

Implementation of Practice-Oriented Training as the Basis of University Competitiveness

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Abstract. The change to practice-oriented training is caused by intensification of applied and practical character of higher education. Practice-oriented approach allows students to acquire necessary professional skills and competence, to obtain experience of organizational work, the system of theoretical knowledge, ability to work in a team and to take responsibility for the decisions made. All these correspond to Federal State Educational Standard, qualification profile of a specialist and make the university graduates competitive. The present article considers the process of implementation practice-oriented approach as the basis of competitiveness of the university. The article also contains the analysis of basic principles of practice-oriented approach. As a result of the research, the authors have revealed practice-oriented approach advantages for each of the participants: the university, business and a student. The conducted research was based on such general scientific methods as: observation, description, and modelling. In the process of turning students into competitive, highly qualified specialists active and interactive forms and methods of teaching play an important role. By means of the present-day educational technologies, systematic knowledge contributes to better apprehension of academic subjects. Thus, realization of practice-oriented approach improves the existing educational programs and technologies of creating conditions for training future employees of branch and regional markets of services. These employees will have professional competence of a new level and will be prepared to conduct professional activity under the current conditions.

1. Introduction

One of the most important aspects of educational process at the university is to determine optimal proportions in the ratio of two things. These things are: theoretical knowledge, gained by students from specialty courses, and practical skills, allowing them to fulfil their potential of future specialists in the chosen field of work. Higher educational institutions are to make graduate students competitive on the job market and skilled enough to meet job requirements. It is worth mentioning that topicality of the present article is also determined by enforcement of federal law No. 273 "About Education in the Russian Federation" dated December 12, 2012 [1]. The law specifies strict requirements for the quality of training students at higher educational institutions and emphasizes that the purpose of higher education

is to train future highly skilled employees. Besides, the law “About Education in the Russian Federation” stipulates educational standards and federal state requirements for the quality of training students.

Thus, Russian higher educational institutions are under the keen competition for the limited resources and students. However, in fact, due to constantly changing competitive conditions, administration of educational institutions is not always ready to rationally change its work.

2. Research focus

In order to be competitive, higher educational institution has to train competitive graduate students. According to S.D. Reznik and A.A. Sochilov [2] a student’s competitiveness should be understood as “an integral personal feature, manifested in achieved motives of success, in knowing how to act to become competitive, in ability to create comfortable living surrounding”. The definition stated above in fact associates the concept of competitiveness with a graduate student’s success both in professional and personality spheres. However, an employer does not consider a student to be “a finished product” because a student does not have professional experience. That is why an employer does not take into consideration a graduate’s professional competence and, as a rule, a graduate student is evaluated from the point of his/her personality features. Therefore, it has been said that employers do not care about diplomas.

This is practice-oriented training that can solve the problem of students’ lack of practical experience, raise students’ competitiveness and therefore raise university competitiveness.

The tasks of the research are the following:

1. to analyze the investigations conducted in the field of practice-oriented training;
2. to evaluate practical experience of practice-oriented training;
3. to work out the concept of fulfilment of “Study Bank” project as an effective method of practice-oriented teaching.

“In general, practice-oriented training at the university is considered to be educational program of real business, formation of students’ professional competence (both general and special) by means of real practical tasks being fulfilled during the study course” [3].

Practice oriented approach actively involves students in educational process and raises their motivation to deeper study of theoretical material. Facing practical tasks to be fulfilled, students begin to realize the importance of good theoretical basics and understand how to apply theory to practice.

It is worth mentioning that an important feature of practice-oriented training is interdisciplinary connection of knowledge obtained in the process of study. This forms structured understanding about the obtained knowledge and skills, but not just a volume of information on university subjects. [4]

In his work titled “The Experience of Creating Practice-Oriented Model of Master Degree Program of Technological Business in Collaboration with Student Business-Incubator”, V.N. Vasiliev he states that implementation of principles and methods of practice-oriented teaching can solve the problem of insufficient practical aspect of education. Besides, effective application of practice-oriented approach in a higher educational institution might become its strongest competitive edge in the market of educational services. [5]

Practice-oriented approach in education can be realized by means of various forms and methods. Mark Newman points out at the following principles of this approach [6]:

- teaching is based on project approach, including teamwork;
- the main objective in organization of the study process is gaining practical knowledge and skills by students;
- teaching is based on fulfilling tasks and solving problems under real conditions, and also by analyzing the results of the work done.

It is worth mentioning that the principles stated above reflect the essence of practice-oriented training. They can be amended and expanded in accordance with the specifics of the university and its priority lines of development.

Despite the fact that principles of practice-oriented training are highly significant in producing competitive graduates, in most cases these principles are declared without being put in action.

