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## ORGANIZING SUCCESSFUL FOREIGN STUDENTS EXCHANGE

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### Abstract

Students exchange activities in the global world we are living in now will become more and more popular and searched for not only by students on their own but also by universities' management as a part of joint degree programs and the opportunities they give for transferring innovations, increasing competitiveness and expanding markets. This paper presents the most important factors influencing the process of training students from abroad (particularly exchanges between countries with very differing cultures) concerning the significance of social integration and intercultural communication. An investigation into good practices being presented by Bulgarian Human Resources Development Center (as the coordinating body in Bulgaria of the European Lifelong Learning Programme) was accomplished and the main points of research were identified. Three types of questionnaires were prepared - for teachers, for administrative staff and for students. The results were summarized and analyzed according to the research topic. Some curricula development principles are proposed and recommendations are given concerning development of both student-oriented and competence-based programs which is not fully in its essence adopted yet as an approach in many countries and sometimes misunderstood.

**Keywords:** students exchange, higher education, social integration, intercultural communication, curricula development, student-oriented and competence-based learning

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### Introduction

The processes of globalization in the whole world, not only from the point of view of the EU expansion and its key role, triggered many challenges and questions for future development concerning all spheres of life. One of the most important spheres that need to be paid attention is education and training. Long since borders - economic, cultural, linguistic etc., are crossed thanks to existing possibilities for communication through the Internet and free travel of people in order to exchange experience. Many changes in traditional approaches and viewpoints have been made during last few decades corresponding to national educational systems alterations and the scope of international collaboration in the field.

Influencing educational and training systems is a basic objective of many strategic documents because of the importance of the human capital and the investments in it. The new Europe 2020 strategy for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth is the most discussed one in last few months but the way of putting global goals to practice is not so easy and simple. The key objectives concerning personal, social and professional realization of citizens, sustainable economic growth, high employability, social inclusion, civic society development, intercultural dialogue, etc. could be reached only if education and training have the capacity to assure the needed quality based on good practices exchange through international collaboration and life-long

learning implementation. The last ones which are in close connections to the mobility processes underline the importance of non-discrimination, social inclusion and active participation in the learning process, encouragement of creativity, innovations and entrepreneurship initiatives. To achieve the goal of innovation and knowledge-based economy the process should start from changing approaches and methods used in both training and learning processes bearing in mind that knowledge and innovation transfer into practice is not a linear process.

This study does not aimed at reviewing the broad spectrum of world, European or national documents and initiatives in the field of higher education and students' exchange as well as the problems of achieving high levels of inclusion of different target groups in higher education and the questions of mutual recognition of qualifications. Authors are not attempt to review the difficulties of assuring the quality of training as a whole (from inputs to outputs), either. Lead by the presumption that education and training are and will be the key points in the different kind of challenges and dilemmas societies face now, and will face in future, in different spheres of life – social, economic, demographic, ecological, technological, etc., as well as that these are not simply one-way processes and in current reality more international than national, authors examine the most important factors influencing the process of training students (paying special attention to exchanges between countries with very differing cultures).

Learning is an interactive process which involves active participation from both the lecturers and students in the classroom (Abdullah et al., 2012). Over the last two decades, training students to monitor their own learning has gained importance (Kurnaz & Cimer, 2010). Student diversity will increase its presence due to globalization and worldwide migration. On the other hand, while tackling student diversity necessitates caution, it does require boldness as well. By learning from one another with a less judgmental approach, both preservice teachers and teacher educators can be more open to change, hence turning the gaps into bridges in multicultural education (Yang & Montgomery, 2013). An understanding on the behavior of the students in the classroom will help the lecturers identify the passive students and plan ways to encourage them to actively participate in the classroom (Abdullah et al., 2012).

The results of a study carried out by Keogh & Russel-Roberts showed that successful mobility at student level could lead to a diffusion of knowledge and skills between different countries. It was also found that the students indicated that their personal and educational needs were met irrespective of the language difficulties they experienced (Keogh & Russel-Roberts, 2009). Effective learning process occurred when both teachers and students interact and participate in the learning activities (Abdullah et al., 2012). It was recognized that international mobility could be a powerful instrument in developing the personalities of students (Keogh & Russel-Roberts, 2009).

Leading acculturation models have been discussed 'to explore the degree to which they represent the acculturation experience of international students, and are consistent with the literature for this student group' (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Acculturative stressors encountered frequently by international students (e.g., language barriers, educational difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems associated with changing environments), as well as the subsequent impact of social support and coping strategies on acculturative stress experienced by international students, and the psychological and socio cultural adaptation were examined in this review. It was found that the international student literature provides support for some

aspects of the acculturation models discussed; however, further investigation of these models is needed to determine their accuracy in describing the acculturation of international students. Additionally, prominent acculturation models portray the host society as an important factor influencing international students' acculturation, which suggests the need for future intervention (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Both lecturers and students must actively engage in the classroom to create a more fun and meaningful learning experiences (Abdullah et al., 2012).

The results of another study indicate opportunities for both preservice teachers and teacher educators to find and create bridges to understand gaps in attitudes toward student diversity, which may help improve the effectiveness of multicultural teacher education (Yang & Montgomery, 2013). Preservice teachers and teacher educators across countries could use the results of this study to enhance their communication and mutual understanding and close the attitudinal gaps toward student diversity. Curriculum design could utilize this information to create more effective courses, workshops or seminars about multiculturalism by discussing and understanding the consensual and divided attitudes toward student diversity. In so doing, teacher educators and preservice teachers may have more meaningful dialog, bring about attitudinal change toward student diversity, and enhance the effectiveness of multicultural education to help close the gap of homogeneous teaching force and increasing global student diversity (Yang & Montgomery, 2013).

Teaching methods, which include learning activities and materials, are generally the area where there is the greatest potential for conflict between teacher and students. In a traditional curriculum this conflict would be ignored on the grounds that the "teacher knows best". In a student-centred curriculum it is imperative that conflicts be resolved by specific techniques and procedures for negotiation and consultation<sup>1</sup>. Studies carried out in recent years have conclusively proven that the cordial and friendly relationship between students and teachers do generate the academic behavior (Abdullah et al., 2012).

Intercultural learning is neither merely a methodology, nor is it merely a subject area. It is a composite of both. This type of pedagogical thinking, in which learning takes place when new knowledge can be incorporated as a relevant part of the students' life, is the theoretical foundation for intercultural learning. Understandably, the content of the established curriculum is naturally aimed at national students and presupposes a wide range of general knowledge of the society and culture they have acquired in their upbringing. Although this knowledge is essential to foreign students or those with different ethnic backgrounds, it is often so far from their own range of experience that it can seem unreal and irrelevant. In other words, it is important that the subject matters in a curriculum, including language teaching, social studies, and cultural understanding, bear some relation to the students' personal experience and previous knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

Student self-assessment is an important strategy to involve students into their own assessment process (Kurnaz & Cimer, 2010)... students, even those without any training on self assessment, may use different comprehension monitoring strategies to make decisions about their own level of knowledge. Based on these decisions they may take further actions. If they find that they did not understand the material, they decide what

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<sup>1</sup> Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners (2002) CHAGAL, 101298-CP-1-2002-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-G1, page 68

<sup>2</sup> Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners (2002) CHAGAL, 101298-CP-1-2002-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-G1, page 29

needs to be done to ensure that they meet the cognitive goal of understanding the material. They may decide to go back and take remedial action with the goal of, for example, being able to answer the questions they had generated. If after the remedial action, they can answer the questions they generate, they decide that they understand. Thus, one can argue that the quality of students' learning is mainly depend on their decisions they make based on the strategies they use to assess their knowledge. Therefore, teachers should be aware of these strategies and introduce self-assessment strategies in a sensitive and thoughtful manner to students. Thereby, students may develop reflective skills to become self regulated and life long learners (Kurnaz & Cimer, 2010). In a student-centered curriculum, although the teacher is the prime agent of curriculum development, both teachers and students share full responsibility for the learning process<sup>3</sup>.

