

# DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE IN THE FRAME OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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## **Abstract**

One of the most important conditions of future specialist's vocational competence is a well-balanced combination of learning, scientific research and practice, which is not easy to achieve in terms of traditional education. Extracurricular activity in the form of educational-scientific-production student units (ESPSU) favours both active and creative learning of theory and practical skills formation vital for students' further vocational activity. Six-year experience of extracurricular activities in Open International University of Human Development "Ukraine" shows ESPSU participants' positive results comparing to other students in their academic achievements, professionalism and career development.

*Key words: professional qualifications, extracurricular activities, career development*

## **Introduction**

One of strategic directions of the Ukraine's development at the current stage is integration into world education while keeping and developing traditions of the Ukrainian higher school, reformation and development of higher education system through increasing its quality, formation of students' aspiration for knowledge and skills necessary for future vocational activity.

On the other hand, modern labour market sets for young specialists ever increasing demands. Under new economic conditions even highly extensive knowledge that students get at university cannot guarantee them successful employment unless it is supported by practical skills, experience and fundamentals of business activity. Besides employers often ask applicants to demonstrate some practical skills in their professional area, which often embarrasses the graduates.

One of the most important tasks of higher education is development of creative and cognitive students' activities. A specialist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be an intelligent and well-educated person, ready to work under changing conditions, adequately react to modern

challenges, able to independently find necessary information and competently use it in their work. Thus it is so important to foster student's aspiration for self-learning (Пасмор, 2003).

The main drawback of traditional education system is its stagnant inertness, which hinders bringing up an independently thinking person, ready to deal with difficult and unconventional life problems. Solution to such situation can be found in students' active involvement in vocational tasks in terms of extracurricular activity in order to develop their professionally important qualifications.

Extracurricular work of student, which is a vital element of vocational education, favours combination of learning, scientific research and practice, and guarantees competitiveness of future specialists at the labour market. Usually extracurricular work is divided into obligatory and voluntary.

**Compulsory extracurricular work** includes self-instruction, preparation for practical courses, seminars and lab trainings, field practice and logically follows from classroom studies. Compulsory extracurricular work favours the formation of following skills: independent accumulation of new knowledge, its application and self-control. Often such compulsory extracurricular work is called independent or unsupervised and it is one of the most important components of educational process. During self-instructions students learn about cognitive methods, get interested in creative work and try to solve learning tasks independently. Karpova (Карпова, 2008) believes that an independently working student should first of all gather factual knowledge on the subject, explore special and reference literature, analyse and interpret scientific material. Thus planning, organization and realisation of student's work in tutor's absence is an important element of educational process.

As opposed to independent work, voluntary extracurricular activity can be aimed at accumulation of extra knowledge (increase of general competence), deep and comprehensive research of particular issues (self-improvement) (Минченко, 2002), participation in scientific research or practical application of gained knowledge in terms of educational institution (Кольченко & Никулина, 2002). Voluntary extracurricular activity should help in formation and development of students' professionally important skills (Burns, 2009, Hollrah, 2010), favour their personality development (Feinerman, 2011), knowledge extension, arouse cognitive interest (Васильева, 2009). During such vocational extracurricular activity students enrich their personal experience, get an opportunity to act independently, show their individuality and ability to perform scientific research, their attitude to their future speciality changes substantially. Depending on their possibilities and other conditions students can freely choose time and duration of work.

Non-compulsory extracurricular activity (participation in scientific research, conferences, competitions, discussions, theme tours, etc.) helps to acquire vocational skills, arouses interest in scientific work.

A new modern form of vocational training was organised at the University "Ukraine" – educative-scientific-productive student units (ESPSU) that helps solve the problems of young specialists' professional establishment.

ESPSU exist in various forms depending on students' speciality:

- Bureau of translations;
- Juridical clinic
- Nutrition club
- Design studio
- Practical psychology centre
- Rehabilitation centre
- Student social service and others.

