

SPANISH AND EXCHANGE STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS IN MARKETING MODULES

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Abstract

The main goal of the present study is to determine whether or not there are differences between Spanish and exchange students when it comes to acquiring several transferable skills. There is an increasing number of international students in our classrooms. Although we are better acquainted with the profile of Spanish students, we know that exchange students come from completely different cultures and education systems, and it is worth exploring if a cross-cultural setting has an effect on the acquisition of transferable skills by the students. The present study has been conducted by the members of Red EUCE: I + D + I (Spanish for "Network of the Programme in Business Studies: Research + Teaching + Innovation"), a group with a multidisciplinary approach to the research on teaching [<http://web.ua.es/es/idoi/publicaciones.html>]

To achieve our goal (and as part of a more ambitious project), we have selected two modules in the marketing area that focus on commercial distribution and share many characteristics: both modules are taught by the same instructor, who uses the same teaching methods, the modules content and intended learning outcomes are similar, they are also worth a similar number of credits, and finally, both are optional modules. On the other hand, one of the modules is part of the International Business Programme of the University of Alicante and is taught in English. Consequently, most of the students taking it are exchange students; whereas the other module is included in the regular Business Programme, is taught in Spanish, and most students are therefore Spanish. The participation of both groups of students was entirely voluntary and anonymous. They completed a questionnaire specially designed to analyse the acquisition of transferable skills in these two modules.

The paper includes a short review of the literature on competences and transferable skills, a description of the methods used by the researchers, as well as the main findings. Finally, we present the main conclusions of our analysis. One that is worth drawing attention to is that we found statistically significant differences in three of the eight transferable skills examined (in both groups), which suggests different learning outcomes according to the educational experience of each group of students. For example, one of these skills refers to the use of IT tools.

Likewise, the results suggest that the teaching methods used in these modules are appropriate, and facilitate the development and acquisition of the transferable skills here analysed. These include the ability to learn independently (essential in the new educational model based on the European Higher Education Area), or the active participation in the classroom, which is very important when students enter the labour market, since it encourages proactive behaviour in the work place.

Keywords: transferable skills, exchange students, questionnaire, cross-cultural.

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent literature is paying much attention to the analysis of the results of using new teaching methods as a consequence of the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). These methods, unlike those previously used by most instructors, place special emphasis on the students' learning process within a context that now continues throughout their entire working lives, rather than being limited to their years at university.

Students' participation in the teaching-learning process is of paramount importance in this new context because the new European education project seeks not only to convey content and specific knowledge, but also a set of skills and abilities defined as transferable that can be applied in a variety of occupations and to solve specific problems in the working world. Although transferable skills are "generic" competences, since they are used in different types of activity, we should bear in mind that they are also eminently "practical" skills because they are aimed at solving particular problems [1].

Furthermore, the EHEA also seeks to promote the mobility of students from the participant countries within its area, as well as from other geographical areas. In fact, an increasing number of European students, and also students from other parts of the world, are taking part in exchange programmes. This not only enables them to learn the language and culture of the host country, but also to study the subjects that they are taking, or may take, in their home country. As a consequence, the students that take our modules as part of an exchange programme and have acquired different skills and knowledge at their own universities now learn to respect diversity and multiculturalism in the Spanish classrooms. The result is a pluralistic education that prepares both Spanish and exchange students for their future integration and adaptation in a working world that is increasingly likely to have a multicultural character and a strong competitive element in constant transformation.

Thus, our research focuses on the development of abilities and transferable skills within this context with an increasing number of students from other countries that not only communicate in other languages but have also grown in different education systems. More concretely, we examine whether or not there are differences between Spanish and exchange students with regard to the acquisition of a set of transferable skills. Therefore, we put forward the following research question:

Do Spanish students improve their transferable skills and abilities as much as the exchange students?

To answer this question, the present paper is structured as follows. First, we review briefly the literature on competences and transferable skills and abilities. Then we describe the methods used in the research and the results obtained. Finally, we summarise the main conclusions of our analyses.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Skill, ability or capability are closely related concepts whose meaning is so similar that are often used interchangeably in the literature and the academia. The problem of determining the competences, and their relationship with the skills and abilities, is one of the most controversial because of the impact that it may have on the notion of how education has to develop [2]. Although individuals' competences cannot be understood without their skills, we need to distinguish between them. *Skills* refer to the professional abilities and knowledge acquired through a learning process that are required to perform adequately a given task or job. *Competences* refer instead to the attributes of individuals when they make use of their skills to carry out a job or task to the standard of performance required by their working environment. Such characteristics, as Aristimuño [3] points out, are based on knowledge but are not reduced to it.

