

DOUBLE AND JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMS IN UKRAINE: REALIA AND PROSPECTS

Olga Lysak

Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics, Kyiv, Ukraine

lolga@voliacable.com

During the last ten years, with the adoption of legislation to promote academic mobility in Ukraine, the interest towards double/joint degree programs has increased dramatically. However, very little empirical research has been carried out to analyse the spread of the programs across Ukrainian universities and to outline the way such programs are used in particular educational institutions. The aim of this study was, therefore, to investigate the level of development of double/joint degree programs in Ukraine, analyse these programs according to the field of study and academic level. The main issues addressed in this article are special aspects, opportunities and issues connected with double and joint degrees. It is apparent that most double degree programs are offered in the areas of economics and management, while there are much fewer programs in the area of business. Double degree programs in economics, management and business tend to be fewer in number than non-degree mobility programs. The most common partner countries for establishing double degree programs are Poland, France, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain and Lithuania. Sustainability of each program can be reached by permanent work on its improvement which includes making clear requirements, promotion of a program, increasing awareness on the benefits of studying abroad.

Keywords: academic exchange; academic mobility; bachelor level; double degree; joint degree; master level.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in developing and promoting student academic mobility in Ukraine. One of the ways to promote academic mobility is the creation of joint and double degree programs, which provide such benefits as a standardised exchange with clear rules of enrolment and certification, an opportunity to obtain a foreign diploma.

There has been a number of research giving an overview of European double/joint degree programs with the analysis of most common professional fields, duration and academic levels of programs, most common partner countries, including “Joint and double degree programs in the global context: report on an international survey” (Obst et. al., 2011), “Results of the Survey on Study Programmes Awarding Double, Multiple or Joint Degrees” (Maiworm, 2006).

However, there has been no sufficient research in Ukraine on double/joint degree programs, the information on them is scattered. The purpose of the present study is to gather and standardise information on programs in the field of business, management, economics (which tend to be the most common fields for foreign exchange programs in Ukraine). Prior research done in this area shows inconsistency as mainly the experience of some programs is highlighted. In this paper, we provide an overview of the spread of double/joint degree programs with particular examples.

Summarising the above mentioned was defined a **scientific problem**: the need for analysis and evaluation of Ukrainian experience in establishing and promoting double and joint degree programs. This problem identifies the object of the research – double and joint degree programs in Ukraine. It is possible to identify an **aim** of the research as analysis of double and joint degree programs in tertiary education in Ukraine, discovering difficulties in their maintenance and perspectives for further development.

Research objectives:

1. Identification of the field of study and academic level of double and joint degree programs.
2. Establishing the benefits and perspectives of study abroad programs for Ukraine.

Methodology of research

Most Ukrainian universities publish information on academic mobility opportunities on their websites. This makes the information available both for prospective and present students. The research was conducted basing on the official information from the universities, including information from the websites presented in tabs “International cooperation”, “Academic mobility”, “Studying abroad”.

The research data on study abroad programs were taken from major Ukrainian universities. However, to narrow down the scope of research joint/double degree programs at bachelor and master levels in the fields of business, management and economics were selected as being most desired fields among students. The data

received during the research were summarised and analysed. On the basis of this information, the conclusions were made on the special aspects of double/joint degree programs in Ukraine.

Theoretical basis

It is necessary to separate terms “joint degree”, “double degree” and “consecutive degree”. While a variety of definitions of these terms have been suggested, this article will be based on definitions suggested by Knight (2006). The joint degree program is a program upon the completion of which students receive one diploma while the program itself is established by Ukrainian and foreign universities jointly. Double degree programs provide two diplomas upon completion of programs established by Ukrainian and foreign universities jointly. Consecutive degree programs require completion of two consecutive degrees (bachelor and master) upon which students receive two diplomas at these academic levels.

Results of research

The development of market relations in Ukraine, particularly in the context of integration into the European community, creates new requirements for education and employability. Therefore, more prestigious becomes the possession of a Ukrainian diploma which guarantees professionalism, while obtaining a second diploma from a European university.

One of the benefits of having a dual diploma for Ukrainian students is improved employment opportunities. Although, not every Ukrainian university offers programs enabling students to obtain such diplomas. In general, this option is possible for students both of state and private universities. In any case, the programs offered by universities should be studied carefully, because their understanding of double degree programs can vary.

