

Transversal Competences for the Labor Market

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ABSTRACT: In the last two decades, the competence-based learning system has spread in Europe, aiming to develop young people's skills to help them perform in a knowledge-based economy (Chapman and Aspin 2013). This system ensures labor force mobility and transparency in the European space and at an intersectorial level. As a regional policy, European education, including higher education, was reformed based on the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process (EMD 1999), and in Romania, the European recommendations regarding the new frameworks of qualifications in higher education were taken over, achieving the connection at EQF*. From another perspective, employing companies validate the importance of skills for the Romanian labor market and the level of satisfaction of employers with the skills of higher education graduates. As a typology, employers consider transversal skills more important than professional ones, both at a conceptual level and as a degree of acquisition following the completion of higher education. In this article, competence is seen as an outcome, reflecting the requirements of a job, according to Tate (1995) and Rowe (1995). In other words, competence is investigated, denoting what a person knows and is able to do to perform the tasks required by a given occupation (Winterton 2009). Since 2005, a process of substantiating study programs on competencies and learning outcomes has been developed in Romania. In the framework of the research, I sought the answer to the question of how the importance of transversal skills of candidates is perceived on the labor market, their type, and the way in which they translate the knowledge and skills that a graduate of the Romanian education system must have. We also explored the most common ways of integrating transversal skills into the university curriculum and their impact on students' personal and professional development.

KEYWORDS: quality education, skills development, graduate, social inclusion, economic competitiveness

1. Introduction

Currently, more than three-quarters of European Union (EU) companies report difficulties in finding workers with the necessary skills, with only 37% of adults taking regular training courses. As a result, the European Year of Skills is an initiative that aims to promote the importance of skills development among European citizens; is a specific year designated to emphasize and highlight the need to improve individual skills in a variety of areas, including education, vocational training, employment and everyday life. The objectives of the European Year of Skills may vary according to the specific context and priorities set by the organizations and authorities involved. However, in general, these objectives may include: raising awareness among citizens of the importance of skills development and lifelong learning; ensuring access to learning opportunities and skills development for all citizens, regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, socio-economic status or other characteristics; improving professional and technical skills to meet the demands of the labor market and to support innovation and economic growth; promoting high-quality education and training systems that prepare individuals for current and future challenges and encouraging cooperation between EU member states to promote the exchange of best practices and support the process of recognition of skills at European level.

Why is a year dedicated to developing and updating skills needed? There are several reasons why it is important to pay special attention to skills development. Such an initiative provides a platform to draw public attention to the importance of skills development in a constantly changing society, and skills development can play a crucial role in combating social

* EQF is an 8-level, learning outcomes-based framework for all types of qualifications that serves as a translation tool between different national qualifications frameworks.

exclusion and promoting social cohesion by increasing the chances of all citizens to actively participate in social and economic life.

Furthermore, such a year can serve as a catalyst for promoting policies and initiatives that support lifelong education and training, as well as improving access to them. Because a focus on skills development contributes to increasing economic competitiveness and stimulating innovation by preparing individuals for the demands of the labor market in a constantly changing economy.

Last but not least, a European Year of Skills can promote cooperation between EU member states in the field of education, vocational training and skills development, facilitating the exchange of best practices and improving the recognition of skills at European level. How do we build the future?

2. Skills acquired in higher education

As a result of the green and digital transitions, which are the most visible and with widespread impact, new skills needs are emerging in today's society, and the EU is acting to ensure their continued development and to remain economically competitive globally. In the European labor market, the required skills may vary depending on the sector and the field of activity of an organization, but there are some general skills that are increasingly sought after and valued in the European work environment. From this perspective we mention digital skills first because technology plays a central role in most industries. These include computer skills, proficiency in the use of domain-specific software, knowledge of information security and the ability to effectively navigate the digital environment. If we look at the business environment, for example, we notice that many companies and organizations across Europe are going through a digital transformation process to remain competitive in today's business environment. Thus, many jobs in various fields, including business, health, education and public services, now require basic or advanced digital skills. This involves the adoption and integration of digital technologies in all aspects of the business, from internal operations to customer interaction, which entails a true digital transformation of today's workforce.

Also, the IT and technology industry is constantly expanding in Europe and the demand for professionals with digital skills is increasing. These skills can include programming, software development, data analysis, cybersecurity, and more. Moreover, technological advancement brings with it the automation of processes and the use of artificial intelligence in a variety of fields, which requires digital skills to implement, manage and use these technologies effectively. In the context of an increasingly digital society, it is important for the EU to ensure that all citizens have access to digital skills in order to enjoy the benefits of technology and participate fully in the digital society. Overall, digital skills are increasingly essential in the European economy, both for economic growth and innovation, and for social inclusion and labor market participation. It is one of the reasons why it is important that individuals, educational institutions and governments invest in developing and promoting these skills to ensure prosperity and success in the digital age.

