INVITED ESSAYS:

Enhancing Faculty Performance through Coaching: Targeted, Individualized Support
Laurie Bedford

IN THIS ISSUE:

Instructional Design and Facilitation Approaches that Promote Critical Thinking in Asynchronous Online Discussions: A Review of the Literature
Laura A. Schindler, Gary Burkholder

Communicative Differences between Domestic Versus Foreign Instructors
Narissa Punyanunt-Carter, Jason Wrench, Stacy L. Carter, and Daniel Linden

Faculty Perspective on Competency Development in Higher Education: An International Study
Paloma Julia Velasco, Begoña Learreta, Claudia Kober, and Irene Tan

A Teaching Model Proposal for Adult University Students [Una propuesta de modelo didáctico para estudiantes adultos universitarios]
Ana Cruz Chust

Motivational Issues of Faculty in Saudi Arabia
Peter John Anthony and Akram AbdulCader

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Editorial

This issue of Higher Learning Research Communications (HLRC) features research focused on faculty development from scholars across both sides of the Atlantic. The opening piece, *Enhancing faculty performance through coaching: Targeted, individualized support*, describes the culture within a US-based higher education institution, where emphasis is given to supporting faculty. One of their latest approaches has been to implement coaching as a means for professional development, with positive results.

Promoting critical thinking skills has always been a challenge for higher education professionals. Different models and techniques have been researched and described in different contexts. And, as higher education makes its way into the 21st century, developing critical thinking skills in online learning environments can prove to be an even bigger challenge. Laura A. Schindler and Gary J. Burkholder present a literature review related to instructional design and facilitation approaches that promote critical thinking in asynchronous online discussions (AODs) across multiple cognitive constructs (cognitive domain, cognitive presence, knowledge construction, and perspective-taking). According to their review of the available literature, certain design approaches are effective for promoting critical thinking.

Another 21st century challenge has been globalization, with higher education professionals being able to teach face-to-face and online across the globe. However, cultural differences and language barriers may present teaching and learning challenges. In the article, *Communicative differences between domestic and foreign instructors*, authors Narissra Punyanunt-Carter, Jason Wrench, Stacy L Carter, and Daniel Linden researched how students perceived their instructors, depending on whether they were local or foreign. Their findings may aid international faculty make a better transition into US-based campuses and classrooms.

From Spain, research conducted by Ana Cruz-Chust reveals the challenges college teachers face when dealing with working adult students (WASs) and mixed classrooms. She found that, even when teachers might not have previous training on how to approach WASs, they can recognize the characteristics and needs of these students, and implement appropriate teaching methods in order to face the challenges these students present. Interestingly, some of her findings contradict the current literature, revealing more research is needed in this area.

Finally, researchers Akram AbdulCader and Peter John Anthony present an overview of faculty in Saudi Arabia and how motivation affects higher education within the Saudi context. Although Saudi Arabia’s economy and workforce seem to be expanding, their research found that faculty in the largest country in the Arab League do not feel motivated to participate in academic program development because of a lack of incentives, feeling irrelevant in the decision making process within universities, and a lack of recognition and moral support. Since the Saudi economy is rapidly growing, their findings point to a need to engage and motivate faculty in order to keep Saudi higher education at par with the challenges that will certainly come during the 21st century.

The Editors
Enhancing Faculty Performance through Coaching: Targeted, Individualized Support

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Abstract

Coaching in higher education is a relatively new field; although, it has been taking place in educational institutions for some time, even if it was not labeled as such. This paper describes the faculty development philosophies of a US-based higher education institution with a strong culture of supporting faculty and promoting social change. A coaching model was implemented as a means for professional development. It was designed to be facilitated through a peer relationship and it offers problem-focused, contextualized opportunities for faculty to collaborate, thus making the experience and outcome more meaningful. The coaching model is individualized, confidential, non-evaluative, and incorporates three pathways to support the professional development needs of faculty: self-assigned, a request from college leadership as a means to support faculty in an identified area of need, or the New Faculty Orientation (NFO) instructor may recommend a faculty member for coaching as a way to further engage in topics not discussed in-depth in NFO.

Keywords: Faculty development, faculty coaching, faculty support

Introduction

The faculty body is an integral part of higher education institutions (Guglielmo et al., 2010). Students spend the majority of their academic career interacting with faculty members and the relationships developed through those interactions have a direct impact on student success (Mundy, Kupczynski, Ellis, & Salgado, 2012). Faculty members who have the most developed pedagogical skills and are immersed in the needs of the students are best situated to
guide students towards their learning goals (Cook-Sather, 2011; Hyers, Syphan, Cochran, & Brown, 2012).

Faculty teaching in the online environment are diverse in their perspective and approach (Cariaga-Lo, Worthy Dawkins, Enger, Schotter & Spence, 2010.). The resulting practices can range from highly effective to quite ineffective. Isolation and few opportunities to network may limit discourse and sharing of best practices that can organically occur in face-to-face settings (Bonura, Bissell, & Liljegren, 2012). Online organizations that understand this diversity in faculty preparedness and challenges in sharing ideas also understand their role in supporting faculty. To ensure that faculty are equipped with the most effective pedagogy and learning tools, ongoing faculty development is essential (Guglielmo et al., 2010; McKee & Tew, 2013). At the same time, according to Herman (2012), providing faculty training for online faculty remains a challenge for universities, especially as time and resources for competing activities become scarce (Huston & Weaver, 2008). Developing structured, standardized training to meet the needs of all faculty members may be an elusive task. Therefore, considering a range of faculty development opportunities that includes targeted, individualized support designed to meet the needs of diverse faculty members may be a viable solution for organizations committed to faculty success (Hyers et al., 2012).

**Background**

Coaching is a relatively new process in professional development; however, coaching has deep theoretical roots that have been around for over a century and are observed in the works of Alfred Adler and Carl Jung. Coaching provides a collaborative, less intimidating approach to improving performance than other development options; effective coaching can guide faculty members from below average performance to above average performance. Not only does coaching provide a collaborative partnership, according to Passmore and Rehman (2012), coaching provides an enhanced relationship, thus encouraging the participants to learn information at a faster pace. Coaching allows individuals to identify their goals and have a voice in their own learning through reflection and feedback—practices which are all critical to change (McLeod & Steinert, 2009; Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Schoniker, 2011). An effective coaching relationship requires trust, confidentiality and that individuals make themselves vulnerable (Cox, 2012). It also provides for the opportunity for assistance without judgment (Koch, 2008).

There is very little research regarding faculty coaching at the university level (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2013). To date, much of the coaching literature focuses on work with elementary teachers in the area of literacy (for example, Stover et al., 2011). According to Brown (2013) and Chingos (2013), funding for education is at an all-time low in the United States. Therefore, coaching may be considered an optional luxury by a few who attest that it would take significant funding to bring schools up to simply an adequate level for operation (Boone, 2009). Still, more academic institutions are starting to consider faculty coaching an important element in professional development (Knight, 2012).

Coaching in some form has been occurring in many educational institutions but has not been until recently that it has been labeled as coaching (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2013). Previously, it was referred to using other titles such as instructional mentoring, faculty mentoring, or even instructional facilitating. Huston and Weaver (2008) suggested that a coaching model for faculty members in higher education includes opportunities for faculty...
members to self-identify issues, review materials or practices in question, and have a conversation between the faculty member and coach to share concerns and potential solutions. These considerations are also embedded in a framework offered by Koch (2008) that includes assessment, challenge, support, and empowerment.

Through their research in applied behavioral science, Payne and Dozier (2013) suggested that when there is positive reinforcement, the outcomes tend to be more constructive than when negative reinforcement methods are used. Therefore, coaching, like any other professional development activity, should be considered a positive, proactive activity for faculty members to enhance current skills and develop new approaches. Conversely, coaching should never be used as a punitive activity designed to monitor faculty members who have been identified as low performing.

Coaching is oftentimes viewed as being a process to induct new faculty members into the organization. However, coaching can be used as a professional development activity for all faculty members, including mid-career and senior faculty members who need more specialized developmental opportunities (Huston & Weaver, 2008). Since coaching is personalized, facilitated learning (Koch, 2008), it can be an innovative alternative to a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development (Stover et al., 2011). The benefits of a coaching program include increased morale, high-quality collaborations, and an emphasis on proven pedagogical practices (Huston & Weaver, 2008).

Coaching should not be confused with counseling because the training, approach, and outcomes are not the same. Coaching does not include working with individuals on mental health issues; in the context of faculty coaching it is strictly directed at pedagogical skills in the classroom. The one similarity coaching does have with counseling is confidentiality. Typically when individuals engage in the coaching process the items disclosed remain confidential. If coaching results must be disclosed to a third party, Greenfield and Hengen (2004) recommended stating the specific parameters surrounding confidentiality at the onset of the coaching relationship to avoid misunderstanding.

Similarly, mentoring and coaching are sometimes used interchangeably. However, they are quite different professional development processes. Coaching involves reflection, discussion and follow-up that reflects learning outcomes with a focus on students (Stover et al., 2011). Conversely, mentors enter into ongoing relationships that extend beyond the individual experience (Stowers & Barker, 2010). Therefore, coaching provides focused faculty members support and just-in-time resolution to pedagogical issues in the classroom.

**Walden University’s Faculty Development Philosophies**

Walden University has a strong culture of supporting faculty and promoting social change. In 2013, Walden also embraced the philosophy of creating a healthy organization, a practice proposed by Lencioni (2012) in his book, *The Advantage*. Lencioni proposed that a healthy organization encompasses the four disciplines model and states them as: (a) build a cohesive leadership team, (b) create clarity, (c) over communicate clarity, and (d), reinforce clarity (p. 15-16). A healthy organization at Walden University consists of faculty members who are engaged and active in the classroom, creating a substantial experience for their students and colleagues. In order to be completely healthy, according to Lencioni, individuals need to be
in tune with their inner self and skills associated with their profession. All four areas of Lencioni’s disciplines model at each stage can be influenced and positively enhanced through individualized support as it increases self-efficacy that can in turn provide higher performance and greater job satisfaction (Leonard-Cross 2010).

Instructors enter faculty positions with varying experiences and circumstances (Cariaga-Lo et al., 2010). These experiences may or may not include teaching in an online setting. According to Mulig and Rhame (2012), “[t]eaching online is much different than teaching face-to-face” (p. 102). Different does not necessarily mean difficult. Still, Walden University embraces the need to provide a faculty development support structure to meet the diverse needs of faculty. Newly hired faculty come to Walden falling into one or more of the following categories:

- They are new to the academy of distance education with no online teaching experience.
- They are highly qualified, have extensive experience teaching face-to-face in higher education, but have never taught an online course.
- They have taught online but are accustomed an unstructured course development system that allows individual faculty members to design course material as they see fit.
- They have taught hybrid courses where some of the course content is delivered online, and some are offered face-to-face.
- They have experience teaching both at the university level and teaching online.

In addition to meeting the needs of instructors with any of these unique attributes, all new faculty members must be inducted into Walden University’s institution acumen. The latter is included in an extensive four-week New Faculty Orientation (NFO), of which successful completion is required before interacting with students. However, addressing all faculty needs cannot be fully accomplished in the NFO as its goal is more focused on familiarizing new faculty with institutional expectations. Topics such as engagement, course discussion, and even time management are referenced in the NFO, but because of time constraints, cannot be covered in-depth. Filling in these gaps, coaching can play a crucial role in faculty professional development and support. According to Lencioni (2012), healthy organizations recognize that their employees want to be successful. One, of the ways to help faculty be successful within a healthy organization is to provide access to individualized support that provides opportunities for reflection and personal growth (Cook-Sather, 2011). Having a supportive process in place for faculty to electively reach out for consultation is the foundation of the Walden coaching model.

Walden University’s Coaching Model

Structure and Support

Since 2009, the Center for Faculty Excellence has supported the university by providing teaching and learning opportunities for faculty and by engaging the faculty and academic leadership through: (1) the design and delivery of professional development and training opportunities; (2) the collaborative review, development, and implementation of academic policy; (3) the collection and distribution of faculty performance information, to support quality assurance in the online classroom; (4) advocacy on behalf of the faculty; (5) communication to the faculty; and (6) community building and networking opportunities for the faculty.

Walden’s Center for Faculty Excellence employs three Faculty Specialists who support the five colleges and centers and promote enhanced pedagogical performance in the
classroom. This team provides consulting services on a broad range of pedagogical issues including faculty development aligned with key performance and assessment data. The faculty specialists also serve as the coaches at Walden University. In addition to the three faculty specialists, Walden’s Center for Faculty Excellence is supported by two instructional designers, two data analysts and a special projects administrator. The Center for Faculty Excellence is led by a manager who reports directly to the chief academic officer.

The Center for Faculty Excellence team provides most faculty development opportunities at Walden University. The team strives to respond to faculty professional development needs that are timely and relevant to organizational expectations as described by Bonura, Bissell, and Liljegren (2012). As a result, professional development opportunities have evolved to vary in content and delivery. Current offerings include instructor-led new faculty orientation, self-paced modules, live webinars, facilitated group discussions, face-to-face workshops, and one-on-one coaching.

The faculty coaching program at Walden University was implemented in 2011. Walden’s coaching model has been designed to be facilitated through a peer relationship as described by Huston and Weaver (2008). It offers problem-focused, contextualized opportunities for faculty to collaborate, thus making the experience and outcome more meaningful. Faculty Specialists at Walden University are considered faculty members and are lateral colleagues with other faculty across the university. Faculty specialists also have experience and expertise in the classroom—both online and the traditional face-to-face setting—and possess a proven track record of reliable and consistent performance. This experience, combined with their role in the university, situates the faculty specialist as peer who can project empathy, provide expert advice, and maintain confidentiality within the coaching setting.

Over the past three years, the coaching process and resulting outcomes have evolved and grown. Initially, coaching was a tangential offering with which many faculty and supervisors were unfamiliar. Coaching is currently a process that academic leadership has recognized and promoted amongst faculty as a primary avenue for professional development within the University. While coaching is sometimes viewed as potential offering for new faculty; veteran faculty are embraced as appropriate coaching participants as well. To date, Walden’s faculty specialists have held 446 one-on-one coaching sessions, supporting 277 unique faculty members. In the first year, 2011, 101 coaching sessions were held supporting 65 unique faculty members and have been consistent over time. As of November of 2014, 111 coaching sessions were provided, serving 61 unique faculty members.

Coaching as Professional Development

Walden University understands the importance of providing ongoing professional development to support faculty. Cariago-Lo et al. (2010) described the effective organization as one that is innovative in creating opportunities to support both new and experienced faculty. Furthermore, mature institutions such as Walden University, in their readiness to support faculty, understand that this development should be aligned to the internal and psychological motivation of individual faculty members (Cox, 2012; Koch, 2008). Walden University’s coaching model provides this level of opportunity for faculty at all stages of career development as well as with differing interpersonal needs. The coaching process is a supportive practice, geared towards helping faculty improve on various pedagogical issues in the online classroom (Denton
& Hasbrouck, 2009; Stover et al., 2011). As described by Taie (2011), coaching is “the art and practice of inspiring, energizing, and facilitating the performance, learning and development of the coachee” (p. 34).

The Walden coaching model is individualized, confidential, non-evaluative, and incorporates three pathways to support the professional development needs of faculty. The first option is self-assigned, wherein the instructor requests a coaching session via the Center for Faculty Excellence. This is the most common way faculty members engage in coaching and provides for the most self-directed approach to professional development. The second option is a request from college leadership as a means to support faculty in an identified area of need. It should be noted that this referral is not based on poor-performance; rather it is a supportive measure on the part of supervisors to assist faculty in reaching their own improvement goals. Finally, the New Faculty Orientation instructor may recommend a faculty member for coaching as a way to further engage in topics not discussed in-depth in NFO. In the latter scenario, coaching is suggested based on the faculty member’s engagement in the NFO with no obligation on the faculty member’s part. These three options provide an accessible pathway to faculty coaching as professional development as a conduit to a healthy organization as suggested by Lencioni (2012).

During the coaching meeting, the faculty specialist works with the instructor to provide a solution based strategy to the topic provided by the instructor. Meetings take place via telephone or video conference and are typically an hour in length. The one-on-one coaching begins with a faculty member sharing the area of concern. As the coaching is a peer supported process, the faculty specialist listens to the issues and formulates a plan to help the faculty member arrive at a solution best suited to his or her individual style. In addition to drawing on the experience of both parties, the faculty specialist also refers to a coaching toolkit. The toolkit hosts various online teaching resources collected by the faculty specialist team. These support tools are organized by popular coaching topics and are used to guide the conversation with the coachee. If required, a screen sharing program is used to demonstrate steps or information related to the topic being discussed. Upon the completion of the session, faculty receive a follow up email with an outline of topics covered, links to corresponding self-paced modules, and to related articles where applicable. Faculty may register for additional sessions as needed.

**Conclusion**

Institutions are increasingly challenged to find innovative and efficient ways to support diverse new and seasoned faculty (Cariago-Lo et al., 2010). As time and resources become scarce and faculty needs become diverse; organizations need to identify creative sources to support faculty in meeting instructional expectations (Huston & Weaver, 2008). Coaching can be an effective way to fill the gap in meeting individual faculty needs (Stover et al., 2011). However, the organization needs to have a culture that supports coaching (Cox, 2012; Koch, 2008). This should include access to professional development opportunities that provide timely and relevant support for instructional concerns (Bonura et al., 2012). An academic institution is only as strong as its faculty members and investing in faculty development that includes coaching may help maintain the strength of the institution, thus providing an enhanced experience for the students.
References


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Instructional Design and Facilitation Approaches that Promote Critical Thinking in Asynchronous Online Discussions: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Asynchronous online discussions (AODs) are often used to promote critical thinking in online courses; however, recent research suggests that levels of critical thinking in discussions remain low. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus in the literature about the definition of critical thinking and many of the existing studies focus on one specific cognitive construct. Therefore, it is unknown which instructional approaches have the strongest empirical support for promoting critical thinking across multiple cognitive constructs. The purpose of this article is to present a review of the literature related to instructional design and facilitation approaches that promote critical thinking in AODs across multiple cognitive constructs (cognitive domain, cognitive presence, knowledge construction, and perspective-taking). Design approaches, such as providing scaffolding and using a debate-based instructional approach, and facilitation approaches, such as using Socratic questioning and allowing students to lead discussions, are effective for promoting critical thinking. Additional research should be conducted to confirm the efficacy of case-based, problem-based, project-based, and role play instructional approaches and to reach a consensus on the definition of critical thinking as well as how critical thinking should be demonstrated and accurately assessed in AODs.

Keywords: online discussions, critical thinking, cognitive presence, knowledge construction, perspective taking
Introduction

Asynchronous online discussions (AODs) are a common instructional feature of online courses used to promote interaction and critical thinking without the constraints of time or space (Arend, 2009; Bowden, 2012; Klisc, McGill, & Hobbs, 2009; Spartariu & Winsor, 2013). AODs typically consist of a discussion prompt to which students must respond with an initial post, followed by a series of response posts in which students comment on, challenge, and/or question their peers (Chavira, 2011). There are several benefits to using AODs compared to traditional, face-to-face discussions, including increased opportunities for all students, rather than a select few, to contribute to the discussion and more time for information processing, reflective thinking, and the construction of high quality responses to peers (Alamro & Schofield, 2012; Cain & Smith 2009; Rizopoulos & McCarny, 2009; Rollag, 2010). However, challenges continue to persist related to effectively designing and facilitating high-quality AODs that promote critical thinking (Armstrong & Manson, 2010; Spartariu & Winsor, 2013), particularly because the consensus on what critical thinking is, as well as the specific guidance on how to effectively teach critical thinking skills is elusive (Garrison, 1991; Mulnix, 2012).

Cognitive constructs that are similar to or that promote critical thinking (cognitive domain, cognitive presence, knowledge construction, and perspective-taking) frequently appear in the AOD literature and often are used interchangeably with critical thinking. While each cognitive construct is distinct, all reflect the progression of thinking from low levels (e.g., recalling/restating facts, offering an opinion, recognizing a problem) to high levels (applying new knowledge, testing ideas, making judgments), the latter being associated with critical thinking (Table 1). Despite the myriad constructs in the literature, the scope of existing articles often is limited to examining the efficacy of AOD approaches in the context of only one cognitive construct (Darabi, Arrastia, Nelson, & Liang, 2011; deNoyelles, Zydney, & Chen, 2014; Hou, 2011; Richardson & Ice, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present a review of the literature related to the efficacy of AOD approaches for promoting critical thinking, as reflected across multiple cognitive constructs.

Table 1. Definitions and Categories of Cognitive Constructs in the AOD Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Categories (Listed from Simple to Complex)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Domain</td>
<td>An area of learning that pertains to recall or recognition of knowledge and the development of intellectual abilities and skills (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, &amp; Krathwohl, 1956, p. 7).</td>
<td>1. Remember</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Understand</td>
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<td>3. Apply</td>
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<td>4. Analyze</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Evaluate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive Presence</td>
<td>The extent to which higher-order knowledge acquisition and application is gained through sustained reflection and critical thinking</td>
<td>1. Triggering</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Exploration</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Integration</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Resolution</td>
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Knowledge Construction
A process through which interaction and higher-order thinking leads to a new understanding of meaning (Gunawardena, Lowe, & Anderson, 1997, p. 410)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Perspective Taking</th>
<th>The ability to cognitively move from just a sense of self to a sense of self and others, then develop and articulate messages incorporating self and other (Chadwick &amp; Ralston, 2010, p. 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                    | 1. Sharing/Comparing Information  
|                    | 2. Discovery/Exploration of Dissonance  
|                    | 3. Negotiation of Meaning/Co-construction of Knowledge  
|                    | 4. Testing/Modification of Proposed Synthesis or Co-Construction  
|                    | 5. Agreement Statement/Application of Newly Constructed Meaning  
|                    | 1. Ecocentric  
|                    | 2. Subjective  
|                    | 3. Reciprocal  
|                    | 4. Mutual  
|                    | 5. Societal-Symbolic  

The search for articles included in this review was limited to 2009 to 2014. Some articles published prior to 2009 were included to address historical aspects of AODs or because they were frequently cited in the existing literature. The following databases were searched: Academic Search Complete; Computers & Applied Sciences Complete; Education Research Complete; ERIC; Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts; PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and Education from SAGE. The keyword used to search the databases was online discussion. The keyword was intentionally broad given that the aim of this article was to conduct an exhaustive search of the literature in order to identify themes related to instructional design and facilitation strategies that influence critical thinking. Using more specific keywords, such as problem-based discussion or instructional design strategies, may have produced narrower results given that educational terminology varies. Any additional articles included in the review were identified by scanning the references of the articles gathered from the initial search of the databases. What follows is a brief background of AODs in the context of the distance education movement followed by a discussion of the instructional design and facilitation approaches that promote critical thinking in AODs.

Background

The first generation of distance education courses began in the late 1890’s to increase access to education in response to the growing demand for an educated workforce during the Industrial Revolution. Universities in the United States, Canada, England, and Europe offered correspondence-based courses that emphasized individual learning and one-way communication through text-based materials sent from the university to students courtesy of the postal service. Even as technology progressed over the next century, the structure of distance education courses remained largely unchanged for decades. Technologies such as radio, television, and audio and video cassettes were incorporated into distance education courses and, while revolutionary at the time, continued to emphasize individual learning and one-way communication (Sumner, 2000). Such individualized learning was limited in the extent to which
critical thinking skills could be developed, as it really was not possible to develop a "critical community of inquiry" (Anderson & Garrison, 1995, p. 197).

During the 1970s and 80s, there were major educational and technological shifts that significantly changed distance education courses and provided an impetus for the emergence of two-way communication. First, there was a major paradigm shift in education from behaviorism to constructivism (Cooper, 1993; Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995; Harasim, 2000). While behaviorism emphasizes the one-way transmission of knowledge from an expert (faculty) to novice learners (students), constructivism was radically different, suggesting that knowledge is built through prior knowledge, experience with the outside world, and interaction with others (Cooper, 1993; Harasim, 1999; Huang, 2002; Jonassen et al., 1995). Second, there was a technological shift propelled by the advent of the personal computer and the Internet, which offered new possibilities to support the constructivist learning paradigm. In particular, computer conferencing (the connection of computers by telephone lines or microwaves) increased the possibilities for two-way communication through a computer network (Bates, 1997; Schlosser & Simonson, 2010).

