



STUDENT PERSPECTIVE OF PRACTICAL TRAINING AND WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE LOGISTICS PROFESSION

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Abstract: Looking for a job in the logistics profession depends very often on whether the jobseeker has the right practice and experience. Students entering the labour market are aware of this. At the same time, they also have clear views on the opportunities and areas where internships are important. The aim of this paper is to attempt to address the question how students perceive the issue of internship/practical training in a profession as a work experience in a company in the field of logistics and the role of internship in “conquering” the labour market. The article is the second of two parts of the study which aims to identify how students of Logistics perceive student internship and apprenticeship as broadly understood work experience in an enterprise.

Keywords: practice in the logistics profession, experience in logistics, student vision of the profession

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Introduction

Logistics is a term describing activities related to the process of planning, implementing and controlling of the efficient and effective flow of raw materials, production materials and finished products to meet customer requirements (Nowicka-Skowron 2001). Logistician must be able to perform a detailed analysis of the processes which take place in the enterprise (Nowosielski 2008), while at the same time to realize a synthesis and coordination with the processes carried out by the suppliers and customers. The logistics specialist should have managerial knowledge in planning, organizing and controlling, as well as should know the basic technical aspects of the mechanics and automation of production and warehouse processes. The logistics specialist should be able to work together in a team and also solve the problems independently and make decisions. Logistics experts are sought in production and commercial companies (Lichtarski 2015; Nogalski, Ronkowski 2007), shipping companies, transportation enterprises (Nowakowska-Grunt 2010), consulting companies and administrative offices. In a word, everywhere where the flow of goods is ordered.

In addition to education and other 21st century competencies (OECD 2003), from future logistics professionals more and more often practice is required. The current situation within the labor market, especially for young logisticians looking for the first job, is not easy. There are many recent graduates in the market, and

employers are most often looking for people with professional experience, so it is worthwhile to think about the practice during the studies.

Practice is the key to getting a job in this area. It is characterised above all by the phenomenon of globalisation, and consequently by increased competition (Skowron-Grabowska, Mesjasz-Lech 2016, p. 22), intensifying the processing and collection of data (Nowakowska-Grunt, Sałek, Strzelczyk 2017, p. 131), complicating relations in the supply chains (Surowiec 2016, p. 215) and creating supply networks (Świerczek 2007, p. 174). This requires new competences from the logistics staff (Kisperska-Moroń 2010, p. 21).

Aim of the study

The aim of this paper is to attempt to address the question how students perceive the issue of internship/practical training in a profession as a work experience in a company in the field of logistics and the role of internship in “conquering” the labour market. The article is the second of two parts of the study which aims to identify how students of Logistics perceive student internship and apprenticeship as broadly understood work experience in an enterprise.

The logisticians entering the labour market from the employers’ perspective

The dynamic development of trade in Poland after 1989 influenced the conditions for the development of the logistic sector, which quite quickly matched the western standards. The logistics profession has gained immense popularity, and universities in Poland have opened education courses in this field. Logistics was a very desirable employee, and for this reason, this profession was included in the Forbes ranking of the best profession of the year at the high 6th position in 2013 (Młynarczyk 2013).

Unfortunately, as the results of the survey “Labor Market Barometer”, commissioned annually by Work Service, show that nearly 37 percent of employers are not satisfied with the skills of graduates entering the labor market. Half of the firms’ representatives believe that the qualifications of graduates are rather appropriate and only 6% find them definitely appropriate. The question of what is lacking in educational traineeship, the entrepreneurs point to the main shortcomings: lack of practical skills (93%), lack of experience (78%) (Work Service 2017).

The proper guidance for graduates seems to be to present a proactive attitude and engage in job search and job market research. According to S. Gołuchowska from the Raben Group, “after the end of education comes disappointment. Without the practice for the logistics profession, the chances of work in a good company are low. With only a diploma in the pocket, the graduate has a very weak position on the labor market, because the employer most commonly look for candidates with education and practice” (Trochymiak 2012).

According to the employers, the situation of graduates of Polish universities has been leaving much to be desired. One of the main reasons for high unemployment among graduates is incompatibility of the acquired education to the needs of the labor market in the region. Many young people while choosing a course of study do not consider if they get a job and the reason for entering the path of study is to develop their own concerns, but also to follow the fashion or choose the easiest way to obtain a diploma. The second major reason for not employing young people after graduation is the lack of professional experience (Raczyńska, Stachowska 2014).

