RECONCEPTUALISING TEACHING FOR QUALITY LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

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Abstract

Teaching approaches in contemporary universities around the world need to be underpinned by new theories of how students learn, and the role of academic developers in shaping and influencing institutional culture in this regard cannot be overemphasised. This study investigated the methods used by lecturers at University of Namibia (UNAM) in their teaching and what informs the choice of these methods. The study also gauged lecturers' views on their involvement in academic development activities. This study employed a phenomenological research design; and a mixed-method approach was used whereby qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined. Structured interviews were conducted with at least 49 lecturers at various levels across 12 UNAM campuses. Participants were purposefully approached to be interviewed because we knew they have experience of the phenomenon explored. The study revealed that lecturers were more comfortable with using traditional lecturer-centred approaches in their teaching. They expressed the need to be equipped with skills that would enhance their ability to facilitate, manage and assess student learning using approaches that have been proven to be effective. Furthermore, they acknowledged the academic development interventions provided by the Centre for Professional Development Teaching and Learning Improvement (CPDTL) in the form of short courses and the recently implemented Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education for Academics. Only a handful of participants did not support the idea of offering a full academic programme through short courses. The study recommended that CPDTL should capitalise on the willingness of most of academics to engage in academic development activities to intensify its operations and make such activities compulsory in order to promote their effectiveness and fast track their impact.

Key words: Academic development, epistemological access, learning theories, university teaching, quality learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

All over the world, teaching in universities has for decades been taken for granted as practice has been based on the 'common-sense' view that any person with a master's or PhD in a certain discipline can teach effectively in a university. Unlike in general education where people study for years to learn how to teach children, one does not need a qualification in pedagogy to become a university lecturer. This state of affairs undermines the complex nature of teaching and gives little consideration to the ways in which students learn (Kruger, 2012).

From our experience of general education, a teacher remains unqualified if he/she practises teaching on the basis of a disciplinary qualification only, irrespective of how much experience they have. It is common practice that a university lecturer becomes a recognised academic from the first day they sign an employment contract with a university. To substantiate this claim, we have seen holders of master's and PhDs in different disciplines, being thrown in the deep end of teaching students when entering the world of academia. This is despite the fact that teaching is an art that needs to be learnt and mastered. This state of affairs puts the poor lecturer, who may have sufficient discipline knowledge but lacks approaches to effective teaching and student learning, on the spot. Ironically, these practitioners are expected to perform wonders in terms of ensuring effective learning. The reality of the matter is that most lecturers end up facilitating poorly and only a few end up becoming good teachers, more or less by accident, as they learn to teach simply through the act of teaching.

Our view in this regard is in line with Knapper (2010:17), who argues that

> … there is an impressive body of evidence on how teaching methods and curriculum design affect deep, autonomous, and reflective learning. Yet most academics are largely ignorant of this scholarship, and instructional practices and curriculum planning are dominated by tradition rather than research evidence. As a result, teaching remains largely didactic, assessment of student work is often trivial, and curricula are more likely to emphasize content coverage than acquisition of lifelong and life-wide learning skills.

Similarly, Common (as cited in Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004: 24) points out:

> Master teachers are not born; they become. They become primarily by developing a habit of mind, a way of looking critically at the work they do; by developing the courage to recognise faults, and by struggling to improve.

Young, enthusiastic, excited and passionate about their new role in academia as they may be, the majority of lecturers tend to emulate the didactic approaches used by their own lecturers from their own educational experiences, thus teaching the way they were taught, which is often didactic and teacher-centred (Kruger, 2012; Williams, Nixon, Hennessy, Mahon, &

Adams, 2016). Even for those who take up a lecturing career from industry or the corporate world, industry experience alone does not necessarily guarantee teaching competence. Kruger (2012) points out that as gatekeepers of knowledge and the directed learning process, they tend to control students' access to information and merely transmit material; thus information, facts and ideas are accepted uncritically. These methods tend to render the retention of information superficial and do not promote a deeper approach to learning (Kruger, 2012).

Nowadays, the situation has deteriorated because many universities, especially in Africa, have to deal with many challenges such as the massification of tertiary education and the diverse nature of the student body, to mention just a couple. Students are not a homogenous group; they have individual learning preferences, varied life experiences, and individual needs, values and abilities. Students differ in terms of race, socioeconomic status, gender, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, work commitments, family responsibilities, and geographical isolation (Morley; and Worthington, as cited in Kruger, 2012). However, many lecturers do not have the capacity to deal with the diverse needs of the student body owing to a lack of formal training in higher education pedagogy. As a result, they end up approaching teaching from a common-sense perspective, even though this approach to teaching in higher education does not seem to be offering epistemological access and academic success to the diverse student body.

