Quality Teaching Practices: Implementing Instruction

الأستاذة : أحلام صالحـــي
كلية الآداب و اللغات
جامعة محمد خيضر- بسكرة (الجزائر)

ملخـــــص:

معظم الدراسات تركز على الصفات الشخصية للأستاذ والسلوكيات الاجتماعية والتنظيمية التي تحيط عملية التدريس. مما لا شك فيه إنّ استعداد الأستاذ وعلاقته الوثيقة مع الطلاب، وأساليبه في إدارة الصف كلها عناصر تؤدي إلى نجاح عملية التدريس. لكن عندما يتعلق الأمر بتقييم جودة التدريس، لا يوجد شيء أكثر أهمية من التدريس في حد ذاته.

فيما يتعلق بهذا الغرض، يقدم المقال لمحة عامة عن جودة التدريس من حيث الممارسة التعليمية من خلال التركيز على البحوث التي تناولت العناصر المهمة في التدريس

Abstract :

Most of studies focus on the teacher's personal qualities and social and organizational behaviors that surround the teaching process. Undoubtedly, a teacher's preparation, relationships with students, and classroom management techniques are inextricably linked with classroom success. When it comes to assessing quality teaching effectiveness, however, there is nothing more important to consider than the actual act of teaching. In relation to this purpose, the paper provides an overview of the effective quality teaching in terms of instructional practice by focusing on research-based elements of teaching.

Use of Instructional Strategies

After instruction has been planned and the classroom prepared, teachers must begin to actually interact academically with students and with the curriculum: they must teach. Many elements of the teaching process have been linked to effectiveness in teaching, including the strategies teachers use, the clarity of their explanation of material, and the types of questions they ask.

In addition, the methods teachers use to keep students focused and engaged are clearly important in implementing instruction effectively.

A teacher's repertoire of teaching strategies is a significant element of overall effectiveness. Studies emphasize the importance of successfully implementing strategies appropriate to the content and instructional goals as well as the initial planning that precedes instructional deliver.

The literature on instruction suggests that students whose teachers develop and regularly integrate inquiry-based problems, hands-on learning activities, critical thinking skills, and assessments into daily lessons consistently outperform their

peers. Flexibility and adeptness with a variety of teaching strategies contribute to quality teaching effectiveness. Direct teaching is one example of an effective instructional technique; studies illustrate the effectiveness of other teaching strategies as well (Randall, Sekulski, & Silberg, 2003; Zahorik et al., 2003).

Additionally, effective teachers use appropriate teaching strategies based on the content, the students, and other factors such as time and resources. For example, a study of the effectiveness of instructional strategies found that more effective teachers use direct instruction, but most effective teachers use both direct instruction and experiential learning techniques (Zahorik et al., 2003).

Teachers who successfully employ a range of strategies reach more students because they tap into more learning styles and student interests (Tomlinson, 2000). They also can use different strategies to ensure that concepts are well understood. Effective quality teaching routinely combines instructional techniques that involve individual, small-group, and whole-class instruction. This allows them to monitor and pace instruction based on the individual needs of students.

Some of the strategies and activities deemed effective in terms of promoting student achievement include direct teaching as well as guided and independent practice. Studies indicate that using concept mapping and graphic organizers to promote students' understanding and retention of content are also factors related to effective teaching. Furthermore, effective teachers consistently note problem solving across the curriculum as an important aspect of their success.

Modeling and coaching are additional characteristics of an effective teacher's repertoire (Allington, 2002; Taylor et al., 1999). In addition to applying basic principles in their lessons, effective teachers stress the importance of higher mental processes, such as problem solving techniques, analytical thinking skills, and creativity. They use longer and more complex assignments in order to challenge students and engage them in learning (Allington, 2002 These skills enable students to relate their learning to real-life situations and incorporate concepts into their long-term memory. Other important instructional variables found to affect student achievement include using student ideas and eliciting student comments.

The following findings related to instructional strategies are supported by the existing research:

• Lecturing, a common teaching strategy, is an effort to quickly cover the material; however, it often overloads and overwhelms students with data,

making it likely that they will confuse the facts presented (Palmer, 1990).

• Students have higher achievement rates when the focus of instruction is on meaningful conceptualization, especially when it emphasizes their own knowledge of the world (Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999).

• Effective teachers recognize that no single instructional strategy can be used in all situations. Rather, they develop and call on a broad repertoire of approaches that have proven successful for them with students of varying abilities, backgrounds, and interests (Cotton, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Responding to the Range of Student Needs and Abilities in the Classroom

Effective teachers tend to recognize individual and group differences among their students and accommodate those differences in their instruction (Tomlinson, 2003). They adapt instruction to meet student needs, which requires careful assessment and planning for all students in the classroom, as well as the ability to select from a range of strategies to find the optimal match to the context (Cawelti, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999).

