

STUDY ON CERTAIN DEMANDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET FROM BACĂU REGARDING THE COMPETENCES OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

Venera-Mihaela COJOCARIU ^{a*}, Doina PASCAL ^a

^a “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău, Bacău, Romania

Abstract

The study aims to present the partial results of certain investigative steps undertaken in the Department of Professional Counseling aimed at knowing how representatives of employers relate to the quality of training of graduates from Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău. The observational, quantitative-qualitative study involved the use of the methods of questionnaire-based survey and focus group. The investigated group comprised 15 employers of all employers attending the Conference on the presentation of the facilities offered by the state to employers and graduates, upon employment, an event integrated in the project Governmental facilities on the employment of graduates into the labour market (the main organizers being AJOFM Bacău/ the County Agency for Workforce Occupation Bacău, the Bacău Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău participated as partner). The collected and interpreted data enabled to: draw conclusions on how the participating employers appreciate the graduates' training; make suggestions on directions to improve the graduates' training; shape future directions for action in order to optimize the relationship between the university and the labour market.

Key words: competences, employers, employability, labour market

Theoretical arguments

The curricular perspective on the instructional-educational process places its finalities, evaluation and feedback on their achievement as a major organization, implementation and efficiency element of the process. In the context of the knowledge-based society and economy, one of the essential finalities of higher education is also one of the directions of reforming it, building a

* Professor, Ph.D.

E-mail address: venera_1962@yahoo.com

close, direct, effective and pragmatic connection with the economic environment (Urs & Ivan, 2011). The connection between the labour market and the university, though seemingly obvious and explicit, is not always easy to achieve, sustain, and demonstrate. On the contrary, studies reveal “labour market linking activities by faculty as generally very modest and unsystematic” (...). They use terms like “haphazard” (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2002, p. 34) and “ad hoc” (Brewer & Gray, 1999, p. 415) to describe the nature of these activities (apud Person & Rosenbaum, 2006, p. 413). On the other hand, nothing from the academic course of a graduate finds valuation but upon integration into the labour market, along with professional and personal achievement. But, these depend on the competences built and the extent to which they are required on the labour market. Alert, sharp and often unanticipated changes of economic life in recent years have made the achievement of financial independence by young adults increasingly difficult in their transition from school to labour market (Danziger & Ratner, 2010).

A 2010 study highlighted that there is no suitable correspondence between how employers define “job descriptions and specializations promoted by the Romanian higher education system and that employers’ demand is rarely directed towards a certain specialization. Usually, especially at first employment, employers value the graduates’ practical experience rather than specialization, transversal skills rather than specific skills, wider fields of study rather than narrow specializations” (Voicu, Tufis & Voicu, 2010, p. 3). These findings highlight the relevance of consulting the economic environment in designing the educational offer and generating the finalities of study programmes.

Employability is the concept that reflects the relationship between graduates and the labour market. A very complex notion, it can be defined in many different ways and from various perspectives. For this study, we selected those definitions that focus on employability by reference to the graduates’ transition to the labour market upon completion of academic studies. In a 2014 report, we identified two types of definitions: employment-centred and competence-centred. The *employment-centred* view approaches employability as a combination of factors that enable individuals to progress towards employability or get employment, keep a job and advance in their careers.

The *competence-centred* view expresses “the ability (of graduates) to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market” (apud European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, pp. 61-64). Complementary approaches define employability by relating to the acquisitions of students throughout their studies. Yorke (2006) defines employability as representing a set of results,

“skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations”. Such skills and competences are usually understood as needed (and demanded) by employers (idem). This is also the starting point of our study, namely the identification of some of the requirements of the local labour market regarding the competences of the graduates of *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău.

Practical arguments

In an economic and political context marked by crises, instability and unpredictability, Romania had, nevertheless, one of the highest growth rates in the European Union (EU) in 2015, “with a percentage of 3.7%” (2016, The World Bank Working for a World free of Poverty, Romania - Overview). Even though after 1990 this largely ensured the progress of transitional mechanisms towards a market economy and its becoming a genuine reality, this did not also mean ensuring its full functionality. Moreover, despite the country’s adherence to the European Union (EU) and some of the resulting positive effects, in particular the impact on the reform and modernization of economic life, the labour market has manifested a certain amount of gaps and negative phenomena. Some of these signal “continuing rigidities in the labour market, including skills inconsistencies” (idem).

According to statistics provided by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bacău (2015) and the County Agency for Workforce Occupation Bacău, the labour market of Bacău County (employers: companies, public authorities and institutions) has failed, in recent years, to create jobs or insert young graduates at a ratio proportionally balanced with their number (over 30% of the unemployed in the county of Bacău are university graduates), which represents a huge loss of the most valuable resource, the higher qualified human resource. And this precisely because it is recognized the fact that investing in people and their higher training is one of the most profitable investment for any society aiming to ensure progress (Ștefănescu - Mihăilă, 2015).

Based on the consideration that about 1500 graduates of the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău (undergraduate and postgraduate studies) complete their studies annually and start looking for a job, most often in Bacău county, we planned to conduct a study to identify the demands of the labour market from Bacău in terms of competences that graduates should possess in order to get employment quickly and be able to adapt. The difficulty and limitations of this study relate both to the fact that we found no similar studies on the labour market from Bacău and the small size of the group of employers investigated.

