

Comparison between employers' and students' expectations in respect of employability skills of university graduates

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The study was aimed at comparing the expectations of Slovak employers and students in terms of employability skills. Twenty-seven companies which employ university graduates working in the manufacturing and financial sectors, represented by a Managing Director or Human Resources Director and 534 university students in the Bratislava region completed a questionnaire that evaluated the perceived importance of, and satisfaction with, generic employability skills. Employers perceived a lack of appropriate skills as the biggest barrier to employing graduates. With regard to the importance of skills, students considered only three skills to be more important than employers did; experience in the field, leadership and authority, and field knowledge. Compared to students, employers regarded engagement and willingness to take on extra work as the most important. In terms of satisfaction, students were more satisfied than employers in nineteen skills from a total of thirty-two. To reduce the satisfaction gap between graduates and employers, higher education institutions can promote students' self-awareness through career psychological services centers.

Keywords: Employability skills, employers, graduates, career service, self-awareness

Employability is “predominantly conceptualized as the skills and personal attributes considered important by industry and needed by graduates in order to secure employment” (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017, p. 87). It expresses the potential to get a desired job. In general, employability means a set of skills that are typically divided into three groups: generic skills (e.g., teamwork, communication skills, organizing, planning), discipline-specific skills (skills in engineering, law, social work) and personal attributes (e.g., self-confidence, resilience, loyalty, integrity). Employability skills are most often explored through self-assessment, especially in generic and discipline-specific skills. Personal attributes represent the individual potential of a graduate. These attributes can include the components of psychological capital, such as hope, self-efficacy, optimism, resilience (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). Psychological capital is related to job success and deemed a general predictor of satisfaction and performance at work. Currently, there is no uniform theory of employability. The reasons for this are complexity, situational factors, the changing labor market, graduate's individual interest and attitude, as well as their professional focus. Clarke (2017) proposes a comprehensive model of employability of graduates. She states that while graduate employability primarily deals with aspects of human capital, such as knowledge, skills and processes, the less specific and wider understanding of employability refers to individual variables (personality, attitudes, career-oriented behavior), labor market variables, and current employment. Therefore, she proposes an integrated model of graduate employability, recognizing six key dimensions: human capital (skills, competencies, work experience), social capital (networks, social class, university ranking), individual behaviors (career self-management, career-building skills), individual attributes (personality variables, adaptability, flexibility), labor market (supply factors, demand factors), and perceived employability. This model helps identify the areas of individual responsibilities of students and graduates and those of cooperation between universities, employers and industry. The model also points to the diverse and

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complementary roles of various experts in this field of research, such as education, career, management and psychology experts and researchers.

Employers' Expectations

The topic of youth employment often resonates in society-wide discussions at the domestic, European and global level. In terms of ideas, this contribution is based on the current priorities and objectives of the European Union, including the increase in employment of the population aged 20-64 up to 75% in the 2014-2020 programming period. The "Europe 2020" strategy (Európska komisia, 2010) defines the key objectives formulated as employment growth, increased investments in science, research and innovation. The "New Skills for New Jobs" (European Commission, 2016) initiative, which has become the flagship of the European Union objectives, aims to predict the changes in knowledge and skills needed in the future, harmonize competencies for the labor market and narrow the gap between the world of education and the world of work (Horný & Ďurina, 2014). In relation to these Europe-wide targets, the Government of the Slovak Republic also points out the need for initiatives to support youth employment in the Human Resources Operational Program (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, 2014). Topics such as promoting youth employability, identifying tools to facilitate the transition of graduates to work are currently a focus globally.

