

Research in business education. Connecting research with the educational challenges of universities

Investigación en educación empresarial. Conectando la investigación con los retos educativos de las universidades

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ABSTRACT

Research in business education is crucial to address the challenges faced by universities. This research provides evidence to educators and policy makers for curriculum design and identifies best learning practices and helps to develop innovative teaching methods. The European Academy of Management and Business Economics (AEDEM), aware of the importance of contributing to the development of universities, created the Journal of Management and Business Education (JMBE). The aim of this research is to respond to the challenges that researchers are responding to and what are the future challenges in this field. To this end, a systematic analysis of 143 manuscripts published by the journal from its birth in 2018 to 2023 has been conducted. The results suggest important implications for researchers and how the main research themes in this field relate to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords. University, systematic analysis, education, business, business education

RESUMEN

La investigación en educación empresarial es crucial para enfrentar los retos a los que se enfrentan las universidades. Esta investigación proporciona evidencias a los educadores y responsables políticos para diseñar el currículo, e identifica las mejores prácticas de aprendizaje y ayuda a desarrollar métodos de enseñanza innovadores. European Academy of Management and Business Economics (AEDEM) consciente de la importancia de contribuir al desarrollo de las universidades, crea el Journal of Management and Business Education (JMBE). Esta investigación tiene el objetivo de responder a cuáles son los retos que están respondiendo los investigadores y cuáles son los retos futuros en este ámbito. Para ello, se ha realizado un análisis sistemático de 143 manuscritos publicados por la revista desde su nacimiento en 2018 hasta el año 2023. Los resultados sugieren implicaciones importantes para los investigadores y cómo las principales temáticas de investigación en este ámbito se relacionan con los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS).

Palabras clave. Universidad, análisis sistemático, educación, empresa, educación empresarial

INTRODUCTION

Universities are engines of economic and social development. Their main mission is to promote the development of society. They fulfill this mission by training students (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2023). To provide a good education, universities develop scientific research, which, through the study of society's problems, allows the development of theories, analysis of information and development of solutions. Research and the challenges faced by universities must be closely linked. This knowledge is disseminated in order to improve economic and social development. To better disseminate scientific advances, universities develop teaching methodologies that facilitate their understanding and assimilation.

Business schools share this mission, focusing their training on business management (Cortés et al., 2022). As is the case with business, schools also face challenges that force them to constantly adapt to the context, as well as the permanent search for knowledge. Some challenges experienced by business schools since the 21st century have been related to: the inclusion of ethics in business; the competencies, skills and attributes desired in students to achieve better employability; the management of sustainability and entrepreneurship; the lack of attention to teaching and management practices motivated by the interest in publishing and staying at the top of university rankings (Díez-Martín, 2018).

We have recently observed how the challenges facing business schools continue to evolve. The role of business in society is becoming more important. The business purpose beyond economic performance, where the challenge is to develop a positive contribution to society while maintaining the performance and viability of organizations. This is a complicated balance, where research plays an essential role in finding solutions. Further, the Times Higher Education report (2023) indicates that countries must harness the potential of universities to achieve the SDGs.

Entrepreneurship education research is crucial to address all these challenges. It provides evidence to educators and policy makers to design curriculum. It identifies best learning practices and helps develop innovative teaching methods. The better the training offered; the more capable business leaders will be to deal with complex decisions.

The European Academy of Management and Business Economics (AEDEM) is a non-profit association of professors and researchers in business economics whose objective is to collectively promote teaching and research in this field of knowledge. Since the creation of AEDEM in 1987, it has organized national and international congresses and edited two research journals European Research on Management and Business Economics (1995) and European Journal of Management and Business Economics (1995).

In 2018, AEDEM aware of the importance of contributing to the development of universities, creates the Journal of Management and Business Education (JMBE) with the aim of contributing to management and business education by publishing original research papers that address the teaching and learning processes of business management from any approach. Other academies such as the Academy of Management have also committed to promoting research in the field of education by promoting scientific journals such as the Academy of Management Learning & Education. Other outstanding journals include Management Learning, Journal of Management Education and International Journal of Management Education.

JMBE began publication in 2018. After 7 volumes we asked ourselves:

- RQ1 What challenges are JMBE researchers responding to?
- RQ2 Which JMBE papers have attracted the most attention?
- RQ3 What is the impact of JMBE research being made in the world?
- RQ4 What are the new research challenges?