The research design

a. Research hypotheses

Our study relies on the following hypotheses:

- a) Most of the study programmes offered by the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău are found in the job requirements of the companies / institutions investigated;
- b) Employers have difficulties in finding adequate qualifications for some jobs and, respectively, suitable candidates for job vacancies because graduates lack certain skills/competencies required by the entrepreneurs from Bacău.

b. Research objectives

The main objectives of our study are:

1. Knowledge of the correspondence between the study programmes offered by *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău and the job vacancies of the employing companies/institutions investigated;
2. Identification of the study programmes, other than those currently offered by the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău, that employers in the investigated sample would need their employees with higher education to have graduated;
3. Detection of study programmes required by the employers from Bacău for the next five years;
4. Specification of the number of employments made during the last year in the companies/institutions of the investigated employers, the degree of insertion into the Bacău labour market and the insertion success of the graduates from *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău;
5. Establishing the degree of satisfaction felt by employers regarding the graduates' competences built during the university years;
6. Specification of the components/competences from the graduates' professional training that should be improved;
7. Systematization of the suggestions made by employers to improve the training of graduates in relation to the labour market;

8. Establishment of a desirable profile of the employee with higher education, of the requirements and expectations of employers in relation to the training and personality of graduates from *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău.

c. Research methodology

This research is an observational, quantitative-qualitative one. The main research method was the survey based on a questionnaire comprising seven items (Annex 1), and a focus group, conducted through a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 2). By applying the questionnaire, we aimed to identify and statistically-mathematically quantify the respondents' opinions, and by using the focus group, the opinion issuers were put in an effective interactive situation that enabled the replacement of quantified statistical - mathematical quantifications of opinions expressed with value judgments offered by direct answers to the questions in the interview guide. This was done to obtain in-depth complementary qualitative and quantitative data. Therefore, the research techniques used in this study were: the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview guide, as well as the procedures of free and guided conversation, and free, direct observation.

Data collection and processing was conducted during April-October 2015, a period that coincided with the development of the project initiated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bacău, namely: *Governmental facilities on the employment of graduates into the labour market* (the main organizers being the County Agency for Workforce Occupation Bacău and the Bacău Chamber of Commerce and Industry). The *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău participated as partner in the project. The Department of Professional Counselling from the University, as a representative, considered as timely the activities when there were held meetings/debates with employers from the city of Bacău (held inside the University) for the realization of our study, also constituting the occasion for applying our questionnaire and conducting the focus group. Data collection was conducted on May 12th 2015, on the occasion of the *Conference on the presentation of the facilities offered by the state to employers and graduates, upon employment*, an event that was attended by approximately 100 companies from Bacău County. On this occasion, we invited the participating employers to fill in the questionnaire in Annex 1 and participate in a series of focus group discussions held immediately after the conclusion of the conference, based on the interview guide in Annex 2.

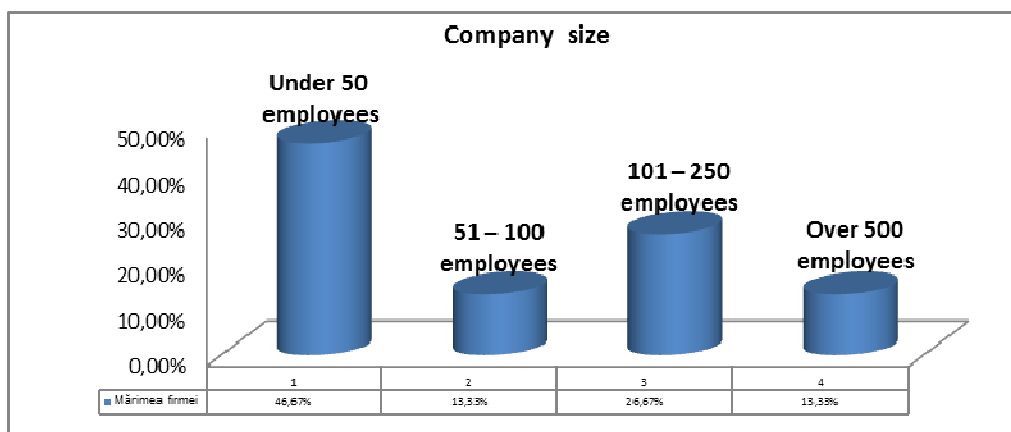
d. Participants

The sample involved in the study represented 48.39% (15 employers) out of the total of 31 employers (14 in the city of Bacău and one in the town of Buhuși) attending the *Conference on*

the presentation of the facilities offered by the state to employers and graduates, upon employment, one of the many activities conducted within the project mentioned above (although there had been invited 100 economic entities in the county of Bacău, only 31 of these actually attended the conference and, of these, only 15 wanted to get involved in our research). The composition and structure of the group of employers according to size is shown in Table 1 and Histogram 1.

