

Contemporary Study Process for Enhancement of Employability in the Dynamic Environment

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ABSTRACT

The requirements of labour market and the dynamic external environment are the competitive forces asking for a new employee competence – ability to align with the national and international labour market requirements. Routine tasks are progressively being replaced by technology therefore it is expected that in the nearest future there will be a greater need for such skills as independent problem-solving, planning, creative thinking, organisation and communication, even for basic jobs. Accordingly, serious changes are observed in the teaching, learning and assessment methods. The aim of the Paper is to reflect the results of three EU funded projects that were conducted to find out what skills and competences are required by modern labour market for current and future jobs, the problems encountered and the needs experienced in practice, and, finally, student perception about the modern teaching, learning and assessment methods.

Keywords: Constructive alignment, Teaching, learning and assessment methods, Skills, Labour market demand, Employability, Competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of employability and skills anticipation, the concepts of competences and capabilities have become more significant. If an employee has the required education, knowledge and relevant skills, the person may be qualified. If an employee demonstrates the ability to achieve the desired results, the person may be competent. Thus, knowledgeable, qualified, capable and competent are not synonyms. Qualified and knowledgeable employees sometimes may be incapable to deliver the results required for the job position as the person may have the necessary knowledge and skills but not apply them properly. Based on this, competences should be understood as a proven ability to apply the knowledge and skills in practice. Routine tasks are progressively being replaced by technology therefore it is expected that in the nearest future there will be a greater need for such skills as independent problem-solving, planning, organisation and communication, even in basic occupations. Accordingly, there is observed a serious need for changes in the teaching, learning and assessment methods to develop these competences.

Labour market demands quality and a certain level of competence as well as recognition of the qualification across borders, which is important not just in the common European space, but across the globe. This brings quality, conformity with the labour market needs as well as the need for common or comparable standards and international recognition of qualifications to the forefront of employability. Labour market as one of the driving forces of the content and quality of education attributes high value to international recognition of qualifications and education [23]. Constructive alignment is an example of outcomes-based education when first we define what we intend students to learn, and align teaching and assessment to those outcomes. Since labour market uses and applies the learning outcomes in real life, the

quality of education and training policy cannot exist separately from it. This is especially important with the free movement of labour in the open European space [23].

The aim of the Paper is to represent the results of three European Union (thereafter – EU) funded projects in order to find out the modern teaching, learning and assessment methods for the enhancement of employability in accordance with the labour market needs and demand. The Paper includes the research results of the three EU projects:

- 1) Leonardo da Vinci project “Employability and Skills Anticipation Policies: a Social ROI Approach” (thereafter – *ESAP*) [35];
- 2) Erasmus+ KA 2 project „Coaches of SMEs: 5POINTS Trainings” (thereafter – *5POINTS*) [10];
- 3) Erasmus+ KA 2 project “Innovative strategic partnership for European higher education” (thereafter – *ISPEHE*) [17].

2. LABOUR MARKET DEMANDS: RESEARCH RESULTS

(1) Project *ESAP* research results

The main aim of the project was to measure the return on investment of active Employment and Vocational Education and Training (thereafter-VET) policies and promoting the involvement of stakeholders in the analysis of the present and future skills needed by the labour market, within the local/regional framework and sectorial perspective, as well as promoting the reflection about the recognition of employability skills. The survey “Qualifications and Market Demands Questionnaire: Skills, competences most demanded from labour market” has been carried out in the project “Employability and Skills Anticipation Policies: a Social ROI Approach” framework.

The purpose of the survey was to identify and analyse qualification needs in the present and close future (core skills) and their connection with the recognition from small and large companies and the labour market in the project partner countries: the Czech Republic, Latvia, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The questionnaire was designed for identifying which abilities, skills and knowledge are essential for the employees, that is, the most important transversal competences for the companies and the identification of training needs. The survey period was May – July 2013 and the questionnaire included 47 questions. 175 questionnaires were received from all the areas where the survey was carried out. It should be noted that data analysis does not follow a rigorous statistical processing due to their diverse origin: production sector, size of the company and different size of sample in each country. The overall picture of the companies involved in the survey can be described as follows:

- 69% of them belong to the tertiary sector or service companies while the rest of the responses, 31%, come from the secondary sector (manufacturing);
- by size of the company, SMEs were predominant (71%) against medium or large companies (29%);
- 69% of the companies declare to have a special training budget allocation, but 63% of them note that this budget is lower than 1%.

