



PR1: Identification of skills, competences and knowledge requirements of tourism university students on today's highly complex and dynamic labour market

Slovakia

Structure of the research sample

Business	Number
Accommodation facility	37
Travel agency	18
Destination management organization	14
Catering facility	4
National tourism organization	1
Total	74

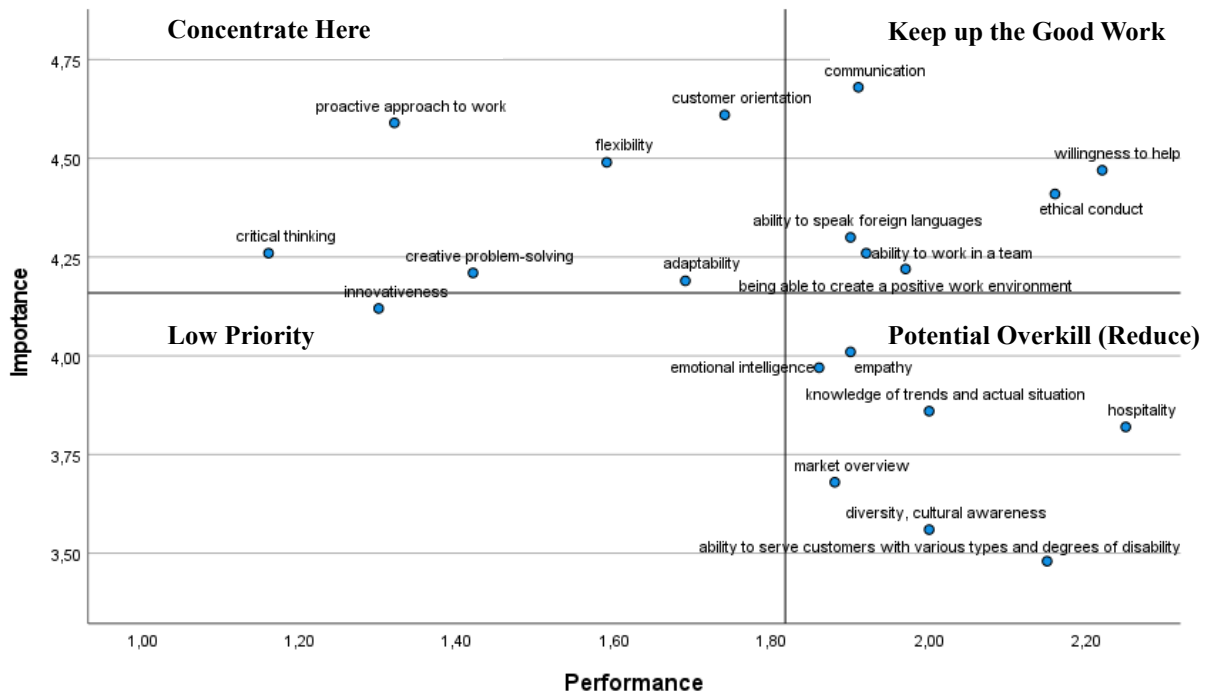
The collected data were analysed by importance-performance analysis (IPA). Moreover, the qualitative analysis was done by the Word Cruncher Analysis; in order to find out the most frequent words and word clouds were used to graphically present the outcomes.

The graphical interpretation of the importance-performance analysis (IPA) is presented in the following figures. Applying the data-centered quadrants approach, the results were analysed using the mean values of the available data. By identifying the most crucial attributes, IPA yields insights into which skills, competences and knowledge areas educators should focus.





