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Differences in Perception of Teaching Leadership between Teachers and Students

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Abstract

Objective: This paper aims to reveal differences in students' and teachers' perception of the latter's teaching leadership and discusses the characteristics of effective teaching leadership. **Method**: The current study investigates students' and teachers' perceptions of teaching leadership through questionnaires, divides their perceptive differences into three categories, and compiles interview outlines based on Baker's Path-Goal theory. These three categories of teachers were selected, resulting in a sample of twenty-five college teachers from China's coastal area, who were then interviewed in depth. **Results**: College teachers and students had different perceptions of teaching leaderships, with the most common being students having low evaluations and teachers having high self-evaluations. Six main characteristics of effective teaching leadership of university teachers are summarized from the coding analysis of interview results.

Keywords

College Teachers, Teaching Leadership, Differences in Perception between Teachers and Student, In-Depth Interviews

1. Introduction

As China's economy develops continuously and its economic structure advances, all sectors of society begin to form higher requirements and expectations for talents cultivated by higher education. Based on this situation, the improvement of the quality of higher education has become an emerging challenge. Teaching is the central task of the school and its quality depends on the effectiveness of classroom teaching. Teachers are an integral part of this process. During teaching and learning, not only do teachers explain the course content,

but also cooperate with students to explore knowledge. Throughout this process, teachers act as students' friend, model, and source of knowledge (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Therefore, teachers can be seen as leaders (Perle, 2016). They guide their classes by implementing the various teaching plans. Students are like group members, receiving the guidance of teachers and completing the important objectives of learning in the generated interactive relationship. Traditionally, teachers have absolute authority over students, controlling the teaching process and explaining knowledge according to the predetermined steps. All students need to do is to follow their respective teachers. Such kind of relationship between teachers and students is a unidirectional subordination (Fang, 2007) which obviously cannot meet the needs of students' development and higher education teaching reform. Teaching leadership originated in the 1970s, when western countries' "school effectiveness and improvement" campaign launched to form a new type of teaching management mode. This kind of management advocated the teachers to abandon the one-way "command-and-obey" relationship. Instead, teachers and students started cooperating and engaging in balanced dialogues.

The best-known research on teachers' teaching leadership is George A. Baker's Path-Goal theory, which is globally applied by scholars in recent years (Grow, 1991; Palmer, 2000; Chen, 2010). This theory emphasizes how teachers guide individuals or groups to set teaching goals and achieve it by integrating students, teachers, context etc. (Baker, Roueche, & Gillett-Karam, 1990). The research on teaching leadership can provide teachers with an opportunity to understand their own teaching styles as well as the needs of students, which is conducive to the improvement of teaching quality. However, the research on teaching leadership in China started relatively late, and relatively few studies on the teaching leadership models have been made over this topic (Gao, 2013). Moreover, the research objects mainly focused on primary and secondary school teachers (Chen & Long, 2009), with little emphasis on the teaching leadership of university teachers. In addition, previous studies have paid attention to teachers' own teaching leadership and ignored students' expectations and needs. This situation led to teachers' confidence that their teaching activities can be helpful for students, which may not be true. Teaching leadership advocates for the teacher-student relationship of "interaction, cooperation, and balanced dialogue". Teachers and students should know each other: teachers, as "leaders", need to understand their own teaching leadership skill and, more importantly, students' true feelings towards their leaderships; students, as "followers", must have a clear recognition of self-learning and teachers' leadership. When both sides have the congruent perception and choose the way of "peer exploration" (Fan, 2003), these teaching objectives can be achieved and teaching quality can be improved. Otherwise, if the perception between teachers and students is not enough, or even has deviation, it will have a bad effect on teaching (Fu, 2013).

This study aims to revise Baker's perceptive scale of teaching leadership from

observed perceptive differences, by carrying out a survey-based study on the perceptive differences between college teachers and students on teaching leadership. Further, a cluster analysis was performed according to the matched scores of the perceptive questionnaire of teaching leadership between college teachers and students. We then summarized different types of perceptive differences between them. After that, several college teachers were selected for interview using outlines based on Baker's Teaching Leadership theory. By comparing the differences and characteristics of different types of teacher teaching leadership, and the key characteristics of effective teaching leadership of university teachers are also focused in the current study. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to help university teachers improve teaching quality by treating the perception between teachers and students objectively, clarifying perceptions of their own teaching leaderships and understanding underlying factors to a successful leadership style.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

500 teachers have been selected from 10 colleges, from the Chinese coastal area, through group and stratified sampling. Each teacher was paired with 30 students (a total of 15,000 students) to conduct a survey on the *perceptive scale of teaching leadership.* The recovery rate of teachers' questionnaires is 90.4% (N = 452); the final effective recovery rate of teachers is 86.2% (N = 431) after excluding teachers' own invalid questionnaires and teachers whose students produced excessive invalid questionnaires that led to a recovery rate of less than 80%. The recovery rate of students is 84.0% (N = 12,600); the final effective recovery rate is 80.5% (N = 12,068) after excluding students' own and any students whose teachers submitted invalid questionnaires. Teachers' basic information is shown in Table 1.

