

## SIGNIFICANCE OF PRACTICES ON QUALITY OF STUDIES AND SPECIALISTS' TRAINING

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*In striving to realize an acquired qualification in practical activity, professional abilities become especially significant. In higher education, competence, that includes not only knowledge that create a core of the qualification under acquiring, but practical abilities that help to entrench in labour market as well, becomes education's goal.*

*Practice is a part of study process, during which students develop their competence according to their speciality in practice enterprises. During practice, students' knowledge is being verified, adapted and developed in practical professional activity. Without practical sessions, for students it is difficult to understand how theoretical knowledge acquired in College could be adapted and used in future professional activity.*

*Practice is a constituent of study process, however, the problem that often appears is a quality of practice performance. Quality of students' practice performance is determined by many different factors: student's motivation and willingness to acquire professional experience, properly formulated tasks and goals of practice, attitude of the enterprise, in which students go for practice, towards trainee, competence of practice mentor, etc.*

*The article tries to find out a significance of practice of professional activity on studies quality, impact of practice on students during their adaptation in labour market and student's successful transition from education system to independent professional activity.*

*The research indicated that in preparation of students for professional activity more attention should be given to soaking up of theoretical knowledge of students' speciality, organization of training and professional practices of speciality, development of social personal characteristics and abilities and give more and deeper specific knowledge and abilities.*

**Key words:** professional activity practice, professional activity, quality of studies, study programme, student.

**Гедвілене Нійоле, Гілювене Вірджинія. Значущість практик для якості навчання й підготовки фахівців.**

*У прагненні зреалізувати отриману кваліфікацію у практичній діяльності професійні здібності стають особливо значущими. У вищій школі компетенція, яка включає не тільки знання, що створюють основу кваліфікації в процесі її набуття, а й практичні навички, які допомагають закріпитися на ринку праці, стає метою освіти.*

*Практика є складовою частиною навчального процесу, проте проблема, яка часто виникає, – це якість практичної діяльності. Якість практичної підготовки студентів визначається багатьма різними факторами: мотивацією та бажанням студента отримати професійний досвід, належним чином сформульованими завданнями та цілями практики, ставленням підприємства, де студенти проходять практику, до практиканта, компетентністю керівника практики тощо.*

*Автори намагаються з'ясувати значення практики професійної діяльності для якості навчання, впливу практики на студентів під час їх адаптації на ринку праці та успішного переходу студентів від системи освіти до самостійної професійної діяльності.*

**Ключові слова:** практика професійної діяльності, професійна діяльність, якість навчання, навчальна програма, студент.

**Гедвілене Нійоле, Гілювене Вірджинія. Значимість практик для качества обучения и подготовки специалистов.**

*В стремлении реализовать приобретенную квалификацию в практической деятельности профессиональные способности становятся особенно значимыми. В высшей школе компетенция, включающая не только знания, которые создают ядро квалификации в процессе ее приобретения, но и практические способности, которые помогают укрепиться на рынке труда, становится целью образования.*

*Практика является составной частью учебного процесса, но проблема, которая часто возникает, – это качество практической деятельности. Качество практической подготовки студентов определяется многими различными факторами: мотивацией и желанием студента приобретать профессиональный опыт, правильно сформулированные задачи и цели практики, отношение предприятия, в котором студенты проходят практику, к стажерам, компетентность руководителя практики и т. д.*

*Авторы пытаются выяснить значение практики профессиональной деятельности для качества обучения, влияние практики на студентов во время их адаптации на рынке труда и успешного перехода студентов из системы образования в самостоятельную профессиональную деятельность.*

**Ключевые слова:** практика профессиональной деятельности, профессиональная деятельность, качество обучения, учебная программа, студент.

### Introduction

Modern changes of labour market raise high requirements for qualification. New specialists who enter labour market have to possess exceptional personal, social, professional, practical abilities etc.

Practice is a part of study process, during which students develop their competence according to their

speciality in practice enterprises. During practice, students' knowledge is being verified, adapted and developed in practical professional activity. Without practical sessions, for students it is difficult to understand how theoretical knowledge acquired in College could be adapted and used in future professional activity.

