

University Student Perception of Teacher Confirmation as Perceived by Instructors at the Faculty of Educational Science at the Hashemite University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine university students' perceptions of teacher confirmation in the Hashemite University in Jordan. A total of 258 students participated in the study, completing the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS). Results indicated the means for the first dimension: teacher response to questions, as 3.58, the means for the second dimension: demonstrating interest, as 3.62, and the means for the third dimension: teaching style, as 3.48. Findings also revealed that there were statistically significant differences between male and female students' perceptions regarding the teacher response questions, and also indicated significant differences among the four academic level groups regarding the teaching styles, as well as significant differences among the four GPA level groups regarding teacher demonstration of interest.

Key words: University student; Student perceptions; Teacher confirmation

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INTRODUCTION

The basis of effective, mutually satisfactory classroom relations according to Booth-Butterfield (1992) is teacher-student co-operation to achieve a range of individual and

educational goals. As an example, a positive relationship in the classroom helps teachers in their primary goal of promoting effective cognitive and behavioral learning in their students.

The focus of confirmation research has been on interpersonal, family, and instructional communication contexts. Ellis (2000) discusses the instructional communication context, proposing the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS) as the tool of choice for measuring student perceptions of teacher confirmation. The TCS comprises 15 items across three dimensions to measure the three teacher confirmation behaviors: (a) responding to student questions/comments, (b) demonstrating interest in the student learning process, and (c) teaching style. In its initial form the TCS was comprised of 27 items and included a fourth dimension (absence of disconfirmation) which was deleted by Ellis, his reason being the lack of cross-validation in separate samples. Ellis (2000, p.266) defines teacher confirmation as "The transactional process by which teachers communicate to students that they are endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals."

The first tool for assessing perceived confirmation was designed by Sieburg (1973), and Ellis (2000) commented that it had resulted in two areas of study being developed: observation and student perception of confirmative and non-confirmative behaviors.

Various aspects of observer confirmation have been studied by a number of researchers including (Bavelas & Chovil, 1986; Cook, 1980; Leth, 1977; Sundell, 1972) and perceived confirmation in the family context (Beatty & Dobos, 1992; Cissna & Keating, 1979; Clarke, 1973; Keating, 1977), and recent years have seen an increased recognition of the importance of teacher confirmation as evidenced in research by (Ellis, 2000; Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Schrod, Turman, & Soliz, 2006; Turman & Schordt, 2006).

In the opinion of Buber (1957), we discover and establish our identity as humans through the interactional phenomenon of confirmation, a wide-ranging and complex construct wherein teacher confirmation represents a context-specific application. Buber was not alone in viewing confirmation as possibly the most significant feature of human interaction, since confirmation was suggested by Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson (1967, p.84) to be the “greatest single factor ensuring mental development and stability” and that the use of confirming or disconfirming behaviors is the process by which one’s identity is endorsed.

Cissna and Sieburg (1995, p.298) defined confirming behavior as including the following: an expression of recognition of the existence of others; an acknowledgement that a facilitative relationship exists; an expressed understanding of another’s self-worth; support for the other individual’s experience. Whereas disconfirming behaviors are recognized by: communication of in difference toward the other’s attempts at communication; disregard of another’s perception; disparaging or denigrating the other by using “name-calling, criticism, blame, and hostile attack”.

Although research into confirmation behaviors is far from new and there have been many studies into interpersonal and family contexts, such as those by (Beatty & Dobos, 1992, 1993; Ellis, 2002; Friedman, 1983; Laing, 1961; Sieburg, 1985), the concept of perceived teacher confirmation was only mentioned in instructional research. Ellis (2000, 2004) however, in her research program identified the following four dimensions of teacher confirmation: teacher confirmation is illustrated by the instructor’s response to questions by communicating interest, both verbally and nonverbally, in students’ comments, as well as facilitating student interaction outside of scheduled classes; by demonstrating and effectively communicating their interest and concern for their students; by using a variety of techniques and exercises when explaining course material, followed by checking that students have understood the material; lastly, by presenting a positive attitude and avoiding disconfirming behaviors including unkind or rude comments that embarrass or belittle students.

