RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enhancing Cultural Competence through University-Business Collaboration: The Case of the Caspian Region

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ABSTRACT

The accelerating pace of globalization and digital transformation presents significant challenges and opportunities for higher education institutions, particularly in regions undergoing rapid economic and educational transformations such as the Caspian area. This study examines the implementation of innovative educational methodologies within the Erasmus PICASP Project, specifically focusing on the integration of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Practice Enterprises (PE) to enhance university-business collaboration in the Caspian area. By leveraging MOOCs for scalable, flexible learning and PEs for hands-on business management experience, the project fosters critical skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability. There are covered the project's framework, educational approaches, and the potential impacts of these methods on the education landscape management, highlighting the shift towards multidisciplinary learning environments that integrate digital technologies. The project reported improved student engagement, enhanced practical skills, and increased employability of graduates. The findings highlight the importance of integrating local contexts with global educational standards to enhance employability and competitiveness, particularly in regions with diverse economic and educational landscapes. Furthermore, future research can contribute to the ongoing development and refinement of educational and cultural tools, ensuring they remain effective and relevant in an ever-evolving global landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of globalization and digital transformation poses significant challenges and opportunities for higher education institutions worldwide. Central to these challenges is the need for universities to effectively bridge the gap between academic theories and practical applications, particularly in the context of university-business collaborations. This is especially pertinent in regions undergoing rapid economic and educational transformations, such as the Caspian area. The PICASP Project, a collaborative initiative between the University of Bologna and the University of International Business in Almaty, Kazakhstan, along with other partners, seeks to address these challenges by integrating innovative educational tools like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Practice Enterprises (PEs).

The project builds on a longstanding relationship that began in 2005 with efforts to introduce the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in Kazakhstan, underpinning a broader commitment to enhancing educational standards and facilitating international cooperation. The integration of MOOCs and PEs represents a further evolution of this commitment, aiming to modernize educational methodologies and enhance students' practical skills and cultural competencies within a framework of international collaboration. Globalization and digital transformation have fundamentally altered the landscape of higher education, necessitating new approaches to learning and teaching. As industries evolve and become more interconnected, there is an increasing demand for graduates who possess theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and cultural competencies that can be applied in real-world settings. This demand is particularly acute in the Caspian region, where rapid economic growth and diversification efforts are underway.

The dissemination of experience, particularly concerning the ongoing PICASP Project, places PE and MOOCs in two different perspectives. On the one hand, PEs are subject to the concentration of teaching in a classroom with direct and personal relationships between the teaching staff and learners. On the other hand, in Tempus and Erasmus projects where the beneficiary partners, without any experience in PE, have locations mainly distributed over long distances, the use of MOOCs can contribute to the rapid preparation of the PE Teaching Staff. MOOCs and PEs offer a promising solution to these challenges. MOOCs provide accessible, flexible, and scalable learning opportunities, allowing students to engage with high-quality educational content from anywhere in the world. This is particularly beneficial in regions where traditional educational resources may be limited or where institutions are geographically dispersed. Practice Enterprises, on the other hand, create simulated business environments where students can gain hands-on experience in managing real-world business operations. This experiential learning model helps bridge the gap between academic theories and practical applications, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and cultural competency skills.

The PICASP Project also focuses on the importance of integrating local contexts with global educational standards. Recognizing the Caspian region's unique cultural, economic, and educational landscapes, the project tailors its approach to ensure relevance and applicability. This involves customizing MOOCs and PEs to address local industry needs while adhering to internationally recognized educational standards. Such an approach not only enhances the employability of graduates in the local job market but also prepares them to compete and collaborate on a global scale. The need for such innovation in educational practices is underscored by the evolving demands of the global labor market, which increasingly values the ability to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and economic

conditions. This is particularly critical in the Caspian region, where economic diversification efforts are intensifying in response to the global shift towards sustainable development and knowledge-based economies. By enhancing the practical skills and cultural competencies of students and fostering closer university-business collaborations, the PICASP Project aims to prepare graduates who are well-equipped to meet the challenges of the modern workforce.

However, applying MOOCs and PEs in this context also presents several challenges. These include the need to ensure the quality and relevance of the courses offered, the integration of these tools into existing educational frameworks, and the engagement of local and international businesses in the educational process. Ensuring the quality and relevance of MOOCs and PEs requires close collaboration with industry experts to design curricula that reflect current market needs and trends. Additionally, integrating these tools into existing educational frameworks necessitates careful planning and coordination with academic institutions and regulatory bodies. Another significant challenge is navigating varying levels of infrastructure and digital literacy among partner institutions and their respective student bodies. In regions where access to reliable internet and modern technology may be limited, innovative solutions are needed to ensure that all students can benefit from MOOCs and PEs. This may include investments in technological infrastructure and training programs to enhance digital literacy among students and faculty.

