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# PRACTICE/INTERNSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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## **Abstract**

Continuous students' preparation for active life in an appropriate institutional framework is an essential factor for their easy insertion after graduation, to reduce unemployment to the young generation and to create an education system adapted to the requirements and demands of the labor market. In adult education, internship/practice programs aim to build relevant skills for higher education institutions' students. Competence is a fusion of organic and functional knowledge, attitudes and skills that appear in this order of priority and are addressed simultaneously in learning. This paper present some theoretical consideration on practice programs developed in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

**Keywords:** MANPRACT, Academic practice/internship, Design of practice programs.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Continuous students' preparation for active life in an appropriate institutional framework is an essential factor for their easy insertion after graduation, to reduce unemployment to the young generation and to create an education system adapted to the requirements and demands of the labor market (Briel and Getzel, 2001).

European Union intend to create a positive environment for the affirmation of young graduates in the labor market, aimed at cultural diversity propagation and mobility.

Romania's situation in recent years has been characterized by an increase in the gap between academic qualifications and labor market realities. Every year it recorded an increase of number of graduates who did not find a job in their specialization, along with an increase in the period in which they could find a job. We consider that part of this decline is the lack of practical training of higher education institutions (HEI) graduates.

In support of those assertions comes conclusion of the study "Effectiveness and Efficiency of Educational Measures: Evaluation Practices, Indicators and Rhetoric". This study calculated a

coefficient of deviation  $K = 0.418$  between the educational system and economic activity, which means that the higher education system is not related to the labor market. Moreover, the first "Barometer of Quality" published by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) shows some interesting results on divergences between the education system (represented by teachers and professors) and employment (represented by employers):

- over half of employers (56%) believe that graduates should continue training after recruitment, lacking knowledge and practical skills;
- regarding relationship with the business, only 42% of students said that their HEIs have invited employers to provide information on jobs;
- 66% of students consider internships useful;
- in terms of skills and knowledge, most of the students (65%) consider HEIs are responsible to provide.

As a result, we can say that training and development of programs for practice/internship in HEIs curricula, targeting acquisition of knowledge and practical skills for students and, on this basis, for faster insertion of them in labor market must become a crucial objective for any Romanian HEI (Ceptureanu and Ceptureanu, 2015).

## **2. LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS**

Preparing students for labor market, as well as students' training in general have intermittently emerged as a function for universities, even though with different intensity.

There are two main approaches, which can successfully complement each other.

a. The first one is training based on knowledge acquisition by student, dominated by the teacher as an expert. Frequently, this type of training is based on unidirectional information flows from the teacher, providing knowledge to the learner. It is usually a rigorous educational programmed learning process being carried out in a formal shape and by teachers.

b. Training based on changing behavior of students, skills development and knowledge, values and attitudes internalization, usually a less rigorous educational programmed learning process being carried out by professionals accompanied by teachers.

To these two forms we can add a third, a combination of the two. For students, this third form can be a practice program within official university curricula. They can experience this way real business situations, can learn by interacting with companies' employees and their tutor, supervised by a teacher.

Under these approaches, three major parties are involved in training - student, trainer and organizational environment.

On the basis of this type of learning is model, such as developed by Kolb, known as experimental learning cycle. Its essence is represented in the following figure (Chambliss et al., 1996).

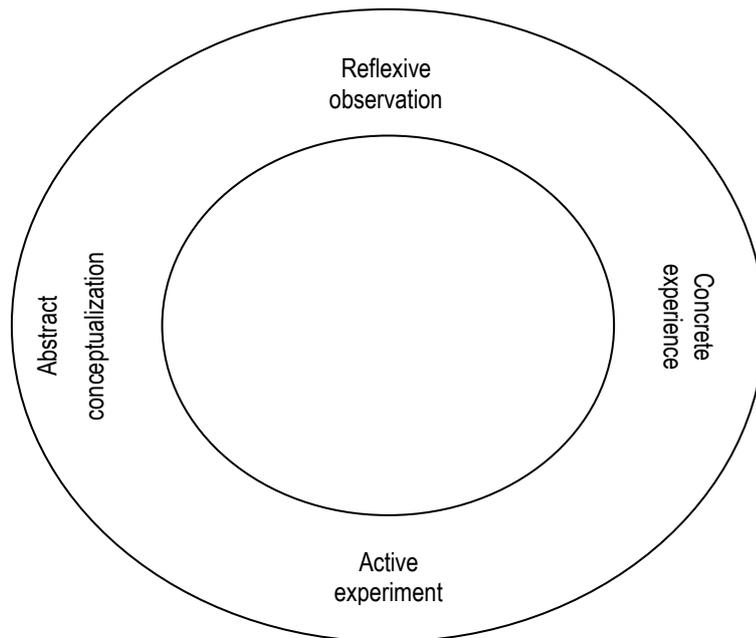


FIGURE 1. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE OF KOLB

Examining the model is more than evident the strong involvement the students have to display and the major role they have in their own experiments.

