WHAT ARE THE FACTORS WHICH HAVE EFFECTS ON THE SOCIAL IDENTITY AMONG THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS?

A CASE STUDY ON THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO IN CO-OP EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract— **Different studies have concluded that education has an effect on the students' identities. This case study tried to find the effect of the cooperative educational system on the social identity among the university students of the University of Waterloo. In the pilot study it was found out that the educational system can affect the social identities of the students in different ways. These effects are not always predictable. The students inclined to introduce themselves by their achievements in their workplaces, i.e. they consider themselves belonging to an imaginary workplace which contains all their achievements. Also the reputation of the workplace plays an important role.**

Keywords- cooperative educational system; social identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of globalisation and due to the rise of industrialization and improvement in technology a greater degree of openness and social and geographical mobility have appeared. Moreover the traditional systems of inequality such as those related to gender, age, caste, ethnic group, and patronage have become supplanted (CLMS, M5 U2), but new challenges have been emerged. Before globalization the process of identification was much easier for youngsters, but now because of the exposure to the greater world this process is much more difficult than before (Lawy, 2002).

New technologies especially in communications and transportation have given the opportunity to transfer wide range of data in a couple of seconds. The geographical distance is not a barrier anymore. Reordering of the time and distance has given this feeling to some people that the whole world is not bigger than a village (CLMS, M5 U2). The critical point is usually youngsters confront with a lot of problems in this village during the process of their identification. Maybe one reason is they have access to the data which belongs neither to their culture nor to their society (Lawy, 2002).

The importance of knowledge and information is increasing in the current world so; learning and educational is a must not a choice anymore. Many studies have been carried out to show the importance of knowledge in the current world, e.g. Nelson and Winter (1982 cited in Inkpen and Dinur, 1998) and Nokata (1994 cited in Inkpen and Dinur, 1998). This study will try to shed some light on the process of identification among the students in the cooperative educational system in the University of Waterloo based on the social identity theory. Particularly this study tries to find out how the work semesters in cooperative educational system have effect on the social identity of the students.

In a cooperative educational system students have to integrate their study semesters with real-world-practical experience, in an alternating mechanism whereby they gain two valuable years of work experiences by the time they graduate with their respective degrees. Students receive in-depth interview-management counseling and are subsequently trained for job interviews and go through the actual job-hunting experience by applying for various different jobs in order to secure successful cooperative work terms. Prior to this phase they have an opportunity to attend several interview-critiquing workshops where they get a chance to build a dynamic resume which will equip them to stand their own ground in the job market and the actual job interviews. These potential job or work-terms need to have several criteria in order for them to be qualified as proper work terms. One of these criteria and the most crucial one is that the students must be able to contribute value to the organization that they must be joining; they cannot be involved in perpetual training, rather be able to execute tasks which will help offload pressure from existing employees or be in charge of some projects that will change the way certain areas managed currently. As such, remuneration also becomes a key component for students in their respective cooperative work-terms. In a four years or more degree, usually students spend five semesters doing cooperative work terms so; the taught materials in cooperative educational system can be divided to two categories; one category is about training practices which are related to transferring information and knowledge, which will be taught during study semesters, and the other is about those practices which are involved with the know-how skills that will be learnt during work semesters. Information and knowledge includes facts, symbols, etc. and know-how skills are involved with the process of doing a task (Inkpen and Dinur, 1998). Happel (1988) proposed that know-how is mostly practical skills or expertise that prepare someone to do a task efficiently (cited in Inkpen and Dinur, 1998).

Now it is the turn of introducing the social identity theory. This theory has emerged in 1979 by the work of Tajfel and Turner (Haslam, 2001). According to this theory a person's identity is rooted from the feeling of belonging to a particular group or a series of groups (Haslam, 2001). In other words social identity is the person's knowledge of belonging to particular group(s) (Stets and Burke, 2000).The formation of the social identity is based on the process of self-categorization, i.e. the person categorizes her/himself in relation to other social categories or classifications (Stets and Burke, 2000). According to Tjfel and Turner the person divides others in two categories as in-group members and out-group members (cited in Haslam, 2001). Individuals who are similar belong to the same group so; they will be labeled as in-group and those who are not similar To the group (s) members will be categorized as out-group. Discovering the similarities will be done by comparing the self with others (Stets and Burke, 2000). Thus according to this theory whenever someone wants to represent her/himself will attribute her/ himself to the group(s) that s/he is a member in. Tajfel (1986) concluded that people will be biased towards their in-group members (cited in Haslam, 2001). The focus of this study does not allow digging the in-group discrimination further, e.g. how the members justify the socially unacceptable characteristics of the groups for themselves and others.

