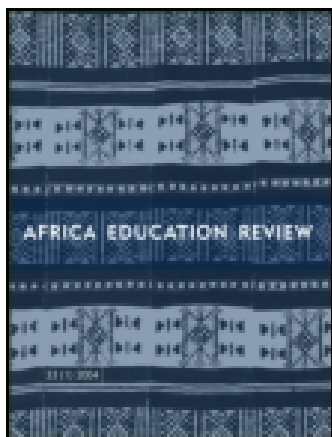




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Quality lies in the eyes of the beholder: A mismatch between student evaluation and peer observation of teaching

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Quality lies in the eyes of the beholder: A mismatch between student evaluation and peer observation of teaching

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Abstract

The study described in this article was prompted by the poor performance of students in an 'at risk subject' in a science faculty at a university in South Africa. Teacher performance could contribute to poor performance among students, therefore the performance of one of the science teachers whose students were performing poorly was evaluated by his students and through peer observation of his teaching. The article draws on a merger between Bernstein's ideas on framing as well as deep and surface approaches to learning to form a theoretical framework that underpinned the study. Peer observation showed that the teacher employed predominantly teacher-centred, passive approaches to teaching, and the facilitation of active learning was minimal, that is, framing was strong. Students, however, evaluated their teacher positively, indicating that he was an 'effective' teacher. Therefore, the perception of what constitutes 'quality teaching' is viewed differently by peers and students. This is most likely due to the incompatibility between peers' conception of teaching and students' conception of learning. Therefore, students' feedback on teaching is not necessarily accurate or useful.

Keywords: student evaluation, peer observation of teaching, quality assurance, conceptions of teaching effectiveness, framing

Introduction

The problem of underachieving first year students is prevalent at many higher education institutions in South Africa (Cross, Shalem, Blackhouse and Adam, 2009; Eiselen and Geyser, 2003). In South Africa, most studies related to attrition and retention focus on the student – in terms of their study skills, organizational skills, language proficiency, socio-economic background, experience of university life and attitude towards learning (Eiselen and Geyser, 2003; Lourens and Smit, 2003). There is a dearth of literature on factors related to teacher performance that influence low pass rates. In order to address this gap, a study was undertaken to address the limitation by exploring factors that contribute to the underachievement of first year students, through evaluation of teacher effectiveness, from a peer's and students' perspective.

Peer observation of teaching involves the observation of a teacher's teaching session(s) by a colleague who subsequently provides them with feedback on their performance (Cosh, 1999), and it is purported to be a valuable developmental tool for enhancing teaching practice (McMahon, Barrett, and O'Neil, 2007). While peer observation of teaching is usually intended for professional development and dissemination of good practice, peer review of teaching usually occurs for quality assurance purposes or for reward (Wood and Harding, 2007; Chamberlain, D'Artrey and Rowe, 2011). In this study, the purpose of peer-observation of teaching was developmental and not judgmental; hence the use of the term 'peer observation' and not 'peer-review'. Other researchers, however, use the terms peer observation and peer review interchangeably when they refer to evidence which is gathered during observations of teaching and learning for formative feedback, which is used to apply interventions for professional development (Drew and Klopper, 2014).

The evaluation of teaching effectiveness by students is increasingly being used by universities for purposes of improving teaching, tenure, promotion and quality assurance initiatives. However, the limitations associated with using student evaluation of teaching quality because of their lack of reliability and lack of validity are well published, (for example Emery, Kramer and Tian, 2003; Simmons, 1996; Sproule, 2002).

Students are being asked questions that they might not have considered and are expected to answer them accurately. 'Students' subjective opinions can so be varied that the overall results are untrustworthy' (Simmons, 1996: 17). Even if students are not able to defend their point of view they will give an opinion

(Simmons, 1996). Student evaluations can sometimes be viewed as a ‘personality contest’ rather than as a tool for measuring teaching performance (Kulik, 2001). In a study conducted by Namaghi (2010), teachers who were evaluated by students complained that students entering university would have had no exposure to evaluating their teachers in high school and, therefore, ‘do not know how to do it’ (Namaghi, 2010: 1510). Therefore, many researchers in the field (for example, Emery et al., 2003; Pounder, 2007) would argue that what happens in the classroom cannot be captured by the student evaluation of teaching alone and that it should be augmented with other approaches (such as students’ performance and peer evaluation of teaching) that afford a richer, more equitable evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

