19th PCSF 2019
Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future

GENERAL TRENDS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to resolve the trends in the transformation of the international academic society; to reveal how people identify themselves on the Internet; to find out whether culture we belong to influence our virtual identity and if people's prejudices towards those of other cultures are relevant online. The paper discusses the Universities mission to teach young people around the world respect and international understanding. The opportunities offered by blended learning and the factors promoting sustainability within professional activity are emphasized. The evolution of blended programmes demands the new professionals to assess the effectiveness of online learning, which empowers them to take advantage of educational technology in their continued professional development. Online courses can solve many of the logistical problems, can help the trainees to focus on their individual needs, and provide individualized support. The development of digitalization should be enhanced by the management culture by investing in competence and support. The achievements in the educational innovation and the creation of the international academic community are discussed as the result of complex factors viewed in historical and sociological perspective. The paper emphasizes the necessity for individual human potential realization and discusses the content of the permeable structures that allow cross-disciplinary interaction. The effectiveness of critical thinking approach is acknowledged, the emotional side of learning is analyzed.

1. Introduction

The internationalism in higher education aims at human development of personality and can be achieved by the exchange of knowledge, extension of cultural borderlines, technical opportunities, and cross cultural awareness among tertiary schools' students and teaching staff alike. Such exchange of knowledge contributes to cultural diversity and enhances the cultural space. There is a rise in internationalization of higher education as a response to the economic demands and the growing necessity for the young generation to fit the global market. Educational mobility is a challenge for contemporary education (Dobbins, 2011). There should be a reliable convergence among universities that can be achieved through the universities' collaboration, industry–universities partnership and more prominent entrepreneurial orientation of tertiary schools. Such university–industry collaboration can boost both academic and business capacity. Free international movement of both capital and labor means that all states are forced to pursue essentially similar economic policies internally if they are not to scare away investors or loose skilled labor to other states, while flows of information mean the citizens everywhere are exposed to the same barrage of cultural massages. The main goals of higher education are to develop students' intellectual capacity, global awareness, critical thinking skills and commitment to constant learning and upgrading. The power of the state is ebbing away and young people are becoming more culturally and academically cosmopolitan. Higher education is treated as a market and the idea of diversity management at tertiary schools is supposed to be connected with market development. The national development of higher education should respond to European challenges. Albeit, the European Universities still consist of national education systems there are a lot of questions about the future of European tertiary schools. Educational reforms like other forms of social change is a process, not an event. Such a process usually takes years, not weeks or months. It is important to recognize that the success in education is a key factor in national competitiveness and is crucial for national economies in a globalized world. Educationalists need to be sensitive to the political dimension of programs' reformation, which can involve the public money and time investment. They need to perceive the pressure the policy makers are under to demonstrate quick results. While the tensions inherent in this potentially contradictory relationship will not go away, the academicians feel that a shared understanding of other agendas is essential, if the best outcomes are to be obtained. It is important that different elements in the educational equation be tackled in parallel, if the lasting effect is to be expected. Educational innovation may vary across the globe, and the policy development must be responsive to the local context.

2. Problem Statement

Nowadays the ability to communicate with not only a person of your culture but also with somebody who belongs to another civilization is far more important than ever before. Soft skills or life skills are enjoying the spotlight amongst the international teaching staff. The attention is paid to the problem of integrating critical thinking and the idea of intercultural awareness fostering. The world recently has stepped into the Information Age where the Internet has blurred the borders between people of different cultures, and given us ability to identify ourselves on the cyberspace in lots of various ways because human beings are no longer attached to a particular nation, religious beliefs, age, and even

