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RESEARCH-ORIENTED TEACHING IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MARKETING: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

The article considers crucially the introduction of research approach and research training in teaching business disciplines. The development of research culture at the University and its practical and social significance among students and University employees is becoming an essential component of well-developed modern universities. Research-oriented learning strategies are considered very important not only for research universities, but also for business universities in Kazakhstan.

This article provides critical reflections on professional experience of using research-oriented teaching strategies in business related disciplines and describes the process of implementation of new teaching methodologies in higher education. It presents the preliminary results of the part of a longitudinal observational study on students' performance and professional development affected by competency-based research-focused learning on the example of «Services Marketing» course. Quantitative as well as observational data have been collected within the prolonged periods of time including 3 years of teaching experience. A comparative analysis of academic performance showed that average grades for research-based student assignments had been lower than grades for traditional academic tasks, while overall professional competences of students had been significantly improved as a result of research-oriented teaching. The study contributes to the body of knowledge describing the state of transitional educational systems in developing countries and fills a contextual gap by addressing important methodological issues of higher education in Kazakhstan.

Key words: research-oriented teaching, research methodology, competency-based learning, hospitality and tourism.

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Қонақжайлылық және туризм маркетингі саласындағы ғылыми-бағдарланған оқыту: сын тұрғысынан пайымдау және іс-тәжірибе

Мақалада бизнес-пәндерді оқытуда зерттеушілік тұрғыларды және зерттеушілік оқуды ендіру сын тұрғысынан пайымдалған. Университеттегі қызметкерлер мен студенттер арасында зерттеушілік мәдениетті дамыту мен оның іс-тәжірибелік және әлеуметтік маңыздылығын арттыру жақсы дамыған заманауи университеттердің басты компоненті болып табылады. Зерттеуге бағытталған оқыту стратегиялары зерттеушілік университеттер үшін ғана маңызды емес, олар сол сияқты Қазақстандағы бизнес-университеттер үшін де аса маңызды болып саналады. Аталған мақала бизнес-пәндерді оқытуда ғылыми-бағдарланған стратегияларды қолданудың кәсіби тәжірибесі туралы сыни ойлауды қамтиды және жоғары оқу орындарында жаңа тұрғылар мен оқыту әдістемесін ендіру үдерісін сипаттайды.

Мақалада ғылыми-бағдарланған құзыреттілік тұрғыларды қолдану үдерісінде студенттердің кәсіби дамуы мен академиялық жетістіктерін «Қызмет көрсету маркетингі» курсы мысалында ұзақ бақылаудың нәтижелері ұсынылады. Бақылау нәтижелері және сандық мәліметтер пәнді оқытудағы 3-жылдық мерзім аралығында жинақталған. Үлгерімнің салыстырмалы талдауы шынайы зерттеуге негізделген ғылыми-бағдарланған тапсырмалар үшін алынған орташа бағалардың дәстүрлі форматтағы бағаларға қарағанда төмен екендігін көрсетті, сондай-ақ студенттердің кәсіби құзыреттіліктері мен дағдыларының ғылыми-бағдарланған оқыту нәтижесінде біршама дамығанын да байқатты. Зерттеу дидактикаға үлес қосады, жоғары білім берудің дәстүрлі оқытудан зерттеушілік жүйеге өту жағдайын сипаттайды және Қазақстандағы жоғары білім

берудің әдіснамалық мәселелерінен көрініс беріп, оқытуға теориялық-контекстік үлес қосады.

Түйін сөздер: ғылыми бағдарланған оқыту, зерттеу әдістемесі, құзіреттілікке негізделген оқыту, қонақжайлылық және туризм.

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**Научно ориентированное обучение
в области маркетинга гостеприимства и туризма:
критическое осмысление и практика**

В статье критически осмыслено внедрение исследовательского подхода и исследовательского обучения в преподавание бизнес-дисциплин. Развитие исследовательской культуры в университете и повышение ее практической и социальной значимости среди студентов и работников университета становится важнейшим компонентом хорошо развитых современных университетов. Стратегии обучения, ориентированные на исследования, считаются очень важными не только для исследовательских университетов, но и для бизнес-университетов Казахстана.

