LEARNING OF THE STUDENT AS AN ONLINE ENTREPENEURSHIP THROUGH COMPANY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION[1]

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Abstract

This paper describes a learning experience in the teaching of electronic commerce at the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). It focuses on learning the student's practical skills as an entrepreneur in electronic distribution channels. The method uses company-university-student collaboration to promote different crosscutting skills that students must acquire concerning the subject "Commercial Distribution Decisions" of the Marketing Degree. Knowledge is transferred to students from their experience participating in a workshop addressed to implementing a real electronic shop. The teacher tutors the work teams in each process step, and Palbin Company provides the necessary technical support. The information obtained through two surveys addressed to the students, pre- and after- the workshop experience serves to compare expectations and performance and shows the success of the experience.

Keywords: Commercial distribution; Crosscutting competencies; Entrepreneurship; Online commerce; Workshop.

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1. Introduction

All business sectors and social life apply immersive technologies in the current digital scenario (Caputo and Walletzky, 2017). They are solutions that permit emulating a real-world through digital media and create a sense of user immersion in the digital world (Cummings and Bailenson, 2016). The current digital scenario is also a consequence of the challenges evidenced by the COVID 19 pandemic. It has served as an effective way to overcome, among other circumstances, the need to substitute presence meetings.

The teaching sector is one of the most affected. As in many other teaching centres, the University of Zaragoza had to approach the last academic course, 2020-2021, using digital resources through distance classes. Teaching innovation leverages immersive digital tools. The business community is another ally in learning economics, administration, and marketing. Training students to acquire professional skills is a concern that motivates to promote the link between the company and the University. Thus, the triangulation company-university-student (Berné et al., 2011) is the appropriate context to carry out a project of teaching innovation that focuses on the acquisition of entrepreneurship competencies.

Professional skills facilitate employment, entrepreneurship, and internal entrepreneurship (corporative entrepreneurship made by employees that develop activities addressed to generate new business for the company, according to Chavarría, 2019). Fostering entrepreneurship is an academic challenge, mainly for public institutions, usually less focused on practical knowledge. Nevertheless, it is essential to train and prepare the students to enter the labour market and start a business. Mainly due to the current unprecedented increase in the youth unemployment rate.

Moreover, learning is most efficient and effective when learning by doing. The learning projects must provide approaches to empower students to take direct action in designing

and setting up e-shops, for instance, using hands-on learning. The approach has to enable the students to apply to learn, enhance their effectiveness in communication and develops other competencies (Ngai, 2007).

Thus, the work Proposition is: "*The company-university-students cooperation, the approximation of actual practice to the classrooms (entrepreneurship), and the leverage of digital resources are main determinants for better academic performance"*.

This work aims to present a practical experience of teaching innovation motivated by company-university-student collaboration. It deals with learning crosscutting competencies of the Grade of Marketing and Market Research, precisely the Commercial Distribution Decisions subject.

The collaboration between the Palbin Company, which provides a digital platform for electronic commerce and support services, and the Marketing Department of the University of Zaragoza is the academic context in which the students, by teams, lead a project of entrepreneurship in e-commerce. Technology-based start-ups are an opportunity for the University-Company-State-Society articulation (Benavides-Sánchez et al., 2021).

The research question is: "*What opportunities do an e-shop workshop managed through a digital platform offer to train students in crosscutting competencies and benefit entrepreneurship?"*

With the aim to solve that question, the students experiment with a situation of entrepreneurship of a wholesale/ retail business or sellers working for a company. The digital platforms create the need of enhancing digital marketing knowledge (Alford and Jones, 2020) and introduce the concept of digital entrepreneurship (Zaheer et al., 2019).

The workshop also includes technical learning to develop the web page that supports the

online store and practical business organization and marketing decisions, both strategic and tactic. Students must apply their knowledge in marketing to start a business in a digital channel. Moreover, learning is most efficient and effective when learning by doing. The providers of products (external companies involved) and the responsible teacher are the ones who evaluate the development and results of the activity. Also, the student judges the interest of the workshop as teaching innovation. Palbin Company assesses the technical quality of the e-shops.

