

# Analysis of the satisfaction degree of students participating in international educational projects

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**Abstract.** The article is based on the results of joint project between the University of Southern Denmark, Denmark, Southern Federal University, Russia and University of Østfold, Norway, “Cooperation active student learning, NCM-RU-2015/10060”, an international educational project aimed at intercultural skills development on the basis of a specific discipline "Innovation Management" at higher education level. Project training simulates real professional research situations in order to solve complex tasks. At the final stage of the project a student satisfaction survey was conducted in order to obtain some information about strengths and weaknesses of the present project. Our customized student feedback survey requires Danish, Norwegian and Russian students who have participated in the project to make an overall statement about their satisfaction with the participation in the project. Students' satisfaction is a multidimensional process which is influenced by different factors, so survey respondents were asked to rate aspects of their educational, research and communication experience, from skill development and personal growth to quality of curriculum and instruction. Determining which features of the student experience in international teamwork are most closely related to satisfaction may provide information about actions that can be taken to maintain high level of project planning and implementation in the future.

## 1 Introduction

The unity of knowledge throughout the world is the greatest idea of intellectual history. Integration of efforts for complex global problem solution can be achieved not only by overcoming barriers between academic disciplines, but also by overcoming differences between countries and cultures. This does not mean blurring the boundaries between the ethnic spheres; on the contrary, individual contribution is enriched due to the interaction

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and use of international and intercultural approach to science and education [1]. Integration of scientific disciplines, international and intercultural approaches and research methods [2] should contribute to the development of students' confidence and enrich the sphere of their communication competence. In our research we have focused on resources that can facilitate integration in theory and practice.

The globalised business and innovational environment create a growing need for managers that can operate in a variety of socio-economical and cultural conditions and capable of handling the complexities that arise while working in an international context.

In the 21st century, a series of parallel trends emerged for more integrative studies and methods of obtaining knowledge, all of which require more adaptive learning management. The inability of mankind to solve many modern problems (for example, such as climate change, pandemics, and land use) leads to the fact that such global problems have to be solved from the positions of different sciences and with the efforts of professionals from different countries. Attempts to solve all the above and many other problems are a kind of challenge to today's students, this challenge has to be faced by reaching a consensus in the scientific world and joining forces from all over the world. Besides, isolation and limitation of scientific and professional knowledge, their separation from real life leads to the fact that effective cooperation is impossible, which, in turn, creates barriers to international students' exchange and academic cooperation. "Integration transcends the boundaries of science and education and has a huge potential including international methodology and collaboration" [3].

Particularly fruitful in this situation is the possibility of implementing international educational projects that provide students not only with professional knowledge and ability to apply it in practice, but also with possibilities to study and work within the frames of international environment.

Project training simulates real professional search situations in order to solve complex tasks. The purpose of project training is to develop the creative potential of students and create the conditions under which they: independently acquire the missing knowledge from variety of sources; learn to use acquired knowledge to solve cognitive, practical and professional tasks; acquire communication skills by working in a team; develop research skills; develop systemic and interdisciplinary thinking; develop international communication skills and habits.

In the framework of a joint grant between the University of Southern Denmark, Denmark, Southern Federal University, Russia and the University of Østfold, Norway, "Cooperation active student learning, NCM-RU-2015/10060", an international educational project aimed at intercultural skills development was implemented on the basis of a specific discipline "Innovation Management" at higher education level.

The main goals of the international educational project were to activate and to motivate students' learning process, to analyze research efforts and project's outcome, students' ability to cooperate under the guidance of teachers and to organize some kind of feedback. To achieve these goals the project progress was facilitated by the active participation of students from three different countries, as well as the use of modern technology to provide psychologically comfortable learning environment. The use of the active student learning methodology included pedagogical development, the development of ways to use integrated student research as an integral part of project work and the international exchange of knowledge between academic staff and students in the course of academic cooperation [4].

International and intercultural joint projects are projects of international inter-institutional cooperation, implemented at the university level. Usually the main areas of implementation are: development of joint educational programs, management and university management, strengthening university ties with the external economic and social environment on the international level.

This international joint project, “Cooperation active student learning, NCM-RU-2015/10060” ensured the integration of scientific research into the educational process of students from three countries; implementation and development of students’ training program with the help of local enterprises as a business incubator and comparative analysis of students from three different universities studies, and psychological study of students’ satisfaction of involvement and collaboration in the project.