Данная статья содержит критические размышления о профессиональном опыте использования научно ориентированных стратегий преподавания бизнес-дисциплин и описывает процесс внедрения новых методик обучения в высшем образовании. В статье представлены результаты длительных наблюдений за академическими достижениями и профессиональным развитием студентов в процессе использования научно ориентированного компетентностного подхода на примере курса «Маркетинг услуг». Результаты наблюдений и количественные данные собирались в течение 3-х лет преподавания дисциплины. Сравнительный анализ успеваемости показал, что средние оценки, полученные за научно ориентированные задания, основанные на реальных исследованиях, были ниже, чем оценки за задания традиционного формата, в то время как у студентов наблюдалось значительное развитие профессиональных компетенций и навыков в результате научно ориентированного обучения. Исследование вносит вклад в дидактику, описывает переходное состояние системы высшего образования от традиционного обучения к исследовательскому и вносит теоретико-контекстуальный вклад в изучение и отражение методологических проблем высшего образования в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: научно ориентированное обучение, методология исследования, компетентностное обучение, гостеприимство и туризм.

Introduction

Teaching methods nowadays being affected by latest transformations in the system of Higher Education have changed significantly in terms of approaches including blended-learning, flipped classroom or research-oriented learning. In current conditions of globalization and digitalization the effectiveness of teaching is gaining an increasing attention across a variety of disciplines (Zhang, 2020). The effective teaching implies an adequate and accurate study program corresponding to different learning styles of students. Moreover, the effective teaching considers active involvement during a class or designing special tasks developing critical thinking skills of students. Active learning in turns helps to reach a deep understanding of a material throughout the process of interaction, direct involvement or open discussions (Kim & Jeong, 2018). Research-oriented teaching as an approach to active learning combines complex techniques encouraging students to study a subject with a deep focus and critical

analysis. It is aimed at linking teaching and research culture in order to boost the abilities of students in problem solving, decision making and adapt to external environment by critical assessment of reality and ongoing changes (Lundahl, 2008). Research-oriented teaching being an approved effective method has been widely used among world leading universities such as the University of Cambridge, the University of Freiburg, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Barcelona or the University of Geneva. Students are trained to apply research skills and analytical capabilities in studying and understanding global issues. Kazakhstani universities are also responding to current challenges (Nabi et.al, 2016) in higher education and have recently started to implement best practices in research-based teaching. Such kind of practice is especially important for practice-oriented business universities where students are developing and mastering entrepreneurial skills comprising excellence in big data, external environment investigations, forecasting, analysis, risk taking and decision making.

Despite the fact that over the past 15 years educational institutions worldwide are actively implementing research-oriented teaching strategies, only few Kazakhstani universities have made shift to a new strategy. This article represents the case of University of International Business (Almaty) in implementing research-oriented teaching on the example of Hospitality and Tourism related disciplines. The study aims to explore changes in students' academic performance and skills as a result of research-oriented teaching. In this respect, the article addresses important issues of practical application of the research-focused education in teaching «Services Marketing» course with the focus on Hospitality and Tourism industries in small student groups. This preliminary longitudinal observational study represents findings on students' performance and professional development based on 3-years of experience of teaching of «Services Marketing» course while offering critical reflections on practice of teaching.

In this article, the author shares her professional teaching experience and shows preliminary data collected as a part of longitudinal research during her tenure at the University of International Business in a period between 2015 and 2019. At the university the author had been teaching a wide range of business related disciplines as the leading expert in the field of International Hospitality and Tourism Management, and on the other hand, had been actively involved in research activities.

From a practical side this article provides professional reflections on the process of implementation of new teaching methodologies in higher education. Furthermore, this study makes a theoretical contribution by expanding the body of knowledge describing the state of transitional educational systems in developing countries and fills a contextual gap by addressing important issues of higher education in Kazakhstan.

Literature Review

Research-oriented teaching in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing as a pedagogic strategy starts from explaining the research methodology. It helps students to learn the ways of finding reliable information and data for making further evaluations and managerial decision in business environment, consequently enhancing critical thinking skills. On the other hand, framed into a “teaching-research-learning” technique it contributes to understanding causal relationships which is very important in business-related disciplines. The main content of lectures on research methodology covers basic topics including literature review, hypotheses or research questions development, finding or developing scales, designing research instruments, methodology, and analysis, presenting findings and drawing conclusions based on research results (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

