

Appropriateness of teaching and learning methods used on the cross-cultural management course: analytical view

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Abstract: Dealing, communicating, negotiating with culturally-different people and managing cultural diversity becomes very important skill in present globalized and multicultural world. The aim of this article is to reflect on the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods used on the courses focused on culture (national and corporate) and intercultural management in the context of management education. Testing different forms of learning and teaching styles enable teachers to find out what works best for their students and curriculum. The article provides a brief overview of opinions on teaching intercultural/cross-cultural issues/subjects/courses. There are also presented the results of a survey (carried out through feedback questionnaires) among students of Faculty of Management (University of Prešov) enrolled in a full-time Master study program attending a Cross-cultural Management and Corporate Culture (CCM&CC) course. Results point to the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods used in a given course. The results also revealed that there are no significant gender differences in views on various aspects of teaching and on the content of the CCM&CC course.

Keywords: cross-cultural, course, education, management, methods

JEL Classification: A23, M14

1. Introduction

With the spread of globalization, more and more cultures are integrating into workplaces. In globalized world and workforce diversity the ability to deal, communicate and build relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds becomes crucial. The understanding of formality, hierarchy, power, identity (individualism/collectivism) timing, time orientation, communication context, spatial relationships (as factors influencing ways of performing work, negotiations, decision-making and doing business) should be part of the "basic equipment" of every manager. In order to better prepare graduates for the real business world, cross-cultural knowledge and skills should be integrated into educational programs and curricula.

Managers and businesspeople must be able to deal, manage, lead and communicate effectively with people from different cultures. "Globalization, increased managerial mobility, and evermore multicultural work environments have had a profound influence on the business school curriculum over the last 20 years. Colleges, faculty, and accreditation agencies have recognized these trends and have attempted to create learning environments that emphasize cross-cultural considerations and provide students with relevant competencies" (Johnson et al., 2006; Thomas and Fitzsimmons, 2008; Witte, 2010, In: Starr-Glass, 2011, p. 113). Generally, cross-cultural and intercultural management courses are aimed at increasing the understanding and insights to culture, improving students' cross-cultural competencies and raising awareness and development of knowledge and skills required in international context and intercultural business environment.

2. Teaching cross-cultural management

The effective design of intercultural training programmes is critical to their success. Training design refers to the selection and sequencing of training techniques to accomplish the specific goals of a training programmes. A well-designed training not only keeps the trainees actively involved, but also contributes to meeting the goals of the programmes (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Black and Mendenhall, 1990, In: Graf, 2003, 199). As states Ramsden (2003) aim of teaching is simple: to make student learning possible". Author argue that "changes in how we think about the experience teaching are crucial to improvements in higher education" and emphasizes the need for reflective and inquiring approach in teaching. "Truly awful teaching in higher education is most often revealed by a sheer lack of interest in and compassion for students and student learning" (Ramsden, In: Weimer, 2009).

"The goal of intercultural training is to prepare individuals to deal effectively with cultural differences" (Fischer, 2011, p. 768). There are various different training approaches – some are based on the level of participants' involvement, some are focused on the intervention and objectives (Brislin, 1989, in Fischer, 2011). Lecture is one of the most common teaching/learning method. During lectures are students passive recipients of information of specific culture-related topic. In addition to positive aspects of lecture such as cost-effectiveness, the possibility to transmit large amounts of information in short time and the high acceptability by participants (Fowler & Blohm, 2004, in Fischer, 2011) there are also obvious disadvantages such as the lack of active engagement/involvement and thus low effectiveness (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000, in Fischer, 2011).

Many authors emphasize the need for active participation of students in learning intercultural/cross-cultural management. For example, Goodman (2012, p. 48) states: "Learning how to properly and effectively interact with people from other cultures is a delicate art which requires more than just reading facts on a country's demographics". "In order the teaching of cross-cultural management to inexperienced students to be really effective, teachers can not rely entirely on textbook based lectures and a formal examination" (Orpen, 2003, p. 81). Teaching of cross-cultural management should move from a focus on the content to a focus on the learning process: from cognitive knowledge, toward cognitive experience and transformation (Szkudlarek et al., 2013). All these facts raise the need to apply activating forms of learning on the "Cross-cultural management and corporate culture" (CCM&CC) course.

