

Working while studying: students in higher education – main conclusions of two pieces of research carried out with a theoretical focus¹

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Abstract

The phenomenon of paid employment among students in parallel with their studies is an increasing worldwide tendency; an ever growing number of economic analyses (see e.g. OECD) are focusing on this subject and its importance on the labour market. Certain studies attribute highly innovative features to future labour markets, and today's younger age group is considered to be an important player in the forthcoming fourth industrial revolution. At the same time, these research and studies pay little attention to certain characteristics of young people, such as the reasons behind 'early' part-time work and other background characteristics, although the understanding and exploration of these drivers can have an impact on the causes - such as employment characteristics and their correlation with studies, and the appropriate balance between learning and work. However, first and foremost, we should investigate the underlying characteristics.

In our study, we illustrate particular employment characteristics of students at two Hungarian-speaking higher education institutions, partly in a comparative way, but by presenting the important results. The data records of both large-sample youth surveys represent a specific crisis period, thus the research samples are comparable in terms of their representative assets and sample size. We can have an insight into the correlations between socio-demographic characteristics and student employment, that young people can be classified into different work value factors, that social capital endowment and its characteristics can be related to paid student employment, that the social activity of young people is basically low, although students in employment are more active and have significantly stronger attachment to their institutions than their non-employed counterparts.

In the future, higher education policy decisions are expected to facilitate young people's access to employment during their studies - as an alternative leisure option - to an increasing extent not least because of the tensions in European labour markets, the shrinking potential labour force on our continent and the increasing age and extent to which young people are expected to enter the labour market at an earlier age while continuing their studies.

Keywords: working while studying, work values, social capital

1. Introduction

Institutions of higher education are important agents of adult socialization. International data (OECD 2012, 2017) suggest that there is a type of non-traditional student in this milieu for whom simultaneous working and studying is playing a more and more important part. Research results show that the future employment of the youth is greatly helped by work experience gained during their studies (NCES 1998, 2020, HERI 2012). Along with students' diverse free-time activities paid work is something of a novelty

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in the examined institutions of higher education but can become crucial from the point of view of the future labour market. Students' attitudes may also project certain future tendencies for the labour market (Sanaullah 2018, Szőcs 2021).

2. Paid student work as a kind of (career) mobility

A dilemma may arise, namely, whether we can talk about students' social mobility (intra-generational mobility) in connection with full-time students when even the specialized literature has not yet addressed this question. Based on our empirical approach (HERD 2012², N=1.118; Szőcs 2021; Szőcs 2024³, N=1.043) we can talk about factors helping students' intra-generational mobility, one type of which is doing paid work in addition to studying. We have two complex arguments to support this:

- As international tendencies show, almost two-thirds of students in higher education do paid work in addition to studying; from 15 to 30 per cent of them regularly do paid work; therefore, we are of the opinion that students' intra-generational mobility can begin during their university studies.
- Moreover, we can be certain that our statement is correct under the following conditions: (1) if we forget about one kind of interpretation of mobility as an exchange program between foreign students implanted into us by mobility programs; (2) if we abstract from the original interpretation of the word mobility also used in sociology and pedagogy (3) if we take into consideration that as much as it can be demonstrated that there exists a well isolated and identifiable student group who regularly do paid work in addition to studying and thereby acquire competences and have already a better quality of life.

We believe that paid employment during studying can help later intra- and intergenerational mobility. At the same time, even during this period, progress may occur in the students' lives themselves, in so far as it indicates a better quality of life as compared to the earlier one. But concrete progress as compared to earlier features of career can be only understood on an individual level. We have not measured in these researches this and it could be measured only longitudinally.

Working for a salary while completing studies is a good transition for students towards the world of employment, which is a "harbinger" of their professional/intergenerational mobility. According to Teichler-Jahr (2001), Richters-Teichler (2006) and Rivza-Teichler (2007), it is also a part of the preliminary stages or landmarks that a student undertakes to find a steady working life, and just as important, as participation in international exchange programmes, which also provide opportunities to acquire languages and other competences. We can assume not only aspirations for mobility behind paid work done in addition to studying but also the role of attitudes. We believe that attitudes are formed, first of all, by social background (deriving from socialization and peer groups); therefore a close connection can be assumed between them.