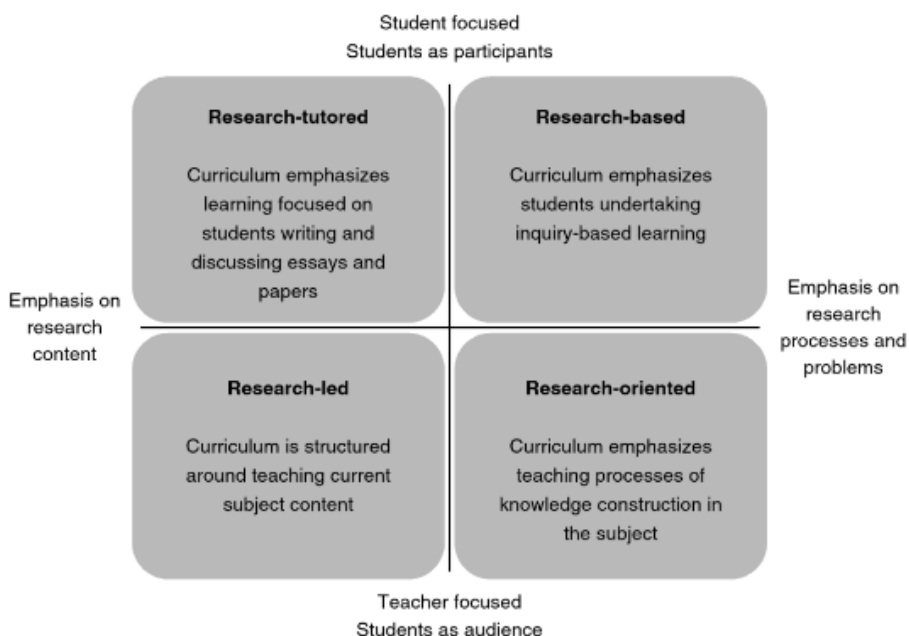


Figure 1 – Teaching-Research Nexuses in Tourism and Hospitality Education
 Source: (Healey, 2005, p.70)

According to widely accepted international experience there are 4 teaching-research nexuses in Tourism and Hospitality education. Depending on teaching policies established at universities teachers usually apply one of four approaches such as «research-tutored», «research-based», «research-led» and «research-oriented».

The research-led approach is characterized as a deductive way of teaching where students stay uninformed in research activities by passively receiving transmitted knowledge. The research-oriented nexus creates a teaching environment where students learn the ways of finding solutions to a given questions of problems with relatively passive involvement. In research-tutored education students actively work within the small groups by teaching each other and doing mainly written works. The research-based approach engages students into the research process increasing their responsibilities and roles in asking questions, developing ideas and conducting analysis. Students are taught to rely on evidence-based reasoning, critical decision making and creative problem-solving (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2017). Being a part of active learning approach, the research-focused teaching strategies offer deep-level understanding of a given material and encourage students “to learn by doing”. Instead of passive absorption of information research-oriented strategies involves students into active search, consequently increasing student engagement in independent written works simultaneously developing analytical skills. As it has been shown by prior research research-oriented teaching has a positive impact on overall group performance by increasing group discussions, critical thinking, and motivation (Böttcher & Thiel, 2017; Barraket, 2005). Moreover, Healey (et. al, 2010) found that students perceived benefits for future employment from their participation in research-focused activities (Healey *et.al*, 2010).

Research-oriented teaching in hospitality and tourism education provides students with tasks and lectures that are linked to business research. Based on given theoretical and practical materials students are trained to conduct scientific activities within their professional disciplines. Research-focused teaching strategies firstly gives insights into theoretical knowledge, then explains practical feasibility and finally encourages students to gather their own data and facts facilitating the process of decision making and problem solving. Students usually learn how to apply knowledge during the process of developing evidence-based results. Deep engagement into research activities enhances multidisciplinary com-

petencies of students, which is very important while teaching hospitality and tourism related courses integrating a wide range of theoretical knowledge tied to marketing, management, consumer behavior and financial disciplines.

Practical Reflection on Teaching Methodology

The implementation of the research-oriented teaching strategy at University of International Business has been carried out in two stages. During the period between 2017 and 2019 research-oriented teaching has been realized by an individual initiative of the teaching staff. Teachers designed special research-focused tasks and series of lectures on research methodologies, which had been integrated into the content of elective courses or professional modules. Since 2019 research culture has become an integral part of university strategy and research-oriented teaching has been implemented at all levels of a Bachelor program within the whole university. Courses of the Bachelor program have been enhanced by research component depending on the year of education and complexity of study materials. Students of the 1st and the 2nd years are involved to simple descriptive research activities within the framework of their disciplines, while students of the 3rd and the 4th years learn advanced research methodologies requiring more independent work and critical thinking skills to understand complex causal relationships between investigated variables based on an evidence-based practice (see Figure 2).