The PICASP Project emphasizes the concept of lifelong learning and continuous improvement, which are crucial in today's fast-paced and ever-changing world. The project encourages students, faculty, and industry partners to remain adaptable and resilient by instilling a culture of continuous learning and professional development. This commitment to ongoing education ensures that individuals can continuously update their skills and knowledge, keeping pace with technological advancements and industry trends.

Furthermore, the project aims to create a sustainable model for educational innovation that can be adapted and expanded upon in the future, fostering a legacy of excellence in higher education.

This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of how the PICASP Project addresses these challenges through the innovative use of MOOCs and PEs. It also examines the impact of these educational tools on students' preparedness for the workforce, the enhancement of university-business collaborations, and the broader implications for management education in the region. The following sections will delve deeper into the project's methodology, implementation, results, and strategic implications for all stakeholders involved. Through this comprehensive approach, the PICASP Project aims to contribute to the ongoing evolution of higher education in the Caspian region, fostering a new generation of skilled and adaptable professionals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Practice Enterprises (PEs) in higher education represents a significant shift in pedagogical approaches to foster industry-relevant student skills (Liyanagunawardena et al., 2013). The literature indicates that MOOCs provide accessible, flexible, and diverse learning opportunities, which are crucial for lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Meanwhile, PEs offer simulated real-world business environments that enhance practical skills and entrepreneurial capabilities (Ratten, 2014).

The effectiveness of MOOCs in university-business collaboration is well-documented. MOOCs facilitate a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, making them essential to modern education strategies, especially in rapidly developing regions (Welsh & Dragusin, 2013). They are particularly effective in delivering content that aligns with the needs of local and global

businesses, thereby enhancing student employability (Tan et al., 2024).

On the other hand, PEs simulate the dynamics of natural business environments, offering students hands-on experience in managing operations, finance, marketing, and human resources within a controlled setting. This experiential learning model reinforces theoretical knowledge and cultivates critical soft skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and decision-making (Hauptman & Cohen, 2011). However, integrating these innovative educational tools into existing curricula poses challenges, including technological requirements, the need for skilled instructors, and alignment with academic standards (Garrison et al., 2010). Moreover, while MOOCs and PEs offer substantial benefits, their impact varies significantly based on the context of their implementation, suggesting the need for careful planning and adaptation to local conditions (Bali, 2014).

The literature also suggests a growing trend towards multidisciplinary approaches in higher education, which blend digital technologies with traditional learning to create more dynamic, engaging, and practical educational experiences (Clark, 2013). As such, the collaboration between universities and businesses through projects like PICASP enhances educational outcomes and contributes to regional economic development, aligning educational objectives with the strategic goals of local industries (Porter & Kramer, 2019).

Incorporating Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Practice Enterprises (PEs) into higher education frameworks, particularly in the context of university-business collaboration, can be further contextualized by examining the broader discourse on education reforms and methodology innovations in transition economies and managerial development. Key contributions in the literature provide an essential foundation for understanding these dynamics.

Bianchi and Tampieri's works have been instrumental in examining the transition of educational systems, mainly through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which aims to harmonize educational standards across Europe. Their publications, including how to manage ECTS with training aids for teachers (Bianchi & Tampieri, 2007a) and the networking approach to ECTS in Kazakhstan (Bianchi et al., 2007), highlight the critical role of adaptive educational methodologies in fostering international collaboration and enhancing educational quality in transition countries.

Further, Bianchi and Tampieri (2005) discuss lifelong learning and managerial development in transition countries, emphasizing the necessity of continuous education in adapting to global economic and managerial trends. This perspective is vital in understanding the backdrop against which MOOCs and PEs are implemented, suggesting that these tools could serve as crucial components in the evolving landscape of educational reform aimed at enhancing managerial competencies and practical skills.

The European Commission's report on pilot courses and new didactics for teacher training in cultural tourism (2020) also contributes to this discussion by providing a contemporary example of how innovative educational methodologies are being deployed specifically in Caspian. This initiative underscores the relevance of tailored educational tools that meet specific regional developmental needs.

In a critical examination of traditional business education, Martin (2018) advocates for fundamentally rethinking business schools, suggesting a shift towards more integrated and practical learning approaches such as those provided by MOOCs and PEs. This critique aligns with the broader debates on the efficacy of traditional educational models in meeting the challenges of modern business environments.