Early online educators struggled, however, to effectively use computer-mediated communication tools (e.g., email, electronic bulletin boards, and chat rooms) because they were unsophisticated, ill-equipped for the educational environment, and could not easily accommodate a high number of students and/or a high level of meaningful interaction (Harasim, 1999; Hiltz & Wellman, 1997). As online learning increased in popularity, the need for viable collaborative educational tools continued to persist, driving the development of early learning management systems. AODs became a regular fixture in learning management systems and an appealing solution to older collaborative tools because they could be more easily facilitated and organized, and they allowed for meaningful discourse, regardless of time or space (Andresen, 2009; Arend, 2009; Bassett, 2011; Harasim, 2000). However, despite the potential of AODs over other asynchronous and synchronous tools, their inclusion in courses does not guarantee learning. AODs must be more deliberately designed to "construct meaning through sustained communication . . . a vital element in critical thinking" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 89). Numerous studies report that low levels of critical thinking and meaningful discourse persist due to a variety of instructional design and facilitation factors ranging from poorly designed discussion prompts to too little or too much faculty involvement (Arend, 2009; Chen, Wei, Wu, & Uden, 2009; Hew, Cheung, & Ng, 2010; Jorczak & Bart, 2009; Kanuka, Rourke, & Laflamme, 2007; Ling, Koo, & Ong, 2010; Mokoena, 2013; Skinner, 2007; Skinner, 2009).

Complicating the use of AODs as a means of teaching critical thinking skills in the online classroom is the lack of consensus around definitions for critical thinking as well as strategies for teaching it (Garrison, 1991; Mulnix, 2012). Many philosophers such as Plato, Thomas Aquinas, and Descartes, among others, emphasized that things are not necessarily as they appear, and training is essential to teach students how to systematically discover the true nature of those things. Halpern (1998) adopted a very pragmatic approach in referring to critical thinking as "use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desired outcome" (p. 450). Garrison (1991) conceptualized a model of critical thinking as a process comprising five stages: problem identification (as a result of an event that creates cognitive dissonance); problem definition (understanding the specific nature of the problem); exploration (the search for evidence supporting the problem that provides plausible explanations); applicability (the student examines assumptions and critically examines alternatives); and integration (testing out the solution in the world, which itself may result in identification of new
problems and this a re-enactment of the cycle). Finally, based on the results of a Delphi study, Scheffer and Rubenfeld (2000) identified 10 habits of the mind (confidence, contextual perspective, creativity, flexibility, inquisitiveness, intellectual integrity, intuition, open-mindedness, perseverance, and reflection) and seven skills (analyzing, applying standards, discriminating, information seeking, logical reasoning, predicting, and transforming knowledge) that reflect critical thinking in the nursing discipline. Given the variety of definitions and approaches to critical thinking, it can be challenging to ensure that AODs support critical thinking. In the sections that follow, the efficacy of instructional design and facilitation approaches for promoting critical thinking will be discussed. For the purposes of this review, the term “critical thinking” will be used broadly to encompass high-level categories of cognitive constructs listed in Table 1, such as cognitive presence, unless referring to the outcomes of a specific study.

**Instructional Design Strategies**

A review of the AOD literature revealed two broad instructional design themes that influence critical thinking. The first theme pertains to the structure of AODs, which includes the degree to which the discussion prompt is detailed and intentionally constructed to elicit a specific type of response, the level of scaffolding and expectations provided, and the extent to which the size of the discussion group is controlled. The second theme pertains to the instructional approach used to design the discussion prompt. There are case-, problem-, and project-based approaches as well as debate and role play approaches that may be used. In the sections that follow, the existing literature related to the influence of structure and instructional approaches on critical thinking in AODs will be examined.

**Structure**

**Structured prompts.** Discussion prompts may be unstructured, requiring students to discuss a topic of their choosing or to simply respond to an open-ended question without any specific parameters for participation or support materials. While unstructured prompts may be enticing because they require less pre-planning and allow for more flexibility, research suggests that structured prompts are more effective for promoting critical thinking in AODs (Darabi et al., 2011; deNoyelles et al., 2014; Kanuka et al., 2007; Lee, 2012; McLoughlin & Mynard, 2009; Sautler, 2007; Scanlan & Hancock, 2010). For example, structured discussion prompts that include detailed instructions and that elicit a specific type of response (e.g., applying knowledge to a scenario, engaging in a debate) were more effective for promoting cognitive achievement compared to traditional question and answer prompts (Darabi, Liang, Suryavanshi, & Yurekli, 2013). Furthermore, discussion prompts that are relevant to course content, include instructions for how to respond to peers (i.e., compare your experiences with your peers), and specify time parameters (i.e., complete all postings within a week) lead to higher levels of perspective-taking than unstructured discussions in which students could choose which topics to discuss, were given no instructions about how to respond to peers, and where participation was optional (Chadwick & Ralston, 2010).

Findings about the efficacy of structured discussion prompts are consistent with recent research suggesting that students exhibit low levels of critical thinking in AODs unless the prompt explicitly guides students to demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking (Alexander, Commander, & Greenburg, 2010; Arend, 2009; Hou, 2012; Pena & Almaguer, 2012; Song & McNary, 2011). For example, Alexander et al. (2010) examined the effectiveness of the four
questions technique for designing discussion prompts to promote critical thinking. Originally developed by Dietz-Uhler & Lanter (2009), the four-questions technique requires structuring a learning activity to foster analyzing, reflecting, relating, and questioning. The researchers assessed critical thinking in two AODs, one that used the four-questions technique and one that did not. The four-questions AOD pertained to a case study about social cognitive theory and asked students to analyze one important concept, research finding, or idea about social cognitive theory they learned from reading the case study (analyzing), explain why they believe social cognitive theory is important (reflecting), explain how they would apply social cognitive theory to some aspect of their lives (application), and identify questions they had after reading the case study (questioning). Critical thinking levels were higher in the AOD that included the four-questions technique (Alexander et al., 2010). Therefore, online instructors and instructional designers should engage in pre-planning to design discussion prompts that are detailed and that guide students to demonstrate higher level of critical thinking.

**Scaffolding.** Scaffolding is any form of instructional support that enables “students to complete tasks they would be unable to master without assistance” (Grady, 2006, p. 148). Providing scaffolding for how to construct substantive discussion posts increases the quality of discourse and the level of thinking in AODs (Spatariu & Winsor, 2013). One effective scaffolding strategy is to provide students with exemplars of initial discussion postings and responses to peers, which reduces extraneous cognitive load and allows students to focus on learning course content rather than on how to properly construct initial postings and responses that meet expectations (Darabi & Jin, 2012). For example, in studies where students were given examples of acceptable initial postings and guidelines for generating substantive responses to extend thinking (e.g., clarification/elaboration, argument/counterargument) resulted in higher levels of cognition and reflection and higher quality responses (Darabi & Jin, 2012; Land, Choi, & Ge, 2007; Stegmann, Weinberger, & Fischer, 2007). When designing a discussion prompt, online instructors and instructional designers should consider the level of scaffolding to provide, given the targeted population of students. Novice online learners who are unfamiliar with sustaining meaningful discourse in an asynchronous environment or are unaccustomed to demonstrating critical thinking are likely to benefit from more scaffolding compared to experienced online learners (Pisutova-Gerber & Malovicova, 2009). Furthermore, prior research suggests that discussions at the undergraduate level reflect lower levels of thinking (Agee & Smith, 2011); therefore, undergraduate students may need more scaffolding than graduate students.

**Expectations.** Providing clear and detailed expectations for performance is similar to providing scaffolding in that it allows students to focus on learning the material rather than wondering what is expected. One of the most effective strategies to communicate expectations for AOD performance is by providing a rubric. Students can use a discussion rubric as a guide for constructing quality responses and to self-assess discussion responses prior to posting them to the discussion board (Maddix, 2012; Norton & Kuruvilla, 2013; Rovai, 2007; Rizopoulos & McCarthy, 2009). While many of the existing rubrics for AODs fail to include criteria on critical thinking (Hsiao, Chen, & Hu, 2013), those that do show promising results for fostering critical thinking. For example, a discussion rubric based on Bloom’s taxonomy lead to higher critical thinking skills among students in an online discussion (Pena & Almaguer, 2012). Points were assigned based on level of cognition reflected in discussion posts, with fewer points for lower levels (e.g., recalling facts, describing main ideas) and more points for higher levels (e.g., making judgments about information, proposing alternative solutions to problems).
Providing expectations outside of a rubric is also effective for fostering critical thinking in AODs. Bai (2009) found students who were informed that their postings must meet all four phases of cognitive presence (i.e., triggering, exploration, integration, and resolution) and were given specific descriptions of each phase had higher levels of cognitive presence than students who were not informed. Similarly, Scanlan & Hancock (2010) found that providing occupational therapy students with a framework that described elements of clinical reasoning lead to an increased frequency of discussion postings that reflected thinking at the evaluation cognitive level. In the future, online instructors and instructional designers should provide clear expectations for critical thinking, preferably in a discussion rubric, and encourage students to use the expectations as a guide when writing a discussion response and as a tool for self-assessment prior to posting a discussion response.

**Group size.** Another strategy for promoting critical thinking in AODs is to control the size of the discussion group. Research suggests that smaller discussion groups foster more critical thinking than larger discussion groups (Bliss & Lawrence, 2009; Scanlan & Hancock, 2010; Sautter, 2007; Schellens & Valcke, 2006). One reason may be that extraneous cognitive load is reduced because there are not as many postings to read (Schellens & Valcke, 2006). AODs limited to 13 students or fewer resulted in higher levels of knowledge construction, characterized by evaluation, proposing ideas based on theory, testing new knowledge against existing schema, and applying new knowledge (Hew & Cheung, 2011; Schellens & Valcke, 2006). Therefore, online instructors should consider breaking AODs into smaller groups, rather than conducting whole-class AODs in order to increase critical thinking.

**Instructional Approaches**

The second broad instructional design theme that emerged from a review of the literature is the use of specific instructional approaches to promote critical thinking. An instructional approach is a plan for determining how a prompt should be structured to meet learning objectives. There are several specific instructional approaches for designing discussion prompts, including case-based, problem-based, and project-based approaches as well as debate and role play approaches, some of which are more effective than others for promoting critical thinking.

**Case-based approach.** Case-based instructional approaches have been used across a variety of different disciplines, ranging from social sciences to health care, to promote the application of theory to practice, inter-professional collaboration, and the development of critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving skills (Koole et al., 2012; Popil, 2011; Waterson, 2011). As applied to AODs, case-based discussion prompts present a specific scenario within an authentic, often discipline-related, context designed to:

engage the participants in analysis and evaluation of a given case, in order to develop their skills in handling a range of similar real-life situations later on, or, alternatively, to create a better and deeper understanding of the general principles that are illustrated by the facts of the case presented. (Romiszowski, 1995, p. 166)

Despite the potential benefits and applicability of case-based discussions to a wide variety of academic disciplines, a recent search yielded only two recent studies that examine the efficacy of case-based discussions for critical thinking. In one study, students were asked to discuss a case pertaining to learning theories. Most discussion posts (78%) were at the integration level of.
cognitive presence, characterized by the connection of ideas, synthesis, and the creation of solution (Richardson & Ice, 2010). In the other study, researchers assessed student perceptions of case-based discussions. Students reported that case-based discussions were useful for critical thinking (Weil, McGulan, & Kerri, 2011). While these studies suggest that case-based discussions promote critical thinking, more research should be conducted to replicate findings and to determine for which academic disciplines case-based discussions are most effective.

**Problem-based approach.** While case-based AODs may elicit problem solving through the analysis of an authentic scenario, problem-based AODs exclusively focus on presenting an ill-structured problem for which students must collaboratively identify solutions. The overall aim of problem-based learning is not only to identify a viable solution, but to increase critical thinking and knowledge construction through the process of discussing viable solutions (Wu, Hou, Hwang, & Liu, 2013; Wood, 2003). Existing research on the efficacy of problem-based discussions is mixed. Şendag and Odabaşi (2009) found that students who participated in a problem-based discussion had higher scores on a critical thinking assessment than students who participated in a traditional discussion. Conversely, Hou (2011) and Wu et al. (2013) found that problem-based discussions yielded mostly lower level postings classified at the understand cognitive level of Bloom’s taxonomy. For example, in one discussion where students were asked to discuss organizational management problems in an MP3 company, 78% of postings were at the understand cognitive level and in another discussion where students were asked to discuss bottlenecks faced by a real estate brokerage company, 88% of the postings were at the understand cognitive level (Hou, 2011).

There are several reasons why the problem-based discussion research may be mixed. First, the studies were conducted in different countries (i.e., Taiwan, Turkey). Therefore, it is unclear whether any cultural dimensions, such as power distance, may have influenced the results. Second, the educational level (i.e., undergraduate or graduate) was not identified, leaving questions unanswered about whether the efficacy of problem-based discussions may be influenced by level of education. Third, studies included different dependent variables. Şendag and Odabaşi (2009) measured critical thinking, via the Watson–Glaser critical thinking skills test, before and after participation in the discussions. Hou (2011) and Wu et al. (2013) used Bloom’s taxonomy to code the cognitive level of students’ postings. Fourth, the mixed results of the studies align with a larger body of problem-based learning research that is also mixed, suggesting that confounding variables (e.g., age, personality, course level) may need to be identified and controlled for in future studies (Şendag & Odabaşi, 2009).

**Project-based approach.** Project-based learning primarily focuses on the targeted application of and integration of knowledge, rather than the acquisition of knowledge, to create a concrete artifact in an authentic context (Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Mills & Treagust, 2003). Most of the recent research on project-based learning suggests that it positively influences critical thinking in AODs (Koh, Herring, & Hew, 2010; Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Thomas & MacGregor, 2005). For example, Koh et al. (2010) found that students in project-based discussions, who were asked to develop e-learning courseware, engaged in higher levels of knowledge construction than students in non-project-based discussions. Higher levels of knowledge construction were characterized by the integration, justification, and resolution of ideas as opposed to lower levels characterized by sharing information, posting questions, and exploring ideas. Conversely, Wu et al. (2013) found that most postings reflected the understand cognitive level of Bloom’s taxonomy during a discussion in which students were asked to design lesson plans for children’s digital instructional media. However, one notable
difference between the studies is timing. Studies suggesting that project-based learning had a positive influence on critical thinking included project-based discussions that occurred over the span of several weeks or the entire course (Koh, Herring, & Hew, 2010; Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Thomas & MacGregor, 2005) while Wu et al. (2013) examined a project-based discussion that lasted only two weeks. Therefore, when using a project-based instructional approach, online instructors and instructional designers may want to design a project-based discussion that spans several weeks.

**Debate-based approach.** The debate instructional approach requires students to take a position on an issue, which provides opportunities for the development and justification of arguments and counterarguments, the identification of inconsistencies in reasoning, the re-evaluation of initial arguments, and the resolution of differences between perspectives (Darabi et al., 2011; Jonassen, 1997). There is strong evidence that the use of debate-based AODs leads to higher levels of critical thinking. For example, debate approaches in which students were required to develop arguments for or against an issue led to high levels of exploration (e.g., explore relevant ideas, organize and make sense of facts), integration (e.g., making judgments about ideas or hypotheses), and resolution (e.g., testing ideas or hypotheses) (Darabi et al., 2011; Kanuka et al., 2007; Richardson & Ice, 2010). One limitation, however, of using a debate-based AOD is that students may be inclined to support their position with only their opinions, particularly if they feel strongly about the issue (Darabi et al., 2011). Assigning students to take a position for or against an issue might reduce the risk of this possibility, as opposed to allowing students to select a stance based on personal beliefs.

**Role play approach.** The role play approach encourages students to examine a topic or problem from different perspectives (Darabi et al., 2011; Kalelioğlu & Gülbaşar, 2014). There are two sub-approaches for designing a role play discussion prompt. The first sub-approach entails asking students to portray discipline-specific roles (e.g., financial manager, human resources manager, teacher, policy maker) to increase the level of discipline-specific knowledge and promote communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills (McLaughlin, 2007). The second sub-approach entails asking students to portray generic roles (e.g., devil’s advocate, summarizer, synthesizer) to improve the overall quality of the discussion (Wise, Saghaian, & Padmanabhan, 2012).

Research on the effectiveness of discipline-specific role play AODs is mixed. For example, information management students asked to portray discipline-specific roles (e.g., HR manager, sales manager, financial manager) in response to a business case study yielded discussion posts that primarily reflected the understand cognitive level of Bloom’s taxonomy and a low level of knowledge construction (sharing/comparing of information) (Hou, 2011; Hou, 2012). Similarly, assigning students educational roles (administrator, teacher, student, and content specialist) and asking them to discuss a professional problem resulted in low levels of cognitive presence as well, characterized by sharing ideas (Kalelioğlu & Gülbaşar, 2014). However, education and engineering students asked to portray discipline-specific roles in response to a case study reflected high levels of integration, characterized by the testing of ideas and the application of content (Darabi et al., 2011; McLaughlin, 2007). Studies in which students were allowed choose their roles report higher levels of critical thinking. Allowing students to choose their roles may foster critical thinking for two reasons. First, discipline-specific role playing requires some degree of domain knowledge (Darabi et al., 2011); therefore, students may select roles with which they are most familiar based on prior educational or professional experience, giving them enough foundational knowledge to construct better
arguments and justifications. Second, students may choose a role about which they feel most passionate and interested, which may increase the level of engagement with classmates and time spent thinking about the content.

The second sub-approach of role playing pertains to the assignment of generic roles, such as starter, questioner, and summarizer (see a list of roles and corresponding functions in Table 2). Generic roles do not require domain-specific knowledge and, as a result, may be more appropriate for novice learners than discipline-specific roles. Overall, using the generic role approach produces a large number of postings at a low level of knowledge construction, characterized by sharing information (De Wever, Van Keer, Schellens, & Valcke, 2010; Wise & Chiu, 2011). However, discussions with generic roles produce higher levels of knowledge construction than those without (De Wever et al., 2010), suggesting that there may be a benefit to using the generic role play approach. Furthermore, some generic roles are more effective than others for fostering knowledge construction. For example, the summarizer, synthesizer, and wrapper roles, all of which have similar functions are most effective for fostering higher levels of knowledge construction (De Wever et al., 2010; Hew et al., 2010; Wise & Chiu, 2011). In particular, the synthesizer/wrapper role was particularly effective mid-discussion to facilitate the transition in discussion from low to high levels of knowledge construction (Wise & Chiu, 2011). In addition, students perceived the devil’s advocate, questioner, and synthesizer roles most helpful for thinking about and contributing to the discussion (Wise et al., 2012). It is important to note that the roles that are most effective inherently require higher levels of thinking. For example, the devil’s advocate and questioner roles focus on challenging peers while the summarizer, synthesizer, and wrapper roles focus on making connections between posts, synthesizing what has been said, and drawing conclusions. These functions are more likely to elevate levels of thinking compared to other roles such as the elaborator and the importer which focus on sharing ideas (De Wever et al., 2010; Wise & Chiu, 2011).

Table 2. Student Roles and Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devil’s Advocate</td>
<td>Take an opposing position of a classmate and justify it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborator</td>
<td>Expand or provide support for an idea someone else has already made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importer</td>
<td>Bring outside ideas, from other classes or the news, into the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventor</td>
<td>Generate new ideas and perspectives that have yet to be brought up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-Me</td>
<td>Represent the author’s position (from an assigned reading) on the discussion topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator/Questioner</td>
<td>Monitor the discussion, ask questions and probe others to elaborate on ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starter</td>
<td>Begin the discussion, add new points that could be built upon, raise most important issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Searcher</td>
<td>Seek external information pertaining to the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizer/Wrapper</td>
<td>Post interim summarizes during the discussion and a final synopsis at the end; identify areas of dissonance and harmony and draw conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizer</td>
<td>Make connections between posts and push the conversation forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretician</td>
<td>Introduce theoretical information to the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Director</td>
<td>Keep the discussion moving and intervene when discussion gets off track</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Roles and functions were gathered from De Wever et al. (2010), Wise et al. (2012), and Wise & Chiu (2011).
Summary

Both the structure of AODs and the instructional approaches used to design AODs influence critical thinking, although the level of empirical support varies. There is strong empirical support for the design of detailed discussion prompts that intentionally guide students to demonstrate higher levels of thinking, the use of scaffolding to help students construct quality initial prompts and response posts, the inclusion of clear expectations that focus on critical thinking, and small group size. Strong support also exists for using a debate-based instructional approach to design AODs. However, there is mixed support for the use of case-based, problem-based, project-based, and role play approaches for promoting critical thinking in AODs.

Inconsistencies in findings may be due to different dependent variables (e.g., critical thinking scores, phases of cognitive presence, cognitive level per Bloom’s taxonomy, phases of knowledge construction) or due to the wording of the discussion prompt. Unfortunately, very few studies revealed the exact wording of the prompts used, which may offer some indication of why some instructional approaches were more effective than others. Existing research emphasizes the importance of intentionally designing prompts to guide students to demonstrate critical thinking, given that some students may not achieve higher levels of thinking without being required to do so (Alexander et al., 2010; Arend, 2009; Hou, 2012; Pena & Almaguer, 2012; Song & McNary, 2011). While prompts may be designed using sound instructional approaches, the wording used to elicit responses may unintentionally promote lower levels of thinking (e.g., Describe the steps you would take to address the problem in the case study). Therefore, whenever possible, future studies should include the exact wording of the discussion prompt studied.

Facilitation Strategies

A well-designed discussion prompt is the first step in ensuring that critical thinking occurs in AODs. The second step is effective facilitation. AOD facilitators can provide additional scaffolding and prompting to help students achieve higher levels of thinking and can mitigate the negative effects of a poorly designed discussion prompt. AODs may be facilitated by faculty members, by students, or a combination of both. In the paragraphs that follow, the existing literature on the influence of faculty and student AOD facilitation approaches on critical thinking will be discussed.

Faculty Facilitation

Level of participation. Determining the appropriate level of faculty participation in AODs is challenging. On one hand, too little participation from faculty may result in AODs that stray off topic or devolve into exchanges based solely on opinion (Maddix, 2012). Furthermore, without feedback or direction from faculty, students may be left feeling like the AOD is equivalent to putting a message in the bottle and dropping it into the ocean (Rovai, 2007). On the other hand, too much participation from faculty may stifle the discussion and the free flow of ideas, leaving students feeling like they have nothing to contribute (Maddix, 2012). The majority of existing research suggests that a low level of faculty participation is more helpful for promoting critical thinking, either directly or indirectly by increasing the amount of student-student interaction (Arend, 2009; An, Shin, & Lim, 2009; Dennen, 2005). Specifically, responding to nearly every student’s post or responding with comments that are off-topic or
more conversational than academic is detrimental to the promotion of critical thinking in AODs (Arend, 2009; Bliss & Lawrence, 2009). Therefore, the research seems to emphasize the quality, rather than the quantity, of faculty participation for the promotion of critical thinking.

**Questioning.** One of the most widely studied AOD facilitation strategies is Socratic questioning. Socratic questioning entails asking a series of questions designed to clarify assertions, probe assumptions, and elicit reasoning and evidence (Hew et al., 2010). There is significant support for the use of Socratic questioning to promote critical thinking in AODs (Darabi et al., 2013; Maddix, 2012; Rovai, 2007; Yang, Newby, & Bill, 2005; Yang, Newby, & Bill, 2008; Xie & Ke, 2011). For example, Yang et al. (2005) found that AODs in which the instructor used Socratic questioning reflected higher levels of knowledge construction compared to AODs in which the instructor did not use Socratic questioning. There are two reasons why Socratic questioning may be effective for promoting critical thinking. First, Socratic questioning challenges students to move beyond restating knowledge or giving their opinion by explaining their reasoning or providing evidence for their points. Second, using Socratic questioning is a form of cognitive modeling which may help students learn how to ask probing questions of themselves and their classmates (Xie & Ke, 2011; Yang et al., 2008). Therefore, online instructors should using Socratic questioning in AODs, particularly at the beginning of the course to promote critical thinking in discussion postings and to develop students’ critical thinking skills over time.