To answer these questions, a systematic analysis of 143 manuscripts published by the journal from its birth in 2018 to 2023 was conducted. The results suggest important implications for researchers. We show the challenges being faced by business education researchers. The main research themes and their relationship to the sustainable development goals (SDGs). We also identify research that is receiving increased attention from researchers, as well as the impact of business education research from JMBE manuscripts. Finally, we provide a research agenda for future business education researchers that can also be used by business school and university managers to develop action plans.

CHALLENGES IN BUSINESS EDUCATION RESEARCH

The interest in university and education research in business journals is remarkable. A search in the Web of Science (WoS) database for publications that include university or higher education*, or higher education as a keyword in their title in the period 2018-2024, generates a total of 8,920 articles. The journals that generated the most publications in this field are Sustainability (329), International Journal of Education Management (180) and Journal of Marketing for Higher Education (139). The most cited articles in this field are Liao & Hitchcock (2018) who analyze the use of reliable qualitative techniques in higher education evaluation articles; Klofsten et al. (2019) who analyze the strategy of universities to foster entrepreneurship; Anwar et al. (2020) who delve into the adaptation of universities to environmental standards; de Wit-de Vries et al. (2019) who through a systematic review explain the relevance of knowledge transfer.

What challenges are JMBE researchers responding to? Main research topics

Journal of Management and Business Education (JMBE) started publication in 2018 and has 7 volumes. To find out what challenges JMBE researchers are responding to, we conducted a systematic analysis of 143 manuscripts, published in the period 2018-2023. Through the extraction and analysis of the manuscripts we have identified the subject matter and objectives of the research in the journal. This has allowed us to identify the research concerns and what challenges they respond to. In addition, using the Dimensions database we extracted information on the contribution of the articles to the SDGs.

The systematic analysis of the manuscripts identifies 4 clusters according to their objective and challenge to be solved:

Cluster 1. Management in the university setting (55 articles)

Universities must offer teaching, research and transfer, but they must also manage their relationships with stakeholders and adapt to changes in the environment. On the one hand, in this cluster we find research that proposes how universities should adapt to new technologies (Bigné, 2020; Jiménez et al., 2019; Almahameed et al., 2020; Muñoz Acuña et al., 2024). In this regard, it should be noted that there are publications that have analyzed: 1) the effect of Covid on teaching adaptation (Awal, 2023); 2) the challenges of on-line teaching (Jiménez et al., 2019); and 3) technological challenges such as adaptation to digitalization or artificial intelligence.

On the other hand, in this cluster we find works focused on investigating how universities should be sustainable and ethical. For example, Delgado-Aleman et al. (2019) raise the importance of universities teaching ethical principles; Aparicio de Castro et al. (2023) highlight training in sustainability; or DeMoraes Abrahão et al. (2023) indicate how university social responsibility is key to train the leaders of the future.

Finally, within this cluster we find authors who analyze the satisfaction, commitment or loyalty of students (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2020) and faculty (Martínez-Navalón et al., 2019; Muhwezi et al., 2023; Kanyumba et al., 2024); obtaining accreditations and quality seals (Mady et al., 2023); or how to apply marketing and strategic management strategies at the university level (Casanoves-Boix et al., 2020; Díez-de-Castro, 2020).

Cluster 2. Educational innovation (46 articles)

In these publications, the authors argue the advantages of implementing educational innovation in classrooms to improve learning outcomes and student motivation. Among the educational innovation methodologies, gamification (Catalán & Martínez, 2018; Silva et al., 2020; Pelegrín-Borondo et al., 2021), collaborative learning (Macías et al., 2018), the use of electronic and digital media to increase student motivation (Medrano et al., 2018; Villagrasa et al., 2022), evaluation and self-evaluation systems (Barba-Aragón, 2018), project management (Mariano et al., 2018; Carballo-Mendivil et al., 2019), teamwork (Canós-Darós et al., 2019; Wilson, 2022; Marmet, 2022), the flipped classroom (Izagirre-Olaizola et al., 2020), or service-learning (De-Juan-Vigaray & González-Gascón, 2023; Morán, 2024).

Cluster 3. University-industry relationship (27 articles)

One of the great challenges for universities is to ensure that their graduates have the necessary skills to face the labor market. This second cluster focuses on how we can equip students with these competencies to improve their employability. In this sense, Beraza Garmendia and Azkue Irigoyen (2018) draw attention to the relevance of dual training; Gómez-Martínez et al. (2022) explain how to estimate the probability of performance improvement from a training action; Eball (2021) analyzes what should be the employability skills for accounting students; or Bindawas (2024) demonstrates how providing students with soft-skills improves the employability of students.

