

TEACHING PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In Higher Education, the role of the faculty is of vital importance in the teaching/ learning process. In the active learning approach, the faculty's main role is facilitating the process without deep intervention, so that the student would be able to take responsibility in his/ her education and shifting the role from the receiver to the strategic partner. In this paper, I am trying to share some of my humble experience within higher education probably it would help my fellow colleagues in one way or another.

KEYWORDS: *Professional Experience, Teaching/ Learning Support, Higher Education, Active Learning, Student Support, Teaching Practices*

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INTRODUCTION

I have always had an early passion for supporting others. The sense of responsibility always accompanied me during my life, beginning with the early years. Being the eldest son of five brothers and sisters implanted in me the responsibility for guiding and supporting others. I tried as possible to set the example for my younger brothers and sisters, something that had its impact later on in my professional life. This sense of responsibility and guidance always impacted me in running for the class presidency during my study, most of the years I succeeded, but of course, I tasted failure sometimes.

During my years of study, my colleagues used to look upon me as an example for them. I have always received requests for advises in doing this or that, and I felt content to provide help and support every time I was put in that role. This role was reflected substantially in my academic profession, namely my mentoring and supporting role within the university.

After I graduated from college, I worked as a licensed tourist guide for a couple of years guiding tourists from all over the world throughout my history-rich country, Egypt. This period affected me deeply in introducing me to different cultures and had a deep impact on my professional life later as it opened my eyes to the different perspectives people have in looking at different things.

After a couple of years, I worked for multi-national companies in and out of Egypt in the field of HR management. Actually, my background profession was the prime mover for me to do my master and doctorate degrees in

the field of HRM. Due to the nature of my previous profession, I used to conduct a lot of job interviews with different candidates from different disciplines. I noticed so many times the wide gap between graduate attributes and what was required in the real business situations. I saw prominent job seekers who handed over very astonishing CVs and did really good in their job interviews, but when encountered with real business situations, such prominence was of very little use. Something like that really motivated me to do post-graduate studies, to be able to slightly contribute to change such situation, which is getting graduates closer to the real business environment, with its problems and continuous change.

Taking my background in HR and training profession into consideration, when I first came to the university, I have tackled the responsibility of HR Training and Development module for master students instead of a fellow colleague who passed away. When I looked at the syllabus and conducted several discussions with my students and the department administration, I recommended that we conduct some changes to the module specifications of the module, which is more practical in nature than theoretical. I have changed some activities related to it, adding more active learning activities, that would make the student feel more of a partner in his/ her education process than a receiver, linking theory to practice, and above all, establishing ROI and evaluation mechanism of the courses I teach.

Theoretical Framework, Literature Review & Discussion

I believe in empowering my students, learning itself is empowering. Almost with each course, and after the first half of the semester, I ask my students to recommend the learning activities they find not useful and to suggest approaches they find more profitable for them to be embedded in the future learning activities, and in many cases I use their recommendations and they turn out to be very useful, such as the use of opposite points of views, in which one group adopts one point of view regarding a specific topic, and another group adopts the opposite point of view, and each group defends its perspective and argument, then we open the discussion of the rest of students.

Any adequate account of theory must take note of the relationship to practice that it implies (Wilfred Carr, Stephen Kemmis 1986), that is why I make extensive use of my previous professional experience in the field of HR management and training, in addition to research focus, in transferring such expertise to my students in BBA level courses, such as Principles of Management and HR Management. With almost every topic covered, and by the end of the class, I urge my students to get engaged in group in-class challenging assignments to immediately apply what was learned in real life case studies to be applied on Bahraini organizations, whether governmental or private, to link theory with practice, and in the following lectures, we get engaged in open discussions, when almost each student expresses his/her opinion, regarding such tasks to establish the main highlights of the topics covered. Such endeavors are reflected in better performance from the students' side and enhance their critical thinking and application skills. That was really obvious during the activities conducted by the final phase of the semester.

When I began teaching at ASU, I noticed that students were accustomed to classroom lectures only, hence, I try my best in breaking the monotony of the one way communication teaching through the use of a mixture of teaching methods such as classroom lecturing, case studies, seminars, group, and individual assignments, and problem-solving to arise their interest, in addition to making students feel partners in the learning process (Healey, M. et al 2014). With time, I noticed that students' interaction and eagerness got better and better in learning when they feel they are engaged in the process, something that gets reflected during the second half of the semester.

With every chance, I try to support my students in any possible way. An example of that is during one of my 4th level English Taught course “Strategic Management”, and because of the difficulties Arab native students face in learning such subject in English, I try my best to use an easy language and vocabulary delivering the main elements required. I used to repeat over and over again using simple English and real-life situations until I make sure they understand the subject concerned. Even though it was difficult at the beginning, but eventually, students got used to the subject and the language, and their performance became better, whether in oral or written skills.

