

COURSE EVALUATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how MBA students evaluate instructor's teaching skills, rapport with students, grading policies, knowledge of materials and presentation skills in two-way interactive television and Internet-based Marketing Management classes. Of the five evaluative criteria, significant difference was noted only with respect to grading policies. Online students rated grading policies better (i.e., higher) than their ITV counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education has allowed educators to exceed the boundaries of the typical classroom. According to the Department of Education (2002), an astounding 56% of 2-year and 4-year Title IV degree-granting institutions offered distance education courses during the 2000-2001 academic year. As education has taken on a more real-world approach, it has become increasingly important for educators to expand the learning environment. Indeed, the use of technology mediated learning in business education has grown exponentially (Malhotra 2002). Among business schools, a growing number of MBA programs are focusing on technology-mediated distance learning modes as supplements and/or alternatives to the traditional learning pedagogy (Gerencher 1998; Donoho 1998).

Marketing has been in the forefront when it comes to technology mediated learning and its applications (Jones and Kelley 2003; Kaynama and Keesling 2000). As a result, there is growing emphasis on distance education in the marketing literature (refer to the Special Issue of the *Marketing Education Review* 2002). Unfortunately, published results on the impact of distance education on teaching effectiveness [and specifically on student course evaluations] have generated inconsistent findings (Mintu-Wimsatt 2001).

To investigate the impact of different delivery modes on student course evaluations, this paper focuses on technology-mediated learning: two-way interactive television (ITV) and Internet or online delivery. The two pedagogies were used in the delivery of the core course in Marketing Management at the graduate level during two different semesters. This study investigates how students' evaluation of the instructor's teaching skills, rapport with students, grading policies, knowledge of materials and presentation skills are affected when technology plays a major role in the teaching methodology.

TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Innovations in the delivery of higher education are becoming more evident. In particular, much emphasis has been placed on distance education and instructional technology (Malhotra 2002). Jones and Kelley (2003) attribute these trends to the changing profile of university students while Mintu-Wimsatt (2001) suggests that universities consider distance education as a means to overcome budgetary constraints.

Delivery Methods

Distance education includes the use of video, voice, data and/or print technology as a means to bridge the gap between the content provider and learners who are separated by physical distance (Smith 1998). For the purposes of this study, two popular distance education methods will be investigated. *Interactive television (ITV)* is a two-way, electronic communication process by which students and instructors from various locations are brought together to form a classroom setting in a nontraditional method. Pictures and sounds can be transmitted as digital signals over high-speed lines allowing people separated by thousands of miles to see and hear each other (Omatseye 1999). The development of fiber optics has allowed instructors to monitor students as they work across campus or across the country (Anderson, Banks and Leary 2002). *Internet-based or online* courses use the Internet to interact with other classmates and the instructor (Farrior and Gallagher 2000; Kaynama and Keesling 2000).

Course Evaluations

Almost all universities utilize some form of student course evaluation as a tool in gauging teacher effectiveness (Anderson, Banks and Leary 2002). Teaching elements such as the professor's preparation, communication skills, overall rating, enthusiasm and knowledge are often included in most teaching evaluation instruments (Anderson and Shao 2002). This paper investigates teaching effectiveness using MBA students' responses to end-of-the-term course evaluations on questions pertaining to the instructor's: (1) teaching style; (2) rapport with students; (3) grading policies; (4) knowledge of material; and (5) presentation skills.

No Significant Differences Syndrome

Some studies have suggested that no significant differences exist between traditional learning and distance education. Russell's (1992) review of research conducted between 1954 through 1992 found little significant differences in teaching effectiveness. Unfortunately, Russell's (1992) work was done prior to the rapid growth of technology mediated learning of the past decade. Similarly, Smith (1998) suggests that mode of instruction does not matter if (1) technologies used are appropriate; (2) student-to-student interaction is encouraged; and (3) teacher-learner interaction is timely. To further investigate the "no significant differences" syndrome, this study compares MBA students' assessment of courses taught via ITV and Internet-based methods.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The current study involves MBA students enrolled in an AACSB accredited regional state university. The university campus is located approximately 60 miles from a major US metropolitan city, but its MBA classes are primarily taught at the university's educational complex in the city's suburban area. ITV remote sites for distance education delivery are typically located in community colleges outside the city.

Marketing Management Course

The graduate Marketing Management course is one of the core courses in the MBA curriculum. The course is offered using two-way ITV and Internet-based formats as well as the traditional face-to-face classroom. The same professor taught the ITV and Internet-based Marketing Management course. Therefore, teaching style and/or personality can be ruled out as a potential extraneous factor.

