Chapter 11

Teaching English to Marketing Students: Bridging the Gap Between Academic and Real–World Skills

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ABSTRACT

The marketing sector has been experiencing substantial changes due to the constant need to adjust to apace–evolving markets and demands. Digital development takes on an important role in this scenario, which may not be echoing in marketing education. Thus, there is an increasing discussion surrounding the skills required of marketing graduates in the current educational and professional set. Given that English proficiency is ranked as crucial by stakeholders, and it seems not to translate into many Portuguese marketing programs, the goal of this chapter is to provide a holistic view over the state of the art on the match/gap between the language skills developed in marketing programs and those expected from practitioners and marketing professionals in the 21st century. The results of the content analysis showed that (in)formal communication in English, namely through emails, instant messaging, and social media, should be recognized as a core competence within the marketing curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the onset of an ongoing digital and economic revolution is considered to have widened out the divide between education and practice. This gap, though widespread, is particularly significant in the business area, where there is permanent pressure to keep up and adjust to global, fast-paced markets and demands. In order to bridge this gap, it is important to understand the skills today’s markets require and be prepared to meet the challenges they present. Much like other areas of business, the marketing sector has been experiencing significant changes, which are prompting stakeholders, including Higher Education Institutions (HEI), to reflect on and ultimately redefine their roles in keeping marketing education relevant and up-to-date. This has encouraged an in-depth discussion surrounding the skill set required of marketing graduates in today’s educational and professional landscape.

In the last 5 years, many authors have focused their research on analyzing markets’ skill requirements and comparing them to those featured on academic curricula. Despite being based on specific or local settings, these studies offer valuable insight on what has been defined as a significant gap between education and real-world skills. In 2015, a study carried out by Estima (2015) correlating job advertisements directed at marketing graduates with a review of undergraduate degrees taking place at Portuguese HE, not only confirmed but also quantified this gap, establishing key areas to be acted on.

Ranked as one of the most important skills by stakeholders taking part in the study, English is considered to be key for marketing graduates and professionals. In fact, fluency in the language is often deemed mandatory, thus offering more than just a competitive advantage for prospective job candidates. However, this importance does not translate well into the curricula, as language training is often insufficient or even absent from Portuguese marketing programs (Estima, 2015).

Grounded on the premise that improving marketing students’ English skills can be instrumental in bridging the gap between education and skills, in this chapter, the authors set out to provide a comprehensive review of recent published research on marketing education, in particular as to the match/gap between the language skills developed in Higher Education in the marketing area and those expected from practitioners and marketing professionals in the 21st century. Taking a global and up-to-date stance on this issue, aimed at understanding the role English as a Foreign Language (EFL) plays within current marketing programs, they systematically selected and reviewed open-access, peer-reviewed papers focusing on marketing education and language skills.
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