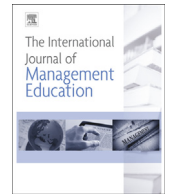




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Research notes

Students' perceptions of the lecturer's role in management education: Knowledge acquisition and competence development



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ABSTRACT

Based on the need for new paradigms fostered by the European higher education framework, this study explores the influence of the lecturer's role on knowledge acquisition and competence development in undergraduate management students. The lecturer's role is analyzed through students' perceptions of the lecturer's ability to build a good relationship and use appropriate teaching methods. This analysis is conducted from the perspective of student-centered learning and theoretical approaches that have emerged in the business field that show a conceptual affinity: the transfer of training and knowledge. Data were collected from 145 undergraduate students studying management courses in a Spanish university. The results indicate that the perceived ability of the lecturer to create a good relationship with students positively influences their perception of the suitability of the teaching methods used, and the suitability of these methods, in turn, influences the students' level of knowledge acquisition and competence development.

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1. Introduction

The creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has prompted the need to advance the understanding of knowledge acquisition and competence development and the methods that can encourage them. In fact, this is one of the major challenges faced by European universities in recent years, but it also represents a 'magnificent opportunity for universities to undertake a reform process that will enable them to adapt to the current social reality, the so-called Knowledge Society' (Montero Curriel, 2010, p. 21). Currently, many European universities are undergoing a process of change in which the development of students' competences becomes the central axis to articulate the teaching-learning process, apart from the basic knowledge that the student also needs to acquire.

In the education context, competences can be viewed as the talents, skills and capabilities that graduates will have, and that will contribute to productivity gains (García Aracil, Mora, & Vila, 2004). The EHEA strongly fosters competence development as a way to ensure education's effectiveness and maximize the efficiency of schooling. In this sense, many higher educational institutions are now developing increasingly close collaboration ties with companies, in order to investigate the extent to which graduates are able to transfer skills and knowledge to the workplace (Green, 2013). Thus, and according to

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Botma, Van Rensburg, Coetzee, and Heyns (2015, p. 499), “transfer of learning is demonstrated by a competent student”, but competencies are not always observed in graduates' behavior because transfer of learning is not an assured outcome of the educational process. This concern is also present in the field of education in Western countries, where the transfer of learning, understood as the application of knowledge and skills to new contexts, has “an eminent role in education”, although it is not exempt from criticism if it is considered the only purpose of education (Green, 2013). However, research on learning transfer is still necessary, specifically about learning environments where the knowledge and skills acquired by students can later be transferred to environments other than education (Burke, Jones, & Doherty, 2005).

Some authors in the field of higher education are concerned about overcoming the idea of an autonomous university and closely analyzing the relationships among society, business, and the academic world (e.g., Tynjälä, Välimaa, & Sarja, 2003). These efforts have focused on the analysis of the relationship between higher education and the knowledge society (Vallima & Hoffman, 2008). In the field of business management, the development of competences has been associated with knowledge management and training. Both of these areas of business management are interested in transmitting knowledge and skills between units and employees in order to achieve better human capital that can do things better or in different ways. Along these lines, although the impact of higher education on personal development cannot be compared with that of training programs, due to the short-term nature of the latter (Vallima & Hoffman, 2008), the analysis of the relationship between higher education and working life could help to define the identity of higher education institutions (Tynjälä et al., 2003).

In order to improve knowledge acquisition and competence development, several factors can be considered, due to the significant influence they can have on these aspects. According to Kember (2009), the role of the lecturer is the key to designing and guiding learning activities. On the other hand, innovative methodologies play a key role in competence development (Salas Velasco, 2014), and the suitability of these methodologies facilitates learning. Moreover, the relationship between the lecturer and the student makes it possible to adapt the method to the required learning needs. Although we acknowledge the relevance of the specific effects that teaching strategies may have on knowledge acquisition and competence development, we are particularly interested in the student's subjective overall assessment of the role of the lecturer in the learning process. The role of the student has taken on a special significance because s/he is now the driver of his/her own learning, and the lecturer becomes an instructor who helps the student to study and find solutions to the different problems s/he may face (Montero Curiel, 2010). The change in methodology has made it necessary to rethink learning activities, materials and contexts, and above all, it has required a change in mentality and routines on the part of the lecturer and the student.

Therefore, the student's perspective is fundamental to knowledge acquisition and competence development. In this sense, ‘serious misunderstandings are likely if teaching staff are unaware of the ways in which students experience higher education’ (Richardson & Radloff, 2015, p. 605). However, students' perception of their own learning is not the same as knowledge acquisition and competence development. Thus, it should not be regarded as an indicator of students' learning or actual performance (e.g., Armstrong & Fukami, 2010; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Sundström, 2005). Instead, it is an affective learning measure based on a student-centered learning perspective that involves students' attitudes, convictions, and confidence levels about the learning objectives (Armstrong & Fukami, 2010; Giacalone & Promislo, 2013; Sitzmann, Ely, Brown, & Bauer, 2010). In this regard, students' perceptions of their own learning is an evaluation criterion in disciplines such as business, education, and psychology (Dobrinsky & Frymier, 2004; Lim & Morris, 2006). It is commonly used at the end of a course, when students are asked to rate their own perceived levels of comprehension (Walczyk & Hall, 1989), competence (Carrell & Willmington, 1996), and performance (Quiñones, 1995).

Taking these considerations into account, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of students' perceptions about the role of the lecturer on the knowledge acquisition and competence development of undergraduate management students. Thus, the paper contributes to the analysis of knowledge acquisition and competences development in the area of management education from the point of view of training transfer, adopted from the field of management (e.g., Botma et al., 2015). There is a conceptual similarity between areas of business management related to the transfer of knowledge and training and the field of education. Therefore, it is appropriate to analyze the role of the lecturer in the knowledge acquisition and competences development of higher education students, based on theoretical approaches to the analysis of professional competences in the business field, as there seem to be important connections between them (Riesco González, 2008). In particular, the article proposes an integrated model that analyzes direct and indirect influences of the lecturer's role on the independent variables.

In order to achieve the aims of this study, this paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, sections two and three present and justify the theoretical model used to conduct this research. Subsequently, section four explains the methodological aspects of the research and the results obtained, and, finally, section five presents the conclusions and limitations of the study, respectively.

2. Knowledge acquisition and competence development in management education

Education is relevant because it allows students to learn and acquire skills and knowledge that will fundamentally shape their behavior (Haveman & Wolfe, 1984). The right acquisition of the right knowledge by students enables them to perform activities and face their professional careers with a more successful approach. Higher education has a qualifying function for the world of work and some other personal spheres, and it is responsible for knowledge transmission and for providing an environment that is conducive to enhancing students' competences (Teichler, 2007).

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