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Determinants of Student Employment in Poland

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Combining full-time studies with work is a controversial phenomenon that is explored in many countries. It is very popular in Poland for various reasons, including the conditions within the higher education system.

Higher education in Poland

Higher education in Poland is organized accordingly to the Bologna process. Students can pursue education at public or private universities. They can study in full-time programs (weekdays) or part-time programs (weekends or evenings). In Poland, full-time programs offered by public

universities are free of charge (the exception are usually English language programs). Payment for studies applies to all students in non-public higher education institutions (HEI) and in part-time programs at public universities. Part-time programs are by definition programs for working people. According to data from the Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2019, in the 2018–2019 academic year there were 392 HEI in Poland, with 1.23M million students. The majority (66%) studied in full-time programs, but the proportion of students in part-time programs (34%) was relatively high compared to other countries according to Eurostudent VI 2016–2018 [1]. In the 2018–2019 academic year, 73% of students studied at public universities, while 58% studied in public HEI full-time programs, i.e. non-fee-paying studies, so it can be concluded that the majority of students in Poland are in studies which are generally accessible. Admissions are based on the results of a matriculation examination. Students bear other costs related to their studies: travel, rent, etc. A relatively small percentage (18.5%) of students, received scholarships including scholarships for the best students and social grants [2].

Humanities (including education, arts, languages) and socio-economic studies (relatively less-time consuming), are very popular in Poland. Almost half of students choose such studies. Young people usually start their studies at the age of 19 or 20 (if they are graduates of a technical school). The weakness of Polish higher education is the low share of internships in study programs. For example, a full-time student at an economics HEI has a compulsory internship only during the bachelor's degree program, of at least 120 hours, which is to be completed in inter-semester breaks. Paid work can be counted as an internship. There are no official statistics on this subject, but various studies show that about half of full-time students in Poland are in paid employment.

Why do full-time students in Poland work?

There are four categories of reasons to work while studying in Eastern European countries [3]: 1) financial, 2) favorable labor demand, 3) a change in the nature of studies, which became more available for representatives of different social groups, including those less affluent, combined with more flexible studying conditions, e.g. fewer hours spent at university 4) the need to gain professional experience and build social networks. In Eastern European countries students often work to show their abilities and ambition due to the relatively low level of academic standards and the decreasing importance of degrees caused by the massification of higher education.

We suggest all of the above reasons are valid in Poland. We designed and conducted research on paid student work to confirm this hypothesis. The survey was an anonymous questionnaire and it covered all first-year students of a full-time master's degree program in economics at the Faculty of Economics, the University of Economics in Katowice in 2014–2017 (499 students: 2014—124, 2015—192, 2016—116; 2017—68; the average age was approximately 23).

They were students who had already obtained a bachelor's degree and who were about 1.5 years away from graduation and entering the labor market. In the research period, 52% of students worked in 2014, 49% in 2015, 54% in 2016, and 72% of students worked in 2017. The results showed that the main reasons for working were financial (45% of working students, four-year average) or financial combined with the desire to gain professional experience (38%). The level of remuneration was of major importance when choosing a workplace (43%), but the importance of acquiring new competences grew in the last year of survey. A small percentage of students planned to continue working in the same place after graduation (10.5%). More than half of the students who were not working were going to look for a job [4]. The possibility of combining studies and work depends not only on the cost of studying but also on how time-consuming study programs are. For example, economics is relatively less time-consuming than other programs and has a small proportion of laboratory classes. Universities often organize classes so as to reduce the costs and time allocated to commuting and, as a result, they schedule classes only 3 or 4 days a week. The remaining days (including weekends) can be devoted to work. Additionally, participation in lectures is usually optional (only seminars are mandatory). Employers willingly hire students on the basis of flexible contracts. The problem is, however, the frequent incompatibility of the type of work performed with the field of study. Work allows students to acquire general social competences, but rarely professional ones.

Student employment during a pandemic COVID-19—instead of conclusions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in the second quarter of 2020 the level of economic activity dropped. GDP in Poland decreased by 8.9% compared to the same period the previous year. The number of employed decreased slightly, but paid employment was lost mainly by those working on the basis of flexible, fixed-term contracts, beyond the statistics. All HEI in Poland have switched to online education. Students have more free time (they did not spend time commuting, working in the library, youth events, trips, etc.), but there are fewer job opportunities. The global student surveys conducted in May–June 2020 by CovidSocLab [5] showed that in Poland 11% of the surveyed students lost their job permanently, 18% temporarily, 11% had their salary reduced, and only 20% continued to work as before. Judging from these statistics, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to change the patterns of student employment.

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Combining study and work in Belarus: the effects of state job assignment

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This paper discusses the Belarusian practice of student employment taking into account the state assignment of work to graduates.

State regulation of the first workplace

Higher education in Belarus has a specific feature: there is a state regulation mandating the first workplace for graduates whose study was state funded. Currently, just under 45% of all students do not pay for their education, therefore their first job is according to the state assignment. Students do not like this rule because the state jobs are less paid than jobs in the private sector. In 2015, when Belarus joined the Bologna process, the country promised to follow Bologna principles, and the rejection of mandatory work placement was one of the main requirements of the Bologna system. However, this did not happen, and remains a problem for thousands of young graduates who want to make their own decisions about their place of work. This feature of the Soviet period, restored in 1997, is viewed by the state as the students working off their higher education and an easy way to fill unattractive (although necessary) workplaces.

Overall, student attitudes to labor employment are formed under the contradictory influence of state social policy, on the one hand, and their personal interests constructed by mass media and market ideology, on the other. The state