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GLOBAL COMPETENCES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES. PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract

Internationalization of Higher Education (HE) has direct implications on adapting the curricula and providing the skills and abilities needed by graduates on the labour market. In this regard, in recent years, universities and researchers have undertaken studies in order to identify the skills that their graduates need in order to be competitive on the labour market. Literature recognizes a range of skills and abilities that are gathered under the term of global competences and are needed by the young graduates both in the recruitment process and in their future career. Also, studies have shown that the graduates with high skills and abilities have mobility on the labor market and are able to work in a variety of cultural contexts. Thus, for universities, it is of interest to identify which are the global competences needed by their students. This paper will present an analysis of students' demand for global competences in the fields of economy and social sciences. To this end, we selected 140 students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies - Faculty of International Business and Economics and 170 students from the National University of Political Sciences and Public Administration - Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, and we administered an online survey regarding the global competences that students believe are valuable for their future workplace and in the recruitment process.

Keywords: Global competences; Internationalization; Labour market; Curricula; Higher Education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Labour market has increasingly expended over national boundaries. In this new circumstance, of internationalization of markets, the demand for a large range of skills and abilities is also increasingly both in the recruitment process and at the workplace. The purpose of this article is to highlight the differences in perception for the two groups of students with different fields of study for the skills and abilities needed at the future workplace and in the recruitment process. Thus, we have chosen one group of students specialized in international economic field from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies - Faculty of International Business and Economics (BUES-IBE), and one group specialized in social sciences from the National University of Political Sciences and Public Administration - Faculty of Communication and Public Relations (NUPSPA – CPR) to investigate whether there are similarities in perception regarding the global competences needed to succeed on the labour market.

The literature review section will show the main skills and abilities gathered under the term of global competences needed in today's labour market. These skills and abilities were distributed in six different classes, including a large range of skills and abilities needed for young graduates to succeed during the recruitment process and at their future workplace. Starting from this approach, the analysis will show if there are differences in perception regarding the skills and abilities needed a) at the future workplace and b) in the recruitment process for the two different group of students coming from two universities with different specializations: economic vs. social fields. Thus, the methodology section will present the methods and statistical techniques used in this research, the research questions that will be addressed through the online survey and the hypotheses that will be tested.

The results section will show the differences but also similarities in opinion for the two groups of students regarding the global competences needed to succeed on the labour market. To achieve this, the analysis will show on the one hand the mean calculation for each variable for the two groups of students and, on the other hand, the significant differences based on *t*-test between students' perceptions in the two universities/faculties.

The conclusion will show that there are some differences in perception between the students' opinion for the international, theoretical and practical skills and abilities for both considered variables: skills and

abilities needed at the future workplace and skills and abilities selected by employers in the recruitment process.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In a highly internationalized labour market, one of universities' main concern is to ensure employability for their graduates [1-5]. The employability is defined as “a combination of factors that enable individuals to advance in the career” [6] from the moment of graduation and through the entire professional life [7]. Furthermore, employability represents a “complex construct and a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to be successful in their chosen occupation” [8] responding also to long-term market needs by “generating competent, active social agents that are able to react to any given context” [9]. Also, studies have highlighted that an important factor which influences employability and ensures higher opportunities on the labour market is the graduation of a higher education (HE) institution [5,9,10]. Graduation of a HE institution involves obtaining not only the theoretical skills and abilities, [10-14] but also a range of soft skills (the capacity to work effectively with others) [10-20] and practical intelligence (the capacity of applying the theory into practice) [9-15].

Being competitive on the labour market involves also other specific skills and abilities, like knowledge of English language or another foreign language, understanding the political, economic and business context, ability to work in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams [1], integrity, adaptability and involvement [10-14,21], ability to present and to produce a CV or learning about the labour market opportunities [22]. By adding the international component of skills and abilities [1,23], the personal competences specific to each individual [21,22], and the competences needed at the workplace or for finding a job [22], literature gathered all this under a new term: the global competences [24,25]. The global competences represent a multidimensional capacity of individuals to activate on a globalized labour market. OECD also defines the “Globally competent individuals” who “can examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being” [24]. Also, the global competences involve using the new technologies, the media platforms and interactions in increasingly diverse societies [26].

