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## The Essence of Learning Methodological Model and its Application in Developing Tourism Students' Research Competence

Agrita Baltrūna

Latvia University of Agriculture, Latvia Email: : agrita.baltruna@inbox.lv

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### Abstract

*After entering the European Union the higher education in Latvia is undergoing remarkable changes which influence both university lecturers' work and the procedure of studies considerably changing the quality of studies' content. The author of the present article is a student of a doctoral program as well as the university lecturer. The author's dissertation focuses on exploring the tourism students' research competence. The present article serves as a tool to substantiate the topicality of learning methodological models. The author introduces her own model for developing tourism students' research competence. The main research methods are the analysis of academic literature and pedagogical observation. The evaluation of the author's methodological model was done by pedagogy experts. The participants of the research process were the university students and the representatives of tourism enterprises. The author has drawn several relevant conclusions and has made concise suggestions which, with the help of the self-elaborated model, can improve development of students' research competence.*

Keywords: *students' research competence; study process.*

### 1. Introduction

The present article includes a part of the author's doctorate work. In order to elaborate learning pedagogical model for developing students' research competence it was necessary to evaluate the existing situation in higher education institutions. The author has been working as a university lecturer for more than 10 years in "School of Business Administration Turība", thus she has become acquainted with students' and lecturers' opinions which together with theoretical information made a good groundwork for the model.

The present research is characterized by interpretative paradigm which means that some of its distinctive features are the following: the model's practical usability, the author's involvement in pedagogical activity as well as action-theory approach. The aim is to comprehend human's action in a definite place, time and condition. It is also characterized by the researcher's practical interest in the topic. The author has chosen qualitatively evaluating research which means that changes in practice are scientifically grounded and their efficiency is evaluated by describing ongoing practice processes. The model elaborated by the author depicts successful student's and lecturer's cooperation, it is highly evaluated by the experts who have authorized its further approbation in study environment.. In the course of last year Ministry of Education and

Science of Latvia seriously evaluates if the curricula of study programs correspond to the needs of labor market and graduates' ability to align with the labor market in Latvia and Europe. The minister of education demands closing lower quality education programs. The use of the model of students' competence development in practice would positively influence the results of studies at the author's work place School of Business Administration Turība which is a private university and Latvia University of Agriculture which is a public university, as well as other higher education institutions.

## 2. Materials and methods

It is advisable to elaborate a research program when working with researches which are voluminous in number of participants and period of time. It helps the author to systematize the process and the participants to understand the course of research better as well as to evaluate the results. The research program helps to determine the type of research, choose appropriate research and data processing methods. The sample of qualitatively-evaluating program elaborated by P.Mayring is used as a base for the author's program.