The method used to assess the utility of the workshop consists of a first questionnaire before starting the workshop, which serves to obtain information on the students' perception of their current level in every analysed competence and their expectations aroused by the activity. A second questionnaire at the end offers information on the perceptions related to the acquisition of skills through the workshop development. The comparison between the prior and later information is approached using multivariate methods for independent samples.

Next, this article explains the role of crosscutting competencies, the procedure that serves to implement the workshop and the collaboration with Palbin Company, the results of the comparison analysis, and the conclusions. The results show the success of the procedure. The students experiment with an entrepreneurship activity. Depending on the market or business activity (industrial/consumption), they act as an online retailer or a non-commercial intermediary of a particular producer-provider, depending on the market or the business activity (industrial/consumption). Moreover, the students improve competencies leveraging the opportunity given by the workshop, the help of the company, and the continuous tutorial of the teacher.

2. The importance of crosscutting competences

From a bibliometric analysis about educational technology, Chen et al. (2020) conclude that teachers and educators must pay attention to the students in learning and teaching. How they feel and what they can achieve. Moreover, researchers and educators must continuously work on how technology can be better adapted to support education. The authors defend the need to construct learning environments that enable learning anywhere and anytime, taking advantage of the current technology devices.

Nowadays, capabilities as memory are not enough, even useless and non-positive values. The current liquid modernity (Bauman, 2018) needs professionals with traditional skills and others regarding avoiding routines and providing unique values to improve team quality (Boltansky and Chiapello, 1999). They are competencies established, although capable of achieving the success of the individual searching differentiation. These virtues are the trigger of leveraging the specific knowledge of an academic subject, such as marketing management and commercial distribution decision-making. Bauman (2008) points out the importance of evaluating the savoir-être and not only the general or specific knowledge.

These precepts motivate this work to enhance students' competencies, both the specific decision-making of marketing and commercial distribution and the transversal ones. Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for professional success. Knowledge is the intellectual content to be learned; skills are the capacity to apply the knowledge to achieve specific goals and objectives, and abilities apply knowledge and skills in a professional work environment (Lawson et al., 2014). In this work, the learning of crosscutting competencies promotes the achievement of specific ones. While the specific competencies linked to any university subject count on consolidated and agreed criteria by the academic staff, crosscutting competencies must serve as a basis of

know-how and essential support of the specific ones. Therefore, this project is focused on the analysis and assessment of crosscutting competencies regarding online entrepreneurship.

The literature provides structured competencies and ranges of assessments and inferences regarding their various types (Kuz'mina et al., 2020), mainly regarding the knowledge area. The current project selected 19 crosscutting competencies from the contributions of Mouradian and Huebner (2007) and Chavarría (2019): ethics, empathy, risks, self-demand, autonomy, perseverance, critical-constructive vision, initiative, adaptation, time management, curiosity, planning, organisation, creativity, innovation, and teamwork.

The professor mentioned above, Bauman (2008), wrote about the challenges of education in liquid modernity. Nowadays, the commercial structure of the organisations trends to an increasing deliberated disorganisation. It deals with the "liquid world", which considers productivity and effectiveness like objectives that must get rid of established knowledge and the rigidity that imposes guiding only by happened and experimented. There is no perfect organisation, and nowadays, the structures do not maintain their form enough time to guarantee confidence and long term responsibility. Therefore, the individual is responsible for providing the best through their abilities and capabilities, which will crystallise in professional competencies.

Specific skills complement crosscutting, including business development in a natural e-commerce environment and marketing strategies focused on the online retail distribution channel. In this context, both types of competencies cooperate in managing the knowledge and the student's motivation to entrepreneurship.

3. The procedure

This work focuses on the relationship between companies, universities, and students. However, the two last have the final responsibility to academic success. Thus, the students receive training resources through Moodle platform and face-to-face classes about: The role of the involved agents, teamwork management, and the way to face entrepreneurship.

To explain the entire procedure, the following sections of this manuscript present the involved agents, the meaning of belonging to a team, the entrepreneurship attitude, and the workshop process.

3.1. Agents involved

Two previous pilot tests (in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 courses) with different technology providers partners made it possible to compare them and launch in the 2020-2021 academic year an entrepreneurship and learning workshop on skills related to commercial electronic distribution. This workshop corresponds to the practical classes of the subject Decisions on Commercial Distribution, of the Degree in Marketing. It is possible through the collaboration between Palbin S.L. and the Marketing Department of the University of Zaragoza. 2020-2021 faced the workshop through online classes (Google meet).

