

LINKING EDUCATION AND BUSINESS ACROSS GEOGRAPHY OF ERASMUS +. IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND JOB MARKET

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Received August 2015; accepted October 2015

Abstracts

A multitude of studies have demonstrated that entrepreneurial competence is not only required to start an enterprise but it is a key lifelong learning competence relevant for the labour market. The recent communications of the European Commission however underlines the need for more entrepreneurship education in Europe. The following paper describes a novel approach to training of entrepreneurial skills, which has been developed by the European funded project *Linking Education and Business* (LEB) (www.oai.ie/linking-education-business.php). The project team, which consists of VET schools and enterprises, focuses on the new dynamics of society, which is demanding not only individuals with critical thinking and ethics training to contribute to sustainable development, but also with strong capabilities to survive in an increasingly demanding job market. The gap between the labor market and the education system generates controversy among experts about how to fix it, being necessary to try to solve the above deficiencies and respond to the new challenges of the production system in a new economic and social contexts.

Research paper

Keywords: Erasmus+, Education, Business, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Balaguer, P. A. (2016). “Linking Education and Business across Geography of Erasmus +. Improving Relationships between Vocational Training and Job Market”, *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 73–84.¹

¹ This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the International Conference on Entrepreneurship, Business and Social Sciences, Indonesia in 2015

Introduction

The gap between the labour market and the education system generates controversy among experts about how to fix it. This was already the case at the end of the Industrial Era and also during the birth and consolidation of the so called Society of Knowledge. This issue has become an even more pressing issue since the economic crisis punched the European Union right in the face in 2008. The weakening of the global recovery in 2012-2014 has further aggravated the youth jobs crisis. The queues for available jobs have become longer and longer for some unfortunate young jobseekers.

There will always be a gap between the world of education and the world of business. But it's our job to narrow the gap as much as we can and it's certainly our job to invest in our young people. We cannot afford to have 'The Young & The Jobless' as a new lost generation, just because both worlds remain so different, resulting in mismatching. We have always invested in our young people through the 'traditional, repetitive and proven learning curve' of the educational institutional framework. In the other corner the world of business leans on 'out of the box' and innovation' development and last but not least 'money'. The business world may not know all the opportunities of lifelong learning education, while education appears to the business world as a separate world of challenges disguised as conceptual change, specific technologies and new business models and products (which is especially worrying in the case of Vocational Training).

The deep concerns about present and future prospects in a time of economic uncertainty must be repaired by bridging the gap between education and business. We can battle youth unemployment through stimulating entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a major contributor to the growth and

innovative power of the economy. We can only do this if we know how to close the gap between education and business. Policymakers have a chance—and an obligation—to chart a new path linking education tailor made to business.

We need to recognize that a 21st century education is the bedrock of competitiveness, the engine, not simply an input, of the economy. The new dynamics of society demands not only individuals with critical thinking and ethics training to contribute to sustainable development, but also with strong capabilities to survive in an increasingly demanding jobs market. That means that every aspect of the education system—primary, postsecondary and adult education, after-school and youth development, workforce development and training, and teacher preparation programs—must be aligned to link education and business in order to prepare our young citizens with the 21st century skills they need to compete. It's all about reinforcing the strengths of both types of institutions and trying to eliminate their weaknesses through a common project: to what extent education impacts on the level of young people to graduate as entrepreneur or whether it enables young people to become more effective entrepreneurs.

The project *Linking Education & Business* was prepared through expert group meetings in Spain, Greece, Germany, Netherlands and Ireland, was organized by the European Lifelong Learning Programme Leonardo da Vinci, and based on information gathered from all organizations and institutions, as well as through desk based research. This paper is written from the perspective of the partner countries about relationships between education and business. Simply put, we tried to answer two questions: What can education world do to improve relationships with business world?; and 'What

can business world do to improve relationships with the education world?' We have outlined the highlights on what is happening in the framework of education regarding entrepreneurship and what business education actually is when implemented in practice in the LEB partnership countries: Spain, Greece, Germany, Ireland and Netherlands.

Geography of Erasmus+

As stated by European Commission (EC) "The Erasmus+ Programme builds on the achievements of more than 25 years of European programmes in the fields of education, training and youth, covering both an intra-European as well as an international cooperation dimension. Erasmus+ is the result of the integration of previous European programmes implemented by the Commission during the period 2007-2013" (European Commission, 2014, p.10).

The current new period of the program runs from 2014 to 2020. With the new name of Erasmus+ "aims at going beyond these programmes, by promoting synergies and cross-fertilisation throughout the different fields of education, training and youth, removing artificial boundaries between the various Actions and project formats, fostering new ideas, attracting new actors from the world of work and civil society and stimulating new forms of cooperation. Erasmus+ aims at becoming a more effective instrument to address the real needs in terms of human and social capital development in Europe and beyond" (European Commission, 2014, p 10).

Besides, the Erasmus+ Programme is open to the participation of countries outside the European Union with a global vocation. More information about the list of countries beneficiaries of the program can be found in Table I. The programme has an overall indicative financial enve-

lopes of 14.774 billion EUR under Heading 1 and of 1.680 billion EUR under Heading 4 of the EU Budget for the seven years (2014-2020). The annual budget is adopted by the Budgetary Authority (European Commission, 2014, p.17). The different steps for the adoption of the EU budget can be followed at:

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/documents/budget_current_year_en.htm

Table 1. *Some Actions of the Erasmus + Programme are open to any Partner Country of the world listed below, regrouped according to the financial instruments of the EU external action.*

Region 5	Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City State, Switzerland.
Region 6 Asia	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, India, <u>Indonesia</u> , Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.
Region 7 Central Asia	Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Region 8 Latin America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.
Region 9	Iran, Iraq, Yemen.
Region 10	South Africa.
Region 11 ACP	Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Cape Verde, Comoros, Bahamas, Barbados, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Tanzania, East Timor, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
Region 12 Industrialised: Gulf	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia,

Cooperation countries	United Arab Emirates.
Region 13 Other Industrialised countries	Australia, Brunei, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, (Republic of) Korea, Macao, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, United States of America.

