

Assessing the Effectiveness of Graduate School Instruction in a State University: Guide to Enhanced Andragogical Teaching

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ABSTRACT:

Quality instruction in graduate education is imperative for developing productive citizens capable of assuming community leadership roles. To ensure institutional delivery meets these expectations, this study evaluated instructional effectiveness through the lens of Malcolm Knowles' Andragogical (adult learning) theory, which emphasizes learner autonomy, experience, and relevance. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 11 Doctor of Education (EdD) students, representing a complete program census. Findings revealed that adult learners perceive instruction as highly effective when strategies are interactive, collaborative, and foster higher-order thinking, such as brainstorming and multidisciplinary approaches. Experiential methods, including case analysis, role-playing, and simulations, were deemed effective but require deliberate instructional scaffolding to maximize their potential. Furthermore, respondents emphasized a strong preference for practical, output-based applications and modality-appropriate instruction. Based on these findings, the study proposes a four-pillar "Guide for Enhanced Andragogical Teaching." This framework provides actionable guidelines to help higher education institutions transition from traditional, lecture-based pedagogy to adult-centered, collaborative learning environments, thereby optimizing instructional delivery for graduate students.

Keywords: Andragogy, Instructional Effectiveness, Graduate Education, Adult Learning, Collaborative Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Quality teaching in higher education matters for student learning outcomes. But fostering quality teaching needs higher education institutions to ensure that the education they offer

meets the expectations of students both today and in the future (Bueno, 2019). The benefits of graduate education extend beyond the economic realm; graduate education also plays a central role in producing an educated citizenry that can promote

and defend democratic ideals (Alismail & Mcguire, 2015; Ritchhart, 2007; Tomlinson, 2015).

Studies generally showing that the problems in education lie outside of the school might have neglected looking into the primary venue through which students learn, the classroom (Reddy, Xie, & Tang, 2016; Rivza, Bikse, & Brence, 2015), and according to Hattie (2003), the link between classroom practices and student academic performance suggested that teachers can contribute as much to student learning as the students themselves.

As found by Huet et al. (2011) and Silvia and Beatriz (2012), teacher's abilities to make efficient use of lesson time, to coordinate classroom resources and space, and to manage students' behavior, are all relevant to maximizing the learning that can take place. Moreover, a teacher as an expert should have a deep representation of teaching and learning as well as on the curriculum matters or knowledge about teaching strategies (Mohamed, 2016).

In andragogy, the students are viewed as more independent and capable of making decisions. It emphasizes that professors should start the learning process using the students' prior life experiences. For instance, selecting and applying approaches such as group discussion or problem-solving encourages the students to use their life experiences to solve problems (Goddu, 2012).

Adult learners tend to focus on institutional quality and make connections between the course content and aspects of their professional lives (Filipa, Goncalves, & Almeida, 2012; Knowles & Associates, 1984) which ideally is what graduate schools aims to enrich among its degree candidates through the instructional strategies that they employ.

Contemporary researches on adult learning mostly lean upon secondary and alternative learning beneficiaries in terms of study subjects. As to content, popularly attributed are investigations on learning style, role experience, self-concept, learning readiness, and learning needs. Few are notably accounting to adult learning in the sphere of higher education, particularly on identifying the types of

instructional approaches that professors use in the classroom that benefit the learning processes of adult learners (Bengo, 2020). Hence, this study, focused on assessing the effectiveness of instructions provided by the graduate school to their doctoral students, particularly the Doctor of Education major in Educational Administration (EdD-EdAd) aimed to find answers to the following questions: 1. What is the level of effectiveness of instructional strategies employed by graduate school professors as perceived by EdD EdAd students?; 2. What measures teaching effectiveness in adult learning?; and 3. What inputs can be derived from the study's findings for an enriched guide to andragogy teaching in higher education? And findings of the study have formed the bases in designing the instructional guide towards an enhanced andragogical teaching.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adult education and learning are an integral part of the right to education and lifelong learning, and comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations, and societies. (UNESCO, 2015).

Further, adult education and learning has wider economic, social, political, and cultural benefits, most notably recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) which has numerous targets on adult education, and to which all states have committed.