Similar findings were presented at in the conference “University for the region – region for students”, which main purpose was to analyze the Silesian labor market, as well as discuss the situation of the graduate. According to the research carried out on a group of 350 employers in the Silesian Voivodeship, the decisive factor in getting a job is not the grade on the diploma, but above all the previous contact with the business practice. As indicated by employers, among university graduates there is a lack of knowledge and practical skills. At the same time, more than two thirds of employers believe that the biggest barrier to finding a good employee is lack of experience of potential candidates (Urbanke 2017).

Changes in the labor market confirm data published by the Central Statistical Office in July 2017 (GUS 2017). The unemployment rate at the end of June 2017 was 7.1% and was the lowest in 8 years. Positive data also refer to youth unemployment, which in both groups 15-24 and 25-34 were the lowest for a few years (12.3%, 27.8% respectively). The biggest challenge for employers engaging young people will be the difference between the expectations and the competences of new employees entering the market. Human resources managers will have to change their approach to the internships and practices, and treat them as long-term investments, strategic for the future of the company (Romanowska 2010). Then they will be able to guarantee stable employment, reduce recruitment costs, and avoid the extra bonus associated with the need to involve employees under time pressure.

The practice of the last few years provides examples supporting the thesis that, regardless of the educational offer of the universities and the institutional relationship of the particular academic environment with the business environment, the study period provides an excellent opportunity for active and entrepreneurial students to develop their skills and gain new experiences and competences desirable in the labor market. Also from the activity of the student environment, which has a wide range of possibilities, depends on the student's acquisition of the desirable characteristics of the employers, as well as the building of other forms of relations with the labor market. They should be indicated as below (*Start na rynku pracy ...*, 2017):

- job fairs,
- practices and internships,
- organization of competitions with employers and their companies,
- academic business incubators and technology transfer centers,

- other forms of interaction with employers' and entrepreneurs' organizations (e.g. academic business clubs, students branch offices of professional organizations, students economic forums),
- activities of non-governmental organizations in the form of associations and foundations supporting the professional development of students.

Study sample and methodology

The material for this analysis was provided by a survey carried out specifically for this study and it included 64 students of the last - 2nd year of Master's degree course in Logistics (Survey 2). A detailed description of the study sample is presented in Part One of this paper. The survey comprised 18 questions. The method of semantic differential and Likert scale were used for most questions; however, a few open questions were also included in the survey. This part of the paper presents the results related to apprenticeship.

Analysis of survey results and discussion

In the first question of the part concerning apprenticeship, the respondents stated how important it is to gain experience in logistics before entering the labour market in this particular branch of industry. The answers were marked on a semantic scale (0 - insignificant, 3 - moderately significant, 6 - of great significance). The respondents determined the importance of doing an apprenticeship in logistics at 5.06, which means that they consider apprenticeship in this profession to be extremely important. In fact, hands-on experience plays an important role in logistics on the labour market. In job offers, experience is a prerequisite in many cases, and according to a widely held opinion it is almost indispensable in this profession. Therefore, the students can be considered to have correctly recognized the labour market in this respect.

Subsequently, the respondents were asked to determine how important apprenticeship is in the given area. By means of a positional scale in the question related to this issue the students were asked whether apprenticeship in this area was very important, important, of medium importance, of little importance or of minor importance. The semantic descriptions were then assigned weights from 4 to 0 (4 for the most important and 0 for the least important). The replies to the question about the areas where, according to the respondents, apprenticeship is important are presented in *Figure 1*.