The questionnaire data were analyzed through deducting the standard mean score of students from that of their teachers. This resulted in 431 total data entries of teachers and their respective students, which underwent cluster analysis for classification. The results from cluster analysis classified perception differences between teachers and students into 3 types: type I, where teachers had higher self-evaluations of their teaching leadership than students' evaluation; type II, where teachers' and students' evaluations were equal or similar; and type III, where teachers had lower evaluations than that of students. Afterwards, 5% of each type was selected for in-depth teaching leadership interviews, amounting to 25 teachers altogether. This selected group contained 13 female and 12 male teachers; 6 had master degrees while 19 had PhDs as their highest level of education.

2.2. Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study are a questionnaire and an interview outline. The perceptive scale of teaching leadership was revised based on the Baker

Table 1. Teachers' basic information (N = 431).

		Population	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	217	50.3
	Female	214	49.7
Age	Under 29 years	0	0
	30 - 35 years	126	29.2
	36 - 40 years	167	38.7
	41 - 45 years	73	16.9
	More than 46 years	65	15.1
Teaching Experience	1 - 5 years	158	36.7
	6 - 10 years	37.1	37.1
	More than 11 years	26.2	26.2
Discipline Background	Business and management	60	13.9
	Science and engineering	153	35.5
	Humanities and Social Sciences	103	23.9
	Medicine	115	26.7
Education Experience	Domestic master	12	2.8
	Overseas master	78	18.1
	Domestic doctor	203	47.1
	Overseas doctor	138	32.0

et al. (1990) scale. The scale has teacher and student editions, both consisting of 33 items and is divided into five dimensions: dimension 1, arousing interest in learning; dimension 2, practicing valuable teaching behaviors; dimension 3, providing positive guidance and correcting learning directions; dimension 4, removing educational barriers; and dimension 5, increasing student satisfaction and motivation. In the confirmatory factor analysis, the indices of fit of the scale are as follows: χ^2/df = 1.808, CFI = 0.948, GFI = 0.894, NFI = 0.892, AGFI = 0.870, RMSEA = 0.004. All fitting indices meet the requirements. Analysis indicates the five dimensions' model of the perceptive scale of teaching leadership is acceptable. The Cronbach's coefficients of each dimension of the scale are between 0.765 and 0.894 and the total scale reliability is 0.924. Both of these values exceed 0.7, indicating that each dimension of the scale is reliable.

In addition, the interview outline was structured based on Path-Goal Theory (Baker et al., 1990). The main contents of which include the following six aspects:

1) Attention to learning interests: How are teachers paying attention to each student's learning interest to motivate them?

2) Guide students to learn independently: What role do teachers play in guiding students to learn independently outside the classroom?

3) Help students overcome obstacles: How are teachers assisting students to overcome obstacles in their learning?

4) Develop learning skills: What methods have teachers used to develop stu-

dents' learning skills?

5) Improve the quality and efficiency of teaching: How should teachers improve the quality and efficiency of learning effectively?

6) Complete teaching tasks and care about students: How are teachers completing their teaching? How are teachers caring about students? How can teachers balance the role of these two responsibilities throughout the teaching process (if required)?

2.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 19.0 statistical software was used to analyze the data. This included descriptive statistics, Paired sample T test, cluster analysis, discriminate analysis. Furthermore, the interview recording was converted into text and the content was coded at three levels by using Nvivo 8 to summarize the six characteristics of effective teacher teaching leadership.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Results

The data of 431 teachers and their matching students were tested using paired sample T test. Results indicated that there are significant differences in the perception of teaching leadership, as reflected in the total scores and scores in each dimension (see Table 2). Both teachers and students got the lowest scores in dimension 1 (arousing interest in learning) and the highest scores in dimension 2 (practicing valuable teaching behaviors). As shown in Table 3, clustering analysis separated the data into 3 types of perception differences: type I teachers (higher perceptions than students') had a perceptive difference between 0.25 - 3.06; type II teachers (consistent perceptions) had a perceptive difference between −1.85 - 0.24; and type III teachers (lower perceptions than students') had a perceptive difference between −5.70 - −1.90. Type I teachers are the most common, followed by type II and type III teachers. This shows that significant differences exist between university teachers' own perception and that of students regarding teaching leadership.

