

## **CONTEMPORARY TRENDS AND PROSPECTS OF PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Student practical training during the first cycle of studies (bachelor studies) is, increasingly, holding an important place in the curriculums in the field of social sciences, as well as the technical and natural sciences. The attractiveness of this problematic, coupled with the European trends in practical training for students, are imposing a need for research in this field, in other words the need to learn the strengths as well as the weaknesses behind the concept, content, organization and implementation of this educative process.

A superficial analyses is all we need to conclude there is a number of aspects which can be a focus for research, aspects that are necessarily to be explored in order to garner an overall picture regarding where practical training stands, and the views of the students *versus* the organizers, as well as the private and public sector institutions where students attend practical trainings.

The goal behind the research presented in this paper is to determine where students stand when it comes to the availability of institutions in both the private and public sector, the need for practical education in different spheres of interests that are available to them, and finally, to look into the suggestions made by students regarding the perspectives of the concept of practical education.

With the aim of achieving the above mentioned goal, a focus of analyses will be the opinions of students attending both private and state universities, i.e. more specifically the law faculties across the Republic of Macedonia. Through summarizing the results of this research we will elaborate on the position that students hold, and we will look into the future trends and perspectives for student practical training at the law faculties in Republic of Macedonia.

**Key words:** education, practical training, private sector, public sector, teaching curriculums.

## **1. Introduction**

Practical training for students or practical education as a term used by the Higher Education Act of the Republic of Macedonia published in the Official Gazette of the R. Macedonia, #35/2008; 103/2008; 26/2009; 83/2009; 99/2009; 115/2010; 17/2011; 51/2011; 123/2012; 15/2013; 24/2013; 41/2014; 116/2014; 130/2014; 10/2015; 20/2015; 98/2015; 145/2015; 154/2015 and 30/2016, (hereon HEA)<sup>1</sup>, is an issue that we have researched previously and to which we continuously come back.<sup>2</sup> This is one more reason why we need to continue researching this issue according to the contemporary trends and perspectives which are part of the curriculum and education process during the first cycle of studies.

Without delving into the segments which we have already explored, and in addition to the previous research, our goal is guided by the perspective of students regarding their practical education. To this end, we classified the results according to data obtained from students of law faculties at both state universities and private universities.<sup>3</sup>

The survey data was set for the purpose of understanding the challenges posed by the theory, practice and policy in the Republic of Macedonia in the field of practical training for students as the cornerstone for future economic growth and private sector development, as well as a foundation for the creation of educated public administration with high administrative capacity.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the research was conducted among 244 student respondents studying law at private and state universities in the Republic of Macedonia, including: Law University "Goce Delchev" - Stip, Faculty Justinian, University "St. Cyril and Methodius" - Skopje, Faculty of law, University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola, Faculty of Law, University American College - Skopje, Faculty of Law, FON University - Skopje, Faculty of Law, State University of Tetovo. Data were obtained through analysis of the information obtained from students' answers to the questions included in the fielded questionnaires.

