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Influence of anxiety on the initial training of early childhood teachers

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ARTICLE SECTION

Influence of anxiety on the initial training of early childhood teachers

Abstract: It is known that anxiety interferes with the academic performance of university students and, therefore, diminishes the adequate acquisition of the competences (generic and specific) that the different university degrees establish. The acquisition of these skills can benefit from the implementation of active methodologies that help shape the future teaching performance of education students. This aspect will contribute to the development of an education for sustainable development. The main objective of this work was to evaluate how anxiety affects the acquisition of these competences in 23 students of the degree in Early Childhood Education Teacher from a public university in Castilla y León during the 2019-2020 academic year. It is concluded that the application of active methodologies contributes to the correct acquisition of competences in university students, which encourages their future teaching performance and consequently the future promotion of sustainability. Likewise, it is concluded that anxiety interferes in the correct acquisition of competences, reducing academic performance in the whole of the subject. Therefore, there is a need to renew and reformulate university plans to include sustainability competencies in learning and emotion management.

Key words: university students, early childhood education, skills, academic performance, sustainability.

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IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

1. Importancia de la calidad de los profesores en la efectividad del aprendizaje de los estudiantes.
2. Necesidad de formar con carácter holístico a los futuros maestros de educación infantil.
3. Metodologías activas fomentan en los alumnos universitarios la adquisición de competencias determinantes del currículo universitario.
4. La ansiedad puede interferir en la adquisición de competencias disminuyendo el rendimiento académico.
5. Los alumnos que mayor implicación tienen con la metodología activa menor nivel de ansiedad manifiestan.

1. Importance of teacher quality in student learning effectiveness.
2. The need to train future early childhood education teachers holistically.
3. Active methodologies encourage university students to acquire key competences in the university curriculum.
4. Anxiety can interfere with the acquisition of competences, decreasing academic performance.
5. Students who are more involved with active methodology show lower levels of anxiety.

1. Importància de la qualitat dels professors en l'efectivitat de l'aprenentatge dels estudiants.
2. Necessitat de formar amb caràcter holístic als futurs mestres d'educació infantil.
3. Metodologies actives fomenten en els alumnes universitaris l'adquisició de competències determinants del currículum universitari.
4. L'ansietat pot interferir en l'adquisició de competències disminuint el rendiment acadèmic.
5. Els alumnes que major implicació tenen amb la metodologia activa menor nivell d'ansietat manifesten.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

1. Introduction and justification

The current COVID-19 health crisis has been a turning point in the actions at the level of training and care of students at all stages. There is a widely held view on the importance of teacher quality in the effectiveness of the educational process for students. In the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2016), the importance of quality teacher training, both in initial and in-service training (OECD, 2020), is set as a target for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which focuses on ensuring equitable and quality inclusive education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. In recent years, we have witnessed the discovery of the relationship between sustainable development and the construction of an engaged, active, participatory and change-generating global citizenship. It definitely seems to be proven that sustainable development begins with education (UNESCO, 2016).

Assuming the need for holistic training of future teachers who will perform their profession in a changing and uncertain society, the competences related to flexibility of thinking, cooperation and leadership in problem solving, the influence of their emotions and their management take on special importance.

Within this generic framework of interest, the scientific literature shows that anxiety, one of the main emotions, emerges as a natural adaptive mechanism that can help to cope with life's challenges. On the contrary, when it occurs in an intense, disproportionate and continuous way, interfering with people's daily activities, it is considered maladaptive anxiety (Medina-Gómez et al., 2019; Serrano-Pintado and Escolar-Llamazares, 2015).

It is well known that in modern society the debilitating effects of anxiety on the emotional well-being of many individuals and especially of many students are considerable (Escolar Llamazares and Serrano Pintado, 2014; Miralles and Hernández, 2012).

One of the most worrying types of anxiety in the educational context is assessment anxiety due to its negative consequences on academic performance and, therefore, because of its interference in the adequate acquisition of the competences established in the different university degrees.

In the university context, academic performance is linked to the acquisition of certain competences, both generic (transversal) and specific (ANECA, 2005). In other words, Spanish universities are focused on competence-based education (Pérez-Pueyo et al., 2019).

