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ВАЗОРАТИ МАОРИФ ВА ИЛМИ
ҶУМҲУРИИ ТОҶИКИСТОН



**БАЛАНД БАРДОШТАНИ РАҚОБАТПАЗИРИИ
ХАТМУНАНДАГОН-ИҶТИСОДЧИЁН ДАР АСОСИ ҶОРӢ
НАМУДАНИ ПРИНСИПҶОИ РАВАНДИ БОЛОНӢ**

**МАҶМУӢАИ МАҚОЛАҶОИ ИЛМИИ ОНЛАЙН-КОНФЕРЕНСИЯИ
БАЙНАЛМИЛАЛИИ ИЛМӢ-МЕТОДӢ**

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**INCREASING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF GRADUATE
ECONOMISTS BASED ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PRINCIPLES OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

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EXITING EDUCATIONAL VACUUM BY UTILIZING WORKING LIFE CONTACTS

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This paper discusses the importance of dusting traditional theory-centered teaching and learning with no connections to outer world. The educational vacuum needs to be broken to be able to offer students real-life learning experiences that generate broader competences and networks, thus making them readier for the labor market. The paper aims to encourage teachers to recognize and utilize their contacts outside university as enrichers of teaching and learning, and as contributors to working life competences of students. First, perspectives on the transition from teacher-centered classroom teaching to learning with working life integration are presented. Then, practical examples of integration are described, hoping they will be modeled, refined and applied in various learning environments.

Keywords: *working life, network, teaching, learning, competence, competitiveness.*

No more teaching and learning in a vacuum

In the spirit of the Bologna process, promoting competency-based assessment rather than workload-based, higher education institutions (HEIs) are revising their curricula, syllabuses and teaching. In the globalized world of work, HEIs need to ensure that their graduates are equipped with the competencies required by employers. Governmental development plans for education in many countries advice HEIs to intensify collaboration with local business and industries in order to develop their regional responsiveness. HEIs are challenged to integrate research and teaching as well as theory and practice because formal

education is inadequate as regards to demands of working life. [1]

Remarkable development financiers like EU funds and the World Bank are increasingly channeling their support to new regions –like Central Asia- in which education development and modernization is key for the future. A good example of such is a project called Improving Competitiveness of Economic Graduates –Economists Based on the Principles of the Bologna Process (ICEG) running 2020-2021, that aims to instil competence-centredness in a Tajik HEI IET TSUC. The focus is on adaptation of academic activities of the HEI to the requirements of the European Higher Education Area based on improvement of educational standards of curricula and syllabuses as well as introduction of innovative teaching methods, advanced teaching skills and creation of new educational laboratories.

Regarding competence-centered reforms, it is not sufficient to write them on project reports but they need to be implemented into reality, too. This, oftentimes, requires change in the HEI's educational culture, and even in the educational culture of the whole country. This includes abandoning some traditional administrative structures and regulations by giving more autonomy to HEIs from the central educational officials and allowing teachers didactic and pedagogical freedom.

Teachers' freedom is one of the key factors in attempts to taking teaching and learning out of a vacuum. Teacher-centric way of learning does not meet the requirements of the globalized digital age. Teaching detailed knowledge and facts no longer has the same significance as before, as information is on the Internet, thus available anywhere, anytime [2, p. 14]. In addition to the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, the working life requires graduates to possessing contextual knowledge and adaptive expertise as well as ability to behave and perform in a professional community. They are doctrines that cannot be learned alone by reading and taking exams, but by gaining experience in relevant authentic context and modeling more experienced professionals.

Learning is an experiential phenomenon, not just cognitive [3,

p. 23]. Teaching is becoming more like coaching and facilitating learning, in which creating encounters between people is focal [4, p. 90]. Teachers' personal contacts combined with pedagogical autonomy can be seen as social capital that contributes to competitiveness of graduates.

Teachers might see collaboration with working life as a burden and extra workload, and thus stick to the conventional classroom teaching from the books. With limited work time resources and, teachers might be reluctant or simply too busy to generate and implement ideas of collaboration with real working life. That does not have to be the case; on the contrary, with the outside partner collaboration, teaching becomes livelier and more interesting not only to students but to the teacher her-/himself, too. Also; that way teachers can keep up with the development and competence requirements of working life in their own fields. Students find learning with working life partners more motivating than plain theory-based studying, which leads to improved learning outcomes and competence acquiring. [5]

Integrating world of work and study in practice

Laurea University of Applied Sciences has at early 2000`s created - with competence-oriented principals- an action model called Learning by Developing (LbD) that intertwines teaching, learning and working life, thus breaking the educational vacuum. The Lbd model aims to respond to the world of work and its development needs, foster regional development and support for individual professional growth. The LbD model is based on development projects authentically rooted in the world of work, which aim to produce new practices and demands collaboration between lecturers, students and experts from the working life. Teaching is to a great extend guidance in the learning projects in which students combine scientific knowing and professional doing, allowing generation of new expertise. [6, pp. 5-8] With traditionally high degree of teachers' didactic and pedagogical freedom in Finland, the LbD model has landed on favorable soil

and it has inspired teachers to innovational teaching experiments in partnerships they have created.