This type of learning, according to content and way of learning, and can be divided into four categories (Ceptureanu and Ceptureanu, 2015). Each category presents different characteristics in terms of how they are designed, managed, developed and formalized.

In this respect, practice programs are driven learning/informal implementation, involving:

- Real-time advice from tutor;
- Pragmatic training based on applying knowledge more than acquiring it;
- Internal Mentoring from university teacher, who doubles the company tutor;
- External Mentoring from company's tutor.

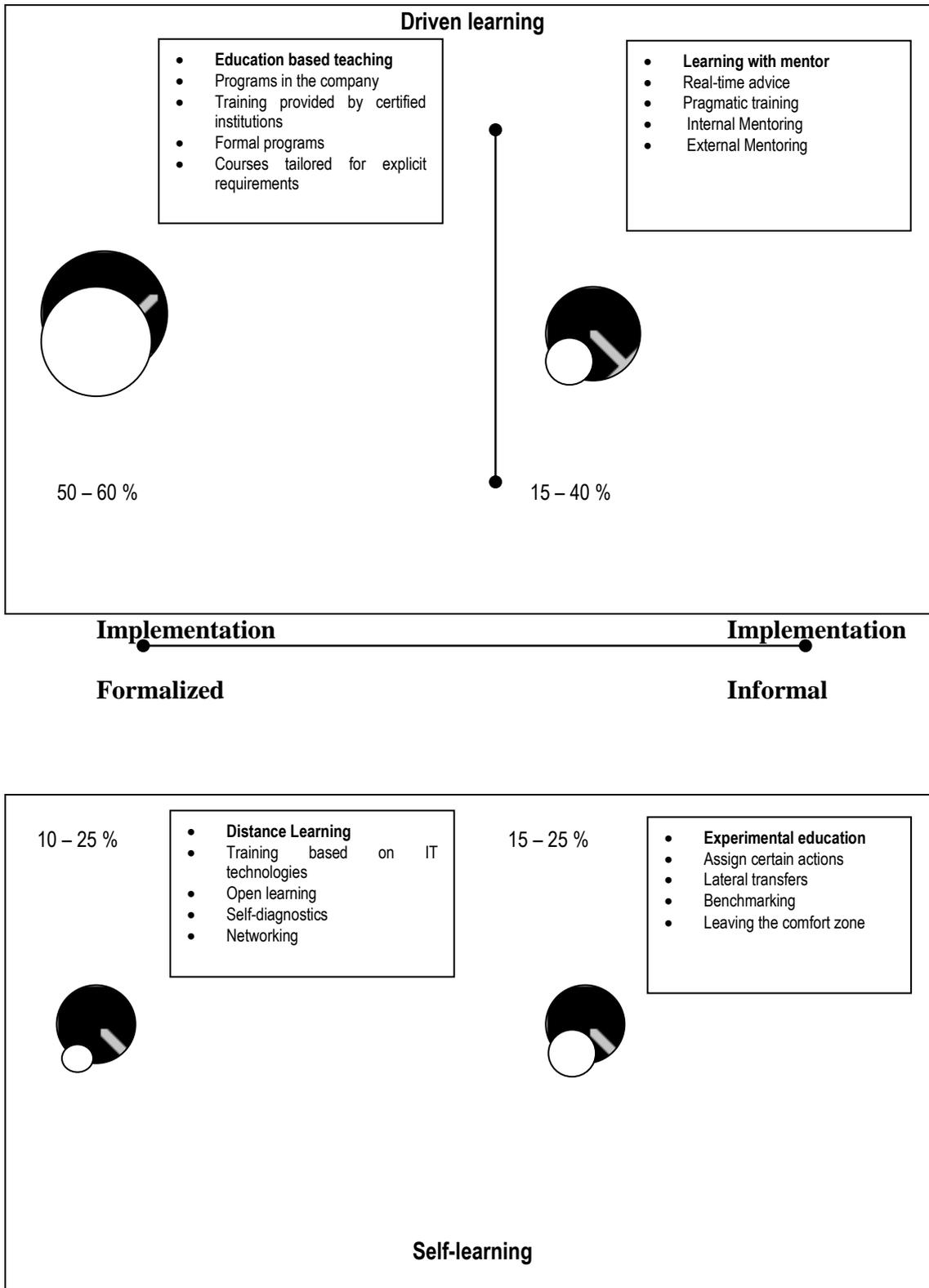


FIGURE 2. LEARNING CATEGORIES

Alain Gibb (Gibb, 1991) considers that there are two major trends in learning.

TABLE 1 LEARNING APPROACHES

No.	Classic	Modern
1	Major attention paid to the content of educational process	Major attention paid to how education is delivered
2	Led and dominated by teacher	Dominated by student
3	Expertise in "handing knowledge"	Teacher/tutor is the facilitator and fellow to student in learning
4	Emphasis on "know-what" (knowledge)	Participants generate knowledge
5	Participants receive knowledge passively	Emphasis on "know-how"
6	Rigorous, rigid learning processes	Sessions are flexible and responsive to student needs
7	Required objectives of education process	Objectives of educational process are negotiated with participants
8	Mistakes are "hunted" and removed	Mistakes are used as a source of learning
9	Emphasis on theory	Focus on practice
10	Focus on areas and / or topics	Focus on multidisciplinary and / or problems

HEIs must adapt to the modern approaches, integrating at the same time the classic approach and using only what is more suitable to labor market.

### 3. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACADEMIC PRACTICE PROGRAMS

Making an effective practice program for students involves a comprehensive and rigorous planning (Ceptureanu and Ceptureanu, 2012). In the design and implementation of this kind of programs, it is necessary to observe at least the following set of requirements (Getzel and Kregel, 1996):

- Precise identification of companies and other stakeholders and their specific requirements and needs;
- Structuring modular internship program, focusing it on "learning by doing";
- Focus on program content and specific aspects of learning opportunities for students;
- Continuous adaptation of inputs and methods of learning to context and to tutors' qualities;
- Development of practice/internship programs in a manner similar to becoming an employee in a business;
- Ensure the appropriate "sensitivity" of the program by considering the specific needs of each of the students involved, such as employment, learning, adaptability;
