

PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY GRADUATES WITHIN THE FIELD OF “INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS”, GERMAN STUDY LINE

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1 INTRODUCTION

The research field regarding practice requirements for university graduates has to be seen as a part of a broader interest field of universities, namely the employability of its graduates. At European level, there are several documents and studies that underline the need to achieve a correlation between academic services of high quality and lasting employability, needs that have been emphasized within the Communiqué of the meeting of European ministers in charge of higher education in Prague, 2001 [8]. Also, the London Communiqué, 18 May 2007 [6] mentions the necessity to improve graduate employability. This document also notes initial progresses done in respect to the implementation of national qualification frameworks. Also, the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is seen as a core element of European higher education institutions. Concerning employability, the London Communiqué, 18 May 2007 mentions that institutions have to develop partnerships with employers and ensure compatibility of employment structures with the new educational system. Increasing employability of graduates, but also introducing on the job learning was an important issue within the Communiqué in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009 [5]. Also, according to same document, improving the program study offer and further development of partnerships with employers should constitute a priority for universities. The Budapest-Vienna Declaration of the European Higher Education Area, 12 March 2010 [7] stressed that begun reforms have to be continued, higher education being a public responsibility. Recent scientific research studies within this field that deal with this topic of particular importance were performed by [3] and [4], emphasizing the role of sustaining the link between universities and employers. Above mentioned reasons set the ground in developing the research de-

scribed within this paper, in our efforts to transform the field of “International Economic Affairs”, German Study Line, into a market-oriented one.

2 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to establish the practice requirements for university graduates within the field of “International Economic affairs”, following research approach was applied:

- Identifying occupations that are most likely to be performed by graduates within this field
- Selecting four appropriate occupations within this field, according to Romanian occupational standards:
 - Foreign trade agent (According to Cod COSA: O-9)
 - Information analyst (According to SO-Cod COSA: O-297)
 - Assistant manager external trade (According to SO-Cod COSA: T-10)
 - Reviewer on external trade (According to SO-Cod COSA: O-4)
- Deciding upon the questioning method
- Designing questionnaires based on occupational standards
- Distribution of questionnaires
- Filling out the questionnaires by German employing companies
- Synthesizing gathered data
- Performing the top level analysis
- Performing the group analysis for each occupation
- Sorting results for all practice requirements
- Establishing possible consequences in re-designing the curriculum

3 THE RESEARCH

Within current phase, data gathered from the major German employers of our graduates

were synthesized; hereby the focus lies on the frequency of each occupation within 12 questioned companies, acting as the major employers of our graduates. The identified level of frequency was then established for each occupation, in comparison to each other analyzed occupation.

The authors have therefore chosen to perform a top level analysis and then four group analysis

using the function Tree and Affinity Diagram with weighting of items performing the Analytical Hierarchy Process [1], using pair wise comparison. The reason in performing this analysis was to point out, which occupations are more probable to be performed by our graduates. Figure no. 1 shows the results obtained within this analysis.

Fig. 13: Top level analysis for occupations specific for the graduate field” International Economic Affairs”

How Important is the Left Item (Row) as Compared to the Top Item (C...

Group:	Top Level ITEMS	Output	Completed:
	AHP Toplevel Matrix		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	9 9,00 an order of magnitude more important	¼ 0,17 demonstrated less important (other item 6x as impor...	1 -Foreign trade agent 2 -Information analyst 3 -Assistant manager external trade 4 -Reviewer on external trade Importance in group
	8 8,00 absolutely more important (8x as important)	¼ 0,14 demonstrated less important	
	7 7,00 demonstrated more important	¼ 0,13 absolutely less important (other item 8x as important)	
	6 6,00 demonstrated more important (6x as important)	¼ 0,11 an order of magnitude less important	
	5 5,00 essentially more important		
	4 4,00 essentially more important (4x as important)		
	3 3,00 considerably more important		
	2 2,00 twice as important		
	+ 1,50 somewhat more important		
	○ 1,00 Equally important		
	- 0,67 somewhat less important		
	½ 0,50 half as important		
	¼ 0,33 clearly less important		
	¼ 0,25 essentially less important (other item 4x as important)		
	¼ 0,20 essentially less important		
Input	1 -Foreign trade agent	5 ○ 3	39,4%
	2 -Information analyst	¼ ¼ ¼	7,5%
	3 -Assistant manager external trade	3	39,4%
	4 -Reviewer on external trade	¼	13,7%

