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**PROBLEMS OF POLISH STUDENTS
WITH GAINING PROFESSIONAL
EXPERIENCE FROM THE
PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPE 2020
STRATEGY GOALS**

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ABSTRACT. The assessment of the situation in the Polish labour market based on chosen indices derived from the Europe 2020 strategy draws attention to the issue of the university graduates' transition into the labour market. According to the studies focused on the perspective of an employer, professional experience constitutes one of the crucial factors which precondition quick labour inclusion of university graduates. Its significance is underlined by numerous theoretical concepts, especially by the human capital theory. The paper aims to identify problems which accompany the process of gaining professional experience during academic studies. The results of a survey study conducted over a section of students in the master's degree course in economics at the University of Economics in Katowice in years 2014 and 2015 are presented. The analysis provided the basis to formulate conclusions with regard to students' preferences and currently available possibilities of gaining professional experience during studies.

JEL Classification: I21, J24

Keywords: Poland, labour market, tertiary education, professional experience.

Introduction

The Europe 2020 strategy provides the direction to the development of the EU economies by formulating main objectives which should contribute to smart, sustainable growth fostering social inclusion. One of its dimensions concerns an increase in the employment rate, a reduction in the early school leavers share and raising the percentage of the population with a university degree (Europa 2020). From what has been observed in the Polish labour market, although the educational goals have been accomplished, the employment rate remains alarmingly low. This fact motivates the search for new means of boosting the employment rate. The high percentage of population with university degrees accompanied by a relatively high unemployment rate amongst the university graduates sets the area of study on tertiary education and its adjustment to the expectations of the employers and generally the issue of graduates transition from a university into the labour market.

One of the conditions to find a job in a short time is to have practical skills developed from hands-on experience. Research shows that this condition is extremely difficult to meet

(Kocór *et al.*, 2012, p. 80; Kocór Strzebońska, 2014, p. 74; Heyler, Lee, 2014). The paper aims to identify the problems with gaining professional experience by students in full-time courses during education at the tertiary level. The issue was illustrated with the example of students in the master's degree course in economics at the University of Economics in Katowice. According to the research presented in this paper, they often try to combine studies with work.

University of Economics in Katowice is one of the five public economic universities in Poland. Full-time studies at Polish public universities are free of tuition fees. Relatively low number of hours spent physically at the university and elastic working hours schemes offered by employers give an opportunity to reconcile full-time studies with job, even though it is not an easy task and affects diploma grades.

The results of the survey performed provide the arguments for the thesis that students' preferences concerning the means of gaining expertise do not comply with available opportunities and actual career paths, and work during studies hardly ever helps to get the type of professional experience which could be appreciated by a potential employer. The paper consists of four parts. The first part formulates the problem in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy. The second part contains the review of the literature which exemplifies the importance of professional experience for successful transition of university graduates to the labor market. The third part describes the survey performed at the University of Economics in Katowice. The last part presents the outcomes of the survey.

1. Problem formulation

Two out of five main goals formulated by the Europe 2020 strategy relate to the labour market. One states that the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 should reach 75%. The other assumes the reduction in the share of early leavers from education and training of the younger generation, aged 18-24, to 10% and the increased share in the population aged 30-34 having tertiary educational attainment to 40% (Europa 2020). The goals concerning education should naturally support the superordinate, employment-related goals. At the stage of formulating the objectives Poland with the indices roughly equal to the EU average had already satisfied the condition referring to early school leavers from education, whereas the tertiary educational attainment goal was reached in 2013 (Eurostat). Therefore, the objectives were adequately modified as presented in *Table 1*. The rates referring to educational goals were set at a higher level and the expected employment rates were decreased to 71%.

Table 1. Objectives defined in the Europe 2020 strategy and their achievement in Poland (%)

| Objective | EU(28) | | | Poland | | |
|--|---------|---------|------|---------|---------|------|
| | Planned | Outcome | | Planned | Outcome | |
| | | 2010 | 2014 | | 2010 | 2014 |
| Employment rate, age group 20-64 | 75 | 68.6 | 69.2 | 71 | 64.3 | 66.5 |
| Early leavers from education and training, age group 18-24 | 10 | 13.9 | 11.1 | 4.5 | 5.4 | 5.4 |
| Tertiary educational attainment, age group 30-34 | 40 | 33.8 | 37.9 | 45.0 | 34.8 | 42.1 |

Source: Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (referred on: 6.10.2015).

