

The Importance of Research Informed Teaching in Higher Education: A Case Study of London College of Contemporary Arts (LCCA)

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the importance of research informed teaching in higher education and possible methods of imbedding it into the teaching practice. The paper is providing clarity on the key typologies of applying research informed teaching which can be divided as the following: Firstly, research led approach. Secondly, research-oriented approach. Thirdly, research-based approach. Fourthly, research tutored approach. The paper is also providing a case study based on the school of business and hospitality management within London College of Contemporary Arts (LCCA) to share practices that are currently being applied or planned as future activities. Furthermore, the paper is providing key benefits and challenges of embedding research informed teaching in curriculum. The paper concludes highlighting key recommendations derived from the review as well as the case study provided.

Keywords: "Research informed, Teaching, Higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Research informed teaching can be defined as one of the key foundations for students' achievement and engagement at the university level which aims to embed a culture of research into higher education institutions rather than having research as an individual activity, enhancing students engagement and experience through linking teaching and research to create an integrated delivery of curriculum, and promotion of links between research, teaching, and professional practice to better prepare students for future challenges in their practice [1, 2].

It has become highly critical to excel in research and teaching in higher education to contribute to the positive change within modern societies as graduates need to further develop their societies by driving change through new contribution to knowledge, and being able to operate within a rapidly changing environment and uncertainties. However, the link between research and teaching in higher education remains controversy.

Linking research and teaching

There has been an increasing interest and attention to the subject of linking research with teaching in higher education. There is also an increasing number of publications on the topic of research informed teaching in higher education such as [3, 1, 4]. The desire of the increase in competitiveness within higher education has led to research councils and governments to increase funding for research which led to the question of whether undergraduates need to be taught in a research informed environment and have the experience of research.

Research informed teaching and learning are one of the main driving factors towards more engagement and challenge at the undergraduate level which ensures that the subject knowledge is being kept current and up to the standard where students can benefit from and link to the practice, and that develops students' ability to research and evaluate to equip them for future challenges and problem solving in their professional practice. Research informed teaching can directly impact of the quality of education provided to students.

There is an increasing significance in making the link between teaching and research [5]. Furthermore, it has been reported that universities can adapt to a new model which aims to inform teaching through linking to research to keep knowledge up to date which can increase students' ability to learn and practice [6]. The report recommends that research should be a general practice at universities as a method of producing knowledge rather than being an exclusive activity which can include all members to contribute to the knowledge production process, students at the undergraduate level can be included in the process by encouragement to turn them into active participants through the availability of various opportunities to learn such as learning through enquiry.

After the publication of the report, there have been an increasing number of researches to clarify the link between teaching and research. The typology suggested by [7] divides research informed teaching into four different types which are as the following: Firstly, Research led approach. Secondly, Research oriented approach. Thirdly, Research based approach. Fourthly, research tutored approach. Several researchers in the field used this helpful typology to illustrate the different methods of embedding research into teaching and to clarify the importance of the link between teaching and research [1, 8, 2, 5].

Derived from [7] typology that research informed teaching can be divided into four categories which each one of them can illustrate a different relationship teaching and research as the following:

Research led teaching: in this type the curriculum is mainly focused on embedding research into the teaching content to be delivered, this gives students the opportunity to learn about the latest research in the field which focuses more on the research findings rather than the process of the research which can be presented as part of the curriculum content. This develops teaching staff research interest into the discipline to create and develop more informative curriculum.

Research oriented teaching: In this type the focus is mainly on the knowledge construction process in the subject in a discipline. In this type more attention is given to the development of students' research ethos and enquiry skills. For example, the delivery of the research methods module which aims to develop the techniques of knowledge construction in a discipline.

Research tutored teaching: In this type the curriculum is more focused on developing students' ability to write and discuss publications in the discipline

relevant to their subject. This type requires students to develop a greater level of the ability to evaluate and critique other's work and research. In this type the curriculum is mainly designed around activities to encourage enquiry and create some interaction between research and research.

Research based teaching: the curriculum is mainly focused on developing students' enquiry-based learning through minimising the division between teachers and students to create more dialog and cooperation. In this type the relationship between teachers and students is based on drawing a systematic enquiry within the process of teaching and learning.