**Student Facilitation**

In some cases, the presence of an instructor in an AOD may stifle interaction and the likelihood for high levels of critical thinking and knowledge construction. For example, Correia and Baran (2010) found that instructor-led AODs resulted in a series of essays from students rather than meaningful student-student interaction. Therefore, student-facilitated AODs may be a viable option to improve the quality of AODs. In particular, several student facilitation strategies have been identified as effective for promoting critical thinking in AODs. The strategies include showing appreciation, providing comments/opinions/explanations, asking questions, encouraging peers to contribute, giving peer feedback, and summarizing what has been discussed thus far (Ekahitanond, 2013; Hew & Cheung, 2011; Lim, Cheung, & Hew, 2011).

Some of student facilitation strategies reflect an explicit relationship to critical thinking while others do not. For example, asking questions that prompt students to clarify or justify their position or re-examine their assumptions, providing feedback to peers about whether they agree or disagree, and offering a summary of the discussion align with the higher phases of cognitive presence and perspective-taking. In addition, these strategies are consistent with what has been found in the existing research regarding the effectiveness of Socratic questioning (Darabi et al., 2013; Maddix, 2012; Rovai, 2007; Yang et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2008; Xie & Ke, 2011) and assigning students the summarizer and devil’s advocate roles in promoting critical thinking (Wise et al., 2012; Wise & Chiu, 2011). Conversely, other effective strategies, such as showing appreciation or providing comments/opinions/explanations, are not explicitly related to critical thinking. Hew and Cheung (2011) acknowledged this paradox and suggested that showing appreciation motivates students to make additional contributions and providing comments or opinions may generate further discussion. While the increase in postings does not guarantee critical thinking, interaction is an important aspect of the construction of knowledge.
Summary

Both faculty and student facilitation are effective for promoting critical thinking in AODs. Effective faculty facilitators limit their involvement in AODs and, when they do participate, use Socratic questioning to model and promote critical thinking. Effective student facilitators show appreciation for and encourage peers to participate, ask questions of or provide comments to peers, give feedback to peers, or summarize the content of peers’ posts. While student facilitation is advantageous because it encourages more student-student interaction, faculty facilitation may be needed as well especially if the discussion becomes off-topic, devolves into an exchange of opinions, or if students do not have strong critical thinking skills. Therefore, depending on the educational level and experience of the students in the course, both faculty and student facilitation strategies may be more effective than one or the other.

Conclusion and Recommendations

AODs are a constant fixture in today’s online courses used to promote critical thinking through interaction with others, regardless of time and space (Arend, 2009; Bowden, 2012; Spartaniu & Winsor, 2013). Given the ubiquity of AODs, it is important to examine which instructional design and facilitation approaches are most effective for promoting critical thinking in AODs. A review of the literature revealed several specific approaches that promote critical thinking in AODs, as reflected in multiple cognitive constructs (e.g., cognitive presence, cognitive domain, knowledge construction, and perspective-taking). There is strong empirical support for some of the approaches (as shown in Table 3) and little or mixed empirical support for others, including the use of case-based (Richardson & Ice, 2010; Weil et al., 2011), problem-based (Hou, 2011; Şendag & Odabaşı, 2009, Wu et al., 2013), project-based (Koh et al., 2010; Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Thomas & MacGregor, 2005; Wu et al., 2013), and role play instructional approaches (Darabi et al., 2011; Hou, 2011; Hou, 2012; Kalelioğlu & Gülbahar, 2014; McLaughlin, 2007).

Table 3. Empirically Supported Instructional Design and Facilitation Strategies for Promoting Critical Thinking in AODs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Design discussion prompts that are structured (e.g., clear, detailed, specify instructions for participation and time parameters)</td>
<td>Chadwick &amp; Ralston, 2010; Darabi et al., 2013; deNoyelles et al., 2014; Kanuka et al., 2007; Lee, 2012; McLoughlin &amp; Mynard, 2009; Sautler, 2007; Scanlan &amp; Hancock, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Design discussion prompts to intentionally elicit a response that reflects higher levels of thinking</td>
<td>Alexander et al., 2010; Arend, 2009; Hou, 2012; Pena &amp; Almaguer, 2012; Song &amp; McNary, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Provide scaffolding in the form of initial and response posts exemplars</td>
<td>Darabi &amp; Jin, 2012; Land et al., 2007; Stegmann et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Provide clear expectations regarding how students are expected to demonstrate critical thinking in posts</td>
<td>Bai, 2009; Pena &amp; Almaguer, 2012; Scanlan &amp; Hancock, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Limit the size of the discussion group to 13</td>
<td>Bliss &amp; Lawrence, 2009; Hew &amp; Cheung,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the future, additional research should be conducted to determine the efficacy of case-based, problem-based, project-based, and role play instructional approaches for promoting critical thinking. Specifically, it would be useful to conduct studies in which such approaches are compared to address existing limitations in the literature related to the use of different dependent variables (e.g., cognitive presence, knowledge construction, cognitive level) and the influence of potentially confounding variables (e.g., variances in participants’ nationality, level of education, extent and type of instructor/student facilitation). Furthermore, researchers should identify a clear definition of critical thinking and a comprehensive description of how critical thinking should be demonstrated and assessed in AODs. This information will help instructional designers and faculty purposefully develop discussion prompts that align with specific, identified skills, which in turn, will allow for the assessment of those skills.

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Communicative Differences between Domestic and Foreign Instructors

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate college students’ perceptions of their foreign and domestic classroom instructors. Two hundred and eleven college students participated in the study. Results revealed support for findings of previous research, which found that domestic instructors were perceived as more effective than their intercultural counterparts on a variety of variables. In contrast, foreign instructors were considered to produce more communication satisfaction among college students. The specific characteristics of instructors that are likely to account for more effective and satisfying communication are discussed. The results of this study are useful for instructors who would like to be more competent and effective in the college classroom.

Keywords: Communication, college students, professors, international faculty

Introduction

Some college students believe that foreign instructors are less capable of teaching in U.S. schools than are domestic instructors. Many researchers have made attempts to discover the various reasons why these accusations are made and whether or not they are true (e.g., Hendrix, 1997; Patton, 1999). Communication researchers, sociological researchers, as well as many others have dedicated much of their time to determining potential factors and attempting to find a solution to the problem that “domestic teachers of college classes are perceived as more effective teachers than are international teachers” (McCroskey, 2002, p. 74). The one very obvious difference between foreign teachers and domestic teachers is their culture.

Although Sellnow, Liu and Venette indicated that “[t]he instructional communication literature is rich with studies that have examined how cultural orientation affects teaching and learning outcomes” (2006, p. 259), recent data regarding the subject is limited. Communication researchers authoring this paper have chosen to examine this literature more closely and conduct studies and experiments to try and determine what factors affect teaching and learning outcomes. Many of the studies overlap and some conflict with others. For example, at a university with primarily Caucasian students, the students were more likely to question an
African American professor’s authority and credentials than their Caucasian professors (Hendrix, 1997). However, Patton (1999) showed that students believed their African American professors, regardless of gender, were more credible than their Caucasian counterparts. These two studies show conflicting findings. There are many differences that can be found within cultural orientations and many of these may influence teaching and learning outcomes.

**Review of Literature**

**Communication Skills**

Different communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, continue to be a problem in a number of fields, including education. Lee, Levine, and Cambra (1997) agreed with this statement in saying that cultural differences are extended into the classroom from general communication styles. These conflicting communication skills include language barriers, the teachers’ reluctance to converse with the student at all, and the teachers’ use of nonverbal communication. Although ethnicity is sometimes the cause for nonverbal immediacy, “student ratings were found to be associated more with teacher communication variables of nonverbal immediacy and clarity than teacher ethnicity” (Glascock & Ruggiero, 2006, p. 200). Nonverbal communication can be the tone setting factor of the classroom and, as expressed in the previous quote, ethnicity is not the single factor in nonverbal immediacy; however, the two are often related. In regard to nonverbal immediacy behaviors, and with concern to specific ethnic groups, research done by Powell and Harville (1990) concluded that there were only small differences between White, Latino, and Asian-American subgroups. However, Sanders and Wiseman (1990) conducted a similar study which concluded that affective learning was larger for Hispanics than Asian or Black groups.

It must be noted that “[e]ach distinct culture has its own norms and expectations for communication” (Roach, Cornett-Devito, & Devito, 2005, p. 88). Because many international teachers are more likely to suppress communication due to English being their second language or having come from a culture that is less communicative, it is possible that international teachers will be perceived more negatively than domestic teachers that are more communicative (McCroskey, 2002). English being a foreign teacher’s second language can have quite a bit to do with the fact that they are less able to communicate effectively with students both verbally and nonverbally. For instance, Yule and Hoffman (1990) found a correlation between the negative feedback international teaching assistants received from students and lower test scores in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the verbal portion of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). However, Neves and Sanyal (1991) also found that foreign instructors tend to receive higher ratings in areas such as subject matter knowledge and social skills, but not in communicating effectively.

Many different cultures believe that interaction and discussion with the instructor is a type of disrespect. As a result, some foreign teachers may be under the assumption that their communicating excessively with the student can lead to disrespect for both parties.

**Lack of Understanding**

Another problem that may arise in the classroom concerning communication is the students’ lack of understanding due to language barriers. According to McCroskey, “[a] common criticism heard on campuses across the U. S. is that domestic students cannot understand
international instructors” (2003, p. 76). This is an assumption most U.S. students can make. Whether it is at the office, grocery store, or classroom, there have always been language barriers which seem to disrupt the flow of communication. McCroskey added that “[t]here is little doubt that international teachers teaching in English as a second language may have an accent and/or employ translations that tend to confuse domestic students rather than being clear to them” (2002, p. 80). The research implies that, a student’s inability to understand the teacher’s instructions and lectures because of an accent can hinder the student’s learning.

Cultural Stereotypes

Cultural stereotypes are something every ethnic group faces from day to day. Some scholars suggest that classroom perceptions are often connected to cultural stereotypes relating to ethnicity (Alexander-Snow, 2004; Pratto & Espinoza, 2001). These stereotypes can be placed in students’ minds by their parents, siblings who have attended collegiate classes instructed by foreign teachers, and society in general. At a university with primarily Caucasian students, the students were more likely to question an African American professor’s authority and credentials than their Caucasian professors (Hendrix, 1997). It is acceptable to assume that these students were more likely to question the African American professor’s authority than their Caucasian professor because cultural stereotypes have given them the assumption that African-Americans are less educated than Caucasians. Cultural stereotypes exist for all cultures and this is something that each student should try to set aside while evaluating the effectiveness of their teacher.

Student Willingness and Motivation

Something that must be taken into account while studying the effectiveness of international teachers is the students’ willingness and motivation. McCroskey stated that “…highly motivated students may perceive less problems with international (as well as domestic) teachers and, as a result, perceive international teachers’ effectiveness more positively than will less motivated students” (2002, p. 67).

Studies show that students are less willing to enroll in classes instructed by international teachers (McCroskey, 2002). Students often believe that they will learn less if they have an international teacher. If students enter their classroom with the mindset that their teacher will be ineffective because they are from a different country, they are less likely to receive the full potential of the class. Studies conducted by McCroskey (2002) have shown that students who are less willing to enroll in classes instructed by international teachers are less likely to learn from the teachers because they are not as willing to communicate, often making this attitude a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a student believes they will not learn from their instructor for any reason, they are not likely to learn very much due to their attitude about the situation. The students’ attitude is very influential on their opinions of the teachers and the class, but often times, parents have negative attitudes that are forced upon their children. McCroskey (2002) stated that “the assumption of many college students, and even more parents of college students, is that if one has an international instructor for a class, the probability that one will learn the information in the class is greatly reduced” (p. 63). Whether it is right or wrong, the fact exists that many parents question their children’s education because if ethnicity and cultural differences. These opinions can easily be transferred to their children.
Research also suggests that anxiety is common in intercultural communication contexts (Gudykunst, 1988). According to McCroskey, “[t]he presence of an international teacher in the classroom is likely to produce anxiety in some learners” (2002, p. 65). If students are unable to get over their anxiety, it may affect their willingness to participate and learn. It should also be noted some researchers have found some students are simply unwilling to study under the guidance of foreign instructors. For instance, Bresnahan and Kim (1993) found that many students welcome interactions with foreigners “unless they find themselves on the low end of a power asymmetric relationship[,] … [in which case, they] are reluctant to entrust their education, which they see as key to their future success, to someone not like them” (p. 356).

**Ethnocentrism**

Ethnocentrism is the act of perceiving the world through the perspective of one’s own culture. Although this is not always the way a person should view the world, it is often times the case. McCroskey (2002) believed the best predictor of a students’ perceived teacher effectiveness is ethnocentrism. This is to be expected. College students are rarely able to venture out to different countries and experience life from a different culture’s perspective. As Bresnahan and Kim pointed out, “often the only experience of cultural diversity that a U.S. undergraduate will have is her or his exposure to an international teaching assistant or a friend’s report of that experience” (1993, p. 356). It is because of this that students enter the classroom with the expectation that the instructor will teach in the same way a domestic teacher would. As Rojas Gomez and Pearson suggested, “students perceive American teaching assistants to share similar attitudes, beliefs, and values; and to think and behave similarly to themselves” (1990, p. 60). Many students are naïve in a sense, because they are unable to see beyond their own cultural norms.

**Behavioral Alteration Techniques**

BATs (Behavioral Alteration Techniques) are also known as compliance-gaining strategies. Liu, Sellnow, and Venette (2006) have defined compliance-gaining strategies as “strategic processes used by a speaker in an attempt to change people’s attitudes and behaviors toward a predetermined goal” (p. 210). These compliance-gaining strategies can be used either anti-socially or pro-socially. Lee, Levine, and Cambra (1997) have said that teachers who use anti-social BATs are more likely to be resisted by students than those who use pro-social BATs. Lu (1997) stated that Chinese instructors are much less likely to use reward-based BATs (pro-social BATs) than American instructors. Lu also found that Chinese teachers are collectively more appealing to students. Instead of using statements like “if you are good, you can get out of class early,” they would say something along the lines of “you are expected to do well by others.”

**Positive Opinions**

While research has indicated that international professors often have problems with American students in the US classroom, it is important to keep in mind that the perceptions of and communication with international teachers is not completely negative. For instance, Neves and Sanyal (1991) found foreign instructors tend to receive positive feedback from older students, non-Caucasian students, and students with higher grade point averages (GPAs) and previous contact with other international instructors. McCroskey (2002) found that 54.4% of students are willing to communicate with international teachers. This statistic is a prime example
of the fact that not all students are intimidated or discouraged by foreign teachers and that they do not let stereotypes and miscommunication get in the way of their education. As can be assumed with any study, it is inaccurate to assume that the overall census generalizes to the entire population in which you are testing. In McCroskey’s (2003) study, she found that “Many (approximately 30 percent) of the students in this study rated their foreign instructor more positively than they rated their domestic teacher” (p. 87). This statement is a primary example that not all foreign teachers are ineffective.

The Solution

Many researchers have come to the conclusion that the majority of the problems that exist in the classrooms of foreign instructors can be solved through training. A study conducted by Liu, Sellnow, and Venette (2006) found that “nonnative teaching associates can adjust their verbal compliance-gaining strategy use to be effective in the United States educational system” (p. 215) Although the Liu et al. study focused on teaching associates, it can also be applied to the primary teachers. Furthermore, McCroskey (2003) found that foreign teachers should be taught to utilize the same communication behaviors that are effective for domestic teachers. These researchers believed that the main concern is miscommunication and with training, foreign teachers will be more capable of reaching the students at the same level their counterpart domestic teachers do.

Not only is communication an issue, but some researchers think that the negative opinions of foreign teachers can be corrected by changing their ideals and expectations. Rojas Gomez and Pearson (1990) believed that the effectiveness of international teaching assistants can increase with their attempt to raise their homophily, “[t]hey can be encouraged to learn about the values, customs and expectations of American students” (p. 61). Some people might find this unethical that a person should change the way they have learned things in their country to fit the needs of Americans, when America is based on diversity. Those people also believe that students should have open minds to learn from ethnically different people.

Hence, the research question for this study was posed:

RQ1: Do college students perceive their foreign and domestic instructors differently?

Method

Procedure

Research participants were undergraduates at a large Southwest university in the United States taking a range of communication courses. The potential participants were approached and offered extra credit to participate in the current study. All participants needed to have at least one domestic instructor and one international instructor during the semester of the research study. Once participants agreed to participate, they were directed to download and print a copy of the study survey and return the completed document to the researcher. Participants filled out a series of measures first examining their personal levels of individualism/collectivism and ethnocentrism, followed by a set of questions related to the participants’ perceptions of their international instructor and then about their domestic instructor. To ensure that participants perceptions were consistent, the Generalized Ethnocentrism Measure was given at the beginning of the survey and then after the international instructor
section and before the domestic instructor section. A paired t-test was conducted using the first measure of ethnocentrism ($M = 33.42, SD = 8.50$) and the second measure of ethnocentrism ($M = 34.53, SD = 8.41$) and a significant difference was not noted, $t(208) = -1.73, p = .09$.

**Participants**

The study included 211 participants with an average age of $20.84$ ($SD = 2.68$). The gender break down for the study included 49.5% females ($N = 106$), 49.1% males ($N = 105$), and 3 who didn’t respond. Next, participants were asked about their ethnicity. 84.1% ($N = 180$) of the sample was Anglo-Saxon/Caucasian, 7% ($N = 15$) was Hispanic/Latino, 3.3% ($N = 7$) was African-American/Black, and the rest of the sample fell into a range of other ethnicities. To ensure that the results measured United States student perceptions, the participants were required to indicate citizenship status. 97.7% ($N = 209$) of the sample was made up of US citizens. The non-US citizens and those who did not answer the question were not utilized in the study analysis.

Participants were then asked to provide some basic demographic information about the instructors being examined within the study. For the international instructors, 57% ($N = 122$) were male, 36.4% ($N = 78$) were female, and 6.6% ($N = 4$) did not respond. Participants also reported a range of ages for the international instructors: 5.6% ($N = 12$) under 25, 43.9% ($N = 94$) 25-30, 27.6% ($N = 59$) 31-40, 29% ($N = 13.6$) 41-50, 5.6% ($N = 12$) 51-60, and 1.9% ($N = 4$) 61 years of age or older. Lastly, participants were asked to provide the ethnicity of the international instructor: 2.8% ($N = 6$) African, 12.1% ($N = 26$) Anglo-Saxon/Caucasian, 48.1% ($N = 103$) Asian, 7% ($N = 15$) Hispanic/Latino/Spanish, 7.9% ($N = 17$) Indian, 15.4% ($N = 33$) Middle Eastern, and 6.8% ($N = 14$) Other or didn’t respond.

Participants then provided the same demographic information for their domestic instructors. 49.5% ($N = 106$) were female, 44.9% ($N = 96$) were male, and 5.6% ($N = 12$) did not respond. Participants also reported a range of ages for the domestic instructors: 5.1% ($N = 11$) under 25, 34.6% ($N = 74$) 25-30, 33.6% ($N = 72$) 31-40, 19.2% ($N = 41$) 41-50, 2.3% ($N = 5$) 51-60, and 0.9% ($N = 2$) 61 years of age or older. Lastly, participants were asked to provide the ethnicity of the international instructor: 2.8% ($N = 6$) African-American, 60.7% ($N = 130$) Anglo-Saxon/Caucasian, 18.2% ($N = 39$) Asian, 5.6% ($N = 12$) Hispanic/Latino/Spanish, 1.9% ($N = 4$) Indian, 3.3% ($N = 7$) Middle Eastern, and 7% ($N = 15$) Other or didn’t respond.

**Measures**

For the purposes of this study, the researchers utilized a range of different measures from the field of communication. Table 1 presents the alpha reliabilities, means, and standard deviations for both the international instructor ratings and the domestic instructor ratings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Name</th>
<th>International Professors</th>
<th>Domestic Professors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\alpha$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Clarity (Chesebro &amp; McCroskey, 1998)</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>33.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Self-Disclosure (Cayanus &amp; Martin, 2004)</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>52.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to examine if students perceived their international and domestic instructors differently, the researchers decided to conduct a series of repeated measures analyses of covariance. For the repeated measures aspect, researchers utilized the scores from the participants relating to international instructors as the first reporting and the scores from the participants relating to the domestic instructors as the second reporting. As a further issue for clarification, researchers decided to include ethnocentrism as a covariate to partial out any of the effect participant scores on ethnocentrism had on their perceptions of both their international and domestic instructors. To achieve a global ethnocentrism score, researchers averaged the participants’ scores from both measurements in the study and averaged them using this average as the covariate.

Overall, the results from this study were mixed (Table 2). The current study noted significant differences between student perceptions of international and domestic instructors on teacher clarity, teacher self-disclosure, affect towards taking future courses with the instructors, learner empowerment-impact, both types of homophily, and communication satisfaction. With the exception of communication satisfaction, all of the differences favored domestic instructors over international instructors. However, the eta-squares reported that these differences were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>n.s.</th>
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<th>.10</th>
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<tr>
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</table>

Results

In order to examine if students perceived their international and domestic instructors differently, the researchers decided to conduct a series of repeated measures analyses of covariance. For the repeated measures aspect, researchers utilized the scores from the participants relating to international instructors as the first reporting and the scores from the participants relating to the domestic instructors as the second reporting. As a further issue for clarification, researchers decided to include ethnocentrism as a covariate to partial out any of the effect participant scores on ethnocentrism had on their perceptions of both their international and domestic instructors. To achieve a global ethnocentrism score, researchers averaged the participants’ scores from both measurements in the study and averaged them using this average as the covariate.
As for the ANCOVA results, ethnocentrism only appeared to affect communication satisfaction.

Table 2. Perceptions of domestic and international professors

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<td>df</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>η²</td>
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<td>(1, 190)</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1, 190)</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>(1, 190)</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1, 190)</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>33.68</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>(1, 190)</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Several studies have found that intercultural teachers are often rated as more ineffective than domestic teachers (McCroskey, 2002; Meyer & Mao, 2014; Paige, 1990; Rojas Gomez & Pearson, 1990; Smith, Strom, & Muthuswamy, 2005). However, as presented in the literature review, many of these studies also show that differing communication skills, cultural stereotypes, student and parent willingness and motivation, ethnocentrism, and differing BATs are the primary reason for the negative association between intercultural and domestic teachers.

The current study supported the findings of previous studies by determining domestic teachers were considered more effective than their intercultural counterparts on a number of variables. Domestic teachers were found to demonstrate more clarity in their instructional communication than intercultural teachers which may be indicative of the ability to more competently use the language. As noted by McCroskey (2002), international teachers may be less communicative because of their lack of competence with the English language. In addition, international teachers may be viewed as having less clarity in their instruction due to their accents and translations which may confuse students (McCroskey, 2002, 2003). According to Meyer and Mao (2014), undergraduate students in the US tend to report confusion and misunderstandings in classes conducted by foreign instructors (citing Clayton, 2000; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Smith, Boyd, Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992; Tyler, 1992). International teachers were also perceived to disclose less to students in this study, which could be closely related to their competency with the language and students’ ability to understand them when they are self-disclosing.

This study found that students were less willing to take future courses with international teachers than with domestic teachers. This supports findings by authors such as Bresnahan and Kim (1993) and McCroskey (2002) that revealed students may perceive international teachers as less effective and therefore the students are less likely to achieve through a self-fulfilling prophecy. It also extends this concept, by showing that students who have taken courses from international teachers did have experiences that make them less likely to take future courses from other international teachers.
Domestic instructors were found to have a stronger learner empowerment-impact than international instructors. Students in this study deemed international teachers as providing less meaningful instruction and being less competent than their domestic counterparts. This lack of student empowerment and confidence with international teachers supports the findings of Hendrix (1997) and McCroskey (2002).

