

Podcasts: More Than Stories – Classroom 2.0 in a Blended Learning Context

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Podcasting, as an educational tool, is becoming increasingly prominent. This research sought to understand how podcasting could be used to support active student engagement in higher education, coming largely from a constructivist learning theory perspective. The case study focused on the practical implementation of student-created podcasting in a blended learning context. Data was gathered in the form of student feedback and interviews. Overall findings were that the students did find the experience engaging and appreciated the variety of learning opportunities. It will be necessary for instructors to ensure that students understand how to create quality podcasts and also recognize their responsibility to deliver quality content to their peers.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are not immune to trends and changing standards in didactics and their corresponding implications on course design. More and more, instructors must design courses to offer increased opportunities for student engagement and active learning. Simultaneously, the number of courses offered in a purely online or blended learning format is increasing. Thus, how instructors can enhance student engagement, especially in light of the obstacles presented by virtual distance education environments, is still a topic of discussion (Mercer et al., 2018). Furthermore, incorporating active learning in course design has many advantages; however, doing so in a distance education environment has been considered more challenging (Considine & Dean, 2003). Podcasting is one potential way instructors can increase engagement and active learning in a distance-education environment. It is also a technology that can potentially overcome certain barriers inherent in online and distant education. Furthermore, it can help instructors address different needs and learning styles.

Therefore, the following chapter explores the question, why and how podcasts should be created and used to encourage student engagement in a blended learning context. A case study illustrating the usage of podcasts will attempt to answer this question from a constructivist learning perspective. The case study focuses on the practical application of podcasts in a blended learning course in a master's program at an Austrian university of applied sciences. The extent to which students feel engaged through the usage of podcasts is evaluated using student feedback. A critical evaluation and discussion of the student feedback highlight the enablers and barriers for podcasts as a learning tool. Additionally, supplemental material like course assignments, podcast rubrics, and evaluation sheets are provided.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Educational technology, ranging from e-books to videos, offers educators many options to present course materials, illicit student interaction, and enhance course design and assessment transparency. For example, Mohd et al. (2016) suggest using audio technology in the classroom can help gain and focus learners' attention "on appropriate information and engage as well as sustain learners' interest over time" (p.25). They also suggest that giving learners access to audio files outside the classroom could offer flexibility and address the needs of learners with different learning styles.

One common categorization used to classify learning-styles is the Visual, Auditory, or Kinesthetic (VAK) learning styles model. "Visual learners can learn

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