One of the core ideas of the business incubator is to intentionally integrate knowledge acquisition and skill development into a more meaningful whole. Students are immersed in teamwork within group environments that promote design thinking and project management ideas, intercultural communication that transcends many different forms, including audiovisual. Besides learners being immersed in these group environments, faculty and staff from these diverse fields will also be immersed in these environments. Discipline-specific skills can be acquired “just-in-time” from a faculty mentor (or mentors), and in the context of larger, real-world problems. This has at least two advantages: 1) relevance: a learner can identify with the skills needed to address open-ended problems, making them relevant, and 2) timeliness: the knowledge or skill is acquired when it is needed, not “in case” it is needed.

These two advantages help students to enhance their natural curiosity, promoting a characteristic that is called “life-long learning” and means never-ending process of acquiring new knowledge and skills obtaining. Regardless of students’ preference or abilities, life-long learning helps them be more flexible, adaptable and responsive to changes in learning or working situation over a lifetime.

Faculty and staff do not want to put the burden of integrating diverse knowledge domains solely on students. Usually, they prefer to let each student choose is or her individual learning trajectory depending on whether it is a specific discipline choice or proficiency establishing so as to influence the world evolution in many different ways.

The students’ training program, lectures delivered by professor from three different universities (Russian, Danish and Norwegian) and a joint research project were aimed at students’ systematic understanding of innovative management and at acquiring critical awareness of current problems along with a new understanding of these phenomena. The cooperation and collaboration program in business education management worked as an international initiative between the University of Østfold in Norway, the Southern Federal University in Russia and the University of Southern Denmark through the Norwegian Center for International Cooperation in Education. Academic cooperation between the three partners was carried out in the form of:

- exchange of ideas and experiences using students research results and collaboration in project-based training in innovation management;
- development of methods for using strategic management platforms with joint learning to facilitate cooperation and collaboration among students of three partner institutions and the use of digitally supported tools and methods for conducting interactive lectures and cooperation with students between educational institutions;
- general seminars for students to exchange research ideas and experience;
- development of students’ proposals toward innovative management research at enterprises in the region of Southern Denmark, in the South of Russia and Norway as a pilot project and provide these students with the opportunity to use the results of their research as the basis for their bachelor’s or master’s degree thesis;
- dissemination of project outcomes and publication of results in the journals of three different countries.

Organizational or management psychologists’ activities are: 1) training and development; 2) organizational development; 3) measurement of work performance; 4) the quality of life or satisfaction of activity results; etc.

As part of the experiment, students' satisfaction was measured by the organizational psychologists. Several coaches took care of foreign students during academic training and joint project implementation.

Within the framework of organizational psychology, coaching stands out as an independent branch, targeted at helping students to achieve a certain academic or professional goal. Unlike mentoring, coaching is focused on achieving clearly defined goals instead of overall development [5].

That is why important areas of coaching in the joint project include: 1) the study of the psychological aspects of the introduction of managerial innovations; 2) participation in the procedures development and methods for training and certification of managers; 3) participation in the selection and training of future managers; 4) optimization of business communication of managers of different ranks.

The experiences of students from such international cooperation are numerous and depend on how well they manage in this context, since project managers must be prepared for the challenges associated with working in international settings with people from other cultures. Effective management of international projects requires a properly balanced combination of explicit and implicit knowledge, professional practical experience, and professional behavior, communication skills.

Specially designed practical assignments were developed for students in which strategies and techniques for international business communication had been developed. An important task of a psychologist working in the innovation management project was the promotion of psychological knowledge of international collaboration peculiarities and intercultural communication competence development.

For all the students in the joint project, English was a foreign language and a kind of lingua franca in the situation of opinion exchange or possible solution of the problem discussion. But not only the language proficiency lack was the main problem, non-verbal communication was also embarrassing, as some gestures and mimics were difficult for understanding. There were also behavioral problems, such as time-management, interpersonal relations, environment-friendly techniques and technologies attitude, social and personal space and subordination, to name just a few.

An international joint project for students of management has been described as a practice that transcends communication boundaries, and seems to have the most potential to respond to new demands and imperatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This potential springs from the characteristic features of such a project, which include problem focus (research originates from and is contextualized in 'real-world' problems), evolving methodology (the research involves iterative, reflective processes that are responsive to the particular questions, settings, and research teams) [6] and collaboration (including collaboration between researchers from different countries with similar interests in the research).

To set the application of these education principles into a context, we discuss a case of joint collaboration project between two Nordic universities, HiØ and SDU, with a Russian partner, SFedDU, financed as a grant from SiU for the year 2016.