In the programmes of college studies, professional practice is an obligatory part of study programme. Professional practice in study process is more than adaptation of theory or knowledge. It is understood as activity and relation in a possible professional field. A purpose of practice is to create conditions for student to adapt available theoretical knowledge and to acquire abilities or experience required for future professional activity in particular working situations. Therefore, through particular practical activity, practice helps to verify how results of studies are being reached, and how quality of studies is being ensured. In this aspect, studies at college have an advantage against studies at university, because college studies are oriented towards practical activity, after graduation of college a professional diploma of bachelor is being awarded. College trains the specialists practitioners, who are able to entrench labour marketing dependently. According to Norkutė and Stasiūnaitienė [9], in order to train a specialist who is good in the market and can compete, and in order to ensure quality of studies, part of studies should be organized not in theoretical, but in real environment of professional activity, because it gives new possibilities to see, experience, act, develop provisions of values important to professional activity.

Therefore, today it is *topical* to examine specifics of practice as part of study programme in a general context of quality of non-university studies, and to relate efficiency of practice with student's ability to enter labour market. Practical training is concurrent of studies' quality.

*Topicality* of the subject is expressed through parameters of organization of non-university studies' practice, that determine the results of studies programme and quality of studies, and student's success full transition from education system to independent professional activity.

*Research object* – practice of professional activity in non-university studies.

*Research goal* – to assess practices of professional activity and their impact on quality of studies in students' point of view.

*Research tasks:*

- 1) to describe practices of professional activity;
- 2) to assess significance of practices of professional activity on quality of studies;
- 3) to summarize students' attitude towards organization of practices and level of students' professional training.

*Research methodology*

By this research there is a striving to find out a significance of students' professional activity practices to quality of studies. Method of questionnaire interview was applied, because it is a reliable method of questioning. Questionnaire is a form of questioning that is being used to gather

research data. During the questioning, respondents were asked to answer the questions (in order to find out their opinion and to gather factual material).

The bigger part of the questionnaire consists of closed questions where respondents can choose the answer of the few presented variants.

In the research, there was used a non-probability sampling. Advantages of non-probability sampling are less costs, less time wasted. Volume of the sample obtained in such way is being determined in accordance with researcher's personal experience and needs, and obtained information could be a base for future researches.

Volume of research sample is not big, because only students of senior courses of Business and technologies faculty of Marijampole college were included into the interview. During the research, the students of senior courses were questioned. Type of quantitative research analysis is resumptive, statistical. While performing the research, there were used: questionnaires, computer, Microsoft Office Word and Excel programmes.

### **1. Links of theory and practice in professional practice**

One of the most topical modern questions in the field of higher education is quality of studies. System of Lithuanian higher education is being criticized a lot regarding the studies programs that don't satisfy quality of studies, regarding insufficient practical training of graduates and insufficient possibilities to adapt obtained knowledge in labour market. In the studies of higher schools, a problem of relation between theory and practice remains topical.

Uncertainty into discussions on relation between theory and practice is given by performed scientific researches on the problem. Domarkas [1], with reference to studies of many scientists, states that students of many specialities differently assess a relation between theory and practice according to the given working experience. He highlights that students without practical working experience pay more attention to the need of practical knowledge, because they intuitively feel, that academic studies are more oriented towards theory. Students with practical work experience more appreciate theoretical knowledge in order to better understand practical processes.

Having assessed insights of Lithuanian scientists [1; 13], a presumption could be done that during practice there are conditions created for a student to adapt available theoretical knowledge in particular working situations and acquire abilities and experience that will be needed in future working activity. However, there remains a big gap between students' knowledge and abilities acquired in colleges, and abilities required at work place. Mentioned authors highlight that practical training would acquire higher significance during training of competent specialists, in case theory and practice as

different but complementary components of totality of experiences would be related into solid study process, which successfully links student's individual experience and theoretical knowledge.

Integrity of theory and practice is being examined by Zubrickiene, Adomaitienė [15] as well. According to them, theoretical and practical training are components of solid process, which are related into totality of different but complementary experiences. In studies process, reflexive learning that expresses itself in practical activity helps to integrate theory and practice. During practice, students do not attach to abstract theories, but assess them reflexively and critically and then apply them in particular practical situations. In this point of view, practice is being characterized by different learning and character of experience attaining, than studies in academic environment.

Practice is like a temporal student's push towards professional reality by creating conditions to acquire knowledge that is not available to obtain during study process in academic environment. This determines more comprehensive discussions, which strive to find out what is more important, theory or practice, i.e. if theory affects practice, or theory arises from practice by summarizing experience, and if theory and practice are concurrent parts of study process [9].