The companies were asked about the abilities, skills and knowledge considered essential for the development of the current employment and the possible jobs in the future. They rated the importance of the skills from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important).

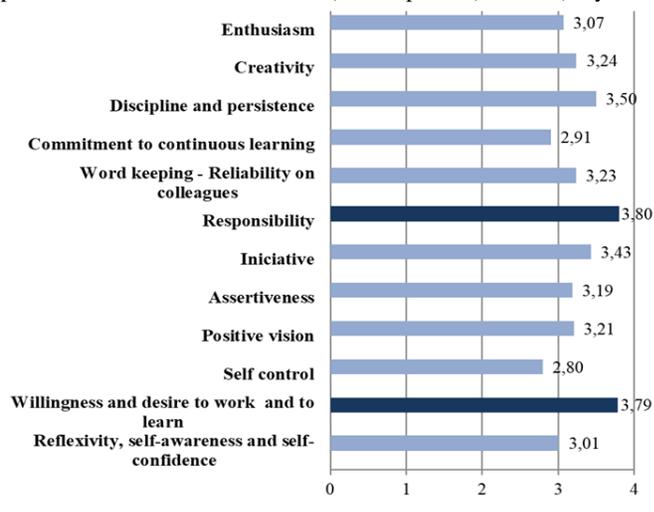


Figure 1. Most valued personal qualities/attributes

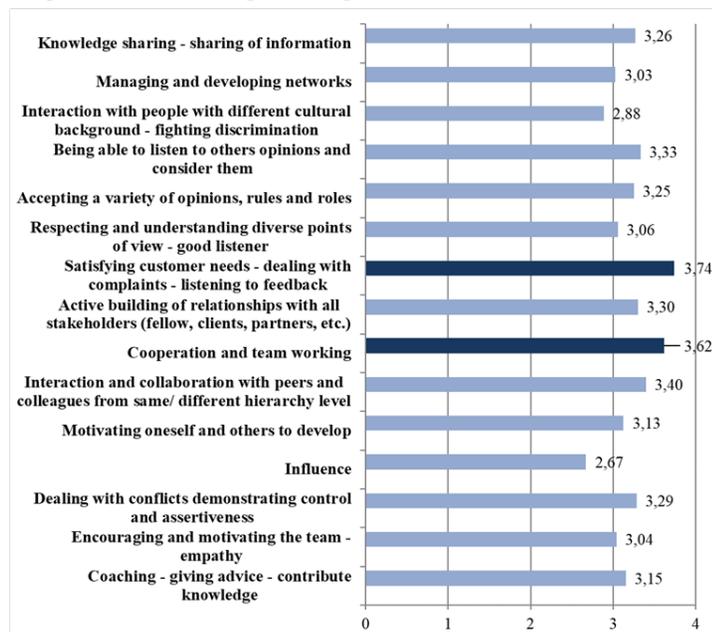


Figure 3. Most valued human relations and interpersonal skills

Almost all personal qualities (see Figure 1) given in the questionnaire were valued as important or very important. Two qualities – the responsibility and willingness and desire to work and to learn – stand out as the most appreciated. This reflects the fact that other qualities may be acquired during work or they may be less important for the jobs assessed.

All the communication skills (see Figure 2) are rated as important for the activity development and the ability to listen to others is rated as most important. The respondents noted that communication itself is important, especially highlighted listening to others, which may be associated with an employee's ability to perceive, understand and execute the given tasks.

Again almost all human relations and interpersonal skills (see Figure 3) were valued as important. The most outstanding skill is the capability to satisfy the customer needs – dealing with complaints and listening to feedback – as well as cooperation and team working. Those are very much connected and interrelated

skills, as customer satisfaction should be the goal of all of the company's employees.

