

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Learning Philosophy in the 21st Century

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This study will answer the question, what do students expect to learn from philosophy teachers in the 21st century. by framing a response based on the following: The researcher's teaching philosophy developed over 30 years, a survey conducted of UAEU students, and a discussion of the changing role and purpose of philosophy in the academy and current pedagogical philosophy in teaching. The study has focused on how philosophical questions have been changed over time, using new technology to teach philosophy, what are the characteristics of philosophy teachers and students, the new direction for teaching philosophy, and career opportunities. The practical frame of this research will be analyzed students survey conducted on female students from United Arab Emirates University. I will use the method of content analysis to investigate and trace this phenomenon to determine its meaning, developing philosophical questions, and the new direction for teaching philosophy. Then I will examine the data taken from the theoretical and practical sources for the purpose of diagnosing and reaching conclusions a process which is called in philosophy synthesis, therefore the approach of the research would be analysis and synthesis.

Keywords: *Philosophical Questions, Characteristics, Goals of teaching philosophy, Career Opportunities, Students survey*

Methodology

The research design comprises two basic aspects, namely, the theoretical frame and the applied practical research.

In the theoretical frame, I will rely on the literature of describing the phenomenon of teaching philosophy referring to discussions of the changing role and purpose of philosophy in the academy and current pedagogical philosophy in teaching to be undertaken as a guide for such description.

The practical frame, on the other hand, will be analyzed students survey conducted on female students from United Arab Emirates University.

I will use the method of content analysis to investigate and trace this phenomenon to determine its meaning, developing philosophical questions, and the new direction for teaching philosophy, and then analyze the data taken from the theoretical and practical sources for the purpose of diagnosing and

reaching conclusions a process which is called in philosophy synthesis, therefore the approach of the research would be analysis and synthesis.

The result of this method is produced two academic tasks a presentation presents at this conference and the individual research will be published on the ANINER's journal.

Introduction

What do Students Expect to learn from Philosophy Teachers in the 21st Century?

This study will answer this question by framing a response based on the following:

- 1) The researcher's teaching philosophy developed over 30 years, in many different universities around the world.
- 2) A survey conducted of UAEU students whom the researcher is currently teaching philosophy.
- 3) A discussion of the changing role and purpose of philosophy in the academy and current pedagogical philosophy in teaching.

Traditionally, the researcher taught theoretical philosophy. The objective of this was not for students to use philosophy itself, but for them to gain knowledge rather than skills. All philosophy students need to understand who key philosophers are and what their philosophy is. Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Al-Farabi, John Dewey attracted former generations of students, who desired to know about and appreciate their philosophy. This traditional method of teaching philosophy used the Socratic method to memorize and recall information in order to assess student learning.¹

Why did the students in the past focus just on acquiring knowledge?

In the past, there were limited resources for obtaining information about philosophy and philosophers. Classes were the main sources of information and otherwise there was a general lack of access to data. Historically, there were very few local channels, limited hard copies of newspapers, and magazines were also not available to all students, so the classes were expected to be rich sources of information. Educated people were also evaluated according to their knowledge rather than their skills.

¹ Plato's Theaetetus, John M. Cooper, Routledge Library Edition, Epistemology, V1, London and New York, First Edition 1990, this edition 2015, http://eltondeaquiles.pucp.edu.pe/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Routledge-Library-Editions_-Epistemology-John-M--Cooper-Platos-Theaetetus-Routledge-2015.pdf

Philosophical Questions

Philosophical questions have changed over time. Thales (Miletus 624-546BC) asked the first metaphysical question – what is the primary principle of the world?² He rejected the traditional explanation of the world’s origin: instead building his answer on ideas about mythology, he also began a rational inquiry stating that the origin of all matter is water.(Aristotle, *Metaph*,983b21-22).

The value of Thales’s question is not in answering the question itself but in undertaking the philosophical inquiry.

