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BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THE DOUBLE DIPLOMA PROGRAMS WITHIN THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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The article deals with the benefits and challenges of the double diploma programs within the national higher education system. The main objectives are defined as the theoretical analysis of scientific and pedagogical literature highlighting different aspects of the problem under research, and study of the double diploma programs implementation in European higher schools and Ukrainian universities. It highlights the historical background of the appearance of the double diploma programs in Europe and in Ukraine, the regulatory framework of this process, benefits and challenges of their realisation within the national system of higher education. The conclusions drawn show that these programs are the basis for accomplishing the major tasks defined in the Bologna Declaration and promote students' mobility, increase the number of students in the European higher education space, and improve the quality of professional training.

Key words: *double diploma, student mobility, ERASMUS, ECTS, the Bologna process, higher education, foreign partner university, the European higher education space, exchange program.*

Introduction

In terms of world globalisation, the rapid expansion of information space and the urgent need to develop innovative technologies in the modern world, the issues of preparation of highly qualified specialists gain a particular relevance.

Modernisation and improvement of the quality of education and science, on which the economic and political stability of the country and its position in the world depend, are one of the major priorities of the development of modern society.

Improving the competitiveness of domestic institutions of higher education in the market of educational services and enhancing the quality of their positioning in the system of a single world educational space are possible through the implementation of the so-called double diploma programs. It should be noted that two graduate diplomas give the future specialist opportunity to carry out his professional activities in almost every European country, presenting the diploma that has more value in this or that country.

Creating double diploma programs in Ukrainian universities, thanks to the support of the European education community, is becoming more and more relevant. Joint programs are found in a variety of subject fields, but most often they are used in economics, engineering and business education, law and management.

The aim of the study

The aim of the study is to follow the path of creating double diploma programs and their implementation in Western Europe and Ukraine, as well as to highlight benefits and challenges of their realisation within the national system of higher education.

The objectives of the research are to consider the historical background of occurrence of the double diploma programs within Western Europe; to examine the regulatory framework of the double diploma programs implementation by European countries; to analyse the implementation of the double diploma programs within the national system of higher education;

to highlight the advantages, difficulties and possible solutions to the emerging problems in order to improve the conditions of implementation of double diploma programs in Ukraine.

Theoretical framework and research methods

The development of joint programs is one of the priorities of international cooperation between partner universities around the world. International experts in higher education believe that no other form of interaction between institutions of higher education brings such significant results in the development of cooperation with foreign partners as a joint program.

Theoretically, this process could contribute to the equalisation of the value of diplomas of each of these countries, this being the main idea of the so-called “Bologna process”. But despite numerous advantages of the double diploma programs the universities of Ukraine have to solve a number of urgent problems associated with them. These problems are dealt with in this research.

Research into the issues of the national higher education becoming part of the European educational space and the solution of the problems introduced by Sorbonne and Bologna declarations are done by many Ukrainian researchers, among them I. Babyn, Ya. Bolyubash, V. Hrubinko, A. Zakhordnii, M. Zhurovskyi, M. Karpenko, V. Kremen, K. Levkivskyi, M. Stepko, T. Finikov, V. Shynkaruk and others. The meaning and methods of realising academic mobility within the European higher educational space are also investigated in detail. The research works of V. Astakhova, O. Bolotska, S. Verbytska, N. Gulyaeva, L. Hurch, I. Zavgorodnii, V. Kapustnik, O. Kyslova, I. Lapshein, V. Lisovyi, A. Mokii, L. Sokuryanska, M. Stepanova, H. Shchokin etc. have made a great contribution into studying these issues. National and foreign experience of creating an effective system of academic mobility as an important educational factor of European integration of Ukraine is considered in the works of these scholars.

Results

A double diploma as a phenomenon is rather new in the history of foreign and national higher education. The urgent need to develop such programs appeared with the beginning of the social and economic integration processes in Europe in the 80-s of the twentieth century, and it became particularly pressing with the emergence of the European higher education space (Grycyuk, & Lyakisheva, 2014).

