

DO STUDENTS KNOW HOW TO LEARN? DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STUDENTS REGARDING THE DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING TO LEARN COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

The ability to learn how to learn is essential for academic performance. The objective of this study was to identify the differences between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate students depending to the dimensions of learning to learn competence. The results showed that there are statistically significant differences between the students from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of studies according to the dimensions of the competence to learn how to learn. Our results can be used by teachers. They can adapt the information so that the students develop this competence.

KEYWORDS: competence, key competence, learning to learn, students

1. Introduction

Skills are essential to adapt to the current demands of society. For a person to successfully cope with the demands of their environment it is necessary to be competent, which means having knowledge, knowing how and in what context to apply it, and understanding how to relate to it. One of the basic skills for academic learning, workplace learning and lifelong learning is the ability to learn or the competence to learn how to learn. In the following lines of this article, we will briefly present the concept of competence, the eight key competences of the current century, but also the concept of competence to learn how to learn, a competence that can be transferred to all fields as well as all key competences.

1.1. The Concept of Competence

In specialized literature, the concept of competence has been approached through various theoretical frameworks. The definitions of the concept of competence existing in the specialized literature tend to define the concept as representing a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, acquired through learning, which together allow the successful completion of some professional tasks (Potolea & Toma, 2010, 2012; Andronache, 2014; Cucoș, 2014; Matei, 2022).

Potolea & Toma (2010) present an integrative model of competence that places competence in a framework of autonomy and responsibility, being composed of elements such as tasks, performance standards, knowledge, skills, personality characteristics and context.

1.2. Key Competencies

The Romanian education system also focuses on the training and development of key skills recommended at the European level by the Council of the European Union (2018) and by the European Commission (2019). Key competences are defined as *“those competences that all citizens need for personal fulfillment and development, employment, social inclusion, a sustainable lifestyle, a successful life in peaceful societies, a management of life that takes into account aspects related to health and active citizenship. They are developed in a lifelong learning perspective, starting from early childhood and throughout adulthood, through formal, non-formal and informal learning, in all contexts, including family, school, workplace, neighborhood and other communities. All key competencies are considered equally important; each of which contributes to a successful life in society. Competencies can be applied in different contexts and in different combinations. They overlap and intertwine; essential aspects in one field can support competences in another field”* (Recommendation of the Council of the European Union, 2018).

The key competencies outlined in this document are:

- Literacy competence;
- Multilingual skills;
- Competences in science, technology, engineering and mathematics;
- Digital skills;
- Personal, social and learning skills;
- Civic skills;
- Entrepreneurial skills;
- Cultural awareness and expression skills.

As noted, the competence to learn how to learn is found in the eight key competences recommended by the Council of the European Union.

1.3. The Ability to Learn how to Learn

The competence to learn how to learn is a concept defined in specialized literature through a diversity of concepts such as metacognition or lifelong learning.

The competence to learn how to learn is a tool that corresponds to high demands and challenges in various contexts (Rychen, 2003).

The European Commission defines the learning to learn competence as a key skill needed by everyone in our society. This competence involves managing one's own learning process, involves a knowledge of preferred learning strategies, knowledge of different ways of developing skills.

2. Methodology of Research

The objective of this study was to identify the differences between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate students depending on the dimensions of learning to learn competence.

Hypothesis

It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences between the students from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of the bachelor's degree in terms of motivation and learning, reflection on learning, time management, information, organization and group learning.

Material and methods

A self-assessment questionnaire was created to measure students' ability to learn how to learn within the project “Inspiring Guide for Learn to Learn” IG4L2L (2016-2018)*.

The questionnaire contains 52 items divided into the following subscales:

1. Motivation and self-esteem;
2. Time management;
3. Organization of information
4. Reflecting on previous learning experiences;
5. Group learning.

The answers are predefined from 1=never to 5=very often. The internal consistency expressed by Cronbach's index of the questionnaire was 0.84 and in the

case of our sample it was 0.79. The total score can be: low score 5-12, medium score 13-18 and high score 19-25.