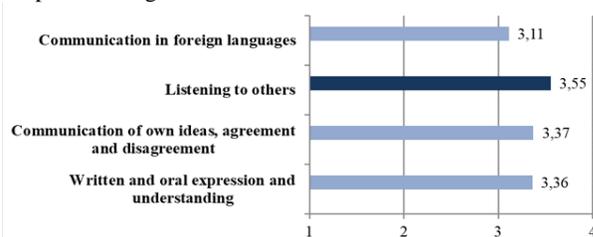


Figure 2. Most valued communication skills

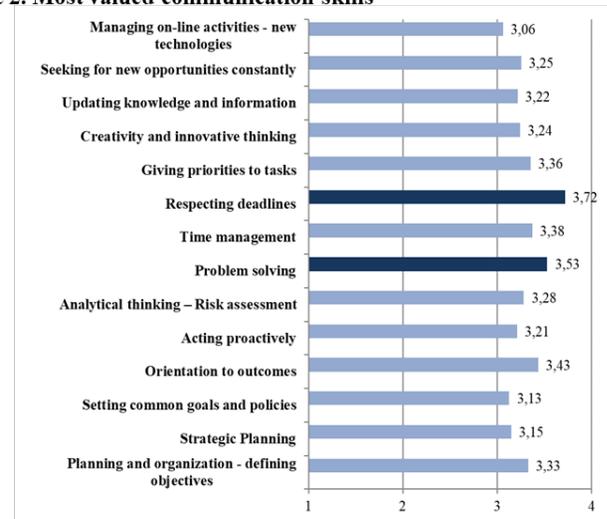


Figure 4. Most valued research/planning skills



Figure 5. Most valued leadership and management skills

Research and planning skills (see Figure 4) were rated as important as well, and the highest-ranked positions are for those related to quality and market demands, e.g. respecting deadlines and problem solving. Nowadays problem solving skill is very important. Problem solving also was named as the main employee skill according to the OECD Top 10 skills for future jobs according to employers [39].

Leadership and management skills (see Figure 5) were highly valued, all of them are important; flexibility, overcoming difficulties and professional competences were valued slightly higher than others.

Although the survey was limited to the fields of activities of the project partners in their regions, the main conclusions obtained are aligned with the European trends regarding forecasting skill demands and job openings according to the European Centre for

the Development of Vocational Training [8] studies. In conclusion, all the companies claim the need for constant training of their employees, but the job market is very volatile and the training offered by education institutions not always meets the requirements of companies. It should be noted that lifelong learning was pointed out as most valued by companies.

(2) Project 5 POINTS research results

The main aim of the 5POINTS project was creating mechanisms towards the solution of the issue of marketing, research and development and management of financial tools and developing problem solving abilities of SMEs, including the solution of financial problems. The basic objectives for the need analysis [22] survey that has been carried out in the framework of the project are:

- determining the relationship between the needs and practices;
- determining the problems experienced in practice;
- giving encouragement and support to the provision of training activities for both managers and employees in SMEs.

In determining the sample of the research, the accounting professionals, company managers, internal auditors and internal controllers, which constitute the target group of the project were used. In total 190 SMEs from Turkey, Hungary, Latvia, Finland, Spain, constitute the sample of the need analysis. The research period was March – May 2015.

Two activities were carried out to determine the basic requirements of the project target group among the coaches of SMEs. The first of these is the interview with open-ended questions. The data of the research was collected using the semi-structured interview technique. The second activity carried out in need analysis is the preparation of closed-ended questions. The purpose of these questions was to determine whether the participants had received any prior training in coaching, and if yes, how the results of the training process were reflected.

All interviews were made in person and the didactic approach was taken as the basis in carrying out the research. The responses were converted into a written text prior to data analysis. Thus, it was made easier to classify the qualitative data provided by the participants in content and digital terms.

In general, high majority of the companies in the five countries have an operating history of more than 16 years. Also in more than half of the companies in five countries that participated in the survey, the owner of the company also is the manager of the company. The fields of operation of the companies generally include trade and service sector. It could be seen that the number of employees is between 1 and 10 in more than half of the companies in the five countries.

After the general information and information on the company was collected in the survey, questions were prepared according to the functional sectioning, which plays an important role in shaping the training materials of the project.

The respondents were asked about the areas in which they feel the need for development in the statements about the assessment of their managerial skills and they were also asked to score them from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently). They responded that there was a need for development in all countries except Spain concerning self-awareness and self-identification, which is the first statement. A need for development concerning inter-personal relations and communication was determined in all the companies that participated in the survey. The country that has the highest need for managerial development concerning problems solving and effective decision taking is Turkey. It was observed that all the companies, which participated in the survey, frequently need consultancy on negotiation and conflict management.