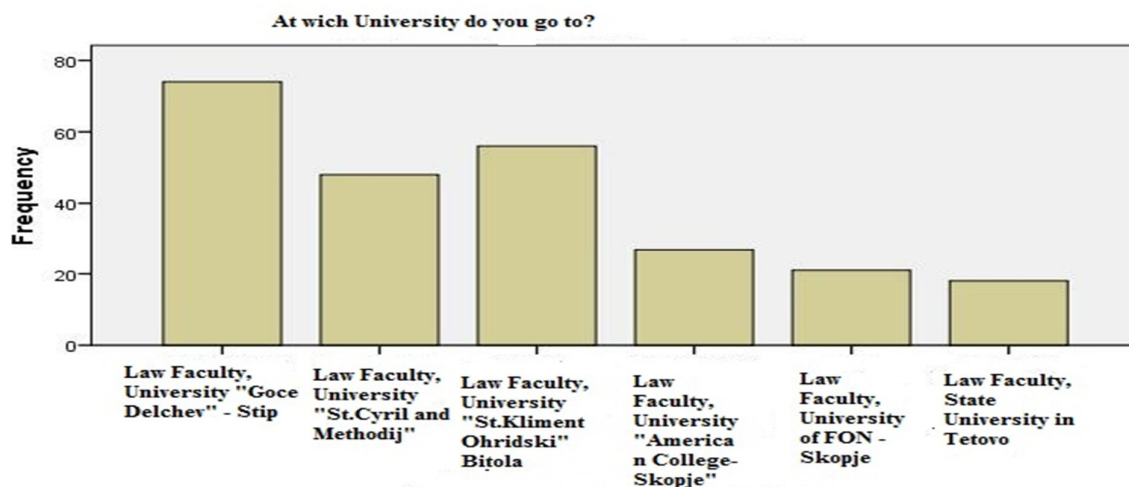
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<sup>1</sup> Although the literature often uses the term a study practices, the HEA in Article 45 and Article 99 in the context of the concept of a student practice during the first cycle of study uses the term "practical instruction." This term is used in the Regulations adopted by several universities, i.e. this term is also used in the Regulations on the manner and conditions for the organization of practical training of students published in the Official Gazette No. 120. September 13, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Tusevska, Borka and Miseva, Kristina and Kosevaliska, Olga (2015) The personnel capacities and needs of small and medium trade companies according to traineeship in Republic of Macedonia. International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research, <http://gssrr.org/index.php?journal=journalofbasicandapplied>;

<sup>3</sup> The data presented in the tables is an overview of the processed data using SPSS. See: <http://www-03.ibm.com/software/products/en/spss-stats-standard>, [accessed July 9, 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Spiegelman P.J., Integrating Doctrine, Theory and Practice in the Law School Curriculum: The Logic of Jake's Ladder in the Context of Amy's Web, Journal of Legal Education, Vol. 38, No. 1/2, 1988, pp. 243-270.



## 2. The practical education for students of law in the private and public sector institutions in the Republic of Macedonia

### 2.1 *The availability of institutions for practical training of students of law in the Republic of Macedonia*

Students of law faculties in the country at state and private universities are legally required to attend practical instruction during each academic year, as a condition for enrollment in the next academic year.<sup>5</sup> According to the decision provided for in paragraph 16, article 99 referred to as "content of studies programs," each academic year students may not attend practical instruction shorter than 30 days.<sup>6</sup>

This legal solution derives from the concept behind the practical instruction, which according to the applicable regulations is perceived as an integral part of the teaching curriculums for individual subjects included in the study program.

In the Republic of Macedonia, students of law faculties have the opportunity to obtain practical training in different institutions in both the private and public sectors.

According to the survey we fielded, most students complete their practical training in the Primary Courts in the country. More specifically, according to the tabulated and processed results, 88 students or 31 percent of respondents completed their practical training in one of the Primary Courts in Macedonia.

<sup>5</sup> Article 99, paragraph 16 of the Higher Education Act stipulates that a student in each academic year must attend practical instruction for no less than 30 days as a condition for enrollment in the next academic year. The way the practical training is organized and the conditions under which they need to be organized are prescribed by the Minister for Higher Education.

<sup>6</sup> From the legal wording of Article 99, paragraph 16, it appears that the only authorized body that is responsible for the fulfillment of this legal obligation is the faculty, (a unit) within the University. No section of the HEA nor the Rules of MES on the organization of practical teaching from 2010, provides for sanctions in the case of non-fulfillment of this obligation. Some type of sanction is the provision that concerns enrollment in the next academic year. In other words, a completed practical training is a necessary condition for validating the next semester, which is under the authority of the faculty within the university. It is only the unit within the faculty that is responsible to ensure that the condition is met by students before they are allowed to validate their semester and enroll in the next academic year. According to the Higher Education Act, the responsible unit within the university is the only body that can sanction students and prevent them from enrolling because they have not completed their practical training obligation.

Out of the total 244 student respondents, 66, or 27 percent said that they attend their practical training at a law firm. Thirteen or 5,3 percent of the students did not answer the question, while 7,4 percent of students or 18 out of the 244 responded that they attended the instruction at a notary firm. Furthermore, 16 out of 244 students or 6,6 percent said they completed the practical training at a local unit of the municipality where they live. Five percent answered that practical education during their studies was attended at commerce companies (joint stock companies and limited liability companies). Less than three percent of students attended practical training at a financial institution (the Central Bank, insurance company, brokerage firm, an investment fund), and a same percent of students / participants completed their practice with an executor of an act/will firm.

