Student Optimal Experiences During an Undergraduate Nonprofit Organizational Management Course

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Abstract

Utilizing a variety of instructional approaches in undergraduate education provides an opportunity to explore the complexity of student learning. The use of instructional approaches including traditional lectures, guest speakers as professional resources, experiential learning approaches requiring students to apply knowledge, and student-led learning experiences are all potential options for educators. Operationalizing optimal experience using the EduFlow model is one way to better analyze instructional approaches and learning where students: (1) have cognitive assimilation in the content being taught; (2) feel as though time is going quickly or being transformed during learning; (3) feel a loss of self-consciousness during the learning experience; and 4) perceive learning as an autotelic experience or the perception related to happiness in the excitement of the moment. The purpose of this research was to determine if there were differences between different instructional approaches and optimal experience constructs using the EduFlow model. Results indicate that leadership lectures, youth educational guest speakers, experiential learning lessons, and student-led experiences were likely to be associated with optimal experiences by learners. The authors recommend further research associated with specific types of nonprofit lectures, guest speaker traits, experiential learning frameworks, and student-led experiences.

Keywords: EduFlow, optimal experience, flow theory, nonprofit

Nonprofit organizational management skills and abilities are highly sought after and valued in today's society (Hoefer & Watson, 2021). Recent decades have indicated a changing landscape in nonprofit management education and how students learn those skills (Ahmed, 2022). According to Hoefer and Watson (2021), nonprofit education is an important curricular component within the academy with the most critical aspects being competency-based approaches afforded by the direct application of content to work-based experiences. Another aspect of management education includes the importance of quality instructional experiences that leads to a student achieving real-life work experiences in the nonprofit sector (Hoefer & Watson, 2021). Ahmed (2022) indicated a similar position that nonprofit management is a dynamic field and that management practices differ significantly from the for-profit and government sectors. As such, according to the National Research Council (2009), learning experiences should provide students with "real-world" interpretation of ideas, concepts, and skills that students can then incorporate into future career opportunities with nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit organizations have played a central role in our current US organizational structure. According to recent statistics from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS, 2020), there were more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service in 2016. According to the NCCS, the nonprofit sector contributed an estimated $1.047 trillion to the US economy during the same year (5.6% of GDP). As the nonprofit sector provides significant value to the US economy, there exists an opportunity to educate students in a way that supports workforce employability skills and standards while also understanding the structure, function, and opportunities within these organizations.

Teaching and learning in a nonprofit setting provide unique opportunities for instructors to utilize real world learning experiences to teach students (Ahmed, 2022; Hoefer & Watson, 2021). How course curriculum is taught to students is critically important to the nonprofit learning process. Variations in teaching techniques are directly

related to student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and overall optimal experiences in the learning process (Everett & Raven, 2018).

Successful instructional approaches can range from instructor-led lectures (Knight & Wood, 2005; Marin, 2020; Nasmith & Steinert, 2001), guest speakers as professional resources (Burns & Chopra, 2017; Casper & Balgopal, 2020; Craig et al., 2020; Merle & Craig, 2017), experiential learning opportunities (Bell & Bell, 2020; Sulkowski et al., 2020; Tavanti & Wilp, 2018), and student-led activities (Bylieva et al., 2020; Frisch et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2018). According to Rosenshine and Furst (1973), variability in teaching and learning provides different strategies to communicate a curricular message, vary instructional approaches, and provide multiple ways to evaluate students. From a historical perspective, lecturing has traditionally been central to dissemination of knowledge between instructor and students (Fitch, 1880). Marin (2020) suggests that lectures are a teaching approach that should be embraced to create a venue for processing information together or making collective thinking happen in the classroom. Nasmith and Steinert (2001) had similar success with interactive lecture-based approaches that were complemented with engaging the audience in various conversations and activities. However, Knight and Wood (2005) refuted this argument indicating that higher learning gains and a better conceptual understanding of content occurred in more interactive courses and less teacher-centered instruction.

