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Entrepreneurial Education: Attitudes and Perceptions of Employers versus Skills and Competences of Graduates

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Abstract: The aim of this research paper is to find ways of improving the entrepreneurial curriculum through an analysis of the employers' satisfaction level related to entrepreneurship and digital skills of HE graduates. In this context, the following objectives were formulated: carrying out a content research on digital environment; conducting satisfaction surveys for target group; performing critical analysis of surveys' results; identifying the strengths and weakness of Cahul State University in entrepreneurial education. The different types of questions were applied: demographic, rating scale and multiple-choice questions. The Likert-type scales were used for rating scale questions. In this context, the authors recommend adjusting the curriculum design by including the formation of attitudes related to job in forming skills and competences and by diversifying teaching strategies (more interactive and collaborative) and learning methods. Students have to be frequently trained how to work efficiently in groups, how to behave in crisis situation, to think and solve problems creatively. Furthermore, digital skills have to be developed deeply by using in teaching and learning process during all courses by creating and using different digital resources and formats.

This research was conducted within the Erasmus + project "Reinforce entrepreneurial and digital skills of students and teachers to enhance the modernization of higher education in MOLDOVA", Nr. 585353-EPP-1-2017-1-RO-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP.

Keywords: entrepreneurship competence; employers' survey; curriculum adjusting

JEL Classification: I23; L26

Introduction

This research is conducted within the ReSTART project "*Reinforce entrepreneurial and digital skills of students and teachers to enhance the modernization of higher education in MOLDOVA*", which main aim is to integrate and improve the digital and entrepreneurial learning needs of students, teachers and local businesses on the basis of internationalization, strategic partnerships and innovative co-operation at Cahul State University "B.P. Hasdeu".

The purpose of the research is to identify opportunities for improving entrepreneurial curriculum by conducting an analyse of the satisfaction level of local target groups (enterprises, professionals associations, civil society organisations, public entities) related to entrepreneurship and digital skills

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Within this main goal, the research has a number of specific objectives:

- To carry out a content research on digital environment using relevant e-resources as innovative best practices and lessons learned from European countries related to modern teaching and learning practices;
- To collect, analyse and organize process flows form of the best EU practices in entrepreneurship education;
- To conduct satisfaction surveys for target groups: enterprises, professionals associations, civil society organisations, public entities, students and teachers;
- To perform critical analysis of surveys' results;
- To identify the strengths and weakness of HEI in entrepreneurial education by correlating perceptions of different stakeholders' categories;
- To outline the ways to improve the curriculum of B&A master programme in order to enhance the formation of entrepreneurial and digital competences of students.

Methods for Data Collection

The research was conducted based on survey's method using Google forms. The different types of questions were used: demographic, rating scale and multiple-choice questions. The Likert-type scales were used for rating scale questions.

The companies were asked to respond to: demographic (e-mail, type, area of activity, number of employees, position of the respondent) and rating scale questions (the importance of personal characteristics for staff, importance of the young HE graduates' skills, the importance of the young HE graduates' attitudes related to the job, satisfaction level related to the young HE graduates' skills, satisfaction level related to the young HE graduates' attitudes related to the job, the importance of different criteria at hiring a young HE graduate).

Results of the Research

In this survey, 27 companies from the South region of the Republic of Moldova were interrogated. Most of these are local enterprises (74%), professional associations - 8% , 7% -governmental entities and 11% civil society organizations.

The field of activity of these companies is very different. At the same time, most of them represent the service sector - 45%, manufacturing - 22%, retail - 15% and industry – 11%. The weights of other areas are insignificant.

