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## Student Management Teams as a means of communication and learning experience satisfaction

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### Abstract

The study aimed to assess the contribution of Student Management Teams (SMTs) in a large undergraduate class and identify barriers and facilitators of the communication process and learning experience. SMTs were put into practice supported by an Online Learning Management System (OLMS: *easyclass*). It was hypothesized that students would positively evaluate their team participation, its role to the communication process and learning experience and there would be positive associations between the LMS, communication and learning experience. The results confirmed the hypotheses showing the effectiveness of SMTs, highlighting the use of OLMS and confirming the relationship between communication and learning experience satisfaction, also supported by qualitative data.

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### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1. The Context And The Problem: Communication and Learning Experience*

Large classes tend to intensify student-instructor communication barriers and, consequently, may create obstacles to the learning experience (Sciarini & Ninemeier, 1998). Students may perceive a lack of two-way communication, see their lecturer as an unapproachable authoritative figure and feel reluctant to express themselves. Thus, the opportunities for interaction, a substantial element of conceptual learning (Sharma, Khachan, Chan, & O'Byrne, 2005) and for involvement to the teaching-learning practice, are diminished. However, such involvement is

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fundamental, as research indicates that a power balance between all the parts implicated in the teaching-learning process is an important element of successful educational programs (Weimar, 2013). An explanation for this success might be offered by the assumption that students' involvement promotes a genuine attempt to respect the individual's right to take part in the decisions that concern their own life (Beane & Apple, 1995). In addition, students' contribution to the teaching-learning decisions offers a great opportunity for the teachers to obtain information on their own practice, as well as to have a constant evaluation of the strategies implemented in the classroom (Stenhouse, 1988), thus obtaining more possibilities for successful context-tailored teaching.

## 1.2. A Solution: Student Management Teams

In this context, Nuhfer (1997, 2008) proposed the creation of Student Management Teams (SMTs) as a means of establishment of a communication channel, aimed to improve the learning experience by having the responsibility of the learning process shared between teachers and students. This technique consists of appointing student representatives that, together with the teacher, monitor the teaching-learning process, are responsible for transmitting feedback on content and other course-related issues and for making suggestions on how to improve the classroom experience (Handelsman, 2012), by the means of regular meetings with their team and the teacher. As confirmed by previous studies (Angelo, 1995; Cullen & Johnston, 1997), SMTs is an effective technique of classroom assessment that increases the communication and students' satisfaction with the learning experience, also making students feel more comfortable with the module content (Buch, 2002). Although there is an obvious positive outcome reported in the literature, there is a lack of recent studies examining the effect of SMTs, with the exception of Troisi (2014) who in fact suggested benefits only for team representatives and not for the rest of the team members.

### 1.2.1. Student Management Teams and Technology

On the other hand, it is proved that the use of online tools in education (Online Management Systems; OLMS) is an effective channel of communication that is consistently related to satisfaction with the learning process (Dixon, 2012), as it encourages successful teachers-students and peer interactions, particularly in large classes (Beatty, 2004). Therefore, it is suggested that any classroom technique applied with *digital native* students (Prensky, 2001) should not exclude technology from its design. Nevertheless, communication should not be merely based on technology, allowing for face to face contacts, which enhances interpersonal interactions in situ (Johnson, Sutton & Poon, 2000). To the knowledge of the current author, there is a lack of studies that incorporate the use of technology as a communication facilitator tool in the context of SMTs, thus its potential role needs to be explored.

Therefore, the present study aims to assess the impact of a SMTs implementation in a large undergraduate class, evaluate the use of technology in this context and identify related elements that act as barriers and facilitators of the communication process and the students' learning experience. It is hypothesized that the fact of forming part of students' teams and the use of an OLMS (*easyclass*) will be positively evaluated in terms of their contribution to the communication process and learning experience. At the same time, there will be significant positive associations between the use of *easyclass* on one hand and communication facilitation and learning experience satisfaction on the other, as well as a positive association between overall communication and overall learning experience satisfaction.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

59 students enrolled at a first year undergraduate module of Psychology in a British University offshore campus in Dubai, UAE, aged from 18 to 25 years old and from a variety of nationality backgrounds.

### 2.2. Procedure

SMTs were implemented after the third week of class by forming 8 teams of 8-9 students, with weekly rotating representatives, who were responsible for communicating the team's doubts related to the module content through an OLMS, namely *easyclass*. All students had access to this OLMS and participated in doubt resolution and

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