

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION. A PARTICULAR CASE.

María Teresa García Álvarez*

Translator: Pablo Contreras Fresán
E-mail: deepcolearning@gmail.com

* PhD in Business. Professor-Resercher. Business Management Area at Universidad de la Coruña. One of her lines of investigation is centered on the effects that the European Space of Higher Education supposes on the university teaching planning.

REVISTA DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR
ISSN: 0185-2760
Vol. XL (3), No. 159
Julio - Septiembre de 2011, pp. 29 - 42

Approach: 17/03/10 • Acceptance: 11/12/10

Resumen

La Declaración de Bolonia conlleva importantes cambios en la educación superior. Así, la implantación de un sistema de créditos implica un papel más activo y dinámico por parte del alumnado. Supone una nueva planificación de las asignaturas dónde es necesario establecer un perfil académico profesional de la titulación, la definición de las unidades de competencia así como el diseño de un módulo de formación. El presente trabajo analiza tales cuestiones para una materia específica en la Licenciatura de Administración y Dirección de Empresas.

Palabras clave:

- Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior
- Aprendizaje
- Metodologías docentes

Abstract

The Bologna Declaration entails important changes for higher education. A system of credits calls for a more active and dynamic role to be adopted by students. It also requires new planning of subject matter where there is a necessity to establish a professional academic profile for the degree, the definition of competence units and the design of a teaching module. In this paper, we show such planning processes for a degree program in Business.

Key words:

- European Space of Higher Education
- Learning
- Teaching methodologies

Introduction

Creating a European Higher Education Area

The sociopolitical and economic characteristics of the European framework as well as the important social and cultural changes linked to the knowledge society, have heightened the need to address a major cultural change in the university model (Fidalgo and Garcia, 2008; Sanchez and Zubillaga, 2005).

This was the context surrounding the June 1999 Bologna Declaration, a major step to adapt European education systems to the above mentioned changes and facilitate the convergence of their respective structures.

The key elements to support the design of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) include the following:

- Diploma system recognition in order to promote graduates' mobility, Establishing a system of comparable qualifications between the countries of the EHEA.
- Introduction of a degree system based on three cycles (bachelor, master and doctorate), which represent degrees with different levels of qualification and specialization.
- Approach to qualifications based on the ECTS system of credits. This involves the development of a student-centered education system. It is therefore necessary to determine the competences expected to be acquired by students once the learning process is completed. In this context, the goal is to redesign the curricula to upgrade students' knowledge in order to incorporate business needs (Marzo *et al.*, 2006).
- Promoting mobility of students, faculty and staff of universities in Europe (Suarez, 2002).

The importance of learning in the new university context

Traditionally, the emphasis in education has been on teaching. However, from the features involved in the creation of the EHEA a special emphasis has been placed on learning, calling for the necessity of a more student-centered approach (Michavila, 2005).

Facilitating this change requires intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for teachers and students. The internal reasons relate to the personal and social expectations of learning. The external reasons are set by the institutional rewards for good teaching and learning in the classroom (Calvo, 2003).

These characteristics highlight the need to develop a new role for faculty, that enables them to build a teaching methodology that promotes student learning. Thus, faculty has to perform new functions, among which are:

- An extension of the traditional functions where, in addition to the development of the lectures, a series of activities are required based on mentoring students, development and supervision of learning activities and the coordination of teaching (Martinez *et al.* 2007).
- Increased efforts in the planning, design and development of educational proposals (Martinez *et al.*, 2007).
- The need to overcome the private orientation of teaching that has led to individualism (Zabalza, 2003).

In this context, universities are promoting a series of actions to fulfill this purpose. In the case of the Universidad de La Coruña, where this work has been developed, the Vice-Rector for European Harmonization and Quality has been in charge of developing a series of actions that began in the 2004/05 academic year, among which are the creation of so-called Departmental Quality Groups (DQG). The aim of the DQG is to make progress towards the conversion of subjects to the European credit system through developing teaching guides which set out the pedagogical principles underlying the acquisition of previously established competences.

This marked the start of the development of an innovative educational experience in order to adapt to the requirements of the Bologna Declaration. Thus, it seeks to adapt teaching methodology to promote more active learning by students, to develop the competences in the teaching program, and to establish a feedback system to assess and explain the results.

Therefore, a series of innovations at the course level have been established, through the implementation of active methodologies (learning based on case studies, techniques of directed learning or cooperative work). It has also required an evaluation system according to the teaching-learning process (also requiring continuous assessment).