Both background and attitudinal homophily were found to be more positive with domestic teachers. This indicates that the international teachers in this study were not adjusting their communication behaviors to make themselves more effective and appealing to domestic students. This supports the lack of self-disclosure on the part of international teachers who through some selective self-disclosure might assist in alleviating some of the perceptions regarding different backgrounds and attitudes that might exist.

The fact that international teachers were found to produce more communication satisfaction supports the findings by Lu (1997). Lu found that Chinese instructors more frequently used reward-based BATs than American instructors and were also found to be more appealing to students. The findings from the present study may indicate that the international teachers in this study may be using more pro-social BATs than their domestic counterparts. The teachers in Lu’s study were Chinese nationals teaching Chinese students and the international teachers in this study were teaching predominantly domestic students. It could also indicate that domestic teachers in this study were using more anti-social BATs than the international teachers which would make the international instructors more appealing by default. The international teachers in this study could be using very few BATs in general due to difficulties in their language competencies or cultural perspective, which could make them more appealing and increase communication satisfaction when compared to domestic teachers who used some anti-social BATs. For communication satisfaction, this explanation would contradict the explanation posed by McCroskey (2002), which indicated that international teachers who communicated less would be perceived more negatively than domestic teachers who communicated more. The key difference being in the frequency with which domestic teachers used prosocial or antisocial BATs.

Limitations

There are a few limitations that must be discussed in this current study. First, the sample that was used came from a conservative large southwestern university. Although, there was diversity present at the university, other universities may have had more foreign instructors. It is entirely possible that this study did not yield a representative sample of the entire population of students who have had exposure to a foreign instructor.

The second major limitation in this study was the overall sample size that was collected. While the sample only consists of 211 participants, the overall data points per predictor variables examined in this study is within reason. While clearly the results of this study would have been stronger with a larger sample, the sample size attained was within statistical reason.

The last major limitation to this study concerns the measures used in it. As initially stated, the measures used in this study have been used in instructional contexts. Other methods of gathering data, such as interviews and focus groups may have provided a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of this relationship.
Future Research

Future studies should focus on the diversity among students and their foreign instructors. Examinations should focus on other variables that can potentially affect students' perceptions of their domestic and foreign instructors such as instructor-student ratios, frequency of various types of communication such as verbal, nonverbal, written, electronic, etc., size of student instructional groups, etc. In addition, future studies might look specifically at graduate student perceptions of their instructors. Researchers have shown that graduate and undergraduate students have different perceptions about their educational experience (Punyanunt-Carter & Wrench, 2008). Future studies should also look at variables other than classroom instruction in the educational context, such as college students perceptions of foreign and domestic advisors. It is evident that more research can be done in this area to understand the impact it can have on college students' retention and graduation rates.

Conclusion

Results from this study provide an exploratory look at college students' perceptions of their domestic and foreign instructors. Overall, the study supported the findings of previous research, which found that domestic instructors were perceived as more effective than their intercultural counterparts on a variety of variables. The results of this study are useful for instructors who would like to be more competent and effective in the college classroom.

References


Narissra Punyanunt-Carter, Jason S. Wrench, Stacy L. Carter, and Daniel Linden - Communicative Differences between Domestic versus Foreign Instructors


Una Propuesta de Modelo Didáctico para Estudiantes Adultos Universitarios

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Resumen

Debido al aumento de la matrícula de estudiantes mayores de 25 años en las instituciones universitarias, este estudio se centró en la realización de entrevistas al profesorado para comprender las peculiaridades y particularidades en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de este sector estudiantil. Los resultados revelaron que los profesores universitarios han actualizado y modificado sus estrategias docentes para atender las necesidades de estos estudiantes no tradicionales. Las conclusiones apuntan a que los profesores son sensibles a las necesidades de estos estudiantes y su docencia revela la incorporación de aspectos recogidos en los enfoques de educación de adultos. Los profesores coincidieron en afirmar que la incorporación de estos estudiantes en las aulas supone un desafío sin precedente en la docencia universitaria tradicional y, pese a la necesidad de más formación sobre educación de adultos, la mayoría lo vivencia en términos de desarrollo personal y profesional. La investigación ha constatado que los estudiantes adultos necesitan más guía y orientación del profesor que los tradicionales y que, además, tienen escasa motivación en trabajar en proyectos grupales y generar conocimiento compartido. Estos aspectos contradicen los presupuestos teóricos del aprendizaje de adultos sobre su autonomía en el aprendizaje y su preferencia en colaborar entre iguales.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes adultos, didáctica universitaria, aprendizaje, andragogía

Introducción

Las realidades sociales evolucionan y una consecuencia de ello es el perfil cada vez más heterogéneo de estudiantes universitarios. La presencia, cada vez más generalizada, de estudiantes no tradicionales (adultos, internacionales, trabajadores, etc.) genera una nueva situación educativa a la que debe responder la universidad con modelos diferenciados del tradicional (Cruz, Learreta, Huertas, Rodríguez, & Ruiz, 2011).

Este panorama se encuentra enmarcado en una sociedad del bienestar que brinda nuevas opciones de desarrollo personal al adulto de cualquier edad, que encuentra una gran satisfacción en formarse como una opción de crecimiento profesional, de ocio y de disfrute. Además, la crisis económica del momento actual en gran parte del mundo, con la consiguiente falta de empleo, explica la situación que aboca a muchos adultos a querer invertir su tiempo en una mejor formación, acudiendo a la universidad. Por otra parte, las demandas laborales
desencadenan hoy día la necesidad de formación universitaria para poder promocionar en los ámbitos profesionales (working students). Es una realidad también encontrar alumnos que en su día no continuaron estudios postsecundarios y posteriormente deciden acceder a estudios superiores (returning students). Este último colectivo incluye aquellas personas que estuvieron excluidas de los sistemas formales de educación por razón de género, etnia, clase social o discapacidad y que, a través de las políticas educativas de inserción de minorías, acceden cada vez más a la educación superior. Por último, encontramos estudiantes adultos que, aunque iniciaron estudios universitarios, los interrumpieron por diversas causas y decidieron retomarlos a edades más avanzadas (interrupted enrollment students).

Toda esta casuística de estudiantes la podemos encontrar actualmente en estudios de grado, lo que supone una nueva dimensión respecto al pasado, cuando el estudiante adulto estaba presente en la vida académica universitaria solo en la formación de postgrado.

Datos contextualizados en Europa, procedentes del informe Trends 2010 sobre las tendencias de cambio de la pasada década en relación a la educación superior en Europa (Sursoch y Smidt, 2010) ponen de manifiesto la necesidad de fomentar lo que se denomina lifelong learning (aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida), lo que necesita del compromiso de todos los sectores implicados: políticas educativas, empleadores, instituciones educativas, y otras a la hora de flexibilizar y dar una respuesta operativa a esta circunstancia. El sentido y valor de esta recomendación se basa en situar al estudiante en el centro. Se hace necesario, por tanto, contribuir a generar conocimiento con relación a este perfil de estudiante universitario, para poder adaptarse realmente a sus demandas. Se podría decir, incluso, que es una cuestión de responsabilidad y compromiso social.

Existe una cantidad importante de literatura sobre el aprendizaje de adultos y formulaciones teóricas que lo explican. Unas más centradas en aspectos relacionados con las características de los alumnos como estudiantes (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2001), otras en las situaciones de vida de los adultos (Kolb, 2005), otras que enfatizan los aspectos más cognitivos de cambio, reestructuración y transformación del adulto (Mezirow, 2000) y otras en aspectos motivacionales (Guglielmino, 2008). Todo este corpus de conocimiento está ayudando a entender el fenómeno del aprendizaje de adultos y la forma de abordar este aprendizaje desde el proceso educativo, cuyos elementos comunes vinculados al aprendizaje de adultos son:

- la autodirección o autonomía como característica o meta en la educación de adultos,
- la participación del estudiante adulto en el proceso,
- su motivación por aprender,
- la importancia de su experiencia previa, intereses y necesidades,
- la reflexión sobre el propio aprendizaje, y
- el carácter significativo y aplicable del aprendizaje.

Desde el punto de vista de la educación superior, autores como Richardson (2007) han afirmado que el estudiante adulto tiene unas características que lo hacen diferente del estudiante universitario tradicional, realidad que ha sido plasmada en numerosos estudios y que se expone extensamente en sus trabajos. Las características de los estudiantes universitarios adultos se centran, según Richardson, en que poseen un alto grado de motivación hacia los programas formativos que deciden emprender (citando a Gibbs, Morgan & Taylor, 1984); poseen sofisticados recursos de aprendizaje, basados en su experiencia, que es
de diferente naturaleza (de vida, estudios previos, familiar...) lo cual les posiciona para utilizarla de manera eficaz (citando a Van Rossum & Taylor 1987); están más inclinados a reportar el uso de destrezas de aprendizaje efectivas (citando a Devlin, 1996); y poseen altamente desarrollada la competencia de planificación del tiempo y autogestión (citando a Trueman & Hartley, 1996) (2007).

Lieb (1991), por su parte, consideró que los adultos muestran un elevado interés por el trabajo entre iguales, por lo que existen amplias posibilidades de desarrollar sus capacidades de liderazgo entre ellos. Al mismo tiempo, se les define con capacidad para dar una adecuada respuesta a proyectos integradores, siempre y cuando éstos se orienten a sus intereses; además, necesitan que el aprendizaje sea significativo para ellos (1991).

Las aportaciones de Rhonda Wynne1, expuestas en la web de ASSET (Adding Support Skills for European Teachers), han añadido que estos estudiantes poseen opiniones, valores y criterios construidos durante su experiencia vital, lo cual juega un papel importante al enfrentarse al aprendizaje; se ha considerado que poseen mejor capacidad para aprender en ambientes democráticos, participativos y que les gusta ser autónomos en el aprendizaje.

En su aproximación al estudio de este tipo de alumnado, Wynne también describió los temores que manifiesta, en la esfera del rol que asume como alumno: miedo al fracaso, inseguridad por ser mayor que el resto de compañeros, temor ante un nuevo entorno tecnológico, posee dudas sobre sus propias capacidades de aprendizaje, e inseguridad ante una evaluación formal por posibles inseguridades respecto a las expectativas que se tengan sobre él más que por el resultado de la evaluación propiamente dicha. Su realidad es su marco de referencia y poder integrar el conocimiento en ella es una necesidad que se hace patente en cada momento para este tipo de alumnado. Este perfil de estudiante, por otra parte, es muy exigente con su profesorado, porque claramente quiere aprender, quiere progresar desde el punto en que se encuentra y porque quiere dar sentido, al tiempo que está invirtiendo en su cualificación. El estudiante adulto sabe lo que quiere y por qué lo quiere; es una decisión firme la que le ha llevado a estudiar en la universidad y, por tanto, actúa en consecuencia.

Estos estudiantes son muy críticos y exigentes. Para ellos su esfuerzo, su tiempo y su dinero es muy valioso, y si no lo ven rentabilizado, manifiestan un alto nivel de frustración. Kohler, Grawitch y Borchert (2009) investigaron precisamente cómo afecta el estrés que supone la vida de trabajo, familia y estudio en el alumnado no tradicional. Investigaciones de Vaccaro y Lobell (2010), por su parte, expusieron que las responsabilidades familiares suponen un impedimento en el desarrollo de aprendizaje de estos alumnos, pero también reflejaron que se sienten precisamente reforzados por ellas, así como por su madurez, capacidad de esfuerzo y de frustración ante las dificultades.

Kasworm (2010) sugirió que la identidad del estudiante adulto es múltiple según su origen, evolución y, a veces, según la percepción de sí mismo, posición, relaciones y contexto de aprendizaje dentro de la universidad. Por tanto, se trata de un perfil que se puede definir con unas características propias, dadas por su naturaleza de tener una edad superior al estudiante tradicional, derivado de su circunstancia, pero que en otro sentido muestra ciertas divergencias.

1 Esta autora expone sus aportaciones en ASSET (http://www.assetproject.info/index.html), financiado a través de un proyecto de cooperación internacional dentro del programa Sócrates de la Unión Europea. Se basa en el aporte de formación y recursos al profesorado europeo, en relación con la intervención formativa con estudiantes adultos.
El trabajo de campo desarrollado en España sobre este tipo de estudiante por Adiego, Asensio, y Serrano (2004) reflejó que las barreras o frenos que poseen estos alumnos para decidir estudiar en la universidad son los horarios en los que se desarrollan los programas, las responsabilidades familiares y las razones económicas. Estos estudiantes se quejan de que el profesorado no da valor a la presencia de estudiantes adultos en las clases, y que su experiencia previa pocas veces se aprovechada en los aprendizajes que reciben. Fruto de estos estudios, se ha generado el término homogeneizadora para calificar a la universidad en España.

Debe entenderse que todo lo expuesto son elementos que deben guiar la práctica docente en aquellas aulas universitarias donde el porcentaje de estudiantes adultos sea más numeroso. Las instituciones deben conocer en qué medida pueden incorporar transformaciones en sus modelos de docencia para adaptarse a un alumnado de cualquier edad, que poseen motivaciones diferentes y que, por tanto, afrontan su proceso educativo con variadas expectativas. Mejorar esta situación aportaría valor a lo que se entiende por una educación a lo largo de la vida, idea que hay que fomentar con hechos, desde las instituciones.

Bajo esta perspectiva, en este artículo se aporta una investigación, basada en el trabajo de campo llevado a cabo en la Universidad Europea de Madrid (UEM), con la intención precisamente de comprender este perfil de estudiante universitario y poder adecuar un modelo de docencia basado en sus necesidades.

**Metodología**

La investigación desarrollada se ha basado en un enfoque metodológico cualitativo por tratarse de una investigación que parte de la singularidad del hecho educativo para llegar a la interpretación de lo social (Buendía, Colás, & Hernández, 1997). El objetivo ha sido profundizar en la mejor comprensión del modelo de docencia que los profesores de la Universidad Europea de Madrid están desarrollando en las aulas con estudiantes adultos para, posteriormente, realizar una propuesta que sirva de referencia para la planificación y estructuración de programas con este tipo de estudiantes como público objetivo y para el diseño de planes de formación del profesorado universitario.

En el desarrollo de la investigación, llevada a cabo a lo largo del año 2012, se han utilizado dos técnicas de recogida de información: la entrevista grupal y la individual, ambas semiestructuradas. En la selección de los participantes, se ha optado por el muestreo intencional, lo que implica la identificación de una población de interés por la investigadora y la selección de los casos que cumplen con los criterios considerados de importancia para alcanzar los objetivos. Por ello, en primer lugar, se identificaron aquellas áreas de conocimiento y titulaciones con mayor representación de estudiantes adultos: Sanidad (Enfermería, Óptica y Fisioterapia), Politécnica (Ingeniería Industrial, Ingeniería de Caminos, Ingeniería de la Edificación y Arquitectura) y Ciencias Sociales (Derecho, Dirección de Empresas y Magisterio). Posteriormente, se identificaron y seleccionaron a los profesores participantes, tal y como se describe a continuación.

Para la entrevista grupal se solicitó la participación de 10 profesores que se seleccionaron en función de tres variables: 1) las mejores valoraciones en las encuestas de satisfacción de estudiantes en los últimos 5 años, 2) la representatividad de diferentes áreas de conocimiento y 3) perfil que combinara experiencia profesional y docente. De los 10 profesores
convocados, asistieron finalmente siete, cuyos perfiles se pueden observar en la tabla adjunta. Un dato a considerar es que los profesores se conocían como miembros del claustro de la Universidad, pero con la diversidad de sus perfiles se previó que la discusión fuera rica y variada.

Tabla 1. Perfil de los Profesores Participantes en la Entrevista Grupal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profesor</th>
<th>Área docente</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profesor 1 (P1)</td>
<td>Área Informática. Varón. Más 10 años experiencia docente y 15 de experiencia laboral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profesor 2 (P2)</td>
<td>Área Ingeniería. Mujer. Entre 5-10 años experiencia docente.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profesor 3 (P3)</td>
<td>Área Ciencias Sociales. Mujer. Entre 1 y 5 años experiencia docente y 5-10 experiencia profesional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profesor 5 (P5)</td>
<td>Área Salud. Varón. Más de 15 años de experiencia docente y profesional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profesor 6 (P6)</td>
<td>Área Salud. Mujer. Entre 1 y 5 años de experiencia docente. Profesional autónomo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profesor 7 (P7)</td>
<td>Área Ciencias Sociales. Varón. Entre 5 y 10 años experiencia docente.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nota. En la columna derecha que se presenta la codificación con la que se ha denominado a cada participante para respetar su anonimato.

En las entrevistas individuales, los criterios para seleccionar a los profesores fueron diferentes, centrándose en los siguientes: 1) experiencia en la docencia de adultos o grupos mixtos (adultos y jóvenes), 2) diferentes áreas de conocimiento, 3) diferentes tramos de edad y 4) diferentes perfiles docentes en cuanto a experiencia en la profesión y la docencia. En la tabla adjunta se describen los perfiles de los profesores participantes. En cualquier caso, se verificó que la información aportada estaba saturada al llegar a la décima entrevista.

Tabla 2. Perfil de los Profesores Entrevistados

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profesor</th>
<th>Área docente</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profesor EF (P-EF)</td>
<td>Área Salud. Óptica. Varón. 54 años. Más de 10 años de experiencia docente y más de 25 de experiencia profesional. Tiempo parcial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Nota

En la columna derecha que se presenta la codificación con la que se ha denominado a cada participante para respetar su anonimato.

Tanto para los grupos de discusión como para las entrevistas, se contactó con los participantes por correo electrónico, donde se les informaba sobre el objetivo de la investigación y la temática a tratar en las reuniones. Todos los participantes manifestaron su interés por la investigación, accediendo voluntariamente a participar y a dar su consentimiento, tanto a la grabación como al tratamiento y análisis de la información que aportaron.

Todas las reuniones se realizaron por la autora principal en las instalaciones de la universidad y tuvieron una duración media de 90 minutos. La agenda de las reuniones partía de una introducción en la que se agradecía la participación a los asistentes, se explicaban los objetivos, la metodología a seguir y la confidencialidad de la información obtenida y su tratamiento. Tras esta presentación se abría el discurso a los participantes con la siguiente pregunta abierta: ¿Tienen los estudiantes adultos características diferentes a los tradicionales como aprendices? La participación de la moderadora, tanto en la entrevista grupal como en las entrevistas, fue mínima pues no se pretendía dirigir el discurso sino dejar que fluyera espontáneamente la información. El punto de partida desde el cual se desarrolló la entrevista fue un guión elaborado ad hoc, con los siguientes aspectos:

- conocimiento del estudiante adulto,
- concepciones sobre la docencia universitaria,
- cualidades del profesor,
- características de la enseñanza, metodología de aprendizaje, y
- seguimiento y evaluación del aprendizaje.

Las reuniones se registraron usando una grabadora y fueron transcritas para su análisis. El método de análisis elegido para el estudio cualitativo consistió en el exa men del contenido aportado por los participantes, agrupado en los temas que sirvieron de guía en los grupos y en las entrevistas. El proceso consistió en la identificación de patrones comunes a través la lectura cuidadosa de las transcripciones y la generación de categorías y subcategorías, con sus correspondientes sistemas de codificación y el desarrollo de memos durante el proceso de codificación. Para el tratamiento de la información y su análisis se utilizó software específico: Word, Excel y Wordle.

### Resultados

A continuación se presentan los resultados obtenidos tras el análisis de los discursos de los participantes, que se han organizado en torno a los cinco aspectos que sirvieron como guía en las reuniones. Al final de cada uno de ellos se presentan los extractos de los discursos de los profesores codificados según las claves de las tablas 1 y 2.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profesor QR (P-QR)</td>
<td>Área Politécnica. Ing. Caminos. Mujer. 39 años. 6 años de experiencia docente y más de 10 de experiencia profesional. Tiempo parcial.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Conocimiento del Estudiante Adulto Trabajador

En general, los profesores entrevistados tienen una clara definición de lo que es el estudiante adulto trabajador y destacan como la principal característica la falta de homogeneidad entre el colectivo, por lo que no se puede hablar de un perfil único de estudiante adulto. Esta heterogeneidad viene dada principalmente por su edad, itinerario académico, experiencia profesional, responsabilidades familiares, motivaciones e intereses.

A pesar de ello, los profesores entrevistados sí destacaron un punto en común en el colectivo de estudiantes adultos: su elevada motivación por estudiar. Los profesores generalizaron diciendo que la mayoría de ellos sabe lo que quiere estudiar, bien desde posturas más emocionales (un deseo postergado por otras responsabilidades) o más racionales (necesario para promocionar o encontrar empleo). Los entrevistados también destacaron que los adultos tienen clara la utilidad de los conocimientos y la acreditación profesional correspondiente que obtendrán. A lo largo de su discurso, van apareciendo otras características que definen a este tipo de estudiante como las siguientes:

- La decisión de acceder a la Universidad está muy meditada y en muchas ocasiones se asume como un reto personal o profesional.
- Están preocupados por el valor de su dedicación y el retorno de la inversión económica.
- Es un estudiante más exigente y crítico cuando ve frustradas sus expectativas.
- Son más frágiles en los primeros momentos que los estudiantes tradicionales por sus miedos como la falta de confianza en sus propias capacidades, las experiencias académicas previas negativas y las lagunas de conocimientos básicos o competenciales.

Según los entrevistados, la inseguridad con la que acceden los estudiantes adultos a la universidad y la desventaja que les suponen las materias básicas de los primeros cursos son las principales razones de abandono prematuro. Ante esto, propusieron como posible solución a nivel institucional asignar estas materias a profesores especialmente preparados y formados en la docencia de adultos.

La experiencia que trae el alumno al aula es en general beneficiosa, según los entrevistados, porque permite aligerar el programa al pasar de manera más superficial por contenidos y procedimientos ya conocidos y detenerse en aspectos más complejos, así como generar conocimiento compartido con los compañeros. Para ello, según los entrevistados, es imprescindible realizar una evaluación inicial que aporte información sobre nivel de conocimientos, experiencia previa, expectativas y necesidades de los alumnos. Una vez analizada esta información, en la que se basará el establecimiento de objetivos, la comunicación para el estudiante debe ser clara y debe aportar una imagen fiel de lo que se espera que consiga al final de la materia.

Hay dos aspectos que generan preocupación entre la mayoría de los profesores entrevistados sobre los antecedentes con que acceden a la universidad los estudiantes adultos. Estos tienen que ver, por una parte, con desmontar estereotipos fuertemente arraigados y neutralizar la transferencia negativa cuando estos conocimientos son erróneos o poco fiables y, por otra, con gestionar el aula cuando el conocimiento y la experiencia de los estudiantes supera a la del profesor. Hay unanimidad entre los entrevistados en que la gestión de esta
diversidad exige dosis importantes de conocimientos pedagógicos, por lo que reclaman formación específica y compartir experiencias en foros de expertos.

