, 2 by 36%, and 1 by 11% (Figure 12). The third index “the teacher inspires the students’ thinking potential” was graded 5 by 7% of the students, 4 by 17%, 3 by 27%, 2 by 25%, and 1 by 24% (Figure 13). The fourth index “the teacher organizes a variety of teaching activities and cares about students’ interests and needs” was awarded 5 by 19% of the students, 4 by 19%, 3 by 16%, 2 and 1 by 23% (Figure 14). The survey calls for further improvement of the teaching skill amongst university teachers.

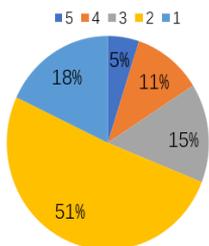


Figure 11. Teacher write.

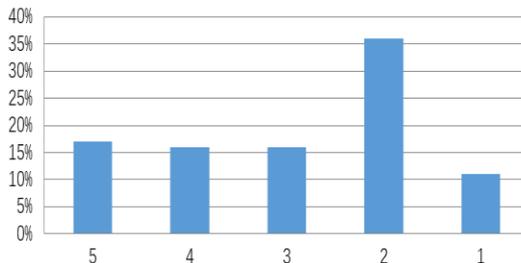


Figure 12: Use multimedia flexibly.

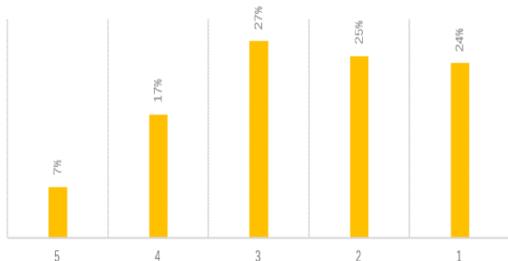


Figure 13. Inspire student's thinking.

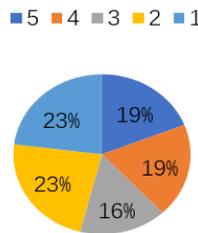


Figure 14. Teaching activities.

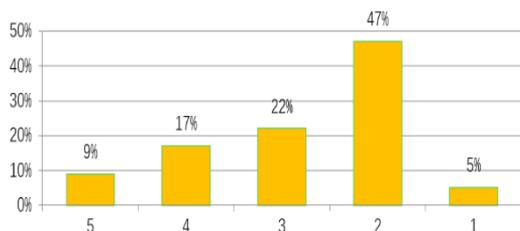


Figure 15. Harmonious relationship.

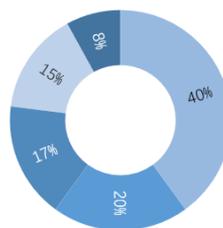


Figure 16. Teaching order.

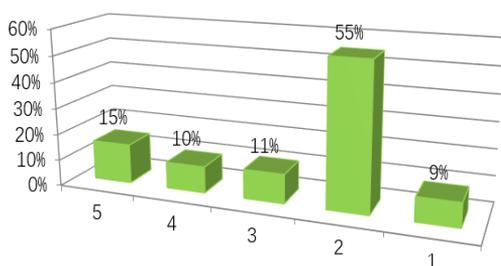


Figure 17. Teaching atmosphere.

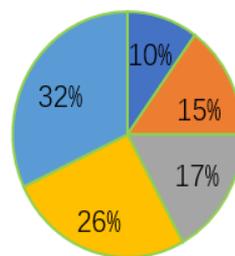


Figure 18. Feedback.

Teaching management

Good management is the guarantee of effective teaching. The teaching management is evaluated against four indexes. The first index “the teacher maintains a harmonious relationship and effective communication with students” was rated with 5 by 9% of the students, 4 by 17%, 3 by 22%, 2 by 47%, and 1 by 5% (Figure 15). The second index “the teacher keeps a good teaching order in the classroom” was rated with 5 by 8% of the students, 4 by 17%, 3 by 20%, 2 by 40%, and 1 by 15% (Figure 16). The third index “the teacher enlivens the teaching atmosphere and arouses the students’ interest” was graded 5 by 15% of the students, 4 by 10%, 3 by 11%, 2 by 55%, and 1 by 9% (Figure 17). The fourth index “the teacher makes timely feedback to students’ questions” was ranked as 5 by 10% of the students, 4 by 15%, 3 by 17%, 2 by 26%, and 1 by 32% (Figure 18). The survey results reflect the necessity to enhance the teaching management amongst university teachers.

Teaching effect

The teaching effect is an indicator of the teaching ability. This aspect is evaluated against two indexes. The first index “students acquire useful knowledge from classroom learning” was rated with 5 by 5% of the students, 4 by 16%, 3 by 28%, 2 by 32%, and 1 by 19% (Figure 19). The second index “the teacher adjusts the teaching strategy according to the teaching effect” was graded 5 by 6% of the students, 4 by 11%, 3 by 15%, 2 by 45%, and 1 by 23% (Figure 20). This means university teachers fail to achieve the desired teaching effect.