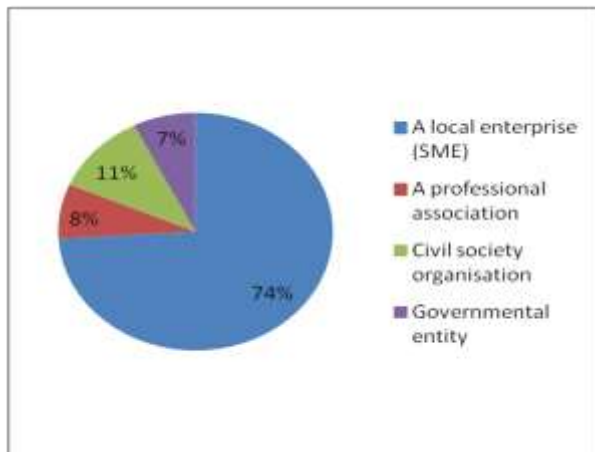


Figure 1. Types of respondents of Companies' Survey

Source: Drafted by the authors

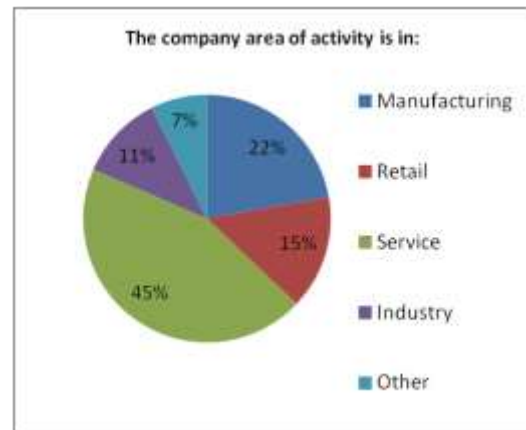


Figure 2. Area of activity Types of respondents of Companies' Survey

Source: Drafted by the authors

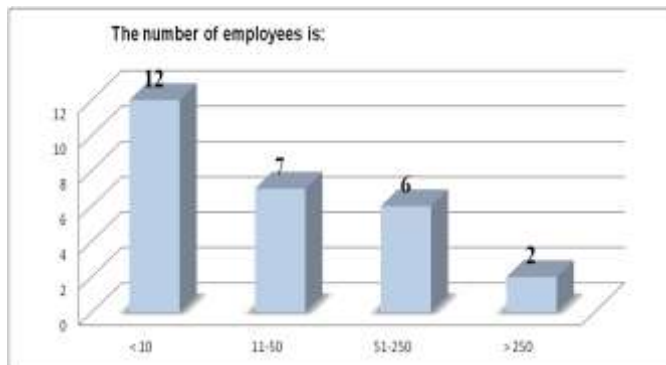


Figure 3. The number of employees of respondents of Companies' Survey

Source: Drafted by the authors



Figure 4. The job position of respondents of Companies' Survey

Source: Drafted by the authors

By number of employees we can characterize the volume of activity of an entity, as well as its impact on the development of the region. Out of the 27 interviewed companies, 2 enterprises have more than 250 employees, 6 are 51-250 employees, 7 have the number of employees from 11 to 50, and 12 have employed up to 10 people.

Respondents to the survey questions are professionals of the highest levels of these companies. From 27 companies, 18 respondents were managers (68%), 4-chief accountants, 2 financial managers, 2 sales managers and merchandiser.

The respondents were asked to answer to a wide range of questions that will help to understand the employers' attitudes and perceptions, and to collect relevant learning needs with respect to entrepreneurship and digital skills.

The following responses were received to the question "How important are the following personal characteristics of employees within your company?": 100% of the respondents considered Communication and teamwork to be important and very important, 93% considered important and very important Confidence in and conviction on one's own abilities and Managing of one's own career development, better ability to solve problems, and only 23 out of 27 respondents argue that it is important and very important Tolerance towards other people's values and behaviour and Better knowledge of

what it wants and reaching. In conclusion, we can say that all these personal characteristics are of major importance for companies, employing young specialists.