- Maximizing the involvement of tutors in learning process, the content and presentation of the program, including the payment of specific fees;

- Selection as tutors of people with extensive experience in the companies simultaneous with avoiding appointment as program coordinators of junior teacher lacking business experience and skills;
- Making the most of the conditions offered by the program enabling tutors to "share" with students as much information, knowledge and experiences is available (Ceptureanu and Nastase, 2005);
- Extensive use of active methods of training and participatory learning styles;
- Emphasize of specificity of company and industry in practice program, reflected in customization of internship documents and requirements for both students and companies involved;
- Development of educational materials for students, emphasizing the essential issues of the internship program etc.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In an age of increased competitiveness, students believe that an internship is critical in helping them to achieve their first entry-level position post-graduation. Universities must understand this and adapt to the labor market. Partnerships between HEIs and private companies create benefits not only for students but for all those involved (Kysor and Pierce, 2000).

For companies, it allows them to gain easy access to human resources, evaluate the students as future employees, establish a first contact with potential employees, and build a familiarity with the organization. Last but not least, it is improving internal processes: selection and recruitment of human resources; introducing newcomers in the organization or development of basic skills (such as mentoring, work organization, delegation of tasks, communication) for current employees, strengthening their participation in training sessions as tutors and carrying out tutoring in the internship program (Nicolescu et al., 2010).

For universities, practice programs allow teachers to gain a better understanding of the needs and requirements of the economic environment, promote their collaboration with specialists from various industries facilitating development of new teaching methods, a more direct link to actual labor market. Last but not least, it allows design, development and implementation of specific methodologies for practice, linked with labor market requirements and is a prerequisite for real internship, discouraging frauds by students.

For students, practice programs provide access to specialized practice, monitored by professional tutors, specialized guidance, counseling and professional support in finding a job and provide materials needed for the internships unavailable otherwise.

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