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**FORMATION OF COMPETITIVE GRADUATES'  
COMPETENCIES IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

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***Abstract***

Every year the role of soft skills in the process of professional development of employees and development of the company increases, it is denoted not only by researchers, but also by the managers of large companies. Many organizations include soft skills in the list of corporate competencies. The article deals with the concept of soft skills and its importance for the specialist in professional activity. The types of activities that contribute to the students' soft skills formation in the learning process at the University are given. It is noted that only educational activities may be not enough for the students' soft skills formation, but extracurricular activities can be one of the additional means of the formation of these competencies. The article presents the results of employment of graduates from Surgut state University of 2016 and 2017 years involved and not involved in extracurricular activities during the period of study at the University. The authors determined a student as involved in extracurricular activities, who became the winner of the competition "the Evening of outstanding students" which included rewarding of the students who scored the highest number of points compared to other students during the year in the following types of activity: volunteering, science, sport, activity, creativity, allowing students to develop the employers' soft skills. The main reasons for non-employment of graduates in the first six months after graduation are denoted. The steps to improve the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market are identified.

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**Keywords:** Competitiveness, soft skills, extracurricular activities, employment, graduate.



## 1. Introduction

Effective use of labor potential of the employees is a subject of close attention of the managers of companies, enterprises, organizations of different levels and types of activities (Buley et al., 2016). In their work they rely on the latest achievements in science, researches of the scientists and practitioners who bring to the fore the improvement of the management system of the organization and personnel. The most important is the creation of favorable conditions of work (Barck-Holst et al., 2015; Rogach et al., 2016; Vinichenko, Frolova, Maloletko, Bondaletov, & Rogach, 2016).

Recently, more and more attention has been paid to introducing innovations into the personnel management system, evaluating employees at all stages of their functioning in the organization (Gureva et al., 2016; Mura et al., 2017). Modern technologies of work with colleagues attract HR managers and line managers (Avanesova et al., 2016; Aeon & Aguinis, 2017; Mitrofanova et al., 2017), valuation of their capacity and work outcomes (Azevedo et al., 2012; Prichina et al., 2017). There is a deliberate search of talented people, ranging from recruitment and throughout employees' activities in the organization (Sears, 2003; Robertson & Abbey, 2004; Smilansky, 2005), there is a formation of personnel reserve (Kirillov & Vinichenko, 2017). The gamification of all personnel management processes is studied in details (Werbach & Hunter, 2015; Vinichenko, Melnichuk, Kirillov, Makushkin, & Melnichuk 2016; Lumsden et al., 2016; Miguel et al., 2017).

HR service also researches the skills of the potential candidates, graduates, to exclude the possible submission of false information by the applicant about themselves on the stage of selection (Tsitskari et al., 2017). Great attention is paid not only to theoretical knowledge and professional skills, but also to the development of personal and interpersonal competencies ("soft skills") (Vinichenko et al., 2018). Recently, interest in emotional competence has been actualized.

"Soft skills" is defined as a social and labor characteristic of a set of knowledge, skills and motivational characteristics of an employee in the field of interaction with people, the ability to manage their time competently, the ability to persuade, to hold negotiation, leadership, emotional intelligence, having the emergence necessary for successful implementation of work and relevant to the requirements of the position and strategic goals of the organization, it is a characteristic of the potential quality, allowing to describe almost all the elements of staff readiness to work effectively in a given situation at the workplace in the working team (Ivonina et al., 2017).

Numerous surveys show that employers want to see motivated workers who have innovative ideas and are able to take the initiative; flexible, development-oriented and result-oriented; able to resolve conflicts and have negotiating skills; who has the skills to solve problem situations; punctual, able to work in multitasking, withstand deadlines, etc. (Bogdan & Chulanova, 2016; Chernyak & Kharlamova, 2015). In this regard and high competition among young professionals in the labor market, university graduates should be able to stand out from the rest of the applicants, demonstrate not only a high level of professional competence, but also developed personal and interpersonal competencies (Demcheko et al., 2017).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Understanding the importance of the development of certain personal and interpersonal competences for graduates to achieve competitiveness in the labor market, the question of possibility to achieve a high level of development of the above competencies arises.