Table 1. Employers involved in the study

No.	Name of company	Activity sector
1.	S.C. EUROPROD S.A	take-out meat products
2.	S.C. AEROSTAR S.A	aviation industry
3.	INTEGRASYS	IT
4.	S.C. AGRICOLA S.R.L	retail
5.	S.C. ANTIPAN.COM	installations and constructions
6.	S.C. ELECTRO STANDARD S.R.L	service provider
7.	WORLD MACHINERY WORKS	machinery tools
8.	VASION	building materials
9.	S.C. ALPINCOMPREST S.R.L. BUHUSI	ferrous waste collection
10.	ISSCO MOLDING SRL	IT
11.	S.C. DENTRO PROIECT S.R.L	forestry
12.	S.C. ROMÂNIA HYPERMARCHE	retail
13.	S.C. FLANDO S.R.L	service provider
14.	S.C. SUDOMETAL S.R.L	building metal products
15.	S.C. AMICI SRL	constructions



Histogram 1. Sample structure according to size (number of employees) from histograma: Company size; Under 50 employees; 50-100 employees; 101-250 employees; Over 500 employees

Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

a. Data obtained from the questionnaire

The application of the questionnaire (Annex 1) revealed the following aspects: The responding employers noted that the study programmes offered by the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău are found in the jobs offered by the companies/institutions they represent, for the year 2016 (as shown in Diagram 1). Most positions are available for graduates of the *Faculty of Engineering*, namely 50 jobs for engineers, representing 58.82% of the 85 positions available for next year, as highlighted by the employers included in the sample. Second place in this hierarchy is the *Faculty of Economic Sciences*, with 19 jobs in the domain of economic sciences (7 positions for *Accounting and Management Information Systems*, 7 positions for *Marketing* and 5 positions for *Business Administration*), representing 22.36% of the total of 85 positions available for next year. Third place is the *Faculty of Sciences*, with 13 jobs for computer experts, representing 15.29% of the 85 positions available for next year. Fourth, the *Faculty of Letters*, with 3 positions for graduates of the study programme *Romanian Language – English/ French Language*, representing 3.53% of the total of 85 positions available for next year. Lastly, with no job available, the *Faculty of Movement Sciences, Sports and Health*.

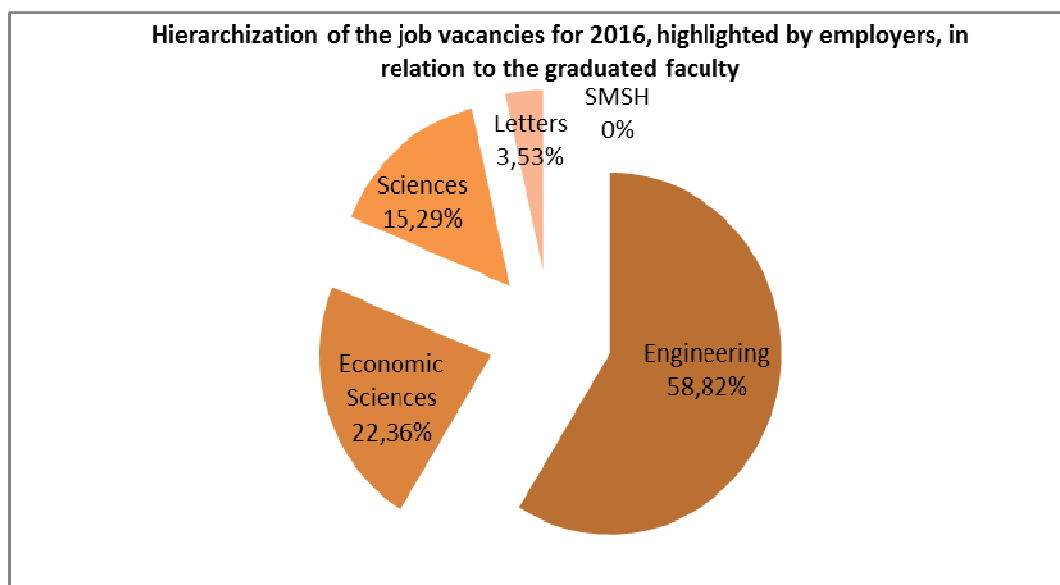


Diagram 1. Number of vacant jobs of the companies from the participating group in relation to the study programmes offered by the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău from diagrama: Hierarchization of the job vacancies for 2016, highlighted by employers, in relation to the graduated faculty; Letters; SSMH; Engineering; Economic Sciences; Sciences

In addition to the study programmes highlighted in the first item, the investigated employers stated that for the good of their companies they need graduates with qualifications in the study programmes presented in Diagram 2.

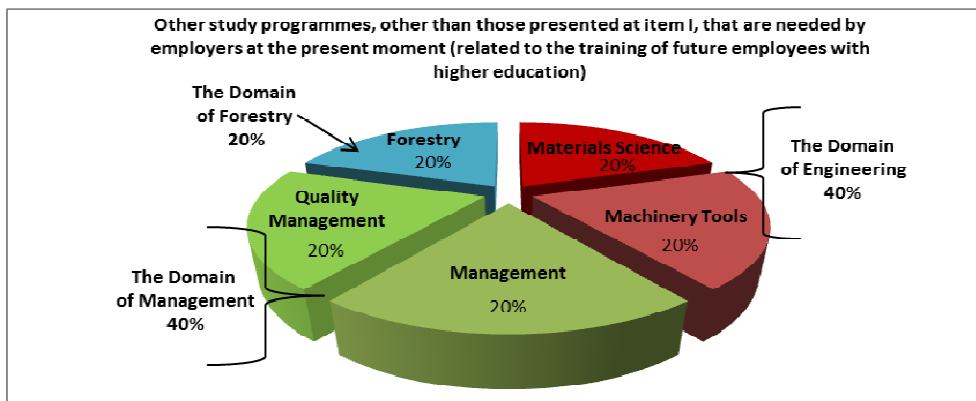


Diagram 2. Qualifications required for 2016, others than those offered by the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău from diagrama: Other study programmes, other than those presented at item I, that are needed by employers at the present moment (related to the training of future employees with higher education); The Domain of Forestry; Materials Science; Machinery Tools; The Domain of Engineering; Management; Quality Management; The Domain of Management)

Of these answers, 40% refer to specializations in the field of Engineering, another 40% to the domain of Management and 20% to Forestry. In the category of the study programmes required over the next five years, highlighted in items I and II by employers, there are the following (Diagram 3).