Ellis (2004) notes the importance of the fact that in her research, this fourth dimension was not cross-validated on a second sample of students, illustrating that the absence of disconfirming behaviors is not necessarily an indicator of the presence of confirming behaviors.

1. THE CURRENT STUDY

The present study was driven by the following research questions:

a) What are the students’ perceptions toward the teachers’ confirmation as perceived by instructors at the Faculty of Educational Science at Hashemite University?

b) Are there any statistically significant differences in the means of student perceptions toward teachers’ confirmation for instructors in educational sciences due to variables of gender, academic level, and grade-point average (GPA)?

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Participants were 258 undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Educational Psychology courses during the academic year 2014/2015. The surveys were administered during normal class time, and students received minimal course credit for the voluntary participation. Sample distribution across study variables: -gender: 64(25%) male and 194 (75%) female; academic level: 68 (26%) participants were first level, 58 (23%) second level, 70 (27%) third level and 62 (24%) were fourth level; GPA level, 12 (5%) participants were first level with 3.50-4.0, 106 (41%) second level with 3.0-3.49, 116 (45%) third level with 2.50-2.99 and 24 (9%) were fourth level with 2.0-2.49. The average age of the participants was 20.07 ($SD=2.97$).

2.2 Instrument

Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS): The TCS was developed by Ellis (2000) and consisted of a 15 item, Likert-type scale asking students to evaluate the extent to which their teachers exhibited confirming behavior during the semester. Responses were solicited using a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The TCS measured low-inference behavior across three dimensions: the first dimension, teachers’ responses to questions (5 items) (e.g., My instructor takes time to answer students’ questions fully), the second dimension, demonstrated interest in students and their learning (6 items) (e.g., My instructor makes an effort to get to know students), the third dimension style of teaching (5 items) (e.g., My instructor uses an interactive teaching style). Previous confirmatory factor analyses have demonstrated evidence of concurrent and discriminate validity, as well as excellent reliability for the TCS (Cronbach’s Alpha= 0.95), with previous reliability coefficients for the three subscales ranging from 0.83 to 0.85 (Ellis, 2000, 2004).

The items of the TCS were translated into Arabic by the researcher and administered to three specialists in English language to ensure the accuracy of the translation, and the Arabic version of the scale was then back-translated into English by a bi-lingual native English speaker. Analysis of TCS reliability using internal consistency technique and Cronbach’s alpha for the three subscales resulted in 0.70, 0.84 and 0.87 respectively for: teacher responses to questions, demonstrating interest, and teaching styles.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher held classroom meetings with all students participating in this study at the Hashemite University during three weeks of the first semester of the academic year 2014/2015. Before distributing the TCS, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and encouraged participants to read the items carefully before ticking their appropriate choice. The participants were also assured of absolute confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Instruments were then distributed, completed and collected during the meeting.

Data analysis of responses to the first research question was achieved using descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations to describe each item and the average values of all the items in each scale were calculated. Analysis of response data to the second question was by independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the data thus obtained was analyzed using SPSS 17 with an a priori alpha level setting of 0.05.

3. RESULTS

Data collected from all participants were analyzed using SPSS-version 17. Inspection of data-entry accuracy of minimum and maximum values for each variable detected no out-of-range anomalies nor omitted items.

The aim of research question one was to determine the perceptions of students toward teacher confirmation for faculty members of the of educational science in the Hashemite University in Jordan. Means and standard deviations were used to accomplish this question. As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score for the dimension teacher response to students' questions was 3.58, the overall mean score for the dimension demonstrating interest was 3.62, and the overall mean score for the dimension teaching style was 3.48, indicating medium favorable agreement toward teacher confirmation for faculty members of the Educational Science at the Hashemite University in Jordan.