If the relationship between university and business is important, fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of our students must be one of our priorities. More and more universities are implementing subjects such as entrepreneurship or business initiatives in their educational itineraries. In this cluster we find research that exposes experiences such as the Junior Enterprise movement (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018) or the University Entrepreneurship Club (Guerreiro & Ferrari, 2023); how educational innovation can be directed to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and the promotion of creativity through project management (Zorrilla et al., 2020; Erdmann et al., 2022; Llorente et al., 2023). Likewise, most of the articles in this cluster highlight the importance of training students in entrepreneurial skills (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018; Calzado-Barbero et al., 2019) and analyzing their entrepreneurial intention (Sendra-Pons et al., 2022).

Cluster 4. Sustainability (12 articles)

Sustainability is one of the main challenges of teaching in business education. Training future leaders in sustainable management is essential to respond to social challenges. To this end, we explore the challenges, experiences and opportunities that emerge from the intersection between sustainability and education in economics and business. We look at how tools, methods and educational models have been explored that favor the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to face the complex challenges posed by sustainability today and that foster a holistic vision that encompasses economic, social and environmental aspects in business decision making.

Researchers have analyzed the current situation on students' knowledge of the SDGs, highlighting the main gaps and avenues for improving SDG training (Aldazabal and Altuzarra, 2023). Also, we note that several authors apply teaching innovation strategies focused on the acquisition of sustainability competencies, for example, through the application of Flipped Classroom (Martín-Peña et al., 2023) or with projects based on active recycling (De-Juan-Vigaray & González-Gascón, 2023). In addition, universities must be managed in a sustainable manner (Sundararajan, 2023).

Sustainable development goals in JMBE

We use the Dimensions database to analyze the SDG-related challenges being addressed by research published in JMBE. Dimensions is a database designed for academic research and scientific information management. It was launched by Digital Science in 2018 and has become a tool for researchers, librarians, research administrators, and other professionals in academia.

Dimensions labels 55 articles as research contributing to SDG 4 - Quality Education. Considering the goal of the journal, all research should be labeled in SDG 4. Regarding contribution to other SDGs (Table 1), we identified 3 manuscripts contributing to SDG 5 - Gender Equality, 2 contributing to SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production, 2 contributing to SDG 3 - Good Health and Well Being, and 1 to SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Table 1. JMBE research labeled in other SDGs

Title	Year	Authors	SDG
Responsible marketing and consumption: a teaching experience based on challenges and sustainability as cross-cutting themes	2023	De-Juan-Vigaray & González-Gascón	12 Responsible Consumption and Production
Flipped classroom as a methodology for acquiring skills in sustainability in the subject production management: an assessment of the students	2023	Martín-Peña et al.	12 Responsible Consumption and Production
Robots in education: a jordanian university case study	2020	Almahameed et al.	3 Good Health and Well Being
Sequelae of the covid-19 pandemic in the performance of undergraduate students from a gender perspective	2022	Castaño et al.	3 Good Health and Well Being 5 Gender Equality
Are female secondary school teachers in Bangladesh becoming digitally empowered or disempowered? An exploratory analysis of the impact of digital empowerment on professional development	2023	Sharmin	5 Gender Equality
Employability skills of business graduates in Saudi Arabia: Do academia and employers speak the same language?	2024	Bindawas	8 Decent Work and Economic Growth
The impact of collectivism orientation and gender identity on work-life balance and life satisfaction relationship: a UK – Spain comparison	2021	Valero Pizarro & Arman	5 Gender Equality

TOPICS THAT ATTRACT THE MOST ATTENTION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

To determine which JMBE research has attracted the most attention, we used Dimensions' Field Citation Ratio (FCR). The FCR is a metric that compares the citation performance of a publication to that of other publications of the same age in its subject area. A value above 1.0-1.5 indicates that the publication has been cited more than average, depending on the subject area code and year of publication. The FCR is calculated for all publications in Dimensions that are at least 2 years old and were published from 2000 onwards (Table 2).

Table 2 shows the JMBE articles that draw the most attention to business education. With an FCR higher than 10, these papers analyze: the impact of the pandemic on the university (El-Sayed Ebaid, 2020; Olmedo-Cifuentes et al., 2022); and also study the management of legitimacy in the university setting (Cruz-Suarez et al., 2020). That is, articles focused on university management (Cluster 1). With values higher than 3 we find articles focused on: entrepreneurship and the university-business relationship (Cluster 3) (Lestari et al., 2022; Erdmann et al., 2022; Ebaid, 2021); and the impact of technology in business education (Vaquero-Diego & López-Vázquez, 2022; Bigné et al., 2018).