It should be noted that the desire to get the adequate professional education outside their own countries was inherent even for the students of the first European universities. These traditions were kept for a long time, having acquired a mass character during the

globalisation of higher education. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics Survey, there is a considerable growth in the overall number of international students: while estimated at a total of 2,1 million in 2002, their number reportedly increased to 3,4 million by 2009 and is currently estimated at around 4 million, thereby representing 7 % of the global migrant population aged 15–29 (ICEF Monitor. (2015).

Global integration processes of higher education were supported by various international documents concerning notification (confirmation, acknowledgement) and equivalence (comparability) of national documents on education. Preparation and signing of these documents began in Europe in the 50–s of XX century with actualisation of the need for the social and economic association of leading European countries. It was then that the following three regional conventions were adopted: “European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities” (December 11, 1953), “European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study” (December 15, 1958), and “European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications” (December 14, 1959).

Academic recognition of an educational document received in one of the foreign educational institutions actually meant that the European countries developing contractual acts recognised common principles, such as: the same standards of admission of persons who have completed secondary education, to universities and higher education institutions at the university level; recognition of study courses, covered by the citizens of one country by universities (higher schools) of other countries; recognition of university diplomas.

The purposeful activities of UNESCO played an important role in dealing with the issues of international cooperation in higher education. Since the mid-70-s six regional conventions have been elaborated under the authority of UNESCO. Among them, there was “Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region” signed in Paris on December 21, 1979. In 1982, the Convention was signed and ratified by Ukraine (Shchekin, 1995). These and other international instruments have expanded the possibilities for young people to get the higher education abroad on the basis of the national documents of already existing and recognized education. This certainly reduced the terms of studying abroad.

The further the political and socio-economic integration processes developed in Europe, the more obvious became the need for decision-making on coordination of the higher education systems development, adaptation of training levels, harmonization of the content of

learning in related professional fields, intensification of student mobility, assurance of the education quality enhancing the competitiveness of graduates in the labour market. These ideas were reflected in Sorbonne and Bologna's declarations signed by European countries (Grycyuk, & Lyakisheva, 2014).

Not only existing international documents on cooperation in the field of higher education but also the achievements of famous academic mobility programs ERASMUS, ERASMUS MUNDUS and TEMPUS were taken as the basis for meeting the challenges of promoting student mobility. We should remember that in 2014 the academic mobility programs ERASMUS, ERASMUS MUNDUS and TEMPUS were absorbed by most ambitious contemporary academic exchange program ERASMUS + funded by the European Union. Many of the projects implemented since 1987 as a part of those programs were directed to providing students with grants for individual mobility. They had the opportunity to study a semester or an academic year abroad. The ERASMUS MUNDUS program (ERASMUS + since 2014) is very popular in European countries. During the last twenty years, more than two million students have used their grants and recently the number increased to over 3 million (Erasmus Programme).

Ukraine also took an active part in the ERASMUS MUNDUS projects. Thus, during the competition for participation in 2013–2014 academic year, 87 Ukrainian students won the right to take training within the ERASMUS MUNDUS program. In general, during the years 2004–2013, 329 Ukrainian students received grants to study in Master and Doctor Degree programs of Erasmus Mundus (From Erasmus Mundus ... to Erasmus+ (Eastern Partnership Countries Facts and Figures).

Organization of such academic exchange programs necessitated searching for mechanisms of the optimal use of students' time and transferring credits in the academic subjects which they studied at a foreign university to the general list of the subjects. Therefore, the ECTS credit system was created and tested. It provided the possibility of credit transfers and accumulation of students' academic achievements. The ECTS system turned out to be so successful that by the unanimous decision of the ministers who signed the Declaration it was put on the basis of implementing the ideas of the Bologna process. It was emphasised in "Action Plan for mobility", specially approved by the heads of European states on December 14, 2000, in Nice. Currently, conventional approaches to determine the academic year in 60 credits simplifies the calculation of student's training effort required for graduation in any country that is part of the European educational space (Franciya u yevropeyskomu prostori vyshchoyi osvity,

2005). Thus, the conditions necessary to gain credits in any foreign higher educational institution have been created. Further development of educational integration, launched by the Bologna process, has led to the opportunity for the student to invest the same credits as conventional educational currency into his academic achievements at different educational institutions. So, the idea of integrated master degree courses appeared and began to be implemented.

