

## **DEVELOPING GENERIC SKILLS AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

Training generic skills is a current, relevant and controversial issue. Today continue the debate about understanding the competence or skill concept and its relevance into the educational and business reality.

The training by competences in the university field arises in Spain with the constitution of the European Higher Education Area, and specifically with the “Bologna Declaration” in 1999.

In the professional field, the competence movement arises around 1973 with David McClellan who identified that to be successful we need something more than intelligence and knowledges.

In this research work we propose the need to train university students in personal competences and skills for their personal, academic and professional excellence and success.

Understanding that competences can be developed and taking this hypothesis to the university field, we intend to answer the question: Can a training program within the university curriculum cause a development of these competences?

The general objective of this study try to analyze the effectiveness and need of a specific university training on generic skills for their development. Competencies that help them to move towards personal, academic and professional excellence and success in their lives.

**Keywords:** Generic skills, Competences, Training, European Higher Education.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

We understand university education as an academic institution that provides an integral and integrating formation that should be the basis for students to continue improving their lives in their different fields: academic, personal and professional.

On the other hand, we do not consider that the university and its training programs must be oriented exclusively to the professional and technical fields, limiting ourselves to producing what companies need in terms of specific profiles for a given occupation. We understand that the university must train the student so that, in addition to providing technical knowledge, it trains and helps them to develop competences and skills such as: personal knowledge, teamwork, communication (assertiveness, listening, empathy, oratory...), decision making, conflict resolution, task management, etc.

More and more companies are placing greater emphasis on the need to incorporate workers who, in addition to have the knowledge of their own degree (related to technical competences and skills), have developed certain generic competences. In this line we find among others, the studies of McClelland (1973) who worked the concept of competence, Gardner (1983) who worked the concept of multiple Intelligences, Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Goleman (1995) who worked the concept of Emotional Intelligence.

In the processes of personnel selection, development, training and evaluation, generic competences have

already been introduced as the backbone of what makes up an excellent worker. The technical knowledge and the results indicate what can an employee produce. But this kind of evaluation is no longer sufficient; in this sense it is also necessary to attend, the climate, the positivity, the environment that the worker can generate around them (related to generic competences).

Therefore, we can observe how transversal or generic competences have become a relevant aspect for companies. The reason is related to the empirical studies that had been contrasted how productivity and efficiency are factors that increase the greater the development of generic competencies of their workers.

On the other hand, the contributions of neuroscience have something significant to say at this point (Bisquerra, 2007): Cognition and emotion are intimately related, so much so that, just as the cerebral cortex (cognitive) and the limbic system (emotional) are connected to each other, so are the hemispheres: left (rational) and right (emotional).

Therefore, the university must provide training that facilitates not only cognitive but also emotional development.

Thus, for example, we understand that a student who studies the Degree of Education, must train or develop generic skills in addition to acquiring technical knowledge. Otherwise, we run the risk of forging a professional future that can know a lot about its science but does not know how to manage its future class because it has not adequately developed basic skills such as assertiveness, empathy, conflict resolution, etc.. In this way, an adequate development of generic competences makes it possible for him to be a better professional with respect to his students, meetings with parents, carrying out projects with other colleagues, etc.

It is important to point out at this moment that we propose the term competence like the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to an excellent performance with respect to a task, activity or function in life (academic, professional and / or personal).

At the same time, it is worth asking what allows an excellent performance with respect to a task, role or function in life. In order to answer this question, we delve into the origin and the different meanings of the term competence.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. A subject for Developing Generic Competences**

At the Francisco de Vitoria University (UFV) an integral personal training plan has been developed since its foundation with the aim of accompanying all their students of different grades and years of study.

To this end, it has several obligatory subjects in its curricula to develop generic competencies that guarantee this integral personal training; training that goes beyond the development of technical skills.

In the first grade, the subject oriented to develop generic skills is called: Personal Skills and Competences

Before explaining the subject, we will proceed to distinguish the terms: competence and ability.

