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Effective Teaching in the Area of Creative Professions, on the Example of “Big Data, Digital Marketing, Trend-Watching” Specialty at the University of Lower Silesia

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the level of competences among postgraduate students of Big Data, digital marketing and trend-watching specialization at the Department of Journalism, Communication and Technological Studies University of Lower Silesia and to indicate the key competences on the contemporary and future labor market. The research concerns the group of the lectures who taught courses to these students.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The main aim of the paper is to diagnose and define competences of the future in the context of the labor market and to indicate points the most important competences in the didactic process. Current data from labor market and 12 in-depth interviews with lecturers working on the project are analyzed. The group of lectures consists of academics and professionals. I consider the specialization as a unique case of education in the sphere of the competences of the future in constantly transforming society. This is an introductory research which will be extended to the group of specialization students and the potential employees.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The argumentation comprises two main parts. Firstly, most needed competences in the field of internet marketing are characterized. Currently available data from the labor market is the basis of this part of the study. In the second part, dilemmas of lectures, their observations and conclusions are presented. Competences which are considered as key one by academics and professionals are named. Additionally, the paper

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evaluates if the competences suggested by the lecturers correlate with information from the labor market.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Students' digital competences are considered by the lecturers to be at the very high level, however, their social and managing skills are considered to be poor.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The research points out the necessity of developing students' social and interpersonal competences. At the same time, students' digital competences should not be neglected. The most important recommendation for academic society is that professionals should be included as lecturers in order to adjust the academic education to the demanding labor market.

KEYWORDS:

big data, education, competences, internet marketing,
in depth interview

1. INTRODUCTION

Classical marketing is sometimes ineffective. In fact, at the threshold of the fourth industrial revolution a brand needs an opinion leader, because today it is they, not the experts, who are the most trustworthy, thanks to new technologies – a platform for connecting to “followers.” Marketing activities on the Internet, data analysis and interpretation, diagnoses and sometimes the prognoses of trends in various areas of life constitute the goal of a new program at the University of Lower Silesia's Department of Journalism and Communication and Technological Studies –Master's Degree specialisation of Big Data, digital marketing and trend-watching. The project was written for the National Centre for Research and Development POWER competition which aims to internationalise Polish higher education and obtained 139 points out of 140. In the content evaluation, the innovativeness of the program was taken into consideration, which combined key competences assigned to future professions. The project commenced in the spring of 2017, and since October, 60 students from Poland and abroad have been studying this specialisation as part of their daily and extramural studies. This is the first, when it comes to the scope, such international study program in Poland.

Employers are more and more operating on a global market and have to draw from the competence resources of other countries. Hence, international programs that increase competences are so important (Górniak, 2015). The project aspires to form a complete and useful employee, in the light of academia and business co-operation, who easily fits into future professions such as: a trendsetter, a trend-watcher, a content manager, a data miner, a mobile advertising specialist etc. This is an interesting group as it is selected from a larger number of candidates (96 people), international (English is the language of the course). They are very interested in the area of Internet marketing and big data—approx.40% of participants are working in the area of international marketing, computer graphics and lifestyle.

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the level of competences among the students of this specialisation. I consider the big data, digital marketing and trend watching as a separate case of education in the scope of future competences in the continually transforming society. (Küng, 2017; Newman, 2018) I would like to treat the case of ULS as an exemplification of expectations, questions and issues seen by the lecturers in the context of technological development.

2. METHODS

Education for future professions poses a huge challenge for scholars and practitioners. Students are learning about jobs which do not exist yet, or are being formed, therefore they need to be equipped with such a set of competences as to manage on the demanding job market (Czarnik, 2015). In this study, I will answer the question as to which competences lecturers employed in this project, who are also professionals and academics, consider as key, how they evaluate students' competences of the characterised specialisation, and how they compare to the forecasts and trends, which come from the job market and subject literature?