Source: Authors' calculations

The top level analysis (fig.1) conducted for all occupations that have been chosen for this graduate field, relied on the feed-back given by employers regarding the frequency in encountering these occupations within their companies. Using these data, authors than compared the importance of each occupation in relation to each other occupation, resulting the top level analysis. By computing calculations within specialized software, the occupations of “Foreign trade agent” and “Assistant manager external trade”, resulted as being the most frequent and therefore probable in being occupied by our graduates. Next probable occupation is “Reviewer on external trade”, by a difference in level of over 25%. Last occupation, “Information analyst”, proved to be less probable in being filled in by our graduates. Therefore, the De-

partment of Economics and Business Administration in German Language could focus on preparing graduates for the most wanted occupations in this field.

Next steps consisted in performing the group analysis for competences specific for each occupation. In order to perform the group analysis, data regarding the expected use of each competence unit (utility degree) were synthesized. The expected use (utility degree) was defined as being the product between the level of frequency and the level of importance of each competence unit (table 1), whereas both frequency and importance levels were established on a scale from 0 (not used, no importance,) to 10 (critical use, critical importance).

Tab. 4: Establishing the utility degree of a competence unit

Name of the Competence unit	Frequency	Importance	Utility degree
...	6	8	48

Source: Authors' calculations

Authors then compared the utility degrees resulted for each competence unit, within each analyzed occupation, resulting the group analysis.

Fig.2. represents the results obtained for the occupation of "Foreign trade agent". In this case, authors performed a pair wise comparison of competence units.

Fig. 2: Group analysis for competences specific for the occupation of "Foreign Trade Agent"

How Important is the Left Item (Row) as Compared to the Top Item (C...

Group: Foreign trade agent	AHP Group Matrix														Output	Completed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9 9,00 an order of magnitude more important	1/3 0,17 demonstrated less important (other item 6x as import...															
8 8,00 absolutely more important (8x as important)	1/3 0,14 demonstrated less important															
7 7,00 demonstrated more important	1/3 0,13 absolutely less important (other item 8x as important)															
6 6,00 demonstrated more important (6x as important)	1/3 0,11 an order of magnitude less important															
5 5,00 essentially more important																
4 4,00 essentially more important (4x as important)																
3 3,00 considerably more important																
2 2,00 twice as important																
+ 1,50 somewhat more important																
o 1,00 Equally important																
- 0,67 somewhat less important																
1/2 0,50 half as important																
1/3 0,33 clearly less important																
1/4 0,25 essentially less important (other item 4x as important)																
1/5 0,20 essentially less important																
Input	1.1 Correspondence with partners	1.2 Processing specific documents	1.3 Activity report	1.4 Assuring post-sale service	1.5 Interpersonal communication	1.6 Teamwork	1.7 External contract completion	1.8 Negotiation of contractual terms	1.9 Developing own professional activity	1.10 Adapting marketing of products to market conditions	1.11 Retail market research	1.12 Preparation of tender documentation	1.13 Promoting products	1.14 Insurance/tracking goods, receipt value	Importance in group	
	+ 7	+ 2	4	o	5	5	2	+ 5	5	5	5	5	5	5	19,9%	
		+ 4	5	2	3	2	2	+ 3	6	3	+				13,4%	
			2	3	+ 2	+	+	2	+	2	+	-			7,8%	
				+	-	-	1/2	1/2	-	o	-	1/2			4,2%	
					-	-	-	1/2	-	-	1/2	2			4,3%	
						+	-	+	o	+	-	-			5,2%	
							-	1/2	o	-	o	-	1/2		5,1%	
									-	+	+	+	-		5,6%	
										2	+	2	+	-	6,9%	
											-	o	o	1/2	5,1%	
													+	-	5,6%	
														-	3,7%	
															5,7%	
															7,5%	

Source: Authors' calculations

In this case, the most important competence units proved to be "Correspondence with partners" and "Processing specific documents", both in the category of specific, professional competences. Social competences, that can be easily transferred to other occupational fields proved to be less significant (competence units "Interpersonal communication", "Teamwork", "Developing own professional activity"). In per-

forming the most important competences, graduates have to achieve good knowledge of foreign language, external trade, law regulations and financial regulations, but also of specific documents used within external trade, such as invoices, delivery notes, tax receipt, payment order and minutes of receiving the merchandise.