The employer survey conducted by the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information (Janková, 2015) on a sample of 2,411 entities in Slovakia showed that more than one third of employers employed university graduates in the last two years, but most employers did not employ graduates. The main findings of this domestic survey also included the reasons why employers refused to take on graduates. They were doing so mainly due to the lack of practical experience and disproportionate salary requirements. A third of them also reported increased turnover and the fact that they did not have discipline-specific skills. Research studies have long confirmed that the perception of the quality of graduate employability skills is different between employers and graduates (Brief, 1982; Fulcher, 2012; Letovancová & Lisá, 2008; Low, Botes, Dela Rue & Allen, 2016; Janková, 2015; Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012; Muyako & Seedwell, 2015; Naveed, Jabeen & Ullah, 2014). The lack of graduate essential skills is one of the most common problems in their employment (AQU, 2015; Clarke, 2017; Messum, Wilkes, Peters & Jackson, 2017; The Gallup Organization, 2010) or in employment in general (UKCES, 2016). Employers' expectations are connected with societal changes and therefore cannot be considered immutable. Researchers in the technically and economically oriented sectors have shown that employers expected graduates to have less communication skills and more specific technical skills in the study field (Muyako & Seedwell, 2015). A research conducted in economic and IT sectors has shown that employers, compared to graduates, consider generic employability skills more important than discipline-specific skills (such as punctuality, time management, responsibility, communication, and a positive approach) (Naveed et al., 2014). Employers in the UK (UKCES, 2016) regard operational skills required for the job (solving complex problems, technical and practical skills) and those necessary for interpersonal relationships (time management, customer care) as the greatest weakness of their job applicants. In the case of already employed workers, employers perceived their greatest weaknesses in the area of working with people (such as time management, teamwork, customer care, emotional intelligence, employee motivation, persuasion of others) as well as comprehensive analytical skills. Regardless of the job position in Slovakia, fresh graduates were perceived by employers as lacking customer orientation, loyalty, ethics and self-reflection (Letovancová & Lisá, 2008). Employers experienced the greatest shortcomings in relation to high turnover of graduates, their poor job preparation and inadequate salary requirements. Employers in the Australian healthcare industry considered integrity and ethical behavior, interpersonal skills, teamwork, flexibility and open-

mindfulness, planning, and lifelong learning the most important skills of graduates (Messum et al., 2017). Employers in Catalonia in Spain have identified a responsible approach to work, the ability to learn new things and teamwork as being the most essential skills, while negotiation skills and leadership have been considered least important. The greatest shortcomings have been identified in competencies, such as solving problems, practical skills and the ability to come up with new ideas (AQU, 2015). The ability and willingness to learn have been identified by employers in New Zealand as most important. While computer skills have been positively assessed by employers, the greatest gap in importance and current performance has been shown in the skills, such as customer service orientation, order, quality and precision, human communication and problems solving (Hodges & Burchell, 2003).

Expectations of Graduates and Students

The expectations of graduates, as well as employers need to be considered. If graduates' expectations are not fulfilled, they can depart early from the organization. This is another reason why employers and training institutions should be in contact with students at the time of their learning and could properly shape expectations for employers (Brief, 1982). Messum et al. (2017) found out that graduates, when compared to employers, considered networking and leadership skills as significantly more important. In relation to assessment of the current level of skills, the research also showed that evaluations by managers were considerably worse than those carried out by graduates. Graduates overestimated the level of their skills compared to their assessment by employers. Graduates' salary expectations were higher than those offered by employers, although graduates lacked practical skills. Employers think that university students should learn more directly in the field, while students expect the schools to be more in touch with industry and employers (Fulcher, 2012).

The research conducted in Slovakia has shown that students prefer management positions to specialist or assistant positions when choosing a job (Letovancová & Lisá, 2008). However, a comparison with employers' requirements has revealed that students lack the necessary managerial skills. In the area of social competences, the most developed skill of students was the need for social contact and communication, but their cognitive and performance skills were not well developed. They lacked leadership and influencing skills. The low level of self-awareness has increased the probability of graduates choosing a wrong job. The worse the students rated themselves in relation to the employer's rating, the less suitable job they chose for them. The increased self-confidence of graduates has also been confirmed by the results of other authors (Hodges & Burchell, 2003), who came to a conclusion that graduates' attitudes to work, the reality of their expectations and the openness to further education were as consequential as the work itself. Based on these research findings, we can define self-awareness and knowledge of job requirements as conditions for the development of graduate employability skills.