The CCM&CC course is a part of Faculty of Management curriculum approximately 10 academic years. Its inclusion in the curriculum was a logical response to the need for development of students' cross-cultural knowledge and skills. The traditional teaching approaches are generally teacher-directed and teacher-centred. Our aim in CCM&CC course is to develop an active learning environment and student-centred approach. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in class. The freedom given to students in processing the topic enhance the learning experience and create a positive learning atmosphere.

Presentations at CCM&CC seminars are an important part of teaching and learning. Students presentations represent a student-centred approach and a form of peer teaching. This encourages all students to be engaged in researching the topic and prepared for class. The main aim of presentations on the CCM&CC course is inform respectively to raise awareness of an important issues of the course. Assignments cover two main areas - the specifics of each country/culture in terms of intercultural management and/or corporate culture (features, properties, manifestations, strengths and weaknesses etc. of corporate culture of the selected company). Students can prepare their presentations in pairs due to the fact that some shy students cannot or can with difficulty present alone.

The main advantages of presentations can be summarized as: (1) students are actively involved in the learning process; (2) students highlight the information, facts and concepts they had found most useful or stimulating; (3) raising further questions about the issues discussed; (4) interaction with the audience and opportunity to receive immediate feedback from the peers and teachers; (5) formal and informal discussion in group that enhances interpersonal relationships; etc. (Abraham, 2010; Halley et al., 2013).

3. Data and Methodology

It is important to note that not individual pedagogical techniques and learning methodologies satisfy all the students and not all students respond well to one particular style/approach/method. An important part of the educational process evaluation on the CCM&CC course is feedback evaluation through questionnaire survey conducted at the end of the semester. The cognition of students' opinions is particularly important because it allows us - teachers to focus on teaching techniques that students perceive very positively and thus continuously enhance educational process. Questionnaire used in the survey includes questions regarding attitudes, perceptions and satisfaction with teaching methods and pedagogical approaches used on CCM&CC course.

The primary data was collected through census survey among students of Faculty of Management, University of Prešov enrolled in a full-time Master study program attending a CCM&CC course in academic year 2015/2016. Total number of students participated in the survey is 323. The questionnaire contained 12 items - 2 identification questions and 9 items that were scaled on five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - neutral (neither agree nor disagree), 4 - disagree, 5 - strongly disagree) that measured either positive or negative response to a statement. The last question/item was open – focused on students' suggestions for improving the quality of teaching on the CCM&CC course.

The following “scale” questions/items were included in the questionnaire:

- The CCM&CC course was interesting (in terms of content) for me (q3).
- Lessons learned on the CCM&CC course were new to me (the course content is different from content other courses) (q4).
- Lessons learned on the CCM&CC course are - in my opinion - necessary for managerial work (q5).
- Teaching methods used on the CCM&CC course I find appropriate (given the nature and contents of the course) (q6).
- The overall climate (social, motivational, creative) on the CCM&CC course seminars I find positive (q7).
- Transfer and gaining knowledge about different countries and corporate cultures through presentations I consider to be interesting and motivating (in terms of inducing demand for new knowledge of the given issue) (q8).
- The rate of students' participation on seminars I considered to be satisfactory (q9).
- Organization of seminars and assignments for the course encouraged me to be creative (q10).
- Lectures on the CCM&CC course were clear and logically structured (q11).