Table 2. Paired sample T test of teachers and students in each dimension and total score.

Dimension	Teacher (n = 431)		Student (n = 12068)		t value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Arousing interest in learning	15.63	2.75	13.04	0.79	18.70***
Practicing valuable teaching behaviors	36.92	5.37	32.21	1.69	18.29***
Providing positive guidance and correcting learning directions	24.34	3.94	21.16	0.94	16.64***
Removing educational barriers	32.48	4.71	28.15	1.43	19.01***
Increasing student satisfaction and motivation	24.87	3.76	22.26	1.30	14.43***
Total scores	134.24	18.26	116.83	5.47	19.89***

Mark: *** p < 0.001.

Table 3. The perception's differences of teaching leadership between teachers and students.

Types	Classification standard	Frequency of teachers receiving questionnaires	Percentage (%)	Frequency of interviewed teachers
Type I Teachers (higher perceptions than students')	0.25 - 3.06	201	46.64%	10
Type II Teachers (higher perceptions than students')	−1.85 - 0.24	198	45.94%	10
Type III Teachers (lower perceptions than students')	−5.70 - −1.90	32	7.42%	5

3.2. Qualitative Results

In-depth interviews were conducted with all three types of teachers' teaching leadership. Six characteristics of effective teaching leadership can be summarized from the results.

With regards to attention to students' learning interests, teachers of different types strike different degrees of balance between interests, school regulations, and collective goals. Type II teachers (consistent perceptions) were able to simultaneously develop students' interests, cultivating a sense of belonging to the school system, and achieve goals as a group. For example, one teacher remarked, "Interest is the best teacher. First, we need to pay attention to students' interests so as to arouse their enthusiasm for learning. We should also pay attention to the requirements of the school system" (T13). Type I teachers (higher perceptions than students') emphasize group standards and attach importance to school rules and regulations, ignoring students' interest in learning. In their opinions, "classroom order must be observed and students' attendance should have quantitative standards" (T5), "students should adapt to the norms in school, which should be formulated after communicating with students prior to class" (T3). Type III teachers (lower perceptions than students') tend to adopt democratic teaching methods and pay attention to students' needs and interests. For example, they "introduce part of information before lectures to arouse students' interest, stimulate students' curiosity and arouse their enthusiasm for learning" (T21).

With regards to guiding students to learning independently, different teachers give different considerations to inspiration and guidance in thinking and behavior. Type II teachers (consistent perceptions) are good at inspiring students, believing that "only by giving consideration to both thought and behavior can we effectively cultivate students' learning ability" (T11) and "to fundamentally stimulate students' autonomy, teachers should adopt heuristic teaching, so that students can discover and create knowledge actively" (T17). However, type I teachers think that some compulsory measures should be taken to guide stu-

dents to study independently. For example, "some people may have no initiative, they may need singling out to encourage speaking" (T8). Type III teachers mainly guide students to learn independently based on their interests. This type of teacher will arrange some interesting extracurricular activities according to the course content, such as "encouraging them to learn autonomously, providing them with extracurricular and practical opportunities that allow for self-learning, in turn transforming their knowledge to practical skills" (T25).

With regards to helping students overcome obstacles, all three types of teachers focus on listening and supportive communication. They listen to students' problems with an open and receptive attitude, maintain supportive communication, discover the root of the problem, and then help students solve it. Type II teachers (consistent perceptions) advocate for "individual, friendly communication to find causes of problems, such as attitude or ability issues." (T16). At the same time, type I teachers (higher perceptions than students') believe that "teachers should understand this situation, talk to students, find the crux of the problem, and encourage them to solve the obstacle actively. They could also let outstanding students to help them" (T8).

With regards to developing learning skills, each type of teacher encourages student to search for knowledge actively in different ways. Type II teachers (consistent perceptions) motivate students to actively explore and learn. For example, they "will give examples to motivate students to explore suitable learning methods voluntarily" (T18) and "generally focus on creating problems and scenarios that provide students with opportunities for active thinking, finding suitable learning skills in the process" (T16). Type I teachers (higher perceptions than students') tend to make special technical explanations and consciously provide methodological knowledge. Meanwhile, type III teachers (lower perceptions than students') cultivate students' learning skills through communication and sharing between teachers and students. They will share their own learning experience and learning skills with students, promoting the sharing of students' experience.

