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Issue editor: Sylwia Przytuła

Text design and typesetting: Marcin Szadkowski
Cover design: Marcin Szadkowski
Language editing: Zbigniew Pyszka, Lidia Pernak, Dominika Świech

Editorial office: Społeczna Akademia Nauk, Kilińskiego 109, 90-011 Łódź
(42) 664 66 21 e-mail: wydawnictwo@spoleczna.pl

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The Role of Students in the Governance of Public Higher Education: a Case Study of Malta

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this paper is to analyse the extent of student involvement in higher education governance by considering Malta as a case study. When analysing participation within institutions, two main players are involved: students and staff.

Methodology: The author uses a hybrid of methodological tools to analyse the subject matter. A review of the existing literature is compounded with document analysis and the collection of unpublished institutional data.
Findings: Student participation in the governance of higher education institutions (HEIs) is becoming a pressing reality. Students, who are the institutional clients, are a crucial key player in the manner in which HEIs are governed and managed. Therefore, HEIs have an interest in ensuring effective student participation. Various mechanisms are available and student participation is not always at an optimum level.

Value Added: This paper analyse in detail two main mechanisms of student participation: elections and academic feedback. A qualitative analysis is provided in order to measure the extent of participation. Elections are an important tool to elect student representatives while study-unit and course feedback provide valuable information to improve teaching and learning.

Recommendations: Further research is required in order to determine the quality of student participation in academic boards and committees. Therefore, the quantitative analysis is to be embraced with qualitative data. Furthermore, HEIs are to study ways in which they can create more participatory tools within their complex governing arrangements. The issue of involving more established student societies, which are not intrinsically part of the governing structures, is also essential.

Key words: governance, students` participation, public higher education & resource management


1. Introduction: students as the institutional clients and a vital resource

Students are nowadays an important player in the shared governance concept and therefore in the decision-making of higher education institutions. Students are the institutional clients and are at the core of the institutional attention. Higher education literature, both scholarly and reports published by the EU institutions and Malta’s public agencies, define students’ participation in terms of the level of enrolment at tertiary level. There are few studies that focus on student participation from a governing and managerial point of view. This is not the reality since students, in addition to the crucial role of human resources, are an essential resource to be considered in the governance and management of higher education.
2. The research methods employed and materials used

The research design involved a review of the existing literature and an analysis of institutional data that was specifically requested by the author. The existing literature includes: first the analysis of the current national legislation acts, the proposed institutional acts that are intended to decentralise some of the legislative powers in the hands of institutional governance, international declarations that pertain to student participation and scholarly literature of the subject matter.

Institutional head count data was requested from the two main public higher education institutions that comprise public higher education in Malta. These are the University of Malta (UM) and the Malta College for the Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). The analysis and the eventual compilation of institutional head count data, that was never published previously, provides a clear and a precise picture of the situation at hand which could potentially help national policy-makers and institutional leaders to take the necessary decisions in order to improve the current governing situation.

3. The current state of knowledge: the involvement of students in institutional governance

As from the 1999 Bologna process, the recognition of students as major stakeholders in shaping their own institutional destiny has been gaining significant importance (Klemenčič, 2012 & Popovic, 2011). In the Berlin communication (ENQA, 2003), the European Ministers of Education highlighted the stance that students are to be considered as full partners in the higher education governance. The Budapest declaration, which assessed students’ participation and governance, focused on the importance of student participation which is ultimately the key for better performance and an increase in quality of higher education (Nyborg, 2011).
The declaration highlighted that:

Students are not consumers of higher education, but significant components within it. Consumers are not involved in management of processes, but students are co-responsible of higher education management, as higher education is developed for students. Students are the main beneficiaries of increasing the quality of higher education. Students should have more impact in decision-making and governance of higher education, which must be a community of students and professors who are equally responsible for its quality (Nyborg, 2011, p. 1).

According to the declaration, students have four stages of participation. The first stage involves open access to documents concerning institutional policies and decision-making structures but no consultation process is actually in place. The second stage embraces a consultation process but there is no guarantee that the student opinions and their views are taken on board by the decision-making authorities. The third stage includes a dialogue between students and decision-making bodies but there is still no guarantee that decisions proposed by the students are implemented. The fourth stage is the highest level of participation where students are continuously involved in decision-making, from agenda-setting to the implementation of decision-making (Nyborg, 2011). In addition to the levels of participation, the declaration stressed the problem of students’ passivity in the decision-making process. Students are risking of being diluted by new stakeholders who became important key players as a direct result of new public management and changes in the governing structures.

Therefore as early as 2001, students’ participation has been recognised as part of higher education governance and as from 2003 onwards it has been a major pillar of the higher education modus operandi. This particular development has wiped the idea that students are just a ‘passive receptor’ and to the contrary have become primary agents who could help HEIs to achieve their main performance targets (Das, 2014, p. 66). Student participation became a core foundational value for European higher education (Klemenčič, 2012). Student participation in the governance and managerial engine of higher education institutions is also important because it helps to en-
sure that students themselves get the best possible experience while studying. It is an effective way of gauging the students’ perceptions and explores ways on how HEIs can improve their internal structural arrangements in order to ensure quality and standards of the services provided by the institutions (Kandiko & Weyers, 2013).

The perspectives adopted by scholarly authors focused on the determinants of student participation (Kouba, 2018), the changing conceptions of student participation (Klemenčič, 2012) and the degree of student participation in governing bodies (Planas, Soler, Fullana, Pallisera, & Vilà).

3. A brief contextual analysis of Malta’s higher education governance

Before discussing the results, this section provides a brief outlook of Malta’s public higher education governance. The Maltese public higher education sector is almost entirely funded by the central government and has increased substantially in the last ten years. Funding is outlined in the annual budget speech of the Minister for Finance and the respective budget votes pertaining to higher education institutions are published each year in the Financial Estimates of the Ministry responsible for Finance. Other sources of financial injection are EU funds, especially the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Institutions are scrutinised by a centralised managing authority (the Planning and Priorities Co-ordination Division – PPCD) in order to obtain these funds especially to ascertain that funding is in line with the nation’s priorities. Therefore, higher education institutions depend on the decisions take at a central government level. State funding and the dependency of higher education institutions on the state to finance their operation is becoming a challenge for Maltese governments especially if the policy of massification is to continue in the coming years.

Policies on a national scale are also crafted at a central level by the Ministry for Education and Employment. The Higher Education Strategy, which is a pol-
icy initiative between the Ministry and the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, discusses the development of higher education in Malta and the way forward for a sustainable future of the sector (MEDE & NCFHE, 2014).

From a legal perspective, the governance of Malta’s higher education rests entirely on the Education Act, Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta. The law was enacted in 1988 and it provides an explanation of the different functions of the Education Directorate and its co-operation with schools, colleges and not least with the University and MCAST, the duty of the state to provide education, a defining framework of further and higher education, details concerning the governance of colleges, the University of Malta and MCAST and other important considerations such as the teacher’s profession and the financial provisions. Throughout the years, the Education Act was amended substantially with the more recent amendments being effected as from 2010 onwards (Education Act, 1988).

The Education Act also highlights the role of important central agencies such as the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) which was set up in 2006 and is the main national authority with the power vested in it as the competent authority for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance, and recognition of Higher Education providers; the promotion and facilitation of lifelong learning and vocational education; maintaining the Malta Qualifications Framework; ensuring the compilation and, where necessary, the updates regarding the skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes of jobs at the labour market which are crucial for higher education institutions to design their courses and the validation of informal and non-formal learning (Education Act, 1988, p. 37).

In addition to these roles, the NCFHE acts as the main research and consultative arm for the Government, it serves as a structured dialogues with the different stakeholders involved in this sector, the liaison with European Union institutions, maintenance of the Quality Assurance Framework, administration of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), development of National Strategy in Higher Education and acts as a medium of infor-
mation to the general public (NCFHE, 2013, p. 10). The Commission also recommends policies related to both the education and financial domains in order to address sustainability issues from various point-of-views. These include financial sustainability, building the necessary structures to provide effective guidance to students when it comes to their educational pathways, research, innovation and knowledge transfer.

From an institutional perspective, the main provider of tertiary education in Malta is the University of Malta (UM). The second largest public HEI is the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). MCAST has been offering courses at degree level as from the year 2009. In addition to public institutions, tertiary education is also provided by a number of private institutions which are mainly franchises of either American or British universities. The number of private institutions is increasing substantially every year. An interesting comparison is made between the University of Malta, which is a higher education institution of more than 400 years old and MCAST which is a relatively recently established college that was set up in the year 2000. Given its old history, which dates back to 1592, the structures of the University represent a mix of a traditional approach and a business-like orientation in order to adapt to today’s realities (University of Malta, 2019).

Institutional structural details and key decision-makers are outlined in sections seven (7) and eight (8) of the Education Act. Both sections explain the governing arrangements of the UM and the MCAST. It outlines (i) the main functions of both institutions and their respective role in the higher education sector; (ii) the governing bodies which are responsible for the resource management and academic affairs of both higher educational institutions; and (iii) the principal officers (Education Act, 1988, pp. 41–64). The UM’s main governing and decision-making bodies are the Council, Senate and Faculty or Institute Boards. The principal officers which are the main decision-makers are the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Rector, Pro-Rectors, the Secretary, the Deans/Directors and Deputy Deans of Faculties or Institutes (Education Act, 1988, p. 43). On the other hand MCAST is composed of
a Board of Governors, an Administrative Bureau, a Principal who acts as the Chief Executive Officer and an Administrative Director whose role is distinct from that of a Registrar (University Act, 1988).

These roles and the structural arrangement of three main colleges namely: the foundation, the technical and the University college are compared with the University’s governing structures in order to assess whether certain differences are the result of purely historical traditions, academic reasons or organisational cultures. The governing ethos, decision-making powers and performance management are analysed within an international perspective and by referring to the proposed new University Act (MEDE: 2017) that is planned to replace the Maltese Education Act that was enacted in 1988.

The new University Act entails that the established Education Act is going to be repealed and instead a new legislation will come into force at an institutional level rather than at a macro-level. This strategic move would certainly influence the governance and management of Malta’s higher education. The analysis of institutional acts also includes an assessment of how such a decision strengthens the autonomy and the discretion of higher education institutions in their respective governing and management decisions. The policy decision of embarking on a framework of separate institutional acts is to be reviewed from a coordinative mechanism aspect. Separate acts, even if governed through a generic education act to act as an umbrella framework, could prove a challenging task in order to co-ordinate separate governing structures effectively. The structures dimension is to be analysed not only from an institutional level but also from a national and multi-level perspective.

The eventual decision to repeal the present Education Act and transform it into distinctive institutional acts has a parallel underpinning element towards the revision of the present governing arrangements within the institutions and which are not necessarily mentioned in the acts. The present governing arrangements have been in existence at the University of Malta for quite a long time, more than 30 years ago. All present University’s resource-decision-making are taken at the University Council which meets approximately five to six times a year.
4. The results of the research originating from the author

The results of the research conducted by the author are classified into three main categories, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. The three different categories of student involvement in higher education governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students` resource management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students participation in elections and governing channels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students involvement in governing structures through feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The role of alumni in institutional development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Students' participation in elections and governing channels

Bergan (2004) analysed the extent and level of students’ participation among representatives from 15 European countries as part of a report commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. The report analysed students’ participation by considering the Bologna process from different perspectives. The survey revealed that in most countries, students have the right to participate, discuss and be part of all decisions taken by the Boards irrespective of the nature of the issue being considered. On the other hand, in 8 countries, students are only allowed a participatory and decision-making status on purely students matters and are not in any way involved in the institutional decision-making apparatus. When it comes to voter turnout it was discovered that as a general pattern, less than half of the student population elects the student body and in some cases the turnout is in the level of one-third of the students’ population.
In Malta’s system of participatory mechanisms, students’ participation happens in a clearly defined governing framework. The University of Malta through the Education Act provides the possibility of students’ representation and therefore participatory decision-making on Faculty Boards, Senate and Council. MCAST’s students’ representation is concentrated in the Council of Institutes and Institute’s Boards of Studies.

What is missing is a clear mechanism of student participation at a national level. Student participation, if any, is limited within the institutional set-up. This raises important consideration of student influence on a higher national level with regards to policy and budgetary options. A consultative and communicative framework is to be developed in the form of periodical conferences as well as through continuous feedback through the surveys conducted by NCHFE and NSO. A missing participatory link at a national level could bring about serious gaps when crafting national policy.

University of Malta statistics exhibited in Table 2 shows that student participation in order to elect representatives on Senate and Council, the highest governing organs, are at a low level. In the period 2011 until 2018, participation ranged from a negligible percentage rate of 0.97% in May 2014 to 12.40% in November 2016. All percentage rates in fourteen different elections under study were less than the mark of 15%. Such a low turnout persisted even though the University introduced electronic elections for the first time in November 2014, although there has been a three-fold increase from approximately 4% to 12% in a span of four years. This entails that the use of information technology can indeed be a useful tool to increase the students’ participation.
Table 2. UM Students’ Turnout during Council and Senate Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Population</td>
<td>11,538</td>
<td>11,538</td>
<td>11,350</td>
<td>11,510</td>
<td>11,510</td>
<td>11,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Election</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of voting</td>
<td>3.68%</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>8.19%</td>
<td>2.31%/3.10%</td>
<td>0.97%</td>
<td>4.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Population</td>
<td>11,451</td>
<td>11,893</td>
<td>11,856</td>
<td>11,765</td>
<td>11,765</td>
<td>11,692</td>
<td>11,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,458</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,425</td>
<td>1,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Election</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,162</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,425</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of voting</td>
<td>7.26%/9.77%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.40%/9.60%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.19%</td>
<td>11.26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Nevertheless, students are still not recognising the benefits and importance of students’ participation at the highest decision-making bodies. These statistics also reveal that despite the large number of students’ societies at the University of Malta, participation is concentrated at a lower, local and informal level rather than through formal higher-level decision-making bodies.

Table 3 portrays the reality that the level of students’ participation is a different story when it comes to elect their representatives on the students’ council, Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (KSU). The percentage rate of voting during KSU elections is very strong when compared to Council and Senate elections. The rate is between three of five times higher and has reached the rate of 58% in 2018. This shows that while students are alienated from the university’s governing bodies, they are much more interested to elect and participate in their own students’ council. This can be attributed to the partisan politics that has infiltrated the KSU elections by having the two largest political parties in Malta, the PL and PN backing Pulse and Studenti Demokristjani Maltin (SDM) respectively.
Table 3. UM Students’ Turnout during KSU Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Population</td>
<td>11,510</td>
<td>11,451</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSU Election</td>
<td>4,196</td>
<td>3,855</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of voting</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Another form of student participation can be observed through student societies. An impressive total of 54 students’ societies are formally recognised at the University of Malta. While most of them represent a confined and a specific interest related to a particular academic area such as Psychology, Geography, Theology, Laws and teaching, there are a number of students’ societies that represent a generic interest. These societies include Grupp Studenti Għawdxin (GUG), We are – the University of Malta LGBTQI Organisation, Kunsill Studenti Universitarji and Youth for the Environment (Y4TE). Having such a high number of University’s recognised students’ societies raises the question of how these student groups could be interlinked to the governance of the University of Malta.

There are no specific elections at MCAST University College, but the same pattern can be observed with regards to MCAST general student elections. Students’ representation at MCAST is at the level of the Council of Institutes. MCAST’S Council of Institutes is represented by 14 members of staff most of them high-ranking officials and 2 students representatives which percentage-wise is 14.3% of the total council membership. Even though MCAST provides the possibility for having a student representative per Institute and two student representatives in the Council of Institutes (COI), in many instances student representatives are either uncontested or when the elections are held, the participation level is still very low. In certain circumstances, the vacant posts available are not filled through such elections. This is a reflection of what happens at the University of Malta when
elections for students’ representatives are held at an Institute or Faculty Board level. Table 4 shows that the approximate percentage of students’ participation during MCAST elections is 3% which is lower than the University’s percentages but within the same bracket.

Table 4. Students’ Turnout during MCAST Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Population</td>
<td>6170</td>
<td>6244</td>
<td>6417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of voting</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Students’ involvement in the governing structures through feedback

Students’ participation in the governance of HEIs can also be assessed through other tools, such as a structured and formalised institutional feedback mechanism. In practice, student feedback can possibly lead to a change in a programme of study or to a collaboration between different entities in offering a programme.

The University of Malta conducts a study-unit online feedback exercise every semester in which students have the opportunity to voice their opinion on the content delivered, the pedagogy used, the administrative services offered and the performance of the lecturers concerned. Surprisingly, such an important feedback tool is absent at MCAST, although it is exploring options to introduce online students’ feedback.

As can be noticed in Table 5, except for the year 2009 in which there was an annual participatory rate of 43.05%, the participation rates in the years 2008 until 2018, varied between 30 to 40% and in the last three years was on the decline and has reached a low level of 23%. If the rate continues to
decrease, the validity of this online feedback exercise maybe in jeopardy. The participation of students in such an exercise is crucial for the university to obtain the necessary feedback to ensure standards and quality assurance in the courses delivered. If need be remedial action is taken to improve certain aspects of teaching and administrative domains.

Table 5. Response Rates – University of Malta Online Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Study-Unit Average Response Rate</th>
<th>Course Average Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>38.24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>43.05%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>33.10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>33.08%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>35.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>35.52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>39.95%</td>
<td>25.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>37.95%</td>
<td>38.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>28.15%</td>
<td>31.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>26.00%</td>
<td>30.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>23.21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

The participation rate for course feedback, that was introduced in 2014, is at the same levels of study-unit feedback, with percentage rates that vary between 25 and 39%. The University of Malta is changing its study-unit feedback in order to try to attract more responses from students by revamping the image of the feedback exercise and by allowing students to just answer one questions rather than the entire survey in order to eliminate student fatigue.

Student participation is not limited to participation in elections and in the feedback exercises. There are other forms of participation that cannot be measured but are of immense importance in influencing decision-making and the strategic orientation of either the Faculty or Institution concerned by actively participating during a Board meeting or at a University level during Senate or Council meetings.
In Academic Year 2016/17 the University of Malta introduced a study-unit entitled: Student Representation at University which was meant to make students cognisant of the impact student representation may have on the University’s responsiveness to changing educational needs, to help students become more conversant with University structures and increase student awareness regarding the University’s response to societal needs. In the first year 13 students registered for this unit but in the second and third year of its offering no students registered for this unit. This lack of interest question the level of interest from students in being actively involved in the University’s governance.

The role of alumni in institutional development

The role of student participation can be extended after graduation. As from the nineteenth century, in anglophone countries alumni had an essential role in the governing machinery and were involved in electing the university’s governors. They also had two seats in the governing board as was the case with Dalhousie University (Pietsch, 2012). The concept adopted two centuries ago, that alumni could be a determining factor in improving the institutional standing, could be applied to today’s realities.

The contribution of the enrolled students in improving the institutional performance can be significantly strengthened by allowing an active role for alumni. Alumni can influence performance indicators that include the following: first, student recruitment by spreading a positive image and act as an institutional ambassador. This role assists institutions to restore and improve their reputation and trust among the external stakeholders. Second, building new and strengthening existing relations with the external stakeholders especially if alumni have become high-ranking officials with external stakeholders after they have graduated. Building bridges is not only limited to government entities and NGOs but also to the general public (Arceo, 2010). Third, acting as a role model for students and injecting a sense of inspiration and assisting students to overcome their academic and wellbeing challenges.
This role is a determining factor towards achieving a higher student retention rate. Fourth, providing the necessary expertise in programme design as well as funded project management and research initiatives. This function strengthens the institutional research platform and visibility that influence the number of collaborative projects that the HEI is engaged in (Idris, 2015).

The UM’s alumni services are spread from an e-platform to bridge academia to employability in the form of career plus to the organisation of conferences of events. However, there is no alumni participation in the governance and management of the University. Therefore, the role of alumni is strictly confined with the brand image of the University and public relations. In fact, alumni are within the responsibility of the Communications Office. Marketing efforts are concentrated in the form of a bulletin and the University of Malta alumni newsletter entitled Luminary.

The idea of conveying a role model is approached by organising an outstanding alumni achievement award and by ceremonially awarding an honoris causa to prominent international and local public figures such as Ban Ki-moon, Romani Prodi and Vaclav Havel.

The number of alumni at the University of Malta have been encouraging since 48,397 students have a record on the student database although just half, 21,974 students activated their UM account and therefore had the possibility to use the university’s resources. With the introduction of GDPR, which has been enforced by the European Union on all EU member states as from May 2018, the number of alumni that had activated and accepted to be involved in the alumni database reached a low number of just 1,500. This shows that measures adopted at a multi-level perspective can substantially undermine the institutional efforts across the years.

Conclusions and recommendations

The attempts made by the author to present an analysis based on qualitative data brings into light the limitations of evidence-based management. Not all
performance measures are identifiable or measurable. Indicators that can never be measured include the extent of student representativeness and their effectiveness in faculty boards, council and senate meetings. These are important facets of students’ influence on higher education governance. Most universities, including the University of Malta, are seeing their study-unit and course feedback declining. This is partially due to the lack of action by the institutions to take the necessary decisions and the inability to build an effective bridge between students and the governing apparatus.

