Article

Building on Strategic eLearning Initiatives of Hybrid Graduate Education a Case Study Approach: MHEI-ME Erasmus+ Project

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Abstract: Online courses are gaining popularity because they provide extensive and varied course material, information, knowledge, and skills, whilst also creating an effective educational online community. This research adopts a case study approach to focus on the teaching method and the manner in which a strategic commitment to eLearning provides scope for the development and implementation of top quality educational online fully accredited programs. Entrepreneurship focuses on developing businesses that add value and create wealth and prosperity in our societies. Therefore, entrepreneurship is a key area of learning for graduate students seeking to set up and operate their own SME organizations. It can serve as a benchmark for the teaching of other graduate subjects that require a sound correlation for the correlation of concepts and theories to the challenging complexities of the real world. The program was developed on the basis of the implementation of a state-of-the-art eLearning platform that allowed for a combination of varied self-learning and collaborative learning elements and activities within a single platform. This enabled students to access the online content material efficiently and effectively. It allows for the development of a program based on the flipped classroom teaching methodology. The underlying concept of the flipped classroom methodology is that effective eLearning should comprise both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. This combination of self-learning and collaborative learning calls for careful planning by the tutor to ensure that the learning objectives are clearly defined for each activity and that the relevant deliverables are monitored. The content material for each subject course module was designed, developed, produced, and presented by the different project partners in a holistic manner structured to motivate participants to learn. The results of our analysis have shown that students were able to learn, discuss their projects, and cooperate during an online course in an effective and participant-focused manner with their tutors. The feedback given highlights the importance of ongoing communications between students and the tutors who often need to act as mentors to retain student engagement.

Keywords: eLearning; higher education; flipped classroom; ARCS model; teaching method; international cooperation

1. Introduction

In our current environment of globalization, accessibility and geographic distances take on different values and meanings more than ever before. For managers or even employees, free time, leisure time, or out-of-work dispensable time have shrunk and become scattered. For efficient career building, including vocational training and post-graduate education, time management has become a key issue. People have less and less free time in their daily schedule. This is particularly relevant to those in leading

positions. Managers typically find it difficult to gain new skills and information through classic education systems [1]. Traveling to attend lectures or seminars in pre-fixed time frames—even in part-time learning programs—takes too much time and is difficult to harmonize with busy working schedules. This phenomenon has generated an increasing demand for new ways and methods for education systems that meet quality standards but enable students to save time and eliminate commuting. Thanks to the growing strength of widely used broadband internet, nowadays online learning seems to be a very promising alternative to the classic education model. Although online education has its limitations, it also has a number of advantages. Norman [2] specified five traits as follows: (a) you can learn whatever you want; (b) it is comfortable; (c) online courses look great on a resume; (d) self-paced learning; (e) lower costs.

Moreover, Rakic, Pavlovic, Softic, Lalic, & Marjanovic [3] believe that digital technologies have become an indispensable asset for those involved in online teaching, both at school and university, so much so that they are no longer considered a "disruptive tool", and Chivu, Orza, & Popa [4] say that eLearning is marked as the study applied in a virtual world. Human creativity and technology combine to simplify and accelerate the in-depth knowledge of the studied field. Higher education institutions took part in a mass of technology development processes. Experts assert that eLearning brings with it a group of radical innovations in form, organization, and succession of education. It is easy s to notice that all players in the learning process increasingly use online learning environments.

Additionally, Zimmerman [5], considers that online learning is a demanding process and learners have to develop self-regulating strategies in order to be able to attend online courses. Institutions have included online learning in their teaching methods and approve online learning strategies. Dumford & Miller [6], declare that "many colleges and universities are interested in how to best deliver course content for online learners". In their study, they discuss ways in which taking online courses influences student engagement. They demonstrated that "students taking greater numbers of online courses were more likely to engage in quantitative reasoning", and "they were less likely to engage in collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and discussions with diverse others, compared to their more traditional classroom counterparts". Moreover, as technology increases nowadays, flipped classroom teaching (or else inverted classroom or reversed classroom) has been appreciated by many teachers as an effective teaching method in online courses [6]. In flipped classroom teaching, students explore the course material and watch the videos of the courses outside the online classroom. The tasks students have to complete in a flipped classroom according to Bergmann and Sams [7] are performed at home and the homework is completed during the class. Thus, flipped classroom activities support personalized learning and promote student-centered learning activities, outside and inside the classroom [8,9].

