

CURRENT ACADEMIC NEEDS VERSUS BUSINESS DEMANDS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Elvira Fetahu¹, Shpëtim Çerri¹, Marsel Sulanjaku²

¹ Department of Marketing and Engineering, University of Elbasan "Aleksander Xhuvani", Albania
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3342-5833>

² Department of Accounting and Finance, University of Elbasan "Aleksander Xhuvani", Albania

*Corresponding author: Elvira Fetahu, Vice Rector, University of Elbasan "Aleksander Xhuvani", Albania. +355 54 52593 e-mail: elvira.fetahu@uniel.edu.al

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: The dynamics of market changes and consumer demands have led to new challenges for businesses, including their offers and their customer service. These challenges are closely related to their ability to react, adjust and adapt to these changes in order to survive or created competitive advantage. A key component of these ongoing efforts is human resources, which must have the appropriate abilities, knowledge, and skills to align with market and consumer changes.

OBJECTIVE: The object of this paper is to explore the needs for professional skills of tourism-sector businesses in the region of Elbasan and compare them with the actual academic offer of Faculty of Economy at "Aleksander Xhuvani" University of Elbasan.

METHODS: In our study 70 businesses of the hotel-tourism sector and 43 businesses of the production sector were selected based in the Directorate of Taxes in Elbasan and the Elbasan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

RESULTS: In our study a major number of the respondents admit to have difficulties in adoption with the new job where 13.6% list professional ability and 13.6% soft skills such as communication as aspects of work in which they had more difficulties to adopt.

CONCLUSIONS: There is an evident gap between the nature of the degree offered by higher education institutions and the job positions of the graduates.

Keywords: *Higher education, Curricula, Tourism, Human Resources, Skills*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays businesses in our country, as well as anywhere in the world, face constant changes and challenges in the environment in which they operate. These challenges are related to continuous price changes, crises that arise in different countries of the world, malfunctioning of the supply chain of businesses, migratory movements, emigration, etc. In an effort to survive in an increasingly competitive and challenging market and to achieve competitive advantages, companies have turned their attention to their human resources. Human resources are considered a very valuable asset and a key factor in achieving competitive advantage. The importance of human resources is particularly evident in the service sector, where there is a direct and interactive interaction between frontline workers and customers. In the process of preparing employees to be at the right level to perform their duties as effectively as possible, higher education institutions play an important role, as continuous "suppliers" of these businesses with qualified workforce. The question raises if the qualifications and skills of graduates in Albanian universities are in accordance with the requirements and needs of the businesses that employ them? So, is there a compatibility between the academic "offer" of higher education institutions in Albania and the "demand" of businesses and companies for the skills and competencies of the human resources that they will employ? This is the main purpose of this study:

analyzing the compatibility between the skills obtained by university graduates and the skills required by businesses from their employees. The study focuses on the region of Elbasan, analyzing two categories of businesses: businesses of the hotel-tourism sector and businesses of the production sector. On the other hand, the academic offer of two bachelor's level study programs of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Elbasan "Aleksander Xhuvani" is analyzed, more specifically Bachelor in Economy-Tourism and Bachelor in Administration-Business and Engineering. This choice was made since these two study programs are supposed to offer a degree that is more in line with the needs of the two respective sectors: hospitality-tourism and manufacturing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

All businesses worldwide are subjected to a dynamic business environment; what differentiates them is how each implement and adopts strategies to cope with change.^[1] In today's economic reality and under the pressure of global competition, many economic entities are constantly trying to generate additional innovative products and services to face these challenges. In order to offer these innovative products

[1] Deshati Erjona, "Strategic entrepreneurial responses to economic, social, political and technological environment – A literature review", CIT Review Journal, November 2022, pg. 57-58

and services, economic entities are looking for different skills and competences from the workforce they have^[2]. In this context, a very dynamic demand from economic entities for new skills and competences from their employees is being observed. Economic changes may create the basis for a different, flexible form of specialization in work and in the HEI (Higher Education Institutions) curriculum. Such a curriculum will have the right flexibility and can be linked with both specialized studies, as well as applied ones^[3].

Given this situation, HEIs in Albania are under constant pressure to produce students with the competencies and skills required by the labor market. The required competencies and skills are offered to students through the curricula of the relevant subjects of the teaching programs prepared by the subject lecturer and approved by the relevant department. One of the challenges facing HEIs is the transformation of pedagogical practices (where the lecturing continues to be the dominant learning method) to competency-based teaching as a response to the needs of the labor market. In the other hand in traditional universities, the development and change of curricula is methodological, and as a result often "slow"^[4].