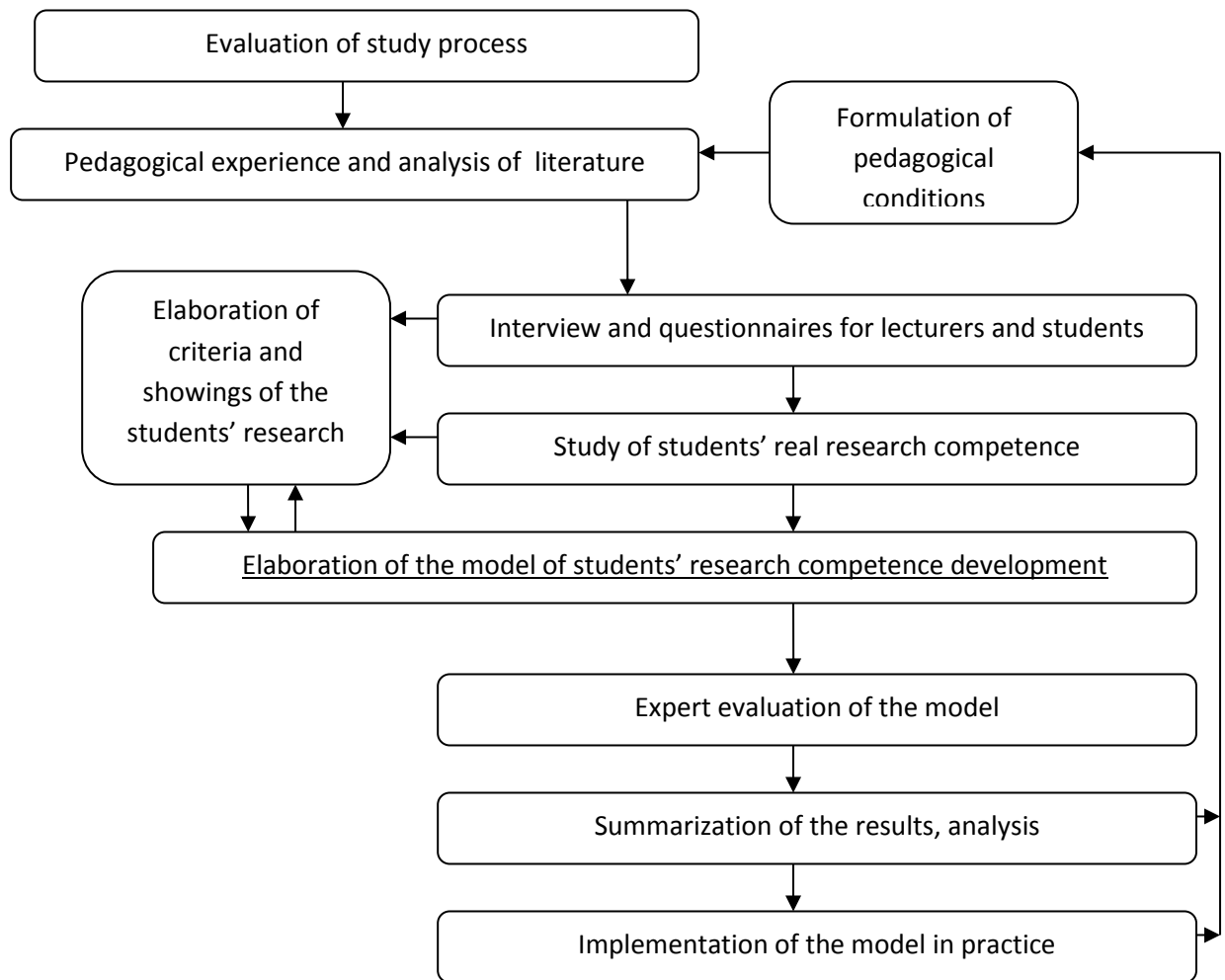


Figure 1 Research program (the author's)

The present research includes evaluation of theories and empirical research in pedagogical practice. The author's observations show that the study result is mostly influenced by quality of pedagogical cooperation, self-motivation and organization of study process. The author works as a lecturer that is why she is personally interested in solving problem situations and improving the quality of studies. Working in the "School of Business Administration Turība" in the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, the author has done observation, organized unstructured interviews with lecturers and summarized the results on evaluation of research papers and bachelor theses. The author surveyed 62 authors of researches in order to clarify what factors influenced their choice of the topic. As the result, 34 respondents mentioned cooperation with the scientific advisor. 23 respondents followed the scientific advisor's advice when choosing the topic, 8 respondents chose the topic themselves. The author interviewed 25 lecturers of the School of Business and Administration "Turība" in the International Tourism Faculty, including 4 heads of department and 3 deans. The respondents had different work experience – 3 to 34 years. All the respondents have had experience in working with tourism program students. The essential questions asked during interviews were connected with the process of elaborating researches and acquisition of study curriculum. The respondents were at the same opinion that greater amount of paid lessons is necessary for improving the process of elaborating research. At the moment the number of lecturer's paid lessons is not sufficient to ensure qualitative student's and lecturer's cooperation. Another factor that was mentioned by the lecturers is insufficient students' self-motivation. Students' priorities differ, more than 60 % of students are working, and some of them place job and opportunity to earn money higher than studies. Students' prior preparedness for elaborating research work is recognized as important, too. 18 out of 25 respondents admitted that it is hard to give objective appraisal of real competence level during research work presentation because presentation time is limited. Apart from the lecturers the author surveyed students asking them to evaluate lecturers as scientific advisors. The total number of respondents was 62. 75 % admitted that lecturers' work methods and the process of evaluation differ. At the moment the department appoints scientific advisors to students but 20 % of respondents would like to chose a scientific advisor themselves because they consider that student's and lecturer's cooperation and communication substantially influence the result of research. This article focuses on one stage of the research program, i.e. elaboration of methodological model and its characterization. The author has elaborated the questionnaire to clarify the expert opinion about the model. The questions – statements are divided into two groups offering the experts answers "yes", "no", "partly". The model of students' research competence development has been evaluated by 12 experts, including 3 doctors of economic sciences, doctors of physics, psychology, engineering, 3 doctors of pedagogy and representatives of tourism industry – the chairwoman of the board of Association of Latvian Tourism Information Organization, the executive director of Association of Hotels and Restaurants of Latvia, the chairwoman of the board of "Hotel Kolonna", Ltd. The main reason for choosing the experts was their work experience and the fact that all of them are closely related to both - the study process at the university and tourism business.

