

Students' perception of the flipped classroom:

Teaching Consumer Behavior and Market Research classes in two Swiss Universities

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Abstract

Marketing instructors have traditionally sought to use experiential and active learning methods in their teaching. The flipped classroom is a learner-centered innovative pedagogical approach that moves the delivery of class material outside the classroom to focus on collaborative activities during class sessions. This qualitative exploratory research aims at understanding how students perceive their experience and the outcome of flipped classroom marketing courses in two Swiss universities. The analysis shows mixed results depending on the student population involved, as well as on the format of the preparatory material provided.

Keywords Flipped Classroom, Inverted classroom, Marketing, Learning outcomes

Introduction

A research conducted on 107 marketing faculty (Smart et al, 1999) found out that they aim at attaining the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom, 1956), placing a greater emphasis on how students can apply the taught content and develop competencies, such as problem solving, that are required by prospective employers. A review of all articles published in the Journal of Marketing Education between its creation in 1979 and 2012 showed that "experiential learning" had the second greatest number and percentage of articles published, right after "assessment" (Gray et al, 2012). Gray et al. (2012) describe experiential learning as "*a cornerstone of marketing education and a signature pedagogy for the discipline*".

Modern technology enables a type of experiential active learning model known as "flipped classroom", first introduced by Baker, 2000, and Lage et al., 2000, and popularized through online videos and activities by, among others, Karl Fisch, Jon Bergmann and the Khan Academy (Butt, 2014)

This research aims at understanding how the flipped classroom mechanism can affect students' perceived experience and perceived outcomes through a qualitative exploratory research conducted in 7 classes of Consumer Behavior and Market Research in 2 Swiss Universities in spring 2016.

Literature Review

Flipped classrooms are about moving the "delivery" of material outside of formal class time (through the use of extensive notes, video recorded lectures, book chapters and other appropriate means) and using formal class time for students to undertake collaborative and interactive activities relevant to that material, such as problem-solving, case studies, exercises, examples, etc., (Butt, 2014). Traditionally, a quiz is performed at the beginning of the class time to assess if students have done their preparatory work. Indeed, a research conducted by Smart et al (1999) showed that among the changes perceived by faculty over the previous ten years, was the fact that students seemed to have a general unwillingness to read assigned materials. Thus many students need to be motivated to read their textbook and do their homework (Frydenberg, 2012).

Research across various fields (Bishop & Verleger, 2013) finds that students provide mixed feedback on flipped classrooms. Lage (2000), Gannod et al (2008) and Bates & Galloway (2012) report mostly positive feedback, Schullery et al (2011) and Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette (2014) report a mix of positive and negative feedback, whereas Strayer (2012) and Jaster (2013) report mostly negative

feedback. Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette (2014) conclude that flipped classroom models might be only effective with specific student populations. Usually, students complain about workload and highlight the importance of clear guidelines and the need to be well organized to succeed in a flipped classroom (Wanner & Palmer, 2015).

One of the pitfalls of flipped classrooms is that students must overcome their reliance on traditional classroom teaching and be willing to accept the responsibility for self-learning that comes with a flipped class (Techsmith, 2013; Knewton, 2013). However, Goodwin and Miller (2011) surveyed 453 instructors who flipped their classrooms and identified 5 benefits of flipped classrooms: Improved student-teacher interaction, Opportunity for real-time feedback, Student engagement, Self-paced learning and More meaningful homework. Teachers, nonetheless, express concerns regarding the time commitment and the workload to set up, implement and manage a flipped classroom (Wanner & Palmer, 2015). Although flipped classroom teaching methods have been somewhat researched, very few research has been done in business education (Schullery et al, 2011; Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette, 2014) and we were not able to find any research on students' assessment of flipped classrooms in teaching marketing,

Methodology

Student data was collected from seven part-time and full-time undergraduate marketing research classes taught by three different teachers in two different schools in Spring 2016. Instead of the traditional quiz performed at the beginning of each session, a different approach was chosen to overcome the risk of students' lack of preparation (Smart et al, 1999; Fox, 2016). In one school (4 classes), powerpoint slides were provided to the students by the instructor. Each week, one group of student was required to present a summary of the course material at the beginning of the class. In the other school (3 classes), 2 books were used as a basis for the course: Malhotra (2014) and Solomon (2013). Each week, 2 groups of students were required to summarize, at the beginning of the class, a 25 to 40 pages book chapter assigned to each. The best summaries from the 3 classes were made available (slides and speakers' notes) to the students, after the session, on the online platform. In all 7 classes, instructors provided feedback on the summaries presented, introduced additional or missing content as well as added many examples. For the second half of the class session, interactive exercises were done in groups. In addition, all classes did a market research project, for a real client.