For the first statement (see Table 1), namely, determining the authorities and responsibilities of employees and managers of the company, improving the business processes, coordination and control of activities, it was observed that there was a frequent need for training in the countries which participated in the survey except Spain. It was determined that, in the second and third statement, most companies in all the countries needed training in the development of strategic management process and human resource management, except that companies in Finland were determined to have less need for developing strategic management process and companies in Hungary – for human resource management.

Table 1. The areas for which you feel the need for development

Areas	Turkey	Hungary	Latvia	Finland	Spain
Determining the authorities and responsibilities of employees and managers of the company, improving the business processes in the company, coordination and control of activities	4	4	4	4	2
Developing strategic management process	4	4	4	3	4
Human resource management	4	3	4	4	4

Among all the participants (see Table 2) in the survey, companies other than those in Latvia selected executive development, entrepreneurship and leadership as the subjects where they needed coaching/training most. Strategic management and innovative approaches were the areas of high priority in which the companies in Latvia needed coaching.

Table 2. SME Coaching/training issues

Training issues	Turkey	Hungary	Latvia	Finland	Spain
Executive development, entrepreneurship and leadership	49%	75%	22%	68%	55%
Strategic management and innovative approaches	39%	39%	46%	55%	45%
Development of employee relations and communication	12%	31%	32%	26%	13%

Research done in both projects shows that in general overall demands are becoming more competence-based in all categories, there is a greater need for such transversal skills as willingness and desire to work and to learn, responsibility, communication, satisfying consumer needs, cooperation and team working, giving priorities to tasks and problem solving. When it comes to management positions, strategic thinking, and quick decision-making were chosen as essential.

In most companies, new employees go through initial training aimed at skills and competences needed in the particular position. Generally, the most popular training areas named in the ESAP project were as follows: business skills, language skills, specific IT skills, communication skills.

The employees are generally satisfied with the level of education provided by formal education and lifelong learning programmes, but there is still a gap when it comes to practical skills gained within studies.

3. CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT: TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

The results of various scientific studies [7], [11], [12], [25], [37] show that large organizations have changed their shapes dramatically, reducing layers of hierarchy, dispersing authority and decision making, and adopting a variety of practices associated with knowledge sharing, quality improvement and information technology. Considering the changes in the external environment that influence the education industry, Biggs [3] suggests constructive alignment approach to curriculum design that optimizes the conditions for quality learning. Biggs [2]

describes it as an integrated system where all aspects of teaching and assessment are tuned to support high-level learning. As the system, all applied methods can be grouped as followed: teaching methods, learning methods and assessment methods; at the same time, Briggs acknowledges that Tyler proposed a very similar constructive alignment concept in 1949 [3].

Since 1996 when Constructive Alignment term was coined [4], the model became widely adopted in higher education institutions (thereafter – HEIs) around the globe [19], while in some countries, such as the UK, New Zealand, and Australia, the model is considered as second most frequently employed for professional development programs [20]. Policy makers support the initiatives, for example, in year 2014, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK required higher education institutions to specify their educational programs with regards to the expected outcomes, teaching and assessment practices while similar requirements were proposed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2005 [19]. Researchers point out that the constructively aligned curricula are varied and implemented among different knowledge domains, including healthcare [24], entrepreneurship [26], sociology [36], and others. During the last decade, better outcomes of study process were observed as result of dealing with increasingly complex tasks [36], or faster learning progress of the students whose programs were more constructively aligned [41]. For example, Terrel et al. [37] noted when describing an Australian project where students and teachers used Web 2.0 tools, e.g. blogs, to document knowledge and assess them, “students exhibited incremental learning each week”.

As was already mentioned, the main pillars of Biggs’ method are defined as intended learning outcomes (thereafter – ILO) and choice of the teaching and learning strategies (both training and assessment) that fit the outcomes best [3], [2]; hereafter course or program redesign are so popular among adepts of the method [26], [37]. For example, researchers describe ILOs for a course on Entrepreneurship as the student’s ability to develop and present a business plan for business angels’ review, explain the process for developing a new business venture or reflect on their own capacity as an entrepreneur [26]. However, as was mentioned by many researchers [36], the core enabling factor for the change implementation is using constructive alignment principles across the whole educational program.

