

THE ROLE OF TRIGGER PROJECT IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN UZBEKISTAN

Tulakov Ulugbek, Maxmudov Omon

Abstract. One of the most important priorities today is the employment of graduates of higher education institutions and the formation of entrepreneurial skills in them. It is no secret that the quality of education and the conditions created for our young people to get higher education or to graduate as qualified professionals depend on the conditions created. The fact that the theoretical knowledge currently provided by higher education institutions must be implemented in consultation with employers is very important in a developing market environment. This article describes the ongoing needs and expected results under the EU Erasmus+ project “Triggering innovative approaches, entrepreneurial skills and attitudes in HEI learners through creating the favourable conditions for graduate’s employability in Central Asia - TRIGGER”.

Keywords: TRIGGER, Erasmus+ project, entrepreneurial skills, communication, internships, legal advice, business incubators.

Introduction

It should be noted that due to the attention paid to young people in our country and the creation of a modern education system for them, today youth issues have risen to the level of state policy. On July 16, 2021, at a video conference chaired by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on the priorities of the higher education system, consistent development of the education system in order to provide young people decent education, to train specialists in line with world standards has become a topic of discussion. Based on these requirements, the main goal of the policy of our country is to provide students with a thorough knowledge and attention to their future independent life. In addition, the authorities of higher education institutions in the country is constantly cooperating with employers on increasing employment rate of graduates.

Of particular importance in the employment of graduates is the gradual introduction of the credit-module system of education in accordance with advanced international educational standards from the 2020/2021 academic year. In this case, five days a week are allocated for the educational process and one day for internships in order to improve the skills and competencies of students in production organizations and enterprises. Graduates are already developing practical skills in their field during their internships, which accelerates the process of their placement and adaptation to future jobs. In recent years, the formation of curricula has focused on the teaching of modern disciplines, based on the needs of consumers, and the extension of internships also serves to strengthen the integration of industry and higher education.

Main part

The normative and legal framework for youth employment has been created in Uzbekistan. In particular, article 6 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On employment of the population” states that one of the main directions of state policy in the field of employment is youth, especially young people in rural areas. Therefore, it is planned to take measures to ensure the employment of graduates of general secondary and secondary special education institutions, vocational schools, vocational colleges, technical schools, higher education institutions.

In accordance with Article 68 of the Labor Code, the state provides additional guarantees to young people who have graduated from secondary special education institutions, as well as privileged graduates of vocational education institutions and universities. According to Article 84, an initial probationary period is not applied when graduates are hired for the first time.

Also, based on the trends in the labor market, district (city) employment centers provide employment services to the unemployed. 46.6% of those who received employment assistance in the last financial year were young people.

Related ministries, organizations and enterprises have entered data on employees into the “Unified National Labor System” (ISHC - interdepartmental software and hardware complex) and formed an electronic database. Today, through this system, information about jobs is published on the sites www.ish.mehnat.uz and www.ish2.mehnat.uz.

In addition, job fairs are held throughout the country to provide employment for young people. Employers and organizations are participating in these fairs with available vacancies.

In 2021, it is planned to allocate 250 billion soums from the Public Works Fund to attract the unemployed to paid public works.

Measures are being taken to allocate subsidies for the employment of the unemployed and unempoyed, especially young people, women, disadvantaged and the needy, which are included in the “Iron Boo”, “Women's Book” and “Youth Book’. In 2021, it is planned to train 72,000 unemployed people in 40 professions that are in high demand in the labor market.

In order to provide financial support to unemployed citizens, 49.3 thousand unemployed people have received and are being paid 40.3 billion soums of unemployment benefits from loans provided under the World Bank project. As of January 1, 2021, out of 19 million 100 thousand labor resources in the country, 14 million 800 thousand are economically active population. Of these, 13.2 million people have their own jobs, and 1.6 million people need to be employed (more than 805,000 people are unemployed aged 16-30)..

In addition, a total of 560,000 graduates (103 thousand graduates of universities, 438 thousand of secondary schools, 18 thousand of graduates of academic lyceums and professional colleges) will enter the labor market in 2021. As a result, the need for youth employment in 2021 will exceed 1 million 365 thousand people.

134 Bachelor's and 137 Master's degrees have been newly opened in 131 universities in the country. In the concept of development of the higher education

system until 2030, it is planned to increase the coverage of youth with higher education to 50% by 2030.

From the above, it is clear that the employment of graduates of educational institutions is becoming more and more important every year. However, at present, the country does not have a system for studying the demand for highly qualified personnel in specific sectors. In addition, in the republic, there are no real-time tracking job vacancies that are highly-paid, no exact information on salaries, fields of work in high demand.

In 2020, 82% of the total employed or 11 million 100 thousand people are employed in the private sector. This means the need to further expand direct cooperation between businesses and higher education institutions in the system of targeted training, defining the real need for personnel.

Employment of graduates studying on the basis of a state grant is carried out by the commission one month before graduation. However, there are no clear targeted measures for the employment of other students, who pay tuition fee.