Despite the limitations associated with using student feedback to determine teaching quality, Richardson (2005) advise that student feedback provides vital evidence for the assessment of teaching quality and for the improvement thereof. Al-Issa and Sulieman (2007) argue that students are able to provide informed opinions about the quality of teaching and that they should be given a voice to do so through a formal system of evaluation. According to Marsh (2007), student evaluation of teaching effectiveness is relatively valid against a repertoire of indicators of effective teaching. Ballantyne, Borthwick and Packer (2000) proclaim that if the quality of teaching and learning is to be addressed properly then the importance of students’ perspective on teaching and learning should be recognized. Ramsden (1998: 353) endorses this position by stating that: ‘Good teaching means seeing learning through the learner’s eyes.’

If students are to evaluate teaching, it becomes important to ask the question: What do students perceive as good teachers? Answers to that question as drawn from the literature are given as follows:

- One with deep knowledge of subject matter (Cortazzi, Jin and Coleman, 1996).
- Delivery (organized and systematic, active participatory learning (Mu, 2002).
- Makes link between theory and application (Mu, 2002) and
- Lessons are easy to understand and clearly explained (Mu, 2002).

In other studies, (see Tam, Heng and Jiang, 2009), about 75% of student respondents favoured teachers who have a student-centred approach to teaching in that they constantly engage students, motivate them and pay attention to student feedback. Effective teachers were described by students as

knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction, and able to help students apply information to practical situations. Teachers who employed didactic delivery modes and taught content for the purpose of passing examinations were regarded as the least effective. Also, 'care' was identified as one of the key teacher qualities. 'Favourite' teachers were those who were perceived as patient, encouraging and relate well with students. The least favourite teachers were those who did not show care or concern for students and were reported as being arrogant, rude and irritable when students did not understand their lessons (Tam et al. 2009).

A study conducted by Kember and Wong (2000) found that students' conceptions of learning influences the way in which they evaluate good teaching. For example, students described quality teaching in terms of good presentation because they expected information to be presented clearly, logically and in a way that could be understood. Logical organized delivery by the teacher is one of the hallmarks of passive belief about learning. Students with an active belief about learning would judge teacher-centred approaches such as organization clarity of structure and clarity of communication to be of lower priority than students with a passive belief about learning. Therefore, students' conceptions of learning introduce a form of bias regarding their beliefs about the teacher's performance.

A literature search to explore university students' conceptions of teaching resulted in only a few publications being found (see for example Kember and Wong, 2000; Trigwell and Ashwin, 2006). Some studies focus on the gap between teacher and students' conceptions of teaching (for example Virtanen and Lindblom-Ylänne, 2010). A comparison between students' and peers' conceptions of teaching is even more limited and therefore this study addresses an important gap in the literature.

The impetus for the study described in this article was derived from a request by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee in response to poor pass rates in an at risk science-based subject. The purpose of the study, which was part of a broader study, was to determine how first year students, who were under-performing in the science-based subject, evaluated their teacher's teaching, and to triangulate that feedback with peer observation of teaching. The findings were meant to have contributed to the improvement of teaching, that is, a developmental approach was adopted.

The study was guided by the following research questions: How do students and peers assess the quality of teaching and against what parameters? Are students'

evaluation of teacher performance a valid measure of teacher quality? What constitutes quality teaching?

Theoretical framework

This study draws on Bernstein's code theory, in particular the concept of framing. Conceptualized as the locus of control over pedagogic communication and its content, framing arises out of the relationship between teachers and students and creates the pedagogic arena, game or specific practice (Bernstein, 1995). Framing is used to describe the degree of control that teachers and students have over the selection, organization, pacing and timing of knowledge transmitted and received (Bernstein, 1971a, 1971b).

The degree of framing (that is, whether it is strong or weak) is dependent on whether the locus of control lies with the transmitter (teacher) or the acquirer (student). Framing is strong when the categories with higher status have the control. Framing is weak when the categories with lower status have the same control in the relationship. Framing will be strong if the teacher, as the transmitter, has control upon the subject and activities (selection), the order followed by learning (sequence), the time given to learning, and if the text produced through learning is made clear (evaluation criteria). Framing will be weak when the student, as the acquirer, has some control upon the selection, sequence, pacing and evaluation criteria. For example, weak framing implies that the student may criticize the teachers' practices. On the other hand, if the teacher uses orders, rules or admonitions as a way of controlling students' behaviour without giving reasons, control is imperative and framing is strong (Bernstein, 1995, 1971a, 1971b). Therefore, in a teacher-centred environment, framing is strong; in a student-centred environment framing is weak.

