

Assumptions about Knowledge and Learning Approaches Amongst South African Postgraduate Students

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ABSTRACT A common thread in contemporary research in student learning refers to the ways in which students go about learning. Research evidence implies that for meta-cognition (meta-learning) to take place, students should be aware of their own learning processes and have control over them. The concept of meta-learning leads to a model of student learning in which the respective links between knowledge assumptions, personal factors, the situational context, approaches to learning and the quality of outcomes are all mediated by the students' meta-learning capabilities. The purpose of this current study, based on a quantitative empirical study amongst a group of postgraduate students at the University of South Africa, was to examine the link between two of these constructs, namely the 'knowledge assumptions' and 'learning approaches' among them. Research done so far has mainly focused on 'approaches to learning' and has very seldom integrated this construct with others, such as students' epistemological beliefs about learning and knowing. An epistemological questionnaire and a learning process questionnaire accompanied by a five-point Likert scale were used as research instruments and distributed during a discussion class of 125 postgraduate students to assess this relation. An exploratory and a confirmatory factorial analysis were used to analyse the data. The findings confirm a positive relationship between knowledge assumptions and learning approaches amongst participants and suggest that universities should provide the necessary support to foster the development of a mature learning experience amongst their students. The study provided substantial justification for looking at epistemological beliefs in the study of learning approaches among university students.