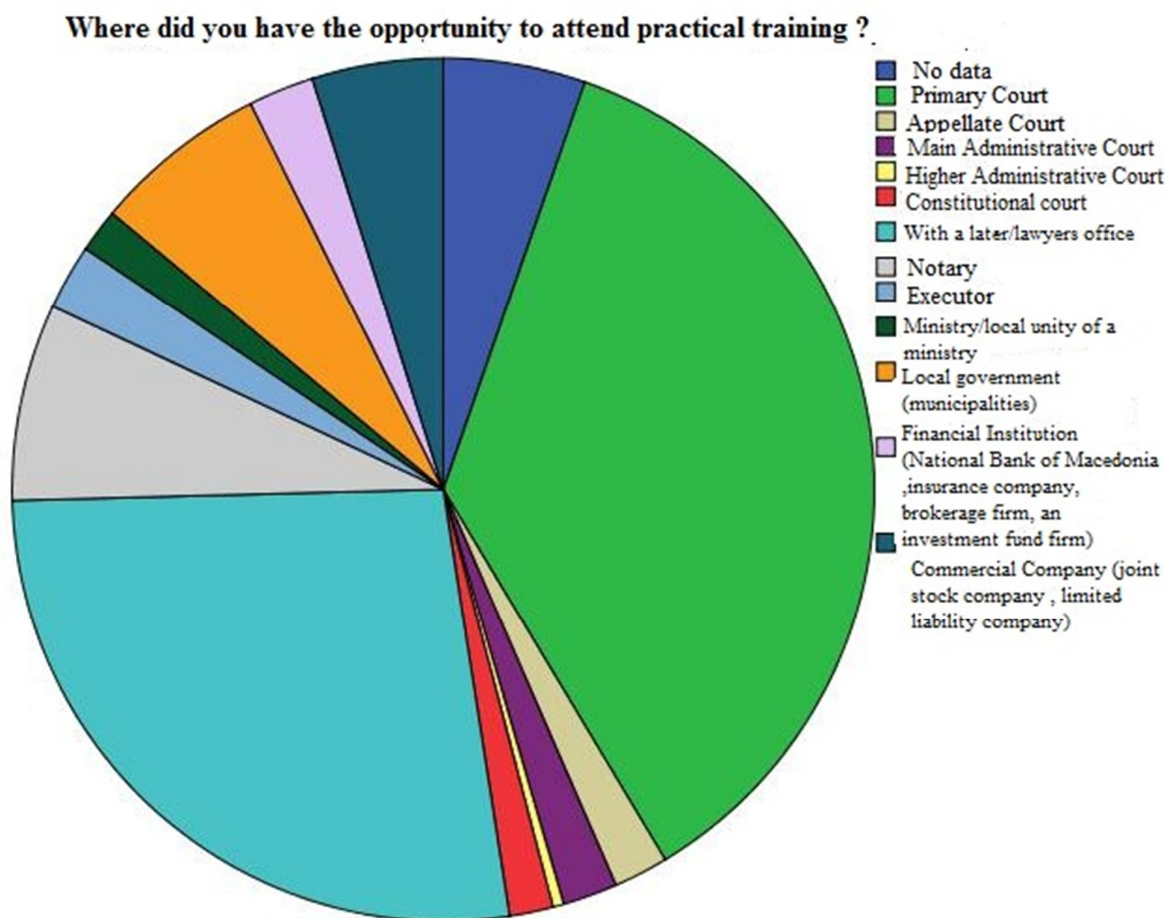
It is important to note that only four out of the 244 students answered that they attend practice in the regional offices of the ministries, i.e. only 1,6 percent of the total respondents said that they attend practical training in the regional offices of the ministries.

From the obtained data it is apparent that the judicial authorities and the institutions of the private sector account for the majority share in realization of practical instruction for students of law faculties. Specifically, the primary and appellate courts have a higher share than other institutions, and compared with the state administration they dominate in offering practical training for students of law at private and state universities.