The dream to go abroad and learn from people representing different cultures was already mentioned by Shakespeare in "The taming of the Shrew", as already stated by Keogh & Russel-Roberts. The last half of the 20th century saw a revival of this age old dream. The Bologna process was one of the contributing factors to this revival through its objective to promote student mobility and European dimensions in higher education (Keogh & Russel-Roberts, 2009).

An innovative and inclusive curriculum sensitive to the students' diversity not only promotes positive student experience and success, but also reflects the host country's acceptance of the benefits these students have to offer. Embracing diversity is one way of achieving social inclusion and moving towards the goals of the Bologna Process. Moreover, developing curricula for this special target group will be a means of improving quality management in the context of worldwide student mobility<sup>4</sup>. Participatory type of learning process will encourage mutual exchange of information; stimulate interest as well as recognition of respect among the teachers and students (Abdullah et al., 2012). "Student-centred approach" refers to the general conditions under which learning takes place in an educational environment where the learners themselves can contribute to their own learning and that of their peers, making use of their own social, cultural, educational backgrounds and being supported by the active professional teaching and mediation of their lecturers or teachers<sup>5</sup>. 'Competence' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy<sup>6</sup>. Competences for higher education are determined as: self competence, social and interactive competence, intercultural competence, learning competence, target-language competence/language proficiency, processing linguistic and content-based knowledge independently (study skills)<sup>7</sup>

Based on all above-stated investigations and considerations, authors of this paper consider the importance of development of student-oriented programs fostering interactions on and between different levels and assessing different kind of factors. In addition, the importance of competence-based curricula development

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<sup>3</sup> Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners (2002) CHAGAL, 101298-CP-1-2002-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-G1, page 65

<sup>4</sup> Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners (2002) CHAGAL, 101298-CP-1-2002-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-G1, page 16

<sup>5</sup> Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners (2002) CHAGAL, 101298-CP-1-2002-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-G1, page 19

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.eucen.eu/EQFpro/GeneralDocs/FilesFeb09/GLOSSARY.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners (2002) CHAGAL, 101298-CP-1-2002-1-AT-GRUNDTVIG-G1

and integrated knowledge, as new terms for many countries, is examined, as well.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

An investigation into good practices being presented by Bulgarian Human Resources Development Center (as the coordinating body in Bulgaria of the European Lifelong Learning Programme) was accomplished and the main points of research were identified. Three types of questionnaires were prepared - for teachers, for administrative staff and for students. They include 24 (teachers) / 25 (students and administrative staff) questions oriented towards students (self) assessment. All the questionnaires were designed in the same way. The scale of assessment used in some of the questions is the following: 1 – very low, 2 – low, 3 –satisfactory, 4 – good, 5 – very good. There are open and closed questions, as well as such with a task to put in order the stated points below. The investigation was made in the period February – April 2013. It includes respondents from the university campus in Plovdiv and its branches in Veliko Tarnovo and Russe. The questionnaires aimed to analyze the basic attitudes towards training by students, as well as important factors that affect practical training or education abroad. Seeking advice from teachers set a goal their (self-) assessment on the learning process and student involvement in it. Administrative staff provided the perspective of people who are directly involved in a mediating role, and often they are people who are looking for consultancy services. The study does not claim to be exhaustive, but it examines the UARD experience over the years in exchange students' activities.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Investigation into experience and good practices in students' exchange activities**

The current investigation started by a study on activities of Bulgarian Human Resources Development Center which is the coordinating body of LLP in the country. It organizes, advises, coordinates and carries out projects and research in the field of education, vocational education and training, labor market and human resources in Bulgaria, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and other institutions, corporate bodies and individuals. The Centre works on the selection, evaluation, financing and monitoring of projects under LLP. It offers consultancy to interested stakeholders in applying to the program. The Centre provides consulting and technical assistance to projects in the field of human resources.<sup>8</sup> This kind of a body arose because of the growing mobility and the need of offering measures of providing information, orientation, mutual recognition, logistics, etc. as well as of integration of diverse cultural, ethnic, social, economic and other backgrounds.

One of its activities is publishing thematic compendiums presenting projects in different areas: training of teachers and trainers – career development, language competencies, e-learning, intercultural dialogue, etc. Although many of these concern not only higher education (looking at their target groups), the good examples are very useful and applicable in many cases providing the good pedagogical experience and the great variety of brilliant ideas for interactive learning and intercultural relations.

The realization that the starting point in successful training, respectively student exchange activities, are the trainers (teachers, lecturers, etc.), urge the authors to examine the activities in this field first. Among the

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hrdc.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0026&g=>

most important training topics in a number of projects for training the trainers were identified the following: encouraging creative skills and thinking, sharing responsibility in learning, good practices exchange, application of ICT in training, multimedia learning materials design and their use in education and training, permanent regular improvement of teachers' qualification, language skills, etc. The topics of e-learning's opportunities are broadly treated as a 'modern' theme in all spheres of training. The same is the case with language competencies which are the main problem in establishing a gap in the training process. Very interesting is the compendia in pretty specific topics – training in the field of tourism and training of people of unequal social status. The importance of the intercultural dialogue is underlined in a special edition of HRDC. All these show different innovative ideas and approaches in LLP activities but they are united by the general objective of the program: to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the EU so that they become a world quality reference. The program aims to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the EU as an advanced knowledge society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. In particular, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training institutions and systems within the EU so that they may become a world quality reference. In this way, it addresses the modernization and adaptation of education and training systems in the participating countries, particularly in the context of the goals set out in the EU 2020 Strategy, and brings European added value directly to individual citizens participating in its mobility and other co-operation actions<sup>9</sup>.

The topics of work show that the processes of globalization and internationalization in the educational area could be examined in different dimensions: political (international status and comparability), social (employability, realization on the labor market, etc.), economic (rising the competitiveness), cultural (intercultural exchange, traditions, values, etc.) and academic (international capacity, international academic standards and quality assurance systems, etc.). Furthermore, they underline the importance of the competitiveness in higher education between different institutions not only on national level but on regional and international too. In this relation the question of the quality is very often discussed and the ways of its measurement and proving. The most important question however is how it can be improved.

Bearing in mind the significance of processes' planning and implementation on lower levels, authors directed the investigation to routine practices rather than to strategic and tactical goals. The last ones are facile to make clear but the way of their putting into practice is not so simple and easy to accomplish. The need of preliminary analyses of such activities is indisputable. Thus the investigation aimed at making analyses of the opinion of target groups in the processes of students' exchange activities in international scope considering the fact the diverse background of learners in such mixed groups and the necessity of estimating the additional intercultural aspects. Institutions providing training should respond to these differing training needs through innovative teaching and learning methods of great effectiveness. Failures are intolerable when the international image of the institution is in danger.

### **3.2. Empirical investigation in students' exchange activities and study process**

Three types of questionnaires were prepared – for students, teachers and administrative staff, with a

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<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/llp/doc/call13/part1\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/llp/doc/call13/part1_en.pdf)

common structure and questions made with the purpose to analyze the motivation, important factors, methodology, objectives, interests, students' assessment of quality, acculturative stressors, overcoming communication and cultural barriers in the learning process and students' exchange activities, etc. So, the questionnaires filled by students are cross-checked by filling them by the teachers and these both - once again by administrative staff. So first students made self-assessment and assessment of teachers and overall quality, and then teachers answer the same questions as the students, finally administrative staff made assessment of students, teachers and overall quality.