Table 1
Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for the Perceptions of Students Toward the Teacher Confirmation Dimension

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teacher responses to questions		
My instructor takes time to answer students' questions fully.	2.76	.95
My instructor listens attentively when students ask questions or make comments during class.	3.95	.80
My instructor indicated that she appreciated students' questions or comments.	3.79	.85
My instructor was available for questions before and after class.	4.12	.80
My instructor was willing to deviate slightly from the lecture when students asked questions	3.27	1.16
Average	3.58	.55
Demonstrating interest		
My instructor communicated that she is interested in whether the student are learning.	3.96	.84
My instructor communicated that she believes students can do well in the class.	3.91	.95
My instructor asked students how they think the class is going.	3.17	1.01
My instructor made an effort to get to know students.	3.14	1.01
My instructor smiled at the class.	3.63	1.12
My instructor established eye contact during the lecture.	3.90	.94
Average	3.62	.67
Teaching styles		
My instructor used interactive teaching style.	3.71	.98
My instructor used a variety of teaching techniques to help student understand course material.	3.59	1.01
My instructor checked on students' understanding before going to the next point.	3.47	1.06
My instructor incorporated exercises into the lecture when appropriate.	3.19	1.04
My instructor gave oral or written feedback on students' work.	3.45	1.04
Average	3.48	.77

The aim of research question two was to determine if significant differences exist in student perceptions of teacher confirmation based on the selected variables of gender, academic level groups and GPA. The *T*-test for independent samples was used to examine the mean differences in responses between male and female students. However, one-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to identify whether the variances between the four-level academic and GPA groups were equal or of statistically significantly difference.

Table 2 shows that there were statistically significant differences (at 0.05 Alpha) between the perceptions of male and female students regarding the teacher response questions. While, no significant differences were shown between male and female students' perceptions regarding teacher demonstration of interest and teaching style.

Table 2
Differences Between Male and Female Students' Responses Regarding Teacher Confirmation

Dimension	Gender	N	M	SD	t	P
Teacher responses to questions	M	64	3.42	.66	-2.56	.01*
	F	194	3.62	.50		
Demonstrating interest	M	64	3.52	.72	-1.24	.21
	F	194	3.64	.65		
Teaching styles	M	64	3.39	.81	-1.09	.27
	F	194	3.51	.75		

Utilizing ANOVA, as can be seen in Table 3, shows that there were significant differences among the four academic level groups regarding the teaching style. While, there were no significant differences between academic level groups regarding the teacher responses questions and demonstrating interest.

Table 3
Differences Among the Four Academic Level Groups Regarding Teacher Confirmation

	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	P
Teacher responses to questions	Between group	1.318	.439	1.448	.22
	Within group	77.057	.303		
	Total	78.375	257		
Demonstrating interest	Between group	3.227	1.076	2.427	.06
	Within group	112.572	.443		
	Total	115.799	257		
Teaching styles	Between group	5.315	1.772	3.033	.03*
	Within group	148.383	.584		
	Total	153.698	257		

Using LSD comparison test, differences were detected between the four academic level groups' responses in teaching styles. Table 4 revealed statistically significant

differences between first, second and third academic level and fourth academic level groups in response to teaching styles.

Table 4
Post Hoc Comparisons Across the Four Academic Level Groups

Dimensions	Academic level	Mean	Mean differences				Sig
			First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year	
TS	First year	3.65				0.22	.00*
	Second year	3.75				0.32	.00*
	Third year	3.63				0.20	.00*
	Fourth year	3.43	-0.22	-0.32	-0.20		.00*

Note. TS= Teaching styles

As can be seen in Table 5, there were significant differences among the four GPA level groups regarding the item demonstrating interest, while there were no

significant differences between GPA level groups regarding the teacher responses questions and teaching style.

Table 5
Differences Among the Four GPA Level Groups Regarding Teacher Confirmation

		Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	P
Teacher responses to questions	Between group	0.491	3	0.164	0.534	0.66
	Within group	77.884	254	0.307		
	Total	78.375	257			
Demonstrating interest	Between group	4.865	3	1.622	3.713	0.01*
	Within group	110.934	254	0.437		
	Total	115.799	257			
Teaching styles	Between group	0.411	3	0.137	0.227	0.87
	Within group	153.287	254	0.603		
	Total	153.698	257			

Using LSD comparison test, differences were detected between four GPA level groups in the demonstrating interest. Table 6 revealed that differences between students

who had GPA 3.50-4.0, 3.0-3.49 and students how had GPA 2.0-2.49.