Entrepreneurs learn from experience, and ongoing learning plays an important role for them [10]. Additionally, learning is a multidimensional process where different learning theories are applied to teach different subjects [11]. According to many researchers [12–14], flipped classroom activities are supporting the constructivist method of learning, combining online learning with offline activities. According to many studies, it is well documented that teaching entrepreneurship online using MOOCs allows students/entrepreneurs to "*reflect on their own learning activities, so they can make necessary connections to course content*" [15]. Students using online teaching methods are motivated by their professors to learn but what learners want to learn is not always what they need, so flipped classroom activities upgrade students' comprehension, enhance instruction, and construct personalized knowledge [16–18].

Although technology has made encouraging steps forward, there are still some disadvantages in the application of online education, according to [19]. In his recent paper, he states that "*any student seeking to enroll for a distance learning program needs to invest in a range of equipment including computer, webcam, and stable internet connection*". In the same paper, the author refers to a paper written in 2013 by Nagrale [20], who believed that it

was quite dangerous for someone to totally rely on distance education for a degree because an online degree may not go on "*to be recognized by private companies in the job market and the same problem in government jobs*". So, most employers "prefer a degree from a regular college over online or distance education. They think that distance education is still not a serious form of education". At the present time, online teaching and learning have been recognized more and more and have been accepted from many higher educational institutions worldwide. Students and teachers can interact via internet and there are many online tools for evaluating online courses [11,21,22]. The problem of distance learning is not just a problem of universities but also primary and secondary schools. Poultsakis, Papadakis, Kalogiannakis, & Psycharis [23] realized the research focused on obstacles that teachers at primary and secondary schools face when managing digital learning objects (DLOs) and digital simulation tools (DST) in science. Their study showed that the main reason for refusing to deal with DLOs and DSTs is the technological equipment. Therefore, adequate and user-friendly eLearning environment is essential for a successful and entirely acceptable education process.

Davidson & Goldberg [24] start off their book with the critique of a simple situation, a professor in a university classroom reading aloud a passage from the assigned work met with the inattentive classroom more focused on their laptop screens and their private engagements. This simple situation presented the wide range of questions that drove their research into what tools are best suited for education in a digital world. Should the professor's role be that of an oracle or a guide leading students to their own discoveries? Is reading aloud from an assigned text still the best use of educational technologies available? They argue that modes of learning have changed dramatically in recent years, but have our institutions changed? Do we question "*how we teach, where we teach, whom we teach, who teaches, who administers and who services*"? Davidson & Goldberg contend that in addition to these fundamental questions, new learning institutions "need not be based on the contiguity of time and place". This introduces the concept of virtual learning organizations and the collaborative manner in which these can be created by established traditional organizations. They contend that collaborative, interdisciplinary, multi-institutional learning spaces help transform traditional learning institutions. The authors maintain that central to the effective implementation of such programs is an understanding of digital learning or as it is sometimes referred to, participatory learning. The concept of digital learning differs from traditional instructional methodologies. In digital learning, the outcomes can be customized by the learners who are able to focus the learning activities more closely on their own needs through shared collaborative initiatives where authorship becomes a shared and interactive experience.

The MHEI-ME project is a perfect example of Davidson & Goldberg's citation of the power of virtual learning institutions. It brings together a collaborative consortium to pitch for EU funds and to administer the funds to obtain project completion. It is interdisciplinary, involving academics from different faculties from European higher educational institutions, and most importantly, it utilizes the European Qualifications Framework administered by the Maltese educational regulator to guarantee the quality of the program. The pilot program presented in this article included an international mix of students and these had collaborative projects in each subject model, ensuring that there was a continued sense of shared development and learning experiences.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Levy [25] raised the issue of proper tools and planning for online education. He stressed the fact that online classes were not just the same classroom classes conducted through a video conferencing platform. He challenged tutors to decide on what material should be kept in live sessions (synchronously), what material for students to engage with on their own time (asynchronously), and what material to eliminate. He recommends synchronous learning as being more effective when the importance is on the following: exchanging perspectives amongst students, students learning from each other, interactions in which the tutor plays the role of the facilitator or mediator, and opportunities to build community. Conversely, Levy proposes asynchronous learning as