During the 3 years of teaching «Services marketing» course based on research-oriented teaching strategy we have significantly increased the proportion of written tasks including scientific essays and research projects. Moreover, we have increased quality requirements and developed research assessment criteria. Depending on a given task students applied one of relevant research methods (survey, case study research, cross-sectional studies, in-depth interviews and focus groups, observational research, meta-analysis or longitudinal studies) and directly involved in data gathering. They learned how to formulate research problems, develop and test hypotheses, collect and analyze initial data and finally interpret the results. In «Services marketing» course student research assignments have been designed as research projects that have to be written in a form of scientific article, which have been presented in international conferences. «Services marketing» course has been designed with a focus on Hospitality and Tourism industries and applied the new approach to

traditional education, which has significantly facilitated the process of effective learning and developed the following competencies based on a competency-based learning policy:

1. Conceptual competencies – understanding the theoretical foundations;
2. Analytical competencies – the analysis of processes, events and phenomena;

3. Methodological competencies – specific knowledge about research activities, the ability to build a logical chain and developing hypotheses.

4. Integrative competencies – the ability to link theory and practice.

5. Adaptive competencies – the ability to carry out projections and forecasting at the macro, meso and micro levels and coping with change.

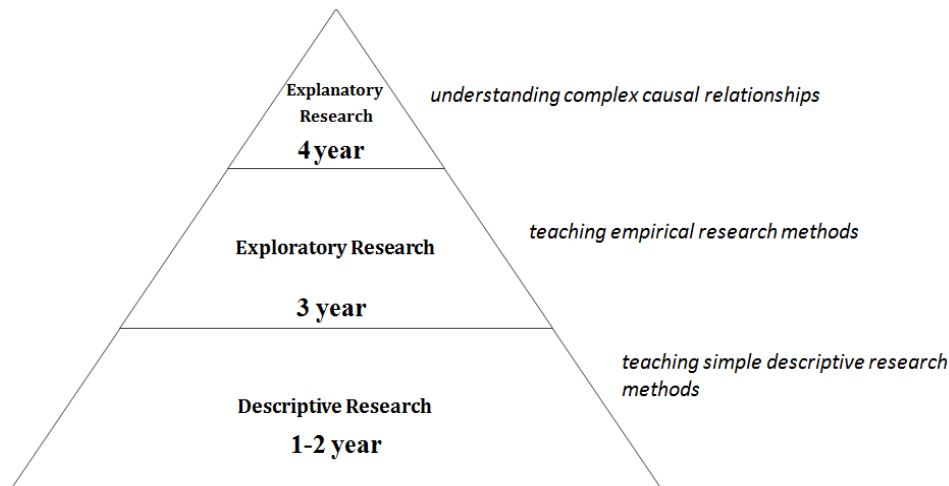


Figure 2 – The research-oriented teaching strategy at University of International Business
Source: The strategy of UIB (2019-2023)

The «Services marketing» course with a focus on Hospitality and Tourism has been conducted in the 5th semester in small English speaking groups. The number of students was between 8 and 11 in each group. The total number of students engaged in observational process was 29.

Methodology

This study adopts the longitudinal research method based on observational data collection technique. A longitudinal observational study is efficient in terms of producing reliable data gathered from a real environment and it gives clear representation of change over time. It also gives a comprehensive and detailed understanding about the investigated phenomena as a result of continuous and long-term data gathering (Gayle & Lambert, 2018). Quantitative as well as observational data have been collected within the prolonged periods of time including 3 years of teaching experience. The study analyzed two important variables such as “academic performance” and “competencies and skills” indicating changes in quality of education as a result of research-oriented teaching approach. The impact of research-oriented

teaching on academic performance of students has been estimated based on comparative analysis of average grades both for traditional and research-based student assignments covering the dynamics of 3 years. Quality changes in competencies and skills have been analyzed by the observation method relying on a time-samples technique. Observational test intervals of time-samples corresponded to the deadlines defined for individual student assignments. Following the requirements for observational studies the same individuals (students) have been repeatedly examined to detect any changes that might occur over the 1 semester period of teaching. In general, initial data has been collected continuously during 3 observational academic years.

Results and Discussion

A comparative analysis of student assignment grades showed that there had been a significant difference between the traditional approach and research-focused teaching strategy. An average grade for research-based individual assignment (Max = 79; Min = 73.4) had been lower than the average score for traditional student tasks (Max = 89,3; Min

= 80,3). This tendency remained stable during the 3 years of an observational period (See Figure3). Lower grades indicated in case of research-oriented teaching do not mean that an overall performance of students has been decreased. It had been occurred as a result of the complexity of research-focused tasks. Although the research component in a study program is considered to be difficult to complete and may have a negative effect on average grades, it facilitates active evidence-based learning and develops broad integrative competencies and skills. The research-oriented teaching trains students to cope with uncertainties and changes. An application of research methods requires from students broad skills and knowledge in research design, data collection, data analysis as well as academic writing.