The main task of ESPSU is to give students a possibility to receive a fundamental

vocational training by getting them involved in actual professional activity. ESPSU training method effectively combines academic classes, research work and field experience, provides students with an opportunity to consolidate their theoretical knowledge, acquire practical skills, and teaches the basic principles of management and entrepreneurship. For example, working at a “translation bureau” linguistics students acquire skills of oral and written translation, “Juridical clinic” allows law students to extend their knowledge consulting retired or disabled people, students and large families. Design students plan interiors, exhibition stands, posters, office door plates and other types of indoor and outdoor advertisements. Participating in “Social service” social work students get to know the problems of poor people, provide them with actual help, and understand the specifics of their future speciality.

**Object of the research:** professional qualifications development of future specialists in terms of extracurricular activities.

**The research aim:** to analyse how extracurricular activities of students influence the formation of their professional qualities and their career development.

### **Research methodology**

*Theoretical methods.* Analytical and generalizing methods for the analysis of the literary sources associated with the research object were used.

*Empirical methods.* Qualitative research, using method of interview to assess personal changes in the result of participation was applied.

The research was conducted at the theory and practice of translation department of University “Ukraine” among students who were members of “Translation Bureau” and those who were not.

Extent of the research: “Translation Bureau” members – 35 persons, other students – 52 persons.

### **Stages of students’ involvement into extracurricular activity**

Students’ extracurricular work should be organized consistently, taking into account the level of their knowledge, their cognitive skills and other factors. Accordingly, tutor’s interference would range from strict guidance to mere supervision (Малеєва&Малеєв, 2005) and then to students’ self-organization.

Tutors can organise students’ activities at different levels: either manage them rather rigidly and severely or give them absolute freedom and help release their creativity. There are the following levels of extracurricular activity management: control, adjustment, cooperation, monitoring and independent work. The choice of management level is defined by individual characteristics of tutors, who organise the activity, and by individual characteristics of students participating (motivation, cognitive activity, independence, etc.).

Translation department of Open International University of Human Development “Ukraine” offers the following stages of students’ involvement into vocational extracurricular activity:

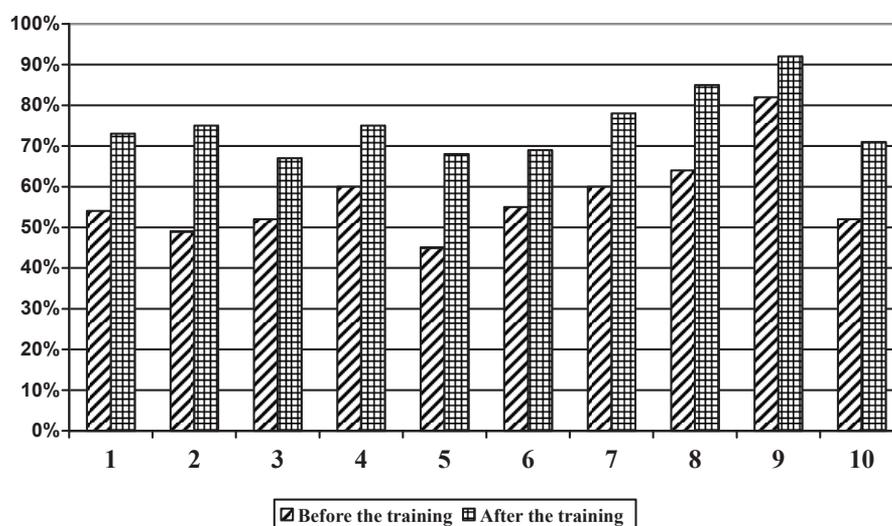
- English Speaking Club – meetings with native speakers, discussions, language contests and quizzes, watching films in their original language;
- Trainings of communication competence, teamwork, time-management;
- Written translations ordered by the university, their further revision and editing with tutor explaining rules and peculiarities of translation;
- City tours and escort of foreign guests of the University, oral translation during scientific conferences, lectures, master-classes from foreign professors
- Employment support in Career Development Centre

**First stage** – English Speaking Club. As freshmen and sophomore students are not psychologically ready to independent work yet (Федина, 2006), and extracurricular work is not included into academic plans and is not compulsory, thus some extra motivation should be created.