the more effective option when the importance is on the following: students developing the necessary groundwork in basic ideas or concepts before classes, an assessment of students' perspectives or background on the subject, students' ability to study and analyze content material at their own pace, and the stimulation of thought and reflection on the content by students. Learners need time to reflect and take on the relevance and significance of the new knowledge they are being exposed to. This ties in with Kolb's framework of learning styles which was used in the design and development of the set of eLearning deliverables that MHEI-ME provided to students [26].

Nowadays, the tools to deliver eLearning courses can facilitate distance-learning activities. Still, learning management systems (LMS) have all the features required to deliver online courses, such as the registration of students, the management of training contents, and the evaluation of the knowledge.

The aim of this study is to examine if the flipped classroom teaching method applies to a Master's course in entrepreneurship. For the analysis of our hypothesis, we used first-hand experiences in using flipped classroom activities in a pioneer-sound Master's degree project that has been launched and implemented online by a multi-HEI consortium. We also applied for the first time in an online Master's course the Keller's ARCS model of motivational design theories, to evaluate the attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction (ARCS) of the students [27]. Poór et al. [28] refer to Kaplan and Haenlein [29], who considered that student motivation is absolutely the key which comprises commitment, challenges, control, novelty, and competition [29]. The results of this project are summarized and analyzed with the view of further utilization in similar online education programs.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. A Strategic Commitment to eLearning: The Erasmus+ MHEI-ME Project

The online Master's program in entrepreneurship was initiated in 2017 and coordinated by Maltese Advenio eAcademy in collaboration with five higher educational institutions (HEIs), University of Žilina, Slovakia, Szent István University (Hungary), University of Ioannina (Greece), University Aldo Moro (Italy), and the University of Poltava (Ukraine). Each of the institutions involved was committed to the continued development of eLearning activities within their organizations, both at an infrastructural as well as at an operational level. The network of HEIs was established specifically to develop an online Master's program in entrepreneurship which would reflect best practices and provide a combination of self-learning and collaborative learning.

Kolb's concept of learning style preferences [26] has become a core pillar of eLearning design and development. His classification of learning styles is based on a cyclical process consisting of four separate activity stages as shown below. The learning experience commences with an individual having a concrete experience; this is reflected upon in the following stage in which the learner learns how to respond to this (reflective observation). This serves as the basis for the learner to develop mental models to integrate and make sense of the experience (abstract conceptualization). These are then used as the basis for decision making and problem solving (active experimentation).

This model links two critical aspects: the manner in which information is acquired during the learning process (vertical axis) and the manner in which knowledge is transformed (horizontal) axis. Kolb focuses on the importance of learning by doing and this is one of the key aspects of the more effective eLearning programs that seek to provide opportunities for reflection and absorption of content material and opportunities for implementing the learning through interactive discussion and debate (see Figure 1).

The MHEI-ME model is based on this approach and includes both self-learning elements that provide students with autonomy in the learning process and time to reflect and take on the learning. It also includes collaborative learning elements that require interaction with faculty or students to review, discuss, debate the learning matter, thus serving as an active learning experience.
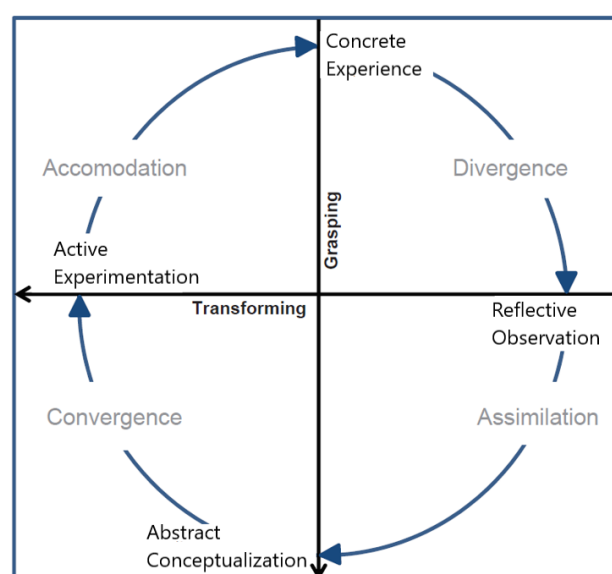
Figure 1. Learning style dimensions and types [26].