If lecturers do not produce desirable results under this arrangement, the blame is always shifted to the school system, with the poor student being perceived as undeserving of academic success through having entered the university environment 'underprepared' (Scott 2009); this despite the fact that many of the students who struggle with higher education are not just those from poor, under-resourced schools. This leads to the question of where the responsibility for addressing the so-called 'under-preparedness' and improving student performance lies; does it lie with the school system or the universities and lecturers? What is normally referred to as 'under-preparedness' is actually the articulation gap and lecturers need to understand what this gap is. They need to come to terms with the reality of the student body and to design curricula and teach in ways that 'look both ways'. University lecturers need to understand that the majority of students are not coping because the university is a new context for them: new disciplines, new ways of thinking about knowledge, knowledge construction and learning; and new literacies - academic literacy. Students need to be inducted into these new ways of being - discourse.

Academic developers and quality assurance practitioners in universities have a role to play in terms of influencing a cultural shift and transformation in teaching to meet the legitimate learning needs of diverse students. They may do so by devising capacity-building interventions that will help lecturers to become reflective practitioners and use teaching methods that are informed

by contemporary learning theories and approaches to ensure students' epistemological access and success. However, according to Quinn (2012), the real challenge is that many academics suffer from an identity crisis as they want to identify themselves only with their disciplinary profession and neglect the academic side in terms of teaching practice. Even the type of research they undertake, which eventually offers them promotion to senior lectureship or professorship positions, tends to be mainly in their discipline or specialisation rather than researching the best ways of teaching and learning in those disciplines. It is, therefore, not surprising that most academics resist involvement in academic development initiatives (Quinn, 2012), and UNAM academics may be no exception.

2. BACKGROUND

Teaching and learning are essential activities for any university. The quality of teaching has a direct impact on the quality of graduates a given university produces. At University of Namibia (UNAM), quality teaching and learning is high on its agenda as this forms a major component of its core business alongside research and community engagement. Unlike research-intensive universities such as Cape Town, Pretoria, Rhodes, Stellenbosch and the Witwatersrand, UNAM is a teaching-intensive university. Given the context in which it operates, UNAM is expected to provide immediate human resource capacity for the country. According to MacGregor (2010:1), "research-intensive universities produced the bulk of postgraduates and future academics, and have high student success and graduation rates, high proportions of academic staff with PhDs, high research outputs, high income and low staff-student ratios".

On the other hand, teaching-intensive universities such as UNAM are characterised by relatively lower postgraduate enrolments, success and graduation rates, qualified staff, research outputs and income but high enrolments in science, engineering and technology and high staff-student ratios (MacGregor, 2010). However, this does not mean research in teaching-intensive universities is less highly regarded. It simply implies that the country at the present moment requires the production of skills for the market to make a contribution to economic development. Against this background, UNAM cannot afford to neglect this area as, apart from one university of science and technology, this is the only public university in the country.

Evidence of valuing teaching and learning at UNAM is seen in its academic workload formula in terms of which this activity is allocated 60% of academic staff time. The remaining 40% is allocated to research and community engagement activities, that is, 30% and 10% respectively. Commitment to teaching and learning is also seen in the University's higher level statements, for example its vision and mission as spelt out in its Strategic Plan and several other official documents (UNAM, 2016). The UNAM's vision is "To be a beacon of excellence and innovation through teaching, research and community service". Its mission is "To provide quality higher

education through teaching, research and advisory services to our customers with the view to produce productive and competitive human resources capable of driving public and private institutions towards a knowledge-based economy, economic growth and improved quality of life" (p. 2). The vision and mission clearly show the University's commitment to quality teaching and learning, research, and community service. However, the emphasis seems to be on teaching rather than learning as there is no mention of 'learning' in the University's higher level statements. Against this background, this study examined methods used by UNAM lecturers in the practice of teaching, what informed the choice of these methods, the challenges confronting lecturers in executing their teaching roles, and the capacity building needs of the lecturers.

2.1. Theories underpinning teaching in contemporary universities

Contemporary literature on teaching and learning advocates for a shift in focus from 'teaching' to 'learning' if universities are to be regarded as 'knowledge factories' rather than being seen as 'knowledge supermarkets'. According to Boughey (2015:2), traditional ideology regards a university as "a place with lots of different packages of knowledge on its shelves which can be picked up and placed in a trolley, and studying at a university is like buying a tin of sociology, a packet of physics, a bottle of economics and so on and the university is the place that sells these things". Boughey goes further to explain that if both university teachers and students hold this view, obtaining a degree is then like getting a receipt at the checkout to prove that a student has acquired all the knowledge. In this regard the degree is the receipt to prove that the student has paid for this knowledge. This sort of understanding is what has led to many lecturers and students thinking that lecturers are there to transmit knowledge to passive students and some students are more intelligent as they absorb the knowledge faster than others. For those who do not have the ability to absorb this knowledge and those who cannot cope, it is normal for the system to eliminate them through failure.