When teachers present information in such a way, the majority of the class is challenged. They adapt the assignment to meet the needs of students who are either functioning higher or lower or who simply need the material presented differently. They also take the time to teach study and organizational skills to students to provide them with the learning tools that many of their peers instinctively acquire and use (Cotton, 2000).

The ability to improvise while teaching to meet the learning needs of all students is another sign of an effective teacher. Students of teachers who receive specialized training in working with a broad range of students, including culturally diverse students, gifted students, and students with special needs, perform (on average) more than one full grade level above their peers (Wenglinsky, 2000). These teachers understand and use "scaffolding" approaches to instruction that allow students to receive the help they need and to work at their own pace. For gifted learners, curriculum compacting can be used so that a student is able to master the objectives and move on to investigations and applications of greater interest to that student. In summary, effective teachers use all available resources, including the school content-area specialists, other students, students' siblings, parents, classroom volunteers,

tutors, community members, meeting times to meet the needs of students.

Studies of student achievement and of perceptions of quality teaching effectiveness have emphasized the importance of appropriate differentiation in instruction, including the following findings:

• Students are most engaged and achieve most successfully when instruction is appropriately suited to their achievement levels and needs (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996).
• Effective teachers use a variety of grouping strategies, including cooperative grouping, flexible grouping, and ability grouping with differentiation to support student learning (Taylor et al., 1999).
• Instructional differentiation requires careful monitoring and assessment of student progress, as well as proper management of activities and behavior in the classroom; placing students into groups based on ability without tailoring instruction to the different groups is insufficient to support academic success (Kulik & Kulik, 1992).
• Effective teachers know and understand their students as individuals in terms of their abilities, achievement, learning styles, and needs (Brookhart & Loadman, 1992) and give greater emphasis to individualization in their teaching (Wenglinsky, 2002).
• Effective teachers demonstrate effectiveness with the full range of student abilities in their classrooms (Allington, 2002).

Communicating High Expectations to Students

A teacher's ability to give clear and focused explanations to students and to clarify expectations for achievement is an important aspect of effective instructional delivery. Effective teachers expect students to learn; they take the responsibility to make sure students do learn. They set high standards and ensure a challenging curriculum for all students. Although achievement is related to the range of teaching strategies a teacher employs, clarity of explanation and expectation is a separate skill that is also vital in teacher effectiveness.
Communication is fundamental to any profession that requires interaction among people and within an organization. Teaching is no exception.
Clarity in explanation (an important communication skill) is manifested in two primary ways in the teaching process. The first relates to the teacher's ability to explain content clearly and in a focused manner, pointing out concepts and relationships. The second concerns the teacher's clarity in terms of explaining directions for how students are to complete an activity.

Further, the teacher's job requires clear communication of expectations, encouragement, and caring. This communication extends both to students and to parents. Effective teachers inform parents of the expectations for student growth and communicate how students are assessed for improvement (Allington, 2002). Moreover, the communication of content in teaching is far more than relating information. Effective communication in teaching requires teachers to clearly understand subject matter and know how to share that subject matter with students in a way that they come to own it and understand it deeply (Rowan, Chiang, & Miller, 1997).

Effective communication on the part of the teacher involves not only one-way communication from teacher to student, but also communication from student to teacher and student to student. Effective teachers respond to student questions and comments in a way that further develops positive relationships and fosters an atmosphere of high expectations within the classroom. They encourage dialogue in the classroom, both between teacher and student and between student and student (Mason et al., 1992). Effective teachers facilitate open discussion within the classroom.

Because, in the eyes of students, the teacher's affective characteristics are often of primary concern, teachers must constantly communicate a climate of support and encouragement to ensure that students participate actively in the two-way teaching and learning process. Furthermore, effective management and student learning are clearly related to communicating expectations.

In several studies, teacher expectations and the ability to effectively communicate those expectations have been shown to relate to student achievement as follows:

• Students and teachers who are asked about effective quality teaching consistently note the importance of clearly explaining the content (Peart & Campbell, 1999).

• Examples and guided practice (as appropriate to the lesson) are important parts of getting the point of the lesson across; additionally, these examples may represent clarity both in content and in directions and procedures (Zahorik et al., 2003).

• Teachers can improve the performance of students who normally exhibit average achievement by setting and communicating high expectations (Mason et al., 1992).
• Successful teachers cite high expectations for themselves and their students
as a key part of their success (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996).
• Expectations that are set high represent an overall orientation toward improvement and growth in the classroom. High expectations have been demonstrated to be a defining characteristic of benchmark schools (Cotton, 2000).
• Teachers stress students' personal responsibility and accountability for striving to meet high expectations (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996), partially through an emphasis on improvement through the assessment model used. Linked to this emphasis is the importance of teaching students metacognitive strategies to support reflection on learning progress. (Allington, 2002)
• Effective teachers promote student self-regulation (Day, 2002).