Rowthorn and Ramaswamy (1997) discuss the broader economic shifts such as deindustrialization, which further contextualizes the need for educational systems to adapt to rapidly changing economic landscapes. This economic backdrop is crucial for understanding the pressures on educational

systems to evolve and cater to new economic realities.

The works of Bianchi (2024) on the eclectic studies in business economics and Poettinger's (2021) examination of historical judgment on post-war economic policies introduce a nuanced understanding of how historical and economic contexts influence educational needs and responses. Bianchi's exploration of eclecticism in Italian business studies (Bianchi, 2023) particularly highlights the ongoing evolution of educational paradigms in response to changing societal and economic demands.

Additionally, the simulated enterprise model discussed by AAVV (2003-2008) in their analysis of the Forlì business simulation lab and PERTING Srl's activities provides a practical example of how theoretical concepts can be effectively integrated into real-world applications, enhancing both learning outcomes and student preparedness for professional challenges.

Together, these sources weave a complex narrative on the evolution of educational methodologies, underlining the necessity for innovative approaches like MOOCs and PEs in addressing contemporary challenges in education and workforce preparation in a globalized economy. These references support the need for such innovations and provide a rich context for their evaluation and potential impact.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology of the PICASP Project incorporates a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the integration and effectiveness of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Practice Enterprises (PEs) in fostering university-business collaboration for the development of the Caspian area. This research design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the educational interventions' quantitative outcomes and qualitative insights.

The quantitative aspect of the study involves collecting data from various sources, including enrollment numbers, completion rates, and performance metrics from MOOCs, as well as productivity and competency assessments within the Practice Enterprises. This data is gathered using the universities' digital learning management systems, which systematically track user progress and engagement metrics. Pre- and post-intervention assessments are conducted to measure the knowledge and skills of students participating in the programs. These assessments are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of MOOCs and PEs in enhancing students' managerial and entrepreneurial capabilities.

Also, in this case, it was essential, for the fulfillment of the project, the preparation of The Teaching Staff (Teachers, Tutors, and Menthors) throughout MOOCs, with particular attention to the coaching activity having the purpose of creating a real team and an adequate network among the staff. This attitude was replied to the project management applied to PE Courses.

The teacher's primary role is to recruit learners, focus the classroom on PE targets, coordinate teaching staff, evaluate results, and motivate learners. Teachers provide overarching academic guidance and ensure the alignment of PE activities with educational goals. Tutor: Tutors support Teachers and Mentors in their relationships with students, ensuring continuity of learners' engagement with PE targets. They assist in facilitating the learning process and provide additional academic support to help students achieve their goals. Mentor: Mentors bring practical experience to the PE activities, supervise learners' activities within the PE, and ensure the feasibility of the chosen targets and sustainability of PE strategies. They offer real-world insights and professional guidance to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The positions involved in PE can be summarized as Figure 1 where the main tasks required are also indicated.

Qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participants. These interviews aim to gather in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and the perceived value of the educational tools used in the project.
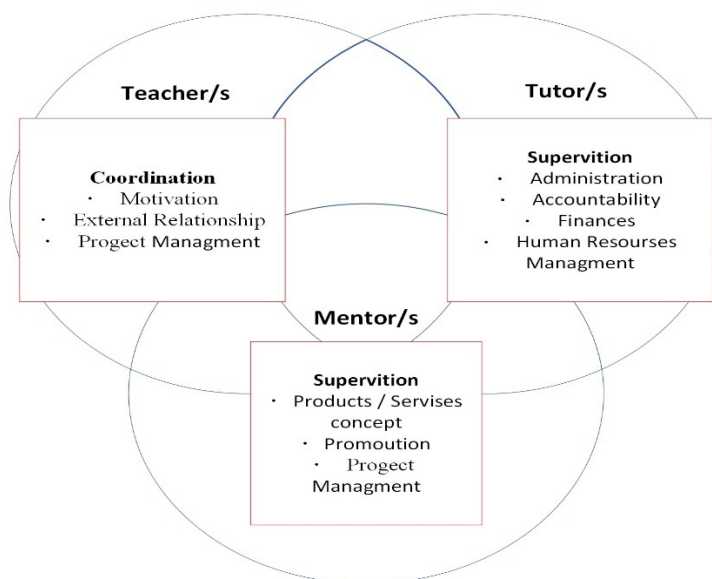
FIGURE 1. Central positions involved in the learning approach by Practice Enterprise
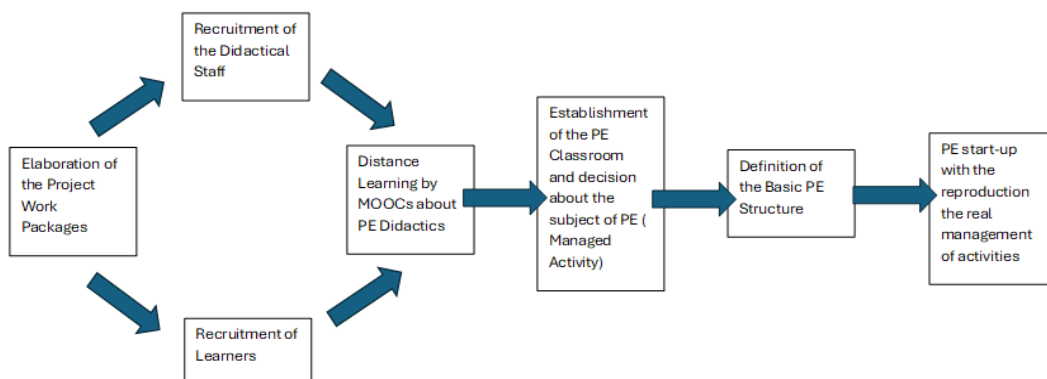
Note: compiled by authors

