



FLEXIBLE TRAINING MODELS: A RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT NEEDS

THE PRACTICUM IN THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS AT UPF

The students' point of view on the internship: analysis of the satisfaction survey results

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1. **ABSTRACT:** At Universitat Pompeu Fabra, EHEA University Degrees have reached their fourth academic year. This is the time when the majority of students undertake traineeships, as set out in the degree outline. This working paper describes the methodology to obtain the students' opinions, and identifies space for improvement in traineeship performance. Furthermore, some considerations are made regarding the role of traineeships in the graduates' labour integration.
2. **ABSTRACT:** En la Universitat Pompeu Fabra los estudios de grado adaptados al EEES han llegado a su cuarto curso y es en este momento cuando la mayoría de estudiantes realizan las prácticas externas previstas en los planes de estudio. El trabajo que se presenta en este artículo se centra en la metodología para obtener las opiniones



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de los estudiantes dirigidas a detectar los aspectos susceptibles de mejora. Asimismo se hacen algunas consideraciones sobre el papel de las prácticas en la inserción laboral.

3. KEYWORDS: survey, student's satisfaction, labour integration, EHEA adaptation, workplace learning. / **PALABRAS CLAVE:** encuesta, satisfacción de los estudiantes, integración laboral, adaptación al EEES, aprendizaje en el entorno laboral.

4. DEVELOPMENT:

Since the 2008/09 academic year Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) is providing the new EHEA-adapted degrees, in which significant changes have been introduced with regard to external practices or internships that students of each faculty develop in companies or institutions. In this context we are performing a study of the situation of the practices, starting with a pilot survey done in May 2013 in the Faculty of Economics and Business, in which four degrees are taught plus a fifth one jointly with the Faculty of Law. This pilot survey will allow the identification of improvements to be introduced into the survey before sending it to the internship students of the current academic year in September 2014. We propose to send a final survey to the whole UPF including postgraduates.

a) Objectives

The main objective is to identify areas of improvement in the management, development and monitoring of the external practices, and their relationship to the labour insertion. In particular, it aims to know:

- 1) The number of students taking external practices and the number of participating companies and/or institutions, and its variation with respect to the previous situation.
- 2) The satisfaction level of students with regard to different items, including the assignment process of the external practices, the interaction with the tutors, the monitoring process and others. We also intend to know their opinion about the studies they have taken and their application to the professional world.



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- 3) The relationship between certain aspects in the development of the practices and the labour insertion degree achieved.

b) Description of your work

In order to know directly the student's opinion on the practices, the methodology we used is based on electronic anonymous surveys. The surveys were designed under criteria based on brevity and concision. The first block of questions collects objective data, related to personal aspects of the student (sex, age), academic data about the studies and the traineeship (degree, academic year, hours of dedication, whether the practice is paid or not, etc), and data about the company or organisation.

A second part of the questionnaire includes subjective questions to collect information about the abovementioned objectives 2 and 3. These questions are oriented to know: (a) the students' perception of the relationship between what they have learned in the university and the activities done in the internship, and also about the expectations of their future profession, (b) the student's opinion about specific items of the development of the practices: work environment, relationship with the external tutor (company tutor) and with the workmates, the process of assignment, monitoring and assessment, (c) the level of satisfaction with the practices and (d) the contribution of the practices to the labour integration.

Lastly, the questionnaire concludes with a student evaluation of their own work and of the practices in general, and an open question is proposed so that the students can add their comments if they wish to do so.

Design of the questionnaire

The questions in the survey were based on works developed by researchers in European countries with a long tradition in investigation on education in the workplace, (Tynjälä, 2008) and on connective models between learning and practice (Griffiths and Guile, 2003, and Guile and Griffiths, 2001).



