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INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLEGE STUDIES QUALITY

Annotation

In order to realize the acquired skills in practice, professional skills become extremely important. Competence becomes the educational aim in higher education, covering not only the knowledge that makes up the core of the acquired qualification, but also practical skills that help consolidate in the labor market.

Practices are an integral part of the learning process, but practice performance quality is a frequently occurring problem. Student practice performance quality is determined by a lot of different factors: student motivation and desire to gain professional experience, properly formulated practice tasks and objectives, the attitude of the company, in which students have their practice, to the trainee, practice tutor's competence, etc. The article aims to figure out the importance of professional practices for study quality, the influence of practices on the students in adapting to the labor market and the successful transition of students from the education system to independent professional activities.

Keywords: professional activities practice, professional activities, study quality, study program, the student.

INTRODUCTION

Modern labor market changes pose considerable qualification requirements. The specialists newly entering the labor market must have exceptional personal, social, professional, practical and other skills.

According to Norkute and Stasiunaitiene [12], in order to train a good specialist able to compete in the market and ensure the quality of studies, part of the studies should be organized not in the theoretical but in real professional environment, as it provides new opportunities to see, to experience, to act, develop valuable attitudes important for professional activities.

Professional activities practices is a compulsory part of the curriculum in college degree programmes. Professional practice in the study process is more than application of theory or knowledge. It is understood as an activity and as a relationship in a possible professional field. The practice aim - to enable the students to apply the gained theoretical knowledge and abilities in specific work situations and gain the skills or experience necessary for future professional activities. Through specific practical activities practice helps check how the learning outcomes are achieved and the study quality is ensured. The College trains specialists practitioners, capable to consolidate independently in the labor market.

Today, it is *relevant* to analyze the specifics of practice as part of the study programme in the total context of college studies quality, and associate the effectiveness of practices with the student's ability to integrate into the labor market. Practical training is an integral part of the study quality. The *problems* of the analyzed topic reveal themselves through parameters of organizing college studies practices that determine the results of the study programme and study

quality, and successful student's transition from the education system to independent professional activities.

Research methods

The study aims to determine the importance of students' professional activities practices for study quality.

A questionnaire method was used because it is a reliable way to survey.

The study used non-probability sampling. Advantages of non-probability sampling - lower costs, less time spent. The sample size received in this way is determined by the researcher's personal experience and needs, and the resulting information can be the basis for further research.

The study sample size is not large, because only Marijampole College Business and Technology Faculty graduate students were included in the survey (59 graduate students were questioned). Quantitative study analysis type is summarizing, statistical.

THE ESSENCE OF PRACTICE IN COLLEGE STUDIES

Education and Study Act [7] states that practice is part of study process, for the organization of which the higher education institution is responsible, in college studies the practices have not less than 15 ECTS credits. Although the practice is regulated by law, the study process encounters various practice organization and implementation problems.

Legally practice is regulated as part of the study process, but the problem of large gap between graduates' knowledge and skills acquired in a higher education institution, and the skills needed in the workplace is still relevant. This affects the quality of studies and practice organization, and searches for process improvement mechanisms.

Jezerskyte, Janiunaite [4], analysing study curriculum content, point out that the concept of practice has undergone significant changes in recent years. Having considered the Bologna experts remarks, the practice volume is increased, there are fundamental changes in the concept of practice, its contents and forms. Practice is becoming the integrated axis of studies. Practice performance encourages students to understand the importance of theory, to look for the answers to the questions raised, and to apply them in practice. According to Tereseviciene and Gedviliene [14], practical learning is based on thinking development, creativity, because they enable the learner individuality expression.

Strazdiene, Garalis [13], discussing the expression of entrepreneurship phenomenon education, note the need to shift from teaching to learning and to create a learning environment that could be as realistic as possible. The authors note that during the practice the students have the opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge in practice, to get acquainted with the business company activities, to know themselves, to improve employability skills.

Concerning the content aspect, the practice is part of the study programme, that is why with respect to time, it is directly included into the process which involves a number of various practical tasks. Practice essence - to enable the student to adapt the available theoretical knowledge and skills working in specific situations and to acquire new skills or experience necessary for future professional activity [9].

However, there are knowledge, skills and values which can be acquired and developed only by learning in a particular workplace, so the harmony of study subject content and practical teaching and learning is very important [9]. Practice content is directly related to the study programme learning outcomes. This can be understood as a temporary boost to professional reality having created the conditions for the students to gain the expected results which may not be obtained during the study process in the academic environment [10]

According to Norkute and Stasiunaitiene [12], the aim of the practice can be described in two ways: practice as knowledge of professional activity field and practice as acquisition of professional or work knowledge, skills and / or experience. Practice is becoming the integrated axis of studies in terms of independent personality development, as well as trying to develop the use of theoretical knowledge into practice of future professionals. [5].