“Soft skills” are formed among students in the development of certain academic disciplines at the university (psychology, conflictology, team building, etc.), as well as in the process of using such methods in teaching as teamwork, preparation of projects, etc., but sometimes it is not enough to achieve high levels of soft skills.

The results of the employers’ survey on satisfaction with the level of training of graduates indicate that, in addition to the insufficient formation of some professional competencies, employers note the lack of developed ability in a number of graduates to plan their time, work in a team, etc. Active extracurricular activities can contribute to the formation of “soft skills” in a higher education institution. In many universities, including Surgut State University, students are actively involved in creative, sports, scientific, volunteer and other types of active extracurricular activities. They participate in various projects, learn to interact in a team, take responsibility, develop their leadership skills, public speaking skills, a network of useful contacts, etc. The number of students involved in extracurricular activities grows every year, but their number is still not very large.

## **3. Research Questions**

Taking into consideration the relevance of the issue of development of personal and interpersonal competencies among university students in order to achieve competitiveness in the labor market, the authors raised the following questions for this study: Does a developed system of extracurricular work with students, which develops “soft skills” among students, allow them to increase their competitiveness, namely, to achieve high rates of employment for graduates?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the results of employment of graduates involved and not involved in extracurricular activities at the university and, subsequently, the development of methodological tools for the formation of the competencies of a competitive graduate in extracurricular activities.

## **5. Research Methods**

One of the indicators of graduates' competitiveness in the labor market is their employment in the received specialty. Employment in a specialty affects both the demand for a profession in the region's labor market, the graduate's level of training (a set of knowledge in the acquired specialty), and whether the graduate has developed “soft skills” that are formed both as a part of the student's educational and extra-curricular activities. To achieve the goal of our study, an analysis of the employment of graduates of Surgut State University who took an active part in extracurricular activities was made. Under the category

of "active participation" we understand the student's entry into the number of laureates of the Evening of Outstanding Students competition. The winners of the competition are students who during the year took part in such types of extracurricular activities as: volunteering, creativity, sports, activities, science and received the highest score compared to other students. Points are awarded according to the following criteria: the level of the event and the status of participation, as well as the number of events in which the student participated.

The study was conducted in several stages.

1. The target group of students who formed the experimental group (EG) was defined. It included graduate students who became laureates of the "Evening of outstanding students" competition in 2016 and 2017.

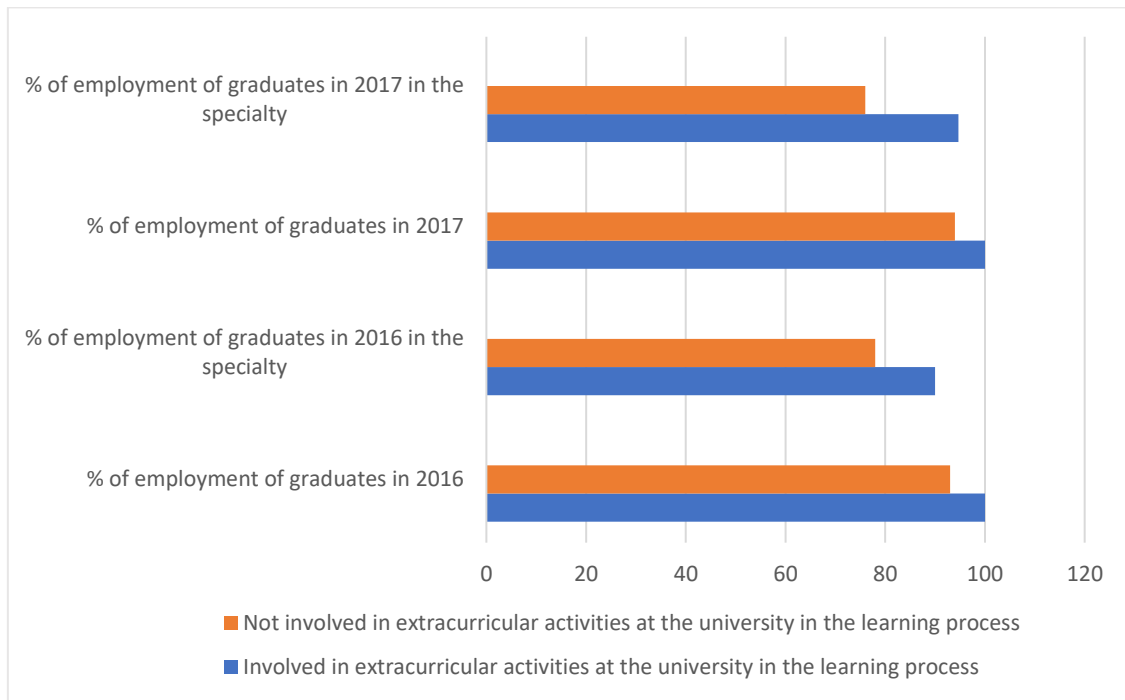
2. An analysis of the employment of graduates of the experimental group (EG) during the first year after graduation was carried out according to the following parameters: employed / not employed, employed in the specialty / employed not in the specialty, employment time (during the period of study at the university, during the first 3 months after graduation, within 6 months after graduation).