Although there are efforts to change and to include also the developing of the soft skills (teamwork, communication skills, ability to work independently, presentation skills, social cognition and decision-making skills), controlled and centralized curricula, traditional learning methods, the prevalence of passivity among students and cultural factors hinder the development of soft skills among students^[5]. There is a growing demand from businesses for the practical skills of graduates, but on the other hand the development of policies to teach these skills have suffered from failure in phase of implementation^[6]. The development of a coordinated system (business-university) requires a number of steps: further conceptualization of this type of higher education, a quality of assurance system and how students can meet these standards, as well as a clear description of responsibilities and obligations of the various parties involved^[7].

Many researchers have noticed a positive impact of the large number of optional subjects offered by a study program on increasing the necessary skills and competencies of the student, required by the labor market. By offering a wide range of elective subjects, the student can choose the subjects he deems most appropriate to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for the job he intends to do. The authors also emphasize the importance of the existence of multidisciplinary courses which help the student to acquire knowledge between different disciplines of study. The subjects of different disciplines have proven to offer a wider and more diverse education in function of the ever more diversified skills that the labor market requires^[8]. Riyadh Mohammed Ali Hamza (2011) supports the provision of a wider range of elective courses but also courses of different disciplines. Another aspect of learning special knowledge and skills remains the combination of teaching subjects with the implementation of various practices at economic units or the simulation of practical cases. It is precisely the interweaving of theoretical subjects with subjects based on practice that simulate the implementation of various practices that makes it possible to provide and equip students with specific skills that are required by the labor market. The integration of theory and practice is essential to have successful study programs. The relationship between higher education and working life should be examined from four perspectives: of the student, of the education system and staff, of employers and businesses, and of society and the education system^[9].

According to Kai Schleutker et. al. (2019), taking into consideration the sector in which the economic entity operates but also the job position, employers do not recruit people based only on their professional or academic qualification, but also look for other competencies that can add value to their organizations. They prefer flexible employees who are able to quickly adapt to unforeseen changes. Consequently, individual skill profiles should ideally combine the specific skills needed for a job with essential transversal skills such as the ability to analyze and organize complex information, take responsibility, manage risk and take decisive action^{[2], [10]}. The importance of interpersonal skills will continue to increase in all business sectors, while collaborative efforts continue to dominate organizational spaces^[11]. Many studies have supported the fact that psychological and personalities variables are in direct association with the development of the new ventures and also distinguish the entrepreneurs

[2] Gabriela Cecilia Julieta Stanculescu dhe Daniel Bulina, "Shaping tourism higher education curriculum - Strategy to develop skills for tomorrow's jobs", *Procedia Economics and Finance* 3 (2012), pg. 1203 – 1207.

[3] Michael Young, "A Curriculum for the 21st Century? Towards a New Basis for Overcoming Academic/Vocational Divisions", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Sep. 1993, Vol. 41, No. 3, pg. 203-222.

[4] Ryan, "Higher Education as a Business: Lessons from the Corporate World", *Minerva*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2001), fq. 115-135.

[5] Thi Tuyet Tran, "Limitation on the development of skills in higher education in Vietnam", *Higher Education*, Vol. 65, No. 5 (May 2013), pg. 631-644.

[6] Geoff Hayward dhe Rosa M. Fernandez, "From Core Skills to Key Skills: Fast Forward or Back to the Future?", *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (Mar. 2004), pg. 117-145.

[7] Joseph Kessels dhe Kitty Kwakman, "Interface: Establishing Knowledge Networks between Higher Vocational Education and Businesses", *Higher Education*, Vol. 54, No. 5 (Nov. 2007), pg. 689-703.

[8] Carmen Delia Dávila Quintana, José-Ginés Mora, Pedro J. Pérez dhe Luis E. Vila, "Enhancing the Development of Competencies", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (March 2016), pg. 10-24.

[9] Päivi Tynjälä, Jussi Välimaa dhe Anneli Sarja, "Pedagogical Perspectives on the Relationships between Higher Education and Working Life", *Higher Education*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Sep. 2003), pg. 147-166.

[10] Judith Roizen dhe Mark Jepson, "Degrees for Jobs: Employer Expectations of Higher Education", 1985, McGraw-Hill Education.