Analysis of data of the performed empirical research "Integrity of theory and practice in point of view of students' experience and assessment" [15] confirmed a principle of inter-compatibility of theory and practice. Respondents indicated that during professional practice, there are necessary both theoretical and practical knowledge that help in real situations of professional activity to acquire practical skills and practical experience. Most respondents acknowledged expedience of practice to future professional activity [15]. Analysis of this research data showed that many students during practice not only adapt theoretical and practical knowledge, are able to use them in real practical situations, but also understand their benefit to future professional activity.

In opinion of the article's authors, more attention must be given to relation of theory and practice in non-university studies programmes and study process while training specialists for labour market, which would warrant quality of studies as well.

## **2. Essence of practice in non-university studies**

The law of science and studies [7] indicates that practice is a part of study process, for organization of which a higher schools responsible. Non-university studies give not less than 15 ECTS credits to practice. Despite practice is being regulated by the law, in study process there are being faced different problems of practice organization and implementation.

Legally, practice is being regulated as part of study process, however, the problem of big gap

between graduates' knowledge and abilities acquired at higher school and abilities required at work place is still topical. This influences the search for mechanisms of development of studies quality and practice organization as well as processes.

Analysing content of study programmes, Jezerskyte and Janiūnaite [4] note that concept of practice has changed significantly during latter years. With reference to notes of Bolognian experts, there was increased volume of practice, essentially changed conception of practice, its content, form. Practice becomes an integral axis of studies, while talking about education of independent personality, also in striving to develop application of theoretical knowledge of future specialists in practice [4]. Execution of practice stimulates a student to understand importance of theory, to look for answers to arising questions and apply it practically. According to M. Teresevičiene and Gedviliene [14], practical training is based on training of thinking, creativity, because it opens possibility for expression of individuality of the student.

While discussing expression of phenomenon of enterprise development, Strazdienė, Garalis [13], note that it is necessary to pass from training to learning and to create learning environment that would be as real as possible. The authors note that during practice, students have possibility to adapt acquired knowledge in practise, to become familiar with activity of business company, to know themselves, have possibility to improve abilities of placement.

In aspect of content, practice is a part of studies programme, therefore, in point of view of time. it also is directly involved into process, during which different practical tasks are being performed. Essence of practice is to create conditions for student to adapt available theoretical knowledge and abilities while working in particular situations and to acquire new abilities or experience required for future professional activity [12].

However, there are knowledge, abilities and provisions of values that could be acquired or developed only by learning at particular work place, therefore, harmony of content of study subject and practical training and learning is very important [12]. Content of practice is directly related to the results, for which study programmes strives. This could be understood as temporal push towards professional reality by creating conditions that cannot be acquired during study process in academic environment for a student to acquire the results under striving [10].

As state Norkute and Stasiūnaitiene [12], purpose of practice can be described in two ways: practice as cognizance of field of professional activity and practice as acquiring of professional or working knowledge, abilities and experience.

Practice becomes integral axis of studies, while talking on education of independent personality, as

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well in striving to develop application of theoretical knowledge of future specialists in practice [5].

One of the most important requirements raised for non-university studies is education of students' practical competencies. In this aspect, studies at college acquire advantage against university studies by the fact that college studies are oriented towards practice – there is a striving to train a student so that he would be able to work at work place straight away.

Professional competence is specific professional knowledge and skills that are important in professional activity. Therefore, in Marijampole college professional practice is a constituent of training process by which theoretical knowledge and its application in practical situations are connected.

### 3. Results of research "significance of professional activity practice on studies quality, specialists' training in point of view of students"

Professional practices in Marijampole college are part of studies, during which students acquire abilities that allow creating of own learning process and control it, as well as willingness to learn and reflect and assess the whole learning process [3].

During the research, first, there were presented general questions—who helped to find place for practice, in which enterprise the student performed practice, what was size of the enterprise, when students were familiarized with programme of practice.

