

# The Portrait of "Good University Teacher" as Perceived by Tunisian Students

Amira Nouri Belhaj<sup>1</sup> & Mohamed Lamine Ben Abderrahman<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Tunis ESSEC Tunis - LARIME, Tunisia

<sup>2</sup> Manouba University, Tunisia

Correspondence: Amira Nouri Belhaj, University of Tunis ESSEC Tunis - LARIME, Tunisia. E-mail: amiranouri@yahoo.fr

Received: May 12, 2015

Accepted: June 9, 2015

Online Published: June 11, 2015

doi:10.5430/ijhe.v4n3p57

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v4n3p57>

## Abstract

Starting from the idea that "students are the best judges of the competence of their teachers" (Ramsden,1992), we propose in this work, which has comparative aim, to provide an update on the human and professional qualities of the university teacher as perceived by Tunisian students in response to the question: "what is a good university teacher like? What human qualities and professional skills should a university teacher have? ". The reading of the survey results highlights: (i) the trend of Tunisian students to focus more on the human qualities of university teachers than their scientific work skills. (ii) The profile of the Tunisian student, i.e. a student who is "a victim of any kind of injustice "that deserves the indulgence of his teachers. (iii) a portrait that is rather alarming than reassuring of the university teacher.

**Keywords:** University teacher, Tunisian students, Human quality, Professional competence

## 1. Introduction

Ten years ago, the educational and professional training of university teachers was completely absent from the concerns of the Tunisian university (Chabchoub, 2007). This new interest in pedagogy is justified in Tunisia by several reasons; the most important reason is certainly the overcrowding of the university. As elsewhere, the overcrowding of higher education leads to a heterogeneous university teaching place where each teacher through his/her personality, and the education s/he received, has a character, knowledge, abilities and desires that make him/her unique. This heterogeneity takes many forms; it may be that of genres, ages (including differences in maturity), skills and expertise in the various fields of knowledge.

The issue of heterogeneity of the student clientele is today at the heart of the educational system. This is undoubtedly a challenge for the teacher, alone facing a large number of students. This heterogeneity of students takes many forms; it can be a heterogeneity of levels (specific aptitude for the subject and ability to understand), heterogeneity of socialization (family and social environment to which the majority of students belong which does not generate opportunities to listen to or to use French, heterogeneity of aspirations and motivations: the motivation to study and the ratio to the academic knowledge are not the same, today's students are younger, less motivated to study, less available, and more attracted by the diploma than the scientific training.

Today, there is a real discomfort shared by both university teachers and students. University teachers are blaming the students and learners in return are blaming the teachers. Starting from the idea that: Education is "a relational finalized practice" (Altet, 1994), and the image that the student is blaming the teacher (and vice versa), we can claim that this affects the pedagogical relationship and consequently the quality of learning. For this particular reason, it is important to ask the following questions:

What is the good teacher like for Tunisian university students? What qualities should he develop? What is the portrait of the Tunisian student as it emerges through the qualities he requires from his teachers?

The objective of our empirical research is to get the complete picture of the attitudes and perceptions of Tunisian students surveyed to identify the qualities of the "good university teacher." In this context, open-ended questions were preferred for collecting information in order to analyze in depth the perceptions of learners regarding the qualities and pedagogical skills needed to teach at the Tunisian university.

First, we are going to present the empirical research conducted among Tunisian students: the mobilized methodology and the results of our empirical study. Secondly, we will deal with the results of different surveys (Canadian, American, and French) with students to identify the portrait of a "good university teacher."

## **2. Empirical Study**

### *2.1 Methodology and Research Protocol*

#### 2.1.1 Data collection system: An open question

We are going to explain throughout this second section our study context and the procedure adopted for understanding our field of study. Indeed, the problematic has emerged from a real context. We used as a data collection method a questionnaire made of two main questions: "what is a good university teacher like for you? What human qualities and professional skills would you like him to have?"

The choice of the two open questions is justified by the desire to gather opinions and detailed suggestions to identify the profile of a good university teacher as perceived by the interviewed Tunisian students and the profile of learners.

The choice and formulation of questions were guided by reference to some empirical research undertaken on the subject (Chabchoub, 2006; Ghozzi, Kamoun and Ben Alaya, 2014) (The research results reveal that the students put the pedagogical and human qualities of teachers long before the scientific merits without specifying the nature of the qualifications) and the needs of the information required by the study.