Linking Higher Education and Practice

In the context of better interconnection between higher education and the needs of practice, employers expect universities to include in teaching other methods, such as practical case studies, discussion groups, presentations of business reports and reports for the client, or students' internships (Low et al., 2016). Job offers for students are the most common form of cooperation between universities and companies in Spain. Cooperation in developing curricula and study program is the least common (AQU, 2015; Letovancová & Lisá, 2008).

Employers regard the incorporation of work experience into the curriculum as the best form of cooperation. Equally, examining employers' expectations of graduates' competencies can serve as a

basis for the higher education curricula, thus supporting graduates' employment and their successful job performance (Muyako & Seedwell, 2015).

The Market Needs Survey in Slovakia (Letovancová & Lisá, 2008) pointed to several recommendations for the preparation of graduates:

- In addition to theoretical knowledge, professional training of students should also focus on learning practical skills;
- Modification of the education system so that it reflects market needs and could flexibly adapt to them;
- Involvement of universities in practical projects for the labor market, which enables better professional training for the graduates;
- Focusing attention on undergraduate students so that they become more aware of the labor market and better understand job requirements;
- When working with students and employers, it is advisable to focus on specifying job positions and appropriate competency profiles; these competencies should be further developed through education or career guidance services for students.

Study Objective and Research Hypotheses

The study was aimed at comparing the expectations of employers with those of students in Slovakia in terms of perceiving their importance and satisfaction with them. The topics of interest also included employers' and students' ideas of interaction between education and practice. The hypotheses of the study were these: the lack of appropriate skills which was the most common perceived problem in employing graduates; the perception of the importance of skills varied between employers and students; satisfaction with skills was also differently evaluated by employers and students; job offers for students were the most often stated form of cooperation with universities; cooperation in developing curricula and study programs was the least common form of cooperation between employers and universities.

METHOD

Research Sample

The survey involved 27 employers and 534 students from Slovakia. Data were collected from July 2017 to November 2017. Employers were contacted using the "Book of Lists" (The Slovak Spectator, 2017), which contains a list of companies in Slovakia. Three hundred twenty-five companies which provided contacts to their Chief Executive Officers (CEO) and Human Resources Directors (HRD) received an online questionnaire. Twenty-seven companies from different market segments, most frequently from the manufacturing and financial sectors, sent them back. Sixty percent of the questionnaires were completed directly by CEOs or Human Resources Directors. The remaining data were mostly provided by human resources staff. The data were gained from employees who have information on company priorities and an overview of human resources, which supports the validity of the data collected. The companies employed from one up to more than 500 employees. Thirty percent were represented by companies with more than 500 employees; companies employing 10-50 and 101-200 employees account for 25%. Eleven percent of the companies involved operate in the domestic market and 26% of them in foreign markets; 63% of the companies are multinational corporations. All of the companies involved had employed graduates over the last five years. Employers took on from zero to 150 graduate students in the last year, most often ranging between three and 10 applicants. To the question of whether there

is a sufficient number of graduates who seek a job position offered by companies, 44% of them replied positively.

A sample of students was composed of university students in Bratislava, who studied economics ($n = 115$), informatics ($n = 51$), mass media ($n = 124$), law ($n = 102$) and psychology ($n = 145$). From a total of 1,019 university students, 534 students delivered a completed questionnaire, accounting for 52% of all the students enrolled at the university. From a gender perspective, 231 (43%) males and 298 (56%) females participated in the survey. The average age of students participating in the research was 22.36 years.

