



## Developing new “Professionals”: Service learning in marketing as an opportunity to innovate in higher education



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### ABSTRACT

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) promotes the use of student-centered participatory methodologies and the design of curricula focused on the acquisition of competences. The objective of this paper is to identify the categories of competence that contribute the most to achieving learning outcomes through the practice of Service Learning (SL) in the teaching of marketing. Using the categories described in the Tuning model, we design a model to analyze the relationships between perceived learning outcomes and competences. The main findings are: 1) there is no evidence of any relationship between perceived interpersonal and systemic competences and perceived learning outcomes, 2) there is a relationship between perceived instrumental competences and perceived learning outcomes and, 3) students do not perceive that achievement of learning outcomes is the cause of the grades they obtain. These findings have important theoretical and practical implications.

### 1. Introduction

One of today's challenges for those involved in planning, designing and offering degree programs is to define precisely what competences they will need to develop in students (Wagenaar, 2014:298). Globalization and constant change demand new professions for new challenging work scenarios. To adapt to these new times, Higher Education (HE) institutions must design their degrees to develop not only the specific competences needed in professional fields, but also a wider range of cross-cutting skills to provide their students with the flexibility to adjust to this constant change. Other important roles of HE are; to educate students such that they develop greater consciousness of their responsibilities to society; and to prepare students and future managers for the leadership challenges and ethical dilemmas they will face in an increasingly complex, global and interconnected world (Floyd, Xu, Atkins, & Caldwell, 2013; Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011).

In spite of the growing focus on 'key skills', many researchers suggest that graduate employability is a complex concept which is difficult to precisely define and measure (Azevedo, Apfelthaler, & Hurst, 2012; Osmani et al., 2015). In this sense, Schlee and Karns conducted a content analysis of 210 job listings in United States and established the importance of internships, experiential learning and relevant work prior to graduation (2017:79). In the year 2000 a group of universities

took up the Bologna challenge collectively and designed a pilot project called "Tuning educational structures in Europe". Tuning developed and has since applied the concept of competences and learning outcomes in the framework of the paradigm of student-centred learning (Wagenaar, 2014:299). Some of these competences require more participatory methodologies, such as Service Learning (SL). Hocking (2008) defines SL as pedagogical practice in an organized activity that meets the needs of the community and learning objectives, and that incorporates critical thinking to improve knowledge, skills and civic responsibility. SL is a combination of two previously recognized concepts: experience based learning and service to the community (Puig, Martín, & Batlle, 2008). It is, therefore, an approach to learning based on the development of competences, understood as personal and professional skills, which are put into practice in different community scenarios (López Ruiz, 2011). This involves focusing the participation of the student body as one of the educational axes that supports and sustains the structure of this pedagogical practice (Mayor Paredes & Rodríguez Martínez, 2017). Student motivation Toncar, Reid, and Anderson (2005) found that students who participated in an SL project expressed greater motivation and satisfaction with the project and the subject material, although other works point out that, for a new generation of learners, there is not a clear positive relationship between experiential learning and motivation (e.g. Hunter-Jones, 2012). This new educational scenario

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involves the student body developing competences linked to social and ethical elements (Folgueiras & Martínez, 2009; Martínez, 2010; Navaridas Nalda, Jiménez Trens, & Fernández Ortiz, 2016; Tejada, 2013) through collaborative learning that influences knowledge construction, not simply knowledge transmission (Keating, 1998). SL has had real impetus in recent years, first in the United States and, later, elsewhere in the world (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2014). For example, SL has been used to promote global leadership through the Ulysses program developed by PricewaterhouseCoopers (Pless et al., 2011).

Despite the importance of establishing precisely what competences to develop in students, there is still no consensus on the concept itself or the most appropriate means to measure it; (Suleman, 2016: 170) thus, the implementation of the competence approach is still a work in progress. Improvement in the quality of higher education requires research into the application of pedagogical methodologies, their learning outcomes and systems to assess learning goals. The objective of this work is to identify the categories of competence that contribute the most to achieving learning outcomes in the teaching of marketing through the practice of SL. To achieve this, we design a model, based on the Tuning model, which analyzes the relationships between learning outcomes and competence categories (instrumental competences, interpersonal competences and systemic competences). The main findings are: first, there is a relationship between perceived instrumental competences and perceived learning outcomes; and second, students do not perceive that the achievement of learning outcomes is the cause of the grades they obtain. The work is structured as follows: in the second section, we present the literature review and the proposed model. Then, we present the methodology designed to test the previously defined hypotheses. Thereafter, we present the results and, finally, the discussion, conclusions and practical implications.

