LITHUANIAN AND POLISH EXPERIENCE IN USING DIFFERENT METHODS IN THE STUDENT-CENTRED PROCESS

Indrė Knyvienė[1], Dalia Perkumienė[1], Zita Baužienė[1], Andrew Gołębiowski[2]

[1]*Kauno kolegija/University of Applied Sciences, Lithuania,* [2]*Wydziału Zamiejscowego w Mielcu, Radom, Poland*

Annotation. This article intends to disclose Lithuanian and Polish experience in using different methods in student-centred process. The research methodology includes a critical survey of contemporary literature on student-centred studies. The most frequent student-centred methods are problem-based studies, project-led education, learning contracts, flexible studies, inquiry learning, just-in-time checking and personalised studies. The main method is to explain students why he/she was assessed in this way, and this provides students with a possibility to self-assess themselves and negotiate for grades.

Key words: student-centred learning, lecturers, methods.

Introduction

The research finds that the student-centred (hereinafter SC) learning is introduced in different professional fields, different geographical areas and practiced also in big classes. Whilst lecturers and students are acquainted with the student-centred learning to a certain degree, they are in need of more guidance, knowledge and understanding regarding its application and practice.

Many researchers and practitioners have already begun to discuss the diversity of the opinions regarding what constitutes the SC approach. Whilst there is a broad consistency in general opinion, there are also growing concerns regarding the apparent misinterpretation of the "ingredients" of the SCL and what the SCL actually "looks" like in practice.

There is an ambiguity in the expression "empowering lecturers for the student-centred approach". One interpretation is in the sense of preparing lecturers to use the student-centred (hereinafter SC) approach addressing questions such as what the prerequisite conditions are, what strategies can be used, what the critical success factors might be, how is »success« measured and so on. Much of the available literature is based on the issues of practice and case studies, and this has been included in the review.

Another interpretation of "empowering lecturers for the student-centred approach" is more abstract and descriptive rather than concrete and prescriptive. Many writers have explored the underpinning theory or constructs; provided models and commentaries in an attempt to suggest reasons why lecturers should be empowered to provide the SC approach; compared and contrasted SC learning with more traditional approaches; or considered the advantages and disadvantages or the consequences. Other writers have been concerned with a broader picture, in which the SC learning is located in a cultural or socio-economic and political context, and some have referred to the SC learning as an approach which is a part of - or reflects - wider pedagogic change looking at how the SC learning both shapes and reflects those trends. These perspectives have also been included.

The aim of the paper is to disclose Lithuanian and Polish experience in using different methods in the student-centred process.

The subject of the paper is Lithuanian and Polish experience in using different methods in the student-centred process.

The methods used in the research are as follows: monographic method, the analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, the analysis of legal acts, a descriptive method, a comparative method, quantitative research methods.

Basic theoretical concepts

"A student-centred classroom is not a place where students decide what they want to learn and what they want to do. It is the place where we consider the needs of the students, as a group and as individuals, and encourage them to participate in the learning process all the time", Jones (2007). Lea et al (2003) also found that different interpretation of the SCL meant that "... many institutions or educators claim to be putting the student-centred learning into practice, but in reality they are not".

O'Sullivan (2002) notes that the concept of the SCL can be credited to Hayward in as early as 1905 and, later, to Dewey in 1956. In its many forms and incarnations, the SCL, or its facets also appear in the works of Piaget and Vygotsky. However, any real paradigm shift towards the SCL in its current form emerged in the last decades of the 20th century. This shift from teaching to the

emphasis on learning means that there has been a parallel shift in power away from the lecturer to the student (Barr 1995). Simon (1999) credits the SCL in the school system as being heavily influenced by the works of Froebel and the idea that the lecturer should not "... interfere with the process of maturation, but act as a guide". Whilst the SCL is acknowledged in most education systems of being generally worthy or beneficial, there are few examples where it has been adopted wholesale across all teaching sectors, study subjects and teaching activities. Possible theories and explanations for this are given later in this review.