For example, in the framework of the ERASMUS MUNDUS program (it included the cooperation of European universities with educational institutions of the third countries) the following has been done:

1. Creation of a consortium of higher education institutions from at least three different countries that conduct professional training and implementation of these educational objectives.

2. Development of common criteria for admission of students to higher schools that are members of the consortium (European, as well as third countries) that trust each other and believe in transparency of the students' enrolment procedure.

3. Elaboration of common methods of assessing students' knowledge and full mutual recognition of the students' performance outcomes (the results of examinations, credits, tests etc.). Thus, for example, examinations passed in one of the universities from the consortium are automatically fully recognised by other educational institutions of the consortium.

4. The introduction of the common (integrated) training program that is recognised by all universities belonging to the consortium. Each higher education institution, a member of the consortium, while implementing a joint program recognises all educational periods along with appropriate forms of control. In addition, each of these educational institutions should have official confirmation of the legitimacy of integrated programs in accordance with the legal requirements of their own country.

5. Common criteria for determining tuition fees. Differentiation of payment quota is allowed only for two groups of people: European students and students from the third countries.

6. Compulsory period of students' mobility: the student's individual plan should include the program of study in at least two higher schools that are part of the consortium. Taking a certain training course, students should know the sequence of its periods in different host universities; mobility options are permitted that guarantee getting recognised joint, double or multiple diplomas after successful graduation.

7. The possibility of getting a certain number of ECTS credits in every higher educational institution that

is a part of the consortium, depending on the developed individual plan.

8. Mandatory contact with at least two European languages.

9. Adherence to high standards of training students and teachers from the third countries by consortium (Grycyuk, & Lyakisheva, 2014).

The minimum requirement for graduation in the integrated educational program is to obtain a double diploma. The official award of a dual or even multiple diploma means that the student receives two or more national diplomas awarded to him by two or more educational institutions- members of the consortium. The joint diploma is awarded by the decision of at least two educational institutions that implement an integrated training program. These diplomas are recognised in the countries where the educational institutions that awarded these degrees are located (Podwojny dyplom. Charakterystyka wspólnych studiów).

Along with the scheme of studying in integrated education programs within the consortium, which is enough complex to be implemented, cooperation in this sphere between individual higher schools has become popular. Contractual relations concerning students exchange programs practised between higher schools of different countries since 80-s of the twentieth century, with the Bologna process launching, has been deepened to the possibility of transferring credits obtained by a student and awarding him with the document certifying parallel education abroad.

Ukraine also actively joined that process. First of all, well-known national universities, building on existing contacts with foreign universities, after Ukraine signed the Bologna Declaration in 2005 and committed to perform the outlined tasks, started signing bilateral agreements on promoting academic mobility. Ways of implementing double degree programs through consortia and bilateral agreements having been worked out in the West, they started being extrapolated to other eastern countries including Ukraine.

Ukraine's geopolitical location and well-known tradition of higher education, especially in technical and natural sciences have drawn attention and interest to our country.

In the last decade, most national higher educational institutions recognised the particular importance of double degree programs in facilitating entering the European educational space and started the active search for foreign higher schools- partners. Most of them were higher educational institutions of Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland and other countries (Grycyuk, & Lyakisheva, 2014).

Thus, having analysed the international relations of higher educational institutions of Vinnytsia region, we can affirm that all state higher schools offer their students double diploma programs, that are based mainly on bilateral agreements between the national and foreign educational establishments. In most cases, they are higher schools from Poland and Slovakia. For example, Vinnytsia Institute of Trade and Economics of Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics works actively in this direction with Pan-European University (Bratislava, Slovak Republic) and University College of Tourism and Ecology (Sucha Beskidzka, Poland); Vinnytsia National Technical University cooperates with Lublin University of Technology (Poland) and Kielce University of Technology (Poland).