Tabla 3. Conocimientos del Estudiante Adulto Trabajador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extractos del discurso de los docentes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Mayor de 30 años o así, con su trabajo, familia, con responsabilidades. Que tienen muy claro lo que quieren hacer y que son muy conscientes de que tienen que sacarlo porque eso les cuesta esfuerzo y dinero”. (P- EF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Algunos tienen conocimientos y otros no, o son más o menos recientes; los que han tenido más o menos experiencia profesional, en fin… ahora todos tienen que tener conciencia de que hay mucho por aprender y que el profesor es la persona que puede hacérselo saber”. (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Es un alumno muy exigente, es muy exigente porque paga mucho y hace un esfuerzo muy grande y el profesor se tiene que ser excelente sin duda, y tiene que serlo siempre porque el que tiene enfrente puede tener un cargo importante en el ministerio y eso es muy serio”. (P-QR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hay que estar muy motivado y ser motivador para provocar el cambio de “cliente” a “estudiante”. Cuando un estudiante se siente estudiante, se compromete… pero cada uno tiene un camino para llegar a eso y hay que estar ahí, motivando”. (P5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Es fundamental que sean profesores que tengan muy claro las cosas. Aquí un profesor que desmotive puede ser dramático, porque puede suponer el abandono del estudiante. [...] Yo siempre les mando mensajes muy positivos, motivadores, de que hay que desdramatizar las cosas”. (P-IJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Entonces yo diferencio mucho esos dos grupos (con conocimientos previos o no), sus carencias y necesidades. ¿Y qué hacemos? pues darles muchísimas facilidades antes y después de las clases para que el resto no se conecte al móvil”. (P2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Digamos que en clase, en el aula tienes que seguir un ritmo, no lo puedes parar porque no puedes frenar el avance del grupo porque haya determinadas lagunas que se presuponen en el sitio en el que estamos. Entonces lo suples con el trabajo fuera del aula. Es un trabajo muy personalizado con esta gente. Se les dan tutorías académicas para temas muy básicos”. (P-AB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yo doy clase en temas de dirección de obras y en algún tema muy puntual pues hay algún alumno que tiene cincuenta años imagine, que a lo mejor ha dirigido ciertas obras como gran experto de no sé qué… en esos casos no puedesabortar esta experiencia compartida. Entonces bueno ahí está la complejidad porque, claro, si les das demasiada cancha se te comen, si no les dejas hablar yo creo que no es positivo y te dejan de escuchar”. (P-ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Vienen (los adultos) con elementos que contaminan un poco lo que nosotros esperamos que ellos sean en un futuro como profesionales. Moldear creencias muy firmes es más difícil sobre los adultos que sobre los jóvenes de 18 años que no tienen fundamentos construidos de tanto tiempo”. (P-CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“El profesor que tiene que tener muchas herramientas docentes para que pueda jugar bien la baza de que el que está delante de ti a lo mejor sabe lo mismo o más que tú” (P-QR).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concepción de la Docencia Universitaria

El modelo de aprendizaje que resulta del análisis de los discursos de los docentes está centrado en un proceso que permita al estudiante adquirir conocimientos aplicados a la práctica profesional, construir significados por sí mismos, interpretar para comprender la realidad, y ser conscientes de su madurez intelectual y personal. Para ello, los entrevistados insistieron en que, además de tener conocimientos sobre las características del estudiante adulto y poner en
marcha las estrategias docentes pertinentes, hace falta promover la implicación del estudiante en el proceso.

En cuanto al modelo de docencia para estudiantes adultos, los entrevistados afirmaron que debe reunir tres condiciones. La primera de ellas es que el programa esté muy bien estructurado y comunicado, aportando transparencia y minimizando la ambigüedad. Los entrevistados coincidieron en que para estos estudiantes el tiempo es el bien más preciado y el escenario tiene que estar claro desde el principio para que su logística profesional y personal quede organizada cuanto antes. En segundo lugar, el programa debe tener la suficiente flexibilidad en cuanto a la dedicación, metodología y evaluación para asumir los cambios y ajustes que a lo largo del proceso pueden requerir estos estudiantes, principalmente promovidos por sus otras esferas de responsabilidad. Por último, los entrevistados concordaron al afirmar que, en un programa con alumnado adulto, es necesario utilizar múltiples formas y formatos para compartir el conocimiento que exceden el espacio físico del aula tradicional. El apoyo tecnológico a muchos de estos estudiantes, apuntaron los profesores, abriría un amplio abanico de posibilidades de aprendizaje.

Tabla 4. Concepciones sobre la Docencia Universitaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extractos del discurso de los docentes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“No puedo ir al aula con el único objetivo de completar el programa. Entiendo que la enseñanza tiene que tener un impacto en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Si al final del día mis alumnos solo consiguen vomitar los datos sin comprenderlos, entonces no ha habido enseñanza, ni aprendizaje, ni nada”. (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Saber gestionar cualquier tipo de problema en el ejercicio de la profesión, relacionado con la prevención en las obras. Que el alumno no tenga miedo de tomar decisiones. Hay que enseñarle las “reglas del juego” de la profesión, o al menos, dónde buscarlas”. (P4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Es difícil llegar a comprender conceptos en muchos casos abstractos y poder ver su aplicación. Eso es construir el conocimiento y para eso estamos. Yo quiero que mis alumnos lleguen a sus propias conclusiones sobre los temas”. (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“El objetivo en mi disciplina es que los alumnos aprendan a reflexionar sobre las cosas y que entiendan por qué es importante saber manejar los principales conceptos. Y eso lo veo por las preguntas que hacen y por la manera en que logran aplicar sus conocimientos”. (P7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Saber algunos contenidos de psicología de la salud para que, después, el alumno sepa saber hacer. Aprender mi asignatura está muy vinculado a ir formando la parte esencial de lo que debería ser una actitud ante la vida”. (P6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bueno pues definiría un modelo en el que las condiciones de evaluación, de entregas, los horarios, la logística, todo esté muy claro desde el primer minuto del partido, por escrito, publicado … no se puede perder tiempo en la logística”. (P-ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Un modelo organizado pero por otro lado con una cierta flexibilidad y que permita margen de maniobra para la casuística que se da con estos alumnos”. (P-GH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Un modelo en el que se fomentase aún más si cabe que en otros formatos el compartir experiencias, prácticas grupales, debates, exposiciones, … esas metodologías y mucha, mucha tecnología”. (P-MN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“El aprendizaje requiere que los estudiantes se involucren… que exploren y busquen el conocimiento por sí mismos. Por lo general, se les da la ayuda necesaria para que sean capaces…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ana Cruz-Chust- Una Propuesta de Modelo Didáctico para Estudiantes Adultos Universitarios
de explorar por su cuenta pero me temo que muchos no lo ven así y todo lo quieren mascado” (P6).

Cualidades del Profesor

Los entrevistados de las distintas áreas de conocimiento coincidieron al afirmar que lo más importante a la hora de definir el modelo de docencia ideal para estudiantes adultos es el perfil del profesor; un profesor que, según los entrevistados, ineludiblemente tiene que reunir dos características básicas: tener experiencia en la profesión y tener experiencia docente.

Destacaron también dos competencias vinculadas al profesor de adultos: la capacidad de actualización constante y la capacidad de adaptación y flexibilidad. La primera la justificaron aludiendo a que los adultos prefieren trabajar con temas de actualidad y que puedan vincular inmediatamente con sus experiencias más próximas al momento actual o a las innovaciones más atractivas en la profesión. Respecto a la capacidad de adaptación, los entrevistados insistieron en que es básica para trabajar con diferentes perfiles de estudiantes (internacionales, adultos, jóvenes, colegas de profesión, …) y en diferentes entornos de aprendizaje (presencial, en línea, mixto).

Los profesores entrevistados reconocieron no haber recibido formación pedagógica específica en educación de adultos y haberse basado en su propia experiencia como profesionales o estudiantes, en el ensayo-error y en su reflexión como docentes para ir trazando el modelo que creen es más eficaz. Algunos de ellos señalaron que les ha costado hasta tres años adquirir seguridad y confianza en su propia docencia, cuando iniciaron su experiencia con estudiantes adultos o en grupos mixtos.

Tabla 5. Cualidades del Profesor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extractos del discurso de los docentes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Lo básico, que no puede ser un profesor que no haya dado clase, tiene que saber cómo dar clase. Punto número uno: que tenga experiencia docente. Punto número dos: que tenga experiencia profesional en esa área. Es imprescindible, si no, no vale, porque si es solo docente le va a enseñar abstracción y eso les va a ir aburriendo y los va a desmoronzar”. (P-EF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hay que conocer a qué se van a dedicar los alumnos cuando salgan pero también es importante enseñarles bien cómo tienen que hacerlo y con los alumnos mayores no es igual, no funcionan las mismas prácticas. Hay que prepararse muy bien y tener recursos docentes a mano. A veces hay que desmigajar todo y otras veces soltarlo en bloque, depende”. (P7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Creo que soy capaz de mantener la atención y la tensión sobre la asignatura pero eso me ha costado muchas horas de formación y partir de la rigidez del principiante… Ahora soy más flexible sin perder de vista los objetivos básicos”. (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Intento ‘llevar’ la realidad profesional al aula. Cercanía y confianza. Todos los ejercicios y prácticas que propongo son actuales y obligan al alumno a entrar en contacto con la realidad”. (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Los mayores prefieren que los temas sean de actualidad, que les sirva para mantener una conversación, entender una noticia, o llevarle la contraria a su mujer… pero claro, eso exige tener que estar todo el día con los periódicos en la mano y las alertas en google”. (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A mí no me han enseñado nada, todo lo hago instintivamente, con la experiencia y mi instinto.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ana Cruz-Chust- Una Propuesta de Modelo Didáctico para Estudiantes Adultos Universitarios
(…) una vez aplicado ese modelo hacerlo rodar, ver los resultados y hacer un bucle para rodar y buscar el background, ir corrigiendo y retroalimentándose. Entonces con ese sistema sale el modelo, esa sería la idea”. (P-EF)

"Mira, el primer año lo llevas todo con alfileres y no eres capaz más de pensar si te ha salido bien o no la clase. En el segundo ya vas pensando en el grupo, quitas y pones actividades, ajustas el nivel… En el tercero, coges la velocidad de crucero y puedes pensar en innovar, en cambiar cosa pero pensando en el global (P-OP)

“Básicamente, mi evolución ha consistido en que la percepción que tenía yo del mundo universitario de cuando yo estudié y era alumna a ahora que he venido como docente, no tiene nada que ver. Son realidades totalmente distintas. (…) Mi percepción ha cambiado en el sentido de que tenemos que prestar mucha atención a lo que es la persona, por un lado tenemos que conseguir que los conocimientos científicos estén ahí, porque sin ellos no vamos a poder trabajar, evidentemente” (P-AB).

Enseñanza y Métodos de Aprendizaje

Los docentes entrevistados afirmaron que el clima de aprendizaje con estudiantes adultos es muy bueno y que se incorporan con relativa normalidad a las clases con estudiantes más jóvenes. Prácticamente todos los participantes manifestaron su acuerdo con que los grupos más interesantes son los mixtos, aquellos formados por estudiantes adultos y tradicionales, pues ambos se complementan en competencias y madurez.

La comunicación con ellos también es fluida y continuada. Los informantes comentaron que estos alumnos demandan más comunicación que los tradicionales y que tienden a pedirles más tutorías presenciales. El campus virtual, revelaron los profesores, se ha convertido en una herramienta de comunicación fundamental con estos alumnos.

La utilidad y la vinculación de los conocimientos a la profesión, así como su transferencia inmediata a la práctica son los tres aspectos que los entrevistados destacaron como fundamentales en un proceso de enseñanza a adultos. En general los profesores no se decantaron por ninguna metodología en concreto, sino que opinaron que cualquiera de ellas es útil siempre que genere participación, intercambio de conocimiento y poner en práctica lo aprendido. Entre las estrategias de enseñanza-aprendizaje que mencionaron, destacan que con estos alumnos les funcionan especialmente bien las siguientes:

- Hacer rondas de preguntas, cuestionarios o actividades para conocer al grupo en cuanto a su formación inicial y el nivel de conocimientos previos y así adaptar el programa, aprovechar los conocimientos que ya tengan y ajustar expectativas.
- Si existen diferentes niveles de conocimiento, los profesores proporcionan información extra con lo que llaman “temas 0”, tutorías personalizadas o actividades y trabajos complementarios de diferentes niveles de complejidad.
- Diseñar las unidades en función de pocos objetivos, organizados de menor a mayor nivel de dificultad.
- Iniciar cada unidad con un repaso o reconocimiento de conocimientos previos para que el estudiante sepa dónde está y gane autonomía.
- Entregar los materiales antes o después para que los estudiantes los tengan a su disposición.
- Crear “espacios abiertos” al aprendizaje destinados a aquellos estudiantes que quieran seguir profundizando o intercambiar puntos de vista más elaborados con otros compañeros.

Por último, cabe destacar dos aspectos señalados por los profesores entrevistados que no concuerdan con los principios de las teorías de la enseñanza de adultos. Por una parte, consideraron que los estudiantes adultos no son tan autónomos en el aprendizaje como esperaban y que necesitan escenarios organizados y la presencia del profesor para ir dirigiendo su aprendizaje. Por otra parte, los estudiantes adultos participan abiertamente y con gran protagonismo en las clases presenciales e, incluso virtuales, pero son reacios a realizar trabajos en grupo principalmente por el coste en tiempo y dedicación.

Tabla 6. Enseñanza y Métodos de Aprendizaje

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extractos del discurso de los docentes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Hay un clima muy bueno porque yo creo que se genera como una micro sociedad donde todos tienen en común un objetivo que es mejorar su situación profesional y todos tienen la necesidad de renunciar a su vida personal durante un tiempo. Yo creo que esto une muchísimo y entre ellos se ve que la comunicación es fantástica”. (P-MN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lo que mejor funciona son los grupos mixtos. Cuando logramos que veteranos y jóvenes se junten. Es otra sensación. Imagínate la combinación de experiencia e ilusión. Los jóvenes tienen más tiempo, pero los expertos, los más veteranos saben por dónde tirar, se las saben todas en temas técnicos. Los jóvenes sin embargo maquetan estupendamente bien, manejan las herramientas digitales imaginete. Es decir, que al final son equipos… cuando hacemos equipos mixtos son equipos con unas prácticas fantásticas”. (P-ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hay un contacto permanente, directo y abierto entre el alumno y el profesor; tengo que hacer esto, cómo lo hago… o bien si no pueden venir, pues a través del ordenador les vamos ayudando, clarificando y guiando como tienen qué hacerlo o si les coincide en su turno vienen en el otro”. (P-AB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Con cualquier duda la tienen que subir al foro de dudas que tenemos en el campus virtual. Entonces uno pregunta y yo le contesto a todos, o si veo una noticia, chicos mirad que sentencia más peculiar sobre algo que tenga que ver con lo que estamos dando. Esa comunicación es constante a través del campus virtual. Porque yo a través del foro de dudas les hago un resumen de cada uno de los temas con los conceptos fundamentales que hemos visto en las sesiones”. (P-IJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A ver hay dos cosas. Primero, comenzar la clase con la aplicación y segundo recordarles la aplicación veinte veces durante la clase y que lo vean siempre como un patrón. Por ejemplo, cuando le hablo del derrape de un coche, les digo ‘miren esto. El coche se va a mover a la derecha o a la izquierda. Como el jabón. Se va a deslizar’ y sigo hablando de ecuaciones, y otra vez les digo ‘¿ven esto? Se va a deslizar’, entonces siguen entendiendo que se va a deslizar. Si dejas de hablar ya creen que estás en otra cosa. Tienes que mantenerlos sujetos, son gente que necesita el pasamanos para caminar sino se caen, se caen mentalmente”. (P-OP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Es verdad que los escenarios de tiempo son distintos, pero la metodología debe ser más o menos la misma. Reflexionar, enseñar y contrastar, volver a reflexionar. Yo creo que son como tres pasos que tienen bastante sentido y lo mismo, con adultos que con jóvenes”. (P-CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Es importante decírles porque están estudiando esto y no lo otro, más que a los bachilleres. No puedes pasar por alto el explicarles porque para ser arquitecto tienen que estudiar física, química y matemáticas”. (P4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Suelo diseñar con diferentes grados de complejidad, cosas más básicas que simplemente con la experiencia que tengan habiendo aprobado otras asignaturas pueden y luego otras cosas digamos un poquito más profesionales… También en algunos casos yo suelo ser más exigente con los expertos, les suelo pedir más trabajo, les suelo pedir que profundicen más”. (P-KL)

“Vi eso, que estos alumnos podían aportar… es que claro, estaba ese grupo de alumnos que había trabajado profesionalmente que se quedaba cojo. Entonces se trata que desde el conocimiento directo, hacer participes a los demás dentro de un trabajo”. (P-IJ)

“Están aprendiendo los profesionales con los no profesionales y además aprenden metodologías de trabajo que no se da específicamente en la clase pero que son interesantes y experiencia directa de consultoría en tiempo real”. (P-OP)

“Ellos se conocen, comparan profesores y entonces en ese sentido, así como en otras titulaciones, en otros formatos, los profesores no se coordinan demasiado, pero si no se coordinan no es de vida o muerte, aquí sí. Aquí la coordinación es imprescindible, en criterios de evaluación, en criterios de condiciones de entrega, condiciones de asistencia, de puntualidad, descansos”. (P-ST)

Evaluación y Seguimiento

Según los profesores participantes, la evaluación es el aspecto que genera más conflictos con los estudiantes adultos. Las repercusiones a nivel personal, académico e incluso financiero que genera la evaluación producen mucho estrés entre estos estudiantes. Los profesores afirmaron que esta presión se traslada muchas veces a ellos en términos de exigencias más o menos objetivas que generan situaciones incómodas, las cuales ponen en entredicho su profesionalidad como docentes.

Para evitar los inconvenientes que se producen cuando el estudiante no está de acuerdo con su evaluación, los profesores insistieron en que es necesario que la retroalimentación sea continua y que el alumno siempre sepa dónde está y cuál es el recorrido que le resta por hacer. De hecho, apuntaron que la frecuencia de tutorías en el seguimiento académico de estos alumnos es más seguida que con los tradicionales y se realiza en gran medida de manera individualizada, bien presencialmente o por medio del correo electrónico. Los profesores mencionaron dos estrategias que les han resultado muy útiles para comprobar grupalmente en el aula si estos alumnos siguen el ritmo: 1) realizar repasos al iniciar la sesión, sondeando al grupo en voz alta y 2) crear una lista de puntos clave que sirve tanto de guía como de evaluación de la sesión.

Las pruebas de conocimientos, las presentaciones orales y los trabajos escritos han sido las herramientas de evaluación más utilizadas por los profesores y a través de las que, según ellos, obtienen buenos resultados con los estudiantes adultos. La mención a otro tipo de evaluación más innovadora es minoritaria, así como a procesos de autoevaluación ni coevaluación. En algunos casos, los profesores mencionaron como parte de la evaluación los trabajos de grupo, aunque nuevamente señalaron las resistencias de los estudiantes adultos a que estos trabajos se extiendan fuera de los ámbitos de la clase presencial dado sus limitaciones de tiempo y la poca objetividad en las calificaciones grupales.

Respecto al nivel de exigencia en la evaluación, los profesores entrevistados reconocieron que con estos alumnos son más flexibles en los tiempos de dedicación y las fechas de entregas pero no hay diferencias respecto a las formas de evaluación ni a los criterios que manejan con los alumnos tradicionales. Para finalizar, cabe señalar que los
discursos analizados apuntan a un uso de la evaluación por parte de los profesores entrevistados fundamentalmente sumativo y en menor medida formativo.

Tabla 7. Evaluación y Seguimiento del Aprendizaje

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extractos del discurso de los docentes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Tienen mucho miedo a la evaluación; o sea, a la herramienta de evaluación y al posible resultado que esta evaluación pueda tener para su propio bienestar, para su propia perfección. Yo creo que porque tiene otro tipo de implicaciones. Cuando eres joven cómo le dices a tus padres que has suspendido, pero cuando eres adulto cómo le dices a tu mujer que has suspendido y luego la implicación económica que es mucho más seria”. (P-CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bueno, se ha gestionado con el defensor del alumno, en una gestión que a mí a veces no me parece adecuada porque yo cuando evalúo soy muy cuidadosa con la evaluación y en ese sentido yo soy muy seria. Se puede cuestionar a un profesor, por supuesto, me podría equivocar y me parece correcto, pero quizás para mi la pega es que se supone que es el profesor el que ha hecho algo mal… Ellos buscan aprobar y… aunque no tenga la sensación de haya sido el grueso de los alumnos, pero sí me ha sucedido…”. (P-QR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sí que necesitan muchos sistemas de evaluación alternativos y me preocupo porque todos lleven la misma carga y esfuerzo”. (P-GH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ojo que no porque sean mayores hay que ser más permisivos. Eso no. Hay que entender sus situaciones particulares pero al 5 tienen que llegar todos por igual”. (P2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“El 65% de las cosas que pido de evaluación en la materia son obligatorias sí o sí. Otra cosa es que yo decida que se hace el día 19 o el 25. No hay problema si a ti, o a ti, se os da el caso y tengo que repetiros las pruebas. Hasta ahí bien”. (P5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Digamos que el chantaje entre comillas, el chantaje llega en el momento de la evaluación. Si todo va bien, va bien. Y si no, el chantaje. Eso sí, son gente más razonable, gente con la que se puede hablar y explicar mucho mejor las cosas. Pero un suspenso es un suspenso tanto para el de 22, como para el de 45, ahí el proceso es el mismo”. (P-OP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Las pruebas de evaluación son el 65% y las hace todos sí o sí. El otro 35% que falta son actividades que llamo optativas y que yo doy todas las alternativas posibles, me explico. Tienen las opciones de hacerlo individual, escrito, ¿que prefieren hacerlo en grupo? vale, pues lo hacen en grupo. No va a ser más de cuatro y tal, lo tienes que escribir y además exponer. Ah, que tú quieres hacer una exposición oral porque el tema gramatical se te da muy mal, yo siempre lo que hago es que le oferto alternativas para que ellos elijan”. (P-AB).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cuando tenemos trabajos grupales tenemos establecida que una parte de la evaluación es a través de hojas de rúbrica. Entonces cada miembro del grupo, aparte de autoevaluarse él por su trabajo hacia el grupo, evalúa a sus compañeros pero no les gusta mucho. No. Primero porque no tienen tiempo y luego porque no lo ven justo. Siempre se echan en cara que unos trabajan más que otros…”. (P-AB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“La herramienta clave es recordar. Recordar los key point, los puntos clave. En cada clase tienes que hacerlo y eso es muy bueno. Los key point tienes que crearlos antes de las clases y tienen que ser tu patrón para continuar la clase y que sean con los que evalués luego los resultados. Así ellos lo van a ver todo acotado”. (P-OP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hay que ir reconduciéndoles constantemente. Yo utilizo mucho la técnica del repaso, de la vuelta al ruedo en la que todos participan”. (P-IJ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusiones y Recomendaciones

Los profesores entrevistados tienen un discurso bastante elaborado sobre el perfil de los estudiantes adultos, destacando su heterogeneidad y su alta motivación hacia los estudios. El perfil híbrido del profesor de adultos universitarios, en cuanto a profesional de la enseñanza y experto en la profesión, es un dato relevante de esta investigación, así como la necesidad de formación específica de los profesores de los primeros cursos como aspecto crítico para evitar el abandono prematuro de estos estudiantes.

El modelo de aprendizaje señalado por los docentes entrevistados como la mejor opción en este sentido, y base de la propuesta que se presenta, está centrado en un proceso que permite al estudiante aprender construyendo nexos entre los nuevos conocimientos y la experiencia previa, aprender implicándose y participando activamente, y aprender en diferentes escenarios, con diferentes formatos y a través de una amplia variedad de actividades.

La propuesta didáctica que se presenta en base a este modelo de aprendizaje se centra en tres aspectos. El primero está relacionado con realizar un diagnóstico individualizado de partida de conocimientos y experiencias previas que permita, por una parte a los estudiantes ser conscientes de la distancia que hay entre su madurez intelectual, profesional y personal y los objetivos de aprendizaje. Y, por otra parte, que permita al profesor diseñar situaciones didácticas que reduzcan esta distancia.

El segundo aspecto está vinculado con la utilización de métodos de aprendizaje basados en el reconocimiento de la experiencia previa como contexto necesario para construir nuevo conocimiento y en la conexión de éste con aspectos relevantes de la profesión. Esta conexión también hace que el aprendizaje sea más relevante para los alumnos adultos, ya que aumenta la conexión afectiva con la materia y, con ello, la motivación y reconocimiento personal, lo cual incidirá en que el aprendizaje sea más profundo.