The required combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning was possible through the eLearning platform selected, as this provided the required range of online learning options. The MHEI-ME online program was supported through co-funding by Erasmus+ program. A major innovation of the program was its accreditation through the national regulator in Malta, the National Commissions for Further and Higher Education in Malta which confirmed the European Qualifications Framework/Malta Qualifications Framework (EQF/MQF) 90 ECTS credits at Level 7 accreditation. The accreditation of the program was a key element in the sustainability of the project, since it ensured that students have a guarantee of quality and the recognition of their qualification, not only at a national level, but at an international level within all countries that are signatories to the Bologna Process due to their obligations to recognize qualifications awarded within the European Qualifications Framework.

Throughout the discussions and planning of the program, the emphasis was on leveraging best practices to ensure that the new program would provide an engaging and international perspective on entrepreneurship. It was agreed that the "flipped classroom" approach would be adopted with a significant investment in the development and production of pre-recorded video content and other self-learning content. The self-learning content provided flexibility to students to study at their own convenience, since the self-learning content was available 24 × 7. In this way, students were able to study the course material prior to the live online sessions where they could discuss the content with the professor and their peers. The flipped classroom teaching method was evaluated using the attention, relevance, confidence, satisfaction (ARCS) model [27], where students were interviewed on the impact the flipped classroom teaching method had on attention, relevance of interest of course material, confidence of students, and satisfaction with the course.

Throughout the development and production of content material there was a strong sense of collaboration and sharing of knowledge and expertise for developing practical guidelines and templates for faculty in the design, development, and delivery of content. This open and collaborative approach was further enhanced with the ongoing quality assurance maintained by Advenio eAcademy. This QA was an integral part of the program accreditation process, critical to creating a common "feel" throughout all the modules. In this way, whilst each partner HEI was responsible for the design, development, and implementation of one or more course subject module, there was continuity in the style and format of the content. In addition, the ongoing workshop sessions served as a valuable training and development platform for both faculty and support staff.

For the purpose of this study, all comments from participating members of faculty and students during synchronous communications were collected and analyzed. From the Checklists & Rubrics for Evaluating Online Programs [30] we used the questions based on the Blended Course Implementation Checklist [31] to evaluate the appreciation for this program of the students.

The main factor concerning the limitations of the external validity of our results is the size of the group of the participants, as in our group we only had twelve Master's students who completed the program. Another factor affecting the validity of our results is the selection procedure. In this research, we used all participants in the MSc program for the evaluation of the ARCS model, so it can be considered as a convenience sample and not a random sample because in this Master's course we included in our research all the 15 participants.

2.2. The eLearning Platform

One of the fundamental elements for the development and implementation of the project was the commitment to seek best practice at all levels of the design, development, production, and implementation of the program, within the budgetary constraints of the project. The use of a dedicated state-of-the-art eLearning platform that would allow for the development of an online program that includes self-learning, collaborative learning and allows flipped classroom activities and functionality was critical. In addition, the sustainability of the platform post-project was also an important factor. Advenio eAcademy proposed the use of the eLearning platform it had been using for a number of years, which had already been heavily customized to allow for extensive functionality within one eLearning platform. The platform was reviewed by the partners and a decision was taken to develop the program which would leverage the extended functionality of the eLearning platform.

The MHEI-ME program was thus hosted and delivered through a dedicated eLearning platform, eB-Learn. This was developed and offered as software on a services basis by eBusiness Systems. This eLearning platform allows for the organization of a broad range of learning objects and activities generally categorized into asynchronous and synchronous activities. The former is referred to in the system as self-learning objects which users can follow at their own convenience, whilst the latter refers to the collaborative elements usually scheduled for particular time slots. Integrating the self-learning and collaborative elements is an integral part of the flipped or flipped classroom approach adopted for the development and implementation of the online program and was crucial for obtaining EQF certification for the program.