**Table 1**  
**Where did you have the opportunity to attend practical training**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
N/A	13	5,3	5,3	5,3
Primary Court	88	36,1	36,1	41,4
Appellate Court	5	2,0	2,0	43,4
Main Administrative Court	5	2,0	2,0	45,5
Higher Administrative Court	1	,4	,4	45,9
Constitutional court	4	1,6	1,6	47,5
With a later/lawyers office	66	27,0	27,0	74,6
Notary	18	7,4	7,4	82,0
Executor	6	2,5	2,5	84,4
Ministry/local unity of a ministry	4	1,6	1,6	86,1
Local government (municipalities)	16	6,6	6,6	92,6
Financial Institution (National Bank of Macedonia, insurance company, brokerage firm, an investment fund firm)	6	2,5	2,5	95,1
Commercial Company (joint stock company, limited liability company)	12	4,9	4,9	100,0
Total	244	100,0	100,0	

Data presentation of results tabulated in the SPSS statistical analysis program.



Independently from the results, when drawing conclusions regarding this question we need to take into consideration that students have the opportunity to choose from various institutions in the private and public sector each academic year.<sup>7</sup>

According to the regulations applicable in the country, students are not required to complete practical instruction at a predetermined list of institutions. Hence, the choice is theirs, and the effects, attitudes and perceptions are different from case to case. One exception to this are the universities (such as the University Goce Delcev in Shtip), which based on previously established cooperation with different institutions refer students for their practical instruction to one of them.

<sup>7</sup> We believe that the completion of a practical training in various private and public sector during the studies has a positive effect on the education of students. Namely, by attending different, in nature and scope of work, institutions, students have the opportunity to determine the scope of the tasks of various institutions and thus get a picture of the work performed by different sectors of society. As a confirmation to our conclusion is the fact that in a period of 30 days, the largest educational benefit for students is the opportunity to learn more about the work of the institution and get acquainted with the internal rules of operation. Hence, we cannot speak of any narrow specialization; therefore we do not perceive the opportunity to intern at the same institution four years in a row as a plus. However, there are no legal restrictions or prohibition. If we proceed from the fact that most students attend their training in the judicial system i.e. the courts, there may be some advantage to students continually attending practical instructions, for four (4) years, at the same institutions, with identical scope of operations. But this question deserves a separate examination; therefore we are going to refrain from further theoretical deliberations.

From the surveyed students at law schools, 42,6 percent say they themselves or through personal contacts came into contact with the relevant personnel at the institutions where they wanted to attend their practical instruction. Usually, this communication was established via email or through direct communication with the person in-charge. For completing their practical training obligation, 54,5 percent of students say that they submit a request for attendance at an institution and the faculty (unit) refers them to the said institution with a referral form. With the referral slip students identify themselves as students at the university. At the end of their time spent with the institution they receive a certificate of completion which they use to enroll in the next academic year.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Strengths and weaknesses of the practical instruction at the public and private sector – student perspective**

From the survey we fielded among the students at law faculties, we concluded that the largest percentage (36 percent) of the respondents complete practical instruction at the primary courts in Macedonia. This applies to students at both private and public law schools in the country. In this context, naturally, in the questionnaire submitted to our students the question regarding the advantages of attending practice at the public and private sector institutions from a students' perspective imposed itself. It is important to note that students reported that they have a greater benefit from studying the practical aspects of the class material when they complete it at public sector institutions. This applies to students at both public and private law schools in Macedonia. According to the research, up to 163 out of 244 student participants or 66,8 percent out of the total of 244 surveyed say that they see a greater benefit in learning the practical aspects of the matter when they attend the practical training at a public sector institution. Sixty eight or 27,9 percent of respondents see a greater benefits when they attend practical training at a private sector institution in the country. Lastly, 5,3 percent or 13 students did not answer the question.