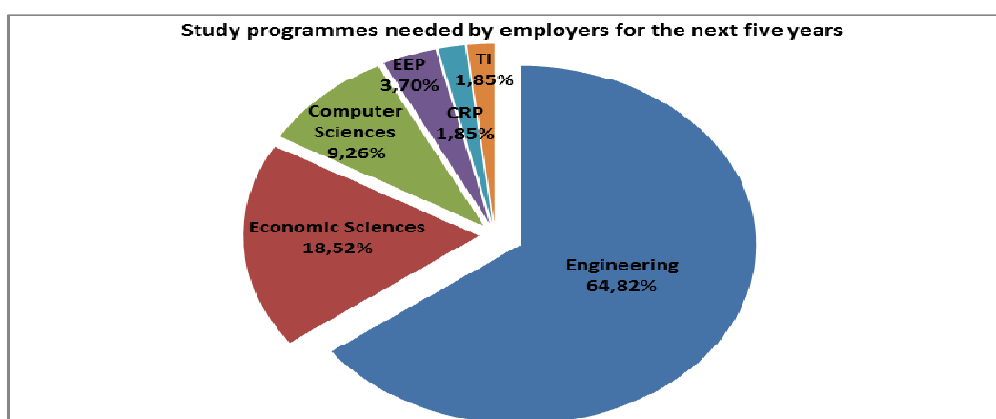


Diagram 3. Study programmes required by employers for the next five years from diagram: Study programmes needed by employers for the next five years; Engineering; Economic Sciences; Computer Sciences; EEP; CPR; TI

As shown in Diagram no. 3, out of the total of 54 answers, most of them, namely 64.82% (35 answers) highlighted a number of specializations in the field of *Engineering*; on the second position, with 18.52% (10 answers), the responding employers mentioned specializations in the field of *Economic sciences*; 9.26% (5 answers) have specified the domain of *Computer Science*; 3.70% (2 answers) mentioned *Ecology and environment*, and with equal percentages of 1.85%, with one answer each, there were highlighted the study programmes of *Communication and Public Relations*, and *Translation and Interpretation*.

Regarding the total number of employments made between early 2015 and the date of the survey, from the 15 companies included in the sample, there we recorded a total of 476 employees with higher education. As shown in Table. 2, of this total, 24 are graduates of the *Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău*, representing 5.05%. Of the 24 graduates, only 17 are employed in the specialization graduated, namely 3.57%, a percentage that represents the rate of successful insertion in the labour market. The other graduates employed by the companies included in the sample, namely 1.48% (7 graduates), represent the rate of graduates working in other areas, different from the domains graduated, not corresponding with their level of professional training.

Table 2. Percentage of overall graduates of *Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău* employed in the former half of 2015 by the responding companies

<i>Time interval January /July 2015</i>		
<i>Total of employees with higher education</i>	<i>Total of graduates of Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău, employed</i>	<i>Total of graduates of Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău, employed in the specialization graduated</i>
476 - 100%	24 - 5,05%	17 - 3,57%

Most surveyed employers generally consider the components of professional training, namely the competences of the graduates of *Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău* (Table No. 3) as **good**, with 36.36% (44 answers out of the total of 121); the employers who appreciate the quality of these competences as **acceptable** are ranked secondly, with 31.40% (38 answers out of 121); thirdly, there is the appreciation **very good**, with 17.36% (21 answers out of 121); the last but one place is occupied by the appreciation **poor**, with 13.23% (16 answers out of 121), and the last place is occupied by the appreciation **very poor**, with 1.65% (2 answers out of 121).

The most popular competences for which employers have chosen the **very good** answering option refers to *computer use*, with 60% (6 employers out of 15) and ranked secondly there were *foreign*

languages, with 33.33% (5 employers). For the other competences, the hierarchy is as follows (in descending order of answers): with equal percentages of 20% (3 employees), *specialized training (theoretical knowledge)* and *management*; with equal percentages of 13.33% (3 employees), *teamwork* and *psycho-pedagogical knowledge*. For this answering option there was recorded no answer regarding the competences related to *specialized training (practical knowledge)* and *communication*.

The employers who chose the answering option **good** mostly appreciate our graduates' *specialized training (theoretical knowledge)*, with 66.67% (10 employers out of 15) and, at close distance, *computer use*, with 60% (9 employers). For the other competences, the hierarchy is as follows (in descending order of answers): with equal percentages of 40% (6 employers), *communication* and *teamwork*; *foreign languages*, with 33.33% (5 employers); with equal percentages of 20% (3 employers), *management* and *psycho-pedagogical knowledge*; *specialized training (practical knowledge)*, with 13.33% (2 employers).

The most popular skills for which employers have chosen the option **acceptable** refer firstly to *specialized training (practical knowledge)*, with 60% (9 employers out of 15) and, secondly, *communication*, with 40% (6 employers). For the other competences the hierarchy is as follows (in descending order of answers): with equal percentages of 33.33% (5 employers), *foreign languages*, *teamwork*, *management* and *psycho-pedagogical knowledge*; *specialized training (theoretical knowledge)*, with 13.33% (2 employers). For this answering option there was no answer related to competences of *computer use*.