El tercer aspecto, que genera más presión en profesores y estudiantes por sus repercusiones académicas y profesionales, busca proporcionar al estudiante información sobre su avance en la consecución de los objetivos, ya sea a nivel grupal o individual, con el fin de dar indicaciones sobre la distancia todavía a recorrer, minimizar el estrés que provoca la evaluación y proporcionar indicaciones que estimulen el éxito académico.

Una de las conclusiones más interesantes a señalar son aquellos aspectos destacados en la literatura especializada como claves en la enseñanza de adultos y que no se han visto corroborados en la investigación realizada. Estos aspectos hacen referencia, en primer lugar, a una mayor necesidad de guía y orientación por parte del profesor, lo que se contradice con el escenario de un estudiante adulto autónomo en su aprendizaje y, en segundo lugar, la escasa motivación a trabajar en proyectos grupales y a generar conocimiento compartido.

Para finalizar, es importante destacar la preocupación de los profesores entrevistados sobre la preparación del profesorado que trabaje con estudiantes universitarios adultos o en grupos mixtos. Esta preparación psicopedagógica debe estar relacionada con la atención de cada uno de los estudiantes como individuos, que requieren una atención personalizada y con los requerimientos que exige gestionar un aula más compleja debido a la diversidad de alumnado y sus diferentes niveles previos de conocimientos y experiencia profesional. A pesar de las dificultades que afirman conlleva la docencia universitaria en este escenario, los
entrevistados lo señalan como un reto profesional, coincidiendo en que los grupos más interesantes a nivel docente son los de estudiantes mixtos: adultos y jóvenes.

Referencias


A Teaching Model Proposal for Adult University Students

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Abstract

Due to the increased enrollment of students over 25 years of age in higher education institutions, this study focused on interviewing faculty members in order to understand the characteristics and special aspects related to teaching and learning this student group. Results revealed that college teachers have been updating and modifying their teaching strategies to meet the needs of these nontraditional students. Findings suggest teachers are sensitive to these students’ needs, and their teaching strategies seem to incorporate adult education approaches. Teachers agreed that the inclusion of these students in the classroom is a challenge unprecedented in traditional university teaching and, despite the need for more training on adult education, most experience it in terms of personal and professional development. This study has found that adult learners need more guidance and direction from the teacher than traditional students, and that they have little motivation to work in group projects and generate shared knowledge. These aspects contradict the theoretical assumptions of adult learning on their autonomy in learning and peer collaboration preference.

Key words: Adult students, university teaching, learning, andragogy

Introduction

Social realities evolve and, as consequence, the profile of college students is increasingly heterogeneous. The progressively widespread presence of non-traditional students (adults, international, labor, etc.) generates a new educational paradigm to which universities must respond with teaching models different to the traditional one (Cruz, Learreta, Huertas, Rodriguez, & Ruiz, 2011).

This scenario is framed within a society that promotes wellbeing and provides new options for personal development to adults of any age, who find great satisfaction in training as an option for professional growth, leisure, and enjoyment. In addition, the current economic crisis in most of the world, with the consequent lack of employment, explains why many adults want to invest their time in better training by attending college. Moreover, employment demands nowadays trigger the need to promote university education in certain professional fields (working students). There are also students who did not continue their education after high school and later decide to access higher education (returning students). This latter group
includes those who were excluded from formal education systems because of gender, ethnicity, social class, or disability and that, through affirmative/positive action policies, are able to access higher education. Finally, there are adult students that had to interrupt their college studies for varying reasons and then decide to retake them later in life (interrupted enrollment students).

All this casuistry of students can be found nowadays at the undergraduate level, which represents a new dimension from the past, when adult students were only present in university academic life at the postgraduate level.

Data contextualized in Europe, from the Trends 2010 report on the changing trends of the last decade in relation to higher education in Europe (Sursoch and Smidt, 2010), highlight the need to promote lifelong learning, which requires the commitment of all sectors involved: educational policies, employers, educational institutions, and others when flexibility and operating responses to these circumstances are needed. The meaning and value of this recommendation is based on placing students at the center. It is necessary, therefore, to contribute to generating knowledge regarding the profile of these college students, in order to really suit their demands. It could even be said it is a matter of social responsibility and commitment.

There is abundant literature on adult learning and theoretical formulations explaining it. Some are more focused on aspects related to students’ characteristics as learner (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2001), while others focus on the life of the adult (Kolb, 2005); emphasize the cognitive aspects of change, restructuration, and transformation in adults (Mezirow, 2000); or motivational aspects (Guglielmino, 2008). All this body of knowledge is helping to understand the trend on adult learning seen from the educational process, having as common elements linked to adult learning:

- self direction or autonomy as a distinctive or goal in adult education,
- adult student participation along the process,
- learning motivation,
- the importance of previous experience, interests, and needs,
- reflecting on their own learning, and
- the meaningful and enforceable nature of learning.

From a higher education perspective, authors such as Richardson (2007) have affirmed that adult students have specific characteristics that make them different to traditional college students, a fact that has been established in a large number of studies and has been depicted extensively in research. The characteristics of adult university students focus, according to Richardson, in their high level of motivation toward the educational programs they decide to undertake (citing Gibbs, Morgan, & Taylor, 1984); they possess highly sophisticated learning resources, based on their experience, which is of a different nature (life, previous learning, family…), which positions them to use it effectively (citing Van Rossum & Taylor 1987); they are more likely to report the use of effective learning skills (citing Devlin, 1996); and their time planning and self management skills are highly developed (citing Trueman & Hartley, 1996) (2007).

Lieb (1991), meanwhile, considered that adults show an increased interest towards peer workgroups, which is why there are ample possibilities to develop their leadership skills among them. At the same time, they are found to have the capacity to respond adequately to project
integration, as long as these are directed towards their interest; furthermore, they need learning to be meaningful to them (1991).

Rhonda Wynne’s contributions, which can be found in ASSET’s (Adding Support Skills for European Teachers) website, have added that these students have opinions, values, and criteria developed along their life experience, which plays an important role when facing learning; they are considered to have a higher learning capacity in democratic, participative environments and that they like autonomy in learning.

In her approach to studying such students, Wynne also described the worries they manifest within the role they assume as students: fear of failure, insecurity because of being older than their classmates, concerns about facing a new technological environment, doubts regarding their own capacity to learn, and anxiety concerning formal evaluations because of uncertainty regarding the expectations others have on them more so than the outcome of the assessment itself. Their reality is their frame of reference and being able to integrate knowledge into it is a need evident in every moment for these students. Students with this profile, moreover, are very demanding with their teachers since they clearly want to learn, want to move up the ladder, and because they seek meaning at the same time they are investing in their qualifications. Adult learners know what they want and why they want it; a firm decision led them to enroll in college and, therefore, they act accordingly.

These students are very critical and demanding. For them their effort, time, and money is very valuable and, if they cannot turn those aspects into profits, they show a high level of frustration. Kohler, Grawitch, and Borchert (2009) investigated precisely how stress coming from work, family, and studying affects nontraditional students. Vaccaro and Lobell’s (2010) research, meanwhile, exposed that family responsibilities seem to be an impediment to learning development in these students, but also that adult students feel reinforced by them and by their maturity, their capacity for effort, and to face frustration when dealing with difficulties.

Kasworm (2010) suggested that the identity of adult learners is multiple according to their origin, evolution, and, sometimes, according to their perception of themselves, their relationships, and the learning environment within the university. Therefore, their profile can be defined by its own characteristics, given by the nature of being older than traditional students, their circumstances, but that also in other ways shows some dissimilarities.

Fieldwork developed in Spain by Adiego, Asensio, and Serrano (2004) regarding this type of student showed that the barriers or hindrances that these students face in order to decide to study at the university are program/class schedules, family responsibilities, as well as economic reasons. These students complain that teachers do not give value to the presence of adult students in classes, and that their previous experience is rarely made use of in the teaching they receive. As a result of these studies, the term homogenizer has been coined in order to qualify universities in Spain.

It must be understood that everything previously exposed should guide the teaching practice in those college classrooms where the percentage of adult students is larger.

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1 This author presents her contributions in ASSET (http://www.assetproject.info/index.html), financed by the European Union program Socrates. It is based on contributions about training and resources for European teachers, related to teaching intervention with adult students.
Institutions should know in which ways they could incorporate changes in their teaching models in order to adapt to a student body of any age group, with different motivations, and that, therefore, are facing their learning process with differing expectations. Improving this situation would contribute meaning to lifelong learning, an idea that needs to be encouraged with actions at an institutional level.

In this light, this article presents research based on fieldwork carried out at the Universidad Europea de Madrid (UEM), intended precisely to better understand the profile of these college students and adapt a teaching model based on their needs.

Method

The research carried out was based on a qualitative methodological approach, as it is an investigation based on the uniqueness of the educational act in order to reach a social interpretation (Buendía, Colas, & Hernandez, 1997). The objective was to deepen the understanding of the teaching model being developed within classrooms with adult students at the UEM, in order to present a proposal that may serve as reference for planning and structuring programs aimed at this type of student, and to design training plans for university teachers.

In developing the investigation, carried out along 2012, two data gathering techniques were used: individual and group interviews, both semi-structured. In selecting participants, purposive sampling was used, which involves the identification of a population of interest in the research and selection of cases that meet the criteria considered important for achieving the objectives. First, knowledge areas and degree programs with the most adult student representation were identified: healthcare (nursing, optometry, and physiotherapy), polytechnic studies (industrial engineering, road engineering, civil engineering, and architecture), and the social sciences (law, business management, and education). Subsequently, participating teachers were identified and selected, as described below.

For group interviews, 10 teachers were invited to participate according to three variables: 1) best ratings in student satisfaction surveys within the last 5 years, 2) the representativeness of different areas of knowledge, and 3) profiles combining professional and teaching experience. Of the 10 teachers summoned seven attended, whose profiles can be seen in Table 1. A factor to consider is that teachers knew each other as faculty members of the University, but because of the diversity of their profiles, it was foreseen the discussion would be rich and varied.

Table 1. Group Interview Participating Teachers’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Teaching Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor 1 (P1)</td>
<td>Informatics. Male. Over 10 years of teaching experience and over 15 of professional experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor 2 (P2)</td>
<td>Engineering. Female. Between 5-10 years of teaching experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor 3 (P3)</td>
<td>Social sciences. Female. Between 1-5 years of teaching experience and 5-10 of professional experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor 4 (P4)</td>
<td>Architecture. Male. Over 10 years of teaching experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the individual interviews, the teacher selecting criteria were different, focusing on: 1) experience teaching adults or mixed groups (both adult and traditional), 2) different knowledge areas, 3) different age groups, and 4) different teaching profiles in terms of their professional area and teaching. Table 2 describes the participating teachers’ profiles. In any case, it was verified that the information provided was saturated by the time the tenth interview was reached.

Table 2. Individual Interview Teachers’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Teaching Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor AB (P-AB)</td>
<td>Healthcare. Nursing. Female. 57 years old. Over 30 years of professional experience and over 15 of teaching experience. Full-time faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor EF (P-EF)</td>
<td>Healthcare. Optometry. Male. 54 years old. Over 10 years of teaching experience and over 25 of professional experience. Part time faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor IJ (P-IJ)</td>
<td>Social sciences. Law. Female. 50 years old. Over 15 years of teaching and professional experience. Full time faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor KL (P-KL)</td>
<td>Business management. Female. 48 years old. Over 10 years of teaching experience. Full time faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor MN (P-MN)</td>
<td>Social sciences. Education. Female. 40 years old. Over 10 years of teaching experience. Part time faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor OP (P-OP)</td>
<td>Polytectic studies. Industrial engineering. 64 years old. Over 20 years of teaching and professional experience. Has always reconciled both professions. Full time faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor QR (P-QR)</td>
<td>Polytectic studies. Road engineering. Female. 39 years old. 6 years of teaching experience and over 10 years of professional experience. Part time faculty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The right column presents the codification used to identify each participant in order to respect their anonymity.
gathered. After the introduction, discussion was started with an open question: Do adult students have different characteristics to those of traditional students as learners? The moderator’s participation, in both group interviews as well as in individual interviews, was minimal as the aim was not to guide the discussion but to allow information to flow spontaneously. The starting point to develop the interviews as script prepared ad hoc with the following aspects:

- adult student knowledge
- views regarding teaching at the college level,
- teacher attributes,
- learning characteristics, learning methodology, and
- monitoring and evaluating learning.

Sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The analysis method chosen for this qualitative study consisted in examining the content provided by participants, grouped according to the guide topics for both individual and group interviews. The process consisted in identifying common patterns through a careful lecture of the transcripts, and generating categories and subcategories, with a corresponding codification system, and the development of memos during coding. Specific software was used to handle and analyze the data: Word, Excel, and Wordle.

**Results**

The results obtained after analyzing the participants’ contributions, which were organized around the five aspects that served as a guide during the sessions, are presented. At the end of each finding, extracts from the teachers’ discussions are presented, codified according to the keys in Tables 1 and 2.

**Knowledge of Working Adult Students**

In general, the interviewed teachers have a clear definition of that a working adult student is, and they pointed out as the main characteristic the lack of homogeneity among those students, which is why one cannot point to a unique adult student profile. That heterogeneity is given mainly by their age, academic schedule, professional experience, family responsibilities, motivations, and interests.

In spite of this, interviewed teachers did point out a common trait in the adult student collective: they are highly motivated to study. Teachers generalized by saying that most adult students know what they want to study, be it from an emotional point of view (a desire postponed by other responsibilities) or a rational one (a necessity in order to find employment or move up the ladder). The interviewees also noted adults clearly understand the usefulness of the knowledge and the corresponding professional accreditation they would obtain. Along their discourse, other characteristics that define these students arose:

- The decision to attend college was very thoughtful and was often assumed as a personal or professional challenge.
- They are concerned about the value of their dedication and return of their economic investment.
- They are more critical and demanding when their expectations are frustrated.
• They are in a more fragile position than traditional students when starting out because of their uncertainties, such as lack of confidence in their own capabilities, negative previous academic experiences, and basic knowledge or competency gaps.

According to interviewees, the uncertainty with which adult students enroll in the university and the disadvantage core subjects represent in those first courses are the main reasons for early withdrawal. At this, they proposed as a possible solution at the institutional level to assign those core subjects to teachers specially trained and prepared in teaching adults.

The experience students bring to the classroom is generally beneficial, according to the interviewees, as it allows for a faster program approach because contents and procedures already known can be merely reviewed while more complex aspects are revised in more detail, and knowledge can be generated by what classmates share. For this, as stated by interviewees, it is indispensable to perform an initial evaluation that may shed light regarding the level of knowledge, previous experience, expectations, and needs in students. Once this information is analyzed, upon which objectives will be based, communication must be clear with students and it must accurately depict what is expected to achieve at the end of the course.

There are two aspects that generated concerns among most teachers interviewed, regarding adult students’ background when entering the university. On the one hand, they need to undo deeply seeded stereotypes and neutralize negative transfer when students’ knowledge is erroneous or unreliable, and on the other, how to manage the classroom when the knowledge and experience of students surpass their own. There was a unanimous consensus among the professors in the study in that managing this level of diversity requires a higher degree of pedagogical knowledge, which is why they require specific training and sharing experiences in expert forums.

Table 3. Working Adult Student Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpts from teachers’ discussion [translated]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Over 30 years old or something like that, with a job, family, with responsibilities. They are clear about what they want to do and are aware that they have to achieve it because it costs them time and money.” (P-EF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some have knowledge and others don’t, or is somewhat recent; the ones with more or less professional experience, in the end… now they all need to be conscious that there is much to learn and that the teacher is the person that can help them learn.” (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They are demanding students, they are demanding because they pay a lot and have to make a huge effort and the professor must be excellent with no doubt, and to always be because the person in front might have an important position in the ministry and that is a serious matter.” (P-QR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hay que estar muy motivado y ser motivador para provocar el cambio de “cliente” a “estudiante”. Cuando un estudiante se siente estudiante, se compromete… pero cada uno tiene un camino para llegar a eso y hay que estar ahí, motivando”. (P5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is fundamental that teachers have things very clearly. Here a teacher that discourages can be dramatic, because it might suppose the student’s withdrawal. […] I always send them positive, motivational messages, that they need to un-dramatize things.” (P-IJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Then, I differentiate a lot those two groups (with and without previous knowledge), their deficiencies and needs. And what do we do? Give them plenty of resources before and after class so that the rest...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ana Cruz-Chust - A Teaching Model Proposal for Adult University Students
of the time they are not connected to the cell phone.” (P2)

“Let’s say in class, in the classroom you need to follow a rhythm, you cannot stop it because you cannot stop the progression of the group because there are certain gaps that are presupposed in the place where we are. Then you supply it with projects outside the classroom. It is a very personalized job with these people. They are given academic tutoring for very basic topics.” (P-AB)

“I teach topics on construction management and in some very timely topic there is a fifty year old, imagine, that probably has managed certain projects as a great expert of who knows what... in those cases you cannot abandon this shared experience. Then, well there is the complexity because, of course, if you give them too much opportunity they eat you, and if you do not allow them to talk I think it is not positive and they stop listening to you.” (P-ST)

“They come (adults) with elements that contaminate a little what we expect them to be in the future as professionals. Shaping firm beliefs in adults is more difficult than on 18-year olds that have not built foundations for too long.” (P-CD)

“The professor needs to have many teaching tools to play well the cards as the one in front of you maybe knows as much or more than you.” (P-QR)

Conceptions Regarding University Teaching

The learning model that results from the teachers’ discussions analysis is focused on a process that allows students to acquire knowledge as applied to professional practice, construct meaning by themselves, interpret to understand reality, and be conscious of their intellectual and personal maturity. For this, the interviewees insisted in that, on top of having knowledge regarding adult students’ characteristics and implementing appropriate teaching strategies, there is a need to promote student involvement in the process.

Regarding a teaching model for adult students, the interviewees asserted it must meet three conditions. The first being the program needs to be properly structured and transmitted, stressing transparency and minimizing ambiguity. They also coincided in that, for these students, time is their most precious asset, so the situation must be clear from the beginning so that their personal and professional agendas can be organized as soon as possible. Second, the program must be flexible enough regarding dedication, methodology, and evaluation in order to assimilate the changes and adjustments students might require along the process, mainly motivated by their other areas of responsibility. Lastly, the interviewees agreed in that, in programs with adult students, using multiple platforms and formats to share knowledge is necessary in order to share the knowledge that transcends the physical space of the traditional classroom. Tech support for many of these students, teachers noted, would open ample learning possibilities.

Table 4. Conceptions Regarding University Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpts from teachers’ discussion [translated]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I can’t go to the classroom having completing the program as the only objective. I understand that teaching needs to have an impact on the students’ learning. If at the end of the day my students can only vomit facts without understanding them, then there was no teaching, no learning, or nothing.” (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Knowing how to manage any type of problem while practicing the profession, related to prevention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ana Cruz-Chust - A Teaching Model Proposal for Adult University Students
in projects. That the student has no fear in decision making. You need to teach them the profession’s “game rules”, or at least where to find them.” (P4)

“It is difficult to comprehend abstract concepts in many cases and see their application. That is building knowledge and that’s why we are here. I want my students to reach their own conclusions regarding the topics.” (P1)

“The goal in my field is that students learn to reflect on things and that they understand why it is important knowing the main concepts. And that I see in the questions they ask and in the way in which they manage to apply their knowledge.” (P7)

“Knowing some contents about the psychology of health so that, later, students know what to do. Learning in my course is connected to shaping an essential part of what attitudes toward life should be.” (P6)

“Well I would define a model in which the conditions for evaluations, hand-in assignments, schedules, logistics, everything is clear from the first minute of the game, written, published… you cannot waste time in logistics.” (P-ST)

“An organized model but on the other hand with certain flexibility and that it allows room to maneuver because of the particularities that happen with these students.” (P-GH)

“A model that encourages even more than other formats if possible sharing experiences, group practices, debates, presentations, … those methodologies and a lot, a lot of technology.” (P-MN)

“Learning requires students to be involved… that they explore and seek knowledge for themselves. Generally, they are given the necessary help so that they are capable of exploring on their own but I’m afraid many do not see it that way and they want everything predigested.” (P6)

Teacher Qualities

The interviewees from different knowledge areas coincided in affirming that the most important thing when defining the ideal teaching model for adult students is the teacher profile; a teacher that, according to them, must inevitably possess two basic characteristics: have experience in the profession and have teaching experience.

They also pointed out two competencies connected to adult student teachers: the capacity to constantly update and the capacity to adapt and be flexible. They justified the first one by noting adult students prefer working with current issues they can immediately associate with their recent experiences or the most attractive innovations in the profession. Regarding the capacity to adapt, the interviewees insisted in that it is fundamental in order to work with students with different profiles (international, adult, traditional, colleagues…) and in different learning environments (face-to-face, hybrid, online).

Teachers interviewed recognized not having received specific pedagogic training in adult education and basing their observations on their own experience as professionals or students, trial and error, and their own reflections as teachers in order to shape the model they think to be the most effective. Some of them pointed out it took them up to three years to acquire confidence and assurance in their own teaching after starting their experience with adult students and mixed groups.
Table 5. Teacher Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpts from teachers’ discussion [translated]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The basics, you can’t be a professor that has not given a class before, you need to know how to teach a class. Number one: you must have teaching experience. Number two: you must have professional experience in the area. It is essential, if not, it’s not worth it, because if you’re only a teacher you will teach abstraction and that will bore and discourage them.” (P-EF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You need to know what students will do after graduation but it is also important to teach them well how to do it and with older students it is not the same, the same practices do not work. You need to prepare very well and have teaching resources at hand. Sometimes you have to take apart everything and other times impart it in blocks, it depends.” (P7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think I am capable of maintaining the tension and attention on the subject but that has cost me many hours of training, parting from the rigidity of a beginner… Now I’m more flexible without losing sight of the basic objectives.” (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I try to ‘take’ the professional reality into the classroom. Closeness and trust. All exercises and practices I propose are current and force students to enter in contact with reality.” (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Elders prefer topics to be current, to be useful to maintain a conversation, to understand the news, or go against their wives… but of course, that requires being all day long with newspapers in hand and google alerts.” (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“No one has taught me anything, I do everything instinctively, with experience and my instinct. (…) once the model is applied you roll it out, see the results, and roll back and see the background, do corrections and get feedback. Then with that system the model comes out, that would be the idea.” (P-EF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Look, the first year you do everything with headpins and you are only capable of thinking of the course was good or not. During the second year you start thinking about the group and you schedule activities, you adjust the level… During the third, you achieve cruise speed and think about innovating, changing things but thinking globally.” (P-OP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Basically, my evolution has consisted on the perception I had about the university world when I studied and was a student towards now that I’m a teacher, one has nothing to do with the other. They are completely different realities. (…) My perception has changed in the sense that we need to pay a lot of attention to the person, on the one hand we have to assure scientific knowledge is there, because without them we won’t be able to work, evidently.” (P-AB).</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teachers interviewed affirmed the learning environment with adult students is very good and that they incorporate with relative ease to courses with younger students. Practically all participants manifested their agreement in that the most interesting groups are the mixed ones, those formed by traditional and adult students, since they complement each other in competencies and maturity.

Communication with them is also fluid and continuous. Teachers commented these students demand more communication than traditional ones, and that they tend to require more face-to-face tutoring. The virtual campus, teachers revealed, has become an essential communication tool for these students.
The usefulness and association of knowledge to the profession, and immediate transference into practice, are three aspects the participating teachers identified as essential in teaching adults. In general, professors did not opt for any particular methodology, but they felt any of them is useful as long as it generates participation, knowledge exchange, and puts into practice what was learned. Among the teaching-learning strategies mentioned, they noted with adult students these seem to work particularly well:

- Make rounds of questions, give questionnaires, or assign activities in order to know the group, their initial training level, and level of previous knowledge to better adapt the program, take advantage of the knowledge they already have, and adjust their expectations.
- If there are different knowledge levels, professors hand out extra information in what has been coined as “topic 0”, personalized tutoring, or complementary activities and projects of different levels of complexity.
- Design units according to a few objectives, organized in increasing level of difficulty.
- Start each unit with a review or summary of previous knowledge so that students know where they are and gain autonomy.
- Hand-in materials before or after so that students have them at their disposal.
- Create spaces “open to learning” targeted at those students that want to continue deepening their knowledge or exchanging more elaborated points of view with other classmates.