Understanding the Complexities of Teaching

Teaching occurs at a crossroads of complex disciplines and involves interacting with diverse and complex student learners. The effective teacher must have sufficient knowledge of subject matter and of teaching and learning to appreciate these complexities. An understanding of these complexities can help prevent the teacher from trivializing content and from underestimating the work it will take to prepare lessons and to implement them with students.
The effective teacher also recognizes each student as a multifaceted person, understanding that each student brings a lifetime of ideas and experiences in and out of learning settings to the classroom. Moreover, the effective teacher recognizes that a class is, itself, a dynamic and complex entity, made of many personalities, evolving into a corporate personality of its own. All these understandings contribute to a teacher's interactions with students, plans and practices for managing the environment, and preparation and differentiation for student learning needs. In a word, teaching is complex.
Unfortunately, teaching and learning does not always focus on both

the memorization of material and the more complex tasks of applying, synthesizing, and evaluating.

Effective teachers emphasize meaning. They encourage students to respond to questions and activities that require them to discover and assimilate their own understanding, rather than to simply memorize material (Marzano et al., 1993).

Eisner (2003/2004) explained that effective teachers emphasize critical thinking and cultivate a propensity for applying critical thinking in order to make good judgments. These teachers also present and engage students in content at various levels of complexity, using a broad range of objectives and activities and employing activities and questions that address higher and lower levels of cognitive complexity. They scaffold lessons to guide students in their emerging skill and knowledge acquisition through step-by-step instructions, modeling,

and opportunities to apply new information and skills to novel situations (Zahorik et al., 2003).

Studies on effective teaching have yielded the following results with regard to cognitive complexity of classroom tasks:

• Effective teachers are concerned with having students learn and demonstrate understanding of meanings rather than merely memorizing facts or events (Marzano et al., 1993).

• Effective schools and effective teachers prioritize reading because it affects success in other content areas and overall achievement gains (Allington,

2002; Taylor et al., 1999).

• Students have higher achievement rates when the focus of instruction is on meaningful conceptualization, especially when it builds on and emphasizes their own knowledge of the world (Molnar et al., 1999; Wenglinsky, 2000).

• Effective teachers make greater use of interdisciplinary connections, connections across the curriculum, and integration of subject areas in their

teaching (Molnar et al., 1999).

Using Questioning Techniques

Questions and answers, from teachers to students and back again, represent much of the academic interaction that takes place in learning. This process supports student engagement in learning and a teacher's ability to monitor the learning process. Although quality teaching effectiveness research supports the importance of questioning, the definitions of the kinds of questions that are most beneficial vary. What is clear, however, is that good questioning is definitely an important aspect of effective teaching.

- Several studies have shown greater levels of student achievement relating to the teacher's use of lower-level, concrete questions, but other studies have supported the benefits of higher-level questions in encouraging student achievement (Taylor et al., 1999). This variance in results suggests the importance of a variety of question types to meet student needs and support student learning. Several key points outlined by these studies about questioning are as follows:

• Questions are most valuable when students have an opportunity to respond correctly or incorrectly because responses encourage student engagement, demonstrate understanding or misconception, and further the discussion (Cawelti, 2004).

• The level of difficulty and cognitive level of questions should reflect the instructional objectives and desired learning outcomes (Cawelti, 2004).

• Questions should be considered carefully and prepared in advance of a lesson to ensure that they support the goals and emphasize the key points, along with maintaining appropriate levels of difficulty and complexity (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

•When planning, implementing, and assessing lessons, questions should be considered as a sequence, not as isolated units (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

• Studies indicate that questioning techniques are imperative for teachers who desire to increase their ability in assessing student learning (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996).

• Wait time is an important aspect of questioning; longer wait times

have been related to higher student achievement and increased participation and student-to-student interaction in several studies. In general, one to three seconds is sufficient, depending on the question. (Stahl, 1994).

Supporting Student Engagement in Learning

Along with the importance of time allocated to instruction by the teacher, the time the students spend on task, or engaged in the teaching and learning activity, is an important contributor to classroom success. To encourage student involvement in activities and lessons, effective teachers use varying strategies, including calling on students in random order, providing any necessary additional clarification and illustration, and finding something positive to say when students do respond or interact. (Zahorik et al., 2003). Effective teachers also view high-interest lessons as necessary to student engagement. Also teachers who use positive reinforcement, praise students, and employ meaningful activities are more likely to actively engage students in learning.