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For example, the group led by Päivi Tynjälä from the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) has studied the factors that promote effective learning of trainees (Virtanen et al., 2012). In this study, the authors search for factors that determine the outcomes obtained by practices students from a double perspective: students' skill-related learning outcomes and students' vocational identity development. To this end, they used an on-line survey asking the students to evaluate, on one hand, their outcomes on 29 generic skills and, on the other hand, their vocational development through questions about their identification with their own field, their assessment of their own vocational strengths and weaknesses, and their perceived needs for development in the future. The conclusion they have reached is that these two groups of dependent variables, skill related and vocational related, are determined by the same factors so they can be considered as a single group of dependent variables. As independent variables, i.e., the factors that explain the learning outcomes of the practices, they used three groups: (1) student-related individual factors, (2) the social and structural features of the workplaces and (3) educational practices.

In the design of the survey we included questions to evaluate aspects related to these independent variables (individual, social and educational) and dependent variables (skill related and vocational identity).

c) Results

Regarding results and conclusions, in this first communication, we can state the following.

- 1) Firstly, the incorporation of the traineeships as a curricular subject in the degree studies has been a success, because the number of students and companies have increased (with data up to May 2013; in the summer the number of internship students increased dramatically) as can be seen in Tables n. 1 and 2. These data have been provided by the Professional Career Service of the UPF, in May 2013. The number of students is greater than the number of companies because some companies offered more than one traineeship.



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SUMMARY 2011/12 and 2012/13							
	DEGREE ADE	DEGREE ECO	DEGREE IBE	DEGREE EMP-MNG	Bachelors' Degrees (Licenciaturas)	Certificate Degrees (Diplomaturas)	TOTAL
2011/12	36	37	15	40	182	8	318
2012/13 (Until May 2013)	124	81	29	77	60	5	376
INCREMENT	244%	119%	93%	92,5%	-67%	-37,5%	18%

Table n.1. Number of students taking practices for every academic year

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13 (until May)
Number of companies	132	150	160	146

Table n. 2. Number of companies for every academic year

According to the answers to our questionnaire (N= 301, n = 135, 44,8 % of surveyed students) we can characterise the students and the companies participating in the internships. 63% of the respondents were female and 37% were male, 81% were between 18 and 22 years old and two thirds were in their fourth academic year.

The survey was sent to the students of the five degrees of the Faculty. There were two groups of students (90 students/group approx.) in each degree except in IBE (1 group) and the double degree (in this case the students were part of a group of ADE). The distribution of degrees of the respondents is shown in Table n. 3. We can see a high proportion of respondents in the ADE degree and a very low number in the IBE degree. We need to take



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into account that the internship in the IBE degree should have been in international companies out of Spain and this explains the low number of respondents in this degree.