Further research can shed light on the influence of national and institutional legislative acts to promote students’ representation on boards and committees. Should higher education national legislation make student representativeness a requirement? Should minimum thresholds of students’ representatives be introduced?

The interconnection of governing structures and student representation is also an aspect worth studying. How could governing structures be altered to ensure more effective student representation?

Another important governing facet that is to be studied in future research are the factors that motivate students to participate in governance. Is there a difference between student involvement in their own unions and students involvement in University governance?

Acknowledgements

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This paper is part of the research conducted by the author for the purpose of the Ph.D. Degree.
References


University of Malta (2018). *History.* Available at: https://www.um.edu.mt/about/history.
Do Soft Skills matter? A Study on Employability of Engineering Graduates in Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Objective: University graduates in Bangladesh are presently confronted with high job competition. Because of less job availability, engineering graduates are facing more challenges in getting job opportunities than business graduates. Moreover, engineering graduates are more
proficient in technical skills than with their human skills. The most important barrier for engineering graduates' employability at their initial stage of career is that they have less focus on acquisition of their soft skills. Therefore, this study is concentrating to analyse the current situation of the engineering graduates' soft skills deficiency and to investigate the impact of having soft skills on employability.

**Methodology:** The nature of the study is qualitative and data has been gathered through in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Respondents of in-depth interview are experienced engineers and HR experts who are working in engineering based organizations especially at the power solution service providing companies in Bangladesh. FGD among final year undergraduate engineering students has also been conducted to validate the interview data. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the qualitative data.

**Findings:** The impact of having soft skills in getting employment of new graduates at the entry level is identified in this paper.

**Value Added:** Higher education can assist in developing employability through increasing employment prospect and also achieving individual learning goals. However, fresh engineering graduates have social skills gap and lack of practical knowledge which can be reduced through acquiring soft skills. Different techniques such as self-training, institutional training, joining language sessions, attending presentation skills development classes and social programs can assist graduates in the acquisition of soft skills.

**Recommendations:** As the most important reason of engineers’ unemployment is the lacking of collaboration between industry and academic institutions, this study focuses to draw the attention of engineering students, educational institutes and policy makers to highlight the importance of developing soft skills for employability and career growth.

**Key words:** Engineering Graduates, Soft Skills, Employability and Bangladesh

**JEL codes:** A23, J24, E24

**Introduction**

Graduates need to acquire adequate soft skills like communication, critical thinking, problem solving, team work, leadership, entrepreneurship skills in addition to academic knowledge (Richard, 2012). This skill is basically expected by the employers. Lack of soft skills reduces the chance of employability for
newly graduates. Soft skills are important just like other qualifications. Lack of soft skills is now a global problem among the graduates (Clarke, 2016). Employees who have both hard skills and soft skills can be successful in their profession. Now the recruiter’s slogan is like “recruit for attitude and train for skills” (Rao, 2014). Deficit in soft skills reduced productivity. Soft skills like communication and team work are more important than traditional academic results (Clarke, 2016). Employers nowadays prefer positive attributes and soft skills from the job candidates than academic excellence and technical skills. From employer’s perspective, employability refers work readiness like required skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that increase the employees’ productivity. The reasons of unemployment among graduates are not because of their unintelligence but because of their lack of soft skills (Omar, Manaf, Rusyda, Kassim, & Aziz, 2012).

The main reason for unemployment and low level of employability among engineer’s graduates in Bangladesh is the lack of soft skills. Employability does not mean only to get a job. It means developing attributes, techniques or experience for getting a job and also to be successful in the jobs. Present education system for engineers in Bangladesh must be related with the expectations of the employers that are necessary for enhancing their employability.

Therefore, the purposes of this study are as follows: identifying the present condition of soft skills gap among the engineering graduates, and examining the impact of soft skills on their employability.

**Literature review**

**Employability and its importance**

Employability skills help graduates to engage in a job quickly. Employability is termed as a combination of varied workplace related knowledge, abilities and personal traits (Keller et al., 2011; Yorke, 2008) that enables graduates to get employment opportunity and gain efficacy in selecting jobs which
also proved as beneficial for the society and the community (Yorke, 2008). Both technical skills and soft skills are considered as employability skills which make individuals ready to get a job (Ju et al., 2012; Omar et al., 2012; Robles, 2012; Shafie & Nayan, 2010). However, employability does not mean only to get a job, rather it focuses on continuous learning, increasing critical thinking abilities, emerging traits and acquiring experiences to growth and gain empowerment in the present job (Harvey, 2003). Employability means the ability to attract employers during interview for getting an employment opportunity immediately after completion of academic degrees. Fresher should possess a certain level of non-technical skills along with the technical skills to increase the chance of getting a job in the relevant field as well as to sustain in that job for career progression.

Students from different academic background are striving to get a job in their relevant areas. Many of students may not get a job instantly after completing their studies for their lacking in some set of skills. In a study of World Bank in India, the findings indicated that engineering graduates have the prevalent skill gap between complex intellectual skills (rational, mathematical and problem solving capability) and simple intellectual skills such as communication and critical thinking (Andreas & Hiroshi, 2011). Due to global competition in the labor market, engineering graduates are facing difficulties to get a job and falling in aggressive competition. To be competent and forceful in the job market, engineering students should attain a set of soft skills for increasing the employability skill (Azami et al., 2009). Employers always seek a certain set of employment qualities like problem solving, strong work ethic and decision making skills during job interview (Green et al., 2011). However, employers face a challenge to recognize the potential employee who has the competency in both technical and soft skills (Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Graduates must understand the recruiters’ demanding issues to prepare themselves as proficient candidates for getting employment in the desired working place.
Organizations’ expectation about employability

Employers assume that employability is the graduates’ readiness to work with having certain set of skills, awareness, attributes and commercial knowledge which assist them to be more productive in the organization immediately after getting a job (Mason et al., 2009). A maximum number of employers are demanding an assortment of different skills like technical competencies, interpersonal, critical thinking, leadership and managerial capabilities reinforced by the educational system from their employees (Brown & Bowen, 2009). Currently, employers are giving more emphasize on higher level skills of employability and adjustability with industrial prompt changes along with technical expertise to locate proper employees in the working place (Sattar et al., 2012; Buntatet al., 2013; Fong et al., 2014). In addition to that, employers are giving less importance on educational brilliance and technical expertise as they think these could be increased by giving training if applicants have noticeable personal traits and soft skills (Winterbotham et al., 2001). During recruitment and selection activities, employers can assess the shortcomings of candidates’ soft skills as per their expressions, aptitude, communication and distinct talent by noticing outfit, looks, motivation, dialogue, self-confidence, gesture, behavior and knowledge level (Devins & Hogarth, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Organizations expect that candidates must show a certain level of soft skills exercise during employment tests to prove them as more competent than others which ultimately help them to get the job in a quicker manner.

Role of soft skills in employability

The ability to get employment will be higher if an individual has both required technical skills and certain level of soft skills. Soft skills are the substitute term of non-technical skills which includes communication, personal and social skills and these are required to perform in the working environment along with the technical skills (Weber et al., 2010). Human ability to communicate, work
in a team, lead a group of people, manage conflict, negotiate, be professional and ethical are classified as soft skill (Azim, et al., 2010). Being intangible and personality based skills, soft skills enable people to determine their suitability in leadership, facilitation, meditation and negotiation activities (Robles, 2012). Soft skills comprise a set of personal attributes, traits and behaviors which ascertain several capabilities of applicants like strong commitment to the work, teamwork, communication, customer service, leadership and problem solving for upholding the better position than peers in the working environment (Deepa & Seth, 2013). Creativity, interpersonal, information communication technology, problem solving, managerial ability, advance thinking, teamwork and adaptation skills are needed to acquire employability skills (Boahin & Hofman, 2013). A set of skills like communication, professionalism, social, creativity, critical thinking and leadership may influence employees’ employability in the workplace (Finch, et al., 2013). Individual with having technical and professional skill may not be able to advance the career because of not having interpersonal skill (Klaus, 2010). Acquisition and execution of several soft skills help an individual not only to get a job but also to upgrade the job status along with high sustainability in the organization.

Organizations’ required soft skills during recruitment

Employers can assess an applicant’s employability by measuring the accessibility of soft skills during recruitment. According to Robles (2012), soft skills are viewed as the pivotal factor for the probable recruitment in different industries and occupations. He also mentioned that graduates with interpersonal capability have the greater chance to get a job for gaining competitive advantage. Fresh graduates have the shortcomings in capability to write, solve a problem, think critically, generate creative ideas (White, 2013), display professionalism, respond in telephone and give customer service (McIntosh, 2013) as reported by employers. Employers also stated in Forbes articles
that current graduates are less prepared to perform in the workplace and are incapable to use their knowledge practically in communication and critical thinking based activities (Klebnikov, 2015). Graduates must possess the most important skill of interpersonal, problem solving and management to enhance their employability (Ramli et al., 2013; Ranasinghe, 2011). Employers are more interested to recruit experienced and soft skilled employees as they do not have the willingness to spend money on fresher’s training for filling the vacant positions (Rao et al., 2011). Though different industry requires diverse categories of soft skills (Pace, 2011), employers give more value to having soft skill relevant to employment (Stoner & Milner, 2010).

A set of soft skills like communication, time management and administrative capabilities are extremely needed for employees’ success in the workplace (Mitchell et al., 2010). Employer are demanding most important soft skills like communication, professionalism, integrity, teamwork, courtesy, sociability, positive attitude, strong work ethic, responsibility and adaptability from their employees (Robles, 2012). Globally operated employers give importance on cross-cultural expertise especially in global consciousness, language and economic issues during recruiting people (Gore, 2013). Employers are persistent in finding employees with great communication, creativity and social skills to create a competent workforce (Knell et al., 2007). To be a successful project manager, individual must have a set of vital soft skills like communication, leadership, administrative, problem solving, teamwork, elasticity, creative thinking and reliability (Baroudi & Pant, 2008). Graduates with communication, creativity, problem solving, team work, leadership, professionalism and adaptability skills have the high level of employability as they are more preferable by employers.

**Techniques to improve soft skills for increasing employment opportunity**

Usually, people can learn by observing, retaining and practicing others’ attitude and behavior. However, fresher should increase their level of soft skills
to enhance their employability. Employment skills can be taught by university and other institutional learning facilities as perceived by employers which in reality are not occurred (Sparks & Waits, 2011). The engagement of industry can reduce the soft skills gap between the classroom learning and execution in the workplace (Teichler, 1998; Pillai, 2009). According to Rao (2015), “The right teaching and training methods will motivate students to acquire soft skill they will need in the world of work”. He also mentioned that teachers should impose team working, case solving, role-playing, debating and outgoing instruments in the learning sessions along with individual feedback to assist students in acquiring soft skills. Soft skills can be developed by creating a sequential link among different aspects like self-awareness, locus of control, motivation, social awareness and social influence (Engelberg, 2015). Individuals can attain soft skills by getting supports from experienced and successful professionals, attending experts’ conferences, coaching and training sessions. University teachers can give support to their students in understanding their attitudes, acquiring skills and finding professional paths (Ciappei, 2015). A variety of social and emotional abilities can be included in the teaching framework to educate students about soft skills along with technical skills (Schulz, 2008). Action learning could be the successive methods of training to acquire new non-technical skills or soft skills (Crosbie, 2005).

Organizations should arrange training to develop their employees’ crucial skills of performance management, challenging discussions, teamwork, delegation and communication to motivate them and increase productivity. Both newly upgraded and experienced managers become competent by enhancing their abilities and self-confidence in four essential areas like self-awareness, delegation, communication and organizational skills with the assistance of supportive working attitude in the workplace (Garwood, 2012). A synchronized and coordinated form of faculties, learners, organizations, administrative personnel of universities and organizational training programs can teach soft skills to improve employability (Rao, 2014). Overall, a combination of self-awareness, emotional control, self-inspiration to learn,
involvement in education based team work, leadership practices in the course related group work, creativity exercise, and outcome based course work and networking can enhance graduates’ soft skills to get employment opportunity.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature where data have been collected through in-depth interviews from experienced engineers and HR experts working in engineering and power solution service providing companies in Bangladesh. Data have been collected from three experienced HR personnel and two experienced engineers in May 2019. To validate the interview data, one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) has conducted in June 2019 among eight final year undergraduate engineering students from eight reputed public and private universities in Bangladesh. Final year students are from different engineering departments like Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE), Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), Electric and Communication Engineering (ECE) and Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (GEB). Thematic analysis has been used for analyzing the qualitative data.

Analysis and findings from HR personnel perspective

Importance of soft skills for enhancing employability among graduate engineers

The newly graduated engineers are good at technology but they have lack of communication skills (HR personnel 1). Time management, team work and leadership skills are mostly absent among the newly graduated engineers (HR personnel 2). The newly graduated engineers are usually very good at numeric problem solving; but they might need communication skills, leadership skills for senior positions (HR Personnel 3). Employees at work are from different
age groups, races and ethnic background. To deal with them, interpersonal skills are required (HR personnel 1). But interpersonal skills are not the most important skills in case of hiring decisions (HR personnel 2). Employers give importance on interpersonal relationship in hiring decision especially for job offer and job promotion. Engineers have to deal with a lot of subordinates working under them in order to achieve organizational targets (HR Personnel 3). Moreover, adaptability is necessary for newly graduated engineers’ employability (HR personnel 1). Time management, communication skill, teamwork and leadership skills are necessary for newly graduated engineers’ employability (HR personnel 2). For engineers’ employability, technical and analytical knowledge as well as interpersonal, teamwork and communication skill are also necessary (HR Personnel 3). Employers have started using tools and techniques for promoting soft skills like communication skills, time management and advance leadership skills (HR Personnel 1 & 2). They also have training materials for promoting soft skills (HR Personnel 2). Employers also arrange training on communication skills for engineers on a regular basis since they have skill deficiency (HR Personnel 3).

**Soft skills necessary for developing engineers’ career growth**

Yes, soft skills are not only necessary for newly graduates but also necessary for developing career. The most important skill is – “Readiness for Digital Change” for developing career (HR personnel 1). Most important skills are problem solving skills, communication skills, leadership skills for developing career (HR personnel 2). Leadership Skills are necessary for career development (HR Personnel 3). Employers at present in Bangladesh arrange soft skills training on time management and personal habit changing skills (HR personnel 1). They emphasize on soft skills training in regards to relationship management, delegation, time management, team building (HR personnel 2). We have arranged soft skills training on team building (HR Personnel 3).
Communication skills and teamwork skills are more important than academic results for successful career. Team work is important at work where business communication plays behind it (HR personnel 1). Communication skills and teamwork skills are more important than academic results for successful career growth (HR personnel 2). Even if academically qualified engineers have to acquire teamwork skills to run a power plant project (HR Personnel 3). Soft skill acquisition and employment opportunity for engineers are related (HR personnel 1&2). Emotional intelligence is required for engineering students (HR personnel 1). Engineering students must attend workshops and seminars, read online materials on soft skills development (HR personnel 2). Soft skill acquisition and employment opportunity for engineers are not related for entry level position; but it is more applicable for senior positions. Teamwork and interpersonal skills are required for engineering students (HR Personnel 3).

Analysis and findings from engineers’ personnel perspective

Importance of soft skills for enhancing employability

Soft skills like communication skills, time management, leadership skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills are important for one’s job (Engineering Job). To run a manufacturing factory, engineers need to communicate with different departments such as supply chain, quality control, product development etc. (Engineer 1). Soft skills like communication skills, time management, leadership skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills are important for engineering job. Because, it helps to represent output, trace the existing problems blocking development and find out a way to solve problem (Engineer 2). Some power generating organizations are really helpful for developing soft skills. Therefore, engineers can solve different problems within a team (Engineer 1) and getting advices from seniors and
experts are now much easier (Engineer 2). For an engineer problem solving skill and leadership skill are most important for career development (Engineer 1). Communication skills (both formal and non-verbal) are essential for career development (Engineer 2).

**Soft skills gap and employers’ expectation from engineering graduates**

Newly graduated students only have the theoretical knowledge, but they have lack of practical expertise. Soft skills lesson is a small part of engineering education compared to the business students. As such in initial stage, there is a soft skill gaps among the newly graduated engineers (Engineer 1). Engineering students need to complete some soft skills courses in their course curriculum. To work in a team and also to obtain better productivity, soft skills are important. As a result, the employer expects that the engineering student should have some sort of soft skills which will be improved by proper training (Engineer 1). Organizations want more trained engineers. There are soft skills gaps among graduate engineers due to the absence of formal educational and training backgrounds (Engineer 2).

**Training program on acquiring Soft skills for engineers**

Many organizations do not arrange any training program on soft skills development. Many engineers are reluctant to participate in soft skills training programs such as relationship management, delegation, time management, team building etc. (Engineer 1). However, some of the organizations arrange training program mostly on teamwork and work process management which are not effective at all since these trainings do not have the skills transfer (Engineer 2).
Reducing Soft skills gaps and developing career growth

Soft skills like communication skills and teamwork skills more important than academic results for successful career of engineers. Academic results are necessary for the entry level job, but it has limited impact for career development. After a certain period, soft skills become more important than hard skills. Different trainings and workshops may be conducted among the engineers to reduce soft skills gaps. Additional courses may be introduced in their curriculum for developing required soft skills among engineering students (Engineer 1). Soft skills are complementary but professional skills are a must. Practical and realistic academic courses can reduce the soft skills gap. Industries must arrange training for newly appointed graduate engineers before starting their work so that they can grow and perform better (Engineer 2).

Figure 1. Important soft skills to enhance employability from the perspectives of HR personnel and engineer

Source: own study.
Figure 2. Training to improve soft skills from the perspectives of HR personnel and engineer

Table 1. Findings from Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on engineering students’ perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of FGDs</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering student’s opinion</td>
<td>Soft skills development curriculum in current education system (Business Communication course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not participated any soft</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skills training</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated training in Team</td>
<td>Did not participated any soft skills training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work and work process management</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in case study, role</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing, debates, group</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion, presentations</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned soft skills related</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information in CV</td>
<td>Training not provided by organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 1</td>
<td>Soft skills refer networking, communication, presentation and creative thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 2</td>
<td>Soft skills is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 3</td>
<td>Soft skills are important for jobs and career development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 4</td>
<td>It refers communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 5</td>
<td>Soft skills mean one’s attitude, behavior and body movement, communicate with others, presentation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 6</td>
<td>Learned soft skills refers communication skills, time management skills, leadership skills, problem solving skills by doing lab works and assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learned soft skills like problem solving by doing assignment and project work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. 7</td>
<td>Developed leadership skills, communication Skills through participated in different seminars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

## Discussions and conclusion

Most of the respondents in FGD have limited idea about soft skills and its importance for enhancing employability. According to them there are no soft skills development courses in their academic curriculum. Even they do not give soft skills related information in their CV. Their current teaching method cannot motivate them for developing soft skills. However, they have participated in group discussion, group presentation, case study, project work, debates, lab work that can improve their soft skills. In this competitive and global business environment, engineering universities need to start business communication related courses for undergraduate students. Engineering universities and academies need to develop some soft skills development programs for the undergraduate engineering students. Both HR personnel and engineers emphasizes on soft skills development like communication skills, team working skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills, and interpersonal skills are necessary for graduate engineers and also are necessary for their future career growth. Though, few organizations have arranged very some training programs on soft skills, engineers working in Bangladesh have less soft skills that have negative impact on individual job performance as well as organizational performance. Therefore, organizations should arrange more
training program on soft skills like team building, relationship management, delegation, communication and time management on a regular basis for increasing the productivity of their engineers. Due to time limitation, it was not possible to apply several data collection methods. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to gather representative findings. Further study needs to be carried out with more sample size especially from engineers and students working in different sectors.
References


Appendix

List of Participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F 1</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Electronic &amp; Communication Engineering (ECE), East West University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 2</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (GEB) Department, University of Dhaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 3</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (GEB) Department, Independent University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 4</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Electronic &amp; Communication Engineering (ECE), BUET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 5</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (GEB), Jagannath University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 6</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), RUET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 7</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Electrical &amp; Electronic Engineering (EEE), KUET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 8</td>
<td>Final Year Student of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), North South University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of HR personnel

**HR personnel 1:** Senior Manager, Human Resources, TUV SUD Bangladesh Pvt Ltd (12 Years’ Experience)

**HR Personnel 2:** Manager, Leads Corporation (12 Years’ Experience)

**HR personnel 3:** Manager, HR & Admin, Bangladesh China Power Company (PVT.) Limited (15 Years’ Experience)

List of Engineers

**Engineer 1:** Senior Principal Officer, One Bank Limited (10 Years’ Experience)

**Engineer 2:** Coordinator, JIKA (10 years’ Experience)
ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study has been to analyse the use of English as *lingua franca* at an internationalised university in a non-English speaking country, the challenges caused by the need to use English for academic and social purposes as well as the use of other languages by a multicultural student community.

