

**МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ / METHODOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

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**ENHANCING TEACHING PRACTICE IN RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: KEY OUTCOMES OF THE ERASMUS+ ENTEP PROJECT**

Research article

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**Abstract**

The Erasmus+ Capacity Building international project “Enhancing Teaching Practice in Higher Education in Russia and China” (ENTEP) started in 2018. It included a consortium of 12 partners: five European universities from the UK, Italy, Portugal and Germany; four Russian universities and three universities from China. The ENTEP Project aimed to improve the quality of education; enhance teaching practices and develop educational science in Russia and China. The Project focused on building cooperation and exchange of best teaching practices between European, Russian and Chinese universities, which, eventually, would result in the modernization of the partner country institutions. One of the Project objectives was to impact the reforms in the tertiary sector in Russia and China through establishing a system of sustainable professional development, which would equip academic staff with innovative teaching techniques and pedagogical approaches. Special emphasis was placed on quality assurance. The paper presents the case of Ural State University of Economics (USUE), one of the four Russian educational institutions participating in the ENTEP Project. We discuss the outcomes of the ENTEP Project; identify good practices and challenges the Project team encountered during the Project implementation; and highlight the impact the Project had on USUE sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Erasmus+; capacity building; higher education; academic staff professional development.

**СОВЕРШЕНСТВОВАНИЕ ПРАКТИКИ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ В СИСТЕМЕ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ РОССИИ: ОСНОВНЫЕ РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ ПРОЕКТА ЭРАЗМУС+ ENTEP**

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

Международный проект Erasmus+ Capacity Building «Улучшение практики преподавания в высшем образовании в России и Китае» (ENTEP) стартовал в 2018 году. В него вошел консорциум из 12 партнеров: пять европейских университетов из Великобритании, Италии, Португалии и Германии; четыре российских университета и три университета из Китая. Проект ENTEP направлен на повышение качества образования; совершенствование педагогической практики и развитие педагогической науки в России и Китае. Проект был направлен на налаживание сотрудничества и обмен передовым опытом преподавания между европейскими, российскими и китайскими университетами, что, в конечном итоге, должно привести к модернизации вузов стран-партнеров. Одной из целей проекта было воздействие на реформы в сфере высшего образования в России и Китае путем создания системы устойчивого профессионального развития, которая будет снабжать академический персонал инновационными методами обучения и педагогическими подходами. Особое внимание уделялось обеспечению качества. В статье представлен случай Уральского государственного экономического университета (УрГЭУ), одного из четырех российских учебных заведений, участвующих в проекте ENTEP. Мы обсуждаем результаты проекта ENTEP; определяем передовой опыт и проблемы, с которыми команда проекта столкнулась в ходе реализации проекта; и подчеркиваем влияние Проекта на устойчивое развитие УрГЭУ.

**Ключевые слова:** Эразмус+; повышение потенциала; высшее образование; повышение квалификации преподавателей.

**Introduction**

2023 year celebrates the 35th year of existence of Erasmus+, the EU's flagship programme for education, training, youth and sport. The programme constitutes three key actions [1].

Overall, Erasmus+ declares the support for projects that foster partnership and exchange of best practices, allowing key actors to make better use of new technologies, develop innovative teaching, training and learning techniques, boost non-formal learning and design common tools and activities. Around 90% of European universities are involved in this scheme. In a communication, adopted on 30 September 2020, on how to achieve the European Education Area (EEA), Erasmus+ is characterized as “instrumental in bringing about the European Education Area. The programme helps drive systemic impact in

mainstreaming innovative policies and accelerating new practices that improve the quality and relevance of education and training, youth work and youth policy systems throughout Europe. The EEA will thus contribute to make quality and borderless learning available for all, everywhere in Europe, to change the culture of education towards lifelong learning, and to modernise the EU on digital skills for young people and adults alike” [3, P. 9-10].

In 2020 Erasmus+ supported almost 640 000 people in their studies, traineeships or voluntary work abroad. It funded around 126 900 organizations and some 20 400 projects. Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has an estimated budget of over €26 billion, nearly doubling the funding compared to its 2014-2020 programme, which will result in more mobility and cooperation opportunities than before [2].

The Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action of the Erasmus+ Programme is undertaken within the framework of Key Action 2. Capacity Building projects are expected to have a long-term structural impact on higher education institutions (HEIs) and educational systems of the Partner Countries. These projects aim to support Partner Countries to modernise and internationalise their tertiary sector; tackle the challenges facing their HEIs; strengthen cooperation with the EU; voluntarily converge with EU development in higher education; and promote personal contacts, intercultural awareness, and understanding [4].