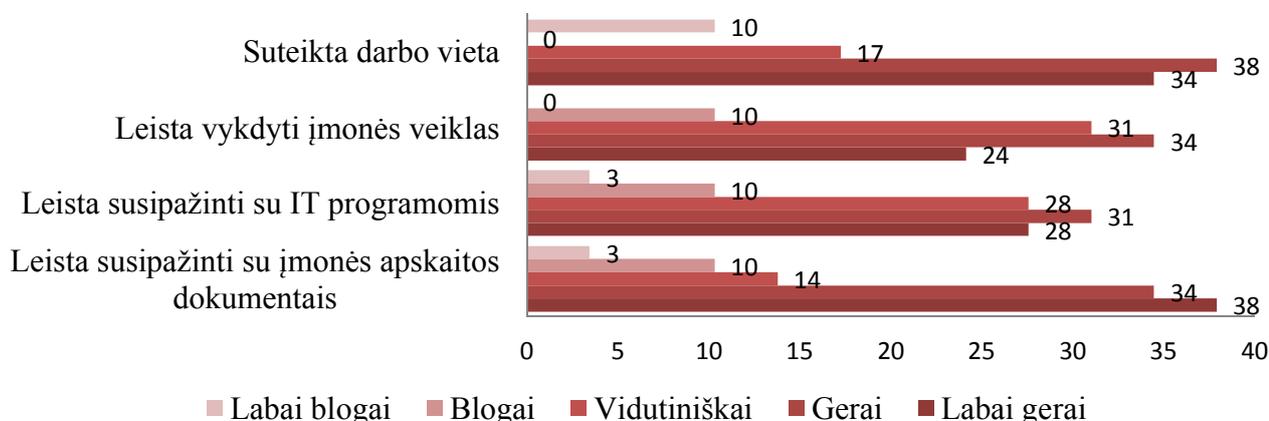
According to the order established in the college, students can look for practice place themselves, and, therefore, the research showed that usually students find practice place by using personal relationship (52%), 34% of students found practice places independently, 10% of students found practice places with help of college practice mentor and 3% of students performed their practice in family business. Research analysis showed that college students usually find practice places independently.

College students selected practice places mostly in the medium size enterprises (48%), large business enterprise as practice place was selected by 31% of students and small business enterprises were selected for practice place by 21% of students. In order to acquire more practical skills and experience, students better selected medium size enterprises. Adaptability of theoretical knowledge and verification of their necessity is more available in such enterprises.

According to area of activity, 38% of students selected practice places in trading enterprises, 34% in manufacturing enterprises, 21% of students performed practices in service enterprises and 7% of students in budgetary (public) enterprises. This is logical, because in region of Marijampole, according to activity area, most enterprises are trading ones.

Students in Marijampole college should be familiarized with practice programme in the beginning of the semester, however, most respondents (38%) indicated that they were familiarized with practice programme one month before the beginning of the practice performance, 28% stated that they became familiar with practice programme in the beginning of the semester, 31% stated that they became familiar with practice programme one week before beginning of the practice and 3% of students stated that they became familiar with practice programmes than one week before beginning of practice. The research indicated that it is important for students to become familiar with practice programme in order to be better prepared for performance of practice, i.e. to find out practice's goals, tasks and jobs presented by practice mentors, which have to be performed during practice.

While performing a practice, created conditions suitable to perform practice are very important for students. There is no secret that in business world attitude towards trainees is still perfunctory.



Pic.1. Conditions created to perform practice

During the research, there was a striving to find out following aspects: if work place was given, if it was allowed to perform enterprise's activities, if it was allowed to become familiar with IT programmes,

if it was allowed to become familiar with enterprise's accounting documents. Assessment aspect—given work place—was assessed as very good by 34% of respondents, good – by 38%, medium – by 17%,

and very bad – by 10% of respondents. Assessment aspect „allowed to perform enterprise’s activities“ was assessed as very good by 24% of respondents, as good by 34% of respondents, as good by 31%, and as bad by 10% of respondents. Assessment aspect "allowed to become familiar with IT programmes" was evaluated by students as follows: 28% assessed as very good, 31% – good, 28% – medium, 10% – bad and 3% – very bad. Assessment aspect "allowed to become familiar with enterprise’s accounting documents" was assessed by students as follows: very good – 38% of students, 34% – good, 14% – medium, 10% – bad and 3% – very bad.

In this aspect, the research showed that many students were given suitable conditions for practice,

however, such aspects as becoming familiar with IT systems and becoming familiar with accounting documents that received very bad assessments how that not all enterprises give suitable conditions for practice. A note was given that organization of practice in December is not a proper time, because this period is complicated for employees of financial system, when enterprise practice mentors can’t give enough attention to trainees even if they want to.

