

## IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN THE SYSTEM OF TEACHING MODERN LANGUAGES IN GREAT BRITAIN

*In this article, the author addresses current views of British researches on enhancing employability skills of university students in the process of foreign languages acquisition. Thus, widening participation of graduates looking for jobs, dependence of national economic and social wellbeing on a good supply of graduates, showing that the financial sacrifices are economically worthwhile are considered to be of crucial importance for the issue of enhancing students' employability in British labour market. In this regard, employability is construed as a range of developing attributes and skills necessary for the employment of graduates, notably developing a scope of attributes employers might demand, forming a range of skills indispensable for a career progression, demonstrating attributes that employers assume essential for the future efficient functioning of their enterprise or organization and acquiring a number of skills to develop into a lifelong learner.*

*The general analysis of the respective activities of professional institutions engaged in the issues of employability of the graduates is presented. Thus, the UK higher education institutions run institutional-wide credit bearing courses that could be taken by any student registered. Moreover, British universities enhance employability skills with the aid of special agencies called careers services. The most effective option is integration of the respective courses into the curricula. This is deemed particularly efficient in case of foreign languages and the related studies acquisition.*

*The list of employability skills specified by the British employers as indispensable for successful employment is cited, the role of language and speech skills is determined.*

**Key words:** British universities, graduates, employability skills, education, employers.

**Problem statement.** Ukraine's current state of economic and social development is marked by better apprehension of interaction foundations between the educational system, the employment market and workforce.

Legislative, organizational and financial framework of functioning of Ukrainian higher education system is stipulated by a number of legislative documents.

Thus, in the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" (dated 01.07.2014 No 1556) the ways of personal self-actualization, providing the society, the labour market and the state with highly-qualified specialists are highlighted [1]. Furthermore, the Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the strategy of development of the state youth policy to the year 2010" № 537 (dated 27.09.2013) defined "... the development of co-operation between employers and

educational establishments for designing and elaborating curricula, internship programs and vocational training and for engaging employers in planning the educational process" [2] as priorities of implementing the state youth policy.

However, the collaboration between higher education establishments of Ukraine and the agents of productive, trade and commercial enterprises envisages optimization and reinforcement. The launch of the process is deemed to be the acquisition and implementation of European, notably British, experience of co-operation between the universities and the entrepreneurs and employers concerning the formation and development of the students' employability skills, including those obtained while second language acquisition.

**The analysis of studies and publications recently issued.** The international experience of co-operation between the workforce and educational markets was surveyed by Ukrainian scientists Hrishnova, O. (Гришнова, О.), Lisohor, L. (Лисогор, Л.), Onikiienko, V. (Онікієнко, В.), Petrova, I. (Петрова, І.), Saiem, I. (Саем, І.). The employment policy in the European Union, the issues of workforce market regulation are considered in the works by Bezsonova, I. (Безсонова, І.), Libanova, E. (Лібанова, Е.), Serdiukova, V. (Сердюкова, В.), Tkachenko, T. (Ткаченко, Т.), Vyshnevskaya, N. (Вишневіська, Н.). The international and Ukrainian expertise concerning establishing partnership between business and educational sectors was studied by Ilich, L. (Ільїч, Л.), Kimova, I. (Кімова, І.), Leshchenko, N. (Лещенко, Н.), Miroshnychenko, O. (Мірошніченко, О.), Osinkina, O. (Осинкіна, О.), Zabolotnyi, A. (Заболотний, А.).

The analysis of the publications issued over the past decade indicates that the state-of-the-art regulatory framework ensuring the co-operation between the universities and the workforce market in the United Kingdom is still insufficiently developed. Consequently, the issue of acquiring a scope of employability skills by the UK graduates is of particular relevance to Ukrainian educational science. The aforementioned problem is being scrutinized by British researches, notably Aston, L., Brennan, J., Canning, J., Harvey, L., Hudson, R., Jones, D., Kelly, M., Knight, P., Marshall, K., Shakh, T.