The CBHE projects specifically contribute to an effective introduction of the standards and guidelines for quality insurance, and the implementation of the student-centred, learning outcome-based approaches to curriculum design.

The purpose of the paper is to present the outputs and outcomes of the ENTEP Project, a capacity building project, which included an international consortium of 12 partners. We look at the results of the Project from the perspective of Ural State University of Economics (USUE), one of the four Russian participating educational institutions. We identify good practices and challenges the Project team encountered during the Project implementation; and highlight the impact the Project had on USUE sustainable development.

The methodological framework is based on systematic approach, which includes general scientific methods such as description and interpretation, deduction, induction, generalisation, comparative analysis, and formal logic.

## **Main results**

### **2.1. The ENTEP Project: Aims, Objectives, Work Packages**

The Erasmus+ project “Enhancing Teaching Practice in Higher Education in Russia and China” (ENTEPE) started in 2018 as a capacity building project based on transnational cooperation and multilateral partnerships between HEIs from four EU Member states (the UK, Italy, Portugal and Germany); Russia and China. The coordinator of the ENTEPE Project was Technische Universität from Dresden (Germany).

The purpose of the ENTEPE Project was to raise the quality of education; enhance teaching practices and develop educational science in Russia and China. A consortium was formed to pool partners’ different experiences and specific competences and to produce relevant, high quality and tangible results. The Project focused on building cooperation and sharing best teaching practices between European, Russian and Chinese universities, which, eventually, would result in the modernization of each Partner Country Institution (PCI).

One of the Project objectives was to impact the reforms in the tertiary sector in Russia and China through establishing a system of sustainable professional development which would equip academic staff with innovative teaching techniques and pedagogical approaches. Special emphasis was placed to quality assurance.

As stated in the ENTEPE Project application, the Project specific objectives were as follows:

- to establish a university-wide, cross-departmental network of Centres for Teaching & Learning (CTLs) in Russian and Chinese universities. These Centres would provide support to university staff members and develop their teaching expertise;
- to produce a single set of professional guidelines for teacher training developers and providers and to introduce teaching techniques and learning tools, as well as pedagogical approaches including learning outcomes, information and communication technology practices, and blended learning;
- to design, pilot and deliver a module-based, incorporating contemporary education science curriculum for academic staff professional development;
- to modernize the existing PhD and Master’s degree programmes through augmenting them with modules on teaching methods, pedagogy and psychology;
- to disseminate project outcomes and best practices in the tertiary sector in Russia and China and to ensure sustainability of CTLs and new programmes beyond the project life.

The ENTEPE Project was constructed around five key work packages.

The purpose of Work Package 1 was to collect and analyze available information about the teaching practices currently existing in Russian and Chinese universities. The in-depth analysis helped reveal weaknesses, theoretical and methodological gaps in the teaching practices; identify needs and emerging issues in the tertiary sectors in Russia and China, and tailor the best EU teaching practices to the existing needs. The report also touched on the skills and competences the Russian and Chinese teachers missed and proposed possible training models based on needs analysis and learning outcomes [5].

Work Package 2 targeted PCIs’ academic top management and teaching staff. In order to get prepared for core development activities, 35 top university managers, such as Rectors, Vice-rectors and Deans, and 35 teaching staff went through training in European consortium member universities. The purpose of the training was to tune Russian and Chinese educational institutions to the European Higher Education Area and implement innovative pedagogy, delivery methods, transparent assessment techniques, quality assurance procedures and student-centred approach in educational contexts.

Viewed from the perspective of academic development, Work Package 3 focused on establishing Centres for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at each PCI. CTLs primary objective was to aid in creating learning environments that enhanced quality of education by offering professional development programmes for academic staff members.

Work Package 4 pursued the introduction of innovative methodologies and advanced pedagogical approaches at the established CTLs through the design of two educational products: Didactical Manual and Practical Guide that contain professional guidelines and teaching tools for teacher training developers and providers.

Finally, Work Package 5 was drawn to align educational theory with practice. Curricula and Module Development Teams, consisting of five teachers, were formed at each PCI. These teams were endeavored with the task of developing a modular professional development course, tailored to the needs identified in the Analytical Report and faculty members' training needs at their respective institutions. The course should be designed in accordance with the Didactical Manual theories and practical recommendations and templates suggested by the Guide.