Focus groups help explore the collective impact of the interventions on teamwork, problem-solving skills, and readiness for the labor market. Additionally, case studies of selected students and businesses are developed to document detailed stories of transformation and success.

This elects MOOCs as an appropriate tool for preparing the teaching staff. This does not mean that the experience in the PE classroom field is not helpful for the teaching staff. On the contrary, with the use of MOOCs, the preparation of the Teaching staff can be concentrated in the shortest possible time they previously received preparatory training by MOOCs.

The procedure followed in project activities is summarized in Figure 2, which includes the phases of recruitment and teaching activities.

FIGURE 2. Procedure for the Preparation of the Implementation Project with the use of PE and MOOCs

Note: compiled by authors

The process encompasses several critical objectives to implement the Practice Enterprise (PE) framework effectively. Initially, the recruitment of qualified teaching staff is essential to ensure the delivery of high-quality education and guidance. Subsequently, establishing the PE location, which serves as the classroom, is crucial for providing a conducive learning environment. Following this, the recruitment of learners, or students, is undertaken to engage participants who will benefit from the PE experience. An inaugural meeting with these students is then conducted to introduce the program and set expectations. During this meeting, the basic structure of the PE is defined through the development of an organizational chart. This chart outlines the various roles and responsibilities within the PE, allowing for the unambiguous assignment of tasks and duties to each learner, thereby facilitating an organized and efficient operational framework. Fundamental to the PE learning process is the use of new technologies (virtual reality, augmented reality, and distance learning. Seminars, tutorials, work groups) that must be applied intensively with the support of adequate equipment in dedicated classrooms. It is also essential that in the classroom if used by several courses, there is a room or container in which to store the PE material, which can only be accessed by the Teaching Staff.

The methodology also details the specific implementation processes of MOOCs and PEs. MOOCs are designed in collaboration with industry experts to ensure relevance to current business needs and are delivered via a platform that supports interactive learning, such as quizzes, peer interactions, and real-time feedback. The Practice Enterprises are set up to simulate real-world business environments within the universities, allowing students to run virtual companies with real-world business processes and decision-making.

Quantitative data is analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and outcomes related to the effectiveness of the educational interventions. This includes using descriptive statistics to summarize data and inferential statistics to test hypotheses about the impact of MOOCs and PEs on student learning outcomes. Qualitative data analysis involves thematic analysis to extract common themes from the interviews and focus groups, providing nuanced insights into participants' subjective experiences.

All research activities comply with ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring the confidentiality of participant data, and using data solely for the purposes of this research. The project's methodology is reviewed and approved by the institutional review boards of the participating universities.

This mixed-methods approach is designed to provide a robust analysis of the educational interventions, offering both breadth and depth in understanding how MOOCs and PEs can enhance university-business collaboration and improve educational outcomes in the Caspian area. Through this methodology, the project aims to generate actionable insights that can inform future educational practices and policies in similar contexts.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Given that the primary themes of the PICASP Project revolve around Cultural Heritage and Related Tourism Activities, the Practice Enterprise (PE) philosophy is geared toward traditional initiatives that promote virtuous behavior among citizens in support of Cultural Heritage. This philosophy emphasizes fostering an understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage through humanities education, encouraging and supporting cultural initiatives, advocating for and contributing to the development and enforcement of legislation against illegal activities and vandalism in cultural heritage, supporting and collaborating with cultural associations, and organizing and participating in fundraising efforts to secure financial resources necessary for the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage sites and activities. This approach ensures a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy to safeguard and promote cultural

heritage within the context of the PICASP Project.