**Methodology:** The methodology was based on qualitative research and involved open-ended interviews with students of 14 nationalities as well as staff members, both local (Polish) and from English-speaking countries.
Findings: The main findings indicate: a degree of mismatch between the self-perception of English language competence and the actual ability to use it; the key function of language for social bonding; frequent recourse to first language comfort zones rather than the use of the lingua franca.

Value Added: The research focuses on English language issues in a non-English speaking country, an understudied area in higher education. It draws attention to the use of Russian as a secondary lingua franca among students for whom it is their other language of fluent communication.

Recommendations: University level educators should be more aware of the specificity of the problems in the use of English by international students, including such as underestimated listening comprehension issues, tensions connected with the use of polite forms and the mismatch between communication skills in English and the academic needs. The impact of language identity on international students social networking should be taken into account as well.

Key words: English, lingua franca, internationalized higher education, first language, communication

JEL codes: I21 (Education and Research Institutions / Analysis of Education) plus, I23 (Education and Research Institutions/ Higher Education - Research Institutions)

Introduction

The use of English as lingua franca is a fait accompli of the modern world. Within a plethora of its functions in the globalized world English has also become the language of academia, including the dynamically developing sector of international higher education, where it is used both for instruction and social communication. Yet internationalized universities, especially in non-English speaking countries, remain strongly multilingual communities. The presence of multiple languages in such multicultural academic communities results in diverse patterns of social interaction and personal identities which stem from the choice and fluency in the use of language/s.

The findings reported in this paper have been obtained through interviews conducted in a department of English Studies at a private university in Warsaw, Poland, where the language of instruction is English, while students represent multiple nationalities. The dominant languages in use, apart
from English, are the local Polish, and then Russian, Chinese and Spanish. These languages do not exhaust the linguistic diversity as students in this institution represent nearly 50 countries. The majority come from the former republics of the Soviet Union (especially Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan), but also China, Turkey and Spain. To some extent this national distribution corresponds to the overall situation in Poland – in recent years the largest groups of international students have come from Ukraine, Belarus, India, Norway, Spain and Sweden (MNiSW, 2013, p. 16; Pucułek, 2017), both as degree students and through mobility programs.

In the analysed group the interviewed students were English majors (both degree and mobility students) of the following nationalities: 14 Chinese, 12 Ukrainian, 8 Turkish, 3 Kazakh, 3 Uzbek, 2 Armenian (with Russian citizenship), 2 Belorussian, 2 Russian, 2 Spanish, 1 Egyptian, 1 Italian, 1 Moroccan, 1 South Korean. Additionally 15 local Polish students were interviewed, as well as 11 faculty members (Polish, Canadian, British, Irish, South-African). Altogether 78 respondents agreed to answer questions related to the experience of being part of a multicultural academic community. The interviews took place between 2015 – 2018. Each lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. They were conducted in English, with Polish students and Polish faculty members usually in Polish. Fragments from the interviews are quoted verbatim, in the case of those conducted in Polish, in translation.

The basis for the interview was qualitative methodology, employing an open-ended interview format. The interviews were similar in style to those practiced in ethnography – generally unstructured and not standardized. The assumption was that, considering the diversity of the interviewees, the ethnographic approach would be useful, that is following the train of thought of the interviewee who, though prompted, largely determines which themes and in which order s/he wants to mention them (Kostera & Krzyworzeka, 2012, p. 176). There was a framework for the interview, but the interviewees were allowed to wander away from the question asked. Free, open-ended interviews enabled them to reveal how they felt in the academic reality of an
international university, thus also taking into account their different, culturally determined styles of conversation. “Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view.” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 267). The framework for the interview included warm-up questions to encourage a positive atmosphere, followed by lead questions referring to the following cross-cultural perspectives: communication and interaction with the faculty and fellow students, use of English and other languages, non-verbal communication, classroom interaction, time perception and any other issues which the respondent felt were of interest in his/her perception of the academic environment. Use of English and other languages came through as one of the main motifs in each interview.

Self-perception of English skills

In the department of English Studies from which the interviewees were recruited, a high level of proficiency in English is expected of all students at the entry to the programme. In reality, however, both degree and mobility students represent diverse skills in English. Still, most interviewees claimed, directly or indirectly, that their competence in English was good or very good. Only some Chinese, Turkish and Spanish students admitted having problems. Chinese students in particular complained about difficulties with listening comprehension and in expressing themselves. Asked about specific difficulties in the use of English some interviewees added such details as the word order or use of pronouns, but mostly listening comprehension, academic writing and speaking were indicated as problematic areas. The listening comprehension difficulties were largely confirmed by the faculty, as one teacher interviewee noted, “[students’] listening skills are atrocious”.

The interviewees, with the exception of some of the Chinese ones, had sufficient fluency to carry on conversation in the interviews which, on purpose, went on in a stress-free atmosphere. Yet most interviewees’ use of
English was challenged by diverse types of grammatical, lexical and phonetic problems. Asked about the ease of communication interviewees tended to say that it was easy to communicate with the teachers, but sometimes less so with fellow students. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the faculty are often trained in the area TEFL, and both NS and NNS of English can in some way adapt their speaking style to international students whose listening comprehension may not be well developed. The adaptation to the needs of NNS of English was confirmed by a Chinese student who had studied finance in England before coming to Poland and commented that “teachers’ English here [in Warsaw] is better than in the UK”. What transpired from the interview with her was that during her studies in Britain she could not understand spoken English for a long time, especially as the majority of her teachers at the British university were from India. The Chinese student claimed that it had taken her most of the semester to finally begin to understand her UK lecturers. In Warsaw she experienced no problems.

Some international students noted difficulties with listening comprehension ascribing them to what they perceived as the Polish way of using English. One of the Chinese interlocutors said that at the beginning of her stay in Warsaw “Polish English was a big problem”, and this was her first experience of studying outside of China. A Turkish respondents also said she needed time to get used to English in Poland which she said was at first “a bit difficult”. Yet such experiences were mentioned only occasionally.

Altogether language issue at the university in Warsaw seems less of a problem than it is reported in Sovic’s (2013, pp. 95–97) study of experiences of international art students in London. Negative experiences reported by the students in that study often seem to have language as the trigger. British teachers in the UK mostly do not make any concessions towards international students in terms of pace of speaking or the use of idiom, as their priority are UK students. Since in Warsaw all students (including home students) are non-native users of English, teachers (Polish and native speakers of English) in one way or another adjust their English, if not in the teaching materials,
than certainly in oral communication. All this provides students with a sense of comfort in communication, which, however, often leads them astray when it comes to more challenging academic tasks. The opinion of the faculty members on the students’ English language skills was often critical. They confirmed that there seemed to be a problem between the self-perception of sufficient English language skills by the students themselves and inadequate competence for academic tasks.

Most students speak fluently, function without problems among English-speaking peers, communicate with teachers, participate in some class activities, but are not prepared to use English for academic purposes of reading and writing. Their command of English represents “surface fluency” which is deceptive, as has been noted by various observers of international students using English for studying (Cammish, 1997, p. 144). Such students, speaking English fluently, do not understand texts above those that can be found on the Internet and are unable to write grammatically, control sentence structure or create texts in a complex way required for an academic degree. The discrepancy between oral skills sufficient for functional English and those skills required for academic proficiency results in a strong sense of discomfort to deal with the requirements. Writing for academic purposes involves special skills far above functional English, such as the use of complex sentence structure, academic vocabulary and register, appropriate conventions, impersonal style with preference for passive voice, use of evidence and references. “Academic writing involves the ability to communicate ideas following the epistemological frameworks and disciplinary conventions of a given subject or a field of knowledge (Górska, 2013, p. 191)”. Lack of command of more sophisticated English often leads to failure in key courses, in Practical English exams or diploma seminars. One of the Ukrainian interviewees stressed how easy it was to communicate with the teachers, but the same student had serious problems with writing her MA thesis. A teacher interlocutor noted that in fact all students have sufficient language skills for communication, even Chinese students who are most
likely to have problems, but for academic needs students’ language skills are frequently insufficient. Content courses in particular create difficulties to students of all nationalities; questions asked by teachers in class often need to be rephrased so that students understand. Answers are related to the questions, but only vaguely. Possibly the problem here is not only linguistic but also connected to the ability to transform information.

An indication of a greater comfort in the use of the first language rather than English is evident in the tendency of Polish students to switch to Polish in individual conversations with Polish tutors, regardless of whether the aim is social or academic. This turn towards search for comfort becomes even more striking in the case of Ukrainian, Belorussian or Russian students who become fluent in Polish. Their fluency in the local language is usually achieved as a result of the length of stay (often more than 3 years), a part-time (or even full-time) job in the Polish-speaking environment, learning Polish in some systematic way and sometimes some prior knowledge of Polish (family roots). When these students become fully comfortable using Polish, it definitely facilitates their functioning within the Warsaw academic environment, also in the areas of communicating with fellow Polish students and with the Polish university administration. Then they also tend to approach Polish teachers through the medium of Polish. With regard to this last situation there is no practical need to do so – English would work equally well. Yet often they clearly begin to prefer Polish over English, or they enter the process of code-switching, “moving from one language to another in the same communicative act” (Komorowska & Krajka, 2016, p. 44). Code-switching may be a sign of language shift or language loss, “but it can also derive from a consciously chosen conversational strategy” (Extra & Verhoven, 1999, p. 43). Students who code-switch in English and Polish probably apply this strategy in situations when they feel that using Polish is more adequate, for emotional or practical reasons. The emotional factors may involve the desire for stronger bonding with Poles, while the practical need would include for instance the use of vocabulary connected with living in Poland, such
as “tramwaj” (Polish for tram, streetcar) or “dziekanat” (students’ office). In either case code-switching represents what Komorowska & Krajka (2016, p. 57) suggest, that is “empathy and creativity” in conversation. However, inadequacy in the use of English may remain a factor as well, and the local language replaces the lingua franca.

Other research indicates that studying in Poland, when the programme is conducted in Polish, makes foreign students happier than when they study in English: “Lower satisfaction levels were reported among those foreign students who followed their programme of studies in English than among those who studied in Polish.” (Bryła, 2015, p. 2076). In view of that it becomes understandable why, even when the international students’ ultimate goal is to excel in English, once they can communicate in Polish, they switch to the local language, or code-switch in English and Polish.

The faculty’s observations of students problems in the use of English for academic efficiency are similar to the results of a study conducted in the United States with reference to international students’ retention at American universities (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014, p. 55). The study indicated a mismatch between students’ evaluation of their language skills and the perception of these skills by the receiving academic institutions. In the study of top reasons why international students leave the university before graduation the institutions identified inadequate English language skills as “the fourth most important reason for departure” (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014, p. 55). The students themselves, in all categories (from BA level to doctoral), did not mention language difficulties at all. Both the American study and the research reported here suggest certain resistance on behalf of international students to accept what it really means to know English sufficiently well for academic purposes.

An underestimated problem of internationalization of higher education is the gap between emphasis on communication in TEFL and “an international mindset” (Byram, 2019, p. 100) as languages are taught with emphasis on the development of communication, but without promoting values educa-
tion. As a result communication in a *lingua franca* often stops at a functional level, without allowing for comfort of being together by people of different first languages. This phenomenon is indicated by communication networks observed at internationalized universities.

**Communication networks**

In order to understand the university system, especially the requirements, students use various information networks. Most interviewees indicated the same sequence in search for information: first they would ask their co-nationals, then classmates, finally the teachers. Erasmus students indicated other Erasmus students as their main social/information network, adding also the international office. The same is confirmed by other research into Erasmus students’ social networks: the first group of access and support for international students is formed by their own co-nationals, the second circle by Erasmus students, and only the third by the host nation students (Biłas-Henne, 2011). This study indicated also that the level of relationship often coincided with linguistic sameness, not necessarily nationality, as Russian speaking students indicated other Russian speaking students, of various nationalities, as their main network of contact.

With regard to classroom communication all faculty respondents noted students’ unwillingness to ask questions in public, although it was suggested that a degree of change occurred over the course of studies, with the third year students, regardless of national background, more likely to ask questions in public. This shift results from both acculturation and improvement in the use of English.

Chinese students tended to comment on how in Warsaw they would communicate more with teachers than at their home universities: „here you communicate more with teachers, at home – with friends”; “in China you ask with friends, here teacher”; “Chinese teachers have more students to take care of”. Both Chinese students and Warsaw faculty would note, however,
that communication took place outside of the classroom, in a more private context, not in front of other students. One of Chinese students’ generalized that in China “we raise questions after class”. A faculty member felt that Asian students would not ask questions in public as they might consider it rude or demonstrating lack of respect. Chinese students would often approach faculty members with their enquiries in small groups, discussing the teacher’s answer in Chinese among themselves. A faculty respondent stressed that communication attitudes of international students would be strongly connected with language competence; in her experience Asian students with good English skills would ask a lot of questions. This observation can be corroborated by a Chinese student’s opinion concerning willingness to approach teachers: “the main barrier is the language”.

Beyond language there is the issue of attitude and perception of the teacher by international students. One of the Kazakh interviewees, who had previously studied in her home country and in Turkey, observed “here teachers respond to your interest, they are personal in their responses though formal […] Kazakh and Turkish teachers are more like mom and dad”. Sensing such a difference undoubtedly reflects the teaching staff’s Western efforts at professionalism and efficiency, yet behaving in a way less influenced by the Eastern attitudes of trust and reciprocation, with the family as the model of relations. Asian students often view the teachers as having a parental role (Liu, 2001, p. 24); “[t]he Chinese see learning as depending on the teacher for knowledge, and also for care, concern and help since the teacher–student relationship is reciprocal: students respect and obey the teacher, the teacher teaches and cares for students like a parent.” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 85). The Kazakh student’s use of the “mom and dad” metaphor for academic teachers refers also to the issue of care in higher education. International students, living in a foreign country, are more likely than local ones to turn to their teachers for pastoral care. The question is whether teachers are prepared for care-giving duties and how well these can be provided without a shared first language.
Some interviewees commented upon problems about receiving information in class. They felt it was insufficient that teachers tended to give instructions only once, complaining that “Information in class is given only once which is not enough”, “Home assignments could be explained better” or “Sometimes they say something important only once – it’s not enough, in Kazakhstan or Turkey it’s repeated twice.” Still the truth may be that in the home country things were not said twice, but were understood properly after the first time as there was no language barrier.

Another communication obstacle revealed in this research is the often invisible area of the rules of politeness which participants want to observe, but are not always certain of when using the lingua franca. The need to observe the rules of politeness and uncertainty about the linguistic apparatus for such may affect international students’ willingness to communicate with their elders, the faculty members in the academic context. Polite behaviour matters in particular to students from Asian cultures, but others are equally likely to feel uncomfortable when uncertain about the appropriateness of social behavior.

One faculty interlocutor stressed students’ tendency not to ask questions as much as they should and failing to enquire about important matters. In his opinion Turkish students in particular have a problem in this area, though for all students, regardless of nationality, the difficulty lies in their not knowing “the art of asking questions” and when they do ask, “it comes through as impolite”. Possibly students avoid situations which feel awkward. Turkish students’ reluctance to ask questions may be particularly closely linked to their unwillingness to appear rude in the interaction with teachers, because of the culture of respect towards elders in which they are raised. Turkish youth are brought up to be polite and deferential toward elders, such behaviour instilled in them at home and in school. With this strong attitude of respect the sense of inability to come up with appropriate phrasing of questions in English, connected with the school tradition of not challenging the teacher, may altogether result in an emotional condition discouraging Turkish students from interacting with the teachers when communicating in English.
They feel they may not behave in a desired style of politeness as they lack linguistic tools necessary for the appropriate impression of a person with a correct attitude towards his or her elders.

In Chinese culture children are also brought up to respect their elders. They learn it is extremely important to address adults with correct appellations. They might avoid communicating with adults when they do not know how to address them properly. Quite possibly some of that ingrained fear of trespassing the rules of politeness is present when they communicate in English, or, rather, avoid doing it not to use inappropriate forms. One of the Chinese interviewees admitted to the awareness of the possibility that Chinese users of English may sound rude. The same interviewee stressed that in contact situations with older people – such as teachers – for Chinese students the natural behavior is only to listen, not to raise questions.

Thus communication apprehension of Asian students may stem from unease about appearing im/polite while relating to their elders, as well as from the desire not to lose face in the process. Both are related to “the notion that high context cultures will produce higher levels of CA” (Pryor et al., 2005, p. 247). The uncertainty in the use of appropriate English contributes to potential communication breakdowns. Insecure use of English is an element of the bigger problem of reluctance to speak in public settings and communicating with people who are higher in the hierarchy.

These problems in communication stem also from the TEFL curricula in which the art of asking questions is not given enough prominence. As a result non-native users of English are not equipped with the skill of asking questions politely. When they do ask, the utterance (or the whole experience) comes through as clumsy (because of wrong sentence structure, insufficient use of polite phrases and/or wrong intonation). Consequently, even if NNS do not fully realize what has gone wrong, they feel that communication was not quite successful and shy away from the next attempt. Polish students almost always, outside of the class context, address the Polish faculty in Polish, which may be dictated not only by the ease of communication in the
native language, but also by a greater sense of comfort with regard to the social norms of politeness. The same happens with those Ukrainian and Russian speaking students who acquire good Polish language skills after a longer stay in Poland. Such students’ preference to communicate with Polish teachers in Polish is likely connected with a sense of social comfort through employing politeness as much as effectiveness of communication.

For purposes of getting information and socially adequate behavior, English as *lingua franca* in a multicultural academic community works less smoothly than might be expected. Insecurity about politeness and loss of face affect social interaction in subtle, but potentially detrimental ways.

**First language zones of comfort**

Language clusters at the observed university are formed in all social spaces: classrooms, corridors, cafes and the courtyard. All teachers observe certain patterns upon entering the classroom: the students have chosen such seating that they are clustered in their language zones, Polish, Chinese, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish (though usually with some individuals breaking the pattern), chattering in their own languages. The criterion for clustering together is not so much nationality as the linguistic comfort provided by the first language, visible in the ease with which Russian speaking students establish small groups regardless of nationality. Russian speaking students come from the former Soviet Union, but represent various nations – they may be Russian, Ukrainian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Belarusian, Armenian. These differences may matter when it comes to friendships or other types of close relationships, but in interactions within the university context nationality is secondary to the native/first language (or the second language if the student is bilingual, as is frequently the case with Ukrainians). A Ukrainian interlocutor, speaking of Russian as “so popular here”, mentioned her friends from Azerbaijan and indicated that Russian language was the basis for social bonding. An Armenian respondent with perfect use of English said she would willingly use
Russian in contacts with other Russian speaking students because “we help each other”. She noted that “people here stick to their language groups”. One of the Russian respondents said she usually interacted with Ukrainians because “we have the same language”, adding emphatically: “when we spend time with other students speaking Russian we don’t feel any barrier”. One of the Ukrainian interviewees, from Western Ukraine, whose native language is Ukrainian, stressed that, especially at the beginning, she definitely preferred to be with other Ukrainians, speaking the common language.

Reliance on the first language for comfort decreases to some extent with the length of stay, while with some Slavonic students it is replaced by competent use of Polish. Ukrainian and Russian speaking students, who become fluent in Polish, begin to mix with Poles effortlessly. One of the Ukrainian respondents, with a Polish background, speaking Polish fluently, mentioned a Polish female student as her best friend. A Polish respondent expressed her opinion of good relations between Ukrainians and Poles, but added that this bonding was possible because Ukrainians were capable of speaking Polish “excellently”. An Armenian respondent (Russian speaking), who quickly acquired fluent Polish, offered: “my entrance into the Polish groups was earned because I spoke Polish”. She expressed her conviction that using Polish language would break the communication barrier while using English would build it, although she strongly stressed that this would not be so with all Polish students.

Apparently for many Polish students, even though they have chosen English as their field of studies, using English for out-of-class purposes, is still outside their comfort zone. The discomfort of using English was confirmed by one of the Polish student interviewees who claimed “Poles are afraid to speak English”. In consequence they might be avoiding foreign students simply because they shun the effort of small talk in English, as they have not internalized the language sufficiently to feel fully comfortable with it for social purposes. Quite likely the same is felt by foreign students who, therefore, outside the class, prefer to spend time with the same first language friends. Two Polish interviewees who insisted they cherished
speaking English and had no problems using it all the time admitted that, after several hours of classes in English, they experienced a feeling of fatigue with using a non-native language.

Chinese students lead in the tendency to stick to their own language group. Chinese respondents were quite aware of their preference to stay with their own co-nationals. This preference was noted in the interviews with other students. A Polish interviewee with a background of earlier experiences in international education stressed “we do our best to talk English to them [Chinese students]”, but spoke at length about the difficulties of establishing closer relations with Chinese students. She described Asian students as “very quiet, conservative, well-behaved, friendly”, pointing out that if one initiated conversation, it “ends with just a few words and doesn’t lead to much, they are approachable, smile, but no deeper conversation is possible”. Another Polish respondent, when talking about Chinese classmates, described them as “self-isolating” adding that she thought they were shy and maybe not sure if they would manage. Other respondents described Chinese students using phrases such as: “Chinese always stick together”; “Asian students seem happier with their own friends”; or generalized “the cultures of the East do not mix [with others]”. The interlocutor who noted Chinese students’ preference for their own company stressed that she had observed the same absence of interaction between Asian and non-Asian students in two other countries where she had received some of her education, namely in the Netherlands and in Scotland. From both these countries she recalled the same images of Chinese students “whispering among themselves, very much into technology, happy when left to themselves”. This observation complies with what one of the Chinese interlocutors has formulated as “our habit to get together”, when asked about interacting with Chinese or non-Chinese students. One of the Uzbek interviewees complained about the difficulty of communicating with Polish students, who seemed unwilling to interact, but stressed that it was easy for her to form relationships with Chinese students. In that case the language of communication was English, though this interviewee said that
she also interacted easily with Ukrainians, but on the grounds of Russian, her second language, which she could use fluently.