**Illustrative table 2**

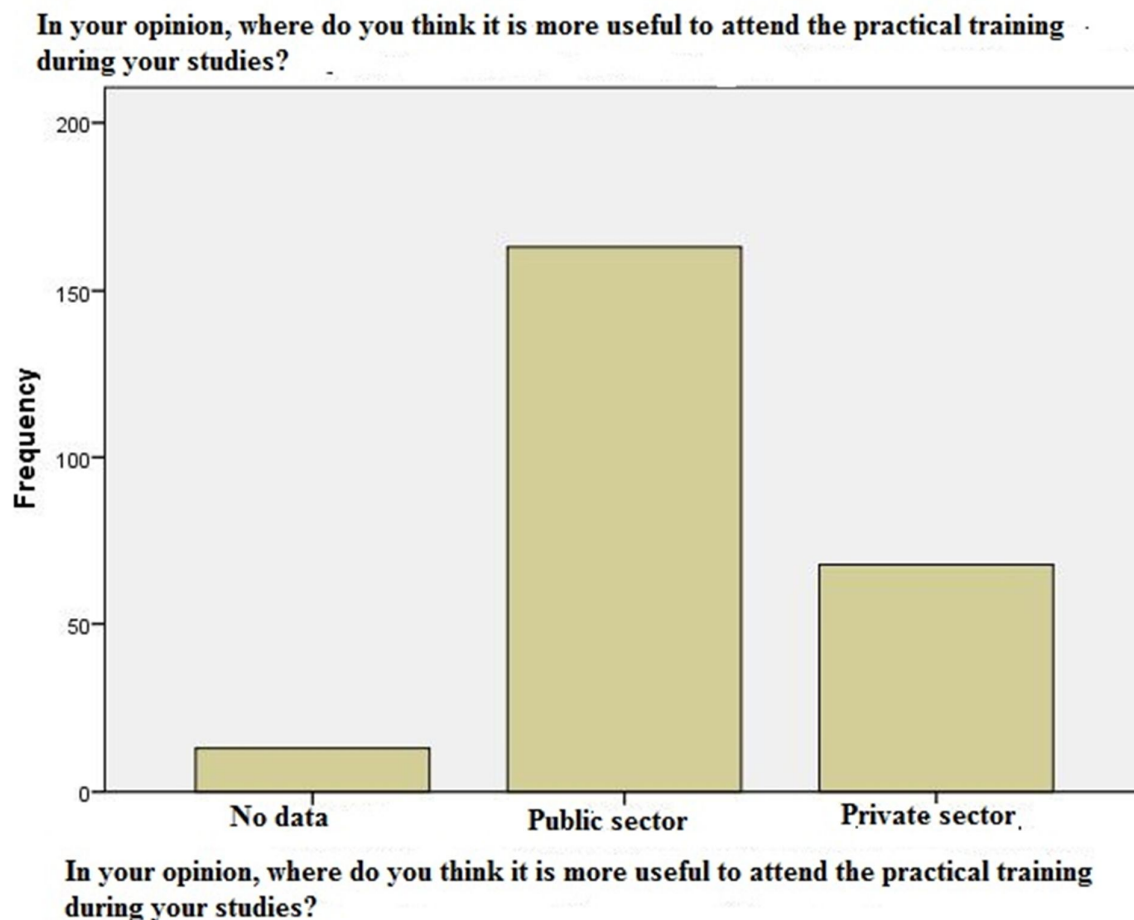
**In your opinion, where do you think it is more useful to attend the practical training during your studies?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
N/A	13	5,3	5,3	5,3
Valid In the public sector	163	66,8	66,8	72,1
In the private sector	68	27,9	27,9	100,0
Total	244	100,0	100,0	

Pyramidal display of data on the question regarding the advantages of interning in the public and private sector in Macedonia

<sup>8</sup> Tusevska, Borka and Miseva, Kristina and Kosevaliska, Olga: Student practical training as part of law faculties through the prism of the public and private sector in Macedonia , PONTE International Scientific Researches Journal to be published October 2016.





#### 4. Practical training instruction at the state and private law schools at universities in Republic of Macedonia

##### 4.1 Practical instruction at the state law schools in Republic of Macedonia

The delineation of the data obtained from the research in this paper is not aimed at presenting the situation in state law faculties versus private faculties in the country. Specifically, separating the data in this chapter of the paper is in the interest of having a systematic presentation and more accurate summary of the results, which also stems from the final conclusions presented in this paper.<sup>9</sup>

In the interest of the main objective of this research, we included questions in the survey aimed at reflecting on the student perspective, their opinions and suggestions regarding the concept of practical instruction, the way it is organized, the timeframe for completion and the availability of institutions offering practical training for students, etc.