In order to answer the above questions, I have used an unstructured interview. Qualitative research is inherently subjective, marked by opinions and the personality of a researcher (Cresswel, 2013).

The greatest possibilities for testing attitudes, views, and behaviours gives an in-depth interview. It allows confronting the

research with a researcher's reality, allows cooperation between a scientist and the researched one, also leads to self-reflection which may result in valuable conclusions concerning the professional environment, working conditions, social and political systems (Cresswel, 2013). An interview as a research procedure enables more extensive familiarisation with opinions, motivations and values that govern current professional groups, which in my opinion, justifies its selection. In the qualitative research, the researcher is interested in deepening his or her knowledge on a given subject, reaching the clue of the problem and the representativeness of the result becomes not so important (Gudkova, 2012).

For the purpose of the study, I conducted 12 in-depth interviews with lecturers working on the project. The lecturers taught one or two subjects out of 36 included in the curriculum. In February 2018, students completed the first semester, therefore, I conducted interviews with lecturers who have completed the course and those who were starting in February 2018. All interviews were recorded and then they were transcribed. Lecturers were answering questions on the skills and competences of the future and methods that their use in their didactic work for effective teaching. This is an introductory research which will be extended to the group of specialization students and the potential employees.

3. FUTURE COMPETENCES – EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Teaching competences required in the future jobs pose as a challenge for universities. There is a problem in adapting the teaching methods to market expectations. The key issue is to identify and implement competences and skills which in the future will be necessary on the job market. Teaching programs in the scope of social communication should include elements such as: theoretical knowledge and technical issues, and also social and interpersonal aspects because such education is championed by employers and recommended in the European Union's documents (Frączek, 2014; McKinsey, 2016).

The name of the specialisation, for a reason, concerns observations and diagnoses of modern trends (Hatałska, 2017). An important paradigm of the creative economy is immateriality of factors such as:

an idea, talent, pleasure, etc. One of the most important challenges of the creative economy is to give its product the values connected with culture, art or new technologies. The ways of work organisation are dominated by a project approach used in the creative industry. New media also constitute an important element of the creative economy. The internet plays a very important role in the creative economy and its users do not only take advantage of its resources and services but also produce them. The internet enables network production of producers, creators, and fans. Thanks to the net, access to artistic or intellectual inspirations is unlimited and provides huge possibilities. In education for job market needs in the area of market communication, it is important to refer to postulates coming from it.

The two reports, *IAB report on Human Capital in the Marketing Communication Sector* and *Market tendencies – Gumtree Report 2017 Active + Future of job market*, indicated what universities should teach in order to educate an employee to match market requirements. The following skills and competences were distinguished:

- problem solving,
- analytical and logical thinking,
- translating theory into practice,
- searching and processing information,
- search and analysis of data,
- team work skills,
- knowledge of the job (industry) market,
- working in international environment,
- digital competences,
- evaluation of sources' credibility,
- flexibility and openness to change,
- knowledge of foreign languages needed in the industry (IAB, 2016; DEL, 2017).

The challenge of the modern job market in the case of future professions is skills mismatch of quantitative and qualitative character. Due to the fact that competences are usually obtained through formal education, then there are two related issues, which are already present and are being signalled by employers – that is over-education and under-education (Kocór, 2015). There are areas where graduates are very proficient in, and their knowledge and skills are more than enough, however there are some that are completely inadequate.

Effective teaching should strive to smooth out such disproportions in cooperation with market practices.

4. FUTURE COMPETENCES IN CREATIVE PROFESSIONS – EDUCATIONAL ASPECT

The creative economy should be considered in a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary way. The modern world, despite the fact that it seems to be offering a lot, also expects a lot. New technologies are constantly forcing employees to obtain new competences, terrorist threats increase the sense of insecurity, ironically, although attractiveness of creative professions is increasing then job security is decreasing. Creative industry workers more and more often choose to be self-employed, and work remotely, this is also a companies' requirement (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Creative industry workers have to show exceptional competences of various areas in the field of digital marketing and big data, as indicated by employers' analysis and industry reports (Zur, 2016).

