

The Perceptions of Postgraduate Students towards the Teaching Strategies Employed by CENTED Lecturers in IIUM

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Abstract

This paper examines the perception of post graduate students towards the teaching strategies employed by CENTED Lectures in IIUM. The population was 219 Masters of education (MED) and PhD in Education students, while the sample size was 58 students in which 48 were master's students and 10 were PhD students. Stratified sampling technique was used to obtain a representative sample. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results show that post graduate students perceive their lecturers as using lecture methods more than non lecture method in their teaching activities. Lecturers rarely apply question and answers techniques or include discussions in their teachings.

Keywords: Lecture Methods, Non Lecture Methods, and Post graduate Students, CENTED.

Introduction

Teaching is a process of imparting and transmitting knowledge, skills, values, and experiences from one who knows to one who does not. It is an art and science that involves specific strategies, which facilitates for every individual student to learn better. It is essentially aiming at delivering instructional content in a smooth and sequential manner.

According to Silver (1996) teaching strategies are ways of managing the group of students in order to achieve designed educational goals. Further, teaching strategies can be defined as the application of several teaching techniques and expanding teachers' repertoire in order to maximize students' understanding. This means that lecturers, teachers and instructors integrate different sets of teaching approaches that not only facilitate learning but also simplify the instructional content being delivered to the students.

Teaching and learning at higher levels of learning occur in complex ecosystems and dynamic environments, where lecturers, students, teaching and learning supportive materials, references, concepts and social structures are interdependent and interactive. The give and take system dominates teaching and learning tasks. In other words learning gets positive momentum when the above-mentioned factors are carefully maintained.

Basically, the applications of multi-teaching strategies not only yield the desired instructional goals but also maintain mutual understanding between lecturers and students and at the same time observing social and academic status of both stakeholders. These strategies are mechanisms that make teaching activities to be fascinating and exciting to both lecturers and students. Postgraduate students not only need clear and elaborative teaching strategies but also need instructional strategies which assure them to achieve their educational expectations or determinations. Most, postgraduates are goal-oriented learners who are always enthusiastic in accomplishing their studying missions.

Consequently, CENTED lecturers have a special responsibility to foster and preserve the scholarly values of the search for truth, and promoting curiosity, integrity and practical appraisal and to nurture these values in their postgraduate students. To achieve these goals choosing teaching strategies that commensurate with the postgraduate learning level is not only a prerequisite but, also a crucial factor which should be pedagogically prioritized for effective teaching and to ensure desirable learning outcomes.

Review of Related Literature

According to Cascone (1990) teaching strategies can be categorized into two major categories namely; participatory and non-participatory ways of teaching. Participatory teaching strategy is that method by which students are to the fullest engaged in teaching activities within their preferably learning styles. Commenting on this strategy, Silver (1996) purported that it creates active learning whereby students are not passive members of teaching and learning process. This type of teaching strategy is comprised of various teaching styles. These include; group-discussion, academic controversy (debating), role-play, problem-based learning, mind mapping, concept attainment, inductive learning etc.

Interestingly, the study conducted by Walker (1996) on the usefulness of cooperative learning discovered that, educators of institutes of higher learning have been incorporating group-work teaching styles into their teaching strategies. The researcher holds that group-work teaching strategy can be used as a vehicle for learning, whereby learning is assessed in methods that are more unconventional. Talking about the strength of group-work denoted that this strategy has the following advantages: it allows the instructor to develop comprehensive assignments, and it enables students to gain an insight into group dynamics and processes.

Martine (1996) claimed that participatory teaching strategy is the way of teaching whereby lecturers involve students to the fullest. The main role of lecturers or instructors is to guide, direct, supervise and facilitate students' learning activities.

Honan, and Sternman (2003) in their book "Using cases in higher education" stressed that case-study teaching technique is a suitable participatory teaching method. In this strategy, lecturers or instructors provide scenarios to students. Students are required to apply what they have learnt in the classroom in searching for solutions of the problems posed by lecturers. Then later lecturers illuminate the complexity or give comments on the solutions presented by students. The case study approach works well in cooperative learning or role playing environments to stimulate critical thinking and awareness of multiple perspectives.

