

Executive Education And MBA Curricula Suitability To The Nation's Culture: A Comparative Study Between Brazil And The United States.

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Abstract

In the past few decades, a huge amount of authors have been discussing the suitability of the curricula to the context in which they are applied.

It is of fundamental importance to develop ideas and practices that fit the nation's own cultural exploration of its pluralities and new paradigms, mainly in 'action-learning' and learner-focused, which can put forward participants to experience more effective changes within themselves and their organizations as well.

American management education curricula have influenced educational institutions of several nations, including Brazil. Specifically, management studies at Brazil's higher education institutions began in the early 1950s, dating from the collaboration of four American Professors from the University of Michigan, through their lectures to undergraduate students in São Paulo.

During this period, many exchanges have been carried out among universities of both nations and other organizations as well. That is, they have been sharing their experiences, and their curricula seem to have reflected such relationship.

Today, Brazilian higher education is composed of undergraduate, specialization (non-compulsory degree), master (academic and professional) and doctoral degrees. Since the last decade, institutions, such as the Universidade de São Paulo, have been formally offering postdoctoral degree through a set of research programs.

The offer of specialization, master and doctoral courses has been increasing year after year in Brazilian universities, and master courses are crossing Brazil's borders.

The growth of Brazilian postgraduate courses and their internationalization call for attention to the quality of such expansion, aiming to provide insights for future guidance.

Whereas the Brazilian higher education in management has been initially assisted by American academics through their lectures and it is in huge expansion today, the following questions have driven the study: to what extent have existing Brazilian executive education and master of business course contents acquired independence from the American management education? And, to what extent their curricula have accomplished a higher quality to justify its internationalization?

Analyzing the results of some surveys on cultural terminal values carried out by Brazilian and American researchers, we observed that no more than 50% of the similarities are among the highest and the lowest values of both countries.

As the approach to the cultural terminal values of both nations seems to show a huge difference among constructs' positioning, it has been therefore expected that management education course contents showed a certain amount of difference between American and Brazilian universities as well, that is, presumably, the greater the distance between cultural values, the more different management course contents are expected to be. In more specific words, the premise underlying the study is that educational course contents shall reflect the society's culture in which they are applied and, therefore, the contents of executive education and masters' degree curricula shall focus on the nation's business context dealing with individual and organizational pluralities and establishing new paradigms.

Gathering concerns and purposes, the study has been designed to (1) discover to what extent have existing MBAE (Master of Business Administration Executive) and PMBA (Professional Master of Business Administration) course contents acquired independence from the American management style, (2) open the pages of the MBAE curriculum aiming to verify its quality; and (3) raise some insights in order to awake essential changes in management education curriculum and for future research.

Documents from secondary and primary sources have been carefully consulted for quantification and qualification of the course contents, in two years: 2006 and 2008.

For the American courses subjects' titles counting, we initially accessed the BusinessWeek website to find courses ranking and, after that, we have raised data at the universities' websites. For the Brazilian courses subjects' titles counting and for the subjects' content analysis, we firstly observed the website of the Você S/A (a Brazilian business magazine) to find faculties rankings, after that, we have raised contents from the faculties' websites and confirmed them along with the courses' coordinators as well.

Frequencies of subjects' titles have been compiled via unique counting and according to their keywords nature. And, we have investigated the titles suitability to the subjects by closely examining their content, aiming to classify them according to our goals.

Only core/compulsory subjects have been considered for the study and they had to be offered by at least 30% of the faculties of both countries.

Quantitative data have been collected aiming the comparison of the subjects offered in both countries. Qualitative data have been collected with the intent to make initial considerations on the quality of the contents.

We applied the null hypothesis (H₀), that is, we would find no association between discipline title and course title. In other words, each subject would present no statistically significant relationship with any course (MBA, MBAE, EMBA, and PMBA). To test this hypothesis, the Pearson's Chi-Square Test and The Fisher Exact Test have been applied, according to the required circumstances.

To order to analyze the curriculum suitability to the nation's culture, it is necessary to deal with one or more curricula theories. We looked into the literature on curricula to find out suitable perspectives to help us in the analysis of this issue. We have found that the Critical Theory perspective is appropriate to support our study, taking into account its purposes, that is, it aims at dealing with the society's social justice and emancipation. In other words, it copes with key social and political problems.

The Critical Theory perspective also holds that the culture disseminated by a suitable curriculum stands for the universe of knowledge legitimized by a determined social group which recognizes it

and believes it is accurate to be transmitted to the segment of students for which it has been conceived.

Therefore, studies which aim to discover the extent to which a curriculum is appropriate to a nation's culture or to investigate if a curriculum has achieved independence from curricula of other countries seem to need the support of a critical perspective.

The main quantitative results showed that the Brazilian course programs hold a certain amount of similarities with American MBA and EMBA curricula and; the qualitative analysis in the MBAE course curriculum revealed quite a few disconnections between course content and stated objectives, weak address to management science for students who come from other disciplines, at the beginning of the course, and no clear information about content integration.

Brazilian educational leaderships and other stakeholders have a huge opportunity to rethink the studied curricula, that is, to analyze their suitability to the context where they are applied to. In other words, they may rethink if the existing curricula are contributing to social justice, and to achieve independence from curricula which are not suitable to deal with the current Brazil's development stage.