Accordingly, Knowles outlined four overarching principles that define adult learning. These are: 1.) Adults should take ownership of the planning and evaluation of their learning; 2.) Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis of adult learning activities; 3.) Adults are most interested in subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life; and 4.) Adult learning should be problem-centred rather than content-centred

As such, autonomy, relevance, and self-directed learning are central pillars of Knowles' theory of andragogy. Whereas childhood learning typically focuses more on the 'what' — such as learning basic facts and skills — adult learning focuses more on the 'why', i.e. the processes and reasoning that underpin a specific learning activity.

Put simply, adult learning should strive to answer the question: "what's in it for me?" Additionally, adult learners should be familiar with the goals and objectives of a particular learning activity beforehand and, ideally, play a role in defining these outcomes. Finally, the content should be relevant to the learners' life and prior experiences (Murry, 2022).

There are 10 simple principles of adult learning for future educators to keep in mind. All of these aspects are important when building curriculum, selecting instructional strategies, learning experiences and expectations for adult learners: 1.) Adult learners are self-directing; 2.) Adults Learn by Doing; 3.) Adults Desire Relevance; 4.) Adults Utilize Experience; 5.) Adults Process with Their Senses; 6.) Adults Appreciate Repetition; 7.) Adults Guide Their Own Development; 8.) Adults Thrive with Goal Setting; 9.) Adults Learn Differently Than Children; and 10.) Adults Require Ownership (Pace, 2020).

As to instructional strategies for adult learners, Atkinson (2024) has identified 10 high impact strategies that can be utilized such as 1.) setting goals - clear objectives in adult education serve as a key motivator, aligning training with personal and professional goals; 2.) structured lessons – this is beneficial for adult learners who often balance multiple responsibilities; 3.) explicit teaching - aids in understanding and mastering new skills by offering clear instructions and guidelines for how to accomplish the desired outcome; 4.) worked examples – this bridges the gap between theory and practice; 5.) collaborative learning – it leverages the diverse experiences of learners, enhancing comprehension and retention; 6.) multiple exposures – a method ensures that learning is a continuous process, enabling deeper embedding of knowledge; 7.) questioning which clarifies and reinforces new knowledge but also makes it more

relevant and easier to recall; 8.) feedback which helps learners refine their skills and acknowledges their progress; 9.) metacognitive strategies such as self-analysis and reflection; and 10.) differentiated teaching to address the diverse needs and backgrounds of learners,

Further, Kobb (2024) provided a set of effective strategies that can be used when teaching adults. First is to keep the lessons relevant. The most significant way adult learners digest information is through real-world filters. Second is to focus on the learners' life experience. When teaching adult learners, it is advised to use familiar terms and address them at an appropriate level for their experience, background, and age. Third is to tell stories as a way of teaching. Adult learners are often more emotionally driven, and storytelling can harness their emotions and help them retain the lessons. Fourth is to break up information to avoid cognitive overload. Adult learners can follow more, and more complex information than children do, but graduate students should still be structured into compartmentalized lessons that progress logically as you teach. Fifth is to provide feedback in the moment of need. This ensures that learners keep up with material and prevents anyone from being left behind. Sixth is to make the teaching material visually stimulating. It is not only children who find color and images appealing. If handouts and slides are too plain they become boring, and the learners' minds will switch off. Attract learners' attention with the judicious use of color, fonts, and pictures to highlight important information and boost the memorability of graduate students. Sixth is to encourage questions and discussion. Adult learners typically need to understand new material in the context of their own life experiences, and one of the best ways to make those connections is by talking. Last is to be flexible. Unlike kids, adult learners do not have to be kept to a rigid schedule to keep learning. Structuring your courses is a great idea, both to keep you on track and to help frame your lessons in a logical, progressive way (Kobb, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The study has utilized the descriptive survey method to carry-out the research study on assessing the effectiveness of the instructional

strategies utilized by the graduate school faculty. The study was conducted at a state university in Eastern Visayas, specifically, the institution's Graduate School. The respondents of the study were students of the Doctor of Education in Educational Administration (EdD-EdAd), enrolled in their academic subjects in the first semester of school year 2024-2025. Those on Dissertation Writing are excluded. There were eleven (11) enrollees in the program during the specified term, all of whom actively participated and responded to the survey questionnaires, yielding a 100% response rate.