gender, unless they want to. Identity, however, is not something, which can be described unambiguously; the formation of one depends on lots of factors and is created through the interaction with other people and understanding of our attitude towards both people and things. The process of identity construction is considered to be highly complex (Diamantaki, 2003). A variety of methods are being used for the study of online activity and for the study of teachers 'decision –making process, knowledge and beliefs. A considerable amount of the early work on online learning was based on transcripts of the online conferences themselves. The status of these accounts is distinctly problematic A delight for the researcher of online teaching is the fact that the online teacher's 'live' teaching work is done out of earshot of the learners, so concurrent verbalization is a real possibility. Since concurrent verbalization is less prone than retrospective verbalization to effects like forgetting and post-hog rationalization, this is a major advantage.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the fact that the way we present ourselves in cyberspace is quite important as it may even influence our real life behavior and choices. The novelty of the work is connected with the emergence of certain behavioral patterns of various cultures' users, which were discovered through studying the articles on the topic of online identity, race, and ethnicity in cyberspace. The necessity to develop a critical approach by practicing seven cognitive skills forming the acronym 'DISCERN' (differentiating, interpreting, selecting strategies, reflecting and noticing) are emphasized as the most meaningful process of teaching and learning. The transformation of western educational achievements into non-western contexts is often problematic, rather than being the expected panacea. The new paradigm for blended learning approach has been discussed and new reasons for employing blended learning at tertiary schools have been provided. In examining the local context, policy makers need to consider teachers' knowledge and beliefs, the quality and content of teachers' educational programs, materials and local perceptions about teaching. Teaching practice needs to be viewed as a cognitive activity, which teachers adopt and adapt through continuing reflective practice. The paper emphasizes the blended learning issue as the challenge of contemporary higher education.

3.   Research Questions

In order to achieve the goal the following tasks have been set: to view the contemporary experience in educational teaching process; to discuss the export of academic processes; to examine the impact of the culture gap; to estimate the research work as the foundation of successful changes; to underline the necessity of public money and management investment; to emphasize the effectiveness of blended learning in the context of higher education; to discuss the importance of soft skills development. The university lecturers are to help learners to develop soft skills to prepare students for modern workplaces.

According to Diamantaki (2003), seeking our identity may be considered as an attempt to find a stable place in the world, which constantly and unpredictably changes (p.3). Based on the feedbacks the users receive on social networks, they make adjustments to their identity as most of the people depend on public opinion. Because of that, true identity, not only the online identity, is really hard to find. Virtual identity may serve as a representation of our real selves, as a continuation, extension of it, or can as well be a completely imagined concept, which was built from scratch and which share either absolutely

nothing or very little with our real selves. Allan (2007); Robbins and Judge (2012) make a helpful distinction between online delivery of content and instruction. Blended learning does not necessarily imply high–tech recourses. A blended learning course can link proposal writing, negotiation skills, and project management courses, thus underpinning the soft skills development. Cyberspace mirrors real life, but on the Internet we can choose how we want other people to see us, if we don't want to project our real life selves into the online world as we may assume that we will be judged by who we are, or just because we want to emphasize our positive qualities or omit negative ones. In some sense this virtual environment is more open-minded and accepting, and, as Kozlova (2015) notes it is easier to find people who will accept you in the virtual environment because it is non-committal and costs nothing for them. (p. 120). The number of authors considered the topic of blended learning implementation and emphasized the digital challenges for the teaching environment (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Bekisheva, 2016; Riabova, 2017). The blended learning was compared with online classes and the positive outcomes for students in blended format were outlined (Chernyavskaya, 2006; Gashkova, Berezovskaya, & Shipunova, 2017). Great strides have been recently made in our understanding of teaching practices that support it. Gay (2000); Rice (2003); Karaulov (2010) captured the major trends and many challenges of teachers' education today, while putting forth a vision for the future that is grounded in evolving knowledge, research and. moral leadership. Teaching is unique in its public service and status. The preparation of excellent teachers is a central commitment without which other reforms are unlikely to succeed.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed to explore the collaborative activity of experienced teachers and effective managers; to analyze the new learning and development strategies; to reveal the principal approach to blended learning course design in the context of effective higher education.

5. Research Methods

The comparative method, a pragmatic-communicative method were used in the paper as the method of investigation was based on the analysis of works targeted at the problem interpretation and the generalization of the study results. The object of the study, the tasks and investigation methods are to be considered in relation to the impact of innovation.