THEORY AND PRACTICE RELATIONSHIPS IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

One of today's most relevant issues in higher education area is the quality of studies. Lithuanian higher education system receives a lot of criticism for the degree programs not satisfying the quality of studies, for not sufficient graduates practical preparation and possibilities to apply the obtained knowledge of the labor market. The problem of theory and practice relationship in college studies still remains relevant.

Some uncertainty in the discussion about the relationship between theory and practice is brought by carried out scientific research on the issue. Domarkas [1], with reference to the works of many scientists, states that students of many specialities assess the theory and practice relationship in different ways, according to their practical work experience. He emphasizes that students who do not have practical work experience, pay greater attention to the practical knowledge need because they intuitively feel that academic studies are more focused on theory. Students who have practical work experience, value theoretical knowledge more in order to better understand the practical processes.

Having assessed the insights of Lithuanian scientists [1; 9], it can be assumed that during the practice conditions are created for students to apply the available theoretical knowledge in relevant work situations and to gain the skills and experience that will be required in the future work activities. The integrity of theory and practice is also analyzed by Zubrickiene, Adomaitiene [15]. According to them, theoretical and practical training is an integral component of the process, related to the whole of experiences that are different but complementary. Theory and practice in the study process is integrated by reflexive learning that occurs in practice. Students do not relate themselves to abstract theories during the practice, but evaluate them reflectively and critically, and then apply them in a specific practical situation. In this respect the practice is distinguished by different learning and experience acquisition nature, opposite to studies in the academic environment.

The analysis of the data of the empirical study "The Theory and Practice Integrity with the Respect to the Student Experience and Assessment" [15] confirmed the theory and practice compatibility principle. Respondents indicated that during the professional practice they need both the theoretical and practical knowledge that helps acquire practical skills and practical experience in a real professional activities situation.

According to the authors of the article, greater attention should be given to the interaction between theory and practice in college study programmes and study process when training the specialists for the labor market and this would ensure the quality of studies.

Professional practices at Marijampole college are part of studies in which students acquire skills that allow to create their own learning process and to control it, besides to create the desire to learn and to reflect as well as evaluate the whole learning process. The data analysis showed that it is relevant for students to get acquainted with the practice programme so that they could better prepare for practice performance, i.e. to figure out the practice goals, objectives and tasks given by tutors to be carried out during the practice. The analysis confirmed the principle of theory and practice compatibility. During the practice most students were given suitable conditions for practice performance, but some aspects were assessed very badly – such as introduction to IT systems, and acquaintance with the record documentation show that during the practice not all companies create suitable conditions for students for practice. The comment was received that doing practice in December is not the right time, because it is a difficult period for the company's financial system staff, when the company practice tutors cannot focus enough on trainees, even if they want to. The results of the research showed that the students assess the general skills acquired during practice quite well, with the exception of computer skills and foreign language skills, because in some practice places there are no proper conditions to realize these skills during practice. Only a small part of students did not learn time management skills during the practice that help achieve the best possible results in the frames of available time. They did not acquire punctuality and skills for performing tasks on time, as, apparently, this personal ability is not followed in the company. The study showed that when training students for professional activity greater attention should be paid to students speciality theoretical

knowledge uptake, speciality training and professional practices organization, development of social personal qualities and skills, and provide greater and deeper specific knowledge and skills. It is very gratifying that some students (24 percent) have enough theoretical knowledge, deeper specific knowledge and skills, and 14 percent of students mention that they have sufficient attention for development of social personal qualities and skills. The vast majority of respondents recognized the usefulness of the practice for their future professional activities. The data analysis showed that during the practice the majority of students not only apply theoretical and practical knowledge, are able to use it in real practical situations, but also understand their benefits for future professional activities.

The study showed that while training students for professional activity greater attention should be given to students' speciality theoretical knowledge uptake, speciality training and professional practices organization, development of social personal qualities and skills, and provide greater and deeper specific knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Training future specialists at College more and more focus is put on professional skills development, broader practical application of knowledge, ideas generation, independent solution of problems and taking responsibility in solving complex challenges of activities.

2. When doing practices it is very important for students to create suitable conditions for practice performance. Practice performance encourages students to understand the importance of theory, to look for answers to the questions raised and to apply them in practice.

3. Focusing on the student's ability to adapt quickly in the changing professional environment, the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in professional activities is highlighted and to dispose of a variety of general and personal skills.

4. The research showed that training students for professional activity greater attention should be paid to the students' receptivity for theoretical knowledge, organization of specialty training and professional practices, development of social personal qualities and skills, and provide with greater and deeper specific knowledge and skills.

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