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# A METHODOLOGY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT IN THE PERCEPTION OF COMPETENCES WITHIN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION DEGREE COURSE

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The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has brought about changes in the different agents involved in the educational process. Both teachers and students (and others involved in this process) are now being encouraged to rethink their perceptions of teaching so as to begin to participate in and take responsibility for their own learning. In this paper, we describe the process and results of a system of self-assessment of the perception of competences, which the students in the third year of their Degree in Business Management and Administration take part in. The system consists in the students' self-assessment in 14 competences, six of which are core or basic and six of which are complementary. The areas chosen are those prescribed within the Degree course, in addition to others which are not required, but which will be necessary for their professional future.

**Keywords:** Self-assessment, Skills, Perception, Assessment, Competencies

## INTRODUCTION

Our society is based on knowledge and information, and for us to make a smooth entry into it, it is imperative to adopt a global strategy and to partake in the process of unifying the national systems of education of all the members of the European Union (EU), thus adapting to the needs of the new generation of university students. With this end in mind, a system has been established which allows for the comprehensive formation of the students and which, additionally, facilitates adapting to a labour and business market, where a series of competency profiles is normally required.

This is where the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) comes in. It has generated changes in the different agents involved in the educational process, stating that it is as much the teachers as the students who need to rethink their way of perceiving education, becoming participants in, and responsible for, their own learning.

The core characteristics of the new model are; quality, mobility and competitiveness. This new model bases itself upon a series of objectives which develop in the following way; firstly, the harmonization of the titles of degree and postgraduate courses; secondly, the

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establishment of a system of credits, called the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), to promote mobility, academic recognition and professional integration throughout Europe; and lastly, the implementation of a sub-section which refers to the courses studied, and the competencies and professional skills acquired.

Miró and Capó (2009) demonstrate that one of the most innovative strands within the work of the EEES is the importance handed over to generic or transversal competencies. There is an ambivalence associated with these competencies as they do not exist in only *one* specific subject area, but are integrated within *all* subject areas. Thus, students acquire these gradually as they progress along their university course.

Villa and Poblete (2007), use a concept known as Competency Based Learning (CBL) to define the transversal competencies which are not only necessary in various professions, but which also help to enrich the learning methodologies used in the classroom. De Miguel (2006) states that learning methodologies should be based on the following: explanatory methods, case studies, problem solving, project-based learning and cooperative learning.

According to Chavarría and Borrell (2002), education should be guided by the concurrence of the needs and expectations of the students and teachers; one way of making the quality of the education tangible is by using a method of assessment which satisfies both parties. Stufflebean and Shinkfield (2007) point out that if the students and teachers do not participate in a monitoring process, the assessment process is not complete. Villa and Poblete (2007), Córdoba (2006) add relevant comments to the discussion.

Firstly, they question *what* is trying to be evaluated; it is important to clarify here that the assessment will be based on the level of improvement of the transversal competencies which are specifically stipulated within the subject area. Secondly, *how* are these competencies going to be evaluated; for this, it is necessary to use various tools throughout the process, which must be easily adaptable to the particular competence being worked on. Lastly, it is helpful to communicate to the students the criteria of their learning assessment and the methodology being used to lead to a final grade.

Accordingly, Jiménez (2009) believes that the competencies needed in our current environment must be related to a spirit of entrepreneurship, where the leadership advocated is one which fits into our knowledge-based society. Heywood (1993) points out that for a competence to be integral, it must combine the following: attributes, information, approaches, and roles and responsibilities which arise in specific or interpretative situations or when decisions have been taken based on ethics and moral principles.

Cano (1999), Poblete, (2007), Escudero (1993) and Sancho (1993) are of the opinion that assessing is a process which serves as a point of support when making rational decisions. Consequently, the assessment should be useful and provide regular reports to facilitate reliable and transparent courses of action. This would respond directly to an ethical component and guaranty the integrity of the information, whilst avoiding subjectivity when it comes to its presentation.

Valderrama *et al.* (2009) thus proposes an objective course of action for the assessment of competencies through project-based learning

within the engineering context. This is divided into a series of stages. The first one is to define the competencies and their objective determinants. Next, is defining the moment when the assessment will take place, the specific steps in the assessment and the agents involved. Subsequently, the objective determinants should be assigned to each of the steps within the assessment process. Following on, the level of fulfillment of each determinant must be assessed. Each assessor then needs to produce his/her report. Finally, the criteria need to be defined. A final grade drawn from the assessment reports can then be given.

With this in mind, García *et al.* (2009) states that assessment fulfills several functions and meets multiple objectives. It is not only helpful to the actual person being assessed, but can also be extended to help the teacher, the teaching institution and education in general. For Cols (2000) the basic function of assessment is to regulate actions, interpret situations and adopt the measures necessary in offering a cycle of continuous improvement.