Disregarding obvious benefits of the approach, fair-minded researchers highlight that implementation of constructive alignment may significantly vary in quality [14], [38]. Apart from it, as students-oriented learning is linked to students’ interest in the execution of the desired tasks [33], Kotzee [21] describes scenarios to illustrate the idea that excessive obsession with constructivism in teaching might lead to students’ denial to knowledge gathering due to their inability of knowledge application in near future or due to their views or beliefs. Their colleagues echoed with a warning to avoid too prompt transformation of scientific disciplines as a response to economic challenges for mass higher education [18]. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that application of the method requires clear explanation to help students understand and assess the skills they acquired in constructively aligned courses and programs [36] and simultaneously, learning assessment does not have to address only short-term benefits of such studies and compromise the skills required for lifelong learning and professional development [7]. In the light of the above, it is understandable that the method is considered as efficient and effective to facilitate professional development among graduates to address the discrepancy between university and real practice during workplace learning [24], [40].

Analysing the literature regarding the teaching methods applied

it is possible to observe that traditional teacher-oriented methods nowadays are shifted to student-oriented ones, that are group work activities, student-led discovery and hands-on experience, as well as more individualized in comparison with the traditional ones [43]. The significance of student-oriented teaching and learning is described by many scientists [16], [11], [25], [43], as due to practical orientation of higher business education better student preparation for their future career is possible, and it can be concluded that it impacts positively on employability and student satisfaction with their potential workplace. Hence, it is possible to note the following trends that will be described further: Internship and practical orientation of education; Problem-based learning; Creativity training; On-line education; Life-long learning.

In year 2013, Pavlin in his article “Considering University-Business Cooperation Modes from the Perspective of Enterprises” suggested to adjust HEI’s curricula to develop student competences, i.e. to combine the traditional teaching method with extensive cooperation with the industry considering student mobility between the academic and professional environments in the form of an internship or direct recruitment, therefore trainings and short courses might be optional forms of an educational content delivery [27]. More specific training in professional competences, practical works of students, as well as active mentorship programs that support the development of more practical orientation of teaching methods [43] are suggested too.

To continue the idea of student-centred teaching and learning process, another alternate approach such as online education was examined by Clark in 2014 when he observed that the new trend not only supports wide availability of free education, but he even speculated that half of the business schools in the United States will be erased due to the change in learning mode [9]. Other researchers believe, that the new form of learning leads to inevitable transformation of HEIs to more collaborative and open for communication with organizations to be fully effective and provide students not only with accreditation, but also the new learning environment [30]. Combination of traditional and online classes might be defined as one of the most promising models, as it contributes to increased student throughput of the HEI facilities, reduced per-student funding on the institutional level, and increased enrolment and might be more personalized than any traditional approach [42].

The next method, problem-based learning (PBL) is especially important to train students in solving ethical-economic-dilemmas to help them understand the principles of professional managerial ethics [31]. Many researchers [32], [28] point out that PBL is very useful for developing transversal skills, for example, presentation skills, self-management, or project management skills [32], that are applicable in any industry and in many occupations; hence it is possible to conclude that the development of these skills would have positive effect on the student employability.

It is worth mentioning that the problem-based or event-based method is not a novelty in business schools; the case study method was introduced a century ago when students and entrepreneurs discussed business problems in the halls of Harvard University [43]. According to Gawel [16], the case study method might be characterized as student-oriented, problem-oriented, and teamwork-oriented, as obviously, students should cooperate and act deliberately as a group to analyse the case, find solutions and choose the best course of action. In the most recent studies [32], [29] researchers note that a problem or a case based on a topical issue for a business organization in the actual moment gives the learners not only the sense of “authenticity”, the ownership of the case, but also add extra value because of the

difficulties in information research and higher degree of uncertainty that are more typical for actual issues in comparison with history based cases.

Another popular *modus operandi* for educational institutions in the last decade has been creativity training. One of the approaches, how conventionally campus based HEIs might compete in higher education market and raise interest among students, is to increase the number of courses and assignments to develop creativity. For example, Schlee and Harich [34] have discovered that series of creative exercises, creativity training, similar teaching techniques to improve mind-set, to improve case discussion [1] or educational drama, help MBA students to develop problem-solving skills and ability to focus on different dimensions of a problem, which is important for future marketers, accountants, and entrepreneurs in the same way as for artists, as it helps them to come up with original decisions and be more flexible and adapt to the changes in the external environment.