The first part in the questionnaires is the interviewees' profile. 65% of the students are up to 25 years old, 35% - from 25 to 40, and none more than 40. None of the teachers is younger than 25, 67% are between 25 and 50, 33% - more than 40. The age distribution of the administrative staff interviewed is as follows: 56% - from 25 to 40, 33% - more than 40, 11% - up to 25. The male: female ratio is the following: students – 1:1, teachers – 1:2, administrative staff – all female. All the interviewees are from Bulgaria, one of the students is from Armenia.

Interviewed students are from specialties in economics and management and pointed different things as their hobbies: music, dancing, drawing, knitting, languages, culinary art, horse riding, car racing, sports, football, science, literature, documentaries, architecture, design, battle arts, training animals, glass and pottery, information technology, etc.

Teachers are interested in plant physiology, environmental protection, agroecology, tourism, jazz, languages, veterinary medicine, food technology, geography, accounting and audit, finances, banking, taxation, etc. Administrative staff - in dancing, theater, alternative tourism, cookery, hotel and restaurant management, economics, biology, geography, art, nature and sightseeing, etc.

77% of the students have traveled abroad, 100% of the teachers and 89% of the administrative staff. Students have been in Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Hungary, Turkey, Germany, Greece, Austria, Poland, France, UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, and USA, mostly on an excursion or exchange programs (for no more than 6 months). Teachers have been in Greece, Germany, Portugal, Argentina, Russia, Macedonia, Turkey, Czech Republic, Syria, Japan, USA, Sweden, Serbia, Latvia, the Netherlands – conferences, seminars, excursions, exchange programs, etc. Administrative staff – Austria, Turkey, Serbia, Greece, the Netherlands, Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, France – on excursions or study trips, as well as under university exchange programs.

Only 3,8% of the interviewed students have studied abroad – in Turkey, Spain and the Netherlands – for no more than 6 months. 33% of the teachers have taught abroad – in the Netherlands, Turkey and Spain – under university exchange programs. None of the administrative staff have studied abroad.

19% of the students have changed the university or the major, 44% of the teachers and 22% of the administrative staff have changed the university they have been working.

The above-described profiles of the interviewees show that they represent differing groups regarding age, gender, interests and experience abroad. All of these have contacts with foreign students coming to the university and they have been working with them.

First in the questionnaire they are asked to (self) assess from 1 to 5 the level of motivation in several aspects (fig. 1). Students (according to their self-evaluation) do appreciate practical training abroad, specific competences, study at a university and find a job abroad. Teachers and administrative staff think that students are well-motivated to find a job abroad and to do a practical training abroad.

Students point 'personal development as the main reason for their choice of the major of study (59%) and the wish for getting a diploma (25%). Teachers underline these reasons two (29% each) but also the choice of students' parents (21%) and current job (17%). Administrative staff thinks that the main reason is the students' current job (35%) and then both reasons pointed by students (20% and 25% respectively). The interviewees have given more than one answer (fig. 2).

Different factors in the study process are put in order of their importance according to the three groups. According to students' opinion at the first place are put practical training, career orientation and responsibility. The significance of self-motivation, self-initiative, study skills and independent decisions, language skills, orientation and introduction in the study programs, advisory services, social and cultural interactions is underlined too. 10% of the students have added career development in the list as well although not at first places. Teachers think that self-motivation and orientation and introduction in the study programs are important, as well as reflection and language skills, self-initiative, teaching methods, putting learning outcomes in terms of competencies and practical training. Administrative staff gives importance to learning contents and self-motivation, self-initiative, independent decisions and career development (fig. 3).

The answers of the following question show that 31% of the students, 33% of teachers and 56% of administrative staff have experienced counseling and mentoring by peers (fig. 4). The results from its assessment are as follows: students and teachers – mostly good, administrative staff – satisfactory (fig. 5). Students and teachers state very good results for working in small groups, and administrative staff – good (fig. 6).

19% of the students don't know what 'competence' means. All the teachers and administrative staff do. 42% of the students don't know what 'competence-based learning' means, 11% of the administrative staff do so. All the teachers do know.

For the students the most important learning objectives are more practical training, profound theoretical knowledge and gaining specific competencies. 10% of the students have pointed specific knowledge and skills in 'other'. For the teachers the most important is changing the way of thinking. Administrative staff puts the priority to profound theoretical knowledge and practical training (fig. 7).

The three groups prefer and recommend student-driven flexible learning contents, although the results from teachers' questioning show underlining the fixed learning contents too (fig. 8).

The assessment of the evaluation process shows that for students it is important for their self-confidence. Reliability, effectiveness and fairness have good results too. Teachers and administrative staff put the attention to the fairness. The three groups' interviewees realize the need of evaluation (fig. 9).

Students prefer closed questions test and individual course projects, teachers – open questions tests and problems discussions, administrative staff underline group course projects (fig. 10).

Students, teachers and administrative staff appreciate the importance of all the aspects examined: self-monitoring, self-judgment and learning targets and instructional correctives in the self-evaluation process (fig. 11).

Experience and proficiency of teachers are assessed by students and administrative staff. The assessment of students shows very good results, administrative staff is more critical. Students put the accent on knowledge and skills in area of study. Administrative staff's answers show the importance of provided training materials too. Equal treatment of different students is assessed very well, especially by administrative staff (fig. 12).

As a whole curricula assessment show very good results, although by students' and mostly by administrative staff's opinion much more attention should be paid to competence-based and integrated approach (fig. 13).

The three groups give priority to teachers' grades when assessing achievement of learning outcomes. Teachers and students point students' satisfaction too (fig. 14).

Study assessment show very good results, especially by the teachers. Students are more critical, especially for weight of practical (as does the administrative staff) training and opportunities for realization (fig. 15).

92% of students recommend exchange activities. All teachers and administrative staff do so. Among the most important reasons for that are: students – gaining new knowledge and skills, exchanging good practices and establishing social contacts, teachers and administrative staff – exchanging good practices, gaining new knowledge and skills, meeting new cultures (fig. 16).

The students' negative answers (8% of the interviewees) point the following reasons: money and time that should be spent, rather than traveling and changes dislikes.

Language appears to be the most important acculturative stressor, as well as social and cultural stressors (especially according to the teachers' opinion). Only students point the discrimination as a choice (fig. 17).

Among the ways of overcoming cultural and social stress there is a consensus in the three groups on organizing joint events. Improving social contacts, changing the behavior according to environment and making special support programs are important too. 7,7% of the students point other too and mention going to clubs and discotheques, etc.

The three groups think that respecting diversity and personal values and beliefs are important for overcoming communication and cultural barriers in the study process. Administrative staff puts the attention to acquiring knowledge about diversity. Searching help when needed is important too (fig. 19). In other some students (5%) added preliminary knowledge in specific fields.

For students the main problems in the study process are the great differences in thinking, as well as communication difficulties due to the language barrier. For teachers and administrative staff they are

significant too (especially the second in the teachers' answers). Teachers point insufficient social contacts too (fig. 20). In other some students (2%) added spending time in different activities outside the university.

This investigation shows that students are above all well-motivated for practical training abroad. Personal development is the main reason for entering the university. Among the most important factors in the study process are pointed: practical training, career orientation, self-motivation and self-initiative, orientation and introduction in the study programs, reflection and language skills. A gap has been found in competence-based learning, as well as counseling and mentoring by peers and working in small groups as very different and new approaches for national educational system.