Quintini (2015), chief economist of OECD, does not only mention the coexistence of studying and working as a tendency. She also urges the studying actors in higher education to acquire adequate skills without delay, thereby adjusting themselves to the fast changing requirements of the labour market: *„The combination of work and study has been hailed as crucial to ensure that youth develop the skills required on the market so that labour transitions from school to work are shorter and smoother”* (Quintini 2015:5).

3. Are students ready for the changes and requirements of the labour market?

No, they are not; nowadays it appears to be infeasible. But, still, what can students expect on the labour market of our rapidly changing world? What work opportunities and conditions wait for them in the future and how much are they prepared for the changes? We have shortly brought here important results of three futurology researches: the ISS 2020 Vision⁴ (2013), Morgan (2014), and The Future of

² HERD 2012 research (Higher Education for Social Cohesion - Cooperative Research and Development in a Cross-border Area)

³ SAPI „Youth and labour market” research, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania 2023. 12. 01. – 2024. 04. 30.

⁴ For more detail see:

Jobs Report (2023).

The first one, carried out by the Fast Future Research Company⁵ on behalf of the British government, tried to predict, for the next 10 years, those occupations which had not existed 10 years before. According to the authors, the advancement of the digital world, environmental protection, looking after aging societies and commercial space travel will influence the emergence of these occupations. According to this - without being exhaustive - we can expect to witness some unusual professions: space travel guide, long-distance surgeon, data waste manager, time broker, personal brand builder, networking social worker, re-forester, waste redesigner, nostalgist and quarantine officer. In parallel with these, some existing professions are also predicted to come to the fore, such as wellness counselling or alternative vehicle development. In other words, the 10/7 rule will come into effect: 7 out of 10 kindergartners will choose a job that does not currently exist. Another significant figure is that the next generation will change jobs on average 12 times (ISS 2020 Vision).

Morgan (2014) listed five key trends shaping the World of Work:

- New behaviors: *"new employee behaviors entering organizations are challenging the conventional idea of how employees work and what they expect from an organization"* (Morgan 2014:4).
- Technology: *"technology decisions are now in the hands of anyone and everyone within an organization, not just IT or management. Cloud-based technologies should decrease the time to deploy, make upgrades and deployments easier and faster, and allow organization to put together their own stacks made up components from various vendors"* (Morgan 2014:6).
- Millennials: *"by the year 2020 millennials are expected to make up just over half of entire workforce...this new workforce brings with it a new attitude about work... a different set of values, and different approaches to how work should be done"* (Morgan 2014:13).
- Mobility: *"allows employees to stay connected and working even when they are on the go. This helps make employees location independent"* (Morgan 2014:15).
- Globalization: *"everyone everywhere, is connected"* (Morgan: 20).

Let's take an important look at The Future of Jobs Report⁶ (2023), which reveals a diverse perspective on the prospects for the global labour market between 2023 and 2027:

- Global macro trends and changes are creating an increasingly complex environment for policy makers, employers and workers, and uncertainty and volatility remain significant.
- Although skill issues are still severe, they have consolidated somewhat since the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), and Generation Z (youth under 25), are the second most frequently cited priority group in each region.
- The future of labour can be adjusted towards better outputs, and the leaders' present-time political, economic, and investment decisions will shape outcomes and future opportunities.
- This report undertakes the task of mapping of the possible evolution of jobs and skills over the next five years. The results outline the expectations of businesses for a range of macro trends affecting their operations. Trends that span from technological transition, to macroeconomic and geopolitical perspectives, environmental transformation, demographic trends and

http://www.publications.issworld.com/ISS/External/issworld/White_papers/ISS_2020_Vision/

⁵ See in more detail: <http://fastfuture.com/>

⁶ See in more detail: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf

consumer demands are all forecast to drive industry transformation over the next five years (World Economic Forum 2023).