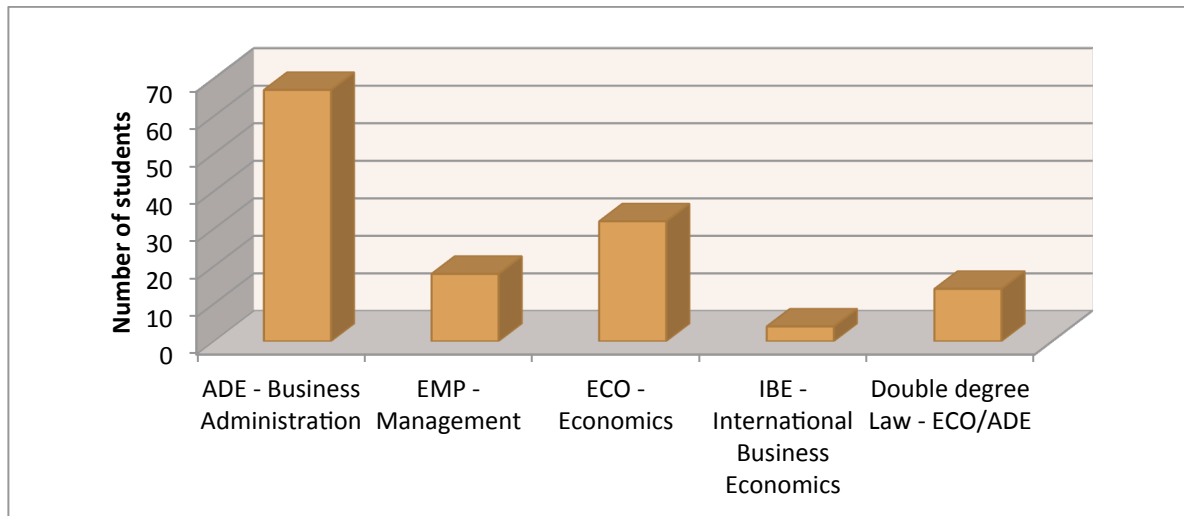


Table n. 3. Number of students by degree

Around 70% of students spent from 10 to 30 hours per week in the internship, and around 30% more than 30 hours per week. Roughly 50% of the internships lasted between three and six months and 30% more than six months.

Almost all internships are remunerated, due to the requirements of the board of the Faculty, although the amount is not necessarily comparable to legally established salaries. Two out of three students earned more than 400 € per month, and only 4% were not paid for the internship and the rest earned more than 100 € per month.

Next, we present some data obtained from the survey related to the companies. With regard to the size of the company, in Table n. 4, we present the percentages of multinationals or very large companies (almost 40%) and local small and medium companies (around 38%).



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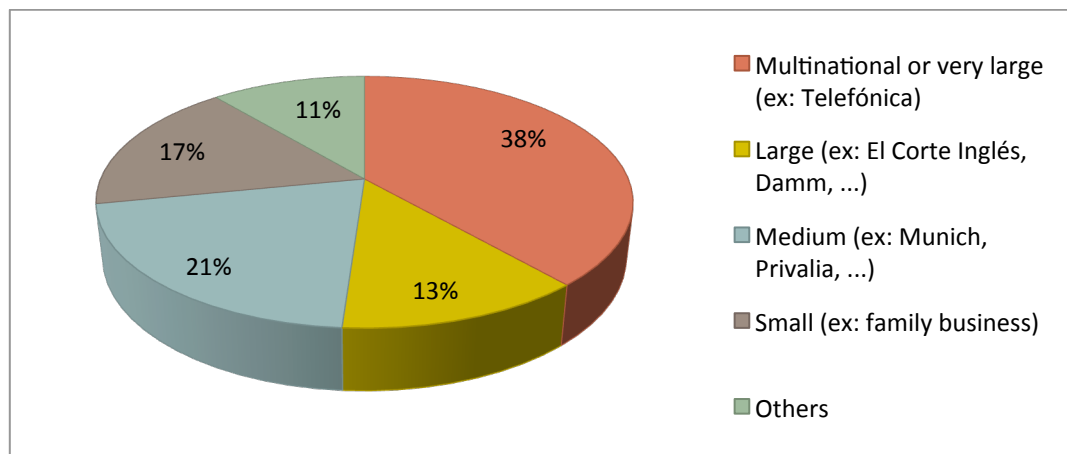


Table n. 4. Size of the company

As more specific aspects we found that most traineeships are developed in local companies (56%, Spanish or Catalan) or multinational companies located in Catalonia (30%) and some others (13%) located in EU or the rest of the world. (Table n. 5)