Along these lines, the project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe" [4], developed with the objective of finding practical ways to further the development of the EHEA, defines the term competence as a "combination of attributes (with respect to knowledge and its application, attitudes, skills and responsibilities) that describe the level or degree to which a person is capable of performing them". In the project's final report competences are understood as to refer to "knowing and understanding" -the theoretical knowledge of an academic field-, to "knowing how to act" -the practical and operational application of knowledge to certain situations-, and to "knowing how to be" -values as an integral part of the way of perceiving others and living in a social context.

Sánchez [5] points out that competences do not really find themselves in the resources used by individuals but in the very mobilisation of the resources. Mobilisation, according to this researcher, means that the use of competences will depend on the individuals, their environment, their effort, and the resources available for the implementation, and all this happens within the framework of expectations generated by a particular socio-cultural environment.

The literature on competences usually distinguishes between generic and specific competences. Generic competences are required to carry out a job, or to take an active part in today's society, whereas specific competences are those needed in a particular professional field. The Tuning Project (2011), in particular, groups generic competences into three categories: 1) instrumental (technological

and linguistic abilities); 2) interpersonal (social skills); and 3) systemic (the ability of individuals to understand complex systems; the combination of understanding, sensibility, and knowledge).

Similarly to this distinction between different types of competences, we find that skills are also likewise categorised. Thus, Rubinstein [6] distinguishes between general and specific skills. General skills refer to the individual's intelligence and the capacity to learn; specific skills enable the individual to carry out certain activities as a result of the learning process.

Of course, generic competences and general skills are closely related. An example of this can be found in Rey [1] when he writes about generic competences, which he calls "methodological", required by all disciplines but not the objective of any of them in particular. Consequently, because they do not belong to any particular discipline, many instructors have devoted extra, unplanned time to the development of the skills needed to acquire those competences. Fortunately, the fact that they have been identified as transferable skills and abilities enables us within the EHEA to teach them in an explicit way and determine to which extent the students have acquired them.

Our network's interest (Red EUCE: I+Do+I) focuses precisely on the development of *general or transferable skills*, which play a part in the development of the above-mentioned generic competences. Their evolution is of vital importance later when students enter the labour market because, as Pérez *et al.* point out, the formal education of individuals does not necessarily create employment *per se*, but should improve their chances of finding it. All the more since an increasing number of individuals must change career several times throughout their lifetime.

As well as the literature focusing on the distinction between skills and competences, other lines of research analyse the characteristics that new teaching methods require from students for them to achieve those skills [8]. In this sense, teaching methods should take into account: 1) the competences to be achieved by the students; 2) the planning of the most appropriate teaching-learning modalities for it; 3) the distribution of the contents across a timeline; and 4) the setting the assessment criteria and procedures.

In this sense, there are some specific works that put forward teaching methods to develop the particular skills and competences of the different modules within each study programme, and in a broader sense, of the different programmes grouped according to branch of knowledge [9], [10]. Worth mentioning are the works of Rojas [10] with regard to social sciences, Dueñas' ([9]) about health sciences, and Font's [11] regarding mathematics, among others. Our network, within the marketing field, has also contributed to this line of research, for example, the works of De Juan *et al.* [12], [13] and [14].

In any case, the development of these skills and competences requires not only changes in the teaching methods, but also in the attitudes of the instructors. Indeed, the development of certain basic professional skills as a result of educational activities requires agents that stimulate the teaching and learning processes. Here is where instructors play an essential role and is necessary to know if they are acting appropriately. Instructors design and conduct the activities, and therefore, become one of the main elements in the design and management of the work done in the classroom [15]. Pérez's research [7] is illustrative of the significance of instructors' attitudes for the development of professional skills.

3 METHODS

3.1 Description of context and participants

This study has been carried out by the members of Red EUCE: I+Do+I (Spanish for "Network of the Programme in Business Studies: Research + Teaching + Innovation") during the academic years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 at the University of Alicante, Spain. The research is part of a more ambitious project about the adaptation of contents, instructors and students to the new study programmes. All members of Red I+Do+I have been involved in the development of the study; however, we have only chosen a group of marketing modules representative of our object of study to write the present paper. Moreover, 195 students of those modules have taken part voluntarily in our research.