In contrast, Felder et al (1996) reported resistance from students: "Some students view the approach as a threat or as some kind of game, and a few may become sullen or hostile when they find they have no choice about playing". They found that students in higher education, who had always been spoon-fed in the learning environment, could be particularly resistant due to the belief "... that they are paying tuition or their parents are paying taxes for them to be taught, not to learn themselves". This may suggest that there is a significant obstacle to overcome when implementing the SCL. By shifting the onus from the lecturer to the student, a large portion of responsibility should also be transferred, which may not be to the students' liking.

In order for the SCL to empower lecturers, they require a clear understanding of what the SCL is, what it "looks" like in practice and what the benefits are. They also need to understand how they can assess their (and their students') progress with the aid of clear and structured success criteria. Presenting them with successful case studies and empirical evidence would also be beneficial in encouraging them to implement the SCL and act as a guide to troubleshooting as they move away from their traditional teaching methods. Projects such as *Time for a New Paradigm Shift in Education: Student-Centred Learning*, Attard et al, (2010), have begun the process of standardising the planning, practice and assessment of the SCL by creating SCL checklists and step-by-step diagnostic strategies for policy makers and practitioners. The work covers all aspects of the implementation and advice to all stakeholders on creating and maintaining a consistent SCL environment.

Characteristics of the contemporary student-centred learning process

Zhu and Engels (2013) found that the student-centred learning is the most important innovation on the micro level that can be placed beside the communication technologies and the use of collaborative learning approaches. The authors mention that innovations like the student-centred learning are most typical in organisations that have integrative structures, emphasize diversity and place an emphasis on cooperation and teamwork.

The main characteristics of the student-centred approach are the considerations given to individual learners' experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, interests, capacities and needs (Harkema and Schout, 2008). Within this approach, lecturers mainly focus upon what students should learn, and emphasize why (Bransford, Vye & Bateman, 2002). They take into account the existing knowledge of students (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, 2000; Protheroe, 2007), provide different opportunities for students to learn, often change teaching methods, help students who have difficulties and consider their background. Lecturers discuss with students which study activities lead to good results, expose students to looking for alternatives and trying to find their own solutions. Examination questions refer to real-life situations and do not lead to categorising students with regard to their scores or grades.

Harden and Laidlaw (2013) emphasise that lecturers should provide feedback to the student, engage the student in active learning, individualise learning to the personal needs of the student and make learning relevant. Hattie and Timperley (2007 in Harden and Laidlaw) speak about giving the students constructive and sufficiently specific feedback, an explanation. They point out and that the language used while doing this should be non-judgemental, given on time and frequently, and help learners plan further studies. Harden and Laidlaw state that students have individual needs regarding personal capabilities, motivation and what drives their learning goals and career aspirations, achieving the learning outcomes anticipated on the enrolment in the course, learning styles and the place of learning – on campus or at a distance – and the time of learning. Individualisation can be achieved in many ways. The teaching programme may be arranged so that students can choose to attend a lecture on a subject, view a podcast of the lecture, engage in cooperative problem-based learning with their peers, or work independently using an online study programme. Learning resources or learning opportunities can be adapted or prepared so that the students' learning experience, as they work through the programme, is personalised to their individual needs. When learning experiences are scheduled in the programme, such as a session with a simulator, the time allotted to an individual student is not fixed, but is sufficient for the student to master the required skills. Moreover, the curriculum can be designed so that it meets students' individual requirements by including experiences in the early year of the course; encouraging a problem-based approach; using virtual problems related to the subject; communi-

cating with the students about how their learning experiences contribute to their the learning outcomes; using short realistic scenarios and new technologies such as simulators, which provide a more realistic learning experience (Harden and Laidlaw, 2013, 31).

Mclean and Gibbs (2010) claim that students should be included in the process of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation at all levels. As "clients", students need to be part of the process of developing a learner-centred curriculum. A clear admission policy (with appropriate support structures) should be developed. The higher education institution should support students' diversity and individual learning needs, the psychological and social aspects of students' diversity; develop students' self-learning skills; allow time for self-study and pursing areas of interest; regularly review the core curriculum content; recognise that education continues beyond graduation; provide ample opportunity for students' professional development and not pay lip service to learner-centeredness.

