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# Study regarding the relevance of the accounting subjects in the economic vocational training of non- accountant specialists

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## Abstract

*The responsibility for the skills of specialists in the economic field belongs to universities, which, by modernizing the curriculum, must take into account the requirements of the professional environment (employers), where the role of the economic specialist extends beyond narrow knowledge, flexibility and high capacity to address various problems. From this perspective, in order to enhance the role of the academic environment and to develop the professional skills of the graduating economists, it is necessary to correlate the competencies and the requirements about educational outcomes. With regard to the relevance of the accounting subjects in the professional training of non-accountant economic specialists, given the competing interests of universities, students and employers in the field of education, we proposed a debate with the view to design strategies of accounting education in the higher economic education of the Republic of Moldova. The article represents a study based on the documentation of the university curriculum in undergraduate programs. With the view to test and validate the necessity of studying accounting subjects in the professional training of non-accounting economic specialists, a questionnaire was developed and implemented. The general research idea refers to the need to study accounting in economic education and practice, which could have an impact over the competitiveness of the Economics graduate.*

**Keywords:** *Superior studies, university professional training, non-accountant economic specialists, professional environment, the relevance of accounting in the economic education and practice, the Bologna process, Republic of Moldova.*

**JEL Classification:** *I25, M41.*

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## Introduction

The current problems of higher education in the Republic of Moldova (RM) generally reflect the status of the national economic complex, which is starting the reform towards a new type of society. The informational transformation of the education, the sustainability of information, the globalization process and the development of the European Union, the issues of the contemporary world, the gap between the educational systems, the accentuated dynamics of the labor market, the multiplication of higher education providers and the growth of competition between universities, and between the academic and the professional environments, have led to deep and multi-dimensional transformations within universities, in order to increase their international competitiveness. This state of fact imposed a new way of thinking and understanding the entire higher education system, including the economic one. The most significant change is the Bologna process (The Bologna Declaration, 1999).

According to the specialists in the field, the core mission of an economic university is to prepare the specialists in the field of economic sciences, who are able to join the workforce immediately and who will perform best in the different industries where they will get employed after graduation. Developing the graduates' professional abilities is a requirement of the higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a phenomenon that has been institutionalized through various normative documents, study programs, university curricula, strategies etc. both at a national and international levels. This goal is emphasized in the Education development strategy "Education 2020" (2014), including specific long-term objectives, with regard to securing the current higher education paradigm (education – research – innovation), educational outcomes, quality of studies, human resources and, implicitly, to the qualifications, modernization of the curricula and infrastructure, and financing.

All of these require not only institutional changes, but also complex changes at all levels: conceptual, institutional, managerial, educational. The University, as a cardinal institution of the higher education system, should adapt itself to the new standards and requirements so that it would develop an environment of quality and performance, in order to maintain its status in

a competitive world, engaged in the process of globalization.

In order to ensure the optimal interaction between the teacher and students, universities must create and provide the needed conditions, namely a material base, resources, programs and services that are specific to a modern educational process, based on relations, the students' needs and involvement, the teaching methods, strategies, and modern teaching – learning – evaluation techniques and methods.

It is certain that the environment in which the higher education institutions activate has fundamentally changed: professional knowledge and competencies have turned into the main generator of economic development. Nowadays, it is required more and more to change the trends from the possession of knowledge to its exploitation through competitive management and quality insurance. Economists permanently face higher expectations and demands regarding their knowledge and abilities. The knowledge needed to efficiently activate as practical economists continue to rapidly change and amplify. Moreover, the need to be competitive emphasizes all the economists' roles and responsibilities.

Economists gather and analyze information, they process it, they notice trends, issue forecasts, and they especially provide solutions to the problems that have emerged as a result of the market behavior and the imbalances that result from it. Without thorough knowledge of the tax regulations, a graduate cannot be considered an economist. An economist must judge and be able to analyze the circumstances that affect him on a market. Without vast knowledge in the field of accounting, the economist cannot be an economist. He must know what the accounts are, the elements of the production cost, to prepare and analyse the financial statements, to prepare a trial balance etc.

Thus, in order to develop the professional abilities of economics graduates, we need to correlate the students' competencies with the requirements of the professional environment. "Competence is not fixed and coded, but flexible and permanently evolving. It does not involve the lack of a subsequent extension, but it is ready to take the next step" (Cabac, 2011, pp. 10-11).