Palbin (2011, Zaragoza, Spain) platform is a technology supplier that facilitates the development and starting up of electronic commerce in the cloud. After the previously mentioned experiences, this company was selected mainly because its platform provides more usability and technical resources to the learners from their point of view. Moreover, it facilitates the task of the academic through complimentary services. Thus, Palbin supports the teachers by providing real-time access to every e-shop, which

allows a continuous assessment of the work. Further, the students directly communicate with the Palbin staff to solve any technical problem. Also, to motivate the entrepreneurship activity, Palbin awards the best e-shop with a year of free use of the platform.

The other agent is the teacher, which gives the students permanent tutorial support and resources related to working in groups, entrepreneurship, commercial distribution, and marketing decision-making. First of all, the students receive a webinar, given by the company's staff, about the Palbin platform. Next, as is usual in previous active learning projects, such as Gricar et al. (2005), the students form teams and choose a team leader. The students also receive a significant reduction of prices using the platform that goes longer than the first free month announced on the company's web. The Moodle platform of the University of Zaragoza facilitates the interaction teachers-students and makes available to them the learning materials.

3.2. Facing the belonging to a team and the entrepreneurship

A team is not just a group. Teamwork develops communicative, influencing, and emotional entrepreneurial skills to practice self-control and manage frustration. Every team usually has a leader capable of motivating them to achieve common goals.

The team members begin training their minds searching for business ideas viable to a shop online. They have to select one idea from a preliminary list of alternatives. Next, every proposal is jointly discussed in class with the faculty. Among other keys, the selected idea should include an overview of the project, specific considerations, and an organization plan. Team norms and planning should be established initially, including performance review procedures and team (not just project).

On the other hand, the workshop bears in mind the three primary stages of an entrepreneurship process. The three stages are the generation and selection of ideas, the identification and study of opportunities, the plan and development of the business, searching partners and resources, implementation, growing up, and consolidation (Chavarría 2019). In this way, the team works have to take the following fundamental decisions:

1. Search for an original business idea addressed to entrepreneurship through an e-shop. Link this idea with the business objectives.
2. Think about the business's mission, vision, and values according to the business objectives. The project has to be coherent, original and driven by respect and even sustainable development goals (SDG).
3. Prepare appropriate storytelling respectful of the project's authenticity and motivate the goal market by generating curiosity. The importance of the message and its content regards communication decisions.
4. Analyse the capability of the image and other communication tools based on the image.
5. Take decisions always bearing in mind the achievement of reputation and prestige.
6. Forecast costs associated with starting the electronic business, both monetary and non-monetary, to assess the business idea in economic terms.

The students have learned about this matter in the two previous Grade courses and through new practices as extracurricular activities aiming to prompt the entrepreneurial spirit. Anyway, the teacher provides them additional training, mainly reviewing aspects such as motivation and leader characteristics, the acquisition of responsibilities and

challenges to face. They all form the entrepreneurship process, characterized by the pursuit of opportunity, which follows a series of steps by combining knowledge and skills to enable value creation in fulfilling a market need (Nikollaq, 2020).

3.3. The workshop process

Firstly, the entire class is divided into work teams, everyone creating and managing their online store. A total of 24 groups is the result of the division. In addition to the list provided above, they must search for information to analyse the external environment and prepare the entire business plan. Students have to make marketing decisions about the brand name, portfolio, image resources, pricing, commercial communication, social media, and payment methods. Even they have to take into account the offer of post-purchase services. All of them bear in mind a customer orientation of the business. The platform helps their customers (e-shops) decide about promotions and delivery methods in different ways. Each work team elaborates an Executive Report, two pages maximum, presenting its ideas and developments about the project. The principal value of this document is helpful to the teacher to evaluate the business idea. All of them must be made before building the online shop on the platform. During this first stage of the workshop, the student compliments a survey using Google Forms about their competencies and their expectations about the workshop. The questionnaire has scale questions and open questions.