[11] Audrey J. Jaeger, "Job Competencies and the Curriculum: An Inquiry into Emotional Intelligence in Graduate Professional Education", *Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (Dec. 2003), pg. 615-639.

from non-entrepreneurs^[12]. Interpersonal skills are critical for managerial success, but are not adequately addressed in university classrooms. Students must learn these critical skills in order to prepare for positions in a global economy that relies heavily on interpersonal effectiveness. Student proficiency in interpersonal skills requires changes in syllabi structure, course objectives, curriculum structure and assessment process design^[13].

METHODOLOGY

For the research methodology of the study, the following steps were followed:

- Registration of businesses in the hotel-tourism and production sector in the Elbasan region.
- The exploratory phase of the research: the development of a focus group session and several in-depth interviews with selected representatives of business managers/owners of the sectors of interest to the study. This is followed by conducting a content analysis in order to identify the key problems and factors that concern business leaders regarding the skills and competencies of their employees. This information received and processed serves to design the questionnaires in the next phase of the study.
- Drafting of two questionnaires, designed to obtain detailed information from two samples: owners/managers of businesses in the hotel-tourism and production sector in the Elbasan region and employees in these businesses. Data collection is then carried out in the field, thus obtaining information from two different perspectives. The above steps will be elaborated in detail below.

Since the main focus of the study is the businesses in the hotel - tourism and that of production sector in the Elbasan region, the first step of the methodology part would be the correct identification of the businesses of these sectors, with data on the address, owners or managers their and other identifying elements. This necessary preliminary information was obtained from the Directorate of Taxes in Elbasan and the Elbasan Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Then, from these two lists, the businesses of the sectors of interest for the study were filtered. More specifically, 70 businesses of the hotel-tourism sector and 43 businesses of the production sector were selected. From these identified businesses, those with the largest number of employees were contacted, inviting them to participate in a focus group session or, if it was impossible for them (due to time or other commitments), the development of an in-depth conversation in settings where they found it most convenient (eg, in their business premises). After contacting a significant number of businesses, agreement was reached with 11 of them to hold a focus

group session at the premises of the UE Faculty of Economics, while with another 10 it was agreed to hold in-depth interview sessions at the premises of their businesses.

In parallel with the identification and contacting of businesses that would be involved in the collection of qualitative research data, preparation of the question guide for the focus group session and the in-depth interviews were developed. The topics for both categories of questionnaires were the same. More specifically, the focus of the questions was on:

- The hiring method that businesses use.
- Difficulties faced by recently hired employees.
- The compatibility between the completed studies program and the nature of the tasks performed by the employees.
- Trainings carried out by employees.
- Competencies that managers/owners think their employees should have.

The focus group session took place near the premises of the Faculty of Economics of the EU in November 2021. It was attended by six managers/owners of businesses in the hotel-tourism sector and five managers/owners of businesses of a manufacturing nature, all located in the region of Elbasan. While the in-depth interviews were conducted by two of the members of the project's working group, in the premises of the businesses whose owners had been agreed in advance.

The information obtained during the group and individual in-depth interviews was recorded and then analyzed. This process was carried out in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the issues of interest to the study, as well as to precede the preparation of detailed questionnaires for the survey that would be carried out afterwards.

From the analysis of the qualitative data collected in this phase, some problems or issues were identified, which needed further quantitative research. More concretely:

- The difficulty in finding qualified individuals to hire
- The employees perform tasks of different natures, regardless of the profile of the university degree.
- Continuous training is well considered by business managers/owners, although there is reluctance on their part to invest in further training and qualifications of their employees.
- There are some skills that are required by businesses, but are not mastered properly newly hired employees.
- Businesses are ready to cooperate with higher education institutions for the improvement of curricula in order to achieve a higher compatibility between them and the needs of businesses.