**Aims of the study** are to survey British expertise on the issue of forming employability skills of the UK graduates; to accomplish an overview of respective institutions of the United Kingdom involved in the issue of employability skills development.

**Results and discussions.** The present-day British university sector is characterized by dramatic growth in the number of students. The aggregated statistical data indicate over 50% of the UK citizens aged 18-30 have a university degree. Within the aforementioned scope there is an issue, if all of them enjoyed the benefits and advantages of the respective degree after their graduation. This problem presupposes focusing their curricula on training and preparation of the students to their everyday professional life.

The aforementioned issue, therefore, requires determining the agent responsible for acquiring employability skills by the students and enhancing the employability of the graduates. Should that be students themselves, or the institution-wide careers service, or the teaching staff? Or should this issue be attended by the government and employers? Though the aforementioned factors have a role to play, it is expected that teaching staff has a major influence in improving the employability skills of the students.

Scientists Aston, L., and Bekhradnia, B. specify social and political contexts for the issue of enhancing students' employability in British labour market:

- widening participation of graduates looking for jobs.
- dependence of national economic and social wellbeing on a good supply of graduates.
- since Higher Education is not free for students, it is necessary to show that the financial sacrifices are economically worthwhile [3, p. 6-7].

Harvey, L. and Knight, P. consider the notion "employability" in two aspects:

1. Getting a job:

- the ability to secure a job long after graduation;
- the ability to get an appropriate job within a specified time after graduation and keep it for a period of time;
- the ability to get an appropriate job within a specified time after graduation, to retain the post and to develop and succeed within the chosen career.

2. Employability as a range of developing attributes and skills necessary for the employment of graduates:

- developing a scope of attributes employers might demand.
- forming a range of skills indispensable for a career progression.
- demonstrating attributes that employers assume essential for the future efficient functioning of their enterprise or organization.
- acquiring a number of skills to develop into a lifelong learner.

It should be pointed out the aforementioned scholars favoured the second definition regarding it as a more comprehensive one.

Considering the specificity and nature of a graduate's employability Brennan, J. and T. Shakh, T. referred to the factors influencing a specialist's ability to get employment:

- competency factors, notably knowledge, attributes, skills and competencies necessary to perform the job;
- attitudinal factors, namely, attitudes, values, aspirations, ambitions indispensable for the job in question;
- status, i.e. race, social factors, schooling, personal and life experiences;
- luck, which is construed as being in the right place at the right time [4, p. 20-21].

The researchers emphasize the practitioners at higher educational establishments should target at producing an intensive impact on the first two mentioned factors to make up for any deficiencies in the factors of status and luck.

Canning, J. singles out two types of job candidates. In the first case, the applicant claims he or she is keen to develop a career in marketing, and hopes to have an opportunity to use foreign languages while performing the respective professional duties. Thus, this attitude sounds adaptable, motivated and aware of current business needs and necessities. Thereby, the other candidate states he or she is keen on joining an international organization to improve language skills acquired at university or just to be able to use his or her languages. This assertion proves the graduate is not really interested in the particular position for the interview [5].

British scholars Jones, D. and Kelly, M. draw attention to the fact, that language students lack understanding of their advantages at the employment market due to the following aspects of their linguistic education:

- being able to read, write and speak a language is a useful skill in many jobs and an essential skill in others, moreover, languages have a value in their own right, not just as a skill;
- language degrees and the respective language skills obtained emphasize self-confidence of a graduate as well as profound communication skills; they are very important at any working place, beyond that, these skills, notably team working and communication, are deemed to be employer friendly ones;
- language graduates possess a strong awareness about communicating across cultures and social realms of various countries [8, p. 34].

British educators claim the intensive development of intercultural skills occurs during the period of residence

abroad for studying or training in the country of the target language. It should be noted the present-day university educational curricula and language programs in Great Britain are designed so that a period of residence abroad should constitute an integrative part thereof.

