

Mnenje študentov pedagoških fakultet o kakovosti predmeta didaktika likovne umetnosti

MARIJANA ŽUPANIĆ BENIĆ

Povzetek Namen raziskave je bil oceniti zadovoljstvo študentov s predmetom metodika likovne umetnosti, ki ga poučujemo na hrvaških pedagoških fakultetah, in opredeliti področja, pomembna za izboljšanje. Kvalitativne odgovore (odprtega tipa) študentov smo pregledali in vsakega uvrstili v eno od naslednjih kategorij: izvedba poučevanja, študentove pedagoške izkušnje, vrednotenje in ocenjevanje, organizacija predmeta, dostopnost učnih gradiv in sredstev ter študentove kompetence poučevanja. Rezultati kažejo, da so študenti najbolj zadovoljni z izvedbo poučevanja, najmanj pa z organizacijo predmeta. Največ predlogov za izboljšanje imajo prav glede organizacije predmeta.

Ključne besede: • kakovost predmeta • zadovoljstvo študentov • mnenje študentov • specialna didaktika • didaktika poučevanja likovne umetnosti •

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Opinion of Croatian Teacher Education Students Regarding the Quality of the Visual Arts Teaching Didactics Course

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to assess student satisfaction with the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course taught at the Croatian faculties of teacher education and identify important areas for improvement. The students' open-ended, qualitative responses were reviewed and each response was assigned to one or more of the following categories: teacher performance, student teaching practice, assessment and grading, course organization, availability of learning materials and resources, and student teaching competences. The results indicate that the students are most satisfied with teacher performance, but they are also the least satisfied with course organization and recommend the most improvements in this area.

Keywords: • course quality • student satisfaction • student opinions • didactics • visual art didactics •

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Introduction

Course quality, as defined by Van Damme (2003, as cited in Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, Pârlea, 2004), is determined by the following elements: “guaranteed adherence to minimal standards, development and achievement of goals in different contexts, ability to comply with the requirements and demands of direct and indirect users and participants, as well as drive toward excellence” (p. 44). Considering the fact that the quality of initial teacher education influences teachers’ ability to work with students in professional practice (Glasser, 1999), teacher education courses must have an adequate level of quality, which can be achieved by assessing student satisfaction with courses and using that information as a guide for improvement. The purpose of this research was to assess and analyze the satisfaction of teacher education students with the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course, and the results are used to provide insight into student expectations from the course. Some expectations of interest include their opinions of teacher performance and preparedness for teaching in practice, as well as their expectations regarding the organization of the course as a part of the overall study program.

The review of literature pertinent to student satisfaction found that various factors can determine student satisfaction with a particular course, and some more commonly cited factors include teacher performance, teaching experience in schools, assessment and grading, overall course organization, the availability of learning materials and resources, and student satisfaction with the teaching competences acquired on completion of the course (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997; Ricijaš, Huić, & Branica, 2006; Tallman, 1994; Vranešević, Mandić, & Horvat, 2007).

Teacher performance is defined, in the context of this research, as the ability of the teacher to effectively combine theoretical and practical knowledge and communicate these to the students, which is made possible if the college professors’ teaching skills are developed (Kyriacou, 2001). The quality of the student-teacher relationship is one of the key determinants of student satisfaction because a positive relationship can facilitate discussion and learning motivation, whereas verbal aggression is an example of a negative relationship component that decreases student satisfaction and learning motivation (Myers, 2002). Establishing a positive relationship is possible when teachers respect their students, validate their sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and are able to interact and collaborate with their students throughout the learning process (Bognar & Kragulj, 2010). In terms of performance during lectures, students attending Croatian universities consider the course contents interesting, and they also give a high rating to teacher performance in lectures, but they are also dissatisfied when teachers do not implement modern teaching methods or when the competences they develop do not measure up to their prior expectations from the course (Pavin, Rijaveic, & Miljević-Ridički, 2005; Ricijaš et al., 2006). If the quality of teacher performance is high, the students will be able to propose and apply their creativity and ideas, which allows them to develop abilities they will need for lifelong learning and professional development (Bognar, 2006).