The results also show articles that have attracted attention (FCR>1) related to cluster 2, where educational innovation practices are analyzed (e.g., Del Castillo, 2022). However, no manuscripts with FCR>1 related to cluster 4, on university and sustainability, have been identified. In a way, this result is explained by the fact that this is the most recent thematic cluster in the journal, with articles published in the last issue of 2023, which have not yet had sufficient dissemination to have attracted the attention of researchers. In general, burst papers take at least two years from publication to attract the attention of researchers (e.g. Díez-Martín et al. 2024; Hernández-Perlines et al., 2023; Escamilla-Solano et al. 2023; Torres-Pruñonosa et al. 2024).

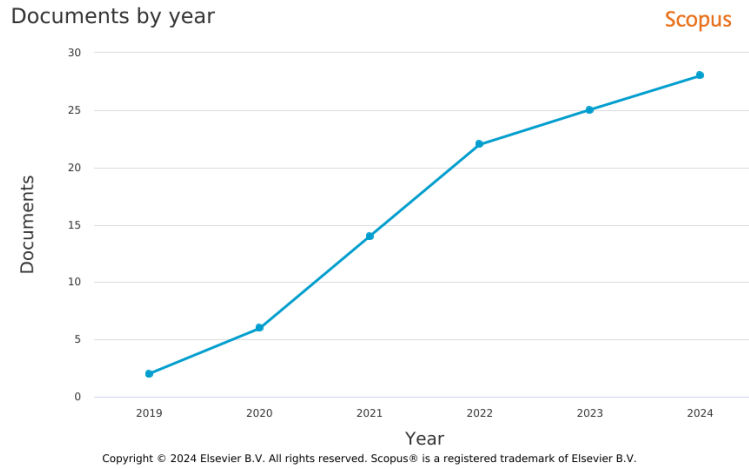
Table 2. Articles drawing attention to business education

Title	Authors	Year	FCR
Accounting students' perceptions on e-learning during the Covid- 19 pandemic: preliminary evidence from Saudi Arabia	El-Sayed Ebaid	2020	13.48
University dropout intention: analysis during Covid-19	Olmedo-Cifuentes et al.	2022	12.98
Origin and evolution of the legitimacy management in higher education	Cruz-Suárez et al.	2020	10.39
The effect of perceived university support, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and proactive personality in promoting student entrepreneurial intention in Indonesia	Lestari et al.	2022	9.20
Enhancing entrepreneurial skills through co-opetitive learning experience: a case study in a spanish university	Erdmann et al.	2022	7.87
Employers' perceptions of generic employability skills of accounting graduates: evidence from Saudi Arabia	Ebaid, I.	2021	6.10
An opportunity for transformative learning in higher education through virtual teaching innovation	Vaquero-Diego & López-Vázquez	2022	5.56
Virtual classroom: teacher skills to promote student engagement	Bigné et al.	2018	3.64
Analysis of nigerian lecturers' professional development programme participation	Awodiji et al.	2022	3.50
Teaching case. Gamification in higher education: turning training in face-to-face and online studies	del Castillo	2022	3.50
Higher education in management and its legitimacy	Díez-De-Castro	2020	3.10
Development of a blended course for online teaching: process and outcomes	Bigné et al.	2019	2.96
Teaching experience in the social media manager course in a situation of confinement by covid-19	del Castillo	2021	2.90
Strategies for retention and completion in vocational education: faculty perspectives	Yamjal & AL-Sa'di	2022	1.85
Physical planning and growth of private primary schools in Kenya	Njiri et al.	2020	1.64
Fostering communication skills in entrepreneurship education	Llorente et al.	2022	1.31
The most waited engagement in higher education: teachers and students' committed with e-learning	Jiménez et al.	2019	1.24
Linking soft skills to business education teachers' job effectiveness in ilorin metropolis secondary schools	Oluwalola et al.	2021	1.07
The influence of self-assessment activities on student learning outcomes	Sánchez-Marín et al.	2018	1.04
Student perception of learning versus performance in project management education	Wilson	2022	1.02
A review of entrepreneurship education research and practice	Sendra-Pons et al.	2022	1.02

THE IMPACT OF JMBE'S RESEARCH IN THE WORLD

Our third research question seeks to answer the impact of JMBE research in the world. To do so, we analyzed the information collected in the Scopus database. Specifically, we used the following search (REFSRCTITLE ({journal of management and business education})). This search informs us of the scientific articles (97), authors (157), countries (36), institutions (141), areas of knowledge, which are citing JMBE articles. That is, they have used JMBE papers as a source of knowledge. See Figures 1 to 5.