An interesting result is paying attention to changing the way of thinking as a main objective of the study process. A student-driven flexible learning content is preferred. The assessment of the evaluation process shows that it is important for the self-confidence. The importance of all the aspects examined: self-monitoring, self-judgment and learning targets and instructional correctives in the self-evaluation process, is appreciated. Curricula assessment shows that much more attention should be paid to competence-based and integrated approach. Practical training and opportunities for realization are pointed as important in that. Money and time limitations appear to be the main demotivating factors for students' exchange. Language is indicated to be the most important acculturative stressor, as well as social and cultural stressors. The main problems in the study process are the great differences in thinking, as well as communication difficulties due to the language barrier.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In connection with the questionnaires, the authors support the thesis for competence-based training and therefore make the following clarification regarding the "competence". According to conventional definition, to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, competence means "proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and / or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development." If more detailed approaches are searched, the three pillars underpinning the competence should be defined: knowledge, skills and abilities. Knowledge is a combination of facts, information, experience in a particular area of life so far, which is transmitted through training or practice / experience /. Skill is knowledge ability to be used in solving a specific problem using theoretical and / or practical tools. Finally the ability to apply knowledge and skills is one that put the finishing to competence, but is strongly dependent on personal attitudes and social environment and the interaction between them. Hence competence based training should be oriented towards results as a starting point, set in the curriculum. Ultimately competences that are acquired during training lead to a qualification which a particular specialty gives.

Student-oriented and competence-based programs are not fully adopted and understood in their essence and application. Thus authors propose a model of student-centered, experience-centered and competence-based learning and teaching model (fig. 21) including some important curricula development principles and recommendations. In addition, authors propose an assessment of the determined important factors in successful learning according to the proposed model (fig. 22). Their assessment was made in the scale from 1 to 5 and then the share of every one point was calculated and presented on the figure.

The model supposes strong interactions between teaching and learning. The key point is the analyses

of students' needs. Self-motivation and self-evaluation are elements of the process of monitoring and control, as well as learning outcomes achievement. The final 'graduation' takes into account not only the results of evaluation. The model promotes the integration between the participants in the learning process – trainers and trainees, as well as rising their awareness. The training objectives should be set by both participants. The model shows the importance of the feedback as a whole and between key points. Learning is based on problems' identification and appropriate to students' background and experience.

The model gives priority to analyzing students' needs, establishing feedback in the training process, collaboration, motivation, communication and social interactions, followed by intercultural exchange, recognizing diversity, quality assurance system, and choice of methodology. University policy and institutional support and provision of facilities, equipment and other necessary conditions have impact but the discrepancy in these could be overcome by the proposed model if it is applied.

Organizing a successful foreign student exchange can only contribute to the development of each educational institution because globalization affects all three levels of the educational system: teachers, university and students. Once learning to accept the diversity during training, students can manage the diversity in a workplace and make this valuable educational experience for them.

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FIGURES

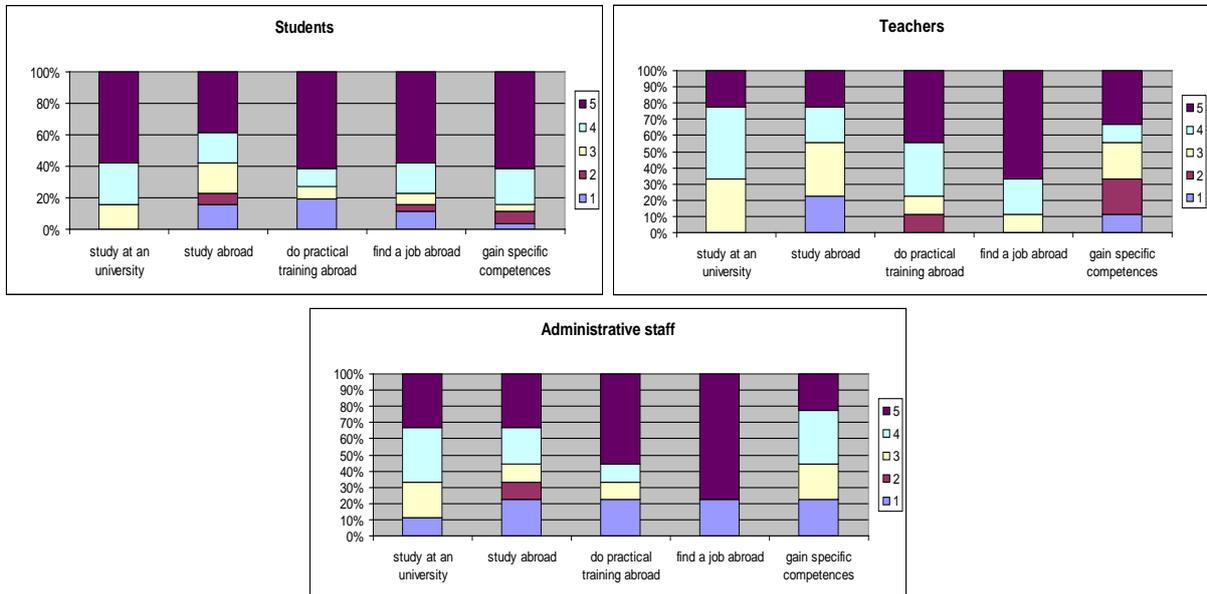


Fig. 1 Assessment of the level of students' motivation in different aspects

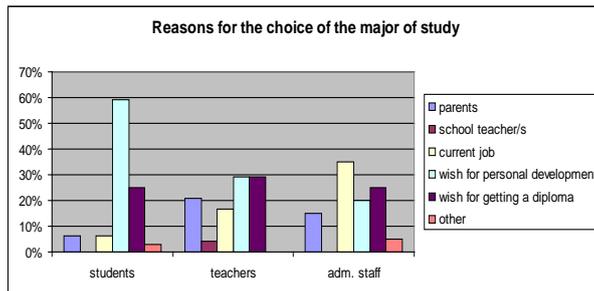
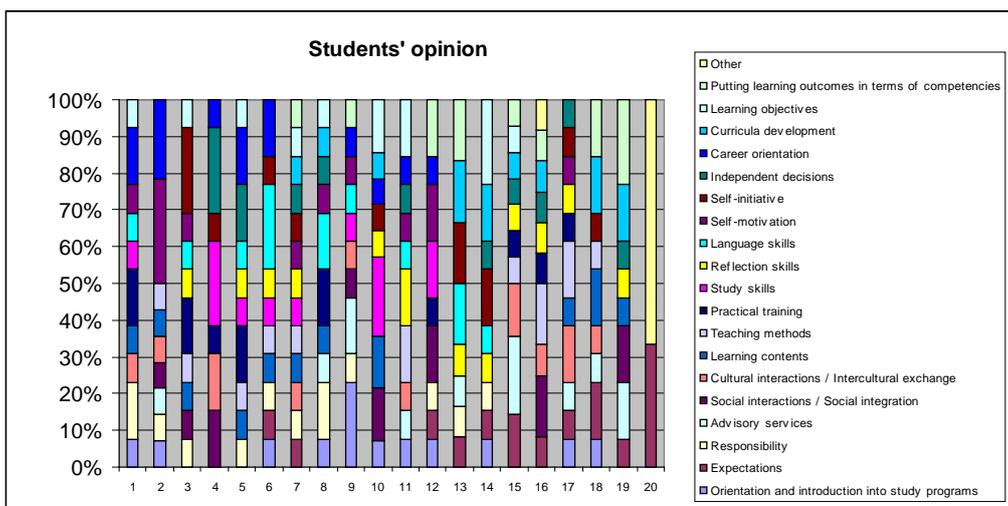