Data Collection Questionnaire

Both employers and students were provided with a questionnaire in which they assessed the importance and satisfaction with 32 skills on a six-point Likert scale from 0 to 5. The "List of Skills" was inspired and developed according to current studies on the perceptions of skills by employers and graduates (AQU, 2015; The Gallup Organization, 2010) as well as skills derived from the psychological capital theory (Cavus & Gökçen, 2015; Luthans et al., 2007). When examining the skills of graduates, it was necessary to select especially those associated with work performance and employment (AQU, 2015). The questionnaire contains generic skills, respecting this principle as well as psychological capital skills, resulting from the research conducted in positive psychology and ethics. The research has revealed that these skills are positively related to job success and satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007). The questionnaire included these key skills: practical and theoretical skills (e.g., field knowledge), cognitive skills (e.g., analysis and problem solving), personal management skills (e.g., the ability to acquire new knowledge), instrumental skills (e.g., communication skills), interpersonal skills (e.g., team working), professional attitude and ethics (e.g., demonstrating responsibility at work), and psychological capital skills (e.g., the conviction that I can finish my job). Table 4 contains the complete list of questionnaire skills. The total score of importance and satisfaction was calculated as the sum of points in 32 skills. Cronbach's alpha reached values of 0.830 and 0.929 in the perception of the importance of employers and students, and 0.967 and 0.927 in satisfaction with skills. The questionnaire for students also contained a question about their expectations of graduate starting salaries.

Besides assessing the importance of, and satisfaction with, selected skills, the questionnaire included a range of questions about employers' types of cooperation with universities. It concerned the experience with five forms of cooperation with universities (ranging from 0 to 4) and a range of preferred collaboration that the employer would consider important (ranging from 0 to 5). The data was analyzed by JASP 0.8.1.2. statistical program. The research study was created as part of the research project GAAA 8_2/2016: Expectations of Current Employers on Graduate Career Competences. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee according to the Ethical Code of Pan-European University No. 1 / 2018.

RESULTS

In the context of difficulties in recruiting graduates, employers and students have cited a lack of appropriate skills as the most common reason (see Table 1). From the employers' point of view, the non-acceptance of salary was the second most frequent barrier to employing graduates. Table 2 shows an overview of expected salary conditions of the research sample of students. The median of the expected salary of students is EUR 1,100 per month; the students of informatics have the highest

expectations (EUR 1,600) and the students of psychology have the lowest expectations (1000 €). TABLE 1: Comparison of employer and student perceptions on the difficulties of employing graduates.

	Employer		Student	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Shortage of candidates with the right skills for the job.	22	82	236	44
Shortage of candidates willing to adapt to the work schedule.	4	15	192	36
Shortage of candidates willing to accept the salary.	11	41	61	11
Shortage of candidates willing to be geographically mobile.	2	7	89	17
Shortage of candidates willing to accept the type of contract.	3	11	112	21
Shortage of candidates willing to relocate.	3	11	89	17
Limited sources to allow adequate marketing of job vacancies.	1	4	125	23

TABLE 2 Students' expectations of starting salaries (per month), post-graduation.

Expected salary	Sum	Informatics	Law	Economy	Mass media	Psychology
Median €	1100	1600	1200	1100	1100	1000
Mean €	1400	1800	1522	1486	1350	1159
SD	817	1118	865	898	753	542
Min	460	900	460	600	500	500
Max	7750	7750	5000	6000	5000	3000

The comparison between students' and employers' perception of the importance of skills showed statistical significance ($p = .012$), but only small substantive significance ($r_{\text{rank-biserial}} = -0.285$), see Table 3. Compared to employers, students regarded only three skills as significantly more important, namely: experience in the field, leadership and authority, and field knowledge. At the same time, employers considered graduates' field experience the least important skill. Compared to students, employers deemed engagement and willingness to take on extra work to be a more important skill, being also the most important of all the skills. Overall, employers regarded a responsible approach to work, morale and ethical behavior, learning from feedback, flexibility and adaptability to changes as the other most important skills. Considering the psychological capital skills identified as important, both employers and students assigned the score of four and more points to self-efficacy and resilience skills: the ability to achieve the goal; the conviction that I can finish my job; psychological resilience, burden and stress management; flexibility, adaptation to change; overcoming obstacles.