As compared to the traditional practice in the higher education system, where the teacher emphasized the process of teaching his knowledge, followed by the

evaluation of knowledge, within the modern teaching systems it is no longer accepted the idea that higher economic education should “generally” prepare the students for life. Teaching must combine instruction with formation and learning with evaluation, according to the educational goals.

## 1. Research motivation and significance

The study is based on the fundamental research and is meant to lead to the discovery of new aspects regarding the role of accounting education within the economic field. By promoting the idea of focusing on professional competencies and skills, we consider that the relationship between the academic and professional environment is preceded by the deep and accurate study of the principles and rules generated by the requirements of the professional environment, a fact that is supported by the teachers in the academic environment. Researches in the field emphasize various problems resulting from the implemented reforms since the affiliation of RM to the Bologna Process. Reforms mainly consisted of the renewing, modernizing and diversifying the resources used in the educational process and creating networks and research centers, to increase connectivity with the international environment. At a national level, the problems regarding the current trends within the higher education in RM have been and are approached within different scientific conferences and projects regarding the university curricula reform, the improvement of university governance and management, promoting the cooperation between the educational field and the business environment (e.g. Erasmus +, Tempus, Horizon 2020 programs etc.).

Many of these problems remain insufficiently debated, requiring developments, specifications, arguments, additions and updates, by adapting to current circumstances. Moreover, the higher education institutions display defining particularities and features which differentiate them from other institutions, by referring to the specificity of the field and its regulatory framework. Our research is limited to the relevance of accounting within the economic education and practice, representing a complex research, which cannot include in a single paper all the aspects regarding the approached field. We provide added value by generating new questions within the current research.

In the context of adhering to the Bologna process, the changes within the higher education curricula have contributed to the significant decrease in the number of direct contact hours between the teacher and its students in the case of accounting classes, with negative impacts on the university professional development of the graduating economist. An extremely negative side of the university professional development is represented by the exclusion of disciplines “Financial Accounting”, “Management Accounting” and “Company Accounting” within different faculties of the Economic Studies Academy of Moldova (ESAM) (*excepting the Faculty of Accounting*). The main objectives of these courses relate to the development of cognitive competencies.

## 2. Research methodology

Our research aimed at researching the graduates’ perspective on the correlation between the gained knowledge from the accounting courses during their university studies and the requirements of the professional environment, in order to improve the university educational offer, by adapting it to the requirements and realities of the socio-economic environment, in accordance with the labor market requirements. At the same time, the article presents an investigation of the accounting disciplines included in the university curricula for the bachelor studies within the ESAM faculties, which develop competencies in the field of management, finances, international economics affairs, economic law etc.. We mention that the ESAM in Chişinău, as an integral part of the national educational system, is fully engaged in the reformation process, according to the objectives of the Bologna Declaration.

In order to reach this objective, we have tried to find out the following: are the accounting disciplines useful and needful to the professional economic formation? To what extent the level of accounting knowledge gathered in the academic environment eases the access to the professional environment?

To carry out the study, we have used the quantitative research as methodology. The qualitative study based on the survey stands at the basis of a scientific research whose objective is the debate of the deepening proposals of the future economic specialists’ knowledge by integrating various issues of accounting in the university curricula.

To this extent, we have issued a survey which included 15 questions. The development of the survey and of the questions is based on the meeting of the main objective of the paper regarding the need of studying the accounting disciplines for the professional formation of non-accountants economists. The first three questions include general identification coordinates of the respondents, such as the faculty, the graduated institution and the gender. As, at this level of research, we do not pursue extrapolations based on the provided answers, we have considered that the anonymous feature of the respondents will ensure a credibility regarding the academic environment's ability to provide the needed training for the successful integration in the professional environment and the requirements of the professional environment. Through 15 questions, both with unique, multiple and mixed answers, we have formulated reference points for the debate of the needs that were identified among the master students, both reported to the provided economic education and the personal experience induced by themselves or employing institutions, in order to develop some coherent integration proposals in the academic curricula of the accounting disciplines.

