

# Review of: "Generic Competences in University Students from Barranquilla, Colombia"

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There is much of interest in this article, reflecting the priorities and challenges facing this institution, and more broadly the perception of skill development through academic curriculum in Latin America, both by academics and in particular by students. The authors suggest “the teaching of generic competences in universities represents a challenge for higher education institutions”, although in some countries (e.g. the U K, Australia) there is now increasing emphasis on how these competences are developed innately through subject curriculum, rather than the specific teaching of these competences (e.g. Daubney, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-07-2020-0165>). So I would suggest that while the authors are correct that work-based learning and experiential learning can offer an important way to develop these competences valuable to employers, developing them in mainstream, academically-rigorous curriculum learning across all subjects is also possible without the need to rely on explicit ‘teaching of’ these skills. This might suggest reasons why the development of these competences is not yet coherently and inclusively achieved for all students.

For example, in Table 1, there are core skills common to all teaching and learning across all subjects that focus on research, managing and responding to evidence, skills around analysis and application of learning. The key here is to ensure that students are actually aware that their academic learning is developing these skills, because curriculum learning often articulates the acquisition of knowledge rather than the development of generic or transferable skills that make that knowledge acquisition and understanding possible. In a different example, the skill of ‘decision-making ability’ is developed in all subjects, from a Historian identifying whether a piece of source evidence verifies understanding of an event, to a Chemist deciding how to use their calculations to predict an outcome, to a Musician deciding how to orchestrate a composition or a Computer Scientist selecting a line of code to alter. But we don’t often describe our subject learning in such ways. However, if we did, our students might be more aware that they are in fact developing those skills.

Were I reviewing this article during blind peer review, I would suggest a more up to date reference list, in particular looking at how this approach to transversal skill development is occurring in other countries. There has been a lot of work in this area in the UK in the last 5 years. I would also look for some analysis of how the skills are being taught and where the gap is in the students’ understanding of how they are or are not already developing the skills. This feels like the beginning of a really interesting study, rather than the end of one.