

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT:The process of international networking is related to an increased international market competition. The price and the quality of products and services are not enough in order to be competitive on the global market. Some other completely different factors have become important as well. Foreign language competences are among the crucial aspects for economic development, achievement, maintaining and expanding foreign trade, because, as researches presented in this paper show, they are directly proportional to the export performance.

The needs of the market for specific foreign language skills, apart from English as a lingua franca, are further researched as part of my doctoral dissertation and presented in this paper. The results show that the needs of the market are not fully met.

The enterprises genuinely need highly educated staff with foreign language skills - not only English, but the languages of current and future business partners.

The main factor for increasing competitiveness, for increasing export and for economic growth is the ability of entrepreneurs, which should, in turn, be developed by the higher education as a crucial factor. According to the analyses and results shown in the paper, there are no effective relations between the education and the economy.

Higher education has a social responsibility and in order to be able to achieve its purpose, the gap between the studies and the professional life (i.e. the labour market) has to be bridged, by a structured exchange and cooperation between the employers and the educational institutions.

In order to establish a dynamic coordination between the needs of the enterprises and the higher education in terms of foreign language competences, specific activities are also listed in the paper as measures to improve the language education of future entrepreneurs.

Key words: Market Needs, Foreign Languages, Higher Education, Research, Coordination

INTRODUCTION:Economic development depends on the ability to enter and endure the international market and to communicate with old and new business partners. The globalisation has brought new possibilities, but also new requirements from the enterprises i.e. the employees, in terms of intercultural affinities and good communication skills, as basic requirements to be able to compete on the international market.

We are aware that insufficient knowledge of foreign languages has a negative influence on international business contacts, on foreign trade, especially on export, because it is almost impossible to develop, sustain and expand business contacts without a knowledge of foreign languages. This is especially the case with smaller countries whose language is spoken by a small number of speakers.

Speaking foreign languages and speaking the language of the business partner increases the chances for competitiveness, entering the international market, economy development and development of the country.

Nowadays, in European countries and worldwide, the importance of languages is increasing on many levels. However, despite the constantly increasing awareness of the importance of foreign languages and intercultural knowledge in the professional life, it is not yet sufficiently developed.

Higher education has a social responsibility and in order to be able to meet its goals, the gap between the studies and the professional life i.e. the labour market has to be bridged, by a structured exchange and cooperation between the employers and the educational institutions. The employers are indirect users of higher education services.

The knowledge, the skills and the competences acquired in the higher education need to be appropriate and relevant for practical use.

In Europe and in the Balkan countries there is a gap between the needs in the professional and the academic life of students and graduates from all professions, who are the leading force of the social and the economic development of their country and of the European integration and, on the other hand, their knowledge and competences developed by higher education. That the connection has not been established is evident in terms of the knowledge of foreign languages, which is one of the key components for the development of economic welfare. The main factor for increasing competitiveness, for increasing export and for economic growth is the ability of entrepreneurs, which is, in turn, developed by the higher education as a crucial factor. In order to develop an employable and competitive workforce for the domestic and the European market, superior and portable qualifications have to be developed, as well as key competences that go beyond a particular profession. Foreign language competences are in the foundations of those qualifications.

Communication in foreign languages is one of the eight key competences defined in the European Framework for Key Competences, essential in today's knowledge society for personal development and employability (Key Competences, 2006).

The labour market, the employers and the enterprises genuinely need highly educated staff with foreign language skills - not only English, but the languages of current and future business partners. The needs of the market are researched as part of the doctoral dissertation and will be presented in this paper. It is proven in the dissertation that the needs of the market are not entirely met - in other words, the graduates do not meet the requirements i.e. the education, especially the higher education, does not provide the desired results.

Visible examples of how all university modules are equated in relation to the offer for foreign languages and how they play a lesser role in study programmes can be seen from the offers at the faculties of economics. The offer for foreign languages is the same at all faculties of economics from all universities in the Republic of Macedonia, for all modules -furthermore, the modules Accounting, Finance and Auditing and International Economics and Business at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola are treated as equal, by having a mandatory class of foreign language or an optional class of German in 3 odd semesters; the modules Accounting and Auditing and Foreign Trade are treated as equal by having an optional foreign language class in the 2nd and 3rd semester at the University of Skopje; and the modules Financial Management, Health Management and International

Economics at the University of Stip are treated as equal as there is a mandatory foreign language class in all semesters starting from the third one for the four-year studies. It can be seen from these examples that the faculty with the longest tradition in the state has the least serious offer for foreign languages, which means that at the Faculty of Economics one can get a degree in foreign trade without learning any foreign language, that is, without having any foreign language competences. It can be concluded that there is no strategy to determine a class load or an offer to learn German language at non-philological faculties in the Republic of Macedonia, that the needs of the students for foreign languages competences, needed for academic mobilities, are not taken into account, neither are the needs of the market nor the demands of EU about foreign languages.

According to a SWOT analysis, weaknesses in terms of competitiveness of the Macedonian industry include weak negotiating power, higher education inappropriate to business needs and problems related to running a business, particularly in connection with the conclusion of business contracts, enforcing them etc (IP, 2009, pp. 20-21). Unfulfilled cooperation is one of the reasons for the unmet needs of the market.

Similar to other signatory countries to the Bologna Declaration, at the older universities in Macedonia which have existed before the introduction of the Bologna process there is a decrease in

the offer of foreign languages in general and thus a decrease in the offer of German as a foreign language at the non-philological faculties. The class load being drastically shortened was partly due to the decrease in the number of classes and the necessity of creating space for others predominantly vocational subjects.

CONCLUSION:International cooperation is no longer limited to professionals trained in international trade (and in the Republic of Macedonia not even the university curricula for the modules on international trade have a constant offer of foreign languages). The new dimension of international trade makes a shift from pure export to international cooperation. There is no longer only a movement of products, the willingness to encourage and maintain cooperation with business partners is required, and so is the coordination, the resolution of problems and so on. Communication is not limited only to professional messages but is also oriented towards communicative relationships (Beneke, 2001, pp. 1). This means that almost all people from different fields and holding different positions should be ready for the international market. This need is increased by today's unsustainability i.e. frequent variability of the employment and the field of work. For these reasons, all students must be prepared to communicate in at least one foreign language besides English.

A conclusion that is 20 years old, and yet still not practiced: "Only if the transfer of foreign languages is perceived as a real task of higher education, if they provide professional structures of organisation and comparable profiles of university certificates, the students can be offered what Europe and professional future will require and that is: command of foreign languages in word and deed as a result of goal-oriented and practically usable foreign language education, adequate to higher education standards." (AKS Resolution, 1996, pp. 2)

Investing in the development of foreign language skills would have economic advantages and would positively influence the productivity and the success of SMEs and the country's economic development. There should be widespread awareness of the needs for activities to develop high-quality foreign language skills, with the intention of reaching political stakeholders at national, regional and institutional levels in the educational and economic sector (ELAN, 2006, pp. 70-72).

The general and the professional education should support the development of key competences so that all young people will acquire competences for further education and professional life. Adult training and education should offer real opportunities for development, improvement and actualisation of their own key competences throughout life (Joint Progress, 2010, pp. 5).

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