Assessment and grading are important aspects of the course because students can develop their methodology in practice only when they receive feedback regarding their

performance. In order to satisfy student expectations from the course, the grading criteria must be clearly defined and implemented objectively in practice. Greenwald and Gillmore (1997) reported that lenient grading criteria were associated with higher student satisfaction, but Centra (2003) reported that assessment and grading criteria did not moderate student satisfaction and evaluation of course quality in terms of teacher performance. Furthermore, even though students are satisfied with assessment and grading practices when the criteria are clear and their grades are objective based on those criteria, their progress should be monitored throughout the duration of the course to improve their satisfaction, rather than just during theoretical and practical exams (Pavin et al., 2005).

Student satisfaction with teaching competences refers to the knowledge and skills they gain through courses during their initial education, such as class planning and evaluation, communication skills for working with children, teachers and parents, creating a positive classroom atmosphere, and the desire for continuous professional development (Vršnik Perše, Ivauš Grmek, Bratina, & Košir, 2015). In addition to the development of the students' professional competences, the course can stimulate their personal development because the communication skills and problem-solving abilities they learn during their teaching experience are transferable to other settings (Radić & Toussaint, 2012). That is why the course classes should be organized and conducted in a manner that allows students to plan and conduct classes in teaching practice based on their own ideas, whereas the role of their mentors is to support them and provide feedback without direct involvement. Teaching a class in front of colleagues, mentors and college professors is cited as one of the most stressful experiences students encounter during initial teacher education, but they consider it to be essential for developing confidence and flexibility (Caires et al., 2012).

Working with pupils directly is an opportunity for developing practical skills and gaining experience, since the students are required to associate theory and practice. However, the organization of courses during initial teacher education determines how developed their competences will be. The main characteristic of good course organization is effective coordination of theoretical lectures and practical activities, but it is also important to ensure that students follow the predetermined plan and syllabus. An adequate number of classes must also be allocated to the course, and the learning environment must be designed to facilitate learning through practical classes because students need time and appropriate conditions for feeling prepared to teach upon graduation. Even when students are satisfied with their respective study programs, they can be dissatisfied with the organization of specific courses, so it is important to consider the role of the institution in planning and organizing classes as one determinant of student satisfaction with courses (Reić Ercegovac & Jukić, 2008).

The availability of learning materials and resources proved to be a significant determinant of student satisfaction with courses. For example, the availability of information technology on college campuses proved to be an important factor in student satisfaction with their courses (Mai, 2005). According to higher education students, the availability

of learning materials in the library is important for their satisfaction, as well as the availability of information on professional training opportunities (Tallman, 1994).

Student satisfaction with courses is an uncommon research topic in Croatia, and the existing body of research on that topic suggests that student satisfaction can be improved by introducing modern teaching methods, updating the course contents, and allocating more time to practical exercises, among other changes (Pavin et al., 2005; Reić Ercegovac & Jukić, 2008; Ricijaš et al., 2006). The purpose of this study was to identify which aspects of the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course require improvement based on student opinion. The objective was to encourage students to provide open-ended feedback and express their recommendations for improving the course.

Methodology

Participants and Instrumentation

A sample of 489 teacher education students in their fifth year of study, who had completed the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course, was surveyed to learn about their satisfaction with the course and to obtain feedback and recommendations. The majority of students attended the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb or one of its remote branches in Petrinja and Čakovec (34.5%). The faculties of teacher education in Rijeka, Zadar, Osijek, Pula, and Split also participated in the study. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

The National Student Survey Questionnaire (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2014) was modified and adapted to assess student satisfaction with the course. One of those modifications was the inclusion of a qualitative open-ended question, which invited students to anonymously provide their feedback, including compliments and suggestions for improving the course quality.

Each response was reviewed to determine if it was pertinent to one or more of the following aspects of the course: teacher performance, student teaching practice, assessment and grading, course organization, availability of learning materials and resources, and student satisfaction with the development of teaching competences.