6. Findings

The contemporary experience in educational teaching experience has been viewed; the challengers of academic processes have been discussed and compared; the efficacy of blended learning has been emphasized. Blended learning tuition involves a combination of elements, activities, and inputs; the success of this type of learning depends on the understanding and commitment of the trainers, the effectiveness of well-organized and reliable administration, and the wholehearted engagement of learners, prepared to participate in a course for innovation to continue. The conclusions about what may be best practice in educational innovation should be attributed to a network of interrelated factors, in which

students' areas of interest, the learning opportunities as well as social and cultural contexts of entire education system are combined with each other. The alternative activities, which are practiced in current educational systems, have been identified. The transformative potential and the range of perspectives have been evaluated. Critical thinking skills have been defined as essential ones in evaluating and refuting someone's opinion, the students should get used to taking a stance on their position or producing opinion. Teachers are expected to prepare virtually their students for the demands of the global age. While we technically can identify ourselves as "non-national" on the Internet by not attaching our virtual selves to a particular nation, there are national markers everywhere on the Web: from country suffixes as parts of the websites and the e-mails (.ru, .uk etc) to different symbols (for example, flags, which can be placed on our website or page on social networks) which point to our nationality (Diamantaki, 2003). While talking to a person in online dialogues, we unconsciously reckon them among a particular nation without really knowing, which one they belong to and even without those markings, which every culture possess (traditions, clothes, food, language, etc.). If people feel like sharing their cultural distinctions, emphasize cultural uniqueness, the Internet allows them to do it, and they may express themselves in both unostentatious (which just show the national identity of a person) and intrusive (including people with nationalistic and racist views) ways, just like in real life. Internet is also becoming a place where ethnic minorities and different Diasporas interact with each other, express themselves and educate other people by spreading the word about their own culture. Although we may think of the Internet as a utopian environment where there are no inequalities, it is not true, and these inequalities still exist online. For example, choices of website designs are mainly aimed at the majority, often disregarding non–white and differently gendered people. Although prejudices created by stereotypes can be removed with the help of online identities, racial stereotypes still exist online and actually play a big role in online community, because it is easier to depict a particular nation using them. While meeting people for the first time in real life, we will judge them, even unconsciously, by their clothes choice, make-up, and race; however in cyber world we can only judge people by "non-visual criteria". It is quite interesting that some researchers argue whether ethnicity requires bodies inscribed with rituals, traditions, and hierarchies for true representation (Macfadyen, Roche, & Doff, 2004, p. 33). None of these criteria exist online, so basically we have nothing but language while communicating with person of different culture via Internet (if our interlocutor, for example, decides not to put any other information about him/her). As Macfadyen et al. (2004) said in their book that cyberspace might eliminate consideration of racial identity (p. 34). Cyberspace is not connected with one and people interacting with us cannot see the elements that would explicitly characterize us as a member of a particular culture. Indeed, the transition from multiculturalism to interculturalism reinforces principles that emphasize the historical interconnectedness of cultures. Societies have never been static as they have always adapted and changed according to the stimuli received from other cultures. Cultural contacts nowadays occur in a much more globalized and faster way. More than ever, intercultural communication is to be practiced, since the scope can encompass the relations between remote Eastern and Western cultures, as much as youth and senior, rich and poor, erudite and popular cultures within the same society, which is only apparently cohesive. The most significant manifestation of identity politics in modern society is multiculturalism. Multiculturalism proclaims the idea of 'togetherness in difference' (Young, 1995), thus multiculturalism recognizes