McIntosh (1996) reveals that in the participatory teaching strategy, lecturer or instructor creates environments that allow students to talk, listen and reflect what is learnt. Teaching is made active by integrating technology into a lecture that enhance and extend the learning experience of students. In this case, computers, VCDs, audios and printings (maps, charts) are the main tools used. Furthermore, the strategy includes discussion that stimulates and refreshes students' memories about the assigned readings. The lecturer facilitates the discussion to remain focused to the planned goals.

Eggen, and Kauchak (2001) posited that discussion as a teaching strategy can take any style depending on the teaching objectives. For instance, the lecturer may pose issues to the class and request students in their groups to brainstorm. Then students in their groups discuss, and report their work to the class. After that, lecturer and students respond to the presentations. Authors insist that, this is an excellent way to generate various ideas about the discussed topic and encourage creative thinking as well as building self-confidence among students. Another type of discussion is debating. In this strategy, the lecturer forwards a motion that is controversial. Students are grouped into two groups, those who accept the motion one side and those who oppose another side. The role of the lecturer is to ensure that the discussion remains objective and that each side is given equal time.

McKeachie et al (1994) revealed that the participatory teaching strategy may employ cooperative learning. In this mode, students are encouraged to work together in their small groups for the achievement of common goals. Lecturers use small groups frequently to generate ideas for classroom discussion. In this strategy, students are in an established and sustained learning groups or teams. The strategy fosters individual accountability in a context of group interdependence in which students discover information and teach that material to their group and, perhaps, to the class as a whole. The researcher however notes that cooperative learning should be structured and focused so that learning is taking place. Further, the lecturer must observe the groups to reflect a diversity of viewpoints, abilities, gender, race, and other characteristics.

McIntosh (1996) denoted that participatory teaching strategy could take a pyramid system whereby the student works alone, then in pairs, and later in larger groups. He argued that this strategy, encourages interaction among students especially students who are reluctant to speak out in class, because they feel that, others in class have the same thoughts, although they may have reached the solution in different ways. This strategy increase students' ability

to manage difficult learning tasks. Heward (2003) advocated that role-play learning used in the participatory teaching strategy helps students to gain greater insight into a person or situation. The researcher urged lecturers to make sure that the "players" take their roles seriously and have defined the characteristics of their roles. The lecturer guides the whole exercise of role-playing while the rest of the class observe and comments upon the action.

Wankat (2002) in his book "The effective, efficient professor: teaching scholarship and service" denoted that think-pair-share participatory teaching strategy that enables students to think individually and then share ideas with each another in their pairs. This strategy enables students to learn from their classmates. Students may use think - pair - share to reach solutions on various issues. In addition to that, the findings of McIntosh (1996) indicate that the lecturer may apply the "think- pair- share structure and think- pair – square" teaching strategy. Students are assigned pair task after they complete it then; they join with another pair to compare their conclusions. The lecturer asks the new formed "squares"(think in a group of two students, then later sprinted into a group of four students) to explain their conclusions to the other pair who has joined them.

Additionally, the style enables students to develop their interpersonal skills as they are exposed to the viewpoints of other group members and it offers to students an opportunity of gaining experiences required for the "real world". Explicitly, this type of learning style is a dynamic communication process whereby the instructional behavior is constantly communicated in a dichotomous ways.

The second type of teaching strategy is the non-participatory teaching strategy. This strategy is also known as the one-way communication whereby process the lecturer disseminates and communicates the instructional content in a talk method while students listen and take notes. McKeachie, et.al (1994) noted that the lecturing system is the oldest teaching method around the globe. This traditional teaching strategy remains an important way to communicate information. The major strength of this strategy is that it provides a way to communicate a large amount of information to many listeners, maximizes instructor control and it saves time in relation to content covered.

Heward (2003); Martin (1996); McIntosh (1996) and Norris (1994) stated that political, economic, social and technological pressures has critically influenced the institutions of higher learning to be more responsive to students' needs and more concerned about how well students are prepared to assume future societal roles. Thus, lecturers are urged to lecture less, to make learning environments more interactive, to integrate technology into teaching activities, and to use collaborative teaching strategies when appropriate. In addition to that, Martin (1996) McIntosh (1996) recommended that lecture-teaching strategy could be more effective if lecturers fit the lectures to the audience, focus on the main points of the topics and organize the points for clarity. Also, lecturers should select appropriate examples or illustrations, present more than one side of an issue and be sensitive to other perspectives, repeat points when necessary, be aware of the audience by noticing their feedback and be enthusiastic.