As for the correlation between double, joint and consecutive degree programs, the research revealed that the majority of programs are double degree programs. The predominance of double degrees is explained by the opportunity to obtain an international diploma in addition to Ukrainian one. Most students and their families view international diploma as a prestigious supplement to Ukrainian qualification. In addition, it gives an opportunity to continue education at the next academic level (master's or doctorate) abroad. Thus, one of the main motivators for students to enrol in double degree programs, which usually require a financial investment, time and effort, is a chance to obtain a foreign qualification. Joint degree programs do not provide similar benefits as only one qualification is awarded.

The majority of Ukrainian universities offer double degree programs to their students; nevertheless, much more information is available on non-degree exchange programs, internships, summer schools. While some institutions offer personalised exchange programs based on bi-/multilateral agreements signed mainly with European institutions (e.g. between Kiev National University named after T. Shevchenko and the University of Macerata in Italy), others only highlight well-established programs including Erasmus+ and Fulbright.

This proves that establishing and maintaining double/joint degree programs is seen as a rather complicated process by universities and they are not ready to make efforts in this sphere. One of the reasons could be that educational institutions do not realise all the benefits of such cooperation which requires considerable investments of money and time. Moreover, the sufficient number of students willing to enrol cannot be ensured.

It is fairly certain that most of the offered double degree programs are rather “new”, e.g. programs operating during 3-4 years. Some programs have been operating for quite a long time, including Ukraine-Dutch program “Double diploma” in business administration operating at the University of economics and law “KROK” (since 1999). However, these examples are rare. The period of program existence is directly connected to the number of students involved. Universities often report data of 2-6 participating students per year. With the number of participating student being so low it may be hard to claim that the program is actually operating.

It is important to highlight the experience of most successful Ukrainian double degree programs, which have been operating for a number of years and have proved their reliability. Moreover, positive experience gained by these educational institutions can serve as a good example and motivator for others.

At the University of Economics and Law “KROK” operate two educational programs with European partner universities, namely the above mentioned Ukraine-Dutch program “Double Diplom” in business administration and Ukrainian-Austrian program in export-oriented management.

The first program is run jointly with the Dutch University of Applied Sciences for Business Professionals, which is a private Dutch university. Training in this program lasts 3-4 years depending on previous education. During the last course are mastered such subjects such as entrepreneurship, leadership,

state law, conflict management and individual behaviour, after which students create their own business plan. The educational process is carried out by experienced Dutch and Ukrainian lecturers who combine teaching with practical activities, thus ensuring a high-quality education (KROK, 2014).

It is worth mentioning the use of a special assessment tool for the “Recognition of prior learning” (RPL), which provides exemptions from certain training modules based on the previous professional experience of students. That is, using the technique of personal evaluation of previous experience (assessment of professional experience and available competencies by written tests and interviews with experts) which allows the transfer of certain subjects. Each year about 10 students participate in this program.

Ukrainian-Austrian export-oriented management program in cooperation with IMC University of Applied Sciences (Krems, Austria) gives students the opportunity to receive a Ukrainian diploma in international economics and Austrian one in export-oriented management. The program combines fundamental subjects of international economics and Austrian action-oriented programs and is held completely in English. Training is conducted by Ukrainian and Austrian teachers involving practical specialists. The program provides training in Austria during a semester and practice in export-oriented companies during a semester (KROK, 2014).

One of the successful master programs is Ukrainian-Italian double degree program has been offered by Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University. The admission to the master's program is available for applicants with bachelor, specialist or master degree in any speciality and sufficient level of English that corresponds to B2 of the European Framework Agreement on languages.

The peculiarity of the master's program in International Business is that students not only learn the theory and practice of business management, but also acquire specific skills in business management in various conditions. By doing situational exercises and making hands-on projects, they gain experience in making appropriate management decisions, teamwork, leadership and more. The program allows its participants to attend free English courses during one semester at the University of Macerata (Italy). Moreover, the University of Macerata provides undergraduate students with practical training at the leading enterprises in Marche region.

As a result of accomplishing a double degree master program students present a thesis to a joint committee comprising representatives of Ukrainian and Italian universities. The total duration of the training program is one year ten months.

Turning now to the academic disciplines it is necessary to analyse which areas of study are common. Figure 1 illustrates the correlation among most widespread disciplines for double degree programs.

