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EFP Takeaways

Returns to Teaching Repetition: The Effect of Short-term Teaching Experience on Student Outcomes

Background

University instructors often deliver the same lesson multiple times in one day. While this practice can help reduce the costs of delivering course content, little is known about how this day-to-day repetition affects student outcomes. Harold Cuffe and Jan Feld of Victoria University of Wellington and Trevor O’Grady of The College of New Jersey seek to close this gap in the literature by examining the effects of teaching repetition in a Dutch business school on a range of student outcomes. Their work is published in vol. 16 issue 3 of *EFP*.

The Study

Cuffe, Feld, and O’Grady analyze data from a business school at which students are randomly assigned to sections and tutorial instructors. To estimate the effect of teaching repetition, they compare the outcomes of students who were in an instructor’s first, second, third or fourth lesson on the same day. The authors focus on comparisons of student outcomes across an instructor's sections of a course for a given term. The outcomes of interest are students' grades, dropout rates, how students evaluate their instructors, and the amount of time they put into studying for the course.

For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in *Education Finance and Policy*](#).
- [Sign up here to receive future *EFP Takeaways*](#).
- Summary of:
Cuffe, H., Feld, J., & O’Grady, T. (2021). Returns to Teaching Repetition: The Effect of Short-term Teaching Experience on Student Outcomes. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16 (3): 363-387.

Findings

Teaching repetition does not appear to negatively impact the students. Being in an instructors’ second, third, or fourth session of the day (compared to the first session) has no detectable effects on grades and drop-out rates, and suggestive positive effects on teaching evaluations. These results hold when time-of-day is statistically controlled for.

Instructors do not appear to use the first section as a “trial” or “practice run” for later sections nor do they appear to suffer from the potential monotony of repetition. Students in earlier sections are not disadvantaged relative to peers in later ones.

Why does this matter? Teaching repetition is a widespread practice used to save valuable instructor resources. Teaching two classes with the same content takes much less time to prepare than teaching two classes with different content. The findings show students are not worse off as a result of this practice.

These findings also speak to a large literature which generally finds positive effects of year-to-year teaching experience. The absence of positive effects of day-to-day teaching repetition suggests that instructors need time to reflect or update their teaching material to improve their teaching effectiveness. Mere repetition might not enough to become a better teacher.