Students' grades were evaluated based on four major components: discussion/participation; case submissions; mid-term and final examinations. This was consistent across the two modes of delivery.

Sample

MBA students enrolled in the Marketing Management course during their first year of the graduate program served as the sample groups for this study. Most of the students are in the 25-30 age range and have worked for at least two years. A large number of foreign students are also enrolled in the MBA program.

ITV. The university campus housed the sending site and there were two receiving sites involved. The receiving sites are approximately 60 miles from the sending site. The class had a total enrollment of 60 students, 32 in the sending site, 22 in one receiving site, and 6 in another receiving site. For the purposes of this study, the evaluation results for sending and receiving sites were all combined together. Approximately 70% of the students enrolled in the ITV course were full-time students and 40% were foreign students.

Internet-Based. Thirty nine students enrolled in the Internet-based course. Over 60% worked full time and 40% were foreign students.

Course Evaluations

MBA students are requested to complete a standardized University evaluation form. For the Internet-based students, a second evaluation form was utilized to assess online technology-related issues. Course evaluation forms were distributed during the last week of classes. Summary copies of the students' evaluations were provided only upon the professor's submission of the final grades.

Measures

The variables of “teaching skills,” “rapport with students,” and “grading policies” were five-point Likert-type items with “*strongly agree*” and “*strongly disagree*” as the 1 and 5 anchors, respectively. These constructs were comprised of three items with relatively high Cronbach’s alphas. “Knowledge of material” and “presentation skills” were single items. Both constructs used a five-point scale with “*excellent*” and “*poor*” as the 1 and 5 anchors, respectively. Table 1 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics of the five constructs under investigation.

Variables	Site	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number Of items	α
Teaching skills	I ¹	51	1.82	.77	3	.77
	O ²	39	1.79	.71		.91
Rapport with students	I	51	1.75	.80	3	.80
	O	39	1.82	.76		.94
Grading policies	I	51	1.89	.75	3	.80
	O	39	1.60	.62		.88
Knowledge of material	I	51	1.73	.80	1	NA
	O	39	1.72	.65		
Presentation skills.	I	51	1.84	.90	1	NA
	O	39	1.94	.72		

Note:

¹ “I” is for the ITV method

² “O” is for online or Internet-based method

RESULTS

To determine if significant differences exist between ITV and Internet-based evaluations, ANOVAs were performed on each of the variables of interest. As shown in Table 2, students’ assessment of teaching, rapport, knowledge and presentation were not significant differently between the ITV and Internet-based course. Only the grading criterion showed significant difference at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 2
ANOVA Comparing MBA Students' Evaluation of ITV
and Internet-Based Marketing Management Course

Variables	ITV class (b)	Internet-based class (c)	F-value (probability)
Teaching skills	1.82 _a	1.79 _a	.038 (n.s.)
Rapport with students	1.75	1.82	.433 (n.s.)
Grading policies	1.89	1.60	4.329 (p<.05)
Knowledge of material	1.73	1.72	.007 (n.s.)
Presentation skills	1.84	1.94	.222 (n.s.)

A post hoc test was conducted to compare final grade differences between the ITV and Internet-based students. No statistical difference was found in the distribution of final grades of students at $p < .05$ level.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this study provide some empirical evidence supporting the “no significant differences syndrome” particularly in the areas relating to the instructor’s teaching, rapport, knowledge of materials and presentation skills. This finding is promising given today’s student needs and university budgetary constraints where the use of distance education is a foregone conclusion. It is also noteworthy to mention that the instructor for the ITV and online course is a seasoned professor who took the time to master the use of instructional technology and participated in several training sessions. Perhaps, this supports Smith’s (1998) contention on the importance of preparation when an instructor is involved with distance education. Fortunately, there are ample research materials and resources available that can help teaching effectiveness in distance education.

The significant difference found with respect of grading policies warrants further investigation. It appears that online students perceived the grading policies to be better (i.e., higher) compared to their ITV counterparts. This leads one to wonder whether online students actually perceive that web-based classes are easier than traditional face-to-face or ITV classes.

CONCLUSION

The results in this study are noteworthy as many universities grapple with various issues relating to distance education while instructors speculate on the impact of instructional technology on their student course evaluations. As marketing educators, we strive to be in the forefront in providing for quality education. This study suggests that given ample preparation and utilization of external resources, we can manage to provide quality instruction to our students.

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