### 3. The current status of the superior education system in the Republic of Moldova

The affiliation of RM to the Bologna process shows that our country is an active player in the edification of a Europe of knowledge. The last moment reforms (Erasmus +, 2015, p. 3) especially aim at: *perfecting the academic management system, promoting the academic autonomy, the insurance of academic quality, promoting the mobility of teachers and students, organizing the continuous formation, as well as other aspects that support the reformation of the academic system from the perspective of the Bologna Declaration stipulations*. The implemented reforms since the adherence of our country to the Bologna Process have also taken shape in the implementation of new disciplines, updated curricula, launching new programs, the development of various networks, centers, the development of institutional abilities and human capital, technical equipment etc.

The affiliation of the local educational system to the community standards has taken shape in the elaboration

and implementation of a normative document which corresponds to the exigencies of this period – The Code of Education (2014) that emphasizes the competitive development of education and research.

As a result, the state superior education institutions have turned into autonomous entities. From the perspective of the organizational economy, universities have the right to choose their own governance organizations and establish their organizational structure. From the perspective of human resources autonomy, they can select their teaching, research and managerial personnel. The superior education institutions are also to approve their own educational activities and scientific research plans.

The changes regarding the implementation of the Bologna process stipulations come from the reformation of the academic teaching in two cycles – Bachelor studies (cycle 1) and Master studies (cycle 2), the introduction in all the superior education institutions of the transferable credits system (Ministry of Education, 2015), the elaboration and implementation of a new classified list of the professional training fields and specializations (Law 142/2011). In this context, the qualitative academic teaching represents a promoter of human rights, sustainable development, democracy, peace, justice and social equity (Education Code, 2014, art. 75) and becomes a sine qua non condition towards progress.

We must admit that the superior education in RM still continues to be one of the most theoretical ones, and the economic agents are less opened towards collaboration with the academic environment, including related with problems that regard the studies' content and quality (Belostecinic, 2015).

The nowadays problem of universities is the one of the selection that they have to make when teaching economic disciplines. It has become important to establish which economic knowledge is needed, what is relevant, convenient and mandatory to teach. To improve the quality and the efficiency of education, the changing of the educational plan requires a deeper analysis, regarding the formation of valuable specialists and the better insertion on the labor market of the graduating economists.

The universal feature of accounting justifies the presence of the accounting disciplines as a main study discipline among all the economic fields and faculties, as

well as among the teaching programs of other faculties: law, engineering, informatics etc. Accounting represents the history of the economic environment of the entity, described in the financial statements, expressed in significantly relevant numbers within the decision making process and within the appreciation of the performance level. In this context, we consider that the accounting disciplines represent some of the basic components of all the mandatory disciplines required for the formation of non-accountant economic specialists.

#### 4. The synthesis of the survey answers and the research conclusions

The survey, named “The relevance of the accounting disciplines in the economic academic formation of non-accountant specialists and the evaluation of the students teaching in the academic environment” (Appendix 1), has been distributed to 100 graduates, actual master students within different Master programs at ESAM. As a result, the sample included 94 respondents, of which 14 men (14.89%) and 80 women (85.11%). Most of the respondents are non-accountant economic graduates from: Business and Affairs Management, Finances and Banks, International Economic Affairs, Economic Statistics and Forecasting, from the bachelor studies of ESAM and also of some economic field universities, such as State University of Moldova. The results of the study show that the master students in the responding sample have studied accounting disciplines.

The survey among the master students firstly shows that the respondents are aware of the fact that a good theoretical basis only represents the starting point in the business environment. On the turn, the practical basis comes after the graduation. They are also appreciating the opportunities the chosen field might provide.

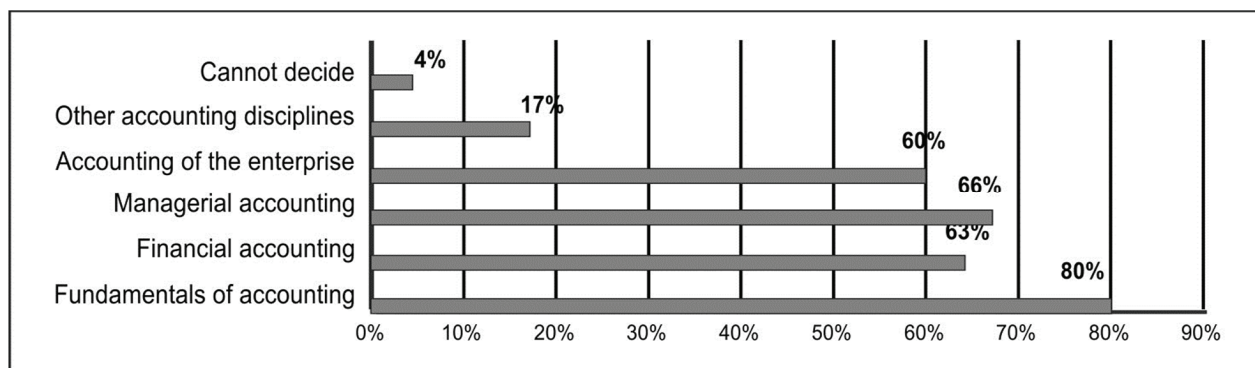
Most of the respondents declared that they are employed in a field that corresponds to the bachelor studies (46.15%), some of them are employed as accountants, though they graduated other faculty in the economic field (19.15%) and the remaining ones activate in other fields (34.04%).

