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## **Practice Generated Knowledge – Monitoring of Tourism Educational Process based on Self-Assessment Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*The topic of this paper leads to the field of practice-generated knowledge. Its importance for the institutional educational process in the Tourism specialty, University of Veliko Tarnovo is being proved. The researched literature shows the need of transferring the teaching in high education from theory-based to practice-based, without belittling the lecture approach. The main method, used is the survey method where self-assessment analysis is applied. Some findings show that practice-generated knowledge is accepted as a useful one for the targeted respondents – they learnt new things in the course of the project/activity done, they acquired necessary skills and consider university practices useful for their career development. Students gave their highest marks for the responsiveness of the lecturers who lead those practices, as well as for their methodology approaches.*

**Keywords:** practice-generated knowledge, tourism, education, self-assessment analysis, practice-based learning.

**JEL Classification:** A2, A12, M5, M510.

### **1. Introduction**

The last decade is typical for its extremely flexible conjuncture of the world market and the great dynamics in the tourism sector. The tourism industry itself has met plenty of challenges related to the workforce engaged in it. These changes, not only decrease the revenue part of business enterprises but even frighten their existence on the market at all. Academic institutions are already recognised as shareholder sides in solving these problems. With both their research expertise and their educational functions, they are becoming much more involved in economic life. Generating adequately skilled and knowledgeable young people becomes their

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strategic task. They should apply and test different methods of teaching and adopt the most appropriate ones for the needs of labour users. Practice-based knowledge is increasingly tested and considered to be very effective for the formation of applicable workforce. Its leading however, implies active institutional monitoring. This fully applies to tourism education which turns to deeply influence the tourism business itself.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Hereby a literature review is made which is to make the relation between two main types of education approaches – theory-based and practice based. This will inevitably lead to the question how knowledge and contemporary students' perception about it has changed and lead to the idea that knowledge management process should be applied. Thus, a portion of the gap about possible methodology applicable in this sense would be filled.

The question about compatibility between academic and needed by entrepreneurs' knowledge, is getting more and more actual nowadays. According to Hristova (2022), now the economy is at its next level when a kind of leap is happening in the perceptions and concepts of the workplace (Hristova, 2022). This also led to different perceptions in young people. Current generations comprehend quite different the sense of career development. The same is true for the acquired knowledge in educational institutions, which just a decade ago, used to be nearly fully theory-based. According to Kim and Davies (2014), the lecture-theoretical method emphasises the control imposed by the teacher during the educational process. However, the picture now is essentially changed and institutions of high education are pointing the focus on students – their perception of career development, attitudes to the process of learning and readiness for sharing knowledge. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) speak about a “gap between theory and practice” known also as “knowledge transfer problem” (Van De Ven & Johnson, 2006). They claim that the understanding of a relation between theory and practice is a difficult problem (Van De Ven & Johnson, 2006). According to some authors, it is a renowned inevitable phenomenon that contemporary students prefer “doing hands-on experience” (Mosca et al., 2019) rather than lecturing. Lecture-based learning focused more on the teacher himself (Garrett, 2008) than on learners, gives the last, the inner feeling of non-usable, un-working for the sake of the career development on the labour market, education. The described situation is valid, especially for generation Z representatives (born in the period 1995-2012). The perception of the currently-forming generation “Alpha”, where no authorities are respected, (as theory knowledge represents works of authorities in different scientific fields), the so observed processes seem to be even with stronger power. Because of the changed reality on the educational market, some authors commence discussions about “management of learning” (Cameron, 2008). Cameron (2018) defines it as developing attractive skills in order to greatly increase the chance of a profitable and fulfilling career (Cameron, 2008). This term is still used in 1966, where in their work “Training in industry-the management of learning”, Bass and

Vaughan (1966) explain the complexity of learning process by treating the principles of a learner's behaviour in a laboratory environment (Bass & Vaughan, 1966). Colin Riches (1998) argues that the management of educational activities is in strong relationship with the management of motivation. The author considers that the benefits for organisations are in correspondence with work behaviour, and work behaviour itself should be modulated during one's education (Riches, 1998).

Knowledge management, together with the management of the educational process, are necessary institutional activities, an essential part of the academic work environment, whose aim is to put students' skills in their proper place on the labour market. In order not to be alone in their work, organizations can establish networks to share their resources, knowledge, and experience (Yordanova, 2022) to engage students' capacity inside the structures. Acquiring the right working set of skills, gives a higher motivation of learners and assures their successful career realisation.