The problem of implementation of practice-oriented approach in education is being investigated by a number of scientists, such as Mayur S. Gondhalekar [7], L.R. Bergman [8], M. Slowey [9], J. Field [10], and others [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20]. Having analysed the works of these authors, we saw that all of them consider practice-oriented approach to be highly significant. They also believe that it is necessary to create specialized platforms based on business partners or university. These platforms will immerse students into real business environment.

In this context, the experience of Togliatti State University (TSU) is very revealing and useful. In order to solve the problem of insufficient qualification of students, the staff of the project-and-analytical center of the university have developed and implemented the concept of practice-oriented training. Practice-oriented training in TSU is performed on the basis of specially created practice-oriented platform (the Center of Information Technologies), where students fulfil practical tasks faced by organizations in field of information technologies.

Let us consider one of the ways of application of practice-oriented approach in education.

Today higher educational institutions are multidisciplinary university formations having contemporary material and technical resources and highly qualified staff. All these use innovation approach to organize educational and research process and strategic partnership with government authorities and real and financial sector of economy.

Administration of educational institutions realized how important it is to apply practice-oriented training, and within the framework of strategic development of the University we have proposed to create "University-City" project [21]. According to the project, the university will have the system of educational infrastructural business units, functioning in conformity with the principles of market economy and reproducing city infrastructure. The conditions created within the framework of the project raise professional competence of students, immersing them into the institutional units of business environment, reproducing economic, social and technological factors of production of market economy. Owing to these conditions, such process also involves students who are considered as potential personnel resource by employers.

Fulfilling this project, economic departments are developing "Study environment" subproject based on their universities.

This subproject must be based on principles of practice-oriented training:

1. practice-oriented goal-setting;
2. choice of individual educational path;
3. metadisciplinary fundamentals of educational process;
4. efficiency of education;
5. priority of student's educational production;
6. situational training;
7. educational reflection.

The concept of "Study Environment" project is creation of "Study bank" as a platform for educational activities based on the university.

Realization of the program requires the fulfilment of the following tasks:

1. to create a working group to develop and test the project;
2. to determine and allocate resources for implementing the project;
3. to develop and test methodology of organization and conducting educational activities.

The main tasks of the project are:

1) to create a specialized auditorium called "Study Bank" in the university, equipped with the following:

- bank's cash register;
- working place of bank clerk;
- working place of credit inspector;
- installed "Bank-Client" software.

2) to develop “Case Study” for different working procedures of business:

- opening settlement account for legal entity;
- opening settlement account for sole proprietor;
- placing cash to settlement account;
- drawing cash from settlement account;
- preparing documents to obtain credit;
- transmit of money using Internet banking.

3) to implement a one-week “Study Bank” course into study plans of all the Bachelor programs.

The essence of teaching technique is the focus of educational process on person’s potential possibilities and their realization in real business.

The mechanism of teaching technique is involvement of students in various kinds of activity.

The order of preparation for teaching in the framework of “Study Bank” project is the following:

- to create conditions for learning which are as close to real bank conditions as possible;
- to prepare teaching material for conducting activities based on the study bank;
- to plan the schedule of the study bank practice for any specialty students of the department of economics.

The educational process according to “Study Bank” project is the following:

A group of 30 students are sent to do practical work in the study bank. In the study bank they firstly take a brief introduction course of banking, then they do practical case study about bank operations. This way, in the process of learning students can try on the roles of a bank clerk and a client.

At the end of the practice work a conference is organized and some of the project business partners are invited to participate in it as speakers.

The practice work is concluded by a report on the completed tasks, such as opening account, non-cash transactions, crediting and so on.

Realization of “Study Bank” project will make it possible to achieve a totally new level of organizing educational process and to solve an important task of raising financial competence of population.

It is worth noting that such kind of the study bank model is definitely a simulation model far from the actuals of banking business and it is not possible to get absorbed in real work of bank clerks. That is why we propose to improve the concept of “Study Bank” by creating a study room on the basis of one of the partner-banks of Economics Department.

Thus, the main work lines of the study bank will be the following:

- raising competence of teaching staff of the departments of economy;
- improving the teaching subjects of banking on the basis of practice-oriented approach;
- cooperative training of bachelor’s degree students of economy specialties for working in banks;
- raising financial competence of the population.