The requirement for graduates studying on the basis of a state grant to bring a tripartite agreement (student, university, employer) from their future place of work in order to receive a diploma, in many cases only serves to increase the false information in this process.

For example, "Recruitment Centers" at U.S. universities bring together alumni and employers. Students regularly develop skills through the formation of resumes, various trainings and seminars on how to pass the initial interviews. There are also "Recruitment Centers", mainly in technical universities, which attract students for large companies such as Apple, Google, Amazon. Career Centers at Russian universities regularly publish information about vacancies and internships for students in VKontakte, Facebook or Telegram groups. There will also be lectures, master classes and workshops with the best employers. The centers provide a wide range of opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities.

The main activity of the special employment service in higher education institutions in Finland is to study the demand for specialties in the labor market and to provide vocational guidance to students.

In Japan, recruitment takes place in April each year in the form of a competition. The selected student will take a compulsory short-term training course for up to four weeks and will be thoroughly acquainted with the activities of the organization. In Japan, there is a program called "lifelong employment system", according to which one person is guaranteed to work in one company for 55-60 years.

Students at the University of Sydney in Australia can participate in real industrial projects, and the Sydney Knowledge Center has partnerships with startups, nonprofits and corporate organizations.

In order to provide employment for graduates in Poland, the government has a "First Job" program, the status of graduates is valid for 12 months from the date of graduation.

In order to provide employment for graduates in Kazakhstan, the program "To the village with a diploma" has been developed. The project will provide additional

benefits to graduates studying in the fields of education, health, social security, culture and sports, veterinary medicine.

Another problem in the employment of graduates of higher education institutions is related to the fact that the standard staff units do not meet the requirements of the modern labor market. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the standard staff units of state and government agencies, ministries.

For example, although many people have gained Bachelor's and Master's in Social Work (various fields of activity) since 2004, there is no provision of employment of the personnel in this area in the standard staff units of social protection institutions Patronage and Charity Houses, Employment Centers. In particular, as a result of the fact that bachelors and masters of socio-cultural activities are not included in the standard staffing table by the Ministry of Culture, graduates studying in this field are unable to find jobs.

Similarly, political scientists and sociologists, specified in the National Standard Classification of Training of the Republic of Uzbekistan, are not included in the standard staff units of the respective employers. The Ministry of Health operates on the basis of the model staffing table of the former Soviet Union, and the Ministries of Public Education and Preschool Education operate on the basis of the model staffing table of 1996.

The report, published by UNICEF on 11 December 2020, highlights the fact that a significant proportion of young people in Uzbekistan (54.6%) do not study, do not work and do not receive vocational training after secondary education. Thousands of young people have informally turned their attention to unprotected employment.

Results and discussions

Despite the fact that the issue of ensuring youth self-employment through the support of entrepreneurship has been identified as a priority in our country, a number of problems remain in the field.

The project "Triggering innovative approaches, entrepreneurial skills and attitudes in HEI learners through creating the favourable conditions for graduate's employability in Central Asia - TRIGGER" within the framework of the European Union's Erasmus+ program was launched on January 15, 2021 to study the problems of higher education in the field of employment of graduates and to provide practical assistance for the higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

TRIGGER project focuses on three Central Asia countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) which undertook significant changes in the past decade. Even the substantial differences between Central Asia countries exist, the serious challenges remain, particularly in implementing deeper institutional and systemic reforms that are critical to strengthening the foundations of economic freedom.

TRIGGER project, which gets 5 European and 11 Central Asian institutions together, is aimed to "strengthening of relations between HEIs and the wider economic and social environment". TRIGGER is multi-country projects within one single region – Central Asia, involving three countries (Kazakhstan; Uzbekistan; Tajikistan) from this region. TRIGGER project refers to regional priority for Central

Asia countries (Region 7): “Developing the higher education sector within society at large”: University-Enterprise cooperation, particular TRIGGER supports student practical placements, entrepreneurship, employability of graduates. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan listed this regional priority also under national priorities. Tajikistan listed governance, strategic planning and management of HEI, which are partially covered by TRIGGER project as the condition for successful implementation of favorable conditions for better employability of graduates in Central Asia countries requires also improvement of strategic planning at HEI level. The EC innovative tools HEInnovate and EntreComp will be used.

TRIGGER also focuses on the university-business cooperation. In a considerable part of the world, including Central Asia, HEIs are still seen as the bastion of basic research and academic values and not as the engines for innovation, growth and employability. Further globalization and the corresponding need to respond to broader knowledge demands from society and the economy are bound to change this. European experience with this change process is a valuable asset in TRIGGER. Given recent socioeconomic developments, closer cooperation in both directions between the worlds of work and learning is inevitable. The lack of contact between HEIs and businesses is felt most strongly in teaching and research. Cooperation with industry for innovation and with employers for work requires HEIs to take a fresh look at relevant academic disciplines and of the mutual benefits entailed. There are clear benefits to closer cooperation for both HEIs and their stakeholders in society. The active involvement of nonacademic partners in curriculum development and performance evaluation enhances the innovation potential of HEIs and the employability of their graduates. TRIGGER is focusing on this area but not exclusively only on cooperation with industry. Opening up HEIs to civil society and to society at large also has strong potential for change. There is much to be gained for students and society by forging links with local NGOs, trade associations and local authorities where possible.