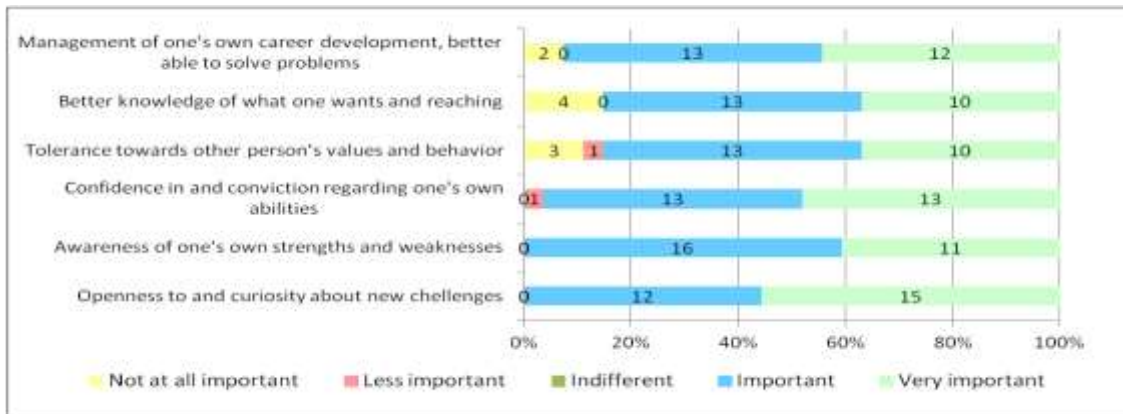


Figure 5. The importance of staff personal characteristics from employers' point of view

Source: Drafted by the authors

In the opinion of respondents, that most of the abilities of young graduates of higher education mentioned in the survey are important and very important. Only 3-4 respondents out of 27 considered critical thinking, leadership, synthetic thinking, written argumentation and knowledge of national cultures to be less importance. The other responses show the considerable importance of these abilities, the Punctuality and Seriousness in Performing Job Tasks is considered to be the most important (figure 6).

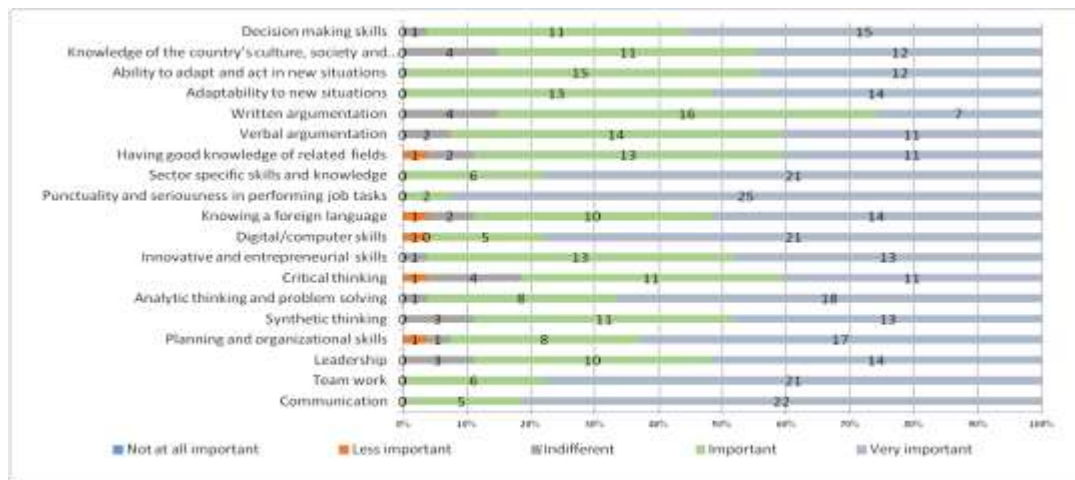


Figure 6. The importance of the young HE graduates' skills from employers' perspective

Source: Drafted by the authors

According to the companies, very important attitudes related to the job of the young HE graduates are (figure 7): Positive attitude toward working tasks, Hardworking, Tenacity, Need for achievement (23-27 respondents). Fewer companies consider Tolerance of Ambiguity and Perseverance to be less important (2-3 respondents).