3. Comparative analysis of the employment of the experimental group, with the results of the employment of graduates who are not involved in extracurricular activities in the university control group (CG) is done.

## **6. Findings**

After analyzing the lists of laureates of the "Evening of outstanding students" competition, it is necessary to note that 20 graduate students were in 2016 and 18 in 2017 among them. For the most part these are representatives of the institute of humanitarian education and sports, the institute of economics and management - 66% (the representation of students from other institutes among the laureates of the competition does not exceed 15% (2-3 people)). In this regard, the EG was reduced to representatives of the above two institutions - by 13 people in 2016 and 2017. The control group (CG) consisted of graduates of these two institutes who were not involved in extracurricular activities at the university (257 graduates in 2016 and 292 graduates in 2017).

Turning to the description of the results of employment of students of the EG and the CG in the first year after graduation, we note the high percentage of employment of representatives of the EG. A detailed picture of the distribution of the results is shown in Figure 01.



**Figure 01.** Employment of graduates during the first year after completion of training  
 Source: Authors

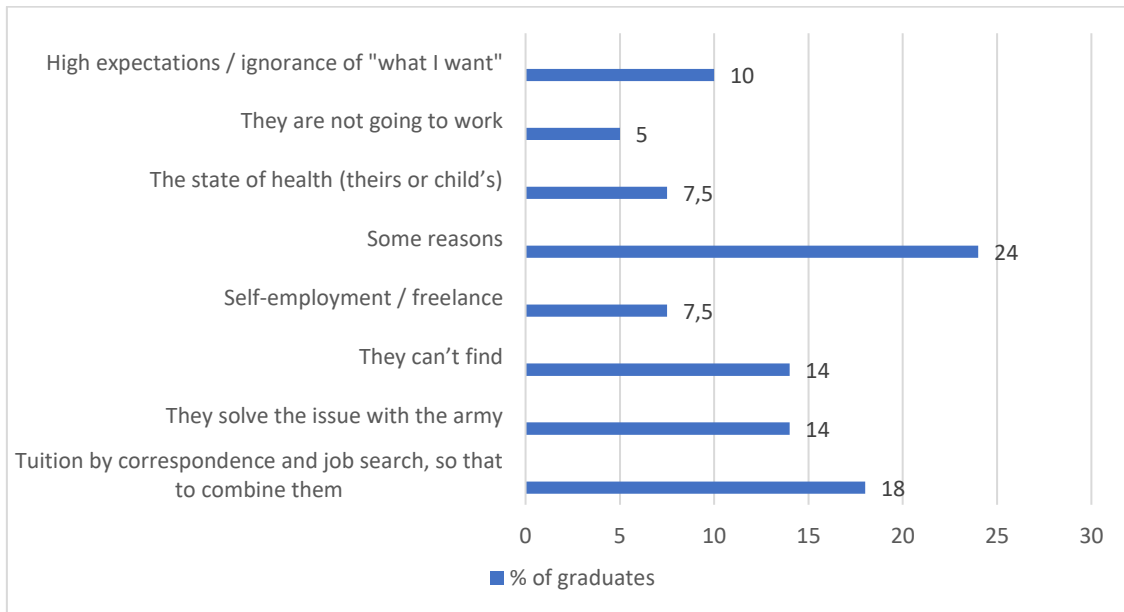
Qualitative analysis of the distribution of graduates involved in extracurricular activities allows us to judge that the decision not to work in the specialty was deliberate. 15% of graduates who were involved in extracurricular activities at a higher education institution who completed their studies in 2016 and who continued their work activities not in their specialty worked in the field of extracurricular youth employment. As the graduates emphasize themselves, they like the activities they do, and their basic education helps them in solving some production tasks (for example, “Working as a youth worker helps economics education, because you have to make cost estimates constantly, to prepare documents for payment, etc.” emphasizes one of the graduates). 7,5% of 2017 graduates who do not work in the specialty explain their decision with a conscious unwillingness to work in the specialty and emphasize satisfaction with the professional activity in which they are immersed.