Another condition for the initiative's success is the creation of an accounting information system that must be constantly updated by students in charge of the administrative office. The following table outlines the Practice Enterprises (PEs) created by UIB PE Classrooms as part of the PICASP Project (2020-2024). Each PE is associated with specific roles, including Teachers, Tutors, and Mentors, who play distinct and crucial roles in guiding students through practical, real-world business scenarios. As it concerns UIB the Practice Enterprise Classrooms were structured as follows (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Practice Enterprises created by UIB PE Classrooms in the PICASP Project (2020-2024)

| Enterprise	Description	Teacher	Tutor	Mentor
Unitour	Research into the tourism and recreational potential of Kazakhstan and global destinations. Creation and organization of ethnic, cultural, recreational, and gastronomic tours.	Nussupova Larissa, Head of the UIB Department of Tourism and Hospitality	Petriscsheva Nina, UIB Department of Tourism and Hospitality	Aznazarov Alexandr, Discover Almaty Executive Director
Jas qanat	Organization of activities for the tour operator Jas Qanat, focusing on developing and providing tourist packages.	Sadykova Zhanar, Head of the UIB Department of Business	Nussupova Larissa, Head of the UIB Department of Tourism and Hospitality	Aznazarov Alexandr, Discover Almaty Executive Director
Mystical Kazakhstan	Exploration of abandoned places in Kazakhstan.	Nussupova Larissa, Head of the UIB Department of Tourism and Hospitality	Ella Pak, Senior Lecturer, UIB Management Department	Saburzhan Saidullayev, SM Travel Directo

Note: compiled by authors

The table illustrates the structure and focus of the Practice Enterprises (PEs) established within the PICASP Project, detailing the specific educational and managerial roles involved. These PEs—UNITOUR, JAS QANAT, and MYSTICAL KAZAKHSTAN— each address distinct aspects of the tourism industry, providing students with opportunities to engage in practical, real-world business activities. UNITOUR focuses on researching and promoting the tourism potential of Kazakhstan and international destinations, with students involved in creating and organizing diverse tour packages. JAS QANAT emphasizes the development and provision of tourist packages by the tour operator, offering students hands-on experience in managing tour operations. MYSTICAL KAZAKHSTAN explores niche tourism markets by promoting tours to abandoned places in Kazakhstan, thus providing unique educational insights.

The basic structure of a PE can be summarized in Figure 3, which represents the structure of PERTING, the PE created in 2003 by the Faculty of Economics of the Forlì Campus of the University of Bologna.

UNITOUR focuses on researching and promoting the tourism potential of Kazakhstan and international destinations. Students involved in this enterprise participate in the creation and organization of diverse tour packages encompassing ethnic, cultural, recreational, and gastronomic experiences.
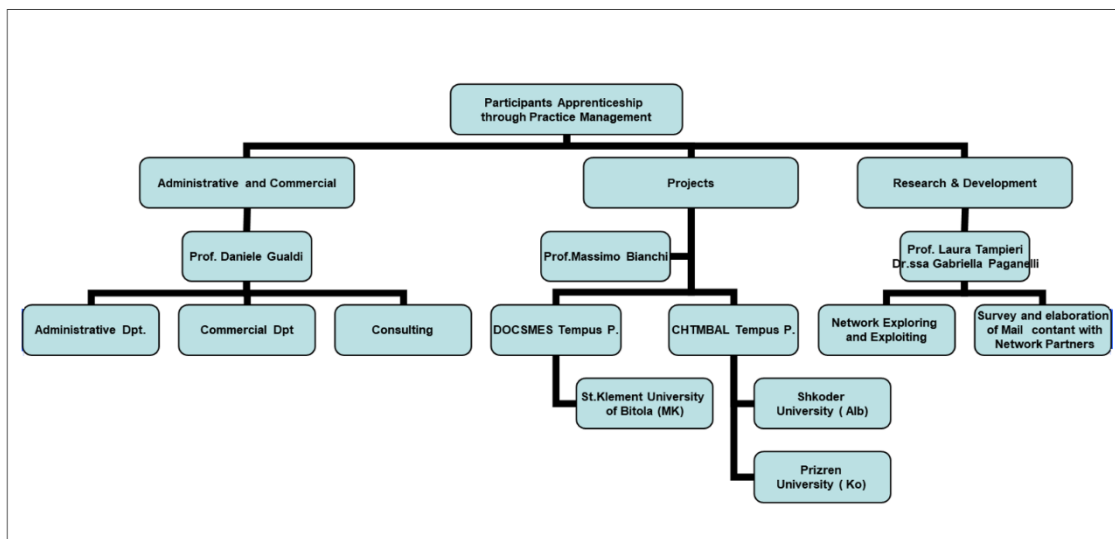
FIGURE 3. PERTING PE in 2003