Contemporary ideology regards the university as a factory or a place that produces knowledge rather than one which sells it (Boughey, 2015). Therefore, academics involved in teaching need to have the ability to devise strategies that will involve students in an interactive manner that focuses on the active co-production of knowledge rather than the transmission of knowledge. It is the role of academic developers to facilitate the development of these skills among academic staff.

According to Essays, UK (2013), there are many theories that offer different accounts of how individuals learn, each with its own strengths and shortcomings in terms of how it informs teaching for quality learning. The reason why there is variation in theories of learning is because each theory presents its own definition and view of learning. While most of the work has been done in the area of general education, little evidence is available on the focus of learning in higher education before the 21st century. However, in recent years there has been an increased focus on how learning

takes place in the higher education environment. This is due to the recognition that teaching in higher education can no longer afford to be viewed and approached from a common-sense perspective if quality learning is to be maintained.

This discourse has led to a shift towards the professionalisation of higher education teaching, as may be seen in the development of centres for higher education studies and/or academic development in some universities (Quinn, 2012). The main focus of these interventions is to promote reflective teaching practices that would ensure quality learning. Such interventions are based on learning theories as informed by research, thus expanding lecturers' teaching and learning horizons by devising strategies that focus on diverse students and inclusive teaching practices. To enable this, lecturers' teaching skills and conceptions of teaching and learning need to be grounded in theoretical frameworks that promote student-centred approaches.

According to Essays, UK (2013), learning theories can be used to foster effective teaching practices, and ultimately align teaching with positive learning and educational experiences. Learning is the "process that results in a relatively enduring change in a person" (Essays, UK, 2013:2) and teaching is by definition the promotion of learning and ought, therefore, to be informed by the best of our knowledge about learning. Learning and teaching form a synergistic relationship; that is, teachers need to teach using an approach that reinforces how students naturally learn. Our understanding of how learning takes place can allow for shaping of the teaching methods and approaches that match the theoretical frameworks underpinning the way knowledge is processed or created to ensure effective learning.

2.1.1. The behaviouristic theory of learning

According to Pavlov (as cited in Stewart, 2012), a Russian psychologist who conducted his experiments on dogs, learning from a behaviourist perspective is viewed as the acquisition of new behaviour or an observable change in behaviour (Stewart, 2012). Learning from this perspective is characterised by the absorption of a predefined body of knowledge by a passive student who responds to environmental stimuli; this is promoted by repetition and positive reinforcement. The focus of behaviourism is on the 'conditioning' of observable human behaviour and is based on the principal conception that a reaction is made in response to a specific stimulus, and this reaction leads to a consequence. If the consequence is pleasant or positive, the behaviour change becomes reinforced. With consistent reinforcement, the behaviour pattern becomes conditioned and is automatically activated upon stimuli presentation. A behaviourist approach advocates reinforcement, which is employed to condition behaviour, and is therefore essentially the tool which brings about effective learning.

The implications of a behaviourist perspective for teaching and learning lie in the belief that learning takes place when the student's activity is reinforced through reward and positive reinforcement (Sotto, 2007). Correct behavioural responses are transmitted by the lecturer and absorbed by

the students. Positive reward strengthens behaviour while negative punishers weaken behaviour. This suggests that reinforcement takes place when the lecturer encourages desirable behaviour by praising it or motivating a student through reward, or discourages undesirable behaviour through punishment or negative reinforcement. The reward associated with this conditioning is what is called reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is the application of a stimulus and negative reinforcement is the withdrawal of a stimulus.

Research by Vygotsky (1972) criticised the behaviourist approach, as he viewed it as being too teacher-centred and directed and devoid of meaningful learning. In addition, in terms of this approach, learning is more individualistic than collaborative. Research into learning theories suggests that although behaviourist theory has some benefits, its limitations outweigh the benefits as it does not offer students the chance to develop deep meaning and understanding, but instead has a tendency to promote superficial learning of skills (Essays, UK, 2013). According to Sotto (2007), it is insufficient to claim that learning occurs purely as a reaction to external stimuli. Activities such as recognising objects and sorting through them to form an order are classed as 'mentalist' activities; they occur in the head and this cannot be ignored. Making a correct response and remembering content does not necessarily imply understanding, and consequently the actual understanding achieved through behavioural approaches is challenged. This perspective is characterised by rote learning, which represents a learning approach involving a surface level of understanding.

