TEACHING AN UNDERGRADUATE NEGOTIATION COURSE USING SOFTWARE: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF A SOFTWARE BASED TEACHING (SBT) METHODOLOGY

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Abstract - The cross-cultural negotiation course and other related courses have been taught for many years, both at graduate and undergraduate levels, using conventional pedagogical approaches such as classroom-based lectures, material readings, and paper-pencil based group exercises.Unfortunately, often students show lack of enthusiasm, interest, and motivation to actively participate in such learning activities. More so, semester after semester we find students becoming less and less engaged in conventional learning activities designed for them. In such learning atmosphere, as teachers, we find it really challenging and difficult to create and maintain the minimum required interest in students and motivate them to pay attention, asking questions, and participate actively in classroom sessions. Every effort to make our classrooms, learners´ friendly and engaging,turn out to be, most of the times, only energy and time consuming for the teacher making him feel that all his efforts do not have any tangible impact on the learning outcome of the student.Therefore, in this study we propose to use a software-based teaching strategy as an effective mechanism to engage students in a more enjoyable and interactive learning experience.

Keywords - Negotiation, negotiation strategies, negotiation tactics; negotiation software, software-based learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today´s students are technology-native and savvy. They like technology related products and services and prefer to work with technology. They are more efficient in performing technology-based activities and tasks. The existing research works on contemporary pedagogical approaches and their effectiveness, find that the vast majority of the researchers are strong supporters of the idea of integrating educational technologies, with the exiting pedagogical approaches. With the advent of information and communication technologies (ICT), the millennial students are found to be fond of ICT related and ICT based activities. These students use ICT for almost every activity they need to carry out whether it is inter-personal communication, doing school assignments or conducting routine social affairs.In recent times, a majority of the university professors complain about the following issues associated with students. Especially, students studying undergraduate programs regardless whether they are in private universities or public sector educational institutions:Lack of interest in and commitment for learning; difficulty in effectively engaging students with learning; developing across-discipline competencies such as self-managed learning and collaboration; and, developing disciplinary competencies in students (in this case, negotiation skills).

Moreover, given the prevailing teaching and learning context, we advocate and promote the use ofsoftware to teach a negotiation course and other related subjects since it can and will enhance the interest and motivation levels of students. As we findthat in both theory and practicethe application of software has grown tremendously in popularity, and its usage in the education field has become an important preoccupation for more and more universities all over the world (Mehar, 2015). As the day by day changes in the technology, technical requirements and techniques of the industry change simultaneously (Mehar, 2015). Therefore, researchers in the field of higher education are of the view that the use of software in teaching can and will provide a better support, more clear and visual learning activities in classroom for students and thus, helping students understand better the concepts and theories (Mehar, 2015). Studies (i.e., OECD, 2010) also find that using any software for teaching purposes will save the time of faculty and students and promote collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is an important learning strategy for educators to use in their classrooms and it improves student knowledge by combining strengths, sharing responsibilities and learning from one another (Roblyer, 2006).

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Determining factors causing the lack of motivation and interest in students for learning.
- How much the use of technology like software in teaching is effective in motivating students to be engaged in learning?
- Dose the application of educational technologies as a pedagogical support system make differences in developing competencies in students when compared to the conventional pedagogical approaches?

- Which are the potential pros and cons of using educational technologies such as software, as a pedagogical support system?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rapid growth of ICT has brought remarkable changes in the twenty-first century, as well as affected the demands of modern societies (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012). ICT is becoming increasingly important in our daily lives and in our educational system. Therefore, there is a growing pressure on the educational institutions to use ICT to teach the skills and knowledge students need for the 21st century. Realizing the effect of ICT on the workplace and everyday life, today's educational institutions try to restructure their educational curricula and classroom facilities, in order to bridge the existing technology gap in teaching and learning. Therefore, it is critically important to pay due attention to the usefulness of the technology when discussing instruction, education, or training issues. The use of computers for teaching and learning purposes will open a new area of knowledge and offer a tool that has the potential to change some of the existing educational methods. As computer use continues to increase in society, teachers must also prepare for the use of computers within the classroom (McCannon, and Crews, 2000; Snelbecker, 1999). In summary, in order to create a conducive environment for technology-learning integration, it is important that educational institutions promote: collaborative learning; encourage using computers for creating and conduction learning activities; ask students to conduct research using computer and computer related technologies and brief students about the potential benefits and information and computer literacy (Tondeur, van Braak, Tondeur, and Valcke, 2008).

LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

The learning technology is defined as solutions to instructional problems involving social as well as machine technologies in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of learning in the context of education (Gentry, 1995). The learning technology is also considered as means of media with four different focuses: media for enquiry (i.e., data modelling, spreadsheets, hypertext, etc.); media for communication (i.e., e-mail, graphics software and simulations); media for construction (i.e., robotics, CAD, control systems), and media for expression such as interactive video, animation software, music composition (Bruce andLevin, 1997).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Based Learning

Themes like mobile learning, electronic learning, flexible learning, online learning and virtual learning are hot topics in the academic world these days. Moreover, the importance of ICT in the evolution and revolution of the modern education system is an undisputable phenomenon. Over the past several years the emergence and the use of educational technologies have been on the rise (Downing and Garmon, 2001). This trend has forced universities to increase substantially their investments in educational technologies, technology experts and faculty training as never before. In parallel to the changes brought about by new technologies in the field of education, researchers have become equally concerns about the actual and potential benefits of integrating such technological supports (i.e., the use of software.Faculty can use other computer-based technologies such as electronic mail, Web pages, chat rooms, and electronic bulletin boards in the classroom to facilitate communication with the students (Driver, 2002). Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are also popular among the young generation to share information and communicate interactively.

Conventional Teaching Techniques

Although, a variety of pedagogical strategies have been innovated and renovated over the past many decades in an effort to make the learning environment more attractive and effective for the learners, nonetheless, trending topics such as ICT based pedagogies are worth consideration. Some of the popular pedagogical instruments innovated and used in higher education are shortlisted below and these can be complimented by the use of emerging learning technologies:

CBL: Case based learning.
POL: Project oriented learning.
PBL: Problem based learning.
COL: Collaborative learning.
SBL: Service based learning.
RBL: Research based learning.

For and Against ICT Based Learning

While comparing the pros and cons of the uses of technology for learning purposes it is found that the benefits of using technology for learning purposes outnumber the costs affiliated with it. For example, technology helps students' access, gather, analyze, present, transmit and simulate information at any place, at any-time and through multiple means (See, 1994). Technology has brought revolutionary changes in the education industry and therefore, "the impact of technology is one of the most critical issues in education (Webber, 2003)".

Software based Pedagogical Approach

In the field of negotiation, practices and models such as virtual negotiation, computer-mediated negotiation, and online negotiation have substituted the conventional or face-to-face negotiationpractices whereby creating challenges and opportunities for the business managers. Our students before graduating

should, therefore, be introduced to the technological advances which are relevant to their fields, helped learn how to use such technologies, and taught the application and benefits of the existing technologies.

RESEARCH APPROACH

A negotiation software iDecisionGameswill be incorporated into the course of cross culture negotiation and communication, during the semester of August-December 2018. This software is actually used to train corporate workforce and teach university students the subject of negotiation. The software covers different key elements of managing a negotiation event strategically and furthermore, allows studentsapply their theoretical understandings of negotiation to plan, implement and evaluate the negotiation process and outcome. It means, students in the first place, will be provided with the theoretical understandings of the course negotiation, and then they will be required to work with the software to conduct (plan, implement and evaluate)negotiations using a variety of negotiation exercises. In the beginning of the semester, students will be provided with all the required orientation/information concerning the importance and application of the negotiation software.A quasi-experimental design, with one treatment group (negotiation course students, n = 30) and one control group (n = 35) will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the negotiation course in developing negotiation skills in students. Such a design overcomes weaknesses identified in past evaluations of teaching methods that have relied solely on end-of-course reaction surveys, instructor impressions, or anecdotal evidence (Shaw, Fisher and Southey, 1999). Students assignment to these two classes will be their own decisions. Pretestquestionnaires covering students´ profile, current knowledge of negotiation, and self-confidence level of students when negotiating will be applied to these two groups in the beginning of the semester. The outcomes of this study will surely help us understand the potential benefits of using educational technologies (negotiation software in this case) in order to make the teaching job easy and time-effective for the faculty, and similarly learning more interesting, dynamic and effective for the students.