The instrument used to gather the data was a survey questionnaire comprised of three parts: Part I has determined the profile of the respondent as to their academic program, number of units earned in the program, sex, age, civil status, current work, and work status (position/rank/designation). Part II has collected data on the students' assessment on the effectiveness of instructional strategies used by their professors in delivering different EdD-EdAd courses as reflected in the syllabi prepared by the faculty of the program. Part III, was on inputs on the improvement of instructional delivery, and Part IV was intended to gather data on other suggestions/comments/

observations. The survey tool had undergone content validation from the faculty experts of the graduate school, especially those handling the EdD-EdAd courses.

In adherence to the institution's research ethics guidelines, the consent of the respondents was sought and anonymity was ensured in the presentation and discussion of findings. The data collected through the filled-out survey forms were tallied and tabulated utilizing frequency counts and weighted means. The following scale was used in interpreting the responses of the students: 3.4 – 4.0 Very Effective; 2.6 – 3.3 Effective; 1.8 – 2.5 Slightly Effective; 1.0 – 1.7 Not Effective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are discussed in this section, including the implications derived from the findings of the study. The list of teaching strategies were pre-identified though the syllabi that the teachers utilize in the delivery of the learning competencies and subject matters for each course.

Level of Effectiveness of Instructional Practices Employed by Graduate School Professors as Perceived by EdD EdAd Students

Table 1. Distribution on the Perceived Level of Effectives of Identified Instructional Practices

Instructional Practices	n = 11	Weighted Average	Level of Effectiveness
Brainstorming	11	4.0	Very Effective
Buzz Session	10	3.7	Very Effective
Case Analysis	10	3.25	Effective
Collaborative Learning	8	3.88	Very Effective
Conduct of Debates	10	3.4	Very Effective
Conduct of Dialogues	10	3.3	Effective
Conduct of Seminars	10	3.0	Effective
Conflict Analysis and Resolution	9	3.56	Very Effective
Critical Analysis	10	3.7	Very Effective
Differentiated Reading Triads	10	3.5	Very Effective

Dimensional Question Approach	10	3.8	Very Effective
Documentary Analysis	9	3.56	Very Effective
Interactive Learning	9	3.3	Effective
Laboratory Method	8	3.62	Very Effective
Lecture-discussion	10	3.8	Very Effective
Multidisciplinary Approach	10	3.7	Very Effective
Multimedia Approach	10	3.9	Very Effective
Project Method	10	3.33	Effective
Reciprocal Questioning	8	3.75	Very Effective
Reporting	10	3.4	Very Effective
Review of Legal Provisions	9	3.44	Very Effective
Role Playing	8	3.12	Effective
Simulations	10	3.33	Effective
Situational Analysis	10	3.7	Very Effective
Socratic Seminar	10	3.5	Very Effective
Textual Analysis,	10	3.5	Very Effective
Transactional Analysis	10	3.5	Very Effective
Video Analysis	10	3.5	Very Effective
Virtual Observation and Analysis	10	3.1	Effective
Others			
Classroom based-learning	1	4	Very Effective
Flipped Classroom	1	4	Very Effective
Visualization	1	4	Very Effective
Culturally Responsive Teaching	1	4	Very Effective

Legend: 3.4 – 4.0 Very Effective; 2.6 – 3.3 Effective; 1.8 – 2.5 Slightly Effective; 1.0 – 1.7 Not Effective.

In addition to the perceived level of effectiveness of the identified instructional practices of the faculty who are handling the EdD-EdAd courses, the respondent-doctoral students were also asked to provide their suggestions as to how delivery of instructions across EdD-EdAd courses can be improved. Their authentic responses are given in the succeeding Table.