Heward (2003); Martin (1996) admitted the fact that the lecture teaching strategy is the most widely used teaching strategy in the institutions of higher learning due to its efficiency in terms of time consumed and materials covered. The lecturer illustrates and demonstrates

while students are responsible for listening, noting main points and remembering. Additionally, the lecture-teaching strategy has extra advantages such as enabling lecturers or instructors to explain difficult concepts within the content. The lecture strategy allows lecturers or instructors in accommodating large or small groups of students for any study area. Similarly the strategy is flexible to the extent that the lecturer or instructor can probe students' understanding and, if warranted, make on-the-spot adjustments during the lecture.

On the other hand, Norris (1994) uncovered the disadvantages of lecture-teaching strategy. The researcher argued that, the strategy could cause students to miss the important points of the content as he/she might consider that everything he/she said is important. It may happen sometimes lecturers to get off-track from their primary objectives for the class session. In addition, lecture-teaching strategy may lead to passive learning since students have no chance to give their contributions

Furthermore, Heward (2003); Martin (1996); McIntosh (1996) and Norris (1994) lamented that, this strategy is unhelpful for students who are poor in note-taking skills and disadvantaged students (handicapped students). It is a mistake to assume all college students are competent note-takers. The listening and language skills deficits of some students who are non-native speakers of the language used in lectures fail to grasp some points from the lectures.

Reporting the findings of the Manchester consortium case study on Development of postgraduate and language assistants in language teaching (DOPLA) Adam (2000) posited that lack of language command among postgraduate students causes poor academic performance and losing learning interests. Insisting on the significance of language mastery at the higher learning levels Woodson (2003) denoted that language proficiencies play a key role to students' understanding the lectures. In his findings at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei, he discovered that students could not understand him properly because he was using English language to students who are non-native English speakers. It can be concluded here that, it does not matter how good the lecture is; rather it is how far students master the medium of instruction used in the particular learning situation.

Tomlinson (2000) showed skepticism on the usefulness of the lecturing teaching strategy today, whereby information fluctuation happens rapidly. The researcher agrees that lecturing minimizes feedback from students, assumes an unrealistic level of students' understanding and comprehension, and often disengages students from the learning process. Consequently, causing information learnt to be quickly forgotten.

Woodson (2003) proposed Guided Notes as an appropriate measure that can boost lecture-teaching strategy. This meant that, lecturer or instructor prepare beforehand guide notes, to be distributed to students soon after the lecture.

Heward (2003) argued that the lecture teaching strategy can be improved and become the most appropriate teaching strategy by using the Guided Notes. This is an instructor-prepared handout that provides background information and standard cues with specific spaces where students can write key facts, concepts, and/or relationships during the lecture. The findings indicated that lectures paired with guide notes are a powerful teaching strategy and it

accommodates all students within their diversities. He insisted that guide notes guides both lecturer and students in prioritizing and focusing to the key points within the lecture and in increasing students' curiosity and learning engagement within the lecture.

Cashin (1990) recommends that lectures should be presented in way that fits its audience, focusing on the topic, pinpoints the specific areas of concentration and precisely organization with clear examples. The researcher adds that sensitive issues, stressing on the key points and getting feedback from the audiences are of overriding importance for effective and efficient teaching through the lecture strategy.

Methodology

Population

In order to obtain the data for this study the CENTED office was approached to obtain the name list of the postgraduate students. The list consists of 219 MEd and PhD students. The list includes students' specializations and all the study programmes offered at CENTED. Table 3.1 summarizes the enrolment of CENTED postgraduate students in relation to their specializations.

Table 3.1:

The Cented Postgraduate Students Across Their Programmes

Preogramme	CI	EDA	TANAS	EP	IT	GC	TT	SFE	IE	Total
PhD	64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	64
Med	15	35	25	21	34	40	2	5	12	155
General	79	35	25	21	34	40	2	5	12	219
Total										

Source: CENTED office (7th Feb 2005)

Key: CI Curriculum and Instruction, EDA Educational Administration, TANAS Teaching Arabic for Non-Arabic speakers, EP Educational Psychology, IT Instructional Technology, GC Guidance and Counseling, TT The teaching of Thinking, SFE Social Foundation of Education, IE Islamic Education

Sample of the study

From the above population, 58 respondents (n = 58) from both MEd and PhD students were drawn up as a sample of the current study. The sample includes 48 from six M.Ed programmes and 10 from the PhD programmes. However, the PhD respondents are not representing any specialization since it is a non-specialized programme. In addition to that, stratified sampling technique was employed in determining the nature of the sample for this study where the previous university of the respondents was also acquired. Table 3.2 delineates sample distributions in their respective study programmes.