Guest speakers as professional resources in undergraduate learning can provide value to the educational experience of students (Craig et al., 2020). However, the authors suggested that faculty need to be strategic about guest speakers and their respective presentation styles when presenting. Burns and Chopra (2017) indicated that successful use of guest speakers can enhance networking connections and potential for professional references, provide application in class methods and theories to real-world scenarios, provide opportunities to gain experience in prospective career pathways, and improve students' professional communication skills. Research also indicated perceived importance by students when guest speakers were alumni of the respective university (Craig et al., 2020) and industry professionals (Merle & Craig, 2017). When industry professionals spoke, students indicated an interest in those speakers who provided industry examples related to content (Craig et al. 2020). Craig et al. (2020) and Merle and Craig (2017) suggested that students preferred instructional approaches that provide insight into the industry (e.g., guest speaker perspectives) as opposed to a traditional instructor-centered lecture. Additionally, Merle and Craig (2017) cited that instructors should follow three criteria when inviting guest speakers including professional availability to present in-person, emphasis on personal examples, and utilization of an active presentation style with students. Another study indicated that 'memorable' guest speakers should tell stories, evoke emotion, and explain theory only after case studies have been adequately discussed (Casper & Balgopal, 2020). Finally, Burns and Chopra (2017) suggested that guest speakers can gain valuable insight about programmatic curriculum and individual skill sets students can provide to their organizations.

Experiential learning in the context of nonprofit organizational management education provides an effective method of educating effective nonprofit managers for the 21st century (Tavanti & Wilp, 2018). According to Wurdinger and Carlson (2010), effective experiential learning approaches include active learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, service-learning, and place-based learning. Tavanti and Wilp (2018) indicated that integration of experiential education techniques should lead to capacity development in nonprofit organizations through university-community partnerships. Research by Sulkowski et al. (2020) supported the university-community partnership practice of reporting findings to nonprofit organizational stakeholders. Tavanti and Wilp (2018) also suggested that social impact and community engagement methods make educational programming more responsive to the needs of nonprofit organizations. Bell and Bell (2020) indicated that the experiential process framework in an organizational setting based on the work of Kolb (1984) included a 'pre-experience' that provides the foundation for students' knowledge, a 'during experience' that involves students questioning existing knowledge while applying new ideas during structured opportunities, a 'post experience' opportunity where students reflect on learning in conjunction with the instructor and provide organizational feedback about the experience. Trinh et al. (2021) cautioned that large enrollment courses are limited in the capabilities to create quality experiential learning experiences. The authors suggested that appreciative inquiry is one approach that can be used to apply experiential learning in larger class settings. During the appreciative inquiry approach students work in smaller groups with facilitation from the instructor during the discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases to allow students the latitude to interview and dialogue with organizational stakeholders as part of a proposal development process.

According to Frisch et al. (2020), student-led instruction provides a unique opportunity for learning where peers learn from peers. One approach was highlighted by Hashmi et al. (2020) utilizing a student-led curriculum framework designed to implement instructional delivery to the homeless as a component of medical program curriculum. In another study, Frisch et al. (2020) utilized medical students in a peer-assisted learning program for assessment review sessions of peer medical students as a form of student-led instruction and learning. Finally, in an online setting, Bylieva et al. (2020) indicated that using group peer communication was another form of successful student-led instructional technique.

The socio-psychological concept of being in flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) or having an optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) has the potential to leverage how students respond to instructional practices and conceptual approaches. To support the use of instructional practices that meet the needs of undergraduate learners, the National Research Council (2009) recommended the use of dynamic approaches for college students studying in agriculture and natural resources fields. These approaches have

the potential to leverage experiences while incorporating cross-cutting innovative teaching experiences that provide students the ability to interpret ideas and concepts, develop problem-solving skills, while being built on the intersection between their academic program and future career goals (National Research Council, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to utilize flow theory to determine if there were differences between varying instructional practices resulting in students having optimal experiences in an undergraduate nonprofit organizational management course. Therefore, the following research question was used to guide this study. Did different instructional approaches of lecture, experiential learning, guest speakers, and student-led activities result in students having differences in optimal experiences as measured using the EduFlow model in a nonprofit organizational management course?

Flow Theory

Having flow or optimal experiences in education is important to student learning (Everett & Raven, 2018). Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1997) developed flow theory to understand individual experiences over time. These experiences were measured based on an individual's perceived skill level in relation to the level of challenge during a specific experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Optimal experiences, also known as being in flow, occur when the perceived levels of skill and challenge are both high for the same experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Therefore, optimal experiences in learning occur when instruction includes (1) a balance between perceived skills and perceived task demands; (2) clear proximal goals in relation to learning; and (3) when there is immediate feedback associated with the learning experience (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). An optimal experience is then characterized by subjective experiences that occur during learning activities that require a degree of skill including: (1) focused concentration on current experience; (2) merging of action and awareness; and (3) loss of self-consciousness (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Previous literature has characterized the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) as one attempt to operationalize optimal experiences in the context of learning. Vygotsky's definition was similarly characterized by the ability to provide students with learning experiences that challenge individual students while falling just beyond that same individual student's skill level in the activity (1978).