The second stage regards the development of the seminar in practical classes. At the end of the course, every team presents the new e-shop in class. The students receive the assessment criteria at the beginning of the workshop. Business ideas based on the consecution of SDG and addressed to solve any problem related to the current pandemic scenario are positively valued. A committee formed by the Palbin staff, teachers, and

rest of the teams assesses the final results using a template that includes the different valuable criteria.

After the experience, a second survey offers the students' opinions about performance.

4. Methodology of comparative analysis

To assess the workshop's effectiveness, the students compliment a questionnaire before starting the workshop. The students give information about their expectations participating in the workshop and perceptions of their current level in each competence. A second questionnaire at the end of the course gathers information on the students' opinions regarding the acquisition and improvement of skills after the workshop development. Likert scales of eleven points, from 0 to 10, measure the variables. This method is endorsed by previous research. For instance, Alonso-Martín (2010) assessed crosscutting competencies of students of psychology in the same way. The comparative analysis makes it possible to identify the most affected competencies, the changes in attitude and behaviour in the students, and their level of satisfaction with the activity and the method. Data analysis performs using multivariate methods suitable for the comparison of independent samples. The following section presents the results obtained from the information given by the students before and after the workshop development.

The number of students in each sample is 112, the total number of students enrolled in the procedure. Thus, the sample is the entire population under analysis; a total of 20 work teams of 5 individuals and 3 of 4.

5. Results

The first result to highlight from the information provided by the first questionnaire is that 100% of the students (112 individuals) who took the online workshop have responded. Achieving this level of participation is a success because the involvement of

the student outside of class hours and more to answer surveys is always a challenge. This response informs about the interest and the positive attitude of the students.

The percentage of affirmative answers to the workshop's potential to improve each of the 18 competencies considered offers a histogram in which the most mentioned is the use of digital tools (Figure 1). Since it is a workshop for building a digital business from a web page, its benefit in this skill is evident. The least mentioned competence is related to the care of ethical aspects. Although ethics is a topic that is directly emphasized, its relationship to the student workshop may not be very intuitive. The competence for empathy, risk-taking, self-demand, autonomy and perseverance continue in the ranking in a percentage below 50%. These capacities are highly dependent on the individual's profile or personality characteristics, which they may see as less related to the workshop. However, it should notice that, although their score is low, several respondents consider them as skills promoted by the workshop so that they somehow increase expectations about the activity.

The competencies that exceed 50% of affirmations are 12. The handling of digital tools, the most indicated, adds the critical-constructive vision, initiative, the adaptation to the circumstances (know-how, resilience and overcoming), time management, curiosity, planning, effective communication, learning, creativity, innovation and teamwork. The result shows the primary advantages of a workshop carried out in a team, under teacher direction and supervision, and in a real market context.

Further, Table 1 shows the assessment assigned by the students according to their current level in each competence. A recording of scores from 0 (minimum level) to 10 points (maximum) from low (0-4), sufficient (5,6), notable (7,8), until outstanding (9,10) level serves to clarify the global scores. The result informs that the students have a high opinion about their current level in the analysed competencies. Most of the

competencies get a notable score in the opinion of the students. Even handling teamwork and curiosity are competencies considered outstanding for many.

Figure 1. Ranking of competences in percentages. Workshop potential from the students' point of view

