



Learning and teaching strategic challenges: the educational answers.

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Summary - Crynodeb

This research article delves into the relevance of higher education frameworks with regards to the quality of programmes and their benefits for the future professional performance of students. Furthermore, innovative educational answers are a crucial component of the strategic challenges that any university institution must review and implement periodically in order to achieve the expected degree of quality and excellence among its cohorts and, therefore, fostering the success of their careers in the long-term. An adapting and efficient management of curricula within an integrating academic framework is mandatory to meet the challenges in a highly competitive and technologically changing environment. The main objective of this research article is to demonstrate from a deductive approach the hypothesis that business and entrepreneurial potential development of individuals is based on learning capacities which students have to acquire through higher education studies along with specific in-company training. The analysis focuses on different academic components that have critical implications for achieving a graduate's lasting professional competitiveness as well as some educational good practices that are necessary to cope with the current sustainability, environmental, economic and social demands.

Mae'r erthygl ymchwil hon yn turio i berthnasedd fframweithiau addysg uwch o ran ansawdd rhaglenni a'u buddion i berfformiad proffesiynol myfyrwyr yn y dyfodol. At hynny, mae atebion addysgol arloesol yn elfen hanfodol o'r heriau strategol y bydd rhaid i unrhyw brifysgol eu hadolygu a'u gweithredu o dro i dro er mwyn cyflawni'r disgwyliadau o ran ansawdd a rhagoriaeth ymhlith ei myfyrwyr, gan feithrin llwyddiant eu gyrfaoedd yn yr hirdymor. Mae rheoli cwricwla mewn modd hyblyg ac effeithlon o fewn fframwaith academaidd integredig yn angenrheidiol er mwyn cwrdd â'r heriau mewn amgylchedd sy'n newid yn dechnegol ac sy'n gystadleuol dros ben. Prif nod yr erthygl ymchwil hon yw arddangos drwy ddull diddwythol y ddamcaniaeth bod y potensial i ddatblygu unigolion o ran busnes a bod yn entrepreneuriaid wedi'i seilio ar alluoedd dysgu y mae'n rhaid i fyfyrwyr eu hennill drwy astudiaethau addysg uwch ynghyd â hyfforddiant penodol o fewn cwmnïau. Mae'r dadansoddiad yn canolbwyntio ar wahanol elfennau academaidd sydd â goblygiadau hollbwysig o ran creu natur broffesiynol, gystadleuol, barhaus ymhlith graddedigion yn ogystal ag arferion addysgol da sy'n angenrheidiol er mwyn ymdopi â'r galwadau amgylcheddol, economaidd a chymdeithasol presennol.

Key Words: educational answers, learning and teaching challenges, sustainability.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has become a touchstone and an indispensable attribute of twenty first century post-modern western societies as well as a fundamental objective to be achieved within the frame of the 2020 European Strategy. Likewise, entrepreneurship has turned into one of the leading attributes for head-hunters and a key driver of socio-economic progress through start-up companies' development. At the same time, the service sector in industrialized economies has an increasing importance in generating a growing amount of income and an extensive number of work placements driving economic development around the world. Therefore, an ever-growing sheer number of people have access to a larger range and number of services to fulfil their expectations, needs and experiences as consumers. It is in this context where higher education studies frameworks have to guarantee the success of their students as futures

creative and innovative professionals capable of generating profitable business initiatives. That is why it is so critical that students becoming experts in the use of entrepreneurial skills as a fundamental skill throughout their higher education studies. Students highly qualified and with an excellent academic profile are at the basis of human resource competitiveness in charge to guarantee business development success in the long term.

Literature implies that questioning by teachers is unimportant unless it has beneficial effects on the performance of students and such questioning should focus on appreciating the results of learning, arousing and inspiring interest, and motivating them to search for information. This implies that questioning and discussion are critical tools for appraisal and evaluation and it mutually assists students and teachers and allows students to improve their learning and thinking abilities.

Sustainable Development

The patterns of production and consumption of contemporary society are altering the natural characteristics of the Earth. The multiplicity of environmental negative impacts generated by many human activities puts at risk the viability of the current development model (Grand et al., 2007; Hardin, 1968; Kleven, 1997; Weale, 1992). Sustainable development is about planning activities avoiding negative impacts against the very bases of development itself. That is, natural ecosystems, cultural patrimony and people's life style, as well as viability and access to efficient equipment and infrastructure.