Finally, contemporary learning process prescribes skills development and knowledge gathering from childhood and throughout life, hence lifelong learning appeared as a new teaching and learning paradigm for educators, and many researchers [1], [5], [15], [29] have recognized the significance of these concepts within the last years.

Summarizing the above-stated, it is possible to conclude that the tendency of integration and synthesis of basic and additional knowledge has become the dominant feature in employability and competence development in the contemporary world. The tendency of integration, combination of basic and additional knowledge dominates in the context of human capital evolution; as every process is explored from many sides applying methods of different sciences, i.e., a many-sided vision of the process is essential, as well as getting acquainted with the surrounding „natural” and „artificial” environment, therefore the methods described earlier are amplified by the results of the three EU funded projects portrayed in the paper.

4. STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF LEARNING MODELS: RESEARCH RESULTS OF ISPEHE PROJECT

The aim of this section is to present the research methodology and results of the Innovative Strategic Partnership for European Higher Education (ISPEHE) project. The objective of the project is to support the development of an innovative pathway by improving a long-term strategic collaboration between higher education institutions and companies and enhancing the development of sustainable learning advancements in HEIs [17]. For the development of one of the project components – Strategic Integration of Learning Models (SILM) – a needs assessment analysis was carried out [13]. As a result of project team discussions, it was decided to use Bloom’s taxonomy [6] in creating the framework for SILM, the innovative component of the project in order to specify and distribute the learning outcomes, and Constructive Alignment Approach [3] for the teaching staff to choose particular teaching, learning and assessment methods for each defined learning outcome. For SILM assessment in compliance with the defined learning outcome, the teaching staff chose the methods to be implemented in the study course. In Latvia the following methods were introduced and tested/validated: PBL (Development of Marketing Plan), Peer to Peer Learning (Peer Evaluation) and Formative Assessment.

On the basis of unpublished materials of the project, the Development of Marketing Plan (PBL) was chosen, because through studying a specific case (a company and/or a product), students are stimulated to learn by doing, which could be

considered as one of the most effective ways how to learn if appropriate support is delivered. The implementation process of the teaching method is explained by the teacher as follows: “Students could choose a company and/or product they are interested in and were provided with the guidelines for the development of the plan. It is very time consuming especially for those who are not used to work independently outside the class and rather prefer to do very clearly defined tasks with one correct answer. But here more effort, creativity and problem solving skills are needed. To facilitate the work, students were able to develop their plans in groups. Students were consulted and guided throughout all the semester.” The teacher evaluates it as very effective, although it takes a lot of effort. When assessing the student reactions concerning the implementation of the method, the teacher notes: “Students are not happy, but this method actually helps to achieve the defined learning outcomes (especially higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy) and prepare students for the development of the bachelor thesis. Complaints are because of the effort needed, but the implementation (including coaching) itself is rather appreciated by the students.” The choice of the learning method was substantiated by the fact that it can help students learn effectively and is helpful for both involved parties. The implementation of the method was characterized by the teacher as follows: “Students were informed about the implementation of this method at the beginning of the semester as well as each time before application. The implementation of this method takes more time because assessment sheets should be prepared and introduced. Each time before application I also asked students to suggest criteria to be included in the assessment sheet, comment on the draft sheet and suggest changes if needed. However, students did not take an active role in suggesting and commenting. The method was applied in both individual and group work.” Among the advantages of this method was mentioned the fact that students are more engaged in the presentations of others and those who do not want to express their opinion by speaking are able to write it down. Whereas, one of the drawbacks is that the usefulness for him as a teacher of evaluation done by peer students is limited because of lack of knowledge and critical thinking. However, despite of disadvantages he believes that in general, this method is useful and meaningful if implemented correctly. Overall, the teacher found it useful and said that complaints were received only concerning the implementation of the method.

Whereas the teacher explains the choice of the assessment method as follows: it helps students detect their strengths or weaknesses during the course. He believes that formative assessment is useful for the implementation of student-centred learning and rising effectiveness of expected learning outcomes achievement. The teacher describes the method implementation as follows: “The students were able to hear qualitative feedback (questions to be solved, comments, remarks, suggestions) as well as quantitative feedback (percentage achieved) about the work done. Positive correlation of the final mark and interim results has been identified and I would say that the method was implemented rather successfully. However, it should be considered that the implementation of formative assessment is time-consuming and appropriate support from the management of the study program should be in place. Besides, it should be considered that not all the students are interested in the implementation of that kind of method. A few students perceive the feedback as criticism or just have not done the task and are ashamed of that. However, most of the students appreciated this method and found it useful and meaningful.”