Some research results related to student engagement in learning include the following:

• Student engagement with learning activities is supported by the teacher's attention to the momentum of the daily lesson, to appropriate questioning, and to clarity of explanation in terms of both content and directions (Cawelti, 2004).

• Students who perceive a positive classroom environment report being more engaged in learning. (Fullerton, 2002).

• Effective teachers engage students by matching the students' skill level to the task challenge level (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

• Effective teachers are accepting, supportive, and persistent in challenging and engaging students in all aspects of instruction (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001).

• Effective teachers vary not only their own instructional strategies but also the types of assignments and activities given to students to support increased student engagement (Cotton, 2000).

• Student engagement is maximized when students engage in authentic activities related to the content under study (Weiss & Pasley, 2004).

Teachers of At-Risk Students

As virtually all teachers know, the range of abilities and needs of students in a single classroom can be great. Further, the effective teacher knows how to respond to those needs and engage learners in the process. One way to engage students and to increase learning is to use a variety of instructional strategies, depending on factors such as prior knowledge of the students and the content and skills to be taught. At-risk students benefit from direct instruction, hands-on learning, simulations, inquiry, and other strategies that work well with the general population of students (Langer, 2001; Wenglinsky, 2004). It is the teacher's skills in implementing these strategies, however, that distinguishes the more effective from the less effective.

Teachers of at-risk students hold both high behavioral standards and high academic expectations for their students. They insist on students completing work and require students to redo the assignment if not done properly.

Effective teachers of at-risk students engage students in the learning process. In addition to the adept use of questioning, teachers increase student engagement by making connections between the curriculum and real life and by coaching and actively involving students in the lesson (Bernard, 2003).

Studies related to effectively teaching at-risk students reveal the following:

• Effective teachers of at-risk students use a wide variety of instructional strategies to meet the range of needs in the classroom (Corbett & Wilson, 2002).

• The higher the level of questions used in the classroom, the more academic
growth was experienced by at-risk students (Taylor et al., 2003).

• There is a positive correlation between high engagement and students'
reading comprehension (Taylor et al., 2003).

• Modeling is positively related to student growth in writing (Taylor et

al., 2003).

Teachers of High-Ability Students

One defining attribute of effective teachers of high-ability students is that they must be masters of multitasking during classroom time. They must also be skilled in implementing various strategies to accommodate the range of abilities found among gifted students. Teachers of gifted and talented students must be able to help them see larger patterns, understand abstractions, and focus on discovery learning. Thus, teachers of high-ability learners strive to develop a wide range of teaching strategies and use this wide range to meet the individual needs and learning styles of their students (Hunt & Seney, 2001; VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2003).

As with all students, the skill of questioning is useful and necessary in teaching gifted learners. Typically, but not exclusively, questioning in gifted classrooms focuses on higher-level learning. Skillfully employing questioning strategies in the classroom requires a deep knowledge of the content and of pedagogy (National Research Council, 2000). Additionally, teachers may ask other students for feedback to a student's response. They repeat students' answers in order to allow students to hear their own words, and they provide time for students to ponder, test hypotheses, and reformulate. They also encourage students to formulate their own questions about content. A review of research studies found that when students generate their own questioning, their understanding of the content is strengthened and they become more intrinsically motivated (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Therefore, effective quality teaching of the gifted not only question students but build students' capacity to generate questions themselves.

Effective teachers of high-ability students recognize the complexities inherent in teaching this population. They know how to develop the competencies and curiosity that reside within each student. In order to achieve this sometimes daunting task, they must first discover each student's special abilities. Then, the teacher must skillfully match the students' abilities with tasks that are challenging enough to engage and motivate. Particularly, the effective teacher of high-ability learners assists students in directing their own learning in order to

develop skills in research, original investigations, and independent study (Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994).

A review of research and literature reveals the following conclusions:

• Teachers of gifted students are able to match individual skills and task complexities, which in turn motivates and engages students in the learning process. Therefore, they must know how to develop competencies within each student (Holloway, 2003).

• Effective teachers of gifted students are skillful at pacing instruction and focus class discussion on in-depth analysis (Renzulli, 1999).

• Effective teachers of high-ability learners actively engage students through a variety of instructional activities (Renzulli, 1997), including direct and indirect instruction in which the teacher can both lead and facilitate students through the learning process (VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2003).

• Effective teachers of high-ability students ask higher-level questions and have high levels of student engagement and student participation during questioning
(Ford & Trotman, 2001).

Effective teaching combines the essence of good classroom management, organization, effective planning, and the teacher's personal characteristics.

The classroom presentation of the material to the students and the provision of experiences for the students to make authentic connections to the material are vital. The effective teacher facilitates the classroom similar to how a symphony conductor brings out the best performance from each musician to make a beautiful sound.

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