#### **2.1.1 Competences Versus Skills**

Over time, many authors have worked on the competence concept. Some of the definitions that are more relevant are:

Competences are the characteristics and ways of making those who present a successful performance (McClelland, 1973). As David McClelland (1973) said, he played a decisive role in the so-called "competency movement". McClelland (1973), after carrying out a research project, commissioned by the United State Department, for the selection of the best diplomats, concluded that: "neither intelligence and aptitude tests nor academic results are sufficient to establish reliable forecasts of professional success". With this statement, McClelland set out to observe diplomats who stood out for their excellence. He discovered that among the traits that distinguished these people were qualities such as transcultural empathy, resilience to complicated situations and understanding of networks of influence. It recognizes, therefore, that knowledge is not enough to speak of excellence in an activity or a job position. In this way, the concept of competence arises to agglutinate all other factors that determine excellence. McClelland (1973) concluded that the key to an individual's job excellence lies in discovering what knowledge and what attributes or qualities are necessary to adequately perform each job.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) determine that competence is related to underlying characteristic of a person

resulting in effective and/or superior performance in employment.

Bunk (1994) proposes as a competence definition: a set of knowledge, skills and abilities needed to exercise a profession, solve professional problems autonomously and flexibly, and be able to collaborate with the professional environment and in the organization of work.

In this sense, as we see, although sometimes we speak indistinctly of skills and competences, it is more correct to speak of competences; because these are the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes, for the precise performance of a task (Muñoz, Crespí & Angrehs, 2011).

This is not the time to delve into each of competence classifications, but we can conclude that, at times, we speak of the same competences albeit with another nomenclature. As Bisquerra (2007) says, that although different, all of them allude to two great typologies of competences: those of a technical-professional or functional nature and those of a socio-personal or emotional nature. We initially took this typology of Bisquerra (2007) as a reference for our research.

Functional or technical-professional competences are those related to the performance or activity itself of a certain task. That is to say, they are those related to the specific knowledge and procedures of an activity or task. We refer to "knowledge" and "know-how" that are critical for the specialized performance of a task.

Socio-personal competences do not present a unanimous nomenclature among the different authors. Some denominations, as Bisquerra (2007) states, are: participative competences, personal competences, basic competences, key competences, generic competences, transferable competences, relational competences, life skills, interpersonal competences, transversal competences, basic competences for life, social competences, emotional competences, socio-emotional competences, etc. (Bisquerra, 2007).

In the following section we present our own classification of generic competences, which is nourished by that of Bisquerra (2007) and also by Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (1983), specifically intrapersonal and interpersonal Intelligence and the concept of Emotional Intelligence by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Goleman (1995).

### *2.1.2 Personal Skills and Competences*

The subject of Personal Skills and Competences, which is taught in all UFV grades at first year, aims to contribute to the integral formation, with a clear vocation to accompany all their students in their personal development through the generic competences.

First, we should distinguish between generic intrapersonal and interpersonal competences:

a) Those of intrapersonal character: those competences of relation with oneself, intimate and personal of an individual. Related to the ability to recognize, accept and/or understand and overcome, trying to give the best response in each situation that presents us. Examples: proactivity, personal knowledge, self-criticism, self-management, etc. These are similar to what Bisquerra (2007) calls self-reflection capacities, that is to say, capacities aimed at identifying and regulating one's own emotions adequately.

b) Those of an interpersonal nature: those of interrelation with other individuals. Related to the capacity to recognize, accept, understand and help that the other is overcome, trying that the other one of the best answer in each situation that is presented to him. Examples: communication (empathy, feedback, assertiveness, listening, making requests, verbal, non-verbal communication), leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, negotiation. These are what Bisquerra (2007;2003) refers to as the ability to recognize what others are thinking and feeling: social skills, empathy, capturing non-verbal communication, etc.

Second, we describe how the subject or program can develop those intrapersonal and interpersonal competences:

a) Intrapersonal competences are developed through a mentoring program. An expert trainer accompanies the student individually during 6 sessions for the development of competences such as: personal knowledge, proactivity, personal improvement and search for meaning.

b) Interpersonal competences are developed through 27 classroom sessions. An expert trainer accompanies all students through experiential learning in the development of skills such as: teamwork, problem solving, communication and leadership.