In addition, and in level two Human Resource Management courses, and when I began teaching it, I noticed that students are not accustomed to group working and practical exercises, so, I began embedding real problem solving and case study exercises to enrich their critical skills and capabilities, and they showed obvious progress in their practical and intellectual questions in the summative assessment.

One of the pedagogical approaches I sometimes use to support master students is the flipped classroom, which increases the effectiveness of the learning environment (Herreid& Schiller, 2013). I send them powerpoint presentations, research, articles, and other materials on the university MOODLE, then in the class time, we open group discussions, problem-solving, analysis, and the like. Such a strategy allows students to learn on their own time and at their own pace and have more time for collaborating with other students which can be a great learning experience. With more usage of the approach, I noticed that it Increased student engagement, strengthened the team-based skills and added more focus on the classroom discussion, in addition to enhancing students’ critical thinking abilities.

Herreid, C.F. and Schiller, N.A. (2013). Case Studies and the Flipped Classroom. *Journal of College Science Teaching*. Vol. 42. No. 5.

I have supervised, and still, supervise a number of Master students’ theses. In this regard, I try my best in supporting my students in the structure of their theses and guiding them to different resources, whether in the university library or other resources, in formulating the research problem and questions, and developing their hypotheses. I try my best to be by their side at any time I am free and have a constant channel of communication with them.

Students in my classes showed a lack of enthusiasm towards expressing themselves, which could be attributed to different reasons (Juhana, 2012). Bahrain is a conservative society, in which female students are always timid in speaking before audiences, I usually encourage them, through individual presentations or seminars to express their points of view and opinions about business issues, have face to face meetings with them, asking stimulating questions, something that has its effect on them to get more courage and enthusiastic in speaking and expressing themselves in front of others to the extent that they sometimes conduct training courses in community societies.

Aside from the teaching activities, I am always involved in contribution to the improvement of the university admin and academic staff. I was recent “January 2016” invited by the HR Department and the Academic Staff Development Unit to deliver two workshops for academic and admin staff of the University. Moreover, and having my first degree in “English”, I am used to supporting my Arab native colleagues revising their research papers, applications, and other documents that are required from them in English.

Research on the classroom environment has shown that the physical arrangement can affect the behavior of both students and teachers (Savage, 1999). I use a mixture of the blackboard, projector, computer software, stories, assignments, group activities...etc. I am used to organizing the learning environment as much as possible to try the best useful

arrangement for my students. Based on the subject and learning activity used, I arrange the classroom in U shape, circles, or regular to suite my students. I like them to feel like I am one of them, when they conduct presentations, I used to take a seat among them, so that the presenter does not feel any pressure. Such strategy improved their interaction with me and encouraged them, especially the female students who might feel timid by nature, to speak freely.

To add more relief, and to decrease the pressure of the academic environment, in addition to having international master students coming from Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, it happens sometimes that I conduct face-to-face and group support sessions in social environments, such as a café, which helps them meeting their needs, and taking into consideration their tight schedules, specially that all of them are employed. This allowed me to get more space of time with them to cover the required issues.

I am used to urging my students to use the University library and accompany them from time to time to encourage them to use different resources, and I even conduct at least one open book problem-solving assignment (Formative) every semester. Such a strategy yields how students use different opinions and perspectives to come up with solutions of their own that are reflected in on and off class assignments.

Teachers need to be aware of the specific learning needs of individual students in their classes(NCSE V4- 2013). I try my best during classes not to make students with special needs feel different. I give them the help and support they need to stand equal with their peers. I conduct individual “face- to- face” sessions in my office, I use fonts that are much larger than usual for the questions they are able to read easily, I examine them separately, allowing more time than the usual exam time. Using such strategies gets their performance enhanced to a great extent, and above all, they do not feel different from the other students.

In one of my postgraduate courses “HR Training and Development”, and for the course group project, I request my students to conduct a real “Training Course” from A to Z in real schools, training centers, social organizations and the like, and I am planning to make the conduct management related training courses for university employees, hence, we get the benefits for both ends. Such endeavor really enhanced their practical skills and sharpened their knowledge of the subject concerned, and it was reflected in the final exam performance.

Online materials provide a means of communication between students, teachers and outside contributors (Cook, 1999). I am trying my best to be a resident more than a visitor to the online environment with my students (David White, 2011) To make sure that help and support are available for my students around the clock, I use different VLE methods, such as the University MOODLE which I use in uploading materials, assignments, quizzes, resources, especially during informal hours to communicate with them, along with the mobile Wat’s APP application and e-mail to be available for them any time, especially for those who live out of Bahrain. Using such tools made me available for them as much as possible.

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