4. The effects of student employment

Of course, student employment has not only positive but also negative aspects, but here we are now focusing primarily on positive consequences.

According to Lucas – Ralston (1997), working while studying is a compulsion with positive effects. Wolbers (2003) mentions working alongside studying as a constraint that helps finance studies, whose effects can ensure good returns for both students and employers. Smith – Taylor (1999) think that students acquire incorporated knowledge and skills by employment. Hunt (2002) highlights its function as avoidance of taxpaying. Curtis –Shani (2002) considers it an advantage aiding later employment. Students who work while studying emphasized the advantages of applying theory in practice besides gaining a better understanding of the working of the labour market.

Twenge (2017) pointed out that young people have an increasing demand for community-based activities that also provide them with a source of energy as a form of social capital. Quintini (2015), Neyt et al. (2018) and Pastorella-Zimmermann (2019) highlight the individual and social benefits of working alongside studying, as it provides an advantage in terms of labour market placement over students who are not in the labour market.

5. The effect of employment on study results

According to Stern and Nakata (1991), in the USA, a measurable and permanent number of student workers were already recorded in the 1960s as a result of the first surveys, in the course of which a dominance of negative effects was found.

Volkwein, Schmonsky and Inn (1989) did not find any negative effects on study results even in the case of students working long hours. Astin (1993), however, reports that full-time student employment has an unambiguously negative effect and causes dropouts. Tinto (1993) warns that student employment affects the whole of the study experience. Employment does not only determine the time of university studies but also narrows down the scope of other possibilities for students. The relationship between student work and average grades has been examined in several studies. Based on Hay – Lindsay (1969), it can be concluded: that there is no significant difference between the study performance of those working short hours and those not working (less than 15 hours/ week). Hammes – Haller (1983) showed that the study results of working students were better than of those not working. The features found with students working in a good time balance were the following: high-level performance, sophisticated organizing skills, more friends, and more relationships. Gleason (1993) did not find any general, statistically significant difference in study results between working and non-working students but noted that the grades of students dropped if the number of their working hours grew. Pascarella et al. (1994), in a long follow-up study including 3 thousand students and 23 campuses, found long-term cognitive growth with working students, in interpretation, comprehension, mathematics, critical thinking and other study results. In many cases there is no connection between work and studies.

According to Curtis and Williams (2002), working does not help studies because, in many cases, there is no connection between work and studies or, because less time can be spent on studying, moreover, students:

- miss classes, lectures
- spend less time studying, reading, or preparing
- use libraries less
- perform less well on exams and tests
- see their stress and exhaustion level grow.

6. Negative effects of working while studying

Smith and Taylor (1999) observed the negative effects of working while studying in many cases, which mainly manifested in preparation for classes. According to Metcalf's (2001) findings, later confirmed by Twenge (2017), the time spent sleeping had to be reduced. Some studies point out that student work

increased the time necessary to complete studies. To sum up the above-said, several differing views have been formed about the effects of student work on study results. Some examinations have shown that student work is potentially harmful, while others have come to the conclusion that it is completely normal and has advantages already during the university years. Several researchers have called attention to the fact that the negative consequences of student employment manifest as extra time needed to complete studies.

7. Some of our research results

We wish to emphasize that our research includes regular students. We observed that more than half of the students also undertake work in addition to their studies. This trend, which is becoming more and more significant internationally, is also increasingly evident in Hungary (Szócs 2021, 2022). In the empirical part of our survey (qualitative own research; HERD 2012 & SAPI 2024 quantitative research), we addressed a number of questions to the members of the aforementioned group of students, who are at the same time present in education and the labour market. Our conclusion was that overall, more than half of our participants are characterized by working while partaking in higher education. At the same time, the proportion of students doing regular paid work is close to twenty percent.