In 2011, eB-Learn was the winner of the Malta Communications Authority national eBiz Award for Best Use of Technology in Education and Training. Later version upgrades of the system improved the security and integrity of the back end as well as added functionality such as auto-issue of course transcripts and tracking of student achievements. The architecture and web-based infrastructure of eB-Learn ensures that it is able to accommodate eLearning operations within different operating scenarios, both within the corporate training and development sector as well as the academic sector. eB-Learn collaborative learning has added functionalities built into the system to allow for online tutoring/mentoring, virtual assistance, online self-assessment, and options for intelligent document handling (see Figure 2). eB-Learn is offered on a software-as-a-solution (SaaS) basis.

The eB-Learn platform is already very well set for mobile access in order to help students and typically more than half of the users access the system through mobile phones and smart phones. The continued growth and expansion of 5G networks in the coming years will provide even more functionality to the networks hosting the eLearning platform, allowing for even broader access and faster communication speeds.
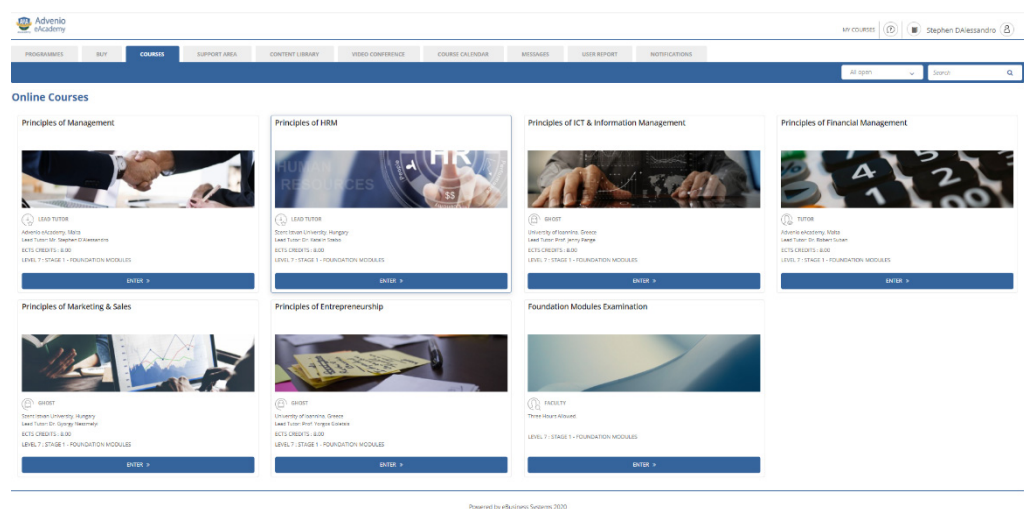
Figure 2. eB-Learn display of foundation modules to MHEI-ME participants [32].

2.3. The MHEI-ME Process

This Master's program consisted of four stages: foundation courses x 6, comprising principles of management, principles of HRM, principles of ICT, principles of marketing, principles of financial management, and principles of entrepreneurship. The second stage consisted of three specialist subject modules comprising: SME fundraising and growth, creativity and innovation, and digital marketing. The third stage involved a twelve-week internship in which the work packages assigned in the first stages had to be implemented and reported on. The fourth stage was the research project in which participants had to develop, submit, and present a business plan for a new SME operation or the growth of an existing SME project. The first intake of this joint project, Multiple Higher Educational Institutions–Masters in Entrepreneurship (MHEI-ME), commenced in April 2018 and the participants who successfully completed the program graduated in November 2019. Interviews were held with all students during all stages of their studies. The content material was all online for every course and students had to communicate with their tutors every week in a synchronous and asynchronous method using the flipped classroom method.

Bill Tucker [33] was one of the earlier promoters of the flipped classroom approach, promoting the successful experiment by Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams [7], who as chemistry teachers in Woodland Park High School in 2007 started to record separate class sessions to be available for absentee students on demand. They found that even those students who did not miss class used the pre-recorded content and came to class better prepared and ready to engage in the discussion and review of the relevant content matter.

