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Web 3.0-Based Non-Formal Learning to Meet the Third Millennium Education Requirements: University Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

The paper provides integrated theoretical analysis of such phenomena as non-formal learning and Google-based Web 3.0 tools for education within a wide social context of the Higher education goals in the new millennium. The research goal is to explore university students' perceptions on Web 3.0-based non-formal learning with regard to the students' future performance on the labor market. The paper provides empirical analysis and interpretation of statistical data that reveal challenges that students might face when being involved in non-formal learning with Google-based Web 3.0 tools use, benefits that students might gain from being involved in the mode of learning under study. The research findings also prove that non-formal learning with Google-based Web 3.0 tools use is expected to contribute to the development of cross-curricular generic competences.

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1. Introduction

Scholars and policymakers have analyzed Higher Education perspectives in the third millennium within various conceptual frameworks, using various methodological approaches. The topic of the present research has been chosen due to increasing focus on the synergistic approach to higher education development (Seitz, 2009). The above approach aims to study and promote multidimensionality and integrity of education process, combining students' training, upbringing, education, and creative development through the educational institutions interaction with social agencies, industrial and commercial enterprises to provide the society sustainable development.

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The competences formation is one of the top education goals. Nevertheless, the views of Academia, Market, and Society often differ regarding possible learning modes and learning environments, as well as scope, priority sequence, particular knowledge, skills and abilities of university graduates. Taking into account the above, the preliminary stage of the research included its background drafting.

2. Research Background

2.1. Higher Education within the Third Millennium Goals

The third millennium has required defining and shaping the world community most urgent goals and targets that, in turn has led the UN to set the Millennium Development Goals (UNMD, 2000). Currently, the UN Member States are drafting the post-2015 sustainable development to be adopted at the UN Summit in September 2015. The respective list includes such objectives as "ensuring lifelong learning opportunities for all, promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all" (Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, 2015). International documents, national legislations and research publications across the world evaluate the human capital as the key determinant for the world sustainable development. The above framework requires higher education institutions to respond to the Post-2015 agenda by addressing international and national needs to champion human development, to foster individuals´ professional competencies. These issues are considered across the continents (Hirsch & Weber, 1999; Roberts & Ajai-Ajagbe, 2013).

Both scholars (see, for instance, de Weert, 2011) and authorized agencies of international organizations (see, for instance, Improving knowledge…, 2007) point out that sustainability requires close and multidimensional interaction between education and research, on the on hand, and industry, on the other one. The interaction could help identify those up-to date competencies that university graduates are expected to have in order to meet the labor market requirements.

2.2. Graduates' Competences and Employers' Requirements

Past years witnessed rather different approaches to competences classification. J. Delor (1996) viewed such competences as "learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be" as four pillars of education. Meanwhile, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe (Recommendation 2006/962/EC) focused on competences in mother tongue and in foreign languages, digital competence, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. The research under the Tuning project (Generic Competences, 2000) has led to a detailed list of abilities, capacities, knowledge, commitments, determinations, etc. The Strategic Framework for European Cooperation for Education and Training has underlined the topicality of cross-curricular competences among which special emphasis is laid on social cohesion and active citizenship, enhancing creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship (for details see: European Council, 2009).

A similar approach is revealed in the Russian legislation and strategic educational framework (On Education in the Russian Federation, 2012; Concept of Long-term Socio-Economic Development…, 2008).

Researchers underline that currently the employers focus on graduates' generic competences (Quek, 2005). Employers are in search of university graduates who can produce knowledge and innovations that are tailored to particular creative enterprise needs, who can accumulate social net working for professional purposes, who are able to adapt to a constantly changing professional performance environment by using the overall potential of the information and communication technologies (ICT) (Hair, Bush, Ortinau, 2006). Enterprises and agencies strongly complain that graduates lack critical thinking, problem solving and creativity skills, adequate information processing and management abilities, etc., there is less dissatisfaction regarding graduates' professional knowledge and skills (Archer & Davidson, 2008; Paterson, Jackson, Grieve, 2012; Super Job Poll, 2011).

Thus, it seems to be of current importance to follow those researchers, who underline, that "the university…belongs to society, that the process of teaching/learning experience is not just a theoretical exercise of abstract knowledge, but a crucial act of training, leading to the development of skills in the labor market for qualified graduates" (Urs & Sorin, 2011, p. 342). The above scholars underline that "University prepares graduates