What can EducationWorld do to improve relationships with Business?

To meet the objectives sought by companies in collaborating with schools is useful to take a look to the Spanish *Libro de la Formación 2010* (Chambers of Commerce, 2010), which states that the most important is retraining of staff, preparing it to face new technologies and / or potential organizational changes resulting from new needs in jobs. Others mentioned objectives are related to maintaining a competitive position in the market and try to promote improved outcomes and improved management and the preparation of personnel to meet the market needs.

The companies' interest in the students training in companies goes beyond the small grant allocated to them. It seems that the program's value for companies lies in the possibility to meet potential employees in an environment useful to provide a systematic assessment of young people who are about to start their employability, the possible selection of some of them, or setting an agenda for job candidates even available for seasonal jobs. This is also the purpose of education reforms made in most of the European Union countries, which has tried to alleviate some of the problems identified in the previous system, including teaching too academic and away from the workplace. One of the strengths of the new system is the practical training through a period in the company that links the world of education and the workplace. The data show that these practices are for companies one of the most important forms of recruitment. In general, students and business part-

ners are extremely satisfied with the experience, emphasizing the fluidity of relationships with tutors and better collaboration with the VET schools.

As regards knowledge, companies are satisfied with the theoretical level of the students while seeing an improvement in the practical training that is necessary. In view of the results it is clear that collaboration established between schools and enterprises has important benefits for all parties involved. For the student, it is a great way to start a contact with the world of business which often leads to a subsequent contract. For schools it is important to know what the market demands and also a way to motivate teachers and keep their knowledge. For companies constitutes a mechanism for incorporating new workers with guaranteed skills and a way of communication for responding to their demands for qualified personnel.

What can Business World do to improve relationships with education?

There are a wide variety of assets that members of the business community can leverage and contribute to support student achievement. Foremost, observes Robert Fukeli, a management Consultant for Deloitte, LLP and a College Summit Volunteer, they have the three keys of “time, talent, and reasure.” (www.summitcollege.com)

Businesses have the capacity to work together with their school partners across a broad range of mission-critical areas of education and learning. For example:

- providing funding for learning materials and technology to improve the delivery of education and learning support services.
- teaming with educators to define and implement core competencies that students will need to perform well in college and career.

- leading experiential learning experiences for students that connect the classroom with the real world of an office, a research lab, or a factory floor.

Businessmen who have the personnel and financial resources or at least a social understanding have changed their strategies for the young extraction or their education offer. They use the numerous promoting possibilities, integrated themselves into a network, in alliances or and commit themselves in public for the extraction of applicants by modern and innovative methods. Businessmen this manner may by far get still more because the education market demands like also years ago albeit different every company.

While large enterprises have developed many public effective strategies into the extraction of trainees, convert and engage themselves to a positive transition management between school and profession, neither the personnel nor financial resources are available at small enterprises to solicit applicants actively. The time, staff and also financial aspects always require the participation in education fairs, the networking in alliances, the active cooperation at projects in schools or also for using of modern communication channels.

What can the economy do now to meet the current education market competently? From our point of view it requires a continuation of the offers already consisting and measures to reach around further businessmen. Which are aware of the present requirements and will engage in the forecast economy event dedicatedly in the future, only the enterprises this one can insists. The following points are inevitably basic at the entrepreneurial further development:

- Change of the selection criteria (school education, second education, age and sex of the applicants.)
- Development of education offers custom-fit for available applicants
- Strategies to further education offers after the education
- Networking and active cooperation in the existing offers, promoting possibilities and projects for a successful transition from school to the business

Conclusions

Partners of LEB project have found some advisable aspects focused in the three actors involved, schools, companies and government:

- Governments, especially in high unemployment countries, must change their legislations bringing closer businesses and educational world, involving both of them in this process, and by creating a functional network.
- Businesses should create schemes, with the assistance of the educational world, giving students the opportunity to have work experience.
- Business world should invest into their employers by educating them in a long term prospective.
- Teachers need to have the tools and the means to assist their students, probably by identifying their skills, to choose the best of them and observe their progress.
- Special teacher/mentor should be responsible for linking schools and business world for a whole year. He has to follow a course to specialize in this area. Together with the students he could help to develop job profiles and teach theoretical knowledge about the business world.

- Organize once a year a job market in the school could be an interesting idea. It requires companies from different industries so that the students can orientate themselves.
- Organize visits with the students to companies in different industries and give all students two weeks each year the opportunity to gain work experience by following an internship.
- In some countries more has to be done from the government to encourage business to enrol students for internships. Primarily it means more funds for the companies ready to be involved in this process, and also for the schools so they can give better guidance.
- Schools should have to find better ways to motivate the students. They have to develop a benefit system (for example extra points for those who were involved in these kind of initiatives). Also use adequate selection criteria according to the needs of the companies and the skills of the students.
- Business world should have to be involved more in the education world. It starts on the first weeks at school, to introduce themselves, to teach and to guide the students, so they are better prepared to join the business world.

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