### **3. Research Questions**

The research questions in the report are limited to the scope of the presented point of view, concerning the institutional model of tested practical forms, applied with the idea of generating contemporary knowledge in the field of tourism. The main ones can be reduced to several. Why practice forms of learning turn to be necessary for students studying "Tourism" in Veliko Tarnovo University (VTU)? How are the practice-based forms implemented checked and assessed within the department so that continuous monitoring takes place? Which type of questions are the most appropriate for a feedback survey to receive reliable results? What show some of the most essential results, given by students? What is the final level of satisfaction of the learners? While the object of this paper is the practice-generated knowledge, the subject turn to be students' opinion given in a survey and analysed by the lecturing team of VTU.

### **4. Research Methods**

The aim to find how useful for the students is the obtained by practising knowledge, is achieved by monitoring. The main method turns out to be a survey, analysed by self-assessment. It is with an open-end duration. The target respondents are students who have passed any form of practice activity, suggested in the speciality during the eight-semester education. The periodic analyses point out the level of importance, adequateness, and usefulness of those practices and are to prove the need of practice generated knowledge in the speciality. The answers are statistically processed. The survey starts in the 2020/2021 academic year and currently receives data. The survey is voluntary and results hereby are based on 165 respondent answers. They are nearly 18% of the students that took part in the practice-based learning forms of the speciality. They are considered to be a representative sample; however, for the self of a more quality self-assessment ways to increase active respondents are sought. Literature review, use of historical content, data visualisation, data extrapolation, and conceptualisation are secondary methods that contribute to reveal how effective is the knowledge generated by practising.

## **5. Findings**

The basis of the current research is a survey distributed among students in the Tourism speciality of Veliko Tarnovo University. Two main aims are laid down with its launching:

Firstly: To receive current and adequate feedback from the students in the speciality about their attitudes and opinion on led practice generated knowledge, and thus a monitoring process of the practice-based activities (including practical disciplines) to be led.

Secondly: To achieve an attractive and competitive educational product on the market, responding to all requirements according to Bulgarian legislation and especially those that concern involving business in the academy. The national body responsible for assuring the quality of the education is the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA), which regulates the criteria related to the quality, role, and shareholder parts involved in Bulgarian high educational teaching. Usually, those criteria are being changed for the sake of specialities' accreditation an according to the conjuncture on the national labour market.

### **5.1 Survey Key Specifics**

#### ***Ground for survey launching***

The idea of launching such a survey is discussed in the framework of a Tourism Department, after certain changes occurred in the official criteria of NEAA (2024). In 2018, when the accreditation period of the tourism speciality at Veliko Tarnovo University was due, it was quite obvious that the necessity of practice-based learning in the educational process is required. The indication of that gave some moments, met among the rich variety of accreditation criteria. Some of these new moments were:

- 1) Requirements about strong relation between curriculums and practical training of students;
- 2) Clearly defined share of practical disciplines in the overall educational preparation of students in the specialities;
- 3) Clearly defined practice opportunities pointed to students in the speciality;
- 4) Clearly traced relation between lecture-based and practice-based teaching hours;
- 5) Complimentary regalement and documentation at the department level concerning practice-based learning in the speciality;
- 6) Selection of business enterprises – partners of the specialities and collaboration with their representatives (designated by the term "labour users");
- 7) Preparation of a set of practice-based cases / situations that stimulate the creativity of students during their education;
- 8) Contracts between business enterprises and universities arranging relationships on student practices;
- 9) Availability of students reports about practice activities and their duration during their practices in the organizations;
- 10) Required specialists from business enterprises included in the decision-making process of the Department (when elaborating schedules, as members of commissions of semester and national exams);

11) Other evidence to show that the department has effective interaction with business organisations.

Based on all that evidence, that persistence of business in the academy is an inevitable process both of the current and future education, the Tourism department’s council took the decision to launch a perpetual survey, aiming to follow up attitudes of students, their perception on the applied test forms of practice activities and study disciplines and thus a monitoring process to be led.

