

# Exploring Students' Course Experience and its Effect on Teaching Effectiveness

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**Abstract:** In British higher education institutions, scales to measure students' experiences included good teaching (clarity of explanation, level at which material pitched, enthusiasm and help with study problems), openness to students, freedom in learning, clear goals and standards, and appropriate workload. It was found that, when academic departments were perceived to have these characteristics, their students were more likely to learn effectively from courses. The study explores students' course experience and its effect on teaching effectiveness by using qualitative methods, classroom observation and interviews. Questions relate to students' experience of the English reading course were asked. The result shows positive attitude of students' course experience positively affect teaching effectiveness as well as language learning. The study also provides some implications for students and teachers in EFL reading class. Teachers may get direct perceptions of the course from students to prompt course improvement and teacher development.

**Keywords:** Course experience ; Language learning; Teacher development

## 1. Introduction

Students' evaluations have been established as valid, reliable and useful indicators of teaching quality. Many studies have been conducted to evaluate students' perception of teaching quality (Frick et al., 2009<sup>[1]</sup>), and the use of student evaluation is related to teaching effectiveness. Marsh (1987)<sup>[2]</sup> carried out a review of massive literature on the use of student evaluation and their relation to teaching effectiveness. The direct measure of teaching effectiveness is through classroom context learning, from which students have direct experience, and they can have direct perceptions of the curriculum, instruction and assessment. Meanwhile, student course experience was found to be the reliable measure as a performance indicator of university teaching quality. But few studies have used student course experience as a measure of teaching effectiveness. By analyzing the two issues with Chinese non-English majors, the study would provide insights to further understanding of the student course experience and its effect on teaching effectiveness.

## 2. Literature review

In the context of learning, students play the central role, and they have direct experience in learning process. Many research studies focused on students' learning performance and its indicators, and most of them adopted students' perspective. Ramsden and Entwistle (1981)<sup>[3]</sup> developed a course perception questionnaire to measure students' experience in British higher education institutions. It was found that students would be more likely to produce effective outcomes from the course experience run within them when the academic departments were perceived to provide the characteristics, and students would be more likely to understand the content when they regarded the teaching to be clearly and helpful for them. When evaluating the courses, students may have objective comments on teachers' performance, but students cannot give objective comment on the aspects which they do not see, for example, the time and effort teachers put into curriculum design. Marsh (1987)<sup>[2]</sup> measured teaching effectiveness in his study by exploring Frey's endeavor instrument, student instructional rating system form, student description of teaching questionnaire, and student evaluation of educational quality (SEEQ). Frick (2009)<sup>[1]</sup> and other researchers developed the Teaching and Learning Quality scales (TALQ) to measure the principles with which instructional developers and teachers could evaluate their products and courses, regardless of design process used. The Teaching and Learning Quality scales (TALQ) provided teachers and designers with ways of evaluating courses, but it did not focus on students' perceptions of course experience.

## 3. Method of the study

Sample of this study consists 120 freshmen of non-English majors at Tianjin Foreign Studies University. They were randomly selected from four non-English major classes and they all attended English reading class. The study conducts classroom observation and a semi-structured interview to collect data. In doing the interview, students were asked about the experience of the English reading course.

## 4. Results of the study

The result reveals that students who have positive attitude of course experience have positive effect on teaching effectiveness.

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Students' learning behavior is partially influenced by the extent to which the context satisfies the need for being connected. Some interview excerpts revealed that students' personal attitude towards learning is passive. They were not willing to gain knowledge positively and were limited to teacher's assignment and in-class tasks. Students had practical objects of passing the exams instead of regarding learning as a developing process.

Students who have positive attitude of experience may feel a sense of belonging and social support, and therefore they are more likely to be engaged. Students in negative of experience group may be less engaged as the context of classroom does not fulfill their needs to feel motivated and supported.

Besides, students who have negative relationship with their teachers are more likely to have problems related to course experience. Excerpts retrieved from student interview were seen that students had the perception that the teacher was not well experienced and the teacher did not plan and instruct well. When the teacher posed the question of "does the teacher tell you the plans, the rules or other expectations of the course at the beginning of the semester?", the student gave her answer that the teacher was not strict enough so that they would do something else instead of listening carefully. It showed that students were not willing to gain knowledge positively, the instructional climate of classroom influenced students' engagement. Moreover, as the students may concern, teachers who teach the course are not experienced enough, students could not focus on the class and their learning interest could not be generated. Attention should be paid on teacher education. Thus, for education institutions, teacher training should take consideration in teaching development. Teachers should also learn and improve their professional abilities in order to be effective in teaching.

## 5. Implications of the study

The study also provides some implications for students and teachers in EFL reading class. Firstly, teachers could reflect on their teaching practices by providing students with the opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their academic experience. Teachers could reflect on teaching quality by analyzing students course experience. In addition, teachers should plan varies of activities to engage students, and create a highly active learning context to facilitate learning so that students may pay more attention on course learning and produce high quality of learning. Moreover, teachers should develop themselves in teaching practices, the universities or colleges should make strict rules in employing teachers and give teachers enough training in teaching practices and give teachers more opportunities for teacher development.

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