Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders: An Inclusive Study of Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Internationalization in Higher Education Across South-Eastern Europe

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Abstract: The complexities introduced by globalization, hyper complexity, and hyper-connectivity in our ever-changing world necessitate a dynamic response from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This article delves into the evolving landscape of education, emphasizing the need for HEIs to adapt their curricula to prepare professionals for the demands of the rapidly evolving workplace. The study underscores the necessity for a shift in the nature of higher education, both in content and pedagogy.

The focus extends to entrepreneurial teaching, where the research explores the development of psychological attributes associated with entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship education, defined as fostering the creation of high-value products or services, is examined along with the importance of cultivating entrepreneurial skills and attributes. The study advocates for innovative pedagogical approaches, moving beyond traditional content-based methods to address the nuanced challenges of applying knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios.

A significant aspect of the research centers on Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), showcasing their potential for collaboration between HEIs and enterprises. KTPs provide a platform for substantial projects, enabling organizations to tap into a university's knowledge base while providing valuable vocational experience to graduates.

The methodology encompasses both qualitative and quantitative approaches, utilizing primary data from questionnaires distributed to academic staff and experts from 35 HEIs in South-Eastern Europe. The findings highlight the readiness of HEIs for future challenges, their engagement in innovation, and the incorporation of entrepreneurial teaching into their curricula.

The study further explores internationalization efforts, revealing the significance of international-oriented programs, internal support structures, and Quality Assurance Criteria in managing international research partnerships. It also addresses the recognition of innovation within HEIs and the challenges faced in adapting to innovative teaching methods.

In conclusion, the research advocates for a proactive approach by HEIs to embrace innovation, entrepreneurial teaching, and internationalization. The findings serve as a foundation for recommendations aimed at fostering a dynamic and forward-thinking education system that prepares students for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial teaching, Innovation, SEE, Higher Education, Curriculum adaptation, Quality Assurance Criteria, Internationalization, Vocational experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Our world and society have become increasingly more complex in the last decades and these complexities have been marked by globalization, hyper complexity, and hyper connectivity, [1]. This constant change is causing a great dynamism and educational researchers are trying to find ways and strategies to adapt the HEIs curricula in this fluid environment in order to prepare professionals for the evolving workplace. Nonetheless, this shift has become evident for some time now. More than 15 years ago, [2], argued that due to exponential changes in our society, we needed to rethink the nature of higher education, both with regard to content and pedagogy. Recent research on professional education emphasize the importance of training students in science, but they also seem to agree on the necessity of chang-

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ing the pedagogy of professional education, suggesting an alternative to the traditional, content-based approach for learning and learning design.[3], pedagogy that focuses on promoting acquisition of decontextualized knowledge and skills fails to address issues concerning when it is appropriate to use such knowledge and skills, how to use them, and to what purpose. Furthermore, given the breadth and complexity of professional practice, no single pedagogical method can be a panacea. [3]. analyzed classic professional education programs and questioned whether these programs are up to date with the demands of society and still capable of delivering graduates who can meet the changing demands of society: Taken together, socioeconomic changes have led to new and pressing demands on educational institutions and other organizations to become more efficient in promoting skill development across the professions. A central question, then, is what is entailed in professional skill development, [3]. Thus said, the problem according to the researchers in education is in too frequently inadequate attention paid to the learning experience. Problems, cases, projects, and assignments are packaged around content because it is convenient for faculty, [4, 5], argue that many professional programs deal with short life cycles of knowledge due to ongoing innovations in practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Entrepreneurial Teaching

The conducted research in entrepreneurial teaching has suggested the prerogative of identifying and nurturing potential entrepreneurs promoting psychological attributes associated with entrepreneurs such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy [6, 7].

Entrepreneurship education has been defined as education with the purpose of creating a new product or service that results in higher economic value, [8]. Entrepreneurial education also examines not only into the knowledge of small business ownership and self-employment but also in entrepreneurial skills and attributes.

Formal entrepreneurial education has been found to affect attitudes of college students toward entrepreneurship as a career option, [9], [10]. It has also found an inclination toward entrepreneurship by adults, [11].