Çubukçu (2012) lists the following characteristics of a student-centred teaching programme (Unver & Demirel, 2004 in Çubukçu, 2012), emphasising the tasks that attract students' interests; organising content and activities around the study courses that are meaningful to students; determining clear opportunities that let all students develop their own learning, skills and progress to the next level of learning; organising activities that help students understand and improve their own viewpoints; developing global, interdisciplinary, and complementary activities; supporting challenging learning activities even if the learners find them difficult; and emphasising the activities that encourage students to work with other students in cooperation. In student-centred learning environments, it is essential for the students to take responsibility for learning and get directly involved in the discovery of knowledge, choice of the materials used in the way that they offer them a chance to activate their background knowledge, and ensure that the planned activities are based on problem solving. Various institutions and extra-curriculum activities are incorporated to support students' learning (Cubukcu, 2012, 53). The time dimension should be evaluated in psychological terms. It is important for the students to have enough time to construct the information cognitively and relate the new knowledge to real life. The students should have enough time for communication, learning, synthesising, observing and applying new knowledge in social life, work, family and society. When talking about "location" of the student-centred learning, all the environments where students learn, i.e. school, library, museums, work place and home, should be included.

Lemos, Sandars, Alves and Costa (2014) claim that the Bologna Process emphasises the importance of the student-centred approach. They point out that this system introduces students to the idea of taking responsibility for their learning activities, increased retention of the content, improved students' engagement and improved status. Their study tried to investigate a new mixed-method approach to evaluate students' centeredness of teaching and learning. The research results revealed that lecturers most appreciated the following: the importance of engaging students in the learning process. The lecture room was a place for discussion, students were encouraged to be autonomous and there was a shift in power relationships from the lecturer to students. The course objectives and assessment remained under lecturer's control. Lecturers used content to capture students' curiosity and increase motivation. They considered themselves more as facilitators; made students highly responsible for classroom activities, and, which is of the greatest importance, provided instant feedback.

According to the European Students' Union (Student-centred learning, 2010), the student-centred learning is actually a synonym for the quality of the higher education. Among other student-related issues, it emphasises transparent procedures for students to be able to give feedback on the quality of the educational process.

Students are consulted on the curriculum content and the teaching and evaluation methods used. As full and equal members of various academic committees, they are involved in periodic reviews of the programme quality; procedures for the students to appeal the decisions regarding their academic attainment or progression. Students are consulted when their learning outcomes are defined; their needs and the diversity of the relevant student group are considered. They are also informed about the anticipated learning outcomes before they start a course or programme component. The representatives of the academic staff and students are involved as full and equal members in the panels undertaking quality assurance reviews, institutional quality assurance reviews and guidelines taking into account the overall elements of teaching and learning. Previous learning (in non-formal learning environments) is recognised by the institution for the purpose of admitting to educational programmes. The process of recognition is easy, with no significant costs of bureaucracy. There are special support measures in order to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The learning processes are flexible enough so as to permit combining work/family life and studies. Group activities are used in the learning process. The aims of the learning process are agreed upon between lecturers and students, with peer and self-assessment used as a method in the student assess-

ment process. Projects, simulation tasks and cases studies are used to assess students' abilities. Students have access to relevant research and study facilities both on and off the campus.

The institution contributes to promoting national/regional culture of student-centred learning. Study programmes are implemented using student-centred learning approach; the academic staff are provided with the training on the use of innovative teaching methods and the development of student-centred curriculum. Moreover, the SCL approach is practically implemented by using problem-based learning, group project activities, student-centred active learning, resource-based learning, case studies, role-plays, workshops, group presentations, web-conferencing environment (particularly in distance education), learning logs for students to record their educational experience, small group activities that enable students to learn how to work in a team. All these methods help students identify and fill the gaps in their knowledge. It is also important to engage students after the task is completed, make self-assessment comments, make peer-assessment feedback comments, suggest self-assessment grades and negotiate self-assessment grades.