Then the study's working group designed the

[12] Emilija Egger, Ivona Mileva, Jovana Saveve, " Investigating the entrepreneurial intentions of young students – The case of motivational factors", CIT Review Journal, May 2022, pg. 16-17

[13] Cathleen Stasz, "Assessing Skills for Work: Two Perspectives", Oxford Economic Papers, Jul. 2001, Vol. 53, No. 3, pg. 385-405

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questionnaires intended for the collection of quantitative data from two target populations: business managers/owners and employees in these businesses. These questionnaires include both closed and open questions, and their purpose was to obtain more detailed quantitative information on the topics of interest to the study. Obtaining information from two populations is carried out in order to compare the opinions and thoughts of both business managers/owners and their employees. The questionnaires were multiplied in 80 copies for those intended for managers/owners and 120 copies for those intended for employees. For data collection in the field, 3 students of the Master of Science in Marketing study program of FE of UE were engaged. These students underwent a 1-hour preliminary training by one of the members of the project group, with the aim of familiarizing them with the questionnaires and realizing a qualitative process of conducting face-to-face interviews.

The field data collection process was carried out in the period March-April 2022. The return rate for the questionnaires addressed to employees was 73% (88 questionnaires returned completed out of 120 prepared), while for the questionnaires addressed to managers/owners it was 85 % (68 completed returned questionnaires out of 80 prepared).

ANALYSIS AND MAIN FINDINGS

After the completion of the field work, the data was entered into the computer program IBM® SPSS® Statistics 21. From the analysis of the data and their descriptive presentation, a clearer overview of the problems that this study aims to address was achieved. Some of the main results of the descriptive data analysis are presented below. The results will be shown in descriptive summary tables, accompanied by corresponding graphs and an explanation for each table/graph. First, the results of the descriptive analysis for the "Employed" sample will be presented. Regarding the data obtained from the sample composed of employees in businesses of the hotel-tourism and production sector, their seniority at work was an average of 3 years. 53.3% of them had completed the bachelor's study program, while 20.5 had finished or were continuing their studies in the master's program.

Indicate the level of studies you have completed					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Bachelor	46	52.3	52.3	52.3
	Master (if graduated or continue studying)	18	20.5	20.5	72.7
	Other	24	27.3	27.3	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: The division of employed respondents according to the level of studies

A large part of the respondents consider that there is a discrepancy between the profile of the degree of studies they possess and the actual job position they perform. More than half indicate that there is no compliance at all, while only 16% of them indicate that there is full compliance.

Indicate how you judge the level of compatibility between your degree profile and your current job position					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	No compatibility at all	44	50.0	53.7	53.7
	There are many incompatibilities	6	6.8	7.3	61.0
	There are some incompatibilities	6	6.8	7.3	68.3
	Both there is and there is no compatibility	8	9.1	9.8	78.0
	There is compatibility to a certain extend	4	4.5	4.9	82.9
	Full compatibility	14	15.9	17.1	100.0
	Total	82	93.2	100.0	
Missing	System	6	6.8		
Total		88	100.0		

Table 2: Results of the employees' opinion on the compatibility of the profile of the obtained degree and their current job position

Meanwhile, regarding the difficulties of starting work, about 33% of the respondents expressed the opinion that they found it a little to very difficult to get used to work. About 50% of the employee respondents expressed that they had a little to very easy acclimatization with the work in their beginnings.

Indicate the level of difficulty you had in adjusting to your job					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Very difficult	6	6.8	7.0	7.0
	Difficult	10	11.4	11.6	18.6
	A little difficult	12	13.6	14.0	32.6

Valid	Neither difficult nor easy	14	15.9	16.3	48.8
	A little easy	14	15.9	16.3	65.1
	Easy	6	6.8	7.0	72.1
	Very easy	24	27.3	27.9	100.0
	Total	86	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.3		
Total		88	100.0		

Table 3: Results of the employees' perception on the level of difficulty they encountered in adapting to work

Despite the declaration of the opinion that they found it relatively easy to adapt to the work when they started, all the respondents declared different aspects of the work with which they had difficulties to adapt or to acquire the special skills for the work required. As can be seen from the table summarizing the answers to the question related to this issue, the vast majority of the respondents indicate the adaptation to the work conditions, the staff or the work schedule as aspects that have had more difficulties. Also, specific technical skills are evident as difficulties, being declared by about 23% of respondents.

Tell and specify the areas or aspects of the work to which you had more difficulties to adapt or acquire					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Technical ability	20	22.7	22.7	22.7
	Setting up with the environment	18	20.5	20.5	43.2
	Foreign language	4	4.5	4.5	47.7
	Relationship with customers	18	20.5	20.5	68.2
	Situation management	4	4.5	4.5	72.7
	Working hours	12	13.6	13.6	86.4
	Adaptation with staff	12	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: The results of the employees' perception of the areas or aspects of work where they had difficulties

Most of the respondents received training from the employer at work, either when they started or during the continuation of the work (about 75% of them). Meanwhile, only about 40% of them have received training sessions on their own initiative (ie, not provided by the employer). Most of the training provided by the employer is related to professional skills, work environment, as well as communication

and customer service. Meanwhile, the trainings made on the employees' own initiative are mostly related to the professional skills required at work, computer skills or foreign languages.

