



# PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the perceptions of quality teaching in higher education from the perspectives of both students and teachers. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 postgraduate students and 3 university teachers at the University of Delhi. The research explores various aspects of quality teaching, including definitions, teaching methods, roles and responsibilities, institutional factors and characteristics of effective university teachers. The findings reveal both similarities and differences in how students and teachers conceptualize quality teaching. Key themes that emerged include the importance of meaningful learning, engaging pedagogies, effective communication and supportive learning environments. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing teaching quality in higher education and offers insights for educators and institutions to improve their practices.*

**Keywords:** *quality teaching, higher education, student perceptions, teacher perceptions, teaching methods*

## 1. Introduction

The concept of quality in education is multifaceted and often contested. As Pfeffer and Coote (1991) note, it can be a "slippery concept" with various connotations. In the context of higher education, quality teaching is not merely about the transmission of knowledge but encompasses a range of factors that contribute to effective learning outcomes (Alemu, 2018). These may include the teacher's expertise, pedagogical approaches, learning environment, student engagement, and institutional support.

In India, where this study is situated, the focus on quality in higher education has gained significant traction. The establishment of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 underscores the national commitment to enhancing the quality of higher education institutions (NAAC, n.d.). However, despite these efforts, challenges persist. Recent reports indicate the prevalence of fake educational institutions, highlighting the urgent need for robust quality assurance mechanisms (Livemint, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of quality teaching by examining the perspectives of two key stakeholders: students and teachers. By comparing and contrasting their views, we aim to identify areas of convergence and



divergence, thereby offering insights that can inform teaching practices and institutional policies.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do students and teachers in higher education define quality teaching?
2. What teaching methods and techniques are perceived as effective in promoting quality learning?
3. How do students and teachers view their respective roles and responsibilities in the teaching-learning process?
4. What institutional factors are seen as crucial in supporting quality teaching?
5. What characteristics are associated with effective university teachers?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptualizing Quality Teaching in Higher Education**

The concept of quality teaching in higher education has been the subject of extensive research and debate. Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) provide a comprehensive review of the literature on quality teaching, highlighting its multidimensional nature. They argue that quality teaching is not just about the teacher's actions in the classroom but encompasses a range of factors including institutional policies, curriculum design, and student engagement.

Alemu (2018) emphasizes that quality teaching is characterized by well-prepared and organized instruction, fairness in evaluation, and a genuine care for students' success.

### **2.2 Student Perceptions of Quality Teaching**

Several studies have explored student perceptions of quality teaching in higher education. Pavlina et al. (2011) conducted a survey at the University of Zagreb, finding that students placed high importance on teachers' content clarity and self-explanatory techniques. Interestingly, they found that students perceived the use of modern technology as less important than the teacher's role in forming the quality of teaching.

Charles (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with students in the UK, revealing that quality teaching means different things to individual students. This highlights the subjective nature of quality perceptions and the need for a nuanced understanding of student expectations..

### **2.3 Teacher Perspectives on Quality Teaching**

While much research has focused on student perceptions, fewer studies have explored teachers' views on quality teaching in higher education. Kember et al. (2002) found that teachers' use of student feedback largely depends on their perception of its reliability and validity. This suggests that teachers' own conceptions of quality teaching play a crucial role in their pedagogical practices.

A study by Skelton (2004) explored the concept of "teaching excellence" from the perspective of award-winning university teachers. The findings revealed that these



teachers emphasized the importance of passion for the subject, ability to inspire students, and a commitment to ongoing professional development as key elements of quality teaching.

#### **2.4 Institutional Role in Quality Teaching**

The role of institutions in promoting quality teaching has been recognized as crucial. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) emphasizes the importance of institutional policies and practices in maintaining and improving the quality of higher education (INQAAHE, n.d.). In the Indian context, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) plays a significant role in assessing and accrediting higher education institutions, thereby promoting quality standards (NAAC, n.d.). Gibbs and Coffey (2004) conducted a study on the impact of university teachers' training on their teaching skills and on their students' learning. They found that training programs can lead to significant improvements in teachers' approaches to teaching and students' approaches to learning, highlighting the importance of institutional support for professional development.

#### **2.5 Factors Affecting Quality Teaching**

Various factors have been identified as influencing the quality of teaching in higher education. These include teacher competency, curriculum design, student intake standards, funding for support services, and infrastructure (UK Essays, 2018).

Technological advancements have also been recognized as a significant factor influencing teaching quality in higher education. A study by Kirkwood and Price (2014) explored the impact of technology-enhanced learning on teaching practices and student outcomes. They found that while technology can enhance learning experiences, its effectiveness depends on how it is integrated into pedagogical approaches and aligned with learning objectives.

#### **2.6 Characteristics of Effective University Teachers**

Research on the characteristics of effective university teachers has identified several key traits. These include subject knowledge, teaching skills, friendliness and approachability, and the ability to make difficult subjects easy to learn (Alemu, 2018).

