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Determining textbook learning enhancement as perceived by students and lecturers

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine to what extent textbook characteristics enhance learning. A project team compiled two questionnaires. Twenty-nine questions had two scales to determine the importance and satisfaction with textbook characteristics. These questions are the focus of this paper. A number of attributes tested by quadrant analysis and the Wilcoxon signed-ranked test showed that perception and expectation differs significantly for a number of characteristics. The results indicate that academics who embark on writing a textbook should take note of the textbook characteristics that students and academics feel enhance learning and those characteristics that do not.

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Keywords: Quadrant analysis; textbook characteristics; students; lecturers; learning enhancement

1. Introduction

Research literature on the use and curriculum role of materials (textbooks) in the United States shows that teachers and students depend on textbook materials. Moreover, in South Africa we have the additional debate about the role of the African Renaissance in curriculum development on the African continent (Higgs, Van Niekerk and Van Wyk 2010, 134). According to Kim-Prieto and D'Oriano (2011, 458), creating a new course from scratch can be time-consuming. Moreover, given the complexity of the modern world and the workload of lecturers, the task of developing resources to fit a curriculum can be daunting.

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2. Problem Statement

In many instances, it appears that only senior academics are involved in curriculum development. According to Lianli (2007, 107), lecturers involved in teaching English language classes at university are quite happy to hand over the responsibility for programme content and design to the textbook.

Another area of concern is that it appears that textbooks are not always selected according to the theoretical basis that supports the framework of the textbook.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated:

Which textbook characteristics are perceived by academics as important to enhance student learning?

Which textbook characteristics are perceived by students as important to enhance student learning?

4. Purpose of the Study

Given the above, the purpose of this research was to determine to what extent textbook characteristics enhance learning - as perceived by academics and students.

5. Research Method

The research approach was a qualitative study comprising two surveys conducted with students and academics. A project team, consisting of a publishing company, academics and the researcher, compiled the two questionnaires. The aim of the research was to include both academics and students of all South African universities, universities of technology and nursing colleges in the study. The participating publishing company supplied a contact list of all the academics of the various institutions to the researcher. All these were contacted via e-mail and requested to complete the lecturer questionnaire on-line.

In total 203 academics participated in the survey. This is a 16% response rate in terms of the electronic database supplied by the publishing company. Five hundred and one students participated in the student survey. Overall students from 12 institutions participated in the survey.

5.1 Compiling the questionnaires

The questionnaires contained the background to the study, instructions for completing the surveys and the assurance that the questionnaires would be handled in the strictest confidence and that no results of the student or academics would be given to the participating institutions. No indication was given of the name of the publishing company.

Both questionnaires consisted of biographical questions, yes/no questions and scale-based questions using the four-point scale. Twenty-nine questions had two scales to determine the importance and agreement with textbook characteristics. Both scales used a 4-point scale. Scale 1 measuring agreement referred to strongly disagree,

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