Furthermore, behaviourism does not take into account learning that takes place without reinforcement, for example, learning of a new language. It also does not recognise the ability of the brain to independently process knowledge without external stimuli. This implies that if students are given a task to do for which they are not being praised or rewarded, learning will not take place. However, it is wrong to assume that a behaviourist approach to learning is all wrong as it may have some benefits to offer. For example, rote learning and memorisation may be more useful when teaching factual concepts and where clarity in understanding is not required. Rote learning may be used to help students cope better with some aspects of the work that they find difficult. Reinforcement may also be used to encourage students to do their best work and to encourage improvement. However, lecturers need to note that rote learning alone is not an approach to develop understanding and, therefore, should be combined with constructivist approaches which encourage understanding.

2.1.2. The constructivist theory of learning

The works of Pavlov have been criticised by Piaget (1976) and Vygotsky (1986), as they argue that a behaviourist approach to learning is too teacher-centred and directed and devoid of meaningful learning and that the teaching process focuses too much on the individual learner rather than collaborative group work. To challenge Pavlov's behaviourist perspective, Piaget and Vygotsky suggested a

constructivist perspective which aims at the separation of mental processing and knowledge, which has to be bridged by the role of a teacher.

According to Harris (1994), a constructivist perspective views learning as the effect of mental construction, whereby learners combine their existing knowledge with new information to construct meaning and formulate their understanding. Furthermore, this theory suggests that learning is an active process, a social activity, contextual, centred on constructing meaning and views the learner as a responsible agent in their knowledge creation (Christie, 2005). In the constructivist classroom setting, the focus tends to shift from the teacher to the students. The classroom is no longer a place where the lecturer, as the expert, pours knowledge into passive students, who wait like empty vessels to be filled. Students draw on their experience of the world around them and work to make sense of what they perceive in order to build an understanding of what is surrounding them (Stewart, 2012). Since constructivist learning involves students' interaction with their immediate learning environment, learning has been considered to be a situation-specific and context-bound activity. Unlike a behaviourist approach where the lecturer is seen as the primary resource of knowledge and is influenced by his or her interests and perspective, constructivism offers the opportunity for learning to become dynamic and varied, as opposed to being static and prescribed. Constructivism is an overarching term encompassing two branches of constructivist perspectives, namely, cognitive constructivism (Piaget, 1968) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1986).

2.1.3. Cognitive constructivism

According to the Essays, UK (2013), Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, is regarded as the father of constructivism. Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that humans are not given information which they immediately understand and use, but that they rather construct and build their own knowledge through experience. He maintains that learning is an active process and people construct new knowledge from their prior experiences through the processes of accommodation and assimilation. For Piaget, people assimilate when they integrate a new experience into their already established mental framework and accommodate when they reframe their mental representation of the world to incorporate their new experience. Piaget believes that learning takes place according to stages of cognitive development whereby increased maturity leads to increased learning ability or a developed ability to acquire more complex knowledge (McInerney & McInerney, and Loyens, as cited in the Essays, UK, 2013).

The implication for teaching and learning is that cognitive constructivism pays attention to what goes on in the student's mind. The teacher facilitates learning by providing an environment that promotes discovery and assimilation and accommodation. Although this theory was drawn from experimentation with children, its application also has a bearing on adult learning. Cognitive constructivist theory

focuses on mental processes rather than observable behaviour. According to this theory, knowledge is seen as something that is actively constructed by learners based on their existing cognitive structures. Therefore, learning is relative to their stage of cognitive development; understanding the learner's existing intellectual framework is central to understanding the learning process. Learning is believed to take place in schemata or frameworks of development from the known to the unknown or from the simple to the complex. Cognitivist teaching approaches focus on assisting students to assimilate new information into existing knowledge, and enable them to make the appropriate modifications to their existing intellectual framework to accommodate that information (GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 2016). The principle of this theory that informs teaching and learning is based on the belief that learning is an active process that should be meaningful and based on the real world. Lecturers influenced by cognitive constructivism devise teaching and learning approaches that encourage students to become active constructors of their own knowledge.