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Variable	Category	Percentage	Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	3.1%	Faculty	Zagreb	24.9%
	Female	96.9%		Cakovec	6.1%
Age	21	3.5%		Petrinja	3.5%
	22	21.3%		Osijek	33.8%
	23	51.1%		Rijeka	13.3%
	24	17.4%		Zadar	8.2%
	25	2.3%		Split	6.3%
	26+	2.9%		Pula	3.9%

Results nad Discussion

The frequency of compliments and suggestions by category is presented in Table 2. In 24.09% cases ($n = 66$), the students complimented the quality of the course. The majority of the compliments provided by the students, 45.45% ($n = 30$), were related to teacher performance. The majority of the suggestions for improvement, which accounted for 75.91% ($n = 208$) of all comments, highlighted the need for better course organization (46.15%; $n = 96$) and teacher performance (18.27%; $n = 38$).

Table 2. Frequency of student compliments and suggestions by category.

Category	Compliments		Suggestions		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teacher performance	30	10.95%	38	13.87%	68	24.82%
Grading and assessment	-	-	16	5.84%	16	5.84%
Student teaching practice	10	3.65%	16	5.84%	26	9.49%
Course organization	6	2.19%	96	35.04%	102	37.23%
Materials and resources	-	-	26	9.49%	26	9.49%
Student teaching competences	10	3.65%	16	5.84%	26	9.49%
General comments	10	3.65%	-	-	10	3.65%
TOTAL	66	24.09%	208	75.91%	274	100.00%

The students' comments regarding teacher performance during the course tend to compliment the teachers by describing them as supportive, available and approachable ($n = 4$), as well as acknowledging their professional engagement ($n = 2$) and efforts to keep the classes interesting ($n = 2$) and informative ($n = 2$). One student recalled being satisfied by the fact that "the teacher sometimes spoke about life values."

Those compliments are indicative of the teachers' abilities to bridge theory and practice because of their successful application of teaching competences and skills (Jurčić, 2014; Kyriacou, 2001). Student satisfaction with teacher performance in previous studies was associated with tutorial-style classes, but student satisfaction was not associated with

theoretical classes and discussion groups (Civian & Brennan, 1996). Previous studies also noted that a positive student-teacher relationship is one of the key determinants of successful classes because it has a positive effect on student learning motivation and satisfaction (Bognar & Kragulj, 2010; Myers, 2002; Pavin et al., 2005; Ricijaš et al., 2006). The student-teacher relationship is important in the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course because it can encourage students to improve their performance during teaching practice by facilitating the pupils' creative expression. If teachers use examples, provide constructive analysis of the students' teaching practice, encourage student self-reflection and critical thinking, and support the use of ideas and creativity, they will have a positive effect on the students' teaching performance and development. However, if that relationship is adversely affected, it will have a negative effect on the students, which was observed in their recommendations for improving teaching performance.

The recommendations pertinent to teacher performance in the course suggest that teachers not use specific examples and experiences from personal practice in their lectures ($n = 9$). A small number of students also complained that their teachers had not observed their performance during teaching practice or had observed only portions of it ($n = 3$). A few students claimed that their teachers were incompetent and should have been replaced ($n = 3$), and they had also expected college lecturers to devote more lectures to methodology and practical advice ($n = 2$), as well as to support student creativity ($n = 2$). One student emphasized that a "warmer relationship with the students" was needed, and another student claimed that the "students are tense and afraid because the professor is cold and distanced." Although a few students were dissatisfied with the performance of their teachers, a total of 30 out of 66 compliments were pertinent to teacher performance, which is consistent with the fact that Visual Arts Teaching Methodology students are satisfied with teacher performance in the course (Županić Benić & Opić, 2017).

Assessment and grading in the course was not complimented, but recommendations for improvement appeared in 5.84% of all comments ($n = 16$). A small number of students also suggested that teachers should give better feedback after practice lessons in schools and their theoretical exams ($n = 3$), and they also think grading should be more objective ($n = 3$). In the students' feedback, it was emphasized that teachers should clarify their methodological errors and provide feedback that is both more specific and more objective than it currently is.