To examine the skills and competences of the students, our study has paid attention to two similar modules in the marketing area that are taken by two different types of students. On the one hand,

Spanish students that use their mother tongue in the classroom, and on the other, exchange students from a variety of countries that use English as a lingua franca.

3.1.1 *Exchange students involved in the study*

We have chosen international students taking one of the modules of the “International Business Programme” (IBP) of the University of Alicante to compare their acquisition of transferable skills with that of Spanish students. The IBP is a study programme offered by the Faculty of Business and Economics since the academic year 2005/2006 and taught entirely in English. In particular, we have opted for the module “Retail Marketing” for our analysis.

The aim of the module “Retail Marketing” is to familiarise students with the decisions and strategies involved in setting up and managing a retail business at national and international level.

The module’s content deals with retail business types, sustainable competitive advantage of companies, merchandising, customer services, and image and positioning strategies for retail businesses. Teaching methods include case studies and the drafting of a report together with an oral presentation (to the rest of the class and the instructor) about an actual retail business of the students’ choice. Part of the students’ tasks consists in gathering primary and secondary information about that actual business with the aim of formulating conclusions and recommendations to defend them as if they were real retail consultants. The module is worth 4 credits of the University of Alicante, equivalent to 5 credits of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The module encourages the interaction and development of inter and intra group activities. Students work in groups of four to six people. The instructor encourages students to form multicultural groups. The teaching methods seek to promote the students’ interaction and participation in the classroom to convey the theoretical framework on which the course is based. Classes are complemented with the analysis of selected case studies. Students are individually assessed through practical cases and activities carried out in and out of the classroom. Finally, given their different nationalities, students must give a presentation to their classmates about the situation of retail businesses in their home country.

3.1.2 *Spanish students involved in the study*

In the case of the Spanish students, we have chosen the module “Commercial Distribution”, an optional module offered in the first semester of the Business Administration undergraduate programme. In this way, we can ensure the comparability of results since students have freely chosen the module, which shares the same instructor with “Retail Marketing”, as well as a similar content. As with the rest of the optional modules in the specialist subject area, it is taken in the third year of the programme. The module is worth 1,5 credits of independent study and 3 credits of face-to-face tuition, which make up a total of 4,5 credits (equivalent to 6 ECTS credits).

The module’s aims include: a) to acknowledge the importance of an efficient product distribution for the success of any company and the clients’ satisfaction; b) to plan, organise, implement, and control the basic tasks in this field; c) to show their implementation in particular cases and situations in the trade dynamics; and d) to think and work on product distribution and the forces at work in this field. Among the specific aims are: a) to go into depth on the practical aspects of manufacturers and retailers; and b) to provide students with the necessary knowledge about the new product distribution systems.

Thus, although the content of these two modules does not overlap, they do go in the same direction. Moreover, they are taught by the same instructor, who uses similar teaching methods and also aims at developing the transferable skills and abilities examined in the present study, as we have already explained.

3.2 **Research instruments**

To conduct our research we have used a questionnaire as measuring instrument. The questionnaire used in our survey has been developed by the members of Red EUCE: I+Do+I, and the results have successfully been used in previous studies [12] [13] and [14].

The questions were grouped into eight categories: teaching methods, course management, teaching staff, development of skills and abilities, classroom equipment, overall satisfaction of the students with the course, students’ *effort*, and finally, the variables *gender* and *age*. The students were asked to rate from 1 to 7 their level of agreement with a list of statements, where 1 meant “strongly disagree” and 7

meant “strongly agree”. This paper analyses their answers with respect to the category “development of skills and abilities”, which gathers information about the items shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables studied in the category “development of skills and abilities” of the students.

Cod.	Ability
(A1)	The module has improved my ability for teamwork
(A2)	The module has improved my ability to learn independently
(A3)	The module has improved my ability to make decisions by applying theory to practice
(A4)	The module has improved my ability to analyse problems through critical reasoning, without prejudices, accurately and rigorously
(A5)	The module has improved my ability for oral communication
(A6)	The module has improved my ability for written communication
(A7)	The module has encouraged active participation in the classroom
(A8)	The module has improved my ability to use IT tools

4 RESULTS

Firstly, descriptive data for the sample are presented in table 2. As can be seen on the table, our survey elicited 195 valid responses, 101 from Spanish students taking the module “Commercial Distribution” and 94 from exchange students. The exchange students all took the module “Retail Marketing” as follows: 42 took the module as part of the “International Business Program” (IBP) in the academic year 2010/2011, another 40 students took the same module within the same programme but in the academic year 2011/2012, and finally, 12 other students took the module “Retail Marketing” as part of the “Summer Business Program” (a summer version of the IBP) in the academic year 2010/2011. Although the data regarding the exchange students were gathered in different academic years, we argue that homogeneity is ensured by the fact that the modules were taught by the same instructor with the same teaching methods.

