

A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' APPROACHES TO LEARNING AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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The main purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between the undergraduate students' approaches to learning and their perceptions of the important aspects of the learning environment of selected courses in the course unit system implemented in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Peradeniya.

Nine different courses were included in the study. The cluster random sample (n=178) used in the study comprised second year Sinhala medium undergraduates. Data was collected through a questionnaire. The data was analyzed using appropriate statistical methods and qualitative methods.

The predominant approach to learning used by the students was the deep approach in all but two courses. Students with different approaches view the same courses differently. It was found that the deep approach to studying was positively correlated though in varying degrees in different courses with the perceptions of good teaching, clear goals, appropriate workload, appropriate assessment, and emphasis on independence. On the other hand, the surface approach to studying was negatively correlated with the same parameters. These findings are consistent with the findings of previous researchers.

Two main conclusions arrived at from this study are, (I) Students with different approaches to learning perceive the important aspects of the courses differently; therefore, student evaluations should be interpreted in relation to the approaches to studying that they use. (II) Improvements are necessary in all five aspects of the courses. It is recommended that to improve the courses further, (a) the lecturers need to acquire an appropriate theory of teaching that is student-centered and emphasize the fact that what matters most in learning is what students do. (b) Improve teaching and learning climate by avoiding practices that generate negative feelings, particularly anxiety and cynicism among students. A particular source of both anxiety and cynicism is time stress brought about by excessive emphasis on completion of syllabi. (c) Improve teaching and assessment processes, especially by making the subject interesting so that the students find pleasure in learning and by using a variety of assessment tasks that demand evidence of understanding of the subject matter rather than the reproduction of detail. Students value effective feedback and therefore it is recommended to provide students with opportunities to discuss their assignments and examination answers with the lecturers. (d) Conduct studies on student aspirations and relevance of the curricula and take necessary actions. (e) Introduce and implement an appropriate course evaluation system to help teachers to receive feedback from students as well as their peers.