Has the employer provided you with on-the-job training (either when you started working or continuously)					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	64	72.7	74.4	74.4
	No	22	25.0	25.6	100.0
	Total	86	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.3		
Total		88	100.0		

Table 5: Results of employees' responses on the provision of training by employers

If so, what were the trainings about?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Professional ability	12	13.6	13.6	13.6
	Environment	6	6.8	6.8	20.5
	Ethical	4	4.5	4.5	25.0
	IT	4	4.5	4.5	29.5
	Communication	2	2.3	2.3	31.8
	Communication with the client	12	13.6	13.6	45.5
	Work culture	2	2.3	2.3	47.7
	Marketing	4	4.5	4.5	52.3
	management	6	6.8	6.8	59.1
	Management of situations	4	4.5	4.5	63.6
	Missing	20	22.7	22.7	86.4
	Customer service	12	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Results of employees' responses on the type of training received at work

Did you do training on your own initiative?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	34	38.6	38.6	38.6
	No	44	50.0	50.0	88.6
	Missing	10	11.4	11.4	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: The results of the employees' responses on conducting trainings on personal initiative

If Q. 7 = Yes, what did you do the training about?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Computer skills	6	6.8	6.8	6.8
	Communication skills	4	4.5	4.5	11.4
	Professional ability	18	20.5	20.5	31.8
	Foreign language	4	4.5	4.5	36.4
	Customer relationship	2	2.3	2.3	38.6
	Missing	54	61.4	61.4	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Results of the employees' responses regarding the nature of the trainings done on personal initiative

The survey of employees enabled the identification of areas or skills which the respondents thought they should have mastered better when they left the university auditoriums. Thus, 34% of them indicate professional skills and practice as areas in which they would like to have more competences, while communication skills, information technology or foreign language are not left behind.

You can list an area or areas in which you really feel you should have come out of your education better prepared					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Professional ability	12	13.6	13.6	13.6
	Foreign language	4	4.5	4.5	18.2
	Communication	12	13.6	13.6	31.8
	Marketing	6	6.8	6.8	38.6
	Managing a business	4	4.5	4.5	43.2
	Missing	20	22.7	22.7	65.9
	Practice	18	20.5	20.5	86.4
	Information technology	12	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: The results of the employees' answers on the shortcomings they perceive they had in their university education

Meanwhile, in terms of specializations that would help them perform their current tasks as well as possible or give them a hand in their professional career, the respondents indicate customer service, foreign language, training as a tourist guide or skills other professional.

You can tell us what course or specialization would help you in your work or professional career					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Professional ability	8	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Foreign language	14	15.9	15.9	25.0
	Touristic guide	8	9.1	9.1	34.1
	Mechanical engineering	4	4.5	4.5	38.6
	Marketing	6	6.8	6.8	45.5
	Business management	6	6.8	6.8	52.3
	Missing	22	25.0	25.0	77.3
	Computer programs	6	6.8	6.8	84.1
	Customer service	14	15.9	15.9	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: Results of employees' responses on the types of training they see as useful in their careers

Respondents were also asked about any subject that they considered unnecessary for their current job, or that they would like to develop in their study program. For these two questions there were many missing answers and respondents were reluctant to answer. This is either for reasons of forgetfulness, or for reasons of not declaring a negative opinion on specific subjects. However, the data for these two questions are presented in the following two tables.