#### 2.1.2 Sample Constitution

To achieve our questionnaires which lasted about 20 minutes, we targeted 200 students who were taught at ESSECT. Certainly, the sample can be considered convenient (Igalens, Roussel, 1988). However, to avoid bias at this level, we have sought to maximize the diversity of our interviewees as on personal dimensions (gender, age) on the specialties related studies (two specialties)

#### 2.1.3 Sample characteristics

The research sample consists of 200 students. The training of surveyed students shows that all respondents are studying to get a diploma (Baccalaureate + 3 years) in the Higher School of Economics and Commercial Sciences of Tunis. These are students in international trade techniques and economy of the organizers and networks and having a certain level of education to identify the educational qualifications for a "good university teacher." The average age was 21 years and most of whom are girls (60%). The results of this research will be summarized in the following section.

#### 2.1.4 The process of making and analysis of the questionnaire

To identify the profile of the good university teacher as perceived by the interviewed Tunisian students and profile of learners, we have implemented "manual" content analysis techniques. The latter consists of several steps including the division into units of meaning, grouping and classification of meaning units and the allocation of securities in the meaning units, followed by a deduction of thematic units (Bardin, 1996).

Initially a thorough reading of the corpus has allowed its division into units of meaning according to the information needs of the study, and the calculation of the frequency of occurrence of the relevant units of meaning. Then these units were grouped into units of meaning as having been classified in thematic units. A cross-sectional analysis has allowed us to identify six units of meaning:

- His character features.
- His relationship with students.
- His relationship with his discipline and knowledge
- His courses
- His Relationship with teaching
- His Physical appearance

## 2.2 The results of the questionnaire survey

## 2.2.1 The picture of the "good university teacher"

Table 1. Distribution of choices among students

<b>Teacher characteristics</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>His characteristics (83%)</b>	
<u>Comprehensive</u>	28
<u>Kind/ patient</u>	9
<u>Sociable</u>	8
<u>Honest / Spot / Dosage</u>	5
<u>(Strict, kind) / Fair</u>	5
<u>Tolerant</u>	4,5
<u>Smiling</u>	3,5
<u>Flexible / charming / young / small</u>	1
<u>Strict</u>	12,5
<u>Creative</u>	6,5
<u>Serious / active</u>	3
<u>Open to Change</u>	0,5
<b>His relationship with the students (69.5%)</b>	
A good communicator	21
Motivates his students	16
Respect for students	12
Widely note students	9,5
Adopt a participative style	5,5
<u>Accepts the delay of students</u>	3
Manage student diversity / objective assessment of students	2
<u>Attentive towards others / Not to be distant from students</u>	0,5
<b>His relationship with his discipline and knowledge (78.5%)</b>	
He masters his course (competent)	37,5
Mastering the French language	14,5
Disciplined / strict	12,5
Experienced / graduate	9,5
He has a general knowledge (cultivated)	4,5
<b>His courses (81.5%)</b>	
Pedagogue	59
He knows how to manage and run the current session	21
He does not dictate his course	1,5
<b>His relationship with the teaching profession (5%)</b>	
He loves teaching	5
<b>His physical appearance (10%)</b>	
Charismatic	10

Percentage % = is a manner of expressing a frequency = number of observations / 200 (total respondent)

This table reveals six qualities that seem important for the surveyed Tunisian students: teacher (59%), skilled (37.5%), understanding (28%), good communicator (21%), motivate (16%) and respect of students. In addition to his

teaching and academic qualities, other qualities are claimed "understanding, kind, patient, sociable, honest, tolerant, cheerful, flexible, respectful, attentive, generous (note)".

From these choices, we can determine the profile of a good university teacher who must master, in addition to its specific specialty (skill: choice of 37, 5% of respondents), most teaching skills listed above, while integrating them. It is the only condition to be able to teach effectively and help students learn the academic knowledge offered by their university (Peterson, 1979). According to (Ben Salem (2010); Reverdy, 2013), pedagogy is inserted in the heart of the current new education.

Perrenoud (1999) defines the pedagogical competence as the global mastery of a teaching situation, which distinguishes it from an ability that it does behind a gesture or a specific operation, the decontextualized limit. Besides the pedagogical competence (the pedagogue), the human communication has to create a positive relationship between the communicator and his interlocutors.

The stronger and the more authentic the ratio, the more interesting the course is. In return, this positive relationship will allow the teacher to better listen to and understand his students. Teaching is communication. And communicating is not simply to impart knowledge to students while keeping them in a state of passivity, or ignoring their reactions. Communication is what motivating one's students interact with them, adapt to their level, taking into account their needs and their reactions (Chabchoub, 2007). In short, the university teacher should primarily target the intrinsic motivation of the accompanied student (Lebrun, 2014; Riberry 2010)

However, this human communication requires from the teacher in addition to being devoted to teaching, some human and personal qualities as being understanding, kind, patient, sociable, charismatic, respectful to students, strict in some cases to enforce discipline in the classroom. We can see a predominance of human qualities to the detriment of scientific and academic qualities. According to Proulx (1994), the only way for a teacher to avoid classroom discipline problems is to do his job professionally. To exercise his teaching skills in the classroom, the teacher needs to be listened to and respected. A teacher must master the skill of discipline management in his class. Several psychological studies (Morissette, 1989) and Psycho (Postic 1980) show that teachers' personality characteristics have a direct influence on their teaching behavior in class (communication quality, nature of the relationship with the students). Maschino (1984) goes so far as to affirm that our students are more influenced by what we are than by what we say. The students are very sensitive to personal characteristics of a teacher: friendly or unfriendly, communicative or reserved, uptight or beaming, confident or indecisive.