This literature review provides a foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of quality teaching in higher education. However, it also reveals gaps in our understanding, particularly in comparing student and teacher perspectives within the same institutional context. This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comparative analysis of student and teacher perceptions of quality teaching in a higher education setting in India.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perceptions of quality teaching in higher education. The research design focused on capturing rich, descriptive



data that could provide insights into the nuanced understandings of quality teaching held by both students and teachers.

### 3.2 Sampling Strategy

The sample consisted of 11 postgraduate students and 3 university teachers from the University of Delhi. The rationale for focusing on postgraduate students was based on the assumption that they have sufficient experience in higher education to critically reflect on their learning experiences and preferences.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection.

Key areas covered in the interview schedule included:

- Definitions of good and bad quality teaching
- Preferred teaching methods and techniques
- Roles and responsibilities of university teachers
- The role of the institution in providing quality teaching
- Characteristics of good university teachers
- Factors affecting quality teaching
- Students' role in the classroom

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online using Google Meet. This platform was chosen for its accessibility and reliability. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes related to perceptions of quality teaching in higher education. This section presents these findings, organized around the main research questions, and discusses them in light of existing literature.

### 4.1 Defining Quality Teaching

#### 4.1.1 Students' Perspectives

Students generally defined quality teaching in terms of its outcomes and impact on their learning. A recurring theme was the emphasis on meaningful and deep understanding, as opposed to mere repetition of facts. As one student expressed:

"Quality teaching is not about memorizing data... it's about developing a deep understanding of the subject that we can apply in real-life situations."

Students also highlighted the importance of skill acquisition and practical application. One participant stated:

"A teacher who helps us acquire necessary skills for our daily life and future career is providing quality teaching."

This perspective resonates with the broader goals of higher education in preparing students for professional life and aligns with the findings of Birhanu Moges Alemu



(2018), who identified the ability to make learning relevant to real-world applications as a key characteristic of quality teaching.

#### 4.1.2 Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers' definitions of quality teaching centered around content richness and engaging pedagogy. One teacher described it as:

"Teaching that is full of rich, updated content delivered through engaging pedagogy where the learner is not only enjoying but also actively participating in the development of content."

Both students and teachers agreed that quality teaching should foster an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and engaging in discussions. This shared perspective highlights the importance of creating a positive classroom climate, which has been identified as a crucial factor in effective teaching (Hattie, 2009).

### 4.2 Effective Teaching Methods and Techniques

#### 4.2.1 Students' Preferences

Students expressed a preference for diverse teaching methods, with a particular emphasis on discussion-based learning and practical applications. Many students valued interactive methods that allowed for the exploration of different perspectives. As one student noted:

"In philosophy classes, I prefer discussions where we can view a problem from different angles. It helps us develop critical thinking skills."

Students also appreciated the use of real-world examples and case studies to illustrate theoretical concepts. One participant commented:

"When teachers use real-life examples to explain concepts, it makes the learning more relatable and memorable."

It aligns with the principles of authentic learning, which emphasizes the importance of connecting academic content to real-world contexts (Herrington & Oliver, 2000).

#### 4.2.2 Teachers' Approaches

Teachers emphasized the importance of adapting their methods to the content and learning objectives. They reported using a mix of lectures, discussions, and practical activities. One teacher explained:

"My choice of method depends on the content and the learning outcomes I want to achieve. Sometimes a lecture is most appropriate, other times a student-led discussion works better."

Both students and teachers highlighted the value of group work and collaborative learning activities. This shared perspective reflects the growing recognition of the importance of peer interaction in higher education (Johnson et al., 2014). Collaborative learning has been shown to enhance critical thinking skills, improve retention of information, and promote the development of social skills.



### **4.3 Roles and Responsibilities in the Teaching-Learning Process**

#### **4.3.1 Students' Views on Teacher Roles**

Students emphasized the facilitative role of teachers in higher education. They expected teachers to guide discussions, provide constructive feedback, and create a supportive learning environment. One student remarked:

"A good university teacher doesn't just lecture, but facilitates our learning by encouraging us to think critically and express our ideas."

Students also highlighted the importance of teachers being approachable and responsive to their needs. As one participant put it:

"Teachers should be sensitive to each student's reactions and be willing to clarify things we don't understand."

This emphasis on teacher approachability and responsiveness has been identified as a key factor in student satisfaction and engagement in higher education (Komarraju et al., 2010). It also aligns with the concept of "pedagogical caring" proposed by Noddings (1992), which emphasizes the importance of empathy and responsiveness in teaching.

#### **4.3.2 Teachers' Perspectives on Their Roles**

Teachers viewed their role as multifaceted, encompassing teaching, research, and what they termed "extension services" - involvement in broader educational activities beyond their institution. One teacher explained:

"Our role is threefold: teaching, research, and extension services. We shouldn't limit ourselves to just classroom teaching but contribute to the wider educational community."

Teachers also emphasized their responsibility in creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment. One participant stated:

"It's our job to create an atmosphere where every student feels comfortable sharing their views and participating in discussions."

#### **4.3.3 Shared Responsibilities**

Both students and teachers recognized that quality teaching is a shared responsibility. Students acknowledged their role in actively participating in class and taking ownership of their learning. As one student put it:

"In higher education, we're responsible for our own learning. We need to engage in discussions and do independent research."