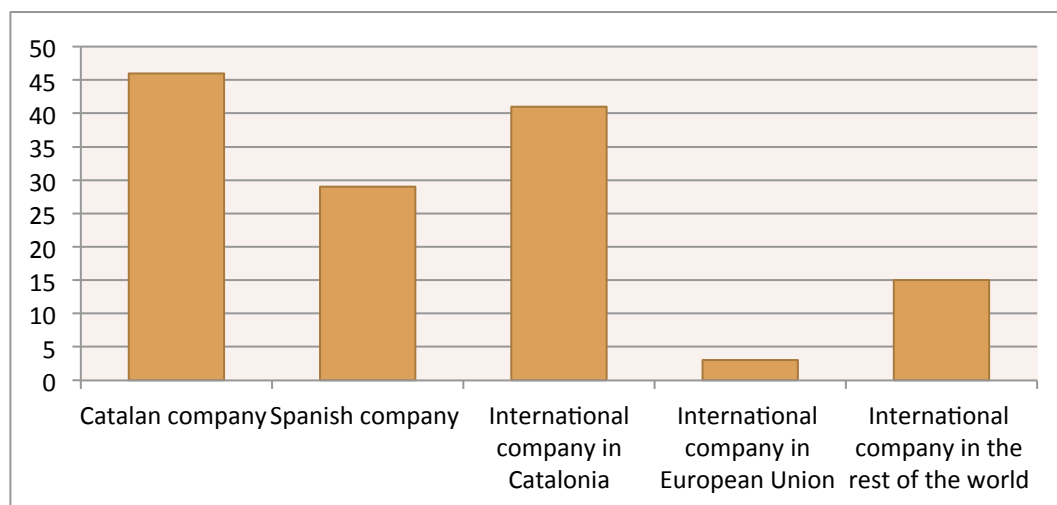


Table n.5. Number of students by company location

In very few cases the practices are in public administrations (9%), and only 2% are in international administrations.



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2) Secondly, we present the results regarding the satisfaction level of students and their opinion in relation to the studies they have taken and their application to professional life. More detailed explanations and data from the survey can be found in Alemany et al. (2014).

i) This satisfaction level will be related to the global assessment done by the interns in the survey. The last item in the questionnaire asked for the general valuation of the internship in a 0-10 scale and, as can be seen in Table n. 6, the results are very satisfactory.

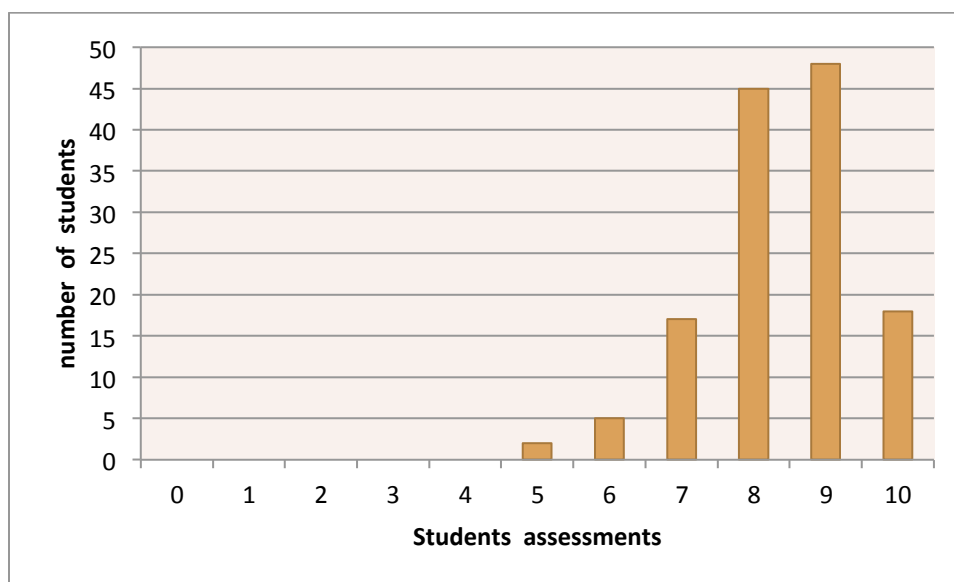


Table n. 6. Global assessment done by students in the survey

The satisfaction level of the students is, in general, high or very high. We analyse the answers in three different stages.

- The first stage is the assignment process, and the satisfaction level is quite high in the three following questions: the allocation process of the traineeship (50% of the students said they were satisfied and 32% very satisfied), information previous to the practices (47% satisfied and 17 % very satisfied) and predetermined objectives for the practices (62% satisfied and 19% very satisfied). These results are satisfactory but they are a little



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below the general satisfaction level especially with the items related to the development process (second stage).