The respondents consider that the graduates of the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău have, firstly, **poorly developed** *specialized training (practical knowledge)* and *management skills*, with equal percentages of 26.67% (4 employers out of 15) and, secondly, with equal percentages of 20% (3 employers), poor *communication* and *psycho-pedagogical knowledge*. On the third place in the hierarchy of these answers are the competences related to the ability to *work in teams*, with 13.33% (2 employers). For this answering option there was no answer regarding the competences of *specialized training (theoretical knowledge)*, *computer use* and *foreign languages*. The employers surveyed appreciated as **very poor** only the competences related to *psycho-pedagogical knowledge*, namely 13.33% (2 employers).

Table 3. Hierarchization of employers' answers regarding the level of satisfaction felt towards the components of professional training/competences of UVAB graduates

Components of professional training/competences	a. Very good	b. Good	c. Acceptable	d. Poor	e. Very poor	f. No answer	TOTAL
1. Specialized training (theoretical knowledge)	3 20%	10 66,67%	2 13,33%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
2. Specialized training (practical knowledge)	0 0%	2 13,33%	9 60%	4 26,67%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
3. Computer use	6 40%	9 60%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
4. Foreign languages	5 33,33%	5 33,33%	5 33,34%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
5. Communication	0 0%	6 40%	6 40%	3 20%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
6. Team work	2 13,33%	6 40%	5 33,34%	2 13,33%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
7. Management	3 20%	3 20%	5 33,33%	4 26,67%	0 0%	0 0%	15 100%
8. Psycho-pedagogical knowledge	2 13,33%	3 20%	5 33,33%	3 20%	2 13,33%	0 0%	15 100%
9. Other	0 0%	0 0%	1 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 100%
TOTAL answers	21 17,36%	44 36,36%	38 31,40%	16 13,23%	2 1,65%	0 0%	121 100%

The employers investigated believe that our graduates' training should be improved in terms of the following components/skills (in descending order of percentages): *specialized training (practical knowledge)*, 38.10%; *communication*, 23.81%; *specialized training (theoretical knowledge)*, 14.29%; with equal percentages of 4.76%., *foreign languages*, *teamwork*, *management* and *psycho-pedagogical knowledge*. For *computer use*, there was recorded no answer, and for the heading 'Other' there were highlighted skills related to the manifestation of creativity, 4.76%.

The responding employers believe that the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău should better prepare graduates for the labour market by performing the following actions: consulting the business and economic environment in the area, building connections with it/partnerships in different fields and monitoring the activity conducted under these partnerships (41.68%); improving *specialized training (practical knowledge)* (16.67%); building the mentality to offer

first and then to ask for/receive the reward for one's work, providing updated information, teaching useful disciplines, improving technical drawing skills and skills in using current IT design software (8.33%).

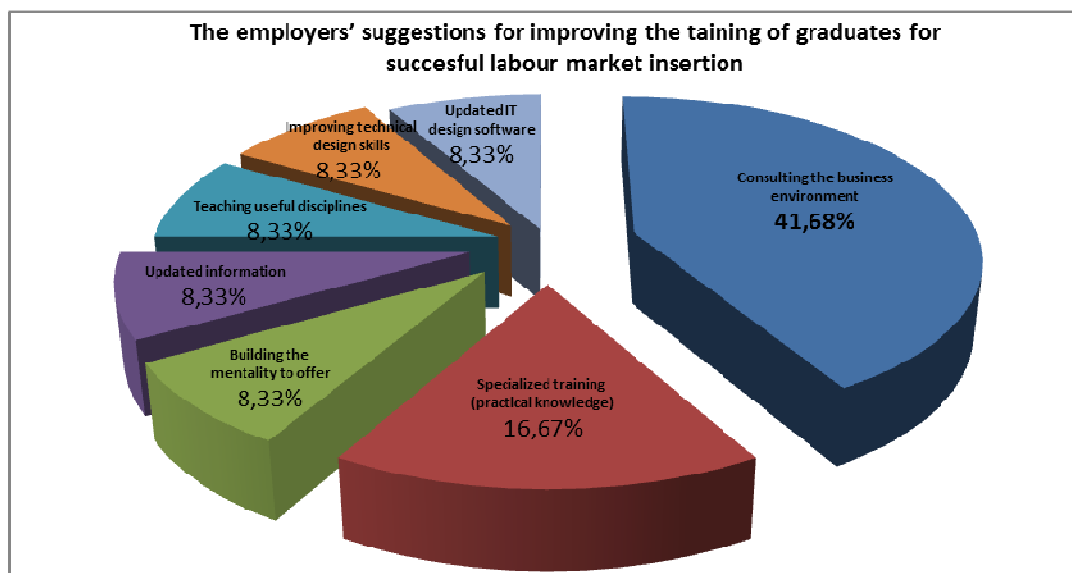


Diagram 4. The employers' suggestions for improving the taining of graduates for succesful labour market insertion from diagrama: Consulting the business environment ; Specialized training (practical knowledge); Building the mentality to offer ; Updated information; Teaching useful disciplines ; Improving technical design skills; Updated IT design software

b. Data obtained from the focus group

A relevant moment of the research was the participation in the focus group organized during the *Conference on the presentation of the facilities offered by the state to employers and graduates, upon employment*, an event which was part of a series of multiple activities organized within the project *Governmental facilities on the employment of graduates into the labour market*. On the occasion of this event, I had the opportunity to interview, for an hour, the representatives of the 15 companies included in the research group. Thus, the research subjects were involved in a semi-structured debate based on an interview guide (Annex 2), on the topic of Employers' demands of young graduates of the *Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău*. These discussions helped us synthesize the aspects presented further.