Table 3.2:

The Distribution of Respondents Per Study Programme

Specializations	Previous university		Study level		Total
	IIUM	Non-IIUM	Med	PhD	
1 CI	-	5	5	-	5
2 EP	2	3	5	-	5
3 EDA	7	3	10	-	10
4 TANA S	7	3	10	-	10
5 I T	5	5	10	-	10
6 GC	2	6	8	-	8
7 PhD non-specialized	4	6	-	10	10
General Total	27	31	48	10	58

Yy

Instrumentation

A self-constructed questionnaire reflecting the teaching dimensions as mentioned by (Eggen & Kauchak 2001, and Silver, 1996) was used to capture the perceptions of respondents. Indeed, this provided freedom to the participants in responding to the items using the likert scale indicators for each item. This also enabled efficiency in analyzing the data. The instrument contains 30 items categorized into seven groups, with each item indicator ranging from one to five levels which are Never (N = 1), Seldom (S= 2), Sometimes (ST=3), Frequent (F= 4), Always (A= 5). The items were designed and constructed to suit the dimensions of teaching strategies.

Data Analysis

In this study, the data was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS, 12.0). The frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of students' perceptions of teaching strategies were obtained. In addition, to obtain the presence of discernible relationships, visual comparisons of the means and percentages obtained were made, all findings were compiled, analyzed and interpreted in a broad spectrum to come up with appropriate conclusions and inferences. Suggestions and the researcher's recommendations were based on the findings.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 4.1:

Teaching Strategy Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Frequency of use
Non-lecture method	3.1655	.63923	Sometimes
Lecture method	3.7543	.56096	Frequently
Teaching goal	4.0517	.51247	Frequently
Teaching aids	3.1681	.73953	Sometimes
Assessment technique	3.6586	.64455	Frequently
Language proficiency	3.2112	.65360	Sometimes
Students' background	3.2284	.66439	Sometimes
learning style			

The analysis of data obtained in Table 4.1 above demonstrates that postgraduate students perceive their lecturers to follow teaching goals of the courses they teach frequently. The data also indicate that the CENTED lecturers frequently employ the lecture method and assign their students with challenging tasks which is indicated under the assessment technique dimension. Table 4.1 articulates the postgraduate students' perceptions for the frequency of the application of teaching strategy dimensions. This part answers research question one which investigated postgraduate students' perceptions of the teaching strategies employed by CENTED lecturers and instructors.

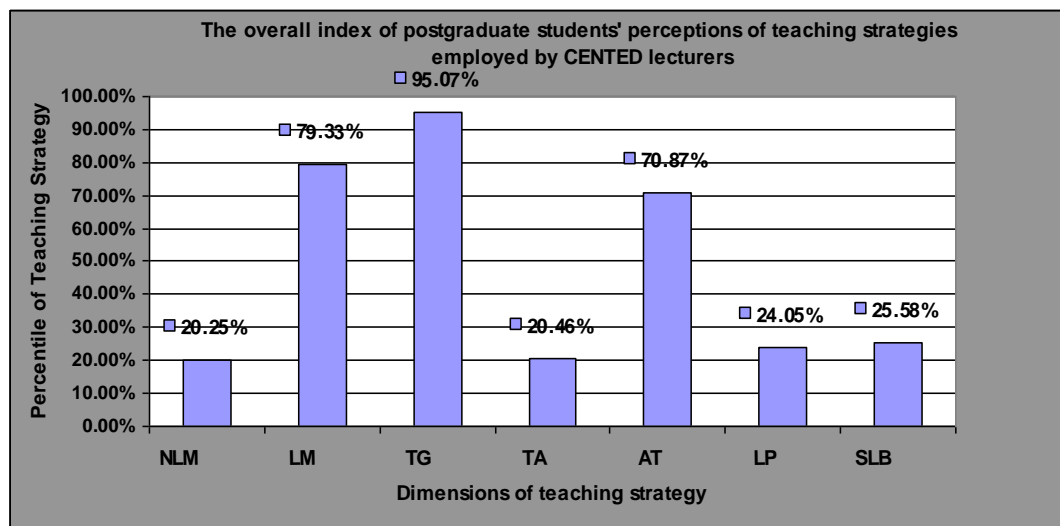


Figure 4.1: The overall index

Key: NLM = Non-lecture method, LM = Lecture method, TG= Teaching goals, TA = Teaching Aids

