ERASMUS+ AS A SOURCE OF THE BEST PRACTICE

J. Budik, O. Schlossberger

University of Finance and Administration (CZECH REPUBLIC)

Abstract

Anyone interested in Erasmus+ can read its report. The report describes the role of each stakeholder in its preparation and deals with the process of data collection and analysis for various background studies. Overall, there is a consensus that the current program has brought very positive benefits for both the participants and the institutions involved, and these positive aspects have been transferred to society as a whole.

The paper deals with the case study of the results obtained from the Erasmus+ program and their use at the Department of Finance with the private Czech University. The aim of the text is to provide information on specific examples that show how shading knowledge at foreign universities is used to innovate in university education. This is necessary because some teachers and lectors use innovative methods carefully and prefer traditional teaching methods. It is not enough for us to introduce innovative methods to schools and universities. It is more important to understand and adapt them.

In the theoretical part, the authors discuss selected basic methodological tools for improving the quality of processes in general, namely education. The theory is used to analyze knowledge from several activities contradicted by the Erasmus+ program abroad. Both teachers and students participated in them.

In the practical part, the authors made a synthesis by Ishikawa diagram. In it, into the structure "fishbone diagram“, new stimulating and interesting ideas for improving the quality of teaching were chosen. The result was an improvement.

Requirements for the learning process in recent years has moved across Europe and the requirement is to emphasize the importance and principle of regulating and supervising without being limited knowledge of the basic functions of financial institutions. Such innovations can be achieved (as shown by the experience of the authors of the project Erasmus+) through project-based studies, processing inspection, review studies, detailed legislation analyzes, international cooperation of students and improving language skills.

The university has been offering theoretically oriented courses (bachelor, master, doctoral and MBA) for many years, and their standards are improving with Erasmus+ results. At the same time, students can choose additional courses in lifelong learning which will further improve them for practical application in consulting business.

Keywords: Erasmus+, experiences, innovations, Ishikawa diagram.

1 INTRODUCTION

Globalization and other stimuli shape social expectations in relation to various activities, including teaching. In the Czech Republic, nearly thirty universities provide tertiary education of the university type. Three of them are private universities established under the Higher Education Act, similar to public universities operating in the Czech Republic since the last centuries. The external evaluation of the activities of all higher education institutions, decision-making on the accreditation of degree programs and checking of compliance with legal regulations in the implementation of accredited programs are carried out by the National Accreditation Office established in accordance with the Higher Education Act. Public universities are mainly financed by a contribution from public sources. This is a variable amount in individual years but derived from the number of students. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports [1], there is a so-called normative per student of approximately CZK 27,500 (approx. EUR 1,100). After inclusion of other components, the subsidy for public universities with economic fields of study reaches around CZK 34,000 (approx. EUR 1,300).

Unlike public universities, the University of Finance and Administration (VSFS) is a private university. The main difference between a public and a private university, such as our VSFS, is the fact that all the costs of a private school must be covered by tuition fees, possibly from loans and sponsorship.

Improving the quality of teaching and research conducted at VSFS are constantly monitored topics. The relevant sections are dedicated to them in the annual reports. The report issued in June 2018 [2] identifies seven mobility programs implemented at the VSFS. They include both short and long-term Erasmus+ students. It states that they are offered to students to gain international experience in studying foreign programs compatible with programs in the Czech Republic. Compatibility allows subsequent recognition of subjects studied abroad as an equivalent variant of study in the Czech Republic.

Under the Erasmus+ program, the VSFS recruits academic staff from abroad for training sessions. There are also Erasmus International Teaching Weeks, where VSFS invites foreign teachers from several European universities to take active part. The VSFS also organizes Erasmus+ staff mobility week, linking research topics at VSFS in EU countries such as Germany, Greece and Poland.

Research and the transfer of its results into educational activities are supported by funding through both the internal grant agency and the grant agency of the Czech Republic. The prerequisite for obtaining funds is their competition in competition with other private and public universities. Students are also involved in creative activities. They are active as research assistants (collaborators) at departments; they work on topics of final theses connected with research of departments and participate in research and other activities.

The aim of the authors of the present case study is to present possible new approaches and improvements in the activities of individual teachers, which were stimulated by the Erasmus+ program.

2 METHODOLOGY

The decision to use the form of a case study as one of the methods for presenting any procedures is, among other things, the fact that it makes it possible to present the findings comprehensively. The benefits of case studies are summarized by Ellet [3] and emphasize that the case study provides a useful tool for analyzing and discussing specific situations and offering an integrated approach to new knowledge, including quality improvement. Improving the quality of the university's activities as a whole (as mentioned in the introduction) is related to the quality of teaching of individual teachers at the department. Their work can be improved by changing the quality of the individual components of the teaching process.

