13 Flipped Learning in Legal Education: A Personal Experience

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Currently, I am teaching two first-year compulsory courses, Constitutional Law I and II, along with the some other elective classes on the Faculty of Law. When I initially applied to work at MEF University, I heard about the Flipped Learning approach as a teaching tool in higher education for the first time. Like the majority of university members, prior to joining MEF, I had no idea about it. When we first started at the university, we attended seminars and read many papers regarding the main aspects and basic principles of this new learning method. In this section, I start by discussing the classical approach to teaching law, before moving on to discuss how I have gradually Flipped my law classes over the past two years.

13.2. Traditional Teaching Methods on Law Faculties

In law faculties in Turkey, tutoring and practical studies have always been the most common traditional teaching methods. However, some students, especially in very large classes, are not

willing to, or are unable to, actively contribute in class. Even in practical studies or case studies, which are of utmost importance for the realization of theoretical knowledge and which require active participation from students, outcomes have been very discouraging. A number of attempts have been made to overcome this problem. Since the mid-20th century, changes in legal education may be observed both regarding the range of courses provided and also the teaching methods used. In particular, the advent of the technology age has had a great impact on how legal courses are taught, and the Flipped Learning approach is one example of how technology has been used to enhance the learning experience in legal education.

13.3. Flipped Learning: First Videos, First Classes

During MEF University's early days in July 2014, just two months before the opening, rough construction work of the building was still in progress. No one believed that the university would open on time. Despite the university administration's determination to implement the Flipped Learning approach, many people had suspicions about the realization of this model which necessitates a certain amount of preparation. However, the university had strongly emphasized its learning strategy based on the Flipped Learning approach, as Arıkan and Şahin were passionate about introducing a new perspective to higher education, and passionate about replacing the traditional learning models that they did not deem effective for student success in the modern world.

During the first semester, we had around 32 students per class. In order to make the videos at this stage, we installed Camtasia onto all the law professors' computers. At this stage, I did not have any idea about how to use the program. I spent approximately three hours at home in order to shoot the first 15-minute video. As I did not know about video editing, I thought I had to have a perfect recording. Moreover, the necessity of standing still on a fixed point raised some difficulty for me because I am used to walking around in class and make many gestures while lecturing. When I watched my first video back, I thought I had come across as slightly dull and anxious; however, I hoped I had kept some of my humor. I uploaded the video anyway, since I needed materials for the course, which was about

to start. When I asked the students whether they laughed or not, they replied in an affirmative manner. I still keep those videos and use them because they remind me how I have developed my expertise over time. There were also some times that I felt frustrated, because although the videos were about 10–15 minutes in length, the length of time spent making videos was almost double or triple the length I usually spent delivering a normal lecture; this new method was much more labor intensive. However, as I gained more experience, it took me less time to make the videos. In addition, I had started to build an archive of videos that I could reuse on subsequent courses. By this point, I felt that I had overcome the original issues that I had been facing. I could also see the benefits that were starting to emerge; increased class time for student-centered learning, and more professional lecture delivery online as we started to create more professional videos.

Secondly, the amount of information that we should give in a video was constantly under discussion. As all the points in a subject area are of a great importance to us, we pontificated over how we could talk over a subject thoroughly in one short video when in a traditional lecture this subject would normally be taught over the course of two hours. The shortest I managed to make my videos was around 20 minutes. However, even at this length, students complained that they had difficulty watching the videos and staying focused. I also realized that long videos were leading the students to believe that they did not need to attend class, as they thought they could learn everything just through the videos. As the main objective was for them to watch the videos *before* lectures so that they could have a better comprehension of subjects, I decided to shorten the videos by dividing long subjects into smaller parts. Moreover I adopted a different manner of lecturing, which involved focusing on core points of topics instead of covering every detail.

Getting students to be involved in pre-class activities is obviously crucial for conducting courses effectively. The biggest problem that I faced during lessons was that students were coming to class without watching the videos; as a result they were not aware of what was being discussed. For this reason, I tried to display some of the short videos during class at first; later on I noticed that it was losing us a lot of class time so I decided to stop doing this. Instead I tried to make the students understand that they would end up as passive observers in future classes if they did not watch the videos in advance. In fact, the students who were not watching the videos soon noticed that their classmates'

performance and their participation in discussions were increasing. Encouraging students who had comprehended a concept to share his/her knowledge with the other students, along with in-class activities, supported by extra explanations made by the instructor when needed, provided satisfactory results. At this point, it was important to be attentive in order to motivate students to follow the discussions so that they could get to grips with the problems and arrive at the answers through their own effort, instead of the instructor providing them with all the answers.

After the opening of the University's recording studio, videos began to be made by a professional team meaning that they increased in quality. In addition, some graphics, short film clips, and news items began to be added to the videos. These innovations raised the students' focus and enabled them to understand the topics more easily meaning they were able to detect problems by analyzing the data in the clips and graphics. All of these innovations increased the students' interest. For example, adding some critical scenes from Katja Von Garnier's "*Iron Jawed Angels*" made them realize what struggles women went through in order to get the right to vote and be elected. These types of materials support students in understanding the real life stories and struggles lying behind the rights and theories that are now in place.