Our personal assessment of the experience has been satisfactory, and students have also found it very helpful according to their comments. In particular, they have valued the exercise of having to perform analysis and case studies of actual companies as well as taking part in the teamwork involved. However, it has also presented a number of constraints resulting from the increased effort required for continuous evaluation.

In this context, the objective of this study is to analyze the effects of such changes in higher education in the specific area of Business Management, in the particular course: Business Economics: Management and Organization.

Planning the Course Business Economics: Management and Organization

The purpose of this paper is to explain the experience of teaching innovation applied to the core subject in the second year of the Business Administration Bachelor degree program at the Universidad de La Coruña (Table 1).

Table 1
Summary table of the subject

| Subject | Specialization | Type | Course | Quarter | Theoretical Credits | Practical Credits | Total Credits |
|---|-----------------------|------|--------|---------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Business Economics: Management and Organization | Business Organization | Core | 2º | First | 3 | 1,5 | 4,5 |

Source: Authors

The following shows the process of planning for this subject in the context of the EHEA, by establishing a) the academic profile of the qualification, b) identifying the specific competences of the subject under analysis, c) defining units of competence and d) the design of the training module which encompasses the development of the list of topics, the characteristics of active and traditional methodologies implemented and the applied evaluation system.

a) Establishing the professional academic profile of the diploma

The main professional academic competence of the degree in Business Administration is acquiring the necessary knowledge for the formation of new executives. Therefore, it is necessary to develop knowledge related to the decision making processes at various levels of the organization, such as Finance, Accounting or Marketing.

b) Identification of competences

The specific skills for the course Business Economics: Management and Organization are:

1. Identifying environmental factors relevant to determining the objectives and strategy of the company best suited for each situation.
2. Determining the most appropriate organizational structure for an organization based on the characteristics of the sector in which it operates.

Thus, it is expected that once the course is completed, students will have acquired such skills.

c) Definition of units of competence

In order to acquire the necessary knowledge for the first competence the following units will be developed:

1. Application of tools for the analysis of the environment (SWOT).
2. Analysis and interpretation of case studies: strategy and environment.

As for understanding the second competence the following units will be developed:

1. Identification of the most important variables in the organizational design of a company.
2. Analysis and interpretation of case studies: organizational structure and specific environment.

d) The design of the training module

It comprises the following stages: 1) development of the syllabus, 2) design of the teaching approach and 3) establishing of an evaluation method.

1) Syllabus development

The proposed program for the course consists of eight topics, which are compiled in a summary in Table 2.

Table 2
“Business Economics: Management and Organization” Synthetic Course Outline

| BUSINESS ECONOMICS: MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION | |
|---|---|
| THEMATIC BLOCK | SUBJECT |
| I. MANAGEMENT | 1. Economic analysis of the company 2. Industrial Analysis vs. Theory of Resources and Capabilities 3. Business strategy 4. Company objectives |
| II. ORGANIZATION | 5. Introduction to organizational analysis 6. Organizational design parameters 7. Contingency factors 8. Structural configurations |

Source: Authors

As seen in the outline, the course has been divided into two thematic sections that correspond to the title of the course: Management and Organization, each block containing four topics.

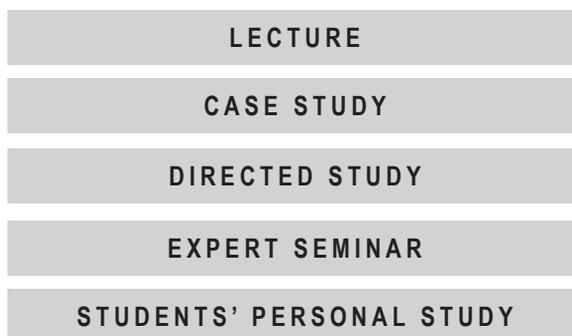
In order to teach the first competence, i.e., identifying the factors relevant for setting the company strategy, the first four topics, corresponding to Management, are delivered. The second competence, establishing the appropriate organizational structure for the company, corresponds to the last four topics of the course, related to the Organization.

2) Designing the teaching approach

The teaching process will be developed through the following sequence of activities which are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

**Traditional and active teaching methods implemented in the course
"Business Economics: Management and Organization"**



Source: Authors

The following is a detailed description of each of these activities:

1. *Lectures*. There are three objectives for the use of this methodology: a) Acquisition of updated and structured information from various sources which is hard for students to access. b) Facilitate understanding and application of specific procedures of the course. c) Promote students' interest and motivation towards the course (De la Cruz, 2004).