According to the GSI Teaching and Resource Center (2016), Piaget's theory was widely accepted from the 1950s up to the 1970s. Although this theory is not now as widely accepted as it was previously, it has had a significant influence on later theories of cognitive development. For instance, the idea of adaption through assimilation and accommodation is still widely accepted. This theory has also influenced the age at which children start formal schooling, namely, seven years, as it focuses on the stages of cognitive development where it is believed that the mind must be ready to learn certain things. However, in my view, this perspective could be challenged by social constructivism in that nowadays children are exposed to formal education before the age of seven due to technological advancement. We like giving the example that today's children acquire language and certain sophisticated knowledge even before they start Grade 1 through the cartoons they watch on television. The other pertinent criticism of this theory is that it is too egocentric as it does not take into account the social aspect of learning. Although Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, was a supporter of Piaget, he criticised the ideology for focusing too much on the individual internal construction of knowledge and neglecting the contextual social environment in which learning takes place. Therefore, Vygotsky developed a social constructivist theory to challenge and improve on Piaget's philosophical ideology.

2.1.4. Social constructivism

Social constructivism emphasises the way meanings and understandings grow out of social encounters. Social constructivism emphasises the integration of students into a knowledge community and the role of language in the process of intellectual development. Vygotsky is a cognitivist, but rejects the assumption made by Piaget that it is possible to separate learning from its social context. He argues that all cognitive functions originate in, and must be explained as, the products of social interactions and that learning is not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new

knowledge by learners, but is a process by which students are integrated into a knowledge community (GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 2016). Vygotsky accepted Piaget's claim that students respond not to external stimuli but to their interpretation of those stimuli. However, he argues that Piaget has overlooked the social nature of language as an essential enabler of learning. As a result, he claimed that Piaget failed to understand that learning is a collaborative process. According to Vygotsky, language and culture play essential roles both in human intellectual development and in the way humans perceive the world.

Vygotsky considered dialogue, usually but not always, with a more knowledgeable other (MKO), for example the lecturer, as a vehicle by which concepts are considered, shared and developed. The dialogue, which is based on learners' pre-existing and current knowledge (schemas), is then exploited to develop and construct new ideas and understanding. Vygotsky advocates that the process of learning involves moving into and across a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is aided by the intervention of another through support. The ZPD is a theoretical space of understanding which is just above the level of an individual's current understanding. The process of giving support to learners at the appropriate time and level of sophistication to meet the individual needs is termed 'scaffolding'. Scaffolding can allow the movement from one zone to another and assists in passing through the ZPD.

The implications of social constructivism for teaching and learning are that lecturers must devise learning approaches that promote collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is facilitated and guided by the lecturer through approaches such as group work. Therefore, collaborative learning methods require students to develop teamwork skills and to acknowledge individual learning as essentially related to the success of group learning. Constructivist learning approaches may include, but are not limited to, discussion, active learning, problem solving, analysis, visual learning, group work, role play and simulation.

However, if not clearly understood, social constructivism may be abused by lecturers who may forget their roles and feel that knowledge construction is an activity that is left entirely to the learner and that what is constructed cannot be controlled by the teacher. Instead, the learner has autonomy and self-regulates what understanding is established. As disciplinary experts, lecturers need to realise that a student's constructed understanding may not be in line with that of other students, with reality or with the lecturer's construction and understanding. Therefore, lecturers must not assume that the construction and understanding of a concept is universal among all students. Instead, they must be actively involved in the students' learning process by creating a community of practice. In fact, there is a need to focus attention on a learning-centred rather than a learner-centred approach. The former puts learning first before teaching while recognising teaching as the core component of learning where the lecturer who is a subject specialist is seen as the facilitator. The latter may give the impression that the lecturer neglects his

or her duty by hovering in the background, not paying attention to the learning process. According to Northedge (2003), the lecturer as a subject has three key roles to play in enabling meaningful learning, namely, lending capacity to participate in a meaningful manner; designing well-planned excursions into unfamiliar discursive terrain; and coaching students in speaking academic discourse.

The role of academic developers in this discourse is to develop and implement programmes that will capacitate lecturers to have the know-how to facilitate academic knowledge in an effective and meaningful manner to diverse students. It takes effort to ensure a common understanding that university learning is not only about gaining knowledge, but about producing it. Biggs (2012) suggests that helping academics improve their teaching is best done using theories that help them reflect on their practice.