Thus, at present we are having the following model of the process of implementing practice-oriented methods of teaching by means of “Study Bank” program (Picture 1):

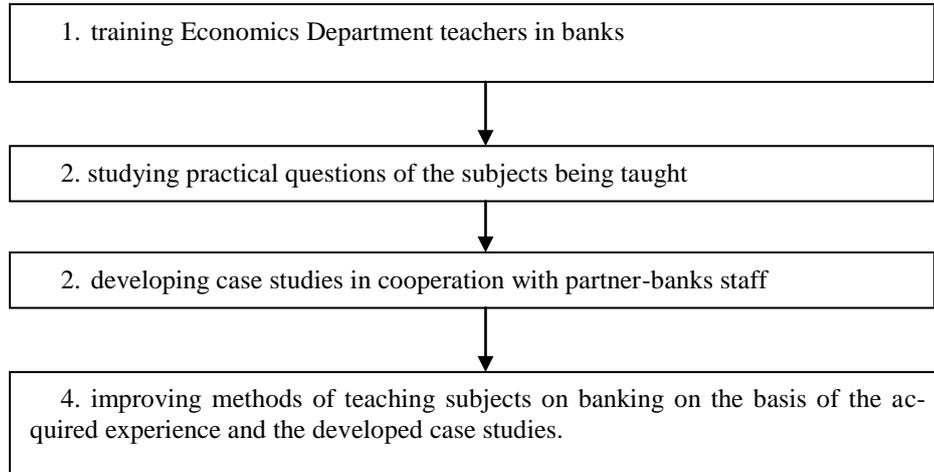


Figure 1. The process of implementing practice-oriented methods of teaching.

“Study Bank” project corresponds to all the actuals of contemporary business. The project is to be amended, adapted and modernized according to the changing conditions of business environment.

Summing up the results of the present work, we have arrived at a conclusion that practice-oriented training builds symbiotic relationships between the university, students and business partners.

The application of practice-oriented approach in education produces positive results for all the participants of this process. The results are shown in Picture 2.

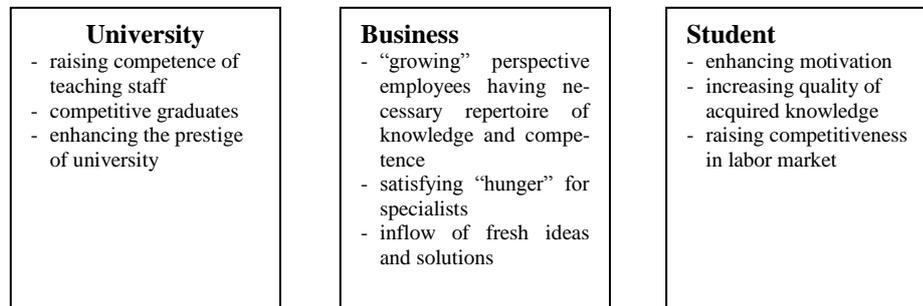


Figure 2. The result from implementing practice-oriented training.

Thus, business partners participating in implementation of practice-oriented approach in educational process have an opportunity in cooperation with the university to produce highly qualified employees. Such employees will not have to be taught again at workplace and will meet the employer’s necessary requirements. In the situation of lack of qualified specialists if we compare the efforts put in the collaborative project and the result produced, it turns out to be obvious that such form of interaction is rather beneficial for business.

From the university standpoint, graduate students are products of its educational activity. That is why growing professional and competitive graduates strengthens competitive advantage of university in the market of educational services. Another pride of university is its teaching staff that raise not only the quality of the subjects but also their qualification in realization of the collaborative project.

3. Conclusions

The realization of “Study Bank” project achieves the following results:

1. Fulfilment – an obligatory application of all the elements of a specialist’s professional competence to his/her practical activity;

2. Demand – importance of all the elements of professional competence for the given professional field;

3. Practicability – stability and repeatability of the whole content of professional competence in practice regardless of time, place, and conditions (according to the specialty);

4. Structural and systematic property, expressed in level structure of professional competence as a system: formation (appearance of professionally important personal substructures according to job description) – development (complication of professional functions and achievement of much higher results by means of acquiring new competence) – crisis (neutralization of professionally significant motives and meanings and weakening of stimulating role of career aims, caused by contradictions and difficulties in practical activity) – improvement;

5. Integrity, expressed in systematic character of interaction of all the elements of professional competence. Integrity appears as a condition of a specialist's self-realization in a profession, and it is revealed by developed self-consciousness, social maturity, ability "to overcome appearing contradictions", and unity of modality of one's integrity ("I want" – "I can" – "I am capable" – "I must" – "I achieve" – "I do");

6. Optimality – achieving better possible results saving specialist's time and efforts necessary to acquire the whole complex of competence;

7. Acme-orientation – following direction of self-improvement and self-development in field of professional competence in practice-oriented educational environment.

It is worth noting that in the Far East of Russia such leading universities as Far Eastern Federal University and Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service successfully apply practice-oriented approach in education and make good use of "Study Bank" in their educational process.

Summing up realization of the new, innovative form of organizing training on the basis of commercial banks, we can conclude that this form makes it possible to implement practical element in the process of teaching, to organize teaching in real workplaces of bank clerks, help students easier adapt to their future work in commercial bank, and in that way raise the quality of education.

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