The ability to communicate in different environments and with different groups of people is essential in almost all fields of activity. This skill involves the ability to convey information, ideas or feelings in an effective and appropriate way in different contexts and with different audiences. Some important aspects of this competence consist in the adaptability of the communication style; in active listening that involves paying close attention to the other's message, carefully interpreting and understanding what is being said and responding accordingly; in empathy and understanding of the perspectives and feelings of others; in clarity and conciseness embodied in the use of simple and accessible language, in the elimination of jargon and ambiguity, and in the presentation of information in a structured and logical way; in recognition of cultural diversity and social or organizational context. Along with all these elements, in the digital age, it is important to be familiar with various

communication media such as email, instant messaging, video conferencing, etc. The ability to use these tools effectively facilitates communication in different contexts and increases the effectiveness of collaboration. Overall, the ability to communicate in different environments and with different groups of people is crucial for success in the professional and social environment and the development and improvement of this competence contributes massively to building solid interpersonal relationships, to effective problem solving and to the achievement of individual and organizational goals.

Critical thinking and problem solving are two essential skills that are increasingly in demand in professional and social environments. They involve the ability to analyze situations and evaluate information objectively, identify problems and find effective solutions. They consist of collaboration and teamwork skills, adaptability and flexibility, language skills to be integrated in a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe. Recognizing and defining problems and the ability to generate and evaluate various solution options lead to informed and well-founded decision making. So that developed skills to evaluate the risks and benefits of each option, to anticipate the consequences and to select the most suitable solution according to the given objectives and circumstances are more and more necessary in an economic and social environment with the current characteristics. Also, the skills mentioned above are equally necessary for the effective implementation of the solution and for monitoring the progress of reaching the set objectives. We can conclude that critical thinking and problem solving are essential skills that can contribute to success in the professional and social environment, are constantly evolving and determine the cultivation of a continuous learning mentality.

Collaboration and teamwork skills are essential in the contemporary work environment, where projects and initiatives are often carried out in collaboration with other colleagues or business partners. These skills involve the ability to work effectively with others to achieve common goals and achieve desired results. In order to cope with the current demands of the labor market, the higher education graduate must have effective communication, understand and give other team members trust and respect for good collaboration and share resources and responsibilities to achieve the best results.

Interdisciplinary collaboration in today's work environment where projects and initiatives can often involve the participation of people from different fields or with different expertise is an increasingly demanded requirement in the labor market, as is the ability to be able to manage conflicts and tensions work constructively to reach solutions acceptable to all team members. Added to this is the open and constructive feedback that is crucial to continuous improvement in performance and collaboration. We conclude that developing and improving these skills can facilitate the achievement of organizational goals and improve individual and team performance as a whole.

The ability to adapt and be flexible is extremely valuable in today's work environment, characterized by rapid and unpredictable changes. This competency refers to the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, to quickly adjust one's behavior and approaches to new requirements, and to effectively handle new or unexpected situations. Some important aspects of this skill involve the ability to adapt to changes in the environment, technology, procedures or other aspects of the work environment. It is important to be able to see change as an opportunity for growth and development, and not as a threat, as an opening to new ideas and perspectives, to solve problems creatively, with an open mind and innovative solutions, instead of the blockage in the routine or in the traditional way of thinking. Also, the ability to adjust to various roles and responsibilities in the current work environment, where you may have to assume various roles and responsibilities depending on the needs of the organization or the demands of projects, coupled with effective communication in new contexts or with new people and managing stress and uncertainty in a work environment characterized by rapid change and uncertainty can contribute to professional and personal growth and facilitate career success in an ever-changing world.

Language skills are essential in an increasingly globalized world and can be valued in different fields and contexts, including professional, academic, social and cultural. Language skills include the ability to speak and understand a language effectively, reading and writing skills, the correct use of the language's grammar and vocabulary, the ability to speak fluently and correctly pronounce the words and sounds of the language, and the knowledge and understanding the culture and context in which the language is spoken. In an increasingly interconnected world, multiple language skills are becoming increasingly valuable. These may include the ability to speak and understand several foreign languages or to communicate effectively in various linguistic media - verbal, written or digital communication. Overall, language skills are essential for effective communication and interaction with diverse groups of people and in different contexts. Developing and improving these skills can facilitate professional, academic and social success and open up new opportunities and perspectives in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

We believe that all students need to acquire advanced "transversal skills" that can be applied in a wide range of situations, such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Acquiring key skills (numerical and digital skills) is also essential. Skills, regardless of their field, are essential in modern society, where rapid changes and the complexity of the work environment demand varied and up-to-date skills. Therefore, the training program must provide a diverse range of skills, including technical skills, soft skills and specialist knowledge, to prepare individuals for the complex demands of the labor market which must be flexible and adaptable, as the work environment and demands the labor market is constantly changing. In conclusion, training programs should provide a balance between technical and non-technical skills, be flexible and adaptable to changes in the work environment, and promote collaboration, communication and continuous learning. These are the key elements in preparing individuals for success in an ever-changing society and economy.