Research results confirm that a significant part of the respondents see the existence of certain difficulties when inserted in the professional environment, as a result of the differences within the academic professional formation: motivational ones, and also the support provided by the universities to graduates.

In order to respond to the question “do you consider that the accounting disciplines are useful and needed in the economic academic formation”, six answers were included:

- a) Fundamentals of accounting;
- b) Financial accounting;
- c) Managerial accounting;
- d) Accounting of the enterprise;
- e) Other accounting disciplines;
- f) Cannot decide (**Graphic 1**).

**Graphic 1. The need and utility of the accounting disciplines in the academic economic formation**



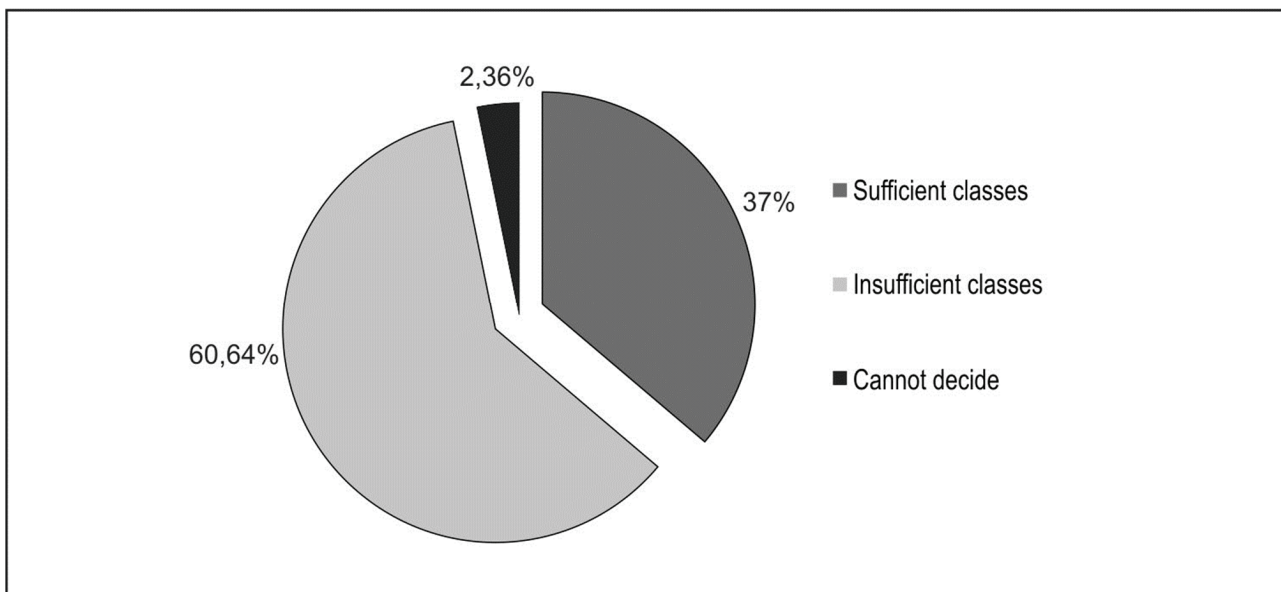
Source: processed by the authors

We must say that the values in the graphic above do not cumulate 100%, as the question had more answer options. Based on the presented results, we notice that all the respondents pledge for the study of accounting disciplines, and not only the theoretical basis of accounting, as it is set in the teaching plans (2015-2016) at the faculties of ESAM, cycle 1. This is due to the relevance of the accounting studies when getting employed. In this context, the academic curricula from the superior economic studies must focus on the student and oriented towards the formation of professional competences. In order to pass over the created situation, we would appreciate a decision regarding the reevaluation of the educational strategy of the academic curricula, which mostly depends on the institutional profile, the

opinion of the academic staff and the result of systemic interrelated debates between the academic and the professional environments. We can mention that the decrease of the number of accounting disciplines, by excluding the above mentioned disciplines, impacts on the quality of the students' knowledge of the accounting concepts and principles, which influences the economic professional formation.