### **3. The results and discussion**

The author has studied academic literature which theoretically focuses on the essence and usability of pedagogical models in order to elaborate her own model. The term "model" in pedagogy is defined as follows: 1. Means or object of experimental research which is developed artificially and contains features of the original and at the moment of experiment substitutes it.

Research model is described as a simplified reproduction that can substitute the original to such an extent that research of the model gives new information about the corresponding object; 2. A diminished reproduction of an object, a simplified scheme or picture, which is used as visual aid in a lesson, class or lecture; 3. A sample which is used for making or reproducing something similar (Pedagoģijas terminu skaidrojošā vārdnīca, 2000, 104).

R.T.Bell has elaborated a model of study program curriculum which can be easily adapted to other study model making (Bell, 1981). This model is based on student's and lecturer's cooperation including both – the process and the result. Models in pedagogy are based on a definite system, which represent fixed pedagogical approach. They include theoretical argument and practical realization. The didactical model gives concrete expression of the content of pedagogical process and its interconnections like learning, learning aim, cooperation, content, methods, knowledge, skills etc. H. Gudjons points out that a didactical model is a construction of scientific theory of pedagogy which helps to plan didactic processes in school and out of it (Gudjons H., 1998, 255).

Several scientists have studied pedagogical models theoretically, including I. Maslo, I. Žogla, I. Beļickis, E. Maslo, D. Laiveniece, I. Rubana, Z. Čehlova, J. Babanskis, M. Skatkins, A. Markova etc. Analyzing young generation's ability to perfect itself E. Maslo has elaborated a model in which the main components are activation of preliminary knowledge, the aim/plan, the process, testing, aim/plan that has been changed. "The learning cycle repeats itself as an infinite process", admits the author (Maslo E., 2003, 126). R. Andersone who studies development of young generation's social skills stresses the following components: needs, aims, knowledge, attitude, social skills, cooperation skills, content, forms of learning, socialization. "Needs, aims, knowledge and attitude establish development of cooperation and social skills. It is a success when the learning process is organized with the help of different methods and learning forms. The result is young generation's socialization" (Andersone R., 2001, 43). On the basis of theoretical cognitions and the results of empirical research the author has elaborated her own model for developing students' research competence.

