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Social Media in the classroom within the framework of the EHEA. Creation of a digital portfolio on Pinterest as a tool for learning about contemporary architecture

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Abstract: This paper presents the experience of introducing a tool with which students are particularly familiar and comfortable -social media- within the teaching activities and evaluation criteria of a first-year subject in higher education. Specifically, the study has been developed within the framework of the subject called Architectural History, Theory and Composition 1, that deals with an introduction to the contemporary architectural context. By means of the substitution of a traditional teaching tool – a personal course notebook – by a new digital portfolio inserted on the Pinterest site, the students have collected a wide range of external and personal resources (pins) and organised them into boards. This has contributed to the acquisition of relevant abilities within the EHEA framework like self-regulate learning, personal learning environments or the incorporation of new technologies, electronical devices and social media into higher education contexts. Results have been analysed from both quantitative and qualitative criteria.

Keywords: digital portfolio – history of architecture – pinterest – social media – teaching innovation

1 Introduction

The arrival of the European Higher Education Area in university teaching has meant, in addition to the adaptation of curricula to criteria based on the uniformity of standards and qualifications, a profound renewal of teaching and learning methodologies [1]. The changes that have resulted from this process, although at institutional and regulatory level they have been consolidated for years, have gradually been integrated into practice and respond, as a priority, to the socio-cultural changes and new European ways of life at the beginning of the 21st century.

From this point of view, the strategies used in teaching must be adapted to current capacities, skills, potentials and needs. In recent years, university classrooms have been occupied, fundamentally, by the generation known as *millennials*. Thus, new students are deeply rooted in the use of new technologies and digital networks [2], which they use as means of contact with reality in their daily lives. This has led to communication gaps between teachers and students in higher education [3], increasing the inter-generational distance, hindering empathy and, therefore, the transmission of knowledge.

The reactions to meet this new challenge from the academia have been diverse: generally, they have led to the incorporation of new technologies within the curricula, prioritizing online educational platforms for information exchange, teacher consultation, online classes and other resources which have already become relatively common [4]. In other cases, the use of mobile devices has been implemented [5], what supposes a higher degree of compliance with the interest and customs of young students and usually derives into a major implication by them.

It has been more recently that social networks have appeared in this scenario. The reasons for this have been, fundamentally, teachers' suspects about a lower academic performance under in-class students multitasking [6] and a lack of tools to make a systematic evaluation of the positive impact on student learning [7]. However, its presence in teaching programmes and innovation projects for learning is increasing in recent years, what leads to the implementation of a pilot test in the classroom that constitutes the main subject of this paper.

2 Problem Formulation

In this context, this work relates the experience and analyses the impact of introducing a tool with which students are particularly familiar and comfortable -social networks- within the teaching activities and evaluation criteria of a first-year subject. Specifically, the study has been developed within the framework of the subject called Architectural History, Theory and Composition 1, belonging to the Degree in Fundamentals of Architecture at the University of Sevilla (Spain).

The subject is developed in the first semester of the Degree. According to the official programme [8], the general aim is to introduce the students into the concept and significance of architecture, focusing into the theory and history of contemporary architecture and being able to make connections with the cultural context, as well as to adopt a critical spirit, an appropriate language and a sufficient range of architectural references to properly develop their first academic works. In this sense, many of the professors at this stage ask the students to follow-up a course notebook in which they write down references, visits, architectural works or interesting ideas to incorporate them into their own resources.

On this occasion, this traditional tool is replaced by the inclusion in the subject programme of a digital portfolio that permits the students to collect and organize information taken from the Internet or produced by themselves. This constitutes a unique opportunity for the implementation of social media as a way to introduce self-regulate learning within a personal learning environment [9].

Among the multiple options of social media providers - some of the most well-known are Facebook, Twitter or Instagram -, Pinterest is finally selected, given the opportunity the site provides to collect images and other items from very diverse sources – as well as upload them by themselves - and then freely organize the *pins* – that is how the resources are called on Pinterest - into different boards [10].

The students have been asked to create a Pinterest account – in case they didn't already have one – and so has done the Professor, who has opened an *ad hoc* profile, easily recognisable for them. Thereupon, they have been invited to create as many folders as they want to relate with the different topics issued on the subject, organizing them according to their own criteria, which can be thematic, by their origin, by the type of resource, by a temporal logic or by the artistic technique used in its creation, among other possibilities.

Once every student has created the account and the first boards, they have been asked to follow the Professor's profile, so she can follow back only the boards related with the subject – personal boards, in case they have them, are left out of the study. Student's profiles are visited and reviewed weekly, normally during the class break so every incidence can be solved quickly. Folders can be created, renamed or reorganized freely until the end of the semester when the final evaluation is to be done.

3 Problem Solution

The results have been analysed, quantified and evaluated in terms of both quality and quantity, with priority given not only to the number of elements collected but also to the cases in which a personal categorisation and structuring of the references is established - fundamentally images, quotations and links - and, most especially, to those in which photographs or resources produced by the students themselves as fieldwork are introduced into this network.

In relation to this study, the following elements have been analysed for each of the Pinterest profiles of the students who have regularly followed the course during the academic year: number of boards, total number of pins included, origin of the pins (taken from third parties or personally produced and uploaded), quality of the boards organization and, finally, relationship between the level acquired in the digital portfolio and the overall performance of the student in the subject.

After collecting all the numbers from the 24 students that regularly assisted to class and were evaluated, the outcomes have been ranged into four levels for each category: high,

medium, low and null. In addition to the quantitative results, qualitative aspects have been considered and analysed.

4 Conclusion

In general, a clear coincidence has been detected between the students with the best general performance in the subject and a better development and organization of the digital portfolio. In fact, the two students with the highest final grades scored a high grade in all the elements analysed. Similarly, students with a lower final score within the group correspond to those owning a poorer development of the digital portfolio.

Several students are observed with a high number of pins but a low number of boards and a bad organization of them. In these cases, the indiscriminate collection of resources does not have a positive impact on the final grade and therefore does not seem to be related to overall academic performance.

On the other hand, the incorporation of own resources (photographs or links uploaded by the students themselves to the network) does not seem to be a requirement for obtaining reasonably good grades, except in the cases of the mentioned two brightest students.

With regard to quantitative results, two particularly interesting trends were observed.

First, the review of the profiles during the class break - which divided the theoretical lesson from the practical work - revealed that many of the students had incorporated photographs and images of architectural references that had been studied in the same day's lesson. This leads to the idea that either they used the electronic devices connected to Pinterest in class for educational purposes, or during the class break they incorporated some resources into their portfolios that they believed were of special interest for the performance of the subject.

Secondly, it has been considered of special interest to monitor the profiles of the students once the academic course has finished, after an additional semester. In this sense, 4 of the 24 students in the class still show intensive and continuous use of the tool, regularly adding new resources to existing boards and even adding new boards related to other architectural subjects.

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