Gradually, the students got used to the Flipped Learning approach despite their resistance at the beginning. They now realized that watching the videos regularly before class was essential to their learning. Additionally, students started to request pre-class videos were made, even when I had felt they were not really necessary for the topic. I also realized that the number of students who used to come to my room after class and ask questions about the lesson had decreased. Those questions had generally been about basic issues, and at times I felt I had to repeat an entire lecture. However, now they come to ask for details or to ask questions about complicated issues, which indicates they comprehend the main concepts from the videos. I can now see, therefore, that the time I put into making videos is easily compensated by the reduced time I spend going over the main ideas again with students after class.

13.4. Flipped Learning: Experience in the Second Year

While in the first year, there had been small class sizes, in the second year, the number of law students per class increased to 200.

Even though this is a not uncommon size in most law faculties, this obviously affected the effectiveness of the Flipped Learning approach. Our Flipped Learning approach in the first year had been developed for 30 students in the specially designed Flipped classrooms at MEF. However, as these have a capacity of 30, in the second year, we had to move from these classrooms into lecture theaters. It would not have been financially feasible to continue to run small classes, as we would have had to hire more law professors. As a result, we are now looking for ways in which we can modify and adapt the methods we have been using in order to cater for larger class sizes.

Some of the adaptations we made in the second year are as follows. We revisited the videos that we had made and improved them by adding more questions directly into the videos as well as including more areas for students to research. Since the main purpose of the pre-class videos is to get the students to prepare for the class so that they can actively participate in the classroom, we made it a requirement that the students had to answer the questions and do some research in advance. At the beginning of each lesson, these questions and research topics are put to discussion. I also ask questions about the subjects in videos in order to ascertain whether they had watched the videos or not. I encourage the students who know the answer to reply and I provide guidance if needed. What this reveals to me is that the students who have watched the videos have a better understanding of the subject than the other students when they come to class. This shows not only through their participation, but also by their level of thinking, the questions that they ask, and the consistency between what was in the videos and what they are discussing. Demands from students regarding video uploads peaked in the spring term of the second year, especially when we had delays in uploading because of moving over to Vimeo, which was done in order to solve some technical problems and to avoid copyright infringement issues.

Being a professor who has always taught freshmen, I have observed that students generally have low grades in their first year on the Faculty of Law. I believe this is because they are confronted with challenging courses such as constitutional law, Roman law, and civil law. This is very different from their high school courses that focused on geography, literature, and mathematics. Generally, their level of success increases with time. I therefore believe that the Flipped Learning approach makes it easier for them to deal with confusion and the feeling of

strangeness that they have at the beginning of their studies, as they are able to slowly adapt to the new subjects by re-watching the videos at their own pace. In addition, my students have expressed that taking exams after re-watching videos has had a positive effect on their grades compared to the exams that they had taken without re-watching the videos. I believe this factor alone reveals the effectiveness of this learning approach.

13.5. Conclusion

There are, in fact, many conclusions inside the above text; however, I would like to summarize the most important ones here. In my opinion, based on our first two years of experience, the Flipped Learning approach saves time for practical studies, which are *sine qua non* in legal education. Since Flipped Learning requires students to effectively prepare for class by watching videos, referencing legal texts, course books, and related materials, class activities are completed in a shorter period of time than in a traditional classroom. Consequently, the Flipped Learning approach leads to an obvious increase in the number of practical studies that students can complete. In addition, they can be completed in a way that encourages active learning. We are pleased to see that the students are now preparing and studying in advance of class; however, we are aware that deep learning does not take place without the essential, active learning, practical activities that we are doing in class. Another advantage we have seen with the Flipped Learning approach is that when students enter the spring semester, there are a number of overlapping topics, or topics that need to be reviewed before the students move on. As all of these topics have previously been presented via videos, these videos can be uploaded again and made available for the students at the start of the spring term. Doing this has saved instructors time and effort in going over these areas again with the students.

Based on my two years of experience, it may be said that Flipped Learning is a promising educational approach, as it provides opportunities for more effective and more rapid learning in higher education. Equally, I believe it improves the effectiveness of the teaching of the instructors. In the traditional system, you can only improve upon your lectures. However, the Flipped Learning approach requires more careful planning, lecturing through videos, and assessing. This means instructors have to

plan their lessons from a different perspective and put more effort into making it work well. All of these aspects together definitely change you from a traditional lecturer into an effective facilitator of learning. Finally, as far as I am concerned, the most important feature of the Flipped Learning approach is that it increases student success by encouraging studying prior to class, and participation in class discussions and activities. Students gain more discipline through preparing and studying for their courses outside the classroom, which makes them more eager to participate in discussions and feel more secure in reaching course sources. I believe that all of these naturally support learner achievement and success.