Marshall, K., while adjusting advertising strategies formulated several decades ago by Reeves, R. [10] to the students' educational needs and necessities, observed that university graduates, who experienced studying languages and related studies according to the aforementioned programs, regarded their learning experience gained abroad as a unique selling point provided by foreign language skills and the respective linguistic experience [9]. Brennan, J. and Shakh, T. also adhere to the aforesaid opinion highlighting that the graduates who spent a period abroad for studying or training have advantages in the job market over those without respective overseas experience [4, p. 16].

Acknowledging the abovementioned views, Canning, J. distinguishes the following skills and attributes able to enhance employability gained from the year abroad, which constituted an integrative part of university undergraduate programs:

- a good oral and written command of a language;
- a capacity to deal with the unfamiliar;
- a capacity to deal with people across cultural boundaries;
- a maturity of behavior and judgement of the graduates, who spent a period of residence abroad for studying or training, over the students without the respective overseas experience [5].

It is deemed necessary to consider the ways of enhancing employability skills of British undergraduates in the process of language acquisition. Thus, some higher education institution of the UK run institutional-wide credit bearing courses that could be taken by any student registered at the institution. Students are sometimes able to do a project relating to part-time work undertaken while studying. Generally, the aforementioned courses and modules are not adapted to professional interests and need of future specialists. The second way to enhance employability skills is implemented with the aid of special agencies called careers services, which is of crucial importance regarding the preparation process of university graduates for job-seeking. However, Brennan, J. and Shakh, T. claim the resources of the careers services vary from institution to institution, which might influence the level and range of the services and facilities offered [4]. The most effective option to enhance employability skills in the classroom is integration of the respective courses into the curricula. This is deemed particularly efficient in case of modern languages and the related studies acquisition. The main advantage of this approach is that graduate employment is not separated from the actual subject content. The disadvantage is that this approach puts the primary responsibility for the implementation of the preparation program strongly upon individual teaching staff which might not see employability as one of their priorities.

In this regard, it is significant to analyze the impact of the views of British employers on determining and specifying the content and resources necessary for the development the employability and the approaches thereof. Employers can play an important role in a number of ways including offering work placements and liaising with departments and institutions which may supply future employees. Moreover, employers also have a legal duty to not to discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, age,

disability, religion, sexuality etc. Employers and entrepreneurs should play an essential role in selecting the sites for professional training abroad. Besides, they are concerned to maintain interaction with higher educational establishments for recruitment the most gifted, educated and professional graduates. Nevertheless, some educational innovations introduced by the teaching staff are sometimes misinterpreted by employers or remain unwanted and insignificant for them. For instance, design, development and further fulfillment of the personal development plan, which is intended to identify skills and attributes acquired during their studies at the university, are not considered as a part of the recruitment process by the employers.

The globalization process and international trade provide greater opportunities for graduates with language skills. However, English is often seen as the international language and has been cited by employers as a reason why speaking foreign languages is not essential.

In the meantime, the main issue for consideration is which exactly employability skills the employers expect from British graduates. This aspect is being elaborated by a number of respective institutions of the UK. From our perspective, activities of Confederation of British Industry (CBI) are of major interest. Among the issues under consideration are, firstly, establishing business expectations from the university system of higher education of Great Britain, secondly, specifying ways of interacting with the stakeholders, notably commercial enterprises and universities for designing and developing patterns of cooperation and defining the level and terms of funding of the educational sector. The studies completed by the aforementioned institution allowed the establishment of the fact that the employers are predominantly interested the following well developed skills with the employee:

- self-management, that is the readiness and determination to take up responsibility, as well as flexibility, self-analysis and self-confidence;
- teamworking, which envisages regard for the other members of the group and co-workers, interaction and interrelation, participation in discussions and awareness of the determination of the outcome on personal input of every participating individual;
- business and customer awareness, that is knowing the factors of business success for enterprises;
- problem solving, namely, analyzing facts and environment and employing creative thinking for making efficient decisions;
- communication and literacy, which denotes an ability produce a structured and explicit written work, coherent oral speech and question formulating;
- numeracy, general mathematical competence and its application in various everyday contexts;
- application of information technology for efficient information search and retrieving [11, p. 12].

