Chapter 19

Innovative Approach to Developing Competencies for Business Practice

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ABSTRACT

The book chapter introduces the research findings on the application of teaching methods in higher education in Slovenia that positively affect the process of developing students’ transversal competences. The goal of the research was to explore the teaching methods that should be applied in the process of improving transversal competences of students in higher education, from two perspectives: developing students’ transversal competences at institutions of higher education and demands of the labour market regarding the required qualifications of graduates. Namely, contemporary business practice recognises transversal competences as increasingly important, due to their impact on innovation and development of society and economy. Higher education institutions have important role when diminishing mismatches between students’ competences and applicable requirements of the labour market.

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INTRODUCTION

Transversal competences that are defined as a “combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to situations to meet social aims” (Report O1 2016, pp. 12–13) are recognized as important at the labour market and in everyday life in Slovenia and evolve rapidly (PIAAC, 2013). Insufficient transversal competences in the population have significant impact to the prospects of innovation and to the development of society as well as economy. Several studies indicate that mismatches between competences and competence requirements of the labour market still exist (EC, 2014). High responsibility for development of transversal competences is especially at the higher education institutions and work places (Akkuyunlu, 2009a; 2009b). In the process of developing competences at the higher education institutions several teaching and training methods can be applied in order to make this process effective. It is estimated (Key competences, 2006) that 50% of new jobs will require tertiary level qualifications in the future. This is why our research and this book chapter is addressing innovative approach in developing competences for business practice, highlighting the Slovenia case of public higher education institution. According to Mulej et al. (2013), innovation is every novelty, which is recognised as useful by its users. This is the definition we were following when exploring competences and teaching methods, and conceptualizing the innovative approaches to the development of students’ competences required by business practice.

Slovenia has the second lowest early school leaving rate in the EU (Monitor Slovenia, 2015) and has increased its tertiary education attainment rate being today above the EU average. Regular monitoring of the level of competences attained in higher education institutions plays an important role in improving the educational process in higher education (HEGESCO, 2009). The framework of the main quality control mechanisms, which appeared as a result of interviews with higher education representatives in Slovenia (HEGESCO, 2009) can be classified as curricular evaluation, career centres, alumni activities, quality control systems, committees and boards, and learning outcomes. One of the most important control mechanisms of the Slovenian higher education quality are evaluations conducted by graduates and employers as well as competence or learning outcomes approach.

The transition from educational system to the labour market in Slovenia is difficult even for higher education graduates and there are demographic changes in the form of a shrinking and aging population. Since employability of graduates is of great importance for Slovenia, higher education institutions should create such study programs and processes that would address the demands of the labour market. Generic skills for transversal competences development are also considered important by the employers. According to the Eurobarometer survey, 43.6% of employers in Slovenia believe that higher education institutions should improve their study programs and educational processes with the goal to improve employability of graduates; they should include sector-specific work placements as an integral part of the study programmes in order to improve graduates’ employability. According to some research results, development of competences should be supported by active teaching approaches and study-related work experience (Čelebič, 2014; Graczyk-Kucharska et al., 2018; 2019; Sternad Zabukovšek et al., 2019; Štrukelj et al., 2019). Therefore, the main research question addressed by the presented book chapter is: Does a given practical teaching method positively influence the improving of a given transversal competence and to what degree? We limited our research to the transversal competences in the following areas: entrepreneurship, communicativeness, creativity and teamwork with the focus on the Slovenia case. Teaching methods are understood as specific approaches of teachers’ work enabling students to acquire and develop knowledge and skills as well as to shape attitudes (Więcek-Janka et al., 2017). A decision of a teacher on the selection of teaching methods is influenced by several factors such...