Alongside the aforementioned theory, the concepts of 'deep learning' and 'surface learning' are also applied in this study. Surface approaches to learning, which are typified as lower order thinking, pertain to conceptions of learning as reproductive, namely, the memorization and acquisition of facts. Deep approaches to learning involve the application of higher order thinking and are characterized by abstraction of meaning, understanding of reality and being as a person (Marton and Saljö, 1997; Saljö, 1979; Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty, 1993).

The aforementioned theory and concepts were adapted for the purposes of this study in that a continuum of strong framing and weak framing was placed on

the horizontal axis and a continuum of deep learning and surface learning was placed on the vertical axis as depicted in [Figure 1](#).

[Figure 1](#) can be explained as follows:

- In the top left quadrant, strong framing is merged with deep learning signifying that deep learning occurs when the teacher is in control of the pedagogical environment. This takes place when the teacher explains concepts to students to facilitate understanding.
- The bottom left quadrant shows an intersection of strong framing with passive learning which would represent didactic, teacher-centred approaches, but the teacher does not explain concepts clearly for understanding to be possible.
- The top right quadrant illustrates an interplay between weak framing and deep learning which would portray student-centred approaches that promote construction of meaning.
- The bottom right quadrant represents an interaction between weak framing and surface learning which implies that the pedagogical situation, although student-centred, does not promote understanding.

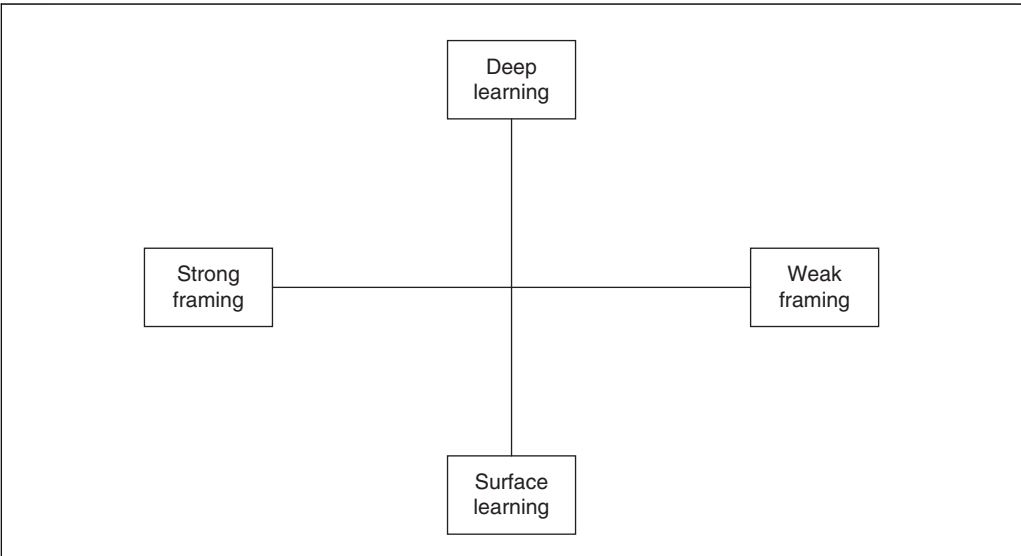


Figure 1: An intersecting of the continua of framing and approaches to learning.

Research design

Evaluation can be limiting if it is premised on only one source of data, such as students' views (Namaghi, 2010; Emery et al., 2003; Pounder, 2007). In order to provide a gestalt view of teaching performance other sources of data should be used such as peer observation of teaching (Mujis, 2006; Emery et al., 2003; Pounder, 2007; Drew and Klopper, 2014). Evaluation based on multiple sources of data will more likely facilitate growth and development in teachers (Marshall, 2005).

In this study, the epistemological approach that was followed was two-fold, that is, quantitative and qualitative studies were conducted. This allowed for triangulation of data to provide different perspectives of the research problem.