Figure 1. Scientific articles citing JMBE



Source: Scopus (2024)

Figure 2. Authors citing JMBE

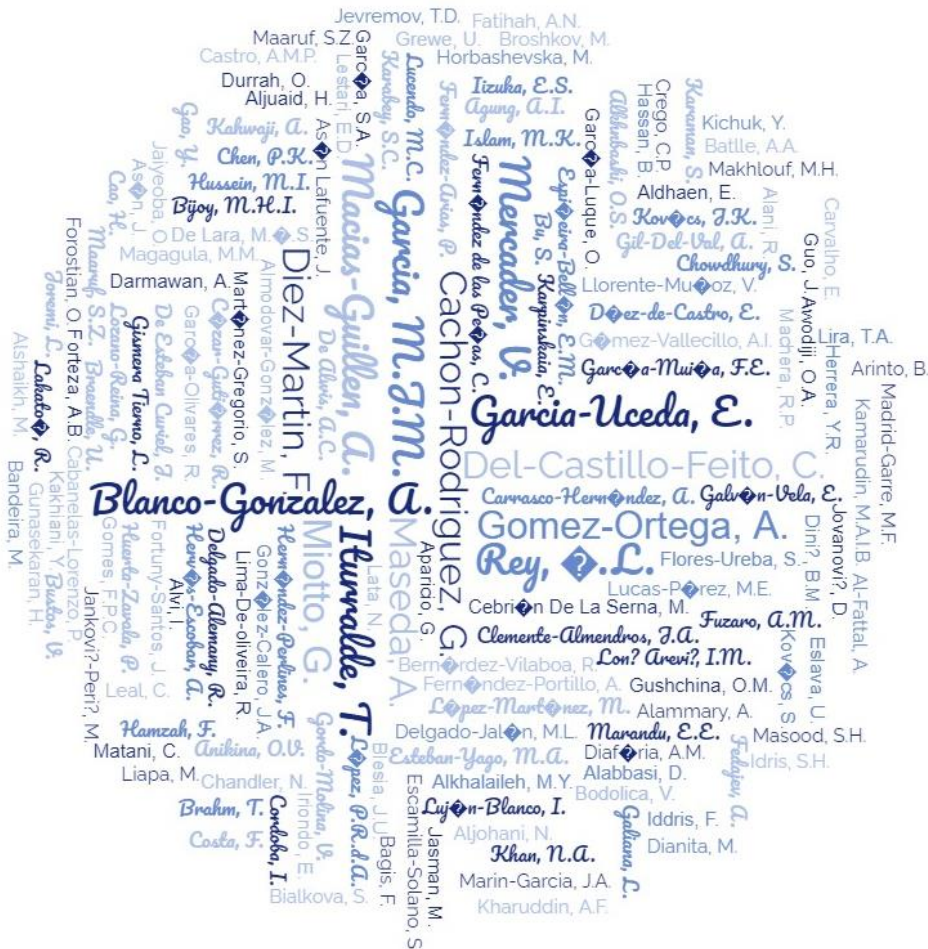


