

Defining Quality Education: What College Students Expect to Learn and How

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ABSTRACT

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Education occupies a unique place of importance in the national priorities of most societies. Education shapes and prepares future citizens who would ensure a society's continued existence, smooth functioning, and sustained prosperity. Further, it preserves accumulated knowledge and skills of the past and combines it with new developments to pass on to the next generations to continue the progress of civilizations to greater heights. Therefore, it is no wonder that societies spare no effort and expense to provide the best possible education for their citizens.

However, even the best designed education programs to impart knowledge, skills, and experience to the young cannot accomplish their objectives effectively unless students understand and wholeheartedly agree with the objectives and methods used by educators to impart that education.

This paper aims to examine what students would ideally like to learn, what they actually expect to learn when they come to college, and what are their preferred methods of learning from among the various learning tools and avenues available to them in the education system.

The ultimate goal of the research is to compare the students' aspirations and expectations of education with what is offered by the educational institutions and programs. Unless there is congruence of thinking between the educators and the educated, it is not possible to ensure sustained quality education and excited graduates who love the experience.

INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a place of unique importance in the national priorities of most societies. Education shapes and prepares future citizens who would ensure a society's continued existence, smooth functioning, and sustained prosperity. Further, it preserves accumulated knowledge and skills of the past and combines it with new developments to pass on to the next generations to continue the progress of civilizations to greater heights (Joag 2017). Therefore, it is no wonder that societies spare no effort and expense to provide the best possible education for their citizens (Joag and Kavil 2014).

After comparing and studying definitions of education from various sources, we use the following working definition for this research: Education required to gain expertise in a field or to do a job must be defined in terms of its 3 critical components: Knowledge, Skills, and Experience (Cambridge Dictionary, American Heritage Dictionary).

Interestingly, with rapid developments in sciences, information technology, and artificial intelligence, what constitutes education for a particular purpose—in its three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and experience—has become a fluid and constantly evolving entity.

In other words: “What is needed for a person to do a job well” keeps changing at an ever-increasing pace. And so do the tools and techniques of learning, applying, and preserving knowledge.

Defining education quality too is a complex endeavor. Education quality would have a different meaning for an individual as compared to that for a society as a whole (Allen & Reich 2013; Moore and Leckenby 1973). Individuals may define education quality in terms of what outcomes they expect out of education for their own careers and lives. On the other hand, a society may define quality education in terms of three important

components: Knowledge, Skills, and Experience needed for a person to do a job well. And the success of any education effort will depend not only on its contents and delivery but also on how happy and fulfilled the educated are, as the customers, recipients, and beneficiaries of education.

To make definition of education quality meaningful, we must define the purpose of the education first and only then attempt to define its quality as a construct. In other words, we can meaningfully define education quality only for “Education Needed (necessary and sufficient) for a Particular Purpose” such as: to do a Job, to handle a responsibility, or to perform a particular task (Joag 2023).

Realizing the vast scope and complexity of education quality as a subject matter, the scope of this research was limited to: “Defining Quality Education Needed for Business Undergraduates.”

Earlier research has examined students’ career goals and happy-life expectations as consumers and users of education. It has also focused on how, “what students expect out of education” will impact the definition, measurement, and delivery of education (Joag 2024).

This paper aims to examine what students would ideally like to learn, what they actually expect to learn when they come to college, and what are their preferred methods of learning from among the various learning tools and avenues available to them in the education system.

The rest of the paper presents information from a preliminary survey of undergraduate business students about their ideal learning goals, their expectations of fulfilling those goals, and their relative preference for various methods of learning available in higher education.

THE STUDY

A survey of undergraduate business students was conducted at the end of the Spring 2024 Semester. The demographic profile of the surveyed students was as below:

Gender: Male = 55% Female = 45%

Year in Program: Freshman = 4%, Sophomore = 75%, Junior = 22%, Senior = 0%

THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The Survey Questionnaire constituted an important part of a Career Planning exercise the students were doing. The survey was divided into three sections.

First section explored the “Relative importance of Various Education Goals” to the students and the “Extent to which they Expected to actually Achieve those Goals” in the present program. Items in this section were divided into 4 groups as below:

- Learning goals of respondents relating to all major fields of business such as accounting, finance, costing, production, quality control, pricing, distribution, advertising, marketing, law etc.
- Learning goals relating to the respondents’ chosen fields of business
- Learning goals relating to the respondents’ specializations within the chosen field of business such as:
 - for Marketing -- advertising, pricing, sales promotion, market research etc.
 - for accounting -- managerial accounting, financial accounting, cost accounting, tax accounting, auditing, etc.
- Learning goals relating to general skills useful in all fields of business

For each learning goal, the respondents had to perform two tasks:

1. Rate the relative importance of each learning goal on a 0-5 scale, and
2. Rate their level of expectation that they will actually accomplish that goal in the current program on a 0-5 scale.

The second section of the survey presented Likert scale items about the overall purpose of college education to the respondents to understand their views about why they came to college.

The third section of the survey asked the respondents about their relative preference for and importance of various learning methods in college education.

Finally, a few items asked the respondents for some demographic information and their status in the program for classification purposes.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY & CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study are most revealing. Overall, students rated most of the learning goals as highly important to them. Further, they also highly rated their expectations that they will accomplish those goals in the present program. In other words, the goals and expectations of students were essentially in congruence with those set by the educational institution.

Most respondents exhibited a very positive attitude and the expectation that they came to college to gain knowledge, skills, and some experience that will help them in their chosen careers. This was very comforting and dispelled the notion or suspicion that students come to college, not really to learn, but only to get a degree so as to get a job where the actual learning will begin.

Among the most preferred learning methods, the respondents listed in-person lectures, study notes given by the professors, and discussions with their classmates as the most effective ways of learning in college. This finding shows that despite the multiple learning available today with all the technological advances, learning from interactions with teachers and other students are still rated as the most effective and therefore most preferred ways of learning.

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