By selecting practice places, students pay big attention to implementation of their needs. The research found out how students assessed own needs related to practice place according to assessment aspects, that are represented in Pic. 2:



Pic.2. Students needs related to practice place

Their most usual needs related to practice place are: to acquire new and additional knowledge that could be adapted in future, to develop their skills by performing work in group, to acquire required practical knowledge that would be useful in future, to develop and deepen theoretical and practical knowledge, perfection of foreign language, becoming familiar and work with IT programmes used in the enterprise and, undoubtedly, willingness to reach out objective relationship and to get proposal for work in the enterprise after practice.

Most students satisfied their needs related to practice place. Presented results indicate that best assessment was given to the aspect "to develop and deepen not only theoretical but practical knowledge as well" – even 59% of respondents assessed this aspect as totally agree, 38% as "agree". Students succeeded to justify the need "To acquire new knowledge that could be adapted in future" – 34% of respondents assessed it as "totally agree", 59% – as "agree", 7% – as "not sure". Assessment aspect "To reach out good objective relationship" was

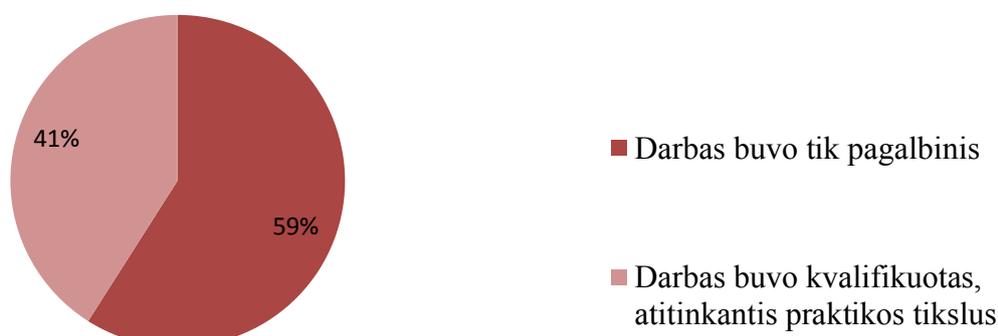
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assessed by respondents as following: 41% – totally agree, 48% – agree, 7% – not sure and 3% – totally disagree. Assessment aspect "Possibility to work in the enterprise after practice" was assessed by respondents as following: 14% answered – totally agree, 38% – agree, 28% – not sure, 17% – disagree, 3% – totally disagree.

Students were asked to assess a character of work performed during practice. There were foreseen following assessment aspects: I was forced to work overtime, the work was too hard, the work was supporting, the work was qualified, corresponding goals of practice, the work was of higher qualification than studied speciality. As was indicated by the research, respondents selected only two aspects, the

work was only supporting and the work was qualified, corresponding goals of practice. 59% of respondents stated that during practice they performed only supporting work, 41% of respondents stated that during the practice they were entrusted to perform qualified work corresponding goals of practice.

A conclusion can be done that during practices in many cases students are given supporting work, because practice mentors don't trust trainees or can't leave their main work, therefore, they give trainees simple work and activity. Character of work performed during practice indicated in Pic. 3. During practice, it is topical for every student to verify accumulated, acquired theoretical knowledge and their adaptability in practice.



Pic.3. Character of work performed during practice

During practice, it is topical for every student to verify accumulated, acquired theoretical knowledge and their adaptability in practice. 45% of respondents indicated that theoretical knowledge could be adapted during practice and 55% of respondents indicated that theoretical knowledge acquired at college could be partially used in practice. There was no assessment that theoretical knowledge was not used during practice. That means, during practice, it is already necessary to have theoretical knowledge to acquire and develop required professional competencies.

During the research, there was intention to find out if theoretical knowledge acquired at college is enough for students and what knowledge is lacking. Research of this aspect will help to develop study programmes in future and will influence studies' quality. The research indicated that students mostly lacked knowledge on accounting, that was indicated by 38% of respondents, economical knowledge were lacking by 17% of respondents, 14% of respondents were lacking knowledge on law, by 7% of respondents were lacking knowledge of foreign language and financial management. With reference to obtained results, college must review essentially results of studies programmes and study methods. In authors opinion, study methods should be changed, they have to motivate student, to be modern, oriented towards novelties and innovativeness. It is necessary

to relate closely theoretical knowledge to practical ones and (orient students' training learning) towards formation of practical skills.