Fig. 3: Group analysis for competences specific for the occupation of “Information Analyst”
How Important is the Left Item (Row) as Compared to the Top Item (C...

Group:	-Information analyst		Output	Completed:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
AHP Group Matrix					
9	9,00 an order of magnitude more important	% 0,17 demonstrated less important (other item 6x as import...	2.1 Technical assistance to client 2.2 Initiating and maintaining effective wor... 2.3 Direct interviewing of the subject 2.4 Collection, verification and correction o... 2.5 Maintenance and updating of reports 2.6 Monitoring of subject companies 2.7 Making the business intelligence report 2.8 Professional development 2.9 Implementation and internal procedures 2.10 Planning and organizing own work and...	Importance in group	
8	8,00 absolutely more important (8x as important)	% 0,14 demonstrated less important			
7	7,00 demonstrated more important	% 0,13 absolutely less important (other item 8x as important)			
6	6,00 demonstrated more important (6x as important)	% 0,11 an order of magnitude less important			
5	5,00 essentially more important				
4	4,00 essentially more important (4x as important)				
3	3,00 considerably more important				
2	2,00 twice as important				
+	1,50 somewhat more important				
○	1,00 Equally important				
-	0,67 somewhat less important				
½	0,50 half as important				
⅓	0,33 clearly less important				
¼	0,25 essentially less important (other item 4x as important)				
⅕	0,20 essentially less important				
Input	2.1 Technical assistance to client		+ + + + + 2 + 2	14,0%	
	2.2 Initiating and maintaining effective working relationships		■ + + + + + + +	10,3%	
	2.3 Direct interviewing of the subject		■ + + + + + + +	8,8%	
	2.4 Collection, verification and correction of data on the subject of business intelligence report		■ + + + + + + +	10,6%	
	2.5 Maintenance and updating of reports		■ + + + + + + +	14,0%	
	2.6 Monitoring of subject companies		■ + + + + + + +	9,3%	
	2.7 Making the business intelligence report		■ + + + + + + +	9,7%	
	2.8 Professional development		■ + + + + + + +	6,5%	
	2.9 Implementation and internal procedures		■ + + + + + + +	10,1%	
	2.10 Planning and organizing own work and teamwork		■ + + + + + + +	6,5%	

Source: Authors' calculations

Fig. 3 shows the group analysis performed for the occupation of “Information Analyst”. As can be seen, the most important competences to be filled in are: “Technical assistance to client” and “Maintenance and updating reports”. Therefore, in order to successfully fulfill first competence unit, a graduate filling in this occupation has to have knowledge on how to gather clients' order, prepare the business report, and solve customer complaints, activities specific to the marketing knowledge field. In order to perform next equally important competence unit, the employee must upgrade basic reports, upload new reports in the database and assign a unique customer code within the database. Therefore, the graduate has to assign good knowledge of informatics while being aware of the classification and coding system adopted by their organization, special reports that deal with company liquidation, PC- and database management. Next competence units that have a close related importance index are no.2, no.4 and no.9. Unlike prior analyzed occupation, this occupation shows to have more use of social and transferable competences, competence unit

no.2 dealing with “Initiating and maintaining effective working relationships”. Therefore, social competences in this field require developing constructive relationships with other employees involved, building up on knowledge fields like: principles and techniques of communication, managing cultural differences and organizational culture.