Foreign universities offer a variety of options for double diploma programs (see Table 1)

Table 1

Ways of implementing double diploma programs

Basic Program Parameters	Proposed options	
	Bachelor	Master
Higher Education Degrees		
Forms of education	Full-time, part-time, distance, combining different forms	
Duration of education	One – two years	
Academic mobility scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2 (3) years of full-time professional studies at a national higher school +2 (1) years at a foreign partner higher school; – 3 years of full-time professional studies at a national higher school +1 year at a foreign partner higher school + 0.5 years of distance learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1 year of full-time professional studies at a foreign partner higher school; – 1 year of full-time studies at a national higher school + 1 year at foreign partner higher school; – 1 year of full-time professional studies at a national higher school + 2 years of part-time professional studies at a foreign partner higher school (combined with distance learning).
Learning Content	The curricula of students' training are consistent and identical, and credits in similar disciplines are transferable	
Final examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examinations in national and partner higher schools. 2. The graduation qualifying works are fulfilled and defended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – at national and partner higher schools (in the native language and the language of the country of study); – at national higher schools (in the native language); – at partner higher school (in the language of the country of study), to be transferred at the national higher school. 	

Implementing educational double diploma programs, Ukrainian universities are aimed at the following: to improve the quality of education through the use of advanced experience of foreign partner universities, thereby increasing the competitiveness of the Ukrainian universities in the world educational space; to increase the investment attractiveness of universities through improving their graduates' competitiveness and quality of professional knowledge; to improve their academic staff professional development; to attract additional sources of financing for universities' activities; to promote the development and strengthening of university international relations and international academic mobility.

Double diploma training programs have many advantages for Ukrainian students. In particular, they include:

1. Significantly saving the time necessary for obtaining specialist education. The student can get simultaneously two diplomas: from national and foreign institutions of higher education.
2. Being financially advantageous for students: they do not pay tuition fees for all the academic years, as it happens in case of independent entry to a foreign university.
3. Getting experience of staying in a fundamentally different educational system, getting practice-oriented, competence training by using modern technical equipment in classrooms, laboratories, research centres etc.
4. Getting the high-quality professional education and internationally recognised diploma, enabling employment abroad without the necessity to confirm it.
5. Attending lectures by leading professors in Europe, participating in joint research and educational programs.
6. Obtaining additional knowledge in related fields of science, professional directions, and qualifications.
7. Gaining experience in offices, establishments, institutions, offices, enterprises of European countries during practical training.
8. Improving knowledge of foreign languages.
9. Getting acquainted with culture and traditions, peculiarities of doing business in one of the EU countries.
10. Feeling psychologically secure due to studying in academic groups together with fellow students, tutoring, mentoring etc. (Grycyuk, & Lyakisheva, 2014).

However, creating joint programs between universities of Ukraine and Europe is accompanied with many problems resulting from incomparability of requirements of various European educational institutions. The most vivid are the problems concerning differences in the structure of curricula, tuition funding, quality assurance and control, poor foreign language competencies of both teachers and students, synchronisation of students' mobility in universities of different countries.

Training in two universities simultaneously requires the actual and formal compatibility of curricula and syllabi, which is not always the case. Theoretically, part of the training program could be completed in any of the partner universities chosen by the student. However, the full course of a student's training in two universities-partners should correspond to the full course in any of these universities. Thus, the simplest solution to this problem would be the adoption of completely identical curricula. The natural way to do this is to compare all the programs, analyse their advantages and disadvantages, and to develop the new program comprising all the advantages and excluding the disadvantages. Unfortunately, the main obstacles to this is the industry standards, approved at the ministerial level, including lists of compulsory courses, standards for study hours and their distribution by semesters, the number of study hours for lectures, laboratory work, practical classes and self-study. However, we can implement changes in the structure of optional courses towards their compliance with the mandatory disciplines at the universities with which the double diplomas programs are going to be implemented.

Therefore, a simpler way is to cooperate with one particular university or, at least, with the universities in one country.

Having analysed the situation with implementation of double diploma program in Vinnytsia Institute of Trade and Economics of Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics and Vinnytsia National Technical University and considering the number of students involved in this process we can affirm that only 5 and 20 students, respectively, appeared to be interested in the proposed exchange program. The financial component of double diploma programs turned out to be crucial in deciding whether to participate in the program or not. Moreover, some students said that because of the ever-increasing fees for double diplomas programs it was difficult to find the money for them.