Pythagoras of Samos (582-504BC)³ made a connection between philosophy and practical life, defining philosophy as “the love of wisdom”.⁴ Thus, it is possible to assert that the Ancient Greek philosophers asked the most fundamental questions about human beings and their relationship to the world.

The central traditional philosophical questions were:

- What is the goal of it all?
- What is knowledge?
- Do we have ‘free will’?
- Are ethical values relative or absolute?
- What is truth?
- How can we be happy?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What is a good life?⁵

These questions have since evolved in reference to contemporary philosophical issues. In his lectures, Stanford philosopher John Perry, amongst others, suggested the following philosophical questions:

- A. **Issue:** Global Justice. **Q:** What new principles of justice will help us manage distinctively 21st century problems like preserving the environment while allowing the poorer nations of the world to improve their standards of living?
- B. **Issue:** Humans and the environment. **Q:** What relationship should humans have to the environment?
- C. **Issue:** The rise of cloning, designer babies. **Q:** What is a person?
- D. **Issue:** New models of collective decision making and collective rationality. **Q:** Can philosophers help build them in time to guide us in meeting the challenges of this century?
- E. **Issue:** Intellectual property, in the age of re-mix culture. **Q:** Can the very idea of intellectual property survive in the age of re-mix?

²<http://www.iep.utm.edu/thales/#H3>

³Burkert. W, *Lore and Science in Early Pythagoreanism*, tr. E. L. Minar (Cambridge, Mass., 1972).

⁴<https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Pythagoras>

⁵<https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-top-10-big-philosophical-questions-most-people-wonder-about>

- F. **Issue:** Information and misinformation in the information age. **Q:** How can we distinguish the good from the bad, the wheat from the chaff?
- G. **Issue:** Science, especially neuroscience. **Q:** Can freedom survive the onslaught of science?
- H. **Issue:** The Mind-Body problem. **Q:** Neuroscience is revealing so much about the brain. Does this new knowledge solve age-old mysteries of the mind? Or does it reduce the mind to mere dumb matter and rob us of what we once thought was so special about us?
- I. **Issue:** Finding a new basis for social identification. **Q:** How can we sustain local communities, communities with which we can identify?
- J. **Issue:** Finding a new basis for common sensibilities and common values. **Q:** Can we find a new basis for shared values that will bring us together rather than tear us apart?⁶

Using New Technology to Teach Philosophy

The internet has become a vital tool for students, while smartphones, laptops and satellite television have contributed to a plethora of information hubs. Research shows: “The generation of American kids (aged 3 to 18) is the tech-savviest in history: 27% of them use tablets, 43% use smartphones, and 52% use laptops. Los Angeles County alone spent \$30 million on classroom iPads this year, outfitting 640,000 kids by late 2014”.⁷

Various types of technologies are being used in classrooms, such as:

- Computers,
- The creation of class websites and blogs,
- Digital microphones,
- Mobile devices,
- Smart interactive Whiteboards,
- Online media, and
- Online study tools.

As a result, new methods of teaching philosophy have emerged utilizing these technologies. The internet is used as a point of contact for students when selecting their majors, enrolling in courses, receiving education materials, submitting assignments, and completing administrative tasks. It saves time and establishes the world as a global village. One of the key advantages offered by the Internet is making information available to people around the world; individuals simply need a computer or smartphone and Internet access, and can then obtain whatever information they require.

⁶<https://neouto.wordpress.com/2010/01/21/top-ten-philosophical-issues-of-the-21st-century/>

⁷The digital Parent Trap 2013 by time inc. Originally Published August 19, 2013. *The official SAT study guide* (The College Board: New York, 2016) 620.

Distance education is a unique example of using the Internet for education. “Distance education or distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. Courses that are conducted (51% or more) are either hybrid, blended or 100% whole instruction”.⁸ Students are able to receive most of their education without physically attending a classroom.

