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Positive aspects of the project “towards the modernisation of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan” (MATCHES)

Adhamjon Tuychiev¹, Sherzod Kenjaboev², Sergio Romeo Malanda³

1. Head of International Relations Office, Namangan Engineering Pedagogical Institute, Uzbekistan, adham.tuychiev@gmail.com
2. Chief Specialist of International Relations Office, Namangan Engineering Pedagogical Institute, Uzbekistan, shkenjaboev@gmail.com
3. Director of International Relations, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, sergio.romeo@ulpgc.es

Abstract: Today international collaboration is being considered as one of the main trends of higher education development all over the world. Knowledge has become increasingly international. In the conditions of the reforms occurring in Uzbekistan's higher education, the necessity of improving the pedagogical potential of higher school arises that would increase the education quality, Higher Education Institutions integration in the international education space in accordance with the context of the Bologna process.

Key words: Higher Education system, international collaboration, development, integration, e-learning platform, globalization, project, sustainability, internationalization.

Положительные стороны проекта MaTCHES к модернизацию высших учебных заведений в Узбекистане

Адхамон Тючев¹; Шерзод Кенджабоев², Серхио Ромео Маланда³

Абстракт: В настоящее время международное сотрудничество рассматривается в качестве одного из основных направлений развития высшего образования во всем мире. Знания становятся все больше международного характера. В условиях реформ, происходящих в системе высшего образования Узбекистана, считается необходимостью улучшения педагогического потенциала ВУЗов, и приведет к увеличению качества образования и интеграции высших учебных заведений в международном образовательном пространстве в соответствии с контекстом Болонского процесса.

Ключевые слова: Система высшего образования, международное сотрудничество, развитие, интеграция, платформа электронного обучения, глобализация, проект, устойчивость, интернационализация.

Introduction

From the old times our forefathers considered upbringing of the rising generation to be the most important problem. People's Pedagogics is envisaging early development of a personality with taking basic principles of teaching and education into account has created, developed and improved in the course of the centuries.

In Uzbekistan the process of internationalization of higher education started from 1991. In 1997, when the new Act on Education and the National program on Personnel Training was approved by the government the international collaboration got its legitimate bases. Even the formal structure of higher education, consisted of 4-year of Bachelor studies and 2-year Master courses which was launched that time underlined the country's endeavors to be implemented in international education.

Professor J. Knight defines internationalism as the activities of higher education institutions in response to the economical, political and social forces pushing higher education towards greater international involvement.

Uzbekistan was the first of the countries of the CIS to begin institutional reforms in the educational sector. Education is one of the most important components of human development; and it possesses a core role in solving fundamental challenges. As a key component of human development education determines a governing influence in solving of a number of social, economic, political and humane problems.

So, the purpose of this article is to present the outcomes of internationalization process that has been implemented at Namangan Engineering-Pedagogical Institute (NEPI), and also some of the achievements that have been carried out by MATCHES project (544573-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-BG-TEMPUS-JPHES, Towards the Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions in Uzbekistan – MATCHES) within the frame of the Tempus program partially funded by the European Commission.

Overview

From our many years of experience in higher education we know that the higher education is the source of energy which activates the society for development. All important persons in society gather knowledge and skills in this stage. The university life influences on the activity of person for future and determines its right role in a society. So, the positive and negative things at the university influence anyway to society.

As for the NEPI is a modern and dynamic developing and one of the leading institutes in Uzbekistan. The main purpose of NEPI is to train highly qualified specialists, who are able to get adaptation in the competition of market conditions, in submission of qualified educational programs, guided by energy, initiative, creation, professionalism and especially international cooperation of the professorial-pedagogical staff.

Moreover, NEPI is one of the active higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan which has a lot of international partnerships being a member of such programs as Erasmus+ and Tempus funded by EU which give chances for teachers & researchers to retraining at the universities of Europe on many branches like International relations, Entrepreneurship, Economical sciences, Management, Accounting, Languages, Pedagogical Sciences, Logistics and etc.