3. METHOD

This study used a mixed-method design whereby qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined. Structured interviews were conducted with at least 49 lecturers at various levels across 12 UNAM campuses. This study employed a phenomenological research design which aimed at understanding and interpreting the meaning that participants ascribed to their experience of the phenomenon under study, that is, new perspectives for teaching and learning in higher education. Participants were purposefully approached to be interviewed because we knew they had experience of the phenomenon we were exploring. The study investigated methods currently used by lecturers at the UNAM in their teaching and the theoretical underpinning of their practice. The study also gauged lecturers' views on their involvement in academic development activities to enhance teaching for quality learning. To address the objectives of the study, the following research questions were asked:

1) What methods do you use in your practice of teaching; and what or who informs the choice of methods used in your teaching?
2) What challenges do you encounter in your practice as a university lecturer; and how do you overcome these challenges?
3) Do you think there is a need for lecturers to undergo some formal training in preparation for teaching in higher education; and what form do you think the training should take?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants in this study provided rich accounts of their experiences of teaching at the University. The findings illustrate critical aspects including the various methods of teaching, the theoretical underpinnings, the challenges and the capacity development needs of UNAM lecturers. In the discussion of the results, the number of respondents identifying each issue is provided to indicate the relative strength or frequency of occurrence of that issue.

4.1. Teaching methods

Various teaching methods were mentioned by the participants, but the most common ones used by UNAM lecturers, as reported repeatedly in the interviews, are as follows:

Table 1: Frequencies of responses on the teaching methods used by lecturers in percentage (%), N = 49

Methods	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Lecture	49	100
Projects	11	22
Field trips	6	12
Assignments	37	76

It is clear from the results that the method mostly used by the lecturers included didactic lectures (100%) and assignments as a form of facilitating independent learning through formative assessment (76% of respondents). Depending on the nature of the disciplines, 22% and 12% of the respondents incorporated projects and field trips respectively into their teaching. From these results one may deduce that the average lecturer is still using traditional lecturing methods for teaching. These methods are informed by behaviourist perspectives and are regarded in the literature as being less effective and as promoting surface learning. When asked what informs the choice of their teaching methods, they mentioned things like the teaching and learning policy and the curriculum. When asked what informs their teaching practices, most of the lecturers who participated in the interviews indicated that there is a curriculum document to guide assessment practices at UNAM, but they seemed not to be conversant with national quality assurance and regulatory frameworks and how these influence the practice of teaching in higher education institutions. Participants further saw the existence of curriculum documents as a strength, as they felt that they serve as a blueprint that sets common standards for teaching at UNAM. However, it was felt that there is a lack of guidance from the institutional leadership on how to teach efficiently and effectively.

From this analysis, one may deduce that many lecturers are either unaware of the existence of national and institutional policies and regulatory frameworks, or that they do not really pay much attention to them. Therefore, there is a need for academic developers and quality assurance practitioners within the institution to collaborate with lecturers, and play a

complementary leadership role in building capacity, not only in curriculum development and assessment, but also in teaching and learning. They need to do so by using their personal properties and powers to influence institutional cultural change by helping lecturers comply with policy that provides guidelines for good practice. They should also offer capacity building opportunities that would equip lecturers with the theoretical underpinnings for teaching in contemporary universities. The majority of the lecturers had been taught through lecture-centred approaches and they are fairly comfortable teaching the way they were taught. As Scott (2009) puts it, if teaching does not produce desirable results under this arrangement, the blame is often shifted onto the poor student, who is perceived as undeserving of academic success by having entered the university environment 'underprepared'. This is despite the fact that many of the students who struggle with higher education are not from poor, under-resourced schools. Lecturers need to come to terms with the reality of the diverse needs of the student body and thus design curricula and teach in ways that would ensure epistemological access and success.

However, the real challenge is that, as Quinn (2012) puts it, most lecturers have disciplinary knowledge but not pedagogical knowledge. While acknowledging disciplinary knowledge, academics need to appreciate, and be capacitated with, the know-how on effective learning approaches. Regrettably, academic development initiatives are often resisted by academics who feel that they are the experts in their disciplines of practice and no one can 'teach' them 'how to teach'.

Furthermore, it seems that the lecturers who participated in the interviews do not approach their teaching from a student-centred perspective as informed by the constructivist theories identified in the literature (Essays, UK, 2013). Learning and teaching form a synergistic relationship; that is, teachers need to teach with an approach that reinforces the way students naturally learn. Our understanding of how learning takes place can allow the shaping of teaching methods and approaches that match the theoretical frameworks underpinning the way knowledge is processed or created to ensure effective learning. As has been pointed out earlier by several authors, such as Biggs (2012), GSI Teaching & Resource Center (2016) and Stewart (2012), constructivist theories, especially social constructivism, are important in that this perspective acknowledges that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and is the result of social processes (Gergen as cited in Maphosa & Mudzielwana, 2014). Social interaction plays a pivotal role in knowledge creation. Learners construct their own knowledge in a social context. Constructivism gives students ownership of what they learn, since learning is based on students' questions and exploration.