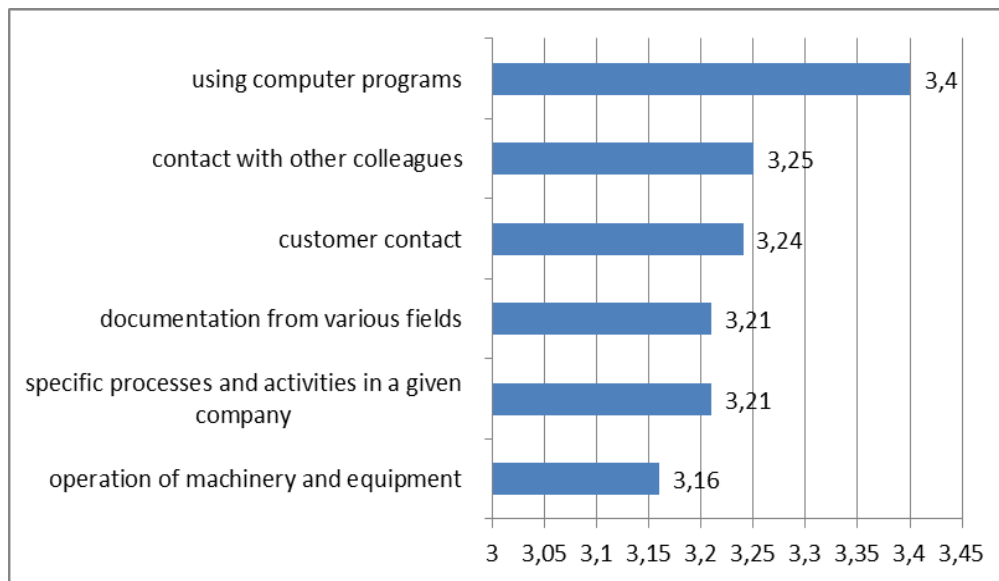


Figure 1. Areas in which apprenticeship is important

Source: Authors' own research

The students found using computer programs to be the most important (3.4), which was followed closely by contact with other colleagues (3.25), customer contact (3.34), documentation from various fields (3.21) and specific processes and activities in a given company (3.21). Operation of machinery and equipment was considered to be the least significant by the respondents (3.1). There were also spontaneous answers, such as being familiar with the range of products on offer, knowledge of foreign languages and mobility. The very fact that the respondents placed computer programs first as an area where experience is the most important and also more than moderately important means that they have correctly recognized the requirements for logistics personnel in the labour market as being familiar with and being able to use relevant software is very important today. Similarly, the students correctly assessed that it is important to practice communication with both co-workers and customers. This indicates their awareness of the essence of soft competences in the labour market. It should also be noted that in all these areas the weight exceeded 3, which means that practical training in all these areas is considered by the students to be at least of moderate importance.

The same formula was used to examine the students' opinion on apprenticeship, in particular divisions of the company. Here too, the respondents were asked to assess the importance of practical training in a given subsystem by specifying whether it was very important, important, of medium importance, of little importance or of minor importance. The semantic descriptions were then assigned weights from 4 to 0 (4 for the most important and 0 for the least important). The results are presented in *Figure 2*.

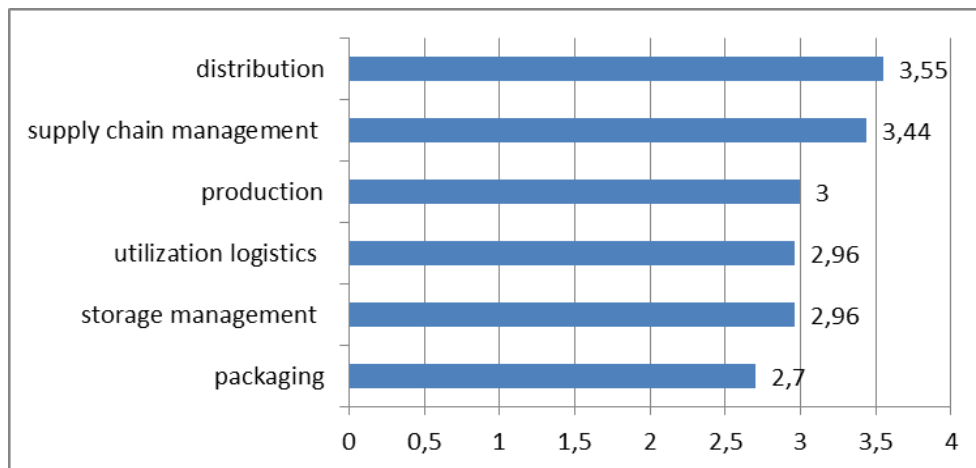


Figure 2. Areas in logistics where apprenticeship is important

Source: Authors' own research

The Survey showed that the students consider distribution to be the most important subsystem, which is later followed by supply chain management (3.44), production (3.0), utilization logistics (2.96), storage management (2.96) and packaging (2.7). It should be noted here that all the areas listed in the survey as those where practical training is important received a relatively high score. The perception of distribution as the area in which practical training and experience is most important derives from the fact that currently there is a widespread emphasis on sales and distribution channels, which students see and of which they are aware. Supply chain management also seems to them to be an area where training is important, which may result from the awareness of the respondents regarding the complexity of this issue. Hands-on experience in other areas seemed to the respondents to be less than moderately important, because they were convinced that it was not in high demand or that it could be gained relatively quickly.

