



Chapter 5

Enhancing the Skill Sets for Increasing Youth Employability in Latvia


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ABSTRACT

Globalization, the development of new technologies, an ageing population, and the economic situation will continue influencing the skills mix; therefore, special attention has to be paid to young people to develop a skilled workforce responding to the current and future labour market needs, as well as to promote lifelong learning. The present study explores different concepts of employability and analyses employability skills of young people (aged 15-29) focusing on the most significant skills and the possible ways of enhancing their development. A survey of 405 youngsters and 81 representatives of institutions conducted in Latvia resulted in developing certain recommendations on how to increase youth employability in the Latvian labour market. Both theoretical analysis and the survey conducted highlight the most significant employability skills necessary to be competitive and successful at present and in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

The strategy for the current decade “Europe 2020” is a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth to increase Europe’s competitiveness by fostering economy based on knowledge, research and innovation as well as to improve people’s employability across Europe (European Commission, 2010a). Its third priority – inclusive growth – is associated with the necessity to work out an agenda for new skills and jobs to increase employability (Eurostat, 2015) which in turn is connected with enhancing education at all levels. In this context, emphasis is on education quality that would correspond to labour market needs. According to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop, 2014a), high quality vocational education and training is a policy priority for the EU as the economic slowdown has led to high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. Furthermore, skills, qualifications and employability are a key issue to the EU economic recovery (Cedefop, 2014a), and therefore special attention should be paid to those with low and obsolete skills (Milquet, 2010) as well as to students at all ages who are the future labour.

It is evident that the contemporary world shows a change in employability patterns and skills needed in the future that are often addressed as employability skills. As pointed out by Fallows and Steven employability skills comprise not only the usual generic or transferable skills but also include such abilities as “the retrieval and handling of information, communication and presentation, planning and problem-solving, social development and interaction” (Fallows & Steven, 2000, p. 75). In other words, the emphasis is laid on generic interpersonal and communication competences (Andrews & Higson, 2008), as well as on analytical and strategic thinking that enables problem spotting, analysis and solution in various contexts. Nowadays, soft skills in many cases are the priority for employers in recruiting employees.

Moreover, recently the term ‘skills mismatch’ has become more and more topical. Thus, the Executive Summary of Global Agenda Council on Employment highlights the importance of skills and their mismatch emphasizing five issues: 1) skills are a critical asset for individuals, businesses and societies, 2) matching skills and jobs has become a high-priority policy concern, 3) skills mismatch has become more prominent in the global economic crisis, 4) many employers report difficulties in finding suitably skilled workers and 5) a more worrying phenomenon is sizeable qualification mismatch (World Economic Forum, 2014a, p. 5). However, recent studies in Europe indicate that “debates about skills and qualification mismatches illustrate how the expansion of education has been poorly aligned to the changing structure of skills required by employers” (O’Reilly et al., 2015, pp. 1-2).

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