Figure 3. Countries citing JMBE

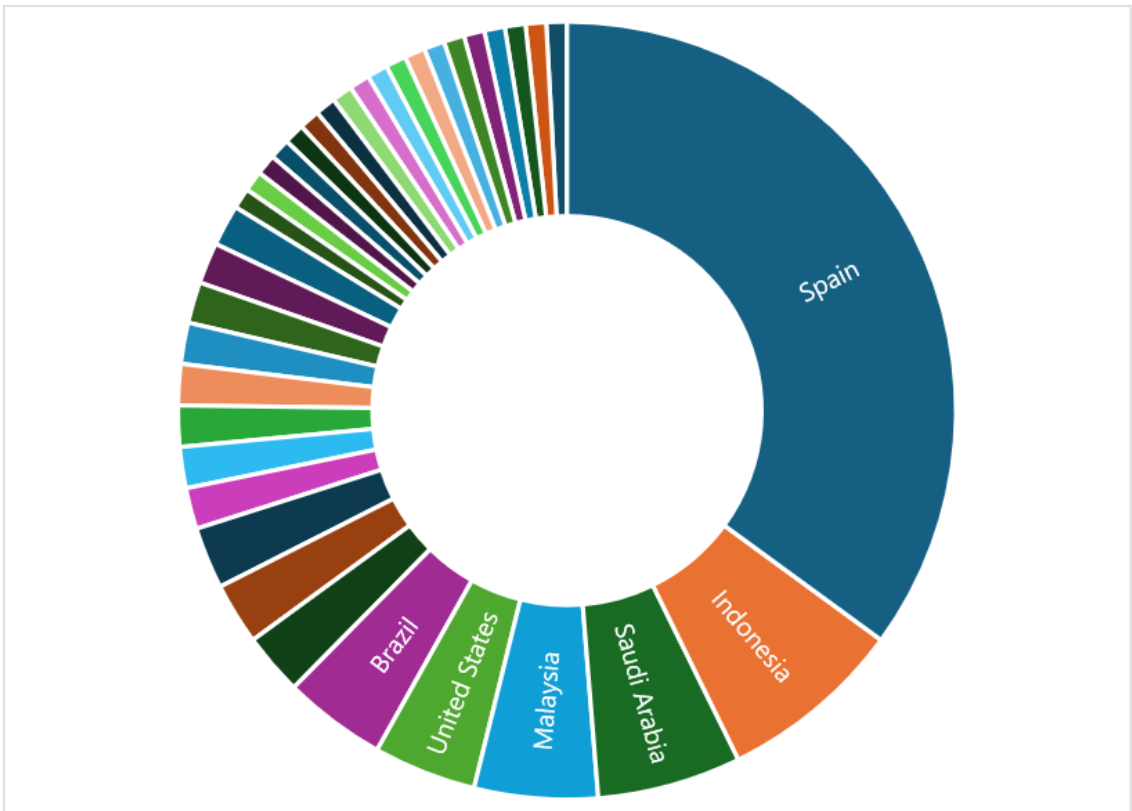
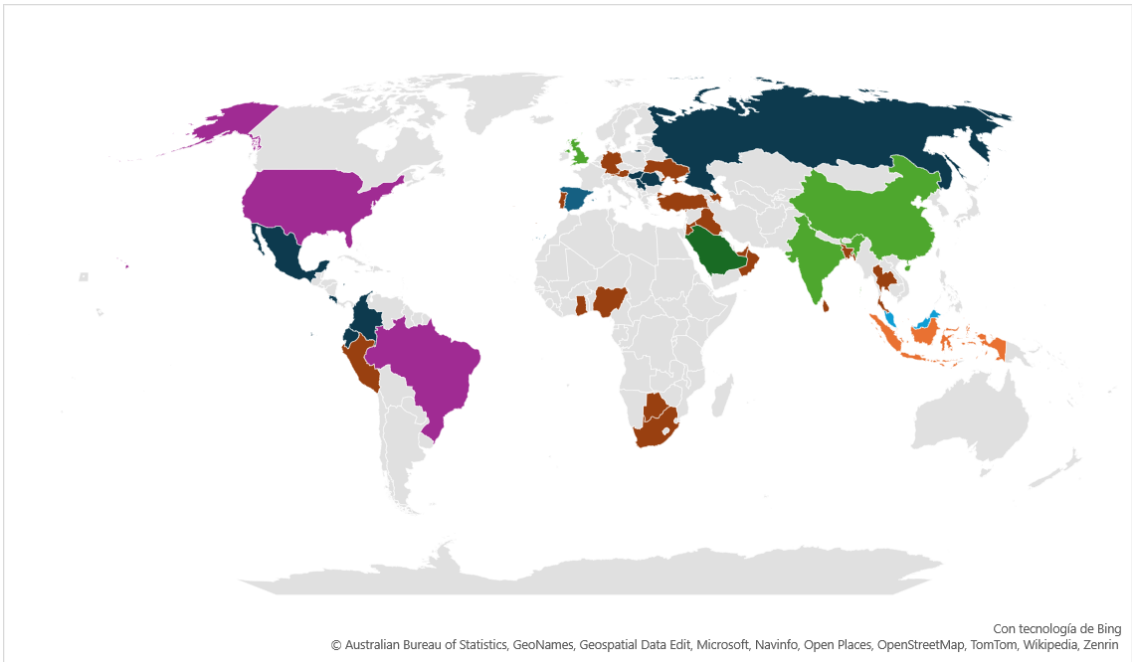