In a social constructivist learning environment, lecturers must devise approaches that promote collaborative learning methods for teaching that enhance quality learning. Social constructivism is one of the theories underpinning these methods and approaches. Collaborative learning is facilitated and guided by the

lecturer through approaches such as experiential learning (i.e. learning by doing); inquiry, discovery, and problem-based learning; collaborative and cooperative learning in groups; writing to learn; research; service learning; and instructional technology. This requires students to develop teamwork skills. The implication is that more effort is needed to capacitate and empower lecturers to devise strategies that meet the diverse needs of the student body to ensure epistemological access and the success of the majority of students.

4.2. Challenges

When asked to mention the challenges that confront them in teaching and how they overcome these, lecturers mentioned a number of issues which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of responses on challenges encountered by lecturers in their practice of teaching in percentage (%), N = 49

Challenges	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Large classes	41	84
Heavy workloads	27	55
Inadequate resources	39	80
Students' negative attitudes	17	35
Underprepared students from high school	45	92

As can be seen from the results in Table 2, lecturers are confronted with several challenges in their teaching practice. These range from large classes (84%), heavy workloads (55%), a lack of facilities, and a lack of human and financial resources (80%), student indiscipline (35%), to students with deficits gaining admission to the university. Issues of large classes, heavy workloads resulting from inadequate financial and human resource capacity are not peculiar to UNAM, as these are a common phenomenon in most universities in developing counties, especially in Africa. The perceived lack of discipline in today's youth is also a grave concern. It takes a well-grounded lecturer in disciplines such as educational psychology to be able to deal with such behaviour, and this is the capacity that most of the lecturers do not have. Students are not a homogenous group; they have individual learning preferences, varied life experiences, and individual needs, values and abilities. As Kruger (2012) put it, "students differ in race, socioeconomic status, gender, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, work commitments, family responsibilities, and geographical isolation", but most lecturers do not have the capacity to deal with the diverse needs of the student body owing to a lack of formal training in pedagogy.

When asked how they overcome the challenges they identified, respondents indicated that they employ mechanisms such as making students share resources, dividing

students into groups and if it is a practical session they halve the number of practical sessions. While lecturers are encouraged to find innovative ways of resolving the challenges confronting them in their practice, some of these solutions may compromise teaching for quality learning.

Therefore, academic developers have a big role to play in equipping academics with skills to help them deal with such challenges. Lecturers, both novice and accomplished, will always face challenges when teaching. These challenges may or may not be unique, depending on the institutional, departmental or disciplinary context (Biggs, 2012). Such challenges may include resource availability; students with a wide range of skills, abilities, and experiences; student behaviour; the classroom environment; and issues relating to the classroom environment in the sense that the students they deal with differ in any of a number of ways, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, urban/rural, economic, or political affiliation (Scott, 2009). Again, academic developers and quality assurance practitioners have a complementary role to play by equipping lecturers with skills that will enable them to effectively overcome those challenges.

Regarding the issue of so-called student 'under-preparedness', Biggs identifies three levels at which lecturers may operate in their academic career, namely, a focus on 1) what the student is; 2) what the lecturer does; and 3) what the student does. The first scenario is based on the blame-the-student theory where the lecturer sees the students as the problem if they are not learning and the lecturer has no influence on how students learn. This is a common approach observed at UNAM. The second scenario is when a supervisor tends to blame the lecturer if students are not learning effectively. The third scenario focuses on whether student activities lead to appropriate learning. This identifies the lecturer as simultaneously a scholar and a teacher who keeps improving as a reflective practitioner. Biggs (2012:44) maintains that "if students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonable and effective manner, then the lecturer's role is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes".

The lecturer plans effectively what students must learn and engages them fully during the learning process to direct them into academic discourse by fostering a community of practice. It is the role of those who are tasked with being academic staff developers to work in productive ways with lecturers to decolonise the institutional culture (Vorster & Quinn, 2015) by implementing developmental initiatives that take the lecturers to this level. They are the key agents who can change the culture of 'business as usual' within institutions. While respecting individual lecturers' disciplinary expertise, they may still ask tough questions about the kind of knowledge they are imparting to students. Academic developers must try hard to convince the lecturers with whom they work that they must always be reflective practitioners and that their teaching practice needs to be informed by contemporary theories of learning in higher education such as social constructivism.