Recent studies have utilized flow theory to better understand learning in the context of undergraduate education (Asakawa, 2010; Everett et al., 2020; Everett et al., 2021; Rogatko, 2009). According to Everett et al. (2020), when film was used as the central media for learning, correlations were high between all themed movies and all EduFlow constructs as well as narrative transportation in the themes of climate, food, energy, and environmental and sustainability films throughout the undergraduate course. These results indicated students felt in control of their actions, were absorbed in the content, didn't care about external surroundings, and felt a sense of well-being during the experiences. Asakawa (2010) supported this argument that students who experienced optimal experiences regularly were more likely to be fully engaged in course material and had goals and expectations consistent with learning outcomes. In another recent study by El Mawas and Huette (2019), results indicated that students in a Computer Science course had autotelic experiences within the EduFlow scale that were positively correlated to academic achievement. The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) is a methodological approach used to measure flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) or optimal experience where the flow in education scale (EduFlow) is a variant of the ESM whereby four dimensions of optimal experience are measured including: (1) cognitive absorption; (2) time transformation; (3) loss of self-consciousness; and (4) the autotelic experience (Huette et al., 2016). Due to the limited research and potential for success using the EduFlow model (Everett et al., 2020; El Mawas & Huette, 2019), there exists an opportunity to apply flow theory and the EduFlow instrument to opportunities that supports improvement of teaching and learning.

This research supports previous theoretical and empirical literature through an examination of undergraduate experiences in a College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) nonprofit organizational management for sustainability course. This study utilized students' self-reported education in flow (EduFlow) constructs during class sessions to support learning and amplify opportunities that create optimal experiences as a function of course lectures, guest speakers, experiential learning projects, and student-led activities. Although the focus of this study was undergraduate students in a nonprofit organizational management course, previous research suggests that flow theory applies to a variety of undergraduate settings in colleges of agriculture (Everett et al., 2020; Everett & Raven, 2018). This study adds to existing literature on socio-psychological factors that provide support for understanding student learning as it relates to nonprofit organizational management course curriculum. Previous research by Everett et al. (2020) and Everett and Raven (2018) suggested that flow theory may have the potential to quantify these dynamic approaches in educational settings as indicated by the National Research Council (2009). Everett et al. (2020) and El Mawas and Huette's (2019) use of the EduFlow scale in undergraduate education provided evidence that students' optimal experiences can quantify flow in teaching and learning settings. In each study, optimal learning experiences for undergraduate learning occurred, however, this study differed through the unique context of a nonprofit organizational management course setting.

Methods

Data were collected at Michigan State University over five semesters from fall semester 2017 to fall semester 2019 in a nonprofit organizational management course with a focus on sustainability. The course is an elective for students in the Department of Community Sustainability for the three undergraduate majors including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Education, Environmental Studies

and Sustainability, and Sustainable Parks, Recreation and Tourism. Average course enrollment during the five semesters of data collection was 34.8 students. The EduFlow research instrument for this study was a 12-item modified version of the experience sampling method (Hektner et al., 2007) for calculating flow. During data collection, the same instructor taught the course during the fall 2017 to fall 2019 period. Additionally, all activities and lectures were consistent during this time period. The EduFlow survey instrument combined flow criteria specific to the context of education (Huette et al., 2016). Additionally, Huette et al. (2016) previous research supports the reliability and validity of this instrument for this study. Table 1 includes the EduFlow items in the research project study. The Michigan State University Institutional Review Board approved the study protocol and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation in the study.

This study used an electronic event-contingent sampling approach (i.e., taking an email-linked Qualtrics survey at the conclusion of each class session). Student participants were provided with instructions at the first course session by the researcher before taking the first EduFlow survey. At the first course session, students were shown an example of the electronic survey. Each successive week of class, students were sent the same survey email. Email surveys were set up at the beginning of the semester, therefore students received the same email at the same time at the conclusion of each class session.

