

Teaching Methods at Business Schools

*Natividad Lisbona, Ana Isabel Castán
María Ángeles Duque, Anunciación Pérez
Universidad de Zaragoza*

"Teaching methods at a business school" forma parte de las ponencias que se presentaron en el seminario que con el mismo título, se celebró en Vlissingen (Holanda) en noviembre de 1993, dentro del Programa Erasmus NL-1002/04.

En dicho seminario participaron instituciones de diversos países como Alemania, Francia, Inglaterra y, por supuesto, España.

Fue una oportunidad para contrastar métodos de enseñanza a nivel internacional muy positiva que ha permitido variar y actualizar nuestros propios sistemas.

1. Introduction

During the last few years the Spanish university is going through a strong process of transformation. At present, it lacks a big strength of adapting its teaching programmes to the needs that society puts upon it.

The continuous social changes and consequences of Spain joining the European Economic Community (EEC), have made it obligatory to review the objectives, contents and teaching methods of the university as well as the general daily workings of the class.

Therefore, in order to achieve a good function of the pupil, unquestionably it is necessary to develop a suitable lecturing method, understanding this is the first stage of the teaching.

In this paper we are going to refer to these methods and particularly to the following points:

1. The teacher/lecturer
2. The objectives
3. Lecturing methods
4. Pupil evaluation
5. Teacher evaluation
6. Foreign pupil/students
7. New teaching programmes/plans.

Before discussing these points we will explain the general characteristics of Business Studies in the school/faculty in Zaragoza, which determine our teaching methods:

- 1.- A very important point to bear in mind is that the duration of the career is short (only 3 years), and therefore the focus is mainly on practical knowledge.
- 2.- We also have pupils from various areas before coming to study at our school: BUP, FP and others.

Therefore their knowledge of different subjects is varied.

- 3.- In some subjects, there are 150 pupils per class.

2. The teacher/lecturer

The university teacher develops his function of communicating knowledge to the pupils, by using a series of methods and materials. The traditional views of the functions of the university are those of investigation and formation.

The university teacher through deep investigation of the knowledge of distinct disciplines, integrates in work groups, has exchanges between Spanish and foreign universities, attends congresses and debates of his area of specialisation, participates in meetings and reports, etc...

Through this formation the teacher transmits the scientific knowledge.

In order to transmit the precise outline of their knowledge the teacher must have:

- 1) A good knowledge of the whole of the subject.
- 2) Teaching motivation.
- 3) Communicating ability.
- 4) Planning.

3. Objectives

The general objectives are as follows:

1) Determination of contents/points:

What are the points to be explained.

2) Selection of contents and the organisation of their order of importance.

3) Organisation of the contents, in order to get a structure of the ideas and concepts.

4) Specification of objectives:

The planning of the course depending on the time.

As you already know the main objective of the Diploma Studies of Business Science is the formation of personal capabilities of managing, advising and judging economic works.

The general aim of the teaching course is the intellectual development of the pupil through the following points:

- * To develop his/her abstraction, generalisation analysis and synthesis capability.
- * To acquire and use right language adequately, which allows classification and precision of the presentation.
- * To develop imagination, intuition and creativity.
- * To acquire easy use of the concepts and operations.
- * To develop a habit of reasoning and take notice of their own reasoning.
- * To reflect upon the effectiveness of Business Science and its application regarding to professionals, and upon the development of private and public companies.

4. Lecturing methods

The most popular teaching methods are as follows:

4.1 Theoretical and practical classes

These occupy the major part of the course, during which the knowledge of the theoretical class subsequently develops in the practical classes.

The theoretical classes through constant representation by the teacher enable him to help the pupil fix main ideas; and allow him to see which aspects of the subject are most important and which may cause problems in the practical development of the pupil.

In this type of class, before talking about the subject it is better for the teacher to give an introduction of a few of the concepts of the subject. It is better for the teacher to discuss only a few concepts but make them very clear. Also at the end of the class it is a good idea for the teacher to give a summary of what he has said.

Another point we consider important is that the teacher gives the class a problem but not the solution, so that the pupils are left to think about the points discussed.

The practical and theoretical classes are alternated to enable the teacher to see if the pupils understand and know how to apply the knowledge they have acquired in the theoretical classes.