Student satisfaction with courses and academic performance increases when students have clear assessment and grading criteria, which is consistent with the students' responses in this study (O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2004; Pavin et al., 2005; Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003). Although in some cases the grading criteria can be inferred from accepted practice, grading policies need to clearly communicate the teachers' expectations from the students and achieve objectivity in grading (Sadler, 2005; Sadler, 2009). In the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course, the teachers need to provide feedback to students based on their performance during teaching practice. The teachers also need to build a relationship with the group in order to have everyone in it participate in providing feedback, which should contain compliments that highlight the exceptional

parts of their teaching, while also offering constructive criticism regarding segments that warrant further improvement. That approach engages the group in active participation, and it also helps the students develop the ability to perform individual self-reflection on their future work. Developing a relationship such as the one described above removes the emphasis from grading to the overall assessment process with a clear rationale behind the evaluations.

Positive feedback regarding student teaching practice was observed in 3.65% of all comments ($n = 10$). A few students also pointed out that they had learned a lot from their mentors ($n = 2$) and overall experience in teaching practice ($n = 2$), and they also thought that the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology prepared them best for teaching compared to other methodology-related courses ($n = 2$). Suggestions for improvement appear in 5.84% of all comments, among which some students emphasized the necessity to build better collaboration between mentors and students ($n = 3$). In similar comments, the students reported that their mentors tend to have extremely authoritarian attitudes, that the “classroom teachers present during our teaching experiences require further education,” and that the practical activities in schools need more diversity because “most of them were identical.” One student suggested that only class teachers should be mentors because subject teachers “do not have the sensibility and experience of working with children at that age.”

The relationship between mentors and students is essential in teaching practice. Students without prior teaching experience find just being among pupils they have not met before stressful (Caires et al., 2012). Mentor guidance during the practicum is important for facilitating students’ socioemotional adjustment to teaching, as well as for shaping their identities as future teachers (Caires, Almeida, & Martins, 2009; Ferber & Nillas, 2010). The mentors’ advice can help students to organize their class according to their plan, ensure that the environment and teaching materials have been prepared, inform the pupils in advance that another person will conduct the class, and provide feedback to the students after class. The comments made by students who think that their mentors require further education also indicates an organizational problem because their professional training through lifelong learning needs to be harmonized with the program of the teacher education students.

Course organization was complimented in 2.19% of all cases. Some students found certain activities, such as field experience and teaching practice, interesting and considered the course to be well-organized. Teacher education students whose field experience included visiting a kindergarten to witness the visual arts activities conducted with children at that age were satisfied with that activity, a judgment which is expressed in the following comment: “I appreciate the fact that we visited a kindergarten even though we are enrolled in the course as a part of our elementary education teacher study program because we were able to witness what children in kindergarten are doing and the extent of their abilities.”

Course organization is the most often criticized aspect of the course, since it appears in 35.04% ($n = 96$) of all comments. The main cause for student dissatisfaction with course

organization appears to be the duration of the course, and according to the students, more time should be allocated to extending the duration of their teaching experience ($n = 19$). They highlight that the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course is the only course in which they have to conduct one lecture with pupils in the presence of a college professor, whereas other courses require students to conduct two of those lectures. Furthermore, they recommend increasing the number of course periods allocated to practical activities in schools ($n = 17$), increasing the number of practical activities ($n = 11$), and introducing museum visits or similar field experiences ($n = 8$). A few comments also recommend extending the overall number of classes assigned to the course and increasing the number of visual arts courses available at the faculty ($n = 9$), and they also think Visual Arts Teaching Methodology should be attended in later semesters. Some of those students justified their comments by stating that they wanted to be involved with visual arts throughout their study program, which would help them develop teaching competences.

Additional comments related to improving the organization of the course were brought up by a few students. A few students suggested that teachers should be present during the students' teaching practice for the entire school period and that the teaching experience groups should be smaller ($n = 2$). A small number of student comments recommended increasing the number of practical work requirements at the expense of theoretical lectures ($n = 3$) and an overall better organization of the course ($n = 3$), so that all students could gain practical experience in schools with similar conditions. One student also suggested "opening the possibility of attending visual arts classes at the school where they will teach so that we could get to know the pupils better."