Sampling

This is a small-scale experimental study, conducted using classrooms, and two sections of the same negotiation course. Around 80% of the participating students are expected to be Mexican international business students, while around 10% international program students coming from different countries (who will be on their exchange program here at Tecnologico de Monterrey), and, close to 10% students are non-business Mexican students undertaking the course as an optional course (topic). These are undergraduate and second tertiary students (4rth semester above).

DATA COLLECTION

Two similar research questionnairesbe developed in order to collect data from the students in the following manners:

- Pre-experiment questionnaire.
- Post-experiment questionnaire.

Both questionnaires will cover key aspects of negotiation (knowledge of the theories, concepts, process, and complexities in negotiation). The questionnaire will consist several sections:

- Respondents profile (gender, semester level, nationality, academic background).
- Rating questions: Using rating scale from 0-5 students will be asked to rate the level of their knowledge/understandings of different theories and concepts learned on the course.
- Comparing the course grades (grade achievements of both groups).
- Observations. In order to enrich the research conclusions, observation notes (behavior, stress, interests, opinions, attitudes of the students) will be recorded in each class (of the experiment group).

Potential Outcomes of the Research

The outcomes of the study are many. The results are expected to be positive in terms of creativity, innovation and making the learning environment more challenging and appealing for the students. Although this innovation project is designed to cover all those key elements which are relevant to the quality education such as continues improvement, incremental changes, and disruptive changes, nonetheless, the project outcomes are expected to revolutionize somehow the existing educational paradigms in the field of negotiation education.

LIMITATIONS IN THE RESEARCH

There are no risks foreseen affiliated neither with the research process, its outcomes nor the context of the project. Specifically, there are no cultural, social, ethical, and legal barriers in either implementing the project or the application of its potential outcomes. Actually, a few challenges or limitations are predicated or anticipated at this stage. One, since the experimental project involves the use of technology or software, the potential technical complexities and technology failures are commonly found phenomenon facing such projects and initiatives. Second, the degree and level of the collaboration and support from the students participating in the project are much needed and expected. Keeping them motivated throughout the project, encouraging them

to learn by doing, and expecting them learn theories before working with the software are not always within the control of the faculty. Obviously, students learning styles, habits and preferences vary from a student to student. Third, there are other factors such as the learning capabilities and previous experiences of individual students, which might impact their learning experience and performance on the course. And not necessarily the use of a particular software to support teaching and learning will be an influential factor in their learning.

Final Thoughts

A big challenge today for the university faculty is to engage and keep their students motivated in classrooms. Since most of the teaching and learning activities are conducted in classrooms where teachers deliver lectures using a variety of techniques such as public-verbal lectures, power-points presentations and You-tube Videos. And students are expected to listen attentively, take notes of the learning points. Students are also expected to participate in the lecture-based teaching by asking questions, answering professors´ questions and presenting ideas and opinions on issues under discussion. Based on these findings and at the same time looking at our educational system including the pedagogical approaches used, and especially, in the field of business and management education, the dearth or lack of initiatives to use technological tools deserve an increasing interest and efforts both from the faculty and academic leadership. Professional technologies or educational technologies not only help students learning effectively, but also prepare them to be able to participate actively and productively in the emerging digitalized professional-social environment and thus leading them to contribute to the progress of society, economy and business.

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