The lecture also entails, from the standpoint of teachers and students, a number of positive and negative issues shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Advantages and disadvantages of lectures

| | PROFESSORS | STUDENTS |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| POSITIVE ASPECTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structuring the lecture as an intellectual challenge. Allows to raise interest in the subject. Personal satisfaction from giving a good lecture. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulating interest in the subject. Structuring and clarity of presentation. If preparation is adequate and content of interest. |
| NEGATIVE ASPECTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passive role of students. Overcrowding. Sense of failure after a bad lecture. Delivery of topics that may not be appealing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty understanding. Bad use of media resources. Inadequate level of difficulty. |

Source: Brown and Bakhtar (1983)

The inclusion of the lecture in the course under analysis, is based on the following characteristics:

- To clearly state the problem to be studied, the theoretical support needed to perform the study and the technical instruments available.
- To develop critical thinking skills by adopting a global interdisciplinary and systemic approach.
- To indicate the sources of empirical information available and relevant to observe.
- To reflect on the practical applicability of the knowledge presented.
- To develop participatory and dynamic classes.

2. *Case study*. This method encourages the acquisition of skills in students based on critical thinking, oral and written expression or the ability to work in groups. Therefore, students become the main actors in their learning through various activities: research, discussion, analysis, presentation and discussion of their findings (Zamora, 2010).

The application of this teaching methodology also involves a number of advantages and disadvantages listed in Table 4.

Table 4
Advantages and disadvantages of the case study method

| Ventajas | Inconvenientes |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes the development of critical thinking in students (De Miguel, 2005). • Fosters commitment and meaningful learning by students (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2008). • Develops communication skills (De Miguel, 2005). • Motivates students, for this methodology is based on real cases they may encounter in their professional practice (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2008). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to implement in large groups (De Miguel, 2005) • Difficulty for teachers to plan and design case studies that could motivate students (Zamora, 2010). • There is no single solution, therefore it is necessary to address all of the solutions students come up with including those they were unable to identify (De Miguel, 2005) |
| Source: Authors | |

In the course hereby analyzed, a case study, where students apply the knowledge acquired, along with additional bibliographic material, is presented at the end of each topic explored in the lectures. Thus promoting the development of students' capacity for reflection and decision making, which would help them develop skills related to empathy, dialogue and critical understanding.

3. *Directed Study*. Through this active teaching methodology, a study guide is provided that shows students: the objectives pursued through this task, the themes and interrelationships it entails, the necessary processing of documentary sources for the study as well as the learning they should obtain after the completion of this task.

The directed study facilitates student learning as it is approached from different dimensions: intellectual, social and personal (Villanueva, 2005). Table 5 shows the main advantages and disadvantages of this teaching methodology.

Table 5
Advantages and disadvantages of the directed study

| Ventajas | Inconvenientes |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes teacher-student relationships. • Encourages student pro-activeness. • Helps students start developing their creative skills. • Fosters students taking responsibility for their work. • Students start to work independently which speeds the transition to autonomy. • Promotes continuous assessment by the teacher as well as student's self-assessment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves a change in the student's attitude, which is not always an easy task. • The learning pace is slower than, say, the lecture modality. • It requires better teaching technique. • It may increase the inequalities within each group as students go at their own pace. • It requires the teacher to follow up on each student. |

Source: De Miguel, 2005.

In this course, the completion of a directed study by a team of three students was established. The following stages have been determined to complete the task:

- Identifying a strategic problem, of theoretical and practical relevance, selected from business press.
- Description of the work methodology.
- Drafting the conclusions of the work and further presentation.
- Development of a working guide, which will include reflections on the difficulties encountered.

This methodology seeks, again, to enhance students' motivation for learning with greater fulfillment than traditional methods.

4. *Expert seminars.* During the academic course there are management seminars with executives where issues of strategic decision making as well as relating to organizational design in real life businesses are addressed.

Students have a reasonable time frame to research on the executive's company and prepare questions about it. Attendance and participation in these seminars is monitored.

5. *Students' personal study.* In accordance to EHEA guidelines, part of theory hours have to be replaced by mentorships, where, there needs to be supervision of the directed study.

Bi-weekly meetings are scheduled for students to show the advances of their work at each successive stage, allowing them to have consultations with professors.