The framework developed by [1] from the original typology suggested by [7] has been very useful for higher education institutions to embed research informed teaching into curriculum and allow teaching staff to identify and map their own practice in embedding research informed teaching in curriculum, this also helped teachers to widen understanding of the concept itself rather than building on the existing assumptions of embedding research into teaching [1]. Argues that to promote students experience and outcomes higher education institutions should be integrate more informed teaching though the different types provided in the shown teaching nexus (figure-1) which will enhance students understanding of the discipline through embedding research.

Based on the Quality Assurance agency [9] that graduates of the Bachelor degree with Honours which is the equivalent of level 6 are expected to demonstrate the following: systematic understanding of the key aspects of their field of study which includes detailed knowledge of the discipline, good ability to analyse and developed techniques of research enquiry within the discipline, in depth understanding of the main concepts in the discipline which enables students to create arguments and problem solve through the use of established techniques in the discipline, ability to describe and comment on current research in the discipline such as refereed research and appropriate materials relevant to the discipline, the ability to apply and carry projects critically, the ability to evaluate arguments and make judgements, and the ability to problem solve and provide solutions. Therefore, teaching research skills through various methods embedded into the curriculum is an important factor to achieve the QAA expectations. However, it may be difficult to achieve [10] as students may not be able to engage with research until the final stage of their degree where they have to produce a final project/dissertation which might lead to limited transfer of learning [11].

Figure 1: Curriculum design and the research-teaching nexus

Source: Based on Healey (2005, 70)

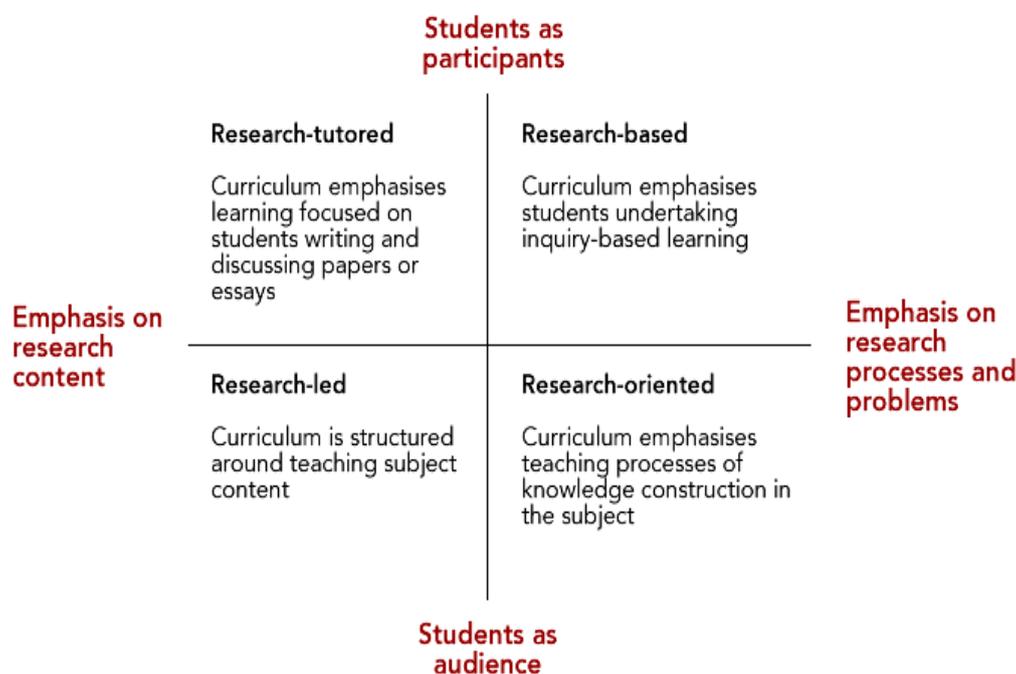


Fig-1: Curriculum design and the research – teaching nexus

Source: Based on [1]

Benefits of embedding research informed teaching

Benefits of research informed teaching can be summarised as the following according to [12, 13, 8]:

- Research informed teaching would enhance the levels of students' participation and engagement in the process of learning and teaching leading to enhancement of deep learning rather than surface learning.
- Research would further enhance students' key skills such as problem solving and communication as well as critical and analytical thinking. This would further enhance the achievement of high quality graduates through development of key graduate attributes that meet the job market needs.
- Research informed teaching can be pursued by higher education institutions as a strategic direction to provide a distinctive and unique learning and teaching experience. This may be directly linked with level of competitiveness as well as overall students' satisfaction.
- Increase the levels of satisfaction and motivations of both academics and students, this would be directly reflected on the healthiness of the learning and teaching environment across the higher education institution or the faculty.
- Research informed teaching can provide new innovative learning and teaching techniques to engage students.