In this context, the economy of services has evolved from being a marginal activity to become a practice of general behaviour (Urry, 1990, 1995; Donaire, 1995; Papagrigorakis, 1999) among developed societies. In general terms, the need for a systematic and integrated planning approach to ensure our further development has become a widely accepted procedure. There are several ways by which it may be assured. Sustainable development needs to guarantee first of all adequate environmental management. Researchers such as Caballero et al (2015), Ceulemans et al (2015), Fleaca et al (2017) and Larran et al (2015) have analysed the role of sustainable development in higher education from different approaches, and have concluded that it is a fundamental component in achieving substantial progress towards a more sustainable development model where shared objectives and cooperation between different stakeholders (international, national and local authorities, economic agents, local communities and employees) are necessarily indispensable. In these sense, policies and strategies recommended by international organizations, and then formulated by national, regional and local government authorities have been increasingly addressing environmental and sustainability issues. The difficulty still remains in most cases of integrating environmental policies, laws and related regulations with an economic balanced development.

In particular, there were two fundamental components to achieve higher degrees of sustainability, the first one is to improve sustainable practices among all stakeholders through awareness and training, and the second is implementing innovation through new operation systems both in the administrations and the companies. Likewise, long-term protection of the environment and local involvement in sustainable development are necessary to achieve long-term fair profitability. Sustainability can avoid the boom-and-bust cycle that creates over-dependency on a particular economic sector which results in over-development that can exhaust natural resources putting on strain social communities. Sustainable development, in accordance with the particular physical and geographical characteristics of a particular area, can help at a local scale to improve the natural, economic and social environment, contributing to the balance between human activities and its territory on a global long-term scale. In this sense it is necessary to highlight that higher education answers are a fundamental component to succeed in managing our common future as students will have to implement after their studies competitive and trained professional practices to run in a responsible and sustainable way all types of businesses if more environmental friendly production processes and consuming activities want to be achieved (Lozano et al., 2015). Higher education has given to new cohorts of students a more critical outlook about the limits of conventional development contributing to spread of the consensus that a more sustainable one needs to be achieved in order to preserve the chances of future generations to keep evolving.

Higher Studies within the European Higher Education Area

European Union (EU) higher education and educational policies in general emerge essentially by the aim of carrying out internal market obligations, depending on economic justifications, as instruments to fulfil the demands of equality and justice in society to realise social justice and contribute to economic growth

(European Commission, 2001; Fontaine, 2007). As a result, the EU started to attach importance to educational policies by noticing that it had to provide a cultural and social integration for achieving the aim of political and cultural integration (Besgul, 2013). The Bologna Declaration of 1999 is an agreement signed by the education ministers of various European countries. It should be pointed out that the European Union still has no powers in matters of education and that it is, therefore, only a joint declaration that has led to the beginning of a convergence process that aims to facilitate the exchange of graduates and the adaptation of the content of university studies to the social demands for improving their quality and competitiveness through a greater transparency and learning based on the student, quantified through the so-called credit transfer system European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

The Bologna process, despite not being a binding treaty, has resulted in the creation of the European Higher Education Area, an area that has incorporated most of the member countries and which serves as a framework for reference to the educational reforms that many countries are carrying out in the past few decades in the context of the World Trade Organization creation in 1995.

The Spanish government, aware of the new educational challenges and following the principles of the joint declaration agreed in Bologna in 1999, promulgated shortly after it the Organic Law 6/2001 of Universities, dated December 21st, 2001. A few years later the Spanish Cortes Generales approved the Organic Law 4/2007 of 12th April, which modified the Organic Law 6/2001. As the current organic law of 4/2007 says in its preamble, "As of the enactment of Organic Law 6/2001, of December 21st, of Universities, five years have passed. During this period, some deficiencies in their operation have been detected that recommend their review. In addition, other elements of the environment have changed and also induce modifications. Among these facts are the agreements in higher education policy in Europe and the momentum that the European Union intends to give to research in all its member countries." In the context of Recommendation Rec (2007)6 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on the public responsibility for higher education and research, that consider higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global competitiveness.

This explicit and direct reference to investigation and research, as a fundamental tool to guarantee the quality of the university education system, in the Organic Law 4/2007 of Universities preamble, shows the need to adopt a series of measures, which are included in the law, in order to improve the operability of all universities in Spain.

In this new context, research work and knowledge transfer to the community is one of the renewed educational answers that universities must give back to society. Another significant component for the improvement and the quality of higher education programmes is the monitoring of the organizations as well as the accreditation of the university teaching staff by the Spanish National Evaluation Agency of Quality and Accreditation (ANECA) or other autonomous entities as the Agència de la Qualitat Universitària de Catalunya (AQU) in Catalonia that watch over the delivery quality of all higher education programmes. These are essential components that with a series of specific measures for continuous improvement of the higher education system intend to implement the current law of universities.