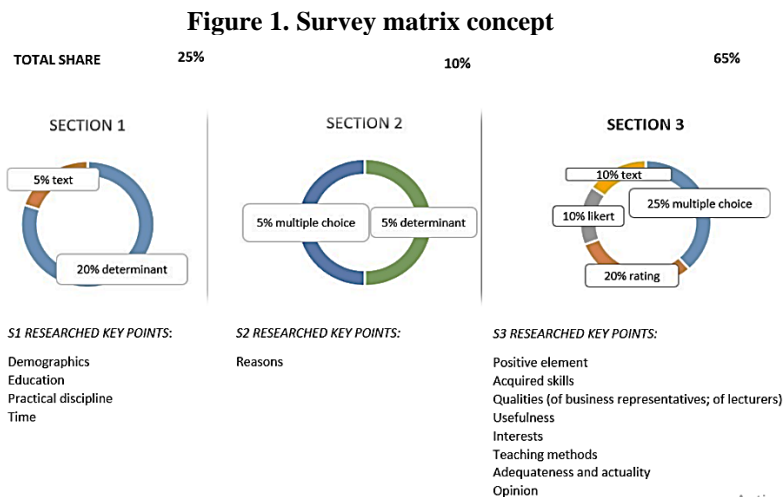
The survey form was prepared and launched in the 2020/2021 scholar year and gathers responses until now.

**Survey matrix concept**

A survey matrix was prepared and discussed (Figure 1). It included three main sections. The first (S1) aims to define student’s profile. Back-information from this section is to be used about taking informed decisions on a department level about the target group of future students in the speciality. This section contains five questions and consists of 25% of the whole survey.

The second section (S2) plays the role of a barrier section. The purpose of this project is to filter students who really took active part in practice-based activities of the speciality from those who chose an alternative form of practice. Lecturers from the department, responsible for the practice-based teaching, landing on their experience, concluded that not all of the students have the qualities and the willingness to work on such tasks. The questions in this barrier section were only two, holding 10% of the survey. Another main function of the section is to reveal reasons for that lack of willingness to demonstrate activity and proactivity in practical disciplines.

The third section (S3) is the most essential, with 13 questions and a share of 65%. These were questions defining attitudes, opinions, and quality of the tested practice-achieved knowledge in different forms.



Source: author’s own elaboration.

The concept of the survey matrix, shown in Figure 1, presents that each of the sections determines some main key research points that should define its effectiveness. According to the aim of the section, certain types of questions are used. The most used one is the multiple-choice question. It is defined as close-ended type of question which is easier to answer, requires lower communication skills from the respondents, and the data driven is quickly coded, entered, and analysed (Human & Sierra, 2016). S3 contains the widest variety of questions, including text, “Likert”, rating, multiple choice. In the frame of the matrix, some quality and quantity information is gathered.

Basing on official data from the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID, 2024) and matched with Tourism departments’ own collected data, a picture of students’ activity in practice-base process can be seen. It is necessary to lay the foundations of future institutional surveys regarding the knowledge received by practice forms. The data collected overwhelms the six-year period in which the Tourism department exists independently in the structure of University of Veliko Tarnovo, Faculty of Economics. Figures in Table 1 show that the department is comparatively active in organising practice activities while in one academic year the average number of such activities is 7.

**Table 1. Activity of students taking part in practice-based learning forms**

Academic year	Number of students* (Na)	Number of students that took part in the practice-based learning forms (Np)	Relation Np / Na	Share for the whole period	Number of the led practice forms	Average annual share (Aas) per one practice form	Average annual share for the whole period
2022/2023	390	272	69,7 %	77,7 %	8	8,7 %	11,3 %
2021/2022	357	192	53,7 %		5	10,7 %	
2020/2021	291	310	106,5 %		9	11,8 %	
2019/2020	256	162	63,3 %		5	12,65 %	
2018/2019	206	193	93,7 %		8	11,7 %	
2017/2018	151	154	101,9 %		8	12,47 %	

Source: author’s own work.

In the table, *Na* shows the total number of students per each academic year. *Np* corresponds to the number of students who participated in practice-based forms of learning initiated in the speciality. The results show that the share of students who are actively included in practice forms for the entire period is 77,7%. The share is calculated as weigh average value. In two of the years, the percentage is exceeding 100% as the values do not reflect their absolute number but the real one, so each student may have participated in two or more activities. The last column shows that, on average, for the six-year period, 11,3% of all students in the specialty have visited one practice activity or discipline.

## 5.2 Survey Results

The current number of students who participate in the survey is 165. We should mention that the answers are cumulative and aim to trace the changes in results through the years.

The results of S1 show that 63% of the respondents are women and 69% of the students who answered the survey questions are part-time students. This figure can be explained by the fact that part-time students exceed the number of full-time students nearly three times. 41% of the respondents come from professional secondary schools with tourism teaching. Secondly, with 18% share, come students graduated from language schools. These data are to show the management of the department where the candidate student campaign so that more and proper candidates become part of the specialty.