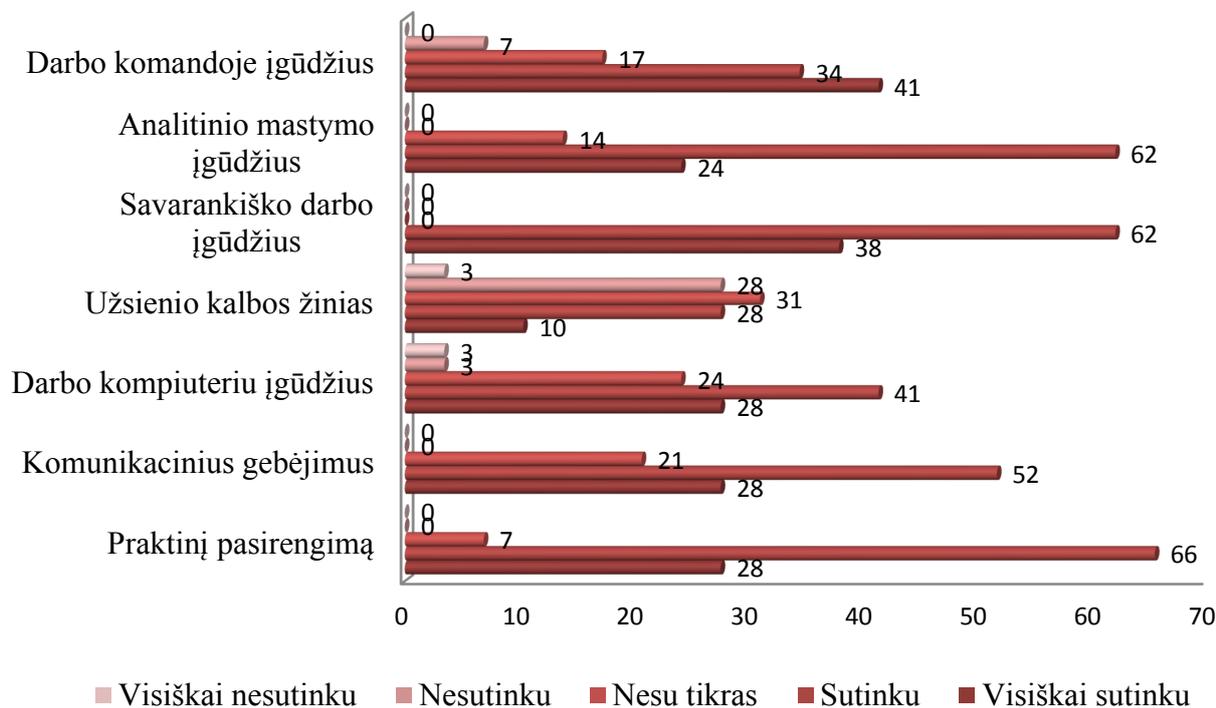
General abilities are human's abilities required for successful work. Learning (studies), professional training and life.

European framework of general abilities of learning whole life establishes and describes 8 general abilities necessary for personal satisfaction, active public spirit, social involvement and busyness in knowledge society: 1) communication in mother-tongue; 2) communication in foreign languages; 3) mathematical abilities and main abilities in areas of natural sciences and technologies; 4) digital literacy; 5) ability to learn; 6) social and civil abilities; 7) initiatives and enterprise; 8) cultural consciousness and expression.

During the research, there was a striving to find out how students assess general abilities that they improved during practice. As regards acquiring of practical training, students answered as follows: totally agree – 28%, agree – 66%, not sure – 7% of students; regarding communication abilities: totally agree – 28%, agree – 52%, not sure 21% of students; regarding skills of work with computer: totally agree – 28%, agree – 41%, not sure – 24%, disagree 3% and totally disagree also 3% of students; regarding knowledge of foreign language: totally

agree – 10%, agree – 28%, not sure – 31%, disagree – 28% and totally disagree – 3% of students; regarding skills of independent work: totally agree – 38%, agree – 62%; regarding skills of analytic

thinking: totally agree – 24%, agree – 62%, not sure – 14% of students; regarding teamwork skills: totally agree – 41%, agree – 34%, not sure – 17% and disagree – 7% of students.



Pic.4. General abilities improved during practice

The research results showed that students gave good enough assessment to general abilities acquired during practice, except skills of work with computer and knowledge of foreign language, because in some practice places there are no conditions to realize these skills during practice.

Despite general abilities, during practice students have to develop personal abilities as well. Pic. 5 indicates how students improved their personal abilities during practice.