Lastly, two aspects noted by the participating teachers should be pointed out, as these do not coincide with some of the principles in adult teaching theory. On the one hand, they considered adult students are not as autonomous in learning as expected, and that they needed organized scenarios and the presence of a teacher to direct their learning. On the other, adult students openly participate, and with great prominence, in face-to-face courses and, even virtual ones, but are reluctant to work in groups mainly because of time and dedication.

Table 6. Teaching and Learning Methods

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpts from teachers’ discussion [translated]</th>
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<tr>
<td>“There is a very good climate because I think a micro society emerges where all have a common objective which is improving their professional situation and they all have the need to quit their personal life for a while. I think that this brings them together a lot and among them you can see communication is fantastic.” (P-MN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“What works best are mixed groups. When you get veterans and young students together. There is another feeling. Imagine the combination of experience with helpfulness. Young students have more time, but experts, the veterans know where to go, they know it all about technical issues. The younger ones, nonetheless, lay out extremely good, they manage digital tools, imagine. It is to say, in the end they’re a team… when we put together mixed teams they are teams with fantastic projects.” (P-ST)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“There is a permanent, direct, and open contact between the student and the teacher; I have to do this, how do I do this… or if they cannot attend, through the computer we help them, guiding and refining how they have to do it, if it coincides with their schedule they come the next time.” (P-AB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Any doubts they have to upload it to the doubts forum we have in the virtual campus. Then someone asks and I answer everyone, or if I read news, guys look at this peculiar opinion regarding something that has to do with the material in class. That communication is constant”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
through the virtual campus. Because through the doubts forum I summarize each of the topics with the basic concepts we have seen in class." (P-IJ)

“Let’s see, there are two things. First, starting class with the application and second reminding them the app 20 times during class and that they see it always as a pattern. For instance, when I talk about a car skidding, I tell them ‘look at this. The car will move to the right or to the left. Like soap. It will slide’ and I keep talking about equations, and I repeat ‘see this? It will glide’, then they keep understanding that it will drift. If you stop talking then they think you’re on something else. You have to keep them tight, they’re people that need a handrail or otherwise they fall, they fall badly.” (P-OP)

“It is true timetables are different, but the methodology should be more or less the same. Reflecting, teaching and contrasting, and reflecting again. I think there are like three steps that make sense, the same with adults and traditional students.” (P-CD)

“It is important to tell them they are studying this and not that, more so than to freshmen. You cannot overlook explaining why to become an architect they need to study physics, chemistry, and math.” (P4)

“I tend to design with varying degrees of complexity, more basic things that simply with the experience of approving other courses you can answer and then other things let’s say a little more professional… Also in some cases I tend to be more demanding with experts, I tend to ask them for more work, I tend to ask them to go deeper.” (P-KL)

“I saw that, that these students could contribute… but of course, there was that group of students that had worked professionally but that were lacking. Then it is about making the rest participate in a project, from direct knowledge.” (P-IJ)

“Professionals are learning with no professionals and also learning methodologies of work that are not specifically given in class but that are interesting and a direct consulting experience in real time.” (P-OP)

“They know each other, compare notes on teachers, and so in that sense, just like in other programs, in other formats, professors do not coordinate too much, but if they do not coordinate it is not a life or death matter; here it is. Here coordination is indispensable, in evaluation criteria, hand-in standards, attendance, punctuality, breaks.” (P-ST)

Assessment and Monitoring

According to participating professors, the assessment is the aspect that generates the most conflicts in adult students. The repercussions at the personal, academic, and even financial level of assessments produce high levels of stress in adults. Teachers asserted this pressure affects them as well in terms of more or less objective higher demands that generate uncomfortable situations, which question their professionalism as teachers.

To avoid the inconveniences produced when students do not agree with their evaluations, teachers insisted constant feedback is necessary so that students always know where they are stand what is left to learn. Actually, they noted academic tutoring following academic progress in these students is more frequent than with traditional students, either face-to-face or by email. Teachers mentioned two strategies that have proven useful in order to corroborate at the group level if these students keep the pace: 1) summarize the material at the beginning of each session, surveying the group aloud, and 2) create a list of key points that serve as both a guide and as an evaluation on the session.
Knowledge testing, oral presentations, and written assignments have been the most used evaluation tools by teachers and through which, according to them, they obtain good results with adult students. Mentions of other types of innovative testing methods was minimal, although they noted adult students resent these projects if they extend beyond the assigned class schedule because of their time limitations and a lack of objectivity in group grading.

Regarding the level of difficulty of the assessments, interviewed teachers recognized that with these students they are more flexible concerning the amount of time invested and deadlines, but there is no difference regarding assessment formats or the criteria they manage with traditional students. Finally, it must be noted that the teacher discourses examined point towards the use of assessments in a mainly summative, and to a lesser degree formative, manner.

Table 7. Learning Assessment and Monitoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpts from teachers’ discussion [translated]</th>
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<tr>
<td>“They have a lot of fear towards examinations; it is to say, towards assessment tools and the possible result that an evaluation could have on their own wellbeing, for their own perfection. I think because there are other implications. When you are young how do you tell your parents you have been suspended, but when you are an adult how do you tell your wife you have been suspended and then the economic implications follow which is a much serious matter.” (P-CD)</td>
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<td>“Well, it has been managed with the student counselor, it is a move that to me sometimes does not seem adequate because when I test I’m very careful with the assessments and in that regard I am very serious. You may question a teacher, of course, I could be wrong and that would be the correct approach, but perhaps to me it seems the presumption is the teacher did something wrong… They want to approve and… although I do not have the feeling that has been the case with most students, but it has happened to me…” (P-QR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They do need a lot of alternative assessments systems and I care about all students having the same workload and effort.” (P-GH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Watch it since not just because they are older we need to be more permissive. Not that. We must understand their particular situations but high grades should be achieved equally by all.” (P2)</td>
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<td>“65% of the things I question in assessments are mandatory yes or yes. Another thing is if I decide if it is administered on the 19th or the 25th. There is no problem if you, or you, have a situation and I have to re-administer the test. Up to that point fine.” (P5)</td>
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<td>“Let’s say blackmailing quote and quote, blackmailing comes at the moment of the evaluation. If everything turns out fine, it’s fine. And if not, emotional blackmail. True, they are more reasonable people, people with whom you may talk and better explain things. But suspense is suspense for a 22-year old and for a 45-year old, in that regard the process if the same.” (P-OP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Assessment tests constitute 65% and they all take them yes or yes. The other 35% are optional activities and for which I give all possible alternatives, let me explain. They have the option of doing it individually, written…. do you prefer to work in a group? Fine, do it in a group. No more than four people and you need to write it down and present it. Ah, you want to prepare an oral presentation because you have problems with grammar… what I always do is give them alternatives so they can choose.” (P-AB).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When we have group assignments we establish part of the evaluation will depend on a rubric. Then each member of the group, besides self-evaluating themselves for their participation in the group, they evaluate the other members of the group but they don’t like that much. No. First...”</td>
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because they do not have the time and then because they do not think it’s fair. They are always reproaching some work more than others…” (P-AB)

“The key tool is to remember. Remember the key points. In each class session you have to do it and that is very good. You need to create the key points before coming to class and they have to be your guide to continue the class so that they then can evaluate the results. That way they will see everything delimited.” (P-OP)

“You have to guide them constantly. I use a lot the review technique, going back over the material and everyone participates.” (P-IJ)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Teachers interviewed have a fairly elaborated discourse on the profile of adult learners, highlighting their heterogeneity and high motivation toward learning. The hybrid profile of teachers serving adult university students, as higher education professionals and experts in their respective professions, is a relevant fact in this report, as well as their need to obtain basic training as a critical aspect in order to prevent student withdrawal and program abandonment.

The teaching model noted by the interviewees as the best option, and foundation of the proposal presented, is focused on a process that allows students to make connections between new knowledge and previous experience, learning by active participation, and learning in different environments, with different formats and through an ample variety of activities.

The teaching model presented, based on this learning model, is focused on three aspects. The first is related to an individualized diagnostic regarding previous knowledge and experience, which may allow students to be aware of the distance between intellectual, professional, and personal maturity and their learning goals. And, on the other hand, it should allow the teacher to design didactic situations that reduce that distance.

The second aspect is related to the use of learning methods based on recognizing previous experiences as a necessary context to produce new knowledge and its connection to relevant aspects of the profession. This connection also makes learning more relevant to adult learners, since it enhances the emotional connection with the subject matter and, with that, the motivation and personal recognition, which will inevitably result in deeper learning.

The third aspect, which generates more pressure among teachers and students because of the academic and professional repercussions, seeks to provide students with information regarding their progress in achieving objectives, be it at the individual or group level, in order to signal how much still needs to be achieved, minimize stress evaluation, and provide suggestions that could stimulate academic success.

One of the most interesting conclusions to point out are those prominent aspects in the literature as key in adult learning and that have not been corroborated in this investigation. These aspects refer, firstly, to an increased need for guidance by teachers, which contradicts adult students situation, autonomous in their learning, and secondly, the lack of motivation to work in groups and generate shared knowledge.

To finalize, it is important to point out the worries of participating teachers regarding the training of faculty members working with adult students or mixed groups. Psychopedagogic
instruction should address providing attention to each student as individuals, since they require personalized attention, on top of the demands of managing a more complex classroom given the student body diversity and their different levels of previous knowledge and experience. Despite the difficulties these higher education professionals admit having in this scenario, the interviewees point it out as a professional challenge, coinciding in that the most interesting groups to teach are mixed ones: working adults and traditional students.

References


Motivational Issues of Faculty in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study focused on the factors that affect motivation of faculty in Saudi Arabia. It included two surveys and open-ended queries to a focus group of five academic managers and 25 faculty members of varying nationalities, rank, and institutes in Saudi Arabia. The research showed that the faculties in Saudi Arabia’s higher education industry feel disconnected from the program development. The faculty members did not feel motivated to participate in the development and improvement of the academic program due to: (a) lack of monetary and non-monetary incentives, (b) management not involving faculty in decision-making, and (c) lack of recognition and moral support. However, the faculties were intrinsically motivated to perform their best within the confines of the classroom. The results of the study indicated that there was a greater interest in intrinsic motivation as a personal measure for success inside the classroom, but extrinsic motivation was a factor that needed greater improvement from the management of the universities for faculty to partake in development of the program.

Keywords: faculty motivation, faculty motivators, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

The idea of motivation has created a wide range of theoretical frameworks centered around studying the causes of what drives people to do what they do or what they are supposed to do (Reiss, 2004). The observation of these factors is influenced by different variables that might positively or negatively affect the outcome and lead researchers to false or misleading results (Reiss, 2004). Some studies have identified empirical evidence that has established a direct correlation between motivation and obtaining wealth (Reiss & Havercamp, 1998).

Higher education is a field with many opportunities for motivation studies, particularly factors that affect student motivation. Research pertaining to faculty motivation identifies certain factors that are affected by different variables (Hsieh, 2007). The use of general variables can lead to a flawed study because some variables are affected by situations that restrict results to conditional motivation. The administration and faculty dynamics can also play a strong role in determining the results of motivation within faculty members. Some faculty may find extrinsic factors, such as wealth, more motivating, whereas others may be more motivated by intrinsic factors, such as personal fulfillment.
Saudi Arabia in Context

Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arab league, with a fast-growing economy (Country Watch, 2010). The Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA), a faction of the Saudi government responsible for investment affairs, has conducted quantitative research into the economic development of Saudi Arabia to outline the economic status of the country for foreign direct investment. The result of the official data collected by census reports, economic indicators, and ministry reports indicated that Saudi Arabia has the largest economy in the Arab and North African region, and ranks number 24 in the world (INSEAD, 2010; SAGIA, 2010). Income per capita was reported as $20,700 in the year 2007 (SAGIA, 2010). The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [IBRD] (2011) indicated the income per capita to be $24,020 in 2009 and GDP per person employed to be $28,460 in the year 2008, making Saudi Arabia a high-income country with a strong economy.

Several aspects of management may be needed to understand the mechanisms behind faculty motivation in Saudi Arabia. Academic managers in higher education who do not understand the complexities of motivation may damage faculty morale and affect teaching performance (Hsieh, 2007). Motivation amongst faculty members in higher education institutions remains a common issue faced by academic managers (Weightman, 2008). Faculty motivation may have a notable impact on productivity of professors and teachers and affects their teaching performance (Weightman, 2008). The performance of faculty members can affect the status of an academic program, thereby limiting investments and reducing profitability (Hsieh, 2007). Research published by INSEAD (2010) ranked Saudi Arabia’s education investment 11th on a worldwide scale, yet it ranked 93rd on the knowledge creation index. Between the high investment and the low output, there might be a problem of faculty motivation.

Statement of Research and Hypothesis

The researchers explored motivational issues faced by faculty members in Saudi Arabia’s higher education industry and examined intrinsic motivators for professors and teachers. The objective of the research was to study the nature of the factors that affect motivation among faculty in Saudi Arabia’s higher education. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the factors that affect faculty motivation in Saudi Arabia’s higher education industry?
2. What is the current role of management in relation to motivation of its faculty?

The second question was used to validate the consistency of faculty responses with the general management strategy in the universities and its departments.

The hypothesis in the study was centered on the significance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators on faculty. The hypothesis was tested by means of two surveys administered to the participants by random assignment (Creswell, 2009). The hypothesis was:

\( H_{10} \): There is no significant difference between intrinsic motivators on faculty productivity and extrinsic motivators on faculty productivity.

\( H_{1a} \): There is a significant difference between intrinsic motivation on faculty productivity and extrinsic motivators on faculty productivity.
Literature Review

A vast amount of literary information has been published on quality in higher education (Stensaker, 2008). The fraction of research related to faculty motivation was divided into numerous sub-categories that range from technological impacts on motivation to online faculty motivators (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Stensaker and Pratasavitskaya (2010) noted that the higher education industry has undergone drastic changes that still rely on a rewards-based system of motivation. This traditional method of rewards and punishments may have adverse effects on faculty motivation (Pink, 2010). Trimmer (2006) concluded that the reward and punishment based system busied the faculty instead of allowing for effective teaching. This element of research into the higher education industry may have created a need for alternative motivation research for faculty members. Intrinsic motivation has become a vital area of research concerning faculty motivation (Pink, 2009).

Hsieh (2007) discussed the importance of motivation in relation to productivity. Motivation is a field of humanistic science that has a direct effect on an employee's desire to complete a given task (Adair, 2006). Lerner, Schoar, and Wang (2008) denoted that academic investments are the results of successful programs. These two factors mentioned by Hsieh (2007) and Lerner, Schoar, and Wang (2008) lay a foundation for the importance of maintaining high motivation amongst faculty in order to improve overall academic performance. This becomes of the outmost importance when considering the changes higher education will experience in coming years, as discussed by Lefebre (2008). Lefebvre predicted the growth rate to exceed 120 million enrolled students worldwide by the year 2020 (2008). Hussar and Bailey (2007) added that the enrollment in US-based universities has faced a 14% to 19% increase since 2005.

Catteeuw, Flynn, and Vonderhorst (2007) analyzed a set of studies conducted on 1,000 professionals and found that 54% were not motivated enough to complete their regular work tasks effectively. A quantitative study conducted by Bayt.com and YouGov (2009) concluded that only 21% of professionals in the Middle East are highly motivated in their jobs, with 45% claiming some level of motivation. According to the Bayt.com and YouGov (2009) study, 45% of employees showed some level of dissatisfaction with the opportunities for personal and professional development, and 53% regarding compensation and benefits. In terms of stress-levels, 85% of employees stated that they were under some level of stress (Bayt.com & YouGov, 2009). The study also included an inquiry into the intended duration of employment for participants. Seventy percent of respondents said that they were in the process of trying to change jobs or willing to change at the opportune moment (Bayt.com & YouGov, 2009). This denotes a high level of anticipated employee turnover. Ton and Huckman (2008) mentioned that a high rate of employee turnover can be detrimental to the success of an organization due to the increase in costs for human resource management.

According to Ton and Huckman (2008), faculty turnover is a result of low motivation. Ongori (2007) also stated that the employee turnover rate could be linked to various job factors that affect motivation. Job dissatisfaction was a major factor in employees’ decision to leave (Ongori, 2007). Ton and Huckman (2008) mentioned that operating costs are affected by a higher turnover rate. They mentioned that a lower turnover rate might bring innovation and creativity from new employees. However, the human resource situation in Saudi Arabia increases the costs of recruitment, especially of expatriate employees, by costs of employment (Achoui, 2009). Ongori (2007) stated that management should seriously consider the rate of turnover in order to reduce the costs of recruitment.
Research Methods and Data Analysis

The research focused on a qualitative insight into the factors that affect motivation of faculty in Saudi Arabia and a quantitative analysis of the most effective nature of motivation on faculty (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). A survey design utilizes questionnaires and interviews in order to obtain statistical data for numerical analysis (Creswell, 2009). The target group was interviewed and surveyed on questions related to motivation (Creswell, 2009). Questions related to motivation were given in hypothetical situations with different scenarios. The responses of individuals were recorded and compared in qualitative and statistical analysis. Two perspectives were taken from two distinct groups of participants: (a) managers and (b) faculty.

In this study, the use of intrinsic motivators was tested on the faculty group to see if it increased motivation among faculty in Saudi Arabia or if it showed no difference from the extrinsic motivation (Creswell, 2009). Randomization was used in selecting the participants in both groups to assure equivalency between them and prevent any unbalance in the participants that may affect the outcome of the results (Creswell, 2009). The purpose was to validate that the results are indeed an affect from the use of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and not due other variables. The results of the analysis signified the effect of intrinsic motivation on the faculty members.

The qualitative research included phenomenological design (Creswell, 2009). The descriptive aspect of the rationale studies required a stronger focus on qualitative design (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The phenomenological design was warranted because the rationale behind human behavior was investigated (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenological design can contribute a more precise understanding of the experiences of participants.

The case study, narrative research, and ethnography methods were rejected because of time constraints and inapplicability to the problem statement. The ethnographic method was rejected because a single cultural group was not observed in the study (Creswell, 2009). The narrative research was rejected because the participant pool was too large to include a complete narrative study (Creswell, 2009). Case study design was inapplicable to the problem statement.

This study included two surveys and open-ended queries to a focus group of five academic managers and 25 faculty members of varying nationalities, rank, and institutes in Saudi Arabia. These interviews and surveys were administered chronologically with the quantitative analysis being followed up with qualitative analysis. This was expected to produce an explanation of the quantitative results (Creswell, 2009). The reason for using different nationalities was to reduce the rate of bias that might be found in interviewing single nationalities (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). This research followed a concurrent embedded strategy (Creswell, 2009).

Research should be able to serve policy makers, practitioners and the public it is directed to (Fowler, 2009). The findings are expected to be useful and applicable in order to foster change and good for the society (Duncan & Harrop, 2006). This research attempted to provide a list of strategies and techniques for academic managers to increase motivation among faculty. Because of the reason-orientated focus of this study, the qualitative approach was stressed more. The qualitative research was used to explain the quantitative findings and show how it affects faculty and how it can be used to provide positive results.

The interview questions were validated through a pilot study that was conducted with five individuals from a similar sample as the intended participants (Lancaster, Dodd, &
Williamson, 2004). The participants in the pilot study were not considered for the actual study. Additionally, the participants of the pilot study were required to maintain confidentiality of the interview questions. A validated survey was obtained from Spector’s (1994) job satisfaction survey. NVivo 8 was used to analyze qualitative data obtained from interviews with participants. The statistical tools that will be used in this study are PASW Statistics GradPack Base 17.0 and Excel. Excel was used to format data after the statistical analysis for ease of customization. However, a more sophisticated statistical tool was used for statistical analysis, PASW Statistics. The interviewees were granted confidentiality at their requests and were coded as faculty participants (FP1 through FP25) and manager participants (MP1 through MP5). The thematic analysis of the faculty participants provided an outlook into the causality of faculty motivation and the factors that faculty found positive or negative. The analysis of manager respondents provided the perspective of management into their faculty motivation to validate the responses of faculty participants.

Results and Observations

The research showed that the faculties in Saudi Arabia’s higher education industry feel disconnected from the program development. The faculty members did not feel motivated to participate in the development and improvement of the academic program due to: (a) lack of monetary and non-monetary incentives, (b) management not involving faculty in decision-making, and (c) lack of recognition and moral support. However, the faculties were intrinsically motivated to perform their best within the confines of the classroom. The results of the study indicated that there was a greater interest in intrinsic motivation as a personal measure for success inside the classroom, but extrinsic motivation was a factor that needed greater improvement from the management of the universities for faculty to partake in development of the program. Faculty members gave mixed responses related to the involvement of their direct managers in their teaching. The faculty believed that their contribution to the program had a great impact on the productivity of the department that they teach. However, they believed no motivation to participate in developing the program due to extrinsic factors that de-motivated them. The research questions were examined in detail in QSR NVivo 8. The hypothesis was tested in PASW Statistics 18 and was based on the survey results. The quantitative analysis on job satisfaction and motivation preference complimented the results of the qualitative analysis on the factors that influence faculty motivation.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that intrinsic motivation has a stronger effect on faculty than extrinsic motivation. The test was non-significant, t(14.997) = -0.731, p = 0.067. The results show that the null hypothesis is not rejected and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. Intrinsic motivators (M = 4.20, SD = .96) showed no significant difference in motivating faculty compared to extrinsic motivation (M = 4.49, SD = .66). Spector’s (1994) job satisfaction matrix was divided into eight sections: (a) financial, (b) promotion, (c) supervision, (d) benefits, (e) environment, (f) coworkers, (g) nature of work, and (h) communication. The distribution of the means of the satisfaction surveys displayed ambivalence in the levels of satisfaction amongst faculty participants with regard to supervision, coworkers and the nature of the job. Higher levels of satisfaction were found among direct supervisors, coworkers, and the nature of the job (M = 4.78, M = 4.80, M = 4.87). The lowest satisfaction mean (M = 3.13) was related to the ability for a faculty member to grow professionally in the organization.
Discussion

The findings show several important factors that affect faculty motivation: lack of financial incentives, ineffective management, and lack of recognition. Hsieh (2007) demonstrated the importance of faculty motivation in establishing a profitable academic program. Teacher motivation proved to have a significant effect on the profitability of the university programs. Establishing what motivational factors affect faculty members can create a higher profitability index of academic programs and create value that can attract investments into the university. The study conducted by Gebauer and Fleisch (2007) strengthens the notion that faculty motivation can influence academic investment.

Saudi Arabia’s higher education industry experiences a very high rate of investment from the government. For university programs to compete for the highest investment rate, they must address the issue of faculty motivation and consider the input of the faculty on how to improve a program’s productivity and profitability effectively. Academic managers, deans, and rectors of Saudi universities can implement better policies to provide faculty with the best opportunity to create a more attractive learning environment. This effort can increase the rate of investment into the university and provide an overall better service to the students.

Private universities stand to benefit the most from the development of quality academic programs and obtaining funding for new colleges and departments. The Ministry of Higher Education (2010) in Saudi Arabia declared an increasing rate of private colleges and universities being established in the country. The competition between private and public colleges and universities concludes at the quality of service, or education, offered. The findings of this study can contribute to improving the quality of education to create better academic programs that may increase the student population or encourage investment. The results can be classified into three themes: (1) Intrinsic motivation, (2) extrinsic motivation, (3) management involvement and support. Investors into higher education can utilize the themes researched in this study to determine whether academic programs are a viable investment. The change in the way that management motivate or manage motivation in the university can yield results that are beneficial to the university’s program.