Figure 4. Institutions citing JMBE

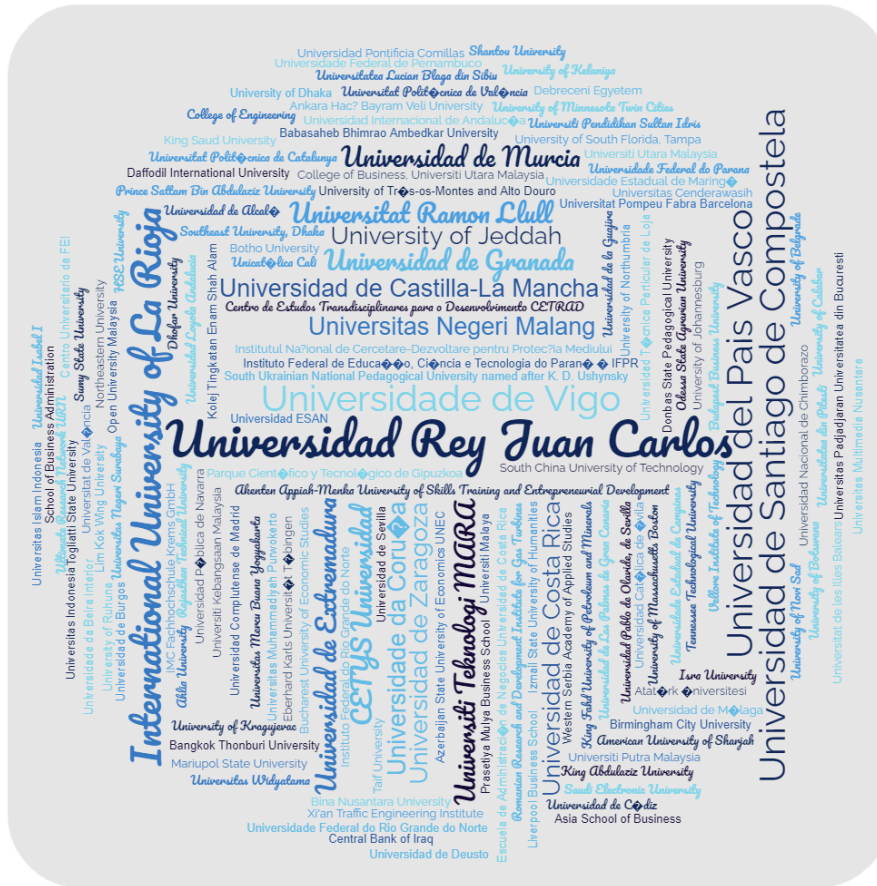
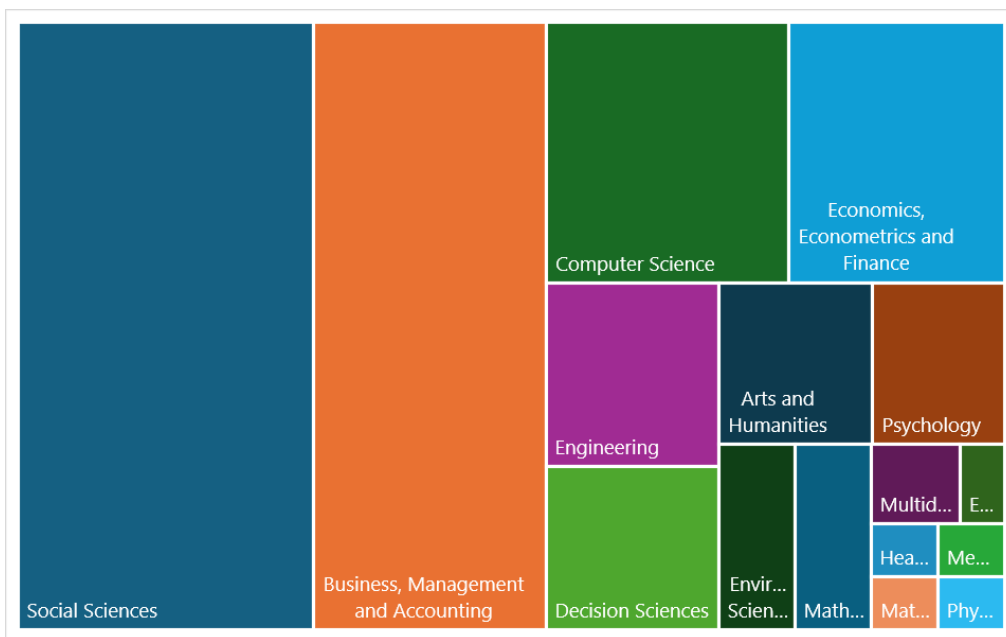


Figure 5. Areas of knowledge citing JMBE



BUSINESS EDUCATION RESEARCH AGENDA

Our fourth research question seeks to answer what the new business education research challenges are.