## 2. Literature review

The growing competition for graduate vacancies and unemployment rates in Europe and North America have forced universities to rethink their graduate programs (Osmani et al., 2015). One question posed by educators in general, and about marketing in particular, is how to better prepare students so that they can tackle the challenges that they will face in their professional reality (Ewing & Ewing, 2017; Smart, Kelley, & Conant, 1999). It has been shown that traditional methods do not help students develop essential skills. Therefore, the need to make changes to marketing curricula and teaching methods has been for some time evident (Doyle, 1995; Polonsky & Mandelov, 2000; Schlee & Karns, 2017). We highlight the approach of the Polytechnic University of Temaseken (Singapore). The academic authorities of this institution discuss the need to develop curricula that will reflect the actual problems that graduates face in the real world. Previously, they had tried to "simulate" the real business world, using case studies, recent marketing literature and by inviting professional speakers, although the classes were still led by teachers and did not reflect the reality of the business environment. Their final proposal was to introduce a SL curriculum (Keng-Neo Wee, Yih-Chyn Kek, & Kelley, 2003).

### 2.1. The SL concept and its application in marketing schools

SL is an educational approach that combines learning processes and community service in a single project, in which participants learn while working on the real needs of the environment, in order to improve it (Batlle, 2011; Martínez Domínguez, Martínez Domínguez, Alonso Sáez, & Gezuraga Amundarain, 2013; Mayor Paredes & Rodríguez Martínez, 2017). The coining of the term "service-learning" in 1967 was a first step toward conceptual clarity. The concept developed from the work of Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey in the Southern Regional Education Board (Sigmon, 1990). In the following years, efforts focused on identifying principles of good practice and on developing a common definition (Giles, Honnet, & Migliore, 1991; Honnet & Poulsen, 1989;

Kendall & Associates, 1990; Shumer, 1993; Sigmon, 1990; Stanton, 1990). Kendall's review (1990) revealed 147 different SL related terms and definitions and concluded that they could be grouped into two categories: service-learning as a class of education and service-learning as a philosophy. Another important line of thought in the development of SL is its connection to the mission and philosophy of higher education (Stanton, 1991).

The underlying spirit of SL is found in the mutual benefit derived by the organization, the students and, of course, the instructors, the educational institution and the community in general (Jacoby, 1996). The method provides educational institutions, their teachers and their students with a valuable and visible way to serve the community and to achieve results (e.g., Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Marshall, Lawrence, Williams, & Peugh, 2015; Neese, Field, & Viosca, 2013; Sedlak, Doheny, Panthofer, & Anaya, 2003). SL has the potential to improve student learning, to increase their participation, to empower them to develop as future leaders (Berson, 1994; Pless et al., 2011; Sedlak et al., 2003), to increase their employability (Berson, 1994), to improve their academic results and their capacity to assume responsibilities and to awake their creativity (Martínez-Odría, 2006). In summary, the benefits of SL can be grouped into three areas (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2014): academic curriculum, training in values and community links.

The training of responsible citizens, integrating them into a democratic and participative society, with principles and values, must be one of the fundamental pillars of a university, especially a public university. Pragmatic considerations applied to education prioritize preparation for entry into the labor market (Cochran-Smith, 2001); thus, creation of professionals is prioritized over the training of citizens. In this sense, there is a whole branch of literature that focuses on identifying the most important competencies for improving graduate employability (e.g., Azevedo et al., 2012; Schlee & Harich, 2010; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Teijeiro, Rungo, & Freire, 2013). Although the issue of ethical training is not new, the last financial-economic crisis revealed how company leaders take decision without any kind of ethical or moral issue, being this leaders graduates of the best business programs. Cavanagh (cited by Floyd et al., 2013:753) suggests that many of today's most highly regarded business schools have "failed to convey ethics, social responsibility, and good moral habits to their graduates." Given the evident need to inculcate values and ethical principles in students, SL encourages students to participate in the community and to contribute to the return to society of the investment that it has made in the institution. In short, SL allows students to link the reality they must face as professionals with the experience of those already working in the field, to demonstrate the competences and skills that they have acquired and adds to this a supportive contribution to socially responsible activities (Nobell & Bengoa, 2013).