Characteristics of Philosophy Teachers

Teachers of philosophy should possess the following characteristics:

- A. Flexibility,
- B. Respect for students,
- C. Willingness to listen,
- D. Creates a sense of community and belonging in the classroom,
- E. Enthusiasm and compassion,
- F. Love of learning,
- G. Leadership skills,
- H. Ability to collaborate with colleagues on an ongoing basis,
- I. Maintain professionalism in all areas.⁹

Characteristics of Philosophy Students

Philosophy students should possess the specific attributes required to study philosophy. The study of philosophy differs from other subjects: it requires an ability to understand and analyse philosophical texts. Tutors have listed some of the skills and qualities they regard as important when considering an application from an individual wanting to study for a BA Philosophy:

- A. Intellectual curiosity
Philosophy students should have an enquiring mind, and the inclination to explore philosophical questions, as well as to determine the right way to answer them.
- B. Intellectual independence

Students must think for themselves, question the opinions of others, and take responsibility for their own philosophical conclusions.

- C. Critical intelligence

Students read in order to probe, analyse, and dissect philosophical positions and arguments.

⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education

⁹<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/nine-characteristics-of-a-great-teacher/>

D. Commitment

Students demonstrate an active willingness to read and think independently and a determination to augment their critical and analytical skills.

E. Communication skills

Students possess a good standard of written and spoken language, allowing them to express their ideas clearly and effectively in seminars, personal statements, and other activities.

F. Study skills

Students organize their working day, and have the self-discipline to keep to their own timetables, the ability to prioritize what may seem an alarmingly long list of reading commitments, and the planning capacity to meet a continuous series of deadlines.¹⁰

Goals of Teaching Philosophy

Skills have become a new phenomenon, and the main goal of learning philosophy is primarily focused on acquiring skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and problem-solving. As an example of these skills, here is a description for the critical thinking course at Mendocino College, Ukiah, California:

“Critical Thinking is the process by which we develop and support our beliefs, and evaluate the strength of arguments made by others in real-life situations. We will analyse media, the current political environment, and our own beliefs and moral inclinations. You will learn to appraise information and influences, discuss controversial topics intelligently, and construct well-reasoned arguments on a variety of topics.....¹¹

The newly identified skills for teaching philosophy related to critical thinking are:

- A. Developing and supporting beliefs,
- B. Evaluating the strength of arguments made by others in real-life situations,
- C. Applying the strategies to understanding current issues, belief systems, political environments, analysing media, and ethical positions,
- D. The ability to summarize,
- E. The ability to consider context,

¹⁰http://www.southampton.ac.uk/philosophy/undergraduate/philosophy_student_specification.page

¹¹<https://criticalthinking-mc205.wikispaces.com/Course+Syllabus>

- F. The ability to devise independent theories, and
- G. The ability to develop reasonable conclusions.

Today, philosophy students read, discuss, and critically examine problems and issues in the field of philosophy and cross-disciplinary aspects of philosophy. This is because they not only need to understand philosophy, they are also – more importantly – expected to use philosophy as a handbook of life learning skills. For example, a business student may study aspects of philosophy in terms of their practical application for managing a group of people or a corporation, or they may study philosophy from the perspective of implementing ethics in the workplace.

To achieve a new direction for teaching philosophy, it is crucial to consider the following:

- A. Increasing the role of digital technology in all philosophy courses and disciplines,
- B. Training students in critical thinking, logical analysis and reasoned argument,
- C. Educating students in creative problem solving, by drawing on the history of systems of thought and practice in hypothetical thinking, to enable forms of thinking outside the square,
- D. Providing students with specific knowledge of the central areas of philosophy, including logic, value theory, history of philosophy, political philosophy, cognitive science, metaphysics and epistemology,
- E. Equipping students with advanced skills in the analysis, construction, reconstruction and evaluation of arguments,
- F. Equipping students with advanced skills in research, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, to enable high-level communication, and
- G. Instilling a lifelong love of learning by encouraging curiosity-driven academic inquiry.