In these type of classes the active participation of the pupil is important, by supplying a series of questions in which the pupil needs to use the knowledge given by the teacher.

These type of classes are particularly important at a Business School, in order to give the pupil sufficient practical knowledge which will allow them to develop a professional nature.

Complimentary to these classes, there are other types such as:

4.2 Voluntary practical classes

There are voluntary classes for the pupils which allow them to develop certain terms which may not be made clear in the theoretical class. These classes are developed through small groups, during which the material delivered by the teacher can be adapted and discussed.

4.3 Individual teaching

Principally developed through the theory class, whereby the pupil can clarify their doubts, searching, bibliography, etc...

This is a more direct way of communicating knowledge between the teacher and the pupils. It allows a direct relationship with the teacher which may not always be achieved in theory classes, due to the large number of pupils at the Spanish university.

4.4 Courses, conferences and teaching aids

These allow the development of certain terms, as well as to orient the professional development of the pupil.

In order to facilitate the learning process it is necessary to use physical resources.

In our Business School the blackboard is the most important teaching instrument, especially for Economics classes, where the number of students is so large that it is impossible to teach on a one to one basis.

Another popular method is the use of the text book, in general a basic book and bibliography is recommended for the pupils use, which completes the notes that are taken in class.

Also of special interest are the visual methods of teaching, clear projectors are considered particularly important due to the time saved by their use.

However, an inconvenience of these methods is that the projection needs to be carried.

One of the most important tools used at present in the world of Business is the computer. Therefore it is very important for the pupils to learn how to use the computer in their studies, in order to provide them with a good basic knowledge of computers when they enter the professional world of Business.

5. Evaluation methods

Of all the possible methods of evaluation the most popular was continual evaluation assessment which included all the activities that the pupil encountered during the course which could be:

- * Attendance and participation.
- * Practical activities.
- * Individual or group work.
- * Seminars, etc.

The main reason for this method is to confirm the pupils' work during a determined period, however, this has been a problem due to the increase in the number of pupils, as is the case in our school. Therefore our evaluation is taken from practical written individual or group work rather than theoretical work.

The written exam is the method used in most departments within our school, to evaluate the level of knowledge acquired by the pupils as well as their reasoning capacity and understanding of the subject.

Generally this evaluation consists of two exams during the course and a final exam, all of which test both the practical and theoretical aspects of the course.

6. Teacher evaluation

In the Spanish university at the end of each academic year there is an evaluation of each teacher by the pupils.

This evaluation consists of an enquiry of the pupils' opinions with regard to the following points:

6.1 *Subject*

- a) Objectives
- b) Difficulty
- c) Span
- d) Contents
- e) Recommended materials
- f) Conditions in the theory classes
- g) Conditions in the practical classes
- h) Coordination between the theory classes and other activities of the subject

6.2 *Teacher/lecturer*

- a) Attendance
- b) Punctuality
- c) Knowledge of subject
- d) Use of lecturing methods
- e) Class preparation
- f) Clarity and order
- g) Efficiency
- h) Pleasantness

6.3 *Teacher-student relationship*

6.4 *Evaluations*

- a) Definition of the criteria of evaluation
- b) Difficulty
- c) The marking methods of different teachers
- d) The level of knowledge acquired in class in comparison to that tested in the exams
- e) Time between the taking of the exam and the publication of results

This enquiry is a process of obtaining results that are of interest for the teacher, the centre and the University. The results of this enquiry are sent to each teacher for them to improve their teaching methods.

7. Foreign students in Zaragoza, and students from Zaragoza in foreign universities

7.1 Foreign Students studying in Zaragoza

The main problem experienced by foreign students (for example, French, German or English students) is that classes are different in their own countries. The major difference is that many other countries have more practical classes than in our school. Therefore many of the students have problems taking notes and understanding what the teacher is saying, as they are not used to so many theory classes.

7.2 Students from Zaragoza in other foreign universities

When Spanish students go to foreign universities it is more difficult because they need to do more investigation of the subjects they study on their own. However, in our school we feel that there are more benefits than difficulties. From past experience we have found that whilst at first it is very difficult for the students, once they become accustomed to the situation, they find it highly beneficial. It is especially good for them as they are able to improve their language skills as well as to experience more practical classes, which they are not accustomed to in Spain, and therefore strengthen their methods of investigation.