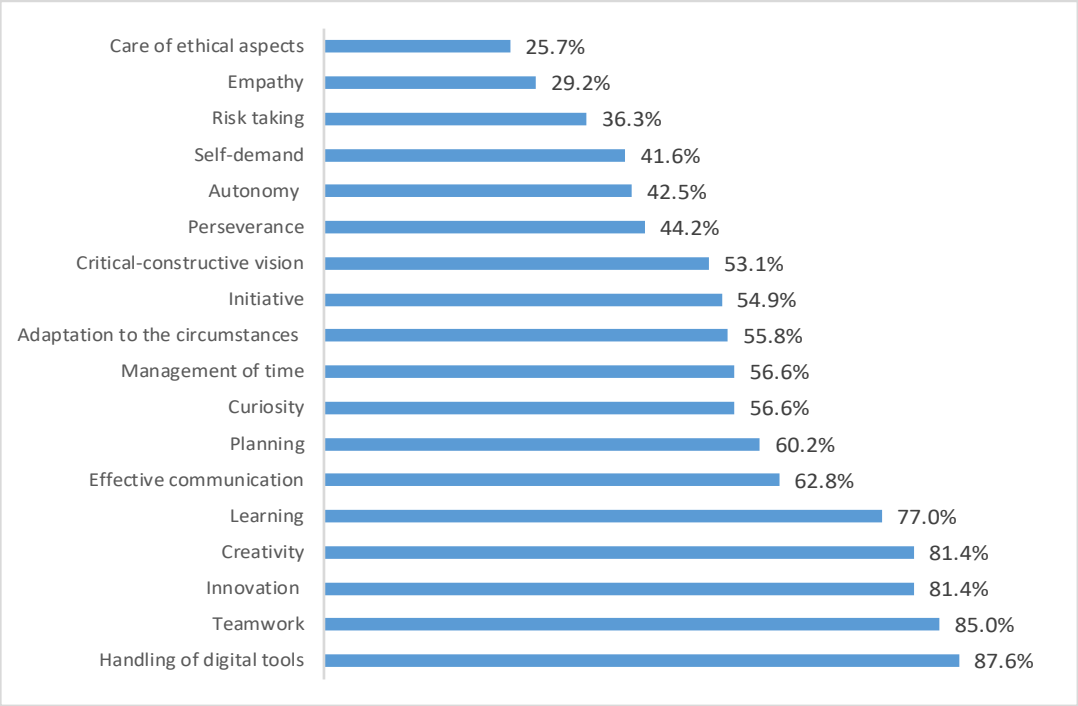


Table 1. Percentages of competence assessment (re-cod. from 0 to 10 points)

	LOW (0-4)	SUFFICIENT (5-6)	NOTABLE (7-8)	OUTSTANDING (9-10)
Innovation	8.0	32.7	42.5	16.8
Effective communication	10.6	23.0	44.2	22.1
Empathy	6.2	20.4	40.7	32.7
Handling of digital tools	4.4	19.5	52.2	23.9
Autonomy	3.5	20.4	49.6	26.5
Care of ethical aspects	9.7	24.8	43.4	22.1
Curiosity	3.5	9.7	39.8	46.9
Creativity	3.6	20.5	45.5	30.4
Self-demand	2.7	17.0	46.4	33.9
Perseverance	6.2	22.1	50.4	21.2
Teamwork	1.8	10.6	38.9	48.7
Risk taking	7.1	36.3	43.4	13.3
Management of time	10.6	29.2	38.9	21.2
Initiative	6.3	17.9	44.6	31.3
Learning	0.9	18.8	48.2	32.1
Adaptation to the circumstances	2.7	16.8	48.7	31.9
Planning	6.3	17.1	43.2	33.3
Critical-constructive vision	2.7	25.7	50.4	21.2

A score under 4 points reflects the individual perception of not having the minimum competence. In this sense, the most affected competence is time management, tied with effective communication. Almost 11% believe that their current level in these two capacities is insufficient. Time management is complex for many. Time is valuable, essential, something we have to care about; the passage of time heralds the diminution of opportunities that should have been seized and consumed when they presented themselves (Bauman, 2008). Therefore, It is optimistic that the students appreciate the importance of leveraging time. In this respect, recognising their low competencies means an excellent motivation to their learning.