It is from these human qualities suggested by the surveyed learners that we can identify the profile of surveyed Tunisian students who seem to coincide with people who believe in the delicacy of this profession, to be close but to remain firm and strict in some cases, exercise kindness in the class without overflow and without detriment to the achievement of the objectives. Another need of the students, equally important, is the teacher's generosity in terms of grades " grade well students: choice of 9.5% of respondents" without any effort and tolerance regarding the absenteeism and delays.

From these results we can deduce the trend of Tunisian students to focus more on the human qualities of university teachers at the expense of their scientific work skills. They expect more flexibility, generosity, and tolerance on the part of university teachers, but they also require their competent, experienced, cultivated, and graduate teachers. This empirical research has highlighted some specificity related to the profile of a good university teacher as perceived by the interviewed Tunisian students. Many Canadian, American, and French surveys were conducted with students to identify the portrait of a "good university teacher". We distinguish at this level, students who focus on the following features:

- Knowledge of the subject to be taught
- Clear and structured methodology,
- Making the link between theory and practice,
- Equitability
- Respecting students,
- Taste to teach.

These results mainly focus on teaching skills and intellectual skills of the teacher. Thus the characteristic "knowledge of matter" is well ahead in all three studies. Then the following characteristics follow: "methodical, clear and structured", "bridges the gap between theory and practice", "respect for students" and "taste for teaching."

The Tunisian survey shows that there are some peculiarities of Tunisian learners compared to Western students about the personality characteristics of the university teacher, Tunisian students surveyed want their teachers to:

- I. Serve them,
- II. Be attentive to their ways,
- III. Be indulgent and generous (grade, tolerance of delay, absenteeism ...)

The university teacher should adopt a caring attitude; supportive and understanding in the classroom especially stimulate Tunisian students. We are dealing with students who need to be assisted; they are "somewhat dependent" and always "victims of all kinds of injustice." By the required qualities: an educator who manages and runs an ongoing session does not dictate his course, masters the language of instruction, requires discipline, strict, educated, experienced and graduate (Ph.D.).

These different qualities provide us with an alarming portrait of the Tunisian university teacher. Interviewed students seem to blame implicitly the pedagogical and scientific incompetence, lack of mastery of the language of instruction, the inability to impose discipline, lack of experience, lack of degrees of university teachers... etc. If the learners surveyed declare a lack of qualities and scientific and pedagogical skills of teachers, would it be unreasonable to deny the responsibility of teachers in the decline of level, demotivation, absenteeism, the mediocrity of their teaching in the art of transmitting knowledge.

### 3. Conclusion

The empirical research shows that the most heavily negative judgment among students concerned contacts (respect for students) that they had no or insufficient respect from teachers. University students expect their teachers not only to have intellectual and pedagogical skills, but also to provide a positive emotional support, motivation, recognition in terms of person. Tunisian students surveyed opt for the human dimension at the expense of knowledge and prefer the style of teachers who are generous and tolerant.

The educational policies should promote teaching methods that encourage students to learn how to acquire information and turn it into an applicable knowledge to their own circumstances. These approaches require teachers to help their students learn to work with others face-to-face, and also how to communicate with others, to create new collaborative knowledge (Moyle 2010).

The Tunisian surveyed students opt for the human dimension of university teaching to the detriment of its scientific work skills. However, teachers never assume their responsibility in to identify the main roots of demotivation, absenteeism etc ... students. In this case, it is essential that university teachers do a self-assessment questionnaire to identify the real reasons and remedies for the problems encountered in the classroom.

Tunisian surveys show a recurrent idea: the vast majority of Tunisian academics perceive teaching as an activity primarily focused on student knowledge and transmissions. These surveys also show that the same teachers do give very little importance to learning and the difficulties that may face some of their students. If we want to improve the internal efficiency of the university, we should review and reform these teaching practices and to refocus more on students, learning and coaching processes and to follow the model of the Anglo-Saxon universities (Chabchoub, 2007).

Munienge and Muhandji (2013) showed the limits of the traditional pedagogy of teaching and learning. They consider that this technique of teaching is a one-way flow of information in which the teacher often talks continuously for an hour or more and he is expected that when he asks a question, the students should be able to reproduce the same thing he was saying. With this teaching, there is less activity in the classroom and less creativity from students.