Furthermore, [12] and [13] suggested that stimulating entrepreneurial attitudes through education at the pre-collegiate level could encourage entrepreneurship as a career choice. Researchers indicate that using learning style preferences that include active experimentation, balanced with concrete experience and abstract conceptualization can enhance entrepreneurial propensity, [11] and [14], also argued for the use of behavioral simulations in teaching entrepreneurship, [15], proposed that entrepreneurship education should include skill-building components such as negotiation, leadership and creative thinking, exposure to technological innovation and new product development. [16], argued that entrepreneurship program should also teach skills in detecting and exploiting business opportunities, as well as include detailed and long-term business planning. [17], introduced the concept of transition stages of entrepreneurship education suggesting programs geared toward creativity, multi-disciplinary and process-oriented approaches, and theory-based practical applications.

Although prior research has debated whether entrepreneurial characteristics are innate, recent findings support the idea that psychological attributes associated with entrepreneurship can be culturally and experientially acquired, [18]. Individuals are predisposed to entrepreneurial intentions based on a combination of personal and contextual factors [19, 20, 21] suggested the following are the most relevant: need for achievement; creativity and initiative; risk taking and setting objectives; self- confidence and internal locus of control; need for independence and autonomy; motivation, energy and commitment; and persistence.

The above literature review suggests to us that entrepreneurial training would improve attitudes toward entrepreneurship and the institutions of higher education must be encouraged to invest in these trainings in order to sow the seeds of tomorrow's entrepreneurs.

2.2. The Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)

Today's universities have great potential to contribute to regional and national development. There is a relationship between academic engagement and commercialization [19], which is thoroughly addressed. Research shows that the motives of university and industry actors correspond despite their different work environments, [22]. University-industry knowledge transfer can unfold in many ways and influence multiple actors [23].

The Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) offer an attractive way for universities and enterprises to collaborate. Typically, university graduates are employed as KTP Associates to undertake a substantial piece of work for an organization under the guidance of an Industrial Supervisor and an Academic Supervisor. Not only does the KTP provide the organization with a dedicated resource to undertake a significant project but also provides access to a university's corpus of knowledge and experience. The university gains the opportunity to inject its expertise into the commercial environment and to engage in further research. Additionally, the Associate gains valuable vocational experience and is supported by a programmer of further study resulting in nationally recognized qualifications, including the opportunity to study for a higher degree. A further expected benefit of undertaking KTPs is providing academics opportunities to develop contemporary teaching materials and conduct research that may contribute toward national research evaluations such as the Research Excellence Framework, as well as the chance to apply knowledge and expertise, [24], for which, half a day per week of the academic's time is allocated, for the duration of the partnership KTPs have been conducted with over 100 universities and other knowledge base partners, across a variety of disciplines including business management, [24].

Recent graduates, employed as Associates to undertake partnership work, get the opportunity to use their degree in a real-world situation whilst gaining invaluable career experience in managing a significant project. During the KTP, approximately 10% of an Associate's time is spent gaining further qualifications and training. Recognizing the complex-

ity of undertaking such a programmer of work, KTP Advisers are employed to support the development of the KTP proposal and ongoing partnership, [24]. Several articles have uncovered aligned motives between university and industry actors despite operating in different work environments, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of university-industry knowledge transfer that influences various stakeholders [25]. This collaboration further enables universities to integrate their knowledge into commercial environments, engage in additional research, and develop contemporary teaching materials [26].

In conclusion, KTP provides a win-win scenario for both universities and enterprises and their collaboration indicates the way for a more multi-faceted education in today's world of consumerism.

3. METHODOLOGY

The scope of this study was to gather data about KTP and innovation in Higher Education Institutions. The methodology of this paper includes mostly qualitative and quantitative methods, the data attained are from primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be provided through questionnaires distributed. The responders were academic staff and experts of 35 HEIs from SEE countries.

For gathering the data was used a questionnaire with open, closed, and multiple-choice questions. 15.6% of the responders were the category of professors, and 84.4% held head positions at Higher Education Institutions. The secondary data are the result of reviewing extensive literature on this research field. The research tool that we used was a survey where a set of questions were presented to the HEIs for answering.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Technical, technological, social and economic developments have influenced the evolution of the labor market. This fact has influenced the educational system to be improved in accordance with the development of time. Therefore, the future of the higher education system is innovation. Higher education institutions feel prepared for the challenges of the future where 83.7% of those who participated in the study said "YES". The labor market is a system that constantly evolves depending on social, historical, political conditions, scientific and technical developments. These factors influence the Institutions of Higher Education to adapt to the needs of the market. One of which is the development of the innovation system in their curricula that they offer. The development of the innovation system is not easy and requires time and investment, only 57.1% of HEIs that responded were ready to develop Innovation system for 5 future years.