As an example, they can serve to the following question that pursues the "set number of hours in the study plan for the accounting disciplines", **Graphic 2**. We reveal the fact that our respondents have studied three accounting disciplines: Fundamentals of accounting, Financial accounting, Enterprise accounting or Managerial accounting.

**Graphic 2. Set number of hours in the study plan for the accounting disciplines**



Source: processed by the authors

The respondents' choice (60.64%) for the insufficient number of hours can be explained by the fact that, according to the curricula, within a course, 6-7 subjects are to be studied in 30 hours. Thus, accounting, a discipline with a superior degree of accuracy compared to other disciplines, needs time and effort to analyze, represent and give examples of the phenomena, the elements and the processes the

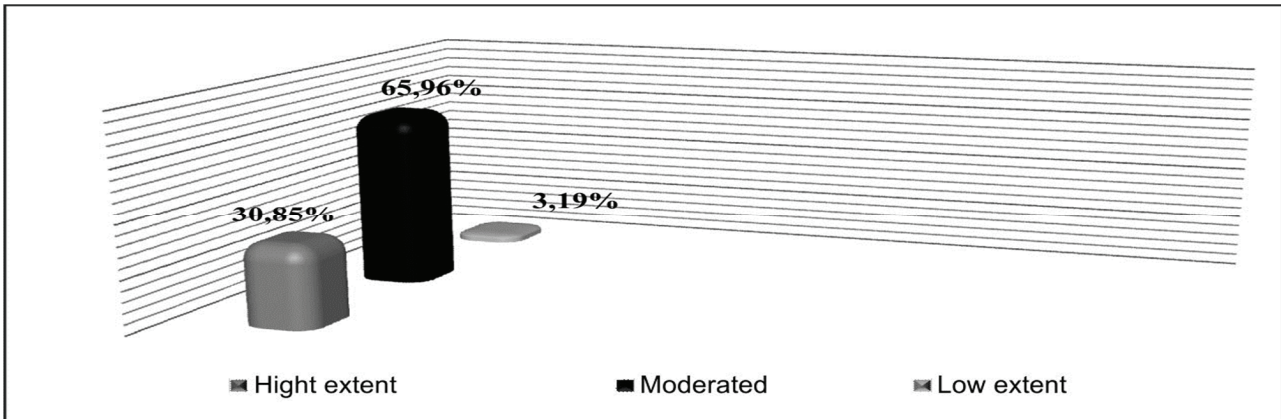
accounting concepts and the national accounting provisions provide. We must say that one of the graduating economists pledge for most classes of accounting compared to other disciplines, which, in their opinion, do not reach a common point with the chosen specialization.

Most of the respondents, 96.81% (30.8% + 65.96%) consider that the academic environment

provides the needed training in accounting in order to activate in the business environment. Only 3.19% of the respondents appreciate the

utility of the gained knowledge in the academic environment as being low for the integration in the professional environment (**Graphic 3**).

**Graphic 3. The ability of the academic environment to provide the graduating economists with the needed accounting training for the integration in the business environment**