For Cabrera (2000), Bordas and Cabrera (2001), assessment should optimize education at any university or academic level, helping to support the process of developing learning and strengthening personal relationships. Basically, it should guide, correct, improve and stimulate students so that they may produce better results and strengthen their own weaknesses. Álvarez (2001) and Escudero (2000) argue that assessment should become a tool which leads students to gain knowledge in a reflexive way. Consequently, students who may often be held back because of other factors present in traditional education could now have a better chance at succeeding in their studies. We

therefore need to see assessment as a system of learning and obtaining knowledge which is not limited to fixed periods and which needs to include an element of tailoring to the individual for correcting and redirecting them successfully. In turn, Blanco (1990) and Pinelo (2005) believe that assessment serves as a starting point for the assessor to predict future situations in the development of professional competencies and to define personality traits in the students. In this way, the assessment exercises respond to systematic and formal processes, with the aim of making the results reliable.

In order to evaluate said elements, Glazman (2001) argues that the students' intellectual and social skills need to be strengthened. For his part, Niremberg *et al.* (2000) states that the personal development of the individual needs to be emphasized so that education becomes comprehensive, connecting knowledge and real life.

Bélair (2000) advocates incorporating the following within the assessment framework; dialogue between student and teacher, the activities undertaken, the learning completed and the weak points discovered. In this way, the grade given responds directly to whether the transversal competencies defined for each particular subject area have been met or not. Ruè (2001) highlights the importance of communication in general when it comes to assessment. Other teachers can thus obtain information about how the student is doing and about their potential progress in a particular subject area. Additionally, parents receive information about the academic status of their child. Lastly, communication also provides the student with the tools they need to better understand their own learning methods and thus be able to work to improve them.



Millan and Pérez (2009) argue that there need to be different stages within the actual assessment, beginning with a diagnostic assessment, which should be undertaken at the start of the learning process. This assessment enables the teacher to find out how much the students already know before they embark upon each didactic unit. Doménech (1999) adds that via this assessment, the teacher can put into motion the learning process planned, whilst also being able to redirect the students to sources of complementary information, so that they may amend any weaknesses themselves which they have come across.

Casanova (1997) states that the real use of assessing lies in the valuation of the learning processes. Rosales (2000) argues that its purpose is to improve the educative agents and to inform appropriate decision making. He states that to be able to develop the best educative strategies for improving learning, assessing should be a systematic, ongoing process throughout the academic period.

Correspondingly, Mosqueira-Rey (2010) adds that ongoing assessment is a positive element in the learning environment. Students note that their work is being assessed all the way along their academic course and that their grade is not solely based on the final examination.

For results to be the most objective possible, a methodology of self-assessment needs to be integrated within the education process, thus enabling students to participate in their own assessment and become responsible for their own learning and the results they achieve. Fuentes and Herrero (1999) and Ducasse (2004) see self-assessment as an element within learning which makes the students' personal goals

stand out and helps identify the progress they have made over a determined period of time.

McDonald *et al.* (2000) is of the opinion that self-assessment is a topic which has not received enough attention and which is, nevertheless, paramount in assessing the competencies and abilities themselves. In the long term, it additionally generates a certain awareness of what the students know and what they do not know, what they can and what they cannot do. Calatayud (2002) adds that self-assessment is the quintessential strategy in teaching students about responsibility. It also teaches them how to evaluate, criticize and reflect on their own learning process. Von Elek (1985) states that self-assessment facilitates visualizing the strong and weak points the students have. As self-assessment also motivates the students to work towards achieving the competencies expected, a more realistic evaluation can also take place. Rotger (1992) and Oskarsson (1984) believe that self-assessment not only generates good results academically, but also psychologically, as it is a strategy which empowers the students and makes them feel responsible for their own learning process. This, in turn, helps build affective ties with their teacher.

To bring to a close the cycle of evaluation amongst the principal agents involved in the learning process, Mosqueira-Rey (2010) speaks of peer assessment or assessment by fellow students as another important element which can be integrated into the complete assessment process. For this assessment strategy to be effective and bring about the best results possible, a certain level of experience and maturity is required. Students will then take this methodology away with them and will continue using and

learning from it throughout their professional career, thus being able to develop objective criteria as a source of pertinent information.

Lastly, he points out that a methodology of self-assessment allows the students to internalize and analyze learning approaches to be able to build knowledge effectively.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The objectives of this paper are to describe the process and results of a system of self-assessment in the perception of competencies which students in their third year on the Business Management and Administration Degree course take part in. Through this, we can learn the extent to which the students currently feel they have achieved these competencies.

Taking into account Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (1997)'s conceptual approaches, it is hoped that by using a system of self-assessment of the perception of competencies, a clear picture can emerge of the level of competencies the students believe they currently possess.