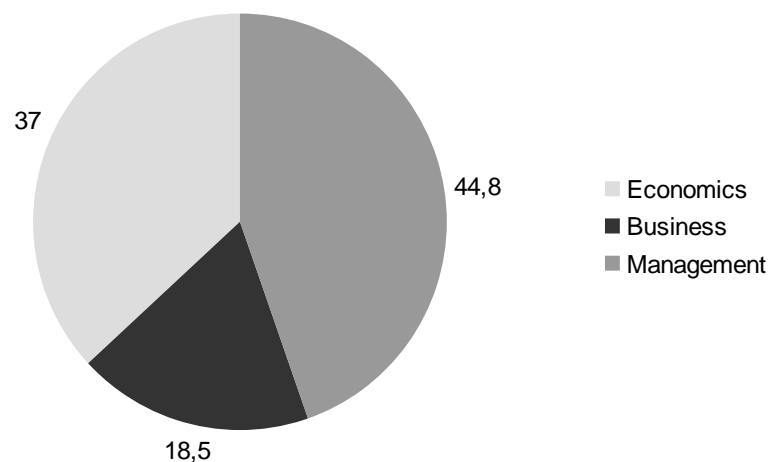


Figure 1. Major academic areas for double degree programs

It is apparent from this diagram that most double degree programs are offered in the areas of economics and management (37% and 44,8% respectively), while there are much fewer programs in the area of business (18,5%). There can be observed the connection between the popularity of double/joint degree programs and ordinary programs in Ukrainian universities. Historically, education in the sphere of economics, management, business is considered prestigious and is expected to provide good employment opportunities.

These findings suggest that Ukrainian students have similar preferences both in national and international education.

From the data in Figure 2 can be seen the correlation of double degree programs according to academic levels.

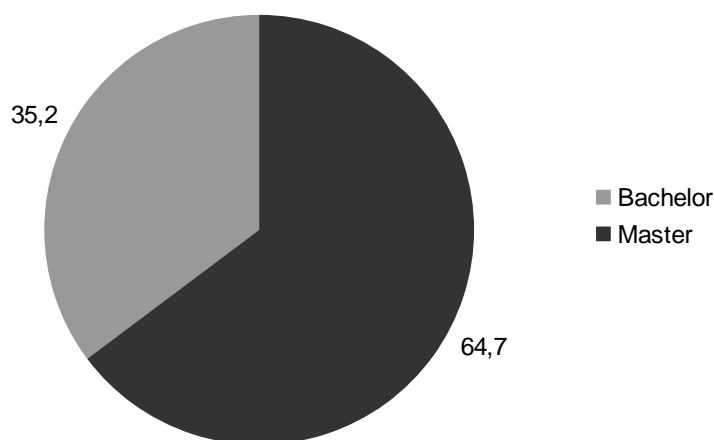


Figure 2. Correlation of double degree programs according to academic levels

The current study on European double/joint degree programs has found that such programs are more numerous at master's rather than at bachelor's degree levels. The same trend can be observed for Ukrainian universities: out of all double degree programs in economics, business and management 64,7 % are at master's level and 35,2 at bachelor's level. There could be several explanations to this correlation. First of all, as some students tend to change university at master's academic level, by offering double degree programs institutions may increase their competitiveness and retain students. Secondly, during the period of study undergraduates have time to enhance their foreign language competence, make more informed choice of program, become more mature to handle increased educational workload.

Having analysed the countries which most frequently become Ukraine's partners for cooperation in educational sphere it has been discovered that Ukraine mainly has academic connections with the EU countries: Italy, Slovakia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, Lithuania, etc. However, the leaders are Poland and France with totally 48% of double degree programs established with these countries.

There could be several explanations to this trend. First of all, Poland has recently become a popular academic destination for Ukrainian students. Currently, the largest quantity of foreign students in Poland is the citizens of Ukraine. According to UNESCO, Poland is the third most popular country for training of Ukrainian students (UNESCO Statistics, 2015). This is explained by a positive attitude to Ukrainian students, cultural proximity, clear conditions for admission, reasonable fees, good marketing campaign.

The focus on France as an educational partner is based on several reasons. Historically, French universities were perhaps the first to enter educational space of independent Ukraine in the 90s due to the rise in the world popularity of French language. Secondly, French universities, unlike in many other EU countries, almost do not charge fees for tuition which allows a greater amount of students to choose studying in France (Saj, 2013; Yakubenko, 2013). Of course, foreigners bear accommodation and food costs, but taking into account the ability to take part-time jobs or obtain grants students do not suffer from great financial pressure (Schüle, 2006).

Turning to practical examples and Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-French cooperation in the area of tertiary education it is important to highlight the experience of Kiev National University of Trade and Economics, which is one of the leading universities in Ukraine in terms of academic exchange programs. In 2013 this educational institution was ranked 1st according to programs allowing students to study abroad; 2nd according to training specialists in economics, finance, enterprise management and 6th in training top-managers (KNUTE, 2013). Academic exchange programs have been operating at KNUTE since 2000, during this time have been awarded more than 350 dual diplomas. Students also have an opportunity to improve their knowledge of French and English and obtain international certificates necessary for participating in double degree programs. Besides, KNUTE offers its students a chance to enrol in a distance learning program, which is still quite a rare type of program in Ukraine.