Results

The empirical research was performed with the intention to find out if the academic staff in Lithuania and Poland know and use different methods which are characteristic for the student-centred learning. The aim was to find out how lecturers in higher education use this pedagogical approach, how they try to personalise learning, and what are the main challenges encountered by lecturers.

The main findings of the theoretical research suggest that lecturers should consider individual experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, interests, capacities and needs of students; provide different opportunities for students to learn and cooperate; often change teaching methods; discuss which activities bring good results; and adapt learning to students' pace. The feedback to students should be constructive, specific, contain explanation, use non-judgemental language, be timely and frequent. The curriculum should consider experiences, problem-based learning, and new technologies. The European Students' Union also emphasizes students' right to decide about the curriculum, teaching and evaluation methods; discuss in the committees the quality of studies in their institution, credits; and practically implement the SCL approach by including PBL, group activities, projects, case studies, role-plays, workshops, distance studies, different forms of assessment, simulation, research, IT, cooperation of librarians with lecturers, etc.

On this ground, it was decided to ask the lecturers about how they organise the learning process; provide feedback to students; include students' interests in the curriculum; consider students' rights, and what the attitude of their universities toward student-centred learning is.

The number of the lecturers who use the student-centred approach was not investigated because the Bologna system expects that all lecturers should have introduced the student-centred approach (at least many of its elements). Neither did the study intend to solve the issues regarding different definitions of the SC learning. It did not deal with the question of the lecturers' work overload, either, because this was out of the scope of the research.

Questionnaires were sent to a large number of lecturers employed in the universities and/or faculties of some colleges in Poland and Lithuania. We received 634 answers that were provided by 300 lecturers from 22 universities in Poland, and 334 lecturers from 10 Lithuanian higher education institutions.

Lecturers in both countries believe that the increased motivation of students is the main advantage of student-centred learning. They also think that an important advantage is partnership between lecturers and students, and student-centred learning makes students more focused upon learning.

Polish lecturers most commonly use the following study methods: in-class discussions – 300 (100 per cent); group presentations – 300 (100 per cent), role-plays – 300 (100 per cent), workshops – 300 (100 per cent), projects – 279 very frequently and 21 frequently – 300 (100 per cent), problem-based learning – 276 very frequently and 24 frequently – 300 (100 per cent).

Lithuanian lecturers use the following study methods: solving practical problems – 107 (45.7 per cent) very frequently, 83 (35.5 per cent) frequently, the total 190 (81.2 per cent); individual or small group activities 100 (42.7 per cent) very frequently, 79 (33.8 per cent)frequently, the total 179 (76.5 per cent); in-class discussions – 99 (42.3 per cent) very frequently, 80 (34.2 per cent) frequently, the total 179 (76.5 per cent); problem-based learning – 49 (20.9 per cent) very frequently, 105 (44.9 per cent) frequently, the total 154 (65.8 per cent); case study – 65 (27.8 per cent) very frequently, 87 (37.2 per cent) frequently, the total 43 (65 per cent); group presentations – 60 (25.6 per cent) very frequently, 88 (37.6 per cent) frequently, the total 148 (63.2 per cent).

Among the most frequently used methods are in-class discussions, individual or small group activities and problem-based learning. Group presentations, workshops, projects and role-plays are also popular in both countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Teaching methods

Teaching methods	Poland	Lithuania
in-class discussions	300	179
problem-based learning	300	154
group presentations	300	148
projects	300	94
role-plays	300	48
workshops	300	91
solving practical problems	-	190
individual or small group activities	273	179

Polish lecturers try to engage students who do not seem to be interested in the student-centred learning primarily by assigning topics for preparation – 248 (82.6 per cent); presentation of the tasks fulfilled in the group forum – 235 (78.3 per cent); doing projects – 218 (72.6 per cent); recommending literature, news of the topic – 201 (67 per cent); assigning individual tasks – 182 (61.3 per cent); stimulating motivation –183 (61per cent); positive reinforcement – 177 (59 per cent); personal training – 173 (57.6 per cent).

Lithuanian lecturers use individual/practical tasks – 102 (43.5 per cent); teamwork – 74 (31.8 per cent), personal training – 54 (23.1 per cent).