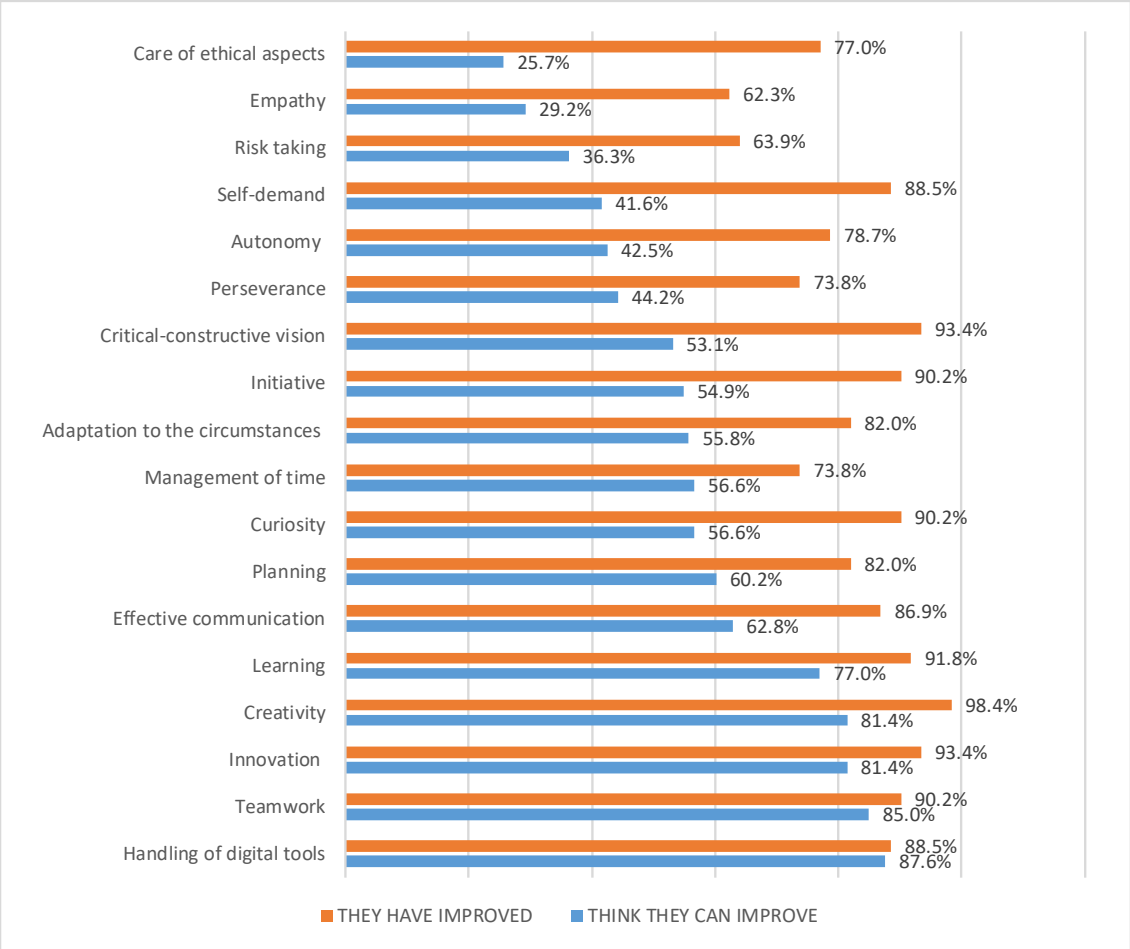
Regarding communicative competence, this individual perception among students can draw attention since they belong to Generation Z and, therefore, they are born digital. However, the ability to communicate effectively is something else, and the honesty of these respondents in this regard deserves applause. Digital communication can isolate individuals (Milosevic et al., 2022), mainly in job environments (Toscano and Zappalá, 2020). In a training context, the problem could be similar.

The competencies with a level lower than 5 points (C level) may be the ones that most motivate them to carry out the workshop. Combining the competencies qualified as failed with the values that these students assign to the potential of the workshop for each of them, innovation, use of digital tools, creativity, teamwork, time management, learning, planning, and critical view have the most significant potential for improvement by carrying out the activity.

Comparing opinions before- and after-workshop shows the great value of the workshop from the students' point of view. It has a high value in practically all the competencies analysed (Figure 2). The most significant difference is found in the competence to improve ethical aspects. It was a competition with the lowest perceived potential. The

difference with the posterior results is more than 51 points. It is also worth highlighting the differences that show competencies such as self-demand (46.9 points), critical vision (40.3), initiative (35.3), and curiosity (33.6). Digital tools present the closest relationship between the perceptions before and after the development of the workshop (0.9 points). These results also report a considerable change of opinion concerning how the workshop can effectively improve the skills considered so that skills considered little related after the development of the activity get recognition.

Figure 2. Comparing expectations and perceptions about competencies



* In blue colour there are the percentages regarding the opinion of the workshop potential in each competence. Orange colour highlights the perceptions after its development.