"Our main educational goal of the project is to activate and motivate students for learning, reflection, through research in company with fellow students under guidance of teachers' observation and feedback. The inference of this overreaching goal focuses our attention on active student learning as well as using modern technology as a means of supplying an active learning environment. The core elements of active learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process"[7] intended to further develop students' inter-cultural communication skills of through this process.

To achieve active students learning and participating in the teamwork, the project's aims were set at educational development, ways of integrated student research integration

as an integral part of course work, and international knowledge exchange between academic staff and students as academic cooperation.

In the project, knowledge of technology, pedagogy and content between academic staff and students was exchanged while intercultural communication was taking place. It definitely provided an insight students otherwise would not have accessed through ordinary curricula. The integration of student research in academic interaction, the establishment of student relationships, provided a basis for mutual understanding of culture differences. By combining active students' research and cooperative learning for intercultural communication skills development had the aim of creating an environment where students felt motivated and engaged as well as satisfied with the results and outcomes.

Upon completion of the international project "Cooperation active student learning, NCM-RU-2015/10060", a survey was offered to students to assess the degree of their satisfaction with the results of the international project and their participation in a team with students from three different countries. The sample involved 20 students of different ages from three different universities. Since gender and nationality were not taken into consideration in the survey, these factors were not highlighted separately and were not taken into account when analyzing the survey results. The question asking about recommendation to a friend to participate in such a project, 19 people answered affirmatively, 1 person found it difficult to answer. When asked if they would like to participate in similar projects in the future, 20 people answered affirmatively. When asked if the work in the project teams was effective, 8 people answered affirmatively and 12 people answered "yes rather than no".

When asked how their expectations from participating in the project were met, the average was 4.25 points. The qualification of the lecturers was rated at 4.2 points. The research work in the international team was rated at 4.6 points. Students' satisfaction with socialization and intercultural communication level in the project was rated at 4.6 points on a five-point scale.

An open question on determining the significance of an international project showed that the main provisions highlighted by students included knowledge sharing, learning new things (7 people), teamwork (5 people), the opportunity to learn about other countries and cultures (4 people), new impressions (3 people), as well as participation in an interesting learning experience, English language practice and new acquaintances.

In the answer to the question "What did you like most?" students highlighted new acquaintances, international and intercultural communication (11 people), as well as project results defense, new insights, meeting various project participants from different countries, communication skills development, teamwork skills.

In the answer to the question "What was that you did not like during the international project implementation?" students indicated a cultural barrier, lack of English knowledge, time limited activity, and difficulty in combining indicators.

In the answer to an open question "What could you recommend for improving participation in an international project?" students suggested to cooperate in the project goals planning in advance, to transfer educational interaction outside one city, to visit other cities and towns in Russia, to extend length of collaboration, to get more time to prepare for the final presentation.

## **2 Conclusion**

Having analyzed the survey results, it was found out that the international project "Cooperation active student learning, NCM-RU-2015/10060" had strengthened connection between partner universities, which would benefit students' educational effectiveness and research attainments, thus contributing to regional business and society sustainable

development. Further studies and another international joint research project are on the way.

All the three universities also gained access to information on the involvement of workers in enterprise innovation, which can stimulate further research in other industries and business. Enterprise research can be compared with industry statistics on employee involvement in innovative activities. Gaining access to the results of scientific research has enabled managers of the regional enterprises under study to increase the productivity and competitiveness of their enterprises. The situation in science meets the need for innovative methods related to globalization of science and education. The inertia of scientific thinking causes disagreement between science and the interconnectedness of everything in the world. For the further existence of science and successful implementation of its tasks set by life, coordination of international efforts is necessary. Integration is necessary in science and education in order to direct knowledge and professionalism to the complex phenomenon of life called globalism. The different epistemologies of science in each country create difficulties for interaction, especially when it comes to a system of views, methodologies, approaches and technologies. The practical solution to the problem lies in the possibilities of team research, international and intercultural projects, teamwork and constructive dialogue. Many scientists and practitioners no longer question the advantages of integration; students also appreciate multidisciplinary approaches to studies and research, mastering higher-order thinking skills. Integrated pedagogy becomes more attractive for universities and invariably leads to discoveries and innovations. [8]

The results of survey conducted among students from three different countries, from various cultural and educational background showed that students not only appreciate the possibilities offered by such a project, but would be glad to join similar research groups in the future and recommend their peers to participate in joint international study and research projects if offered.

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