Importance of Information Literacy

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INTRODUCTION

During the last decade an educational change has taken place in many European countries. The European Union has promoted several reforms in the university education system in order to create a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The changes introduced aimed to adopt a comparable degree system (Sanchez-Ruiz, Pérez-Pérez, Blanco-Rojo, & Serrano-Bedia, 2013), being one of their main objectives the adoption of a competency-based education system.

Among the wide range of competences that students may acquire, the relevance of information literacy has increased during the last decade as we are said to live in an information society.

But, what does information society mean? As Webster (2006) said this concept has been extensively studied from different perspectives (technological, economic, occupational, spatial and cultural). Whatever the perspective, *they all share the conviction that quantitative changes in information are bringing into being a qualitatively new sort of social system, the information society* (Webster, 2006).

In this new scenario, information becomes a key aspect in everybody's professional and personal lives. Thus, a new concept appears: information literacy. *It entails the learning of the skills, competences, knowledge and value to access, use and communicate information in any of its forms, in order to produce competent professionals trained in the routines of identifying, evaluating and recording information sources appropriately and with the knowledge to process and produce their own information* (Pinto, Doucet, & Fernández-Ramos, 2007).

Despite information literacy is not always considered a core competence, many organisations require information literacy skills on their job offers (Klusek & Bornstein, 2008). Therefore, every university student should acquire and develop information literacy skills during their undergraduate studies. For instance, among the whole range of information literacy skills, students should: be aware of the goals for which they are going to use information, know how to use available technologies to organise and store information, be able to assimilate the key information of documents or know how to synthesise and represent essential information properly (Pinto et al., 2007).

Taking this into consideration, as a first step, students should be aware of the relevance of information literacy skills. Once they are aware of its importance, they are able to improve and develop them. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse whether university students are aware of the importance of information literacy. Additionally, we will analyse whether their awareness varies or not after attending and information training course.

Once the objectives of this study have been stated, the structure of the rest of the paper will be as follows. First, in the next section (Background) the basic concepts of this study (European Higher Education Area, Information literacy and the IL-HUMASS survey) are explained. After this, the following section includes information about the methodology used and, after that, the results obtained in this study are presented. Next, some

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recommendations based in the results are made. Finally, future research suggestions are presented together with the conclusion of this research.

BACKGROUND

The European Higher Education Area

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is aimed to adopt a comparable degree system from a common system of credits (ECTS) based on two main levels –undergraduate and postgraduate- harmonizing its duration and combining the balance between basic education, cross-cutting skills, specific knowledge and discipline skills, and professional competence (Sanchez-Ruiz, Pérez-Pérez, Blanco-Rojo, & Serrano-Bedia, 2013).

Although the intention of convergence had already been expressed in the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), it was due to the Bologna Declaration that the process was accelerated. Specifically, the main objectives of the Bologna Declaration were (ANECA 2005, pp.27-28):

- Adoption of a model of degrees based on two levels: undergraduate and graduate.
- Creation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).
- Establishment of a comprehensible and comparable degree system.
- Promoting mobility in Europe.
- Improving the quality of institutions.
- Promoting education and training throughout the whole career.
- Adopting a competence-based education system.

According to an extensive review of literature, companies require four characteristics from their employees: content of study, social skills, methodological skills and participation skills (Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, & Rivera-Torres 2009). Before the implementation of the EHEA, universities primarily focused on the first one, the content of study. However, later the development of other skills has been encouraged from the university.

Competence is understood as "the combination of knowledge, skills (intellectual, manual, social...), attitudes and values that will enable the graduate to successfully tackle the problem solving or intervention in an issue in an academic, professional or social context" (MEC 2006).

Two types of competences may be distinguished: specific and generic. Generic competences are those attributes that a graduate must have regardless of their degree; while specific competences are defined as observable behaviours that are directly related to the use of concepts, theories and skills of the degree (Martinez-Caro, & Cegarra-Navarro 2012, p.10).

There is a wide range of competences that students are supposed to acquire during their degrees (organising, solving, managing…). As above-stated, depending on the field of study, specific competences vary. However, generic competences are common to all the degrees. Among them, this study is focused in the information literacy competence that will be described in the following section.

Information Literacy

Althought the concept of information literacy come into use in 1974, it has achieved its current popularity due to a proliferation of information available (Gradstein, 2002). Due to this fact, the concept of information literacy has been widely studied along literature from different perspectives and fields (Zabel, 2004).

Among all the existing definitions, the American Library Association definition has become widely accepted (Bherens, 1994). According to it (American Library Association, 1989), in order *to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they*