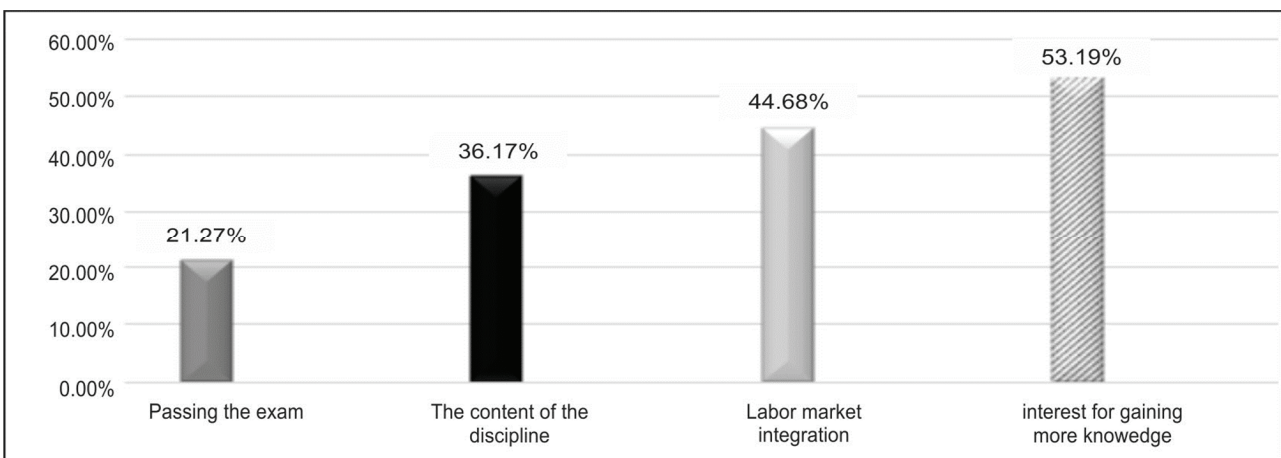
Source: processed by the authors

As for the relevance of the studied accounting disciplines for the employment in the field of work, 40.42% of the respondents claim that they are highly relevant, 57.45% moderated and only 2.13% appreciate the relevance as being low.

The determining factors for the graduates regarding the knowledge accumulation in the field

of accounting through the study years in the faculty were ranked by the respondents as follows: labor market integration (44.68%) and the interest to gain more knowledge (53.19%) (**Graphic 4**). We mention that the values in the graphic below do not reach 100% as the question included more answer options.

**Graphic 4. The reason for accumulating the accounting disciplines in the academic environment**

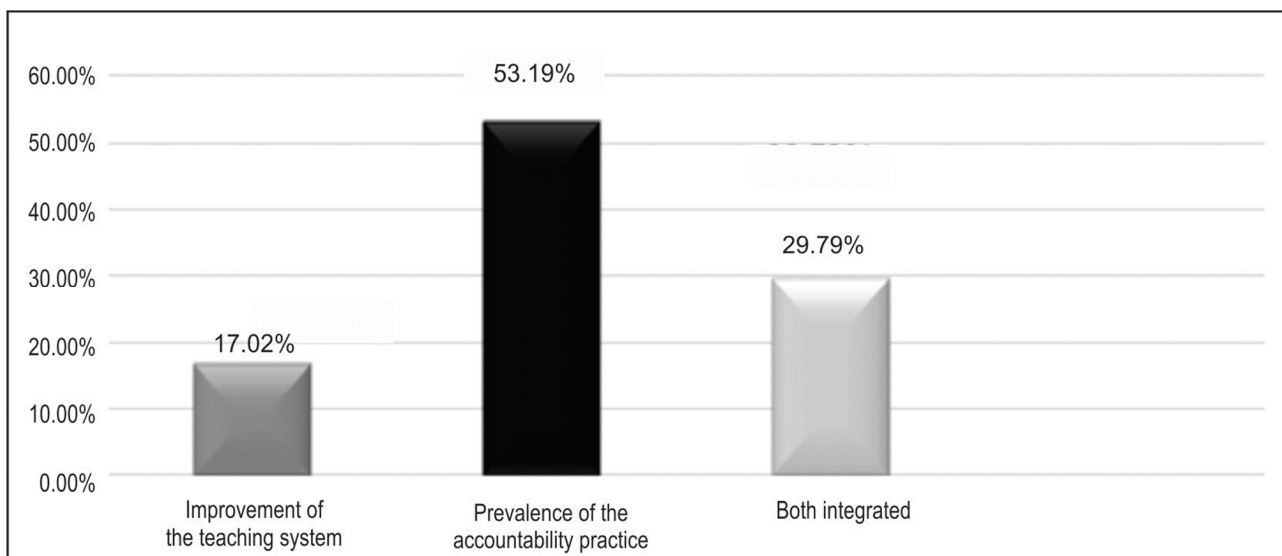


Source: processed by the authors

In this order of ideas, we are aware of the fact and we notice that the study of accounting in the academic economic formation is necessary and useful. Also, the interest of the respondents to accumulate professional experience during the

academic studies is reflected by their most opinions regarding the approach method of the accounting disciplines: the prevalence of the accounting practice, the improvement of the teaching system, both integrated (**Graphic 5**).

