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A comparative analysis of flipped, online and traditional teaching: A case of female Middle Eastern management students

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ABSTRACT

This study compares performance and perception of students in a management course at a business school in the Middle East. 122 students completed an Introduction to Management course, which was divided into three different delivery modes, namely traditional, online and flipped. The results of the study reveal several interesting findings. Both the online and flipped sections performed better than the traditional one and the flipped section performed better than the online one. Absenteeism was higher in the traditional mode compared to the flipped mode. Furthermore, accessing online material improved performance in the online and flipped modes; students who accessed the online material missed fewer classes in the flipped mode; and 52% of the students (of whom 58% were high performers) believe the flipped mode is more helpful than the traditional mode. Implications of the study and avenues for future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

In a statement to the World Economic Forum, Paul Kruchoski said the following about the future of learning:

“The university of tomorrow will also focus on ‘learning to learn.’ Learning is a lifelong process and with today’s pace of change, everyone will need the tools to learn throughout life. ‘Grit’ or persistence lies at the heart of the lifelong learning process, so university educators will push students to develop the resilience to master challenging material outside the classroom” (Kruchoski, 2016).

This statement is profound as it points towards the future, which has already begun. Among the phenomenon of future learning and teaching are blended (combination of face-to-face and online instructions) modes of teaching. Bielawski and Metcalf (2003) define blended teaching as the combination of traditional and interactive modes of classroom instruction with learning technologies. Other researchers define blended learning as a combination of face-to-face and online learning instruction with the aim of complementing each other (Bentley, Selassie, & Parkin, 2012; Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013). These definitions imply different teaching modes exist including traditional, online and flipped. Literature on technology-supported learning is growing immensely, with much of the emphasis upon student learning effectiveness (Benson & Kolsaker, 2015). This study compares student performance and perception in traditional, online and flipped teaching modes in an Introduction to Management course. Online education has been used since the 1990s. However, a recent phenomenon known as the flipped classroom has just started gaining acceptance in academia. Nevertheless, researchers have examined these three modes and arrived at mixed results as discussed below. This inconclusive outcome is one of the motivating factors underlying the current study.

Burke and Fedorek (2017) compared the student engagement in traditional, online and flipped classes and did not find the

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students in the flipped classroom to have a higher level of engagement compared to the other two methods. Their study was conducted using three sections ($N=92$) of an upper level (third- and fourth year students) undergraduate crime control class at a U. S. university. [Burke and Fedorek \(2017\)](#) advised to exercise caution on the generalizability of their results, as their study was conducted using only one discipline from one university in one country. They called for studies to be done in other regions, cultures, disciplines, or class levels. In addition, [Ramanau \(2016\)](#) called for more international management education research from both cross-cultural and culture specific perspectives. We are partly responding to these calls. Ours is one of the few studies in the Middle East where Arabic is the language of instruction. [Abdelaziz \(2014\)](#) proposed a new mode of immersive learning. [Amiri, Ahrari, Saffar, and Akre \(2013\)](#) studied the preferences for traditional and flipped classrooms. Culture influences students' learning ([Al-Harathi, 2005](#); [Sanchez & Gunawardena, 1998](#)). Learning of language and culture happens simultaneously and they affect each other ([Bataneh, Qublan, & Bataneh, 2016](#)). As a result, what holds true for students at Western universities may not necessarily hold true for students in the Middle East ([Seckerka & Yacobian, 2016](#)). Our findings, however, hint that the future of flipped classrooms is promising.

Reflecting on 25 years of teaching management, [Dyck \(2017\)](#) concludes that the most important lesson he learned was that there is no “one best way” to teach an introductory management course. This sentiment is especially true in the current educational environment, where there is no shortage of innovative teaching methods and styles. Nevertheless, a methodical assessment of some of these methods is needed to achieve success in student learning. In this study, we aim to compare three teaching modes, which are traditional, flipped and online. Our objective is to examine student performance and perceptions pertaining to those teaching modes in an introduction to management class located in the Middle East.

