Student Perceptions of Effective Teaching in Higher Education

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Introduction

Despite the recognized importance of teaching effectiveness in higher education (HE) for improving student outcomes, satisfaction, and institutional reputation, limited research has examined student perceptions on the topic. This study aimed to explore the key characteristics of an effective instructor from the student perspective, using quantitative and qualitative data, and how these qualities relate to student-, instructor-, and course-related variables. While research supports these relationships, empirical data from Greek HE remains limited. By addressing this gap, the study aims to inform practices that enhance learning experiences and outcomes.

Keywords

Student Engagement, Autonomy Support, Teaching Effectiveness, Academic Success, Higher Education

Aim & Hypotheses

This study aims to explore the key characteristics of an effective instructor from the student perspective, using quantitative and qualitative data and how these variables relate to key teaching variables.

- H1: Autonomy support would be positively correlated with SE (Montenegro & Schmidt, 2023).
- H2: Teaching effectiveness is positively correlated with SE (Fernández-García et al., 2021).
- H3: Higher SE predicts higher academic achievement (Wong et al., 2023).
- RQ1: What teaching aspects of higher education instructors are perceived as effective by undergraduate students at the American College of Greece?

Method

An online questionnaire was distributed to 124 undergraduate students at the American College of Greece. Instruments included:

- Student Engagement Scale (Tafesse, 2020).
- LCQ-5 (autonomy support) (Simon & Salanga, 2021).
- Instructor-related questions from the institution's Course Evaluation Questionnaire.
- Open-ended question designed to explore their perceptions of instructor qualities that resonate with effective teaching practices.

Results & Discussion

Hypotheses supported

- **Autonomy support showed a positive correlation with SE**, supporting prior research indicating that autonomy-supportive practices enhance engagement (Montenegro & Schmidt, 2023).
- **Teaching effectiveness was also positively correlated with SE**, aligning with studies that highlight the importance of perceived instructional quality in fostering engagement (Fernández-García et al., 2021).
- **Emotional engagement displayed the strongest associations** with both predictors, suggesting the emotional connection students feel in their academic environment plays a pivotal role (Fredricks et al., 2004; Connell & Wellborn, 1991).
- Ordinal regression analysis suggested that **SE holds predictive value for academic achievement** (GPA), but this relationship was non-linear, indicating that while engagement contributes to academic performance, it does so in a more complex manner than a simple direct correlation (Wong et al., 2023).
- Qualitative responses enriched the quantitative findings. Students identified **emotional support, creative teaching styles**, and **strong communication skills** as hallmarks of effective instruction. These characteristics highlight the concepts emphasized by Self-Determination Theory, which proposes that fulfilling students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances motivation and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Reeve, 2009).



Sample Demographics

Sample characteristics	*n*	%	*M*	*SD*
Gender				
Female	69	55.6%		
Male	55	44.4%		
Age			20.99	2.12
Major				
Psychology	51	41.1 %		
Marketing management	5	4 %		
Information Technology	6	4.8%		
International Business	6	4.8%		
Other	49	39.5 %		
Year of study				
Freshman	21	16.9 %		
Sophomore	37	29.8 %		
Junior	43	34.7 %		
Senior	23	18.15 %		
GPA			3.21	0.56

Characteristics of Effective Instructor Practices

Effective Instructor Practices	*n*	%
Communication skills	18	14.63%
Patience and emotional support	32	26.02%
Feedback and engagement	18	14.63%
Adaptability and Flexibility	14	11.38%
Teaching style and creativity	25	20.32%
Knowledge and expertise	10	8.13%
Motivational factors	13	10.57%

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for Main Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Student engagement	3.32	0.73	-	.74**	.79**	.85**	.35**	.39**
2. Emotional SE	3.42	0.92		-	.40**	.36**	.31**	.36**
3. Behavioral SE	3.18	1.06			-	.57**	.23**	.30**
4. Cognitive SE	3.31	0.83				-	.28**	.28**
5. Autonomy Support	5.03	1.28					-	.74**
6. Teaching Effectiveness	4.03	0.59						-

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