Perceptions of workload

Introduction

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate and explore howacademicworkload is perceived by students, particularly those of Master's level study, and how it is in contrast with the perceptions of teachers. The paper will begin by stating research questions on the grounds of which the entire research methodology will be formed. It will be followed by a brief account of factors that determine a students' estimation of workload and how they shape their perception along with a review of how teachers evaluate the academic capabilities of their students and what their opinions are regarding workload. In the last few decades, there has been increasing concern among the educationalist circles regarding students' academic workload. In this digital age, there is a great pressure on curriculum designers to incorporate content regarding new developments so that university graduates have an enhanced understanding of latest technologies and modern concepts (Kember & Leung 1998, p. 293). However, it poses a challenge for them to design such curricula that fulfils the demands of modern learning methodologies and does not overburden students.

For many students, the size of the workload they are expected to take on is one of the most crucial factors that determine their engagement with a particular course. Although bothteacher's and student's acknowledge and accept that academic workload must be appropriate, it is a disturbing fact that there is no standard measurement criteria of assessing a student's workload and this is one of the biggest causes of an obvious contrast in the perceptions of workload of a teacher and that of a student. Nearly all course

grading forms comprise of at least one element that taps students' opinions about whether the amount of work assigned is suitable and realistic (Silverman 2001, p. 117). Their perceptions regarding one or both may greatly vary from those of the teacher because he or she may consider the workload as appropriate but the student may not. Even if the instructor rightly evaluates it, it counts for very little as students do the rating.

Students' workload perceptions are also strongly related to the amount of time they spend studying individually and in teams, especially when the workload is measured in terms of number of hours given to studies. Since the learningenvironmentis one of the essential variables that determines workload, hence group learning and individual learning have visible influence towards a student's ability of handling workload and ultimately on their perceptions (Burdett 2009).

Keeping this context in view, our research study will be addressing the following research questions:

To what extent student's perception of workload and teacher's opinions differ from each other in today's academic scenario
Do Students' perceptions' regarding workload affect the quality of their learning
Are these perceptions changing with time
Research Methodology

Factors that Constitute Workload

Major factors that comprise workload include quantity of assignments, amount of time spent in class, expected academic results, group activities,

required material reading, assessment tasks, research and writing tasks and the number of hours spend studying (Tampakis & Vitoratos 2009, p. 2).

Factors that Shape Student's Perception

According to a research article by David Kemberfi, student's perception of workload is largely formed by the learning environment which form their approach towards learning, the nature of their relationship with the instructor, kind of content (poorly or perfectly written) and individual experiences and capabilities (2004, p. 2).

Factors Associated with Group Work

Even though group work provides students with an opportunity to engage in effective learning practices and share their ideas, skills and knowledge, it is also an established fact that not all students take team work positively. Therefore, the popular assumption among teachers that group work evokes interest and enhances productivity and problem solving abilities among students is not valid. Since each student sees group work in a different way, majorly owing to his past experiences and his capability of producing well in a group or individually, it also shapes students perception of workload (Elliott & Higgins 2004). For instance, those students who don't take team work positively perceive it as an extra workload, as compared to those who take group assignments confidently.

In order to find out the answers to our research questions, we conducted research and the data was obtained through a carefully designed questionnaire. The questionnaire that was to be distributed to the sample students contained simplistic questions that were developed for finding out

their perceptions about workload, what the indicators of realistic workload are and appropriate workload, how would they rate their workload on a likert scale from ‘ little’, ‘ too much’ or ‘ appropriate’. Furtermore, they were asked to describe what heavy workload costs them and how it affects their academic progress. A sample of 10 instructors teaching various MSc related courses was taken along with a sample of 100 students enrolled in similar courses. Perceptions of the teachers are obtained through personal interviews while students were given the questionnaire.

Research Findings

Most of the students rated their workload as ‘ too much’ while several considered it appropriate. However none of the student ranked the workload as being a ‘ little’. By carrying out a thorough analysis of the answers, the following outcomes were acquired.

There exists a strong relation between a student’s learning quality and interest in a certain course, and nature of workload he/she has to deal with. Also students’ views about workload influence their behaviour towards learning and thus their academic progress. Many students, who experience heavy workload, tend to get stressed and anxious which affects their learning skills psychologically.

On the other hand, the interviews with professors revealed that many teacher’s judge a student’s intellect and knowledge of the concepts and ability to apply them by assigning term papers, writing tasks and the results of assessments at frequent intervals. Student’s concern about workload has been increasingly growing, a fact that is yet to be studied by empirical

researchers. This is due to the rapidly changing lifestyle, work-study routine and involvement in other non-academic activities. Additionally, factors such as poor teaching methodologies, student-teacher relation and level ofcommunicationbetween students and instructors and high expectations greatly influence student's perception of workload (Dee, 2007, p. 69+). More than 60 percent of the students claimed that intense workload makes the course confusing and have experienced of loss of interest in the subject.

It was also observed that there is a critical difference between a teacher's estimate of workload and a student's estimate. This is due to the fact that there are no fixed criteria of evaluating academic workload in educational institutions and thus the curricula designers within highereducationoften fail to design programs to keep an overview of the real perspectives of students.

Conclusion

From the given research study, the connection between student's interest, learning quality and workload has been established. Since it plays a huge part in motivating or demotivating students towards achieving their academicgoals, teachers as well as curricula designers should investigate their student's thinking regarding workload and craft a program strategy that is aligned with their perspectives. Instructors must also adopt interactive and interesting ways of assigning learning tasks so that student's concentration and interest does not drop. This can be done by effectively communicating learning outcomes so that's students see and can relate to the benefits of the project in the context of theircareerof future study. Teachers must also remember that the sole aim of assessments is to determine a student

understands of the given topic and not as punishment. As such, overloading students with examination dates can have adverse effects on student's performance.

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