From many personal abilities, there were selected abilities that are most important to the students of business and technologies faculty, and these are: formation of time planning skills, to which most students responded positively (totally agree 28%, agree 59%, not sure 7%); formation of skills of punctuality and timely performance of tasks (45%, 41%, 10% correspondingly); development of diligence and dutifulness (48%, 58% correspondingly) and development of reliability and responsibility of student (as future employee) (38%, 52%, 10% correspondingly).

Abilities of formation time planning skills were not improved during practice by 7%, and formation of skills of punctuality and timely performance of tasks were not acquired by 3% of students.

The research showed that only small part of students didn't learn time management skills that help to reach as best as possible results in the

framework of available time. Skills of punctuality and timely performance of tasks were not acquired because it is likely the enterprise doesn't follow this personal ability.

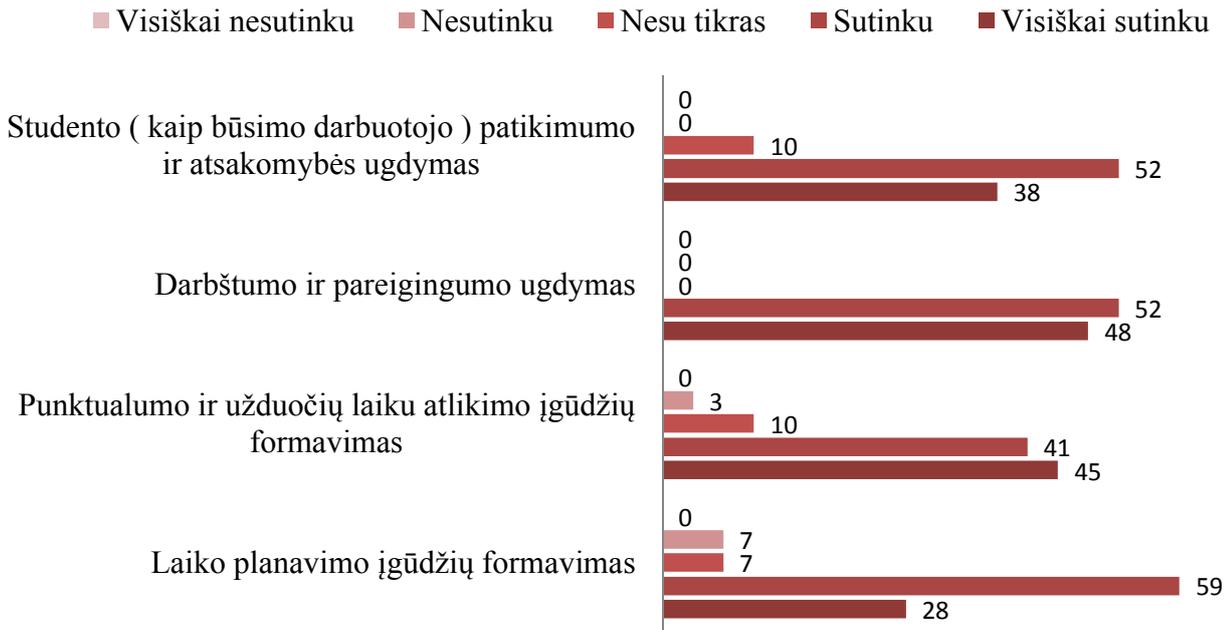
Students usually relate benefit of practice with possibilities to acquire required knowledge, abilities needed for future professional activity. The most important criterion for future specialists is a possibility to test theoretical knowledge acquired during studies in practical activity.

The research revealed aspects to which attention should be given while preparing students for professional activity (see Pic. 6).