23% of graduates of 2016 and 2017 in the first year after graduation changed jobs moving to organizations with more favorable employment conditions.

The analysis of the period required for EG and CG graduates for employment shows that the majority of EG graduates (73%) were employed during the first 3 months after employment, 15% were employed during the period of study at the university, and the rest - 6 months after graduation. Among graduates of the CG at the time of graduation, 12% of graduates were employed, 22% were employed during the first 3 months, the remaining group of employed graduates found work within six months after graduation.

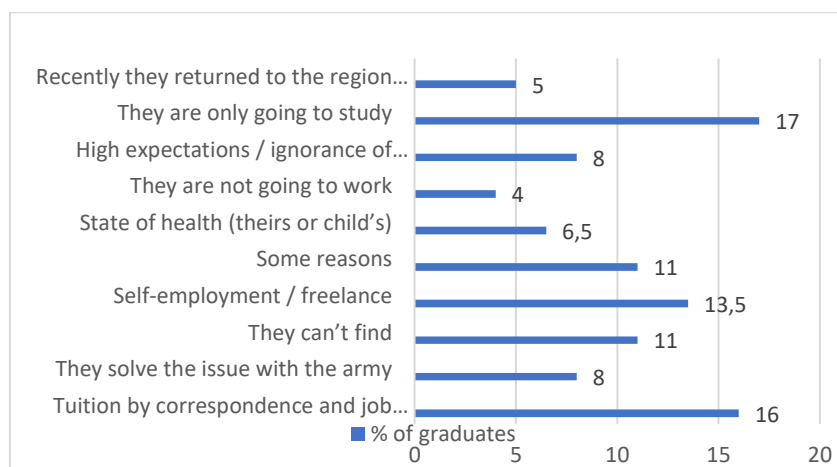
Let us turn to a more detailed analysis of the employment of graduates who were not involved in extracurricular activities. Due to the fact that the percentage of employment of graduates in this category is lower compared to the EG (see Figure 01), we analyzed the reasons for the non-employment of the CG.

The results of monitoring the reasons for the non-employment of graduates of 2016 and 2017 are shown in Figure 02.



**Figure 02.** The results of monitoring the reasons for the non-employment of graduates of 2016  
 Source: Authors

The analysis of the reasons according to which graduates were not employed indicates that there is a growing percentage of graduates who tend to postpone time to work (17% of graduates of 2017 are only going to study), or tend to plan their employment independently (the percentage of freelance work graduates of 2016 graduation is 7.5, and among graduates of 2017 graduation - 13.5). Self-employment / freelance is most common among graduates of such specialties as linguistics, pedagogical education (73% of all graduates engaged in freelancing). We also note that 5% of 2016 graduates and 4% of 2017 graduates are not going to get a job.



**Figure 03.** The results of monitoring the reasons for the non-employment of graduates of 2017  
 Source: Authors

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, our study allows us to emphasize the importance of student participation in extracurricular activities to increase their competitiveness in the labor market. This conclusion allows us to form a series of further steps of the authors.

- It is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of the career development of graduates who are involved and not involved in extracurricular activities in student period
- To form, together with employers, competitive graduates' competence models and to develop students' soft competencies not only in educational, but also in extracurricular activities.
- To develop methods for the formation of competitive graduate competencies in extracurricular activities, in accordance with the needs of the region's labor market, taking into account the importance of developing "soft skills".

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