The management discipline, including marketing, has found appropriate objectives within the framework of SL. For example, there is recognition of the suitability of social marketing tools and techniques for non-profit organizations, government agencies and other social interests (Andreassen, 1994; Fine, 1990). SL allows students to apply marketing tools and concepts to social problems/issues. The response of marketing students to experimental activities, such as SL, differs from that given to other, more passive, less participatory approaches (such as conferences and master classes), as it is seen as more interesting, understandable and facilitates retention (Cohen, 1988).

### 2.2. Competences

According to the Tuning Project (González & Wagenaar, 2009, 3), learning outcomes are evidenced by the competence levels that the student must achieve. In this context, competences are "a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive abilities, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, as well as ethical values" (Wagenaar, 2014: 294). For the purposes of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), competence acquisition must involve

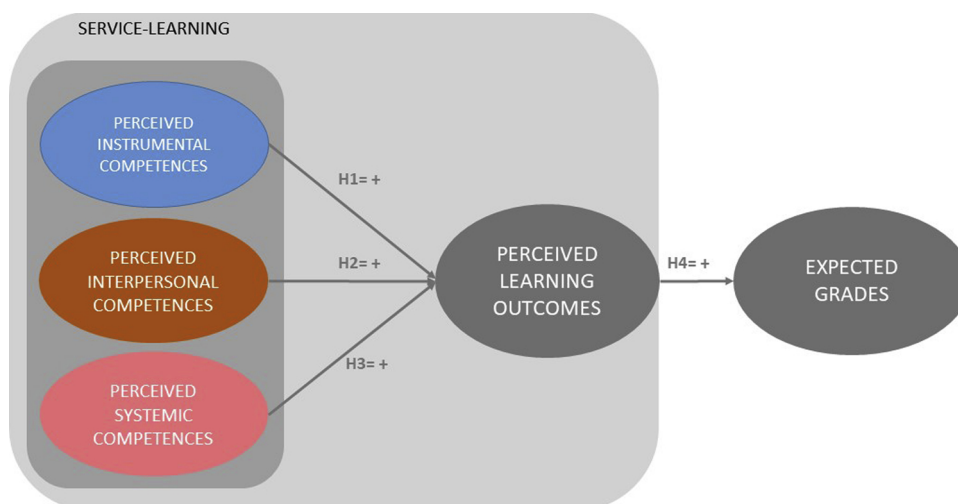


Fig. 1. Research model.

providing the student with a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow him / her to advance in their professional development (e.g., Armengol Asparó, Castro Ceacero, Jariot García, Massot Verdú, & Sala Roca, 2010; De Miguel, 2005; Fresko, Reich, Sjöö, & Lönnroth, 2013). De Juan-Vigaray and González-Gascón (2013) provide empirical evidence of the relationship between students' competence acquisition and the satisfaction they derive from their recognition of the practical utility of the skills they develop during their courses.

The Tuning Project (González & Wagenaar, 2009) establishes three categories of competence:

**Instrumental competences (personal):** the ability to analyze and synthesize, ability to organize and plan, basic knowledge of the profession, oral and written communication in one's own language, information management skills (ability to search for and analyze information from different sources), conflict resolution and decision making.

**Interpersonal competence (organization and communication skills):** critical and self-critical abilities, team working, interpersonal skills, ability to work in an interdisciplinary team, ability to communicate with experts in other fields, appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism, ability to work in an international context and ethical commitment.

**Systemic competences (transferable skills):** ability to apply knowledge in practice, research skills, ability to learn, ability to adapt to new situations, ability to generate new ideas (creativity), leadership, knowledge of the cultures and customs of other countries, ability to work autonomously, design and project management, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit, concern for quality and motivation to succeed.