Jonathan Bergmann at Panopto.com was one of the pioneers of the flipped classroom pedagogy which evolved from an obscure experiment to a widely implemented model for improving the student learning experience in universities and educational institutions. Conceptually, Bergmann defines the flipped classroom as a situation in which "Lectures are recorded outside of class, and then shared with students to review as their "homework". Classroom time is reserved for students to engage in discussions and activities". He contends that by making lecture materials available on-demand, students can learn at their own pace, coming to class better prepared to engage in the review, discussion, and application of the content matter. Bergmann contends that classroom activities may include "group work, comprehension tests, presentations, and other applications of the subject matter". This more engaging approach provides more space for individual queries and personalization of content to the interests of the particular student group [34].

The challenge of adding interactive content meant that each stage of the program, during the course subject stages of the foundation or specialist modules, the internship

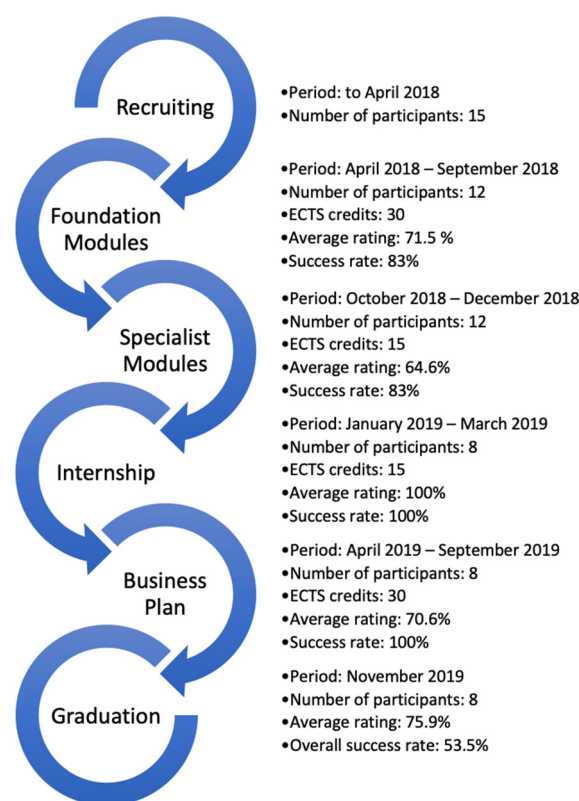stage or the final business plan stage, was met at both planning and implementation levels (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Process of MHEI-ME—facts and numbers.

Students from every economic background and country were able to participate. Students who enrolled and were accepted for the full program were interviewed and replied to our questions concerning the flipped classroom teaching method. The students lived in different geographical areas including Malta, Slovakia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Kenya, and Ghana.

The range of the ages of the participants was 36 years with max 59 years and min 23 years of age. Thirteen students were males and two females.

2.3.1. The MHEI-ME Self-Learning Elements

The elements in this category included:

- Pre-recorded audio video sessions carefully planned and prepared to reflect a professional presentation and not merely a reading of the accompanying power point presentation or course notes, to help students read the course material before class tutoring.
- Supporting PowerPoint presentation or notes to facilitate the absorption of the content being delivered during the presentation for the flexibility of the flipped classroom process.
- Reference lists providing the key topics for accompanying live tutorial sessions.
- Reading lists were required for each subject module to encourage students to spend time reviewing the readings and understanding their relevance and correlation with the core course materials before or after the class tutorial.
- FAQs were provided for each subject module to provide an ongoing source of content development and support to the flipped classroom method.
- Online self-assessment facilities allowed for student self-evaluation, enabling them to identify any areas or issues within the course subject module. These self-assessment facilities enabled students to develop skills in the flipped classroom teaching method.

- Glossaries were included, not only to facilitate the precise use of jargon within the particular subject module, but often to ensure that the correct meaning of the English vocabulary used was understood for the flipped classroom process.