Table 1: Socio- demographic background & regular paid work students – Comparative characteristics based on the two pieces of higher education research (frequency in percentage)

Overrepresentation of women in paid work (men 12,5)	16,5	18,3
There is no significant correlation between the educational level of parents and the paid work of university students	-	-
There is a significant correlation between parents' labour market status and paid work (the effect of mothers' inactivity on their sons)	49,2	57,3
Overrepresentation of students with a poor financial situation (below average and poor) in paid work	34,3	38,7
The proportion of affluent university students in paid work is significant	14,2	16,7
Indicators of housing, religious affiliation and religiosity are not significantly related to employment	-	-
Regularly working students are overrepresented in the planned future labour market placement in the university's county	15,5	13,8
Among university students who regularly work, a lower degree of emigration intention can be detected	14,1	11,8

In addition, we were able to reveal a group of students who are in a special situation: students who regularly work during the academic year accounted for twenty percent of the respondents, MA students who are preparing to enter the labour market with a purposeful intention to do so, who are most interested in expanding their personal network of contacts, knowledge and experience, thus considering the enrichment of their social capital as their primary interest. These observations suggest that these students have a high sense of self-fulfilment, while at the same time they are empathetic with their parents. There is no significant difference between students in and out of the labour market in terms of their attitude towards employment, thus it is their social background and early socialisation which lead them towards trying to take up a job while pursuing their studies. We identified five

different types of students who regularly undertake work: community-oriented and humane-minded; security-oriented and careerist; performance-oriented and impressive; leisure-oriented and comfort-loving.

Table 2: Factor analysis – work values (combined data analysis)

Work values	Factor analysis Max-likelihood KMO=0.912, explained variance 49,92%				
	<i>community-oriented humane</i>	<i>security-oriented careerist</i>	<i>performance-oriented self-fulfiller</i>	<i>experience-oriented impressive</i>	<i>leisure-oriented comfort-loving</i>
be useful to society	,675	,115	,209	,212	,100
give you the opportunity to help others	,667	,085	,172	,147	,203
to meet people	,543	,211	,191	,369	,119
secure job	,149	,726	,010	,172	,106
high available earnings	-,081	,598	,177	,077	,385
good advancement opportunities	,039	,567	,345	,135	,287
announced job	,220	,528	,087	,245	-,055
family time	,241	,508	,131	,276	-,058
professional challenge	,192	,100	,769	,211	,058
further training is provided	,248	,266	,511	,186	,195
work should be responsible	,405	,099	,542	,159	,150
performance orientation	,108	,146	,507	,070	,364
the workplace should have a good atmosphere	,306	,260	,098	,786	,146
provide a sense of success at work	,266	,346	,243	,631	,087
work should be interesting	,213	,266	,300	,616	,161
work should not be strenuous	,245	,077	-,018	,054	,632
flexible working hours	,070	,064	,198	,216	,632
company to be famous	,071	,051	,360	-,064	,508

In terms of social capital, we observed that it is available through institutional circumstances

(friendships, contact with other students and professors, trust, intra-institutional activities) tends to characterize a higher percentage of students who regularly participate in employment during the academic year in comparison to those who do not.

Table 3: Social capital – student paid work and relations (combined data analysis)

Student paid work		Relation with students $p=0,043$	Relation with friends within the institution $p=0,24$	Relation with friends outside the institution	Relation with university lecturers/professors, etc.
does not work	mean	4,9022	7,4392	6,6712	2,4252
	N	1214	1203	1205	1212
	variance	1,95027	1,94665	1,93237	2,4657
work	mean	5,1652	7,7389	6,8075	2,7142
	N	756	737	739	742
	variance	1,90819	1,75172	1,71274	2,52421
all	mean	4,9979	7,5532	6,7132	2,5375
	N	1970	1940	1944	1954
	variance	1,93828	1,88327	1,8574	2,4952

However, the situation is reversed in terms of activity within the institution (mainly during classes, in connection with classes): it is significantly higher among students involved in paid work. Trust in the institution (managers, lecturers, students) is also significant for students involved in paid work, i.e., it are more characteristic of them. We see the reason for this in the greater need to expand acquaintances, i.e., the network of contacts, and in the perceived special type of attitude of those who regularly participate in student work.