As it was mentioned before, the second most popular destination for European mobility is Poland. Students exchange programs now operate between KNUTE and the Poznan and Cracow economic universities. Students demonstrating a high level of proficiency in English and Polish, high academic results and active participation in educational process can spend a semester studying in Poland, while the same quantity of Polish students come to study in Ukraine.

The evidence proves that Poland is becoming one of the major destinations for Ukrainian students, often successfully competing with Ukrainian educational institutions. Ukrainian students comprise the biggest group of foreign students in Poland, accounting almost 20% of all students studying in Poland. Poland as an educational destination attracts Ukrainian students for several reasons: reasonable tuition fee and living costs, European educational standards, favourable attitude towards Ukrainian students, territorial closeness to Ukraine (Center of society research, 2013).

Discussion

Double and joint degree programs give the university, students and staff a number of benefits:

1. The university can promote itself on the international level via participation in conferences and signing two- and three-party agreements;
2. The university can enhance its educational programs and curriculum by adopting positive experience and innovations from foreign universities;
3. Establishing new mobility programs can be the source of additional income and will help to attract new students;
4. The students become more motivated to study well because only people with high academic achievements can apply for mobility programs;
5. The students get better opportunities for further employment due to having international experience, have more active life position and improve language skills;
6. The faculty members have opportunities to engage in academic mobility and adopt foreign experience (Lysak, 2014).

The current study has found that the majority of Ukrainian universities offer academic mobility opportunities to their students. However, double degree programs in economics, management and business tend to be fewer in number than non-degree mobility programs. In many cases, educational institutions view these programs as a marketing tool to demonstrate the level of international involvement, establish an international image of the institution and attract a greater number of prospective students.

During the research, it was not always possible to differentiate between actually operating (“de facto”) and “de jure” programs. In the situation when the official web page provides detailed information on the duration, curriculum, tuition fee, specifies which parts of the course will be conducted in Ukraine and which ones in partner country, is demonstrated sustainable quantity of students over several years – it can be claimed that the double degree program exists not only on paper. On the other hand, sometimes there is no detailed information available and an annual number of participating students is not more than 1-2. As a result, the conclusion about the necessity of serious further improvement can be made.

Insufficient quantity of students willing to participate in academic mobility programs also proves that the system of informing and motivating students to participate in double degree programs should be enhanced. Certain obstacles to academic mobility, including lack of motivation, information and knowledge of foreign languages also prevent students from enrolling in such programs. Students often do not fully realise the benefits of having dual diplomas.

Another significant issue is a financial aspect. As it was mentioned earlier, Ukrainian universities also view double degree programs as a source of generating additional income, e.g. by offering language courses or preparatory courses with Ukrainian lecturers. Generally, no scholarships are available for double degree programs, for this reason, the financial burden could be rather heavy and many talented students will not be able to use this opportunity. As a consequence, it might be simpler to participate for less academically successful, but more financially well-off students. On the other hand, certain European countries charge very reasonable fees for the education or sometimes offer it free of charge. In this case, Ukrainian students only bear the costs of staying in a foreign country. Administrators of double degree programs claim that students often do not realise the advantages of paying much less for a double degree program in comparison with the financial burden of studying abroad during 4-5 years.

One more point is the quality of the qualification received, and whether it is possible to talk about obtaining two qualifications, not only two diplomas or whether the attitude to double degree programs is “obtaining two degrees for the price of one” (Knight, 2006). As argues the vice-rector of Kiev National University named after T. Shevchenko Volodymyr Bugrov: “Very often we face a hack where a person

receives two diplomas never visiting the country of the partner university, and some teachers just come to Ukraine and give lectures, conduct examinations and issue a diploma” (Web portal “Money in credit”, 2016).

Nevertheless, the benefits of obtaining double diplomas for Ukrainian students cannot be underestimated. Language skills improvement, getting familiar with foreign instruction methods, immersion in international environment gives students an invaluable experience.

Conclusions

To summarise, the establishment of double/joint degree programs signals the new stage in the development of Ukrainian education. Particular attention should be given not only to establishing new programs but to improving the existing ones. Sustainability of each program can be reached by permanent work on its improvement which includes making clear requirements, promotion of a program, increasing awareness on the benefits of studying abroad. By offering double degree programs it is also possible to retain talented students and combat brain drain. Further research could be conducted in the area of academic recognition of double/joint degree diplomas.

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