Spanish students have an average age of 19.48 years (ranging from 17 to 35), and among them are 25.7% of men (26) and 74.3% of women (75). The average age of exchange students is 22.39 years (ranging from 19 to 40); 36.2% (34) are men and 63.8% (60) are women.

As for the nationality of exchange students, they come from 14 different countries: United States of America (23), Germany (18), Austria (1), Brazil (1), Canada (10), Slovakia (1), France (2), United Kingdom (5), Ireland (7), Italy (1), Norway (1), the Netherlands (11), Poland (6), and Switzerland (1). Moreover, 4 students reported Europe as their place of origin and 2 other students did not state their nationality.

Table 3 shows the mean values for each of the eight abilities or skills examined and for both groups of students. We have used the letter A together with a number to refer to the corresponding ability, and we have added the letter S when it refers to Spanish students and the letter E in the case of exchange students. Thus, for example, SA1 refers to the ability 1 (“The module has improved my ability for teamwork”) for the group of Spanish students, whereas EA1 makes reference to the group of exchange students. As can be seen from the table, the mean values for all the skills, with the exception of A8, are greater than 4 (mean value of the scale). This may be interpreted in the first place as meaning that the students perceived an improvement in each of the above-mentioned abilities as a result of having taken the module.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the sample.

		Men N (%)	Women N (%)	Total	Age		
					Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Spanish students		26 (25.7)	75 (74.3)	101	17	35	19.48
Exchange students	IBP-2011	14 (33.3)	28 (66.7)	42	19	28	22.00
	IBP-2012	15 (37.5)	25 (62.5)	40	19	40	22.58
	SBP-2011	5 (41.7)	7 (58.3)	12	20	33	23.17

Table 3. Mean values of ability improvement by origin of students.

		N	Mean		Standard Deviation
			Statistic	Standard Error	
A1 - The module has improved my ability for teamwork	SA1	101	5.1584	0.13404	1.34709
	EA1	94	5.1277	0.13716	1.32984
A2 - The module has improved my ability to learn independently	SA2	101	5.2277	0.10519	1.05718
	EA2	94	4.8404	0.12034	1.16677
A3 - The module has improved my ability to make decisions by applying theory to practice	SA3	101	5.4455	0.09171	0.92169
	EA3	94	5.1596	0.11450	1.11010
A4 - The module has improved my ability to analyse problems through critical reasoning, without prejudices, accurately and rigorously	SA4	101	5.2277	0.09737	0.97858
	EA4	94	5.0851	0.12893	1.25003
A5 - The module has improved my ability for oral communication	SA5	101	4.9010	0.12547	1.26099
	EA5	94	5.1702	0.13750	1.33310
A6 - The module has improved my ability for written communication	SA6	101	4.8218	0.12851	1.29148
	EA6	94	4.9894	0.12967	1.25719
A7 - The module has encouraged active participation in the classroom	SA7	101	4.8614	0.13933	1.40021
	EA7	94	5.6915	0.12747	1.23590
A8 - The module has improved my ability to use IT tools	SA8	101	4.2079	0.16187	1.62676
	EA8	94	3.6489	0.15027	1.45696

Figure 1 and 2 show box plots for each of the abilities analysed in this paper according to the origin of students. This enables to compare visually and quickly their behaviour, as well as to locate some atypical values. In particular, figure 1 shows the following skills or abilities: A1) ability for teamwork; A2) ability to learn independently; A3) ability to make decisions by applying theory to practice; and A4) ability to analyse problems through critical reasoning, without prejudices, accurately and rigorously. Figure 2 shows the rest of the abilities examined in our study: A5) ability for oral communication; A6) ability for written communication; A7) Active participation in the classroom; and A8) ability to use IT tools.