The three themes constitute a general understanding of the factors that faculty faces in Saudi Arabia's higher education system. Understanding these factors from the perspective of the faculty can provide academic managers with the ability to address these issues appropriately in order to achieve the optimal level of performance. The thematic analysis provides a detailed understanding of the dynamics that affect faculty motivation. University management and academic managers can match these factors with their current faculty and utilize this knowledge to support and foster faculty productivity in order to improve the quality of their programs.

This study concentrated on a specific area in Saudi Arabia where higher education development is on the rise (IBRD, 2008). The results of the study were expected to add to the understanding of motivation in a diverse faculty workforce in a country that is also developing its education (IBRD, 2008). The result of the study may serve as a guideline in motivating faculty and improving faculty productivity by motivation. The results of this study are expected to assist academic leaders in understanding the motivational issues faced by faculty so that they may improve their techniques in order to improve the profitability of the program. Solving the issue of motivation of faculty may lead to higher efficiency in teaching and thereby improve overall profitability of a program (Yee, Yeung, & Edwin Cheng, 2008).
Research of this type may provide academic leaders and education investors with a broader understanding of the common issues faced with motivating faculty. In addition, the findings could lead to potential solutions to managing motivation, including how to create intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation for faculty. Research that considers cultural-specifics of an educational organization may improve cultural sensitivity within the non-local faculty. The results of filling these gaps may lead to higher profitability of an academic program by reducing a high-turnover rate of faculty (Kroth, 2007). The results of the research may contribute a stronger focus on positive implications that can improve management efforts in motivation of faculty in cross-cultural environments.

Conclusion

This study focused primarily on a commonality of motivation factors faced by faculty members that could be used to develop an understanding of motivation processes that could be implemented in the higher education industry of Saudi Arabia. The intended audiences for this study are current and potential academic managers and investors in higher education institutes in Saudi Arabia. This study was expected to provide a guideline to current and potential academic managers in Saudi Arabia for handling faculty motivation issues. This study was limited to particular instances with the effect of religion, culture, nepotism, and Saudization, or the nationalization of jobs, on faculty motivation.

The results of the study may positively contribute to change within an educational organization concerning managing its faculty members. Academic managers can benefit from the results of the research and improve their techniques in motivating their faculty to improve teaching performance. The intent of the researcher was to create a greater condition of social and academic management change. One of the strongest positive outcomes related to the study would be a creation of academic excellence for students. Improving the state of academic in Saudi Arabia would create a better learning environment for students who will soon enter a challenging job market.

References


Faculty perspective on competency development in Higher Education: An international study

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to establish common ground on how faculty development should be instituted and the needs it should address on an international level, with its major focus being the development of competencies. A survey was developed and distributed to a sample of 764 university teaching professionals. Results show that 90% find that it is either important or very important to develop competencies in higher education, and that 73% find they are well or very well trained in developing and assessing competencies, particularly with regard to applying theoretical knowledge in practice, teamwork, and oral and written communication skills. The least valued competencies are found to be entrepreneurship and leadership. The most valued teaching methods are: project based learning, immersion in a professional environment, visits, field trips, and anything that closes the gap between the professional and academic worlds. University teaching staff consider the best assessment scenarios to be those that involve a certain amount of immersion in real situations, problem posing, and simulation; the optimum measurement instruments use observation techniques and rubrics. The need to create academic teaching communities is found to be of great importance. A common assessment method is also seen as a useful addition.

Keywords: Competencies, faculty perspectives, assessment, teaching methods

Introduction

Rapid changes in technology, work organization, and life itself are part of an increasingly interdependent and conflicting world, and they present new challenges for everyone. Traditional problem-solving methods are unable to respond to the constant need for innovation and efficiency imposed by intense competition among organizations, now powered by globalization. The old individual work toolbox, equipped with the knowledge acquired in school and some
competencies developed during early years, must be extended with new competencies like teamwork, multitasking, communicating, taking initiative, lifelong learning, and adapting to change. These changes in the workplace naturally had an impact on each organization's human resources management, bringing the notion of *competence* and *competency* to the fore.

Although much discussed, there is no consensus on a definition of *competency* (e.g., Fletcher, 1997; Mansfeld 1996; Roe 2002; Spencer & Spencer 1993). The word is part of our daily language, but has different meanings in various academic fields—psychology, economy, education, sociology or linguistics, to name a few. It is almost impossible to find one definition that would suit such different fields of knowledge, and it is even more difficult to find adequate translations of the term into the many languages used in this globalized world. There is also critical analysis of the concept of competence as it is being used in higher education (Lozano, Boni, Peris, & Hueso, 2012).

Perrenoud has pointed out that “competence is the power to act with effectiveness in a situation, mobilizing and combining, in real time and in a pertinent way, intellectual and emotional resources” (2013, p. 45). He saw competence as a product of learning and, at the same time, a foundation of human action. Competence is a personal and unique way of dealing with a situation or solving a problem, in both work and personal life. In this sense, competence is inseparable from action and results and is, according to Ropé and Tanguy, “an attribute that can only be appreciated and assessed in a given situation”. (1997, p. 16). As Perrenoud noted, this concept recognizes the complexities of work; it appreciates the ability of an intelligent person to provide solutions in complex situations, make decisions when faced with uncertainty, act quickly, and assume risks (2013).

Boyatzis (2007) defined competency as “a capability or ability. It is a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct” (p. 6). Markus, Cooper-Thomas, and Allpress (1997) pointed out that the literature has approached competency in three different ways: educational, behavioral, and business (p. 117-118). Within the educational context in the United States, “competencies’ were based on functional role analysis and described either role outcomes, or knowledge, skills and attitudes, or both, required for role performance, and assessed by a criterion, usually a behavioural standard” (1997, p. 117).

Chan, Liu, Cao, and Fellow (2013) noted that the terms *competence, competency*, and *competencies* are frequently used interchangeably, which might create confusion. According to these authors, these terms tend to be distinguished in research in the following manner:

i) competence refers to aspects of the job that an employee can perform, ii) competency is defined as behaviours an employee needs to display in order to do the job effectively, such as sensitivity; and iii) competencies refer to the attributes underpinning a behaviour. (Chan et al., 2013, p. 385 [citing Manley and Garbett, 2000; Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002; Westera, 2001; Woodruffe, 1993])
In the context of this research, authors refer to competency instead of competence, as differentiated in this introduction.

Higher Education and the Development of Competencies

Changes in the workplace are putting pressure on educational systems to change their academic approaches to developing new generations. Since the 1970s, documents prepared by Unesco, OCDE, the European Union, and a wide range of regional and national governments to address these changes have guided curriculum reform and teaching methodology. A good example of this movement is the document New Skills for New Jobs, produced by the European Commission in 2009, that aimed to set the agenda for anticipating the skills Europe will need in the next 10 years and reforming education and training systems to prepare people for the “jobs of tomorrow” (2009, p. 3). It stated:

Labour markets - and the skills people need - are evolving ever faster and future jobs are likely to require higher levels and a different mix of skills, competencies and qualifications. It will be increasingly necessary for workers to acquire transversal key competencies, to participate in lifelong learning and to develop new skills to be able to adapt to a variety of tasks over their working lives. (2009, p. 2)

Nowadays, everyone who wants to be part of the labor market and have a good job must have a degree, but in our modern society this is far from being enough. Employers today are looking for graduates who have not only specific knowledge, but also the ability to see and respond to problems proactively. Their search is on a comprehensive scale for graduates who balance good academic achievement with skills in oral and written communication, teamwork, personal interaction, and the like (Juhdi, Abu Samah, & Yunus, 2004).

Lifelong learning and the ability to develop competencies are the new requirements. However, it is not only in the workplace that new competencies are needed. As pointed out by Rychen and Salganik:

From a broader social perspective, knowledge, skills, and competencies are important because they contribute to
- increasing individual understanding of public policy issues and participation in democratic processes and institutions;
- social cohesion and justice; and
- strengthening human rights and autonomy as counterweights to increasing global inequality of opportunities and individual marginalization. (2000, p. 3)

Higher education institutions cannot be exempt from these changes; they must prepare students to deal with the professional and personal challenges imposed by an increasingly complex society. Developing competencies is very different from learning academic topics in the traditional way. Because, as Perrenoud pointed out, “competencies can be addressed only
within the context of given circumstances, it is essential to think simultaneously using competencies in such situations” (2013, p. 43). This implies a significant move that leads to substantial changes in how teachers teach and students learn. Thus, to improve education based on the development of competencies, it is essential to rethink curricula and to work with faculties to change the way teaching and learning happens in classrooms.

It is necessary that faculty members change both the manner in which they devise and carry out their instructional practices and the way they perceive their own professional competencies. This can happen only if faculty members shift the way they comprehend their own practice; instead of being all-knowing sages, they need to move towards being facilitators, who structure situations that help students find and build knowledge. The extent of this challenge establishes the need for intense faculty development in this new view of education (Roe, 2002). Therefore, the assessment of students’ development of competencies is an important issue in higher education and needs to be taken into account. Just as students' knowledge is evaluated, so must their achievement in terms of competencies also be subject to comprehensive assessment (Bartram & Roe, 2005).

It is imperative to be informed of teachers’ perceptions of their training in methods that develop competencies in students, and their perceived capacity to face this challenge; it is also crucial to identify their needs and difficulties. However, there are not many studies available on an international scale that investigate this from the point of view of the instructors. Most research focuses on the development of specific competencies (Lwoga, 2013) and the various aspects of evaluating them (Barrales Villalobos, Landín, Pérez, Cruz, & Rodríguez, 2012; Cambridge, 2008; Schaeper 2009; Wilson & Scalise, 2000).

**Competency Development in an International Higher Education Network**

Students enrolled at the universities that took part in this study are part of an international, academic community, a higher education network that spans 29 countries throughout the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In this context and aware of this need, this higher education network is developing a common pedagogy to support students in developing professional competencies. In order to do this, its first step was to establish which competencies were not only the most important, but also suitable for professional training in countries as different as, say, Switzerland and Malaysia. These competencies would be essential for working both locally and internationally, as required in a globalized world.

A survey of deans and professionals conducted within the universities in this higher education network established eight common professional competencies that are central to development and accessible to students around the world:

- Oral and written communication
- Teamwork
- Autonomous learning
- Ability to apply knowledge in practice
- Capacity to adapt to new situations
- Leadership
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Global mindset

Although there are many other competencies that would be of interest for development during professional education, choices had to be made, and these were considered to be central to the success of every undergraduate student. These competencies address the needs imposed by work in local organizations; they also prepare students to: be part of worldwide organizations, do business locally and internationally, be informed and participating members of their community, and become responsible global citizens.

Research Questions and Objectives

In a worldwide higher education organization such as the one in this study, there will be significant differences among its institutions’ educational approaches and philosophies. This study intends to find common ground for establishing faculty development on developing competencies, while addressing their needs at an international level. The results would be used, for example, to build a training program that could be offered to all universities within the network. This study, therefore, aims to answer the following research questions:

- Which philosophical and pedagogical principles guide daily teaching practices?
- How does the faculty perceive learning?
- How familiar is the faculty with the notion of competence?
- How does the faculty interpret the notion of competence?
- What does the faculty know about competency development?
- What experience does the faculty have of competency development?

Some of these questions have been considered in different studies. Research has been done into the development of general competencies at the university level, in an attempt to assess teaching when clinical practices are used to develop and assess student skills and competencies (Prince, van Eijs, Boshuizen, van der Vleuten, & Scherpbier, 2005). These approaches have focused on integral education and the labor market. This necessity for change in teaching is already recognized. Huanca (2010) provided evidence in his research for the success of such teaching.

Barrales et al. (2012) research questionnaire included a question asking the best way to assess competencies: portfolios, forms, headings, logs, or checklists. Mir Acebron’s (2008) research attempted to assess the perception of the development of competencies in teaching and learning. In this study, a questionnaire asked respondents to select the best choice in given teaching situations; the best strategies were seen to be specific workshops for teachers and
practicums for students. Spronken-Smith's (2012) research assessed inquiry-based learning in higher education instruction as it related to developing competencies in students. These studies show that it is necessary to develop new activities for teaching when the purpose is to improve competencies in students. The research suggests that ideally there is a mix of theoretical classes, practical classroom activities, and external experiences. This study demonstrates that coordination among teaching professionals is very important.

In the above context, the research being described in this article has the following objectives:

- Obtain a better understanding of how Laureate teaching staff comprehend the notion of competency and its use in practice, so that competencies development training will be more effective.
- Acquire a clear view of pedagogical principles of the faculty.
- Understand how instructors perceive teacher and student roles in the learning experience.
- Ascertaining faculty knowledge and perception of competencies development.
- Find out what experience faculty have with competencies development.

To attain these research objectives, a survey was designed and administered to faculties from three universities part of a global higher education network: Universidad Europea de Madrid (UEM), located in Madrid, Spain; Universidad de Anhembi Morumbi (UAM), located in São Paulo, Brazil; and INTI International University and Colleges (INTI), with campuses in Subang, Kuala Lampur, Penang, and Sabah, all in Malaysia.

Method

Participants, Tools, and Data Collection

In order to gather the information needed to meet the objectives, a questionnaire was drawn up based on the study's variables. This survey was piloted by 50 teaching staff for its initial validation. A pattern was designed by conglomerates in proportion to the size of the university and its faculties. Each conglomerate was comprised of the faculties/teaching schools of the universities taking part and selected by the participating departments. The extent of the survey was determined to be at a level of 95% confidence and the questionnaire was distributed until the desired response ratio was reached. The survey was carried out online. The first step was to e-mail to the teaching staff of the chosen departments cover letters that requested the completion of the questionnaire, described the study, and provided a link to the survey. The heads of each department encouraged everyone to participate. Data collection began in April 2014 and ended in May 2014.

In total, 729 faculty members in three universities completed the surveys: Universidad Europea de Madrid (317), INTI (68), Universidad de Anhembi Morumbi (344). The demographic
profile of the sample included 51% women and 49% men. The mean age of faculty members was 43 years (SD = 9.8 years). Approximately 26% had been members of the faculty for less than 3 years, 21% between 3 and 5 years, 18% between 6 and 10 years and 35% for more than 10 years. Apart from teaching at the university, 66% were involved in other professional activities.

Teaching professionals are not unaware of the concept of competencies or the means of developing them, and they integrate them into the various activities that form part of their educative task. More particularly, 81% of the teaching staff indicated that they had attended conventions, discussions, and seminars on the topic, and 49% of them had presented papers or studies related to the development of competence. In addition, 74% of them had received specific training within the last 3 years, and 23% had been in charge of studies that considered aspects of development and evaluation of competencies as part of graduate studies and even doctoral theses.

Measures

Demographic variables. Participants were asked to report their gender, age, years of experience as a faculty member, and the year of the program in which they have the greatest teaching load.

Importance of the development of competence. Crucial to the success of this teaching paradigm is the commitment of the instructional staff to an educational process that is based on the development of competencies and that defines learning objectives that stem from the competencies. For this reason, teaching professionals were asked whether in their opinion it is important to develop general competencies in their university students.

Level of knowledge for developing general competencies. Two questions were drawn up (on the Likert 5 point scale) to ascertain the degree of training in general competence undergone by the teachers at the university. One of these was more general and had as its objective a self-evaluation of training; the other, which addressed all eight competencies, was intended to determine whether university teachers consider themselves better prepared for developing some competencies than others.

Learning activities and teaching methods for competency development. Two questions were intended to identify the teaching methods and learning activities used by university teachers to develop general competencies; these also address the most suitable methods for developing each competence.

Assessment. When considering the development of competencies of university students, the evaluation of competency development is crucial. For information on this factor, four questions were drawn up relating to the importance of the evaluation. Respondents assessed their own training in competency development evaluation, both overall and by addressing each competence separately, in order to determine the strategies most used by teaching staff to conduct such evaluations. These questions elicited specific answers on the Likert 5 point scale.
Disadvantages and specific needs related to the development of general competencies. Once the difficulties and specific needs confronted by teaching professionals in the development and evaluation of the competencies are recognized, the areas where more work is needed to help them in their daily interactions with students can be identified. In order to facilitate the collection of this type of information, there were several open questions that led to answers which could be categorized prior to being analyzed.

Results and Discussions

The results provided by university teachers from all countries confirm the importance of the development of general competencies among university students, given that 90% of them consider this to be important or very important (mean=4.4, SD=0.7), with no significant differences among the universities studied. Teaching staff are conscious of the demands made by society and the importance of offering a training model that is more congruent with these demands. In a climate of changing paradigms in education, support for instructors is crucial to the successful implementation of these changes, and to the universities’ ability to ensure that these changes are effectively carried out.

Faculty development is fundamental to the effectiveness of these strategies. Abdul-Ghafar (2004) stressed that an important factor in developing an effective curriculum is the need for academics to understand the breadth of the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to engage in professional practice. This is corroborated by several international studies (Mir Acebrón, 2008; Ting & Ying, 2012).

![Figure 1](image_url). To what extent do you consider the development of general competencies relevant for students in higher education?

Academic teaching staff are confident of their ability to develop general competencies in their students along with the specific competencies contained in their teaching materials. This is demonstrated by the fact that 89% of teaching staff at the universities consider themselves prepared to do this (mean 4.81, SD 0.9). This shows that universities are incorporating new teaching methods, and that teaching staff have progressed from traditional approaches where competency development was not important towards more up to date instructional frameworks in which university teachers are responsible for developing competencies. This is in contrast with the viewpoint of university teaching staff of a few years ago (Corominas et al. 2006).
To what extent do you believe that you have enough knowledge or training to be able to help your students develop general competencies?

The answers to this, however, are not quite as conclusive when the question is asked for each one of the eight selected competencies individually. Table 3 for the applicability of knowledge put into practice shows that oral and written competencies, together with teamwork, are the areas where teaching staff feel most confident in their ability to nurture student development. Conversely, they feel less confident about developing entrepreneurial spirit or the global mindset. In spite of the fact that entrepreneurial spirit is a key competence, there has been little research on how to teach this competence within the education framework (Draycott & Rae, 2011; Gibb 2008; Hynes, O’Dwyer, & Birdthistle; 2009). This discrepancy in self-assessed teaching ability demonstrates the instructors’ consensus that developing each separate competence requires a different methodology and approach.

How well are you prepared to develop each of these general competencies?

The following tables show the data obtained regarding teaching strategies and learning activities developed by teaching staff for developing competencies in university students. By
Paloma Julia Velasco, Begoña Learreta, Claudia Kober, and Irene Tan – Faculty Perspective on Competency Development in Higher Education: An International Study

asking how frequently faculty members use specific activities in their classrooms, we have ascertained that 84% of them always or nearly always use learning activities to promote the development of students’ general competencies. However, not all these activities are suitable for developing any one particular competence. Evidence shows that each competence requires a different set of activities; it is up to the teacher to identify and manage the spectrum of possibilities. With this in mind, Table 1 demonstrates the results obtained when teaching staff are asked which of their activities or strategies they consider most appropriate for developing each of the competencies. There is already evidence available in the literature on the use of different teaching and learning methods for developing competence.

Table 1. In your experience, which teaching methods are most appropriate for developing each of the following skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Oral and written communication</th>
<th>Capacity to adapt to new situations</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Ability to apply knowledge to practice</th>
<th>Autonomious learning</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Global mindset</th>
<th>Entrepreneurial spirit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem-based learning</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case method</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative/cooperative learning</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialog learning (debates)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-based learning</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation (in laboratories or specific spaces)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion in professional environments (visiting, trips, practices...)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group investigations</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real life industry projects</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answers to the other methods of learning item mentioned the use of a reflective diary, mind maps and conceptual diagrams, related texts for reading, etc. The flipped classroom was also suggested as an additional learning method suited to guiding the class towards developing competencies.

In a university environment, it is important to measure the level of competency development being attained by students. In this respect, the majority of teaching staff claimed that they always or nearly always make specific evaluations of their pupils’ development of competencies (Figure 4). There are no significant differences among the universities. For the teaching staff, developing and assessing the generic competencies poses a real challenge.
because of the need to access and organize relevant and innovative strategies in teaching, learning, and evaluation processes. (Halász & Michel, 2011).

The following figures show that even the perception is that teaching staff have had sufficient training for classroom assessment, their response is less emphatic than when asked about their level of assessment training (average evaluation of 3.65, SD 0.84 as opposed to average development of 3.85, SD 0.9). In this case, the figures indicate that UAM staff perceive their training more favorably than at the other universities. ($F=19.068, p<0.0001$). There is an opportunity here to back this up with further research that would analyze the proposals for training the teaching staff at each university, in order to compare and contrast such data with these figures.
As to the development of each particular competence, the researchers in this study found that teaching staff believe themselves to be better trained in evaluating the ability to apply knowledge to practice, communication, and teamwork than they are in evaluating students' global mindset or entrepreneurial spirit.

Figure 6. How much training have you had in assessing the development of these general competencies?

Figure 7 shows the methods of evaluation used by teaching staff in their classes. Teachers consider the best assessment scenarios to be those involving a certain amount of immersion in real situations, problem posing and simulations; they prefer observation techniques with rubrics as instruments over co-evaluative techniques with colleagues. It must not be forgotten that the evaluation of learning cannot be reduced to a qualification nor can it be applied during a key period in the learning process, as its purpose is to be a tool for learning. It would be appropriate to evaluate acquired skills using a number of different methods that both enable further understanding of the development stages and indicate areas for improvement. Further references are provided by authors such as McDonald, Boud, Francis, and Gonczi, (2000), Segers and Dochy (2001), and Gerard and Bief (2008).
The answers to the open survey questions were categorized in order to detect unexpected difficulties and identify needs. Based on these categorized responses from teachers regarding needs and difficulties encountered in the development of their students’ skills, the following issues emerged:

- A change in the mentality of students is necessary for raising the profile of competence assessment within general assessment. (Numerical grading is still their top priority).
- The felt need to create academic communities for learning in which faculty members can research, collaborate, enrich, and share best practice is of great importance. These academic communities must be divided into areas of qualification and expertise.
- It is important to concentrate on the weakest competencies of entrepreneurship and leadership, and create specific training to develop them.
- Practical tools commonly used, such as activity files, should be made available to teachers.
- Other issues emerged such as lack of time, greater class sizes and too many skill areas per subject (the need to focus on a few).
These findings show the need to improve development programs for teaching staff, so that they are better qualified to develop their students’ skills.

Concerning the evaluation of the development of competencies, the following findings were obtained:

- A common assessment tool is seen as a potentially useful addition, since it would allow an objective evaluation of competency development, and it would also allow cross-curricular comparisons to be made without having to standardize results.
- It would be helpful to include tools or technical support to facilitate the evaluation process.
- It would be advisable to offer specific training and practice that focuses especially on areas of competence such as entrepreneurial spirit and leadership.
- Raise the profile of competence assessment and students’ perception of it.
- Set up academic groups for teacher training and better coordination.
- Other issues are lack of time and class sizes.

The above ideas contributed by university teaching staff should lead to new improvement plans instituted in universities to improve skill-based learning. There is a need for institutions to address the issues raised and reflect on ways of helping teachers fulfill their tasks.

**Conclusions**

The concept of higher education has changed throughout the world, and a new paradigm is being adopted that seeks to develop students’ general competencies along with their specific knowledge. Employers seek graduates who possess not only excellent knowledge of subject matter, but also additional competencies that indicate their ability to successfully confront problems and continue acquiring knowledge throughout their working life. University teachers play a key role in making possible this competence-based learning model. It is for this reason that it is crucial to listen to their opinions and consider their needs in this respect.

In this study, teachers in universities across three countries reported their ability to develop general competencies in their students and, as appropriate, to introduce learning strategies into their classrooms on a regular basis. However, from the eight chosen competencies, faculty are less comfortable working and assessing global mindset, entrepreneurial spirit and leadership, which indicates the need of focusing training in these areas.

The evaluation of these competencies is also an important topic, and one to which teachers are giving their full attention. Some of the needs mentioned by teaching professionals concerned with improving development of competencies among their students are the need to create communal work spaces for sharing experiences and the need for objective and standardized evaluation methods. The responses from teaching professionals have also shed light on the most appropriate combinations of teaching strategies for each of the competencies that are targeted for improvement.
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