The student evaluation of teaching involved the application of self-administered questionnaires, which allowed for large numbers of students to be involved in the study. The questionnaires enabled the researchers to gather (mostly) quantitative data through structured items and qualitative data through unstructured items. The structured items were designed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaires were handed out to a purposively selected sample of 22 first year students studying a science-based subject. Twenty-two completed questionnaires were received giving a response rate of 100%. The responses to the structured items were statistically analyzed and the responses to the unstructured items were analyzed through the process of coding, categorization and the identification of themes, as described by Saldana (2009).

Other qualitative data, which was collected through the peer observation technique, allowed for observing the teacher 'in action'. For the purposes of peer observation of teaching, a checklist containing categories that covered good practice in teaching was employed. This checklist was compiled from an analysis of the relevant literature (Drew and Klopper, 2014; Mu, 2002; Cortazzi et al., 1996). These categories were: planning, introduction to the lesson, development of the session, delivery or facilitation style and professionalism. Data was captured through the use of handwritten observation notes. Data was analysed using data reduction techniques such as coding, categorization and the identification of themes (Saldana, 2009). The peer in this study was an academic member of staff who has a science qualification, experience in teaching science-based subjects, qualifications in education and experience in the field of academic staff development.

Results and discussion

The findings of the study are discussed below in subsections that would help answer the research questions.

Feedback on teacher performance within a strongly framed pedagogical context

The items in the questionnaire were grouped according to strong and weak framing in line with the theoretical outline of the study. The responses to the strongly framed structured items in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.

In Table 1, the students as respondents agreed that the range of teaching methods applied were suitable to the size of the class and were effective in correcting gaps in their understanding. In general, the teacher fared well in areas

TABLE 1: Responses to structured items with strong framing.

Category of items	Item	Percentage in agreement
Methods of teaching	• Teaching methods suited to the size of the class.	91%
	• Uses range of methods to correct gaps in students' understanding and	95%
	• Use of technology in teaching to enhance understanding.	100%
Resources	• Develops course materials.	90%
	• Prepares study guide.	41%
	• Quality of materials developed is high.	86%
Cognitive development	• Encourages critical thinking,	91%
	• Challenges ideas about subject.	86%
Assessment	• Ensures that assessment is a valuable learning experience.	100%
	• Assesses students' work fairly.	79%

of teaching and learning that were strongly framed. Also, students felt they were benefitting from teacher-centred approaches. In this study, students perceived good teaching to occur when the teacher explained concepts and gave course materials, that is, when the teacher was a performer.

Ninety-five percent of students agreed that the teacher used a range of methods to correct gaps in students' understanding. Peer observation of teaching found that these methods were mostly teacher-centred. Students' tasks related to traditional approaches to teaching tend to influence their perceptions of the learning environment (Struyven, Dochy and Janssens, 2008). Also, student-centred methods that would require the teacher to be a facilitator of learning would be a challenge to students' conceptions of teaching, which presents the teacher as an authority on the subject and sole bearer of knowledge.

In an educational environment where the framing is strong and the students are given information, the students become dependent on the lecturer to disseminate content. If the teacher is successful in delivering and covering content adequately and does not expect students to be highly involved in self-directed learning, which they could construe as a burden, the perception held of teaching performance can be expected to be positive. A high level of dependency on the teacher as bearer of knowledge characterizes the perception of the learning environment.

The students' approach towards learning will be adjusted so that they absorb as much of the information given in the classroom as possible. This behaviour will act as a motivator for the teacher to perpetuate and even improve the quality of his or her role as transmitter of information. This performance which is intended to improve the quality of teaching actually stifles active participatory learning and compromises understanding, leading to surface learning. This, according to Vermunt and Verloop (1999) will influence the quality of the learning experience.

A literature account of what constitutes good teaching and what makes a good teacher is given in the introduction section of this article. In this study, students construed good teaching as follows: the teacher presenting knowledge in order to help students understand and the teacher being good at explaining concepts, and providing course materials. This view is synonymous with the notion of the teacher as the bearer and transmitter of knowledge. There was an expectation that the teacher should be knowledgeable and should take control of the class. Examples of responses from students, to this effect, are given in Table 2: (1) 'He is teaching me [science] and he is good at it'; and (2) 'He explains things in a manner that is very understandable and I can always ask him to explain more if I still don't understand.' These responses can be positioned in the top left

TABLE 2: Responses that reflected strong framing/deep learning.