In summary, and in line with the findings of previous works (e.g., Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Berson, 1994; Geringer, Stratemeyer, Canton, & Rice, 2009; Klink & Athaide, 2004; Martínez-Odría, 2006; Neese et al., 2013; Pless et al., 2011; Riley, 2006; Sedlak et al., 2003; Shaw, 2007), SL provides improvements in all competence types. These works show the benefits that students have obtained in personal and interpersonal aspects, such as leadership and self-esteem, self-knowledge, communication skills, interculturality, greater sense of personal effectiveness (often accompanied by a greater sense of civic responsibility) and greater awareness of their own personal values. They also verify the importance that SL has in instrumental competences (those related to cognitive ability, linguistic skills and methodological capability). Specifically, they demonstrate that students show a greater interest in, and greater retention of, course content and a better understanding of key concepts. Improvements in writing ability, in analytical reasoning skills, in leadership development and in knowledge application have also been identified. Other skills and

capabilities, also described, are those that involve a combination of understanding, sensitivity and knowledge that allows the student to recognize how the parts of a whole are related and grouped, how to develop the ability to analyze problems and propose alternative courses of action and how to identify the special needs and challenges of organizations and their clients.

Based on these results, and considering the differences between actual learning and perceived learning (Bacon, 2016; Clayson, 2009), we test the relationship between the achievement of perceived competences and perceived learning outcomes through the following three hypotheses:

**H1.** Perceived instrumental competences have a direct and positive effect on perceived learning outcomes.

**H2.** Perceived interpersonal competences have a direct and positive effect on perceived learning outcomes.

**H3.** Perceived systemic competences have a direct and positive effect on perceived learning outcomes.

To analyze the understanding of the relationship between learning results and grades, and considering the differences between self-assessment and evaluation outcomes, we establish our last hypothesis:

**H4.** Perceived learning outcomes have a direct and positive effect on the grade expected by the student.

The structural equation model is presented in Fig. 1.

### 3. Methodology

This article presents a teaching-learning experience whose main objective is to support the acquisition of the aforementioned categories of competence to achieve the learning results defined in the curriculum using a structural equation model. SL promotes more active learning and interaction with the reality of the organization. For an educational approach to be considered as SL it must unite the following characteristics (Puig Rovira & Palos Rodriguez, 2006):

- Learning related to the content of the student curriculum.
- A learning process integrated into a quality community service.
- Students take a prominent role in the process.

In this teaching-learning experience, the social objective to be supported by a quality community service is a group of small city-center retail trade establishment. The retail trade constitutes a fundamental economic pillar of the city of Logroño: approximately 4500 commercial

