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Perspectives, stakeholders, and competences

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Introduction

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Editor

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Abstract: The papers in this Edition of the Journal comprise six 'general papers' and six in the COVID-19 section. Together, the papers clearly illustrate our theme *Perspectives, stakeholders, and competences*. While the papers comprising the general part of this Edition represent a diverse range of countries (Brazil, Iran, Spain, Turkey), there are some common themes. One cluster of papers is concerned with student outcomes or the professional competence of teacher trainees. The other cluster is interested in aspects of university strategy, whether financial or related to the university mission. The papers challenge us to consider the benefits of stakeholder engagement and multiple perspectives on policies, strategies, student or professional outcomes with their respective definitions, and specific educational interventions. Consequently, the methodologies and methods are appropriately diverse, involving bibliometric analysis, qualitative analysis (grounded theory, content, and textual analysis) the use of digital tools and statistics. From a theoretical lens, we encounter concepts such as parallax, historical and contemporary worldviews on education and the various philosophies on the nature of the university. Within a socio-political framework, we are introduced to the nuances of national government policies and their country-based impact that is shaped by local cultural traditions in education and attitude. Despite the range of topic, context and methods, each paper demonstrates a commitment to improving educational practice, research and student or staff experience.

Keywords: professional competences; COVID-19; teacher education; budgeting; strategy; bibliometric review.

Our first paper *'A bibliometric review of research on student outcomes in higher education'* by Ahmet Aypay and Hasan Yücel Ertem analysed 2,375 journal papers that met the initial screening criteria and were found in 52

Scopus- indexed higher education Journals during the period 1960-2020. Student outcomes, as defined in this paper, comprise competences that broadly include cognitive, affective, conscious, and social dispositions that create the basis for performance. Drawing on content analysis techniques, the study focussed on the distribution of the articles, their impact, authors and foci and knowledge base in the sector. 83.5% of the articles in the Scopus Data base were from the United States (1370), United Kingdom (330), Australia (2156), and Canada (66) demonstrating a 'Western' dominance in the literature. The most popular Journal was Studies in Higher Education (200 articles). Clustering the articles by theme, perhaps unsurprisingly, were outcomes concerned with learning and teaching, the retention of minorities, socio-economic status as a student, demography and diversity.

As the authors discussed, the quantity of papers from the United States and United Kingdom, with their respective contextual and cultural features, raises questions concerning the generalizability of the findings to other countries and settings where different trends, topics or influences upon Higher Education and student outcomes may exist. The bibliometric analysis enables the reader to discover how a field of study is influenced over time by authors (the most prolific), settings, data sources/populations and topics. Limitations of the study are that the criteria of analysis did not include author gender, ethnicity, or age and was restricted to the content analysis strategies outlined in the paper.

Perspectives on competences and outcomes from an International Business perspective are discussed by Marcelo Almeida de Camargo Pereira and Vera Lucia Felicetti, *'Competences in parallax in higher education from multiple standpoints in a Brazilian undergraduate program in International Business'*. In this small case study, the authors sought the views of several stakeholders (students, professors, programme lead, Dean, and employers) regarding their views of the educational process and professional competences required for a programme in International Business. Here, a different perspective on competences is offered, namely the authors relate competence to the labour market and the cognitive skills used by individuals to problem solve. Almeida de Camargo Pereira and Felicetti's introduction covers two other perspectives. The first is the development of education associated with international business from the industrial periods to current times. The second is the concept of *parallax*, that has its origins in astronomy namely the 'stellar parallax' that considers how shifts in objects occur according to the point of observation.

The sample was 7 graduates in one focus group, 4 interviews with employers of the graduates and 9 one to one interviews with academic staff.

Following transcription, the data were analysed by participant group using Textual Discourse Analysis generating units of meaning. Although the study sample was small, it is fascinating that the connections between culture and technology emerge so clearly in this study. Different cultures (professors, stakeholders, and graduates) exhibit different preferences for modes of learning and teaching particularly between students and their teachers. Surprisingly as a reader, it seems that students preferred more traditional modes of learning and teaching. In contrast, the academic teachers were trying to use modern pedagogies. This was attributed in part to the students' cultural experiences of school prior to university (i.e. traditional). Another difference was that graduates perceived that the real learning for professional competence came from the workplace. Aspects of this study echo the Tuning methodology that may have been a useful reference for the authors. Most helpful are the schematic diagrams or concept maps that present the data and were gleaned from the units of meaning. These show clearly the relationships between technology and culture on the perceptions and experience of stake holding groups in relation to work-based learning. The paper concludes by discussing recommendations for others engaged in the promotion of professional competence in their field.

Continuing this theme of professional skill development is the work of Daniel David Martinez and Sara Cortés Dumont *'ICT and 360º evaluation: Improving professional skills in higher education in Spain'*. The authors studied the extent to which 360-degree evaluation techniques could improve the impartiality of student assessment or judgment skills. 360-degree evaluation of a person's performance or character relies upon the triangulation of three points of reference, in this instance self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment. The method generates large volumes of data. The research investigated whether this form of evaluation could enable students to learn to make impartial judgements on performance content, enabled by a previously designed digital web-based tool. In this case study, fifty-six bilingual (Spanish/English) primary school teacher students volunteered to undertake the study during their final class presentation. All the participants engaged in the peer evaluation, but only forty-five completed the self-evaluation. The teacher's scores were used as the reference point. Seventy criteria that included both quantitative and qualitative components formed the assessment tool, with qualitative responses being quantified. The data included comments that justified the scoring outcomes. The student participants were predominantly female (44/56), and some gender differences were noticed in the responses. The detailed methodology gives helpful background knowledge on 360-degree evaluation and the ICT tools employed.