The employers appreciated positively the role of the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău in the training of future specialists in the labour market, in the economic environment from Bacău, statements that confirm the answers from item V of the questionnaire applied referring to the satisfaction felt towards the components of the professional training of graduates from *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău, formed during the university years, which a third of employers, namely 36.36%, appreciate as *good*.

At the same time, employers have stated that there is currently the need to better connect the academic environment from Bacău, some of its study programmes to the concrete needs of the labour market, showing that some of these are old, outdated and no longer required on the current labour market. At the same time, the interviewees mentioned the fact that there are specializations for which it is very difficult to find specialists, such as *Materials science* (including *composition materials* - plastics, tires, carbon fibre). These statements correlate and confirm the answers for items I, II and III from the questionnaire applied and, not least, the answers for item VII, where 41.68% of the respondent employers highlighted the need for a better training of our graduates for the labour market by consulting the business and economic sectors in the area (by establishing connections/partnerships in different domains and, at the same time, monitoring the activity in these partnerships). When speaking of *specialists*, these companies refer only to people with professional experience, work seniority being a great advantage for employment, from their point of view.

Theoretical knowledge of young graduates are not enough, which is why the representatives of these companies say they are not interested in the diplomas (bachelor, master, doctorate) or grades that graduates have obtained (annual, final exams), but in what they *know to do* concretely (their skills). Companies want to recruit responsible young people, able to lead the production process, display strategic thinking, problem solving ability, communication and teamwork skills. These statements correlate with the respondents' answers for item VI who consider that the professional training of our graduates should be improved in terms of the following components/skills: *specialized training (practical knowledge)*, 38.10%; *communication*, 23.81%; *specialized training (theoretical knowledge)*, 14.29%.

What matters most for employment is not expertise, foreign languages or IT operating skills, as we are tempted to believe at first sight (although they have their relevance), but competences and the possibility of integrating them into the organization professionally and personally. Therefore, their character and attitude (towards oneself, others and towards work) are particularly evaluated and *weighed*. Employers are interested in punctual, proactive, engaged, motivated persons, with

“targets” and real resources to achieve the targets, who consistently pursue those targets, have initiative, spontaneity and uniqueness in solving problems.

For the employers included in the sample the human resource is very valuable, they invest in its development and cannot afford to give up easily on their investment, and in their organization they focus on creating a sense of valuation, role and affiliation. These employers have shown interest in the possibility for students to elaborate their bachelor’s, master’s and doctor’s dissertations within their organization, the essential condition being that the themes prove useful and feasible for their company.

The recommendation of the investigated employers for graduates relates to their involvement in as many volunteering activities as possible (even within the university, tutoring peers or younger students etc.), their benefiting from every opportunity offered by employers, asking employers to perform various volunteering activities or have their own investment, work directly on achieving personal projects (individually or in collaboration).

Generally, the representatives of employers have shown that today’s students exhibit shyness in talking about them or are not familiar with personal promotion techniques, which is why when they present their CV to an employer they should talk about the projects or activities in which they have been involved, explaining the specific operations they performed (thus compensating for lack of experience). This aspect was also confirmed by the answers to item VI from the questionnaire applied, where communication was ranked second, with 23.81%, in the category of the training components of our graduates that should be improved.

Conclusions and future actions

The research conducted has ensured the full achievement of the eight objectives initially set. Achieving the first seven goals (in order of their presentation) resulted in validating the first hypothesis and achieving the eighth goal ensured the validation of the second hypothesis.

The survey results confirmed the first hypothesis, namely that at present, most study programmes offered by the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău are found in the job vacancies for the next year of the companies/institutions investigated. Most positions are available for graduates of the *Faculty of Engineering* with 58.82% of the 85 positions available for next year (highlighted by the employers included in the sample). On the second position there is the *Faculty of Economic Sciences* with 22.36% of all the positions available, the *Faculty of Sciences* with 15.29% of all the positions and the *Faculty of Letters*, with 3.53% of all available positions. For the *Faculty of the*

Sciences of Movement, Sports and Health there is no job available at the time of the survey applied to the analysed sample. Given these data, it results that the first objective of our investigation was entirely achieved.

For the smooth running of companies, the surveyed employers said that currently they need a number of other study programmes that may contribute to the formation of specific skills for future employees with higher education, such as those in engineering and management (40%), and forestry (20%). These data reflect the fact that we managed to fully achieve the second objective of our investigation.

For the near future or the next five years, the study programmes required by employers cover: the domain of *Engineering* (64.82%), *Economic sciences* (18.52%), *Computer Science* (9.26%), *Ecology and environmental protection* (3.70%) and, with equal percentages, *Communication and public relations*, and *Translation and interpretation* (1.85%). These figures confirm the full achievement of the third objective of our research.

The 15 companies in the sample, from early 2015 until the date of the survey, made 476 employments of university graduates. Of this total, 24 are graduates of the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău, representing a percentage of 5.05%. The rate of *successful labour market insertion* of these graduates is 3.57% and the percentage of graduates working in other areas, different from the domains of their studies, not corresponding with their level of training is 1.48%. These data confirm the achievement of the fourth research objective.