The top skills and abilities expected today on the labour market also include creativity, the use of Internet and large data bases [26], time management, problem solving, communication and negotiation [27,28]. Furthermore, studies based on LinkedIn database and experts' analysis [29] have identified the top five soft skills needed to get hired in 2020. These skills are: creativity, persuasion (negotiation skills), collaboration with colleagues and clients, adaptability and emotional intelligence.

Synthesizing the key competences from above, for the formulation of skills and abilities, which will consist the basis of this research, were selected a number of 23 skills and abilities, distributed in 6 different classes. This is the result of an inclusion of a large range of skills and abilities that contribute to individual employability and an extant agreement of the literature on what each category of competencies comprises [30]: 1) international competences, 2) personal competences, 3) competences related to career management, 4) workplace competences, 5) specific theoretical competences and 6) specific practical competences. The detailed skills and abilities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Global competences.

<i>Global competences</i>	<i>Skills and abilities</i>	<i>Bibliographical references</i>
International competences	Ability to communicate and to work efficiently in teams	[1,14,23-25]
	Thorough knowledge of English language	
	Thorough knowledge of a foreign language other than English	
	Understanding the international political, economic and business context	
Personal competences	Ability to work in multidisciplinary teams	[10-14,19,21]
	Ability to work in multicultural teams	
	Integrity	
	Adaptability	
	Initiative and involvement	

Competences related to career management	Learning about the labor market and employment opportunities Use of the Internet and recruitment platforms to find a job Ability to present and to produce a CV	[12,19,22]
Workplace competences	Planning Organization Problem solving Orientation towards customers and results Critical thinking in decision making process	[9,12,19,20,22,26]
Theoretical competences	Knowledge of general theoretical concepts and formation of a professional way of thinking Knowledge of professional terminology, theories and concepts related to profession	[10-18]
Practical competences	Correct use of principles and theoretical knowledge in practice Use of information and technology (ICT) Use of mathematics to solve operational problems Understanding the business reality	[10,12-14,27]

Sources: Authors' compilation

3 METHODOLOGY

For the analysis of students' perception on skills and abilities required by employers in the recruitment process and the competences that the subjects believe they will use at their future work place, a survey was conducted, using a questionnaire. The survey was used as a data collection method, as it allows a large number of responses and analysis of results using statistical techniques. The analysis will be focused first on descriptive statistics used to measure central tendencies (means) and second on inferential statistics as a method that allows group comparison (t-test for group differences) [31]. Thus, the analysis will present the results of an online questionnaire with 170 students from NUPSPA -CPR and 140 students from BUES – IBE. The self- administrated questionnaire was available online during October and November 2019. To accomplish the purpose of this research, the main research variables were defined, the research question were formulated and the hypotheses were proposed, as follows.

The main research variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The main research variables.

Students from the first group	Subjects of the analysis from NUPSPA - CPR
Students from the second group	Subjects of the analysis from BUES - IBE
Global competences	A combination of theoretical, practical, personal, relational, international and career-related management skills and abilities
Competences required in the recruitment process	Skills required by employers in the recruitment process
Competences used in the future career	Competences that the subjects use or believe they will use at their future work place

Source: Authors' own research

The research questions addressed in the present study are:

- RQ1: Which are the skills and abilities needed by students in the recruitment process?
- RQ2: Which are the skills and abilities that the students believe they will use at their future work place?
- RQ3: Are there any differences between opinions of students from the different fields of studies for skills and abilities that they believe they need in the recruitment process?
- RQ4: Are there any differences between opinions of students from the different fields of studies for skills and abilities that they believe they need at the future workplace?