- Having several research informed teaching initiatives across institutions would further enhance and develop a culture of research across departments and faculties. This would provide developmental opportunities for academics and students leading development of curriculum which is informed latest field updates and new research insights.
- Research informed teaching can provide higher education institutions the opportunity to go beyond the institutional level to engage with local communicates and businesses.

Challenges of embedding research informed teaching

Different research outcomes have identified several key challenges which can be summarised the following based on [13]:

The higher education system is rapidly changing at the demands of the job market as well as the demographics of students is becoming more diverse. For example, several disciplines such as business and hospitality management are becoming attractive to non-traditional and mature students, meaning that those types of students are coming from non-regular and common routes to higher education, they are rather coming after a long period of leaving high school or further education as well as having long practical

experience. Therefore, the need becomes more toward having academics that can be considered as practitioners rather than being purely researchers in their field. However, a balance between both research and practice should be maintained to enhance teaching and learning quality in higher education.

Embedding research led approach in teaching can be considered as highly challenging considering the aspects of students' numbers and levels. For example, teaching a large group of students in a theatre and for year one or foundation course can reduce the quality time to be spent with individual students to share best practices as well as to enhance levels of motivation. However, the option of having a research informed teaching can be embedded in the curriculum such as teaching material development and case studies. Furthermore, this challenge can be overcome through having additional quality time to be provided for smaller number of students which can be considered as tutorials or seminars where a higher level of interactivity and feedback can be facilitated.

Embedding research informed teaching level in the curriculum can vary from a discipline to another considering the nature of the topics. For example, there is less research informed teaching embedded in humanities than pure science-based topics.

There is lack of funding provided for research activities provided from external bodies for students to work on variety of projects within the field. Higher education institutions aim to have allocated budgets for such activities. However, there is growing demand as higher education is becoming more accessible.

There is a growing separation between research focused staff and teaching focused staff as universities aim to enhance their research outcome quality to compete on the national and international ranking. This would reduce the possible benefits of actual and purely focused staff on research to enhance the strategy of embedding research informed teaching in the curriculum. Furthermore, research focused staff would have most of their commitment for research supervision and more commitment towards postgraduate levels, leaving a gap in the undergraduate level when considering the strategy of embedding research informed teaching. However, as stated earlier that balance between teaching staff and research staff can be maintained through development of enhancement plan to encourage teaching focused staff to be more research informed and active, the given case study in the next section of this paper has provided several examples of possible activities to achieve it.

It has been discussed by [14] that many educators acknowledge the challenge of research, let alone its importance in the process of learning and teaching, based on a study that he has included in his

research that teachers may perceive research as the following:

- It may be perceived as not important based on the assumption that teaching can be further enhanced and improved through development of experience with students.
- It may be perceived as useful based on the assumption that research can be presented with consideration of students' needs and in practical methods.
- It may be perceived as useful based on the assumption that teachers may not need to provide practicality similar to the previous assumption. It would rather challenge and help to further understand about teaching theories.

Approaching research informed teaching at London College of Contemporary Art (LCCA)

The case study is based on London College of Contemporary Arts (LCCA) which is considered as one of the leading higher education alternative providers in London, London College of contemporary Arts is a medium size college with less than 2000 students studying currently at its both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The study will be aimed at the teaching staff at London College of Contemporary Art as the purpose of the paper is to explore the importance of research informed teaching and to investigate ways of embedding research informed teaching into the curriculum, it would be highly essential to audit the current practices of embedding research informed teaching into the curriculum to take them as a base and draw some recommendations to be taken as next steps by the organisation.

