

THE ESSENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

To respond to the dynamic global changes, the Algerian Higher Education has constantly brought reforms aiming at enhancing the learning outcomes and more importantly to define the optimal objectives necessary for students to enter the professional world. Yet, the main concern is to raise an awareness of what an effective instruction implies. In this respect, the present paper aims to explore the main components of an effective training which should meet the cognitive and emotional developments of university students. Indeed, as future novice teachers, they need skills to deal with the new situations they may face as the classroom involves a variety of individual differences in terms of personality traits and peculiar learners' cognitive and affective parameters.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence ; higher education ; objectives ; teaching ; reflective thinking.

1. Introduction

When setting higher education objectives, the growth of the new knowledge students get from university remains important, but the other necessary point is to provide those students with the necessary readiness to enter the labour market in general and the profession of teaching in particular. Accordingly, the current paper is an attempt to describe the basic elements that can contribute to a productive learning/ teaching environment. This implies the fields of didactics and educational psychology, and the focus would be on the awarenesses teachers would consider for a fruitful pedagogy. Hence, the prominent question to be raised is:

What is the essence of teaching in higher education mainly to prepare students for their future professions?

In this respect, considerations would be on cognitive and affective aspects related to the learning/teaching process. Such concerns would address mainly the teacher as he has a crucial role in providing support and guidance to his learners for promoting the appropriate skills for a self-directed learning as well as a development of the necessary skills and values to get ready for the world of teaching namely reflective thinking and interpersonal skills.

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2. Higher education objectives

The higher education system in Algeria has gone through various stages marked out by a series of reforms that have attempted to meet the demands of the country and to catch up the world growing changes. One of the perspectives of higher education is to provide a lifelong learning and to prepare the students for the world of labour market as high qualifications become necessary requirements for the professional careers. In this respect, Henard and Roseveare (2012) asserted:

‘The fundamental changes in employment over the past 50 years imply a rise in the demand for non-routine cognitive and interpersonal skills and a decline in the demand for routine cognitive and craft skills, physical labour and repetitive physical tasks... Graduates are entering a world of employment that is characterised by greater uncertainty, speed, risk, complexity and interdisciplinary working. University education, and the mode of learning whilst at university, will need to prepare students for entry to such an environment and equip them with appropriate skills, knowledge, values and attributes to thrive *in it*.’

(Henard & Roseveare, 2012, p. 25)

Indeed, the economic situation has led to consider lifelong learning as national policy discussions focus on the development of an effective and a productive workforce for the knowledge society. The quality of education remains important in order to insure a long-term knowledge, and qualify students with the appropriate skills and competences required in their life. Higher education institutions play a fundamental role in providing this lifelong learning. This latter represents all learning activities undertaken during the life of every person in formal, non-formal and informal training or skills development for a multiple perspective: personal, civic, social or occupational.

Lifelong learning would be understood as a flexible programme that meets the needs of the students in their social life. Thus, the higher education institutions are expected through their programmes to enhance learning quality as well as learners’ autonomy. In addition, focus would be on the holistic development of the students.

Furthermore, in terms the teaching profession, the main focus is to provide students with a strong flexibility and versatility essential to the exercise of their future professions. This can be achieved through a useful knowledge effective for their future career and most importantly how to use that knowledge in real life such as problem-solving and appropriate self-regulation. Besides, this training should also provide some actions to students who desire to progress and gain the capacity to learn effectively. Learning is not limited to accumulate a certain amount of knowledge but to achieve in parallel a mastery of emotional intelligence beneficial in their teaching practice.

3. Effective instruction: what does it imply?

As stated above, an effective instruction implies a holistic development of the learner to help him step in the world of work in general and the teaching profession in particular. Thus, higher education programs should offer a quality of training that can affect the future teachers’ practice, effectiveness, and career commitment (Eren & Tezel, 2010). Education programs are structured to equip student-teachers with theoretical knowledge and practical readiness to step in the profession of teaching by offering disciplinary knowledge, theoretical knowledge, and affective awareness. This implies two prominent aspects; namely, the cognitive aspect and the affective one.