Unstructured item	Students' feedback
What did you benefit most from the lecturer's teaching?	'He brings everything that is beneficial to the lecture.' 'He is teaching me [science] and he is good at it.' 'He brings and shows us experiments to class to make sure that we understand.' 'Lecturer is always presenting work well and is easy to understand.' 'He explains things in a manner that is very understandable and I can always ask him to explain more if I still don't understand.'

quadrant (Figure 1), which depicts teacher-centred, deep approaches to teaching and learning.

Students do not necessarily perceive teaching with a weak frame as being effective and according to Vermunt and Verloop (1999) they might actually dislike the teaching methods and the level of self-regulated learning expected of them within an active learning environment. From the students' perspective, the active nature of the teaching methods is not the main feature that characterizes good teaching. Instead it is the criteria: pace and instructional clarity (Alder, Avasalu and Fisher, 1998).

In this study, student evaluation of teaching showed high ratings for the majority of items (see Table 1) in spite of the fact that teaching was mostly strongly framed while not accompanied by deep learning. Surprisingly, 95% of the students agreed that overall the teacher is effective even though the pass rate was just 40%. The positive opinion of the teacher held by the students was mostly due to the low academic expectations that the teacher had for the students. That is, the teacher was the provider of information and the students were expected to be passive recipients and simply reproduce the content given to them in class. The positive feedback from students would give the teacher the impression that he is doing well and as a result he would most likely perpetuate that behaviour.

Feedback on teacher performance within a weakly framed pedagogical context

Although the teacher received a high rating (86%) on the item that pertained to the challenging of independent thinking (see Table 3), peer observation data

TABLE 3: Responses to structured items with weak framing.

Category of items	Item	Percentage in agreement
Active learning	• Encourages student to be responsible for own learning.	95%
	• Challenges independent thinking.	86%
	• Encourages students to answer questions.	91%
	• Encourages interaction among students.	86%
	• Encourages participation in tutorials.	95%
	• Encourages students to ask questions.	100%
	• Initiates relevant discussions.	82%
	• Provides opportunities for problem solving.	64%
	• Gets students to apply knowledge.	100%
Accommodation of student diversity	• Uses language that is understandable.	95%
	• Acknowledge cultural differences among students.	68%
	• Provides support for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.	68%
	• Fair in dealing with students.	86%

showed that the challenging of independent thinking was a limiting experience for students. The teacher challenged students to think critically and ask questions but since the students were accustomed to being non-participatory they were not be able to challenge the ideas presented by the teacher.

Similarly, the teacher received a high rating (91%) for the item on ‘encourages critical thinking’, but yet in a strongly framed pedagogical environment, the teacher is in control of the flow of information. The questions that were asked in order to encourage critical thinking were as controlled as the knowledge disseminated to the students. In this way, the teacher was able to control the amount and type of knowledge the students could use in answering questions critically.

Only 64% of students agreed that there were sufficient opportunities for problem solving. For a science based subject, there should be more opportunities for problem solving, thereby creating a weak frame that would promote deep learning (see [Figure 1](#) – top right quadrant). It became apparent from the peer observation as well as the pre-observation meeting that the teacher had an inclination towards explaining concepts as he felt that this was a more effective approach in achieving deep learning than the use of teaching approaches with a weak frame.

Further, 100% of students agreed that the teacher ‘gets them to apply knowledge’. In a pedagogical environment with a strong frame the students were not able to solve problems based on their reflections of their own experiences. Students were asked to apply knowledge in ways that were predetermined by the teacher and which would have enabled them to obtain a pass in summative assessments.

One student stated that he/she benefitted most from the teacher through ‘simple understanding of difficult concepts of the subject’. The same student, however, also reported: ‘I hardly recall anything.’ This demonstrates that the teacher can explain concepts well enough to promote understanding yet if that is not reinforced, retained and applied, it can amount to surface learning ([Figure 1](#) – bottom left quadrant). This suggests that for teaching to be effective, one needs strong framing for the explanation and clarification of difficult concepts in addition to weak framing that would allow students to engage with each other and allow for reinforcement and application of knowledge.