The *competences* of the graduates of *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău are appreciated by most employers surveyed as **good**, with 36.36% (44 answers out of the total of 121). The most popular competences, which employers have appreciated as **very good**, refer firstly to *computer use* (60% - 6 employers out of the total of 15) and, secondly, to *foreign languages* (33.33% - 5 employers). In contrast, in the category of the least developed competences, there were recorded, with equal percentages, *specialized training (practical knowledge)* and *management skills* (with 26.67% - 4 employers out of 15), as well as *communication* and *psycho-pedagogical knowledge* (20% - 3 employers). As very poor skills, there were mentioned only the competences related to *psycho-pedagogical knowledge* (with 13.33% - 2 employers). These figures confirm the full achievement of the fifth objective of the research. Some of these answers are consistent with results presented in relatively similar studies in neighbouring countries. Finna & Erdei (2015, p.153), for example, demonstrate that for students-graduates the skills considered as essential for their future are correlated with the ability to study, to work in a team and self-train. The same study also presents the views of employers. For them, the skills required are more complex and

layered, even when incorporating common parts with the perspective highlighted by the youth, being spectacularly articulated around “meticulous work, autonomy at work and heavy workloads, in addition to the ability to work in a team, to have full theoretical knowledge and professional proficiency, ability to study, self-instruction and the ability to achieve the goals set”. According to those surveyed, the training of the graduates of *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău should be improved, primarily, in terms of *practical knowledge* (with 38.10%), *communication* (23.81%), and *theoretical knowledge* (14.29%). It results that the sixth goal of our investigation has been entirely achieved.

Consulting the business and economic environment in the area (by establishing connections/partnerships in different areas and monitoring the activities under these partnerships) is, according to the opinions of the respondent employers, the main action that the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău should undertake in order to better prepare graduates for the labour market (41.68%). Also, it is important to improve *specialized training, practical knowledge* (16.67%), but also to build the mentality of giving first and then asking for/receiving the reward for one’s work (8.33%), providing updated information (8.33%), teaching useful subjects (8.33%), improving technical drawing skills (8.33%) and the use of up-to-date IT design software (8.33%). These figures confirm the achievement of the seventh objective of the research.

The role of the *Vasile Alecsandri* University of Bacău in the training of future specialists on the labour market was assessed positively by the majority of those investigated, as well as the degree of satisfaction felt towards the professional training of these graduates, formed during the university years, were assessed as *good* (36.36%).

The investigation results also confirmed the second hypothesis of our study. The investigated entrepreneurs from Bacău have difficulties in finding adequate qualifications for some jobs (*Materials science* – composition materials, plastics, tires, carbon fibre, *Machinery tools, Management, Quality Management, Forestry*) and, respectively, the suitable candidates for job vacancies. These difficulties are problematic even if the current economic environment from Bacău is characterized by a period of crisis and high unemployment rates especially among young people. The investigated subjects showed interest not only in technical knowledge and competence (computer operation, foreign languages, domain-specific skills, mathematical skills, etc.) and general knowledge of university graduates, but also in their behavioural skills (communication, teamwork, ability to work independently, time management, assuming responsibilities etc.), in some cases even tilting the balance in favour of the latter.

The **low** level of satisfaction of employers from Bacau related to *specialized practical* knowledge (26.67%), *management* skills (26.67%), and poor *communication* skills (20%) of graduates are the causes that explain the behaviour of entrepreneurs during employment, namely, why they come to prefer people with professional experience instead of young graduates (work seniority is a big advantage in getting employment, from the point of view of employers).

For the investigated companies, work seniority is a great advantage in getting employment (from their point of view, people with professional experience are the true professionals!). The theoretical knowledge of young graduates are not enough, which is why representatives of these companies say they are not interested so much in diplomas (bachelor, master, doctorate) or grades obtained in exams (annual, final), but what graduates *know how to do* concretely (their competences). Companies want to recruit young responsible people, able to lead the production process, display strategic thinking, problem solving ability, communication and teamwork skills.

For the employers included in the sample human resources are very valuable, being able and willing to invest in its development and hence demanding towards their own investment. Within the organization, they strive to build a quality environment, a sense of appreciation, role and higher status of belonging. These employers have shown interest in the possibility for students to elaborate bachelor's, master's and doctor's dissertations within their organization, the essential condition being that the themes prove useful and feasible for their company.

Thus, the interviewed employers have suggested that students get engaged, during their university studies, not only in academic training, extremely necessary but not enough, but also in additional professional and social life experiences in the non-formal environment. This means getting involved in as many volunteering activities as possible (even inside the university, counselling programmes, tutoring for first-year students or high-school students in final years, participation in local social projects, inventions and innovations), benefiting from every opportunity offered by employers, asking employers to perform various volunteering activities or have their own investment, work directly on achieving personal projects (individually or in collaboration).

Generally, the representatives of employers have shown that students do not master enough personal promotion techniques, which is why when they present their CV to an employer they should talk about these projects or activities in which they have been involved, explaining the specific operations that they performed (thus compensating for lack of experience). These arguments show the fact that the eighth objective of our research has been reached.

In conclusion, the solution for a better employability of graduates on the labour market does not come from unilateral measures (closing study programmes, reducing the number of students enrolled, giving up a number of school disciplines, changing the employer's methodology of selection), but from a successful blending of contributing factors: increasing investment in education (Stefanescu-Mihăilă, 2015) and placing it appropriately, corroborated with the adjustment/ completion/ compatibilization of the academic curricula with the labour market on the background of increasing responsibility, active civic spirit and free enterprise of graduates. Similar studies in neighbouring countries also argue that the answer to the needs of employers implies new ways of combining and capitalizing new non-formal and informal approaches to the academic programme of specialized training (apud Finna & Erdei, 2010). Among the solutions promoted and exploited at national and European level, we may mention: developing career counselling services (at least for graduates of the first Bologna cycle); a much more flexible academic curricula that can incorporate internship periods as national and/or international mobilities; improved communication and cooperation with employers (Urs & Ivan, 2011).