Career Opportunities

Many employers seek employees who have high-level skills in research, communication, analysis, reasoning, ethical sensibility, and innovative thinking. It is necessary to demonstrate *excellence* in these skills, which can be done with outstanding undergraduate results in philosophy or with a higher degree in philosophy. Therefore, one opportunity suggested is to continue philosophical education in graduate school.

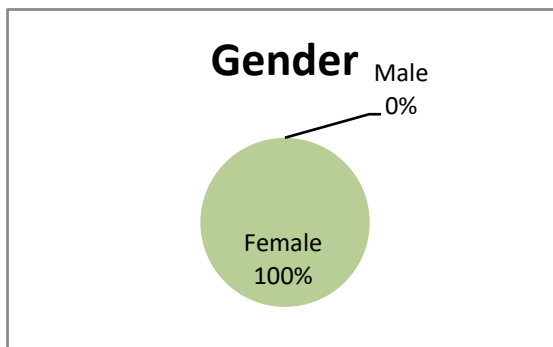
Some specific career opportunities for those with good degrees in philosophy include: professor, journalist, editor, policy developer (in government and non-government organizations), paralegal specialist, environmental manager, ethicist (in health systems, corporations, and research organizations), author, researcher, technical writer, philosophical counsellor, software designer (applying logic to object-oriented programming), or diplomat.

Students Survey

The results of the students' surveys on Learning Philosophy in the 21st Century as following:

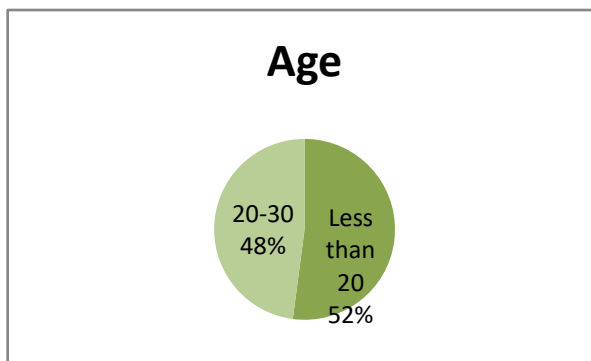
Question 1: Gender?

This survey was conducted on 48 female students from United Arab Emirates University.



Question 2: Age?

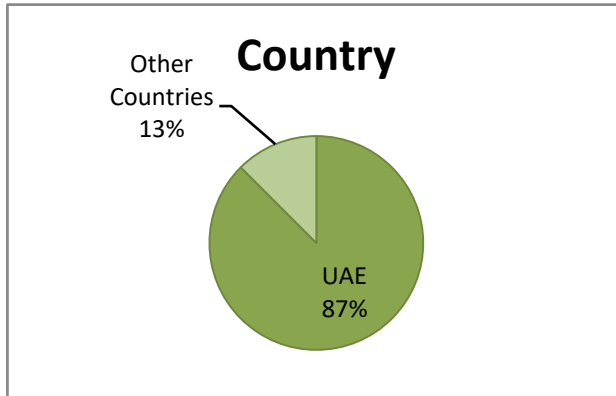
The pie chart below shows the percentage of respondents in each age group. 25 students (52%) were less than 20 years old, while 23 students (48%) were between 20 and 30 years old.



Age	Number of Students
Less than 20	25
20-30	23

Question 3: Country?