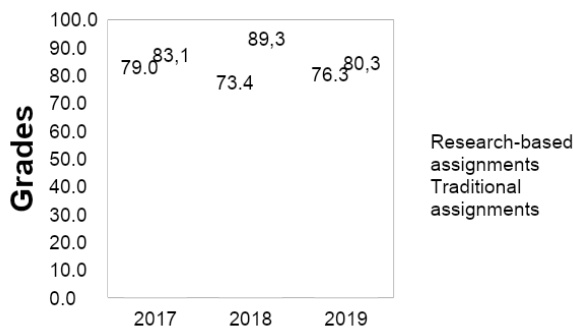


Figure 3 – The distribution of average grades depending on types of student assignments
Source: Developed by the author

Traditional approach to teaching is not able to develop innovative and integrative competencies of students. Moreover, student assignments designed in a traditional way are not able to incorporate students with problem solving, decision making attitudes, critical thinking skills and evidence-based reasoning abilities (Ali & Abbas, 2019). In the process of research oriented teaching the responsibilities of students are increased as compared to traditional teaching and they lead their own research as decision-makers and problem solvers. The research based teaching aims to train students for individual decision making and self-exploring through scientific methods. Teachers usually act as instructors or mentors and guide to use relevant research methods. The role of teachers is limited to creating problematic questions and teaching scientific ways of doing research. Students are expected to explore and explain the nature of a problem by constructive analysis, critical evaluations and evidence-based prob-

lem solving (Shi, Xue & Zhang, 2015). This fact has been additionally supported by findings of the study. According to the results of long-term observations there had been a positive progress in professional development of a majority of students. Findings indicate that 38 percent of students actively involved in research activities have improved their methodological competencies, especially an ability to build evidence-based logic using exploratory research skills. Furthermore, the results of observations showed that 31 percent of students developed analytical thinking, while 19 percent learned how to apply theoretical knowledge in practical professional environment. A minor part of students (5 percent) felt that they mastered adaptive competencies by learning forecasting techniques. The rest of the group (7 percent) felt improvements and progress in conceptual competencies (See Figure4).

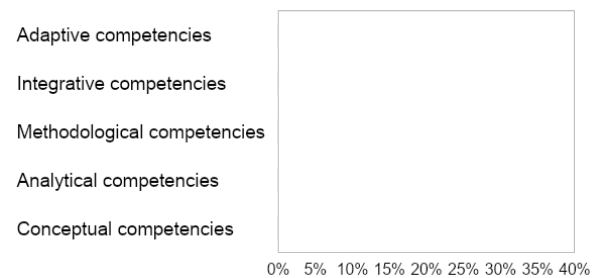


Figure 4 – Students' progress in building comprehensive professional competencies
Source: Developed by the author

Although the research-oriented teaching has many benefits for students as well as teachers, there are functional limitations associated with the process of organization and implementation. As we understand from lengthy observations the research-oriented teaching is more effective in small groups. The observations indicated that the larger the group, the lower the quality of learning. The observed groups had been more productive while conducting small-scale research activities within the small group. These findings are in line with prior research (Arora, Saxena & Gangwar, 2017; Smyth *et.al*, 2015) emphasizing the importance of group works and mini-research projects organized in small manageable groups. Research activities and student assignments should be designed around contemporary research problem in order to motivate them to search for solutions to real current challenges. Additionally, recent publications

in peer reviewed academic journals indexed in international scientific databases should be used and distributed as an important teaching material, as it helps to develop academic reading and writing skills of students.

Conclusion

Using effective teaching methodology in educational process has becoming increasingly important because of current changes in socio-economic and technological environment requiring new skills and competencies that will help to deal with modern challenges. The style of knowledge transfer has been changing and new methodologies of teaching have been actively replacing traditional ways of education and learning. Traditional ways of teaching have been transforming into research-focused teaching. Nowadays universities are placing special emphasis on research-oriented teaching by develop-

ing and implementing interactive course formats as well as active learning environments (McKeachie, 2014). Developing research culture within the university and increasing its practical importance and social value among students and university staff has becoming a crucial component of well-developed modern universities. Research-focused teaching strategies are considered very important not only for applied or science-oriented universities, but it is also important for practice-oriented business universities of Kazakhstan. Implementation of research-oriented teaching strategies requires strong research team, integrating highly qualified teachers with rich scientific background and advanced research experience. Incorporating research-oriented teaching strategies into study programs and courses facilitates positive moves in terms of intellectual capacity-building in the universities by enhancing a dialogue and collaboration between students, teaching staff, departments and research centers.

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