## **3. RESULTS**

The results of the subject evaluation criteria are very satisfactory; in fact, it is one of the integral training

programs that is best valued every year.

Specifically, we present the quantitative results of the program for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Area	Item	CLASSROOM MEAN				MENTORING MEAN				
		N: 1.489				N: 1.443				
		Area	Item	D.T.	Mode	Area	Item	D.T.	Mode	
Programming – Teaching Organization	1	4.53	"I have sufficiently clear the initial planning of the subject (activities, evaluation criteria)".	4.55	1.35	5	5.11	5.15	1.09	6
	2		"The teaching methodology of the subject favours my learning".	4.5	1.41	6		5.07	1.11	6
Content Domain	3	4.79	"The explanations about the content of the subject are clear to me".	4.68	1.32	6	5.27	5.21	1.05	6
	4		"The doubts raised are resolved".	4.91	1.25	6		5.34	0.99	6
Teaching Innovation. Motivation	5	4.55	"I can connect the subject with real life situations".	4.76	1.35	6	5.00	5.19	1.18	6
	6		"My desire to learn is encouraged".	4.34	1.51	6		4.81	1.32	6
Interaction with class group	7	4.71	"The activities developed encourage interaction with the group in class".	5.07	1.18	6	4.97	4.88	1.31	6
	8		"The topics dealt with make me ask questions".	4.34	1.47	5		5.05	1.23	6
Individual Student Attention	9	4.94	"I feel respected in my opinions".	5.04	1.18	6	5.40	5.44	0.98	6
	10		"I feel accompanied by the teacher".	4.85	1.37	6		5.35	1.10	6
Evaluation	11	4.59	"I have felt adequately demanded by this teacher".	4.68	1.34	6	5.04	5.20	1.12	6
	12		"The evaluation method makes it possible to reflect what I have learnt".	4.5	1.43	5		4.87	1.32	6
Results	13	4.51	"I receive significant feedback that allows me to improve".	4.67	1.38	6	5.00	5.14	1.15	6
	14		"I learn by taking this subject".	4.35	1.57	6		4.86	1.40	6
Fulfillment of obligations	15	4.95	"The teacher is punctual in his commitments (attendance at class, delivery of grades...)".	4.91	1.34	6	5.28	5.22	1.24	6
	16		"It is accessible in the attention to the student (tutorials, mails, etc...)".	5	1.24	6		5.34	1.09	6
Items-Criterion	17	4.63	"From a general consideration: evaluate the teaching work of this teacher as a facilitator of your learning".	4.75	1.3	6	5.12	5.20	1.09	6
	18		"If you could, in which degree would you enrol in another subject taught by this teacher?".	4.49	1.58	6		5.03	1.37	6
GLOBAL AVERAGE		4.69	4.69	1.37	5.83	5.13	5.13	1.17	6.00	

**Table 1. CEDA Results: Questionnaire of Teaching Activity**

Observing the data of the previous table, we can say that this subject, in global terms, is very well valued by students, if we observe the average of the evaluation of the mentoring, which is 5.13, over 6. Nevertheless, the students seem to value the mentoring part better than the classroom part, which has an overall average of 4.69.

On the other hand, the qualitative evaluation indicates that the students value and are especially grateful for the personal development space provided through the subject.

In terms of significance, and through the statistic "t student", (alpha 0.05) we could verify that the students'

evaluations of the teaching received in the classroom, in the HCP subject were high, while the evaluations of the mentoring were significantly higher, as part of the same subject.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Sectors such as education (infant, secondary and university) together with business, advocate and progressively demand training that goes beyond the provision of knowledge.

We have talked about how to work excellence we have to work in terms of competence, that is to say in terms of attitude, skills and knowledge.

The training in university competences, specifically in generic competences, advocates providing them with greater training in competences, competences that they already demand today for the exercise of their personal and academic life, but which they will undoubtedly also need in their closest professional environment.

Through the instrument for measuring the teaching activity of the subject and the qualitative evaluation we can consider that this subject as a space for personal development through the generic competences.

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