The high cost of these programs relates primarily to the fact that investments in creating partnerships for such academic exchanges are great. The preparatory stage involves, first of all, the costs associated with a large number of necessary business travels, organisation of negotiations, overcoming the language barrier. Great investments are needed to create the necessary infrastructure for implementing a joint project. To partly solve this problem is possible by increasing the number of partnerships and sources of funding at both European and national levels (grants and funds), by involving business to financing such programs, channelling financial support to the "organized mobility" programs, delegating the rights of financial management to the supervisors of joint programs for developing effective cooperation.

The issue of providing and controlling the quality of training is primarily connected with the structure of curricula and course programs, qualifications of teaching staff and their motivation for professional development, improvement of teaching methods and enhancement of the evaluation objectivity, feedback between the participants of the educational process, active participation of the university in national and international programs of training professionals with higher education.

World practice shows that the lack of foreign language skills of students and teaching staff involved in this process hinders the implementation of double diploma programs. Therefore, universities have to organise learning courses of foreign languages, because usually, the level of foreign language competencies by Ukrainian partners is insufficient for professional communication. The problem of language learning may be partly solved through involving students and teaching staff to international programs of internship and practical training, their participation in volunteer programs etc.

A significant difference of educational systems in approaches to quality standards, the role of teachers, the correlation of classroom workload of students and their self-study, and assessment of learning outcomes should also be taken into account. The existing differences are based primarily on the fact that Ukrainian system of higher education is built on the model 4 + 1 or 4+ 1.5. That is why three-year undergraduate programs that are common in Europe are not recognised in Ukraine. It makes practically impossible to recognise a graduate diploma awarded by European university in Ukraine and makes it harder to get the education at the Master level. Besides, the fact that the secondary education in European countries requires 12–13 years, while in Ukraine only 11 years isn't also taken into account. Contrary to Ukrainian students who are overloaded with classes, student – teacher relations in European universities have more democratic character. There arises a problem of understanding at a professional level. Therefore, to solve the issue of synchronising the movement of students within the universities of different countries, first of all, a general view of the educational process should be changed at the communication and organisational levels. It is necessary to upgrade curricula and programs, provide modern material and technical equipment of laboratories, develop distance form of education, and promote teaching in several foreign languages (Vitenko, 2014).

The students are motivated to participate in double diploma programs, first of all, by the search for new knowledge, experience and the opportunity to learn a new culture. In their responses, most of them place priority on the possibility of getting diploma from a

prestigious Western university simultaneously with receiving higher education at home, the possibility of getting practical training in foreign companies during or after studying at university, gaining experience of living in another country and learning another culture. In addition, students point out the fact that in the future they will be able to link their career plans with the work in a foreign company. This requires not just professional competencies, but also the ability to find the common language with others, to communicate effectively and find appropriate arguments, to work in teams, to know professional terminology in foreign languages. An equally important factor is the belief that the graduates will find guaranteed employment at the end of the program. Students say that such training process makes their attitude to work different and teaches them to be independent.

It is important that in many cases the experience of getting training in a European higher school makes students rethink the very idea of learning. Students say they are fundamentally changing because training requires hard work in libraries. Even those who were not very diligent students in Ukraine had to study hard in a foreign higher school. The students derive pleasure from studying and understand how to plan their future career. Besides, students become more competent in a foreign language, their self-esteem rises, they come to understand and respect other points of view, get new friends and contacts.

Conclusions

The study of the experience of developing and implementing double diploma programs in Europe shows that these programs form the basis for accomplishing the major tasks defined in the Bologna Declaration and promote the mobility of students, increase the number of students in the European higher education space, improve the quality of professional training.

The analysis of models of double diploma training proves their sufficient capacity and effectiveness. This direction of reforming higher education is developing intensively in Europe. It needs to be improved in the system of Ukrainian higher education as well. Nowadays, most Ukrainian universities recognise the importance of implementing “double diploma” programs to meet the challenges of entering the European educational space and to raise the quality of professional education. The higher educational institutions that are involved in the “double diploma” programs are considered to be the leading in innovation and have high status.

It should be noted that foreign partners, as well as national universities that are interested in expanding ties, are studying deeply and objectively the barriers to the mobility of students and are actively seeking the ways of their levelling and overcoming.

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