In order to research how lecturers work with a group of high expectations, varied experience and in which it is important to stress the set of competences defined in this article, it is necessary to ask the question on how a lecturer should teach in such specialisations and what methods to apply. There is also a question about how the lecturers evaluate students' needs in the context of needs in the marketing and analytical industry. What competences, in their opinion, should students work out and polish off in the course of their studies? I asked this question to 12 lecturers of big data digital marketing and trend-watching specialisation. The researched group consisted of academic lecturers (5 people, coded – acc) with master's degree, PhD, or professors and professionals (7 people – coded – pr). When it comes to the professionals, they are top managers and one is a very experienced journalist. All of them conducted their lectures in English. I conducted an unstructured interview with each of them, lecturers quoted in the research were coded by means of using their initials and subjects assigned to them.

In the scope of competences and digital skills, that means using a computer, generating data, programming, searching for information,

creating content, the lecturers drew attention to a very high level of the group. The students represent the generation of digital natives, students today are all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers and the Internet (Prensky, 2001). The lecturers also point to the fact that for the students, the net is not only their natural environment but also a passion. Students are searching for information about trends in digital communication, they often take part in additional training courses, conferences, webinars, and workshops. The marketing adepts are proficient in online searches, they can use the right key words to quickly find what they are looking for on the Internet. These are very crucial competences in this characterised area.

“They quickly learn new techniques on the net” (PK, Excel and Python Programming Workshop , Data Mining, pr).

“They are proficient in searching for sources” (A. S, law and data protection, pr).

What is more, the lecturers pointed to the high creativity of the group in the context of willingness to learn online and developing one’s skills.

“They have some of the competences and are trying to add other competences, to the ones they already have” (K.G, video marketing, web design, pr).

Such approach would be very useful to future employees, who should be characterised by readiness to learn all their lives, flexibility and the willingness to expand one’s competences (IEL, 2017; IAB, 2016). Students willingly got involved in class activities when they saw a practical application of knowledge and skills taught. In the case of work in the future creative industry, there appears a problem of work methods. Lecturers are looking for new methods and ways of reaching the student. My interlocutors also presented conclusions from their quests. Some of them pointed to the necessity of conducting classes using methods such as: case studies or visualisations, etc.

“The methods I use involve: a lot of problem solving activities, case studies, solution comparison” (S.S, lifestyles, creative industries, pr).

In order to educate a data scientist, that means a person who can manage data bases, knows statistics and machine learning, and distribution and parallel systems (IEL, 2017), it is important, as one lecturer claims, to “move away from traditional teaching methods and

introduce multimedia methods. Implementation of only the necessary theoretical elements" (J.N, Internet and media monitoring, acc).

According to a majority of my interlocutors, students definitely concentrate on the more practical aspects of education, the ones most useful on the job market. Three of my interlocutors modified the timetable in the course of the classes, resigned from a fixed syllabus and tried to modify the teaching process together with students. Lecturers are mainly pleased with the results of individual projects carried out by the students. Some even talk enthusiastically about them stating that the "results exceeded their expectations." The students were able to use internet tools, useful work applications, analytical methods and tools. Without any major problems they adapted strictly technical knowledge in the area of programming.

Their interpersonal competences were evaluated much worse. It is clearly noticed by most of the lectures, I quote:

"I can see a problem in team work competences. They can't work together, prefer to work on their own" (AK, project manager, pr).

"They cannot cooperate, evaluate predispositions, distribute tasks, brain storm" (K.G, pr).

"They cannot accept criticism, they lack distance to themselves" (A.W, MCT, acc).

"They have a problem in working out common solutions" (M.Z. Fundamentals of Marketing, acc).