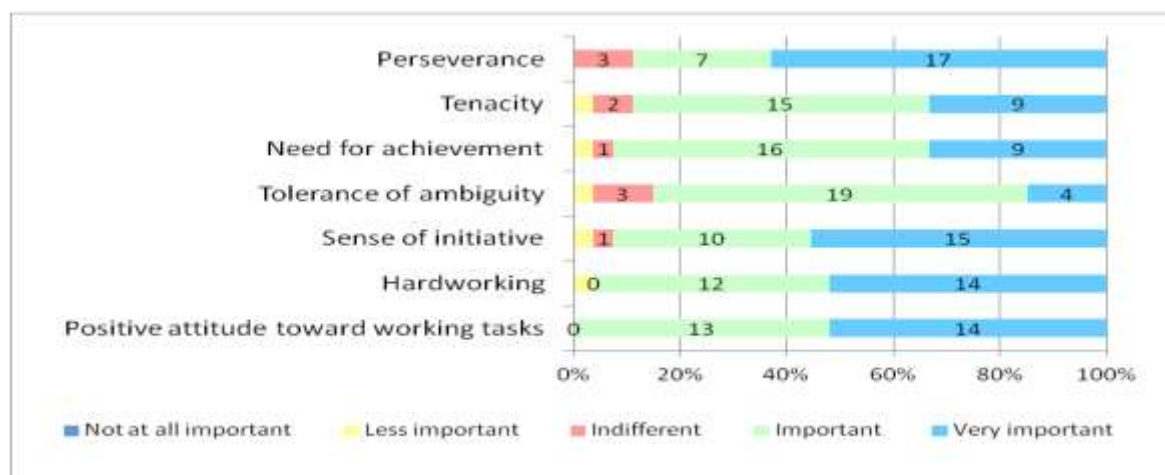


Figure 7. The importance the young HE graduates' attitudes related to the job from employers' point of view

Source: Drafted by the authors

The results of employers' satisfaction survey related to the skills of young specialists show a more interesting situation. According to the responses, from 3% to 14% of respondents are dissatisfied with the graduates' skills (1-4 companies of the 27 polled). At the same time 10-43% of the respondents are indifferent to the possession of these abilities by graduates of higher education (6-12 companies). The other companies are satisfied (39-67% or 11-19 companies) and very satisfied (3-28% or 1-8 companies). The abilities that have received high level of satisfaction are: punctuality and seriousness in performing job tasks (25 of 27), digital skills (22 of 27), communication, teamwork and sector specific skills (21 of 27), analytic thinking and problem solving (19 of 27) and planning skills (18 of 27).

Representatives of the companies were asked to describe the level of satisfaction of the young HE on Graduates' attitudes related to the job. As a result, 1-3 companies of 27 (3-12%) are dissatisfied, 4-9 (14-32%) are indifferent and 14 to 17 companies (50-60%) are satisfied and 2 – 6 of 27 companies (7-20%) are very satisfied with the attitude graduates related to job. According to the results, most respondents are satisfied and very satisfied with the Positive attitude toward working tasks, Sense of initiative, Need for achievement, Tenacity and Perseverance, Hardworking and Tolerance of ambiguity.

From the interviewed companies' view, different employment criteria have a different importance for employers. Thus, Reputation of HE institution is considered to be: not at all important by 2 of 27 respondents, does not matter for 8 of 27 respondents, it is important for 12 respondents and very important for 4. Personality/ soft skills are considered to be important and very important by 11 and 15 of the interviewed companies. Practical/work experience is not at all important or does not matter for 8 companies, and it is important for 19. Main subject/specialization are considered important and very important by 16 and 6 companies, it does not matter for 5 of them. The field of study is also very important for 7 companies and important for 15 out of 27.

