Teaching philosophy **Wahideh Achbari**

During my academic career I have always appreciated the opportunity to convey scientific knowledge and methodologies. The following teaching philosophy, evidencing my commitment to excellent teaching, has resulted from my experience with students at different levels, ranging from first years to advanced students. I have served as a university lecturer, course convenor, tutor, and mentor, which has given me the following insights.

To me scientific education is a dynamic process with three goals: 1) reducing science anxiety and science aversion, 2) encouraging cooperation between students, and 3) ensuring that students understand essential concepts and are able to apply these critically and independently. My experience has taught me that students will only truly absorb the material if they are actively involved. Therefore, a lecturer cannot solely rely on traditional teaching methods, but has to encourage academic debate, offer tailored exercises, and provide non-generic feedback. Students should learn to think independently, but also require direction at critical moments.

Cooperation between students is both a goal and a means to keep them engaged. Cooperation encourages the exchange of ideas between peers and prevents science aversion and anxiety. Quantitative methods courses can be particularly prone to such anxiety. To encourage a cooperative atmosphere where students are allowed to make mistakes I create small groups during tutorials, keep my distance when required to reduce pressure, and provide practical examples. While teaching a postgraduate course on quantitative data analysis, I designed hands-on exercises, which students reproduced together. Making errors in an informal setting helped them to overcome science anxiety. My alternative approach to teaching was appreciated by the students, which resulted in my nomination for a "The Best Teaching Award".

This approach has also served me in supervising interns and research assistants in my role as a project leader and postdoctoral researcher. While advanced students are often motivated and can work fairly independently, they need to be guided at crucial times in order to not lose sight of the bigger picture and the project goal. Therefore, I encourage them to regularly ask questions and to break down their tasks in smaller ones, which helps them to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

To provide a lively and encouraging learning environment, I use every-day examples to illustrate theoretical concepts in my lectures. To that end I rely on news items from social media, maps, videos, and cartoons. For example, during a lecture on Multiculturalism and policy shifts vis-a-vis immigrant integration in Europe, which I held in Edinburgh, I showed a video campaign (by the Dutch SIRE foundation). In this video children pronounced well-known slogans of Geert Wilders. This served to illustrate the populist turn and societal responses in Dutch politics in mid-2010. British students in Edinburgh who were unfamiliar with debates on multiculturalism in other European countries could better contextualise their reading material, while encouraging debate during the tutorials.

In order for the discussions in the tutorials to be academically informed, I use a weekly reading exercise, which consists of 4 elements: a core citation; argument; connection; and a critical question. Students should prepare this before coming to class. They should summarise the

material in a core citation, explain this with arguments, summarise the material in their own words connecting their reading, and to pose a critical question. This format stimulates the students to present their understanding of the core concepts in a structured way and to engage with the literature instead of solely relying on their general knowledge and opinions.

Although exams and essays are essential to the assessment process, one can occasionally rely on alternatives. Writing policy briefs, for example, can show the students how theoretical discussions and empirical findings have real life application. I designed a policy brief in which students were asked to consult a specialised website (MIPEX) to summarize empirical data and to write a policy brief for a minister. The minister, who is hypothetically taking part in an EU summit on immigrant integration, had only 30 minutes to prepare their stance. This served to highlight how crucial it is to succinctly summarise and present data, while signalling the relevance of scientific enquiry in policy circles.

I believe the best way to improve the quality of teaching is through enhancing pedagogical skills, and an up-to-date theoretical and methodological knowledge by committing oneself to continuous improvement. Developing and providing high quality teaching goes beyond explaining the material. I aim to show students why asking questions is crucial to scientific enquiry, and do not see a clear divide between teaching and research. By using examples from my own research I can illustrate the importance of the studied material. Teaching and thesis supervision often helps me to see research questions in a new light. I believe that academic education is a dynamic process where students are an active part of their learning experience rather than a passive vessel for knowledge.