Lecturers of both participating countries try to engage students who do not seem to be interested in the student-centred learning. They try to motivate students and/or arouse their interest in different ways. First of all, they speak with students and give them different tasks. Polish students are given different topics, they present the tasks in the class, work on projects. They are recommended to read literature, and get individual tasks. Lithuanian lecturers try to engage students in teamwork or consult them individually. Lithuanian lecturers also include practical examples.

Polish lecturers support students' diversity in the following ways: 300 – 100 per cent offer students additional consultations/advice; 300 – 100 per cent offer students individual examination terms; 300 – 100 per cent allot some time to speak with a student who has troubles personally or tell him/her how to achieve better results; 300 – 100 per cent help study either on campus or virtually.

231 (98.7 per cent) of *Lithuanian* lecturers offer students additional consultations/advice; 225 (96.2 per cent) spend some time speaking with a student who has troubles personally or telling him/her how to achieve better results; 157 (67.1 per cent) encourage students to extend their studies (i.e. finish them in 2 years instead of 1 year); 154 (65.8 per cent) help foreign students who do not speak the national language; 145 (62 per cent) help study either on campus or virtually; 143 (61.1 per cent) offer

students individual examination terms and provide support to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Lecturers in both countries try to support students' diversity and meet individual learning needs in rather similar ways (Fig. 1):
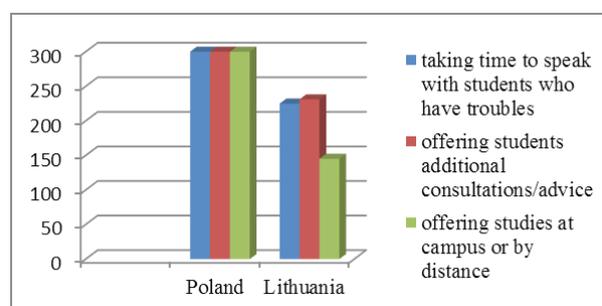

Figure 1. Meeting individual learning needs

Lecturers also use a lot of other activities to support individual learning needs:

1. Lecturers of both countries help foreign students who do not speak the national language;
2. Polish and Lithuanian lecturers offer support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
3. Lithuanian lecturers enable acceleration of studies (but Polish do not);
4. Polish lecturers emphasize virtual consultations and inviting students to scientific conferences.

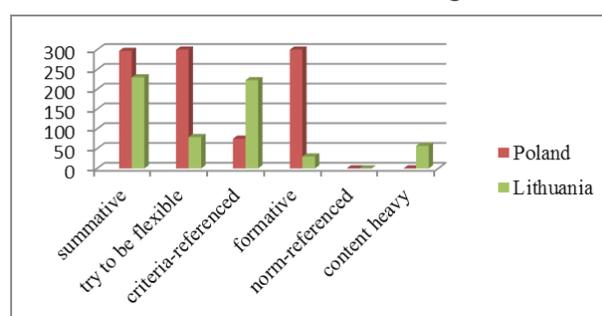The lecturers of both countries most often use the methods of assessment indicated in Fig. 2.

Figure 2. Methods of evaluation

The system of cumulative assessment prevails, but there also exist criteria-referenced and flexible types of assessment. Besides criteria-referenced and flexible assessment, the lecturers in both countries use other assessment methods. This question was not sufficiently specified, so the answers did not provide reliable and detailed information; it was not clear what exactly a lecturer means when he/she performs criteria-referenced or flexible assessment. To get more reliable information, it is necessary to make a much more detailed analysis of the specific examination papers.

It is obvious that in Poland there are procedures for students to appeal decisions regarding their academic attainment or progression. The percentage of positive answers in Lithuania is a bit lower than in Poland. In many universities there are appropriate rules to appeal, but it is possible that they are not used in practice (Fig 3).
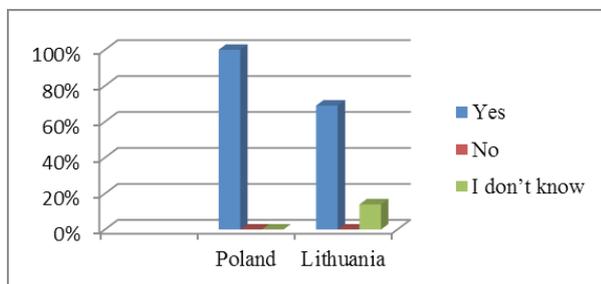

Figure 3. Procedures to appeal decisions

In Lithuania just a couple of lecturers (5.6 per cent) tried to introduce student-generated examination questions and they state that this functioned well. In Poland, this is a usual practice (300 per cent) and obviously brings good results.