**Graphic 5. The approach method of the accounting disciplines**



Source: processed by the authors

Regarding the *applicability degree of the accounting knowledge gained in the academic environment in the professional environment*, 94.68% of the respondents claim that these are found in practice. A possible explication of the 5.32% result would be that some of the respondents do not operate in the economic field. The provided options allow us to confirm that 36.17% of the respondents consider that the cumulated accounting abilities and knowledge in the economic environment give them higher chances of integration in the work field, 61.70% average chances, and 2.13% have expressed the low degree, regarding the fact that accounting knowledge eases the access to the professional environment.

If, according to the study plan, one would not choose other accounting disciplines, except for Fundamentals of accounting, we asked the respondents what their options would be, giving them

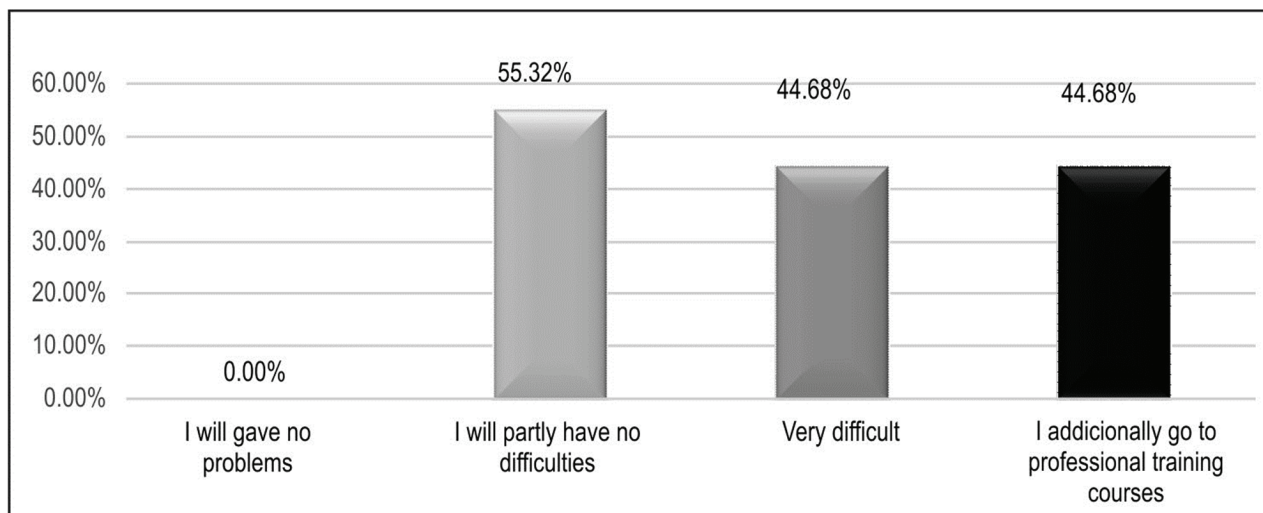
the following options: I will have no problems, I will partly have difficulties, very difficult and I additionally go to professional training course. The question had more answer options, which are displayed in **Graphic 5**.

Reached results emphasize the significance of studying the accounting disciplines, claiming that they will partly face difficulties in the professional environment (55.32%), and very difficult, having to go to additional professional training courses (44.68%).

We mention that the sole study of Fundamentals of accounting gives the students the ability to accumulate the needed knowledge just from the general perspective, regarding the basic notions corresponding to the decision making process, as well as the costs, expenditures and revenues accounting models and of the financial results.



**Graphic 6. The respondents' options if, according to the study plan, one won't choose other accounting disciplines, than Fundamentals of accounting**



Source: processed by the authors.

The training for the activity in the economic field is only recognized based on the competences, which comply with the socio-economic context and with the promotion of the new realizations in the field of economic sciences.

Asked to what extent they appreciate the subsequent development need of the educational competences and the professional training in the field of accounting after the graduation of the bachelor degree (master studies or professional development courses), the respondents have answered: 48.93% of the respondents claim the high participation degree in the master studies programs and 51.07% average degree.

## Conclusions

In the end, we claim that the economy of RM has no other development opportunity than the investment in the human potential and education, which will develop a knowledge-based society and will lead to the development of a productive economy.