Moreover, Foreign Languages Proficiency is important and very important for 20 companies, while for 7 it is less important or does not matter. Experience abroad (study/traineeships/work) is important only for 13 companies, others consider this criterion not at all important or does not matter. Recommendations/references from third parties are less important for 7 companies and 5 do not matter, as 15 companies out of 27 are important and very important. Grades as Experience abroad (study/traineeships/work) is important only for 13 companies, others consider this criterion not at all important or irrelevant.

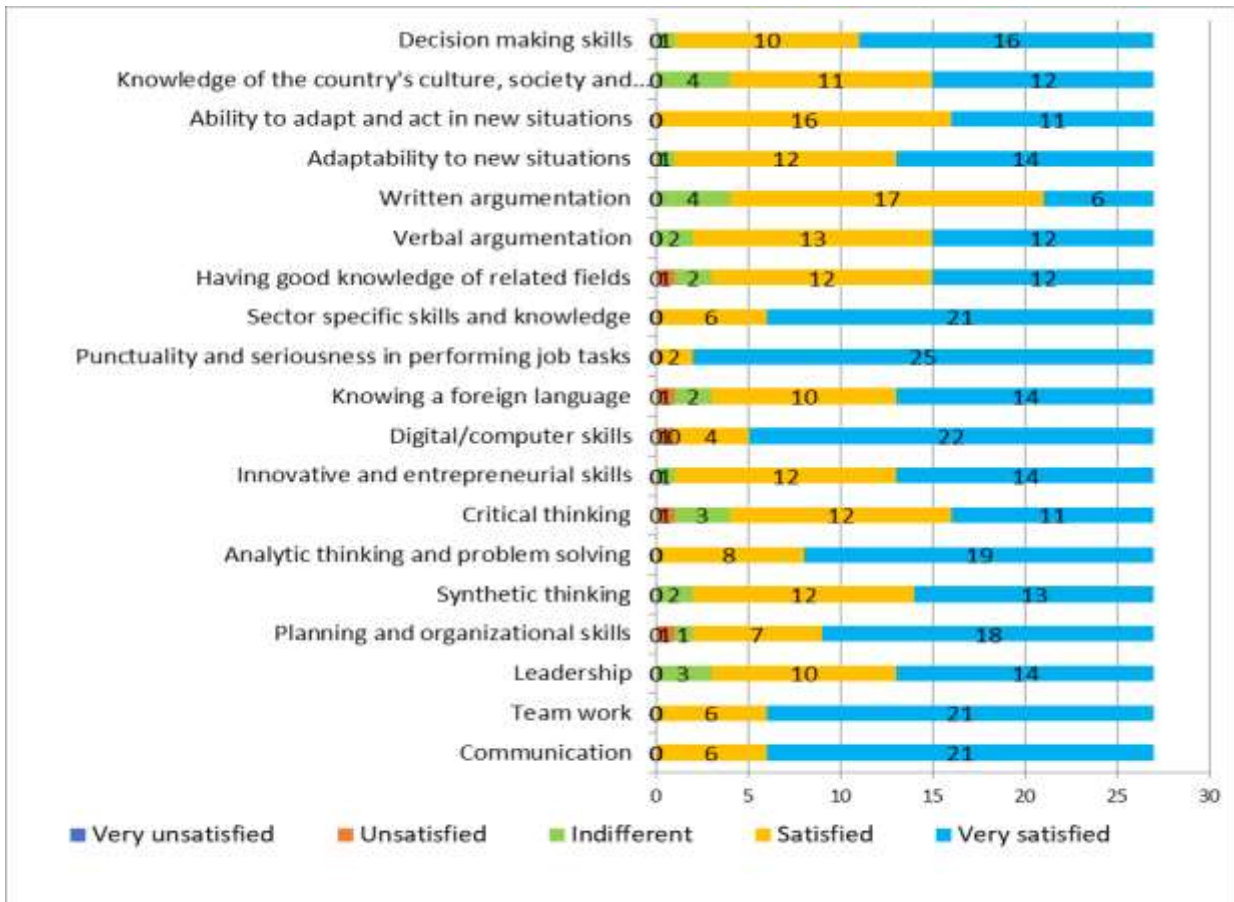


Figure 8. The companies' satisfaction level of the young HE graduates' skills

Source: Drafted by the authors

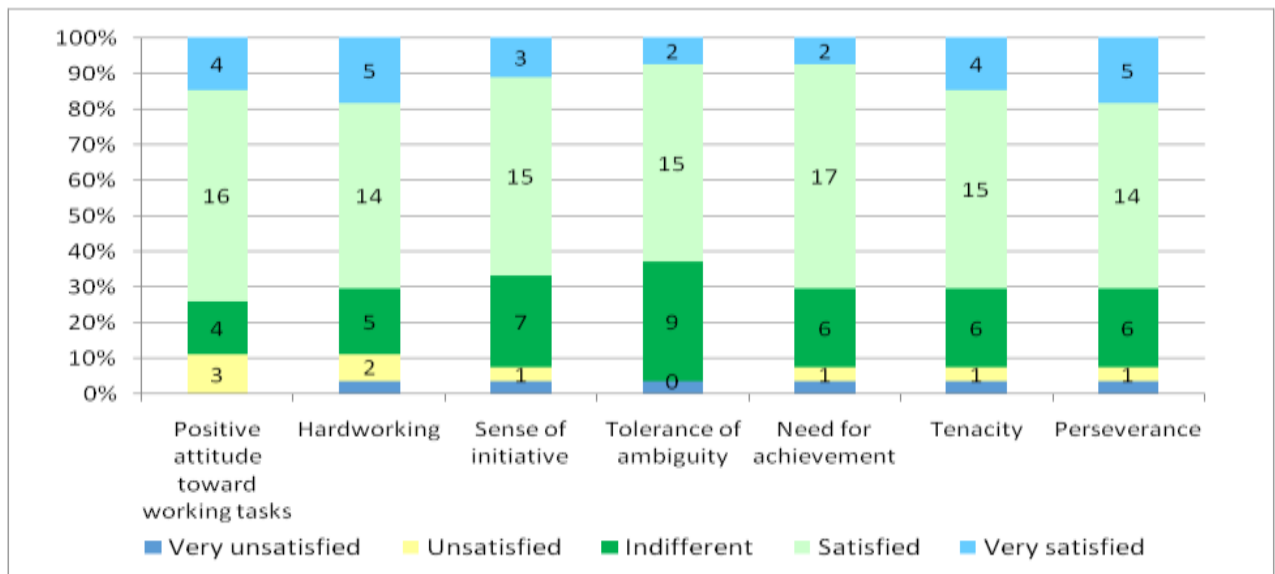


Figure 9. The companies' satisfaction level of the young HE graduates' attitudes related to the job