Peer feedback compared with students’ evaluation of teacher performance

The results of the peer observation of teaching showed that the teacher employed predominantly teacher-centred, passive approaches to teaching and the facilitation of learning was minimal. There was little opportunity for active learning as interaction among students was minimal. The teacher stifled questions from students in order to get through the lesson. Framing was strong

and there was a focus on content coverage rather than understanding of concepts. The empirical findings of Kember and Wong (2000) showed that students who conceptualize learning as being active favour discussion and interaction and become frustrated with teachers who discourage participation.

On several occasions the teacher purposefully discouraged students from asking questions as he felt that they were deviating from the topic. In doing so he stifled the curiosity of students even though they were lively and curious to know more. He should have allowed students to ask more questions about the content. Arguably, the pedagogical difficulties found in a multi-linguistic and multicultural classroom environment is amplified by the amount of content the teacher needs to cover. The limited strategies that are available to the teacher to address these problems forces the teacher to become a transmitter of knowledge, thus limiting the deep learning that students can engage in.

In line with a case for weak framing, a suggestion made by the peer was that the teacher considers using student-centred methods of teaching and learning, for example, case studies that contextualize the content and employ small group discussions with the focus on students, rather than a lecture. The feedback obtained by some students calling for more student-centred approaches that would promote deep learning are shown in Table 4. Students were not in a position to argue effectively for teaching with a weak frame as they appear to have a limited understanding of student-centred approaches to teaching and learning.

According to Sivan, Wong-Leung, Woon and Kember (2000) the development of a deep approach practice is equal to active participation in the lesson or active learning. The greater the degree of weak framing, the greater will be the likelihood of students developing deep learning skills. Wilson and Fowler (2005) found that students who described themselves as shallow learners started using deeper learning methods when the classes they attended had an active learning design.

Kember and Wong (2000) argue that students' *perception* of the quality of teaching is influenced by their *beliefs* about teaching (see the Introduction of this article). When that argument is applied within the context of this study, it can be stated that when students conceive good teaching as a process whereby it is the responsibility of the teacher to explain concepts in order to help them understand, then the ability of the teacher to provide clarity of information will be perceived as important and as a positive contribution to the quality of teaching.

TABLE 4: Responses that show a need for weak framing/deep learning.

Unstructured item	Students' feedback
What recommendations do you have for further improvement?	'If he can be more available outside/ after lecture as it is sometimes difficult to consult him in class or in front of other students.' 'To check if we really understand.' 'Must ask more questions from the students. Allow students to speak their minds or give their opinions more.' 'He is kind of too fast.'

In general, 63% of respondents in this study gave responses that had a strong framing/deep learning slant. Twenty-two percent of respondents expressed a need for weak framing and 14% of respondents felt there should be a balance between weak and strong framing. Therefore, the majority of students as respondents prefer the teacher to be in charge of the pedagogical situation as they see this as effective teaching. This shows that they are not in an optimum position to evaluate the quality of teaching.

Notions of the quality of teaching and implications for evaluation

A holistic analysis of the feedback from the majority of respondents showed that they gave an opinion about the quality of teaching which was based on teaching as agency (Figure 1 – horizontal axis). Yet, what is required is for an option to be made on learning as agency. More simply, they should have based their perceptions on the extent to which learning had taken place.

In answer to the research question: ‘What constitutes quality teaching?’ it is suggested that quality teaching should be positioned in the top left and top right quadrant of Figure 2. That is, a balance between strong and weak framing, which promotes deep learning is needed. When teaching is located in the bottom quadrants (see Figure 2), it would be ineffective.

Questionnaires which are designed to obtain feedback on teacher-centred models of education may encourage didactic approaches to teaching. This is especially true if there is a belief that student evaluation will show bias against active participatory teaching because of a preference for passive forms of