3) Establishing the evaluation method

The final grade for the course is the sum of the final examination and the learning spaces points derived from the European credits (see Table 6).

Table 6
Breakdown of scores for the final grade for the course
“Business Economics”

| Concept to be evaluated | Maximum Score | Minimum Required Score |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Attendance | 0.75 points | 1.5 total points for all of these concepts |
| Case Study | 1 point | |
| Directed Study and Mentorships | 0.25 points | |
| Expert Seminar Attendance | 2 points | |
| Final Examination | 6 points | 2.5 points |

Source: Authors

Finally, in Table 6, we can see that there is a minimum score for both, the examination and the learning spaces derived from the European credits. Hence there is the need for students to take an active participation in order to pass the course.

Strengths and weaknesses of the new teaching methodology

The application of the new teaching methodology based on learning has represented a number of advantages and disadvantages, both from the standpoint of students and teachers.

As for the students, the following stand out as positive aspects:

- The acquisition of skills related to the development of communication, learning on their own and learning new ways of working in direct connection to the workplace.
- Conducting case studies on each of the topics discussed in class.
- Guidance on the use of books and support material for carrying out different tasks.
- Mentorship follow up.

In terms of the weaknesses of the new teaching method:

- The difficulty to weigh team members' different levels of involvement.
- Fear of not expressing themselves correctly.
- It is also necessary to consider that there are students who prefer traditional lectures as opposed to the new learning methods due to the time required to carry out the teamwork.

As for the teachers, the positive aspects are:

- There are more elements from which to derive the final grade for the course.
- The new teaching methodology involves a closer teacher-student relationship which mean some positive aspects (increased confidence, better classroom environment, and so on).
- Following up on students' work highlights the main difficulties they are encountering, which feeds-back into teaching.

In terms of weaknesses, these arise mainly because:

- The work load is significantly expanded, not just occasionally but week to week.
- Difficulty in determining whether the work is done as a team or rather if there is a distribution of individual tasks.

There are thus a number of strengths and weaknesses inherent to any change process, where conflict and consensus as well as resistances and adaptations tend to arise (Rosenstein and Cavalli, 2007) until the new EHEA system becomes fully established.

Conclusions

This paper has summarized the teaching experiences on the planning and implementation of new methodologies undertaken in the Business Economics: Management and Organization course for the second year of the Bachelor degree in Business at the University of La Coruña.

The objectives and competences to be acquired have been achieved through a methodology that has required a more proactive student participation, through case study and problem solving based learning. This has allowed students to develop as part of their learning, on top of the course curriculum, to acquire other skills such as interdependence, responsibility, ability to find information or oral communication.

The results have been in general very satisfactory, for the work done by students has been very complete and their presentations very enriching. In addition, students have welcomed the tasks of having to perform analysis and case studies of real companies as the assignments carried out, touch on issues they may encounter in their professional practice. However, we have

also observed a number of weaknesses arising from the increased workload for teachers that the application of these methodologies involves, as well as the persistence of students who still prefer, traditional methods where student roles tend to be more passive.