Students are invited to participate in English Speaking Club, which is supervised by tutor but at the same time is mostly entertaining. Club's activities include language games and exercises, quizzes and contests, viewing of foreign films and their discussion, meetings with native speakers and discussion of new books. In such relaxed atmosphere tutors had an opportunity to get to know students, learn about their interests, evaluate their potential, and identify leadership abilities.

**Second stage.** For interpreters who work in communication field, oral competence ranks second important after actually mastering the language. However, students felt unsure about getting to real work as they lacked ability to establish contact, logically and clearly express their opinions, listen and take in peers' opinions, lacked tolerance. Thus everyday and business communication and teamwork trainings were included into ESPSU program, in particular a social and psychological training was designed (Козліковська, Кольченко&Нікуліна, 2006). It included exercises on establishing and ending contact, active listening and trust establishment, conquering negative feelings and conflict solving. The training lasted 6 weeks (18 hours), with the exception of tests and questionnaires, and was conducted in English. Before and after the training students were given a self-assessment questionnaire on 10 communication skills: ability to establish (1) and end (2) the contact, express their own feelings (3) and understand other people (4), overcome psychological barriers (5) and establish trust (6), present arguments (7) and solve conflicts (8), active listening (9) and teamwork (10).

Data analysis (Figure 1) has shown that the skills, which were assessed at least developed, improved the most and vice versa the most developed skills improved the least. It was set up that the abilities to end the contact and overcome psychological barriers improved by 26% and 23% accordingly (with the average improvement of 18%). Similarly, as students believed they knew how to listen actively, this skill only improved by 10%.



**Figure 1.** Results of communication competence training for translation speciality students

**Third stage** – Translation Bureau. Professional self-improvement of students was aimed at defining further specialisation, evaluation of professionally important qualities and skills, certain steps for their development. This stage involved students from 3<sup>rd</sup> year on, who had already had sufficient theoretical basis, can adequately evaluate their abilities and define the type of translation (oral or written) they are more comfortable with.

Students, who wished to translate in writing, were given some university documentation to work on, as well as articles, lectures and presentations of foreign visitors, correspondence with foreign partners, new academic Internet resources.

Beginners were usually divided into 2 groups and translated the same texts. The results were compared and discussed under tutor's supervision. Doing written translations for the university, students feel responsibility, learn to deal with large texts, face stylistic peculiarities of various scientific, technical and journalistic writing, learned to use translation transformation and extended their vocabulary. As they gained more experience, the best students were given personal task, although still supervised by the tutor.

For example, Bureau participants were involved in a career development training conducted by Peace Corps volunteer. It consisted of 6 Power Point presentations, and each of them was given to a separate student, who first had to translate the slides and then interpret during the session. The translations of the slides were reviewed and discussed by the whole group with the tutor providing corrections.

An important experience for Bureau members was participation in European Virtual Seminar on sustainable development, where students from various European universities worked on a common project in a virtual classroom. Ecology students from Open International University of Human Development "Ukraine" university hardly spoke any English and were not used to on-line projects, thus translators had to master distant learning technologies, memorise special terms, discuss scientific issues on the forum and perform various project tasks within strict deadlines. At the same time they had to get along with ecology students they accompanied, go to the root of the project and keep to the schedule announced.

Students, who decided to improve their interpreting skills, accompanied foreign guests of the University during conferences and round table discussions, interpreted speeches and reports during seminars and open lectures, conducted tours round the city. Due to such practice students perfected their aural reception, got used to various foreign accents, learned to quickly pick out the main idea of the oral message, translate briefly not literally if needed, appear before an audience, find a way out of difficult situation.