Table n. 7 presents the relationship between these satisfaction levels and the final assessment of the practices done by the students.

Correlation between satisfaction with preliminary aspects and global assessment of the practices	
The allocation process of the internship	0.1345
Information previous to the internship	0.2301
Predetermined objectives of the internship	0.3596

Table n. 7. Relationship between aspects before the practices and the assessment after the practices

Good information and understanding about everything related to the formal part of the internship is positively valued. The more satisfied is the student with respect to preliminary aspects of the practices, and specially the predetermined objectives, the better is the valuation of the internship, in general.

– The second stage is about the satisfaction level with the development of the practices.

he results of the survey show a very high level of satisfaction (between 76% and 80% of students surveyed are very satisfied) with aspects related to the workplace: work environment, relationship with workmates and integration in the workplace. For example, Table n. 8 shows the answers to the question about the integration in the work environment, and this diagram is very similar with the other items of this group.



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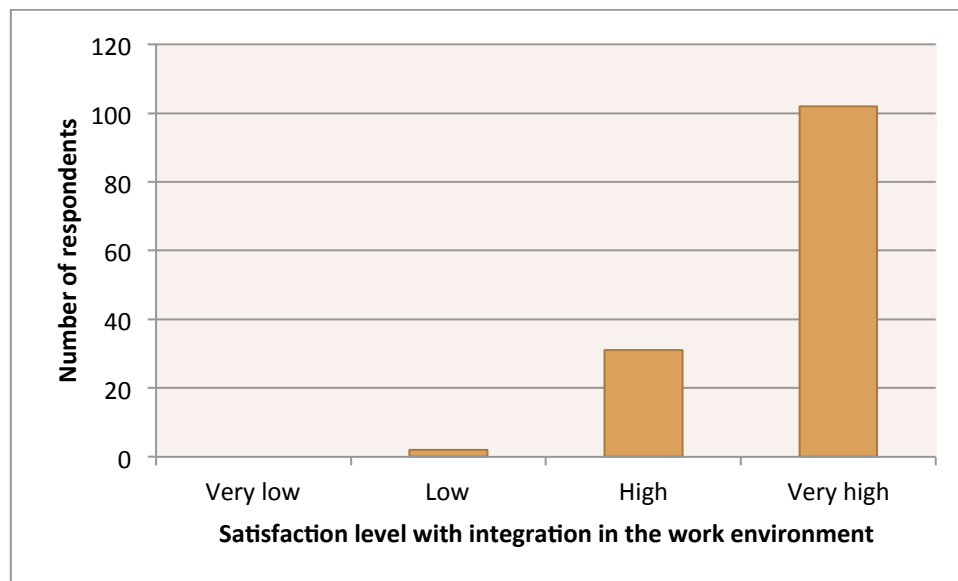


Table n.8. Integration in the workplace

Around half of the students surveyed said they felt satisfied with the solutions for problems that arose and with the monitoring process. The more contrasted situation came from the items related to the tutors. The majority of students (74%) were very satisfied with the in-company tutor, but more than half (56%) stated that they were little or very little satisfied with the academic tutor (see Table n. 9). A possible explanation for this situation is that after the Bologna process the practices have been an option for all the students, and the academic tutors have been overwhelmed.

Satisfaction level during the internship	Very low	Low	High	Very high
1. Relationship with the company tutor	1%	4%	21%	74%
2. Relationship with the academic tutor	32%	24%	27%	16%

Table n. 9. Relationship with tutors

We also detect the need for improvement in the monitoring process (see Table n. 10), in line with the results found for the items in the first stage: the allocation process, previous information and objectives of the practices. The comparison between Table n.8 and Table n. 10, shows a different pattern in the responses.



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Table n. 10. Monitoring process of the practices

- The third stage is related to the satisfaction level after the practices have been completed.