In the conditions of the reforms occurring in Uzbekistan's higher education the necessity of improving the pedagogical potential of higher school arises that would increase the education quality, HEI integration in the international education space in accordance with the context of the Bologna process.

1. Adopting and realization the plan-program of retraining and qualification improvement of HEI pedagogical staff on the following trends:

- Innovation and information technologies
- Pedagogy and psychology
- Master-classes on economic profile and other subjects
- Practical work of teachers and students directly at the ventures
- Quality management

2. Working out or developing modules and methodological complexes on improving the teaching staff quality

3. Organizing trainings, seminars, experience of exchanges, round tables.

4. Training of teachers-trainers on innovation informative technologies of education on the basis of the set centers.

It goes without saying, international activities of NEPI with the other higher education institutions has significantly changed since 1999. In comparison with the period before 1999, the changes in international relations have been linked especially to volume of relations, number of partners involved, reorientation of the international relations to the new geographical and also professional (pedagogical/research) areas. The International Relations' main aim is to keep, develop and improve the current level of international

relations in line with the institution development goals. The starting point for the international relations is derived from the strategic NEPI priorities and from the integrated shape of the activities within the institution, which both correspond with the Ministry of High Education strategy.

Due to many different forms of international relations this has a good name and holds a prestigious position among the best high educational institutions in Uzbekistan. In relation to NEPI environment they take into account the complete socio-economic situation in Uzbekistan as well as the international atmosphere in the global environment, which still keeps its significant particular regional attributes. The tasks of NEPI international activities are to support international relations as a way to enhance the position and good name of NEPI within and outside the Central Asian education area.

Key focus within the international relations has been changing from quantity to quality, which is just a continuation of the process started in the past. It means that they focus on those, which significantly help to enhance and improve the specific dimension given by study programs. They offer several well-established activities linked to the international education area.

The above information confirms that the key activities within international relations support the internationalization of studies and research. Such activities are as follows:

- Students and Teachers mobility within the Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ programs.
- Participation in international research projects.
- Support of the student organizations, which recruit more students into the international arena.
- Building a network with other similar universities and faculties with the aim of supporting and extending international cooperation.

As we mentioned above, role of the International cooperation in Higher Education System is very important in our lives. For this we have a lot of reasons to participate in projects (MATChES project) with European universities.



With MATChES partners in project meeting at Ruse University, Bulgaria, February, 2014

- ✓ The first reason is to learn invaluable experience from European universities (for example, Ruse University, Bulgaria, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, Jan Kochanowski University, Poland). (During our visits to these universities we have gained as much as possible with the help of proficient scientific advisors and also we

achieved to sign bilateral agreements with the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Jan Kochanowski University, Targi Kielce Exhibition and Congress Center and also Kielce Trade Fair Cluster Chamber of Commerce in Poland for the development of mutual academic and research programs, student exchange, friendship and business collaboration among the universities.

- ✓ The second reason is the international scientific atmosphere of European Higher Education; it would play an important role in providing the productivity of our research activity as well as successful accomplishment of it. For our teachers very important thing was to talk with overseas colleagues and students so that we can conduct some surveys for our research in order to compare their higher educational system with that of ours. Moreover, European System of Education is the most developed in the world which promises advancement opportunities for researchers and scientists.
- ✓ The third reason, we could have an opportunity to use huge library resources (research database of EU, E-books, so on), business centers, so on and thus, investigate new knowledge within the mobility programs to Spain and Poland.

Currently, the MATCHES project has began to develop knowledge background in R&D. The aims of this project are: (i) creating a knowledge basis on the existing knowledge triangle and on best practices on regional innovation systems in Uzbekistan; (ii) reinforcing the capacities of universities and of other regional actors through training and mobility programs; (iii) developing 3 Regional Knowledge Platforms (REP) for long-term cooperation between Universities, enterprises, local and regional authorities and other stakeholders; (iv) developing 3 Joint Action Plans as strategy and work plan documents of the platforms; (v) establishing 3 Knowledge Transfer Offices (KTO) and support the establishment of 3 Scientific and Technological Parks (STP); (vi) fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of students and researchers of Uzbekistan; (vii) designing and implementing dissemination and exploitation strategies.