These key Work Packages were supported by other work packages that were dealing with Quality Assurance, Dissemination and Management of the Project.

## **2.2. Centres for Teaching and Learning: A Model for Continuous Professional Development**

Teaching excellence is considered an essential factor in building the relationship between the teaching and learning practice and the intellectual effort demanded of students [6]. The European Science Foundation regards the advancement of pedagogic qualification and competences of university teaching staff as a priority set by the recent changes in higher education and central to the enhanced quality of European higher education, its integration and regionalization of European higher education [7]. Effective university teacher education through high quality professional training will better prepare faculty members for facing educational changes and handling a variety of emerging socioeconomic conditions, e.g. COVID-19 epidemic.

In spite of these international trends, many faculty members continue to rely on their own past student experience and teach in the same way that prevailed in the past, i.e. traditional lecturing, focused on teachers' rather than students' needs and knowledge of the subject. On the contrary, effective teaching of today calls for students' interests, needs and expectations to be put at the centre of the teaching process [7]. The challenge of today is to develop a new generation of academics who will be ready to leave behind the traditional way of being a teacher and develop new professional identities to create a student-centred learning environment.

Over the past years, the concept of Student Centred Learning has become central in the policy discourse on higher education. Learning outcomes represent the core concept of a student-centred higher education system. They are defined as a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of a learning experience. The European Student Union [8] believes that learning outcomes should accommodate the multiple purposes of higher education, which includes preparing students for active citizenship, creating a broad, advanced knowledge base, and stimulate learners' critical thinking and transferable skills. Putting students at the centre of the teaching and learning process sets new targets for academic staff. First, it demands that they use innovative and interactive teaching methods and techniques. Second, nowadays academics are commanded to carry out multiple tasks, such as determining and formulating learning outcomes, developing assessment methods, giving and responding to feedback, dealing with classroom diversity and ethical issues. Consequently, it is not practicable to expect teaching staff to play all these roles effectively without finding sufficient support in the form of training and professional development courses [7].

To professionalise academics as higher education teachers, universities should create learning environments and offer their faculty members the professional development opportunities that would enhance quality of education [9]. The set-up of the Centres for Teaching & Learning (CTL) in Russian and Chinese PCIs was one of the key work package activities, aiming at enhancing teaching practices and one of the essential outcomes of the ENTEP Project. CTLs are supposed to take on three main functions:

- 1) to improve the teaching and learning practices across the institution;
- 2) to advance teaching skills of academic staff;
- 3) to encourage innovation and change in teaching and learning.

CTLs at PCIs introduce a model for high quality continuous professional development and equip educators with up-to-date technologies to support teaching design and delivery. CTLs help staff members adapt and fit the changing learning environment through informing them about modern pedagogy, principles of curricula and syllabi design, classroom psychology, contemporary teaching methodologies such as Information and Communication Technology practices, and student involvement. Centres are aimed to provide professional acknowledgement for higher education providers and leaders through acquisition of a complete set of professional standards and guidelines. Along with academic staff training CTLs offer opportunities for initial training for postgraduate students who are assigned with teaching duties.

CTLs are university-wide and cross-departmental units located on the premises of Russian and Chinese PCIs. Their functioning is regulated by each university Statutes. At Russian PCIs, centres were established during 2018-2019, at the Chinese PCIs – during 2019-2020. One of the major elements of ENTEP was the provision of funds to establish adequate training facilities in Partner Country HEIs. The equipment purchased for university CTLs included computers, notebooks, multifunctional devices, and multimedia projectors. This budget was also used for subscription to EBSCO database and purchase of online books.

The functioning of the established CTLs is backed up by senior university management and heads of academic and service departments. The Centres collaborate with PCI Quality Assurance units (e.g. on development of academic/pedagogical policies), however, they remain separate units since CTLs function as 'developers' rather than 'inspectors', thus being able to retain teaching staff' confidence in working with them.

## **2.3. Didactic Manual and Practical Guide**

In order to assist teacher trainers and educational leaders, a single set of professional guidelines was developed that included two key documents: Didactical Manual and Practical Guide. The purpose of designing these educational products was to introduce up-to-date pedagogical approaches and innovative methods and techniques at the PCIs which could be further

used for developing professional development courses for academic staff training at Russian and Chinese educational institutions.

Didactic Manual and Practical Guide were developed in January 2019 and translated into the Russian language in September 2020 and into the Chinese language in August 2020.