cultural diversity together with the fact that the differences should be respected and the importance of beliefs and values, sense of self-worth and various ways of life should be acknowledged. Cultures can enrich each other by extending cultural understanding and transcending the benevolence. Liberal multiculturalists tend to stress the vitality of civic unity, paying special attention to civic allegiance. Albeit, conservatives argue that developed societies must be based on common cultures, thus multicultural societies are conflict–ridden. All hostility, rivalry, violence between ethnic groups is a fact of social psychology but not a product of ignorance or inequality. Managers of higher education require the same amount of support as the teachers do at all stages of innovative process as the introduction of innovation brings about changes that are to be managed. Some researchers keep debating whether blended teaching is a term coined in corporate training, rather than the actual approach to teaching and /or learning. Pazio (2010) suggests that blended learning should occupy the main part of the training, learning and instructional environment, encourage the teachers to think back to the college days when the pedagogical approach involved a number of different teaching strategies. He emphasizes three reasons for employing blended learning in ELT: a) Learners' expectations –learners nowadays expect technology to be integrated into their classes; b) Flexibility –learners expect to be able to fit learning into their busy lives, especially professional adults and university students; c) Ministry of education (or similar) directives–in some contexts teachers are expected to offer blended training options.

In general, the overarching goal of English for Academic purposes international contemporary programmes is to prepare non–native students for the cross–cultural challenges. Nowadays it is necessary for the foreign language classrooms to have networked computers and data projects. Hardware in the labs should be updated annually. Remote teaching is considered popular. The interaction with foreign counterparts in telecollaborative projects in order to learn more about each other's cultural trends is an effective practice. The university supports Moodle as the official management system. In the global age advanced level students are expected to demonstrate a high degree of autonomy when undertaking key tasks such as writing research papers and delivering presentations. The advanced reading course curriculum includes summarizing, critical reading strategies, and reading response. The design of every international project is usually underpinned by the notion that the critical literacy and language skills should support effective online reading and research. The skills are best developed through student-centered experiential learning. Experiential learning allows students to explore ideas from their own perspectives, building individual understanding of new ideas and information based on previous experience and knowledge. Many learning theorists reason that the current information–driven environment demands a student-centered, relevant, and ongoing approach to teaching, wherein students are equipped with the dynamic skills and autonomous strategies for managing information in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing society. It is possible to conclude that the online networked reading environment can provide opportunities for authentic reading experience, and is conducive to the development of critical reading skills. Miller, Hanter and Kwai Fun (2012) noted that a project –based learning approach led to the use of new technologies because students were supposed to underpin the ideas by the range of technological devices in order to communicate, share and present the projects, do their research. The Moodle forums are to provide public evidence of the project work, which is supposed to motivate students to work harder. The use of technology is inextricably linked to the pedagogical aims.

A blended design provides flexible opportunities for international online collaboration. However, in the developing countries, poor technology infrastructure and inadequate facilities exert great pressure on the most willing students and staff, in term of effort, time and finance.

Ten years ago, the International Diploma in Language Teaching Management (IDLTM) was launched and was designed in response to indications that there was a demand for a management course, which, by being made available in blended learning mode would enable participants to combine study with work. To be convincing, online material has to be updated regularly and links have to be checked thoroughly before each course and there needs to be a fast response to changes on the web that impact on access to resources. There is no such thing as a 'finished' course. In overall structure, the course involves two different modes of presentation: face–to–face and online. White, Hockley, van der Horst Jansen and Laughner (2008) emphasize that the course package consists of a syllabus, and a main course book, which itself is closely based on both the structure of the course and experience of teaching it. This book is supplemented by other publications covering the topics of the modules, as well as articles and material downloadable from the virtual learning environment (VLE) or from recommended online sources. The VLE is a critical component, being the main channel by which online material is made available to participants, as well as being the vehicle through which communication is managed between trainers and participants, and among participants themselves. The activities in the face–to–face phase provide participants with the opportunity to develop as a social group as they proceed through some of the stages involved in team formation and establish norms of working as a team. Forming a social group and becoming a professional learning community is important in order to support the online and phase when participants themselves act as sources of information and ideas, and sharers of experience. However, as participants have become more experienced and sophisticated in blended learning, they are more critical. In a course covering a wide range of management areas, some activities are more appropriate or effective than others. For instance, a task in financial management intended to apply specific processes will have an outcome, which will be either right or wrong. By and large, tasks which are relevant to the workplace, but allow for a range of responses from simple to complex, are the most effective at encouraging participation, collaboration, and lateral learning. For instance, reading articles, which have an angle on a topic, and can then be mapped onto the participants' own contexts seems to generate most discussions. In fact, some groups establish a very productive dynamic during the face–to–face phase, which they then carry over to the online part of the course. The key variable appears to be the group itself. When it comes to synchronous activities, some have proven to be problematic. Firstly, participants are often in widely dispersed time zones, which can make scheduling of chat sessions complicated. Secondly, managing chat sessions with more than five participants is difficult. Some participants have commented that they found it more useful not to attend the chat sessions, but read the transcript afterwards. It was more conducive to their style of learning. Thirdly, the simulation generates a lot of involvement; it is a great way to bring participants together. The results of the student's questionnaire revealed that nearly all of the students considered that an online learning management system helped them improve their knowledge. Blended learning gives rise to a number of administration demands. In a programme such as International Diploma in Language Teaching Management (IDLTM), the trainers are employed on a freelance basis, and only the course manager and administrator are full–time employees of the provided institution. Trainers are