Fig. 2 Reasons for the students' choice of the major of the study



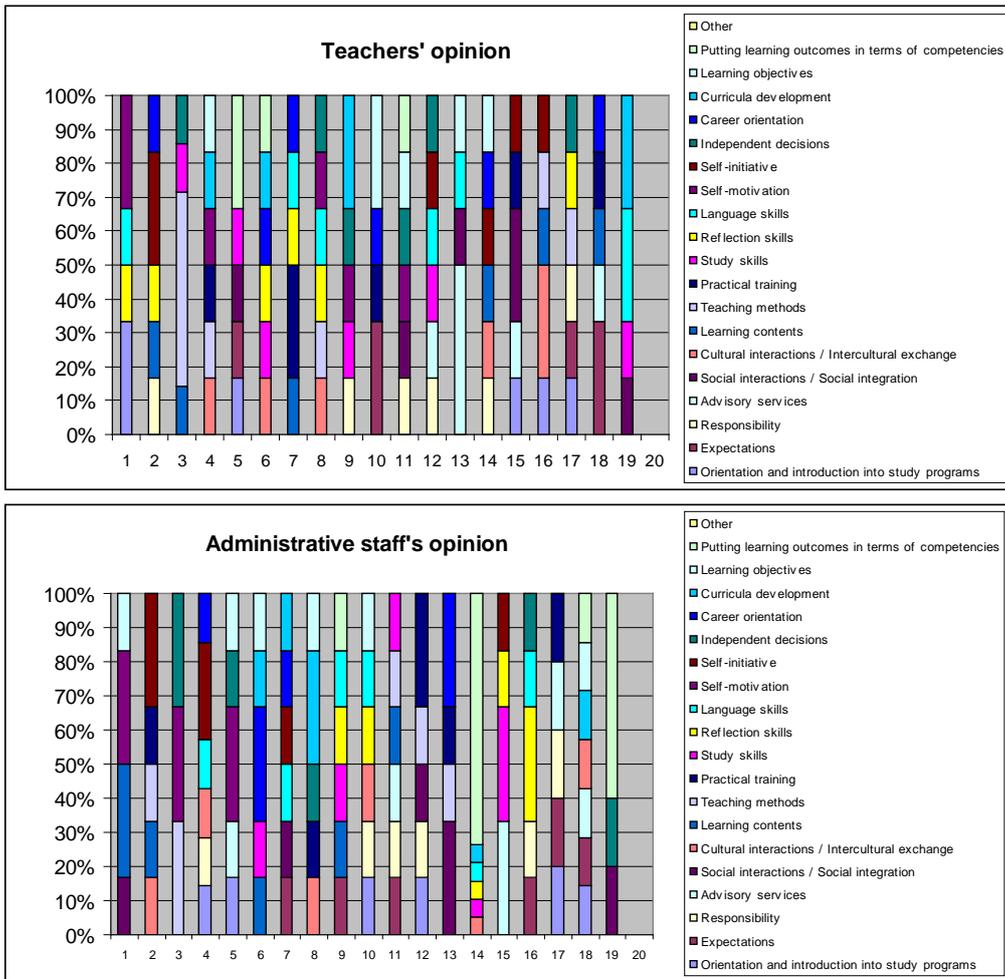


Fig. 3 Assessment of the importance of different factors in the study process

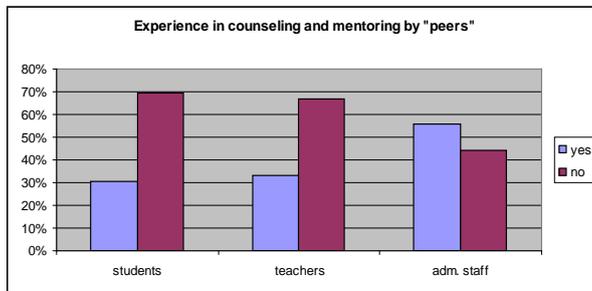


Fig. 4 Experience in counseling and mentoring by peers

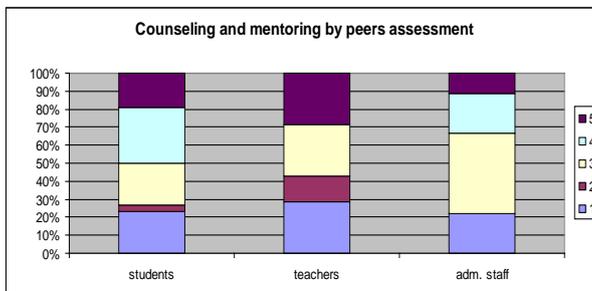


Fig. 5. Assessment of counseling and mentoring by peers

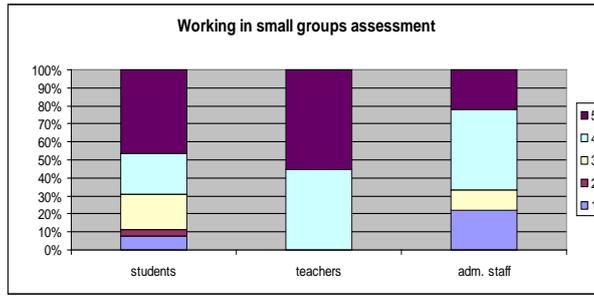


Fig. 6 Opinions about 'working in small groups'