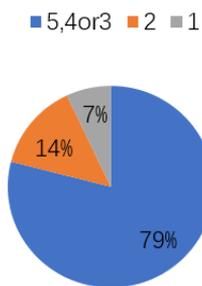


Figure 19. *Students acquire.*

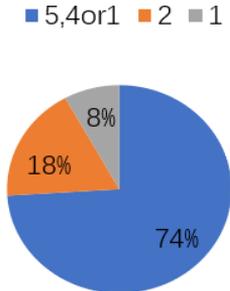


Figure 20. *Change tactics.*

Causes of Insufficient Teaching Ability Amongst University Teachers

Judging by the results of the questionnaire survey, the university teachers keep a good teaching attitude, but need to improve their teaching philosophy, teaching design, teaching skill, teaching management and teaching effect. The insufficient teaching ability is mainly attributable to the following reasons.

Rejection to the scholarship of teaching and neglection of students' learning

Ernest Boyer, former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, put forward the concept of “scholarship of teaching” in the report *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990), seeking to resolve the binary opposition of research and teaching in universities (Wang, 2012). The idea has evoked great social repercussions, and swept across the world. Many scholars have worked hard to put it into practice.

Nevertheless, some university leaders and teachers still have a grudge against the scholarship of teaching. Their rejection has impeded the improvement of teaching ability amongst university teachers. Many university leaders only have a narrow understanding of the scholarship of teaching. They place much more emphasis on scientific research than teaching. In their minds, teaching is merely the interaction between teacher and student, and has nothing to do with turning knowledge into useful applications. Following this train of thought, scientific research has become the only yardstick of the competence of university teachers, and the sole criteria for awarding academic titles. The unfair treatment to teaching delivers a heavy blow to those teachers devoted to teaching activities, and hinders the progress in scholarship of teaching. Many university teachers are forced to spend more time on academic research, ignoring the development of teaching ability.

In addition, the neglection of students' learning also blocks the teaching ability development of university teachers. Quite a few university teachers are not aware of the importance of interacting with students and focusing on their knowledge acquisition. In the course of teaching, these teachers mechanically impart the contents, rarely communicate with students, and pay no attention to the students' acquisition of the contents (Li, Yang, & Zhang, 2013). What is worse, the teaching contents are often divorced from the actual practice, and lagging behind the tide of the times. The self-centred teaching mode shackles the improvement of the teachers' teaching ability (Xiao, 2012; Fan, 2009).

Lack of innovation in teaching design

The severe lack of effective teaching measures has hampered the teaching of the already dull and poor contents. Due to the preference of teaching theory to actual practice, many university teachers have neither selected the proper contents nor emphasized on practice (Guan & Li, 2016; He, 2011). In our survey, only 35% of the students rated the teaching contents with 5.

The improper teaching contents also add to the difficulty in highlighting the key points (Li, 2014). Our survey shows that quite a number of students are dissatisfied with the selection and organization of the teaching contents.

In addition, the students' learning ability is constrained by the lack of flexibility in teaching methods. 58% of university students believe that their teachers only have an average performance in teaching methods, and even 6% think poorly of the flexibility of teaching methods.

In summary, the teaching design of university teachers cannot keep pace with the times, and lack of innovation.

Poor teacher training contents and methods

First, the training contents are outdated. At present, the training of university teachers in China largely focuses on theoretical knowledge, and ignores the improvement of teaching skill. The empty talks by the trainer is a far cry from the actual needs of university teaching. The detachment from reality dampens the enthusiasm of university teachers and affects the quality of training, making it difficult for university teachers to improve their teaching ability (Liu, Su, & Liu, 2009).

Second, the training methods are rigid (Cui & Yang, 2007). Centralized lecturing is the predominant form of university teacher training in China. There is simply not enough field diagnostic training, not to mention more innovative forms of case teaching, problem inquiry or action research (Guo & Li, 2013). The monotonous training pattern leads to poor training results and substandard teaching ability.

Imperfect performance evaluation system of university teachers

First, there is something wrong with the philosophy of performance evaluation. As is known to all, teaching occupies a very important position in any university. However, the importance of teaching is not demonstrated in the evaluation of teaching performance. The evaluation standard is biased towards theoretical research. As a result, university teachers have to spend much more time on scientific research than actual teaching practice.

Second, the evaluation contents are far from desirable. The index design mainly reflects the teaching results, failing to take account of the teaching process. During the evaluation process, the accuracy and equity are jeopardized by the absence of standardized assessment procedure and indexes. Furthermore, the evaluation terminates at the teaching results, and ignores the feedbacks and corrective measures (Ma, Zhu, & Chen, 2007). The performance appraisal completely goes astray and cannot effectively improve the teaching ability of university teachers.