recruited on the basis of their subject expertise, but among any group there is the diversity of experience of blended learning pedagogy, expectations and commitment. In turn, this gives rise to a need for trainer training and the exchange of good practice among members of the teaching team. At best, this can be arranged during the face–to–face phase, under the guidance of the leading trainer, who is, however, one among equals, and has limited authority to direct such training or to invoke any sanctions if the under–performance happens. It is vital that meeting deadlines should be established. The effectiveness of such a blended learning programme is dependent of effective collaboration, management and coordination. Presentation software is useful in academia for giving lectures where the audience is quiet and passively observes what the presenter is saying, but the value of such technology for the communicative classroom is doubted by many. Recently, the need to develop such soft skills as communicative skills in the classroom in order to help the learners become more effective communicators has been at the fore front of teachers' minds. The traditional Moodle learning platform is widely used but new experiments have been launched. The option for the students and the teachers alike to use mobile devices for studying has been noted to reduce the need for traditional IT rooms at universities and resulted in changes in teaching. The acquisition of devices has involved training to instruct the users on the pedagogic opportunities, digitalization can be seen as transferring materials to Moodle instead of interactive learning. The management of the universities was challenged to become more involved in the creation of a new kind of operation model.

7. Conclusion

The IDLTM model of blended learning is successful when judged from the satisfaction level. On the base of the IDLTM experience, some guiding principles and practical considerations emerge, which may have implications for blended learning provision. When considering blended learning there is, of course, no single perfect blend because it is grounded on the notion of flexibility. There is no prescription for designing effective blended learning practices. The planning and designing of effective practices can be challenging and demanding. To what extent to use technology and when to integrate it are important questions to be considered in order to find the most efficient combination of the two modes of learning for the individual contexts and objectives. Firstly, there is the role, reliability, and accessibility of the platform for the blended learning components. It is possible to consider students' concerns over technical issues as one of the perceived weaknesses of blended learning, while the importance of both teacher and student training in the use of blended learning facilities can be noted as beneficial. Secondly, the course material must be directly relevant. Thirdly, the trainers are supposed to create a forum for mentoring and the exchange of pedagogical practices. Fourthly, it is beneficial to restrict the number of trainers to a maximum of four. The course provision, facilitating communication and cooperation among the teaching staff becomes the most challenging requirement. Fifthly, the trainers themselves influence how, when and what participants contribute to online tasks and discussions. Finally, nowadays complex environment of cyberspace plays a huge role in constructing new, virtual identities which may or may not differ from those we formed in real life. It concerns people from all over the world, people of different cultures. And although we may think that concept of "races" do not exist or doesn't matter in cyberspace, in real world race and belonging to a particular culture matter, whether we like it or not, but Internet culture has its own

etiquette, customs, and ethics, and it even starts becoming a culture itself, formed by people who are part of it (Zhang, 2005 pp. 1-2). The digital revolution has been quick and keeping up with it requires a positive attitude and eagerness to enter the new era together with the students. The concept of academic community is complex with diverse areas of discussion amongst academics in different parts of the world. Communities of practice have a far–reaching scope of reference, extending from research partners and practitioners, professional academic bodies to online open resource development and shared repositories.

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