A proven method for process improvement is the cause and effect diagram, sometimes also called the Ishikawa or Fishbone diagram. Bowen [4] states that it is still an up-to-date method of determining the most serious cause of the problem we are dealing with. The authors of the present text solved the problem of further improving the quality of teaching.

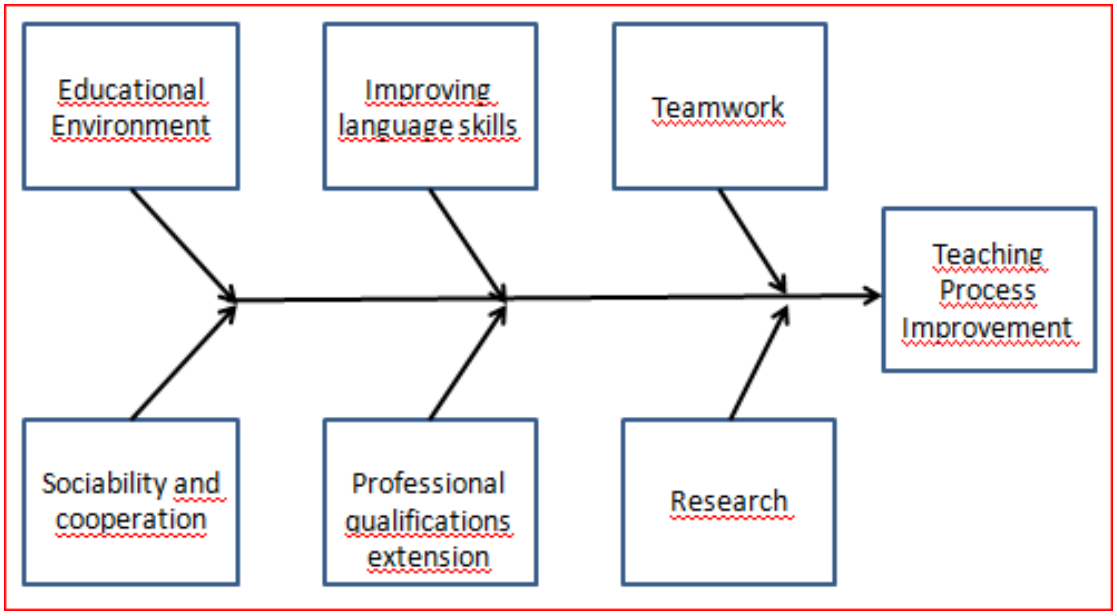

Figure 1. Fishbone diagram for teaching process improvement

As Slameto [5] emphasizes, school systems are social systems. They are much more complex than mechanical or biological systems. For this reason, it is often impossible to isolate one major path to improvement. But with a defined method and common sense, improvement can usually be achieved. In addition, Slameto notes that a roadmap for future action can be developed or identified by analyzing the causes of the problems. On its basis, then we can implement a process for improving the quality of education at a particular university.

There are various procedures for creating a cause and effect diagram. One option is mentioned by the OECD in a new publication [6] and recommends, inter alia, "enabling data sharing across borders and across disciplines." Erasmus+ knowledge was a good source. The research of the authors of this paper focused on finding potential categories of possible improvement of teaching. And subcategories can also be found, i.e. partial improvement options. The subcategory appears on the chart at the main. A reasonable approach is to the second level of subcategories.

In this way, the authors identified, created and recorded opportunities to improve the educational environment, social skills, language skills, broader professional qualifications and research (Fig. 1)

3 RESULTS

EU policy requires strengthening Europe's innovative capacity and developing a creative and knowledge-based economy and society by strengthening the role of education and training, OECD materials state [7]. I consider the authors' own experience with personal participation in the Erasmus + program to be a more substantial part of the present case study. These were different groups of activities.

For students, it was an activity associated with the international project “Intensive Program”, an international activity based on the idea that sustainable development requires growth without significant environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources. The three pillars of sustainability are: the social, environmental and economic pillar. At the end of the Intensive Program project, students wrote a documentary on sustainable decision-making in financial institutions, identified success factors in working with people from different cultures, and practiced intercultural cooperation.

Irrespective of the Intensive Program project, a larger group of students went to study at partner universities abroad and their foreign experience was also used in teaching.

Erasmus+ provides teachers with the opportunity to travel and teach and shade teaching abroad, as well as to collect research data.

3.1 Educational environment

Educational environment is a concept that works with the idea that the school creates a unified educational environment, has full control over its functioning and operation.