For this study, participants completed a total of 482 EduFlow surveys, which amounts to an average response rate by semester of 11.0%. To obtain consistent and reliable EduFlow data, incomplete surveys were not included in the data set for analysis. By comparison, Everett et al. (2020) had a similar response rate of 13.4% for a 200-level undergraduate course where the online EduFlow scale was administered each class session to students in the context of an environmental and sustainability issues and policy film course. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, non-respondents were encouraged, but not required to participate in this study. This may have attributed to the low response rate in the study; however, this has been comparable to previous research without incentivized participation (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 2014; Hektner et al., 2007). Thus, the response rate of the present study was deemed acceptable. The EduFlow (Heutte et al., 2016) survey instruments were determined to be reliable through previous research (Everett et al., 2021). The internal consistency of the scale for this study was determined using Chronbach's alpha for EduFlow items (.91).

Variables. The independent variable for this study was instructional approach consisting of four levels: 1) lecture-based classes, 2) experiential learning activities, 3) guest speakers, and 4) student-led activities. In lecture-based class sessions, instruction was largely led by the course instructor (teacher-centered approach) with a traditional lecture and student-instructor dialogue. Experiential learning activities included instruction, then student-centered application through case studies or another form of problem-solving activity where students interacted with each other in group settings. Guest speaker class sessions included

Table 1.

EduFlow instrument items

EduFlow Item #	EduFlow Item Questions
	While watching the movie(s) today I…
1	Feel that I am able to meet the demands of the movie.
2	Feel that what is happening is under my control.
3	Know what I would do during each part in the movie.
4	Believe time seems to flow or pass by like never before.
5	Feel like time is flying very fast.
6	Don't notice time passing by.
7	Don't care about what others think of my opinion about the movie.
8	Don't fear the judgement of others toward my belief of the movie.
9	Was not worried about what others were thinking of me.
10	Am excited about the topic today and feel in the moment.
11	Believe this movie and class session made me happy.
12	Feel a strong emotion and want to share it with others.

Note. Items 1, 5, and 9 measure the construct of cognitive absorption, items 2, 6, and 10 measure the construct of time transformation, items 3, 7, and 11 measure the construct of loss of self-consciousness, and items 4, 8, and 12 measure the construct of autotelic experience.

individuals in leadership roles with nonprofit organizations as professional presenters and resources for students. Finally, student-led activities were defined as individual and group presentations where students led the instruction and interaction with peers during the class session. The dependent variables were students' optimal experience as measured by the EduFlow scale instrument and optimal experience. Optimal experience using the EduFlow model include 1) cognitive absorption, 2) time transformation, 3) loss of self-consciousness, and 4) autotelic experience (Huette et al., 2016). Cognitive absorption was defined as the knowledge gained after completing an instructional task and feeling under control during the process. Time transformation was defined as feeling as though time was passing quickly during the teaching and learning process. Loss of self-consciousness related to not worrying about others' perceptions and autotelic experiences included the level of happiness related to the excitement of the moment of learning. A summated 5-Point Likert type scale interval was utilized for EduFlow constructs to simplify the options for filling out instrument questions (1 – Not Agree to 5 – Very Much Agree). Two faculty from the Department of Community Sustainability reviewed categories to ensure that instructional themes were categorized based on the course subject matter.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0) was used to analyze data for this study. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine measures of central tendency. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test for differences between instructional approaches for each of the EduFlow constructs. Due to the large differences in group sizes, a Hochberg GT2 post hoc test was conducted to determine significance between instructional approaches and EduFlow scale items (Hochberg, 1974). EduFlow scale items number 1, 5, and 9 were summated to calculate mean cognitive absorption scores. Items 2, 6, and 10 were used to determine mean time transformation, items 3, 7, and 11 for mean loss of consciousness, and items 4, 8, and 12 were summated for mean autotelic experience (Table 1).

Results

The research objective for this study was to determine if varying instructional approaches led to differences in students' optimal experiences. Descriptive statistics indicated that specific lecture topics had higher mean EduFlow construct values. Specifically, Principles of Leadership, Volunteer Leadership, and Marketing in Nonprofit organizations' lectures had consistently higher mean scores as compared to other lectures in the course and across the semesters measured (Table 2). The Principles of Leadership lectures had the highest mean scores associated with cognitive absorption (M = 4.17, SD = 0.51), time transformation (M = 4.06, SD = 0.90), loss of consciousness (M = 4.22, SD = 0.66), and autotelic experience (M = 3.83, SD = 0.59). As such, descriptive statistics indicated leadership topics were more likely to elicit optimal experiences in undergraduate students. This may suggest that lectures, where student personal and professional development was the central theme, were more likely to elicit high student perceived

values of EduFlow constructs and optimal experiences of individuals.