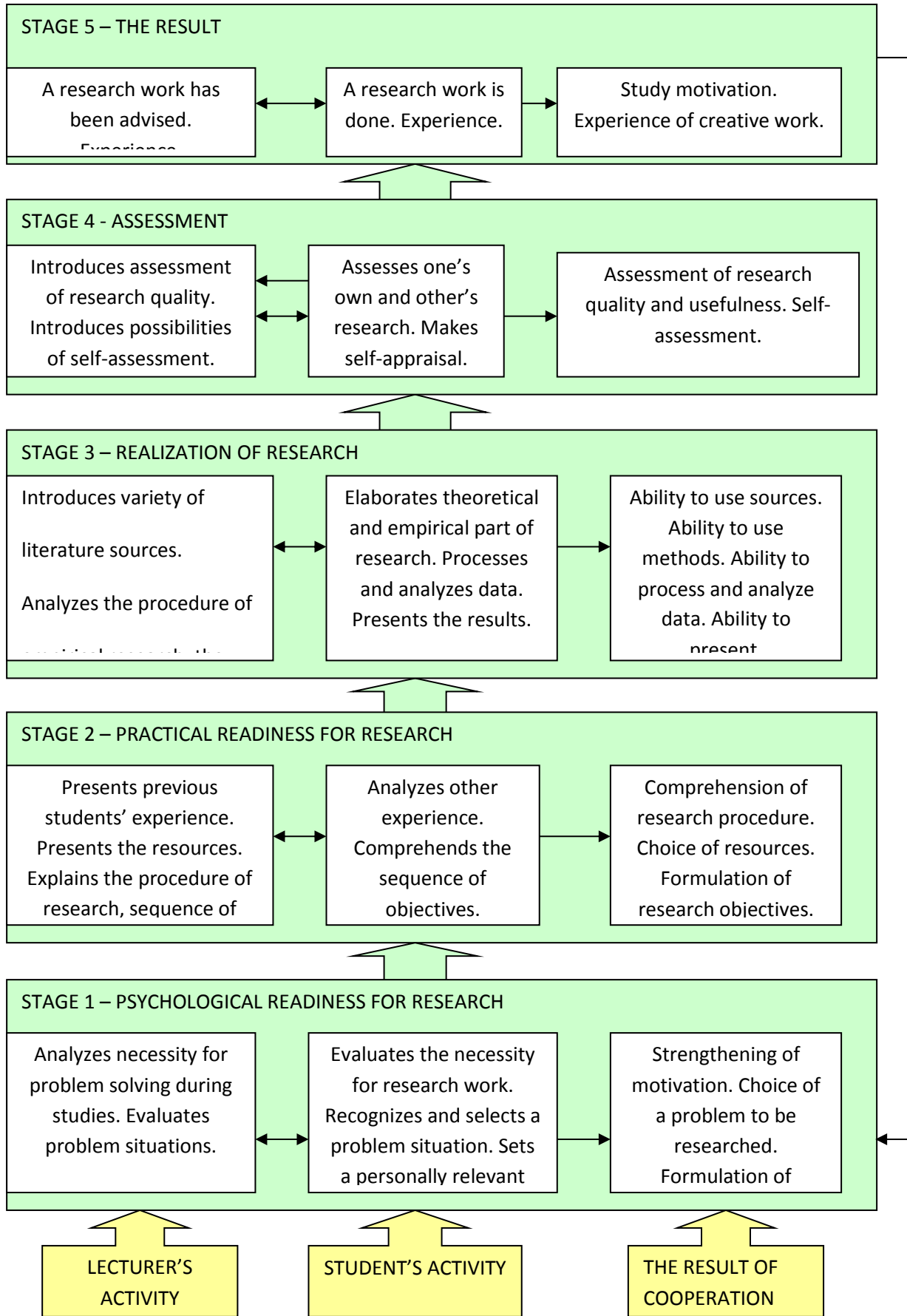


Figure 2 The model of students' research competence development (the author's)

Evaluation of experts affirms the author's personal opinion about the model's functionality and possibility of successful use in study process. Below the answers to the given statements are summarized. The model improves students' research motivation – 11 answers “yes”, 1 answer “partly”. The model emphasizes necessity to acquire theoretical knowledge – 10 “yes”, 2 “partly”. The model enables comprehension of work planning and resource exploitation – 9 “yes”, 3 “partly”. The model stimulates evaluation of problems recognized in practice – 7 “yes”, 5 “partly”. The model encourages cooperation with scientific advisor and research participants – 10 “yes”, 2 – “partly”.

The second group of statements includes skills and qualities that are improved with the help of the model. Responsibility for objective implementation – 9 “yes”, 3 “partly”. Use of knowledge – 11 “yes”, 1 “partly”. Reflection skills are improved – 11 “yes”, 1 expert has not answered. Presentation skills are improved – 12 “yes”. Communication skills are improved – 11 “yes”, 1 “partly”. One of the experts mentioned that theory analysis and comparison skills are improved, as well as that such model would positively influence pedagogical process in general. Another expert admitted that such model would advance the scientific level of study process. It is stressed that in the result phase along with a successfully done research work students would receive satisfaction and chances of self-expression. The experts have evaluated the model positively – 8/9 out of 10.

#### **4. Conclusions**

- Process of pedagogical cooperation is important for students' cognition activity. The stage of psychological and practical preparation is the result of students' and lecturers' cooperation and forms groundwork for successful research activity.
- The model of research competence development is easily perceptible, students comprehend it and use in study process.
- Lecturers use the model of research competence development in order to form a program of research work advising that is well-considered.
- The model of research competence development facilitates assessment of students' research skills.
- The use of the model of research competence development would improve students' research skills, and would help prospective specialists align with the labor market. The proportion of graduates who work in the tourism branch would positively influence evaluation of study program quality and would promote comparativeness of the university.

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