However, online learning is not necessarily associated with an educational institution. Černý [8] agrees with the conclusions reached by Dabbagh and Kitsantas [9] on this subject and further states that learning in cyberspace cannot be limited to working with a teacher, as is the case in conventional formal education courses. On the contrary, there are concepts that try to bring the educational environment closer to what students commonly use. Instructors try to enter to the students' own environment and their habits. For communication it is possible to use social networks (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook). Tasks can be done in the form of shared Google documents. The goal is to use digital applications and tools to create learning environments.

But the classroom is still an important place for students to work. With an increasing emphasis on a healthy lifestyle, new studies on ergonomics are emerging. They are focused on human-computer interaction as reported by Benmoussa et al. [10], but can also be used in classrooms.

Participation in the Erasmus+ program has led to the following considerations regarding the organization of the classroom:

- the option that students sit around several round tables is suitable for group activities, but when watching and presenting the teacher, almost no one is facing the “blackboard”,

- the option that students sit in "U" desks is also inappropriate when watching the teacher and presenting it, half of the students are sitting against the window, but the teacher can consult the work of all students on their own.

The option that students sit in a desk and the windows are on their left hand and the whiteboard in front of them is very suitable for perception information from the teacher as well as facts on the whiteboard. To work in a group, the students turn to classmates behind them. However, consultations with the group are more difficult for those sitting further away from the aisle.

3.2 Sociability and cooperation

Finding a satisfactory and sufficiently broad definition of sociability is not easy and in an online environment such an approach gains even wider contours. This is stated by Černý [8] who says that in general sociability must be understood as a skill or ability to engage in society, cooperate and communicate. He agrees with Marilyn Price - Mitchell [11], the idea that socio-emotional skills will be needed by everyone. These include self-regulation, active listening, cooperation and effective communication. Socio-emotional skills are important in creating a personal learning environment. Similarly, there is a personal educational network in theory. This is also embedded in the Lifelong Learning Program 2007-2013, published by the European commission in 2017.

Defining the personal learning environment of different authors may have different content. In general, it can be perceived as a set of links, materials, people and networks that enter into the learning process (online and offline), are actively contextualized, critically evaluated, and worked in some way. Each individual's network is autonomous and unique. Tulinská [12] points out that for Downes, it is the heart of the entire educational process, a tool that enables a student to connect to a network of people, services and resources in a distributed learning environment.

According to the authors' experience, involvement in Erasmus+ related activities required, inter alia:

- to communicate appropriately with classmates in the study group in the Czech Republic,
- to communicate with teachers in a specific (especially time-consuming) way, because the fulfillment of study obligations was limited in time by Erasmus+ activities,
- to respect their national customs when communicating with students from other EU countries,
- read articles, write a blog, be active on social networks, connect with others and comment on their work, etc.

In many cases, students at a private university do not have learning as their only activity. Many of them are employed, doing business or actively verifying the theories in the capital market. Such activities create further demands on time and prompt orientation in various professional topics.

3.3 Improving language skills

In this context, the Erasmus+ program should also be mentioned as a very effective tool for improving pupils' language skills and competences. Foreign experience in teaching some subjects motivates students to study languages more intensively. In addition, pupils improve and acquire competencies in a foreign language along with the curriculum content.

3.4 Professional qualifications extension

For students of VSFS accredited bachelor programs, there is an offer to simultaneously study bachelor courses at VSFS and the City University of Seattle. Parallel study will allow obtaining two bachelor's degrees simultaneously. Successful VSFS graduates will be awarded an EU-recognized Bc. Degree and, in fulfilling their bachelor's degree in English, the City University of Seattle will also award them an internationally recognized BSBA degree.

According to [2], the Double Degree "B" program is designed for VSFS students who want to gain a competitive edge in a globalizing labor market with excellent knowledge of business English in particular and broadening their knowledge and skills. At the same time, the graduates open the way to obtain American academic education with special regard to knowledge of the practical life of multinational companies. They can also continue at the VSFS by studying Double Degree “M” and at the same time obtaining the Ing. & MBA degree.

3.5 Teamwork

According to Katzenbach and Smith [13], the team is: “A small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to the common purpose, work goals and access to work for which they are mutually responsible. Teamwork, according to Kayser [14], is finding ways to do things right for the first time and then every time. To use teamwork is irrelevant whether the team is working in the public or private sector, for profit or not-oriented organization. In an intensive program, international student teams were working on a given topic. According to the experience of the work of different teams, newly set up for three years in a row, it turned out that:

- Students were quite satisfied with the working atmosphere in international teams,
- communication between them and teachers was generally assessed positively,
- the teams strengthened links between members (even outside the project activities, i.e. at parties),
- students have noticed that their work in the international team has been appreciated by the students,
- the teams agree that their joint work is an important element in the implementation of one specific international activity called the "Intensive Program". It is also supported by the Erasmus+.
- teamwork gave students enough space for self-realization.