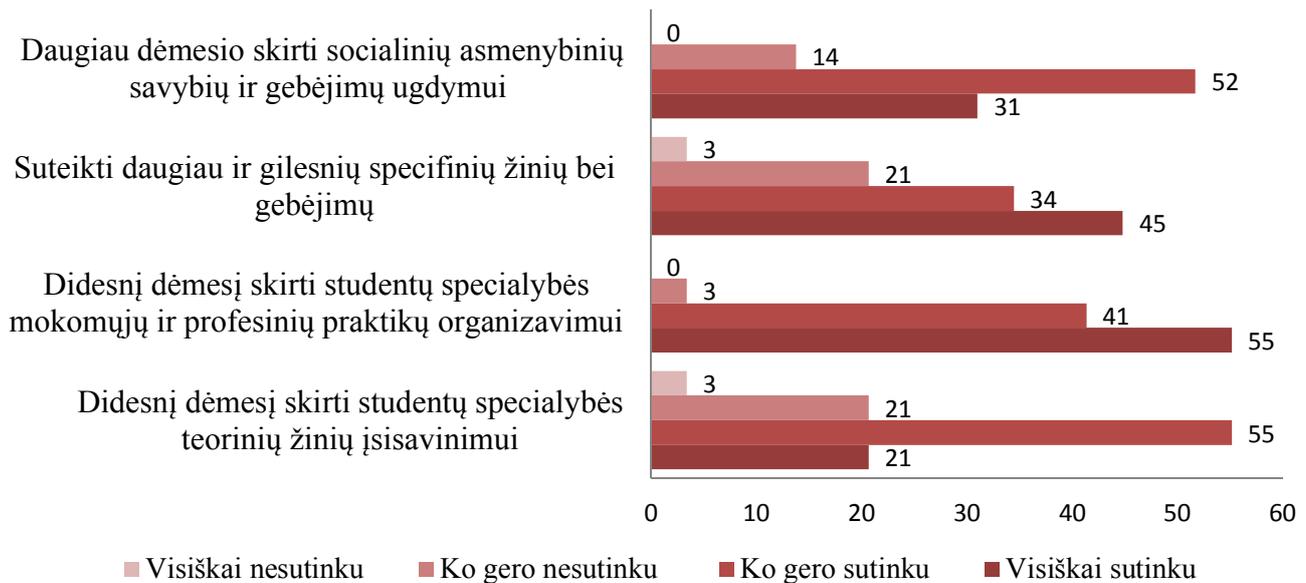
Most students agree that more attention should be given to soaking up of theoretical knowledge of students' speciality (totally agree 21%, probably agree 55% of students), probably disagree 21%, and totally disagree 3% of questioned students. The aspect that more attention should be given to organization of training and professional practices of students' speciality was responded as following: totally agree 55%, probably agree 41%, probably disagree 3% of students. The aspect that more and deeper specific knowledge and abilities should be given was responded as follows: totally agree 45%, probably agree 34%, probably disagree 21% and totally disagree 3% of students. The aspect that more attention should be given to development of social personal characteristics and abilities was responded

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by students as follows: totally agree 31%, probably agree 52%, probably disagree 14%.



Pic.5. Personal abilities improved during practice



Pic.6. Aspects to which attention should be given while preparing students for professional activity

Most students agree that more attention should be given to soaking up of theoretical knowledge of students' speciality (totally agree 21%, probably agree 55% of students), probably disagree 21%, and totally disagree 3% of questioned students. The aspect that more attention should be given to organization of training and professional practices of students' speciality was responded as following: totally agree 55%, probably agree 41%, probably disagree 3% of students. The aspect that more and deeper specific knowledge and abilities should be given was responded as follows: totally agree 45%, probably agree 34%, probably disagree 21% and totally disagree 3% of students. The aspect that more

attention should be given to development of social personal characteristics and abilities was responded by students as follows: totally agree 31%, probably agree 52%, probably disagree 14%.

The research indicated that during students' training for professional activity more attention should be given to soaking up of theoretical knowledge of students' speciality, organization of training and professional practices of speciality, development of social personal characteristics and abilities and give more and deeper specific knowledge and abilities. It is very encouraging, that part of students (24%) have enough theoretical knowledge, deeper specific knowledge and abilities, and 14% of students have

enough attention to development of social personal characteristics and abilities.

### Conclusions

While preparing future specialists, the college focuses more and more on development of professional skills, wider practical adaptation of knowledge, generation of ideas, independent tackling of problems and responsibility taking in tackling of complicated activity tasks.

During practices, creation of conditions suitable for students to perform practice is very important. Performance of practice stimulates a student to understand the importance of theory, look for answers to arising questions and apply them practically.

By orientation towards student's ability to adapt quickly in rapidly changing professional environment, there is highlighted ability to adapt acquired knowledge in professional activity and to have disposition of different general and personal abilities.

The research indicated that in preparation of students for professional activity more attention should be given to soaking up of theoretical knowledge of students' speciality, organization of training and professional practices of speciality, development of social personal characteristics and abilities and give more and deeper specific knowledge and abilities.

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