Source: Drafted by the authors

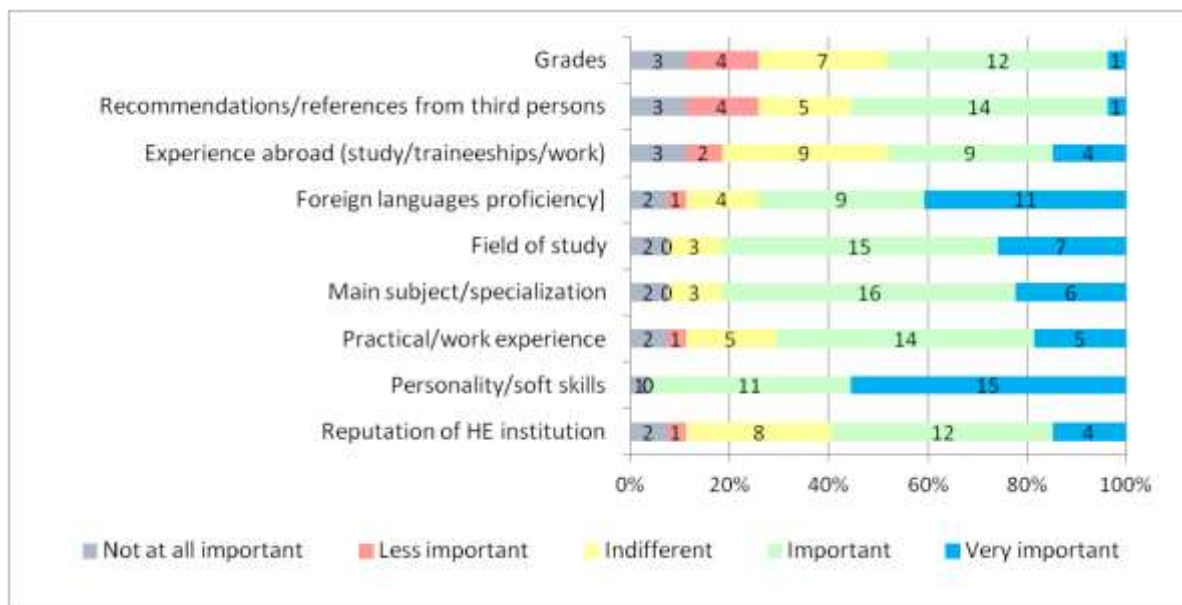


Figure 10. The importance of criteria in hiring young HE graduates

Source: Drafted by the authors

In conclusion, a major part of companies employing graduates of higher education are satisfied with their personal and professional abilities, as well as with their attitude to work. At the same time, there are reserves for improvement of the abilities of graduates of higher education, based on the importance of the employment criteria. According to survey results, the most important employment criteria are: personal skills and interaction skills, main subject/ specialization and field of study.

Findings and Further Recommendations

Findings. The surveys' results on target groups such as enterprises, professionals' associations, civil society organisations and public entities reveal important aspects related to entrepreneurship curricula.

Enterprises and other organisations consider that the most important skills for professional success (as entrepreneur or employee) are: *openness to and curiosity about new challenges, awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses, confidence in own abilities and better able to solve problems* as personal skills; and *punctuality and seriousness in performing job tasks, communication, team work, digital/computer skills and sector specific skills and knowledge* as professional skills. Moreover, companies affirm that the most important attitudes are: *perseverance, sense of initiative, hardworking and positive attitude toward working tasks*.

The responses related to satisfaction level reveal that companies are generally satisfied with the young HE graduates' skills and less satisfied with the young HE graduates' attitudes related to the job.

Recommendations

The project team recommends adjusting the curriculum design by including the formation of attitudes related to job in the formation process of skills and competences.

The curriculum has to be redesign by diversifying teaching strategies (more interactive and collaborative) and learning methods. Students have to be frequently trained how to work efficiently in

groups by developing specific skills as generation of ideas, argumentation of own ideas, listening and tolerating others' ideas, ability to debate intelligently and to conduct a dialogue. In addition, students should be trained how to behave in crisis situation, how to make decision quickly and based on ration arguments rather than on emotions. Moreover, the teaching and learning strategies have to enhance the students' ability to identify their strengths and weakness, how and where they can use their skills. In the same time, more attention has to be paid to creativity, students have to be trained to think and solve problems creatively, and students have to be able to change their perspective of view. Furthermore, digital skills have to be developed deeply by using in teaching and learning process during all courses by creating and using different digital sources and formats.

Conclusions

Entrepreneurial and digital skills have become the most important nowadays. Companies seek to employ creative young specialists with well-developed social, personal and digital skills. These results reveal the development of a wide range of skills as teamwork, communication, problem solving, critical thinking and negotiation in the master courses. In the same time, digital competences are seen very important by the employers and entrepreneurs.

Finally, the best solution in enhancing the development of entrepreneurship education is offering to students a possibility to develop themselves not only as well-trained specialists, but also as strong personalities and competitive entrepreneurs by connecting teaching-learning process with real entrepreneurial environment. Students has to interact actively with companies and entrepreneurs, they should learn and develop their skills and attitudes also through informal channels.

Acknowledgements

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