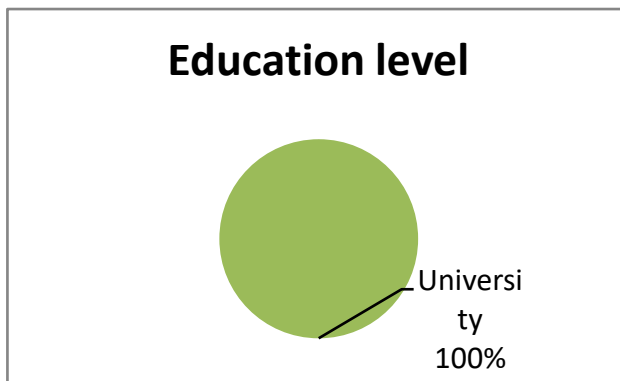
The pie chart below represents the respondents' countries of origin. 42 participants (87%) are from the United Arab Emirates, while 6 participants (13%) are from other countries, such as Syria and Pakistan.



Country	Number of students
UAE	42
Other Countries	6

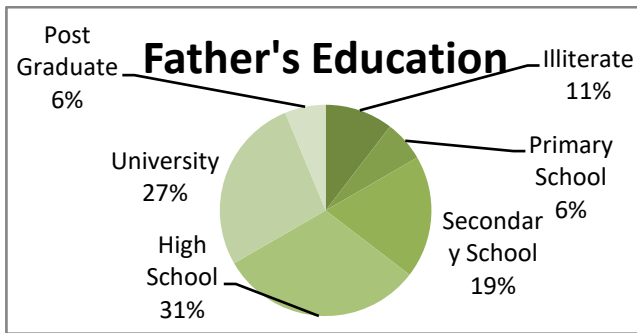
Question 4: Education Level?

The survey was undertaken by university students.



Question 5: Father's Education?

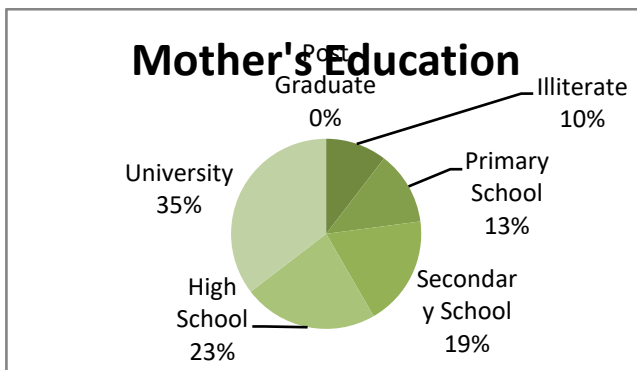
The pie chart below presents the levels of education achieved by respondents' fathers. The highest numbers are 15 (31%) for high school and 13 (27%) for university education, while the lowest is 3 (6%) for both postgraduate and primary school educations.



Father's Education	Number of students
Illiterate	5
Primary School	3
Secondary School	9
High School	15
University	13
Postgraduate	3

Question 6: Mother's Education?

The pie chart below shows the percentages gathered from the survey with regard to the level of education reached by the respondents' mothers. The highest percentage is 35% for university followed by 23% for high school, while the lowest is 10% for illiterate.

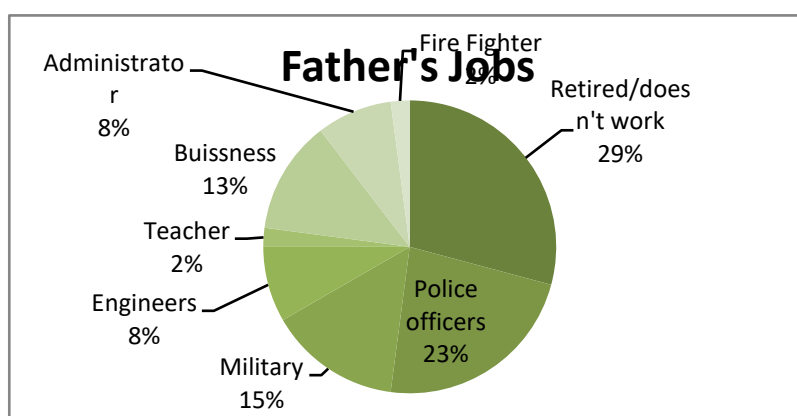


Mother's Education	Number of students
Illiterate	5
Primary School	6

Secondary School	9
High School	11
University	17
Post Graduate	0

Question 7: Father's Work?