The proposed hypotheses that will be tested are:

- Hyp.1) There are significant differences between groups for the skills and abilities needed in the future workplace;
- Hyp.2) There are significant differences between groups for the skills and abilities needed in the recruitment process.

Before discussing the analysis of survey data through tests of significant differentiation of statistical averages, the primary issue of verifying the consistency of the analysis of statistical data is raised.

In this perspective, the consistency of statistical data was analyzed, both for the large sample (consisting of 310 students), and for the data samples taken from the two universities with different specializations (NUPSPA -CPR for 170 students) respectively (BUES - IBE for 140 students).

Calculated values for Alpha Cronbach reliability test are value of alpha ($\alpha = 0.985$) for whole data colectivity, value of alpha ($\alpha = 0.984$) for NUPSPA -CPR colectivity and ($\alpha = 0.983$) for BUES – IBE colectivity.

The analysis of the data can lead to the conclusion that there is a high level of statistical reliability, both for the entire data collection and for the statistical data analyzed at the university level.

4 RESULTS

The present section will present a) the means calculated for all items in order to identify the global competences needed by the two groups of students at the future workplace and in the recruitment process and b) the result of calculated *t*-test for group differences.

4.1 Means

Table 3 shows the calculated means for all category of variables. Both group tendencies show that the students believe to a large extent that the global competences are needed equally at the future workplace and in the recruitment process.

Table 3: Aspects related to global competences and their utility at the future job/ requested by employers in the recruitment process as seen by students.

<i>Aspects related to global competences</i>	<i>To what extent do you consider that the following skills will be needed at your future workplace?</i>		<i>To what extent do you consider that the following skills are requested during the recruitment process?</i>	
	<i>NUPSPA - CPR</i>	<i>BUES - IBE</i>	<i>NUPSPA - CPR</i>	<i>BUES - IBE</i>
<i>International competences:</i>				
Ability to communicate and to work efficiently in teams	4.73	4.70	4.61	4.74
Thorough knowledge of English language	4.53	4.71	4.48	4.75
Thorough knowledge of a foreign language other than English	3.74	4.14	3.61	4.23
Understanding the international political, economic and business context	4.15	4.35	4.09	4.33
Ability to work in multidisciplinary teams	4.39	4.40	4.24	4.39
Ability to work in multicultural teams	4.32	4.45	4.28	4.49
<i>Personal competences:</i>				
Integrity	4.54	4.46	4.49	4.52
Adaptability	4.62	4.62	4.61	4.64
Initiative and involvement	4.61	4.64	4.61	4.61
<i>Competences related to career management:</i>				
Learning about the labor market and employment opportunities	4.25	4.26	4.23	4.29
Use of the Internet and recruitment platforms to find a job	4.25	4.25	4.22	4.44

Ability to present and to produce a CV	4.45	4.49	4.45	4.56
<i>Workplace competences:</i>				
Planning	4.55	4.53	4.51	4.56
Organization	4.60	4.61	4.58	4.60
Problem solving	4.57	4.68	4.51	4.62
Orientation towards customers and results	4.59	4.55	4.49	4.51
Critical thinking in decision making process	4.38	4.51	4.33	4.42
<i>Theoretical competences:</i>				
Knowledge of general theoretical concepts and formation of a professional way of thinking	4.18	4.31	4.08	4.26
Knowledge of professional terminology, theories and concepts related to your profession	4.10	4.41	4.06	4.29
<i>Practical competences:</i>				
Correct use of principles and theoretical knowledge in practice	4.25	4.47	4.26	4.37
Use of information and technology (ICT)	4.34	4.50	4.21	4.34
Use of mathematics to solve operational problems	3.59	3.84	3.59	3.78
Understanding the business reality	4.34	4.51	4.28	4.41

Aspects related to global competences and their utility in the future job: 1 = to a very small extent and 5 = to a very large extent;

Aspects related to global competences requested by employers in the recruitment: 1 = to a very small extent and 5 = to a very large extent;

Source: Authors' own research

The values indicate that there are no notable differences, between the two groups of students, in their appreciation towards the skills and abilities needed at their future workplace or requested in the recruitment process. However, students from BUES – IBE appreciate more the international competences and professional competences than those from NUPSPA – CPR which value more the personal/ relational competences and skills and abilities related to communication and working efficiently in teams.

