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## 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 (Lovell, 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; Tompson & 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

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(Knotts & Keys, 1997); their self-efficacy (Tompson & Dass, 2000); their planning and decision making skills (Coffey & Anderson, 2006) and their team work skills (Betts & Knaus, 2006). Despite the fact that this line of research has explained some of the specific advantages of simulation, but it has not provided the opportunity for business educators to compare and contrast students' perspectives on the effectiveness of these three methods simultaneously.

The present study has three distinguished purposes that make it a unique effort to empirically compare lecture, case study and simulation methods. Comparing and contrasting two teaching methods, and more specifically, exploring the advantages of experiential learning methods such as simulation or case study has become a common practice in this literature (e.g. Betts & Knaus, 2006; Cadotte, 1995; Coffey & Anderson, 2006; Li & Greenberg, 2009; Matlay et al., 2010; Tompson & Dass, 2000). However, only exceptional studies such as the empirical studies by Beuk (2016) and Waggener (1979) and the essay by Cadotte (1995) have compared these three teaching methods simultaneously. No other study has compared the learning outcomes of these three methods to assess, test, and rank their effectiveness. Thus, the first purposes of this study is to fill this gap in the literature by comparing the effectiveness of these three teaching methods simultaneously.

Furthermore, those studies that have compared two teaching methods, are mainly focused on very specific outcomes such as self-efficacy (Tompson & Dass, 2000), interpersonal skills (Bedwell, Fiore, & Salas, 2014) and decision making skills (Coffey & Anderson, 2006). Studies have rarely compared these three teaching methods based on different types of learning outcomes. Both educators and practitioners believe that business education lacks the development of key management competencies required for the 21st century's world of business (Mill, 2007) as well as the employability of business schools' graduates (Neubaum, Pagell, Drexler, Mckee-Ryan, & Larson, 2009). Developing various skills and competencies has become the essence of business education (Klimoski & Amos, 2012; Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007; Rubin & Martell, 2009). This led us to the second purpose of this study which is to compare and test students' perceptions on the effectiveness of these three teaching methods for multiple learning outcomes. For this purpose we have selected problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness to represent the cognitive, skill-based and affective learning outcomes suggested by Rubin and Martell (2009) respectively. Problem solving skills known as the top most common learning goals of AACSB accredited business schools (Goltz, Hietapelto, Reinsch, & Tyrell, 2008; Martell, 2007) and required skills for employability of business schools' graduates (Maxwell, Scott, Macfarlane, & Williamson, 2010). Interpersonal skills defined as the goal directed communication and relationship-building behaviours (Klein, DeRouin, & Salas, 2006) are known among practitioners as the critical competency necessary for successful workforce (Bedwell et al., 2014). The third learning outcome is self-awareness which is related to what students should know about their capabilities and managing their limitations (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-awareness is a required intrapersonal dimension of emotional intelligence for monitoring oneself feelings, behaviors and actions (Myers & Tucker, 2005), which has significant impact on the work-related performance.

To begin, we review the historical background of business education followed by a brief description of the three teaching methods to develop the theoretical foundation and corresponding hypotheses for comparing these methods. This will be followed by the methodology section which describes various steps of developing the survey questionnaire along with sampling method and statistical analysis of the results. We then discuss the implications of our findings in developing effective learning process and improving the practicality of business education. Finally, in the conclusion section we try to integrate the theoretical and practical implications of our findings and identify possible future research opportunities.

## 2. Business education

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 (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). This led scholars to question the academic qualification 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

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