- Sharing best practices amongst peers and students regarding research interests and motivation. Collaboration on several research and scholarly projects to enhance the departmental research profile.
- The school of business and hospitality management represented by its head, other key academics and teaching staff are well informed on the importance of research inclusion in curriculum development. The syllabus is updated on regular basis to enhance inclusion of key research outcomes as well as industry trends and updates.
- Students are given the opportunity to express their research interest and to share motivations. Students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are given the opportunity to be trained on research methods in the following modules (Research project for undergraduate courses and research methods/dissertation module for postgraduate courses).
- The business and hospitality management school host several guest speakers and visiting lecturers on

semesterly basis to share best practices, research as well as industry trends and changes.

- The business and hospitality management school has timetables a skills session on weekly basis for each group at level four and five to develop their key research skills and competences. During those sessions students are encouraged to present their findings and to relate to the required assessments for each studied module.
- Availability online research such as ebooks and collection of papers that may enhance their students' awareness and integration in the process of research for topics.
- The school of business and hospitality is aiming to organise several research workshops for students and academics to share their research interests and outcomes with possible opportunities for publication. Planned activity: It is noted that the Business and Hospitality management department has a rich experience of research as the department includes several key members of active researchers and PHD students in several academic fields. Therefore, there has been an in-depth discussion with several members of the department to accommodate and enhance this good research practice to further benefit and develop staff by providing opportunities to have their research presented and peer reviewed and for students to benefit to further their understanding of trends within the fields of Hospitality and Business management. Running such workshops and seminars would give staff the opportunity to further develop their research methods' skills that can be used in their own research and in their teaching.

Wide range of topics is expected to be presented during the seminar to reflect the breadth of research interests of our staff within the business and hospitality disciplines. The proposed workshops and seminars would allow more complex papers to be presented in future internally and then to be further developed through feedback from the audience to be presented/published externally at national and international conferences/journals.

The initiative would start with organization of a series of quarterly seminars and workshops for both Business and Hospitality management directed at internal audience (staff across academic and non-academic departments, and students across schools). The first quarterly seminar would be considered as pilot of the initiative, and to be analysed. The Targeted audience for the proposed seminars is as the following:

- All members of staff within the business and hospitality management department are invited to contribute to these workshops/seminars as presenters or audience.

- Members of staff across other academic and non-academic departments are invited to participate as audience.
- Students from business and hospitality courses are also welcomed to attend.

CONCLUSION

The research has provided introductory statements by defining research informed teaching and its growing significance in higher education. The research also has provided key insights based on key authorities within the field on how research and teaching are linked through the following approaches: Firstly, research led teaching by development of curriculum to be structured based on the teaching material required for the learning and teaching process. Secondly, research-oriented teaching by development of teaching to be emphasising on knowledge development and construction within the field. Thirdly, research tutored teaching by focusing on students' writing and discussions in the process. Fourthly, research-based teaching by providing opportunities for students to undertake inquiry-based learning through research activities.

There is a growing significance and implication of pursuing a clear process of embedding research informed teaching in curriculum in higher education as it develops key skills, competences and attributes of students, this development would enable higher education institutions to meet with quality assurance agencies' requirements and expectations. Furthermore, it would meet the needs and requirements of the job market.

The paper has also provided several key benefits of embedding research informed teaching in higher education which can be summarised as the following: Firstly, enhancement of students' participation and engagement. Secondly, Development of key skills required in the job market. Thirdly, it can provide a distinctive and competitive advantage for higher education institutions. Fourthly, increase of motivation and satisfaction of both academics and students. Fifthly, development of innovative learning and teaching techniques as well as inclusion of research insights. Sixthly, the opportunity to go beyond the institutional level to engage local communities and businesses.

The paper has highlighted several key challenges facing higher education institutions to embed research informed teaching in their curriculum which can be summarised as the following: Firstly, changes in the higher education system and changing demands of the job market. Secondly, increase in students' numbers as well as the challenge of embedding process may be more challenging in lower levels such as foundation and year one levels. Thirdly, the challenge of embedding

research informed teaching may vary from a discipline to another as some are practice based. Fourthly, lack of funding for research activities. Fifthly, the growing separation between research focused staff and teaching focused staff.

The given case study has provided key practices that may be applied in other institutions in the process of embedding research informed teaching in their curriculum. However, higher education institutions should consider the key challenges identified of the process and aim to achieve the key benefits identified. The given four approaches of embedding research informed teaching may be applied individually or collectively across departments. However, educators should consider levels such as undergraduate and postgraduate, or even more specifically such as year one, two or three as students' abilities and readiness may vary from a level to another.

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