Chinese students in the interviews largely confirmed that the interaction with non-Chinese may be difficult. One of the interviewees clearly mentioned a potential sense of embarrassment in communication with non-Chinese students. Another said simply “we are totally different” while yet another pointed out that “Chinese students are a little shy” and sometimes “don’t know how to start a conversation”. There was a suggestion “it may be humiliating to talk to other students”. Still, desires to establish contact were expressed: “we want to make foreign friends”, “[we] like to get along with foreign students”, “[we] like to talk to people from different countries”. The very last statement came in answer to the question about the best aspect of the experience of studying in Warsaw, and came along with the statement that the interlocutor “was not good at being with strangers, now better”. The Chinese interviewees spoke diversely of contacts with Polish students: positively when giving opinions such as “I like Polish students”, “Polish students are very friendly”, but also more problematically, formulating their observations as “Polish students are a little bit indifferent” and “they [Polish students] look very cold but maybe they are not like that”. One Chinese respondent stressed it was natural for Chinese people to keep together, but in her case she appreciated the fact that in her particular MA program there were no other Chinese students – this way her social contacts were students of other nationalities.

The above responses of Chinese students suggested some willingness to get involved in intercultural communication and take steps towards integration with the host academic community. Yet culturally different patterns of interaction and insecure English language skills create a challenge while remaining within one’s own language zone gives a sense of emotional comfort.

The first/native language as a key factor of social interaction is by no means a specific Warsaw phenomenon. Similar examples can be quoted from other parts of the world. When American students decide to take part
of their study abroad, they mostly go to English speaking countries. Some choose Italy and Spain, still, as Martha Bayles observes, they tend to travel in groups, “perhaps learning something of the culture but rarely becoming immersed in the language. Indeed, according to one expert, most American students who brave non-English-speaking countries tend to remain in English speaking enclaves, including ‘transplanted’ American college environments.” (Bayles, 2014, p. 224).

Existence of native language speaking enclaves seems to be part and parcel of international academic institutions. The same language implies the ease of similar cultural patterns. Using the native language provides the comfort of avoiding misunderstandings of expression “but also of intent” (Lewis, 2006, p. 66). The existence of Russian speaking zones which put together students of various nationalities demonstrates that the first language connects people across ethnic backgrounds.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above study. English as the lingua franca is the fact and the future of communication in internationalized higher education. Yet there are areas in which it fails to work smoothly, while international students are likely to achieve higher levels of comfort and satisfaction with their studies if they learn fluently the local language. The following challenges have been noted in this research:

• The discrepancy between self-perception of English language competence and the actual ability to handle academic tasks and fulfill social functions affects both effectiveness of studying and students’ well-being. This mismatch may lower international students’ confidence and their academic progress.

• The fluency in the use of English for everyday communication may decrease the awareness of the necessity to progress to a higher level in the academic use of English, necessary for effectiveness and success in learning.
• Problems with English language skills, particularly listening comprehension, may be underestimated by educators at university level and at preparatory courses.
• Inadequate competence in the use of polite forms in English affects the necessary intensity of communication with the faculty, especially in the case of Asian students who come from societies where strong significance is attached to politeness towards older people, to harmony in interpersonal relations and to the avoidance of loss of face.
• Language trumps nationality – social relations are most of all determined by linguistic identity which in the higher education context takes precedence over ethnic background.
References


The Practical Aspects of Employer Branding in the Light of the Findings of Qualitative Primary Research

SUPPORTED BY THE NEW NATIONAL EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME OF THE MINISTRY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES
ABSTRACT

Objective: Our study presents the partial results of the research with the Z generation, which aims to get acquainted with and explore the specific features of selecting Human Resources Professionals (HR) in order to increase employment, especially through the applicability of the tools of employee branding. Our main objective is to explore the tools that can be implemented in the branding process for the potential employees of the Z generation and to demonstrate the practical applicability of these elements to improve investment. In addition, we aim to explore the generational-specific characteristics of investments, what challenges should be addressed today by a HR specialist, what solutions and practices are used in relation to the relevant response to these challenges.

Methodology: In this publication, we present the partial results of a research project, supported by the New National Excellence Program of the Ministry of Human Resources (ÚNKP-18-3-III). In the first phase of the research project, we conducted a qualitative examination (B2C, B2B), in which we conducted thirty mini-focus interviews (using semi-structured interview guides). The subjects were recruited using a snowball sampling method, the filtering condition was the age of the subject. Only the subjects remained in the sample who, according to their age, belong to the Z generation.

Findings: As a result of this research, we can see what the HR specialists interviewed think the benefits of employer branding are if they are able to act with a conscious and strategic approach to HR activities. Investigating consumer attitudes related to investments - despite the recognition of their significance - is less well-researched, and articles of empirical research also appear in international literature today. In order to fill the gap, we would like to contribute to Hungarian studies.

Value Added: In our view, the results can provide useful information to companies who have similar difficulties in dealing with recruitment challenges and generational differences. In this paper we present the qualitative partial results of primary research. Both secondary and primary research show that a key factor for successful companies is the existence of a credible, internal employer branding strategy that continuously reflects on the labour market challenges. It is important that the employer’s brand - just like a product / service brand – should be well-positioned with clear values and messages. The other important aspect is the coordination of the activities of the individual groups and areas, because marketing, PR and HR are the builders and representatives of the same brand. You can then be successful and credible with your employer branding if all the details – similarly to a puzzle - are in place.

Recommendations: Without the strategic approach, the directions, the goals, and the alignment of the activities are not identified, which is reflected in inefficiencies. The employer’s brand has a well-positioned value, message and mission, which plays an especially important role in increasing the loyalty of young people (Y and Z generations).
1. The theoretical background of the topic

During the examination of the current Hungarian labour market, it can be seen that the quantitative and qualitative composition of the workforce is becoming more and more problematic. This problem emerges as an absolute obstacle to corporate growth and the development of investments. The recovery of investments has an absolute positive impact on the economy. As during the economic crisis in 2008, the downturn in the investment sector had a direct negative impact on the performance of the economies, the currently perceptible positive change has the same effect, but with the opposite sign. This kind of cyclical sensitivity makes us think of the components of the investment sector, such as exploring labour market problems, getting acquainted with the relationship between choice and brand building, and identifying generation-specific changes in unemployment and structural rearrangement. The labour market is undergoing a lot of changes; just to mention a few: there is shortage of labour, different generations live side by side and how to motivate them is quite different, and, also, competences of the employees are changing (Cseh-Papp & Varga, 2018; Cseh-Papp et al., 2017; Varga et al., 2016; Varga et al., 2015; Bárdos et al., 2014).

Our research focuses on the extent to which and how the factors revealed affect the labour market demand of the investment sector, what changes they make in terms of age-related differences between generations, and what are the factors that can help reduce the frictions of different generations in a work area. Different age groups, different preferences and different corporate strategies are required in the selection process. The shortage of labour and, in particular, the shortage of skilled workers has an impact on
the feasibility of investments, taking into account the wage inflation that has begun, which means that the planned budget is no longer sustainable.

Our paper concentrates on the labour market situation, selection and the Z generation.

Economic policy has also recognized the difficulties of labour migration and lack of qualification in the recruitment process of companies, and has taken a number of measures, such as the raising of the minimum wage, the modification of public employment rules, and the stimulation of domestic mobilization. The employment rate of those aged between 15 and 64 from July 2017 to September 2017 increased to 68.7%. There is also some improvement in unemployment over the past year. According to the International Labour Organization, the Hungarian unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2017 amounted to 203.1 people, which has declined significantly since the crisis. Between June and August 2018, the average employment rate for this age group was 4 million 484 thousand and the employment rate rose to 69.4%. It is interesting to look at the tendency when the number of employees who are public employees has increased while the number of those who work abroad has decreased according to the CSO 2018 June-August Flash Report (www.ksh.hu, 2018).

Overall, the number of Hungarian employees showed a positive trend in 2017 and 2018 and could be increased with the aforementioned government measures (Europa.eu, 2017).

1.1. The specific characteristics and consumer features of Generation Z

The generation of Facebook has grown into a fast-paced, continuously present, ubiquitous community. If Generation Y works on three monitors at the same time, Z on five. They have much more partners to co-operate with and are able to communicate much more quickly than any generation before. A time spent on more than one relationship is less, and attention is
being rather paid to the communities. Then, we can best match the needs of the new generation if the activities we want them to be involved are made more social. Not the way that is social to us, but the way it is to them. Communication on the social network is made up of well-fictional slogans and pictorial worlds. Few text, many images, preferably moving and dynamic. If you like, we communicate in advertising. Therefore, you must have clear, personal, and credible messages to connect with Z generation in high quality. Technological separation is bidirectional, so it interferes with young people as much as less young people. To connect, you need to provide security for each other; a friendly tone and acceptance is required. It may have never been so necessary to raise awareness of the intergenerational relationship as it is now for Generation Z. (Tari, 2011).

While one of the young people’s favourite pastimes was previously “hanging” in the shopping centres, it was a survey of last year that it has changed by now. The turnover in large shopping centres, which was generated by secondary school students, decreased by thirty percent, and therefore more and more shopping malls are forced to close – as was revealed by a survey of US Quartz 2017, with 7500 teenagers. Young people prefer to buy online and chat in cafes. According to the American youth, spending time in the mall is not quite as popular as shopping. Instead, they get into a restaurant, drink coffee, talk, and spend so-called quality time with their friends. It is clear from the survey that these young people order online instead of conventional shopping. According to recent surveys, web shops have a growing number of new registered customers in their twenties. This tendency also reached Hungary, but the young people of Hungary, if they can and have their home near shopping centre, still enjoy spending their free time there. It is a thought-provoking fact that there is a more frequent use of drugs among young people frequenting shopping centres on average, as compared to their peers, while the young people’s lifestyle and mentality in the shopping centres are likely to be trend setter to a great extent. The patterns also contain experiences and behaviour skills, the need for mood
conditions that young people believe can receive through drugs, or take as a value and be available by influencing this stratum. If so, the mall may also be a venue for drug prevention, and generally a terrain of mental health assistance, where there is potential to represent healthier values and patterns on the spot, or to counteract negative patterns there. As a meeting place and a venue for socialising the shopping centre can also represent healthy self-reflexive effects and provide consultancy options (Laszlo, 2017).

In general, about 10% of the total area of the shopping centres gives space for recreational activities. Many people associate the shopping centre with the city, which is considered one of the common characteristics of modern metropolitan life and the phenomenon of entertainment. The young generation needs fun, experience, tasting, touching, amazement, admiration, a thrill, so in one word: entertainment.

Noteworthy, for example, is the research result according to which the more frequently a young person goes out to visit a shopping centre, the more likely they are to report depressive symptoms, and those frequenting shopping centres on a regular daily basis can be characterised by the lowest self-esteem. In this respect, we also consider it important to initiate the opening of alternative centres in the shopping centres, as they can help to tackle effective environmental coping, for example, tackling drug-related problems is the best where the person with the problem feels comfortable. Research results show that the youngsters visiting the shopping centre would enter for a cosy, relaxed, calm, central but yet slightly secluded place, where there is no discerns and where young employees are working.

Within the framework of the Hungarian Youth research, eight thousand young people aged between 15 and 29 commented on their family making plan, the possibility for the labour market, their plans for further learning and consumer habits. The recreational spaces and activities of the young people have not changed fundamentally, as still they are addicted to the screen, the attendance of cultural institutions is insignificant. Young people continue to spend their time after fulfilling their obligations at home and at
their friends, but it is worth mentioning here that a large group of respondents spend their leisure time with sports.

Around a quarter of the young people ‘do nothing special’ during the week or at the weekend. This state is true primarily in the capital city, where about 30 percent stated to do nothing special on weekdays and 26 percent at weekends, respectively.

The existence of a company of friends is basic and decisive. The 2016 data shows that the younger age group the respondent is, the more time they spend with friends, and the more friends they have.

In 2016, 14 percent of the Hungarian youth did not have friends or company with which they could often spend their free time. This ratio in 2012 reached 24 percent, in 2008 13 percent. Among the lonely young people, people living in the rural communities are over-represented. It was an important aspect to analyse young people’s relation to culture and cultural consumption since the large-scale research on the young starting in 2000. Similarly to the previous investigations, young people were asked again about how many traditional and electronic books (e-books) they have in their homes.

In 2004, the young people interviewed reported an average of 344 books. 2008 in the households of young people interviewed had an average of 265 books, and 175 in 2012. In 2016, the number of traditional books further decreased, with an average of 172 pieces reported by young people. Only 12% of households had more than 300 books, have one book, and 6 percent of young people have no books in their homes (in 2004 this was 4 percent).

In 2012 the average number of e-books was 4, which doubled by 2016. These types of books are most popular among the 20-to 24-year-olds (Laszlo, 2017).

1.2. The connection between labour market and employer branding

Conscious, well-organized and coordinated employer branding is an effective strategic tool to give responses to labour market challenges. Our empirical
experience is that when it comes to job advertisements, more and more companies are turning to a typical branding tool used in marketing for decades, which can help distinguish the job position, place of work, brand positioning the employer as a brand and make them more attractive.

The labour market is changing in the world as well, and more and more important aspects such as work and life balance, a stress-free working environment and an inspirational workplace atmosphere are becoming increasingly important.

Employer Branding plays an increasingly important role in the lives of many companies, including Hungary. These companies are increasingly responding to employee needs and adapting their brand to this expectation. Employer branding means both external and internal branding simultaneously, and their combined presence provides tangible results.

Changes in internal marketing have been observed in the major segments of the marketing in recent years, which have an outstanding role to play. Employer brand is the image created by the company, which each institution possesses, and it affects the composition and qualifications of employees and candidates. This is a well-established employer brand for particular companies, which is a tangible competitive advantage in gaining talented labour force. However, there are a number of examples where it just assists a recruiting process or intensifies the effectiveness of internal communication.

Employer branding is a more complex concept: the company and the employee work closely with the organization and both the hardship and the success are directly or indirectly borne together.

The key role of employer branding is to provide a logical framework for management, which simplifies and focuses on priorities, improves productivity, improves recruitment and other HR processes, promotes employee retention and commitment. From this point of view, it is important to have the right Employer Branding strategy, which communicates well with new employees, both about the employees and the company. The potential worker thus sees a real picture that attracts a company that is right for him
and thus makes a job-choice decision easier, and companies can find the valuable workforce who can be a useful member of the selected workplace in the long run (Hrportal.hu, 2009; Profession.hu, 2018).

HR specialists report that the real volume and / or quality of the workforce is becoming more and more problematic. So, it is not surprising that employers are becoming more and more concerned about how to find and retain good workforce. One of the reasons for labour shortage is that there are fewer new entrants in the domestic labour market: 15 years ago, nearly 189,000 young people aged 24 were entering the labour market, their numbers did not reach 128,000 by 2015, according to CSO data. The other main reason is that many people go abroad for better pay. It also makes recruitment more difficult, because in many cases employers are most in need of a well-trained and experienced team (hrportal.hu, 2017).

Competitive pay is not enough, as there are many demotivating factors in a company, for example over-regulated corporate bureaucracy, inappropriate office temperature, and lack of individual improvement. Benefits are increasingly being incorporated into the basic salary (Csiszárik, 2016).

Direct head-hunter methods come in the forefront, and online data upload is put in the background. Wage tensions are more and more common. New staff have to be offered higher salaries, which creates unpleasant tensions between new entrants and those already at work (Matthias, 2017; Kópházi, 2017).

Selecting and retaining talents play an important role in HR policy. According to Joseph Renzulli’s “three-circle talent model,” 3 basic factors determine talent: above average ability, creativity, and task commitment. The Czeizel model includes four mental abilities (general intellectual, specific mental, creativity and motivation). Talent Management is a fairly popular research area within human resource management. The prerequisite for the management is 4 basic elements of planning, organization, management, and controlling. These factors play an important role in the recruitment, selection, retention and, last but not least, motivation of the workforce. Strategic planning is a key part of maintaining long-term co-operation. There is a need for a well-established
and regularly supervised employer brand that can simultaneously involve and retain talented employees (Borgulya & Konczosné, 2017; Giger, 2006).

In order to be able to build an employer’s brand efficiently and effectively from a strategic point of view, we need to know the brand’s values as well as what the employees are looking for to make this brand appealing. Therefore, the focus of our research was taken on the members of the Z generation as the potential target group of prospective employee / consumer needs, values and characteristics.

2. The methodological background of the research

In this publication, we present the partial results of a research project, supported by the New National Excellence Program of the Ministry of Human Resources (ÚNKP-18-3-III).

In the framework of the project we analysed the factors influencing the career and job choice of the Z generation through qualitative and quantitative techniques in the context of consumer and expert surveys. We also reviewed the opinions of the HR specialists on the employer’s side in the framework of expert interviews. Our goal is to provide points to help employers focusing on Z generation to effectively target a target group-oriented employer branding strategy, as well as to examine employer expectations and selection methods and compare the differences between them.

In the first phase of the research project, we conducted a qualitative examination (B2C, B2B), in which we conducted thirty mini-focus interviews (using semi-structured interview guides). The subjects were recruited using a snowball sampling method, the filtering condition was the age of the subject. Only the subjects remained in the sample who, according to their age, belong to the Z generation.

Up to 6 people could participate in one focus group, according to which the group composition was heterogeneous throughout the research, in order
to collide and compare opinions. A recording of the interviews was made. The results were processed using a traditional content analysis methodology.

The first qualitative (B2C) phase was to explore, to outline hypotheses and to prepare for the second step, i.e. quantitative research.

The main research questions of the qualitative phase were as follows.

· What does the generation think about career, success, and the preferred and disadvantaged workplace?

· What does their career, success in work mean, and what factors help them achieve their individual goals most effectively?

· How can the career goals that they formulate be achieved?

· What do they expect from a good job? Which employer’s activities and programmes may be most target group-specific for them?

· What kind of generation problems do the members of the sample perceive? How open are they to work with other generations, what are its advantages and disadvantages?

In the present research, we also conducted 7 expert interviews with representatives of the employers’ side in the framework of another qualitative survey with the help of a semi-structured interview.

· Our goal was to get to know the challenges and difficulties faced by practitioners in the labour market and what they experience regarding generational differences.

· What are the methods applied to address the Z generation?

· Are there HR, HR communication techniques, activities, campaigns that were judged effective on the basis of their empirical experience and would they recommend it to other employers wishing to open up to the Z generation?

In the research, we were interviewing automotive suppliers, manufacturing and development companies - HR managers of large and multinational companies and conducting interviews with HR specialists. The recruiting of the subjects was also done with the snowball method in this case. All five companies were located in Hungary but were foreign-owned: two operate in
the capital city, one in Békés, one in Csongrád and one in Veszprém County. Of the companies participating in the research, the smallest number of people was 300, the largest 3700 employees full time.

3. Results

Below, we summarize the results of the qualitative research and compare the revealed characteristics of the employee side (Z generation) in the light of the previous X and Y age groups and then present the expectations and experiences gained through the interviews of HR specialists in the selection of the employees.

3.1 Results of the focus group examinations

The results of our primary research in focus groups confirm that the expectations and preferences of the Z generation differ from expectations, habits, and job attitudes of the currently employed (X, Y) population.

The Z generation, also known as “super now”, is the true multitasking generation. They are acquainted with the different info communication tools because they are familiar with them and from their younger age they are active users, so they can easily choose the ideal tools for their individual needs. For them, online chat is every day, which is constantly changing, but they follow the latest technical options. They were born into this life-style, which is why they are also termed as “digital natives”.

Internet communication is mentioned by the American psychiatrist Dr. Elias Aboujaoude as a netspeak, where we often communicate through online space. These emoticons, which serve to express our emotions, take on the place of text messages, thus reducing the expression of our inner thoughts and emotions.

They want everything as soon as possible, so they use the aforementioned signals, and the text of their e-mail messages is getting shorter for speed.
Based on the replies of the subjects of the sample, in the case of the Z generation, the individual goals, individualism, the ability to pursue their own career and career paths are clearly appreciated. This is overlooked by the older generation who give priority to reliability, stability and predictability. That is why HR has been in marketing for a long time because it is used for differentiation: that is, the target groups, in this case, the exploration of the needs of the employees and the solutions that conform to it. That is why high standardization will no longer be effective in addressing and retaining workers with increasingly heterogeneous needs.