4.3. Trajectories for addressing academic development needs at UNAM

Lecturers were asked to give their perspectives on whether they think there is a need for lecturers to undergo some formal training in preparation for teaching in higher education. They were also asked to suggest the form they thought the training should take. Overall, respondents supported the academic development initiative initiatives offered by the Centre for Professionals Development Teaching and Learning Improvement (CPDTLI). They felt that most academics lack the requisite skills to deliver in higher education. Even those with a teaching background find it extremely challenging to move from teaching school children to teaching adults in higher education. Others go to the other extreme of leaving students alone in the mistaken belief of student-centredness, that is, that students should not be 'spoon fed'. The challenge is that some lecturers, especially in science, ridicule academic development activities, claiming they are experts in their disciplinary areas and nobody should teach them how to teach; therefore, academic development should be made compulsory. One respondent wrote:

> *I suggest the training to be on how to set up meaningful assessment activities that suit the needs of the students. They need to be equipped on how to handle large classes from handling 50 students and less to handling 200 and more students.*

It is evident from this argument that lecturers need to be capacitated to overcome challenges in implementing quality assessment practices and teaching large classes. This argument was echoed by another respondent who pointed out that

> *… not all lecturers are educators. Some are specialized in certain subject areas, yet they lack teaching skills. They do not have pedagogic skills that enabling them to impart information to students. Consequently, expertise needs to be complemented with appropriate teaching skills in order for a student to derive full benefits from both.*
>
> *Any teaching needs training, what more so at a tertiary level where higher order thinking skills as opposed to simple recalling is taught. We also need skills in how to teach/ work with adults – andragogy.*

Another one stated:

> *I do agree that there is need for lecturers to undergo formal training in preparation for teaching higher education. This is so because most lecturers start teaching straight away after graduating, without exposure to the teaching methodologies and other means of managing classes. Most lecturers depend entirely on their instinct as well as emulating professors who taught them not necessarily following any methodological ideologies. It would greatly benefit many lecturers as this would close the gaps in knowledge delivery and assisting students who need more attention.*

This is so true, especially because we live in a world that is constantly changing and, as such, lecturers should be trained to use the latest applications and methodologies in higher education teaching. Lecturers need to know the educational theory, instructional methodology and educational technology used in higher education teaching. There is a need for training for a full teaching role to develop practical teaching skills. This will help lecturers to teach in an expert way with the ability to diagnose, analyse, evaluate, prescribe relevant materials and, most importantly, improve the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, academic development initiatives will increase lecturers' pedagogical ability to teach and equip them to make informed decisions that benefit learning and teaching practice. In addition, this will also improve lecturers' professional and academic approaches to teaching and lecture management, and how they interact with students.

Based on how strategically the courses are designed, it can also assist lecturers in understanding, managing and coping with the dynamics of student behaviour as a function of time and technologies, in different academic environments. The majority of the participants suggested that such training could be in the form of short courses, seminars and specialised capacity building workshops which must be made "*a must for all lecturers who are not in possession of a professional teacher's qualification and subsequently no teaching experience. Some lecturers in certain subject areas are competent in those subject areas, but were not trained to teach. Such initiatives will help them acquire the basics in the teaching industry"* (Respondent).

These mandatory short courses should build up into a fully-fledged Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip) programme leading to a formal qualification. To avoid encroaching on the mainstream teaching schedules of participants, these could be offered via block release, online or distance education through the blended mode.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study revealed that the current state of affairs in many universities including UNAM is that teaching is approached from a common-sense way of thinking. Academic staff tend to approach teaching and learning in their discipline from a common-sense perspective. Academics often resist engaging in activities aimed at professionalising academic practice. Based on these findings, the following recommendations for consideration are offered:

- Higher education institutions need to take a holistic approach to academic development that brings together all initiatives geared to empowering academic staff to fulfil their role of being reflective practitioners. The focus of such practitioners should be on ensuring epistemological access of a diverse nature for students throughout their academic careers that would ensure their success.
- Lecturers in higher education institutions need to employ teaching

approaches and methods that are informed by contemporary theories of teaching and learning in higher education, thus equipping students with the requisite knowledge, skills and values.

- Lecturers need to acknowledge and come to terms with the reality that traditional approaches to teaching are not working, even in higher education institutions where most students are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, teaching and learning processes need to be adjusted to the real needs of the majority of students.
- Higher education institutions need to strengthen academic development by having in place the right structures, cultures and agencies that drive the teaching and learning agenda; and build the capacity of academics to be able to implement with confidence the contemporary theories of teaching and learning in higher education.
- To ensure teaching for quality learning, academic development initiatives should focus on ensuring the constructive alignment and responsiveness of the curriculum in terms of curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment that acknowledge the diversity of international, national, institutional and disciplinary contexts.

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