A number of Polish (83.3 per cent) and Lithuanian (57.5 per cent) lecturers claim that students can suggest curriculum contents. Brief explanations show that there are different ways of how students are consulted: formal via the Senate or the Faculty Council, at meetings and during individual discussions.

59 per cent of Lithuanian students indicated that they can express their opinion on the teaching methods. Polish students are much less involved in discussing teaching methods and ways of assessing learning outcomes (263, i.e. 87.6 per cent) (Fig. 4).
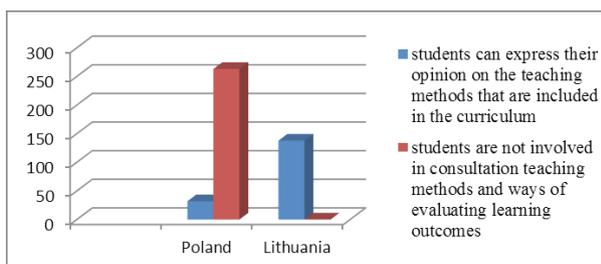

Figure 4. Students' voice regarding teaching methods

Some Lithuanian students indicated that they are interrogated when the learning outcomes in the study programme are designed (34 per cent), but this is not observed in Poland. However, in Lithuania the results are also rather low. However, the such answers do not surprise, as according to 79.9 per cent of Lithuanian lecturers, the definition of the learning outcomes requires a lot of knowledge. The Polish answers are vague.

Conclusions

1. The student-centred learning is actually a synonym for the quality of higher education. Among other student-related issues, it emphasises transparent procedures for students to be able to give feedback on the quality of the educational process. Students are consulted on curriculum content, the teaching and evaluation methods used, and they are involved in periodic reviews of programme quality.
2. The comparative analysis reveals that lecturers from Poland and Lithuania think and work similarly. They all believe that the main advantages of student-centred learning are increased motivation, partnership between lecturers and students, and student-centred learning makes students more focused on learning.
3. Among the most frequently used methods are in-class discussions, individual or small group activities and problem-based learning. Group presentations, workshops, projects and role-play are also popular in both countries.
4. The lecturers of both countries try to support students' diversity and meet individual learning needs by finding time to speak with students who have troubles; offering students additional consultations/advice, individual examination terms; and support studies at campus or by distance.
5. The research intended to encourage lecturers use student-centred learning, therefore it does not try to solve some important problems, namely that the SCL needs a more consistent and solid identity, and lecturers need a better defined and generally approved model of the SCL, which should be based on a combination of theory, practice and evidence, should utilise technologies to their best advantage and should be underpinned by effective assessment strategies.
6. The lecturers in both countries provide study materials in the form of additional literature, textbooks and additional slides. Lecturers from both countries include a lot of cases from work places of the students (the highest percentage in Poland, the lowest in Lithuania).
7. Lecturers from both countries show that they value students, especially by praising them (high percentage is seen in Poland, less in Lithuania), speaking with and listening to students and

different forms of respectful behaviour.

8. The main method is to explain students why he/she was assessed in this way, and this provides students with a possibility to self-assess themselves and negotiate for grades.

9. Lecturers try to reduce students' anxiety before examinations mainly by speaking with students and trying to calm them down, providing them with the questions that help to repeat the topic, and telling students to think logically.