The acquisition of these competences has been changing in university classrooms through the development of teaching methodologies focused on student learning, which allow students to be more involved in the teaching process (Vega et al., 2014). These are the so-called "active methodologies", one of which is Project Based Learning (ABP). From this methodology (ABP), the student becomes the protagonist of the teaching and learning process and the teacher a mediator or guide of this process. Another of the fundamental methodologies in the active acquisition of the competences established by ANECA (2005) is Service Learning (ApS) (Santiago-Ortíz, 2019). ApS attempts to encourage student participation in community service (Pérez-Pueyo et al., 2019).

¹ Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

Therefore, these active methodologies (ABP and ApS) encourage university students to acquire the different competences determined by the university curriculum in an appropriate way, which will allow them to shape their future teaching performance as education professionals (ANECA, 2005; Escolar-Llamazares et al., 2017). Therefore, the future teaching performance of students will make it possible to move towards sustainable development, one of the recent challenges with the greatest international scope (Allec and Alonso, 2018; UNESCO, 2016).

2. Objectives, methodology and sources

1. To find out the level of anxiety (state-trait) of university students in the second year of the Early Childhood Education degree, at three different points in time: 1st, in September, at the beginning of the academic year; 2nd, at the beginning of December; and 3rd, at the end of January. And to check if there are significant differences in the levels of anxiety.
2. To evaluate the relationship between anxiety (state-trait) and academic performance or the acquisition of the competencies that make up the future teaching performance of second-year university students in the degree of Early Childhood Education.
3. To find out which factors mainly influence the academic performance or the acquisition of certain competencies of the aforementioned university students.

The sample consisted of 23 female students of the Early Childhood Education Degree of a public university in the autonomous community of Castilla y León, selected by incidental sampling during the 2019-2020 academic year.

In this research, anxiety (state-trait) was assessed using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI E/R) by Spielberger et al. (1982). In addition, the academic performance or acquisition of competences (generic and specific) of the subject "Systematic Observation and Research in Educational Contexts" was evaluated. For this purpose, the overall mark for the subject and the marks for the different tests that make up the continuous assessment were analysed.

In order to achieve the research objectives, a longitudinal and correlational design was used.

3. Results and discussion

In relation to the first research objective, to find out the level of anxiety (state-trait) of university students at three different points in time and to check whether there are significant differences, it is established that there are significant differences in the levels of state anxiety between the situation at baseline and the evaluative situations, both before the final exam of the subject and before the presentation of the group research project. Specifically, state anxiety went from a low level at the beginning of the course to a medium-high level in the two evaluative situations. For their part, levels of trait anxiety remain stable over time, specifically, at scores below the 50th centile. These findings are in line with the scientific literature, since trait anxiety is a stable measure that does not vary easily over time; however, state anxiety suffers a high variability depending on the stressful stimuli faced, in this case, by the students (Ávila-Toscano et al., 2020; De Castro Fernández and De Castro Fernández, 2019).

In relation to the second research objective, which evaluates the relationship between anxiety (state-trait) and academic performance/acquisition of competences at the three

points in time, it is found that the lower the state anxiety in an evaluative situation, such as the presentation of the group research project to the class group, the higher the score obtained in the final exam and in the overall mark for the subject. In other words, greater acquisition of both generic and specific competences. In other words, mastery of the group research work influenced a better mastery of the overall subject competences, which could ultimately foster better future teaching performance of the students. Therefore, as many researchers point out, the use of active methodologies such as PBL and PSA facilitates a better acquisition of the subject competences, which increases emotional security in the assessment of these competences (Pérez-Pueyo et al., 2019; Rodríguez Izquierdo, 2019).

In the third research objective, to determine which factors mainly influence the academic performance or acquisition of competences of university students, it is again obtained that it is state anxiety or situational anxiety before the exposure to group research work, which seems to mainly influence the performance or acquisition of the competences of the subject. In other words, high anxiety seems to directly affect students' acquisition of competences, as is also reflected in recent studies (Ávila-Toscano et al., 2020).

4. Conclusions

It can be concluded that active methodologies such as ABP and ApS encourage the correct acquisition of the generic and specific competences which, in this case, are included in the degree in Early Childhood Education. This will encourage these students to shape their future teaching performance and, consequently, the future promotion of sustainable development.

Likewise, it is concluded that anxiety, especially state anxiety, can interfere in the acquisition of these competences, diminishing academic performance. On the other hand, students who work better and are more involved with ABP and ApS methodology show lower levels of anxiety in the different assessment situations (exposure and exams) and obtain better overall grades. This will favour a better acquisition of the different competences.

Consequently, emotions and their management should be present in the contents developed in the initial training of future teachers, in this case, Early Childhood Education students.