Third, the evaluation indexes are not scientific and the methods are unreasonable. The monotonous index system emphasizes on the level of scientific research rather than the teaching level and ideological education. The improper indexes and methods are bound to deter university teachers from enhancing their teaching ability.

Improvement Strategies of University Teachers' Teaching Ability

Renew the outdated ideas, improve the status of teaching, and highlight students' learning achievement.

On the one hand, both leaders and teachers of universities should renew the outdated ideas, recognize the importance of teaching in education quality and teacher development, and promote the status of teaching. Teaching is a matter of life and death to teachers and universities. As Newman put it, the university is a place of teaching universal knowledge, and the impart of knowledge must be done through teaching.

On the other hand, teachers and universities ought to pay attention to students' learning achievement. With the goal of promoting students' learning, it is highly necessary to establish a student-centred model and teach students in accordance with their aptitude (Xu, 2009).

Promote the independent development of university teachers' teaching ability.

In order to achieve professional growth, the teachers and universities are obliged to enhance the teaching ability. With professional awareness as the premise of professional growth, university teachers should consciously sharpen their teaching ability.

First, awaken the awareness of teaching development amongst university teachers. To this end, universities must build a good teaching faculty, and create a favourable teaching environment, making teaching improvement the common goal amongst university teachers. The awareness of teaching development drives university teachers to reflect on daily teaching behaviours and teaching practices, and thus enhance their own teaching ability.

Second, encourage university teaching to participate in teaching reform. Different from teaching theories, the teaching reform depends on teachers' personal experience, and directly bears on the acquisition of teaching experience and the improvement of teaching ability. Thus, university teachers should be incentivized to join teaching reform, make full use of teaching resources, and inject fresh ideas into classroom teaching.

Third, forge a teaching ability development community of university teachers. The teaching ability of university teachers is influenced by many stakeholders, namely, university leaders, teacher trainers, and students. These influencing parties should be integrated into a community to develop the teaching ability of university teachers.

Perfect the evaluation system of university teachers

The evaluation system plays an important role in the development of university teachers. Based on the situation in various Chinese universities, the university teachers should be developed in four basic ways:

teaching development, organizational development, personal development and professional development. The overall development requires an improved evaluation system.

First, increase the proportion of teaching performance in the assessment. For this purpose, the traditional emphasis on scientific research should be shifted to the teaching practice. Although the theoretical achievement does have an impact on teaching contents, the students' learning outcomes mainly hinge on the teaching level. The teaching level does not always correspond to the level of teachers' theoretical research. Hence, the future evaluation of university teachers should underline the importance of teaching performance.

Second, eliminate the administrative intervention in the appraisal procedure. The existing evaluation system is distorted by university leaders. The distortion discourages university teachers from seeking development. Besides, the teachers' voice is suppressed in the evaluation system, due to the lack of effective communication between teachers and leaders. The teachers are not given the right to know about, participate in and supervise the assessment procedure. To put an end to the situation, it is of vital importance to establish an evaluation process that is fair, just, open and free of administrative interference.

Third, establish a variety of evaluation methods. Different evaluation methods cover different aspects, plays different roles and have different emphases. The rewards and punishments also vary with the purpose of the evaluation. The main functions of evaluation, either qualitative or quantitative, include problem diagnosis, process assessment, and outcome analysis. If different evaluation methods are integrated together, the appraisal results will be more convincing and authoritative. The diversity of evaluation will facilitate the overall development of university teachers' teaching ability.

Improve the system of teacher training.

First, develop a group of high-level trainers. The university is a place thronged with elite talents. The training institution should make use of this advantage, and develop a high-quality trainer team of proper scale and rational structure. The training must tap the dominant resources, let old teachers guide new teachers, and concentrate on the development of young teachers.

Second, reform the teachers' continuing education system. The current continuing education system in universities faces three problems: limited time, poor effect and high cost. These problems are major obstacles in higher education training. In some universities, the leaders pay little attention to teacher training, and set no rules or requirements. In some other universities, the fund is too limited to cover the cost of teacher training. Thus, universities should attach more importance and allocate more fund to teacher training, and continuing education.

Third, endow university teachers with more choices of training courses. The existing mode of teacher training in Chinese universities is under the contradiction between the available courses and the interests of teachers. Instead of imposing courses on teachers, the training institutions should fully respect the willingness and autonomy of university teachers, seeking to arouse their interests in teacher training.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the current teaching ability of university teachers from the perspective of students in 3 universities in Northwest China. The survey results show that the university teachers keep a good teaching attitude, but need to improve their teaching philosophy, teaching design, teaching skill, teaching management and teaching effect. The innovative points are the uniqueness of the research object, the statistically robust research method and the special perspective of students.

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