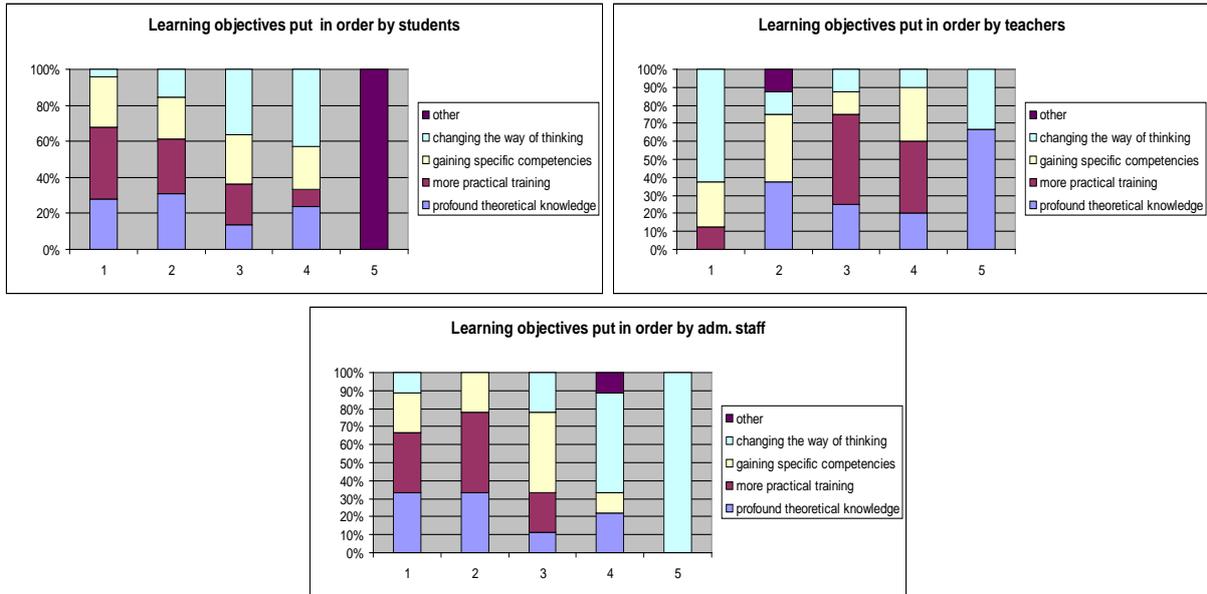


Fig. 7 Learning objectives

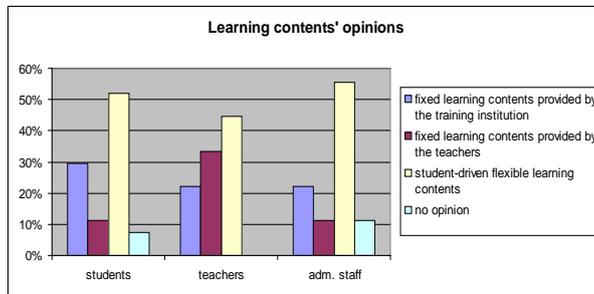
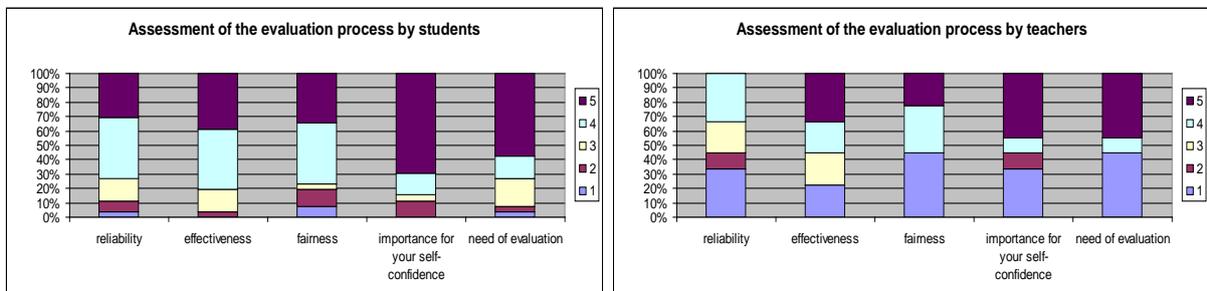