4.2 Testing significant differences between the “key competences” required in the “future workplace” and those requested during the “recruitment process” based on *t*-test

It is of interest to evaluate whether the means of the two independent groups of students differ on some variables. For this purpose, the mean difference *t*-Test will be used. The Independent Samples *t*- Test compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different [31,32].

To test whether there are significant differences between the two independent groups (students from NUSPA-CPR program and students from BUES-IBE program), we performed the hypotheses testing for differences in means between the two independent samples.

$$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0 \text{ (there are no significant differences between the two independent groups)}$$

$$H_1 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0 \text{ (there are significant differences between the two independent groups)}$$

The level of confidence is set at 95%, $\alpha = 0.05$ and for $p\text{-value} < 0.05$, reject H_0 .

The hypotheses testing is run for the 2 different approaches to the global competences and their associated skills: a) the students' perception on skills and abilities needed at the future workplace (Hyp. 1); b) the students' perception on skills and abilities requested during the recruitment process (Hyp. 2). In *t* –Test approach the most relevant difference between the averages is at $p = 0.000$ level of significance (2 –tailed) and statistically significant differences exist at $p\text{-value} < 0.05$. The areas marked with greys in Table 4 represent significant differences between the averages of statistical classes.

Table 4: Testing significant differences between student groups based on t-Test.

Global competences and associated skills and abilities	Skills and abilities needed at the future workplace (Hyp 1)		Skills and abilities requested during the recruitment process (Hyp 2)	
	t value	Sig. (2-tailed) p- Value	t value	Sig. (2-tailed) p- Value
International competences:				
Ability to communicate and to work efficiently in teams	0.45	0.656	-1.93	0.055
Thorough knowledge of English language	-2.38	0.018	-3.62	0.000
Thorough knowledge of a foreign language other than English	-3.53	0.000	-5.49	0.000
Understanding the international political, economic and business context	-1.91	0.057	-2.45	0.015
Ability to work in multidisciplinary teams	-0.06	0.950	-1.52	0.129
Ability to work in multicultural teams	-1.39	0.165	-2.14	0.033
Personal competences:				
Integrity	0.79	0.430	-0.37	0.714
Adaptability	-0.05	0.963	-0.30	0.766
Initiative and involvement	-0.32	0.751	0.06	0.951
Competences related to career management:				
Learning about the labor market and employment opportunities	-0.17	0.862	-0.58	0.562
Use of the Internet and recruitment platforms to find a job	0.03	0.977	-2.41	0.017
Ability to present and to produce a CV	-0.48	0.633	-1.20	0.232
Workplace competences:				
Planning	0.30	0.765	-0.74	0.462
Organization	-1.87	0.853	-0.23	0.821
Problem solving	-1.36	0.176	-1.41	0.160
Orientation towards customers and results	0.54	0.592	-0.21	0.833
Critical thinking in decision making process	-1.43	0.155	-0.95	0.345
Theoretical competences:				
Knowledge of general theoretical concepts and formation of a professional way of thinking	-1.36	0.174	-1.83	0.068
Knowledge of professional terminology, theories and concepts related to profession	-3.25	0.001	-2.31	0.022
Practical competences:				
Correct use of principles and theoretical knowledge in practice	-2.36	0.019	-1.15	0.250
Use of information and technology (ICT)	-1.81	0.072	-1.29	0.200
Use of mathematics to solve operational problems	-1.79	0.075	-1.48	0.140
Understanding the business reality	-2.02	0.045	-1.32	0.187

Source: Authors' own research - valuing SPSS output

Analysing the data from Table 4, it can be observed that for most variables there are no statistically significant differences (following the application of t -Test).