Table 6
Post Hoc Comparisons Across Four GPA Level Group

Dimensions	GPA level	Mean	Mean differences				Sig
			3.50-4.0	3.0-3.49	2.50-2.99	2.0-2.49	
DI	3.50-4.0	3.53				0.17	.00*
	3.0-3.49	3.50				0.14	.00*
	2.50-2.99	3.47					NA
	2.0-2.49	3.36	-0.17	-0.14			.00*

Note. DI= Demonstrating interest.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of students toward the teacher confirmation as perceived by instructors at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the Hashemite University.

The first question addressed the perceptions of students toward the teacher confirmation for instructors at the faculty of educational sciences. Results indicated that students have a medium level of agreement toward teacher confirmation for faculty members.

The present study examines the premise that student perceptions of instructor caring and understanding, or teacher confirmation, may contribute to our appreciation of how students' motivation, communication and participation behaviors are challenged by these perceptions. According to Myers (2006), these perceptions generate the student's motives for communicating with the instructor, stating that the quality of a student's relationship with an instructor is definitely associated with functional, interpersonal, participatory, and sycophantic motives. This finding is supported by Teven and McCroskry (1997), and Myers and Bryant (2002) who concluded that relational quality could be improved by teachers' communicating a caring and understanding attitude.

It becomes apparent that student participation is less likely to be increased by demonstrating a general interest

in the students or using a variety of teaching methods than by the way in which instructors respond to student questions, illustrating that student perception of teacher confirmation is more closely linked to improved student participation.

Therefore, if the students' assessment of success or failure when trying to communicate with the instructor is based upon his/her perception of teacher understanding, then rather than demonstrating general interest or varying teaching methods, a more robust predictor of perceived understanding must be that of instructor responses to student questions.

It emerges therefore, that the strongest and most reliable predictor of perceived understanding is the behavior of the instructor in demonstrating care and attention by listening attentively when students comment or ask questions and answering fully, thereby demonstrating appreciation of the student's participation in the class.

The goal of the second question was to find out how students rated teacher confirmation and whether there were any statistically significant differences in students' perceptions resulting from gender, academic level and GPA variables.

Analysis of results in the gender variable regarding teacher responses to questions illustrated significant differences at 0.05 Alpha between the perceptions of male

and female students, indicating a greater interest in the learning process by female students, particularly in asking questions to clarify their grasp or understanding of the learning material. Moreover, the Faculty of Educational Science at the Hashemite University has a higher percentage of female than male students, this difference being clearly evident in the composition of the study sample where 25% were male and 75% female.

Among the many studies of the gender effect on teacher-student interactions, Allen, O'Mara and Long (1987) identified a link between student gender and learning outcomes, while Wood (2003) found that the classroom setting influenced perceptions of female students as passive and underachieving and the male students as independent and achieving.

Gabriel and Smithson (1990), Krupnick (1985), Spender (1989), found an indication of the educational setting itself providing a reinforcing environment for the generally displayed male behavior.

The findings of a study by Allen et al. (1985) which examined females in public speaking environments, indicated strongly that the females were significantly more apprehensive than males. This result was supported by Garrison and Garrison (1979) adding that the younger the student the greater the difference in apprehension.

Regarding the results of student perceptions related to teaching style, significant differences were found among the four academic level groups, suggesting that first and second academic level students are more influenced by instructor style than the more experienced students in the fourth academic level.

Results of the student perceptions based GPA level groups showed significant differences among the four GPA level groups regarding demonstrating interest. This result seems logical because high achievement students are generally more needful of demonstrating interest from instructors than lower achieving students.

In the researchers' view therefore, teacher training programs may derive valuable benefits from the results of the present study in developing skills and effective teaching styles in the classroom environment. Newly appointed and inexperienced teachers often find their greatest difficulty in engaging students in productive classroom discussions, and recognizing that this skill involves some of the most difficult techniques for teachers to develop, the present study could make an important contribution to the corpus of information and knowledge in this field. It is hoped that researcher will continue to examine interpersonal behaviors in the academic environment with the objective of enhancing teacher-student relationships, thus helping them to positively influence students towards instructional goal achievement.

Future research might focus on the extent to which the influence of teacher conformation behaviors on instructor

and student outcomes are mediated by other instructional variables since, as we are reminded by Ellis (2000), there exists a strong association between perceived caring and nonverbal immediacy and the perception of teacher confirmation.

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