Data was collected through standardized surveys used by schools to assess classes in an ISO Quality approach. Therefore, two different questionnaires, depending on schools, were distributed. However, both surveys included open-ended questions about strong and weak points. Students completed the questionnaires anonymously and online, so, we do not have any demographics about the students. Additionally, one of the instructors asked the students (2 classes) to make up to 3 recommendations to improve the teaching. Sources were categorized according to table 1, below:

Table 1: Categorization of sources

	Class	Number of respondents	Full time (FT) or part-time (PT)	School	Preparatory material provided	Survey method
Source 1	A	21	FT	Geneva	Textbooks	Standardized questionnaire
Source 2	B	15	FT	Fribourg	Instructor material	Standardized questionnaire
Source 3	C	14	FT	Fribourg	Instructor material	Standardized questionnaire

Source 4	D	17	PT	Fribourg	Instructor material	Standardized questionnaire
Source 5	E	21	PT	Fribourg	Instructor material	Standardized questionnaire
Source 6	F	21	PT	Geneva	Textbooks	Standardized questionnaire
Source 7	G	23	PT	Geneva	Textbooks	Standardized questionnaire
Source 8	D	23	PT	Fribourg	Instructor material	Recommendations
Source 9	E	27	PT	Fribourg	Instructor material	Recommendations

The research process followed different steps:

- We conducted a thorough literature review to determine the state of the art of research related to the use of the flipped classroom approach in general, and more specifically in marketing.
- Based on this literature review, we identified key issues to investigate.
- Schools sent questionnaires to students to assess the quality of teaching. A total of 154 students responded to a standardized quality-aimed questionnaires and/or to an open-ended question about recommendations for improvement.
- The collected data was analyzed using content analysis (with the help of Nvivo) based on codes and categories of codes from the literature review. We also counted the frequency of words to find out any additional relevant codes.
- We conducted a cross member validation to ensure higher reliability of our findings.

Open-ended questions were used, consistently with the exploratory nature of our study but we faced the difficulty that students sometimes provided very short comments that were difficult to interpret. In that case, comments were ignored when analyzing content.

As code categories (parent node in Nvivo), we retained the 4 characteristics identified by Crews & Butterfield (2014), i.e., class structure, interaction, instructor and material. Word count allowed us to add codes as child nodes and new parent nodes, such as learning outcomes or semester projects. The whole corpus was coded. Relevant parts were associated with one or several codes. All the code-related content was analyzed.

Discussion

This research revealed divergent attitudes regarding the way we applied the flipped classroom method. In-line with Finley-Thompson & Mombourquette (2014), it appeared that this approach is better suited for specific students' populations, i.e. in our research, the top and the part-time students. These students might prefer this approach as it allows a self-paced and steadier learning, for which they might be better prepared (techsmith, 2013; Knewton, 2013). The majority of students seems to have trouble to let go of the traditional approach they are used to and they consider this approach as an imposed and useless change which, in-line with Wanner & Palmer (2015) provides too much workload, requires clear guidelines and well organized students. Therefore, teachers should think of class structures and mechanisms that would enable to benefit from the advantages while addressing the drawbacks of flipped classrooms.

Teachers' skills were highlighted. However, the hard work of teachers, mentioned in Wanner & Palmer (2015) was not recognized. On the contrary, students considered that there was no real work by the instructors. To address these shortcomings, this approach should be better explained to the students at the

very beginning of the course, i.e. roles of each, involvement, objectives, etc. Instructors might also be more directive when setting the guidelines, otherwise students might feel lost and overwhelmed when dealing on their own with all the material. It is worth mentioning that students provided feedback that is more positive when the preparatory material was a set of powerpoint slides provided by the instructor than when it was a set of assigned textbook chapters.

In-line with Goodwill & Miller (2013), students valued and wanted even more real-time feedback. For many, they found their engagement enhanced by this method. Yet, in contradiction to Goodwill & Miller (2013), few appeared prepared for this self-paced learning approach and rare were those who found that the preparatory homework was meaningful.

Further research should be conducted in a more structured and robust manner, for instance, by using a unique questionnaire for all the students. As our research showed mixed results, exploratory research based on semi-structured interviews might help to gain in-depth insight of motivations and inhibitors related to the flipped classroom approach. In particular, it would be interesting to know if students' assessment of flipped classroom is correlated to their prior experience with this method (or lack thereof) or their ability to learn on their own. Additional information as to the gender and age of students might also provide a better understanding on the types of students better suited for flipped classroom approaches in marketing teaching.

References available upon request