**Table 1**  
Technical details of the SL experience and sample description.

EMPIRICAL APPLICATION PROCESS	
SL experience implementation context	Course: Marketing Fundamentals Academic years: 2014/5, 2015/6, 2016/7 Compulsory, Semester :3 <sup>RD</sup> 6 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System): 60 hours lecture (4 hours per week), 90 hours of autonomous work (6 hours per week) for 16 working weeks. Bachelor's degrees: Administration and Business Management, Tourism and Law University of La Rioja (Spain)
Participants	348 Marketing students; 4 Marketing lecturers; 30 small city-center shops
SL EXPERIMENT INSTRUCTIONS	
Objective	to carry out a marketing consultancy service to devise three improvement proposals
Task format	The work to be carried out in groups of four students - a trader was assigned to each group ("client", in marketing consultancy terms)
SL process to be carried out	Stage one: Diagnosis of the business. Information about: (1) web positioning (2) to interview the trader, (3) a survey of the trader's customers. Stage two: Analysis. (1) a SWOT analysis, and (2) the trader's target client base. Stage three: Results. Three improvement proposals to increase visits to the stores, to increase customer loyalty or to increase the average store ticket price, among others.
Marketing consultancy service	
Number of face-to-face meetings	1 initial face-to-face meetings with traders 2 meeting with lecturers to revise the SL process Final presentation to the client of the reviewed and improved final report
QUESTIONNAIRE: SCALE MEASURES	
Perceived Competences set Tuning model, (González & Wagenaar, 2009; Navaridas Nalda et al., 2016)	Comp1. Capacity for analysis and synthesis Comp2. Capacity for organization and planning Comp3. Planning, coordination and organization Comp4. Degree related theoretical knowledge Comp5. Degree related method knowledge Comp6. Written communication skills Comp7. Capacity to communicate orally Comp8. Ability to document ideas and information Comp9. Problem-solving skills Comp10. Assume responsibilities, make decisions Comp11. Critical and self-critical capacities Comp12. Team working Comp13. Capacity to work in a multidisciplinary team Comp 14. Capacity to appreciate different points of view Comp 15. Honesty and loyalty Comp 16. Predisposition to involve oneself in the work Comp 17. Capacity for learning Comp 18. Adaptability Comp 19. Creativity Comp 20. Leadership capacity Comp 21. Capacity for autonomous work Comp 22. Initiative Comp 23. Concern for detail / quality
Perceived learning results (ANECA, 2005)	Res1. Application of basic marketing concepts Res 2. Knowledge and application of the analysis elements of consumer behavior Res3. Knowledge of the consumer purchasing process and identification of its different conditioning variables Res4. Knowledge of the organizational purchasing process and identification of its different conditioning variables Res5. Capacity to search and analyze information provided by different sources about the market environment to develop commercial policies
Expected grades	
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDENT SAMPLE	
Gender	Female N = 112 (38%)      Male N = 182 (62%)      Total N = 294
Age	Mean = 20,39; Standard deviation = 2,83

establishments employ some 12,000 people. The shops in the city center are generally smaller and independent (Medrano, Olarte-Pascual, Pelegrín-Borondo, & Sierra-Murillo, 2016), they do not have marketing departments and they find innovation difficult task (Medrano & Olarte-Pascual, 2016). Fernández, Alcaide, and Aires (2012) estimate that an average of 100 stores close daily. The design of the project respected the principles of good practice (Giles et al., 1991), and took into account that SL requires multiple tasks to be undertaken, requires long-term effort and continuous commitment to the organization (Riley, 2006). We now present the characteristics of the innovative teaching developed (Table 1).

To analyze the results of the application of SL to the Marketing Fundamentals course, we designed a questionnaire to collect relevant information from the participants in the experience. All participants gave their informed consent for the study. The participants indicated their degree of agreement with the items on an eleven point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree).

#### 4. Results

An exploratory factor analysis was applied with IBM SPSS 24 to test the structure of the factors of the competences variable (Annex 1). The results show a KMO of 0.915, and the Barlett sphericity test shows a significance level of less than .001 (Chi-square of 1664.571). The perceived instrumental competences, perceived interpersonal competences and perceived systemic competences factors explain 64.26% of the variance.

Subsequently, to develop a relational model between perceived competences, perceived learning results and expected grades, we carried out a regression analysis of the latent variables using the optimization of Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression technique, with SmartPLS 3.0 software. We took as starting points the factors obtained in the exploratory factorial analysis and the structure of the latent variables taken from the literature review and the model designed in the course guide. We examined the validity of the items, considering standardized loadings (> 0.70) and T-values (> 1.96) (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). Given that a re-specification of the model might produce greater convergence if one or more of the problematic indicators are excluded (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), indicators with a low standardized load were eliminated. The following items were eliminated from the model, "Critical and self-critical capacity", "Leadership capacity", "Capacity for autonomous work", "Adaptability", "Capacity for analysis and synthesis" and "Concern for detail / quality".

The measurement model was verified in terms of construct reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The values of the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were satisfactory, as all were above 0.70 (Cronbach & Shavelson, 2004) (Table 2). Similarly, the convergent validity of the constructs was satisfactory, with an average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.50 in all cases.

The discriminant validity of the constructs was measured through the comparison of the square root of the AVE against the correlation between the constructs. According to the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, a model has discriminant validity if the AVE from the indicators of the same factor is higher than the estimated correlation between two factors (Table 4). The HTMT ratio criterion (upper diagonal of Table 3) confirms the existence of discriminant validity.