Note: compiled by authors

The diagram effectively captures the interconnected roles and departments within the PERTING PE, showcasing a well-structured approach to integrating practical management training with academic and professional development. This structure allows students to gain hands-on experience in a simulated business environment, preparing them for real-world challenges in their future careers. Moreover, the collaborative nature of PORTING PE fosters teamwork and communication skills, as students must work together to solve problems, make strategic decisions, and achieve common goals. This alignment between theory and practice is crucial in developing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are highly valued in any professional setting. Overall, the PERTING PE structure provides a robust platform for students to transition smoothly from academic settings to professional environments.

The necessary basic information is shown in Table 2 for the creation of new courses.

TABLE 2. The Basic Course Information Sheet for Practice Enterprise

No	What Practice Enterprise new courses will the PICASP project implement in your HEI?
1	For each course, please state:
2	Title
3	Level of study
4	List of subjects and credits for each of them
5	Estimated date of accreditation and accreditation body
6	Number of students to be accepted in the first year/ second year
7	Number of teaching staff to be trained
8	Internship /placements (if applicable)
9	What is the list of equipment to be purchased for this course, and for what purpose? (if applicable)
10	Date of submission to intra-university organs
11	Date of accreditation
12	Date of implementation (up and running)

Note: compiled by authors

For the materials produced, the primary activities to be undertaken by each participant are outlined with specific objectives. Firstly, students must identify the training process by rotating within various departments. This involves carrying out predefined tasks at each workplace, with the duration of their stay in each department contingent on achieving set objectives. This rotation aims to comprehensively understand the operational dynamics across different facets of the simulated company. Additionally, the program is designed to develop critical behavioral skills within the simulated enterprise and in interactions with other domestic and international companies. Participants are expected to provide adequate and consistent responses to the needs of real customers and suppliers, thereby enhancing their practical business acumen.

From the beginning, the Simulated Enterprise of Bologna, called PERTING SRL, has been involved in the planning and implementation of International Projects, of which those implemented in the last decade are listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Projects in which Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise has been applied

Project Acronym	Project Subject	Project Grant Holder	Countries Involved	Period	Distance Learning
DOCSMES	TEMPUS - Regional Joint Doctoral Programme in Entrepreneurship and SME Management for Western Balkan Countries	University of Bologna	Albania, Italy, Kosovo, Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Spain	2010-2014	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise
CHTMBAL	TEMPUS - Network for Post Graduate Master in Cultural Heritage and Tourism Management in Balkan Countries	Gabriele D'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara (IT)	Italy, Poland, Kosovo, Albania, Spain	2014-2016	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise
RESINT	ERASMUS - Collaborative Reformation of Curricula on Resilience Management with Intelligent Systems in Open Source and Augmented Reality	Unibo Campus Forlì (IT)	Italy, Lithuania, Spain, United Kingdom	2013-2015	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise
BECK	ERASMUS - Integrating Education with Consumer Behavior Relevant to Energy Efficiency and Climate Change at the Universities of Russia, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh	Vilnius Gedeminias Technical University Vilnius (LT)	Bangladesh, Italy, Lithuania, Russia, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom	2019-2022	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise - MOOCs

HEIPNET	ERASMUS+ - Inclusion of Innovative Work-Based Learning and Business Partnerships in HEI Curricula Development	University of Pavia (IT)	Austria, Germany, Italy, Lithuania	2020-2022	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise - MOOCs
PICASP	ERASMUS+ - Pilot Courses and New Didactics for Teachers Training in Cultural Tourism for the Development of the Caspian Area	University of Chieti (IT)	Azerbaijan, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Poland, Russia	2021-2023	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise - MOOCs
AGENDA	Behavioural Change for the Green Deal	Vilnius Gedeminas Technical University (VILNIUS TECH): Lithuania	Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Italy, Sri Lanka, Thailand	Submitted in 2013	Simulimpresa/Practice Enterprise - MOOCs