You can tell us any subjects that you would consider unnecessary in the curriculum you did					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Project management	4	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Physical education	12	13.6	13.6	18.2
	Econometrics	8	9.1	9.1	27.3
	Physics	2	2.3	2.3	29.5
	Courses of justice	4	4.5	4.5	34.1
	Macroeconomics	6	6.8	6.8	40.9
	Marketing in health	4	4.5	4.5	45.5
	Mathematics	4	4.5	4.5	50.0
	Missing	44	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 11: The results of the employees' responses on the courses they completed during their studies and which they considered unnecessary

You can tell us any subject you would like to develop (that you did not do at all during the study program)					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Digital marketing	6	6.8	6.8	6.8
	E-commerce	6	6.8	6.8	13.6
	French language	2	2.3	2.3	15.9
	Foreign language	2	2.3	2.3	18.2
	Touristic Guide	6	6.8	6.8	25.0
	IT	4	4.5	4.5	29.5
	Italian language	2	2.3	2.3	31.8
	Missing	56	63.6	63.6	95.5
	SPSS	2	2.3	2.3	97.7
	Web Design	2	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

Table 12: The results of the employees' responses on the subjects they would like to have done during their studies

Meanwhile, in the next part, a summary of descriptive statistics is presented for the data collected from the managers/owners of the hotels - tourism and production sector businesses in the Elbasan region.

The first questions were related to the employment methods that businesses use the most, that is, how they find the qualified labor force for the vacancies they have, as well as the difficulties they encounter in filling vacancies. More than half of the respondents indicated that they hire based on the recommendations of others (friends, relatives, etc.), while about 27% of them used Internet or social network announcements to announce the vacancies they have in their businesses. The vast majority of respondents expressed that they encountered many difficulties in filling vacant jobs (about 60% of them), while only 6% found it relatively easy.

How was the hiring of employees?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	News social networks/ specialized websites	18	26.5	26.5	26.5
	Proactive search by the employee himself	12	17.6	17.6	44.1
	Recommendation from others	36	52.9	52.9	97.1
	Other	2	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 13: Results of employers' responses on the employment method they used

How difficult is it for you to fill a vacancy in your business?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Very difficult	40	58.8	58.8	58.8
	Difficult	6	8.8	8.8	67.6
	Relatively difficult	4	5.9	5.9	73.5
	Neither difficult nor easy	14	20.6	20.6	94.1
	Relatively easy	4	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 14: Results of employers' responses on the level of difficulty they encounter when filling job vacancies

In terms of the match that managers/owners believe there is between the employee's degree profile and their job position, the vast majority of them, about 70%, judge that there is little to no match.

How do you judge the level of compatibility between the degree profile obtained by the employee and his current job position					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	No compatibility at all	24	35.3	35.3	35.3
	There are many incompatibilities	6	8.8	8.8	44.1
	There are some incompatibilities	16	23.5	23.5	67.6
	Both there is and there is no compatibility	2	2.9	2.9	70.6
	There is compatibility to a certain extend	2	2.9	2.9	73.5
	Full compatibility	6	8.8	8.8	82.4
	No compatibility at all	12	17.6	17.6	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 15: The results of the employers' responses on their judgment about the compatibility of the training of the employees they have with the tasks they currently perform

The respondents of this sample were also asked about the difficulties they have identified in their employees, the time they started working. Mostly they indicate adaptation as the main difficulty (adaptation to work, environment, schedule, to colleagues, to the nature of group work, etc.). About 12% of them cite professional skills as an obvious difficulty for newly employed people.

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List the difficulties you think the new hires had in their beginnings at work					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Professional ability	8	11.8	11.8	11.8
	Ethics at work	6	8.8	8.8	20.6
	Foreign language	2	2.9	2.9	23.5
	Communication with customers	8	11.8	11.8	35.3
Valid	There was no correspondence between the position and the degree	2	2.9	2.9	38.2
	Tim schedule adoption	6	8.8	8.8	47.1
	Job adoption	20	29.4	29.4	76.5
	Team work	16	23.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 16: Results of employers' responses on their opinion about the difficulties that new employees have encountered at work

Despite the fact that all respondents cite the difficulties encountered by employees in their beginnings, only 75% of them have provided training for them, at the beginning of work or continuously.

Have you provided training to your employees?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Po	46	67.6	74.2	74.2
	Jo	16	23.5	25.8	100.0
	Total	62	91.2	100.0	
Missing	System	6	8.8		
Total		68	100.0		

Table 17: Results of employers' responses on the provision of training to their employees

If so, was it offered only when they started work or on an ongoing basis					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Only when they started work	26	38.2	56.5	56.5
	When they started work and ongoing	18	26.5	39.1	95.7
	Ongoing	2	2.9	4.3	100.0
	Total	46	67.6	100.0	
Missing	System	22	32.4		
Total		68	100.0		

Table 18: Results of employers' responses on the frequency of training provision

These trainings were offered mainly in the field of management, and less in that of marketing and accounting. However, the vast majority of the respondents are ready to provide facilities for employees if they would be trained on their own initiative, as they consider the employees' desire for self-development to be extremely beneficial for their business.