In the next part of the survey, the respondents' self perception was examined in the context of practical training. The respondents were asked in what kind of logistic practical training they feel confident. The replies were given by putting a circle round one of the areas listed in the previously asked questions. Thus, the respondents had a choice of operating computer programs, operating machines, equipment and devices, contacting customers, specific actions and processes in the company and documentation from various areas. The results of this finding are presented in *Figure 3*.

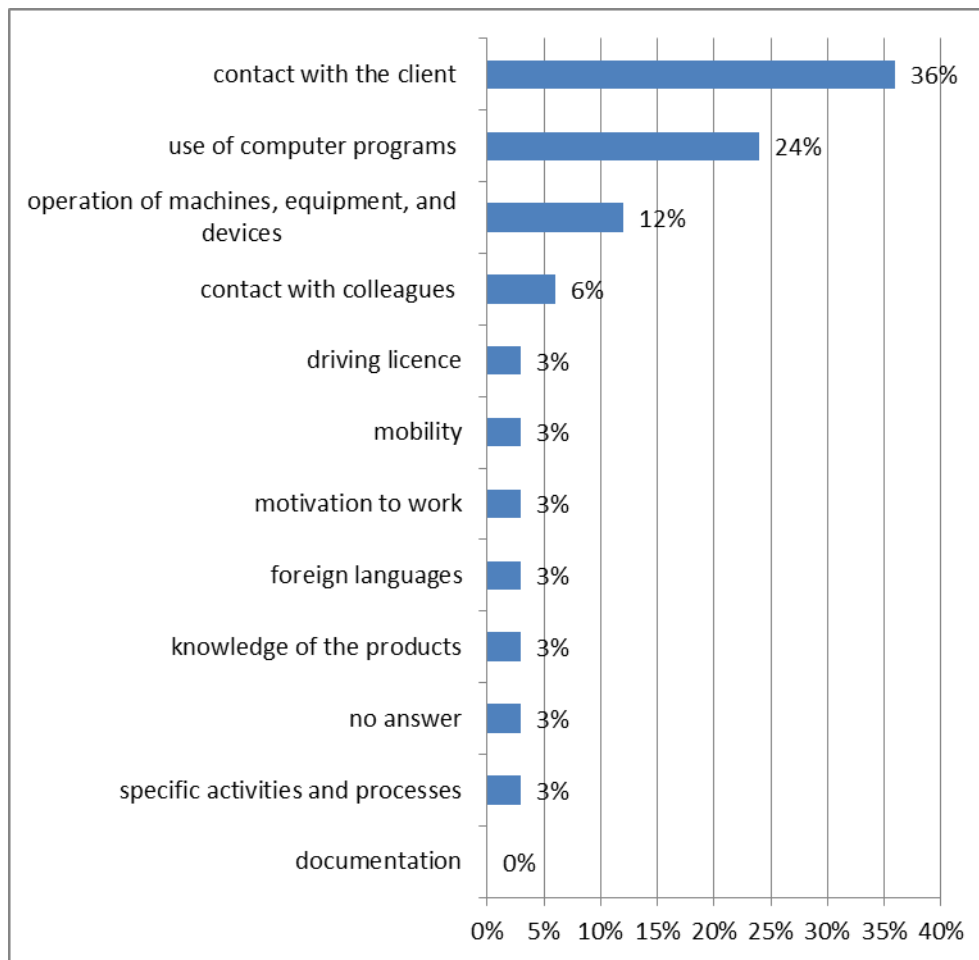


Figure 3. Areas in the operation of an enterprise in which the students feel confident

Source: Authors' own research

The area in which most respondents described themselves as "confident" was contact with the client (indicated by 36% of the respondents). The next area in which the students perceived themselves to be competent was the use of computer programs (24% of the respondents) followed by operation of machines, equipment, and devices (12%), and contact with colleagues (6%). There were also spontaneous answers in which the students included holding a driving licence, mobility, motivation to work, knowledge of foreign languages, specific activities and processes, and also documentation. This distribution of responses corresponds to a large extent to the answers given previously to the question about the areas where practical training is important. The students believe that it is actually the ability of operating computer programs and dealing with the client where experience is the

most important and in these areas they consider themselves competent. It is extremely important because it strengthens confidence on the labour market.

