Chapter 88

Interactive Online Learning:
Solution to Learn Entrepreneurship in Sparsely Populated Areas?

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ABSTRACT

This study is focused on the implications of the student voice in digital-based entrepreneurship education basing on the case study example from university-level schooling from Finland. Practice-based subjects, such as entrepreneurship, have been seen in literature as a problematic field for digital-based education. The studied education was implemented using the synthesis of two computer-mediated communication channels. Analysis based on the content analysis of individual portfolios (diaries), which were returned and stored in the asynchronous platform. In the case study environment, the decision of using use two-channel digital teaching platforms (synchronous and asynchronous) seemed to be successful, because dual channels enable wider forms of feedback and student voice activities during and after the lecture. The results of this study encourage educators to use multifaceted digital educational technology in education and as a channel for the student voice also in practice-based subjects, such as entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education has many alternative manifestations, not only in the form of famous Mass Open Online Courses (MOOC), which is provided, for example, by Stanford University using online videos in YouTube and Apple's iTunes University. (Cooper & Sahami, 2013). In addition to mass lectures, Distance education, in its best, can promote interactive individual and team-based learning efficiently and carefully focused on different target groups (Letassy et al., 2006) enabling even world-wide teams (Taras et al., 2013). Especially challenging distance education is in the context of entrepreneurship education. According to the results of Kuratko (2005), only 21 percent of entrepreneurship educators use distance education technologies in their entrepreneurship education courses or concentrations. However, distance education seems to be suitable tool in practice-based learning in workplaces (Michalski, 2014).

Generally, the contemporary distance education activities are often based on Mass Open Online Courses, where hundreds or thousands of students are participating in the same lectures at the same time via the Web or via web-based platforms (Knox, 2014). The possibilities for individual interaction in the largest events (lectures) are minimal. At least the possibilities to express the student voice during the events such as MOOC are challenging. Thus, this paper studies the content and features of student voice in learning of entrepreneurship by computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels on the University level of education, where the courses contained 10-30 active students. Interesting question is, whether small group education and aimed interactivity using two CMC platforms will compensate the potential disadvantages of distant education. This question will be studied qualitatively using the voice of students in their portfolios (diaries) of the case study courses.

Basing on the exploited technology, the case study courses and lectures contained two levels: the level of each lecture, which is based on an interactive synchronous online learning in the real-time online platform during lectures (iLinc) and the level of (static) asynchronous learning environment (platform Optima) to support learning. This study presents the experiences about the interactive online learning of entrepreneurship, where the students are assumed to have active participation in iLinc, that is to follow actively the lectures and prepare adapted small practices alone and in groups during the lectures. Each lecture in iLinc follows the structure: lecture (presentation of theme) => team/individual adapting practices of students => the presentation about the outcomes of practice by students and discussions. This structure ensures that the student voice is an important tool of the learning process. The practice-oriented entrepreneurial theme and long distances of Finland were the main reasons for these activity-based virtual teaching methods. Asynchronous Optima platform supports the learning during time periods between lectures as a source of recorded lectures and other material of each lecture. Optima provides also an environment, where the students are able to return their larger team works and individual reports. Sometimes Optima is also used as the source of presented files, which are presented and transmitted during the lecture via iLinc.

This study is focused on traditional or micro perspectives of student voice, where the students are on the tertiary level education, actually on the University level education in the subject of entrepreneurships. Entrepreneurship is especially interesting branch to study the role of student voice in digital education, because of the previous studies and educators have, perhaps, underestimated the possibilities of digital technology in entrepreneurship education (Kuratko, 2005). Especially this study focuses on digital solutions, which might increase the empowerment of the students in the learning process. Though entrepreneurship has many societal, political and economic dimensions (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) this study considers, as a starting point, student voice following the traditional narrow micro perspective: student voice in educational course basing on case study example, which will not particularly consider any wider societal extension. However, the subject of education, entrepreneurship, provides naturally as such also wider societal perspectives. Case study example focuses on learning via CMC channels and blended learning in the entrepreneurship courses and solutions, which might enable student voice in this kind of digital implementation.

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