##### 4.1. Evaluation of the structural model

The proposed model satisfactorily explains the influence of perceived competences on perceived learning results, although the relationship between the results and the grade expected by the students (expected grade) is not proven. The R<sup>2</sup> result from the model is 53.6% (Table 4). The Stone-Geisser cross-validated redundancy Q<sup>2</sup> is > 0, specifically 0.332. This result confirms the predictive relevance of the model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).



**Table 2**  
Reliability and convergent validity.

	Cronbach's alpha > .7	CR > .6	AVE > .5
Perceived instrumental competences	.871	.906	.660
Perceived interpersonal competences	.912	.927	.587
Perceived systemic competences	.879	.926	.806
Perceived learning outcomes	.899	.925	.711

**5. Discussion, conclusions and implications**

The previous literature highlights that SL is an active learning methodology that improves teaching quality (Martínez-Odría, 2006). In the marketing field, many universities, faculties, centers and institutions put their trust in this type of methodologies (Astin et al., 2000; Berson, 1994; Geringer et al., 2009; Keng-Neo Wee et al., 2003; Klink & Athaide, 2004; Martínez-Odría, 2007; Neese et al., 2013; Pless et al., 2011; Riley, 2006; Sedlak et al., 2003; Shaw, 2007).

One of our theoretical contributions to the perceived competence field is the identification of the competence categories based on the Tuning model (González & Wagenaar, 2009) that should be used in a marketing learning context. We also consider the psychometric properties of the scale, thus addressing one of the limitations of the previous literature that may be the origin of the discrepancy over the influence of competences on learning results. Perceived instrumental competences are defined by written and oral communication ability, degree related theoretical knowledge, ability to document ideas and information and degree related method knowledge. Perceived interpersonal competences include the capacity for organization and planning, honesty and loyalty, willingness to get involved in work, ability to appreciate different points of view, ability to take part in teamwork, problem solving skills, coordination and organization creativity, planning and the ability to work in an interdisciplinary team. Perceived systemic competences are defined by initiative, ability to learn, assumption of responsibilities and the ability to make decisions.

Another contribution of this work is the identification of the input of the different perceived competences to the perceived learning outcomes of SL in marketing. As the literature review shows, many studies analyze SL competences. In this research, we advance the understanding of SL competences by conducting the study within the framework of the EHEA. The findings show that perceived instrumental competences positively affect perceived learning outcomes in marketing. Specifically, they improve written and oral communication skills (which accords with Geringer et al., 2009 and Klink & Athaide, 2004), degree related theoretical knowledge, the ability to document ideas and information, knowledge of method in the relevant degree field (Klink & Athaide, 2004) and concern for detail / quality.

No empirical evidence was found for the influence of perceived interpersonal and perceived systemic competences on perceived learning outcomes. This result is contrary to the findings of previous works, which noted the development of civic and professional competences (Amat & Miravet, 2010; Folgueiras & Martínez, 2009), greater awareness of the external world and development of personal values

**Table 3**  
Discriminant Validity.

	Perceived competences			Perceived learning results
	Instrumental	Interpersonal	Systemic	
Perceived instrumental competences	<b>.812</b>	.837	.783	.788
Perceived interpersonal competences	.741	<b>.766</b>	.875 <sup>a</sup>	.698
Perceived systemic competences	.684	.788	<b>.898</b>	.569
Perceived learning outcomes	.707	.650	.639	<b>.843</b>

<sup>a</sup> Although there are works (Kline, 2011) that suggest that the HTMT ratio indicates a risk of discriminant validity for values higher than 0.85, other authors argue that there is a risk of discriminant validity when the HTMT ratio > .90 (Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001; Teo, Srivastava, & Jiang, 2008).

**Table 4**  
Results of the structural model.

R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	DE	p	T	CI Min.	CI Max.	EV %	
53.6%	.332							
H1		.496	.000	4.077	.273	.748	35.06	H1:√
H2		.269	.133	1.502	-.110	.581	17.5	H2:X
H3		.018	.895	1.005	-.259	.292	1.02	H3:X
1.0%	-.010							
H4		.100	.315	1.005	-.118	.270	1	H4:X

Note: DE = Direct Effects, CI Min. = Lower value of the confidence interval, CI Max. = Upper value of the confidence interval, EV = Extracted Variance.