Satisfactory outcomes in terms of educational objectives are accompanied by the employment rates explicitly lower than the EU average. Therefore, it is worth to investigate to what extent the potential of population with tertiary educational attainment is used (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Economic activity of the population with tertiary educational attainment in Poland (1st quarters of 2010 and 2015)

| Population group | Labor force participation rate | | Employment rate | | Unemployment rate | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | 2010 | 2015 | 2010 | 2015 | 2010 | 2015 |
| Aged 15+ | 80.8 | 80.1 | 76.6 | 76.5 | 5.3 | 4.5 |
| Graduates aged 15-30 | 91.3 | 93.4 | 72.1 | 71.7 | 21.5 | 23.2 |

Source: GUS (2010), *Aktywność Ekonomiczna Ludności Polski, I kwartał 2010*, Warszawa, pp. 126 and 132; GUS (2015), *Aktywność Ekonomiczna Ludności Polski, I kwartał 2015*, pp. 71 and 81.

Table 2 shows that part of the population with the university degree is characterized by a relatively high employment activity rate and the unemployment rate much lower than for the whole population (8.6% in 2015 and 10.6% in 2010 (GUS, 2010a, 2015)). However, the problem concerns university graduates aged 30 or less where unemployment rate is five times as high as for the whole population with tertiary educational attainment. A high unemployment rate accompanied by considerable economic activity suggests problems with entering and lasting in the labour market in the initial period after graduation. In the updated reform programme (Krajowy Program Reform Europa 2020, 2015, pp. 9-12), the government announced the implementation and planned a number of activities predominantly oriented towards the unemployed. Nonetheless, the unemployment prevention was focused mainly on the education system reforms through the division into professional and academic universities while the problem of transition into the labour market for the graduates of the latter was basically ignored (Krajowy Program Reform Europa 2020, 2015, p. 43).

Unemployment amongst university graduates is poorly recognized as in the 1990s. people with tertiary educational attainment entered the labour market relatively easily. For instance, in 1995 university graduates constituted only 0.3% out of all the registered unemployed and in 2012 their share rose to 1.5% (GUS, 2003, 2012). Most of all, it is the consequence of a growing number of university graduates (whose share in the first quarter of 2010 and 2014 in the total number of graduates reached 57% and 48.4%, respectively (GUS, 2010a, 2015) and partially the result of a mismatch between the professional structure of the labour force and the needs of the labor market.

Studies focused on the expectations of employers towards candidates for a job may give some overview of the requirements which graduates fail to meet most frequently. Due to the research performed in years 2010-2014 by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) professional experience was the first (in 2014 and 2010) or the second (preceded by gender and followed by education) feature indicated as most important for employer (Kocór *et al.*, 2015, p. 32). On the other hand, the survey conducted by the Institute of Labour and Social Studies on both graduates and employers shows that the former recognize knowledge and skills as the first and expertise as the second most important factor to find a job, while in the view of the latter graduates have the biggest problems with combining academic theory with practice (IPiSS, e-Dialog, 2012, pp. 10-12). Similarly, the research concerning expectations of the employers who employ the graduates of the University of Economics in Katowice showed that professional experience was the second most important criteria for the new employees (preceded by knowledge and skills) in both business sector and public administration (Krannich *et al.*, 2011, p. 21). Additionally, the research on the career paths of the graduates at the same university in years 1977-2011 unveiled that 29% of respondents were required to have had professional experience and for 35% was significant in search of job (Keystone Consulting, 2011, pp. 54, 58). This fact draws attention to the problem of

gaining expertise as a factor preconditioning the transition of university graduates to the labour market.

