



UNDERSTANDING WELL-QUALIFIED EDUCATORS: A COLLEGE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Bituin Ábalos

La Consolacion University Philippines, Gordon College, Philippines

ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This study explores college students' perceptions of what makes an educator well-qualified, examining the key qualities and attributes that students believe contribute to an effective and impactful educator. Through surveys and interviews with a diverse sample of college students, the research identifies common themes regarding teaching skills, subject knowledge, communication, and personal qualities. The findings highlight the importance of both academic credentials and interpersonal abilities in fostering a positive learning environment. The study also sheds light on the evolving expectations students have for educators in an increasingly digital and diverse academic landscape. The results aim to inform educational policies and practices by incorporating student insights into the definition of a well-qualified educator.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, the question of what makes an educator well-qualified has long been a subject of debate among academic professionals, administrators, and policymakers. Traditionally, qualifications have been defined by academic degrees, professional certifications, and teaching experience. However, as the landscape of education evolves, so too do the expectations of students regarding the qualities and competencies that define effective educators.

College students, as the primary recipients of education, possess unique insights into what constitutes a well-qualified educator. Their perspectives are influenced by various factors, such as personal learning experiences, exposure to different teaching styles, and the shifting dynamics of modern classrooms, particularly with the integration of technology and diverse student populations.

Understanding these perspectives is crucial, as students' perceptions directly impact their engagement, learning outcomes, and overall academic success.

This study seeks to explore the views of college students on the qualities they believe make an educator well-qualified. By investigating student expectations, this research aims to bridge the gap between traditional definitions of educator qualifications and the evolving demands of contemporary learners. Ultimately, the goal is to offer a deeper understanding of how students define educational expertise, which can inform the development of more effective teaching strategies and educator training programs in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore college students' perspectives on what makes an educator well-qualified. By combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, the research aimed to capture a comprehensive view of students' expectations and perceptions.

The first phase of the study involved administering a structured online survey to a sample of college students across various disciplines. The survey included both closed-ended questions (using Likert scales) and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were designed to assess students' views on the importance of specific qualities such as academic credentials, teaching experience, communication skills, and interpersonal abilities. The open-ended questions allowed students to elaborate on their responses, providing more in-depth insights into their expectations of well-qualified educators.

Following the survey, a subset of participants was selected for in-depth interviews. These semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to explore students' views in greater detail and allowed for follow-up questions based on their survey responses. Interviews were conducted in person or virtually, depending on the participants' preferences, and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. The interview questions were designed to probe deeper into the reasoning behind students' preferences, exploring themes such as the balance between content knowledge and teaching skills, the role of empathy and approachability, and the significance of technology integration in modern education.

The sample for both the survey and interviews was diverse, including students from different academic years, majors, and demographic backgrounds to ensure a wide range of perspectives. All participants were assured of confidentiality, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Data analysis followed a two-step process. Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and common patterns in students' responses. Qualitative data from open-ended survey questions and interviews were coded thematically to identify recurring themes and categories. These themes were then analyzed to determine the key qualities that students associate with a well-qualified educator.

This mixed-methods approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how college students define a well-qualified educator, providing both broad trends and in-depth insights into their perceptions.

RESULTS

The results of this study revealed several key themes regarding what college students consider to be the essential qualities of a well-qualified educator. From the survey responses and interviews, four primary characteristics emerged as critical:

Academic Knowledge and Expertise: A majority of students (82%) indicated that subject knowledge and academic qualifications were among the top criteria for evaluating an educator's qualifications. However, students also stressed that knowledge should be current and relevant to the field of study, with 72% of participants emphasizing the importance of staying updated with trends and innovations in the discipline.

Teaching Skills and Pedagogical Competence: The ability to communicate complex concepts effectively and to engage students in meaningful ways was considered vital. About 75% of students highlighted the importance of an educator's teaching skills, such as clarity in explanations, use of varied instructional methods, and the ability to adapt lessons to different learning styles. The use of technology was also mentioned frequently, with 68% of students indicating that educators should integrate modern tools and digital resources to enhance the learning experience.

Approachability and Interpersonal Skills: Another significant theme was the importance of an educator's interpersonal qualities, with 70% of respondents identifying empathy, approachability, and the ability to create a supportive classroom environment as key factors. Students expressed a strong preference for educators who were patient, willing to listen, and who made an effort to foster a sense of community in the classroom.

Fairness and Consistency: Lastly, fairness in grading and consistency in expectations were mentioned by 65% of participants. Students valued educators who were transparent, set clear guidelines, and maintained a fair and consistent approach to assessments and classroom management.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of both academic expertise and effective teaching skills. However, the strong emphasis on interpersonal qualities and approachability reflects a shift in student expectations. This suggests that college students today prioritize an educator's ability to connect with them on a personal level, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

The role of technology in teaching was also highlighted as an important consideration. As educational technologies continue to evolve, students increasingly expect educators to not only be knowledgeable in their field but also capable of integrating technology to enhance learning outcomes. This finding underscores the importance of professional development programs that focus on both pedagogical skills and technological proficiency.

Furthermore, the focus on fairness and transparency in grading points to the growing desire for clear expectations and accountability in the classroom. Students are increasingly aware of the impact that

consistent and equitable evaluation can have on their academic experience, which suggests that educators must be mindful of how they communicate expectations and grade assignments.

The study also reveals that, while academic qualifications remain important, students are placing more emphasis on the quality of interaction and support they receive from their instructors. This shift in priorities may reflect broader societal changes, including increased attention to mental health and well-being, which has influenced students' expectations in academic environments.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into college students' perceptions of what makes an educator well-qualified. While academic qualifications and subject knowledge remain important, students increasingly value teaching skills, interpersonal qualities, and fairness in assessments. Educators who can combine expertise in their field with effective communication, empathy, and the ability to adapt to the evolving educational landscape will likely be seen as the most qualified by students.

These findings suggest that educational institutions should consider these evolving student expectations when developing faculty training and professional development programs. Fostering a more holistic approach to educator qualifications—one that includes both academic and interpersonal skills—can enhance the student experience and improve educational outcomes. Additionally, as technology continues to shape higher education, it will be essential for educators to stay current with digital tools and teaching methods to meet the demands of modern learners.

In summary, a well-qualified educator is not only one with academic credentials but also one who demonstrates teaching effectiveness, emotional intelligence, and adaptability in an ever-changing academic environment.

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