Statistical measures indicated that guest speakers with a background in youth education had the highest mean EduFlow construct values (Table 3). The youth education guest speaker had the highest mean scores associated with cognitive absorption (M = 4.50, SD = 0.41), time transformation (M = 4.33, SD = 0.56), loss of consciousness (M = 4.56, SD = 0.34), and autotelic experience (M = 4.33, SD = 0.47). Interestingly, guest speakers with a background in agricultural advocacy, and fisheries & wildlife advocacy from a nonprofit organizational management perspective also had high mean scores across most EduFlow constructs. These results suggest that students had a particular interest in hearing from individuals with a background in youth education and tangentially, agricultural advocacy, and fisheries & wildlife advocacy. This may be due to the passion or enthusiasm associated with specific guest speakers (Merle & Craig, 2017), the potential to develop networking insights (Burns & Chopra, 2017), or the value in the case studies and examples provided by a specific guest speaker (Casper & Balgopal, 2020; Craig et al., 2020).

Results of this study indicated that when students completed an online nonprofit case study activity followed by an online forum as part of the students' reflection of the activity, they reported having the highest mean EduFlow values of all experiential learning class sessions measured (Table 4). Online case study mean scores included cognitive absorption (M = 4.67, SD = 0.47), time transformation (M = 4.08, SD = 0.63), loss of consciousness (M = 4.25, SD = 0.57), and autotelic experience (M = 4.25, SD = 0.57). Notably, other experiential learning activities had similar high mean EduFlow values across all constructs. This indicates that students were increasing acquired content knowledge, time was passing quickly during activities, perceptions from others were limited, and happiness and excitement during the moment of the various activities was a positive experience for students.

Student-led activities were bifurcated into individual student presentations and activities where student groups led the learning process (Table 5). Mean EduFlow construct values were similarly high across both types of student-led activities with individual presentations having higher levels of cognitive absorption (M = 3.90, SD = 0.89) and autotelic experience (M = 3.70, SD = 0.73), whereas the fundraising group activity had a higher mean loss of consciousness (M = 4.00, SD = 0.92). Both, student-led learning experiences had equal levels of time transformation (M = 3.56, SD = 0.80). Though EduFlow values were not as high as experiential learning activities, results indicated that students did have an appreciation for peer-led activities in the context of a nonprofit organizational management course. Mean scores may have been indicative of students feeling anxiety about presenting to peers in a class setting, not having felt prepared for the instructional experience, or if not presenting, not feeling comfortable with peers in an instructional role.

Overall, a multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there was no significant difference between instructional approaches and the EduFlow constructs of

Table 2.

Mean EduFlow constructs by lecture topic (n = 316). Where CA=cognitive absorption, TT=time transformation, LC=loss of consciousness, and AE=autotelic experience

Lecture Topic	CA M(S.D.)	TT M(S.D.)	LC M(S.D.)	AE M(S.D.)
Intro to nonprofits	3.43(0.73)	3.44(0.60)	3.85(0.69)	3.00(0.82)
Nonprofit and Gov't	3.75(0.71)	3.63(0.88)	3.90(0.78)	3.30(0.75)
Organizational Behavior	3.58(0.84)	3.54(0.90)	3.58(0.97)	3.37(0.86)
Trends and Capacity in Nonprofits	3.74(0.91)	3.54(0.80)	3.46(1.05)	3.54(0.80)
Principles of Leadership	4.17(0.51)	4.06(0.90)	4.22(0.66)	3.83(0.59)
Volunteer Leadership	3.98(0.67)	3.82(0.79)	4.06(0.76)	3.61(0.94)
Nonprofit Resource Acquisition	3.67(0.75)	3.38(0.82)	3.61(0.95)	3.35(0.67)
Marketing in nonprofits	3.98(0.67)	3.85(0.77)	4.04(0.73)	3.71(0.77)
Accountability & Ethics	3.64(0.70)	3.42(0.68)	3.77(0.58)	3.26(0.69)
Nonprofit Organizational IT	3.64(0.64)	3.64(0.69)	3.70(0.92)	3.24(0.76)
Nonprofit Foundation & Missions	3.39(0.71)	3.17(0.95)	3.54(0.70)	3.18(0.69)
Risk Management	3.67(0.64)	3.61(0.79)	3.81(0.74)	3.11(0.76)
International Nonprofits	3.57(0.98)	3.57(0.98)	3.52(0.94)	3.19(1.02)
Fundraising in Nonprofits	3.60(0.66)	3.37(0.64)	3.60(0.62)	3.03(0.76)
Strategic Planning in Nonprofits	3.53(0.61)	3.33(0.47)	3.73(0.43)	2.60(0.89)
Financial Reviews in Nonprofits	3.33(0.94)	3.50(0.71)	3.17(1.18)	2.83(0.71)
Sustainability and Nonprofits	3.81(1.10)	3.69(1.15)	3.88(1.11)	3.74(0.93)
Average	3.64(0.76)	3.51(0.82)	3.76(0.80)	3.29(0.80)