2. Professional experience as a factor supporting university graduates' transition into the labour market – literature review

Professional experience can be regarded as an element of human capital. J. Mincer, who created the foundations of the human capital theory, considered it as a kind of investment into human capital and the reason for salary divergence (Mincer, 1958; Chiswick, 2003, pp. 5-6). T. Schultz classified it as one of the most important activities for the development of human capital (Schultz, 1981, p. 23). Therefore, the human capital theory provides a significant perspective on the problem.

Contemporary studies on the factors for successful transition from university to employment are rather interdisciplinary due to the multidimensionality of the problem. Hence, they comprise economic, educational and psychological determinants. D. Piróg (2013, pp. 133, 134) takes into account the macroeconomic aspects such as overall condition of the economy and its innovativeness, and the situation in labour market, as well as the individual features (e.g. parents' education attainment, levels of aspiration and motivation) and accumulated educational capital. In the studies devoted to the quality of educational capital, D. Piróg indicates two main groups of factors: 1) university activities, especially the profile of a graduate, activities of career centres and cooperation with employers, 2) the behavior of a student or graduate as an individual, including: pursuit for high educational results, gaining professional qualifications and expertise. Thus, both spheres of the university environment and individual's decisions contribute to the university graduates' status in the labour market.

Alternatively, professional experience may be regarded as a component of broadly defined knowledge which comprises both formal education and job experience (Kowalczyk, 2012). Some studies concentrate on the identification of the set of most important characteristics which shorten the time lapse between graduation and getting the first job. These characteristics include practical experience acquired during studies (Kopertyńska, 2009, p. 78; Wincenciak, 2010). The studies led to two kinds of conclusions. Some of them underline the necessity to enrich the educational program and orient it towards practical skills development. Others stress the need for creating the environment for contact with potential employers and gaining hands-on experience. Lack of unambiguous solutions or recommendations to the problem suggests the existence of a problematic area which gives room to shifts of responsibility between universities, employers and graduates.

Combining theoretical knowledge with a job through the promotion of flexible educational paths and striving for the development of fruitful contacts and cooperation between the subjects in the labor market became fundamental in building the European labour market (Marszałek, 2012). Literature offers three models of expertise acquisition during studies (Harvey *et al.*, 2002, p. 30): 1) organised work experience as part of a programme of study, 2) organised work experience external to a programme of study, 3) ad hoc work experience external to a programme of study. Students at Polish universities tend to do relatively short internships, usually within the framework of bachelor's degree studies. For instance, a student at the University of Economics is obliged to work as a trainee for 120 hours during the intersession. As a result, more and more students take steps to broaden experience, do traineeships, apprenticeships or get gainfully employed on their own initiative. For example, a study conducted by the Institute of Labour and Social Studies revealed that 44% of university graduates were employed during studies (IPiSS, e-Dialog, 2012, pp. 10-12).

The modular survey concerning entering the labour market by young people conducted in the second quarter of 2009 showed that from all the people who found their first job during studies (10.5% of people tested), 79% were employed beyond or only as part of the

compulsory internship framework (including working during intersession). Amongst the tested who started to work at least 12 months after graduation (17.6% of people tested) only 23.6% worked during studies (GUS, 2010b, p. 56). This fact leads to the conclusion that combining gainful employment with tertiary education significantly raised the chances for quick transition into the labour market.

Getting hired in a short time still does not guarantee the job in the profession. Obviously, some students will decide to change the job due to e.g. unsatisfactory wages, however, taking into consideration the effectiveness of university education, it seems reasonable to make the most of educational capital already accumulated over the years of studies. In the survey module from the 3rd quarter of 2011 from all the people with tertiary educational attainment 62.5% declared being employed in the acquired profession (GUS, 2011, p. 103).

In order to incorporate the experience gained at work during studies into human capital and raise the chances to be hired in the acquired profession, a number of conditions need to be met, such as advancement of job duties and the requirements, kinds of technical equipment, means of communication and employment policies. The workplace (enterprise or institution) and the post are also of great importance together with the qualities of an employee as an individual including development orientation and personal competences (cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects), a career in the hierarchy of priorities and striving for self-realization in professional life (Jeruszka, 2014).

The accumulation of human capital through gaining professional experience by students turns out to be a very complex process and of a great impact on the opportunities in the labor market, nonetheless, preconditioned by a number of factors.