2.3.2. MHEI-ME Collaborative Learning Elements

- Calendaring facilities within the eB-Learn platform provided an important link with students as it provided them with auto notification of collaboration events in each module of the program.
- Live video conferencing facilities for online tutorials proved to be one of the most effective collaborative elements in the program. This allowed for inclusion of video clips or other content for discussion. The live interactive aspect of the tutorial/workshop was critical to the overall success of the program. This faculty—student interactivity was crucial to the success of the program, enabling faculty to leverage the technology to bring into play their expertise and experience for the students' benefit.
- Forum sessions proved to be a very powerful learning tool which challenged students to refer to reference material, readings, and other external sources to support their discussion and debate of topics put forward by the forum moderator.
- Individual and/or group assignments were designed to encourage students to collaborate and research both the theory and, most important to the focus of the program, the application, of the various concepts and theories in the context of entrepreneurial activity. The various assignments were discussed during the tutorial/workshop sessions ensuring that students received feedback which enhanced the learning experience of the compilation of the assignment.
- File repository for sharing of documents enabling student-to-group interaction is an important functionality to support groupwork in the flipped classroom process, particularly group assignments.
- Internships were included in the initial MHEI-ME program to provide participants with the opportunity to obtain real-world experience.
- Research project in the MHEI-Me program consisted of the development of a business plan for the launch of a new business or the growth of an existing business. Throughout the research project phase, the weekly online tutorials were maintained in order to support flipped classroom activities, in addition to the scheduled online meetings students had with their supervisors. Again, the weekly tutorial sessions provided the continuity of the flipped classroom process and the ongoing communication with an international dispersed student body.

These elements reflected the manner in which a powerful eLearning platform was used to apply the flipped classroom teaching method and create customized content targeted at the target student audience. It provided the infrastructure for a range of online self-learning and collaborative learning activities that ensured a valid evaluation process which was critical to the EQF certification that was the guarantee of quality promised to students. This model involved more than just turning up for the weekly live tutorial and supported students in the many ad hoc challenges they inevitably faced during an eighteen-month program.

3. Results and Discussions

We had feedback about the flipped classroom teaching method from 12 Master's students who graduated (8 received an MHEI-MI and 4 received a certificate). In particular, two students received an Award in Entrepreneurship, another two students received a Post-Graduate Certificate in Entrepreneurship, and eight students ended up with a Master's in Entrepreneurship.

We used the attention, relevance, confidence, satisfaction (ARCS) model (Keller, 1987) for the evaluation and the analysis of the flipped classroom teaching method. For the evaluation of the ARCS model, we applied qualitative research methods. We interviewed all participants in the course, and according to the results of this model, we found that:

1. Attention was gained by all participants, mainly by posing challenging questions during the online sessions, or by their active participation in problems to be solved. This process also included an active collaboration of students–professors. Students from Malta and Slovakia said in their interviews: *"following the course of Masters in Entrepreneurship was more relaxed to follow because, you can study at your own pace, through a number of videos on each topic. This is easy to follow and with the weekly tutorials with the lecturer and other students gave us the impetus needed to communicate, learn from one another"* and *"I attended a study program MHEI level 7 Master in Entrepreneurship and I authorize that this institution delivered top quality programs with a focus on student needs using ICT. One of the biggest benefits is the support of collaboration between students coming from different countries and cultures"* [35]. According to the views of the students, active participation during the flipped class teaching method was very much appreciated by them according to all their reports.

2. Relevance was well-organized in the courses in order to increase a learner's motivation. Students found the online course material relevant to their interests and they were able to make comments on the course material or search for more information on the internet. Students from Kenya and Slovenia said: *"was an eye-opener for me, far beyond my expectations. Time spent with highly qualified lectures and other students was extremely valuable. The diversity of participants from different nations and the impressive curriculum, has given me inspiration, insight, and enhanced my confidence of start my own business"* and *"as participants, we dealt with multiple issues in particular fields of various subjects and help each other understand the situation in our countries. Not only it helps us strengthen our cooperation but also we gained new views on various topics"* [35]. In all courses we used actual language and examples with which the students were very familiar. During the online meetings of the courses, all students were able to answer questions such as *"What will the subject matter do for me today?"* and *"How can I apply it to a theoretical case tomorrow?"*. These questions describe the skills of the students gained through the relevance of the course material and their motivation, because all students replied that they found the course interesting and helpful for their later jobs.