Connecting theory with practice to ensure employability. Businesses evolve by adapting to the changing environment. Business schools must rethink what and how they teach, as well as their governance structures. Adopting innovative approaches ensures relevance and prepares students for a dynamic economy. Universities and business schools must continue to research and train students with the new skills demanded by industry. Along these lines, one of the complaints from employers is the slowness with which many universities incorporate new skills into their training programs. It seems that the university is lagging the needs of companies. Although this is an explainable fact, insofar as innovation occurs to solve problems that arise within industry, nevertheless, the university could employ systems to improve its connection with industry, seeking to improve flexibility to adapt the curriculum to new developments occurring in industry, as well as develop joint projects and research to solve business problems. Future research could investigate systems for incorporating skills demanded by employers into university programs.

Sustainability for a better society. In the quest for a more sustainable society, universities play an important role, among other reasons because they are the ones who train the employees and leaders of the future. Hence, the importance of providing training in social responsibility principles, and promoting awareness and commitment to the SDGs. Research is currently underway on: the level of knowledge and commitment of students to the SDGs; how to integrate sustainability into university degrees using challenge-based learning methodologies; what is the perception, attitude and involvement of teaching staff on these issues; as well as effective tools to influence society towards responsible consumption. However, researchers still have a lot of ground to explore on this topic. Future lines could further investigate how specific sustainability actions can be promoted within the subjects taught in universities, as well as explore how other active learning methodologies can be used to promote sustainability.

In search of entrepreneurship. Universities can contribute to community economic development through entrepreneurship education. Current research on entrepreneurship education is increasing and opening up new lines of research such as inspirational education, which seeks to raise awareness and improve education to prepare students to acquire and apply knowledge ethically and productively. Happiness studies and entrepreneurial education represent a promising line of inquiry for researchers. Project-based learning and cooperative learning are currently being explored in the context of entrepreneurship subjects. However, aspects such as the communicative dimension of the business plan, an essential task in the process of setting up a business, is not sufficiently worked on in many cases. This gap represents a possible direction for future research.

The effect of interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity has become a central theme in higher education. The vision offered by combining different disciplines helps students tackle complex problems and adapt to a constantly changing world. It allows problems to be approached from multiple perspectives. Future research can explore how to design interdisciplinary projects and their outcomes, for example, between business and engineering students. Research on team management can be very beneficial for these projects. In turn, collaboration across disciplines fosters creativity. Investigating how to promote synergies between areas such as engineering, consumer psychology, or business can be a boon to students' creativity. Researchers could investigate how interdisciplinarity impacts students' creativity, skills, and employability. What are the tangible benefits of interdisciplinarity?

CONCLUSIONS

Four business education research questions have been formulated in this research. Answering these questions has led us to explore the challenges facing business education researchers, the main research topics and their relationship to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the research that is receiving the most attention from the scientific community, and the impact of this type of research. All of which has allowed us to propose a research agenda for future researchers.

The main challenges identified in business education research fall into four broad categories: (i) management at the university level, or how universities must adapt to new technologies, sustainability, ethics, student and faculty satisfaction and loyalty; (ii) educational innovation, where the implementation of innovative methodologies in classrooms to improve learning outcomes and student motivation (gamification, collaborative learning, the use of electronic and digital media, and the flipped classroom) is related; (iii) university-business, to equip students with the necessary skills to improve their employability and foster entrepreneurship; (iv) sustainability, exploring the tools, methods and educational models that favor the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to face the challenges of sustainability.

In this research we have also deciphered the topics that have generated a greater attraction of the interest of researchers in business education. Using the Field Citation Ratio (FCR) of Dimensions, we have provided a classification of the articles that have generated an average number of citations above other works in the same area of knowledge. These are articles whose topics have generated more attraction among researchers. Additionally, we have shown the impact generated by the research published in *JMBE*, which has been cited by 97 scientific articles, 157 authors from 36 countries and 141 institutions.

Finally, we have proposed a research agenda on business education based on four pillars. Connecting theory and practice to favor the adaptation of university programs to market demand and ensure the employability of students. Train future workers in principles of social responsibility and sustainability, promoting awareness of and commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Advance entrepreneurial training to strengthen economic development. Promote interdisciplinarity to address complex problems and foster creativity and employability.

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