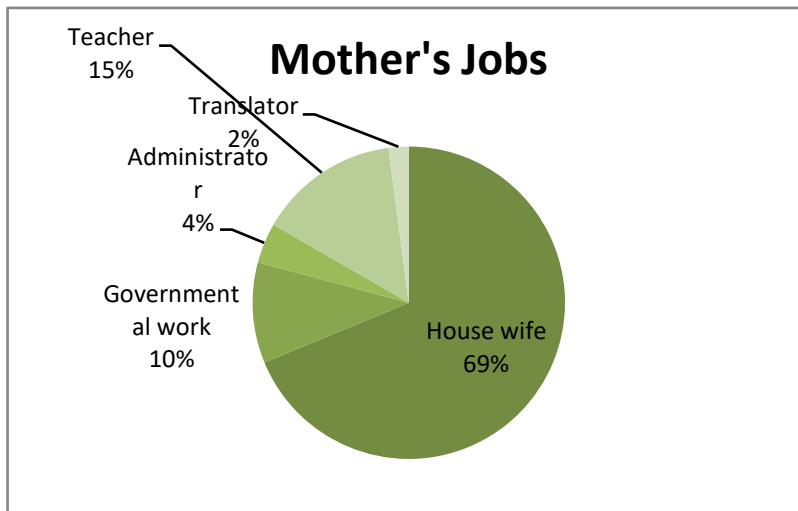
The pie chart below shows the percentages gathered from the survey with regard to the range of jobs held by the respondents' fathers. The results show that a high percentage (29%) of fathers are retired/not working. The second highest is 23% for police officers. Business and military are similar, with a percentage of 13% and 15% respectively. There are also a range of other jobs, such as teachers, fire fighters, and administrators.



Father's Work	Number of students
Retired/doesn't work	14
Police officers	11
Military	7
Engineers	4
Teacher	1
Business	6
Administrator	4
Fire Fighter	1

Question 8: Mother's Work?

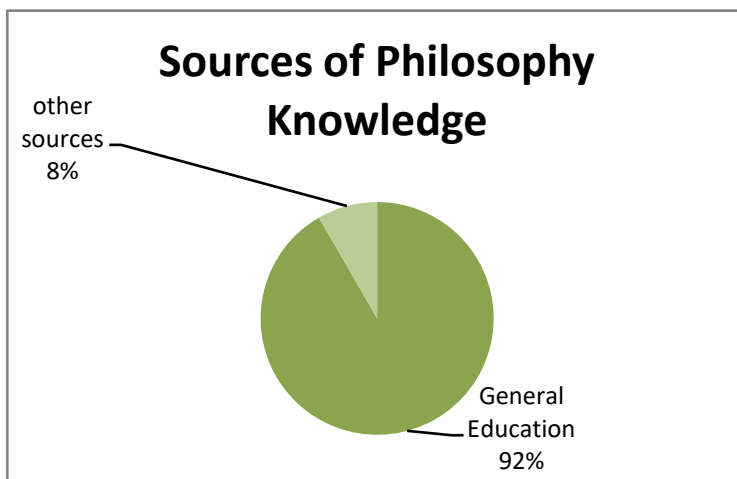
The pie chart below shows the percentages collated from the survey with regard to the range of jobs held by the respondents' mothers. The results show that the majority (69%) of mothers are housewives. The second highest percentage (15%) refers to teachers, followed by governmental work (10%). The lowest percentages are for other jobs, such as translators and administrators.



Mother's Work	Number of students
Housewife	33
Governmental work	5
Administrator	2
Teacher	7
Translator	1

Question 9: Do You Study Philosophy Courses in General Education Or Other Programmes? If yes, what are they?