This requires an educational training program for university teachers, evaluation of lessons aimed primarily at improving teaching performance and thereafter their skills. We must also inspire empirical results that aim to know the qualities of a good university teacher among students. Thus among the new roles of the teacher is to become a true guide to students in their learning and a facilitator of new knowledge. In this new constructivist paradigm, the teacher is no longer centered on himself and on his own knowledge; he should refocus on the student and the learning process (Chabchoub, 2007). Student evaluation can play a key role in improving the university and teacher training (OECD, 2005). It is very important to identify the strengths and weaknesses of education. Therefore, feedback from students can be useful for teachers (Belhaj, 2014)

Vieluf et al. (2012) reported that worldwide, the reforms and actions aimed at promoting quality education in classrooms and professional collaboration at the university level. In order to adjust policies and interventions to the

needs of students and improve their learning conditions, it is important to understand what is happening at universities and in classrooms in the different educational systems.

However, this work remains limited as an exploratory study. It could be deepened by a quantitative study from the meaning units collected from respondents to generalize the results and deal with other lines of inquiry such as the system of evaluation of teachers, the content of the educational program provided to students, the pedagogical training of teachers... etc... and the impact on the quality of education.

## References

- Altet, M. (1994). *La formation professionnelle des enseignants*. Paris : PUF.
- Bardin, L. (1996). *L'analyse de contenu thématique*, 8<sup>ème</sup> Edition.
- Belhaj, M. (2014). Perception de l'efficacité et de l'innovation de l'enseignement par les étudiants : Cas du master DICAMP1, *Management de l'innovation*, Colloque RAPU, Hammamet, Tunis.
- Bensalem, D. (2010). En quoi la pédagogie de projet permet-elle de donner du sens à l'enseignement du français ?, *Synergies Algérie*, n° 9 (2010). 75-82.
- Chabchoub, A. (2006). l'enseignement efficace , regard croisés des étudiants et de leurs professeurs.23<sup>ème</sup> Congrès international de l'AIPU ,Monastir, Tunis.
- Chabchoub, A. (2007). A.: *Quelles compétences pédagogiques pour enseigner au supérieur*, Publication de L'ATURED, Tunis.
- Ghozzi K., Kamoun, R. et Ben Alaya, B. (2014). Lamotivation/démotivation des étudiants : Regards Croisés, Colloque International sur la Recherche Action en Pédagogie universitaire, Mai 2014, Hammamet, Tunis.
- Igalens, J., Roussel, P. (1988). *Méthodes de recherche en Gestion des Ressources Humaines*, Paris: Editions Economica.
- Lebrun, M. (2014). HybridationS dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage à l'ère numérique, Unige-Genève, 2014. Document téléaccessible à l'adresse <http://fr.slideshare.net/lebrun/hybridation-dans-lenseignement-et-lapprentissage-lrenumrique>.
- Maschino, M. (1984). *Guide pratique de l'évaluation sommative*, Bruxelles : De Boeck.
- Morissette, D. et Gingras, M. (1989). *Enseigner des attitudes? Planifier. Intervenir. Évaluer*. Québec/Paris: De Boeck-Wesmael/Les Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Moyle, K. (2010). Building Innovation: Learning with technologies. In: *Australian education review*, 56, published by ACER Press, Australian Council for RAPU Educational Research <http://research.acer.edu.au/aer/10>.
- Munienge, M.; Muhandji, K. (2013). The use of ICT in Education: a comparison of traditional pedagogy and emerging pedagogy enabled by ICT's. The 2013 World Congress in Computer Science, Computer Engineering, and Applied Computing (WORLDCOMP'13), Las Vegas, USA.
- Perrenoud, Ph. (1999). *Dix nouvelles compétences pour enseigner*, invitation au voyage, Paris : ESF.
- Peterson. (1979). *Research on teaching concepts*, Berkeley : MC Cutchan.
- Postic, M. (1980). *La relation éducative (8e éd., mise à jour)*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France (1re éd., 1979). Paris : Presses universitaires de France.
- Proulx, J. (1994). *Enseigner mieux: Stratégies*. CÉGEP de Trois-Rivières, p. 319.
- Ramsden, D. (1992). *Learning to teach in higher education*, N.Y : Routedledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203413937>
- Reverdy, C. (2013). Des projets pour mieux apprendre ? Dossier d'actualités Veille et analyses, n°82. (2013). En ligne sur <http://ife.enslyon.fr/vst/DA/detailsDossier.php?parent=accueil&dossier=82&lang=fr>.
- Ribéry, M.F. ( 2010). *outils et exercices pédagogiques, formation à l'animation d'équipe*, Insep Consulting Editions Paris.
- Vieluf, S., et al. (2012). *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264123540>