Caires et al. (2012) found that students perceived teaching practice to be the most stressful part of their initial education, but they also believed it to be essential for developing their confidence and flexibility in the workplace. In this study, the students' lack of confidence for teaching was evident, since numerous students expressed the need for additional practical activities during their initial education so that they could gain more practical experience by working directly with pupils. It should be noted that organization and planning depend on the structure of the entire program, so the entire institution determines how satisfied the students will be with a single course (Reić Ercegovac & Jukić, 2008).

In addition to course organization and teacher performance, the size of groups in the course was associated with student satisfaction (Gibson, 2010). At Croatian faculties of teacher education, college professors must simultaneously monitor multiple students during their teaching practice because the number of students in each group ranges from 12-15. Therefore, the students are divided into two subgroups so that professors can monitor two student lectures at the same time. This means that students' will receive feedback and grades based only on their performance while the professor is present. An ideal organization of the course would allow for the formation of smaller groups consisting of 7-10 students. With those group sizes, the students would have adequate conditions for working with pupils, and the professors would be able to monitor their performance during the whole class.

There were no positive comments regarding the availability of learning materials and resources, but 9.49% ($n = 26$) of the students provided negative comments in that category. The majority of those comments ($n = 8$) argue that the faculties need to provide students with the teaching materials they need to use during their teaching practice (e.g., reproduction folders). Some comments highlighted that the students purchase their own materials for that purpose ($n = 2$), which means a high financial burden for them ($n = 3$). Although some feedback focuses on the provision of financial support for students who need to conduct visual arts activities during their teaching experience ($n = 6$), an alternative suggestion was to create a repository of teaching materials at the college from which the students could borrow materials for the practical parts of the course ($n = 4$). Furthermore, some schools where teaching practice takes place lack essential equipment, such as projectors, so the students need to buy or borrow these ($n = 3$). Those comments are consistent with the findings reported by Mai (2005) and Tallman (1994), who found that the availability of learning materials and resources was important for student satisfaction with a course. Teaching experience represents a significant financial cost for students, so it is important to find a solution to alleviate any financial issues associated with the course.

A total of 3.65% ($n = 10$) of the comments conveyed the students' satisfaction with the development of their teaching competences. Some other comments that were less frequently brought up included the successful application of their knowledge during teaching practice ($n = 3$), satisfaction with the outcome of their graded teaching practice ($n = 2$), and overall satisfaction with professional development as a result of the course ($n = 2$). The students also complimented the role of their college professors in helping them develop those competences, as they now know how a lecture involving visual arts activities with children should be conducted.

Negative comments regarding the development of teaching competences account for 5.84% ($n = 16$) of all comments, and the majority of those comments indicate that students do not feel sufficiently competent to assess and grade student work ($n = 4$). A smaller number of other comments suggest that some students are unfamiliar with all the materials and techniques they need to work with during their teaching experience ($n = 2$). A few students also brought up the issue of being given pre-prepared teaching plans rather than being taught how to develop their own ($n = 2$). One student suggested that poor feedback could be one reason why students do not always develop their teaching competences through the course: "We were graded without an adequate explanation and critical approach, and our methodological errors were not clarified, so the [students'] teaching competences did not improve." The students tend to lack the confidence required to teach and communicate with children, and they believe extending the duration of teaching practice would solve that issue ($n = 5$). Finally, they do not feel competent to perform some teacher duties, such as filling out rubrics or selecting teaching methods, and they often attribute those feelings of incompetence to the short time allocated to the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course.

Based on these findings, it is possible to notice that one aspect of the course is the lack of preparation for certain teaching duties, such as assessing and grading artwork. Those