Note: compiled by authors

A crucial aspect of the training involves learning to manage specific roles through active participation. This experiential learning process aims to increase the motivational base of participants by fostering a cooperative climate. The perception of achievable work results, visibility of objectives and goals, and an apparent coherence between goals and methods are emphasized to enhance the learning experience. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to take daily responsibility for resolving real-world problems that may arise from customer or supplier interactions, or logistical issues such as postal delays. Lastly, the program underscores the importance of teamwork. Participants must collaborate effectively with their peers, learning to work in groups and contribute to collective goals. This collaborative approach facilitates the sharing of knowledge and skills and strengthens the participants' ability to function as part of a cohesive team. To be mentioned, with the position of the Grant Holder of the project PICASP, represented by the University of Chieti-Pescara, is the contribution of Europen-Pen, which manages the international network of Practice Enterprises, enrolled in the project as an Associate Partner with the Italian ICA, Central Institute of Archaeology.

This will be induced by the training and updating of teachers, tutors, and mentors from the entrepreneurial and managerial sectors to apply new didactical technologies such as Practice Enterprise (PE) and Massive Open Line Courses (MOOCs). To develop the didactical methodology of courses by multidisciplinary MOOC modules in Practice Management by Practice Enterprise for the preparation of teaching staff in condition to promote and manage courses oriented to the start-up of SMEs and to the modernization of the existing ones.

The Practice Enterprise teaching approach, translated into Italian as Simulimpresa, was introduced for the first time in Italy, in University Courses in 2002 at the Forlì Campus of the University of Bologna. It must be said that in these projects, although PICASP and AGENDA, the MOOCS approach was not applied. It was experimented in PICASP and AGENDA to prepare Teaching Staff and Mentors. These were most of the activities carried out for the PICASP Project in the UIB together with the Consortium of Partners, as represented in Table 4.

TABLE 4. PICASP Consortium Partners

No.	Country	Organization	Partners	
1	ITALY	University of Chieti Pescara UDA (Grant Holder)	UDA	EUROPEAN PARTNERS
2	ITALY	SERINAR	SERINAR	
3	POLAND	Universytet Warszawski	OBA	
4	LITHUANIA	Vilnius Gedeminias Technical University	VGTU	BENEFICIARY PARTNERS
5	KAZAKHSTAN	Caspian State University of Technologies and Engineering Named After Sh. Yessenov	CSUTE	
6	KAZAKHSTAN	University of International Business	UIB	
7	AZERBAIJAN	Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University	ATMU	
8	AZERBAIJAN	Khazar University Baku	KHAZAR	
9	AZERBAIJAN	MIRAS Association	MIRAS	
Ass. 1	LITHUANIA	JSC GET WEB	GetWeb	ASSOCIATE PARTNERS
Ass. 2	GERMANY	Europen- PEN	Europen	
Ass. 3	ITALIA	Central Institute for Archaeology	ICA	

Note: compiled by authors

The European Partners of PICASP participated in the project by sharing their know-how concerning the didactical innovation with a focus on Practice Enterprise and the collaboration of universities with the business environment. The beneficiary partners have received the support and expertise of European Partners. The Associate Partners do not have a budget but provide support and expertise in their specialized field of activities, for Europen, the Practice Enterprise, and ICA, the Cultural Heritage. The distribution of responsibilities among Work Packages (WPs) distinguishes roles between WP Responsible and WP Support according to the distribution in Table 5.

TABLE 5. PICASP Distribution of Work Packages

No.	Country	Institution	Acronym	WP Nr.	Type of WP	Role
1	Italy	University of Chieti Pescara UDA (Grant Holder)	UDA	WP5	Management	European Partners
2	Italy	SERINAR	SERINAR	WP4	Dissemination and Exploitation	European Partners
3	Poland	Universytet Warszawski	OBA	WP1	Preparation	European Partners
4	Lithuania	Vilnius Gedeminias Technical University	VGTU	WP2	Development	European Partners
5	Kazakhstan	Caspian State University of Technologies and Engineering Named After Sh. Yessenov	CSUTE	WP3	Quality Plan	Beneficiary Partners