This self-assessment was undertaken by 41 students in their third year on the Business Management and Administration Degree course. To this end a questionnaire was designed. It consisted of 14 questions relating to the basic and complementary competencies which students should develop along their academic formation (Torrez, 2013).

To be able to quantify the answers, it was decided to put together an ordinal scale, made up of 6 levels, going from lesser to greater perception of the competencies acquired. The surveys distributed were drafted with the aim of measuring the competencies stipulated within the objectives of the degree. However, the research

for this particular paper is comprised of a broader spectrum of skills. In addition to the competencies stipulated, others which are not assessed, but which respond directly to the needs of the job market, have also been included. The basic competencies or those which are required by the university and the complementary competencies are the following:

Basic Competences	Complimentary Competences
Analytical skills	Finances
Organization	Sales and Marketing
Creativity	Market Research
Innovation	English
I.T. for research	Working to a deadline
I.T. for administration	Sales Plan
Written communication	Ethical decision-making
<i>Source: Authors own, 2015</i>	

It is important to point out that the basic competencies shown here are cross-disciplinary and relevant throughout the entire university course, forming an integral part of the students' development. They do not only provide specific skills, as the complimentary competencies do, but they go further and become factors which are imperative to being able to enter any work and social setting.

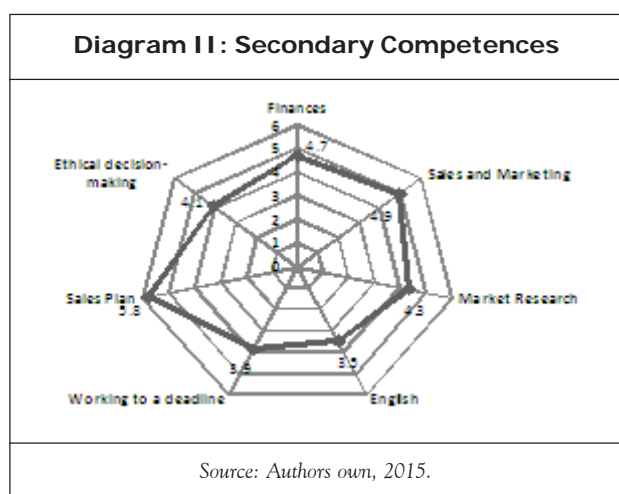
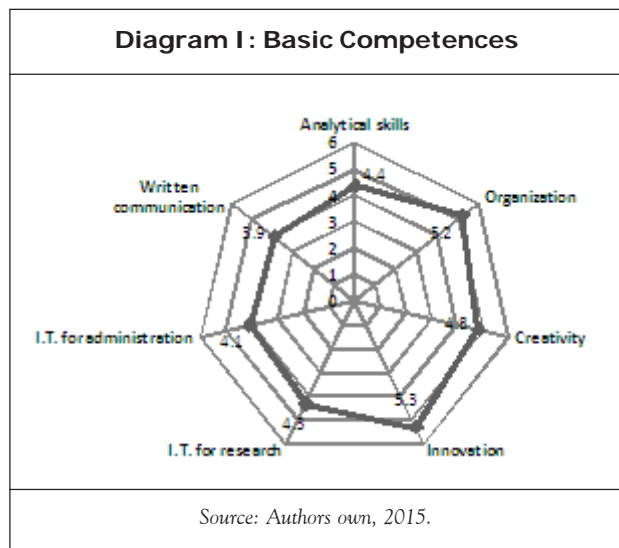
To measure the results, the average from all the students' answers was used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It can be seen that the competence given the greatest value by the students is that of "Sales Plan": the bringing of a sales plan to fruition, from the initial idea, up to the final presentation of a formal document. We can also see that within

the competencies researched (analytical skills and organization, creativity and innovation, use of IT, written communication, finances, sales and marketing, market research, English, working to a deadline, business plan and ethical decision-making), the majority of these competencies exceed the core value of the scale.

In short, self-assessment of the students' competencies has shown itself to be an objective process and has demonstrated clearly how the students assess themselves. These students are currently satisfied with the level of competencies they have acquired during their first three years at university.



## CONCLUSION

To generate a final grade which will be satisfactory both to the student and the course organizer, it is important, in the future, to consider using a methodology of students' self-assessment, thus also incorporating new agents into the learning process.

It is also important to take into account that assessment has a formative role, and as such, in taking part in this process, the students gain responsibility and maturity within their learning.

For the purpose of avoiding subjective and biased judgements, it is advisable to adopt an educational model of assessment which takes into account all the interested parties involved in the learning process. In this way, the assessment is made up of various perspectives, which will bring about the creation of cycles of ongoing improvement, which, in turn, will make assessing competencies more efficient.

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