A similar question was asked about the company's subsystems, where the students consider themselves competent i.e. "confident". The replies were given by putting a circle round one of the areas mentioned in the previously asked questions. Hence, the respondents had a choice of warehouse management, production, distribution, packaging, reverse logistics and supply chain management. These results are presented in *Figure 4*.

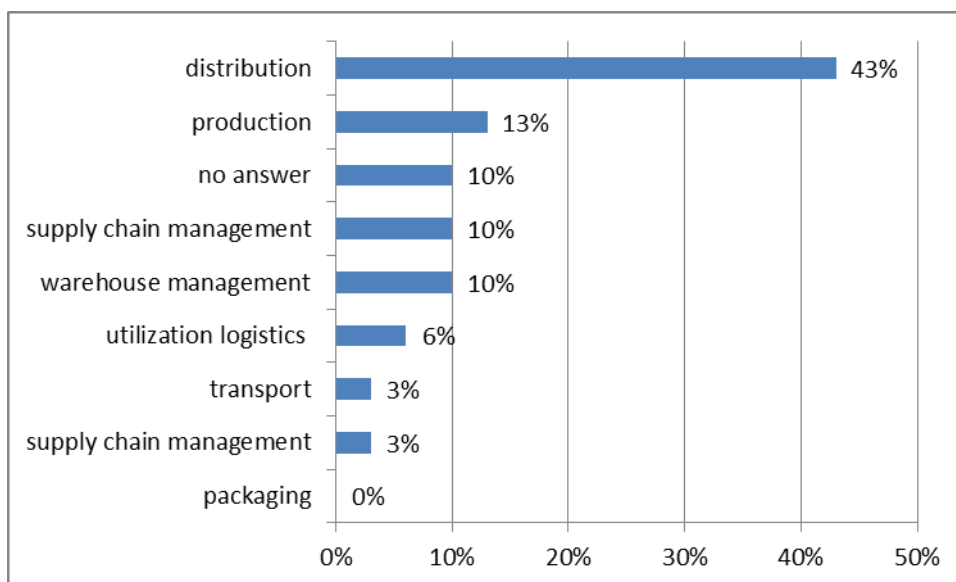


Figure 4. Logistic subsystems in which the students consider themselves competent

Source: Authors' own research

The answers to this question reveal that the students consider themselves particularly experienced in the area of distribution. This is consistent with the answers to the previous questions. In the other areas the respondents do not feel competent, but do not believe that this is necessary. An exception is supply chain management, which is revealed to be an area in which the respondents feel that they do not have enough experience.

The respondents were then asked to determine in which area it was most difficult to gain experience. In this question, they were asked to refer to the areas given in the previous questions and to circle their choice. *Figure 5* illustrates the distribution of the answers to this question.