The importance of the filter second section is well visible in the results. They show that nearly 20% of students chose an alternative type of practice-based forms. These alternative tasks are, in fact different kind of activities organised in non-practice environment. They are not typical practices, but they give students the opportunity to be rated. If S2 is not included in the survey and the percentage is not divided from the others, the data would be distorted. From S2 can also be understood the reasons for those students to choose a non-practice teaching exercise. One of the main ones is that *they find the tasks within the project/activity difficult* – 28% of the students, but there are some other reasons as well that need to be clarified. The last fall under the option *Other reasons*.

S3 contains 13 questions (as shown on the survey matrix) divided into four groups. For the group of **multiple-choice questions** there can be generated the following results, shown in Table 2.

Findings from this type of questions show that students do think that practices generate new knowledge. This in fact makes the current paper quite reasonable. Also, visible in the results of second question, students admit that the most positive from the practices led in the specialty are the knowledge and skills. 62% pointed to that option. A detailed look at skills shows that *responsibility* is the most frequently marked answer for Q3. The remaining two leading answers are *communication skills* and *initiative*. In Q4, it can be seen that students do appreciate the professional approach that business representatives, included in the practice, demonstrated. Regarding the lecturer, who leads the practice, they highly evaluate the excellent explanation of the tasks.

**Table 2. Results from multiple-choice questions in S3**

Question (Q)	First three options with largest share
1. Which of the below best express your opinion about this practice?	I learned <b>new things</b> 72%
	Useful for my future <b>career development</b> 67%
	Useful for my <b>personal development</b> 56%
2. Which of the elements you consider POSITIVE for this practice form?	Acquired/confirmed <b>knowledge and skills</b> 62%
	The <b>way</b> the practice was led 47%
	The <b>tourist area</b> I researched 44%
3. Which of the skills are formed by this practice form?	Responsibility 68%
	Communication skills 59%
	Initiative 53%
4. Which of the below mentioned you can refer to the BUSINESS RERPERENTATIVE in this practice?	<b>Professional</b> in his area 63%
	Respectful <b>approach</b> to me 47%
	Dedicated in <b>experience sharing</b> 42%
5. Which of the below mentioned you can refer to the LECTURER in this practice?	<b>Explained</b> excellent what is the practice about 68%
	Answered <b>on time</b> if any questions occurred 63%
	Chose an <b>interest</b> practice-based initiative/project 57%

Source: author's own elaboration.

**Rating questions** express four main sides of the led/tested practices:

1. Level of usefulness (code U);
2. Level of interest according to the topic of the practice activity (code I);
3. Level of adequateness of lecturer's teaching methods (code A);



4. Level of appropriateness of the business representative (if such is included in the relevant activity) (code Ap).

The questions are asked formulaic and the rate range is between 1 and 5: 1 – for lowest rate, 5 for highest rate. Table 3 presents the rates for each question.

**Table 3. Level of satisfaction from practices**

Code of the rating question	Share of respondents that rated between 4 and 5	Average rating	Mode rating
U	90%	4,50	4,48
I	83%	4,34	
A	92%	4,61	
Ap	86%	4,47	

Source: author's own work.

It can be noticed in the results that the highest marks are given for question code A (92%) concerning lecturer's teaching methods. This is to show that the academic staff of the Tourism puts into practice quite relevant methodology. The second most appreciated is the usefulness of the rated practice – another proof for the necessity of knowledge, generated by practitioners and/or any academic collaboration with them.

The last three questions are the richest in content and are subject to investigation in another report. Respondent's answers can be complementary analysed both by quantity and quality research methods including content analysis.

There is one "**Likert**" question that consists of seven positions. The aim of this question is to establish a kind of final brainstorming and to enrich the feedback information for the Department about practice-generated knowledge in the speciality. The last two are **text questions**, aiming to form opinion and recommendations from respondents, as well as to define *the idea of the perfect practice-based learning process* in the university.

## 6. Conclusions

Practice generated knowledge turns to be an inevitable phenomenon in contemporary education. Current results based on the institutional survey analysed show that it is being adequately integrated into students' schedules and respondents are more inclined to highly evaluate its benefits. Further discussions and results are to be delivered after detailed analysis of the last "Likert" and text questions of the considered survey and explained as a part of author's monography work. The results of the centralised survey will be shown in the last. The monitoring process applied in the Tourism department of Veliko Tarnovo University is an essential part in the politics of supplying contemporary, working and, at the same time, attractive educational process in the speciality. For the sake of the more effective self-assessment process and a more proper practice-based knowledge to be led, the future direction put by the author is gathering a larger percentage respondent. Limitations, however, are to be widened and the survey should overwhelm at least several "Tourism" departments in Bulgarian academic institutions.

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