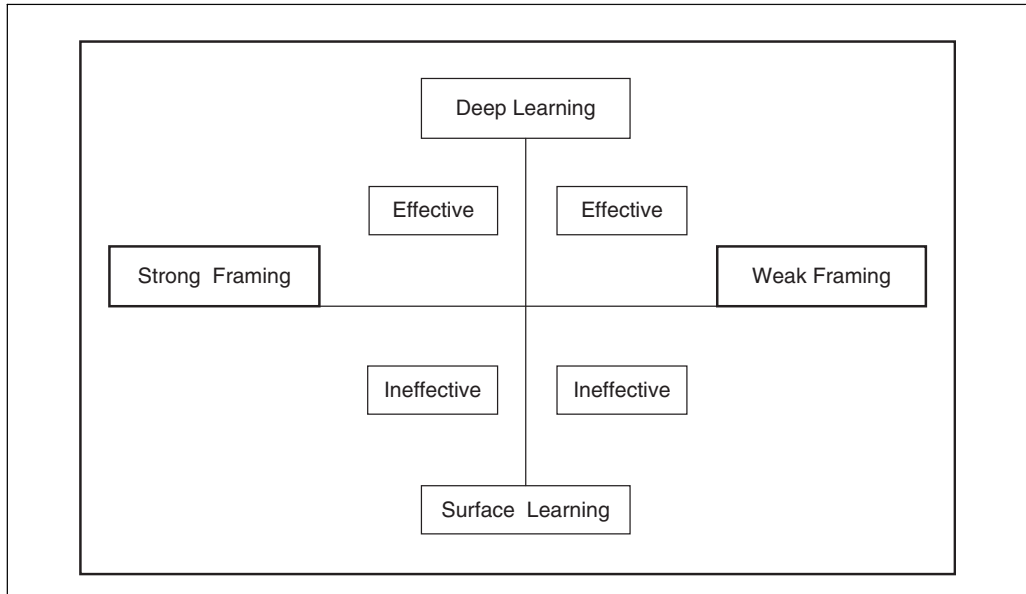


Figure 2: An intersecting of the continua of framing and approaches to learning showing effective and ineffective teaching.

learning. This potential bias of students could distract teachers from adopting innovative methods of teaching (Kember and Wong, 2000). This claim has serious implications when student evaluations are used for developmental purposes. If students perceive good teaching as being teacher-centred (strongly framed), there might be little attempt by teachers to use innovative, weakly-framed approaches to improve teaching.

A synthesis of selected literature (Kember and Wong, 2000; Trigwell and Ashwin, 2006) within the context of this study are given in Figure 3. Students' perception of the learning environment which is largely created by the teaching approach adopted, influences their conception of learning (Trigwell and Ashwin, 2006). In turn, students' conceptions of learning influence how they evaluate teaching (Kember and Wong, 2000). This would influence the teacher's belief about what constitutes good teaching. The teacher would then teach in a way that would be congruent with students' feedback and the nature of teaching would be reinforced (Kember and Wong, 2000). Through the cycle shown in Figure 3, the teaching approach, whether it is strongly or weakly framed, will be perpetuated.