Quality of oral translation was also openly discussed, the foreigners accompanied also commented on immediacy of translation, vocabulary, and proper behaviour of the given student.

**Professional advancement of students** (Figure 2) who participated in Bureau of translation was assessed by following parameters:

- academic performance in major courses (1);
- participation in scientific conferences (2);
- quality of written translations (3);
- vocabulary and language competence improvement (4);
- quality of oral translations (5).

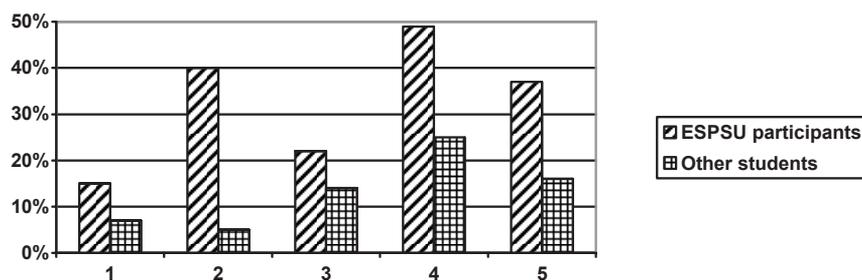


Figure 2. Professional advancement of students

**Fourth stage** – assistance of Career Development Centre. This comprehensive education would logically end with students' successful employment. The researchers' experience has shown that even the most advanced students do not know where to start looking for a job, how to write a professional resume or how to behave during a job interview. For a young specialist to persuade an employer in their professional competency, they need to thoroughly think through their strategy for various situations connected with job search, application and interview.

The main goal of Career Development Centre is to help students and university graduates plan a successful professional career and form skills necessary for it, develop their abilities and discover their talents, increase their creative potential. The Centre offers certain trainings that provide students with theoretical knowledge and form practical skills of job searching and self-presentation. Professional guidance is provided by experienced instructors.

Graduates' career achievements (Figure 3), both of those who participated in Translation Bureau and who did not, were assessed as follows:

- employment in their professional area (1);
- salary rise within 3 years (2);
- promotion within 3 years (3).

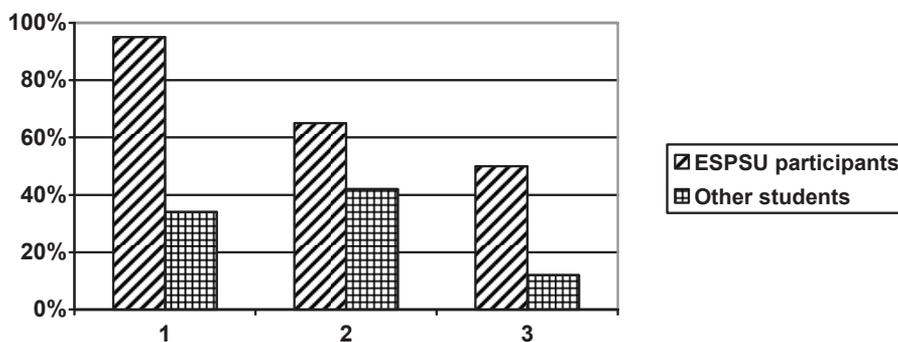


Figure 3. Graduates' career achievements

### Conclusions

As a result of students' participation in ESPSU their communication skills increased, their professional knowledge extended, they became more independent and learned to collaborate, and finally managed to find promising jobs.

Thus, in terms of education reform according to Bologna process demands, extracurricular activity of students is gaining its importance as an essential part of vocational training, which

combines academic learning, research and practice. Successful organisation of extracurricular activity has resulted in:

- wider scope of activities;
- increase in number of participants;
- students' self-reliance and independence;
- extension of students' knowledge;
- integration of extracurricular activities into department's educative, scientific and research curriculum;
- students-tutor team implementing various innovative elements into training courses.

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