The authors found that the various modes of assessment revealed different behaviours and the identification of students who were more able to assess objectively. The authors reported on the use, weaknesses, and strengths of the digital tool, explained how the characteristics of the task, academic course and instances of subjective bias influenced the responses. Debate concerning the extent to which (1) the criteria used were objective and not subject to interpretation by the assessor; and (2) that all the qualitative data were amenable to quantification for the purposes of analysis remains. Broader literature relating to self and peer/group assessment and their relationships to gender and cultural influences were not explored in detail. Having shown that the 360-degree evaluation and ICT had identified student abilities to assess and instances of under and over scoring, the authors then debated associated challenges within the social sciences and the Spanish education system. The study supported the notion that techniques like this could enhance reflective and critical thinking skills in the students.

Teacher trainees are the focus of the next paper *'Views of pre-service teachers on the research-based teacher education approach'* (Emel Bayrak Özmutlu). Here the author analyses the views of the trainees concerning their research-based course that had been integrated within their programme following a policy directive from the government in 2007. The aim was to increase the research skills of teachers and to promote critical thinking and reflective practice. The course itself is spread over fourteen weeks, with predominantly female trainees preparing to teach 'basic education' (primary school ages).

Using a qualitative interview methodology, one hundred and ten trainee teachers were interviewed to elicit their views concerning research competence for teachers; the growth/promotion of research-based teacher education; and the outcomes of the methods course itself. The methodology section in this paper is detailed, demonstrating a robust approach to validating instruments, pilot testing, interview question design and ethical considerations. The presentation of the qualitative data clearly demonstrated how the themes were generated. Content analysis was validated by an external person and thematic analysis conducted according to the aims of the study. Özmutlu's findings were that trainees considered that the programme and research-based education enabled personal development, improved professional competence and that they were better able to handle complexity. The author noted the cultural tendency towards teachers holding a 'passive technician role', arguing that the research based education could foster teachers who were more critical and able to be active implementers.

The final two papers in this section address university operations and strategy from a financial perspective (Zargham Faramarzi Nia, Hamid

Farhadi Rad, Yadollah Mehralizadeh, and Rahmatullah Gholipour Soteh: '*Beyond performance-based budgeting policy in Iran's public universities: Causes, outcomes, and strategies'*) and that of mission (Nazife Karadağ and Betül Balkar: '*Comparison of strategic objectives of universities subject to mission differentiation with strategic objectives of well-established universities in Turkey'*).

First, we have Nia et al., who explored performance-based budgeting (PBB) in the context of an Iranian government policy initiative whose aim was to increase the transparency and accountability of the university system. Following a detailed account of the history and application of performance-based budgeting in the university sector, the authors investigated the reasons for the introduction of PBB in Iran, any consequences of its use and the identification of strategies that enabled effective implementation. The method adopted was grounded theory with in -depth semi-structured interviews with experts acquired through purposive sampling. There were two groups of participants, one from the government to give a macro perspective and the other from the university sector to explore the micro perspective and practical implementation issues. This fascinating paper provided detailed accounts of the research methods and rationale for their adoption. There were extensive findings and recommendations for local policy makers and points of interest for international colleagues.

The authors were able to elicit several factors that had influenced the adoption of EBB in Iran, and positive outcomes that included improved accountability and transparency. The authors reported factors that had led to the successful implementation of the model in the public universities. Their analysis of the factors that had been problematic led the authors to argue that performance-based budgeting alone cannot address the problems experienced by Iran's public universities and higher education. Their contextual analysis and research data led the authors to make recommendations and to propose that 'policy makers should caution in using this strategy and prioritize preserving the independence, nature and mission of the university'.

Consideration of the nature and mission of the university leads us to the final paper in this section by Nazife Karadağ and Betül Balkar ('Comparison *of strategic objectives of universities subject to mission differentiation with strategic objectives of well-established universities in Turkey'*). Mission differentiation has been a recent feature of the Turkish system (2006). These 'newer' type of universities has been shown to have a lower academic performance. This comparative study analysed the features of ten public universities with specific mission identification associated with their region, as determined by Turkish government requirements and ten public universities

who do not hold such mission requirements. The study excluded private and foundation universities. Documentary analysis of the relevant documents from each university were subjected to content analysis that focussed upon the quality of education, conditions for research, communication and interaction with stakeholders, identity, and internationalization. In addition, the mission universities were reviewed for the extent they were leading local, regional development.

The authors found many factors that enabled or hindered the 'mission' universities in their ability to work effectively with the local region. For example, there were problems with structural arrangements, legal regulations, and effective engagement with stakeholders in the region. While there were many similarities in objectives between these two groups of public universities that were attributed to the nature of their being public universities, the authors argued that the mission differentiation universities should strengthen their objectives to include more reference and engagement with the local region. Further work with the private and foundation universities might show diversity. While the findings of their study are specific to one country, Turkey, they would be of interest to international colleagues who are considering the development of similar 'mission differentiation' universities.

In conclusion, these six papers illustrate the crucial importance of stakeholder engagement and stakeholder perspectives within the full range of Higher Education activity, from individual courses within programmes, to the programmes themselves and the wider institutions at local, regional, and national levels. We also see how different worldviews and perspectives shape the lens through which these various evaluation and research studies are conducted, expressed, and validated. The importance of culture, technology and gender are but three interactive influencers upon context, sample populations, data analysis, interpretation, and presentation. Each paper has, to a greater or lesser extent, commented upon their relevance to the study and the relevant stakeholder experiences and expectations.