The practical learning cases described here have been implemented at Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Bachelor's Degree Programme of Business Management, by applying the LbD model. I personally have been creating and realizing these cases, utilizing largely my own networks, with assistance of students' ideas and networks. The aim of these implementations has been to bridge the gap between theoretical and empirical knowledge by providing the students with real connections to the world of work and opportunities to develop competencies needed in it.

Local Rotaries mentoring on leadership and management

Leadership and management course is compulsory to all Laurea students, regardless of their degree programme. I have been running it for 12 years in cooperation with local Rotary Club that once asked how they could contribute to educating the rising generation of business employees and managers. For the start, I presented in a Rotary Club meeting an idea of them becoming mentors of leadership and management. They welcomed the idea and ever since there have been Rotary volunteers participating as mentors in the course. When Rotaries share their extensive work experiences from various jobs and positions with the students, they enliven the theories students study from books. In addition to gaining empirical and even tacit knowledge, students are able to model professional behavior and attitude.

Learning saving and investing with bankers

A group of students expressed a desire to learn about saving and investing so I took up the Saving and Investing in Practice complementary course in Laurea's curriculum. To make my course implementation attractive to students, they participated in the planning it with me. I also invited a director and a private banker – whom I happened to know- from a big international bank to plan and run the course. To collect ideas and interests, the students first run a survey among 100 students potentially interested in taking part in the course. They shared the results with the bank representatives and

created together contents and tasks for the course. At the realization phase, I and the private banker held lectures on saving and investing, and we advised students in building up their personal savings and investing plans. He also evaluated the plans with the bank director, so the students learned in a very practical setting.

Co-designing entrepreneurs' services and improving digital media presence

I have many self-employed acquaintances. As they run their enterprises alone, they often lack time and fresh ideas for developing their business. Within Service Design course, included in the core competence studies, student teams have been applying their knowledge in real business development with entrepreneurs: conducting customer surveys, benchmarking competitors, counting margins and volumes, etc., in creation of new processes, products and services.

On another core competence course, Digital Service Business and Marketing, student teams have been assisting and even teaching those entrepreneurs to effectively using social media and other digital tools in their marketing and (web) sales by setting up enterprises' Facebook & Instagram account and homepages, launching campaigns, search engine optimizing etc. At both cases, as a bonus learning outcome, students acquired a comprehensive picture of entrepreneurship.

Fostering foreign retailer's market entry

As a passionate shopper, I have made friends with owners of my favorite boutiques, like Accademia Boutique in Tallinn, Estonia. Once the owner shared his dream of having distribution channels in Finland, too, and that sparked off a learning project. A student team learned a great deal about exports and imports, trade agreements and contract price calculations while searching and contacting prospective outlets. The project outcome was a success: a distribution agreement was signed between the Estonian retailer and a Finnish boutique.

International cooperation in a leadership course

It might sound odd but one does not even need to know the outside partner before starting collaboration; it is enough to be connected through a mutual acquaintance and share similar interests

and inspiration. A mother of one student introduced a Colombian university professor and the co-founder of Humanistic Management Network to me, and that was the starting point for a joint learning assignment on my Intercultural Leadership course. The students gained an authentic international experience of working in teams with diverse cultural backgrounds and different time zones while broadening their perspectives to leadership. In the student feedback, it repeatedly appeared that learning about intercultural cooperation is not complete without experiencing it in reality.

I hope that these practical examples lower the threshold for utilizing one's own contacts and ideas of enriching teaching. I also hope they bring inspiration and ideas to be applied in different courses and learning projects. It is good to keep in mind that in addition to teachers' networks, it is fruitful to call out the ones of students: suitable partners for courses can be found among them. Learning integrated with working life adds value to students' competencies, and thus improves their employability. That is a vital goal for any educational institute.

Conclusions

To provide graduates with necessary competences and thus ensuring their competitiveness on the labor market, it is vital to integrate authentic working life contacts into studies. To advance in this, numerous global and regional initiatives and projects have been launched and funded by regional and national authorities as well as international actors such as the EU and the World Bank, especially in the context of the Bologna Process. Also, individual universities have developed their own action models to ensure their graduates a smooth transition to labor market.

Traditional classroom teaching needs dusting to give space to more innovative and participatory teaching methods. Teachers' own contacts and networks outside academia can be truly valuable and useful in creating learning methods and environments in which

students' real working life competences can be developed and evaluated. The university could, and should, show deep commitment to systematic collaboration with the world of work. In addition to creating partnerships with industry and business, successful collaboration between higher education and working life requires allowing didactic freedom and pedagogical autonomy to teachers and new types of teachers' pedagogical competences so it is undeniably important to invest in teacher training.

The more opportunities of collaboration and dialogue between the students and the working life a university offers integrated into its studies, the more competitive graduates it produces. This has a positive impact on not only the employability and career of the students but also on developing the regional business and entrepreneurship. At the same time, the university increases its attractiveness both in the eyes of prominent students and organizations. This creates a true win-win situation.

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