Contrary to earlier generations - who cannot show such sharp differences – they have different thinking, communication skills, and attitude to work. Their usefulness at work is creativity, robustness, fast phishing, and virtual skills. They are faster than the generations ahead, so they are a benefit to companies if the differences between the ages are handled. They need good working atmosphere, playful solutions and are really open to new ideas. Gamification offers playful solutions that target the talented Z generation. A generation longing for experiences is theirs who cannot withstand ongoing routine activities at the workplace, either. They are everyday explorers in whom there is a desire to be on the move day by day. This generation has innovative solutions for companies that can be used jointly with employer branding (Kis, 2016; Kovács, 2017).

Young people love and need interactivity and the use of modern technologies. Augmented reality is a means to catch the Z generation. One example of this was the introduction of the so-called “magic view glasses” to the next generation, enabling a virtual walk through the company. “These 360° images can be downloaded with an online application and the visitor accesses the virtual scene of the company using the glasses”.

Of course, it should also be taken into account that if we recruit manual workers from the X generation, the composition of the motivation toolbox differs from that of the intellectual ones. For intellectuals, career path and the possibility of achieving individual success undeniably dominate, but
the focus of manual workers is still on pay, stability and benefits. For them, individual goals and career paths are less motivating, but we must also say that over-evaluating individual goals over the older generation by the young generation, even among manual workers, is striking.

3.2 Results of the specialist interviews

In the current labour market environment, not only finding the right workforce, but keeping it as well as retaining its motivation is challenging for professionals. Keeping the workforce is an essential issue in terms of employer branding, since if the fluctuation is lower, it also qualifies as professionals and as a factor in increasing the brand value in the selection process means a kind of “quality workplace” in communication. This is an absolute positive message for the future employee, so one of the best recruitments for professionals. Workers are more attracted to the workplace where they meet with a satisfied workforce.

Typically, more prepared workers ask questions at job interviews.

- What is labour migration like and
- what about paid sick leave?

These considerations clearly reflect how long-term planning can be done in a given place, how demanding the job is for the employee.

- Experts have clearly emphasized that, in current market conditions, the consistency of internal and external communication is even more appreciated so
- we must not forget the encouragement of the current employees, in recruiting new ones.

That is why we have looked separately at what they do for the employees to create a better employee-employer relationship.

- All the experts said that family days are important for employees than corporate events, which provide an excellent opportunity for workers’ family members to get an insight into what they are doing, and where the wife, husband, father or mother works.
Some jobs do not invite only active workers to such events, but also mothers on maternity leave, with the aim of having a bond between the workplace and them.

Several companies invite their colleagues in retirement to such events as they are credibly able to report their experiences to younger colleagues with a perspective, showing an example to current staff.

Just as every brand, employer branding is built from the inside, feeds from the inside, so this is a reason of its credibility.

Current employees are the best messengers, ambassadors of a company. It is far more credible if someone speaks positively of a job who works there as the manager who wants them to work there.

In connection with corporate events, family days have been mentioned several times, the Christmas banquets, the regular team builders, whose purpose is to strengthen the community, team spirit and ease the internal tension.

Some of the sample members mentioned the following in connection with the greater consistency of internal communication and internal processes:

organizational development, efforts to optimize corporate processes.

These are complex and lengthy processes, cost, time and labour-intensive projects, but HR experts say they can do a lot to help simplify internal business systems and increase their efficiency. However, the necessity and the expected benefits of these developments must always be explained to the staff in every case.

Without the necessary education, such projects will also have less efficiency; internal acceptance and support are key factors for such process development provisions, as well.

There were four HR managers among the interviewed subjects where the manual workers were dominant. They were unanimously in the opinion that in the internal communication toolkit, besides the generational differences, attention must be paid to the different information needs of the intellectual and physical resources as well as the fact that a physical worker and an office worker have different possibilities to read internal news. “We
pay particular attention to using both online and offline communication channels to get information both for mental and physical resources. In addition, personal consultations are also available for staff (HR reception hours, employee briefing, one to one meetings).”

Some of the interviewed HR experts highlighted

- supporting the career path, ensuring the opportunity for individual development as a good workplace atmosphere, as these considerations contribute to employee satisfaction.
- The respondents also agreed that it is important to ensure adequate flow of information to provide the staff with the information: they need to know their goals, competences and responsibilities.
- They pay attention to make their appearances fit for the virtual, dynamic, and innovative needs of the Y and Z generation, using gamification and an interactive communication style.

Several interviewees have stressed that a number of methods are used to manage the internal brand professionally so that they can meet all the needs and expectations. To this end, they provide their employees with business phones, home-based work, free health care, and social responsibility. Some people mentioned lack of internal communication when there is insufficient coordination, cooperation between the HR and marketing communication activities of the outside target group.

Our experts agreed and highlighted the importance of CSR in employer branding. Similarly, earlier research shows that for the Z generation it is really important to work in a company whose value system and corporate mission fit into their value system (Fodor & Jäckel, 2018).

4. Conclusions

In recruiting and addressing potential workforce, due to generational differences, a number of well-proven tools have to be redefined or re-interpreted according to the members of the sample.
Job advertisements, the job message and its function must be matched with the changed media and information consumption of the younger generation. These factors are especially important for the Z generation. According to the results of a previous research focusing on the choice of jobs by the Z-generation, the feasibility of individual career prospects and the potential for professional development are similarly important factors in choosing a job than pay (Fodor et al., 2017). According to experts, the emergence of the Z-generation has brought a dramatic change in the world of work, which means a number of advantages and disadvantages.

HR experts did not evaluate the effectiveness of traditional career days for prospective employees as clearly positive. There have been some who think that good forums have these personal meetings and prestige values, but the opportunity for personal meeting with young people and prospective employees is certainly a good thing. However, it is becoming more and more difficult to attract young people to a stand, what should a lot of exhibitors give them to distinguish themselves and become appealing to young people. It is clear that classic, static elements are no longer sufficient today.

Based on the primary research it can be said that the subjects of the sample see a successful solution to market challenges in mutual cooperation. In this context, the interests of companies representing educational institutions, professional organizations and the employers need to be coordinated.

It is interesting that, on the road to the X generation, representatives of the corporate sector have highlighted the role in education. In a rapidly evolving and increasingly specialized technological environment, companies need to take an active role in education so that they can get in touch with the potential targeting group from those specially interested. As a result of trends in the industry, a significant part of the specific jobs will be transformed in the future, and HR professionals will have to prepare their own colleagues. This is especially suitable for internal trainings, further training and specialization.

Generational differences are also challenging. From the employer’s point of view, adaptation to different generational needs requires flexibility. It re-
quires recognition of the HR and HR communication tools to be tailored to the specific workforce.

Overall, both secondary and primary research show that it is very important, and, because of the current competition, it is essential to create a positive workplace atmosphere that increases satisfaction and thus productivity among employees. Good working atmosphere is closely linked with the good employer brand. A key factor for successful companies is the existence of a credible, internal employer branding strategy that continuously reflects on the labour market challenges. It is important that the employer’s brand - just like a product / service brand – should be well-positioned with clear values and messages. The other important aspect is the coordination of the activities of the individual groups and areas, because marketing, PR and HR are the builders and representatives of the same brand. You can then be successful and credible with your employer branding if all the details – similarly to a puzzle - are in place. Without the strategic approach, the directions, the goals, and the alignment of the activities are not identified, which is reflected in inefficiencies.

The employer’s brand has a well-positioned value, message and mission, which plays an especially important role in increasing the loyalty of young people (Y and Z generations). So, it is not surprising that we are seeing more and more positive examples of successful, trendy employer branding. In our opinion the significance and role of these activities will continue to grow in the coming years, in the intense battle for talents.
References


ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this article is to present a brief analysis of the Romanian higher education system from the perspective of basic indicators, as well as the use of Markovian techniques for studying the evolution of the schooling process.

Methodology: The descriptive statistical analysis was mainly used to visualize and synthesize the information extracted from the data on the Romanian higher education system. Markovian methods were used to study and predict the evolution of the schooling process.
Findings: The rapid dynamics of the number of students in Romania in the last two decades has been accompanied by a series of structural changes, of which the most important are: a) constantly increasing the degree of feminisation of student achievements and b) increasing the relative importance of economic studies, legal studies and other social sciences, while reducing the relative importance of technical sciences and of medical-pharmaceutical studies within university specialties. Also, the distribution of the graduates’ specializations correlated to a very small extent with the requirements of economic and social activity. It can be said that the development of tertiary education in Romania was stimulated mainly by the action of factors of social and cultural nature and only at second level by the demand for qualified personnel generated by the productive apparatus.

Value Added: This study highlights the current state of Romanian higher education. The fact that the evolution of tertiary education has been “explosive” over the past two decades makes some econometric methods, involving the use of stationary data or which have a high degree of complexity, more difficult to use. In this context, the use of Markovian modelling methods for studying and forecasting the evolution of the schooling process can contribute to improving access to and participation in higher education.

Recommendations: In the current conjuncture, when trying to increase the insertion of graduates into the labour market, it is natural for decision-makers to use various estimation methods and techniques that allow them to correlate university study programs with the needs of the labour market and at the same time provide them with scientific support for their prognosis.

Key words: labour market, tertiary education, Markov models, forecasts

JEL codes: C53, I23

Introduction

The investments in education and vocational training for skills development are essential in order to boost the economic growth and competitiveness both at European and national level (Copenhagen Declaration, 2002; Bruges Communiqué, 2010 and Conclusions of Riga, 2015).

Competencies can stimulate innovation and economic growth, add value to production within the value chain, stimulate higher concentration of skills and shape the future labor market.

The education and training systems in many European countries and in Romania are still failing to provide the appropriate skills needed to increase
the degree of professional insertion and do not work properly with the business environment or employers to bring the learning process closer to the reality of the working environment.

The analysis of the number of graduates of the bachelor university cycle in Romania in the last years shows a general tendency of decreasing the number of staff. Clearly, this fall affects the labor market directly and in the long run.

The analysis of indicators and benchmarks that underlie policy development in the field of education and training in Romania indicates that the initiatives taken in recent years have led to an improvement in the situation, but the gaps towards the EU average still remain significant. Thus, the tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34) was of 26.3%, well below the EU average of 39.9%.

Consequently, specific actions are needed in order to reduce early school leaving, reduce the rate of unemployment and the NEET rate among young people. At the same time, the mission of education and vocational training is also to provide high-quality skills necessary for employability in the context of reducing the workforce due to the aging of the population.

The analysis of the higher education system using basic indicators

The educational system in Romania at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century has undergone through major changes, this being determined both by the profound changes in the economic and social environment and by the need to regenerate and revive the national education system on all its levels (National System of Indicators for Education, 2014).

Starting with the academic year 2005–2006, Romania has moved on to the implementation of the Bologna objectives by adopting, in the higher education, the three cycles of study: bachelor, master, doctorate. The implementation of Law no.1/2011, the Law of National Education was carried out under the conditions in which the Higher Education System was already
functioning in accordance with the Bologna Process, ensuring the complementarities of the requirements through: comparability, compatibility and fairness, necessary requirements for the creation of the European Higher Education Area (SEIS-European Higher Education Area-EHEA).

The reforms in the Romanian higher education system aimed to “generate and transfer knowledge to society through:

1) initial and continuing education at university level for the purpose of personal development, of professional insertion of the individual and satisfying the need for skills of the socio-economic environment;

2) scientific research, development, innovation and technological transfer through individual and collective creation in the fields of sciences, engineering, arts and letters, by ensuring performance and physical and sporting development and the valorization and dissemination of their results” (Law no.1 / 2011, National Education).

Despite a rapid rate of massification of the participation in higher education after 1990, Romania continues to be on the last place in the European Union (Eurostat statistics) regarding the participation of young people in tertiary education, only 24.6% of the young people between 30-34 years had a graduation diploma in 2018 (Report on the state of higher education in Romania, 2016/2017, 2017/2018).

The problems of quantitative access result partly from the qualitative situation and the way in which the secondary education works and from the access problems existing in early forms of education. These problems are manifested not only at the level of the absolute rates of participation in higher education but also in the situation of the Romanian pupils’ results at international tests (e.g. PISA Testing, PISA results 2017).

The different rates of access to higher education are due to both the demographic characteristics and the particular access problems that some groups of young people face: the poor, the rural population, and especially the young Roma, those from groups with a high-risk of exclusion.

Synthetically, the major changes faced by young people are:
a) The population of young people is subject to rapid demographic flows, especially by correlation with extremely high emigration rates: the share of those remaining in the country as residents is continuously decreasing, relative to the original number of newborns per cohort. In this context, negative demographic trends have been observed in recent years regarding the age-related population corresponding to higher education, with decreases in most age groups, with priority being given to the ages of 21-24 (TEMPO-online database of the National Institute of Statistics; Ghețău, 2018). The demographic evolution represents one of the factors influencing the fluctuation of the number of persons registered in higher education (Figure 1).

b) The youth population is changing. Starting from 2012 and 2014 respectively, young people of 18 years and 19 years are over-represented in their age segment. The same phenomenon has been recorded since 2019 in young people aged between 20 and 24. Also, there is also a particularly low participation of young people from rural areas to higher education (Statistical notebooks on Higher Education, NIS, 2012–2018). In this context, for the rural students there have been awarded an increasing number of scholarships, study grants, or hostels (for the academic year 2018–2019, 2000 places were allocated for them). The students in rural areas have a very low share in arts universities (the National University of Theatre and Film has only 5% of rural students) or in case of the universities with high study fees (in areas such as architecture or medicine). The Universities of agronomic sciences and veterinary medicine or the technical universities have significantly more rural students. The higher education institutions with the highest number of rural students in 2017-2018 are the “Ștefan Cel Mare” University of Suceava (52% of rural, 48% of urban) and the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine from Timișoara (46 % of rural areas, 54% of urban areas) (Annual Reports);
c) the young people without a full pre-university education represent a particularly vulnerable and largely inhomogeneous category. Romania faces an early school leaving rate of 18.3% in the year 2017, slightly decreasing compared to year 2015 (19.1%) (the national objective of the „Europe 2020 Strategy” (11.3%) remaining unattainable), a decline in the rate of passing the baccalaureate exam (of 67.7% in 2018, with 5.2 pp lower than 2017) and with the highest rate of functional illiteracy in the European Union (about 40%) (according to PISA testing 2017);

d) the people with disabilities is another group facing difficult conditions in accessing higher education, often due to the lack of support found in most institutions.

In the recent years, the number of higher education institutions had an oscillating evolution so that at the level of years 2017/2018, the national higher education system comprised 93 higher education institutions, in which there were operating 508 faculties (the state education representing 59% of the higher education institutions and 73% of the total faculties) (Figure 2).
The analysis of the data in Figure 2 shows that the total number of universities and faculties registered a descending trend in the period 2011-2018, a situation determined on one hand, due to the decrease of the number of universities and private faculties, while maintaining approximately the same parameters, of the network of higher state education and, on the other, the decline of the number of students.

Out of the total number of persons enrolled in higher education in 2017/2018, 87.4% were following study programs in state institutions and 12.6% in private education (Figure 3). Also, in the academic year 2017/2018, in the higher education institutions in Romania, out of the 538.9 thousand registered persons, 75.75% were following bachelor’s degree programs, 19.74% – master’s degree programs, 3.66% – Doctoral studies programs, and 0.85% – Postgraduate programs.
The basic assumption of this model is that the passing of a young man into a higher position can be described with the help of the Markov chains (Klock & Nimmer, 2001; Iosifescu et al. 1984; Ratitch & Precup, 2001; White, 1993; Ashley, 2002; Stefănescu, 2000).

Let it be \( M \) the number of number of steps a young man must go through until the end of the studies.

Let it be \( P_j (j = i, i+1, \ldots, m) \) the probability that an individual in the state \( i \) at a certain moment will go to state \( j \) at the next moment in time.

It is also assumed that \( \sum_{j=1}^{m} P_j < 1 \), so that \( 1 - \sum_{j=1}^{m} P_j \) is the probability that a person will leave the system in the next period.

Let it be \( C_i^{(n)} \) the number of individuals in the state \( i \) after \( n \) periods of time and the dispersion:

\[
E[C_i^{(n)}] = \eta^{(n)}
\]  
(1)

Figure 3. The evolution of the number of students enrolled in Bachelor Higher Education (thousand)

Source: own work.
It is assumed that in the n period of time, \( N_n \) is the number of pupils/students enrolled in the education system.

The values \( \eta_i^{(n)} \) satisfy the recurrence relation:

\[
\eta_i^{(n)} = \sum_{r=1}^{\infty} P_r \eta_i^{(n-1)} + N_n \rho_i
\]  

If \( Q \) is the transpose of the passing probability matrix:

\[
Q = \begin{pmatrix}
P_3 & 0 & 0 & \ldots & 0 \\
P_2 & P_2 & 0 & \ldots & 0 \\
P_3 & P_3 & P_3 & \ldots & 0 \\
0 & \ldots & \ldots & \ldots & 0 \\
0 & \ldots & \ldots & \ldots & 0 \\
P_{1m} & P_{2m} & P_{3m} & \ldots & P_m
\end{pmatrix}
\]

the matrix of which can be written as:

\[
P = \begin{pmatrix}
I & O \\
R & T
\end{pmatrix}
\]

where \( I \) is the unit matrix, and the components of the \( T \) matrix are appropriate to the six educational levels considered.

and

\[
\eta_n = \begin{pmatrix}
\eta_1^{(n)} \\
\eta_2^{(n)} \\
\vdots \\
\eta_m^{(n)}
\end{pmatrix} \quad ; \quad \rho = \begin{pmatrix}
\rho_1 \\
\rho_2 \\
\vdots \\
\rho_m
\end{pmatrix}
\]

In matricial notations, relationships (2) can be written in the form

\[
\eta_n = Q \eta_{n-1} + N_n \rho
\]  

where

\[
\eta_n = Q(\eta_{n-2} + N_{n-1} \rho) + N_n \rho = Q^2 \eta_{n-2} + N_{n-1} Q \rho + N_n \rho
\]

By proceeding in the same manner, we obtain:

\[
\eta_n = Q^{i+1} \eta_{n-i-1} + \sum_{j=0}^{i} N_{n-j} Q^j \rho
\]
Taking into account that $Q^k \to \infty$ for $k \to \infty$ (because they are substochastic processes), we obtain:

$\eta_i = \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} N_{i,j} Q^j \rho$  \hspace{1cm} (6)

relationship that can be used to predict the number of individuals existing in each state after $n$ periods.

For the Romanian educational system and considering that there are public and private educational institutions that absorb graduates at different levels of education, it is reasonable to assume that $P_i = 0$ for $j \neq i, i+1$. It is obtained the following:

$$Q = \begin{pmatrix}
P_1 & 0 & 0 & \ldots & 0 \\
0 & P_2 & 0 & \ldots & 0 \\
0 & 0 & P_3 & \ldots & 0 \\
\vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\
0 & 0 & 0 & \ldots & P_{m-1,m} P_m
\end{pmatrix}$$  \hspace{1cm} (7)

Assuming that all the elements of the matrix $P_i$ are distinct for $i=1,2,\ldots,m$, and $P_1, P_2, \ldots, P_m$ can be interpreted as own values of the Q matrix, then it can be written in the form:

$$Q = \mathbf{A}^{-1} \mathbf{E} \mathbf{A}$$  \hspace{1cm} (8)

where

$$\mathbf{E} = \begin{pmatrix}
P_1 & 0 & 0 & \ldots & 0 \\
0 & P_2 & 0 & \ldots & 0 \\
0 & 0 & P_3 & \ldots & 0 \\
\vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\
0 & 0 & 0 & \ldots & P_m
\end{pmatrix}$$

and $\mathbf{A}$ and $\mathbf{A}^{-1}$ are lower triangular matrices with 1 on the main diagonal and in the rest with elements having the form of:
\[ a_j = \prod_{k=j+1}^{i-1} P_{k+1} k+1 \left( P_j - P_k \right) \]  \tag{9}

and

\[ a_j = \prod_{k=j+1}^{i} P_{k+1} k+1 \left( P_j - P_k \right) \quad i > j \]  \tag{10}

Therefore, it is obtained

With the help of the T-matrix components and using the relationships:

\[
\begin{aligned}
n(i, i) &= \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+1}} \quad 0 \leq i \leq 6 \\
n(i, j) &= P_{i+1} \cdots P_j \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+1}} \cdots \frac{1}{1 - r_{j+1}} \quad i \leq j \\
n(i, j) &= 0 \quad i > j
\end{aligned}
\]  \tag{11}

it is possible to determine the elements of the matrix N, and then

\[ \eta_\rho = \sum_{j=1}^6 N_{j, \rho} A^{-1} \lambda A \rho \]  \tag{12}

Results

For the proposed analysis the data on the population included in the 6 levels of study of the Romanian education were used and a series of assumptions were made namely:

\begin{itemize}
  \item it is assumed that a schooling process consists of 6 stages, each of which has a certain duration depending on the type of appropriate education: 4 years for primary, secondary and high school, 3 years for post-secondary and foremen and 3- 6 years for the superior;
  \item at the end of each stage, the promotion in the next stage (or completion of schooling) is decided on the results of the passing/examination;
  \item it is admitted that a student can withdraw from the courses at any time, but once retired he never returns. Thus, a learner’s situation at the end of a study period can be described by one of the alternatives:
\end{itemize}
1) the student promotes the class/exam and will attend the next stage;
2) the student does not promote the class/exam;
3) the student withdraws before the end of a school year/exam.