Soft skills, competences and knowledge

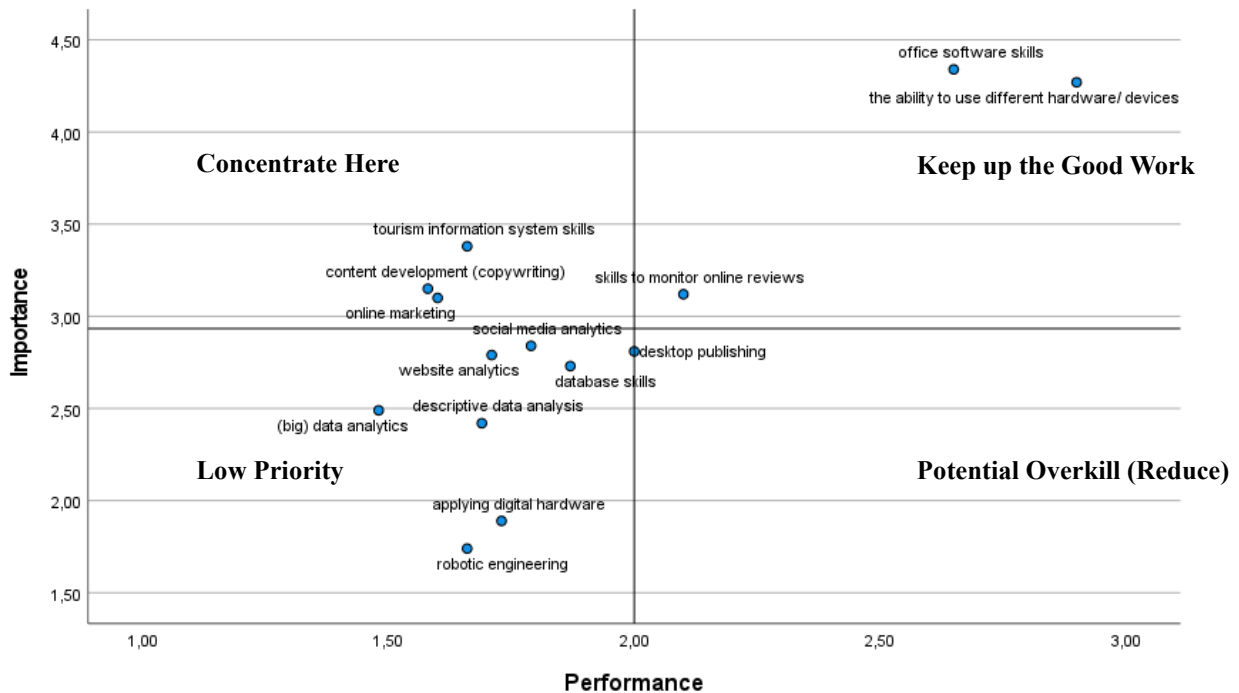


Regarding soft skills, competencies and knowledge, the most urgent are issues located in the quadrant - Concentrate here. The skills, competencies, and knowledge found in this quadrant are in high demand and hold significant importance for employers. However, the performance and proficiency of graduates in these areas are currently very low. Based on the obtained results, employers agree that critical thinking, proactive approach to work, creative problem solving, flexibility, adaptability and customer orientation should be strengthened during the teaching process. These variables also exhibit the largest gap between importance and performance, indicating that they hold significant value for employers but are the least mastered skills by students. The encouraging result is that both the importance and performance are high and thus the recommendation to keep up the good work is focused on communication, willingness to help, ethical conduct, ability to speak foreign languages, ability to work in a team and being able to create a positive work environment.