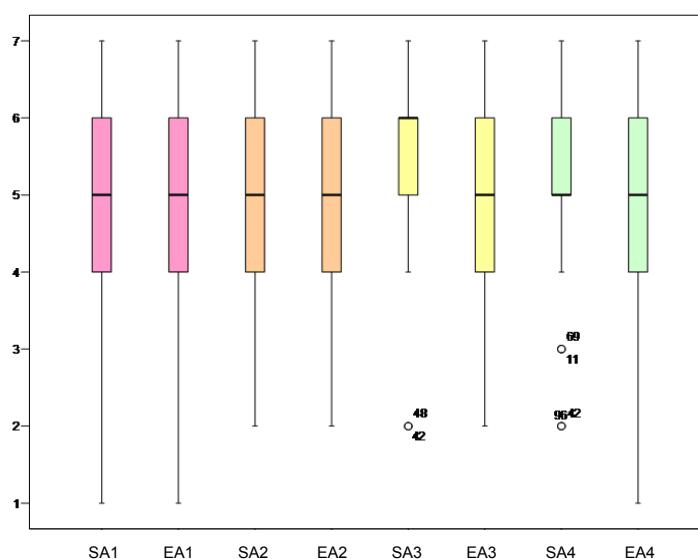


Figure 1. Box plots of transferable skills and abilities A1, A2, A3 and A4 (by students' origin).

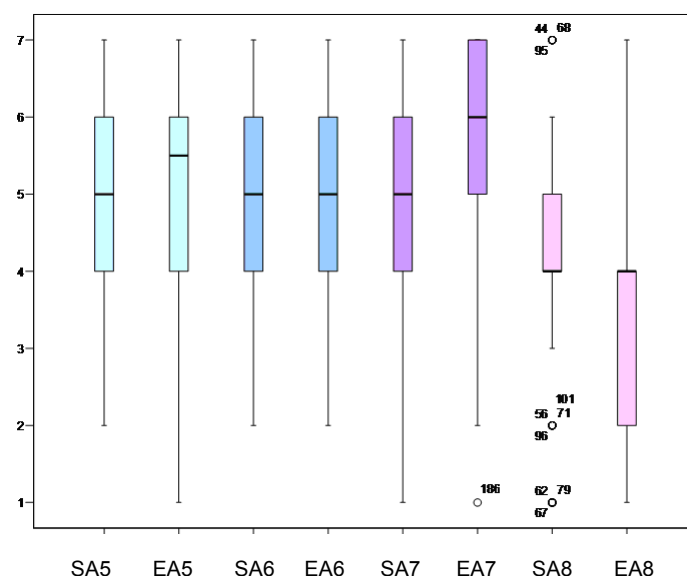


Figure 2. Box plots of transferable skills and abilities A5, A6, A7 and A8 (by students' origin).

To check whether there are significant statistical differences between both groups of students (Spanish and exchange) regarding the improvement of their transferable skills and abilities, we have used Student's t-test for independent samples. Previously we tested both the normality and the homoscedasticity of the two groups. Table 4 shows the results obtained. As can be seen, for all the transferable skills analysed, Levene's test for equality of variances does not reject the hypothesis of equal variances ($p > 0.05$), so the results of the t-test shown on the table for equal variances in the samples are relevant.

For the skill A1 ("The module has improved my ability for teamwork"), the value of the t-statistic is 0.160 (with 193 degrees of freedom) and the p-value associated to it is 0.873 (> 0.05). Thus, we conclude that there are no differences between Spanish students and exchange students with regard to their opinion about the development of their ability for teamwork, since the mean values for both groups are not statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

Furthermore, when we take a look at difference between the means of both groups, with a confidence interval of 95%, we observe that its value lies between -0.348 and +0.409. Since the confidence interval includes the value zero, we reach the same conclusion: the random error (sampling variability) enables us to explain the small difference between the means of the groups (0.031) regarding the ability A1, so we must assume that there is no difference between the means.

Table 4. Test for independent samples.