Higher Studies in Spain

The Spanish Royal Decree 1393/2007 of October 29th establishes the organization of official university studies specifying its structure in accordance with the general lines emanating from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). According to this structure, university studies are divided into degrees and postgraduate programs. The postgraduate programs consist of master's and doctorate courses. It is this Royal Decree 1393/2007 that effectively establishes, in its article 12, Chapter III, the bases and guidelines for the design of graduate degrees, and it is defined that the syllabus leading to obtaining the title of graduate must be prepared by the universities themselves. Once the syllabuses have been developed, these must be verified and accredited by the Spanish Council of Universities and ANECA.

It is in this context of great educational challenges where these ambitious legislative reforms have urged Spanish university institutions to design and go through subsequent verification and accreditation processes conducting to the authorization of their academic awards by the competent legislative bodies mentioned above. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the relevant contribution from different universities, which led, for the first time in Spain, to deliver four-year undergraduate degrees from the 2009-2010 academic year in addition to other notable changes (Burjalés et al., 2005). This fact implies the complete and highest academic revision of higher studies in the Spanish university system in the last fifty years.

First student cohorts have now finish their university programmes obtaining their award based on a renewed higher educational system endowed with greater transparency and learning based on the student. From these new cohorts more and more students decide to take a master's programme as a route to obtaining a PhD degree. Research and knowledge transfer based on masters and doctoral studies are a very significant advance for the future quality of further professional activity. Systematic and scientific research will undoubtedly increase competitiveness among new future professionals boosting the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development as cornerstones of a more sustainable strategy.

Some researchers have identified some critical factors for the success of higher education programmes, such as the development of international activities. This objective can be achieved through partnerships and collaborative agreements with other institutions. Some of the possible themes to be shared in collaboration between institutions are the quality of the programs and their degree of specialisation (Celis Sosa, 2017; López-Pastor et al., 2011). Current programme and subject design must ensure, therefore, the acquisition of sustainable professional skills, economic, social and environmental competencies, stimulating entrepreneurship and networking among students and their future professional national and international organizational links, encouraging good reputation, rigorousness and prestige.

The compliance of the Quality of Higher Studies in Catalonia

At autonomic (regional) level, the quality of university studies is regulated by an autonomic quality agency, because it is a transferred responsibility of the central government. The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) is a public entity with an internationally recognized status. Through internal standards and quality procedures, AQU assures the quality of higher education programmes in accordance with the Spanish legislation and the international standards of quality. The AQU main goals are institutional quality, the quality of teaching staff and teaching methods, knowledge generation and transfer, internationalisation, strategic management, and internal organisation. AQU supports higher education institutions monitoring the quality of their study programmes and their academic staff for which institutions themselves are responsible. Besides, AQU carry out a systematic follow-up process for all university programmes in Catalonia through an official guide for the review and the assessment of higher education institutions that takes into account the needs and expectations of all the stakeholders involved with the corresponding award, and uses and applies international benchmarks standards and archives for quality enhancement. This systematic follow-up process contributes to enhancing the quality of all programmes as well as the skills and capabilities of the human capital of the university system as a whole in Catalonia. The proposals for new degree programmes must be submitted to an ex ante assessment procedure (known as verification) and, after a period of four years (for Master's degrees) or six years (for Bachelor's degrees and doctoral programmes), be submitted to an ex post assessment procedure (accreditation) based on the procedure and terms stipulated by the Government of Catalonia considering the framework for the verification, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognized degree programmes (VSMA Framework, AQU, 2016),

The EUFB's Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) is a fundamental instrument for programme accreditation and as such should be seen as the cornerstone in the process of producing the self-assessment report. This self-assessment report is the fundamental tool to assess the faculty and the degree. The report includes different criteria and standards of assessment as the quality of the training programme, the relevance of the public information, the efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system, the suitability of teaching staff for the training programme, the effectiveness of learning support systems, the quality of programme and the learning outcomes among others.

The definitive accreditation report is drafted using as a primary source of evidence the external visit report prepared by the external assessment committee. The report may be favourable or unfavourable and, on the basis of accreditation criteria, the outcome may be placed at four possible levels which are favourable report of accreditation with (a) progressing towards excellence, (b) compliant, (c) compliant with conditions and unfavourable report, (d) non-compliant.