Comparison of students' and employers' perceived satisfaction (Table 3) showed significant differences both statistically and substantively ($p < .001$; $r_{\text{rank-biserial}} = -0.551$).

Students were individually more satisfied than employers, statistically and substantively significantly in 19 skills: flexibility and adaptation to changes (3.25 / 3.89), overcoming obstacles (3.04 / 3.81), a realistic view of themselves (2.5 / 3.79), the ability to learn from experience (3.16 / 4.10), engagement and willingness to take on extra work (2.68 / 3.82), analysis and problem solving (3.12 / 3.77), decision making (2.69 / 3.58), innovation, new ideas and solutions (3.04 / 4.06), learning from feedback (2.96 / 3.95), the ability to work independently (2.70 / 4.06), sales skills (2.31 / 3.07), communication skills in conflict resolution (2.81 / 3.75), work performance and carrying out assignments (3.20 / 3.94), leadership and authority (2.63 / 3.58), negotiation skills (2.77 / 3.42), responsible approach to work (2.92 / 4.08), morale and ethical behavior (3.44 / 4.26).

TABLE 3: Comparison of student and employer perceptions of skills importance / satisfaction

The skills importance / satisfaction	Mean students	Mean employers	Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test statistics	Statistical significance	Rank-Biserial Correlation
Field knowledge	4.27 / 3.17	3.66 / 2.64	4665 / 4762	< .001 / 0.013	-0.349 / -0.281
Field experience	4.11 / 2.64	2.55 / 2.24	3042 / 5547	< .001 / 0.148	-0.576 / -0.167
Ability to Achieve a Goal	4.32 / 3.89	4.34 / 3.36	6737 / 4874	0.819 / 0.017	-0.024 / -0.269
Conviction that I can finish my job	4.34 / 4.02	4.30 / 3.60	6141 / 5485	0.313 / 0.124	-0.105 / -0.172
<i>Psychological resistance and coping</i>	4.33 / 3.71	4.25 / 3.20	6130 / 5036	0.163 / 0.033	-0.142 / -0.241
Patience, self-esteem	4.13 / 3.54	3.73 / 3.27	4313 / 4778	0.011 / 0.133	-0.291 / -0.182
Self-confidence and self-expression	4.14 / 3.55	3.80 / 3.82	4893 / 7020	0.018 / 0.214	-0.262 / 0.147
Flexibility, adapting to change	4.06 / 3.89	4.50 / 3.25	8424 / 4410	0.033 / 0.007	0.232 / -0.309
Success expectations	3.76 / 3.81	3.40 / 4.00	5121 / 6940	0.051 / 0.440	-0.221 / 0.089
Optimism for the future	3.99 / 3.87	3.84 / 3.66	5596 / 5464	0.184 / 0.227	-0.149 / -0.139
Overcoming obstacles	4.25 / 3.81	4.22 / 3.04	6787 / 4005	0.636 / < .001	-0.050 / -0.399
Realistic view of yourself	3.93 / 3.79	4.15 / 2.52	7121 / 3296	0.615 / < .001	0.055 / -0.504
Learning from experience	4.39 / 4.10	4.33 / 3.16	6602 / 3762	0.441 / < .001	-0.077 / -0.435
Engagement, willingness to do something extra	3.97 / 3.82	4.66 / 2.68	9881 / 3562	< .001 / < .001	0.384 / -0.465
Analysis and problem solving	4.22 / 3.77	3.76 / 3.12	5058 / 4349	0.014 / 0.002	-0.265 / -0.345
Numerical, mathematical skills	2.59 / 2.50	3.03 / 3.20	7369 / 7681	0.098 / 0.015	0.188 / 0.288
Decision making	4.05 / 3.58	3.70 / 2.69	5096 / 3401	0.091 / < .001	-0.193 / -0.440
Innovations, new ideas and solutions	4.06 / 3.64	3.85 / 3.04	5945 / 4614	0.149 / 0.008	-0.155 / -0.302
Ability to gain new knowledge	4.33 / 4.06	4.26 / 3.40	6222 / 4675	0.346 / 0.007	-0.099 / -0.300
Learning from feedback	4.16 / 3.95	4.51 / 2.96	8636 / 3560	0.052 / < .001	0.205 / -0.464
Ability to work independently	4.22 / 4.06	4.11 / 2.72	6347 / 2579	0.287 / < .001	-0.111 / -0.613
Oral speech, presentation	4.03 / 3.44	4.00 / 3.08	6398 / 5032	0.371 / 0.076	-0.096 / -0.207
Written presentation, preparation of documents	3.79 / 3.55	3.74 / 3.08	6352 / 4834	0.342 / 0.020	-0.104 / -0.265
Sales skills	3.13 / 3.07	3.00 / 2.31	4574 / 2885	0.392 / 0.004	-0.106 / -0.377
Communication skills in conflict resolution	4.20 / 3.75	3.87 / 2.81	4701 / 2875	0.025 / < .001	-0.248 / -0.504
Computer skills at user level	3.79 / 3.76	3.66 / 3.64	6102 / 6128	0.271 / 0.560	-0.121 / -0.066
Teamwork	3.89 / 3.84	3.96 / 3.00	6976 / 3844	0.913 / < .001	-0.012 / -0.420
Performance of assignments	4.06 / 3.94	4.38 / 3.20	7901 / 4231	0.132 / 0.001	0.164 / -0.359
Leadership, authority	3.87 / 3.58	2.75 / 2.63	2777 / 2758	< .001 / < .001	-0.558 / -0.522
Negotiating skills	3.59 / 3.42	3.25 / 2.77	4696 / 3411	0.055 / 0.002	-0.224 / -0.380
Responsible access to work	4.50 / 4.08	4.65 / 2.92	7493 / 3364	0.382 / < .001	0.085 / -0.496
Morale and Ethical Behavior	4.19 / 4.26	4.60 / 3.44	7880 / 3897	0.072 / < .001	0.192 / -0.415
Overall perceived importance / satisfaction	126 / 116	119 / 95	5142 / 3264	0.012 / < .001	-0.285 / -0.511

