ABSTRACT

Textbooks may be considered essential to student learning, but many faculty wonder if students ever read the book. Also, textbooks may actually have too much information in them, overwhelming students and creating confusion about what content is really important. A study was conducted wherein the instructor stopped using a consumer behavior textbook and instead used only the introductory marketing book the students had already purchased along with the instructor’s notes and slides. The result? Student test scores went up significantly.

Educators may feel that there is no such thing as too much knowledge, but when it comes to teaching with a textbook, too many concepts and models is a problem. Bacon and Stewart (2006) recently demonstrated how quickly consumer behavior knowledge is forgotten if it is not learned at a deeper level or not reinforced. The trend in textbooks is to offer very broad coverage with very little depth. The presentation of thousands of terms may motivate students to try to learn just a little about each term, which is a recipe for rapid forgetting.

Research on textbook effectiveness is very important because textbook have become quite expensive. In the bookstore at the research site, our Consumer Behavior textbook sells for nearly $170. Thus, for a single class of 40 students, the textbook may add as much as $6,800 to the cost of delivering the course (assuming all the students buy new books). Instructors should question whether or not this money is well spent. The central research question in the present research is:

RQ1: What effect does the inclusion of a textbook have on student learning?

To address this question, data were collected in three sections of a consumer behavior (CB) course. The first section used a widely-adopted consumer behavior textbook (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 2003). In the remaining two sections, the students were asked to retain the same text they had used in a prerequisite introductory course (Kerin, Hartley, Berkowitz, & Rudelius, 2006). The first section was taught in the fall of 2006 (n = 32), the second in the winter of 2008 (n = 33), and the third in the spring of 2008 (n = 37). In addition to these materials, the instructor used extensive custom PowerPoint slides and some handouts in all sections, developed over 19 years of experience teaching the course. The PowerPoint slides contained additional terms and more in-depth and detailed examples and visuals that supported the learning of each concept. Copies of all PowerPoint slides and handouts were made available to students as a course packet in the bookstore at the beginning of the term.

The students completed four multiple-choice quizzes and a final exam in each section. The quizzes are used for the analysis presented here. The Cronbach’s alpha was estimated by regarding this composite as a single test with four questions. The Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .87. Following recommendations from Bacon and Bean (2006), GPAs were collected from the registrar and used as a covariate.

After partialing out the variance in the quiz composite due to GPA ($R^2 = .57, F(1,100) = 131.5, p = < .001$), a simple t-test was then performed with the residuals of this regression, comparing residual quiz composite scores across the text/no text groups. The difference was found to be significant ($t = 2.184, p = .031$), with the no-text group scoring higher than the text group. The difference reflected an effect size of 0.47 standard deviations. According to Cohen’s standards, this would be a medium effect (0.2 standard deviations = small, 0.5 standard deviations = medium, Cohen, 1977). However, when we consider the effect before partialing out the variance due to GPA, the effect would be closer to 0.31, which might be described as a between a small and medium effect. To understand this effect in terms of grades, if a traditional grading distribution had a mean of 85 (a “B”), and a standard deviation of 10 points, then dropping the textbook would be expected to raise the average grade .31 standard deviations, or to a 88 ($= 85 + .31*10$, a “B+”).

In summary, this study found that students learned more effectively without a specialized textbook than they did with a specialized textbook.

References Available on Request