



# Graduate Employability and Linguistic Diversity

A Needs Assessment of the Austrian-Czech Cross-border Region

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# OVERVIEW

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- Research Context
- Theoretical Framework
  - Employability in Higher Education and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
  - Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- Research
  - Questions
  - Design
  - Focus of the Research Study
- Empirical findings
- Conclusion

# RESEARCH CONTEXT

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- Cross-cultural study of Higher Education between Austria and the Czech Republic
- Enhancement of graduate employability in technical degree programs (informatics, logistics, civil and mechanical engineering) of the Austrian-Czech border region through content language integrated learning (German, Czech and/or English)
- Qualitative Study
  - 14 Interviews
  - Employability requirements of the local industry in 4 disciplines (informatics, logistics, civil and mechanical engineering)
  - Importance of foreign language skills (German, Czech and/or English) in the cross-boarder region
  - Necessity of the awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in the local industry

A man in a dark blue suit and white shirt is sitting at a desk. He is looking at a laptop screen. A brown leather briefcase is on the desk next to him. The background is a blurred office setting with a plant and a window.

# Employability in Higher Education

## 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

# EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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*“Employability means that students and graduates can discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”*

(Oliver, 2015)

# EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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- Equip future graduates with an appropriate skillset that goes beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries e.g.
  - Intercultural competence, foreign language skills, communicative effectiveness, global networking, etc.
- A broader understanding of employability which opens up the narrow lens of the processing perspective is seen as a key of a profound framework for future graduates.

(Holmes, 2013; Gaisch & Oellinger, 2014; Clarke, 2017; Gaisch, Rammer, Hrušková & Krátká 2017)

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

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- Significant modifications within the working environment e.g.
  - Flatter hierarchy and management structures
  - Decentralized knowledge transfer and information sharing
  - Interdisciplinary teams and global networking
- ... lead to new ways of thinking and working
- Requirements for success in the global workplace of the future

(Binkley et al., 2012; Germaine et al., 2016; van Laar et al., 2017)

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

21 <sup>st</sup> century skills in 2015	21 <sup>st</sup> century skills in 2020
1. Complex Problem Solving	1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Coordinating with Others	2. Critical Thinking
3. People Management	3. Creativity
4. Critical Thinking	4. People Management
5. Negotiation	5. Coordinating with Others
6. Quality Control	6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Service Orientation	7. Judgement and Decision Making
8. Judgement and Decision Making	8. Service Orientation
9. Active Listening	9. Negotiation
10. Creativity	10. Cognitive Flexibility

(World Economic Forum, 2016)





**CLIL**  
**Content and Language**  
**Integrated Learning**

# CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING

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*“CLIL can be defined as an educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary, or tertiary level” (Dalton-Puffer, 2011)*

- Increase intercultural awareness and foster personal abilities of the learner
- Support the development regarding language usage, cognitive flexibility, communication competence and cross-cultural understanding of students

A top-down view of a wooden desk. On the left is a silver laptop with a black screen. To its right is a white mug filled with dark coffee. Further right are two pencils, one yellow and one green, and a small stack of yellow sticky notes. There are also some crumpled pieces of yellow paper scattered on the desk. A semi-transparent grey rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the text.

# Research Questions, Design and Focus

# RESEARCH QUESTION

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- Do foreign language skills (German, Czech and/or English) in technical degree programs (informatics, logistics, civil and mechanical engineering) have the potential to increase graduate employability in the Austrian-Czech border region?
- Are intercultural competence and linguistic diversity an asset for the local industry of Upper Austria and the Czech Republic?
- How can technical study programmes be enriched with elements of content and language integrated learning (CLIL)?

# RESEARCH DESIGN

Age	Min Max	26 years 62 years
Gender	Male Female	11 3
Duration of the interview	Min Max	15 minutes 69 minutes
Countries	Austria Czech	5 people 9 people
Disciplines	Informatics Logistics Civil engineering Mechanical engineering Business representative *	2 people 2 people 2 people 2 people 6 people
Total participants		14 participants

\* Upper Austrian Chamber of Commerce, Institute for Economic Development (WIFI) and WIFI International, South Bohemian Chamber of Commerce

# FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

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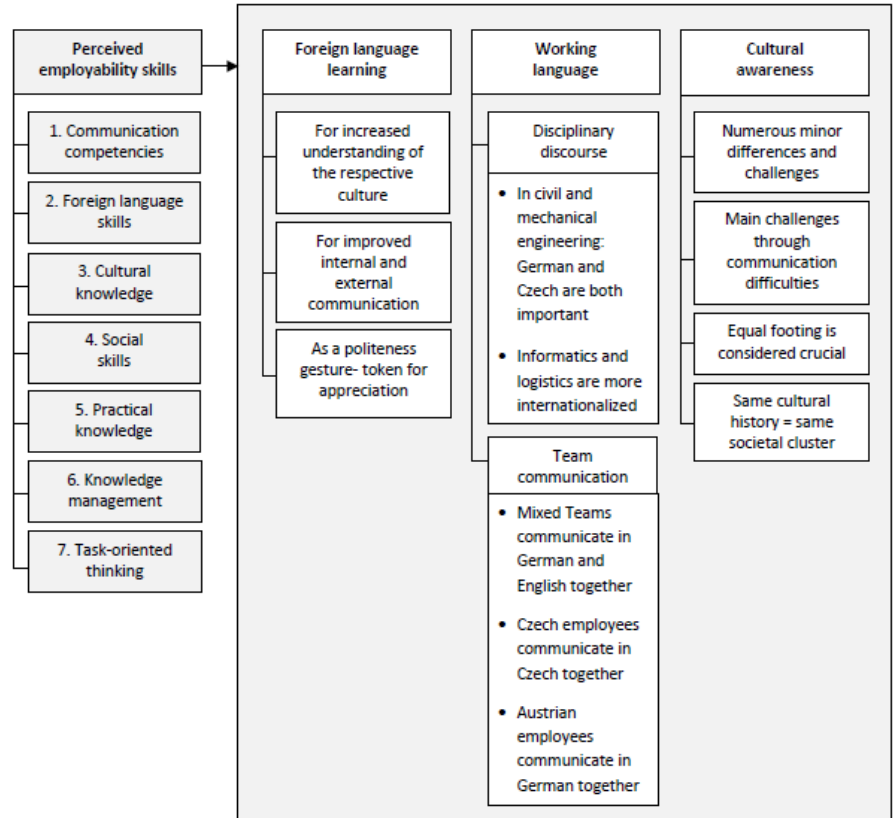
- Experience within cross-border cooperation in Austria and the Czech Republic
- Employability requirements of the local industries
- Lingual and cultural awareness of employees
- Working languages within the companies
- Foreign language skills of employees
  - Usage of technical terminology in different languages (German, Czech, English)

A modern conference room with a large table, chairs, and a projector, overlaid with a semi-transparent box containing the text 'Empirical Findings'. The room features a wooden floor, a grid ceiling with recessed lights and a projector, and large windows on the right side. The text is centered in a white, bold font within a grey semi-transparent rectangle.

# Empirical Findings

# EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

- Thematic map of the key findings
  - Perceived employability skills  
(ranked according to the priority)
  - Foreign language learning
  - Working language
  - Cultural awareness





# EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

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- Perceived employability skills
  1. Communication competencies
  2. Foreign language skills
  3. Cultural knowledge
  4. Social skills
  5. Practical knowledge
  6. Knowledge management
  7. Task-oriented thinking

# EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

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- Foreign language learning
  - For increased understanding of the respective cultures
  - For improved internal and external communication
  - As a politeness gesture – token of appreciation

# EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

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- Working language
  - Disciplinary discourse
    - In civil and mechanical engineering: German and Czech are both important
    - Informatics and logistics are more internationalized (English as a lingua franca)
  - Team communication
    - Mixed teams communicate in German and English together
    - Czech employees communicate in Czech together
    - Austrian employees communicate in German together

# EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

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- Cultural awareness
  - Numerous minor differences and challenges
  - Main challenges due to communication difficulties
  - Intercultural competence builds the bridge to a respectful and effective working environment

# PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS VS. 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

Perceived employability skills	21 <sup>st</sup> century skills in 2015	21 <sup>st</sup> century skills in 2020
1. Communication competencies	1. Complex Problem Solving	1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Foreign language skills	2. Coordinating with Others	2. Critical Thinking
3. Cultural Knowledge	3. People Management	3. Creativity
4. Social skills	4. Critical Thinking	4. People Management
5. Practical knowledge	5. Negotiation	5. Coordinating with Others
6. Knowledge management	6. Quality Control	6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Task-oriented thinking	7. Service Orientation	7. Judgement and Decision Making
8. Collaborative and cooperative problem solving	8. Judgement and Decision Making	8. Service Orientation
9. Critical (self)-reflection	9. Active Listening	9. Negotiation
10. Diversity Management	10. Creativity	10. Cognitive Flexibility



# Conclusion

# CONCLUSION

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- Cross-border region requires graduates that possess willingness to engage in
  - a profound understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity
  - disciplinary and transversal skills e.g.
    - communicative skills
    - cultural competence
    - complex problem solving
    - critical and analytical thinking
    - critical (self-) reflection

# CONCLUSION

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- The enrichment of technical study programmes with CLIL-based elements was perceived to bring:
  - more practical and hands on of language usage
  - increased intercultural awareness
- Improved collaboration between internationalized companies at the Austrian-Czech cross-border region through
  - Foreign language skills
  - Intercultural competencies
  - Respectful and appreciative communication
  - Awareness of national communication style (e.g. high vs. low context, face, criticism)



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# Graduate Employability and Linguistic Diversity

A Needs Assessment of the Austrian-Czech Cross-border Region

*Website: <http://clil.vstecb.cz/>*

*ResearchGate: CLIL-Content-and-Language-Integrated-Learning-at-the-Tertiary-Level*