Among these, employers were least satisfied with the following skills of the students: sales skills (2.31), a realistic view of themselves (2.52), leadership and authority (2.63), engagement and willingness to take on extra work (2.68), decision making (2.69), the ability to work independently (2.72), negotiation skills (2.77), communication skills in conflict resolution (2.81), a responsible approach to work (2.92), learning from feedback (2.96). By contrast, employers were most satisfied with the student skills of expectation of success (4.0), self-confidence and self-presentation (3.82), optimism for the future (3.66), computer skills (3.64), and the conviction that I can finish my job (3.6).

According to the experience of employers', job offers for graduates and students rank among the most common forms of cooperation with universities. Development of curricula in the form of discussions on the content of lectures and seminars is the least common form of cooperation (Table 4).

TABLE 4: Forms of cooperation between employers and universities.

	Forms of cooperation between employers and universities	Mean	Median
What kind of cooperation with universities do you realize?	Cooperation with universities in discussing and designing curricula	2.29	2
	Recent graduate recruitment through university careers and information services	2.77	3
	Participation in business forums and conferences organized by university	2.73	2,5
	Offer of work placements to university graduates	3.66	4
	Offer of work placements to university students	3.55	4

Employers also expressed the need for further cooperation with universities, answering to the question of what collaboration they would welcome and consider important within a scale of 0 – 5 points. The answers showed that they would most welcome an internship ($M=4.29$, $Me=5$) and mandatory training in the workplace ($M=3.88$; $Me=5$).