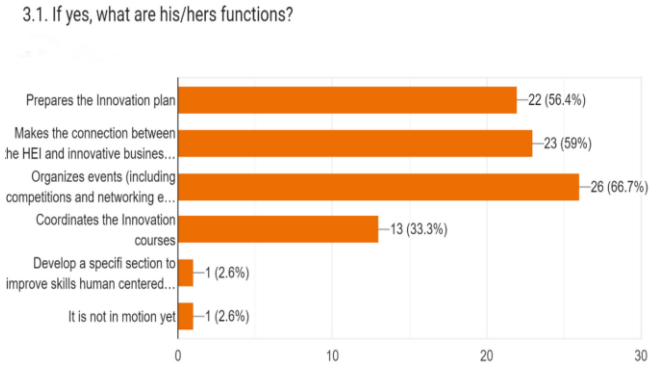
Table 1. The first questions, Authors.

		Yes	No
1.	The questions 'Based on your opinion Higher education institution HEI prepared for future challenges in general'	83,7%	16,3%
2.	'Do you already mapped your innovation system for the next 5 years'	57,1%	42.9%

77.6% of HEIs have recruited staff who are responsible for the development and innovation. They are mainly involved in: Organizing events (including competitions and networking events, Making the connection between HEI and innovative businesses, preparation of the innovation plan and Innovation Courses for 56% of them.

Table 2. The seconds questions, Authors.

		Yes	No
3.	Does your HEI have any staff member in charge of HE innovation development?	77,6%	22,4%



Graph (1). The question 4, Authors.

Higher Education Institutions do not develop the innovation system alone; they cooperate with other actors in the field operating in their country. 61.2% of the Institutions that participated in the survey expressed that "Yes" they include other actors in the field in this process.

The reflection of new innovations in the curriculum Higher education institutions express it by offering courses that focus on innovation. Only 63% of HEIs offer innovation courses across all study levels and subjects. Some of the methods used in these courses include "innovation labs, start-ups, Surveys, Questionnaire, case-based learning, flipped classroom, problem-based learning (PBL) Zoom, MOOC."

Table 3. The f questions 5,6, Authors.

		Yes	No
5	Does your HEI offer any tailored made innovation courses across all study?	61.2%	38.8%
6	'Does your HEI involve any innovation and key actors from the innovation ecosystem of your country?	63.3%	36.7%

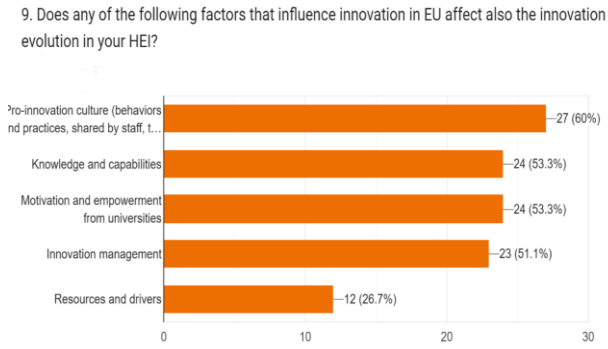
The MOOC format is not a widely used method as 67.3% of HEIs do not offer it and less than 32.7% of Higher Education Institutions offer this format. This is an indicator that HEIs invest in improving curricula and developing the capacities of academic staff in the use of new methodologies.

In addition to new methods, higher education institutions must create conditions for setting up innovation laboratories, where students can increase and apply their skills. This suggestion comes from the fact that only 63% of the HEIs that participated in the surveys offer innovation labs.

Table 4. The f questions 7,8, Authors.

7	Does your HEI provide any education in MOOC format?	Yes	No
		32.7%	67.3%
8	'Doe your HEI have already any innovation lab (a place where innovation can be a part of a course?	57.1%	42.9%

In the development of innovation, the answers given by the Higher Education Institutions participating in the survey are: 60% Pro-innovation culture, 53.3% Knowledge and capabilities, 53.3% Motivation and empowerment from universities, 51.1% Innovation management, 26.7% Resources and drivers, with pro-innovation culture being the leading one.



Graph (2). The question 9, Authors.

Table 5. The questions 10, Authors.