AT= Assessment technique,

LP= language proficiency, SLB = Students' learning background

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents perceive CENTED lecturers rarely use the non-lecture teaching method in their teaching routines. The outcomes also suggest that the use of teaching aids among CENTED lecturers and instructors is very limited. It appears that, lecturers and instructors at CENTED minimally use and integrate modern teaching aids in their teaching activities. Similarly the data analysis reveals that postgraduate students perceive that giving consideration for students' English language problems and their background learning styles among CENTED lecturers are relatively limited or seldom done.

Interestingly, the data analysis indicates respondents perceive CENTED lecturers to state teaching goals of their course/study programmes. It also denotes that lecturers are applying different varieties of assessment techniques in determining the academic progress of their students. Additionally, results shows that the lecture method teaching strategy is most commonly used in teaching at CENTED.

Comparison Between Programmes And Teaching Strategy Dimensions

Key: CI = Curriculum and Instruction, EP= Educational Psychology, EDA = Educational Administration, TANAS = Teaching Arabic for Non-Arabic Speaker

The second research question of this study proposed to find out whether programme differences affect students' perceptions on the dimensions of the teaching strategy. To answer this question, Table 4.2 depicts comparisons of means and standard deviations for each dimension in relation to the selected seven programmes offered by CENED.

The result for this question is delineated in Figures 4.2 to 4.8. The analysis summarizes the comparison between teaching strategy dimensions and seven study programmes. The data indicate means for each study programme in relation to each dimension.

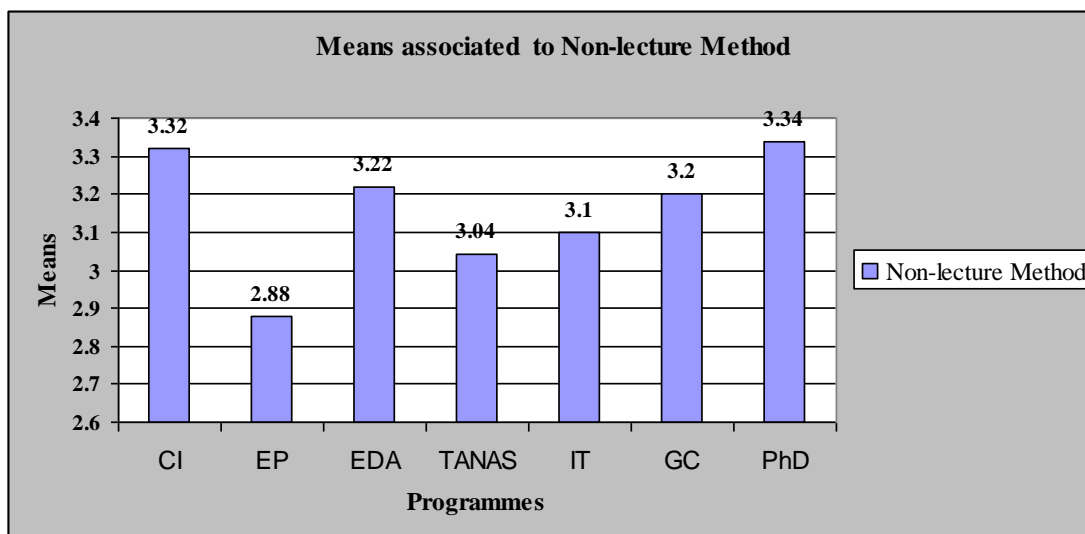


Figure 4.2: Non-Lecture Method

The data analysis indicates that CENTED lecturers of EP (Educational Psychology) specialization employ the non-lecture method least compared to lecturers of other specializations. Very noticeably is that the lecturers at the PhD level mostly employ non-lecture method in the teaching. This is an impressive act and very desirable since this level strives to prepare outstanding scholars soon who shall work independently.