3.1 The cognitive aspect

Higher education instruction is challenged to develop learners' thinking to meet the 21st century skills which enable them to thrive for their professional career. For this to happen, instruction has to encompass a quality teaching that transforms students' perceptions and the way they set about applying their knowledge to real world problems. In this sense, the High Level Group on Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe (2013) advanced: "There is no contradiction between the imperative of good teaching and the imperative of research which critiques, refines, discards and advances human knowledge and understanding." (p. 89)

As such, efficient teaching, in many areas, is only good when it is related to the latest research and findings. A good teacher, is also an active learner, questioner and critical thinker. Accordingly, a good teaching aims to help the student be confident in handling the subject as it has developed so far, to be open to new ideas, curious enough to seek new solutions and opportunities, and insightful enough to cooperate with others so that his effort maximizes his lifelong learning. As such, the quality teaching implies enhancing learning outcomes and meet learning objectives by addressing the learner's cognition and metacognition principally their critical thinking: a reflective learner in his learning journey will develop to become a reflective teacher in his teaching career.

To reach this critical thinking, university teachers need to apply the principles of Bloom's Taxonomy as explained in figure 1. Basically, developing the cognitive and metacognitive aspect of the learner will be greatly achieved with a focus on comprehension, abstraction, analysis, synthesis, generalization, evaluation, decision-making, problem-solving and creative thinking.

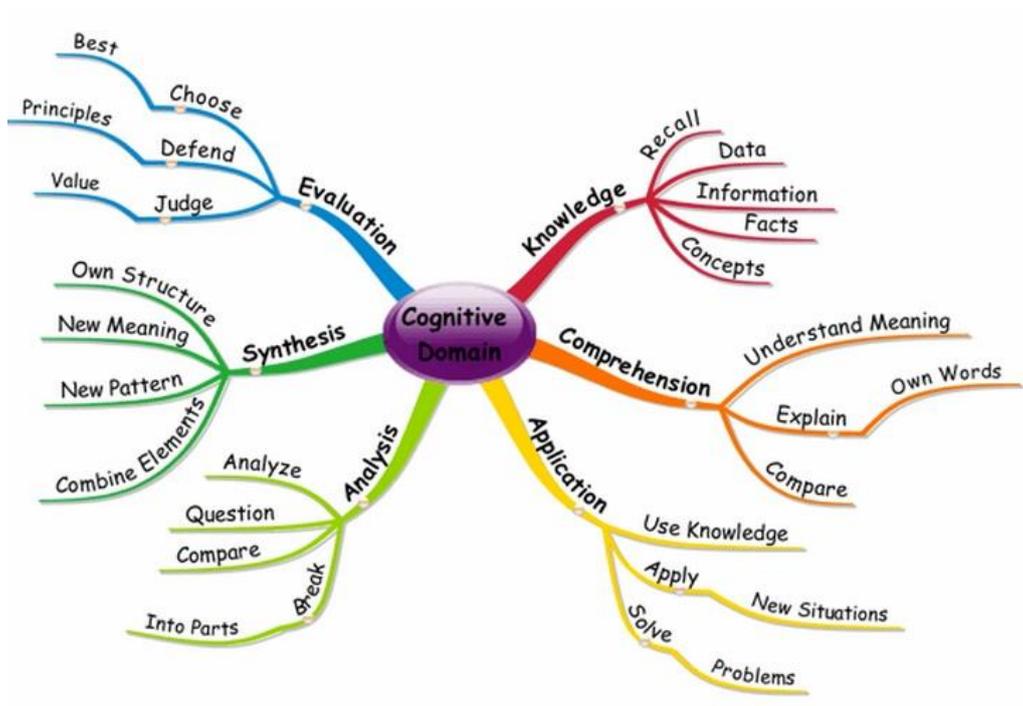


Figure 1: Using Mind Maps through Bloom's Taxonomy (2011)

The development of these different kinds of learning skills would engender critical minds capable to participate actively in their future professional knowledge. Seifert & Sutton (2009) believed that critical thinking demands more than just the '*skill at analyzing the reliability and validity of information*', it requires '*the attitude or disposition to do so*' because these skills and attitude are not related to only a specific topic or subject matter but rather to any realm of knowledge.

