

Characteristics of Effective Instructors from the Students' Perspective in Swiss Higher Education

Roediger Voss¹

¹Professor of Business Administration and Education,
University of Applied Sciences of Zurich, Switzerland

Abstract: *This experiential analyse targets to develop a deeper understanding of the expectations regarding the teaching qualities of effective lecturers that student's desire. The main objective of the present paper is to uncover the constructs that underlie these prospects in order to reveal the primary benefits that students seek. A semi-standardized qualitative technique called laddering was applied that allows researchers to stretch deeper levels of reality. This technique involves progression from attributes to benefits to more abstract values. The study results demonstrate that students want lecturers to be knowledgeable, empathic, enthusiastic, approachable, and friendly. The Lecturers should have communicative competence. Students' desire to learn something appears to be the most important concern and the key concept of meaning altogether. They predominately want to encounter appreciated teaching experiences to be fit for their job. Underlying student's values are self-fulfilment, achievement, security, well-being.*

Keywords: Laddering, Higher Education, Expectations, Qualitative Research, Empirical teaching research

1. Introduction

Student expectations are a valuable source of information [1]. Telford and Masson [2] highlight that the perceived quality of the educational service depends on students' expectations and values. If higher education institutions identify their students' expectations, they may be able to inform them of what is accurate to expect from lecturers. Additionally, the knowledge of student expectations may help instructors to design their teaching programmes. The study purposes to develop a deeper understanding of the attributes (qualities and behaviours) of effective lecturers that student's desire and to uncover the constructs that underlie these desire expectations and reveal the underlying benefits that students look for. To address these issues, a semi-standardized qualitative technique called laddering will be applied.

This paper is concerned with one particular participant in higher education: students. On the other hand, this view does not mean that other perspectives may not be valid and important as well. Consequently, the underlying assumption of this paper is that for students, the qualities and behaviours of instructors have a significant impact on their perceptions of teaching quality. This proposition is extensively supported in the education literature; Voss [3] for instance believe that the behaviours and attitudes of teachers primarily determine the students' perceptions of teaching quality. Research findings by authors such as Gruber *et al.* [4] stress the essential protagonist of lecturers. Hence, the behaviours and attitudes of lecturers should be the primary component students' perceptions of teaching quality in higher education.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Laddering-technique

The Laddering-technique (see e.g., [5], [6]) tries to discover the salient meanings that students associate with behaviours of instructors. The approach focuses primarily on the

associations in the students' mind between the attributes of behaviour, the consequences of these attributes for the student, and the personal values or beliefs, which are reinforced or satisfied by the consequences. Attributes are the tangible and intangible characteristics of teaching. Consequences are the motives why an attribute is imperative to the student. Values may be seen as the students' universal life goals and the most personal and general consequences individuals are striving for in their lives [7]. The linkages between attributes, consequences and values are the means-end chains presumptuous that students have knowledge about the symbolic and/or personal value that instructors' behaviour supports them to satisfy. Consequences (mid level of abstraction) are more important to the self than attributes (low level of abstraction) and values (high level of abstraction) are more relevant to the self than consequences. In order to find out the ladders of associations between attributes, consequences and values, the laddering technique is using in-depth interviews to prompt the interviewees to think critically about their mental connections with personal values and goals. For this, the questioner frequently queries why an attribute/consequence/value is essential to the respondent. The response to this question assists as the opening point for additional questioning.

After the interviewing process the scientist has to content analyse and code all the sequences of attributes, consequences, and values (the ladders) obtained from the laddering interview so that comparisons of ladders from several respondents can be made. Moreover, in order to reveal the respective links between the attributes, consequences and values, the software MECAnalyst+ was used. The found links have to be represented on a "hierarchical value map" (HVM). This map is a graphical picture of a set of laddering- chains. A value map normally consists of three different levels, which relate to the three concepts of meaning: values are put at the top of the diagram, consequences are placed close the middle and attributes are positioned at the bottom of the map.

2.2 Participants

The study was conducted from January to June 2013 amongst extra occupational students in business administration at a Switzerland University. Personal laddering interviews were conducted with 36 students aged between 20 and 39 years ($X=24.8$). Participants were enrolled in two business management courses and took part on a voluntary basis. Grunert and Grunert [8] propose that analysts should collect ladders that are from a group of *homogeneous* respondents, and business administration students all have similar experiences and qualifications and come from the surrounding Zurich area.