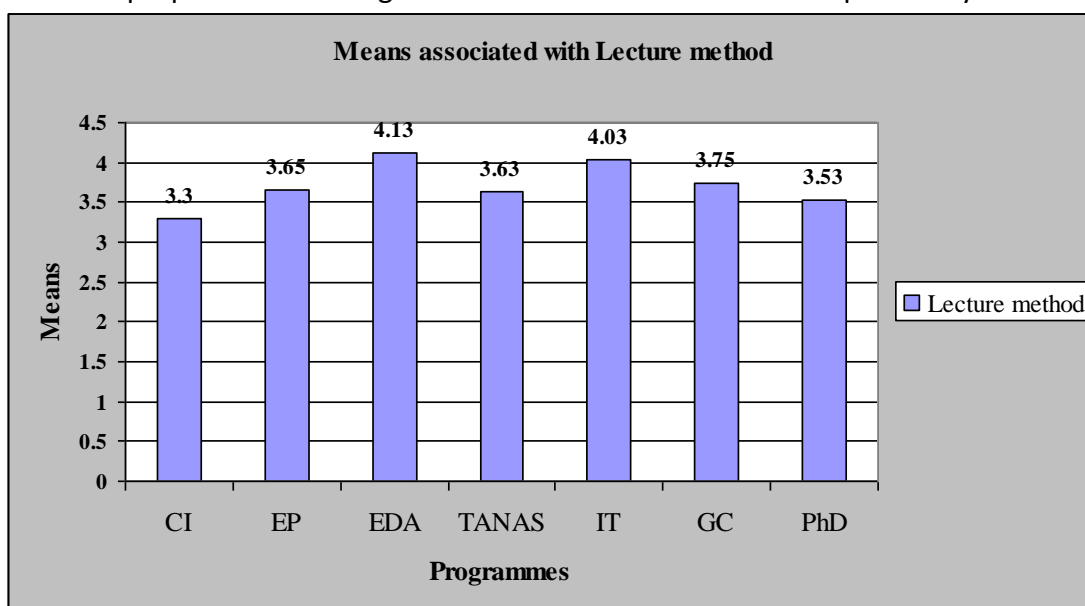


Figure 4.3:

Lecture Teaching Method

The data analysis in Figure 4.3 indicates that all lecturers regardless of programme specializations use the Lecture Method frequently.

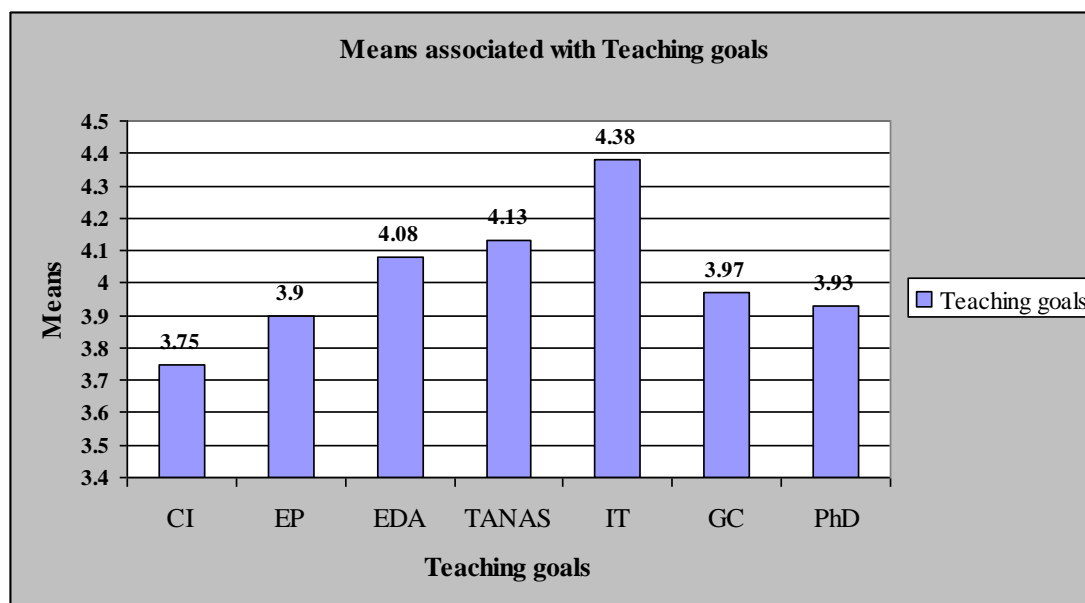


Figure 4.4: Teaching goals

Figure 4.4 indicates the means by which lecturers state the teaching goals across postgraduate specializations. The results indicate that students' perceptions are discernibly different according to their respective programmes. For example the respondents of the CI programme indicate that very seldom lecturers spell out teaching goals to students, while students of other programmes indicate differently.