Note. Data are from Nonprofit Organizational Management for Sustainability taught between fall semester 2017 and fall semester 2019 at Michigan State University.

time transformation (F(3, 478) = 1.041, p = .374) and loss of consciousness (F(3, 478) = 1.375, p = 0.250). However, there were significant differences between instructional approaches (lecture, guest speakers, experiential learning and student-led experiences) and the EduFlow constructs of cognitive absorption (F(3, 478) = 4.549, p = 0.004) and autotelic experience (F(3, 478) = 5.186, p = 0.002). A test for homogeneity indicated no significance between instructional approaches and EduFlow constructs. As such, results of a Hochberg GT2 post-hoc test suggested that within the cognitive absorption construct there was a significant difference between lecture and guest speaker values (p = 0.009). This result indicates that students' cognition during guest speaker presentations was greater than traditional lectures as an instructional approach. Additionally, an autotelic experience construct post-hoc test indicated there were significant differences between lectures and guest speakers (p = 0.025), and lectures and student-led activities (p = 0.020). This result suggests that students were more likely to be happy and excited (autotelic experience) about guest presenters than traditional instructor-centered lectures supporting the work of Merle and Craig (2017). Lastly, the MANOVA and post-hoc results also indicated that student-led activities elicited greater levels of happiness and excitement than lecture experiences.

Discussion

Variability in instruction using appropriate communication strategies, instructional materials, and forms of evaluation is a trait of effective teaching (Rosenshine and Furst, 1973). This study sought to understand socio-psychological differences using flow theory and measuring student frequencies of optimal experience using the EduFlow instrument during varying instructional approaches in a nonprofit organizational management course. EduFlow constructs used to measure optimal experience included: learning content (cognitive absorption), time moving quickly during teaching and learning experiences (time transformation), students not worried about others' perceptions (loss of consciousness) and high levels of student happiness and excitement (autotelic experience).

STUDENT OPTIMAL EXPERIENCES

Table 3.

Mean EduFlow constructs by guest speaker background (n = 92). Where CA=cognitive absorption, TT=time transformation, LC=loss of consciousness, and AE=autotelic experience

Guest Speaker Background	CA M(S.D.)	TT M(S.D.)	LC M(S.D.)	AE M(S.D.)
Food Security	3.77(0.73)	3.62(0.72)	3.75(0.79)	3.38(0.81)
Land Management and Protection	3.82(0.86)	3.48(0.98)	3.85(0.86)	3.52(1.04)
Fisheries & Wildlife Advocacy	4.19(0.67)	4.19(0.96)	3.26(0.66)	3.89(0.83)
Agriculture Advocacy	4.23(0.63)	3.97(0.76)	4.27(0.58)	3.87(0.76)
Environmental Advocacy	3.73(0.76)	3.13(0.99)	3.47(0.90)	3.13(0.87)
Youth Education	4.50(0.41)	4.33(0.56)	4.56(0.34)	4.33(0.47)
Recreational Advocacy	3.29(0.55)	2.79(0.96)	3.75(0.87)	2.79(0.78)
Healthcare Advocacy	3.17(1.03)	3.00(1.12)	3.33(0.98)	2.92(0.74)
Food Production	3.08(1.07)	3.04(1.01)	3.13(1.07)	2.50(0.98)
Average	3.79(0.82)	3.57(0.93)	3.83(0.85)	3.40(0.93)

Note. Data are from Nonprofit Organizational Management for Sustainability taught between fall semester 2017 and fall semester 2019 at Michigan State University.

Table 4.