DISCUSSION

The study of perceived barriers to employing graduates on the part of Slovak employers revealed that they regarded the lack of appropriate skills as the greatest shortcoming, which is also evidenced by other studies (Clarke, 2017; Janková, 2015; Messum et al., 2017; The Gallup Organization, 2010; UKCES, 2016). Despite the criticism of a narrow-minded approach to the development of skills (Jackson, 2016), the results confirmed that these were important for employers, namely as generic skills (AQU, 2015; Naveed et al., 2014; Messum et al., 2017; The Gallup Organization, 2010) as well as discipline-specific skills (Muyako & Seedwell, 2015). Employers reported the amount of expected salary as the second most frequent barrier to employing graduates (Fulcher, 2012). Expectations of research-sample students from Bratislava region correspond to the value of the average salary in this region, which reached EUR 1,111 in 2017 (Nejedlý, 2017). In 2016, graduates expected a lower starting salary than in 2017, namely EUR 935 per month (TASR, 2016). Similarly, to our research, it was confirmed that IT students have the highest salary expectations, followed by students of technology, economics, and law; the expectations of graduates of social sciences, natural sciences, health, philosophy, pedagogy and theology were below average. The results showed that the perception of the importance of skills was similar for both employers and students. Employers considered the most important skill, engagement and willingness to do something extra – in comparison to student responses, this skill was viewed as more important by employers. Employers considered a responsible approach to work, morale and ethical behavior, learning from feedback, flexibility and adaptability to change to be other important

skills. Our results are partly consistent with those of the studies conducted by Spanish authors (AQU, 2015); Catalan employers deem a responsible approach to work, the ability to learn and teamwork the most important. In the case of experience in the field, students considered it more important than employers who, by contrast, attached it the least importance. Nonetheless, the research studies have revealed that completion of several short-term internships during higher education increases the probability of employment for graduates (Silva et al., 2018). In respect of psychological capital, both employers and students attached importance mainly to the skills of self-efficacy and resilience, i.e. the ability to reach the goal; the conviction that I can finish my job; psychological resilience, burden and stress management; flexibility, adaptation to change; overcoming obstacles. These results highlight the importance of individual responsibility for the development of career skills of graduates. As Clarke (2008) states, employability is dependent on an individual and therefore it is essential to take interest in how organizations can support an individual in managing their careers and employability. Graduates must be able to proactively navigate their world of work and manage themselves in building their careers (Bridgstock, 2009).

Perceptions of satisfaction showed that students were considerably more satisfied with the level of their skills than employers were (Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Letovancová & Lisá, 2008; Messum et al., 2017). Differences were demonstrated in skills which employers were least satisfied with, namely selling skills; a realistic view of themselves; leadership and authority; engagement and willingness to take on extra work; decision making; ability to work independently; negotiation skills; communication skills in conflict resolution; a responsible approach to work; learning from feedback. Overall, employers were most satisfied with the skills of expectation of success, self-confidence and self-presentation, optimism for the future, computer skills, and the conviction that I can finish my job. Satisfaction with the computer skills of graduates is reflected in the results of several studies (AQU, 2015; Hodges & Burchell, 2003). Shortcomings in students' skills are not rare, yet students do not perceive them (Letovancová & Lisá, 2008; Messum et al., 2017). Thus, the role of universities should be to support self-awareness of students (Messum et al., 2017). Eby, Butts and Lockwood (2003) showed that students who had a well-developed concept of their career goals and a realistic evaluation of their own skills and competences were perceived as more employable than other students. As Clarke (2017) states, when developing employability skills, it is necessary to understand and differentiate between the role of a higher education institution and that of an individual. An educational institution can provide students and graduates with support in the form of career guidance that will facilitate students' reflection and self-awareness. Career guidance staff at a university can thus promote awareness of the importance of the attributes needed for job success (e.g., self-management) as well as experience of personal responsibility for getting and keeping a job. Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) also state that, unlike the attention paid to human capital, within employability skills, less attention is given to individual characteristics, the impact of perceived employability skills and of the labor market on real employment outcomes. These are the aspects which can be dealt with in university career guidance centers for students. The centers can help:

- build a relationship with employers, identify employers' requirements and minimize differences in the perceptions and opinions of both employers and graduates;
- learn new perspectives on the labor market and provide information;
- support clients in developing self-awareness and discovering their personal potential, mediating both standard and non-standard assessment methods;
- formulate a strategy and draw up an individual development plan so that graduates can fulfil their personal potential in the best possible way.

Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) propose portfolios, oral presentations, and reflective contributions as widely usable assessment and development methods for promoting employability skills. These tasks can be generally included in higher education curricula as assignments in individual subjects. Our employers regard the incorporation of mandatory internships into the teaching process as a desired form of cooperation with universities, as also confirmed by the results produced by other authors (AQU, 2015; Silva et al., 2018). Jackson (2016) states that in addition to the development of discipline-relevant employability skills, the role of universities is also to develop pre-professional graduates' identity. This can be developed during studies through memberships of professional organizations, student societies, career centers, or employers.

As Bridgstock (2009) points out, the current political trend is aimed at supporting universities through employability funding, enhancement of teaching and learning for employability, work-integrated learning programs, and calls for further research in the field. She also stresses that individual skills and knowledge need to be supplemented with targeted geographic and industrial development in relation to lifelong learning and social inclusion initiatives. The issue of employability is targeting dynamics on the relationship between higher education institutions and the labor market (Tomlinson, 2012). As research in the area shows (Tomlinson, 2012), graduates' awareness of the challenges of future employability is on the increase, resulting in a growing level of flexibility, individualization and competitiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to shape graduates' orientation towards the labor market. Trends show that there is a need for exerting stronger pressure on organizations and their role in encouraging employees to manage their careers and employability (Clarke, 2008). In this way, organizations will be able to provide for more employable workforce, which also enhances attractiveness and retention. Higher education institutions themselves have assumed responsibility for a comprehensive employability construct, which is dependent not only on individual competencies and dispositions, but also on economic conditions and personal circumstances. It is necessary to address the issue of what are the implications of entrusting the responsibility to higher education institutions (HEI). According to Sin and Neave (2014), these implications consist mostly in submitting to the labor market and the current orientation towards professionalization by focusing on narrow job-specific skills. The study results also revealed a need for work-integrated learning (WIL) in the case of Slovak university students (e.g., in the form of mandatory internships), which would reduce the differences in perceived satisfaction with employability skills from the perspective of both students and employers. This research supported the Slovak view of some the results of reported by Zegwaard and Rowe (2017) who address the question of how WIL contributes to enhancing employability outcomes for students and graduates.

CONCLUSION

When assessing what graduate skills to develop, it must be primarily taken into account those which employers consider important and with the level of which they are least satisfied. It is unnecessary to pay attention to those skills in which graduates demonstrate a low level but are also of little importance for successful work performance. Furthermore, it is essential to pay attention to mitigating the differences between graduates' and employers' perception of the level of acquired skills. It is obvious that graduates expect employers to be satisfied, while they are dissatisfied. It can cause demotivation and a higher rate of graduate turnover. One way to reduce the gap in the perception of graduates and employers is to promote mandatory students' internships, enable active contacts with employers and the labor market, and promote self-management skills, such as self-awareness. Higher education institutions can provide and facilitate such services through career guidance center services. Provision of psychological services for the purpose of improving self-awareness can help graduates find the right

profession as well as improve their retention by employers. For further research, it would be advisable to directly examine the data from employed graduates and their perceptions of employability skills after they start working.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favored the broader term of WIL. In response to these changes, the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning in 2018.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "*an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum*". Examples of such practice includes work placements, work-terms, internships, practicum, cooperative education (Co-op), fieldwork, work-related projects/competitions, service learning, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, applied projects, simulations (including virtual WIL), etc. WIL shares similar aims and underpinning theories of learning as the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training, however, each of these fields are seen as separate fields.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily of two forms; 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider best practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data. And a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Best practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal also seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of best practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or is situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.



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