- it is admitted that the probability of promotion at a higher stage, of repetition of the stage reached or withdrawal does not depend on the results obtained by the student in the previous years.

In these circumstances, the process of passing successive stages by a learner, which can end either by the successful completion of schooling or by withdrawal, can be described by a Markov chain with the states 0, 1, ... 6. State 0 characterizes a learner in the first stage of schooling, state 6 a student who successfully completed schooling, state 7 a trainee who withdrew. An intermediate state, \( i, 1 < i < 6 \), characterizes a student who promoted the first \( i \) stages of schooling. State 6 and 7 are in these conditions absorbent states.

The data used for the period 2015–2018 are:
- the school population by educational level;
- the school population that promoted each educational cycle;
- the number of young people who left the education system, by levels of education.

With these assumptions, the computations led to:
- the crossing matrix:

\[
Q = \begin{pmatrix}
0,928 & 0,056 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0,009 \\
0 & 0,879 & 0,0945 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0,0151 \\
0 & 0 & 0,836 & 0,125 & 0 & 0 & 0,0214 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0,835 & 0,142 & 0 & 0,0198 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0,968 & 0,039 & 0,00512 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0,928 & 0,053 & 0,0053 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1
\end{pmatrix}
\]

- the \( T \) matrix:
• the $\mathbf{N}$ matrix:

$$
\mathbf{N} = \begin{pmatrix}
9.9 & 5.8 & 4.8 & 3.9 & 9.8 \\
0 & 6.8 & 5.2 & 5.1 & 1.8 \\
0 & 0 & 6.250 & 7.5 & 3.2 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0.0 & 5.0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0.7 \\
\end{pmatrix}
$$

• the $\mathbf{R}$ matrix:

$$
\mathbf{R} = \begin{pmatrix}
0 & 0.0 \\
0 & 0.015 \\
0 & 0.0 \\
0 & 0.0 \\
0 & 0.005 \\
0.055 & 0.005 \\
\end{pmatrix}
$$

Therefore, with the results obtained previously and based on the relationships:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\alpha(i, d) &= \sum_{j=0}^{d} \alpha(i, j)p(i, j) = p_{i+1}\cdots p_{d} \frac{1}{1-r_{i+1}} \cdots \frac{1}{1-r_{d}} \\
\alpha(i, d+1) &= 1 - \alpha(i, d) \quad 0 \leq i \leq d-1
\end{aligned}
$$

(13)

we can calculate the absorption probabilities from one stage to the other in the education process.
It can be noticed that the probability of absorption $a(0,d)$ and $a(0,d+1)$ represents the probability that a beginner student will successfully complete the schooling, respectively to withdraw.

Based on the data used, there were obtained the values for the absorption probabilities presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. The absorption probability values for studying a learner’s evolution during the schooling period**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$a(1,6)$</th>
<th>0,86</th>
<th>$a(1,7)$</th>
<th>0,46</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$a(2,6)$</td>
<td>0,82</td>
<td>$a(2,7)$</td>
<td>0,37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$a(3,6)$</td>
<td>0,01</td>
<td>$a(3,7)$</td>
<td>0,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$a(4,6)$</td>
<td>0,26</td>
<td>$a(4,7)$</td>
<td>0,09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$a(5,6)$</td>
<td>0,94</td>
<td>$a(5,7)$</td>
<td>0,08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own work.

The average length of schooling for a student, which ends either through graduation or retraction, was determined on the basis of the relationships:

\[
E_i(\nu) = \sum_{j=1}^{d-1} r(i, j) = \frac{1}{1 - r_i} \left[ 1 + \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+1}} \left( 1 + \sum_{j=2}^{d-1} p_{i+1} ... p_j \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+2}} ... \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+j}} \right) \right] \quad 0 \leq i \leq d - 1
\]

\[
E_{d-1}(\nu) = \frac{1}{1 - r_d} \left[ \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+1}} \left( 1 + \sum_{j=2}^{d-1} p_{i+1} ... p_j \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+2}} ... \frac{1}{1 - r_{i+j}} \right) \right] \quad i = d - 1
\]

The analysis of the obtained results allows to determine the average value of the duration of the schooling for a beginner learner (schooling ending either by graduation or by withdrawal) at each level of education. Thus, for the case considered these values are presented in Table 2.
Table 2. Duration of schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of education</th>
<th>Duration of schooling (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form of education</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary education</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education</td>
<td>10.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary education</td>
<td>11.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary non-tertiary and foremen education</td>
<td>14.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own work.

Conclusions

Romania has assumed in the Bologna Process (launched in 1999) a series of commitments regarding the development of the social dimension of education and equity in higher education.

The decrease in the number of students in the bachelor’s cycle was manifested especially at the level of private higher education. The decrease in the number of students amid the constant maintenance of the level of funding in the public university sector has led to a doubling of the share of students who do not pay fees.

A problematic evolution typical of the recent years is due to the increased emigration. This constitutes an alternative for young people in the detriment of higher education and is particularly important in poor regions.

Because there are no details of the student dropout profile, the indirect deduction of the dropout rate may be problematic. For example, students who follow two faculties may drop out of a faculty without placing themselves outside the higher education system.

Also, increasing cross-border mobility or enrollment for continuing to study at another university are factors that can distort the calculation of a general abandon rate. Perhaps the most palpable outcome in calculating the actual dropout rates is given by comparing admissions by cohort with
the share of young people completing a form of university education until the age of 30–34.

In this context, the differences between the incomes and outcomes (the percentage difference between the beginning and the end of the academic year) in tertiary education tend to increase to 9.3% in the academic year 2016/2017 and have similar values in state and private education.

In the current situation, when trying to increase the degree of insertion of graduates of higher education into the labor market, it is natural for the decision-makers to use different methods and estimation techniques to allow them to study the interdependencies between the indicators of the education system and those of the labour market and at the same time to provide them with scientific support for their prognosis.

Using Markovian modeling methods to study and predict the evolution of the schooling process can contribute to improving the access to and the participation in higher education, to correlating the university studies programs with the labour market needs, to involving universities in developing sectoral policies and strategies, to encouraging the formation of the poles of excellence in education and research, to a more efficient use of resources and increasing the performance of Romanian universities.
References


Higher Education Policies and Employability of University Graduates in the EU-28

ABSTRACT

Objective: The main purpose of this research is to analyze and reveal if the recent policy measures in higher education carried in European Union member countries have had a significant impact on the labour market integration of university graduates.

Methodology: We selected a set of indicators that were common in the 2015 and 2016 editions of Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe and could offer an image of intensity of higher education policies in relation with labour market at European level. We further used these measures to test for any significant effects of the policies on the integration of graduates in the labour market.
Findings: We found significant effects of various policy measures in high education in the European countries. We estimate a positive role for factors like monitoring of completion rates, requirements for the staff to have higher education, presence of educational guidelines, and recognition of formal and informal learning for entry in higher education.

Value Added: This is the first study to address the impact of high education policies carried in European countries on the integration of college graduates. The study is distinct through both the design of new measures of higher education policy in Europe as well through testing whether the intensity of policies carried for higher education has affected the employability of young graduates or not.

Recommendations: The results of this empirical research allow us to make some recommendations for improving the insertion of young graduates on European labour market.

Key words: higher education, graduates, education reform, university

JEL codes: C53, I23, I28

Introduction

There is an increased awareness at both European and national level that education in general and higher education in particular, are key domains that can bring an increased welfare. This awareness is underscored by the emphasis that the European Commission sees its significance by mentioning it in key documents and strategies.

Probably the key document in terms of impact, since all other documents and strategic plans are derived from it, is the Strategy Europe 2020, see European Commission (2010).

Using the experience gathered through the implementation of previous strategies and maintaining employment and growth among its objectives, the Europe 2020 strategy aims to create a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. These priorities are achieved through the joint effort of the EU Member States to achieve a high level of labour productivity, employment and social cohesion. The new type of growth promoted by the Europe 2020 strategy (smart and inclusive growth) is achieved through, inter
alia, education and research measures: enhancing permanent education and skills, supporting research and innovation, efficient digital economy and smart grids (EC, 2010).

In order to achieve smart and inclusive growth, the EU’s objectives under the Europe 2020 strategy relate to aspects on education, but also research and development (R&D):

- Achieving better results in education by reducing school dropout rates, but also by increasing the share of university graduates to at least 40% of the population aged 30-34;
- Increasing the employment rate to 75% by 2020 for the 20–64 year-old population by better integrating young people, the elderly, women, unqualified persons and legal immigrants;
- Increasing R&D investment to 3% of GDP and creating better conditions for R&D and innovation (EC, 2010).

Other key documents related to higher education that should be mentioned are Supporting growth and jobs - An agenda for the modernization of Europe’s higher education systems, see European Commission (2011a), as well as The Seven Principles of Innovative Doctoral Training, see European Commission (2011b). In (2011a), the European Commission builds on Europe 2020 document and establishes the same target for the share of people with higher education (40%) along a set of measures aimed at improving the higher education system:

- a more inclusive education;
- an increased relevance of higher education for the labour market;
- the increased collaboration between business environment and universities;
- an increased mobility within Europe for students and professors;
- reforming the governance and finance of universities.

The second document mentioned above, see European Commission (2011b), refers to improving the quality of doctoral education and developing the research collaboration between the business environment and universities.
The importance of the higher education for economic development is further underscored by recent studies. For example, Pinheiro and Pillay (2016) perform a case study of two OECD economies, Finland and South Korea, and reveal the key role of higher education in ensuring the economic success of these countries. Further studies confirm the importance of higher education for economic growth, see Aghion (2008), Bridges et al. (2007), Pinheiro et al. (2012), to cite just a few papers.

In spite of the importance of this subject, the topic of the determinants of the employability of (young) graduates remains scarcely addressed. In this paper, we aim at looking at the employability of young graduates in Europe from the perspective of the policies carried in higher education across Europe. A number of papers have already discussed various characteristics of employability of higher education graduates, however, they do not analyze the impact of policy reforms.

For specific case of Greece, Livanos (2010) found employability differences between the jobs corresponding to whether graduates’ skills are in demand in the private or in the public sector. The distinction is important given not only the size of the public sector in Europe, but also the fact that many countries in European Union have gone through austerity (which affected the public sector foremost).

Robert (2014) discussed the issues of skills mismatch for graduates in selected post-communist countries. He found significant differences among the study fields, with prior work experience having been found as having a significant impact on employability. The issue of skills mismatch (more severe at the beginning of transition to market economies) is quite known for former socialist countries (which are a consistent number in our sample), see Sondergaard & Murthi (2012).

There are a few contributions that this paper does. First, it proposes, using data available at European level, a set of variables that correspond to various policy measures carried across Europe. Second, it quantifies these variables in order to further use in an econometric framework. Third, it compares the effects of the policies carried by estimating models for EU-28 countries using
the previously derived measures of reforms. The paper also distinguishes between the impact of policies for older and newer member states.

**Methodology**

In this paper, an econometric approach consisting in the application of some hierarchical linear models or multilevel models will be employed. The advantage of this method is that the overall error distribution of the linear mixed-effects model is considered to be normal, while heteroskedasticity and correlations within lowest-level groups could be also modeled. Linear mixed models include both fixed and random effects. The approach is based on more cross-sections for which random and fixed-effects are analyzed.

This method was selected for actual research because the analysis is conducted on more countries that could be grouped according to the intensity of the reforms’ effects expressed as a set of qualitative indicators. There are countries with the same intensity of reforms’ impact. Moreover, we will consider two clusters of countries: old member states (OMS) and new member states (NMS) in the European Union. OMS correspond to developed countries where concerns for education quality are more intense and with a longer tradition. In NMS, the transition to market economy and the overall transformation of society in the new economic context made the education policies more difficult to implement.

These models are a generalization of linear regression including random effects, other than the deviations corresponding to the total error. If the matrix notation is used, then:

\[ y = X\beta + Zu + \epsilon \]  

\( y \): vector of responses (n x 1 elements)  
\( X \): covariate matrix corresponding to fixed effects (n x p elements)  
\( Z \): covariate matrix corresponding to fixed effects  
\( u \): vector of random effects (n x q elements)  
\( \epsilon \): errors vector with multivariate normal distribution \( N(0, \sigma^2 \varepsilon R) \).
$X\beta$, which is the fixed portion of the equation (1), corresponds to the linear predictor in the traditional OLS regression, where $\beta$ is the parameter that has to be estimated based on empirical data.

In $Zu + \varepsilon$, which is the random portion of the equation (1), the assumption that $u$ has $G$ has variance-covariance matrix is made. In this case, $u$ is orthogonal to $\varepsilon$:

$$\text{Var} \begin{bmatrix} u \\ \varepsilon \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} G & 0 \\ 0 & \sigma_\epsilon^2 R \end{bmatrix}$$

Even if $u$ could be predicted, it is not estimated in a direct way. Its estimation is based on the components of $G$.

The form of the design matrices $Z$ and $X$ is the support for the estimation of a large number of linear models: multilevel models, split-plot designs, blocked designs, growth curves etc. These matrices permit a flexible method for modeling the correlation that appears within cluster. The correlation between the subjects in the same cluster might result from the shared random intercept or slope. The specification of $G$ brings more flexibility, because random slope or intercept might be modeled as correlated, or independent with equal variances. The general form of $R$ permits to residual for correlation and heteroskedasticity with exact specification on the models of these characteristics.

There are some particular cases when random effects model is preferred to fixed effects model, as Snijders (2012) explained:

- when the groups are seen as a sample drawn from a population that is the subject of the inference;
- when level-two effects should be checked;
- in case of many groups of small size;
- when group effects are not normally distributed.

For building the suitable mixed models the variance components should be estimated using various methods. At the beginning, variance components were estimated in the ANOVA models. In case of simple models based on balanced data, the estimation of variance components consists in finding
out the solutions of a system of equations obtained by fixing expected mean-squares expressions to the values of observed counterparts.

The ANOVA method has its limits like the absence of uniqueness in the alternative, the unbiased estimates corresponding to variance components being derived based on other quadratic forms of data instead of observed mean squares (Searle et al., 1992). Moreover, Gibbons et al. (2010) showed other disadvantages of ANOVA methods: restrictive assumptions related to missing data across time and in case of repeated measures the presence of variance-covariance structure. After considering the limits of these methods, from historical point of view, two alternatives were proposed to ANOVA method: minimum variance quadratic unbiased estimation (LaMotte, 1973) and minimum norm quadratic unbiased estimation (Rao et al., 1973). These methods suppose the determination of optimal quadratic forms of unbiased data with variance components. However, these methods still have limits, especially because how specific individuals change across time is not reflected. In this context, mixed-effects regression models (MRM) became a popular method in modeling longitudinal data. The main characteristic of MRMs is the consideration of random subject effects in order to compute the impact of subjects on their repeated observations. The role of the random subject effects is to present each cross-section trend across time and to figure out the correlational structure of the data. Moreover, the degree of cross-sections variation that is presented in the population is identified (Gibbons et al., 2010). There are various types of MRMs:

- variance component models (Dempster et al., 1981);
- random-effects models (Laird and Ware, 1982);
- empirical Bayesian models (Strenio et al., 1983; Hiu & Berger, 1983);
- random regression models (Bock, 1983; Gibbons et al., 1988);
- random coefficient models (de Leeuw & Kreft, 1986);
- mixed models (Longford, 1987; Wolfinger, 1993);
- two-stage models (Bock, 1989);
- hierarchical linear models (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992);
multilevel models (Goldstein, 1995);

In the case of clustered-data, it is better to consider just a part of the n observations at once and to construct the mixed model as a series of M independent clusters:

$$y_j = X_j\beta + Z_ju_j + \varepsilon_j$$ (2)

$j=1, 2, \ldots, M$

Cluster $j$ has $n_j$ observations.

$y_j$ refers to rows of $y$ associated to $j$-th cluster

The random effects $u_j$ could be considered as $M$ realizations of a $q \times 1$ vector with normal distribution of null average and variance matrix $\Sigma$ ($q \times q$ elements).

$Z_j$ - matrix design of the $j$-th cluster random effects ($n_j \times q$ elements)

The form in (2) belongs to Laird and Ware (1982) and presents two main advantages. The specification of random-effect component is made easier. If the mixed-model is specified using the form in (2), more random-effects sets could easily be generalized.

Mixed effect models are a useful statistical tool working with clustered data (Goldstein, 2011). In this paper, the aim is to study the effects of various policies in education on labour market knowing that there are groups of countries with the same level of reforms implementations. In the proposed mixed effect models, the unobserved heterogeneity at cluster level determines intra-cluster correlation between responses. Therefore, mean of the responses and/or the effects of the covariates may vary across clusters (Peng and Lu, 2012). This intra-cluster correlation is modeled using fixed and
random effects. The fixed effect assumes that unobserved heterogeneity at cluster level is constant, while the random effect assumes a random quantity.

Data

Considering the objective of this research related to the evaluation of the impact of various education policies on labour market indicators, more variables were selected from the European Commission reports: Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe 2015 and 2016. These reports are published annually by the European Commission. Their objective is to assess the progress made by the EU Members States towards achieving the targets that were already fixed by the Europe 2020 strategy and by the Education and Training 2020 reform processes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

There is a small number of key policy indicators in 6 main areas: early childhood education and care (ECEC), early leaving from education and training, achievement in basic skills, higher education, graduate employability, and learning mobility (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).

The database was reconstituted using the maps provided by these reports for main indicators related to education policies. The data refer to EU-28 countries and the variables are represented by:

1) Requirement for at least one staff member per group of children in ECEC to have a tertiary qualification in education (minimum 3 years ISCED 6) that shows whether education staff in the sector are highly qualified. In general, highly qualified staff in education are able to provide leadership to groups while delivering developmentally suitable activities for children and thus the provided quality is higher.

2) ECEC educational guidelines include learning opportunities for young children.

3) Quantitative targets for widening participation in and/or completion of higher education by underrepresented groups are used in order to
strengthen the social dimension of education as European Commission requests in its education policies.

4) Monitoring the socio-economic characteristics of the student body is an aggregate measure regarding students’ or their families’ social and economic position compared to others, in what concern education, income, and occupation.

5) Recognition of informal and non-formal learning for entry to higher education.

6) Requirement to monitor completion rates as part of external quality assurance procedures refers to the use of completion rates as criterion used in external quality assurance procedures for higher education programs or institutions.

7) Labour market forecasting as a common way to anticipate demand and supply on the labour market.

8) Using labour-market and skills forecasting in central planning.

9) Involvement of employers in the processes of external quality assurance analyses as higher education institutions have a requirement to have employer representatives on their governing bodies.

10) Long run unemployment

11) Requirements to include work placements/practical training in higher education programs.

Moreover, public expenditure on education (% of GDP) was used as control variable in the model. The dependent variable in the model was taken as employment rates of young people (20-24 years) not in education and training with 1-3 years since graduation.

The data for public expenditure on education were provided by World Bank, while for the indicators related to labour market the data were taken from Eurostat database. The values of these indicators were taken for 2015 and 2016 for EU-2018 countries.

We describe the data in Appendix A.
Results

Quantifying the Intensity of Educational Policy Measures

Using the available data on policy measures at European level for latest years, see Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe 2015 and 2016, we construct an index of degree (or intensity) of policy reforms across the EU 28 countries.

The methodology consists in the following steps:
- encoding the variables related to the educational policies for the EU-28 countries based on the colour coding in the maps provided by European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015);
- the dependent variables and the control variables are added in the model from World Bank and Eurostat;
- the fixed-effects that are added to the model represent the systematic part of the model: the independent variables represented by the measures of policies explain the patterns of the variables related to labour market;
- random effects are added to countries in order to characterize the idiosyncratic variation due to individual differences between countries.

The set of educational policy indicators that were monitored aim to:
- construct a skilled workforce, by using the opportunities for learning and development;
- improve teaching and learning processes by providing educational guidelines or suitable curricula;
- provide the essential additional support for ensuring adequate language development.

The data availability is limited to the years 2015-2016, however, we use the available data to measure the state of reforms at the present moment. Thus the values of the policy related variables also comprise information for
the reforms carried out in the previous years and should not be considered as having a limited value.

The results are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Quantifying the Impact of Labour Market Integration of Higher Education Policy Measures

The empirical analysis consists in the estimation of 2 mixed-effects models based on data for the EU-28 countries taken from the reports on education in 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. First, the analysis was conducted on panel data, but a valid model was not identified. Knowing that clusters of countries might be identified with the same stage of policy implementations, mixed-effects linear models would be suitable for this type of analysis. In order to extend the data in the sample, the values of the variables were considered for both years. Variables related to labour market like employment and unemployment rate and participation rate of young employed people in education and training were considered, in turn, as a dependent variable, however, in the end, we only kept the employment rate of young graduates. The heterogeneity of the EU countries influences the significance and magnitude of coefficients so we treat the old and new countries separately.