In order to find out the student perception, three questionnaires were prepared – one for each of the implemented methods. All 18 students participated in the survey, submitting 18 valid

questionnaires about the implemented teaching method, 16 about the learning method and 16 about the assessment method. The students were asked how much they agree or disagree with each of the following statements and mark only one answer in each statement using the following rating system: 1 – strongly agree, 2 – somewhat agree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – somewhat disagree, 5 – strongly disagree. The means and standard deviations of student perception are shown in Table 3.

The means and standard deviations of the student perception show that the methods used have contributed to the defined learning outcomes and student opinions are similar and characterize the homogeneity of the group, except for the perception of the workload, which has a slightly higher standard deviation. This can be explained by the differences in the prior knowledge level, which can significantly change the amount of time students need to do certain activities.

In order to determine the overall effectiveness of the methods used (according to the student perception), they were asked to evaluate each of the introduced methods as excellent, very good, moderate, satisfactory or poor.

Table 3. Student perception of the methods introduced in the study course

Attitude statement	PBL (n=18)		P2PL (n=16)		FA (n=16)	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
The tasks required for completion were in accordance with my level of understanding of the course material	1,89	0,76	1,75	0,58	1,63	0,72
I was able to recognize the helpfulness of the particular method for improving my grades and understanding of the course material	1,83	0,71	1,75	0,68	n/a	n/a
The method provided an efficient way for me to express the knowledge concerning the course material	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,00	0,82
The workload was sufficient according to the time period given for completing the implementation of the method	2,72	0,75	2,75	1,06	2,63	0,72
The method was confusing and I thought it was a waste of time	4,61	0,61	4,69	0,48	4,19	0,83

11% of students rated Development of Marketing Plan (PBL) as Excellent, 72% as Very good, 17% as Moderate. Peer to peer learning (Peer evaluation) as Very good was rated by 94% and Moderate by 6% of students. Whereas, Formative Assessment as Excellent was rated by 6%, Very good by 69%, Moderate by 19% and Satisfactory by 6% of students. Consequently, considering both - the assessment of the students' attitudes and the evaluation of the effectiveness - it is considered that the methods used are rather useful in the modern study process.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The authors of the article observed correlation between the trends in modern education discussed above and the key findings of *ESAP*, *5POINTS*, and *ISPEHE* research projects that were conducted to trace employability and skills anticipation in the industry, as well as defined the relationship between skills development and practices, and recognized pathway for improving long-term strategic collaboration between higher education institutions and companies. The *ESAP* project's fact-findings addressed the labour market demands, hence it is possible to state that employers' exigency for such graduate

qualities and interpersonal skills as responsibility, ability to satisfy customer needs and deal with complaints, as well as to respect tough deadlines might be trained by practice-based learning methods, while problem-solving skills and flexibility skills are trained by means of creativity exercises. Communications skills, cooperation and team working skills, as well as the ability to listen to others and, unquestionably, problem-solving skills are acquired by students with the help of individual problem-based learning (PBL) exercises and case study learning assignments in groups. It is worth mentioning that the lifelong learning paradigm contributes to the development and enforcement of willingness and desire to work and learn, individual's skills and competences required for professional qualification, and their abilities to overcome difficulties, which are pointed out as important personal attributes for the employability and sustainable development of the human capital. Since the *5POINTS* research project is aimed to analyse the relationship between the needs and practices and recognize the problems experienced in practice at SMEs, it is possible to conclude that all the modern trends in teaching and learning discussed earlier are relevant to address the company needs by providing institutional development through its individuals' development.

As the *ISPEHE* project itself is founded to support collaboration between HEIs and companies, it is not a surprise that student perception is more favourable about the courses where teaching, learning and assessment methods have been aligned to practice, and at the same time students demonstrated greater enthusiasm about the courses that included PBL and creativity exercises, as well as modern information technology infrastructure. A dimension of lifelong learning professional development was not approached by the research; hence, this is a limitation of the study, however it is not in contradiction to other findings.

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This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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