Discussion

Non-Lecture Method

The results show that postgraduate students perceive their lecturers very seldom use the non-lecture method in their teaching activities. The bodies of research suggest the worth of the non-lecture method teaching strategy particularly at the higher educational level (Sliver, 1996; Walker, 1996; Martine, 1996; Honan & Sternman, 2003; McKeachie, et.al., 1994 and Wankat, 2002). The non-lecture method creates active learning where students, to the fullest, are participating in the teaching and learning progress. The primary consideration in the non- lecture method, as in all other teaching strategies, is the achievement of desired learning outcomes. Learning is best achieved if students participate actively in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere.

The findings indicate that very rarely lecturers apply the question and answers technique or include discussion in their teaching. It must be realized that a non-lecture teaching strategy is a powerful way that can help to create confidence among students. This dimension encourages students to make contributions such as giving opinions and ideas, while improving their public speaking skills. Further, it enables lecturers to respond to the experiences and prior knowledge of their students. Such exercise offers an opportunity to the lecturers to tailor the lectures to students' needs. It also enables the lecturer to add variety of teaching techniques that stimulate the interest of students at the same time the students' understanding being assessed.

Principally, learning is an active process thus the non-lecture method tends to foster student-independence in the learning progress. It brings about maximum attainment of certain types of learning outcomes. Motor skills, for example, can seldom be learned by listening to a lecture. The only effective way students can perfect such skills is through hands-on practice (Panitz, 1999). The ultimate goal of higher education is to prepare professionals of a higher caliber who can positively contribute to their societal development. Learning through collaborative techniques not only helps to create sociable persons but also provides social and communication skills demanded society. Our current globalize world is increasingly dependent on the knowledge and skills which the bearer have attained from the university. The information age we are living in have experienced severe and tough competition to the extent everything now is valued in terms of its quality and viability.

The review of literature indicates the non-lecture method is useful in achieving desired learning outcomes through improving of self-expressive skills and retention rate of the materials learned. The non-lecture teaching method plays a pivotal role in creating social interaction between students to students and lecturers to students either through formal or informal ways. For instance students presenting their work to other students help to develop a deeper understanding of materials and actively engage them in their learning. Role-playing allows students to apply and test knowledge in a simulated environment. Students take on roles to solve tasks, contribute during discussion. Debating allows students to have the opportunity to generate ideas, defend their positions and critique countering positions. The use of guest speaker gives students access to resources which otherwise may be unobtainable.

Lecture Method

The lectures are useful for introducing new subjects, summarizing ideas, showing relationships between theory and practice, and reemphasizing main points. In addition, the lecture teaching method is adaptable to many different settings, including either small or large groups. Virtually, the motive behind lecture method preferences is to cover large amount of the instructional contents in a short study time. Such time pressure can only be met through lecture strategy.

Despite the mentioned advantages the lecture teaching strategy has several shortcomings. The lecture teaching strategy limits students' participation in the learning progress, (Heward, 2003; Martin, 1996; McIntosh, 1996 and Norris, 1994). It assumes students as passive partners of the teaching and learning process whose role is to sit and listen or watch the presentation from the lecturers. Interestingly, the results of the findings indicate that the lecture teaching method is frequently used by CENTED lecturers in their teaching. The literature provides a body of knowledge that demonstrates the weaknesses of the lecturing teaching method. (Dynamic Flight, 2003; and Heward, 2003) show their skepticism of the lecturing method as it encourages students to be passive learners who neither contribute to the class through discussion nor engage in critical thinking or problem solving. Although some scholars would disagree with that criticism of the lecture by arguing that if it is used when it is appropriate, the lecture is a very effective technique. The lecture does not easily allow the lecturers to estimate the students' understanding as the material is covered. Within a single period, the lecturers may unwittingly present more information than students can absorb, and the lecture method provides no accurate means of checking

students' progress. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that lecturers prefer students to listen or observe the demonstrations. The result discloses that the lecture talk method dominates teaching. Consequently, lecturers exclude discussion sessions in their teaching tasks.

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