References

- Bologna Process: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/eudc/bologna/bolona_en.html
- Brown, G. y Bakthar, M. (1983). *Styles of lecturing*. Loughboroug University of Technology, ASTD Publication.
- Calvo, J. (2003). "Enseñanza centrada en el desarrollo de estudiantes universitarios", *Revista de la Educación Superior*. Vol. xxxii, núm. 128.
- De la Cruz, M.A. (2004). "Un modelo de la lección magistral para un aprendizaje activo y cooperativo", *Conferencia de Innovación y Desarrollo Docente*, Universidad de Vigo.
- De Miguel, M. (2005). *Modalidades de enseñanza centradas en el desarrollo de competencias. Orientaciones para promover el cambio metodológico en el espacio europeo de educación superior*. Oviedo, Ediciones de la Universidad de Oviedo.
- Fidalgo, R. y García, J.N. (2008). "Las directrices del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior en el marco legislativo del sistema universitario español", *Aula Abierta*, Vol. 35, núm. 1-2, pp. 35-48.
- Imbernon, F. y Medina, J.L. (2008). *Metodología participativa en el aula universitaria. La participación del alumnado*. Barcelona, Editorial Octaedro.
- Martínez, B.; García, J.N.; Robledo, P.; Díez, C.; Álvarez, M.L.; Marbán, J.M.; De Caso, A.M.; Hidalgo, R.; Arias, O.; Pacheco, D.I. y Rodríguez, C. (2008). "Valoración docente de las metodologías activas: un aspecto clave en el proceso de convergencia europea", *Aula Abierta*, Vol. 35, núm. 1-2, pp. 49-62.
- Marzo, M.; Pedraga, M. y River, P. (2006). "Definición y validación de las competencias de los graduados universitarios", *Revista de la Educación Superior*, Vol. xxxv, núm. 4, pp. 49-72.
- Michavila, F. (2005). "No sin los profesores", *Revista de Educación*, núm. 337, pp.37-49.
- Rosenstein, S. y Cavalli, A. (2007). "Viejas y nuevas prácticas en un contexto de cambio. El caso de la Facultad de Ciencias Agrarias de la UNR (República Argentina)", *Revista de la Educación Superior*, Vol. xxxvi, núm. 6, pp. 145-168.
- Sánchez, P. y Zubillaga, A. (2005). "Las universidades españolas ante el proceso de convergencia europea: Análisis de las medidas institucionales y acciones de aplicación", *Revista de Educación*, núm. 337, pp. 169-187.
- Suárez, B. (2002). *¿Qué es la Declaración de Bolonia y cómo nos puede afectar?*, Ed. Universidad de Cataluña.
- Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (2008). *El Método del caso*, at <http://innovacioneducativa.upm.es/guias/MdC-guia.pdf>
- Villanueva, R.S.L. (2005). "El aprendizaje cooperativo: un modelo de intervención para los programas de tutoría escolar cooperativo. Un modelo de intervención para los programas de tutoría escolar", *Revista de la Educación Superior*, vol. xxxiv, núm. 133.
- Zabalza, M.A. (2003). *Competencias docentes del profesorado universitario: calidad del desarrollo profesional*. Madrid, Narcea.
- Zamora, M.R. (2010). "La aplicación de metodologías activas para la enseñanza de las ciencias jurídicas a estudiantes de primer curso", *Revista Jurídica de Investigación e Innovación Educativa*, núm. 1, pp. 95-106.



CONVOCATORIA

Tema: Derecho a la educación

Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa

Número 53, abril- junio de 2012

Fecha límite de recepción de artículos: 1 de noviembre de 2011

Coordinadores de la sección temática:

Mercedes Ruiz Muñoz, Universidad Iberoamericana, Ciudad de México

El derecho a la educación en los últimos años se ha ido configurando como un campo de creciente relevancia y urgente atención analítica, de interés para los investigadores iberoamericanos que analizan los procesos de exclusión escolar y desigualdad educativa que se observan en los sistemas escolares, particularmente de la población más vulnerable: indígenas, migrantes, mujeres, jóvenes, niños en situación de calle, niños trabajadores, entre otros.

Desde 1980 existe una extensa discusión sobre el tema entre las agencias internacionales, en especial la ONU y la UNESCO, que han contribuido al posicionamiento del derecho a la educación y a la creación de un marco normativo para garantizarlo y concretarlo. A esta situación se han sumado las organizaciones de la sociedad civil y los movimientos sociales en la defensa de la escuela pública (obligatoria y gratuita) y en la lucha de los derechos fundamentales (exigibles y justiciables) marcando una frontera política frente a las visiones que conciben a la educación como una mercancía o como un servicio y no como un derecho ciudadano.

En el caso de México, la discusión acerca del derecho a la educación si bien no es reciente, ha girado principalmente en torno a las reformas constitucionales y los fundamentos jurídicos de la educación. En los últimos años –aunque de manera incipiente– se observa un giro en la producción académica con énfasis en la dimensión educativa, sin dejar de lado los aspectos jurídicos y sus implicaciones en materia de la política educativa.

Por lo anterior es de gran importancia integrar una sección temática que dé cuenta de diferentes líneas de la investigación sobre el tema que se produce en el mundo.

Temas de interés específico:

- Investigaciones históricas, sociológicas y jurídicas del derecho a la educación
- Estudios comparados del derecho a la educación
- Reconstrucción y sistematización de experiencias de exigibilidad y justiciabilidad
- Derecho a la educación y: políticas públicas, actores sociales, justicia, movimientos sociales, grupos vulnerables
- Hacia un estado del conocimiento del derecho a la educación

Sólo se aceptan trabajos inéditos. Todos los artículos se someterán al proceso de dictamen.

Es importante consultar el Protocolo para colaboradores (versión impresa o en <http://www.comie.org.mx/RMIE/>).