Poland became the beneficiary of two programmes implemented consecutively: the Operational Programme Human Capital (2007-2013) and currently conducted Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development (2014-2020). However, these programmes support unemployed (including graduates), problem groups e.g. discriminated in the labor market, or improvement of the education quality. The issue of providing university students with professional experience which is vital for smooth transition to labor market, has been utterly overlooked.

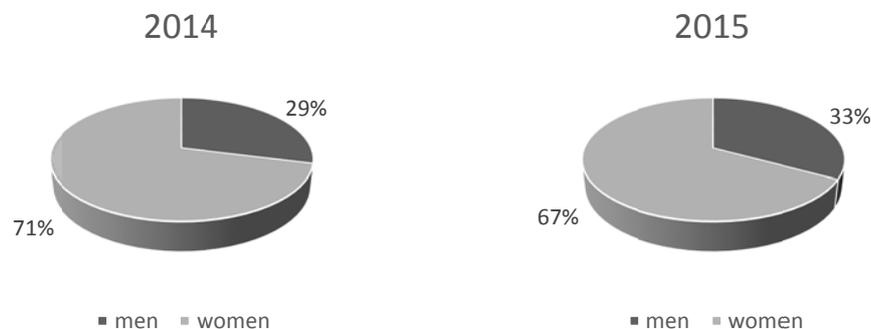
3. Professional experience during tertiary education – students' preferences confronted with reality – description of the survey

The survey conducted over a section of the students at the University of Economics in Katowice was inspired by graduates' problems with transition into employment, possibly attributed to the issue of professional experience. The hypothesis about a minor contribution of gainful work to professional expertise and general obstacles whilst gaining it was tested. The idea, research concept and the questionnaire were elaborated and the survey conducted by the author of the paper. The research should be regarded as pioneer and the article aims to present its results. Due to its exploratory character and the prevalence of qualitative variables only basic descriptive statistics will be derived. The research was not submitted to grant from any institution in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. Therefore it receives no funding.

The survey was conducted over the whole population (nearly 100%) of students at the 1st year of full-time master studies at the faculty of economics at the University of Economics in Katowice. Quite naturally, all the respondents had already earned a bachelor's or engineer's degree and continued their education in graduate studies. The survey was performed in two consecutive years: in January and March 2014 and in January 2015, in the form of an anonymous paper-based questionnaire, which enhanced the response rate. The collected questionnaires were manually input into spreadsheet. Although the survey contained 17 questions, only a part was presented due to the problem analyzed in this paper, including:

3 single-answer questions (one closed and two semi-closed) directed to all respondents, 5 questions directed to those who were working or running a business including 4 single-answer questions (two semi-closed, two – closed) and one ranking question, and finally – 3 single-answer questions (two semi-closed and one closed) directed to those who were not employed at a time of the survey performance.

All students present in the lecture on the day of the survey were questioned. It was also ensured that the survey was conducted during the lectures with the possible highest attendance. In 2014 and 2015 the totals of 129 and 194 students took part in the study, with 124 and 192 correctly fulfilling questionnaires, respectively. All respondents belonged to the same age class (around 23) and were free of tuition fees which means these features did not divide the examined group into subgroups. On the contrary, the results and conclusions may possibly be differentiated by gender. In 2014 the completed questionnaires were returned by 89 women (71%) and 35 men (29%) whereas in 2015 by 129 women (67%) and 63 men (33%). *Graph 1* shows that women constitute a prevailing majority of the students at the faculty.



Graph 1. Age structure by research years

Source: the author's survey.

Strong disproportion of the sample by gender should be handled carefully. Eventually, it was taken into account in the part of the survey directed to all respondents and omitted in the part intended for working and non-working part of the population, as the number of men in the subgroups was too small.

The crucial aspect of the study was the classification into students who had been gainfully employed and those who had not. Students who had already had contact with labor market could possibly give a better view of best ways to gain professional experience. This criterion was used in *Tables 4* and *5*. *Table 3* presents the classification concerning their job status.