Fig. 8. Learning contents' preferences



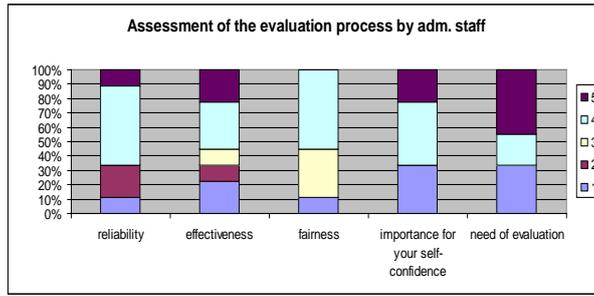


Fig. 9 Evaluation process' assessments

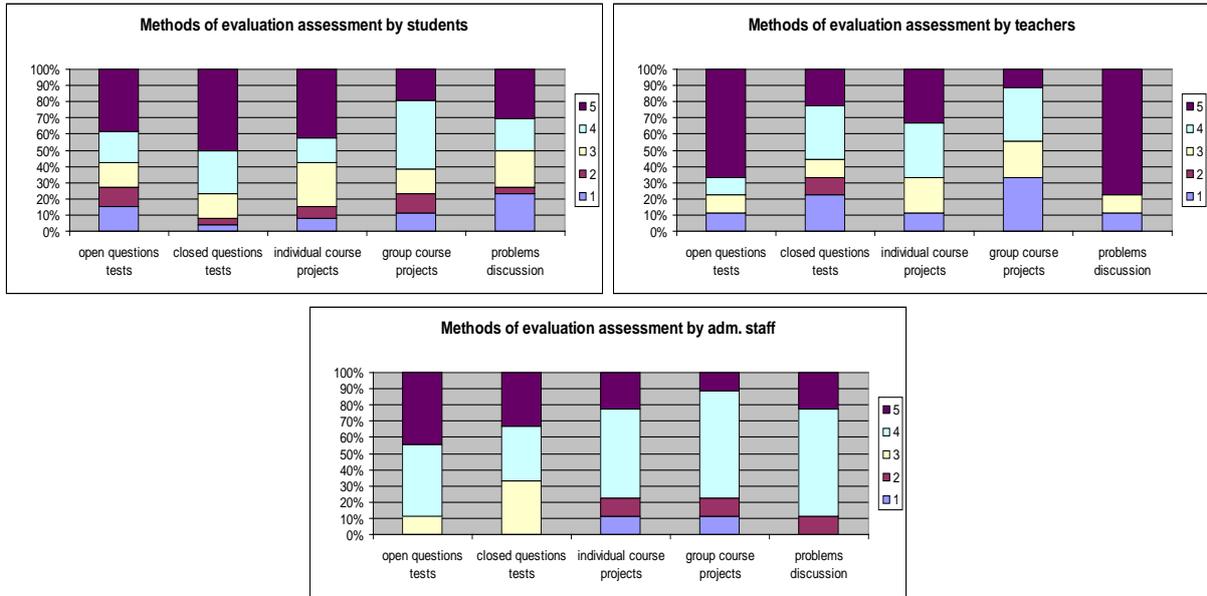


Fig. 10. Assessment of methods of evaluation

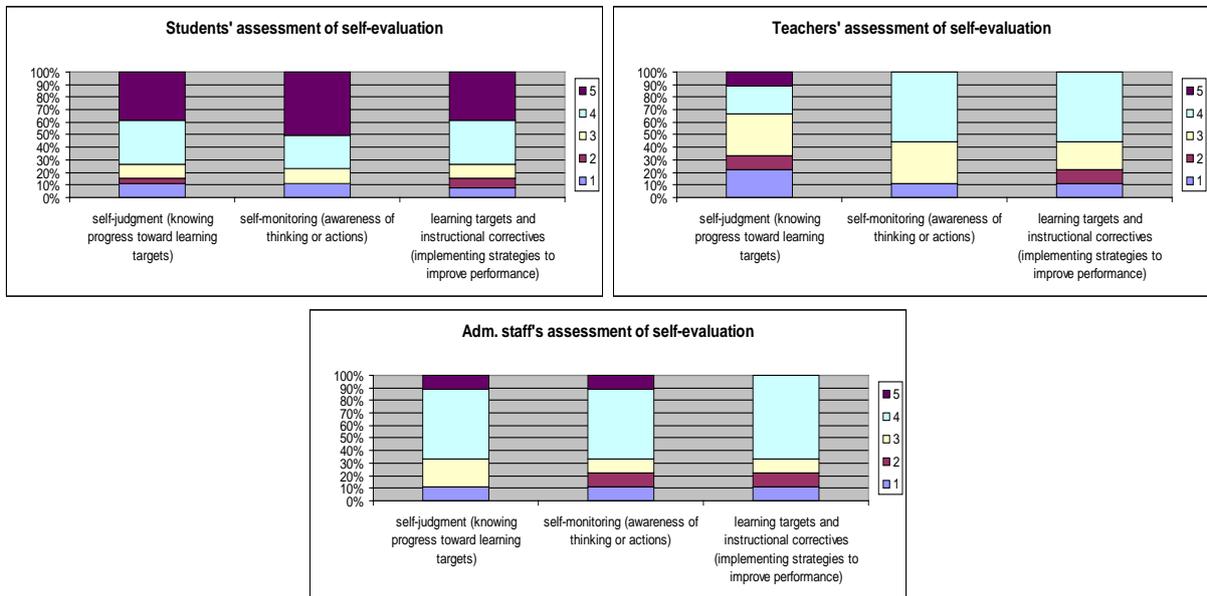


Fig. 11 Assessment of different aspects of students' self-evaluation

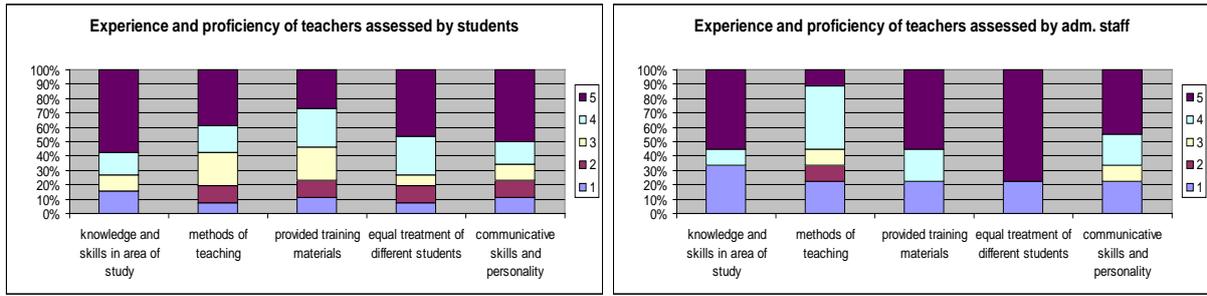


Fig. 12 Assessment of experience and proficiency of teachers

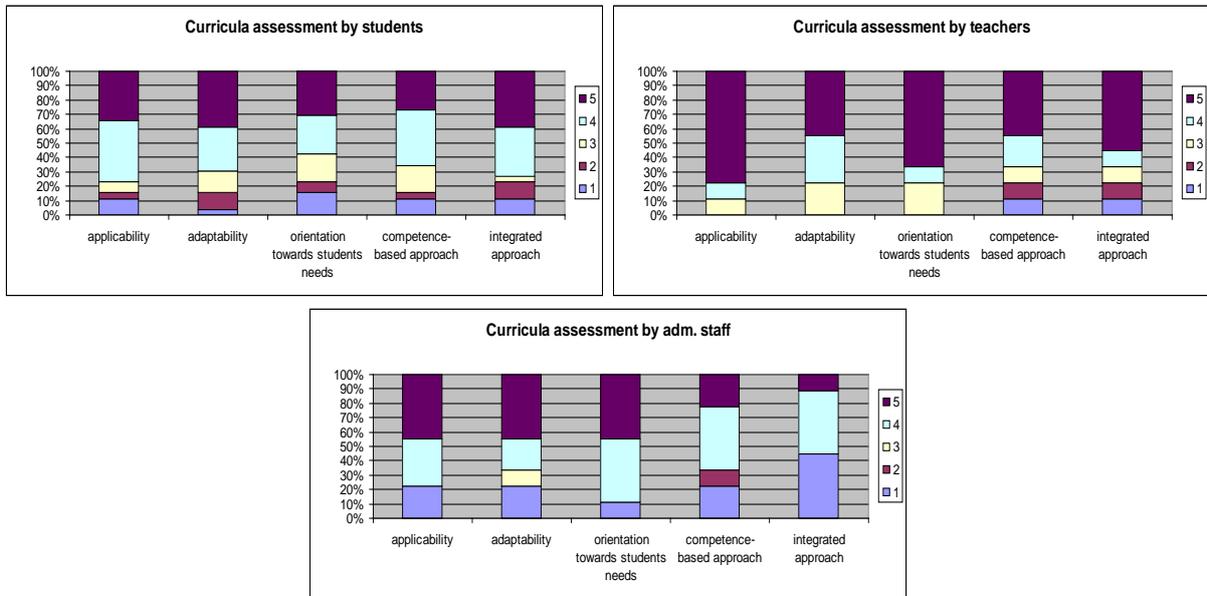


Fig. 13. Curricula assessment

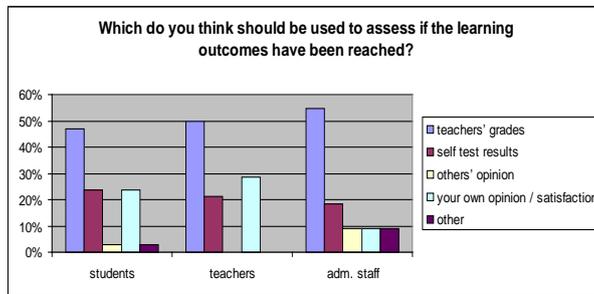
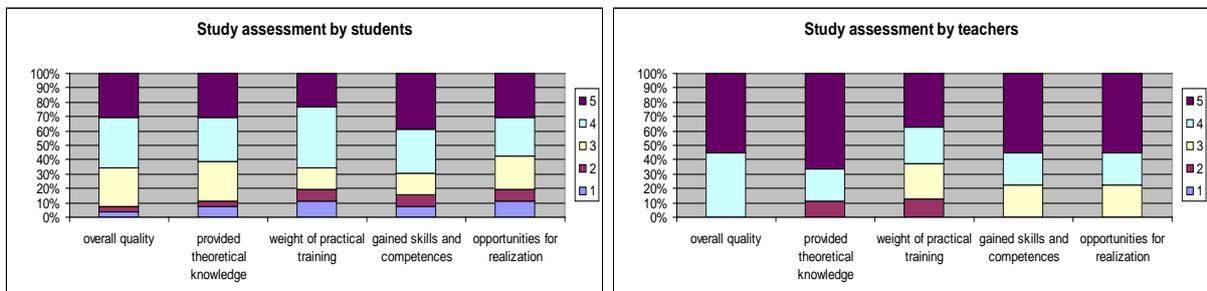