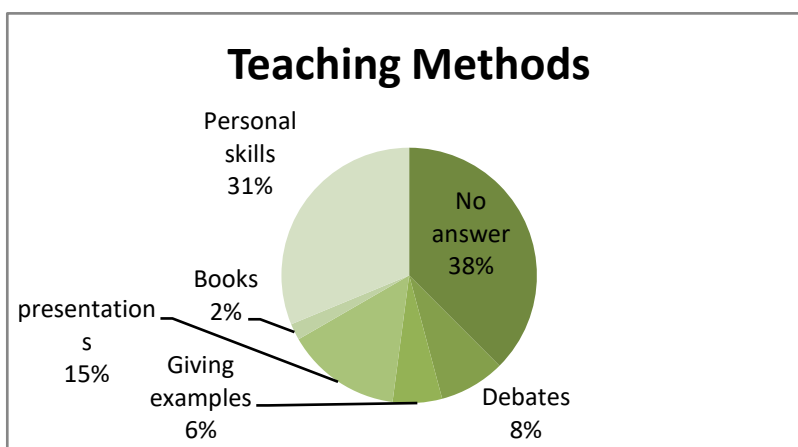
In response to question nine of the survey, 44 out of the 48 students (92%) stated that their knowledge of philosophy comes from general education courses (this is a band of courses which students elect to study based on their interests). Such courses include: introduction to philosophy, the principle of professional ethics, critical thinking, and human rights. Other respondents stated that philosophy is a component of some courses in their area of specialization.



Source of Philosophy	Number of students
General Education	44
Other sources	4

Question 10: How do Different Teachers at University and College Levels Teach Philosophy?

The answers to this question indicate that philosophy is being taught using different techniques and methods. In total, 31% of students described how their professors use personal skills when teaching, such as choosing to talk about a small part of philosophy or going into specific areas of philosophy in depth. Using technology like presentations ranks second (15%), followed by debates through discussing case studies from articles (6%), and giving examples from practical life (8%). The smallest percentage is 2% for books. 38% of the students had no answer for this question, with many explaining that this is the first philosophy course they have taken.

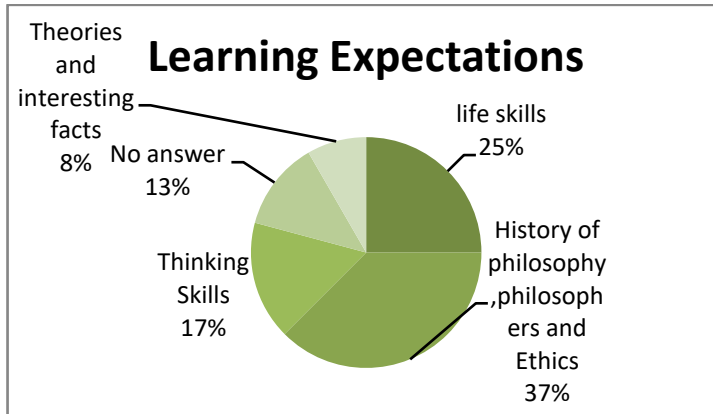


Teaching Methods	Number of students
No answer	18
Debates	4
Giving examples	3
Presentations	7
Books	1
Personal skills	15

Question 11: What do the Students Expect to learn from Philosophy Teachers?

The pie chart below shows the percentages gathered from the survey with regard to what the respondents expect to learn from their philosophy teachers. The answers show that most of the participants (37%) are expecting to learn about the “history of philosophy, philosophers and ethics”, while 25% expect to learn about life skills, and 17% are hoping to gain critical thinking skills from their study of philosophy. Just four participants (8%) were expecting to learn about theories and interesting facts.

It is important to note that 13% of the respondents had no answer to this question.



Learning expectations	Number of students
Life skills	12
History of philosophy, philosophers and ethics	18
Thinking Skills	8
Theories and interesting facts	4
No answer	6