	Levene's test for equality of variances		T-Test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	Degrees of freedom	Sig. (bilateral)	Difference between means	Standard error of the difference	95% confidence interval for the difference	
								Upper limit	Lower limit
A1	0.082	0.775	0.160	193	0.873	0.031	0.192	-0.348	0.409
A2	0.681	0.410	2.432	193	0.016	0.387	0.159	0.073	0.701
A3	2.134	0.146	1.962	193	0.051	0.286	0.146	-0.001	0.573
A4	3.231	0.074	0.890	193	0.374	0.143	0.160	-0.173	0.459
A5	0.175	0.676	-1.449	193	0.149	-0.269	0.186	-0.636	0.097
A6	0.741	0.390	-0.917	193	0.360	-0.168	0.183	-0.528	0.193
A7	1.660	0.199	-4.376	193	0.000	-0.830	0.190	-1.204	-0.456
A8	0.214	0.644	2.521	193	0.013	0.559	0.222	0.122	0.996

For the ability A2 (“The module has improved my ability to learn independently”), as table 4 shows, the value of the t-statistic is 2.432 (with 193 degrees of freedom), with an associated p-value of 0.016 (<0.05). In this case, we conclude that there exist differences in the perception of Spanish and exchange students about the improvement of their ability to learn independently, since the means of both groups are indeed statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

Moreover, when we take a look at the difference between the means of both groups, with a confidence interval of 95%, we find that its value lies between +0.073 and +0.701. Since the confidence interval does not include the value zero, we reach the same conclusion: we cannot attribute the difference between the means (0.387) of the groups to sampling variability (random error). Therefore, we reject the hypothesis of no difference in means.

For A3 (“The module has improved my ability to make decisions by applying theory to practice”), the value of the t-statistic is 1.962 (with 193 degrees of freedom) and the associated p-value is 0.051 (<0.05). Thus, we conclude that there are no differences between Spanish students and exchange students regarding the development of their ability to apply their knowledge to practice when making decisions since the means of both groups are not statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

The difference between the means of the groups, again with a confidence interval of 95%, lies between -0.001 and +0.573. Since the confidence interval includes the value zero, we reach the same conclusion: the random error (sampling variability) enables us to explain the difference between the means of both groups (0.286) regarding the ability A3, so we must assume that there is no difference between the means. It should be pointed out, however, that the interval includes the value zero by only 0.001.

For the ability A4 (“The module has improved my capacity to analyse problems through critical reasoning, without prejudices, accurately and rigorously”) the value of the t-statistic is 0.890 (with 193 degrees of freedom), with an associated p-value of 0.374 (>0.05). Consequently, we conclude that there are no differences between Spanish students and exchange students regarding the improvement that they have experienced, since the means of both groups are not statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from -0.173 to +0.459. Since the confidence interval includes the value zero, we reach the same conclusion: the random error (sampling variability) enables us to explain the small difference between the means of both groups (0.143) regarding the ability A4, so we must assume that there is no difference between the means.

We have obtained similar results for the ability A5 (“The module has improved my ability for oral communication”). The value of the t-statistic is -1.449 (with 193 degrees of freedom) and the associated p-value is 0.149 (>0.05). Thus, we conclude that there are no differences between Spanish students and exchange students about how they perceive the evolution of their ability for oral communication, since the means of both groups are not statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. We have reached the same conclusion regarding the means difference between both groups, with a confidence interval of 95%. Since the interval ranges from -0.636 and +0.097, it contains the value zero, and the small difference between the means of the two groups (0.269) can be attributed to random error (sampling variability). Consequently, we do not reject the null hypothesis of no difference in means.

With respect to the ability for written communication (A6), the results presented in table 4 show similarities with the ability for oral communication. The value of the t-statistic is -0.917 (with 193 degrees of freedom), and the associated p-value is 0.360 (>0.05). Thus, we conclude that there are no differences between Spanish students and exchange students regarding the development of their ability for written communication (A6) because the means of both groups are not statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, when we observe the difference between the means of the two groups, with a confidence interval of 95%, we find that it lies between -0.528 and +0.193. Since the confidence interval includes the value zero, we reach the same conclusion: the random error (sampling variability) enables us to explain the small difference between the means of both groups (0.168) in regard to the ability A6, so we must assume that there is no difference between the means.

For the seventh ability (A7) examined in this study (“The module has encouraged active participation in the classroom”), table 4 shows a t-statistic value of -4.376 (with 193 degrees of freedom) and an associated p-value of 0.000 (<0.05). Therefore, we conclude that there exist differences between

Spanish students and exchange students about the improvement of their active participation in class, since the means of both groups are indeed statistically different at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

If we consider the difference between the means of both groups, with a confidence interval of 95%, we find that it lies between -1.204 and -0.456. Given that the interval does not include the value zero, we reach the same conclusion: the difference between the means of the groups (0.830) cannot be attributed to sampling variability (random error), and therefore, we reject the null hypothesis of no difference in means.