A team of Uzbek delegation in Trainings within MATCHES project in Technological Institute in Canary Islands, Spain, December, 2015

There are many kinds of positive aspects in MATCHES project within the international mobility. It can provide new experiences and widen the ways of thinking. When the exchange is organized in international groups they can familiarize themselves not only with the hosting country, but also with other cultures and systems of education.

They also have to learn to communicate and collaborate in a new group with people from different cultures. This opens a wide challenge: observing lessons, introducing small business and Technological Scientific Parks, learning and teaching abroad and acquiring new backgrounds.

Every partner university gains new knowledge and international atmosphere for their every-day lives.

MATcHES project has planned as a three-year project in which the competence of local Knowledge Triangle actors in the field of innovation-research-education has been developed in several stages. The first year focused on analyzing and learning needs of various organizations through face-to-face interviews and institutional meetings.

The development of capacity building activities was available within the second stage of the project. The consortium organized interactive trainings in the three Uzbek HEIs – Namangan Engineering Pedagogical Institute (NEPI), Bukhara Engineering Technological Institute (BETI) and Karshi Engineering Economical Institute (KEEI). The trainings took place in the period of 20 - 30 April 2015 and in total 393 Uzbeks participated under 5 topics:

- Knowledge transfer practices and mechanisms.
- Public-private partnership and other financial models for research and innovation.
- Development and management of international research and innovation projects.
- Design and implementation of support services for entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Business development and management: how to create and successfully ran a start-up.

The training materials have been developed in collaboration between the EU and UZ trainers. An important period of their join preparation was the mobility program to Spain and Poland in January-February 2015. The target group of these trainings has been professors, researchers, and managerial staff from universities, representatives of business support organizations, representative of public authorities and representatives of SMEs.

The final stage of the project dealt with the further improvement of internal regulatory framework and procedures for bilateral and multilateral partnership (BMP) and university-business support services (UBSS) at the three Uzbek HEIs. Throughout the life time of the project MATcHES introduced a Knowledge Transfer Offices (KTO) focusing on enhancing activities in the field of innovative research, R&D projects, and Regional Knowledge Platform (REP) with different interactive services including online e-Learning platform previously developed by EU and Uzbek trainers. The e-Learning platform of the MATcHES project and the REPs is based on MOODLE technological infrastructure, a worldwide platform that is used by more than 600 international academic institutions and growing fast to dominant open learning environments, and an open source web application that education designers can use to build effective online learning infrastructure. The e-Learning platform will support multiple languages: English, Uzbek, and Russian and will ensure the flow of knowledge and information between the academic and non-academic partner institutions with fundamental contribution to the execution of the MATcHES goals and objectives: (i) to facilitate the cooperation of the universities with businesses and local authorities, (ii) to facilitate the emergence and consolidation of the knowledge triangle in the 3 regions involved and (iv) to addresses specifically the priority on “Knowledge triangle: innovation-education-research” by focusing on the collaboration of universities with the world of business and with public authorities.

The Knowledge Transfer Offices (KTO) and Regional Knowledge Platforms (REPs) at each of the three Uzbek HEIs should use the e-Learning platform for organizing specific trainings, informational meetings related to “Business-University” relations – i.e. innovative research, R&D projects, etc.

Conclusion

The further globalization of education will involve more deeply Uzbekistan universities through international educational collaboration and cooperation. Hence, the higher education institutions in Uzbekistan are well-prepared for implementing such kind of partnerships, which is demonstrated here in the example of NEPI. Many of the here described MATCHES project results could be adapted to other projects funded by different funds – local, national, EU, non-EU, etc.

As we mentioned above, for us, the project brought a lot of experience. We persuaded ourselves that it was interesting, also fun and joy for us! We got on very well with everybody, we have seen real education systems and culture events, and we joined many interesting and long informal discussions not only on the Economical and educational topics. During this three-year' period we made friends who we would miss. But we hope that we will see them once again!

We could also see and feel a little bit how the social life is in Spain, Poland and Bulgaria. It was interesting and useful.

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