This is reflected in the fact that students from both universities do not make significant differences between certain key skills and abilities that would be specific to the future job, as well as others that would be mainly specific in the recruitment process.

However, there are some exceptions, which we will address below.

For example, students from BUES - IBE, significantly consider that certain "key skills and abilities" are more specific to their future job. This is the case for skills and abilities from the category of international

competences: “thorough knowledge of English language” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.018) and “thorough knowledge of a foreign language other than English” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.000), and also skills and competences from the category of theoretical and practical competences “Knowledge of professional terminology, theories and concepts related to profession” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.001) and “correct use of principles and theoretical knowledge in practice” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.019). For more details see Table 3.

Also, the students from BUES - IBE appreciate statistically significantly that some key skills and abilities are more useful in the recruitment process. These are also mainly skills and abilities from the category of international competences: “thorough knowledge of English language” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.000), “thorough knowledge of a foreign language other than English” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.000), “Understanding the international political, economic and business context” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.015) and “ability to work in multicultural teams” (Sig. 2 -tailed = 0.033). Other significant differences for skills and abilities considered useful in the recruitment process are for “use of the Internet and recruitment platforms to find a job” and “knowledge of professional terminology, theories and concepts related to profession”. For more details see Table 3.

It can be concluded that we can only partially reject the null hypothesis. It means that for the selected two groups of students, their appreciation on global competences differs on the group of international competences, theoretical and practical competences for both approaches: skills and abilities needed at the future workplace and skills and abilities necessary in the recruitment process.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This article wanted to highlight the existence of potentially significant differences, recorded at a perceptual level, between students of the two universities participating in the survey, in terms of “skills and abilities needed in the future workplace” and “skills and abilities needed in the recruitment process”. Analyzing the results recorded in the study, we can conclude on the following significant aspects:

There are whole groups of “global competencies and associated skills and abilities”, as is the case with global classes: “personal competencies”, “competencies related to career management” and “workplace competencies” within which there are no significant differences in student responses (following the analysis of statistical data using “t -Test”). For those classes of competences both Hyp. 1 and Hyp. 2 will be rejected. In conjunction with the analysis of high averages recorded for the response items for each competency group, we can say that students recognized the labour market demands for specific skills and abilities both in the recruitment process, and needed in today's jobs. Basically, both groups of students recognize that on the labour market there is a high level of competition for selecting the best employees and for integration into companies' culture and goals.

The study also highlights classes of “global competencies and associated skills and abilities”, in which students have significantly different perceptions regarding the level of assimilation of skills and competencies by the labour market. For example, the largest differences in perception occur within the “international competencies” classes for the “Thorough knowledge of English language” and “Thorough knowledge of a foreign language other than English” components. For these competences, BUES-IBE students feel that the labour market is more oriented to internationalization and demand for global competences than those at NUPSA-CPR both in terms of future job utility (Hyp. 1) and for recruitment process (Hyp. 2).

Furthermore, there are also some other significant differences recorded at the perceptual level between the students of the two universities. BUES -IBE students consider that some competences are more valuable in the recruitment process than their colleagues from NUSPA – CPR (Hyp. 2) for example: “ability to work in multicultural teams”, respectively “use of the Internet and recruitment platforms to find a job” and “knowledge of professional terminology, theories and concepts related to profession”. Obviously, the reason for the existence of these significant perceptual differences between the students of the two universities can have multiple connotations.

These differences can result from the different study curriculum, the intensive level of language study within the study years, the emphasis on the practical and applicative dimension of the theoretical competences, access to different job typologies considered by the two groups of students (with a lower or higher degree of internationalization).

Whatever the reasons that would have led to these subtle differences between the perceptions of the students participating in the survey, it is clear that the results of this study can be a very important starting point for a process of improving the quality of students' results. This will lead to increase the

effective chances in the recruitment process, as well as the sustainable insertion of graduates in the local and international labour market.

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