Have you offered/Would you offer facilities to your employees if they wanted to be trained on their own initiative?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	62	91.2	91.2	91.2
	No	6	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 19: Results of employers' responses on the facilities they would offer employees for training

Show how beneficial for your business you consider your employees' desire for self-development					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Neutral thought	2	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Relatively beneficial	10	14.7	14.7	17.6
	Beneficial	8	11.8	11.8	29.4
	Very beneficial	48	70.6	70.6	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 20: Results of employers' responses to the judgment about the usefulness of employees' need for self-development

Also, about 65% of them were ready to finance training or various professional development programs for their employees.

Indicate the level willingness to finance the further training of your employees					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Not willing	12	17.6	17.6	17.6
	Not so willing	4	5.9	5.9	23.5
	Relatively not willing	4	5.9	5.9	29.4
	Neutral thought	4	5.9	5.9	35.3
	Relatively willing	8	11.8	11.8	47.1
	Willing	10	14.7	14.7	61.8
Valid	Very willing	26	38.2	38.2	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 21: Results of employers' responses on their willingness to finance employee training

Respondents from the managers/owners category think that the competencies that their employees need to develop more are professional skills, communication, customer service, management or foreign language.

If your employees were to be trained, what competencies do you think they should develop?					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Computer skills	2	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Ability to work on group	4	5.9	5.9	8.8
	Professional ability	18	26.5	26.5	35.3
	Ethics at work	4	5.9	5.9	41.2
	Finance	2	2.9	2.9	44.1
	Foreign language	6	8.8	8.8	52.9
	Communication	12	17.6	17.6	70.6
	Marketing	4	5.9	5.9	76.5
	Management	8	11.8	11.8	88.2
	Customer service	8	11.8	11.8	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 22: Results of employers' responses on the nature of competencies that employees should develop

About 50% of the respondents are slightly to very satisfied with the work of their employees, while only 15% categorize themselves as relatively not satisfied to not at all satisfied.

Please indicate the level of satisfaction you feel with your employees' work					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Not satisfied at all	6	8.8	8.8	8.8
	Not satisfied	4	5.9	5.9	14.7
	Relatively not satisfied	10	14.7	14.7	29.4
	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	14	20.6	20.6	50.0
	Relatively satisfied	12	17.6	17.6	67.6
	Satisfied	8	11.8	11.8	79.4
	Very Satisfied	14	20.6	20.6	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0		

Table 23: Results of employers' responses on the level of satisfaction they have with their employees' work

Also, more than half of them were willing to collaborate with the university or academic staff to improve the existing curricula of the teaching programs.

Indicate the level of willingness you have to provide assistance in improving the curricula of our undergraduate programs					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Not willing	10	14.7	14.7	14.7
	Not so willing	6	8.8	8.8	23.5
	Relatively not willing	10	14.7	14.7	38.2
	Neutral thought	6	8.8	8.8	47.1
	Relatively willing	6	8.8	8.8	55.9
	Willing	8	11.8	11.8	67.6
	Very willing	22	32.4	32.4	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0		

Table 24: Results of employers' responses on their willingness to contribute to the improvement of university curricula

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarizing the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data (collected through focus group and in-depth interviews) and quantitative data (collected through face-to-face surveys), the study reached the following conclusions:

- There is an evident discrepancy between the nature of the degree offered by higher education institutions and the job positions of the graduates. Under these circumstances employers do not consider the degree profile when making new hiring's. This can also come as a result of the fact that a good part of employment is not based

on the type of education the applicant has, but on the basis of recommendations and personal acquaintances. This type of problem is not specific only to Albania, but is encountered in other countries as well [13];[14].