Didactical Manual [10] acquaints the teaching staff with core principles of the pedagogical framework. More specifically the Manual focuses on how to translate course goals into measurable student learning outcomes. It also reviews the key types of didactic teaching strategies (e.g. teaching-learning strategy, problem-solving strategy), and describes possible applications of these strategies. This allows the educator to select a relevant tool and apply it to a specific context of the subject of study, considering the teaching objectives and learning environment (e.g., face-to-face, online or blended contexts).

While the ENTEP Didactic Manual is dealing with teaching strategies and engagement practices, the ENTEP Guide [11] summarizes most recent achievements in curriculum design and offers a user-friendly methodology for writing modules, courses and programmes, which is drawn on practical experience and based on student-centred and learning outcomes approaches.

The training activities of the Centre at each PCI are performed with the involvement of Curricula and Module Development Teams who are responsible for developing comprehensive and innovative professional development curricula and module syllabi at their respective institutions in accordance with theories, practical recommendations and templates suggested by the Didactical Manual and the Guide.

#### *Ural State University of Economics: Added Value of ENTEP*

The case of Ural State University of Economics (USUE) exemplifies how the Project objectives have been attained, particularly in terms of the design and delivery of modern, module-based courses for academic staff training.

USUE is one of the four PCIs from Russia, along with universities from Kazan, Moscow, and Penza. Located in Ekaterinburg, the capital of the Urals Region, the University is amongst the largest in Russia and the only state university with the economic subjects profile in the Urals.

USUE was the PCIs' coordinator in the Centre for Teaching and Learning Work Package and led the Didactical Manual Development Working Group. The CTL was established in USUE in July 2018. Its activities are regulated by the Rector Order No 338/1 dated July 07, 2018. The university allocated the premises for the Centre where three working places were equipped with computers and photocopiers. These equipment expenses were covered through the ENTEP funding. Currently the CTL every-day activity is coordinated by two full-time staff: the ENTEP project coordinator (project manager) and the project administrator. Other staff can be brought in to perform individual teaching tasks.

Differences in academic culture might be the real challenges in the international perspective. The achievement of the ENTEP Project objectives required not just changes in curriculum design. The Project aimed at a shift from more traditional – both for Russian and Chinese academic cultures – teacher-centred to student-centred approaches in the university teaching and learning practice. The cooperation with European universities was designed specifically to assist in overcoming these systemic differences. The diverse experience of European universities was shared through a series of workshops and seminars for Russian and Chinese teachers. As a result, educational materials have been developed that incorporate up-to-date pedagogical and methodological knowledge and teaching practice. With EU support, PCIs in Russia and China have designed flexible curricula that made them fit the changing learning environment and meet the needs of their labour markets and businesses. These newly created curricula are based largely on learning outcomes, are competence-oriented, modularized and tailored to lifelong learning and continual professional development. Each PCI has developed its own university and regional specific teaching materials. Overall, 32 new and updated courses were developed and delivered as an output of the ENTEP Project.

In case of USUE, applying the knowledge gained during the training offered to PCI top management and teaching staff at each EUI (Work Package 2), academics in collaboration with the CTL staff designed an innovative CPD course made up of seven modules. The teaching and learning package for the CPD programme has a strong focus on student-centred learning, active methods and work-based learning.

Module 1 Educational Standards and Quality Assurance (QA) looks upon the concept of QA, the importance of state educational standards (e.g., federal standards, professional standards) in the development of educational programmes; and the role of professional communities in QA provision. Module 2 and Module 3 are built around principles and guidelines for developing learning outcome-based curricula, programme and module specifications. Module 4 overviews teaching and learning technologies, evaluation methods and feedback provided both in groups and individually. Module 5 focuses on research informed teaching and student involvement. This discussion is continued in Module 6 Student Engagement and Support and aims at a variety of ways to enhance student's learning interests (e.g. in-class vs out-of-class student engagement). Finally, Module 7 Self-Evaluation, Programme and Module Evaluation, Enhancing Quality of Teaching covers such topics as self-evaluation techniques; student review; assessment criteria for programme and module quality. It also answers the question of how to enhance teaching using the results of self-evaluation and student evaluation.

The CPD trainings brought benefit to several target groups. Within the years of the ENTEP Project USUE reported seven teachers' training workshops and seminars. In total, over 200 faculty members and 60 Master and PhD degree students were trained. The Master's programme 'State and Municipal Administration', particularly Academic Research Planning Module and research and teaching internship, incorporates several mandatory modules on pedagogy and psychology (approximately 50 master-degree students per year).