Sample

120 urban female students aged between 19 and 48 ($M=25.7$, $SD=9.27$) participated in the study. 48 students are in the 1st year of studies, 48 are in the 2nd year of studies and 24 are in the third year. 12 of the students had low scores for motivation and self-esteem, 24 students had low scores for reflection on learning, 18 had low scores for time management, 12 students had low scores for organizing information and group

learning. Instead, 60 of the participants had a high score on group learning, 90 of the participants had an average score on organizing information, 84 had an average score on the time management scale, 54 had average scores on the reflection on learning scale and 91 students had a high score on the motivation and self-esteem scale. As we can see, most students had a high score for motivation and self-esteem, and half of them had a high score for group learning, which means that in addition to motivation and high self-esteem, it is also important group learning (Table no. 1).

Table no. 1
Demographic data

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
year.of.study				
1	48	40.000	40.000	40.000
2	48	40.000	40.000	80.000
3	24	20.000	20.000	100.000
motivation.and.self.estesteem				
1	12	10.000	10.000	10.000
2	17	14.167	14.167	24.167
3	91	75.833	75.833	100.000
reflection.on.learning				
1	24	20.000	20.000	20.000
2	54	45.000	45.000	65.000
3	42	35.000	35.000	100.000
organization.of.information				
1	12	10.000	10.000	10.000
2	90	75.000	75.000	85.000
3	18	15.000	15.000	100.000
time.management				
1	18	15.000	15.000	15.000
2	90	75.000	75.000	90.000
3	12	10.000	10.000	100.000
group.learning				
1	12	10.000	10.000	10.000
2	48	40.000	40.000	50.000
3	60	50.000	50.000	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	120	100.000		

3. Results

Tables no. 2 and no. 3 show that there are statistically significant differences between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students regarding all dimensions of the learning to learn competence, $p < 0.01$.

However, 1st year students show the best reflection on learning (18), 3rd year students excel in time management (24), and 2nd year students demonstrate the highest level of group learning (30).

Thus, the highest scores were recorded by students from the 2nd year of

study, while the lowest scores were recorded among students from the first year of studies. These results are also due to the fact that in the second year of studies the students began to get to know each other and collaborate in learning.

In the dynamics of the group, the second year is the one in which group cohesion is high, while in the first year the students do not know each other very well and in the third year they start to become independent, being in their final year of studies.

Table no. 2
Contingency Tables

Contingency Tables				
	year.of.study			Total
	1	2	3	
motivation.and.self.esteem				
1	12	0	0	12
2	5	12	0	17
3	31	36	24	91
reflection.on.learning				
1	12	12	0	24
2	18	24	12	54
3	18	12	12	42
time.management				
1	18	0	0	18
2	30	48	12	90
3	0	0	12	12
organization.of.information				
1	12	0	0	12
2	30	42	18	90
3	6	6	6	18
group.learning				
1	6	0	6	12
2	30	18	0	48
3	12	30	18	60
Total	48	48	24	120

Table no. 3
Chi-Squared Tests

	Value	df	p
X ² motivation.and.self.esteem	28.507	4	< .001
X ² reflection.on.learning	10.000	4	0.002
X ² time.management	82.000	4	< .001
X ² organization.of.information	22.000	4	< .001
X ² group.learning	36.750	4	< .001

4. Conclusions

All our goals were achieved. In conclusion, each year of study has its own particularities in terms of the learning to learn competence. In the case of our sample, the students from the 1st year of studies show the best reflection on learning, the students from the 3rd year of studies excel in time management, while the highest level of group learning is demonstrated by students from the second year of studies. There are significant

differences between students regarding the dimensions of the competence to learn how to learn.

A limitation of this study was that the groups of students were unequal, and the number was relatively small.

As a future direction, we propose to increase the sample and carry out longitudinal studies to see the process by which the learning to learn competence is formed in students.

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