The research made at a conceptual level emphasizes the significance of the academic environment for the professional one, as well as the need to collaborate between the academic and the professional environment for the cognitive formation and development and the professional thinking of the future graduates according

to the trends in the economic field. The study and the reached results are more interesting, as a new element and suggest, at the first sight, eventual future educational policies. Their objective cannot be other than positive in an eventual balance of the demand and offer on the working market.

Given the fact that the study has used available samples, the displayed results are available only for the analyzed respondents' samples. These cannot be though generalized for all the economy graduates in RM. Regarding the structure of the reached sample, most of the graduates that responded the survey came from the ESAM.

On the whole, the sample mandates us to have reserves regarding the reached results. They are useful for the analysis of the evolution of the university economic studies, namely the growth of the educational processes quality. Also, we can conclude regarding the educational policies applied in the evaluation of the way in which the knowledge, the competences and gained abilities are sufficient enough in order to allow the economy graduates to get employed and continue their studies.

An issue is though certain – the challenge of maintaining or giving up on the study of the accounting disciplines, in the formation of the non-accountant professional is certain. If we see the

education programs, they should set what economic knowledge is necessary, what is relevant and mandatory to teach, in order to meet the contemporary requirements of the economic academic education and of the international specialists' training in the economic field. The main problem of universities is to choose which economic disciplines must be taught. Thus, it is mandatory to reevaluate the role of each discipline in the assembly of the specialty disciplines and the adaptation of teaching each discipline to the concrete needs of the future activity of the graduate.

In these circumstances, the perfecting of the teaching plans represents a continuous and complex process. Adapting the academic curricula of the bachelor and master studies depending on the requirements of the professional environment will ensure a relevant level of the economic specialists' training, and, as a result, it will ease their employment process on the labor market. Regarding the graduates, they "must learn during their whole lives, and, next to the development of other abilities, the teaching based on the solving of problems teaches you how to teach. And it counts for all the graduates" (Belostecinic, 2015).

**Appendix 1. Survey regarding "The relevance of the accounting disciplines in the economic academic vocational training of non-accountant specialists and the evaluation of the students training quality in the academic environment"**

No.	Question	Answer
1.	Graduated faculty	
2.	Specialization	
3.	Gender (male/female)	
4.	Employment methods on the labor market: a) I got employed in a field corresponding to the Bachelor studies (management, finances) b) I got engaged as an accountant, though I graduated from another faculty in the economic field. c) Others, namely...	
5.	Which of the accounting disciplines do you consider that are useful and needed for the economic professional formation: a) Fundamentals of accounting b) Financial accounting c) Management accounting d) Entrepreneurial accounting e) Other accounting disciplines f) Cannot decide	
6.	Do you consider the number of class hours set by the study plan for the accounting disciplines? a) Sufficient b) Insufficient c) I cannot decide	
7.	To what extent the teaching – learning methods were used during the accounting disciplines within the graduated study program? a) Great extend b) Moderated c) Low extent	
8.	Do you consider that the economic environment has the ability to provide the economy graduates the needed accounting training to integrate them in the professional environment: a) Great extend b) Moderated c) Low extent	

No.	Question	Answer
9.	Can the studied accounting disciplines be considered relevant for the employment in the labor field? a) To a great extent b) Moderated c) Low extent	
10.	To what extent is the applicability of the accumulated accounting knowledge in the academic environment found in the professional environment? a) To a great extent b) Moderated c) To a low extent	
11.	To which extent the level of the accumulated accounting knowledge in the academic environment eases the access to the professional environment? a) Great extend b) Moderated c) Low extent	
12.	Which is the reason for the gaining of accounting disciplines in the economic environment? a) Passing the exam b) The content of the discipline c) The integration on the labor market d) The interest of gaining more knowledge e) Cannot decide	
13.	If, according to the study plan, no other discipline than Fundamentals of accounting will be studied, then a) I will have no problems b) I will partly face difficulties c) It will be very difficult d) I additionally go to professional training classes	
14.	Your opinion regarding the approaching mode of the accounting disciplines: a) The improvement of the teaching system b) The prevalence of accounting practice c) Both integrated d) Other methods, namely...	
15.	To what extent do you consider useful the subsequent development for your competences, through education and professional training, in the field of accounting after graduation? a) Great extent b) Moderated c) Low extent	

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