With regards to improving the quality and efficiency of teaching, different teachers focused on different aspects of teaching quality in the interviews. Type II teachers (consistent perceptions) emphasize and pay significant attention classroom communication and interaction. "During the class, I will share and discuss something with students and also encourage students to share with each other" (T19). "Students belong to a learning community, and their interaction is a crucial activity in the process of knowledge construction" (T13). Type I teachers (higher perceptions than students') generally believe that interesting teaching content is helpful to improve teaching quality. In their opinion, "the content of the lecture should be interesting and the presentation of the class should be full of passion and personality, so as to attract students' attention" (T8). Type III teachers (lower perceptions than students') improve the quality of teaching by providing students with practical opportunities to deepen their understanding of knowledge in practice. For example, "according to the particularity of the

course, I will provide students with practical opportunities to continuously develop their problem-solving abilities" (T21) and "Exert their subjective initiative and encourage them to present themselves" (T23).

With regards to the relationship between teaching tasks and care for students, they help differing beliefs as to which are more important. Type II teachers (consistent perceptions) agree that the fundamental task of teaching is to promote the physical and mental development of students. Caring for students is a natural part of the teaching task. A teacher pointed out that "teaching tasks and caring for students are the two legs of teaching activities" (T19). However, type I teachers (higher perceptions than students') believe that completing teaching tasks at hand is more important than caring for students. They think that "teaching is the most important thing, because the school assesses student performance, thus it is only natural to focus on teaching tasks" (T8). On the contrary, type III teachers (lower perceptions than students') advocate that caring for students is more important than teaching tasks. For example, "when I pay a lot of attention to students, they will communicate with me about life, so our relationship becomes more and more harmonious, in turn making the teaching activities become easier and more harmonious" (T23).

4. Discussion

This study found that the difference between teacher and student perceptions on teaching leadership ability is significant, with the majority of teachers belonging to type I (higher perceptions than students'). This may be due to the lack of communication between teachers and students regarding teaching leadership. First of all, a good teacher will understand the needs of students and adjust the teaching content according to student abilities, so as to attract students' interest in various ways and handle the interaction between teachers and students carefully (Zheng, Jiang, Zhang, & Chen, 2009). With the expansion of colleges and universities nowadays, teachers' tasks are more and more onerous. They have no time to care about students' study or life. They also have less contact and communication with students. Teachers often leave immediately after class, unable to patiently listen to students' problems and troubles. Currently, colleges and universities attach more importance to scientific research than to teaching, so it is difficult for teachers to spare time to give guidance to students and help them overcome the difficulties. As teachers are often busy and unavailable to students, students naturally begin to seek help elsewhere. In the end, teachers and students gradually become alienated (Li, 2010; Guo, Xu, & Wang, 2009). Therefore, in the teaching process, teachers' intentions and students' opinions on teachers are not perceived by each other. Estranged teacher-student relationships and insufficient communication will inevitably lead to perceptive differences on teaching leadership in the teaching process.

Through in-depth interviews, this study further analyzes the characteristics of effective teachers' instructional leadership. First of all, the basis for effective teaching is to strike a balance between student interests and school regulations.

Every learner is a unique individual with their own interest, learning style and expression (Zhao & Zhang, 2002). This is even more pronounced in college students. If a teacher wants to get students to pay attention to the class content and improve their learning enthusiasm, they must be able to keep students interested in learning (Renzulli, 2014). At the same time, teachers should also guide students to follow the teaching system, promoting a sense of belonging to the system and achieving collective goals. Secondly, the characteristics of effective teachers' instructional leadership are to give consideration to students' thinking and behavior, and to guide students to study independently. Self-realization of the value of learning through students' own thoughts and behaviors is conducive to increasing learning motivation in students, in turn increase their learning ability. One of the keys to effective teaching in colleges and universities for teachers is to guide students to learn independently (Ail, Taib, Jaafar, Salleh, & Omar, 2015; Zhao & Zhang, 2002). Ideological guidance from teachers is also conducive to deepening students' understanding of learning, enabling students to understand the meaning and value of learning and promoting changes in learning attitudes. Teachers should also advocate independent learning through actions, such as setting an example for students, and encourage students to participate in learning activities with needs and desires (De Vries, Jansen, Helms-Lorenz, & Van de Grift, 2015). In addition, those teachers are good at helping students solve problems is another characteristics. Teachers help students solve problems by listening and supportive communication, which helps to enhance the mutual understanding between teachers and students. Teachers' and students' interactions can convey their perceptions, emotions, attitudes and values. These interactions can also develop more individualized students. The constant interactions create a democratic educational interaction, possessing individuality, commonness, harmony, sharing, and dialogue. Thus, this forms a type of ideal, kind, and symbiotic relationship between teachers and students (Yin & Qiu, 2010). In addition, those teachers who have such characteristics pay attention to the training of students' learning skills, and encourage active exploration learning. As independent individuals, college students have their learning particularity which determines their own optimal learning strategies (Lin, 2009). It is unrealistic for everyone to form their own learning strategies through "teaching". The most meaningful method is to guide them to explore their own learning actively and communicate with their classmates. Only when learners know how to learn and master learning strategies, can they adopt correct methods and attitudes to comprehend the content confidently, correctly, flexibly, and independently (Jourdan, Bagwell, & Grawford, 2004; Ren & Sang, 2006). Throughout this process, teachers are special and crucial members of the learning community who play the role of organizer and facilitator (Stein et al., 1994). Therefore, the enhancement of students' self-learning efficacy will also improve their perception of teachers' teaching leadership. Finally, effective teaching leadership requires teachers to pay attention to both teaching tasks and students. In a caring teacher-student relationship, the attention and love that students receive

