

The use of Poll Everywhere in a debate-oriented flipped classroom to enhance student engagement.

Abstract

One of the challenges I faced during my teaching practice is the students' lack of engagement and little interest in learning Criminal justice modules. The present study explored the existing literature concerning student engagement in Social Sciences to actively engage Criminology students in the classroom debates and discussions to develop critical thinking and speaking skills. The current study used debate-oriented flipping and Poll Everywhere to enhance student engagement and critical thinking. It was found that this pedagogical intervention has indeed improved student engagement and critical thinking in my classroom.

Objective

The objective of this research was to design a classroom intervention activity that aimed to enhance student engagement.

Context

The diverse background and learning needs of the student body at UWL (who are a more diverse group compared to the broader Higher Education sector) pose many challenges. One of the challenges I faced during my teaching practice at UWL is the students' lack of engagement and little interest in learning Criminal justice modules, and particularly 'Research methods' module (a large class of more than 100 students). After a few weeks, I found that only a very small number of students were dedicated and engaged. Whereas, a large proportion of learners were quiet, timid, and did not engage in the classroom discussions. Despite my efforts to enhance their level of engagement, I failed. Even during small group discussions (both in classroom and workshops) most of the students stayed quiet, seemed frightened to speak up, and withdrawn. Therefore, the present study explored the existing literature concerning student engagement in Social Sciences to actively engage Criminology students in the classroom debates and discussions to develop critical thinking and speaking skills.

Intervention

An active learning student-centred technique was used to enhance engagement in students at the University of West London. I used debate-oriented flipping for my level 6 'criminology dissertation' module. I assigned learning materials one week prior to the class to set the grounds for face-to-face discussion and idea exchange in the classroom. Poll Everywhere when used in a flipped classroom has been found to make the activities more interesting, engaging, and interactive (Gubbiyappa et al., 2016). As such, I used Poll Everywhere (an audience response system) and a flipped-classroom approach to have the potential to fully equip students with the knowledge and skills required in criminology and criminal justice studies. The use of Poll Everywhere together with a flipped classroom would be beneficial by familiarising students with the lecture contents before the session and provide them with the opportunity to participate via Poll Everywhere during the session. This will make learning activities more interesting, engaging, and interactive, as it was claimed in the existing literature (Gubbiyappa et al., 2016; Florenthal, 2018).

Literature review

Student engagement has been a long-standing aim in teaching practices in the field of Social Sciences. Recent research (e.g. Bradford et al., 2016) emphasises on the importance of critical thinking for criminology and criminal justice studies which cannot be accomplished without active class participation and engagement in learning. Majority of colleagues in the Criminology division acknowledge the student-centred pedagogical techniques that enhance both behavioural and psychological engagement (Davis et al., 2014). For instance, research studies (e.g., Slunt and Giancarlo, 2004) found that flipped classroom techniques are effective to generate discussions and facilitate critical thinking. Formica et al. (2010) examined the effectiveness of the flipped classroom technique. These authors compared two groups of students where one group was taught using the traditional lecture, while the second group used the flipped classroom technique. They found that the students under the flipped classroom were more engaged and had a greater understanding of the concepts as compared to the traditional group. Slunt and Giancarlo (2004) found that flipped classroom techniques are effective to enhance engagement, facilitate critical thinking, and optimise the chances to achieve ILOs.

The use of Poll Everywhere (an audience response system) and flipped-classroom approach have been found to have the potential to fully equip students with the knowledge and skills required in criminology and criminal justice studies (Gubbiyappa et al., 2016; Florenthal, 2018; O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015). Poll Everywhere when used in a flipped classroom has been found to make the activities more interesting, engaging, and interactive (Gubbiyappa et al., 2016). Therefore, the present study, aimed to use Poll Everywhere in a flipped classroom to enhance student engagement.

Data

I used Poll Everywhere and debate-oriented flipping for my level 6 'criminology dissertation' module. My mentor observed my teaching session and highlighted in their feedback that my lectures were organised, and my students were actively engaged throughout my sessions. My mentor found that in my classroom, "there was a good atmosphere with students highly engaged in seeking clarification on issues. There was a good rapport between myself and the students with a high level of student engagement".

To evaluate further this pedagogical intervention a post-session questionnaire and a module evaluation survey were applied to gather students' views. Students participation in these surveys was voluntary. Overall, it was found that students were positively satisfied and felt that lecture contents were interesting. Further, students suggested that I should incorporate such pedagogical interventions more often in my lectures.

From a personal perspective, I found that the use of Poll Everywhere in a debate-oriented flipping has helped me to enhance my teaching skills related to an area I was mainly concerned (i.e. student engagement). Further, I noticed that it was a good atmosphere in my classroom with student highly engaged in seeking clarification on issues, showed interest, and understating concerning the topics explored. The ILOs have been satisfactorily achieved by the application of these interventions.

Conclusions

The use of Poll Everywhere in a debate-oriented classroom aimed to promote students engagement and critical thinking. This pedagogical intervention has indeed enhanced student engagement and critical thinking in my classroom, strengthen previous evidence provided by the previous studies (i.e. Moore et al., 2017; Gubbiyappa et al., 2016; Florenthal, 2018; O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015). It would be beneficial to conduct further research, particularly in the field of criminology to further examine the effectiveness of this pedagogical intervention. In future studies, other technological interventions (such as Kahoot) should be incorporated in a flipped classroom to examine whether students engagement could be further enhanced.

References

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