3. Transposition of skills into university programs

National and regional policies in the field of education, especially in higher education, have reoriented towards market-type solutions (Bleikli 2000). Tertiary education graduates had to be endowed with skills, attitudes and behaviors that would support them in employment shortly after graduation, becoming useful to employing organizations and quickly integrating into their environment. Transposing the need for transversal skills in universities can be achieved through a series of educational strategies and practices, of which curriculum revision and adaptation is by far the most appropriate method. Universities are revising their curricula to better integrate transversal skills into curricula. This involves *introducing courses or modules that focus on developing communication, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and leadership skills*. Curriculum review in universities involves several steps and strategies and starts with the analysis of labor market requirements, which involves consultation with employers in various fields, analysis of data on employment rates and trends in the field, followed by the next step which is the identification of skills relevant transversals based on the information obtained from the analysis of the labor market and the updating and integration of the courses. Teachers can use interactive and experiential teaching methods to promote the development of transversal skills (e.g. case studies, group projects, simulations, internships and real-world practice).

Collaboration with the employer is crucial to ensure the relevance and topicality of university study programs. Through this collaboration, universities can better identify the needs of the labor market and adapt their curricula to meet them. The concrete ways in which universities collaborate with them are strategic partnerships, updating and adapting the curriculum, holding regular consultation sessions with employer representatives to get feedback on study programs and facilitating employment opportunities for their students

through these partnerships. The organization of events and conferences is added to facilitate the interaction and exchange of ideas between students, teaching staff and professionals in the respective fields that provide students with the opportunity to develop their professional networks and learn more about the opportunities in their field of study (eg presentations, panel discussions, career fairs and networking). Universities thus ensure that their study programs remain relevant and up-to-date, and that their graduates are prepared to face the demands and challenges of the modern labor market.

If we speaking about *the certification of the quality of education*, certification and accreditation processes are used to assess the quality and standard of education offered by universities and accreditation agencies evaluate the academic programs, faculty, resources and infrastructure of the institution to ensure that they meet academic standards and professional. The inclusion of transversal skills in the accreditation criteria is done to promote the development of transversal skills and universities must demonstrate that their study programs and educational practices promote the development of communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration. In addition, universities can offer cross-skills certification programs that are recognized by employers and other relevant institutions.

Career counseling and support are extensive services to help students identify and develop transversal skills relevant to their career goals. This support could include one-on-one counseling sessions, workshops and online resources. Universities also facilitate internship and employment opportunities for students, collaborating with employers and organizations in various fields. These hands-on experience opportunities are essential for developing practical skills and building the students' professional network.

4. Research methods

The most appropriate research method, which is based on analysis, may depend on the specific objectives of the research, the context the availability of resources and the nature of the available data. However, an effective and widely used method in analysis-based research that we used in this research is qualitative analysis.

Qualitative analysis, a research method that involves the detailed examination and interpretation of textual content in order to identify patterns, themes and deep meanings, is appropriate when researchers want to understand in depth the perspectives, perceptions and experiences of the study subjects, respectively the transposition of transversal competences in education programs university level.

Thus, we did a *thematic analysis*, which involves identifying and analyzing the themes and patterns that appear in the collected data. We identified keywords, recurring ideas, and patterns of interaction occurring in the data and interpreted them to derive deep meanings. Through content analysis, we *interpreted* units of meaning from a text or data set and developed data categories and subcategories. Through the method of phenomenological analysis, we explored and interpreted the subjective meanings of the experiences in order to identify the essence of the researched phenomenon - transversal skills in their relationship with the labor market and university level programs.

5. Conclusions

The educational system has the difficult task of adequately meeting the expectations of the labor market and developing the skills necessary for young graduates to become efficient employees. The assumption of responsibility for the quality of the workforce must be accompanied by the adoption of a set of strategies to ensure the quality of the educational process, an important condition being good information on the requirements of the internal and external environment. By knowing the skills required by employers, educational institutions obtain important feedback that allows the orientation of the teaching-learning process, so as to effectively respond to the needs of the labor market.

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