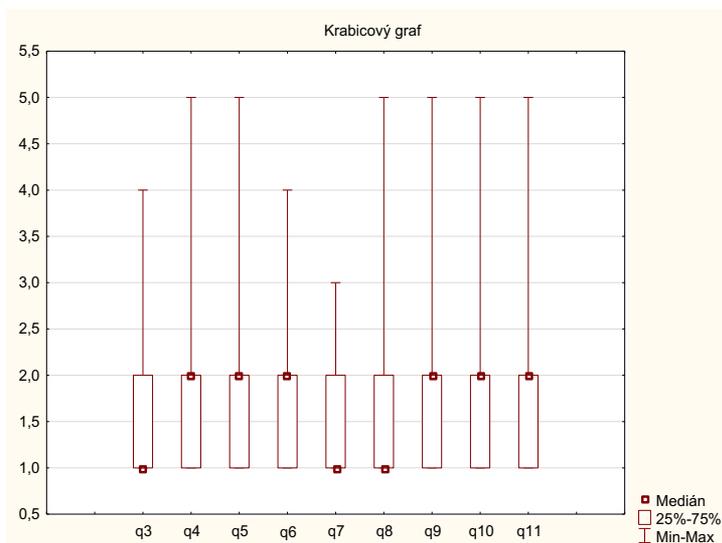
4. Results and discussion

The results were very positive - in all nine closed questions/items there was a strong predominance of positive i.e. affirmative responses (as indicated by mean values) (see Table 1). The best results (i.e. the highest level of agreement respectively the greatest students' satisfaction have been obtained on items concerning the presentations as a form of transferring and gaining knowledge (q8), overall climate on seminars (q7) and content of the course (q3).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables examined

Variable	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	St. Dev.
q3	323	1,482972	1,000000	4,000000	0,660924
q4	323	2,040248	1,000000	5,000000	0,860588
q5	323	1,835913	1,000000	5,000000	0,768768
q6	323	1,718266	1,000000	4,000000	0,762804
q7	323	1,458204	1,000000	3,000000	0,616002
q8	323	1,442724	1,000000	5,000000	0,653919
q9	323	1,860681	1,000000	5,000000	0,808977
q10	323	1,761610	1,000000	5,000000	0,808810
q11	322	1,714286	1,000000	5,000000	0,776834

The lowest level of agreement was found for item q4 “Lessons learned on the CCM&CC course were new to me” indicating that part of subject matter has been acquired on some previously completed/attended courses. This result was expected, because some topics of the subject are partially discussed in other courses, for example, on the “Intercultural communication in tourism” course and “Business ethics and corporate culture” course (included in the Bachelor study programme “Tourism, hotel and spa industry”). This is partially confirmed by the results of one-way ANOVA determining whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of groups (in our case – four “study specializations”).

Table 2. Symmetry and variability of the data set

Students' attitudes were very positive towards the design of the course as well as the toward the gaining knowledge about other cultures through presentations. There were no statistically significant differences on this issue between respondents in terms of gender and study specialization (q8). Moreover, many course participants noted (in the last – “open question”) that this was one of the best courses during their study at university.

In formulating a hypothesis there was assumed that there are statistically significant differences in opinions (answers regarding the various aspects of teaching the CCM&CC course) from a gender perspective. The hypothesis examines whether there are statistical differences in opinions between male and female students, while H₀ assumes no differences between groups. Analysis of variance was used to assess the likelihood that the hypothesis is true. Significant differences in the responses of men and women using one-way ANOVA were found in one item, namely q11 "Lectures on the CCM&CC course were clear and logically structured" [$p < 0.05$]. In this context it should be noted that these differences may be due to the fact that on the study there is a predominance of female students and thus their attendance at lectures is higher than among male students.

5. Conclusions

Almost every teacher wishes to promote effective learning. There is no single teaching method appropriate for all contexts (i.e. group size, study programs etc.). It is therefore necessary that teachers and lecturers use different teaching methods in various circumstances in which they teach. From my own experience I can say that the use of appropriate teaching and learning techniques not only improves students learning but also leads to an improvement of relationship between teachers and students. My own experience has also shown that giving students possibility of independent choice of the topic and its handling (of course while respecting certain rules) can have highly positive effects on them, and greatly increases their level of engagement and interest.

Presentations are very popular and widely used method of learning. It seems (which is also confirmed by my own experience) that "senior" i.e. Master undergraduates are able to better manage this form of learning. By correct course settings, appropriate assignments and the right motivation (e.g. in the form of a score) it is possible to achieve that students are enthusiastic about and perceive their own presentation as a challenge. Our survey reveals that presentations about different countries (from an intercultural perspective) as well as the different enterprise/corporate cultures are positively perceived by students. Students (voluntarily) enrich their presentations with new elements (such as quizzes, games, demonstrations of traditional clothing or products, tastings of typical/national dishes, etc.) that make this course more attractive. I believe that if students enjoy coming to seminars, they will easily absorb new information. Creating a positive and competitive climate makes every lesson/seminar a challenge and a refreshing change from the last.

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