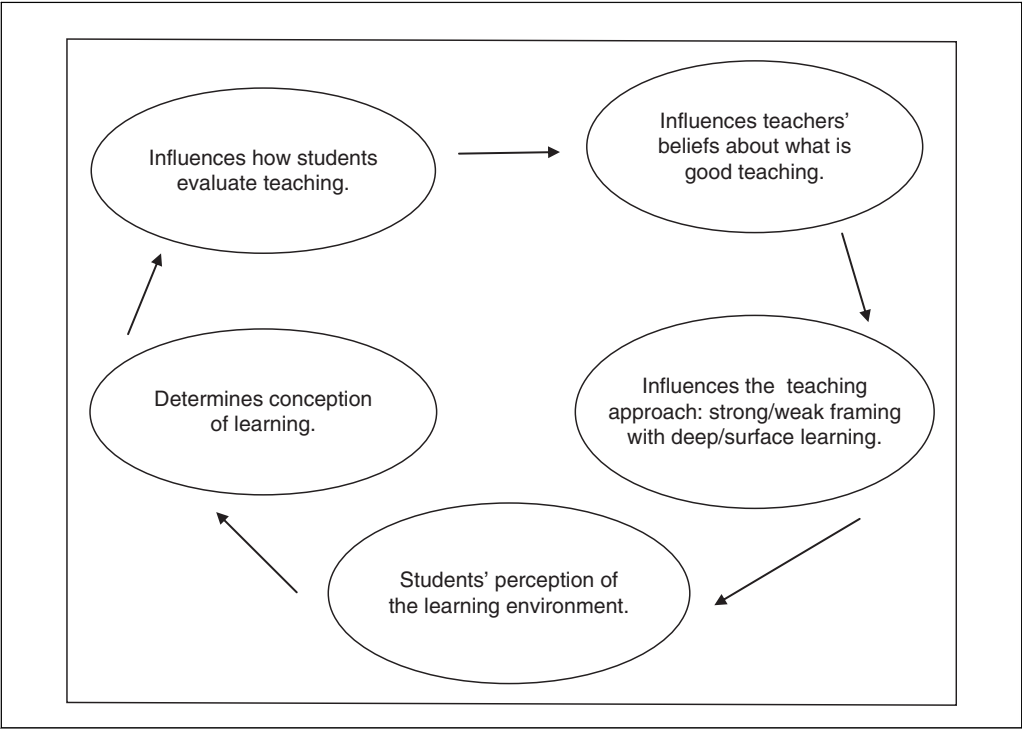


Figure 3: A cycle of how students' perception of the learning environment influences the teaching approach.

Conclusion

The main conclusion drawn from this study is that the perception of what constitutes quality teaching is viewed differently by peers and students. Students in this study were not sufficiently aware about student-centredness. They were first year students and would have evaluated their teacher based on what they had perceived as good teaching in high school, as was suggested by Namaghi (2010).

It may well be that students perceived approaches to teaching that have a strong framing as being effective because of their assumptions, and previous experience, of teaching being teacher-centred. It is likely that they may not have been exposed to approaches of teaching that have a weak frame and, therefore, were not in a position to accurately identify the indicators of effective teaching.

It can be concluded that students' measurement of teaching quality, when viewed in isolation, is not necessarily accurate, valid or useful. In order to

obtain a holistic view of what constitutes good teaching other methods such as peer observation of teaching should be applied.

Although student evaluations of teaching might not always be valid, we cannot do away with their evaluations. It would not be accurate to assume that students' perceptions of teaching are not valid simply because they may differ from those of peers. It is important for them to have a voice in the enhancement of the quality of teaching. This would augur well for weak framing as it would render the pedagogical situation more student-centred. What is needed is an improvement in students' perceptions and evaluations of teaching quality.

In this regard, recommendations on how to improve students' perceptions and evaluation of teaching quality are given below:

- The philosophy of teaching and learning should be explained in study guides and in orientation programme materials.
- Workshops on student-centred teaching should be run for students to make them aware of these approaches.
- The hallmarks of accomplished teaching should be taken cognizance of in designing student evaluation instruments.

There were a number of limitations to the study, for instance, it was conducted at one university and may not be generalizable to other universities. The study can be repeated elsewhere though. Also, only one teacher was observed and his group of students was small at only 22. Other studies will have to be conducted and the results compared. In the absence of vast amount of data, however, the generalizability of the study was made possible by the use of a theoretical framework that was adapted from existing theory and concepts.

A further limitation was that the teacher was allowed to select items from a question bank for the design of a customized questionnaire for the study. The teacher selected mostly strongly framed items and when students responded positively, it made him 'look good'. Kember and Wong (2000) argue that the evaluation of student-centred teaching becomes difficult with questionnaires which cater more for a teacher-centred model of instruction. Questionnaires should make reference to modes of teaching and learning such as self-directed learning, role-play, collaborative learning and project-based learning.

Another limitation of using self-administered questionnaires was that it was not possible to obtain clarification or to probe further on responses that were unclear. In addition, the use of student feedback questionnaires as a means of

evaluating teaching could make the assumption that students have consistent views of what constitutes good teaching (Kember, 2004). Therefore, in the interest of validity, it would be necessary for interviews to be conducted among students to obtain their differential conceptions of teaching. The successful application of small group interviews in student evaluation of teaching has been described by others (for example, Smuts, 2005).

On a concluding note, the measurement of teaching quality is gaining momentum especially because of the focus on rewarding performance in terms of promotion and awards. Student evaluations of teaching are the most common form of appraisal of teaching at most universities (Wood and Harding, 2007). There is a belief that modern day students are well-informed and discerning ‘consumers’ who are less likely to accept poor quality teaching at increasingly higher costs (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

In the wake of the importance attached to student evaluation of teaching, there is a tendency towards a knee jerk response to student feedback. We need to be wary of such results and how they are used.

Notes on contributors

Salochana Lorraine Hassan works in the field of academic staff development and her research interests include evaluation of teaching, programme evaluation, problem-based learning and academic staff development. She heads the Academic Staff Development Unit at her university.

Wouter Wium was employed in the same unit at the time of this study. He made a valuable contribution in terms of data capturing and analysis.

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