The research conducted among students at the Faculty of Law at the University "Goce Delchev" - Stip expresses their views regarding student practical training and offers suggestions in terms of the concept,

<sup>9</sup> Chickering A.W., Gamson Z.F., Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, AAHE Bulletin, American Association for Higher Education, Washington, DC.1987, p. 2.

the organization and implementation of practical training during their first cycle of studies. In other words, to the question: *what would you suggest as ways to improve the practical training during the first cycle of studies*, the majority of students suggested: *there is a need to increase the time during which the practical instruction is completed* in other words, *extend the time span during which students attend practical instruction at different institutions*.

It is important to note that in the context of this question some of the students suggest making the practical instruction obligatory, or as they opinionate in their answers, *make the practical training mandatory*,<sup>10</sup> *the practical training needs to be paid, to carry out practical work at several state institutions* and make it possible for students *to attend practical training at different places*. Also according to the views of students regarding the practical instruction, their practical training *should be held simultaneously with their classes during the academic year*. In the context of this issue, many of the students said that the practical training should be implemented as a replacement to “class exercises” as part of the educational curricula.

The results show that the students’ suggestions pertain to extending the timeframe during which practical instruction is attended, a concept already defined in the Higher Education Act of the Republic of Macedonia. Furthermore, it is also important to note, their suggestion that practical training should be realized during the semester while students are active and as an alternative to “class exercises”. We believe that the practical training is not a substitute for exercises in terms of the way the concept is defined in the established educational process in accordance with the Higher Education Act and the Decree on the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, Official Gazette No. 154, 2010.

The practical instruction for students is a separate and specific time frame in which students complete their practical training. Consequently, the practical training may in no way be a substitute for the “class exercises.” We do accept positively the suggestion that the practical training should be completed while the semester is in session. To the question of what they suggest as a way to improve the concept of practical training within their first cycle of studies, students stressed the need to *increase the number of practical training classes, the introduction of compulsory practical instruction, receiving remuneration for attending training; the need to appoint a mentor who will help in the process. The mentor should be provided by the institution, i.e. the faculty*.

From the mentioned suggestions from law students at Justinian I, what stands out is the opinion of students that the practical training should be paid, and a mentor should be provided by the institution; and the need to introduce practical training as mandatory.

Within the public law school faculties, the same questionnaires were answered by students from the Law Faculty in Bitola, and the dispersed studies in Kicevo and Struga.

In fact, according to the research conducted among these students, it appears that their suggestions are almost identical when it comes to practical instruction. When asked what they would suggest to improve the concept of practical classes, students say the most benefit for their learning the practical aspects of the subject matter, and the curriculum material in each subject is to have the practical training during the semester i.e. parallel with the lectures during the semester. In terms of the timeframe in which the practice is

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<sup>10</sup> This conclusion, tied to the need for compulsory implementation of practical instruction, is apparent in the research results received from students at both private and state universities in the country.



implemented, students say it should be parallel with the lectures throughout the academic year. Students also expressed their opinions regarding the cost and fees related to the completion of practical training. According to the views of students from the law school at the University Kliment Ohridski, after the completion of the practical training the institution should reimburse their costs and commit to providing a compensation for the realized training.

Of course, these are the opinions of the students, which do not correspond in any one segment to the general concept behind practical training during the first cycle, nor do they align with our views. Finally, among state law schools, the students from the Law Faculty in Tetovo offered nearly identical remarks such as: *longer practical training and the need to introduce practical education as compulsory*.

#### **5. Practical training for students at the private universities in the Republic of Macedonia**

The research regarding the issues of practical training for students was also conducted at the law departments within the private universities in the Republic of Macedonia. For the purposes of the research, our target group were students from the Faculty of law at FON University - Skopje, the faculty of law at University American College - Skopje.

The questions they were asked were identical. The students from the faculty of law at FON University manifested the need for practical training at the state institutions after a proposal from the university, the need for implementing the practical instruction alongside the lectures during the semester, and the implementation of practical training in different areas of public and private law.

The students from the law faculty at the University American College - Skopje, stated that the availability of institutions is satisfactory.