An analysis of basic statistics, which includes the mean, standard deviation, median and mode, provides more information on the situation of each competence from the

student's point of view, once the workshop has been completed. Table 2 collects these data. The competence that offers a higher average statistical value is the one related to the improvement of creativity, with a deviation of 1.4. It is even higher than the digital tool management variable, whose mean value is 8.2 and standard deviation is 2.0. The lowest values correspond to empathy, risk taking and ethics.

Finally, the closed questions of the post-activity questionnaire inform that the students consider that the workshop deserves its implementation in subsequent courses by 93.4% of those surveyed, that it can be helpful in other subjects, by 90.2%, and that it is closer to professional reality than different types of internships, by 91.8%.

Table 2. Basic statistics

	Average	Standard deviation	Median	Mode
Innovation	7.3	1.8	8.0	8.0
Effective communication	7.1	2.0	8.0	9.0
Empathy	5.7	2.6	6.0	7.0
Handling digital tools	8.2	2.0	8.0	8.0
Autonomy	7.2	2.1	7.0	9.0
Care of ethical aspects	6.0	2.0	6.0	6.0
Curiosity	7.6	1.9	8.0	7.0
Creativity	8.5	1.4	9.0	9.0
Self-demand	7.3	1.9	7.0	7.0
Perseverance	6.9	1.9	7.0	8.0
Teamwork	7.8	2.1	8.0	8.0
Risk taking	5.9	2.4	6.0	6.0
Time management	6.9	1.9	7.0	8.0
Initiative	7.7	1.8	8.0	8.0
Learning	7.8	1.8	8.0	8.0
Adaptation	7.5	1.8	8.0	8.0
Planning	7.1	2.1	8.0	8.0
Constructive critical vision	7.1	1.9	7.0	6.0

Personally, several students expressed their gratitude to the teachers; the idea and the workshop process, were qualified as the best practice they have had studying the Grade. These data report a high level of satisfaction with the activity carried out and reinforce the previous discourse.

4. Conclusions

This paper intends to contribute by offering a learning experience that endorses the research proposition and answer the research question. The experience firstly highlights the effectiveness of the collaboration between company and university to achieve better academic performance. The university resources and business environment benefit the acquisition of competencies and entrepreneurship. The work of Nikollaq (2020) offers a similar conclusion.

Second, the procedure facilitates the consecution of the three precepts of Chen et al. (2020). Participating in the method, the students felt that the teachers pay attention to their needs and advances. Their motivation and active participation increased; they also recognized the receiving of global benefits and individual.

The process linked to the e-store workshop shows the students the worries of their university and teachers about adopting the available technology to get better performance. The collaboration between practitioners and educators plays an essential role in this sense. The academic objectives and the student's profile, on the one hand, and the practical knowledge of the companies on the other, must serve to improve the educational support of the technology. Definitively, constructing learning environments such as the one presented here allows learning in the distance and leverages the current digital technologies.

All in all, collaboration companies-university-students, encouraging entrepreneurship, and using available digital resources increase academic performance. The last responsibility of the procedure and its success is the academic staff. Searching and managing the opportunities and available resources offer practical training in crosscutting competencies and benefit entrepreneurship. In particular, the e-store workshop is an effective method to enhance the teaching addressed to acquire and

enhance crosscutting competencies. Moreover, digital platforms represent an excellent approach to creating and implementing novel business ideas.

By offering the e-commerce workshop described in this article, students get involved in actual business processes. Moreover, they have the opportunity to experiment as entrepreneurs, learn to test new e-commerce models in a real-life environment, and can be a businessman exploiting the business once the workshop is over.

All the surveys' results and the basic information of the e-shops inform about the very high student's level of satisfaction. They are grateful and recognize the procedure's strengths to acquire the competencies regarding the subject and advise its use future (in subsequent courses and other subjects). Another benefit of the method is that other learning contexts may leverage this experience and transfer the workshop's idea to their teaching objectives.

Although online classes are an excellent way to solve circumstances like the pandemic, they could limit the experience. The next course, 2021-2022, will benefit from the face-to-face classes. The personal interaction with the company staff, the classmates, and the teachers could improve the efficiency of the communication and the mechanisms linked to the procedure, avoiding some distance relationship problems.

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