- The vast majority of newly hired employees undergo initial and ongoing trainings on the job. This comes as a result of the incompatibility of university education - nature of work, but also as a result of the insufficiency of the qualifications that graduates obtain during university studies. On the other hand, there are certain skills that employers are looking for, which vary from different types of market conditions^[15]. Many studies have shown the dissatisfaction of employers with the development of competencies required to perform tasks at work^[16], [17]. It should be emphasized that training has a significant impact on employee performance. Also, increased investment in human capital fuels the further growth of companies^{[17];[18]}.
- Newly employed people encounter difficulties in adapting to working conditions, difficulties in communication with clients or colleagues, as well as having problems with team work. These difficulties can be reduced if, during the years of study, more attention is paid to practices, or with the changing of teaching methodology (focusing more on the practical side of subjects, encouraging group work, encouraging communication with other individuals or with the public)^{[19];[20]}. Although each employer requires that the job seeker (job applicant) possess specific competencies necessary for a certain type of job, some skills

required by employers are almost universal. Researchers have found that the most required competencies for graduates are: (a) mobilization of the capacities they have (use of time efficiently, good performance at work when under pressure); (b) mobilizing others (working productively with others, coordinating activities, being clear with others) and (c) having good specialist knowledge (mastery of one's field of study, ability to quickly acquire new knowledge)^[21].

- Employers are ready to invest in the professional development of their employees, or create the necessary facilities. This is because they consider employees as valuable assets, where their development contributes to the progress of the business. Also, employees expressed considerable interest in further professional development, being ready to participate in training programs. These conclusions are consistent with the findings of Huei-Mei Liang et. al. (2014) and James W. Drisko (2014).
- There are spaces for curriculum improvement since, as it follows from the analysis; the teaching programs are not updated, while the environment and the labor market have evolved^[22].
- Changing and improving the curricula can also be done by asking for the cooperation of businesses, as their opinions and ideas are very valuable to achieve the intended compatibility between the academic offer and the market demands^[23] [24]. You can't have a good offer without knowing what the market is looking for.

Some of the recommendations derived from the data analysis and study results are:

- Extension of the practice period for the bachelor study programs in "Economy - Tourism" and bachelor in "Administration - Business and Engineering". Currently, these programs include practice as a semester course, with one day a week, but it is not enough.
- To search of possibilities for reducing subjects in the study programs in question, in order to ease the theoretical capacity of students, leaving more space for practice (in view of the point above).

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- Within the course programs, expand the practical focus. In one form or another, higher education activities will have to move out of the classroom, into the world of real work^[25]. Of course, these changes must be made in close cooperation with the academic staff^[26].
- The pedagogic form of teaching may change, passing e.g. in learning based on problem solving (Problem Based Learning) is an approach which can be used as a pedagogical tool to achieve learning goals. This contributes to the development of students' analytical and cognitive skills^[27],^[28],^[29]. Academic staffs can also implement the so-called competency-based teaching^[30],^[31].
- Encourage students to work in groups, encouraging communication between them and with others. Practical group projects should be continuous and part of every course developed.
- In order to carry out the internship in the most optimal possible way, contacts with the businesses of the hotel - tourism and production sector should be expanded and further consolidated. Businesses in these sectors should look at these two programs as main suppliers of qualified employees.
- Request cooperation with businesses for changing and updating educational curricula. This is based also on the recommendations of Mantz Yorke (2004) and William Lowe Boyd (1979).
- Constantly invite representatives of businesses to hold lectures, in order to pass on their practical experience to students. Even Robin Middlehurst (2001) recommends that HEIs that have existing links with industry, successful international alliances, disciplinary curricula or special specializations, as well as a strong customer focus, have skills and strengths that give them advantages.
- To carry out further studies to achieve a higher compatibility between the academic offer in

general and the changing demands of the market.

Disadvantages of the study and scope for further studies

This study, in addition to its achievements, cannot be immune to flaws and limitations. Thus, as its disadvantages we can mention:

- The narrow focus of the study, either in terms of the curricula that were considered for analysis (only two), or in terms of employment sectors (only two).
- The limited geographical space in which the study extends (only the region of Elbasan).
- Relatively small sample, both in terms of employees and owners/managers. This leads to deficiencies in the overall study results [30]. For this purpose, the authors were limited only to a descriptive analysis of the data, without analyzing further into more in-depth statistical analyses, which could also highlight the importance of different variables or the relationship between them. However, despite these limitations, the results of the study serve as a good starting point to have a clear overview of the current academic supply – labor market demand situation.

This study can be expanded further, including other study programs offered by the Faculty of Economics of UE or beyond, as well as including other employment sectors. In this way, a better and more comprehensive harmonization of the academic offer at the faculty or university level will be achieved, increasing the competitiveness of the study programs offered. Also, as mentioned just above, more extensive studies would enable a more sophisticated quantitative analysis, highlighting the importance of different factors, the causal relationships that may exist or other dynamics of the relationship of the variables taken into consideration.

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