problems arise because the students must conduct a 45-minute class for evaluation, while 45 minutes is the entire amount of time allocated to visual arts in Croatian elementary schools per week. However, it is difficult to reach all milestones (preparation, motivation, assignment presentation, realization, analysis and evaluation) during that time, so little time is left for the analysis and evaluation of the artwork produced. That is why the students need to hasten their performance in order to clean up afterward, which means that grading student artwork is something they encounter only in theory. It is also important to mention that the learning process in visual arts classes, which encompasses learning the visual elements and conducting the creative process, is as important as the actual product of creation. Matijević, Drljača, and Topolovčan (2016) emphasize that those aspects of learning cannot be evaluated using traditional methods that are used in other classes, such as grading scales and standardized tests. Evaluating students in the field of visual arts is best done by keeping a portfolio, taking an action-based approach, manufacturing actual products, self-assessment, and various other methods. Previous studies suggest that elementary school students prefer student-focused assessment and grading methods over traditional grading methods (Matijević, 2006; Matijević et al., 2016; Sahlberg, 2012). Therefore, the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course as a part of the initial teacher education should prepare students, i.e., future teachers, to apply the aforementioned assessment and grading methods.

In addition to specific compliments and suggestions, generic compliments were identified in 3.65% cases ($n = 10$). Some examples of student statements in those cases include “everything was excellent” and “no need to change anything.”

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze the opinions of teacher education students regarding the improvement of the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course. The results of the qualitative analysis of this assessment, which was conducted at all faculties of teacher education in Croatia, revealed those aspects of the course with which students are satisfied, as well as those aspects that warrant further improvement. The positive comments reveal why students believe the course will help them as future professionals, but the most important results are those that identify areas for further improvement in order to increase student satisfaction and facilitate their professional development. The majority of the student compliments highlighted the quality of teacher performance, which primarily refers to the quality of the student-teacher relationship, whereas the most criticism and suggestions for improvement were directed at course organization. One of the more common suggestions was to increase the course duration to increase the students' perception of their teaching competences required to perform visual arts activities. The significance of these findings is the insight they provide in the specific compliments and suggestions based on student opinions of the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course, and these opinions are important for teachers and higher education institutions because they are indicators of areas that require quality improvements for increasing student satisfaction and preparedness for teaching.

Summary

Assessing student satisfaction is an important part of course quality improvement. That is why the purpose of this study was to assess and analyze the students' opinions regarding the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course, which is taught at the Croatian faculties of teacher education. The objective was to encourage students to provide feedback in form of both compliments and suggestions that can be used to improve the quality of the course in the future.

An anonymous questionnaire was administered to students in their final years of study after they had completed the requirements for the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course. The questionnaire was a modified version of the National Student Survey Questionnaire (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2014) that both quantified the students' satisfaction with the course and provided them with the opportunity to

Based on its contents, each response was assigned to one or more of the following categories: (a) teacher performance, (b) student teaching practice, (c) assessment and grading, (d) course organization, (e) availability of learning materials and resources, and (f) student satisfaction with the development of teaching competences. A few generic compliments (e.g., "everything was excellent") were categorized separately from the specific comments in the categories mentioned above.

The results showed that the students' compliments tend to be associated with teacher performance, which refers to the ability of teachers to establish collaborative relationships based on respect with their students and facilitate their development in terms of gaining theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Students described their teachers as open and accessible, but a few students also pointed out that their teachers did not use specific examples and experiences from personal practice in their lectures, which means there is also room for improvement in that area.

The majority of the feedback aimed at providing suggestions for future improvements is pertinent to the organization of the course. Course organization in this study was defined as the coordination of theoretical lectures and practical activities, the management of workflow according to the plan and syllabus of the course, as well as the allocation of sufficient time to develop the students' competences. The results indicate that students do not feel competent to perform some duties, such as filling out rubrics or assessing and grading the pupils' artworks, and the students suggest increasing the number of practical activities and the overall number of theoretical and practical requirements. The students also argued that one school period, during which they perform a lecture for their evaluation, is not sufficient for improving their teaching competences and should be increased to two lectures.

Some important issues were also brought up in regard to assessment and grading. According to some students, even though they received a grade at the end of the course, the assessment process did not provide them with insights into the mistakes they had made

during their teaching practice. Consequently, their teaching competences were not developed to their full possible extent at the end of the course.

The significance of these findings is the insight they provide in the specific compliments and suggestions based on the students' opinions of the Visual Arts Teaching Methodology course, and those opinions are important for teachers and higher education institutions because they are indicators of areas that require quality improvements for increasing student satisfaction and preparedness for teaching.

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