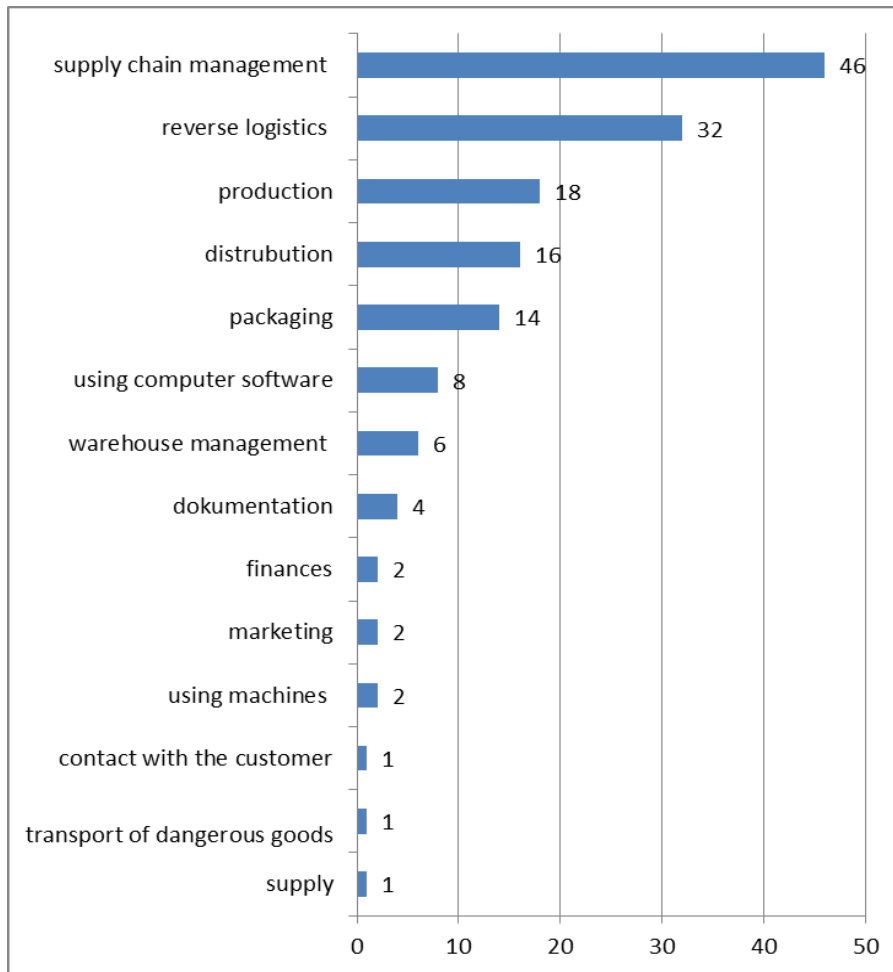


Figure 5. Areas in which it is most difficult to gain experience

Source: Authors' own research

The responses given most frequently included supply chain management (46) followed by reverse logistics (32), production (18), distribution (16), packaging (14), using computer software, warehouse management (4), and documentation (4). Based on the results of the study, it is the easiest to gain hands-on experience in areas such as finance, marketing, machine maintenance, customer contact, transport of dangerous goods, and also in purchasing. This distribution of responses clearly confirms the basic conclusion that has been reached on the basis of the replies to the previous questions: supply chain management is the area where it is most difficult to gain experience. Mentioning reverse logistics here might be somewhat surprising, but it seems that the respondents pointed out this area, because they were actually asked to fill in the survey during their reverse logistics classes, which they encountered during their studies for the first time in the fifth

year, and so far they had had no contact with this subject area. It is also interesting to note that the use of computer programs has been selected very few times as an area where it is difficult to get practical training, which means that the students consider it to be relatively easy. This is certainly due to the fact that they belong to Generation Z described in the first part of this study, and thus it is easy for them to gain experience and master skills related to the use of technology, including computer programs.

The last element of the survey referred to the factors that determine opportunities of finding the best apprenticeship for students. The respondents were asked to indicate on a semantic scale how important a given factor was (it is of no importance, it is of moderate importance, it is of great importance). The list of factors included what is generally thought to be the most common factors determining professional success, i. e. one's own efforts, good luck, acquaintances, competence and graduation diploma from a recognized university or faculty. The semantic descriptions were then assigned weights from 0 to 2 (0 for a factor that is insignificant, 1 for a factor of moderate importance, and 2 for a factor of very high importance). The distribution of average weights for particular factors is shown in *Figure 6*.

