

job search websites and given basic skills that are necessary for a successful job search, such as, how to write a CV, how to compose a cover letter, how to search for vacancies, how to prepare for a job interview. Naturally, all these skills are not directly related to the profession or field of study, but without these skills, the chances of a student finding a suitable job that would require the skills and competencies acquired during education are reduced. Graduates of vocational education often cannot afford a lengthy search for a suitable job for financial reasons. This is why a vocational graduate is forced to accept the first job offers received while focusing on the promised salary, and not on employment in his or her area of study or career prospects. In fact, without the simple, perhaps auxiliary, but still very necessary skills, the employment effectiveness of graduates and, therefore, the effectiveness of education as a whole, suffers.

Notes

[1] For more details on the methodology and questionnaires, visit <https://memo.hse.ru>

To work or not to work during a PhD?

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A critical number of highly skilled graduates is considered a necessary condition for innovation, technological development, and economic growth. Nevertheless, despite the increasing number of PhD holders, a large proportion of PhD students do not make it to their thesis defense. The share of Russian PhD graduates who defended their thesis within the expected period has been steadily decreasing since 2007. Prior to then it was stable at around 30%.

In 2019, the dropout rate hit an all-time high, with 89.5% of graduates not defending their thesis on time. There are not many studies of dropout factors in Russia but public discussion views doctoral student employment, caused by low financial support, as one of the key reasons for the high dropout rate. Despite the widespread belief about the negative effects of employment on graduation outcomes, there is no empirical evidence for such a conclusion. This study investigates how student employment and the balancing of work and study relate to doctoral experience and graduation outcomes.

Student employment and studying process

In order to investigate the relationship between student employment and studying process we analyzed the data from a 2016 survey of PhD students at leading Russian universities [1]. The aim of this cross-sectional study was to assess the extent and types of their employment, their experiences of balancing work and study, and the main challenges that confront them. We explore how such factors as the place of employment, the type of contract, and the nature of the job affect their academic performance and professional experience.

The survey showed that 90% of doctoral students combine study with work. The most common type of employment is full-time work off-campus (34%). The place of employment has a significant correlation with career prospects. There are more PhD students planning to pursue an academic career among those who have a full or part time job at a university. The sphere of employment plays significant role in student perceptions of studying and university services. Students employed on-campus are more satisfied and have less difficulties with combining study and work. Those employed off-campus reports more difficulties and lower levels of satisfaction with the services provided by their university. Usually there is little connection between their jobs and their thesis topics, which can negatively affect their study. These students also see their supervisors less often. Most of these students plan to pursue a non-academic career after their graduation and the share of those who do not plan to defend their thesis is also higher in this group.

Student employment and graduation outcomes

The studying process is different for PhD students with different employment characteristics. But do these students differ in their graduation outcomes? To answer this question we collected a longitudinal dataset on doctoral students who studied at HSE University between 2008 and 2017 [2]. The dataset combines data collected during doctoral training and administrative data about students' outcomes, gathered in 2018, after graduation. The final dataset consists of 655 doctoral students. To characterize the relationship between graduation outcomes and student employment, a logistic regression was used with graduation outcomes (defense or dropout) as the dependent variable.

Only 36% of students had defended their thesis by 2018. Other students graduated without a defense (30%), were dismissed (19%), or withdrew before graduation (15%). Most doctoral students who get their degree defend their thesis within the expected period (4 or 5 years) or the year after (78% of full-time students and 79% of part-time students). Theoretically, a student can work on their thesis after withdrawal, but this is quite rare. The share of PhDs among those who graduated is much higher than among those who were dismissed or left the program (55% vs 5%). 39% of full-time students defended their thesis compared to only 29% of part-time. There are no differences

in completion rates between male and female students or between students from different fields of study.

The results of the logistic regression models showed that different factors play a significant role for students employed on campus or off campus. Students employed on campus have the highest completion rates. The critical success factor for these students is their position at the university. Students who have a research assistant position defend their theses more often than students who work as instructors or administrative staff at the university. Students not employed on campus are divided further into those not employed and those employed off campus. Employment itself has a negative impact on the outcomes. Non-working students have more chances of defending their thesis in comparison with students employed off campus. Among those employed off campus, those who decide to pursue a degree to build an academic career and plan to work in the university after graduation have more chances of defending their thesis. Participation in the advanced doctoral program, which has greater financial and academic support, has a positive impact for both groups.

Summary

Both parts of the research showed that employment does affect the process and the results of doctoral study. Cross-sectional data analysis showed that the characteristics of employment are connected with the doctoral students experience and those students who are employed on campus have more benefits during their study. Students with full-time off-campus work are the most vulnerable group in terms of the learning process. These students are already less focused on their study, they plan to work in non-academic fields, and they have the greatest difficulties in combining study and work. A longitudinal study showed that these students have less chance of defending their thesis. Combining study with work negatively affects the chances of a postgraduate student defending their thesis and thus contributes to the dropout rate. The exception is research positions at the university. Additional academic and financial support by the university is also an important factor of student outcomes. These findings might help to define the groups of students that are at risk and who should be targeted with support. In addition, they can be used as a basis for policy changes at the university and national levels.

References

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Differences in student work according to educational factors at a Hungarian university

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Introduction

In Hungary, since the 1990s, we have been talking about student employment as a phenomenon when students start working during their university studies. They either worked while studying or interrupted their studies and took a job. The boundaries between studies, work, and unemployment, and the output points have become increasingly blurred, so the start of a career can no longer be interpreted as a single closed process [1]. Student employment is a complex phenomenon, and during this transition period, student and employee status are constantly changing.

Based on EUROSTUDENT VI data, 39% of students in Hungary worked during the semester and 14% took up casual work. Nearly 40% of Hungarian students worked to cover their living expenses and would not be able to continue their higher education without paid work. In addition to financial reasons, gaining experience was an important motivating factor, and this type of employment was important for 25% of students. Gaining work experience was typical of young people, those in full-time students and students in a more favourable financial situation. In terms of educational level, work experience was typical for master's students [2].

According to previous large-scale studies investigating the relationship between the field of education and student employment, the proportion of working students is higher in the social sciences, arts, natural sciences, computer science and agriculture, while students studying medicine work less [2]. Study-related work is typical for students in the fields of computer science, engineering and economics, as employers in these fields are more interested in hiring students. However, according to EUROSTUDENT VI data, students in health care have often study-related jobs too [2].

In our research, the PERSIST 2019 database was used. We focused on the employment habits of students from the University of Debrecen (N=803), which has almost 30,000 students in 14 faculties.