Mean EduFlow constructs by experiential learning activity (n = 23). Where CA=cognitive absorption, TT=time transformation, LC=loss of consciousness, and AE=autotelic experience

Experiential Learning Activity	CA M(S.D.)	TT M(S.D.)	LC M(S.D.)	AE M(S.D.)
SWOT/SOAR Activity	3.67(0.33)	4.00(0.67)	4.11(0.19)	3.78(0.19)
Case Study In-Person Activity	4.15(0.67)	3.73(0.85)	3.96(0.82)	3.69(0.60)
Case Study Online Activity	4.67(0.47)	4.08(0.63)	4.25(0.57)	4.25(0.57)
Average	4.17(0.65)	3.82(0.78)	4.03(0.72)	3.80(0.58)

Note. Data are from Nonprofit Organizational Management for Sustainability taught between fall semester 2017 and fall semester 2019 at Michigan State University.

Table 5.

Mean EduFlow constructs by student-led learning experience (n = 51). Where CA=cognitive absorption, TT=time transformation, LC=loss of consciousness, and AE=autotelic experience

Student-Led Learning Experience	CA M(S.D.)	TT M(S.D.)	LC M(S.D.)	AE M(S.D.)
Nonprofit Student Presentations	3.90(0.89)	3.56(0.80)	3.90(0.83)	3.70(0.73)
Nonprofit Fundraising Group	3.75(0.59)	3.56(0.80)	4.00(0.92)	3.50(1.00)
Average	3.86(0.83)	3.56(0.80)	3.92(0.84)	3.65(0.80)

Note. Data are from Nonprofit Organizational Management for Sustainability taught between fall semester 2017 and fall semester 2019 at Michigan State University.

STUDENT OPTIMAL EXPERIENCES

The results of this study indicated that students had increased cognitive absorption (ability to learn content) and autotelic experience (happiness and excitement) during guest speaker presentations in comparison to traditional lectures. This result supports the notion that varying instructional approaches supports student learning (Rosenshine & Furst, 1973) and is one pedagogical approach that may be used to complement lectures in the classroom. Given increased cognition, happiness, and excitement during guest speaker presentations, students may have experienced personal relevance related to career goals and were focused on content from industry experts as indicated by Craig et al. (2020). Based on these results, it is recommended that guest speakers are sought out who can provide students with experiences that align with their potential career goals (Craig et al., 2020; Merle & Craig, 2017). Although used less frequently than traditional lectures for this study guest speakers were more likely to increase frequencies of optimal experience in students as measured by the EduFlow instrument. As such, the authors recommend further research to better understand the implications of using guest speakers as a technique to enhance teaching and learning while complementing other types of instruction (Rosenshine & Furst, 1973).

Results also suggested increased student cognitive absorption during student-led activities in comparison to a teacher-centered lecture approach. Student-led experiences provided support for opportunities to learn content through a peer-to-peer teaching and learning process (Frisch et al., 2020). Student-led learning also provides additional ways to communicate curricular messages that augment instructor-centered lectures while providing students a different perspective on content (Rosenshine & Furst, 1973). The authors also recommend more peer-to-peer experiences that complement other learning activities as supported by Frisch et al. (2020). However, due to the limited opportunities in this study for student-led activities, the authors recommend further studies to assess peer-to-peer learning opportunities to better understand its impacts and enhance this valuable teaching and learning approach.

Summary

This research provides support that guest speakers and student-led instruction were important to learners and the learning experience. Guest speaker and student-led instructional experiences provided positive support for increasing student cognition while guest presenters also increased student excitement and happiness during presentations. Determining appropriate guest speakers (Ahmed, 2022; Hoefer & Watson, 2021) and student-led (Frisch et al., 2020) instructional experiences are critical to incorporate in undergraduate learning in a nonprofit organizational management setting. This study also determined that inclusion of these approaches provided variability to learning and complemented traditional lectures (Rosenshine & Furst, 1973). As such, providing students with varying opportunities for acquisition of knowledge is critical to support an ever-changing agriculture and natural resources workforce (National Research Council, 2009).

One important limitation of this study includes the potential for recall bias as related to students filling out EduFlow surveys after each of the class sessions. This study supports similar research that optimal experience (Everett & Raven, 2018) in the context of EduFlow and student learning (Everett et al., 2020) are important to learning and provides the impetus for further research using socio-psychological indicators (e.g., EduFlow) to understand teaching approaches that motivate and engage undergraduate students in the 21st century and beyond.

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