3. Results and Discussion

The found associations are represented on a hierarchical value map (HVM), which characterizes the most important attributes, consequences, and values (conceptual meanings) and the linkages between them. The map only displays associations beyond the cutoff level of 4, which means that connections have to be mentioned by at least 4 respondents in order to be graphically denoted. The significance and relationships between attributes, consequences and values can be traced back by checking the HVM in Figure 1. White circles represent attributes, grey circles stand for consequences, and black circles represent values.

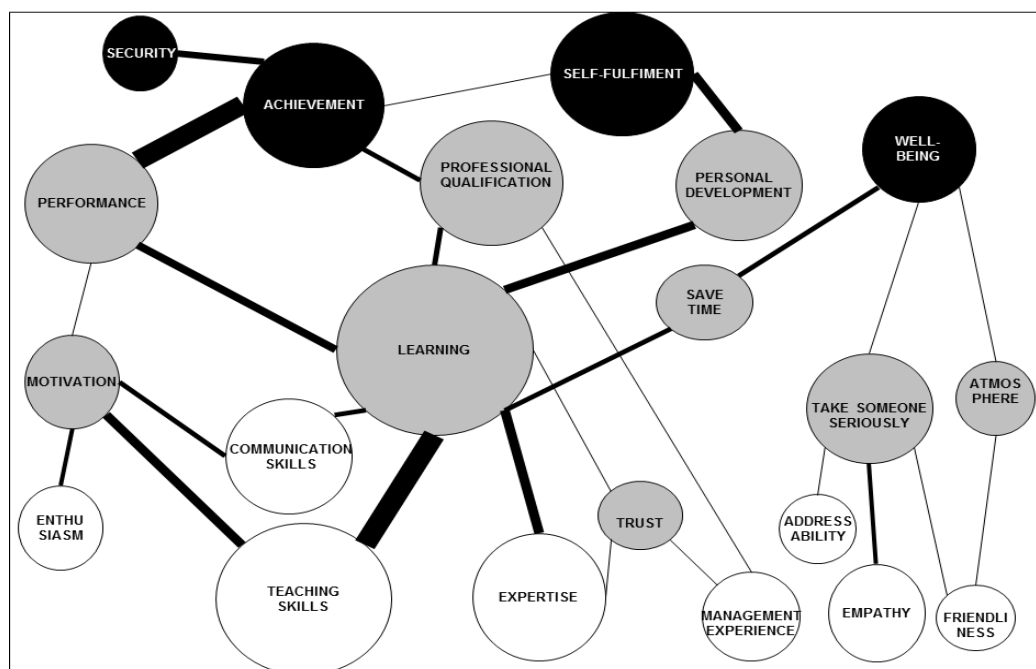


Figure 1: Hierarchical value map of business administration students

The study indicates eight attributes, nine consequences, and four values. The longest ladder consisted of nine concepts of meaning (attributes, consequences, and values) and the shortest two, with an average of 4.1 concepts of meaning per ladder. For respondents, the most critical *characteristics* of lecturers are teaching skills, expertise, communication skills, management experience, empathy, enthusiasm, friendliness, and addressability. These findings are comparable to prior study results that showed the significance of these instructor factors (see e.g., [9], [10], [11], [12]).

As the size of the circles in the hierarchical value map stands for the frequency respondents brought up a certain concept expertise teaching and communication skills are the most important attributes of instructors. Instructors should have understanding of their subject, be able to communicate it clearly to their learners and choose the most suitable instruction technique. The skill to pick the most appropriate teaching method from a variability of teaching tools (“teaching methods”) is central to students as lecturers can then offer best learning conditions (“learning”). Respectable instructors should also be interested in and show concern for their students and their learning progress (“empathy”, “enthusiasm”). They ought to be sociable (“friendliness”)

and acquirable (“addressability”). Students consider “management experience” as a necessary entry condition for instructors employed in extra occupational business programs.