from teachers will enhance their recognition and affirmation of their self-existence value, and the understanding and love that teachers receive from students will also further enhance teachers' sense of responsibility for education and enthusiasm for education (Bieg, Rickelman, Jones, & Mittag, 2013).

5. Suggestions

5.1. Teachers Should Learn the Characteristics of Effective Teaching Leadership and Improve Their Own Teaching Leadership

This study found that balancing school regulations and students' interests, paying attention to students' development of conscious self-learning, and emphasizing the importance of cooperation between peers are important characteristics of effective teacher teaching leadership. Knowing the characteristics of effective teaching leadership is the main way to improve teaching leadership and quality. Students' interests and needs should be taken into account in designing teaching objectives. At the beginning of the course, teachers can use direct communication, quizzes or questionnaires to understand students' interests. They can also add a column of students' learning needs in the course selection system to understand students' needs and make plan of course content. During the completion of teaching tasks, students' independent, cooperative, and research-based learning methods should be advocated to encourage initiative taking in exploratory learning (Ma, 2012). When dealing with students' daily problems, teachers should facilitate the healthy channeling and expression of students' emotions. This could be achieved through encouraging the outwards expression of students' thoughts and providing appropriate advice and assistance. In terms of learning problems, teachers should be improve their understanding of students' learning and growth, realizing the crux of students' problems, and encouraging them to explore their own ways to solve the problem. Some studies have shown that teachers' non-technical qualities, such as personality, ways and attitudes of dealing with people and things, and the forms of interaction with students, all are important characteristics of leading students to achieve learning goals through teaching leadership. Therefore, in the construction of teacher-student relationships, teachers should pay attention to the expression of their personalities and set examples for students. This can in turn enhance their influence on students, improving the quality of teacher-student relationships.

5.2. Schools Should Provide Opportunities to Promote Teachers' Teaching Leadership

Teaching leadership is an open system and an interactive process between teachers, students, and learning environment. The promotion of teachers' teaching leadership should not rely solely on teachers' own efforts. School atmosphere plays a key role in students' achievements and the cooperation among teachers (Zhao, 2011; Jones & Shindler, 2016). Therefore, schools should provide teachers with opportunities and environments which are conducive to the im-

provement of teaching leadership. Schools should attach importance to the development of teaching leadership. They should organize teachers' on-the-job training of teaching leadership and actively establish a learning community for teachers both inside and outside the school. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to communicate with each other, so as to promote the exchange and inheritance of teaching knowledge, skills, and experience. This could be achieved through holding a conference related to teaching leadership positively, establishing information exchange platform between teachers about teaching leadership, conducting creative teaching activities, etc.. This may allow teachers to observe and learn from each other, enhancing teaching skills that can guide students to think and innovate, promoting teaching leadership, and improving teaching quality.

6. Limitations

Due to the limitation of time and manpower, the research object of this study is teachers in universities in coastal areas, so the corollary of the research results is limited. Therefore, it is suggested to expand the population of the subjects in the follow-up study to improve the practical significance of the research results. In addition, in the early stage of this study, teachers and students with different cognitive types of teaching leadership were screened out through quantitative research. Then characteristics of effective teaching leadership were explored and summarized through in-depth interviews. The results have certain subjectivity because of the nature of interviews; thus, it is recommended that future research can add classroom observations to the research methodology. Through observation, teachers' leadership behavior and students' learning situation can be seen. Alternatively, an experimental method can be adopted to clarify and understand effective teaching modes, providing more scientific suggestions for improving the quality of university teaching.

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Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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