

Identification of Three Strategies to Enhance University Students' Professional Identity, Using Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Authors : Alba Barbara-i-Molinero, Rosalia Cascon-Pereira, Ana Beatriz Hernandez

Abstract : Students' transitions from high school to the university have been challenged by the lack of continuity between both contexts. This mismatch directly affects students by generating feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, which increases the dropout rates and reduces students' academic success. This discontinuity emanates because 'transitions concern a restructuring of what the person does and who the person perceives him or herself to be'. Hence, identity becomes essential in these transitions. Generally, identity is the answer to questions such as who am I? or who are we? This is integrated by personal identity, and as many social identities as groups, the individual feels he/she is a part. A case in point to construct a social identity is the identification with a profession. For this reason, a way to lighten the generated tension during transitions is applying strategies orientated to enhance students' professional identity in their point of entry to the higher education institution. That would create a sense of continuity between high school and higher education contexts, increasing their Professional Identity Strength. To develop the strategies oriented to enhance students Professional Identity, it is important to analyze what influences it. There exist several influencing factors that influence Professional Identity (e.g., professional status, the recommendation of family and peers, the academic environment, or the chosen bachelor degree). There is a gap in the literature analyzing the impact of these factors on more than one bachelor degree. In this regards, our study takes an additional step with the aim of evaluating the influence of several factors on Professional Identity using a cohort of university students from multiple degrees between the ages of 17-19 years. To do so, we used hierarchical regression analyses to assess the impact of the following factors: External Motivation Conditionals (EMC), Educational Experience Conditionals (EEC) and Personal Motivational Conditional (PMP). After conducting the analyses, we found that the assessed factors influenced students' professional identity differently according to their bachelor degree and discipline. For example, PMC and EMC positively affected science students, while architecture, law and economics and engineering students were just influenced by PMC. Basing on that influences, we proposed three different strategies aimed to enhance students' professional identity, in the short and long term. These strategies are: to enhance students' professional identity before the incorporation to university through campuses and icebreaker activities; to apply recruitment strategies aimed to provide realistic information of the bachelor degree; and to incorporate different activities, such as in-vitro, in situ and self-directed activities aimed to enhance longitudinally students' professional identity from the university. From these results, theoretical contributions and practical implications arise. First, we contribute to the literature by identifying which factors influence students from different bachelor degrees since there is still no evidence. And, second, using as a benchmark the obtained results, we contribute from a practical perspective, by proposing several alternative strategies to increase students' professional identity strength aiming to lighten their transition from high school to higher education.

Keywords : professional identity, higher education, educational strategies , students

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