According to the first mixed-effects model, the employment rates of young people (20–24 years) not in education and training with 1–3 years since graduation (%) on the new UE countries depend on:

- the requirement for at least one staff member per group of children in ECEC to have a tertiary qualification in education (minimum 3 years ISCED 6) (denoted by the correlation according to expectations: as the requirements for higher education are less, the staff members get easier employed in education system; the variable was codified as to take the value 1 in case of strong requirements of higher education and 3 for no requirements of superior education);
- ECEC educational guidelines (denoted by Education guideline -the correlation is according to expectations, since the variable takes the value 1
for education guideline for entire period and 2 for education guideline for children of 3 years and older; when guideline is required for a shorter period, young people working in education have more chances to be employed;

- Requirement to monitor completion rates as part of external quality assurance procedures (denoted by monitor completion rates – the strong necessity to monitor completion rate takes value 1 and in this particular case, when there are less restrictions for control completion rates, the employment rate of young people decreases, as expected);
- Labour market forecasting (in this case, the variable takes value 1 for forecasts made at regular intervals; when the regularity in making labour market forecasts decreases, the employment rate decreases, as expected).

Table 1. Mixed effects linear regression model for explaining employment rates of young people (20–24 years) not in education and training with 1–3 years since graduation on new UE countries

| Variable                      | Coefficient | Z       | P>|z|   |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------|
| Requirement staff tertiary    | 2.841441    | 2.51    | 0.012 |
| Education guideline           | 4.499974    | 2.88    | 0.004 |
| Monitor completion rate       | -2.224444   | -2.77   | 0.0061|
| Labour market forecasting     | -5.267587   | -4.04   | 0.000 |
| Constant                      | 86.09461    | 26.68   | 0.000 |

Source: own computations.

As expected, more educated staff in higher education programs and good education guideline had a positive impact on employment rate of young people with 1-3 years since graduation, helping them to integrate easier on labour market in the period 2015–2016. Aspects related to monitor completion rate
and labour market forecasting succeed in attracting more recent graduates on labour market. However, in new entered countries from Eastern Europe the monitoring practice, that is a strong indicator of priorities attached to internationalization, would occur only if the central government institutions request for it, and only small number of countries do this. As result, the sign is negative. However, in some Eastern European Countries, the forecasting of labour market is done on the ad hoc basis in these countries.

According to the second mixed-effects model, the employment rates of young people (20–24 years) not in education and training with 1-3 years since graduation (%) on the old EU countries are explained by:

- Requirements to include work placements/practical training in higher education programmes (denoted by Requirements training – the variable takes value 1 if practical training/work placements is required for all higher education programs; the employment rate continued to grow, even when the requirements for training decreased);
- Requirement for at least one staff member per group of children in ECEC to have a tertiary qualification in education (minimum 3 years ISCED 6) (the correlation is according to expectations: as the requirements for higher education are less, the staff members get easier employed in education system; the variable was codified as to take the value 1 in case of strong requirements of higher education and 3 for no requirements of superior education);
- ECEC educational guidelines (denoted by Education guideline - the variable takes the value 1 for education guideline for entire period and 2 - for education guideline for children of 3 years and older; when guideline is required for a shorter period, young people working in education have smaller chances to be employed);
- Monitor socio-economic characteristics of the student body (the variable takes value 1 for systematic monitoring; when we have less monitoring of socio-economic characteristics, the employment rate decreases).
- Quantitative targets for widening participation in and/or completion of higher education by underrepresented groups (Widening part completed, the variable takes value 1 for quantitative targets for entry to and/
or participation in higher education; when there are smaller targets, the employment rate decreases);
• Recognition of informal and non-formal learning for entry to higher education (variable takes value 1 if informal education is recognized in all higher education institutions; when the recognition is made in fewer educational institutions, the employment rate continues to increase);
• Requirement to monitor completion rates as part of external quality assurance procedures (in this case, the lower control of completion rate does not prevent the employment increase);
• Labour market forecasting (in this case, the variable takes value 1 for forecasts made at regular intervals; when the regularity in making labour market forecasts decreases, the employment rate decreases, as expected);
• Using labour-market and skills forecasting in central planning (denoted by using forecasting – the variable takes value 1 when there is systematic use of forecasts by educational authorities; when the use of these forecasts by educational authorities decreases, the employment rate of young people decreases);
• Involvement of employers in external quality assurance processes (denoted by involving external assurance - the variable takes value 1 for formal requirements regarding the involvement of employers; as expected, when the involvement of employers in external quality process decreases, the employment decreases);
• Public expenditure on education (% of GDP) (positive correlation; the expenditure in education is efficient since the employment rate increases);
• Long run unemployment (negative correlation, as expected, since the increase in unemployment negatively affects employment).
Table 2. Mixed effects linear regression model for explaining employment rates of young people (20–4 years) not in education and training with 1–3 years since graduation for old EU countries

| Variable                                                      | Coefficient  | Z      | P>|z| |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|------|
| Requirements training                                        | 3.723479     | 2.41   | 0.016|
| Requirements staff tertiary                                  | 3.695234     | 3.69   | 0.000|
| Educational guideline                                         | -8.032486    | -5.30  | 0.000|
| Widening part completed                                       | -2.90757     | -3.31  | 0.001|
| Monitor socio-economic characteristics of the student body    | -12.93755    | -11.91 | 0.000|
| Recognition learning                                         | 0.9552949    | 2.14   | 0.032|
| Monitor completion rate                                       | 2.754024     | 3.99   | 0.000|
| Labour market forecasting                                    | -10.45704    | -8.45  | 0.000|
| Using _forecasting                                            | -3.463634    | -2.58  | 0.010|
| Involvement external assurance                                | -7.033406    | -6.29  | 0.000|
| Expenditure education                                        | 2.693214     | 3.08   | 0.002|
| Long run unemployment                                        | -0.008955    | -6.40  | 0.000|
| Constant                                                      | 118.1321     | 12.11  | 0.000|
| Random-effects parameters                                    | Estimate     |       |      |
| Var (Residual)                                                | 5.072629     | 1.309747|      |

Source: own computations.

As expected, more public expenses made in education, more educated staff members, and recognition of all types of education (formal and non-formal) helped in increasing employment. Requirement to monitor completion rates as part of external quality assurance procedures had not contributed to better employment rate because the opportunities on labour marker in the developed countries are higher as compared to emerging ones. Other aspects did not have the expected results in employment issue. This might be explained by the fact that the reforms need long-run implementation to have visible and sustainable effects on labour market issues and the pace of reforms differ a lot across the countries base on national consideration.
Discussion of results

The results of the models have some limitations, while unexpected results for some coefficients need more comments.

First of all, we use public expenditure on education (% of GDP) as control variable, it might be sometimes of limited relevance because in many countries a higher part of expenditure for education comes from private and household sectors. The public expenditure offers possibility to us to show if the education is a priority of state government and if there is a great equality of chance for the people with lower income and underprivileged to education. In the future, an extension of our analysis by including all expenditure sources for education will highlight other aspects that were not possible to be revealed in this article. Moreover, more control variables will be added in a future research to assess their impact on employment. The period should also be extended by adding the last reports on structural indicators in education.

The public expenditure has a positive impact on employment rate of young people (20–24 years) not in education and training and participation rate of young people (20–34 years) in education and training as we expected. This result is in accordance with the results of Pencova & Valkov (2015, p. 32), who found a “direct and significant (0.652) relationship between public spending on higher education (ISCED 5–8) as % of GDP and employment for respective group level (derived for the sample countries-Denmark, Sweden, UK, Austria, EU-27, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria and Romania)”. The second limitation comes from the fact that the results of the models are influenced by the data collected from survey. The great difference between countries and the manner to encode the results with number from 1–5, with 1 the favourable situation and 5 - the lack of policies could explain the unexpected sign of some variable coefficients. For example, 64% of the new EU countries perform the labour market forecasting on ad-hoc basis, while in Croatia the forecasting of labour market is not currently used. More than that 76% of the old EU countries have done the labour market forecasting at
the regular intervals, and only 24% on an ad-hoc basis. These results highlight the fact that in many EU countries, educational authorities had limited information about the labour market demand for skills and fields. That fact creates imbalance between the university supply and real labour market needs that influence the employment rate of higher educated persons, even the low rate of unemployment rate of this labour force. There are also national differences, some countries use labour market information to determine the funds needs for some fields of higher education (Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Scotland, Norway) or when accrediting new study programs (Belgium, France, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom). (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015, p.43). More than that, only in 47% of the old EU countries educational authorities used systematic labour-market and skills forecasting.

A half of the new EU countries and 41% of the older required at institutional or program level to monitor completion rates as part of external quality assurance procedures. More than that, 36% of the new EU countries and 47% of the older had no form of external quality assurance procedures. These levels indicate that the negative sign of coefficient attached to monitor completion rates is generate by the absence of this measure in many countries, so the employment rate of young people decreases, as expected.

Monitoring of the socio-economic characteristics and the student body, offer a measure to widen access and participation in higher education. The European Higher Education Area in 2015 highlights a small change in the composition of student body in the last decade and a little increase in the number of migrants or students form ethics minorities, and so on. The students’ socio-economic characteristics combined measure based on parents’ education, occupation, economic status, household income, so the different structure of this characteristics possible also could explain the models results. It is also important to notice that low level of job finding rate during 2014-2016 as compare to 2008, influenced the dynamics of labour market more than other factors (E. C. 2015), and also we cannot exclude the poverty and economic inequality who possible could influence the results.
The unexpected sign of coefficient in the case of monitoring the socio-economic characteristics and the student body, could be explain by the fact that it is referring in the 64% of the countries (2014/2015) and 54% (2015/2016) to the monitoring of students’ socio-economic characteristics and less that 18% of the countries systematic monitoring of characteristics of the student body (in terms of disability, ethnic status, so on). The systematic monitoring student characteristics in Greece, Cyprus, Lithuania in 2014/2015, Latvia in 2015/2016, Portugal in 2015/2016, Romania in 2015/2016, Slovenia and Slovakia in 2014/2015 were not in place.

The unexpected sign of the educational guideline is possible influence by the fact that it is referring to the entire period of education, not only for higher education and there no information about the frequency of changes in this guideline. However, when guideline is required for a shorter period, young people working in education have more chances to be employed. Also, the imbalance between the supply of university (skills) and new demand of labour market, that had a greater speed of transformation than university curricula, and the dramatically contraction of the funds for research and development in some countries during the crises period and after, because of economic development fluctuation could be other possible explanations.

The third aspect is that the employment rates of young people (20-24 years) not in education and training with 1–3 years since graduation depend of a complex set of factors, that could be interrelated. Stiwnne and Alvares studied these aspects and considered the following factors as important in this respect: “economic and professional context, individual trajectories and characteristics as well as teaching and learning in higher education” and consider as a good examples: the “paradox of Swedish situation with high general education and equality aspiration but with increasing difficulties for young adults to access the job market” and “the national differences, i.e. students from Scandinavian countries as well as the United Kingdom emphasized practical learning and facilities to higher degree that students from southern Europe” (Stiwnne & Alvares, 2010, pp. 36–37).
A factor that influences the results could be that period analysed in our paper 2014–2016 comprises the post-crisis effects. We can mention: some adverse demand shock that affected labour market differently across countries and implied the active measure; a declined tendency in education expenditure in some countries; impact on enrolment rates, staffing and infrastructure issue; deterioration of wealth; a great impact on the young people and more time needed to put in practice active measures on labour market so on. Between active labour market policy we can mention consolidation the labour market relevance of education systems, taking into account the four industrial revolution that implied the higher qualification skill and a polarization between low-skilled and high-skilled the labour market demand. The nature of this impact has not been uniform across the countries, so it had different influence on the indicators selected in the models and possibly, could explain the unexpected sign of some coefficients.

We can also mention as a factor that influences the results of the models the mass academic migrations that have positive effects as an injection of a highly skilled workforce for the hosted countries but a negative effects as a great disequilibria on the labour market in the countries that loss this people and on the practice of higher education institution and policies. The brain drain phenomenon was most visible in Europe after the economic crises and hit especially the countries more affected by crises: Greece, Spain, and Portugal where the unemployment rate of educated young people was very high, and also Easter Europe countries like Romania and Bulgaria.

Romania, for example, is one of the countries with a higher migration rate (3 million people, most of them high school graduates). According to Romanian Governor of National Bank, the imbalance between the demand and offers of labour market in Romania highlight a deficit of workers with high education level and an excess of the workers with secondary and primary educational level (Isărescu, 2017).

In Portugal, about 20% of young Portuguese professionals go to use their skills in other countries (Pelletier, 2011), and in Spain thousands of young
researchers considering that they have not professional perspectives in Spain, leave the countries (Morel, 2013).

Grecu and Titan (2016, p.64), using a quantitative method based on two index of Global Competitiveness Report for 2013-2014 period, conclude that according to the first index “Country capacity to retain the talent” Finland, Switzerland and Norway were placed on the second, and respectively third and fifth place out of 148 countries and on opposite side, Slovakia was placed (130th place), Romania (138th place) and Bulgaria (142th place). Regarding the second index “Country capacity to attract talent” on the first place was Switzerland, the United Kingdom on the fourth place and Norway on the 11th, and at the end of ranking was Greece (127th place), Romania (132th place) and Bulgaria (144th place).

Böckerman & Haapanen (2010, pp. 2–3) highlight that “propensity to move increases with the level of education”, “easily transferable and because of the” greater earnings differential between region” and a way to open new opportunities in the labour market.

Conclusions

There is an increased awareness about the key role of education in general and higher education in particular, for the performance as well as level of development of an economy. In this sense, the increased competitiveness in world markets and the fast growth of knowledge economy require a highly educated workforce.

In the recent years, we have seen more and more emphasis at European and national level on the necessity of modernizing the higher education with the final aim of a better integration of young graduates on the labour market, on the one hand, and having a better prepared workforce on the other hand. In this paper, we review and quantify some of the recent reform patterns at European level and analyse whether the implemented policies have impacted the employment of young graduates. On the one hand, the
public amounts spent on higher education (taken as a control variable) have a clear positive impact, on the other hand, we document a significant role for factors like monitoring of completion rates, requirements for staff of having higher education, the presence of educational guidelines, and recognition of formal and informal learning for entry in higher education, all these factors being associated to various types of educational policies in higher education.

APPENDIX A

Variables’ presentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requirements to include work placements/practical training in higher education programs might take the following values</td>
<td>1 for all higher education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 for some higher education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 no requirements/incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement for at least one staff member per group of children in ECEC to have a tertiary qualification in education (minimum 3 years ISCED 6)</td>
<td>1-for the entire phase of ECEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-only in settings for children of 3 years and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-no requirement for min. 3 years ISCED 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of continuing professional development (CPD) for ECEC staff</td>
<td>1-CPD is a professional duty and/or necessary for promotion for the entire period of ECEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-CPD is a professional duty and/or necessary for promotion only for staff working with children of 3 years and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC educational guidelines</td>
<td>1-educational guideline for the entire period of ECEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-educational guidelines only for children 3 years and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of student performance data in external school evaluation</td>
<td>1-student performance data used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-student performance data not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-no external evaluation of schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-situation varies within the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-data not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative targets for widening participation in and/or completion of higher education by underrepresented groups</td>
<td>1-quantitative targets for entry to and/or participation in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-quantitative targets for the completion of higher education and/ or fining employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-no quantitative targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Monitoring the socio-economic characteristics of the student body | 1-systematic monitoring of characteristics of the student body  
3-no systematic monitoring student characteristics  
2-systematic monitoring and monitoring socio-economic characteristics  
4-not available |
|---|---|
| Recognition of informal and non-formal learning for entry to higher education | 1-recognized in all higher education institution  
2-recognized in all higher education institutions and access to recognition procedures is a legal right  
3-recognised in 2 or more higher education institutions  
4-recognised in 2 or more higher education institutions and it is a legal right  
5-not available |
| Requirement to monitor completion rates as part of external quality assurance procedures | 1-required at institutional and/or program level  
2-optional at institutional or program level  
3-not part of external quality assurance procedures  
4-not available |
| Performance-based funding mechanisms with a social dimension focus (students and staff) | 1-student disability  
2-students' socio-economic background  
3-other  
4-none  
5-not available |
| Labour market forecasting | 1-labour market forecasting is done at regular intervals  
2-labour market forecasting is done on an ad hoc basis  
3-no forecasting  
4-not available |
| Using labour-market and skills forecasting in central planning | 1-systematic use by educational authorities  
2-no systematic use by educational authorities  
3-no forecasting  
4-not available |
| Involvement of employers in external quality assurance processes | 1-there are formal requirements regarding the involvement of employers in the external QA processes  
2-there are no formal requirements, but employers are normally involved in external QA processes  
3-employers are not involved in external QA processes  
4-not available |
| Availability of external career guidance services | 1-services are available within HEIs to all students throughout their course of study  
2-services are available within HEIs to some students  
3-services only available within HEIs to students in the year before they graduate  
4-no career guidance available in HEIs  
5-not available |
| Incentives to include work placements/practical training in higher education programs | 1-requirements/incentives apply to all higher education programs  
2-requirements /incentives apply to some higher education programs  
3-no requirements /incentives  
4-no available |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment rates of young people (20-24 years) not in education and training with 1-3 years since graduation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rates of young people (20-24 years) not in education and training with 1-3 years since graduation (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate of young people (20-34 years) in education and training, employed people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate of young people (20-34 years) in education and training, not employed people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure on education (% of GDP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ elaboration.
References


Relations of University Values and Competences of University Teachers

ABSTRACT

Objective: The paper deals with the theoretical and empirical examination of university values in relation to key competences of university teachers. The combination of values that universities should prioritize and the competences that university teachers should possess is seen in the paper as an important precondition for improving the quality and acceleration of modern university progress. The theoretical part analyzes, compares and synthesizes opinions on key terms examined in the paper, i.e. higher education, university, values, and competences. The empirical part presents, on the one hand, the results of the questionnaire survey aimed at de-
fining important university values. The survey was carried out on a sample of \( n = 279 \) students of the University of Žilina, Slovak Republic, and obtained 1,786 statements on crucial values or sub-values of the university. On the other hand, based on results of the previous survey \( (n = 27) \) university teachers which was targeted on key competences of the great university teachers, the empirical part seeks to experimentally link university key values with teachers’ key competences.

**Methodology:** Analysis, synthesis, comparison, abstraction, questionnaire survey, thinking experiment. Hypothesis \( H_1 \): University values defined by students will be repeated in the survey, i.e. student views on the core values of university will be identical or similar in content. Negation hypothesis \( H_0 \): University values defined by students will not be repeated in the survey.

**Findings:** Respondents reported a total of \( n_0 = 1,786 \) statements regarding the university values or sub-values. A substantial consensus was found: many of values were repeated for respondents. Defined values were subsequently grouped: from the initially defined \( n_1 = 229 \) values, \( n_2 = 32 \) complex values were generated. This leads to a rejection of \( H_0 \), in favor of \( H_1 \): the university values generated by students are similar in the content.

The results in the evaluative question confirmed the assumption that respondents considered most important mostly those values that the previous open question most frequently reported. Although depending on the study program is always the quality of education in the first place of importance, the order of importance of other values varies to some extent.

**Value Added:** Opinions on university teachers’ competences and university’s values were discussed. Experimental linking of university values to competences of teachers was performed based on the survey results conducted by the authors in 2012 (this one consisted of three sequential interviews/workshops with teachers of University of Žilina). A logical conclusion was formulated: All the university teachers and scientists are becoming authorities competent to build, preserve and transform universal knowledge into an ever-higher level.

**Recommendations:** A conclusion of the paper contains the characteristics recommended for achieve an effective process of developing university competences.

**Key words:** university, university teachers, values, competences, students, survey

**JEL codes:** M12

1. Introduction

Higher education fulfills an irreplaceable and inimitable role in the continuous, dynamic, responsible and sophisticated advancement of every country,
and a comprehensive world respectively. Highly educated people possess huge knowledge wealth, have great professional skills and competences, are characterized by above-average motivation, and enthusiastically venture to enhance and improve all processes, organizations, society, and all of humanity. The wisdom that graduates have received at the university from lectures and study literature is put by them on a new, application level and provided to everyone around them. In this context, universities represent a specific type of organization, with the specific result of their activities: strengthened knowledge and improved personal features on the side of graduates.

However, similarly as all other organizations, universities as higher education institutions are also faced with a changing environment. An increasing international competition besides changing management paradigms in higher education, make universities encounter with new challenges (Dorri, Yarmohammadian, & Nadi, 2012, p. 3842). Especially a globalization of higher education accelerates the international dimension of higher education which is very important to improve the quality of education, research and other higher education services (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). To react quickly and wisely to changes that occur unexpectedly and are usually difficult to predict, people should be actively involved in the learning process (Figurska & Sokół, 2016, p. 143). This leads to the fact that the higher education institutions have become a highly competitive market, where consumers (i.e. students) are highly involved in their choices, and managers need to focus on competitive edges (Li, Granizo, & Gardó, 2016, p. 855).