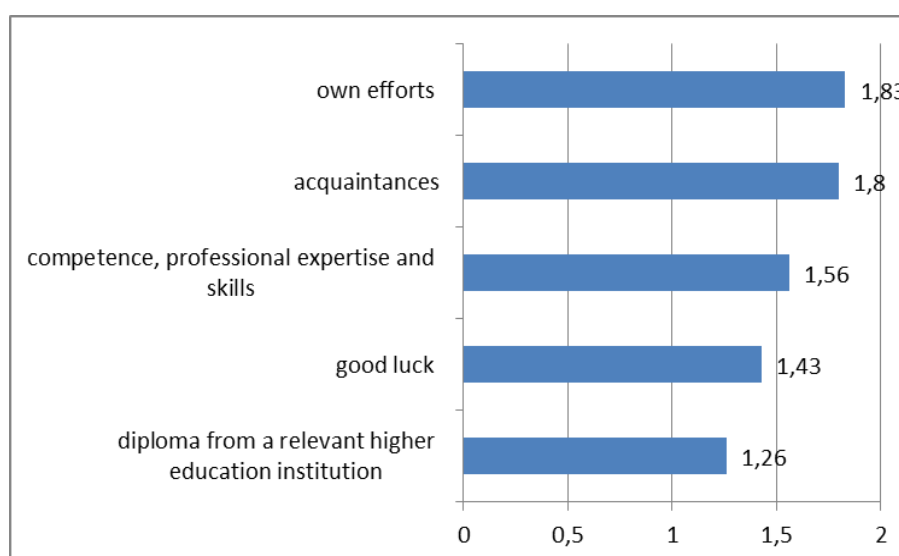


Figure 6. Decisive factors in finding the best apprenticeship

Source: Authors' own research

In the opinion of the respondents their own efforts (1.83) are the most important success factor in obtaining an apprenticeship. Acquaintances (1.8) come next and are followed by competence, professional expertise and skills (1.56), and good luck (1.43). The diploma from a relevant higher education institution comes as the least important factor which is supposed to help to obtain a good apprenticeship (1.26). From this distribution of responses it can be concluded that for the students, the

possibility of obtaining an apprenticeship depends on a large number of factors with the most important ones being their own efforts and acquaintances. While the first factor, i. e. one's own effort, is dependent on the students themselves and brings them closer to the *self-direction* axis, in the case of acquaintances we are faced with an independent factor, located closer to the *conformity* axis. The other factors, i. e. competences, expertise, skills and good luck, are again factors interchanging in the areas of self-direction and conformity. It would be highly desirable, of course, for the students to believe first of all in their own strengths and competences as factors dependent on the individual and which allow them to obtain an apprenticeship. However, it should be remembered that in Poland the myth of having the right acquaintances is still very strong and perceived as a key to getting a job. Therefore, in this context, the student's conviction that the most important factor determining obtaining apprenticeships are their own efforts is a good proof of their self-esteem and personal assessment of job opportunities on the labour market.

Conclusions

Practical training and work experience are an important characteristic of a candidate for a job in logistics and the students are fully aware of this fact. The results of the survey clearly show that they consider the apprenticeship to be very important, in particular in the area of using computer software and in contacts with colleagues and customers. In particular, they place emphasis on distribution and supply chain management and thus, prove to be good observers of modern trends, which strive to provide comprehensive services and excellent customer service. In the opinion of the respondents, they have already had practical training in the most important areas relevant to the labour market needs, although there are also some areas in which they do not feel competent enough, such as e. g. the supply chain management mentioned above. The attitude of the students should therefore be assessed extremely positively, as it is starting to show belief in their own strengths and competence. Doing practical training is a natural process when entering the labour market and it is particularly important in logistics, since logistics as a practical discipline requires practice and experience.

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STUDENCKA PERSPEKTYWA PRAKTYKI I DOŚWIADCZENIA ZAWODOWEGO W ZAWODZIE LOGISTYKA

Streszczenie: Poszukiwanie pracy w zawodzie logistyka zależy w dużej mierze od tego, czy osoba szukająca pracy posiada odpowiednią praktykę i doświadczenie. Studenci wchodzący na rynek pracy mają tego świadomość. Jednocześnie posiadają sprecyzowane poglądy na temat możliwości zdobycia praktyki oraz obszarów, w których jest ona ważna. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, jak studenci postrzegają problem praktyki w zawodzie rozumianej jako doświadczenie w pracy w przedsiębiorstwie w obszarze logistyki oraz roli praktyki w zdobywaniu rynku pracy. Artykuł jest drugą z dwóch części opracowania mającego na celu rozpoznanie, w jaki sposób studenci logistyki postrzegają praktyki studenckie oraz praktykę rozumianą szeroko, jako pracę w przedsiębiorstwie.

Słowa kluczowe: praktyka w zawodzie logistyka, doświadczenie w logistyce, studencka wizja zawodu