References

- Danziger, S., & Ratner, D. (2010). Labor Market Outcomes and the Transition to Adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 20(1).
- Finna, H., & Erdei, J. (2015). Qualification as a Success Factor in the Labor-Market: The Faculty-Specific Attributes of the Employment of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics Recent Graduates. *Acta Polytechnica Hungarica*, 12(8), 135-154.
- Person, A. E., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (2006). Educational outcomes of labor-market linking and job placement for students at public and private 2-year colleges. *Economics of Education Review*, 25, 412–429.
- Ștefănescu-Mihăilă, R. O. (2015). Social Investment, Economic Growth and Labor Market Performance: Case Study – Romania. *Sustainability*, 7, 2961-2979.
- Urs, I. R., & Ivan, S. (2011). Academic Management and Graduates' Integration into the Labour Market. In C. I. Murzea and A. Repanovici, *Legal Practice and International Laws* (pp. 336-342). Brasov: Transilvania University of Brasov.
- Voicu, B., Tufis, C., & Voicu, M. (2010). *Absolventii recenti de învățământ superior și integrarea lor pe piața muncii* [Recent graduates of higher education and their integration in the labor market]. București: ACPART, DOCIS.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2014). *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe – Access, retention and employability 2014*, Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

- *** (2015). *Integrarea pe piața muncii a absolvenților 2015- Facilitățile fiscale oferite de stat* [Labor market integration of graduates 2015 - State fiscal concessions]. Retrieved from <http://ccibc.ro/tineriabsolventi>.
- *** (2016) *The World Bank Working for a World free of Poverty, Romania - General presentation*. Retrieved from www.worldbank.org.

Annex 1. Questionnaire

Please support us in a study on the assessment of labour market requirements, as an expression of the *quality of services offered by the Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău*. Your honest answers to the questions below would be very helpful. Thank you!

I. Please indicate the graduates of the following study programmes offered by the Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău who are suitable for the job vacancies of your company/institution for next year?

<i>College</i>	<i>Study programme</i>	<i>No. of job vacancies for next year</i>
Engineering	a. Machine Building Technology	
	b. Food Products Engineering	
	c. Mechatronics	
	d. Economic Engineering in the Domain of Mechanics	
	e. Information Technology	
	f. Industrial Power Engineering	
	g. Equipment for Industrial Processes	
	h. Environmental Engineering and Protection in Industry	
	i. Biochemical Engineering	
Sciences	a. Biology	
	b. Ecology and Environment Protection	
	c. Mathematics	
	d. Computer Science	
	e. Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-Primary Education	
Economic Sciences	a. Accounting and Management Information Systems	
	b. Marketing	
	c. Business Administration	
Letters	a. Romanian - English / French	
	b. English / French - Romanian	
	c. English - French	
	d. Translation and Interpretation	
	e. Communication and Public Relations	
SMSH	a. Physical Education and Sports	
	b. Sports and Motor Performance	
	c. Kinetotherapy and Special Motricity	
	d. Occupational Therapy	

II. In addition to the study programmes specified in item I, are there others for which you need employees with higher education?

.....

.....

.....

III. What study programmes, from those mentioned in items I and II, do you think will be required over the next 5 years?

IV. Please specify the number of employments made during the last year:

<i>a. Total number of employments during the last year</i>	<i>b. Total number of employees with higher education during the last year</i>	<i>c. Number of employees with higher education, graduates of the Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău</i>	<i>d. Number of employees with higher education, graduates of the Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău, hired according to the graduated specialization</i>

V. The professional training of the graduates of Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău is:

<i>Components of professional training/competences</i>	<i>a. Very good</i>	<i>b. Good</i>	<i>c. Acceptable</i>	<i>d. Poor</i>	<i>e. Very poor</i>
<i>1. Specialized training (theoretical knowledge)</i>					
<i>2. Specialized training (practical knowledge)</i>					
<i>3. Computer use</i>					
<i>4. Foreign languages</i>					
<i>5. Communication</i>					
<i>6. Team work</i>					
<i>7. Management</i>					
<i>8. Psycho-pedagogical knowledge</i>					
<i>9. Other</i>					

VI. Which component/ competence from the professional training of our graduates should be improved?

.....

VII. What else do you think that the Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău should do to better prepare its graduates for the labour market?

.....

Company name.....Location.....

Activity sector..... Company size – total number of employees:.....

<i>Under 50</i>	<i>51-100</i>	<i>101-250</i>	<i>251-500</i>	<i>Over 500</i>

Name and function of the person providing the information.....

Contact data of the information provider.....

Thank you for your support!

Annex 2. Interview guide used in the focus group

I. What should the academic environment from Bacău do, at the present moment, to meet the needs / requirements of the employers in the labour market? ?

II. Do you prefer hiring young graduates or people with professional experience?

III. From your viewpoint, what prevails in hiring a young graduate?

IV. For employment, compared to those who have graduated only bachelor's studies, do graduates of master and doctoral studies have an advantage?

V. In your view, what does the profile of a future young employee look like?

VI. What would you recommend to young graduates regarding their insertion in the labour market?