Fig.4 provides insights into the most important competence units within the occupation “Assistant manager external trade”. According to performed group analysis, an assistant manager external trade spends most of his time “Administering documents” (14,9%), followed by “Information management”(11,3%) and “Correspondence with partners”(10,7%). The obtained results are not surprising; an assistant manager being less competent and having less experience in “Establishing strategy”(5,3%) ore “Coordination of contracts” (8,3%), activities based on long-term planning. In perception of employers, the most important and frequent employee skills deal with their capacity to manage documents and to have good communication skills. Also, an employee engaged in this

occupation should possess basic knowledge of specific documents in this field, mainly in the sphere of legislation and internal working procedures. Also, an assistant manager should have good computer skills, knowledge of foreign relations and a specific vocabulary of the

domain. However, taking decisions, coordinating other employees and improve their professional activities had the lowest importance. Daily activities obtained the highest utility degree for this occupation.

Fig. 4: Group analysis for competences specific for the occupation of “Assistant Manager External Trade”

How Important is the Left Item (Row) as Compared to the Top Item (C...

Group: Assistant manager external trade		Output													Completed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
AHP Group Matrix															
9	9,00 an order of magnitude more important	%													0,17 demonstrated less important (other item 6x as import...
8	8,00 absolutely more important (8x as important)	%													0,14 demonstrated less important
7	7,00 demonstrated more important	%													0,13 absolutely less important (other item 8x as important)
6	6,00 demonstrated more important (6x as important)	%													0,11 an order of magnitude less important
5	5,00 essentially more important														
4	4,00 essentially more important (4x as important)														
3	3,00 considerably more important														
2	2,00 twice as important														
+	1,50 somewhat more important														
○	1,00 Equally important														
-	0,67 somewhat less important														
½	0,50 half as important														
¼	0,33 clearly less important														
⅓	0,25 essentially less important (other item 4x as important)														
⅕	0,20 essentially less important														
		3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.10	3.11	3.12	3.13	Importance in group
Input	3.1 Administrating documents	○ +	3	4	3	3	3	3	+	3	3	3	+		14,9%
	3.2 Correspondence with partners		-	-	2	3	2	2	2	+	2	2	+		10,7%
	3.3 Information management				2	3	2	2	2	+	2	2	2	+	11,3%
	3.4 Reporting activity					½	½	½	+	+	½	○	○	-	5,7%
	3.5 Making decisions						¼	¼	¼	¼	-	-	-	½	4,1%
	3.6 Analysis of significant information							½	½	½	○	○	○	-	6,0%
	3.7 Optimizing workforce									○	○	¼	○	○	7,3%
	3.8 Promoting initiatives										½	○	○	○	6,4%
	3.9 Interpersonell communication											2	2	2	8,4%
	3.10 Improve coordination of employers												○	○	6,3%
	3.11 Development of professional activity												○	-	5,3%
	3.12 Establishing strategy														5,3%
	3.13 Coordination of business contracts														8,3%

Source: Authors' calculations

The group analysis performed for the occupation of “Reviewer on External Trade” (fig.no.5), shows that the most important competence units are “Processing of documents” and “Sending documents”. Daily activities therefore focus on sorting, analyzing and translating documents.

The range of expertise for this occupation covers areas such as foreign languages, marketing, commodities, company products, economic efficiency, specific documents, legislation, customs documents, supplier documents and documents regarding foreign partners. Transversal skills relate to: teamwork, interpersonal skills, and self-critical abilities.

Figure no. 6 represents the sorted results for all practice requirements in order to achieve a ranking of competences gathered from all four occupations in order to establish which competences should be covered by the curriculum, so as to achieve the best and fastest market insertion of our graduates. Also, the authors have chosen to represent only those competence units that have a final importance over 2,1%, following competences being almost insignificant at a global level. As can be seen, most wanted competences can be found within the occupation of “Foreign trade agent”.

Fig. 5: Group analysis for competences specific for the occupation of “Reviewer on External Trade”

How Important is the Left Item (Row) as Compared to the Top Item (C...