(Astin et al., 2000) and an improvement in time management and teamwork (Riley, 2006). An explanation of these new findings might lie in the weak relationship that exists between the learning outcomes designed for the course (mainly of a cognitive nature: application of basic marketing concepts, knowledge and application of elements of consumer behavior analysis, knowledge of the consumer purchasing process and identification of its different conditioning variables, knowledge of organizational purchasing processes and identification of their different conditioning variables) and systemic and interpersonal competences. A second explanation, which accords with the Tuning project (González & Wagenaar, 2009), is that systemic competences require the prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences. It is surprising that second-year university students do not perceive these as the cause of learning outcomes. These results shed new light on notion that service learning does not improve marks because traditional testing methods do not adequately reflect increases in higher order thinking (Hébert & Hauf, 2015).

Another finding to highlight is the lack of a perceived relationship between learning outcomes and the grades that students expect to obtain. The open debate regarding learning assessments features one of the possible reasons that explain the gap between actual, perceived and expected learning results (Bacon, 2016; Chonko, Tanner, & Davis, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Elbeck & Bacon, 2015; Sitzmann et al., 2010). Sitzmann et al. (2010) and Clayton (2009) clearly establish that actual learning and perceived learning are indeed separate and distinct constructs (Bacon, 2016:3). In this sense, the previous literature does not establish that there is a single optimal system of assessing learning results, and that measurements of perceived learning, actual course grades and expected course grades present advantages and disadvantages. According to Clayton, previous studies show that a small average

relationship exists between learning and evaluations and there are numerous variables, unrelated to student skills and knowledge, that can affect course grades (Clayson, 2009). Another possible explanation is that the incorporation of the SL methodology was done in isolation - for a single course subject and, for the students, as a completely new activity - and, as they were not accustomed to participatory and proactive methodologies, they expected traditional assessments focused on knowledge acquisition. Therefore, it is the evaluation system that conditions the learning. Although the new EHEA promotes the use of student-centered participatory methodologies and the design of curricula focused on the acquisition of competences, this cultural change needs to align learning objectives and methodologies with the evaluation system. Evidently, this new paradigm will require time and experience to be able to achieve full effectiveness.

In this work we identify the factor “competences”, but it would be interesting to take the analysis further. An important finding of this work is that the curricula should favor the achievement of competences. At present, the large number of competences identified make this re-assessment difficult. Therefore, the simplification of categories, and the grouping by different types of competence, should provide an improvement in teaching-learning systems. This contribution, which accords with Azevedo et al. (2012), supports the idea that in undergraduate curricula it is better to focus on a small set of competencies and concentrate efforts on the development and evaluation of the dimensions that are more important for the achievement of the defined learning results.

Future works should study the sequencing of competence acquisition throughout the degree programs and the consequences of this in the evaluation system, student motivation and satisfaction. As for research lines to be further developed, first, an analysis could be undertaken into the effect of SL on actual learning to discover whether it helps perceived learning more than it helps actual learning. A second line would be to analyze the effect of SL on the development of social values and ethics competences, and its contribution to the companies involved and the participating students and teachers. Due to the overarching demand to progress toward valid assessment systems in higher education, our last proposed research line is to compare pedagogical methods, and learning outcome measures, in relation to different competences to promote improved student learning assessments. Clearly, whether performance adequately achieves learning goals is an additional challenge that will involve both validity and reliability issues (Elbeck & Bacon, 2015; Sitzmann et al., 2010).

The new professionals of the 21st century will encounter professions that probably do not exist today. The challenge for educational institutions is to ensure that their students are prepared for their future jobs and for the future society. In consequence, higher education institutions should be aligned and in direct contact with real world demands to help them design learning models that have the relevant knowledge, skills requirements (c.f. Schlee & Harich, 2010), values and commitment to social objectives. Internships, experiential learning and work experience equip students with knowledge and skills that are highly valued by employers of marketing graduates (Schlee & Karns, 2017:79). The future for universities is full of challenges, and although SL is not new, it offers an opportunity to innovate in marketing higher education.

#### Declaration of conflicting interests

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

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