Table 3. The situation of the examined students by job status

| Job status | 2014 | | 2015 | |
|--|------|-----|------|-----|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| I do not work and have never worked before | 42 | 34 | 53 | 28 |
| I used to work | 17 | 14 | 44 | 23 |
| I work | 31 | 25 | 51 | 26 |
| I run a business | 0 | 0 | 6 | 3 |
| I work part-time (weekends, summer break) | 34 | 27 | 38 | 20 |
| Total | 124 | 100 | 192 | 100 |

Source: the author's survey.

According to the data in *Table 3* in 2014, 82 individuals (58 women and 24 men) who had contact with employment constituted 66% of the total (65% of all women and 69% of all men questioned) and their share rose to 72% in 2015 (72% of all women and 71% of all men questioned). In both years around a quarter worked full time, another 20-27% had a part time job. Running a business was declared by 6 individuals in 2015.

One of the greatest problems of the survey was lack of information whether the job or economic activity were legal. Additionally, students could have misunderstood the term “economic activity” („I run a business”). The research was conducted by the author personally, which provided the respondents had a possibility to be instructed, when necessary.

4. Survey results

4.1. All respondents

In order to identify students’ preferences, the respondents were given a general list of activities which potentially enable to gain professional experience, both available and unavailable in the current educational system. All options were precisely described. The results are presented in *Table 4*.

Table 4. What would be the best option to gain professional experience during studies? (Number of responses)

| Options | 2014 | | | 2015 | | |
|--|-------|----|------|-------|----|------|
| | Total | W* | NW** | Total | W | NW** |
| Compulsory placement (current system) | 4 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Internship during winter or summer breaks | 14 | 8 | 6 | 13 | 9 | 4 |
| Regular job during winter or summer breaks | 3 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Job during the academic year (or at weekends) | 15 | 8 | 7 | 24 | 19 | 5 |
| Dual educational system, e.g. 3 days of lectures at university + 2 workdays at work or 3 months of lectures at university + 2 months at work arranged by the university, salary dependent on a job description | 88 | 63 | 25 | 137 | 99 | 38 |
| Other? | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| - placements and internships during studies, | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - |
| - additional term devoted to compulsory placement | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - |

*W – respondents who were employed on the day of the survey or had worked in the past, ran a business or worked part-time at weekends or during intersessions,

**NW – respondents who had never been employed.

Source: the author’s survey.

The prevailing majority of respondents – over 70% in both 2014 and 2015 – found the dual educational system as the best option to gain professional experience during studies (79% of women and 51% of men in 2014 and 72% of women and 71% of men in 2015). Among the proponents of the dual system, 72% (2014) and 65% (2015) had already been employed. At the same time, 77% (2014) and 71% (2015) of those who had ever been employed, chose the dual system, which implies that previous forms of contact with the labour market were not satisfactory. The second most popular option (12% in both 2014 and 2015) was a job performed during the academic year and organized on a student’s own initiative. This was the choice made by the respondents who both had and had not already been employed. The popularity of summer internships in 2014 was comparable, with a drop in 2015. Only 4 respondents in 2014 and 8 in 2015 indicated the internship in the current system.

To summarize, students find the dual system the most rewarding and their preferences seem to be quite apparent.

Moreover, students were asked to indicate which specified, currently available opportunities to gain professional experience they find the most suitable for them personally (Table 5).

Table 5. Which of the following options would you choose as the most suitable option to gain hands-on experience during studies? (Number of responses)