Satisfaction level after the internship	Very low	Low	High	Very high
1. Knowledge acquired in the internship	1%	7%	37%	55%
2. Labour experience acquired in the internship	0%	4%	28%	68%

Table n. 11. Satisfaction level after the internship

The percentages of students with high and very high level of satisfaction after the internship with knowledge and with labour experience are very large. The sum of the high and the very high responses are more than 92 % of the respondents in both cases (Table n.11).

- ii) Next we study their opinion in relation to the studies they have taken and their application to professional life.



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With regard to the relationship between what has been learned in the academic period and its application to the learning in the workplace, the students show a satisfactory level of connection between learning and practices but it can be improved.

When asked whether they had found situations explained in class during the internship, 58% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, this perception is uncorrelated with the global assessment of the internship (the correlation factor r between both questions is 0,003). In addition, the disagreement was between 50% and 60% with the statements regarding the application of theoretical knowledge in the practices and regarding the usefulness of subjects explained in class. However, there is around 60% of agreement with the statement that there is good relationship with acquired knowledge, and when asked inversely if there is little relationship between classes and practices, 56% of answers are in disagreement or strong disagreement. In summary, the satisfaction with the relationship between theory and practice is comprised between 40% and 60% (Table n.12).

Level of agreement	Very low	Low	High	Very high
During the internship I found situations that have been explained in class.	19%	39%	33%	9%
During the internship I applied theoretical knowledge learned in class	13%	41%	36%	10%
Classes address topics that were useful for the internship	13%	41%	36%	9%
The internship has been well related to the knowledge acquired	7%	32%	48%	13%
There is weak relationship between classes and tasks performed during the internship	13%	43%	36%	9%

Table n.12. Level of agreement with the relationship between theory and practices



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- 3) Finally, about the incentive character of the internship to the labour integration process, either by means of a labour contract or a continuation of the internship, this situation occurs in one third of the cases.

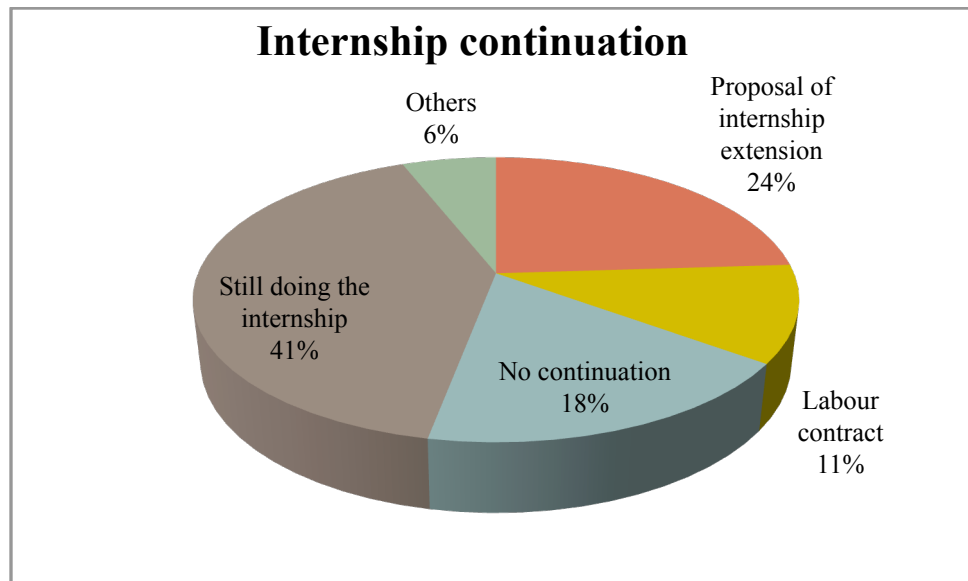


Table n. 13. Continuation of the internship

One half of the respondents are still doing the internship or in other situations, one out of two of the other half received a proposal of an internship extension, and an 11% a labour contract. In our opinion it is significant that, in spite of the economic crisis context and taking into account the limitations of the survey, only one third of the students who had finished the internship did not have any offer to continue in the company. (See Table n. 13)

Regarding the features of the labour insertion further details can be seen in Alemany et al. (2014), and with regard to the relationship between satisfaction level and labour insertion of the students who have finished the internship, see Table n. 14.