Students of this specialisation function very well in the internet environment, however in direct communication they cannot manage relationships, diffuse and solve conflicts (IEL, 2017; IAB, 2016). It is difficult for them to evaluate usefulness of others in a group or work out solutions. When it comes to team work methods, many lecturers showed that these methods were difficult to perform during classes because students cannot generate any common products, and in this aspect, the lecturers noticed the need to intensify activities in the direction of interpersonal competences, which scored low.

The project workers talked a lot about who a data analyst, digital marketing worker should be. The lecturers pointed to the complexity of all the necessary skills for this sector's employees.

"In order to effectively diagnose, and even foresee trends, it is necessary to have the ability to analyse and interpret internet data. Such data interpretation is not an easy task, it requires both

economic and socio-cultural knowledge” (J.S, project content coordinator, acc).

“Today we need people like Leonardo da Vinci, able to do everything” (K.G, pr).

“There is a need for an employee who can obtain feedback, has the skills of verifying hate, defining fake, use traditional sources, ability to select, choose the key words” (L.B, online journalism, pr).

The lecturers noticed the complexity of expectations towards a digital marketing employee. Theoretical knowledge rejected by the students seems to be as one useful competence in the case of identifying fake news or when searching for data. In such cases, theoretical background is necessary and this reflection of the lecturers, both academic teachers and the professionals, want to pass on to the students.

5. CONCLUSION

At the end of the above divagations, the conclusions that come from implementing an innovative study programme are very important. In response to information that comes from the market, the lecturers have identified competences needed in the creative professions connected with big data, digital marketing and trend-watching. In my opinion, a very important conclusion is the fact that lecturers and employers alike have noticed that in the case of interpersonal competences, students of this specialisation present significant lack of education, however their digital proficiency, according to the lecturers, seems to be adequate. In the conclusive part of this article I would like to quote a longer statement of one of my interlocutors because it includes most aspects that constituted the core of this research.

Therefore, it is very difficult to predict what skills or features of character employers will favour. However, in my opinion, social skills may become very important. These include highly developed interaction and communications skills and ability to adapt flexibly to changing circumstances. Computers cannot simulate human interaction well, so mind reading abilities may be very important for employees involved in team work. Other than that, judgment and decision making can become very important. What I mean here is

the ability to analyse data and then draw appropriate conclusions. Critical thinking, the ability to use logic and proper reasoning to evaluate various different solutions as well as openness to knowledge, information and ideas may be become very sought-after skills too (M.S, English, acc.).

The above statement shows that project lecturers understand market needs in professions connected with social communication. It is worth noting that the lecturers did not familiarize themselves with the content of the two reports mentioned in the first part. The students mainly do not show enough assertiveness, take criticism very badly and what is important and what the lecturers noticed, it does not appear to concern students from the Ukraine. However, apart from them, the project lecturers define the shortcomings in their competences that are characteristic for the whole generation of the millennials, as to a larger extent they are the project participants (Meisner & Willyer, 2010). It is worth adding that a large part of lecturers noticed the students to be open and always bringing something new to the classes – a fresh point of view, which every company needs. It confirms their value on the job market, as most of the students are already working, and a significant group in the characterised industry as I have described at the beginning. Another competence evaluated low among the students of this specialisation is the ability to work as a team. It is also connected with the issue of assertiveness and it also corresponds to the macro scale, that is all market's diagnosis. For those managing the project it poses as an indicator to encourage lecturers to continue working on them, although they identify them and declare the needed direction for teaching. With the application of methods that increase the interpersonal competences and continuous work on their digital skills, with simultaneous training of managerial skills, there is a chance to obtain an effect that would pose as a real answer to the needs of the job market. It is important to involve professionals into the education process who understand market needs and the direction of its further development (Łuczka & Rembiasz, 2016). With the synergy of market and science the chances to educate whole employees in the desired professions and bridge the competence mismatch both qualitative and quantitative.

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