

STUDENT'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN HEI-S

Ülle Kesli, Lilian Ariva
University of Tartu (ESTONIA)

Society is increasingly talking about the key competences that are essential throughout the whole life cycle and the skills to cope successfully in both social and working life. There has been several discussion on 21st century skills needed for the current and next generation. Bri Stauffer indicates in her article that 21st century skills are 12 abilities that today's students need to succeed in their careers during the Information Age (B. Stauffer 2022). The Council of the European Union has issued a document "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning" where eight key competences essential to citizens for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion are identified.

The article deals with the skills and competences acquired through extracurricular activities and takes deeper look at two activities of the University of Tartu based on problem-based learning methodologies. In both cases, online and face to face qualitative interviews were performed. This article follows an empirical case study approach and facilitates insight on the incremental development of skills within extracurricular activities in HEI-s.

First case study, **the STARTER program**, an early-stage extracurricular activity for students is aimed to develop students' entrepreneurship mindset and skills. After completion the students can apply for 3 ECTS. During the program students are supported by mentors and can participate in training sessions and workshops on different topics. The program attracts students from different disciplines and educational level who want to experience the process from idea to product/service launch. During this process the students explore the problems in community and try to develop solutions. Within the Idea Hackathon the participants from different subject areas formulate the business ideas to solve problems in society and ends up with new, often digital solution.

Second case study was **Tartu Welcome Centre**, which is a non-profit association operating in the public interest and their goal is to help new immigrants arriving in Tartu and Southern Estonia to adapt smoothly and settle into Estonian society by providing different services for newcomers. This case study is taking deeper look at organisation of cultural and networking events for newcomers where the students are mainly involved. The students apply to the programme on voluntary bases. The students are fully responsible for preparation, organisation and delivering different events under the supervision of staff member. At the end of semester, they can apply for 6 ECTS for the apprenticeship subject.

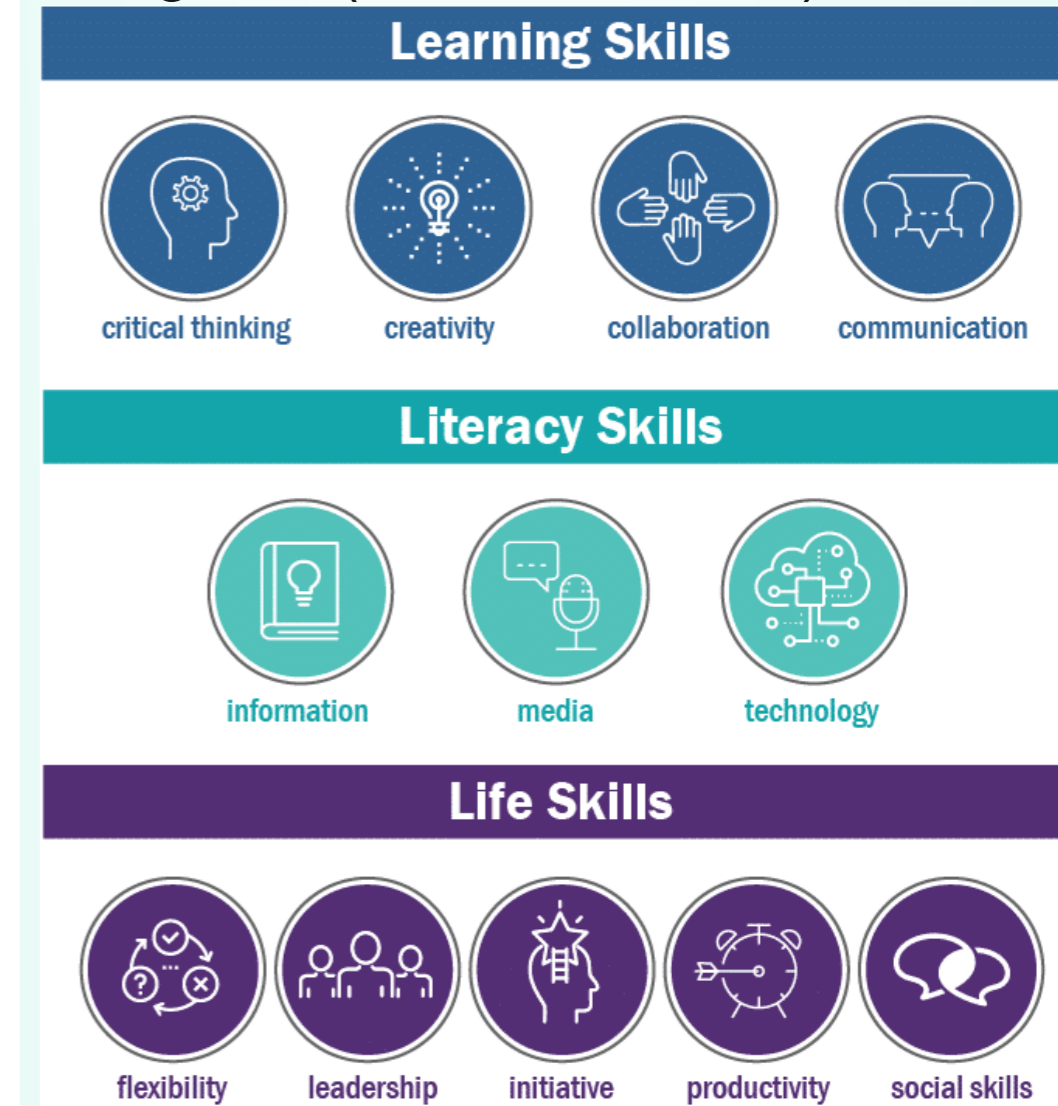
Key competences for LLL are described as a combination of knowledge, composed of the (1) concepts, facts and figures, the ideas and theories which are already established, and support the understanding of a certain area or subject, (2) skills, which are defined as the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results, and (3) attitudes, which describe the disposition and mindset to act or react to ideas, persons or situations (European Union 2018). The key competences are developed throughout life. Next to the school environment, the development of competencies takes place also in communicating with peers and friends, within family, at workplace, in different networks and communities. While formal education in HEI-s pays traditionally more attention to the development of knowledge in certain subject areas, the extracurricular studies as a form of informal learning supports better the development of different skills as it can be concluded from the case studies. While interviewed students easily pointed out several developed skills the attitudes were rarely mentioned. Only few were mentioned by couple of students. For example, responsibility to others, green mindset and a more open attitude towards career choices. Also, the supervisors did not emphasise the change of attitudes as one of the possible goals in extracurricular activities. There is definitely room for improvement in the formulation of teaching goals regarding attitudes.