For the eighth and last of the abilities (A8) examined (“The module has improved my ability to use IT tools”), the value of the t-statistic is 2.521 (with 193 degrees of freedom) and the associated p-value is 0.013 (< 0.05), as shown on table 4. Thus, we conclude that there are differences between Spanish students and exchange students regarding the improvement of their ability to use IT tools, since the means of the groups are statistically significant at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. This conclusion is confirmed by the difference between the means of both groups, with a confidence interval of 95%. The interval does not include the value zero because it ranges from +0.122 to +0.996, and consequently, we reach the same conclusion: the difference between the means of the groups (0.559) cannot be explained as a result of sampling variability (random error). Thus, we reject again the null hypothesis of no difference in means, and conclude that the means between the groups are indeed different.

Table 5 below summarises the results obtained. For three of the abilities examined, A2 (“The module has improved my ability to learn independently”), A7 (“The module has encouraged active participation in the classroom”) and A8 (“The module has improved my ability to use IT tools”), we have found statistically significant differences. Consequently, we can conclude that Spanish students and exchange students improve these abilities in a differently way. In the case of the other five abilities (A1, A3, A4, A5 and A6), the results show that the difference between the means are not statistically significant, and therefore, our conclusion is that Spanish students and exchange students improve these abilities in the same way.

Table 5. Summary of hypotheses’ results.

Cod.	Ability	
A1	The module has improved my ability for teamwork	No
A2	The module has improved my ability to learn independently	Yes
A3	The module has improved my ability to make decisions by applying theory to practice	No
A4	The module has improved my ability to analyse problems through critical reasoning, without prejudices, accurately and rigorously	No
A5	The module has improved my ability for oral communication	No
A6	The module has improved my ability for written communication	No
A7	The module has encouraged active participation in the classroom	Yes
A8	The module has improved my ability to use IT tools	Yes

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained in this study lead us to reflect on the acquisition of transferable skills by students. Both groups of students face similar circumstances, if not identical, when they take the modules here examined. First, they share the same instructor because the two modules are taught by the same person. Second, they also share teaching methods; participative lectures, together with case studies and group work (including the drafting of a report and the oral presentation of it by the students). Third, the modules also share content and learning objectives since both deal with similar concepts with respect to distribution in the field of marketing. Finally, the modules are worth a similar number of ECTS credits (5 in one case and 6 in the other), and both are optional, that is, students choose freely to take them.

With regard to the students, we have also found similarities, from the age range (17-35 years in one group, and 19-40 years in the other) to the gender distribution (see table 2 for further details). We can assume that the two groups share a similar motivation if we take into account, as we have previously mentioned, that these are optional modules, and therefore, students choose them freely. Then, we can presume that one of the main differences (without ruling out others) between the students is their

previous educational experience, which is determined by their origin, that is, whether they are exchange students (they communicate in other languages) or national students (Spanish) that communicate in Spanish.

For a group of three skills or abilities we have found statistically significant differences: “The module has improved my ability to learn independently” (A2), “The module has encouraged active participation in the classroom” (A7), and “The module has improved my ability to use IT tools” (A8). Thus, we can conclude that Spanish students and exchange students develop these abilities in a different way. Regarding the abilities A2 and A8, Spanish students show (see table 3) a mean value greater than the group of exchange students. This can be interpreted as meaning that Spanish students perceived a lower level of command of these skills, which leads us to believe that they had not been adequately worked upon in their previous educational experience. Following this line of reasoning, with respect to the ability A7 (active participation in class) the exchange students were less well prepared by their previous experience.

There is another group consisting of five skills: A1, A3, A4, A5 and A6. The difference in means in this group is not statistically significant, and this indicates that both groups perceive their improvement equally. Thus, we can assume that these abilities have been worked upon in a similar way in the previous educational experience of both groups. This leads us to believe that both in the rest of the countries involved in this study through the exchange students (USA, Germany, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Slovakia, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland) and in Spain these skills have been worked upon and similar levels of command have been reached.

As for the mean values obtained by both groups in each of the abilities examined in our study, we have found that they are in all cases greater than the mean value of the scale (let us remember that the scale ranges from 1 to 7, so the mean value is 3.5). From this it follows that students develop all of these skills, which indicates that the teaching methods used in the modules (the same in both groups) are appropriate for the development of the transferable skills and abilities analysed in this paper.

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