#### **6. The institutional openness to the needs for practical training of students of law in the Republic of Macedonia**

The availability of private institutions and the public sector in the Republic of Macedonia is of vital importance for the quality of practical training and its future perspectives and developments in the Republic of Macedonia. More specifically, the accessibility / availability of the private and public sector in the country for training for students of law faculties is of essential importance for the quality of the entire educational process. As a concept and way of organization and implementation this issue can be analyzed from several aspects. In terms of the perceptions and attitudes of the private sector in the Republic of Macedonia, this issue has already been analyzed and it will not be revisited.<sup>11</sup> However, it is our opinion that in order to obtain an accurate picture of the current, factual situation in this area, the focus should be on the students and their perceptions and attitudes regarding the availability of the institutions, their offering of resources and making them available to students during their first cycle of studies.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Regarding the availability of the private sector institutions from the perspective of the business community (trade companies, banks, insurance companies) see: Tusevska, Borka and Miseva, Kristina and Kosevaliska, Olga (2015) The personnel capacities and needs of small and medium trade companies seen through the traineeship in Republic of Macedonia. International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research, p. 17. Available from: <http://gssrr.org/index.php?journal=journalofbasicandapplied>;

<sup>12</sup> Ramsden P., Learning to teach in Higher Education, RoutledgeFalmer, Taylor & Francis Groupe, 2003, p. 233.

The study of this issue through the prism of practical instruction for students opens up numerous other questions, dilemmas and discussions. As a fundamentally important issue in this context is the issue of public and private sector institutions' social responsibility when it comes to the educational process and the creation of future promising human resource potential whose practical and theoretical knowledge will ultimately positively reflect their work as well.

The corporate responsibility versus the interest of protecting the environment, protecting the vulnerable category of subjects, i.e. the prohibition of discrimination in the employment process and in achieving the rights and obligations from employment, as well as in the employment of individuals who have been out of work for a long time is a frequent topic of analysis and studies found in the legal literature and numerous other theoretical discussions

Regarding this issue which we are now raising, the available research is minimal. However, we are of the opinion that the availability and the commitment of these institutions is of crucial importance for both the volume and the quality of the implemented practical training. Even more so because we believe that the public and private sector institutions in cooperation with the universities in the Republic of Macedonia can contribute the most to the improvement of the quality of these programs.

Guided by this observation, it is useful to identify the current situation, especially from the students' point of view. From the answers we received from students of law at the University Goce Delcev – Shtip, students opinions are divided. Some of them say that there is organization and accessibility of institutions; that institutions are willing to answer any questions that students might have. Overall these students say their experience so far has been positive and satisfactory.

The other half of respondents said that the public and private sector institutions are not available; do not engage in the process of educating interns. Specifically, half of the respondents have a positive impression, while the other half has a negatively view on the current state of this issue.

The majority of student respondents from the Law Faculty Justinian University I, "St. Cyril and Methodius" - Skopje reported that the institutions are available for practical training and that employees treat them well and are willing to explain i.e. make it easier for students to learn the practical aspects of the material. A smaller number of students are of the opinion that the institutions are available, but that employees are not engaged enough in the training.

The same questions about the availability of the institutions were posed to students at the law faculty at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski". According to the results we received, the majority of respondents said the biggest weakness of the practical training is the short time in which it is attended. More specifically, because of the short duration of the training, they can not assess the availability of institutions. Most frequent among the opinions is the belief that there is the need for a better communication between practitioners and the employees at the institutions where students carry out their internship.

The data summarized from the questionnaires filled by students at FON show divided opinions. Some of those surveyed said they have a positive experience with the availability of institutions, and that the university has contracted with private firms where university students have the opportunity to attend practical classes. They also say these institutions greatly contribute to learning the practical aspect of the learned material. The rest of the respondents have a generally negative opinion, saying that not every institution accepts interns, especially among state institutions. Overall, according to the summarized data institutions are available and manifest a satisfactory degree of responsibility when it comes to practical training for students.

## **7. Conclusion:**

In the final observations regarding the research we will summarize the results and conclude with the views of student from all law faculties expressed in the questionnaires. Based on the answers provided by students at both private and public universities, i.e. students of law under these universities, we can highlight the need for extending the time period in which students shall attend practical training. This is a suggestion offered by students from *all law schools that were the subject of research in this paper*.