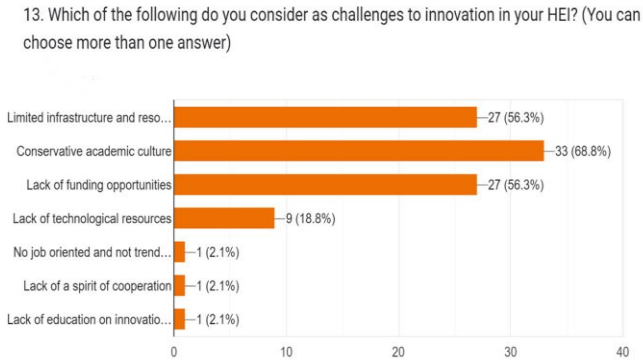
10	Do you believe that there are opportunities for innovation in the education sector? Exam. (include changes in curricula, new or improved ...) methods for education, such as online learning.	Yes	No
		98%	2%

HEI is oriented towards innovations from different factors as the best way to improve the curricula. And 81.6% of HEIs are familiar with the terms open innovation/open business/open science.

In maintaining coherence with the labor market, HEIs have agreements with innovative SMEs and other innovative public or private organizations. HEI consider as challenges to innovation in higher education teaching are like Conservative academic culture, Limited infrastructure and resources, Lack of funding opportunities and Lack of technological resources and the respondents include lack of spirit of cooperation and lack of education in innovation.

Table 6. The f questions 11,12, Authors.

11	Are you or your HEI familiar with the terms open innovation/Open Science	Yes	No
		81,6%	18,4%
12.	Does your HEI have a memorandum of agreement with innovation SMEs or other innovation public or private organization?	51%	49%



Graph (3). The question 13, Authors

5. ENTREPRENEURIAL TEACHING

Educational institutions are environments that develop and create entrepreneurial skills, in these conditions HEI offers opportunities to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skills.

The activity of HEI is not only in the auditorium in the preparation of students' theoretical knowledge, but also in practical activity. Only 67.3% of HEIs have partnerships with well-established companies as internships during one week to 6 months. Internships will help students get to know the new things that the labor market offers and promote employment quickly after finishing their studies.

Table 7 The f questions 14,15, Authors.

14	Based on your opinion, does your HEI provide diverse formal learning opportunities to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skills?	Yes	No
		67.3%	32.7%
15.	Does your HEI already have established formal or informal partnership with well establishment companies for students' internships in your country?	67,3%	32.7%

Higher Education Institutions use training as a mechanism for increasing the capacity of staff to create new curricula in entrepreneurship. Where 40.8% of HEIs declare this. HEI expresses the importance of entrepreneurial skills by supporting entrepreneurship competitions like hackathons, startups, conferences, training, innovation competitions, pitching, business and social innovation, business plan competitions. They organize networking events between students, academic staff and non-academic staff / businesses / entrepreneurs, etc.

HEIs that participated in the study, only 46.9 % of HEIs declared that they have criteria for measuring entrepreneurial teaching and they have incubation mechanisms for supporting the entrepreneurial first steps of their students. Decision to criteria for measuring entrepreneur teaching in HEI is good indicator for Internal Quality Assurance.

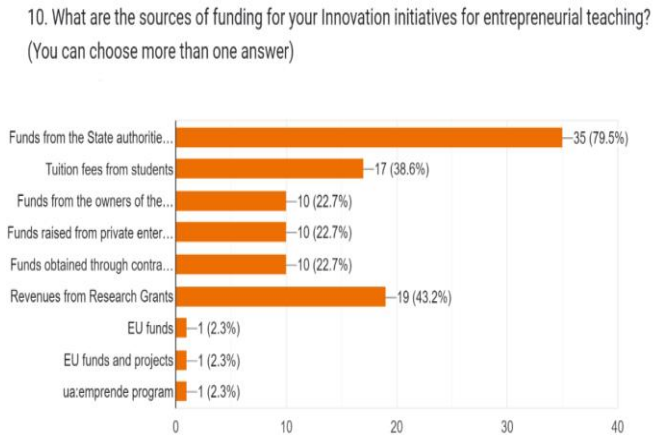
Table 8. The f questions 16,17, Authors.

16	Does your HEI provide any training mechanism to staff in creating new curriculum related to entrepreneurship?	Yes 40,8%	No 59.2%
17.	Does your HEI support any entrepreneurship compactions (hackathons, business/social innovation compactions, pitching compactions, business plan compactions, etc.) for its students??	53.1%	46.9%

Not all the HEIs that participated in the questionnaire provide a forum where staff and educators can exchange new knowledge and ideas, incorporating the latest entrepreneurship news and a budget for supporting entrepreneurial teaching. In this direction, higher education institutions should be more oriented towards creating conditions for the development of the capacities of their staff for young people in the field of entrepreneurship and support them financially.

