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Testing a model of Competence- based Teaching

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Abstract

The concept of competence has been, and still is, one of the most controversial issues during the process of restructuring the university studies within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This is not surprising as the concepts creating greater controversy are the most complex ones but at the same time, they are the most interesting and innovating ones. Those concepts encourage debate and equally they bring changes and improvements to the knowledge field (Mora,2011, Salaburu, Haug, Mora, 2011; Teichler, 2011, Perrenoud, 2012,)

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Keywords: teaching, competence-based,

Purpose of Study

We present a research that shows the point of view of university lecturers who are putting into practise the model of Competence-Based Teaching (CBT). Its conceptual foundations, the proposed specific procedures and the tools have been created by our research group.This model was set up at the University of Girona and applied to several educational institutions from different countries (Pérez Cabaní, Juandó Bosch, Echazarreta, 2009; Juandó, Pérez Cabaní, 2010).

Methods

A total of 63 lecturers from the University of Girona with different profiles, years of experience and dedication (full time and part time) participated in this study. Some of them also took part on a pilot plan to adjust the study

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programmes to the EHEA where a set of competences was defined and matched with the different subjects. All they have been lecturing at the first year of the faculties programmes.

The tool used in this study to collect information was an online survey with different types of questions about the model and its procedures and tools. The different types of questions of this survey were the following:

·Questions with multiple-choice answer: years of experience, type of dedication, participation in the pilot plan and in the allocation of competencies to their subject (independent variables). Example: "Years of experience in the university: (a) between 0 and 5, (b) between 5 and 10, (c) between 10 and 15, and (d) more than 15." The total number of these questions was 4.

· Likert questions on their views about the model and planning by competence. Example: "Would you consider that the competences of your subjects are suitable?: (a) very much, (b) little, (c) nothing." The total number of questions was 14.

· Open questions to broadly explain the arguments that guided the choice on the likert questions. Example: "Comment on your answer". The total number of the open questions was 5.

After testing the survey validity and reliability, we sent this survey to the lecturers in order they could answer it via online.

Data analyses were both quantitative and qualitative:

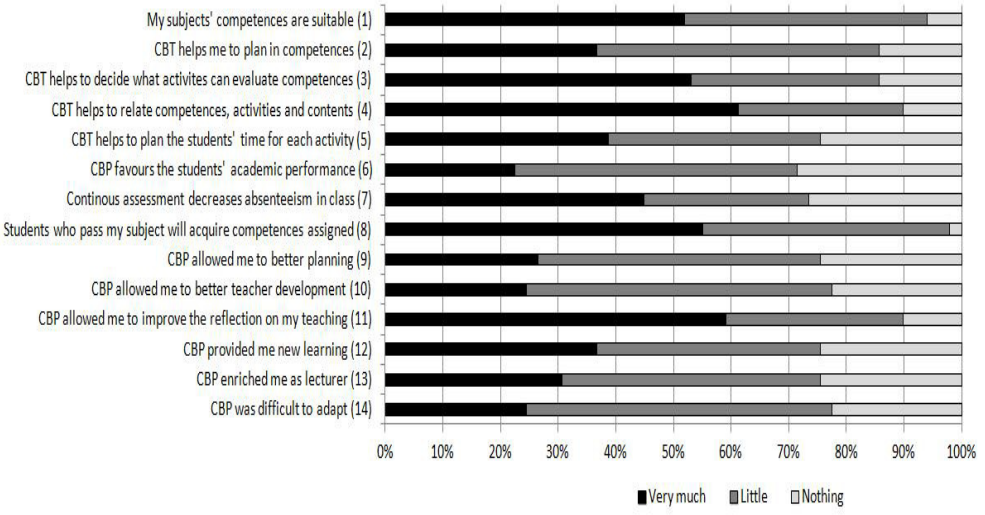
· Quantitative analysis consisted in the calculation of the percentages of the survey questions.

· Qualitative analysis consisted in the analysis of the content of the open answers. For this reason, we conducted an interactive and group process of categorizing, from which 5 main categories emerged: Competencies, Assessment, Academic performance, and Initial phase of the model implementation, other issues. These broad answers grouped in categories helped us to better interpret the answers of the likert questions.

Finding results

As regards the quantitative analysis, Figure 1 shows graphically the percentage of answers given by the participants in the survey. The three possible answers were: very much, little, nothing. We consider “very much” and “little” as positive answers whereas “nothing” as a negative answer. More than the 70% of the lecturers gave positive answers to all the questions. Among them, six questions exceed 80%, and two were above 90%.

(Figure 1) Figure 1. Percentage of answers given by the participants to each question about Competence-Based Teaching (CBT) question and Competence-Based Planning (CBP)



Higher scores are related to the competences of the subjects: participants thought in more than 90% that their subjects' competences are suitable (question 1) and that students who passtheir subject will acquire competences assigned (question 8), which reveals that the process of allocation of these competences to the subjects from the coordination board of studies is highly concurrent with the criterion of the lecturers.

Other higher scores (above 80%) refer to the usefulness of the Competence-Based Planning (CBP) (question 2), to decide which activities can be used to assess competences (question 3) and to relate competences, activities and contents (question 4), as well as the fact that the CBP allowed them to improve the reflection of own teaching (question 11).

The participants also showed in more than 70%, in greater or lesser extent, that CBT helped to plan the time that the student would devote to each activity (question 5). In addition, they also pointed out that continuous assessment decreases absenteeism in class (question 7) and the CBT favours academic students (question 6), it allowed them to better planning (question 9) and teaching development (question 10), it provided new learning (question 12) and enriched them as lecturers (question 13), although it difficult and coasted them to adapt (question 14).

As regards the qualitative analysis of the open answers are summarised on the following categories:

a) Competences:
· Regarding to this category, the most notable elements of content analysis are, first, the definition of each competence. In some cases, competences definition is assessed very positively and in other cases it is considered as a lack of specification.
· The allocation of competencies to each subject is another aspect the participants commented. They expressed concern on the excessive number of competences allocated in each subject and they showed interest in verify whether the allocated competences are really that the teacher would consider during their teaching. They also took into consideration the relationship between competences and content and, in some cases, these two elements are contrasted.
· Another aspect commented by the participants was the unbalance between specific competences, related directly with the subject and general or transversal competences.

b) Assessment:
The few considerations that are made with respect to the assessment of competences are oriented to show the difficulty to assess every competence allocated to each subject. On the other hand, the continuous assessment generates a set of diverse comments, ranging from its positive impact on class attendance to its objections.

c) Academic performance:
The contributions of the participants with respect to the incidence of the CBT on academic performance are abundant. Most of them highlighted a positive influence or posed some uncertainties in their connection. Some other contributions considered that academic performance is basically dependent on student.

d) Initial phase of the model implementation:
Since this research has been carried out after a first year of the CBT implementation, frequent comments were related to this issue.

e) Other issues:
Considerations which focus on circumstantial and diverse aspects are grouped in this category, that involve the process of teaching and learning, but not directly to the object of this research. For this reason, they are not analysed in this study. They are referred to aspects as the excess of students per classroom, absenteeism, students low level to access University, the lack of resources to implement the plan Bologna, opposition to the educational approaches that arise in the current European University, among others.

Conclusions

From the point of view of lecturers, CBT is useful especially to connect competences, contents and learning activities, to evaluate competences and to think about their own practice. In addition, the CBT model also may be useful for the students, because they are assessed by competences and they are able to show them on their Diploma Supplement.

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