It seems that the legal framework of 30 days during the academic year does not present a problem for students and their suggestion of extending it does not apply to it. Specifically, from the written replies and explanations we concluded that the suggestions refer to the flexible set timetable, which includes a practical training on daily basis that is at least two hours and no more than eight hours. Students from both the private and public universities share the view that the practical training needs to be obligatory. This is an interesting result which opens new dilemmas and a need for a separate discussion. To be precise, if we take into consideration that the practical training is mandatory for all students, we are wondering what these students' answers tell us. The practical training is mandatory for all students, at all faculties and yet the opinion that practical instruction should become mandatory prevails in students answers. So we wonder whether it is a simple question students *not being informed or they were not serious in approaching the questionnaire*. There is nothing in the current regulations in Macedonia that provides for regulation of practical training. This type of an act is necessary so it could differentiate between an intern and a volunteer, as well as establish the difference in status between a student intern and an intern with completed education.

This is important because under the code regulating labor relations in the Republic of Macedonia (from here on ZRO) ("Official Gazette" no. 62/2005, 106/2008, 161/2008, 114/2009, 130/2009, 149 / 2009, 50/2010, 52/2010, 124/2010, 47/2011, 11/2012, 39/2012, 13/2013, 25/2013, 170/2013, 187/2013, 113/2014, 20/2015; 33/2015, 72/2015, 129/2015 and 27/2016, chapter XXIII named "work regarding children and students under 15" in Article 250/1/2 provides that *employees can accept students who have turned 14 years of age to carry out practical work as part of their educational program*. In the case of paragraph 1, Article 250 the Labor Code regarding working time, holidays and breaks, special protection of workers who have not yet reached 18 years of age, and for liability for compensation shall be applied accordingly.

Furthermore, some students at some law faculties proclaimed the need for providing them with a mentor responsible for the implementation of their practical training and finally, the need for remuneration. Given that the request for providing a mentor was mentioned by students at only one institution we can conclude that most of the universities fulfill their obligations established by the Rules of MES which stipulates the obligation to provide a mentor for practical teaching.

When it comes providing compensation for attending practical training, this point of view seems totally unsustainable, unrealistic and a reflection of the student's lack of understanding of the general concept behind practical training during their studies. Given the fact that the concept of practical instruction during the first cycle of studies differs from the concept of implementation of practice for individuals with the status of trainees in terms of the operational plans and programs intended for employment and offering services adopted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Work and implemented by the State Employment Agency, it is more than clear that this category of trainees should not be remunerated for the work they carry out as trainees. The compensation is intended to pay for the contributions an individual makes. Interns are students, their presence in the institution is aimed at helping them learn and understand the material, therefore they fall outside the realms of contributing employee.

On the other hand, there is the question about motivation and incentives, discipline and desire to study the practical aspects of the subject matter. Specifically, we emphasize that the survey was conducted among students and we analyzed and elaborated the views of students regarding the concept of practical training, its organization and implementation in the public and private sector within that frame.

To encompass the true picture regarding this subject, special attention should be placed on a research that will focus on the attitudes and perceptions of public institutions and the private sector. Specifically, to get a full picture of the situation it is necessary to look at the factual situation in the field of practical training for students through the prism of the institutions and their opinions.

The private sector (trading companies, public-private partnerships, sole proprietors, etc.) have no obligation to provide practical training within their institutions. Specifically, there is no legal obligation under any law put on them to ensure the availability of practical training.

Still it is a question of corporate social responsibility, whose involvement has an indirect influence on the quality of student practical training. From the research conducted for this paper, and based on previous data gathered on this topic, we can rightly conclude that the corporate culture and responsibility among companies in the Republic of Macedonia when it comes to their contribution to the practical educating students is satisfactory.

It is necessary to increase the level of cooperation between institutions and universities, and to increasingly motivate students in the process of learning the practical aspects of the subject matter they study. Among the numerous calls and research conducted it is obvious that there is a tendency for universities to increase their cooperation and ensure for better ways to implement practical instruction. The fact that a large number of students feel the practical training needs to be paid is concerning, even though the practical training is an obligation for students in the second year of studies, who are only at the beginning of their education process.

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