Table 9. The f questions 18, -22, Authors.

18	Does your HEI organize any networking events between students, academic, and non-academic staff, and entrepreneur business?	Yes 89.8 %	No 10,2%
19	Are there internal quality assurance criteria for measuring entrepreneur teaching in your HEI?	46,9%	53,1%
20	Does your HEI have any incubation mechanism supporting the entrepreneurial first steps of his students?	53,1%	46.9%
21.	Does your HEI provide a forum whereby staff and education can exchange new knowledge ideas, incorporating the latest news in entrepreneurship?	55.1%	44,9%
22.	Does your HEI officially dedicate budget for innovation initiatives for entrepreneurial teaching?	46,9%	53,1%



Graph (4). The question 23, Authors.

6. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS

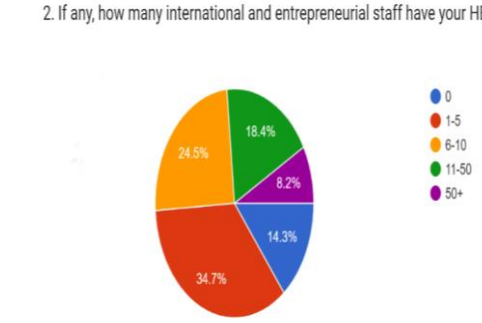
I. Internationalization

In the focus of their work, Higher Education Institutions have the transfer of knowledge and internationalization. This is evidenced by the answers given by HEIs that participated in the survey, 51% of HEIs support their staff and students for international mobility by their own budget but presence at number of international staff is small.

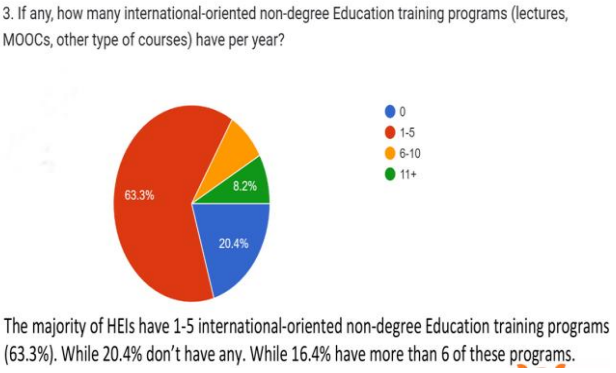
Table 10. The f questions 24 Authors.

24	Does your HEI support as the international mobility of its staffs and students by its own budget besides EU and the donor grant?	Yes 51%	No

The majority of HEIs have international-oriented non-degree Education training programs, have 1-5 international-oriented non-degree Education training programs 63.3%, while 20.4% don't have any and 16.4% have more than 6 of these programs. These data identify the need for internationalization of HEIs and the use of international programs in



Graph (5). The question 25, Authors.



Graph (6). The question 26, Authors.

An important role in the internationalization of higher education institutions is the office of foreign relations. About 96% of the HEIs which took part in this survey have internal support structures in place to manage and grow international relations; 73.5% have departments or scientific centers dedicated exclusively to international research partnerships and networks and 61.2% of HEIs have Quality Assurance Criteria for measuring international research partnerships and works.

Table 11. The questions 27-29 Authors.

27	Does your HEI have internal support structures in place to manage and grow the international? relationship	Yes 96,9%	No 3,1%
28	Does your HEI have department or scientific centers exclusively dedicated to international research partnership and network	73,5	26,5%
29	Are there internal quality assurance criteria for measuring international research partnership and networks in your HEI?	62,1%	28,9%

Internationalization or knowledge transfer in higher education institutions are rewarded. This is evidenced by the answers given, 59.2% of HEIs the respondents believe "Yes" innovation is valued in their HEIs, but also by the support that the Higher Education Institution has for the mobility of staff and students, and the increase in the number of agreements with public and private institutions that have their work oriented towards Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Open Science outside their country. More than 3/4th (75.5%) of the respondents answered that they are interested in participating in innovation partnerships.

Table 12. The questions 30-33 Authors.

