Effectiveness of teaching methods in business education: A comparison study on the learning outcomes of lectures, case studies and simulations

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ABSTRACT
Our study compares simulation, case study and lecture as the most common teaching methods in the business education. A sample of 194 undergraduate and MBA students is used to assess the perceived effectiveness of these teaching methods for developing students' problem solving skills, interpersonal skills and self-awareness. Our findings indicate that students perceive simulation as the most effective teaching method for developing their interpersonal skills and self-awareness followed by case study and lecture respectively. Regarding problem solving skills we found that simulation and case study are perceived as being similar but more effective than lectures. Comparing these three teaching methods based on their cognitive, skill-based and affective learning outcomes is a new approach for comparative studies in this literature.

1. Introduction

Business administration is considered as one of the most evolving fields of contemporary social science. Rapid trend of globalization through major developments in the communication systems and endless evolution in various technologies have influenced the field of management and business administration the most. This is reflected in the ongoing and escalating challenges between educators and business schools, particularly, in the practicality of business education. Critics have identified major gaps between the required knowledge and skills for the real world of business and the acquired academic knowledge and skills through business education (e.g. Baldwin, Pierce, Joines, & Farouk, 2011; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004). This has brought up significant attention to identifying the most effective teaching methods in reducing this gap and developing the required professional skills. As a result of this, various approaches such as action learning (Reynolds & Vince, 2004); evidence-based/problem-based learning (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007), practice-based learning (Raelin, 2007) and problem solving learning (Lovelace, Eggers, & Dyck, 2016) are developed. Among all these teaching methods, simulation as an experiential learning method has received more attention among business educators (Salas, Wildman, & Piccolo, 2009; Zelin II, 2010). Theoretical and empirical studies have explored the advantage and disadvantages of simulation in comparison with either case study or lecture (e.g. Adobor & Daneshfar, 2006; Coffey & Anderson, 2006; Matlay, Tunstall, & Lynch, 2010; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Thompson & Dass, 2000).

Extant literature indicates that majority of these studies focus on very specific teaching and/or learning aspect(s) when comparing simulation with one of the other two methods. For example, they explore the effectiveness of simulations in comparison with either case studies or lectures in areas such as helping students to develop their time management, team building and negotiation skills.
Business education has historically evolved with much slower pace than the actual business world (Moratis, Hoff, & Reul, 2006). Livingston (1971: 88) is one of the earlier researchers who criticized formal management education and claimed that students “learn theories of management that cannot be applied successfully in practice”. Later on, Behrman and Levin (1984) questioned business schools for not paying attention to the needs of managers. Business schools pay too much attention to theory, separate disciplines, quantitative analysis, tools and models, short-term performance and corporate goals; but least attention to execution, integrative problem-solving, qualitative thinking, complex trade-offs and creativity, long-term success and interpersonal relationships (Behrman & Levin, 1984; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Cheit, 1985; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, 2004). Most recent studies show that business educators are still unable to relate management theories or instructions to practice or practical learning (Ghoshal, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), leading managers to criticize educators for being behind in providing adequate education and knowledge in developing required skills for dealing with the challenges of the real world of business (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005).

Business schools have a history of ongoing challenges for balancing the academic and professional concerns. During the 20th century business education was generally focused on professionalism and relied on practitioners and businessmen for teaching quantitative analysis, tools and models, short-term performance and corporate goals; but least attention to execution, integrative problem-solving, qualitative thinking, complex trade-offs and creativity, long-term success and interpersonal relationships (Behrman & Levin, 1984; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). This led scholars to question the academic validity of business education and call for recruiting more academically trained faculty members with doctoral degrees and scientific qualifications (Cheit, 1985). As a result of this, business professors have become much more interested in being better researchers rather than better educators (Whetten, 2007). This trend of moving toward scientific concentration has led executives and practitioners to criticize the effectiveness of business education and its corresponding research in the practical world (Clinebell & Clinebell, 2008; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, 2004). It has also created certain pressure and calls for moving toward professionalism as reflected in the AACSB's revision of its accreditation standards in 2013. According to these new standards (AACSB International, 2013), business schools should have ongoing improvement in three major themes: Innovation, Impact, and Engagement. AACSB expects business education to create value for employers and communities, make a difference in business and society, and make meaningful interaction with business professionals and provide real world learning experience under innovation, impact and engagement themes respectively. Thus, being effective in the professional world has become a major element of AACSB's objective in its new standards, which requires special attention to the development of various skills for dealing with the challenges of the real world of business (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005).
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