| Options | 2014 | | | 2015 | | |
|--|-------|----|------|-------|----|------|
| | Total | W* | NW** | Total | W* | NW** |
| Unpaid three-month internship in a known, attractive corporation, a post in accordance with the area of studies, recruitment through competition | 14 | 9 | 5 | 28 | 22 | 6 |
| Unpaid internship in a locally operating company, recruitment on a first come first serve basis | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Full-time job in a company, tertiary education not required, minimum wage (in 2014: 1680 PLN, in 2015: 1750 PLN), probable overlap of lectures and working hours | 5 | 4 | 1 | 16 | 13 | 3 |
| Contract of mandate or contract for specific work, flexible working hours (around 15 hours per week), complying with the area of studies, gross wage around 1000 PLN per month | 84 | 52 | 32 | 108 | 78 | 30 |
| Unpaid three-month internship in a known, attractive corporation abroad, a post in accordance with the area of studies, recruitment through competition, the cost of living and accommodation covered by the company | 11 | 10 | 1 | 29 | 19 | 10 |
| If you find the options above insufficient, please give your suggestion: | | | | | | |
| - paid internships in good companies | 3 | 3 | - | - | - | - |
| - paid 6-month internship | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| - half-time job, flexible working hours | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| - contract of mandate in free time, around 50 hours per week | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - |
| - paid internship | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | - |
| - half-time job, gross salary 1 000 PLN | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| - one-month internship during the academic year | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |

W*, NW** – as in Table 4.

Source: the author's survey.

From all the currently available possibilities students chose civil law agreements for 15 hours per week as the best way to gain professional experience. It was indicated by 68% respondents in 2014 (82% of women and 57% of men) and 56% in 2015 (62% of women and 42% of men), mainly by those who had already been employed. As in the case of the prevalence of the dual system over other systems, students were clearly interested in internships rewarded with a salary. In 2015, the percentage of the proponents of unpaid internships (inland or abroad) in large, established corporations was slightly higher than in 2014. What is worthy of mention, most of them had already been employed and their ability to assess the available options was presumably better. In 2014 10% of women and 14% of men was ready to undertake unpaid internship in homeland. In 2015 their share rose to 12% and 20%, respectively. Additionally, in 2015 a significant percentage declared the willingness

to start an unpaid internship abroad, declared by 15% of all women and 14% of men. Taking into consideration the data above, the propensity to undertake unpaid activities aimed at gaining professional experience is slightly higher in case of men.

4.2. Students employed at the time of the survey

On the day of the survey, 52% (65 persons) of the respondents in 2014 and 49% (95 persons) in 2015 were employed (full-time or part-time job, own business). Taking into consideration the gender structure of the working group, 53% of women and 51% of men in 2014, 50% and 48% in 2015, respectively. Women exhibited slightly higher activity in this extent.

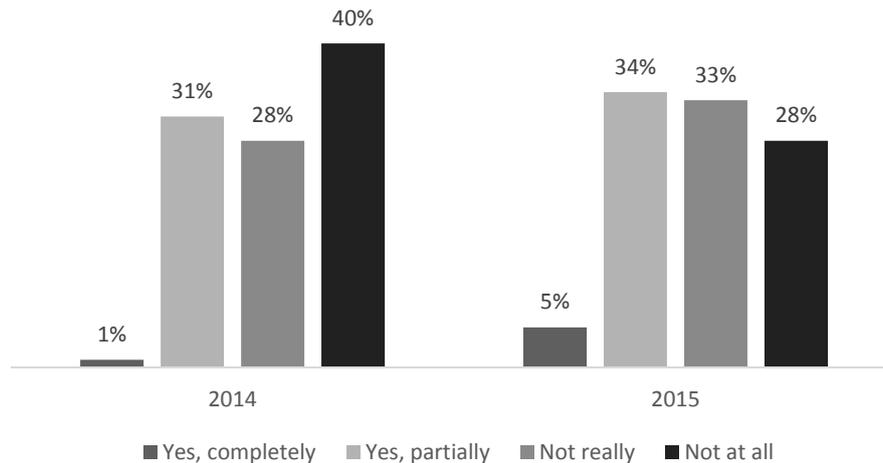
The share of the working group is comparable to the one reported at the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Szczecin in years 2008/09, according to which 48% of respondents received income (Jarecki, 2010). The share is slightly higher than in all-Poland researches in 2013 by Polish Agency for Enterprise Development which amounted to 45% in reference to economics- and administration-related faculties (Jelonek *et al.*, 2014, p. 40).

From the perspective of the aims of the analysis it is essential to identify the main incentives to search for a job and what factors were crucial to the choice of the job.