In order to improve communication between academics and entrepreneurs, and between HEIs and enterprises, TRIGGER brings the training on proper way of communication, usage of suitable communication techniques, carrying out needs analyses on issues related to entrepreneurship, organizing events with partners outside of HEI environment and integrating special kind of internships based on ENTER.M into study programs. Transferrable skills and soft sciences will be encouraged to become a part of science and engineering curricula, so that these graduates are better adapted to labor market needs. A favorable legal, administrative and financial environment is needed, in which HEIs can conclude comprehensive agreements and contracts with industry, provide incentives to their staff, as well as to representatives of enterprises, and establish and operate dedicated structures. The support from national authorities is required to do this that is why they are involved as associated partners in high extend. TRIGGER will be focused on enhancing the value of learning, research and innovation for society. The TRIGGER partners will learn how tracking of the graduates is needed for the employability of students and career trajectories, to provide evidence on which to react. They can be supplemented with the establishment /enhancement of work with alumni for monitoring longer-

term outcomes and ensuring peer support. TRIGGER also ensures the sustainability of project results by establishing operational structures that sustain industry-HEI cooperation.

Main aim of TRIGGER project is: to contribute to economics growth through creating the favorable conditions for better employability of graduates in Central Asia countries. The main aim will be reached through 4 specific objectives fulfilment as follows:

1. to support HEI preparedness for future challenges especially related to the entrepreneurial and innovative nature of their higher education environment;
2. to enhance Entrepreneurship Education and Skills Development at partner country HEIs;
3. to establish/enhance the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Services at partner country HEIs;
4. to strength the relations between HEIs and the wider economic and social environment.

The list of TRIGGER partners:

1. Technical University of Kosice, Slovakia
2. L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan
3. Atyrau State University, Kazakhstan
4. Toraighyrov University, Kazakhstan
5. Termez State University, Uzbekistan
6. Namangan Institute of Engineering and Technology, Uzbekistan
7. Jizzakh Polytechnic Institute, Uzbekistan
8. Tashkent State Transport University, Uzbekistan
9. Dangara State University, Tajikistan
10. Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University in Dushanbe, Tajikistan
11. Khorog State University named M. Nazarshoev, Tajikistan
12. Kulob State University, Tajikistan
13. University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna, Austria
14. Universite Cote d Azur, France
15. ASTRA, Slovakia
16. IDEC, Greece

Termez State University is considered to be the leader for the WP5 referring to Dissemination, Exploitation and Sustainability of the project.

The target groups of TRIGGER projects are as follows:

The primary target audiences:

- a. HEI teachers, researchers, lecturers;
- b. HEI administrators, technicians, librarians;
- c. Developers of standards, programs, curricula, etc.;
- d. Training providers;
- e. Decision-makers and managers in HEI institutions;
- f. Representatives of employers, employer's organizations and networks;
- g. Relevant businesses and R&D institutions, other universities;
- h. HEI students and graduates.

The secondary target audiences:

- a. Decision-makers on regional/national level especially in economics, labor, employment & education policy;
- b. Policy makers at the national, regional and community level;
- c. Representatives of regional and local authorities;
- d. Representatives of non-profit sectors dealing with employment and training;
- f. Regional development support organization (e.g. regional development agencies, innovation centers);
- g. business support organizations at the regional level (e.g. business innovation centers, regional information, and consultancy centers).

Under the TRIGGER project all Central Asian universities conducted surveys, using the EC innovative tools HEInnovate, on HEI preparedness for future challenges, on entrepreneurship education at each partner university and gaps between labour market future skills requirement and entrepreneurship education provision, potential knowledge and skills mismatches, on graduates employability within the WP1, WP2 and WP3 of the project. Coming out of the results, the universities were given a chance to identify weak points on the above mentioned areas, and to work on them.

Conclusions and suggestions

Taking into account the above, based on the analysis of the work done under the project as well as the work carried out in Uzbekistan in the field of employment of graduates, the following conclusions and recommendations can be made:

1. Taking into account the requirements of employers, modern labor market and industries in the development of curricula for areas of study and specialties;
2. Introduction of special courses on entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy in general secondary, vocational and higher education institutions;
3. To create sufficient conditions for internships for students in enterprises and organizations, and to establish the practice of reaching employment contracts during the future internships;
4. Establishment of services, such as “legal advice”, “business incubators” for young entrepreneurs and simplification of the process of obtaining a loan;
5. To study the modernity of electronic resources that track real-time specialties in high demand and provide exact information on vacancies and average wages available in the labor market

In conclusion, we believe that the TRIGGER project will make an invaluable contribution to the employment of university graduates in line with the state policy in the field of youth employment in Uzbekistan.

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