Fig. 14. Reaching learning outcomes' assessment



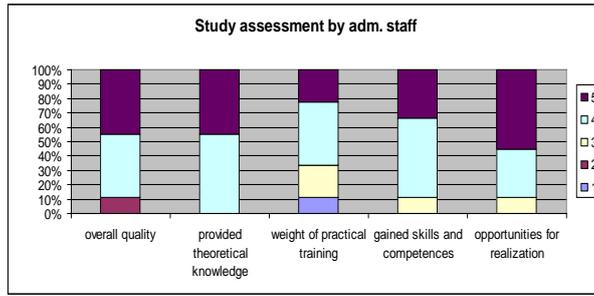


Fig. 15 Assessment of study

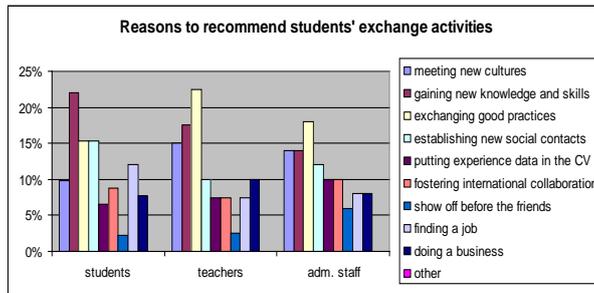


Fig. 16 Reasons to recommend students' exchange activities

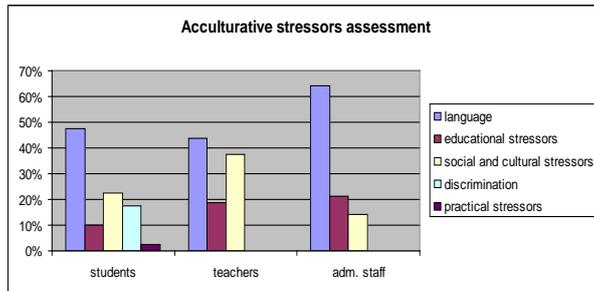


Fig. 17 Acculturative stressors

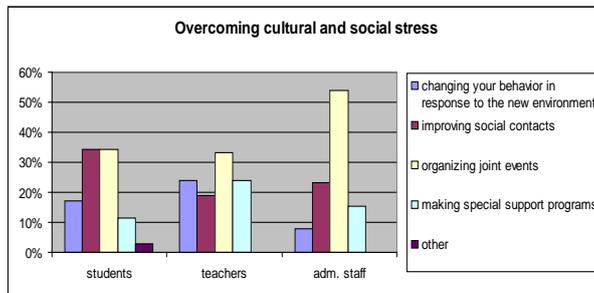


Fig. 18 Ways of overcoming cultural and social stress

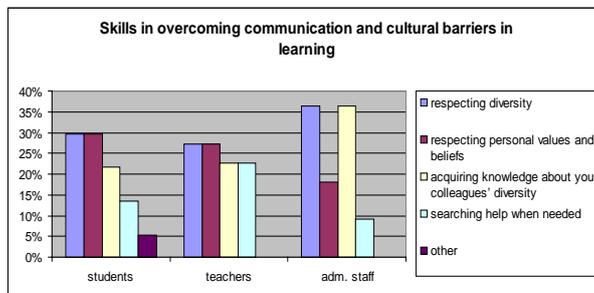


Fig. 19 Skills in overcoming communication and cultural barriers in the study process

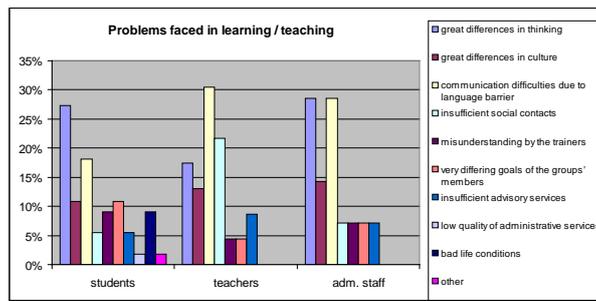


Fig. 20 Problems faced in the study process

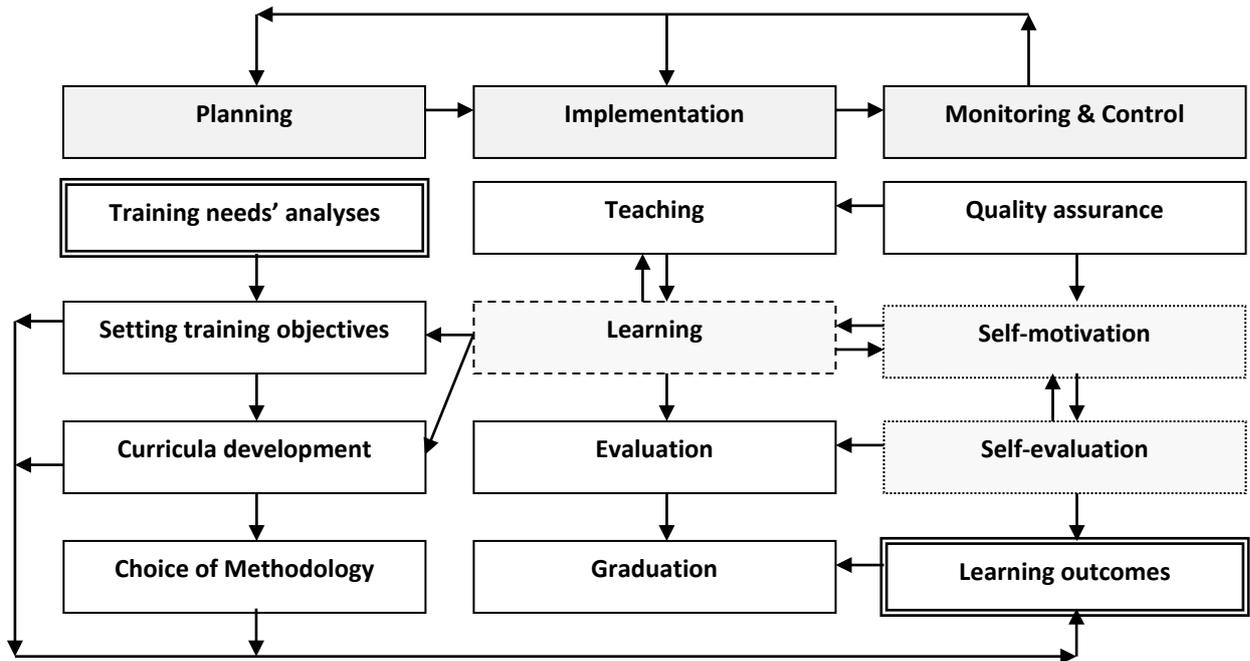


Fig. 21 Student-centered, experience-centered and competence based learning and teaching model

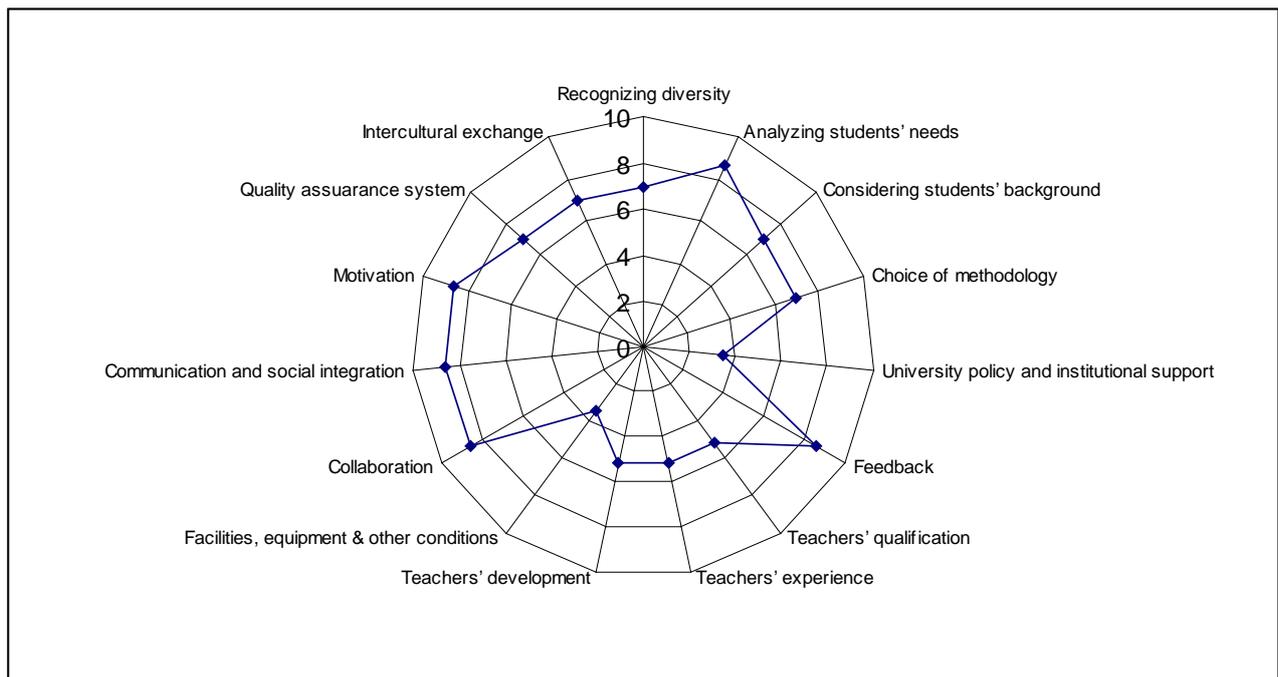


Fig. 22 Assessment of the determined important factors for successful learning