30	Is internationalization on knowledge transfer partnership anyhow rewarded in your HEI?	Yes 59.2%	No 40.8%
31	Does your HEI participate in any formal partnership oriented to innovation entrepreneurship and open science outside to country	44.9%	45.1%
32.	Does your HEI invest any funds in any formal or informal partnership oriented to innovation entrepreneurship and open science outside the country	46.9%	43.1%
33	In your HEI interested in partnership in any formal or informal partnership promoting innovation entrepreneurship and open science?	75.5%	24,5%

7. CONCLUSION OF QUESTIONERS

* Higher Education Institutions in their perception are prepared for future challenges in general. They are working based on mapped innovation system for the next 5 year- refer responded question no.2 (57.1% said “Yes”)

* HEIs had staff members responsible for the development of HE Innovation- refer responded question no.3.

* HEIs involve innovators and key actors from the innovation system in their country- refer responded question no.4.

* Around 33% of HEIs offer an innovation course in all levels of studies and subjects. - refer responded questions no.5, 6.

* At least 32.7% of HEIs offer education in MOOC format – refer responded question no. 7.

* HEIs are oriented toward innovations from different factors as the best way to improve the curricula – refer responded questions no.8, 9, 10.

* 81.6% of HEIs academic staff are familiar with the terms of open innovation/ open business/ open science – refer responded question no. 11.

* HEIs have agreements with innovative SMEs and other innovative public or private organizations - refer responded questions no.12, 12.1

* HEIs consider as challenges to adapt innovation in higher education teaching because of: Conservative academic culture, Limited infrastructure and resources, Lack of funding opportunities and Lack of technological resources. Also, responders included lack of spirit of cooperation and lack of education in innovation- refer responded question no.13.

II.

* HEIs offer opportunities to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skills. 67.3 % of HEIs have partnerships with well-established companies as internship during one week to 6 months – refer responded questions no.2 and 2.1.

* HEIs declared that there is a training mechanism for the staff, in the creation of curricula related to entrepreneurship.

* HEIs support entrepreneurship competitions like hackathons, startups, conferences, training, innovation competitions, pitching, business and social innovation, and business plan competitions. They organize networking events between students, academic staff, and non-academic staff/businesses/entrepreneurs, etc. – refer responded questions no.4, 4.1, 5.

* Only 46.9 % of HEIs declared that they have criteria for measuring entrepreneurial teaching and they have incubation mechanisms for supporting the entrepreneurial first steps of their students- refer responded questions no. 6, 7.

* Not all the HEIs that participated in questionnaire provide a forum where staff and educators can exchange new knowledge and idea, incorporating the latest news entrepreneurship and a budget for support entrepreneurial teaching - refer responded questions no. 8 and 9.

* HEIs mainly funding for Innovation initiatives for entrepreneurial teaching are from state authorities and research grants.

III. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships– Internationalization

* 51% of HEIs support their staff and students for international mobility by their own budget but the presence of international staff is small - refer responded questions no. 1 and 2.

* The majority of HEIs have international-oriented non-degree Education training programs- refer- responded question no.3.

* About 96% of the HEIs which took part in this survey have internal support structures in place to manage and grow international relationships - refer responded question no.4.

* 73.5% have departments or scientific centers dedicated exclusively to international research partnerships and networks and 61.2% of HEIs have Quality Assurance Criteria for measuring international research partnerships and works -refer- responded questions no.5 and 6.

* 59.2 % of HEIs responders believe "Yes" innovation is rewarded in their HEI -refer responded question no 7.

* 55% of academic staff have participated in partnerships oriented to Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Open Science outside their country- refer responded question no.8.

* 46.9 % of HEIs invest funds outside their country for innovation and partnerships -refer responded questions no. 9.

* More than 3/4th (75.5%) of the respondents answered that they are interested in participating in innovation partnerships -refer responded questions no.10 and 10.1.

RECOMMENDATION

Innovation is the future of Higher Education Institutions. They should do the mapping of their innovation system and increase the staff members responsible for development of their HEIs innovation.

They (HEIs) should grow cooperating with others actress that operating in this field and to improve the curricula.

HEIs should provide different mechanisms to grow entrepreneurial teaching skills; to create opportunities for participating in entrepreneurship competitions and stimulate academic and administrative staff and students to organize together events for innovation.

HEIs should have a budget for supporting entrepreneurial teaching and to diversify possibilities to ensure funds.

HEIs should support their academic and administrative staff and students to participate in international mobilities offered by other HEIs.

HEIs should create conditions to offer training courses for innovation to its students and academic and administrative staff.

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