Mentioned keywords in students' interviews related to eight LLL competences

LLL KEY COMPETENCE	COMPETENCY -RELATED KEYWORD
LITERACY COMPETENCE	terminology, oral and written communication, writing texts
MULTILINGUAL COMPETENCE	communication with foreigners and foreign students, English and Estonian language
MATHEMATICAL COMPETENCE AND COMPETENCE IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING	calculating budget, analysing statistical data, composing graphs
DIGITAL COMPETENCE	using different digital devices, tools and communication platforms and software, programming, searching for information and background knowledge, critical approach to digital information, data and resources
PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND LEARNING TO LEARN COMPETENCE	personal skills and abilities, patterns of behaviour, career choices, managing stress, problem solving, collaboration, self-motivation
CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCE	community engagement, civic skills, sustainable development, use of different media to reach different audiences, role of social media, cultural diversity, intercultural communication
ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETENCE	planning, management, collaboration, team work, negotiations, calculation of resources, decision making
CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION COMPETENCE	customs and traditions of different nationalities

In order to succeed in careers during the Information Age the student need so called **21st century skills** or 12 abilities which are divided into 3 categories (B. Stauffer 2022):



Based on case studies descriptions and interviews with both supervisors and students can be concluded that all mentioned skills are important or very important in both extracurricular activities and were developed more or less in both activities.

Analysis of interviews shows clearly that **extracurricular activities play an important role in development of skills and competences** and could be used more in university studies to develop skills and competences relevant to learners' lives and careers.

All the students interviewed suggested that **this kind of hands on activity should be mandatory for all students**. They also thought that it is essential to show that university and students can help community and society as well as it is beneficial if universities, public sector and companies work together for solving problems. Students also pointed out that it is important that policy makers recognize that practical studies are more beneficial and develop many different skills even if this might be more expensive and more difficult to arrange.

In the process of supervising students and helping them to turn their ideas into reality the supervisors need to be open, curious and proactive as well as constantly informed of new developments and digital tools. This means that **developing knowledge and skills is a daily activity for university professors**.