The fact that the work in the team did not have a direct link to the elaboration of their final theses, whose assignment and elaboration preceded the start date of the “Intensive Program” project, had a somewhat negative impact on students' satisfaction with their participation.

3.6 Research

Research is concerned with Hair, Money, Samouel, and Page [15] and states that an important research phase is the research strategy. This includes consideration of the main philosophies that the researcher can adopt and the ways in which the choice of strategy influences the research outcome. They discuss different types of research strategies, with an emphasis on the possibility of mixing strategies in one research project. A manual for research planning and implementation has been published by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill [16]. They emphasized that the core of the research process is data collection. The problem of selecting a sample of respondents and compiling a questionnaire is a key issue. Respondents from one region will provide a local, regional view of the problem. When visiting universities abroad the Erasmus+ project also provides their feedback.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The authors showed that a private university (such as VSFS) has set up processes that internally control the quality of teaching and research results. Similar processes are used at public universities.

For the teaching of individual subjects, it has proved appropriate to use more technology. Various forms of computer support for the interpretation and use of the University's internal computer system for the processing of seminar papers are standard. Practicing individual topics proved to be effective when students worked in a team. The teams usually worked with a student's private notebook. This allowed them to work rationally and use the University's WIFI network to work.

The research of individual academic staff of the department was processed by using several internationally available data into several texts presented in professional journals and at international conferences.

Findings from the Erasmus+ program have confirmed that a university teacher cannot be seen as an official who complies with regulations and methodological recommendations, but that he is a self-thinking professional who is responsible for his work.

REFERENCES

[1] ”Ministry of Education Youth and Sports”, Accessed 20 September, 2019. Retrieved from https://regvssp.msmt.cz/registrvssp/cvslist.aspx

[2] “Výroční zpráva o činnosti Vysoké školy finanční a správní za rok 2017“. Praha, červen 2018. Accessed 20 September 2019. Retrieved from https://www.vsfs.cz/?id=1052-vyrocni-zpravy

[3] W. Ellet, “The Case Study Handbook: A Student's Guide”, Harvard Business School Press. 2018.

[4] P. Bowen, “The Fishbone Diagram Handbook - Everything You Need to Know about Fishbone Diagram”. Emereo Pty Limited, 2016.

[5] S. Slameto, “The Application of Fishbone Diagram Analisis to Improve School Quality,” Dinamika Ilmu, Vol. 16 (1) 2016.

[6] OECD, “Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook 2018: Adapting to Technological and Societal Disruption”, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2018. Accessed 20 September, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org.

[7] OECD, “Opportunities, Challenges and Good Practices in International Research Cooperation between Developed and Developing Countries”, OECD, 2011. Accessed 20 September, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org.

[8] M. Černý, “Vybrané přístupy k učení se od druhých v online prostředí,” (Selected Approaches to Learning from others in online Environtment), *ProInflow: časopis pro informační vědy*, vol. 10, No. 2, str. 147-166., 2018. [Online]. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/ publication/ 328793043.

[9] N. Dabbagh & A. Kitsantas, “Personal Learning Environments, social media, and self-regulated learning: A natural formula for connecting formal and informal learning”. *The Internet and higher education*, 15(1), 3-8.

[10] K. Benmoussa et al, “Enhanced model for ergonomic evaluation of information systems: application to scientific research information system," *International Journal of Electrical and Computer Engineering*, vol. 9, (1), pp. 683-694, 2019. Available [Online]. [cit. 2019-09-25] Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/2205376510?accountid=37662.

[11] M. Price-Mitchell, “Sociability: The Core of Social-Emotional Learning”, Retrieved January15, 2018, from https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-moment-youth/201505/sociability-the-coresocial-emotional-learning.

[12] H. Tulinská, “Strategie řešení vybraných kognitivních zkreslení při studiu prostřednictvím osobního vzdělávacího prostředí” (“Solving Strategies of Specific Cognitive Bias in Personal Learning Environment”). [Online]. Brno, 2017 [cit. 2019-09-25]. Retrieved from: https://is.muni.cz/th/wb5z6/.

[13] J. R. Katzenbach & D. K. Smith, “The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance”, Harvard business school press, 1992.

[14] T. A. Kayser, “Building Team Power: How to Unleash the Collaborative Genius of Teams for Increased Engagement, Productivity, and Results”. McGraw-Hill Education, 2011.

[15] J. Hair, A. Money, P. Samouel and M. Page, "Research Methods for Business", *Education + Training,* Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 336-337. 2007.

[16] M. Saunders, P. Lewis and A. Thornhill, “Doing Research in Business & Management: An Essential Guide to Planning Your Project”, Pearson, Harlow: FT Prentice Hall. 2012.