

FACTORS THAT ARE DETERMINING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM FIRMS

*María de los Ángeles Frende Vega**

*José María Biedma Ferrer***

*Manuel Arana Jiménez****

Universidad de Cádiz

mangele.frende@uca.es, josemaria.biedma@uca.es, manuel.arana@uca.es

The Human Resources Management (HRM) is an essential tool for general competitiveness in general business and in tourism, particularly. The main part of the company value chain activities within tourism and entertainment industry, is carried out by human people. Hunter, Schmidt & Judiesch (1990) analyse how labour intensive companies can get competitive advantages if they have committed employees and if the adequate conditions for transferring productivity from the best employees to the rest of them are created. Thus, workers become the most important and differentiating resource in this type of organizations (Lillo, Ramón & Sevilla, 2007).

Concerning the business field, human resources are also key elements for the company success. Thus, the “Libro Blanco” by *Exceltur* (2006) emphasises the importance of HRM the tourist sector and highlights that this Management has become a key policy for tourist companies due to it has the responsibility of creating a working environment in which employees are motivated in doing their best for the client, company and business.

All this testifies the importance of an adequate learning process in university. It would benefit companies where these students go for working.

In the last years, some studies related with the university academic performance have been done (Fernandez & Alonso-Tapia, 2012). Notwithstanding, there is a lack of project focused on HRM. Therefore, and taking into account the topic importance, the aim of this investigation is to analyse the factors that affect this subject academic performance, being taught in Tourism Degree in the University of Cadiz.

The results obtained from this project would let us design methodological and contextual purposes that would improve students’ learning quality; it is one of the aims our university rules encompasses (Maquillón Sánchez & Hernández Pina, 2011).

Although many advances have taken place, there are not so much projects that analyse the relation between the methodology used and the students' perception about the subject, specifically, Human Resources Management in Touristic Firms (HRMTF), one. Therefore, this project wants to give an answer to these questions:

- Is the subject perception related with the academic performance?
- Are the new methodologies employed related with the academic performance?

This project has been accomplished during the academic year 2011/2012 in HRMTF subject that is imparted in the second semester of the second year in the Tourism degree in the University of Cadiz. The participants of this study are 120 students. Notwithstanding, the students that usually attended to class were 75, the ones that filled in both questionnaires. Participation rate comprised the 62, 5%, with a mean age of 21, 75 years, being inferior the male participation (34, 25%). This is largely due to the fact that the main part of the students that study Tourism are women (68, 30% approximately).

This project has tried to determine the variables that affect the students' academic performance in this subject in the University of Cadiz. Specifically, we have analysed if there is any relation between the contents perception the students have and their final learning process, as well as the methodology employed by the professor.

We have mainly dealt with the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) as statistic methodology. In order to study the relationship between the variables, we have used regression techniques for the linear case, as well as for the ordinal case (Spearman), among others.

With respect to the first objective of our work, we can state that the perception obtained by the students in relation to the subject HRMTF is linked to academic performance, measured by the hours of study they devote to it (Manzano, 2007). In particular, we find significant differences between perception and low and high performance levels. That is, when students have a low view of the importance of the subject, the time spent it is also low, what implies a lower learning. A similar situation occurs when the perception is high: in this case, the performance is higher. However, we find no evidence of differences in perception levels when the effort (hours dedicated) is medium. Thus, in subsequent studies we may eliminate this medium effort level, and consider only two measures: low and high.

However, we can say that there exists a link between perception and academic performance. These results are consistent with those obtained in other studies. In this regard, in Alfalla-Luque et al. (2011) we have that the perception of students in the subject Operations Management determines the learning process. As indicated by Siegle and McCoach (2005), the vision they have of the usefulness of a subject for their professional future (extrinsic rewards) affects their effort. Similarly, Astin (1999) points out that to achieve the objectives written in a particular educational program, students must dedicate some effort level which is related to the importance they perceive it.

On the other hand, with respect to relationship between methodology and academic performance, we find a no statistically significant relationship. That is, we have not been able to prove that the use of new methodologies affects the effort that students devote to the subject HRMTF. It seems that these methodologies, which imply more effort than the typical student lecture, tend to discourage them and produce the opposite effect, and

students spend less time to study (Cross et al., 2009). Similarly, these results are in line with those obtained by Rodríguez-Martin and Álvarez-Arregui (2013), who did not detect changes in student learning by introducing new methodologies following the incorporation of Spanish universities to Bologna Plan. In fact, students believe that “it is a methodological continuity which has contributed in an impoverishment of teaching in many cases ...” (Rodríguez-Martin and Álvarez-Arregui, 2013: 110). Furthermore, Alfalla-Luque et al. (2011), in their study focused on the subject Operations Management, obtained no significant results between the ‘new’ methodologies and scores on knowledge tests. In the similar way, the work by Leeds et al. (1998) shows that students with the lecture (traditional methodology) scored better than with other more innovative methodologies, such as cooperative work, groupware, etc.

In this paper, we have considered two factors in the academic performance. Thus, in future studies we could include other variables, such as demographic, cognitive and social (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen, 1993; Monroy and Hernandez-Pina, 2014, Thomas-Miquel Exposito-Langa and Sempere-Castelló, 2014) which have been discussed in the literature about their potential relationship with the effort that students devote to HRMTF and, therefore, their learning.

Moreover, this study can be replicated in other areas in Human Resources, which are taught in other degrees in the University of Cádiz, as in Administration and Management, since these subjects have different structures and differ in some of the methodologies used.

The results in this study are interesting to make us reflect on how to improve the performance of students in HRMTF, since the effort of students in the subjects they attend is about 10% - 50% below their capacity, which affects their learning process and, therefore, their professional success, such as Siegle and Rubensteiny Mitchell (2014) point out. In this regard, teachers should make an effort to make subjects more attractive and useful, as well as to communicate explicitly their importance for their professional development, and for the competitiveness of businesses and organizations in which they will work.

To do this, we have to analyze the methodologies which are more motivating and, therefore, they will make students better in human resource managers. In particular, in tourism, employees are the most valuable asset in all hierarchical levels and areas of the company.