6	Kazakhstan	University of International Business	UIB	WP3	Quality Plan	Beneficiary Partners
7	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University	ATMU	WP1	Preparation	Beneficiary Partners
8	Azerbaijan	Khazar University Baku	KHAZAR	WP2	Development	Beneficiary Partners
9	Azerbaijan	MIRAS Association	MIRAS	WP4	Dissemination and Exploitation	Beneficiary Partners
Ass. 1	Lithuania	JSC GET WEB	GetWeb	-	Associate Partners	Associate Partners
Ass. 2	Germany	Europen-PEN	Europen	-	Associate Partners	Associate Partners
Ass. 3	Italy	Central Institute for Archaeology	ICA	-	Associate Partners	Associate Partners
Ass. 1	Lithuania	JSC GET WEB	GetWeb	-	Associate Partners	Associate Partners

Note: compiled by authors

Table 5 delineates the distribution of work packages (WPs) among the consortium partners of the PICASP project, categorized by country, institution, acronym, WP number, type of WP, and role within the project. This comprehensive distribution underscores the collaborative framework and delineates each partner's specific responsibilities and contributions. The consortium is divided into three main categories: European Partners, Beneficiary Partners, and Associate Partners. European Partners, comprising institutions from Italy, Poland, and Lithuania, are primarily responsible for the project's overarching management and strategic development. The University of Chieti Pescara (UDA), serving as the grant holder, leads WP5, which is focused on management, while SERINAR is responsible for WP4, which pertains to dissemination and exploitation. Universytet Warszawski and Vilnius Gedeminias Technical University (VGTU) are tasked with WP1 (Preparation) and WP2 (Development), respectively.

Beneficiary Partners, including institutions from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, play a crucial role in implementing the project's innovations and ensuring quality outcomes. The Caspian State University of Technologies and Engineering, named After Sh. Yessenov (CSUTE) and the University of International

Business (UIB) are both responsible for WP3, which involves the quality plan. Azerbaijan's involvement is marked by the Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University (ATMU) handling WP1 (Preparation), Khazar University Baku managing WP2 (Development), and the MIRAS Association taking charge of WP4 (Dissemination and Exploitation). Although not assigned specific work packages, Associate Partners provide specialized support and expertise to the project. This group includes JSC GET WEB from Lithuania, Europen-PEN from Germany, and Italy's Central Institute for Archaeology (ICA). Their contributions are essential in providing auxiliary support and ensuring the smooth execution of project activities.

In summary, the distribution of work packages across the PICASP consortium partners highlights a well-structured and collaborative approach to achieving the project's objectives. The delineation of roles ensures that each partner contributes effectively according to their expertise, facilitating a cohesive and integrated effort towards enhancing educational methodologies and fostering university-business collaborations within the Caspian region. This structured collaboration promotes efficiency and enhances the potential for successful project outcomes through shared

responsibilities and collective expertise. The project has shown that despite the challenges, the integration of MOOCs and PEs can significantly enhance educational outcomes and university-business collaborations. Addressing the challenges head-on with strategic planning and collaboration has been critical to the project's success.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The PICASP Project has illuminated the potential of integrating Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Practice Enterprises (PEs) as innovative educational tools within the realms of university-business collaboration. This initiative focused on the Caspian region, providing significant insights into the evolving educational landscape influenced by global economic shifts and the dynamic interplay between developed and developing economies.

The project's findings underscore that MOOCs and PEs can significantly enrich students' educational experiences, effectively bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This is especially pertinent in today's rapidly changing business environment, where the ability to adapt and apply learned skills in real-world settings is invaluable. The enhanced engagement and improved employability of students, as evidenced by the project outcomes, affirm the value of these educational tools in cultivating a workforce ready to tackle contemporary challenges.

Moreover, the project reflects on the broader discourse in management education, highlighting the critical need for educational systems to evolve beyond traditional approaches. The integration of MOOCs and PEs addresses some criticisms of management education by offering a more eclectic and practical learning environment that prepares students to manage and lead in diverse settings.

However, the journey does not end here. While the project has made substantial strides, such programs' continuous development and refinement are essential to ensure they remain relevant and practical. This includes addressing technological, logistical, and pedagogical challenges that may arise, ensuring that these innovative educational tools continue to meet the needs of both students and the global market.

In closing, the PICASP Project stands as a testament to the potential of innovative educational methodologies in transforming learning landscapes. It offers a framework for other institutions to replicate and adapt, potentially influencing broader educational policies and practices. The success of such initiatives will ultimately depend on the sustained collaboration among educational institutions, businesses, and policymakers to foster environments where practical and theoretical knowledge converge to meet the exigencies of modern-day challenges. While the project has made substantial strides, continuous development and refinement of such programs are essential to ensure they remain relevant and practical. Future implementations can benefit from the lessons learned in the PICASP Project, including the importance of industry collaboration, robust quality assurance, and the provision of adequate infrastructure and training.

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