Based on the fact that higher education significantly raises the level of knowledge, the intellectual disposition, and the cognitive powers of its students (Bowen & Fincher, 2018a), the higher education provides considerable value to individuals, to the economies where educated individuals live and work, and society in general (Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005, p. 4). In this sense, universities have to take a higher degree of responsiveness towards their customers (students, business firms and other employees), and more engaged and socially responsible behavior in their interaction with other
stakeholders in a broader society (Rosi et al., 2018, p. 189). It means that all higher education institutions should provide favorable responses to social needs (Dorri, Yarmohammadian, & Nadi, 2012, p. 3842).

Because higher education includes both the curricular and extracurricular influences on students, its purpose is to change students in both the cognitive and affective aspects of their personalities and to prepare them for practical affairs (Bowen & Fincher, 2018a). In this perspective, the theme of values and competences at universities becomes very important.

*Aim of the paper* is therefore to search dynamical relations between the university values recognized by students and the competences that should be disposed by university staff. A theoretical part of the paper is built on the analysis, synthesis and comparison of opinions on the higher education and universities, values, and competences considered needed at the university. An empirical part presents the survey results participated by n = 279 students of University of Žilina, Slovak Republic, the intention of which was to define the most important values of the university. Relating results of this survey to results of previous one, the authors focus an attention on competences of university teachers/lecturers which should be applied appropriately towards students. As it flows from the discussion and the conclusive part, a novelty of paper consists in the effort to assign the key competences of university teachers to the most important values defined by students, and vice-versa, and recommendations targeted on improving the quality of universities.

### 2. University values

When considering common themes, one connection runs a live wire: the importance of understanding the value and the values of higher education (Law, 2013, p. 81). However, there is no simple or unified approach to conceptualizing value in relationship to higher education: the term of ‘value’ is not unequivocal and can be defined in various ways (Majchrzak-Lepczyk, 2015) and often has a different meaning depending on the disciplinary lens being
adopted (Tomlinson, 2018, p. 713). For example, many authors consider the values of higher education from the viewpoint of economics, financial profit achieved by university and return of investment (Freeman, 1981; D’Aguiar & Harrison, 2016; Agiomirgianakis et al., 2018; etc.). Other authors consider the values from the viewpoint of marketing and/or marketization of university (Rosi et al., 2018; Sellar, 2013; Tomlinson, 2018). Other authors (including the authors of this paper) consider university values from the viewpoint of psychology, sociology, management and behaviorism (Miller & Nadler, 2016; Watts, 2017; O’Doherty et al., 2019).

In psycho-socio-behavioral considerations mentioned above, values are a unique, imaginative guide, indicator, inspiration, and limit of individuals’ behavior. Values lead people lives and contribute to ethical behavior and general growth (Blašková & Hriníková, 2019). In other words, values represent difficult to define and handle qualities, states, principles, attributes, and senses that the student or teacher confesses, which s/he considers to be extremely important, even crucial in his or her professional and personal life, and which correct the appropriateness of his or her academic conduct.

According to Watts: “A key premise is that we need to understand why our universities are now the way they are. This involves avoiding abstract arguments about ‘structural’ factors. This matters because if we are ever promote the kinds of changes we need, we must reinstate a proper regard for the choices people make and the beliefs they entertain” (2017, p. 12). In mentioned regards, it can be stated that beliefs, expectations, hopes and visualizedimaginations that are accumulated on the part of university students, teachers and scientists, create and anchor the values. They together are a firm subpart of the university value system. Because of this, wanting to move the higher education to the more modern level, these ‘sensual and emotional’ elements, i.e. values have to be intentionally discovered and analyzed, and then improved. They have to be strengthened and transformed to as truest as possible level. In this perspective, one of the possible ways of how to advance the university value system and overall university results.
is the effort to relate and even connect the values felt by students with the competences disposed by academicians. In mentioned dynamical process, the role of teachers’ professional competences and personal insert is crucial.

3. University competences

Similar as defining the concept of value, the concept of competence might be understood in various ways. Firstly, an idea of many scholars has to be presented that the competence has acquired remarkable importance in higher education (Grant et al., 1979; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Lozano et al., 2012; Blašková et al., 2015; Pinto, 2018; etc.). Secondly, two perspectives have to be considered in this field: (a) perspective of teacher competences, and/versus (b) perspective of student competences. According to Avalos (2011), teacher competence is the teachers’ ability in critical analysis of teaching phenomena and education policies which enables them to design the teaching process and procedure in a way to achieve the objectives. Mohamadi & Malekshahi (2018) opine the teacher competences include: critical (teamwork, maximizing teaching quality, making tasks and initiating actions, and sharing innovations and developments); clinical (real-time teaching action focused on learners’ learning); technical (related to the metacognition and pre- and post-planning of teaching act – development of professionalism), and personal competences (personal involvement and establishing a sense of community). Therefore, when striving to correspond to changing requirements, it is inevitable to be oriented towards strategic competencies and create systems consistently oriented towards development of such competences (Adamonienė, Ruibytė, & Šikšnianaitė, 2017, p. 7).

From the perspective of students, Rychen & Sagalnik (2003) defines the competence as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisites (including both cognitive and non-cognitive processes)” (p. 43) while a com-
petence structure is located within the individual, who is able to incorporate its different elements after a learning process (Lozano et al., 2012). In the learning process today, a cognitive and participative learning can be considered as the most valued and effective form of the student competence development. This one engages the students into an educational process and put the responsibility for educational content and dynamics onto both the students and the teachers. According to Bowen & Fincher (2018b): “Cognitive learning is aimed at verbal and quantitative skills, substantive knowledge, rationality, intellectual tolerance, aesthetic sensibility, creativeness, intellectual integrity, wisdom, intellectual and cultural pursuits of students, and lifelong learning”.

Based on all above mentioned opinions and thoughts, an idea has to be emphasized that the competences of teachers form and improve the competences of students and graduates, and vice versa, the improved competences of students and graduates calls for the improvement and advancement of the teacher competences. And, it is just the values which are: (a) the starting point; (b) the inspiration; (c) the final state of this developmental process. In addition, “the competence should be integrated in the academic programs, but for various skills, special time should be reserved for specific teaching and learning of these skills, such as communication, critical reflection, information literacy, teamwork, etc.” (Mulder et al., 2008, p. 13). Such individual approach is inevitable especially from the perspective of diversity management concept, since this one promotes the idea of “accepting all possible – visible and invisible, innate and acquired – aspects that account for differences and similarities between people” (Cewińska & Striker, 2018, p. 47).

4. Methods

Coates (2005), based on his critical study on improving the quality at Australian universities, argues for the importance of engaging students into determination of the university education quality: “The right kinds of engagement are certainly necessary for students to learn, even if an institution is reputable,
well resourced, has impressive teachers, teaches the right content and has well-regulated governance and management systems” (p. 31). In the words of Li, Granizo, & Gardó, “It becomes fundamental to analyze and study student’s satisfaction and perceived value in higher education, as higher education institutions could greatly benefit from being able to establish long term relationship with students” (2016, p. 860). With the same intention, i.e. to disclose and obtain opinions on the set of university values, the authors have decided to perform a questionnaire survey on a sample of higher education students.

Apart from the questions on basic characteristics of respondents (sex, year of study, level of study), questionnaire consisted from 2 open and 2 evaluative questions. Task of students was to generate 10 values that are important for the great university (first open question) and 10 values that are important for the student oneself (second open question). In evaluative questions, task of respondents was to choose the one most important value of the university (from a set of values generated by the student himself or herself) and the one most important value of the student (from a set of values generated by himself or herself).

### 4.1. Survey sample and hypothesis

Survey, performed in February – March 2019, was participated actively by \( n = 279 \) students of the University of Žilina, Slovak Republic. Sample consisted of 94 female and 185 male in all three levels of the university study: bachelor, master, and PhD. Structure of the respondents from the viewpoint of concrete study program is shown in Table 1.
Table 1. Structure of survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Study program Management</th>
<th>Study program Information Management</th>
<th>Study program Informatics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>% of all</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>25.81%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>27.61%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

The following survey assessment focuses only on the academic field, i.e. the university values while hypothesis $H_1$ and Hypothesis $H_0$ were determined for the paper. **Hypothesis $H_1$:** University values defined by students will be repeated in the survey, i.e. student views on the core values of great universities will be identical or similar in content. **Negation hypothesis $H_0$:** University values defined by students will not be repeated in the survey. The method of qualitative content analysis, the method of thought abstraction, and the method of logical comparison were used to test the relevance of the set hypotheses.

### 4.2. The most important results

To verify the validity of hypothesis $H_1$, it was necessary to examine in more detail the substance/content of all values generated by the respondents. Respondents reported a total of $n_0 = 1,786$ statements regarding the university values or sub-values. After a detailed examination, using a qualitative content analysis, a *substantial consensus was found in the nature of many statements: many of stated values were repeated for respondents. This means that students have defined many values identically or very similarly to their classmates. The result of this initial processing and reduction was the definition of $n_1 = 229$ values that students perceive essential to the great university.*
For easier presentation of results, and especially for their possible use for the university expansion, defined values were subsequently grouped and categorized based on their interconnection and context. In this way, from the initially defined $n_1 = 229$ values, $n_2 = 32$ complex values were subsequently generated.

Table 2. The 15 most frequent complex values of university defined by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of university (with defined sub-values)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High quality of education and information (providing information, mature students, quality teachers, expertise, qualifications, education, enough teachers, topicality, wisdom)</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>11.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive characteristics and skills of teachers (competence, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, inspiration, non-exaltation, professionalism, critical thinking, access to literature, respect)</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive and obliging approach to others (thoughtfulness, loyalty, humanity, support, understanding, positivism, dignity, justice, friendliness, tolerance, decency)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>7.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open cooperation (participation, teamwork, cooperation among faculties and with companies, partner network, teambuilding for teachers and students, coherence)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness for practice (practical experience, usefulness of sturdy subjects, excursions to companies, own student projects, internships in companies)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>5.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing activities (attractiveness on the market, reputation of the university, background, history, prestige, added value, reflection of market requirements, success, recognition)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping rules (promises, terms, laws, high goals, accountability, confidentiality, honesty, integrity, foresight, equality, equivalence)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment quality (student houses, accommodation, facilities, teaching equipment, climate comfort, convenience)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication (courtesy, expression of opinion, personal approach, open access, discretion, sincerity, active listening, directness)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High motivation (motivation of employees and students, enthusiasm, creativity, intellectual stimulation, benefits, reward, joy, care for students and teachers)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal aspects of education process (difficulty of study, graduate level, science and research, time-consuming study, joint decision-making, timetable adaptation to students, outdoor learning)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive conditions and atmosphere (creative atmosphere, fellowship, collective strength, university culture, peaceful and good working environment, enjoyable behavior)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonized content of study (provided courses, programs, training, licenses, equal opportunities for individual departments, perspective)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of new trends (responding to trends, modern approaches, innovation, electronic enrollment and learning, information system, dynamism, flexibility)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relations (sound relations and negotiation, positive relationship with teachers, mutual aid, sociability, encourage activities with students, eliminating barriers reciprocity)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

This leads to a rejection of $H_0$, in favor of $H_1$: the university values generated by students are similar in the content. Table 2 lists the 15 most frequently reported complex values, including their contents, i.e. sub-values defined by students. The first place in terms of the number of statements is clearly the high quality of education and information. Of the total number of respondents (279), up to 205 respondents reported it, representing 73.48% of the total number of
respondents. Other high-ranking values include the positive characteristics and skills of teachers (160 respondents), the responsive or friendly approach to others (135 respondents), and the open cooperation (100 respondents).

Continuing to analyze the questionnaire survey results, the role of respondents in the evaluative question was to choose the only university value they consider most important. The results are shown in Table 3. These ones confirmed the assumption that respondents considered most important mostly those values that the previous open question most frequently reported. In particular, the quality of education and information has been reiterated as the most important value. Among the most important values over 20 frequencies are the positive characteristics and skills of teachers, the responsive approach towards others, and the readiness for practice.

Table 3. The most important values of university defined by all students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of university</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High quality of education and information</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>30.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive characteristics and skills of teachers</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive and obliging approach to others</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness for practice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping rules</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High motivation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open cooperation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonized content of study</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal aspects of education process</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for freedom</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target on students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of new trends</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study
It is also interesting to note that, although depending on the study program is always the quality of education in the first place of importance, the order of importance of other university values varies to some extent (Table 4).

Additionally, in comparison to the overall importance of values defined by all respondents, new values of ‘freedom’ and ‘satisfaction’ occur in a case of respondents from the study program Information Management, as well as the value of ‘thoroughness’ in a case of respondents from the study program Informatics.

Table 4. Importance of university values depending on study program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study program Management</th>
<th>Study program Information Management</th>
<th>Study program Informatics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of education</td>
<td>Quality of education</td>
<td>Quality of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive approach</td>
<td>Characteristics of teachers</td>
<td>Characteristics of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to practice</td>
<td>Readiness to practice</td>
<td>Responsive approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of teachers</td>
<td>Respect to students</td>
<td>Readiness to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing activities</td>
<td>High motivation</td>
<td>Keeping rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping rules</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>High motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying new trends</td>
<td>Responsive approach</td>
<td>Formal aspects of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Correct relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open cooperation</td>
<td>Open cooperation</td>
<td>Open cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive atmosphere</td>
<td>Marketing activities</td>
<td>Thoroughness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

4.3. Experimental linking of university values to competences of teachers

With an intention to help universities in their process of the quality improvement, it is possible to experimentally relate the most important university values to the most important competences of university teachers. For this reason it can be considered proper to link the results ascertained by the above mentioned survey (the most important university values viewed by students) with results of the survey conducted by the authors in 2012, which
was aimed to identify the most important competences of university teachers. The survey consisted of three sequential interviews/workshops with a group of \( n = 27 \) university teachers of University of Žilina. From the viewpoint of sex, the survey was participated by \( n = 12 \) male and \( n = 15 \) female. From the viewpoint of academic erudition, there were \( n = 15 \) lecturers with PhD, \( n = 9 \) Associated Professors, and \( n = 3 \) Professors.

The outcome of the survey was a list of personality competences of a university teacher which include following competences: (1) morally and ethically acting personality; (2) professional personality; (3) personality with valuable scientific effort; (4) acclaimed author and honest personality; (5) personality with excellent teaching competences; (6) personality acting as a role model; (7) mature personality; (8) critically thinking personality; (9) sophisticated and communicating personality; (10) progressive, highly motivated and always motivating personality (Blašková et al., 2014).

Based on repeated discussions and harmonization of authors’ opinions from 2012 with the present knowledge and acquired experiences, Table 5 shows the experimental linkages between the 3 most important university values defined by students and the 10 most important competences of university teacher defined by scholars. Table reflects a conviction that there have to exist active and facilitative relations between the most important values and the most valued competences at the university. In other words, if the system of the most required competences of lecturers is functional and works correctly, the most appreciated values of university can be achieved.

In addition to defined linkages, the practical experience based on the utilized feedback confirms that the most expected university values really act as a pressure of/for the future competence improvement.
Table 5. Experimental linkages of the most important values and competences at university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Most important values</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Most important competences of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High quality of education and information</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Professional personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Personality with excellent teaching competences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sophisticated and communicating personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Positive characteristics of teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Morally and ethically acting personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personality with valuable scientific effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Acclaimed author and honest personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mature personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Critically thinking personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Responsive (obliging) approach to others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Personality acting as a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Progressive, motivated and motivating personality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

4.4. Discussion and implications

Overall success and prosperity depends directly on the quality of employees, their efforts to participate in the development, which is mainly related to the quality of performance (Čandík, 2018, p. 44). In this view, the competence represents all predispositions which the individual performs or can perform in achieving his or her tasks (Krasnova, 2017, p. 69).

Opening the discussion to presented surveys, the high quality of education and information provided at the university is at the first place in the listed most important university values. As Coates believes (2005), although the specification, assurance and enhancement of quality is often complex and problematic, strong interest in the phenomenon has been stimulated and maintained by a range of factors. Students need accurate information about educational quality to help them choose between different courses of study. Academics and university administrators need information to help them monitor and improve their courses and programs. Institutions need information about quality to help them benchmark and market their
performance. Governments and other bodies need information to assist with funding, policy development and accountability. For these and other reasons, quality assurance has become part of the fabric of many higher education systems (Coates, 2005, p. 25).

However, according to e.g. Report of House of Commons Education Committee, United Kingdom is facing a serious skills deficit (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018, p. 16). Two thirds of businesses surveyed in the 2017 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey said that skills gaps are a threat to the UK’s global competitiveness and 61% of participated business were “not confident there will be enough people available in the future with the necessary skills to fill their high-skilled jobs” (CBI, 2017, p. 11, 16). This highlights the need for having teachers and scientists who are the professionals in their field, who are perfectly able to transfer an enthusiasm and wisdom on students, and who communicate with students sophisticatedly, inspirationally and without any barriers.

When disputing on importance of the teacher positive characteristics which takes second place in mentioned above list of university values, especially the competences of moral sustainability, ethics, scientific and publication responsibility are on the foremost. Naturally, these ones have to be accompanied by the personal maturation and objective thinking of the teacher, i.e. his or her appropriate criticism combined with a sufficiently high level of tolerance. In this regard, an empathy as a specific personal competence also has to be considered. Empathy occurs most often in those with strong attitudinal similarity and attraction (Grover & Brockner, 1989) while through the projection of own thoughts and feelings, the individual shows his/her own individuality and uniqueness (Kim & Chu, 2011). This means that sadness, shame, guilt, sympathy, and empathy are emotional ingredients in the development of prosocial behavior (Reeve, 2009).

The responsive (obliging) approach to others is put on the third position in the list of values defined by students. In this field, especially the competence of acting as a role model and the motivation competence should be
emphasized. The role of university teacher must be perceived as a highly qualified profession, which is mostly understood as a mission. Teacher is a carrier of education and guard of humanitarian and ethical values. Teacher must cultivate the student as a multilayer personality (Slavík et al., 2012, p. 73). Teacher has to inspire students for achieve an appropriate feeling of dignity (Figurska, 2017). And, this is possible only if the teacher has the high motivation and is willing to share with and transfer it on students.

5. Conclusion

Active connection and mutual harmonization of values that universities should prioritize with the competences that should be disposed by teachers is an important prerequisite for improving the quality and accelerating the progress of higher education. It is essential for modern universities to carefully consider the mission, roles, and complex and particular outputs to be achieved. In other words, universities must be thoroughly focused on the values favored by their addressees or customers. The primary addressees of universities action are mainly students. Secondary addressees are student parents and employers who incorporate graduates into their work teams. Tertiary addressee of universities is the entire society. This means that if the university wants to become the great university, it must target its system of values to all three of these groups.

Generally, it is not easy to achieve the harmonization of the values of all customer groups with the values naturally defined by and defined for all the teachers, scientists, administrative staff and university managers. It can be stated that respect for and fulfillment of any values is always conditioned by the actions of the authorities respected at the university and ensured by the common belief in the correctness of the defined values. The peculiarity of universities is that, as centers with the highest intellectual capacity of a given country, they have a specific structure of their staff. In this sense, only the top university officials cannot be considered as authorities. All the
University teachers and scientists are becoming authorities competent to build, preserve and transform universal knowledge into an ever-higher level. This is because it is precisely the teachers who recognize the values favored by students, parents, employers and society. Teachers, through their professional behavior and performed competences, actively link values of all addressees of university action to their own values, and then jointly fulfill them. The quality of teacher competences is a determining and decisive factor in this process.

For mentioned above reasons, the development of competences must become one of the most important and most supported processes. In particular, in order to develop the competences of teachers (and, consequently, of students), the following characteristics can be recommended in the university environment:

1) Efficiency – competence development must not be random; the university must analyze in detail what competences need to be developed.
2) Sustainability – development of competences must become a solid part of the day-to-day work as well as strategic advancement and created mechanisms of the university.
3) Systematism – it must be respected that any competence (development) is related to all other competences and the personality profile of the teacher concerned.
4) Consequence – current positive development will lead to a positive development in the future, and conversely, the current failure will cause future displeasure and fear.
5) Support – every process of exiting former stereotypes and acquiring better competences is hard and challenging, so support, assistance and facilitation are essential for the teachers.
6) Conditions – it is necessary to ensure appropriate material, spatial and capacity conditions for the competence development (on the part of teachers, departments, faculties).
7) Motivation – not only the self-motivation of teachers is necessary for the development, but also targeted encouragement and inspiration from the university must be pursued.
8) Reward – if teachers develop their potential conscientiously, they should be positively valued and adequately rewarded for it.
9) Differentiation – teachers who develop their competences permanently should be distinguished not only by higher wages, but should also be posted as a model for others.
10) Validation – it is necessary to continuously evaluate whether the competence development is correct and whether strengthened competences contribute to increase the quality of university processes.

It is correct to note that such a system of competence development has the highest chance of success which meets all the above characteristics. If any of them is not followed, it threatens the essence and potential impacts of the university progress.

The ideas in the paper can also be expressed in this way: the quality of university depends on the quality of understanding and grasping the values of the main participants and addressees of the university activity, while the quality of understanding, grasping and fulfilling all values depends on the quality of university teachers and scientists’ competences. Simply, the quality of university depends on the quality of competences available at the university.

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References