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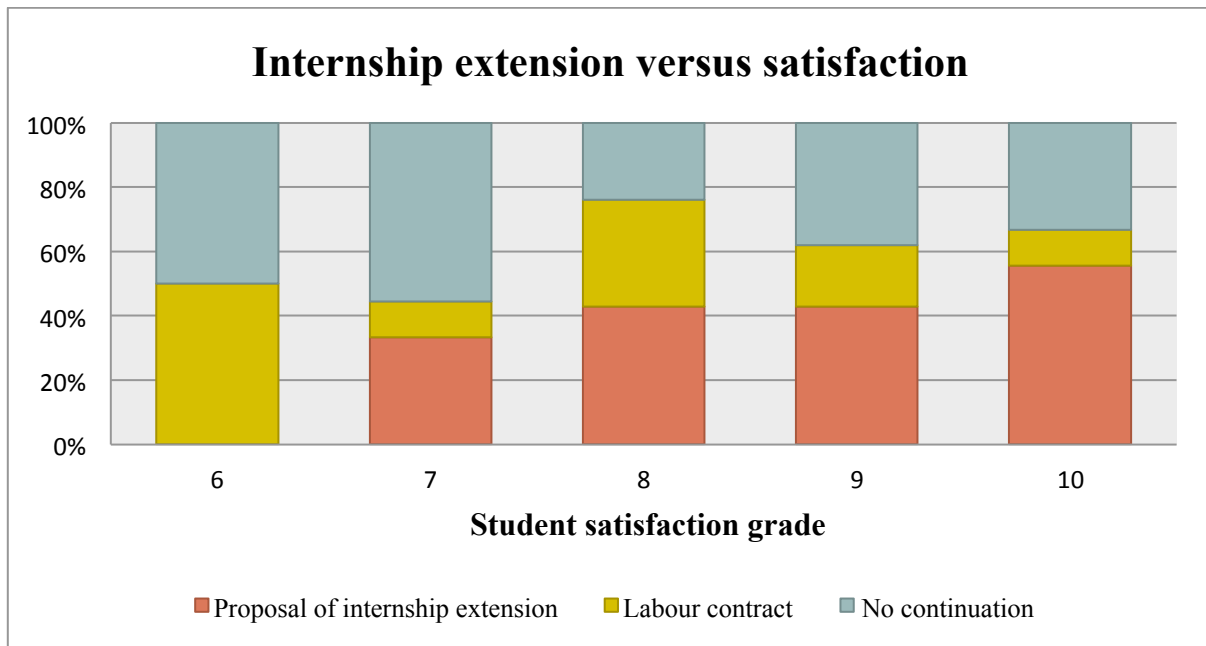


Table n. 14. Relationship between labour insertion and satisfaction level of students who have finished the internship

According to our data there exists a relationship between proposals of internship extension and satisfaction level of the trainees, and this relationship is positive. We understand that the students who received an extension of the external practices are more satisfied. However this relationship does not hold for the students who were offered a labour contract, and this situation is quite surprising.

The relationship between the continuation of internships and the duration is shown in Table n. 15. The initial goal was to check whether longer practices end with a contract offer or with an extension.

Without taking into account the four students with an internship shorter than one month, we can see that the longer the duration of the internship is, the more frequent are the labour contract offers.

As for internship extensions, although it would be logical that students that had been a long time in the company are not offered more extensions, we observed the contrary effect. This



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may be due to the fact that companies know the intern well and they prefer to offer an extension rather than a contract, in order to save labour costs.