Raising awareness of what critical thinking implies is necessary to help learners develop and take in charge their own learning. Seifert and Sutton (2009) advanced that:

A critical thinker [...] can be thought of as astute: the critical thinker asks questions, evaluates the evidence for ideas, reasons for problems both logically and objectively, and expresses ideas and conclusions clearly and precisely. The critical thinker can apply these habits of mind in more than one realm of life and knowledge. (p. 185)

Accordingly, when implementing such strategies, learners can efficiently and more successfully approach their learning process: they would think and understand before attempting any other step until applying their prerequisites and reaching higher skills. In language teaching, critical thinking "is said to engage students more actively with materials in the target language, encourage a deeper processing of it, and show respect for students as independent thinkers." (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 135)

An effective teaching design would basically address the learners' reflective thinking. For this to happen, teaching has to involve the implementation of different pedagogical techniques to improve learners' outcomes. It implies different patterns such as guided independent learning, project-based learning, and collaborative learning, and consequently an effective assessment. Finally, it needs to use adequate environments and supportive atmosphere, as it will be seen in the subsequent sections.

3.2 The Emotional aspect

What students learn in their universities can go on to affect them for life, framing them into the citizens they will become. In fact, an effective instruction is not only limited to prepare them for their future careers in terms of adequate cognitive skills, but it also aims at helping them acquire a sense of emotional awareness and self-regulation. Indeed, the 21st century learning skills refer to the positive self-development of university graduates and mastery of soft skills in dealing with future challenges and issues through a healthy development of emotional intelligence.

In fact, the notion of emotional intelligence recently emerged and is deemed crucial in our daily life and for human relationships, it encompasses intrapersonal and interpersonal relations. Emotional intelligence is perceived as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions." (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 2). According to Goleman (1998), emotional intelligence is someone's ability:

- a) to understand his feelings,
- b) to listen to others and to feel them, and
- c) to express his emotions in a productive manner.

Thus, emotional intelligence can be said to cover five main areas: Self-awareness, emotional control (self-regulation), self-motivation, empathy, and social skills (relationship skills).

Self- knowledge is important as it helps to regulate oneself and manage difficult and challenging conditions. Indeed, by knowing one's emotional strengths and weaknesses, the

person can work on them to lead better relationships. In fact, novice teachers need to be aware of this skill and mainly how to regulate themselves when they face disturbing and annoying classroom situations. Self-awareness includes many affective aspects; namely, self-esteem, self-confidence, anxiety, anger, mood among many others. Hence, developing positive affect and decreasing the negative one help gaining better empathy and get ready to tolerate others' moods and understand their different thoughts.

In fact, concern to empathy is also emphasized to lead acceptable relationships; people with empathy tend to be understanding and open; they understand and accept differences in thoughts, beliefs, cultures, and then are receptive and unprejudiced. Teaching with empathy helps address the different learners with their differences and behave with objectivity. Such skill favour greatly good relationships and better classroom atmosphere.

In this respect, Goleman (1998) put forward that these competences are central to learning job-related competencies that are favourable to direct emotional intelligence for specific work abilities. He claimed that, "An emotional competence is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work.... Our emotional intelligence determines our potential for learning the practical skills that are based on its five elements" (p. 24).

In our universities, consideration is then to raise the self and social awareness, the ability to recognize emotions (and their impact) in both oneself and others. Thus, it should include both teachers as well as learners. Actually, the learning/ teaching process is first based on interpersonal relationships and begins with knowing and understanding the self; hence, examining the self remains important for teachers to be good models and for learners to develop appropriate human development behaviours convenient for their future careers. In this sense, Csikszentmihalyi (1993) argued that when we understand our nature, what incentives incite us, what objectives we seek for, and how we developed to be human, we can conceive a promising future and a significant prospect.

4. Conclusion

In this article an endeavour has been made to delineate the essential features that higher education instruction should imply. Indeed, higher education objectives need to be channelled towards a holistic development of university students to cope with the 21st century requirements. For this to be achieved, our universities are expected to provide an effective delivery of knowledge as well as an awareness of emotional aspect for an individual and social development.

During their university journey, relevant cognitive achievements and germane emotional intelligence will help students in their adaptation. In long course, they also sustain students in coping with challenges in the real life. The essence of an effective instruction is to equip learners with qualifications promoting lifelong learning that would lead to enhanced learning outcomes and transform the way they reflect on the critical, emotional, social, cultural, and moral issues, and how to apply their knowledge to deal with the real world situations.

Finally, raising adequate awareness in higher education remains the heart of any prosperous novice teacher development. The significance of higher education objectives cannot be only limited to developing individuals' cognitive capacities but also to flourish astute and perceptive humans who will model this balanced acuity in their professional life especially in the classroom.

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