In the next section general information about the University of Waterloo will be given. After that the competencies which can have effect on social identity will be discussed. Then the methodology and the process of the study will be explained. Finally the hypothesis will be discussed and the possible conclusions will be given.

II. METHODOLOGY

University of Waterloo has eight academic units and thirteen undergraduate programs. It has two thousand m^2 facilities. In terms of faculty members and the students, it has 257 leading faculty members, 5,942 undergraduate students, 1,742 graduate (post-graduate) students, and 30,601 successful alumni (Annual Report UW, 2010).

The Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV) requires universities to review all of their programs in terms of **U**ndergraduate **D**egree **L**evel **E**xpectations (UDLES). University of Waterloo also has to evaluate all aspects of its programs, including how the cooperative program contributes to the success of the learning outcomes of its students according to the UDLES. The UDLES competencies that require the schools to examine include Depth and breadth of knowledge, Knowledge of methodologies, Application of knowledge, Communication skills, Limits of knowledge, Autonomy and professional capacity, Experiential learning, and Diversity (Wu et al, 2010).

One way to evaluate the programs in terms of these competencies is the evaluation of the students' performance in their work terms. Statistically it can be unbiased because the employers are outsiders and they do not know about the academic performance of the students, but also it has limitations, e.g. the evaluations do not give unified instructions to employers on how to evaluate their students. Every employer evaluates their students differently due to the fact that there is no standard for evaluating (i.e. some employers might compare their students to previous students whereas others compare their students to other employees).

These evaluations feature eighteen categories that every employer rates their students on the Likert scale. These competencies are to what extent they are Interest in Work, Initiative, Planning and Organizing, Setting Goals, Ability to Learn, Quality of Work, Quantity of Work, Creativity, Judgement, Reflection and Integration from prior Learning, Adaptation to Formal Organizations, Rules and Policies, Problem Solving Skills, Dependability, Handling Conflict, Response to Supervision, Communication –Written and Oral, and Leadership Qualities (Wu et al., 2010).

By factor analysis some of these eighteen competencies were merged to reflect particular categories from the UDLES. Witten and oral communications, and interpersonal behaviour were categorized under the communication skills, and ability to learn, problem solving skills, and adaptation to formal organizations rules and policies were considered as autonomy and professional capacity. After the factor analysis all data should be put into a usable database which is called JobMine.

The performance evaluation form that the employers should fill up for each student after the work semester will be used instead of identity questionnaire and the students will fill up the same form before and after the work semesters.

Following steps will be taken to measure the results:

1) Ask the students to fill up the evaluation questionnaire before and after each work semester;

2) Ask the students to introduce their social identities before and after the work semester. This is an open question and the answers will be coded and categorized by factor analysis;

3) Ask the employers to fill up the evaluation questionnaire after each work semester;

4) Record the hard-copy evaluations into student JobMine file in case that they did not fill up the forms online;

5) Compare the questionnaires for each student after completion of the five work semesters in order to find a trend. The questionnaire of both the employer and the student will be compared with each other. If the difference between them is high, the student will be removed from the group and questionnaires will be considered invalid. In such cases interviews will be taken with the student to discover the reasons of this difference. Moreover the questionnaires of the students before and after each work semester will be compared with each other to find out the effect of the work semester on their social identities;

6) Try to design an identity questionnaire based on the responses to remove the potential inefficiency of the used questionnaire.

III. CONCLUSION

It should be mentioned that there are a lot of factors which can play roles in the formation of the social identity so; it is not possible to find a causal relationship between these two variables, i.e. cooperative educational system particularly the work semesters and the social identity. The study can just find a relationship between them and the way this relationship will be. The hypothesis was as a student progresses from one work term to another, the cooperative program would have effect on the student to improve her/ himself based on the competencies. Along with that going through the work semesters would have effect on the social identity of the students. This effect can be either positive or negative based on the workplace. This study wants to know how the students introduce themselves in relation to the workplaces that they have worked in. Based on the pilot study which was done the researcher predicts the students will consider themselves belonging to an imaginary group which is a combination of the all workplaces they worked in. This group contains all the best competencies that the students have achieved. S/he rarely refers to her/his mistakes or failures. The other attribute that the student would mention is the reputation of the workplace, e.g. if the student has worked in a workplace which has a very high reputation in the market, s/he would refer to that group and s/he would consider her/himself belonging to that workplace. In few cases it has been seen that the student labeled the imaginary group the best workplace that s/he has worked in. Further study is under process.

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