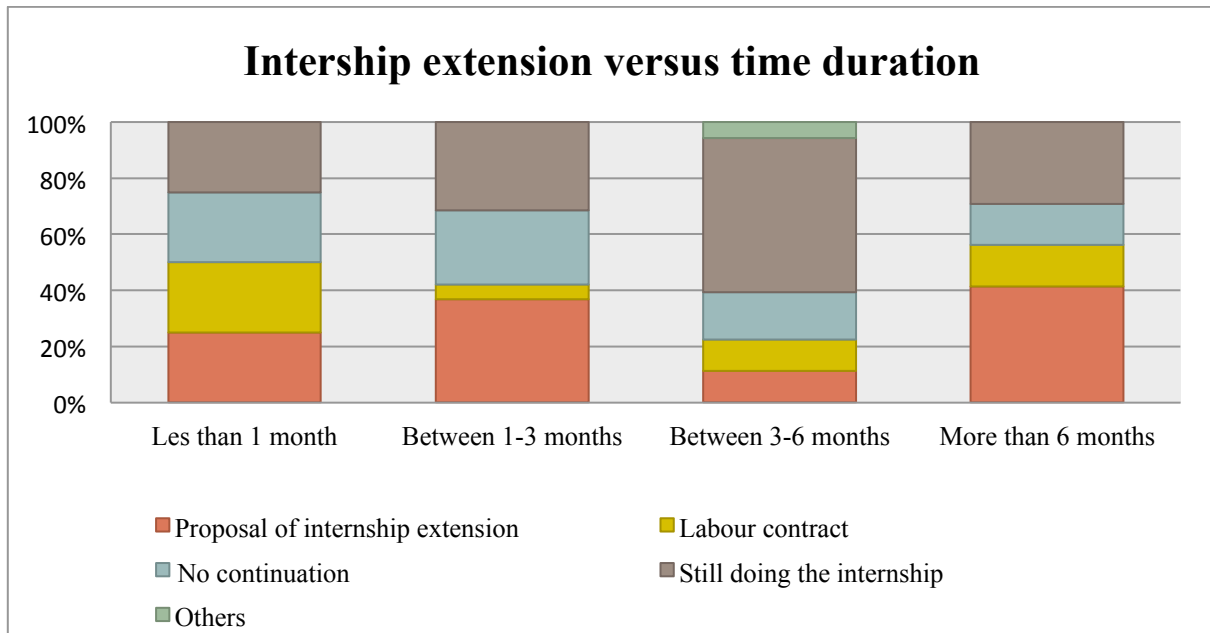


Table n. 15. Relationship between the extension of the external practices and their duration

d) Conclusions

According to the three objectives we have set for our work, we can draw the following conclusions.

First, the number of students and companies participating in internships has increased in the last years. About the characteristics of the students we can say that there is a bias in the respondents towards students of the ADE degree, and a low number of respondents from students of the IBE degree. In the same line the number of international companies is much lower than desirable.

Second, the students' satisfaction is acceptably high with regard to technical aspects (assignment process, preliminary information, monitoring, etc) and it is very high with



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regard to the development process of the practices: work environment, relationship with workmates and integrations in the labour place.

The relationship between the knowledge acquired in the academic studies and its application to the practices and to the professional life is perceived as reasonably acceptable, in all the items analysed. The average satisfaction in this respect is between 40% and 60 %. There is room for improvement in this aspect, but we have to consider that the higher education studies have wider goals than preparing students only for a specific job, and the students have to be prepared to adapt to different types of jobs in their professional life.

Finally, two thirds of the students who have finished the internship have been offered to continue in the company either with an internship extension or with a labour contract. This is an important result because according to Gault et al. (2000) the graduates who have done external practices get the first job more quickly and with a better salary than those who have not. Also according to González and Hevia (2011) students see the internships as an excellent means to approach real professional scenarios.

In summary, the results achieved represent a promising and interesting starting point to continue the development of this research.



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