Table 4: Social capital – student paid work and other aspects

Student paid work		Relation with parents $p=0,014$	Activity within the institution $p=0,004$	Trust in the institution $p=0,012$	Satisfaction with the institution	Social activity
does not work	mean	32,8322	32,6983	23,4471	12,7950	3,3957
	N	1207	802	5,35813	561	513
	variance	5,3763	6,76786	832	4,97376	3,38559
work	mean	32,4861	36,7678	25,8922	13,3548	3,4951
	N	743	130	5,36534	310	307
	variance	6,15434	7,73517	126	4,98118	3,42747
all	mean	33,5255	32,9742	23,6169	12,9943	3,4329
	N	1962	932	958	871	820
	variance	5,61521	6,94039	5,37404	4,98076	3,39958

Our results confirm the results of Pusztai (2013) and Fényes (2019), which are close to our topic, in which they highlight that student employment is not only related to the lack of economic capital, but also requires social capital. From the data of the social capital indices, we can also infer the positive, integrating effects, which Pusztai (2015) identifies as a new type of resource, the social capital of the campus, in her research results on institutional contexts.

Our research confirmed that those who work several hours a week labour not only becomes a habit, but they also spend a significant amount of time with their friends. In the course of the investigation of another aspect, we found that work, leisure activities and hobbies coexist, i.e. employment is a form of leisure activity for students. Upon examining the motivations of finding a job, the leisure aspect of employment was also significant in addition to the material aspect.

Following the analysis of the qualitative data, we examined the students according to six criteria, which can be used as a source for further, mainly quantitative, research.

- Significant differences were observed between "students who work during school hours (including holidays and vacations) and seasonal student workers in summer".
- On the basis of the use of earnings from employment, there is a distinction between 'empathic as well as hedonistic types of students'.
- In terms of employment motivations, there are separate groups of "those who seek to accumulate economic capital and those who aim to increase social capital".
- On the basis of demands associated with work and studies, the participants can be divided into two groups: students with qualitative aspirations (who try to integrate their work into their field of study) and students with material aspirations.
- On the basis of employment and other aspects of student life ('studies, hobbies, human relations'), we can distinguish between 'students who excel at combining work and studies and those who are pathfinders'.
- There are "recessive online and dominant offline jobseekers" in terms of job search and acquisition.

As a summary of the qualitative data, we can conclude that students who work and study at the same time live their university life consciously, while at the same time have a prospect of entering the labour market. This kind of multifaceted capital investment pays off in the short term, although several students expressed hopes that their sacrifice would lead to a smooth and rapid entry to employment following their graduation.

8. Conclusions

Our outcomes suggest that it is important to study the drivers and impacts of student employment, not only because it provides a reliable picture of the future labour market, but also because it can provide insights into the motives and work attitudes that are shaped by social background and socialisation. We assume that these attitudes will be extended, and perhaps even refined, by the acquisition of work experience and by adaptation to labour market requirements. We also suggest that working alongside studies can also be considered as a potential area of social capital, whose impact goes beyond the limited functioning of economic capital and the constraints of material status.

Our opinion is that it is worth paying attention to the interactions between regional and local labour markets and to create channels that are sensitive to labour market supply and demand conditions. The expected growth of dual training in higher education could be an important instrument in this process. As a less typical form of employment, matching supply and demand, i.e. aligning student tasks with labour market conditions, could become an important future endeavour from an educational policy perspective. In order to provide high-quality services, both for education-related and non-education-related careers offices, more intensive institutional support is necessary to facilitate the integration of student work into studies. Improving job opportunities for students and assistance for disadvantaged students could also be a useful future project.

A number of pedagogical aspects lead to the conclusion that regular student work during the

school term can have a negative impact on academic performance and lead to drop-outs. It is important to balance student work and studies and to provide related institutional support. Given that young people are the future main players of the labour market, it is important to support the expansion of student work, on the one hand to increase the efficiency of the transition from school to work and, on the other, to have a positive impact on students' employment aspirations.

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