## **Discussion**

### *Challenges of the ENTEP Project*

An international project cannot be successfully realized without clear communication between project consortium members [12]. However, in a large multinational consortium such as ENTEP, some potential obstacles to good communication are inevitable. The most frequently reported problem for a multinational project seems to be language barriers, however, that was not the case. More challenging were cultural differences. True, working with people from different cultural backgrounds

can be quite enlightening and exciting. However, people from different cultures can have different perspectives on the same situation. Their expectations of the outcome can also vary. Misunderstandings are frequent and can have a negative impact on how project activities are implemented. Though within the framework of ENTEP, a clear internal communication strategy was developed and agreed by all partners and a variety of electronic tools were exploited to facilitate long distance communication, which was especially vital due to geographical dispersion of consortium members, the problems did occur especially with Chinese partners as there were continuous delays in submitting project documentation. During the pandemics, the communication almost ceased as a result of Chinese government regulations.

Another challenge relates to the issue of Project management. As it was mentioned above, the ENTEP Project integrated several Work Packages which were logically sequenced. Each Work Package involved academic and administrative staff from all targeted PCIs and EUIs, and led to concrete tangible and intangible results. The leadership and tasks in each Work Package were distributed among the consortium members according to their competence and resources. However, despite the fact that each Work Package had its own coordinator, the participation of the partners in it was not equal, though the Project aims meant equal participation of each partner in each Work Package.

The Project implementation was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with uncertainty being the main challenge. Overall, the impact of the pandemic was mainly on such activities as project meetings, budget ('Travel and costs of stay' was mostly affected due to the restrictions on mobility), dissemination, the running of the courses and the planned training and study visits. The pandemic affected communication between the partners and forced the Project participants to find new means of cooperation. Every Programme and Partner country institution made great efforts to adapt to the new situation. The pandemic opened up opportunities for change and innovation, thus allowing the universities to benefit from the new possibilities that arose. Despite the challenges faced by the Project, the consortium took some measures to overcome them and found many positive elements in the new ways of working, e.g. shifting the consortium and management meetings online and converting the planned training for academic staff and study visits for PhD and young teachers into online activities. The most tangible benefit of shifting to blended and remote learning was that instead of a study visit for 28 persons as originally was planned by the Project, a total of 130 teachers from Russian and Chinese universities were involved in the training. This was identified as an opportunity to improve the partners' digital tools and education technology. PCIs may keep these positive elements in the future.

Finally, another issue worth mentioning is an insufficient use of social media to disseminate the Project outcomes and outputs and to enhance the Projects' impact at the national and regional level.

### **Conclusion**

Each Capacity Building project aims to create a unique local education space. The ENTEP Project has contributed to the internationalisation of Russian and Chinese universities through such innovative elements as the use of international approaches to teaching and learning, the increased number of student-centred, learning outcomes-based curricula, assessment and feedback, student engagement.

At the institutional level, the Project has contributed to institutional development and capacity building of each PCI both in Russia and China by designing new programmes and methodologies, enhancing the position of the university in society at large. The Project has supported the capacity building at each partner institution through cooperation, long-term partnership and the exchange of good practice. The Project has also contributed to reinforcement of university infrastructure via set-up of new Centres for Teaching and Learning.

The Project is beneficial for multiple stakeholders, such as academic staff, policy and decision makers, research and industry community both in Russia and China. The modernisation and launching of new study programmes and the introduction of innovative learning and teaching methods have changed the landscape of the university sector. Curricula reform projects are highly sustainable, when newly created study programmes become an integral part of regular degree programmes and professional development courses taught at the HEIs.

Modern, tailored to local conditions, module-based courses for professional development of the academic staff were developed and piloted at each PCI. These teachers' training workshops and seminars significantly contribute to internationalisation and harmonization of teaching practices in Russian and Chinese universities.

The ENTEP Project has increased the standing and profile of the HEIs involved, through their strong outward orientation and focus on international cooperation. The Project has given professors from PCIs the opportunities to meet their peers in different countries. By working together in an international consortium, faculty members have become aware of different perspectives, gained new insights into their academic field and have been exposed to international quality standards in education. The ENTEP Project has also been beneficial to the acquisition by academic staff of cross-cultural communication skills; team-building and leadership skills; enhancing project management skills and quality assurance procedures.

### **Конфликт интересов**

Не указан.

### **Рецензия**

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

### **Conflict of Interest**

None declared.

### **Review**

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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