Traditional mode describes the face-to-face in-class interaction between the instructor and students with the occasional aid of online or web-based learning material. One of the distinguishing factors pertaining to this mode is that most of the “teaching” takes place within the confines of the classroom. Non-traditional approaches to teaching often include flipped and online teaching modes. The flipped classroom uses a combination of face-to-face and online instructions ([Graham et al., 2013](#)). This mode allows students to study at their own pace and encourages active learning ([Fulton, 2012](#)). However, the most important characteristic of flipped classroom mode is that it engages students in and out of the classroom. Access to online material, allows students to prepare for the lecture before coming to class, thus the “flipped” learning. The other non-traditional mode is online learning, which is becoming increasingly popular due to its flexibility and low cost ([DiRienzo & Lilly, 2014](#)). Students would be required to learn at their own pace, while being committed to other activities such as a full-time job ([Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003](#)). In this mode, there is no face-to-face contact between instructor and students, thus enabling students to take full charge of their learning experience.

Prior studies examined various issues related to comparative educational methods. [Allen and Seaman \(2011\)](#) and [Coates, Humphreys, Kane, and Vachris \(2004\)](#) compare online and traditional modes and they conclude that their results are mixed. Similarly, [Al-Zahrani \(2015\)](#) and [Yong, Levy, and Lape \(2015\)](#) arrive at mixed results when comparing the flipped and traditional modes. [Larson and Sung \(2009\)](#) compared the three modes and found no difference in student performance but found faculty and student satisfaction and teaching effectiveness to be higher in the blended and online modes. Similarly, in their study of a UK university's global blended learning MBA program, [Bentley et al. \(2012\)](#) found a high level of student satisfaction. Neither study found any difference in students' performance nor did they further explore to find reasons. The conflicting results in prior studies offered an incentive for the current research to compare student performance and preference in traditional, flipped and online modes.

Using Piaget's theory, cognitive load theory (CLT) and the theory of mastery learning, we ask several questions. Firstly, does student performance vary based on teaching mode? This radiometry question lays the foundation to the rest of the study. Secondly, we ask whether students in flipped and online classes outperform students in a traditional class. Thirdly, we move to explore absenteeism in the three teaching modes. We argue that students in the flipped teaching mode have less absenteeism relative to students in the traditional delivery mode. Fourthly, we delve into the relationship between access to online material and student performance. Our premise is that non-traditional modes offer more access to online material, thus creating a more engaging learning environment. The engagement is manifested in the three steps as indicated by our findings in [Fig. 2](#). First students access the videos before coming to class, then the students who access the videos miss fewer classes, lastly the students who attend regularly engage more and do well in the class. This by deduction leads to a higher student performance. Lastly, we seek student feedback about their experience in non-traditional modes. The purpose is to attempt to understand student perception.

The results in this study provide important and insightful information. They show that online and flipped modes performed better than the traditional one. More specifically, student performance was higher under the flipped mode relative to other modes. Absenteeism was higher in the traditional mode compared to the flipped mode. Furthermore, accessing online material improved performance in the online and flipped modes. Additionally, students who accessed the online material missed fewer classes in the flipped mode. The survey results show that 52% of students (of whom 58% were high performers) believe the flipped mode is more helpful than the traditional mode.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section discusses past literature and hypothesis development. The following section discusses methodology and results. Finally, the last section discusses the conclusion, implications and future research.

2. Theory and hypotheses

We adopt Piaget's theory, cognitive load theory (CLT) and the theory of mastery learning to build hypotheses and explain results of this study. Piaget's theory of active learning lays the basis for interactive and collaborative learning and asserts learning occurs when people act on and implement new concepts and ideas ([Galway, Corbett, Takaro, Tairyan, & Frank, 2014](#)). Similarly, [Andrews, Leonard, Colgrove, and Kalinowski \(2011\)](#) argued many of the learning difficulties encountered by undergraduates could be attributed to their passive role in traditional learning. They proposed active learning as a remedy because of evidence that it leads to

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