Course Title	Suggestions to Improve the Delivery of Instructions
Educational Learning Alternatives	”Ensure that materials and examples reflect diverse cultures and perspectives. (These are constantly applied in my previous courses and subjects)”

	“Conduct of Face to face classes”
Evaluation of School Programs	“Inclusive Content” “Face to face classes”
Across subjects	“I am hoping that all reporting/reports will be delivered during face-to-face sessions because not all of us are comfortable delivering the topic assigned to us online”
Advanced Research	“Encourage the students not to be afraid in conducting research” “Conduct of group research through collaboration”
Advanced Financial Management	“Help the Students learn the basic concepts of Financial Management/accounting” “Full face-to-face sessions, its more effective than online classes” “Some subject terminologies are taught in technical manner, especially for us that we don’t have background of the subject”
Advanced Statistics	“Let the students recall the basic concepts in basic statistics” “Hands-on activities/experiential learning for better understanding of the concepts”
Problem, Decision Making and Development Planning Analysis	“The instructions and outputs asked from the students are so practical and useful. However, reporting must be minimized.”
Human Relations in Education	“I have nothing to suggest because my teacher uses strategies that really fits the subject”
Comparative Educational Administration	“Strategies used helped us develop our understanding”
Comparative Education	“To have holistic learning for this course. I think benchmarking activity shall still be push through to allow students gain inputs on the best practices being implementers from other schools.”

The authentic suggestions of the students, reveal that they are hoping or clamouring for face-to-face class sessions, more interactive learning and hands-on activities, conduct benchmarking to gather best practices from other institutions, and practical application in conducting researches.

Measures of Teaching Effectiveness in Adult Learning

Based on the findings concerning the level of effectiveness of the instructional practices of the EdD-EdAd faculty in their delivery of lessons across courses, and the authentic suggestions by the students, it can be said that adult learners consider teaching very effective if the teachers use strategies which are appropriate to the subjects taught, interactive, collaborative, integrative, challenging, experiential, and develops higher order thinking skills.

The findings of the study also show that there are teaching practices identified by the doctoral student-respondents as effective as follows: Case Analysis, Conduct of Dialogues, Conduct of Seminars, Interactive Learning, Project Method, Role playing, Simulations, and Virtual Observation and Analysis. Since these strategies and techniques were not considered very effective, the results imply that when teachers use them in delivering sessions, careful planning, review, orientation/consultation with students and must be done so that the use of the strategies will be maximized and applied according to students' levels and nature of the courses and subject matters.

Enriched Guide to Andragogy Teaching in Higher Education

The findings of this study will be utilized as inputs in designing an enriched guide to andragogy teaching in higher education that focus on the perceived very effective strategies and refining the practice of the identified effective strategies to ensure appropriateness and suitability to the courses and subject matters taught. Specific strategies can also be considered to give more learning experience with interactive, collaborative, integrative, challenging, experiential, and develops higher order thinking skills.

The direct responses of the students when they were asked to give their suggestions, comments and observation regarding the EdD-EdAd curriculum implementation can also be utilized as strong inputs in enriching the quality of teaching in higher education as follows:

"Generally, our professors' delivery of instructions poses a very challenging impact in me- a positively challenging one. It enhances my ability to clearly articulate complex concepts needed in our discussion as I make sure to be more productive- by engaging in thorough reading reflection, to gain deeper understanding as it is needed in the academic level I belong at the moment."

"The delivery of instructions undertaken and the process in the academe are enough to bring globally competitive and productive graduates."

"I am thankful with all the learnings I gained from the university. The professors are competent and diligent in the delivery of instructions and sharing their knowledge and expertise."

"So far, the teachers in this university use varied teaching strategies that promotes understanding of concepts under the doctorate program. Most of these strategies are effective in terms of attaining educational learning objective. However, there are times that classes are held virtually with many challenges (internet connectivity issues, etc.) that Affects the way students learn."

"Being here at the university helped me to grow and develop professionally. The strategies, competencies, and skills taught in the university are applicable and useful in our field of work. It helped me more in the different aspects such as communication, decision making and personnel development. The strategies used by our professors helped me to be more responsible. However, there are times that tasks given have deadlines which are sometimes affecting our working hours."