3. Confidence was upgraded in every course because most students met the objectives of learning during the online MHEI-ME. According to the report from a student from Kenya *"I learnt a lot and it gave me a good grounding in the basics of entrepreneurship. I feel that over the duration of the course, I gained a lot of knowledge and practical strategies that will be beneficial to me especially to my future businesses. The course exceeded my expectations significantly"* [35]. Professors were increasing the confidence of students through the online meetings provided to their students, videos, online PowerPoint presentations, list references, and online tests for feedback and support. During the online meetings, students were able to discuss the course material and create a brainstorming list of new ideas. This kind of communication via brainstorming and forums had an added value for the flipped classroom method because students were well prepared and confident to share their ideas with their professors and other classmates. Specifically, a student from Ukraine said that *"Tutors possess deep expertise and are open for communication"* [35]. This opinion confirms confidence gained through class interaction of students and tutors.

4. Satisfaction of this teaching method was evident for all students. They described it in the final evaluation form as a very useful and beneficial process offering them the extra opportunity to be able later to create their own business plan. A student from Slovakia said that: *"Tutors here provided me with much more practical knowledge, all of them spent years working in companies, where did they gain another kind of knowledge and in this study, they shared it with us, what did I miss at my university the most. Studying together with students from others country has helped me to open eyes and to understand different issues from other countries in all topics around business. What do I like the most?"* [35], additionally, a student from Kenya said that *"A very interesting and valuable experience. I learnt a lot and it gave me a good grounding in the basics of entrepreneurship. I feel*

that over the duration of the course, I gained a lot of knowledge and practical strategies that will be beneficial to me especially to my future businesses. The course exceeded my expectations significantly" [35], and the other student from Malta said *"Whether if one seeks knowledge in transforming an existing company, dream of starting an own venture or even simply wanting to expand the career horizon, this course opens a spectrum of paths to pursue. I recommend this course to anyone who wishes to become an entrepreneur for many reasons"* [35]. According to the previously presented opinions of the students, we find that they were satisfied with the online teaching process and the flipped classroom method because they described it as a valuable experience.

Moreover, in comparison with another type of evaluation of this program, and especially according to the evaluation and certification of the program by the national regulator in Malta, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, the motivation of the Master's students for this course was high. They eagerly commended the innovation and relevance of the program for up-to-date entrepreneurial issues. They also said that one of the innovative aspects of the MHEI program was that each individual subject module was designed and delivered by one of the partners' HEIs, and it was automatically recognized throughout Europe and any country which is a signatory to the Bologna Process. So, this evaluation supports the findings of ARCS evaluation on the flipped classroom teaching method applied during this Master's course.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the application of the flipped classroom teaching method on an online entrepreneurship course gave us positive feedback. We can apply it to other online courses for the benefit of students. The flipped classroom helped students to become more engaged in the course material. During this process, students were able to explore the topics in greater depth and collaborate with their peers before the face-to-face meeting. Students upgraded their attention, relevance, confidence, satisfaction (ARCS) pertaining to the course material.

Additionally, this method of teaching may have great impact during Covid-19 because students will be able to study or complete their learning material at home and work faster during class time. Professors, on the other hand, have the ability to offer more guidance and apply various teaching components such as videos, discussion forums, and feedback to all students online. Another positive impact of the implication of flipped classroom is the fact that students had something to do during class and the online delivery of the course was not a boring experience. So, students' main benefits from the flipped classroom include upskilling to all forms of learning, contribution to course material, upgrading online communication skills.

In fact, there is another outcome of our experiences concerning the validity of online learning, thus confirming the findings of Marengo & Pagano [1]. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in most European countries HEIs (and other schools) had to convert to online. As the pandemic hit Europe suddenly, both professors and students had only a couple of days to adapt to the radically changed situation, including all lecturing and tutoring online. For many lecturers and professors—having no experience in the flipped classroom system or other methods of eLearning—it was and still is a challenge as was mentioned in the Rakic study [3]. There are universities where online teaching methods, including online examinations, are still in the embryonic stage, and now some professors use different LMS like MS Teams, Zoom, or CooSpace, while others are not skilled in teaching in LMS and just share their lectures in PowerPoint. However, according to Levy [25], the online courses have to be interesting for the students. In our courses we cooperated with Advenio eAcademy with a well-functioning and solid platform system which could be adjusted to all necessary online functions during the full study program. After all, we believe that our experiences and all these didactic methods for online teaching that we applied throughout our MHEI-ME project can be useful case studies for teaching by other higher educational institutions, especially in these difficult days when online teaching is a must of the HEIs.

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