In addition to displaying the most important attributes of lecturers, a hierarchical value map also indicates why these attributes are essential to students. In this manner, it offers a profounder understanding of the characteristics of lecturers that business administration students desire by uncovering the constructs that underlie these desire prospects and graphically illustrating the underlying benefits that scholars seek. In this connection, respondents mentioned several consequences and values. Students’ desire to learn something (“learning”) appears to be the most significant reckoning and the main concept of meaning altogether. Students have confidence in that belief in the professors’ “expertise” and “management experience” is critical for their personal learning process. Students consider that they have to make valuable learning experiences at academia in general and to acquire focused skills and methods in particular, which help them prepare for their work (“professional qualification”). The instructor needs to teach material which will be useful in the real business world to meet student’s

expectations. As the width of the line in the hierarchical value map reveals, learning is also strongly associated with “performance” and “personal development”. Students believe that when they learn something that is perceived central for their lives, they make a personal development. Cord and Clements [13] point out that self-development is one of the key themes in education. Students similarly want to have valuable teaching experiences to be able to pass tests (“performance”), which are essential for students to obtain the degree and to optimize their careers. Students also regard “learning” as a means to obtaining suitable academic results (“Performance”). In the same way, Reschly and Christenson [14] contend that a better academic performance is a result of an effective learning process that relies on the extent of engagement between the student and the course. Successful students feel free from doubt and have certainty (“security”).

The lecturer’s communication skills have a positive impact on students’ motivation and learning. Students also believe they can save time (“save time”), because of a quick learning process (“learning”). They should take time for their students during and after lessons (“addressability”). As a result, students get the impression that lecturers take them seriously (“take someone seriously”). This consequence is perceived by students as an essential condition to maintain “well-being”. Lecturer’s empathy has also a positive impact on this consequence. The lecturer’s addressability and empathy is indirectly related to students’ desire for security and well-being. Furthermore, students feel well if the atmosphere in course is supportive (“atmosphere”), which can be positively influenced by the perceived friendliness of the instructor. The value map also illustrates that the lecturer’s friendliness, which is associated with nonverbal signals like unintended smiling or open body posture makes students feel good (“well-being”).

Conferring to the HVM, scholars predominantly want to satisfy the values: “well-being”, “achievement”, “security”, and “self-fulfilment”. Students feel good (“well-being”) if they can relax, save time, and take seriously from friendly instructors. Scholars who acquire personal development feel better about themselves to realize their deepest desires and capacities (“self-fulfillment”). The HVM also reveal that students who are prepared for their profession and have success (“achievement”) feel safe and certain (“security”). The students want to manage their career and in which profession they progress themselves. These findings support the results stated by Carvalho and Oliveira Mota [15]. The strong association between the consequence “professional qualification” and the value “achievement” that respondents revealed during the laddering interviews, nevertheless, could be a extraordinary perspective of business administration students. This study showed that the participants are primarily motivated by individualistic values to maximize the own outcome (“achievement”, “self-fulfillment”, “well-being”) and less inspired by collective values (“security”). In contrast to that, education students are balanced stimulated by individualistic (“self-esteem”, “hedonism”, “well-being”) and collective values (“Universalism”, “security”) [1].

4. Conclusions and Limitations

The empirical study gave a valuable first into the desired teaching qualities of instructors in Switzerland and revealed the linkages between desired attributes, consequences and values. Expressly, the study results show that business administration students want lecturers with management experience to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, addressable, and friendly. They should also possess sufficient communication and teaching skills. Students predominately want to encounter valuable teaching experiences to be able to pass tests and to be prepared for their profession. The data of student expectations may help lecturers to design their teaching programmes.

Appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research overall and the scope and size of its sample in specific, the outcomes outlined are hesitant in nature. As the study elaborate only a single group of university students from one university, the results cannot be generalized to the student population as a whole. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers can enhance generalizability by carrying out further studies using related data collection and analysis methods at other research sites. Social scientists have to decide whether the additional research sites should be heterogeneous or homogeneous. As commensurate results from heterogeneous research settings will contribute to generalizability, qualitative researchers should prefer these sites to similar locations. By applying study results to other contexts and by demonstrating existing connections and linkages, qualitative researchers engage in moderate generalization [16].

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Author Profile

Roediger Voss received the B.S. and MSc degrees in Business Administration, and in addition a MEd from University of Cologne in 1993 and 1994. Dr Roediger Voss is a Professor of Business Administration and Education at the University of Applied Sciences (Zurich), Switzerland. Prior to that, he was a part-time visiting lecturer at the University of Birmingham, a lecturer at the University of Bamberg, and a lecturer at the University of Education Ludwigsburg. For his research, Roediger Voss has received several awards and he publishes in leading international peer-reviewed journals such as *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Quality Assurance in Education*, and *Journal of Marketing Management*.