Group: Reviewer on external trade		Output														Completed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
AHP Group Matrix																
9	9,00 an order of magnitude more important	%														0,17 demonstrated less important (other item 6x as import...
8	8,00 absolutely more important (8x as important)	%														0,14 demonstrated less important
7	7,00 demonstrated more important	%														0,13 absolutely less important (other item 8x as important)
6	6,00 demonstrated more important (6x as important)	%														0,11 an order of magnitude less important
5	5,00 essentially more important															
4	4,00 essentially more important (4x as important)															
3	3,00 considerably more important															
2	2,00 twice as important															
+	1,50 somewhat more important															
○	1,00 Equally important															
-	0,67 somewhat less important															
½	0,50 half as important															
⅓	0,33 clearly less important															
¼	0,25 essentially less important (other item 4x as important)															
⅕	0,20 essentially less important															
		4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.10	4.11	4.12	4.13	4.14	Importance in group
4.1	Gathering documentation	½	-	½	½	+	○	○	○	○	2	½	○	○	5	6,2%
4.2	Reporting activity		½	½	½	-	-	-	○	½	½	½	½	½	3	4,5%
4.3	Sending documents			+	○	2	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	9	10,9%	
4.4	Provide guidance and information in the company				-	2	+	+	+	2	-	+	+	6	9,1%	
4.5	Processing of documents					3	+	+	+	3	+	2	2	9	12,3%	
4.6	Settlement failure						-	-	-	+	½	-	-	3	4,8%	
4.7	Interpersonell communication								○	○	○	2	½	5	6,8%	
4.8	Collection and analysis of information									○	2	½	○	5	6,8%	
4.9	Teamwork										2	½	○	5	6,6%	
4.10	Developing of professional activity											2	½	3	5,7%	
4.11	Purchase of specific documents											2	2	8	9,8%	
4.12	Organizing business meetings												2	5	8,2%	
4.13	Participation in trade negotiations													5	7,0%	
4.14	Processing complaints														1,4%	

Source: Authors' calculations

Fig. 6: Sorted results for all practice requirements

Sorted ITEMS 1	Importances	Calculated Importance %	Final Importance %	Gewichtung, Sorted Items					
				Final Importance %					
				0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.1 Correspondence with partners		12,5%	6,8%						
1.2 Processing specific documents		8,4%	4,9%						
1.3 Activity report		4,8%	3,3%						
1.14 Insurance/tracking goods, receipt value		4,7%	3,2%						
1.9 Developing own professional activity		4,3%	3,0%						
1.13 Promoting products		3,6%	2,7%						
1.8 Negotiation of contractual terms		3,5%	2,7%						
1.11 Retail market research		3,5%	2,7%						
1.6 Teamwork		3,2%	2,5%						
1.10 Adapting marketing of products to market conditions		3,2%	2,5%						
1.7 External contract completion		3,2%	2,5%						
1.5 Interpersonal communication		2,7%	2,3%						
1.4 Assuring post-sale service		2,6%	2,3%						
1.12 Preparation of tender documentation		2,3%	2,1%						
3.1 Administrating documents		2,3%	2,1%						

Source: Authors' calculations

CONCLUSION

The aim of the current research paper was to identify the most probable occupations to be filled in by our graduates within the field of “International Economic Affairs”, German Study Line, but also to identify which practice requirements would be expected by German employers, within analyzed occupations. Current research proved, that not only is the occupation of “Foreign trade agent” one of the most frequent to meet in employing companies, but also the competences found within this occupation should be provided to our students with maximum priority. Therefore, subjects within the curriculum for the specialization of “International economic affairs” should cover knowledge fields like: marketing, international economics and international transactions, informatics and foreign languages. Future research work will focus on integrating these interim results into a cascade QFD analysis, so as to point out, which institutional capabilities have to be fulfilled in order to succeed in integrate fully and efficiently our graduates into the labor market.

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PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY GRADUATES WITHIN THE FIELD OF “INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS”, GERMAN STUDY LINE

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Abstract: Current research paper gives an overview on practice requirements based on competences for university graduates within the field of “International Economic Affairs”. Obtained results derive from market data gathered while questioning employers regarding the expected use of competences and occupations specific for this graduate field. Authors therefore underline the most probable occupations for university graduates within this field and the most important, frequent and useful competences to be filled out by a university graduate.

Key words: Requirements, university graduates, top level analysis, group analysis, sorted results

JEL Classification: I21, J01, J21, C88