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LIETUVOS IR LENKIJOS PATIRTIS NAUDOJANT ĮVAIRIUS METODUS Į STUDENTĄ ORIENTUOTŲ STUDIJŲ PROCESE

Santrauka

Tyrimas parodė, kad Lenkijos ir Lietuvos universitetų dėstytojai galvoja ir dirba panašiai. Jie įsitikinę, kad pagrindiniai į studentą orientuoto mokymosi privalumai padidina motyvaciją, partnerystę tarp dėstytojų ir studentų, ir kad į studentą orientuotas mokymas/sis skiria daugiau studentui motyvacijos mokytis. Tarp dažniausiai naudojamų metodų yra grupinės diskusijos, individualius arba grupinis darbas, problema paremtas mokymasis. Taip pat grupiniai pristatymai, seminarai, projektai ir vaidmenų žaidimas yra populiarūs abiejose šalyse. Abiejų šalių dėstytojai bando remti studentų ir individualius mokymosi poreikius, randa laiko pasikalbėti su studentais, kurie turi bėdų, siūlomos studentams papildomos konsultacijos, individualus egzamino laikas ir studijos nuotoliniu būdu. Jei studentams sunku dėstytojai vėl paaiškina temą, ieško naujų studijų metodų ir rekomenduoja papildomą literatūrą. Tiek Lietuvos, tiek Lenkijos dėstytojai studentams nurodo papildomą literatūrą, vadovėlius ir papildomas skaidres. Dėstytojai iš abiejų šalių pateikia studentams atvejus iš darbo vietų. Abiejų šalių dėstytojai rodo, kad jie vertina studentus ypač pagiriant juos (didelis procentas vertinamas Lenkijoje, kiek mažiau Lietuvoje), kalbėdamasi ir klausantis studentų ir pagarbiai elgiantis su jais. Pati didžiausia problema, kad studijų programos negali būti greitai pakeičiamos, tam tikra programos struktūra ir mažai žinių SOM srityje. Daugeliu atvejų geros praktikos į SOM yra panašios abiejose šalyse akcentuojama studentų patirtis, vyksta projektinis, probleminis mokymas/sis, siekiant studentų susidomėjimo, susiejant teoriją ir praktiką, analizuojant jų problemas ir lūkesčius, organizuojant nuotolinės studijas, sistemingai konsultuojant studentus, savanoriaujant ir tt. Vertinimo srityje dėstytojai abiejose šalyse naudoja lankstų bei kriterijais pagrįstą vertinimą. Čia nėra labai dielio skirtumo, kai dėstytojai komentuoja užduotis, klaidas bei teikia patarimus dėl stiprybių ir silpnybių. Pagrindinis metodas yra paaiškinti, kodėl studentas gavo tokį pažymį. Taip pat atsiranda atvejų, kad studentai derasi dėl vertinimo arba save įsivertina. Dėstytojai prieš atsiskaitymą bando studentus nuraminti, kalba su jais, duoda klausimus, kad pakartotų temą, prašo juos galvoti logiškai. Visuose tirtuose universitetuose studentai informuojami apie vertinimą per savaitę. Lenkijoje yra aiškiai nustatytos procedūros, kaip studentas gali kreiptis dėl vertinimo, kai tuo tarpu Lietuvoje šiek tiek teigiamų atsakymų mažiau. Apie pusę Lietuvos dėstytojų atsakė, kad yra žinomos kvalifikacijos kėlimo programos. Lenkijos ir Lietuvos dėstytojai tiki, kad į studentą orientuotos studijos - tai geresni ryšiai tarp studentų ir dėstytojų.

Esminiai žodžiai: į studentą orientuotas mokymasis, dėstytojai, metodai.

Information about authors

PhD Dalia Perkumienė. Assoc. Prof. at Faculty of Management and Economics, Kauno Kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences.
E-mail: dalia.perkumiene@fc.kauko.lt.

PhD Zita Baužienė. Assoc. Prof. at Faculty of Management and Economics, Kauno Kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences.
E-mail: zita.bauziene@fc.kauko.lt.

Indrė Knyvienė. Lecturer at Faculty of Management and Economics, Kauno Kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences.
E-mail: indre.knyviene@fc.kauko.lt

PhD Andrew Gołębiowski. Assoc. Prof. Wydziału Zamiejscowego w Mielcu, Radom, Poland.
E-mail: agolebiowski@wsh.pl