"Having been enrolled in the EdD-EdAd program in this university, it gives positive impact or influence as to decision-making and problem-solving is concerned. All of the learnings gained were placed in the bucket, serving as reflective guide in all my daily undertakings in school."

Proposed Guide for Enhanced Andragogical Teaching in Graduate Education

Based on the synthesized findings of this study and grounded in Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, the following narrative guide is proposed to enhance the delivery of instruction for

graduate school professors handling Doctor of Education (EdD) courses. This guide categorizes instructional delivery into four actionable pillars designed to maximize the adult learner's experience, autonomy, and practical application.

Pillar 1: Maximizing Collaborative and Higher-Order Interactive Learning

The data revealed that Brainstorming, Collaborative Learning, Multimedia Approaches, and the Dimensional Question Approach were perceived as "Very Effective." Therefore, professors should transition from traditional lecture-heavy formats to facilitator-led environments. Classes should be designed around high-level cognitive discourse where adult learners can draw upon their professional work experiences (e.g., as school administrators or teachers) to solve complex educational scenarios collectively. Multimedia should not be used merely for presentation, but as a tool to provoke interactive discussions.

Pillar 2: Strategic Scaffolding for Experiential Methods

While strategies such as Case Analysis, Role Playing, Simulations, and Virtual Observation were deemed "Effective," they did not reach the highest tier. This implies a need for better instructional scaffolding. For these methods to reach maximum efficacy, professors must provide clear orientations, rubrics, and real-world contexts prior to execution. Adult learners need to know the purpose (the "why") behind a simulation or role-play. Professors are advised to conduct a brief alignment briefing before assigning case analyses to ensure the activity directly mirrors the current realities of the educational management landscape.

Pillar 3: Modality-Appropriate Instruction and Psychological Safety

Authentic student feedback highlighted a strong preference for Face-to-Face (F2F) sessions, particularly for complex subjects (e.g., Advanced Statistics, Advanced Financial Management) and student reporting. To enhance andragogical teaching, the graduate school should implement a modality-sensitive curriculum. Highly technical

subjects or high-anxiety tasks (such as individual reporting) should be prioritized for F2F sessions to ensure immediate feedback, hands-on guidance, and psychological safety. Online synchronous sessions should be reserved for collaborative discussions, benchmarking presentations, and lighter consultative check-ins.

Pillar 4: Practical Application and Institutional Benchmarking

Adult learners are highly motivated by relevance. As suggested by the respondents, graduate instruction must minimize rote reporting and maximize output-based, practical applications. Professors handling Comparative Education and Development Planning should integrate actual benchmarking activities—allowing students to examine the best practices of other institutions. Furthermore, research courses should foster a collaborative environment that reduces the fear of research, encouraging students to produce working papers that address authentic problems within their respective work stations rather than theoretical exercises.

By adhering to these four pillars, graduate school faculty can ensure that their instructional delivery is not only academically rigorous but profoundly relevant, deeply engaging, and perfectly tailored to the psychological and professional needs of the adult learner.

Conclusion

The assessment of instructional delivery in the EdD-EdAd program underscores a fundamental principle of higher education: graduate students cannot be taught using the same pedagogical frameworks applied to younger learners. To achieve true instructional effectiveness, teaching must be explicitly rooted in andragogical principles that respect the autonomy, prior experience, and professional goals of adult learners.

The findings of this study reveal that instructional strategies are perceived as highly effective when they are interactive, collaborative, and directly applicable to the students' real-world professional environments. While traditional methods remain foundational, adult learners deeply

value high-order cognitive strategies such as brainstorming, multimedia integration, and dimensional questioning. Furthermore, the study highlights that experiential methods like simulations and case analyses require deliberate scaffolding and orientation to reach their maximum potential.

Ultimately, this study confirms that effective graduate school instruction is not merely about the transfer of knowledge, but the facilitation

of a collaborative learning environment. By adopting the proposed "Guide for Enhanced Andragogical Teaching," higher education institutions can transition from rigid, lecture-based formats to flexible, adult-centered modalities. Doing so will not only improve student satisfaction and engagement but will also fulfill the graduate school's mandate to produce empowered, globally competitive educational leaders capable of driving meaningful change in their respective communities.

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