Teachers echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the partnership between students and teachers in the learning process. One teacher remarked:

"While I'm responsible for planning and facilitating learning activities, students are partners in this process. Their engagement and contributions are crucial for effective learning."



This shared perspective aligns with the concept of "students as partners" in higher education, which emphasizes the active role of students in shaping their learning experiences (Healey et al., 2014).

#### 4.4 Institutional Factors Supporting Quality Teaching

Both students and teachers identified several institutional factors as crucial for supporting quality teaching. These included:

1. Professional Development Opportunities: Teachers emphasized the importance of ongoing training and workshops to enhance their pedagogical skills. One teacher stated:

"Regular faculty development programs help us stay updated with new teaching methods and technologies."

This aligns with research highlighting the positive impact of professional development on teaching quality (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004).

2. Adequate Resources and Infrastructure: Students and teachers alike stressed the need for well-equipped classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. A student commented:

"Having access to good resources, like a well-stocked library and modern labs, really enhances our learning experience."

This finding supports the literature on the importance of physical learning environments in higher education (Temple, 2008).

3. Supportive Policies: Teachers highlighted the need for institutional policies that value and reward teaching excellence. One teacher remarked:

"Institutions should have clear policies that recognize and reward innovative teaching practices."

This perspective aligns with research on the importance of institutional culture in promoting teaching quality (Knight & Trowler, 2000).

4. Student Feedback Mechanisms: Both groups emphasized the importance of effective systems for gathering and acting on student feedback. A teacher noted:

"Regular student feedback helps us understand what's working and what needs improvement in our teaching."

This supports the literature on the role of student feedback in enhancing teaching quality (Richardson, 2005).

5. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Several participants highlighted the value of cross-disciplinary interactions. A student commented:

"I really enjoy courses that bring together perspectives from different disciplines. It broadens our understanding."



#### 4.5 Characteristics of Effective University Teachers

The study revealed several key characteristics that both students and teachers associated with effective university teaching:

1. Subject Expertise: Both groups emphasized the importance of deep subject knowledge. A student remarked:

"A good teacher should have in-depth knowledge of their subject and be able to answer complex questions."

This aligns with Shulman's (1986) emphasis on the importance of content knowledge in teaching.

2. Communication Skills: The ability to explain complex concepts clearly was highly valued. A teacher noted:

"Being able to break down difficult concepts and explain them in simple terms is crucial for effective teaching."

This supports research on the importance of clear communication in effective teaching (Hativa et al., 2001).

3. Enthusiasm and Passion: Both students and teachers highlighted the motivational impact of passionate teaching. A student commented:

"When a teacher is truly passionate about their subject, it's infectious. It makes us want to learn more."

This aligns with research on the positive impact of teacher enthusiasm on student engagement and learning outcomes (Keller et al., 2016).

4. Approachability and Empathy: The ability to connect with students on a personal level was seen as crucial. A teacher stated:

"Being approachable and understanding students' challenges is key to creating a supportive learning environment."

This supports the literature on the importance of teacher-student relationships in higher education (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

5. Adaptability and Openness to Feedback: Both groups valued teachers who were willing to adapt their methods based on student needs and feedback. A student noted:

"The best teachers are those who are open to our feedback and willing to try new teaching approaches."

This aligns with research on the importance of adaptive teaching in higher education (Corno, 2008).

6. Use of Innovative Teaching Methods: The ability to incorporate diverse and engaging teaching methods was highly valued. A teacher commented:

"We need to keep up with new pedagogical approaches and technologies to make our teaching more effective and engaging."



## 5. Conclusion and Implications

The findings reveal a complex and multifaceted understanding of quality teaching that goes beyond mere content delivery to encompass aspects such as meaningful learning, engaging pedagogies, effective communication, and supportive learning environments.

Several key implications emerge from this research:

1. **Need for Alignment:** The study highlights the importance of aligning student and teacher expectations regarding quality teaching. Institutions should facilitate ongoing dialogue between students and teachers to foster a shared understanding of effective teaching practices.
2. **Professional Development:** The findings underscore the need for continuous professional development opportunities for university teachers. These should focus not only on subject expertise but also on pedagogical skills, communication techniques, and the use of innovative teaching methods.
3. **Institutional Support:** Higher education institutions play a crucial role in fostering quality teaching. This includes providing adequate resources, implementing supportive policies, and creating mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence.
4. **Student Engagement:** The study reinforces the importance of active student engagement in the learning process. Institutions and teachers should create opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning and contribute to the teaching-learning process.
5. **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** The value placed on interdisciplinary learning suggests that institutions should encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations and integrate diverse perspectives into curriculum design.
6. **Adaptive Teaching:** The findings highlight the need for teachers to be flexible and adaptive in their teaching approaches, responding to diverse student needs and learning contexts.
7. **Emphasis on Soft Skills:** Beyond subject expertise, the study underscores the importance of teachers developing soft skills such as effective communication, empathy, and the ability to create supportive learning environments.

By providing a nuanced understanding of student and teacher perspectives, it offers valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers striving to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions.

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