It is worth emphasizing that British employers and entrepreneurs place particular emphasis on linguistic and speech skills acquisition by university graduates. It should be noted the UK employers view the aforementioned skills as an integrative part of the ability of an individual to operate effectively in a multi-cultural environment and acquisition of a scope of knowledge and intercultural skills at a sufficient level.

The study accomplished by Confederation of British Industry in 2015 indicates that about half of all British trade and commercial enterprises (45%) acknowledge the fact that mastering foreign languages to a sufficient level might

significantly improve opportunities of applicants for employment. This is particularly true for the sectors dealing with establishment business networking with clients, customers and services and goods providers and suppliers (36%) [7, p. 36]. Statistical profiles of activities of enterprises recruiting employers with language skills demonstrated that British business is in need of specialists with the knowledge of French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Polish and Arabic. [7, p. 42].

**Specific conclusions reached from this study.** In view of the above, it should be noted that at the current stage British university sector, notably the language field, is enhancing strong links between higher educational establishments of the country and the employers. This interrelation manifests itself, firstly, in eliciting the requirements and needs of employers, including those at the institutional level, secondly, it reveals in consideration of individual psychological characteristics of future specialists and the respective individual learning experience, which enables autonomous formation of individual educational paths and raising the level of competitiveness at the labour market of the country.

**Directions for further research** lie within the scope of considering the experience of interaction and co-operation between professional establishments of Great Britain in the sector of teaching foreign languages and the institutions engaged into researching employability skills of British graduates.

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Надійшла до редколегії 15.11.2019

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### УДОСКОНАЛЕННЯ ВМІНЬ ТА НАВИЧОК ПРАЦЕВЛАШТУВАННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ: ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ РОЗВИТКУ СИСТЕМИ НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ ВЕЛИКОЇ БРИТАНІЇ

*У статті автором представлені сучасні погляди британських науковців щодо формування навичок працевлаштування студентів університетів, зокрема під час вивчення іноземних мов. Зростання кількості студентів, які знаходяться у пошуку роботи, залежність національної економіки та соціального благополуччя від якості підготовки випускників, підтвердження економічної доцільності фінансових вкладень у власну освіту вважаються надважливими факторами у контексті підвищення рівня конкурентоздатності студентів на ринку праці Великої Британії. З огляду на це, конкурентоздатність розглядається як широкий спектр якостей та навичок, необхідних для працевлаштування, зокрема тих, яких найбільше потребуватиме працедавець, у такий спосіб формуючи діапазон вмінь та навичок, потрібних для розбудови власної кар'єри, виявляючи якості, які сприймаються працедавцями необхідними для ефективної роботи підприємства чи організації у майбутньому, а також набуття певних навичок, що сприяють формуванню здатності навчатися протягом життя.*

*Поданий загальний аналіз діяльності професійних інституцій країни, які досліджують питання зайнятості випускників. Заклади вищої освіти Великої Британії запроваджують загальноуніверситетські курси, які доступні всім студентам навчального закладу, за результатами опанування яких нараховують певну кількість кредитів. Крім того, британські університети сприяють розвиткові навичок працевлаштування завдяки залученню спеціальних агенцій, а саме, кар'єрних служб. Проте найбільш дієвим інструментом вважається інтеграція відповідних навчальних курсів до навчальних планів та програм. Особливу ефективність таке посвідчення виявляє під час навчання іноземних мов та суміжних дисциплін.*

*Наведений перелік навичок, визначених британськими роботодавцями в якості необхідних для успішного працевлаштування, вказана роль мовних та мовленнєвих вмінь та навичок.*

**Ключові слова:** британські університети, випускники, навички працевлаштування, освіта, працедавець.