Cross-Cultural Challenges

An international effort must be made by academic institutions to educate their students through efficient university study programmes designed in accordance with the principles of sustainable development (Ferrer-Balas et al., 2010). To achieve this goal, educational institutions must focus their effort in designing

holistic and integrated programmes to promote an effective process towards a more balanced and sustainable development. Sustainable management standards and procedures need to be a central component of the academic profile among an increasing number of professionals inspiring their daily activity in a more sustainable and integrated way. The current upgrade of higher educational programmes entails a stronger coordination and cooperation between new professionals and local authorities. A systematic implementation of monitoring and businesses accreditation systems as well as a widespread use of sustainable codes of conduct and good practices in production and consumption processes has to ensure world sustainability performance.

The Escola Universitària Formatic Barcelona (EUFB), is a collaborative centre of the University of Girona and collaborative partner of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and previously the University of Wales, that promotes sustainable knowledge among its degree student community. The EUFB approaches development as a process introducing cultural and interpersonal understanding and stressing its unique role in achieving sustainability worldwide. As a leading process to guarantee the wealth and well-being of people sustainable development is therefore presented as an international priority due to its potential contribution to poverty alleviation and the environmental protection of endangered ecosystems.

Academic institutions must face the challenges which means improving the opportunities of internationalisation and the benefits of cross-cultural experiences of students around the world (Vann et al., 2006). In this sense the Escola Universitària Formatic Barcelona, faithful to its commitment to society and its proven educational experience based on the prestigious Catalan educational tradition, keep innovating constantly to ensure the capacity and future performance of their students in today's expanding international economy.

The highest competence of students and its responsibility in running businesses in a sustainable way as well as a deep concern and solidarity towards the global community are the main objectives of the educational project of the Escola Universitària Formatic Barcelona. Thanks to that endeavour, reviewed educational subjects are offered each year to our students with the aim to give them the right tools to succeed in front the challenges of an extremely technological and innovating economy.

As an example of continuous improvement, it is necessary to stress the educational value of foreign language subjects designed to guarantee not just oral language competencies among our students but to promote as well their cross-cultural relationships and the internationalisation of their profiles as future global economy professionals. In this sense, it must be stressed that, beyond the communicative function that languages possess, they constitute a sample of the cultural diversity that characterise each human community. Therefore, language is a very powerful tool for approaching the countless cultures and their evolution over time.

Taking this into consideration foreign language subjects become a strategic vehicle to broaden the understanding of students about the culture, the history, the geography, the economy of a great variety of territories and their societies giving them a broader knowledge of mankind's history and heritage. Therefore, foreign language subjects allow students not only to improve their foreign language skills but also to learn more about cross-cultural challenges increasing their general background and sensibility toward other ways of life, cultures and customs. Likewise, foreign language subjects promote among our students a better understanding of their own environment on a global scale and the need to preserve the concept of diversity for the next generations not just in terms of culture but also both in terms of preservation of the environment and the sustainability of the economy.

Educational Programmes Challenges

In reinforcing the role of foreign languages, academic institutions can make a huge contribution toward increasing cross-cultural relationships in the global economy. New professionals can contribute to sustainable and responsible development that strengthens social and cultural exchanges between producers and consumers. Sustainable development can then alleviate poverty as contributing to environmental protection.

Good foreign language skill and an open-minded attitude towards cultural diversity and interpersonal understanding, combined with effective management practice is the most fundamental way to train our student community and to guarantee their professional future. A responsible and successful professional must be aware of the trends that characterize the economic development today and to be able to innovate and offer new opportunities to improve local community's life in terms of access to health and education. An accurate assessment and management of the physical characteristics and cultural circumstances of

each territory are fundamental components to be considered in order to achieve both the desired long-term economic competitiveness and a positive cross-cultural performance in a well preserved natural environment.

According to Richie's (2003) segmentation model of education, academic institutions must educate their student communities in an effective practice management, although it is necessary to include certain sectors which should be considered as training subjects (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). Our future professionals must be prepared to run businesses simultaneously with economic excellence and social and environmental concern. Functional and efficient management in a sustainable way not only help to preserve the environment but also benefits economically both locals and investors.

Conclusion

Higher Education is a fundamental component to ensure market performance taking into account different perspectives such as sustainable development, quality, training, skills and learning outcomes. These are some of the most important issues for the coming years in the educational research field. Nevertheless, higher education, is still a subject of intense debate, with no consensus in what concerns its definition and practical applicability (Boyra, 2012). Despite the plurality of researchers and analysts' opinions, sustainable development represents the dominant approach. The AQU quality system guarantees theoretically and practically students learning. Following this approach, higher studies based on promoting sustainable development should aim at, on the one hand, capitalising exceptional natural and cultural resources integrally and, on the other hand, improving stakeholder's satisfaction such as the local community's quality of life and the consumer's demands satisfaction.

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