Hard skills, competences and knowledge

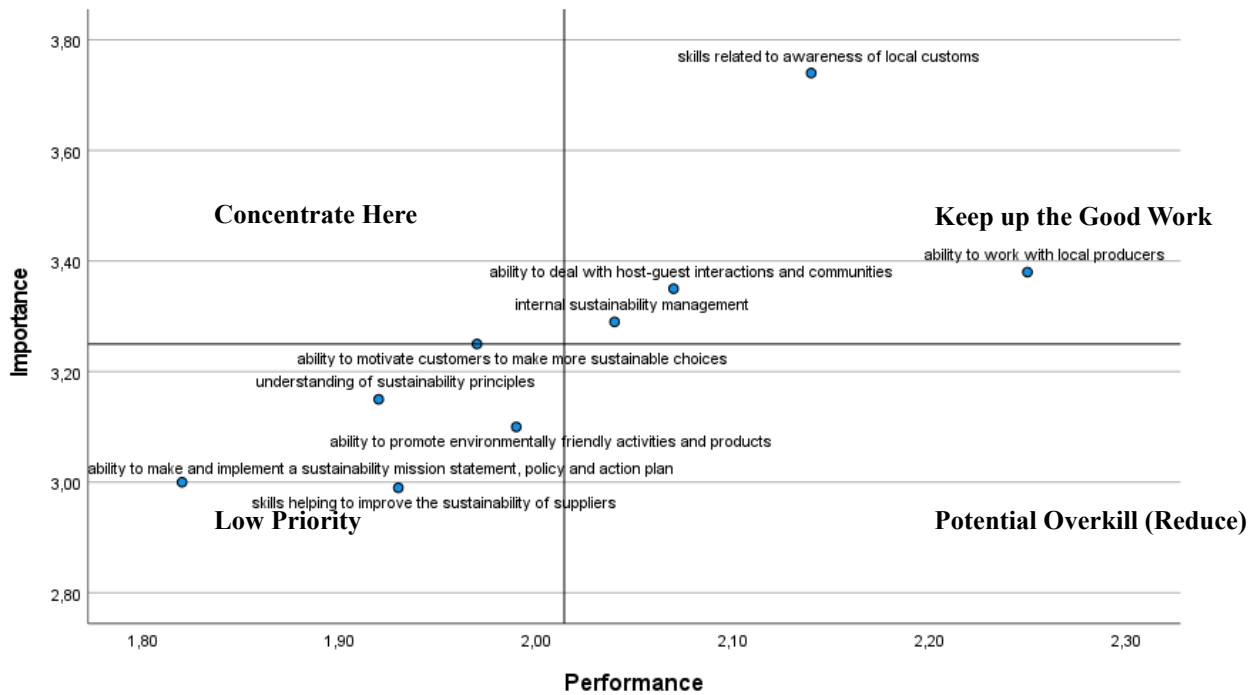


In terms of equipping students with the necessary hard skills, competencies, and knowledge for the labour market, the focus should be directed towards areas that exhibit the most significant gap between importance and performance, such as tourism information systems, content development, and online marketing. According to businesses, not so much attention is required in the domains of big data, website and social media analytics or descriptive data analytics. However, as UNWTO (2019) indicates, big data and data analytics, together with environmental related technologies, emerge as the most valued technologies to consider in term of future skills development. Therefore, in the near future these skills, competencies and knowledge will be more important. Minimal attention from the point of view of the labour market, i.e. employers is needed for robotic engineering and the application of digital hardware. Graduates are well equipped with office software skills, ability to use different hardware and devices and skills to monitor online reviews.





Sustainability skills, competences and knowledge



In regard to sustainability skills, employers currently do not place significant importance on them, as none of them fall within the concentration quadrant. Skills related to awareness of local customs emerge as the most significant for employers. The majority of variables are positioned in the low priority quadrant, indicating that employers are not yet sufficiently aware of the importance of ensuring sustainable development within the tourism industry. However, this does not imply that they should be disregarded in the teaching process. The current societal changes indicate a pressing need to direct attention towards specific opportunities for addressing the challenges associated with enhancing sustainable development.





Requirements for an “ideal” employee



Tourism businesses also expressed their requirements for an ideal employee. According to the word cloud, the most important requirement for an ideal employee is flexibility, followed by communicativeness, multilingualism, hard work, ability to learn and customer-orientation.

Characteristics of university a graduate according to the employers



The employers characterise the university graduate, as a person with high expectations, who can work with information and communication technologies, knows a foreign language, is professionally educated, but live in the virtual world, is non-communicative and without interest.





Conclusion

The obtained results indicate the need for changes in teaching content as well as teaching styles, methods and techniques in order to make a fit between the graduates' skills and the real needs of the labour market represented by the employers' expectations. The obtained results can be applied to the learning process by employing carefully selected student tasks to make a progress in the required skills. Higher education institutions should focus more intensively on developing the critical thinking, proactive approach to work and creative problem solving. Flexibility, adaptability and customer orientation should be more essential part of the learning process. As far as hard skills, there is a need to prioritize the topics of tourism information systems, content development, and online marketing. Employers increasingly value candidates who possess knowledge and commitment to sustainable practices. Additionally, incorporating case studies, leveraging best practices, and engaging students in solving specific assignments and problems from industry can greatly enhance their smart skills development.

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