48% of respondents in 2014 and 49% in 2015 declared the financial motivation as the main reason for a job search. 45% and 35% of students indicated both the financial motivation and the need to gain experience, only 5% and 11% were oriented mainly towards gaining professional experience. A few respondents indicated the need to pursue their passions or help to run a family business.

43 responses in 2014 and 52 in 2015 pointed to the salary as the first or second crucial determinant of accepting a job offer. A decision about the job is therefore dictated mainly by financial incentive. The developmental aspect of the post, including an improvement in skills and competences, was indicated as at least the third most important aspect by 40 respondents in 2014 and 58 in 2015. The opportunity to put knowledge acquired at the university into practice appeared lower in the hierarchy, usually between 4th and 7th place, which implies that students expected to acquire skills which did not really rely on university knowledge. 31 students in 2014 and 40 in 2015 valued the attractiveness of an employer as at least the third most important factor. Convenient access to a workplace, distance from home and the good reputation of a company as an employer were generally perceived as the least important, however in 2014 ranked by 24 and in 2015 by 25 respondents at least the third most important determinant.

The next question was addressed to the group of students who had already had contact with employment and referred to the alignment of the job with their university specialization. *Graph 2* provides the summary of the results (93 correctly fulfilling this part of the questionnaire in 2015; 65 – in 2014).



Graph 2. Do your job duties correspond with the area of study at the university?

Source: the author's survey.

The conclusions following from this part of the survey were not optimistic. A vast majority of students perform job duties unrelated to their area of study (71% in 2014 and 61% in 2015). Slightly over 30% declared a partial alignment with their course, few students declared full alignment (1 response in 2014 and 5 in 2015). Another part of the survey was devoted to developmental opportunities, including acquiring new skills and knowledge (Table 6).

Table 6. Does your job give you an opportunity to gain skills and competences appreciated in the labour market?

| Answer | 2014 | | 2015 | |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | No. of responses | % | No. of responses | % |
| Yes, to a significant extent | 13 | 20 | 23 | 25 |
| Yes, but to a minor extent | 25 | 38 | 46 | 49 |
| Not really | 22 | 34 | 21 | 23 |
| Not at all | 5 | 8 | 3 | 3 |
| Total | 65 | 100 | 93 | 100 |

Source: the author's survey.

The issue of developing skills and knowledge sought after in the labour market looks better than the alignment with the area of studies. Every fifth student in 2014 and every fourth student in 2015 reported the development of valuable competences. Whereas a significant part of respondents evaluated the improvement in this area as little or insufficient, their share dropped considerably in the second analyzed year. Independently from the statements above, the alarming 40% in 2014 and 26% in 2015 stated the lack of the development of skills and knowledge.

In spite of the general predominance of financial motivation to take up a job, students are apparently aware of gaps in their professional experience, which was reflected in the closing question for this part of the survey: 'If you were given a chance to take an internship offered by an attractive company and corresponding with your university course, with the possibility of employment for the best interns, would you give up your current job?'. Full

57% would certainly accept the offer, another 23% would accept the offer but under additional conditions, concerning mainly the salary for the internship.

4.3. Non-working students at the time of the survey

Another part of the survey included 3 questions and was intended to analyze the situation of the non-working students at the time of the survey. This group consisted of 59 students in 2014 and 97 in 2015. First of all, students were asked to choose one of the options specified in *Table 7* which described their situation best, with an option to give their own description.

The most frequent reason why one did not work was little chance to reconcile studies with work. A significant part had been in search of a job, however, they did not find the suitable offer. The share of students who concentrate on education and strive for scholarship for academic merit dropped drastically in 2015.

Table 7. Which statement depicts your situation best?

| Answer | 2014 | | 2015 | |
|---|------------------|----|------------------|----|
| | No. of responses | % | No. of responses | % |
| I do not work, I did not work in the past and am not looking for a job, the compulsory internship is sufficient | - | - | 5 | 5 |
| I do not work and focus on studies, I am striving for scholarship for academic merit | 18 | 31 | 12 | 12 |
| I have no possibility to study and work at the same time because of personal / organizational / other issues | 21 | 36 | 39 | 40 |
| I study at two faculties and do not work | 3 | 5 | 9 | 9 |
| I am looking for a job but still have not found the right one | 15 | 25 | 26 | 28 |
| Other (please specify) | | 3 | | 6 |
| - I am looking for a paid internship | 1 | | - | |
| - I am finishing the accounting course to work as an accountant | 1 | | - | |
| - I am a foreigner and learning the language, getting to know the country, etc. | - | | 2 | |
| - I am running a business (unofficially) | - | | 1 | |
| - I finished a two-month paid internship | - | | 1 | |
| - I gave up a job | - | | 1 | |
| - I started looking for a job | - | | 1 | |

Source: the author's survey.

Students were also asked whether they were going to look for work before they graduated (approximately in the forthcoming 1-2 years). Almost 70% (2014) and 53% (2015) admitted they would, another 24% and 39% had already been searching for employment, which means that over 90% took steps to get a job. There were only few individuals who remained idle towards their future employment in both analyzed years.

The last question concerned ways of obtaining professional experience in the view of those who lacked any contact with the labor market. In 2014, 46% intended to search for internships, 39% wanted to gain experience at work, 8% were interested in additional internships, another 7% were content with compulsory internships. In 2015, shares accounted for 40%, 32%, 9% and 19%, respectively. The percentage of respondents who did not plan to extend their experience beyond a compulsory internship grew in 2015. Independently from

their willingness to look for work, a considerable part of students wanted to gain experience by alternative means, therefore, they did not consider work itself as a source of professional experience.

The issue presented in the paper as well as the results of the survey constitute a new, cognitively interesting area of study. Previous researches concerning labor activity of the students concentrated on the level received income and planned career path (Jarecki, 2010; Jelonek *et al.*, 2014, pp. 39-49). The scheme of the questionnaire presented enables to recognize the preferences of the students in terms of gaining professional experience, the identification of existing problems and to design of new solutions to these problems.

Conclusions

Striving for the accomplishment of the Europe 2020 strategy goals should involve solutions to particular problems of the groups exposed to unemployment risk, including university graduates. The paper raises one of its aspects which concerns insufficiency in terms of professional experience and practical skills in this particular group. Professional experience, as a component of human capital, preconditions their successful transition into the labour market, which is underlined in various theoretical concepts.

The survey conducted over the section of the students of master's degree course in economics at the University of Economics in Katowice allowed for the confirmation of the formulated hypothesis. The results prove that students come across concrete problems in their efforts to acquire professional experience. The analysis of their preferences revealed the strong approval of the idea of the dual educational system. This solution remains still a hypothetical concept as in Poland it is implemented experimentally at technical universities only and in the future remains reserved for vocational schools. Implementation of such a form of studies on a larger scale is definitely worth considering. From all the currently available options students chose the civil law agreement, mainly due to its flexibility in terms of working hours and salary. Most of all it was chosen by females and respondents who had had a contact with employment. The research unveiled the growing tendency to undertake unpaid internships (both inland and abroad) in accordance with the area of study.

Students who made an effort to combine studies with work tended to accept the job offer based on a salary. Additionally, they did not regard the job as a way to broaden the knowledge already gained in the university. Admittedly, up to 75% students found that employment helped them develop skills and knowledge potentially appreciated by an employer, however, this component of experience cannot be regarded as strictly professional as it did not correspond with the area of studies.

The recognition of the problems encountered by students when gaining experience before graduation was essential due to the fact that a significant part of those who had no contact with employment, planned to search for a job within 2 forthcoming years, even though in terms of experience they were interested mainly in internships. This confirms the lack of consistent solutions to the problem with gaining professional experience during studies and a need to elaborate these solutions.

Both preferred and actually chosen ways to gain professional experience were driven by financial motivation. Students were aware of the necessity to build up experience, although it was the salary that eventually determined their decisions. Under no circumstances should this conclusion be underestimated. The problems identified in the survey confront the universities with the need to develop better ways to support students' contact with hands-on experience, including the possible implementation of the dual educational system and extend the range of paid internships intended to improve the transition of graduates into the labour

market. Obviously, they require greater concern and funding. These steps are partially included in the reform plan based on the National Reform Programme Europe 2020.

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