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EMPLOYED STUDENTS IN GEORGIA: EXPERIENCE AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract

The shortage of jobs in the labour market, the difficulty of efficient employment, the often unjustified requirement for work experience by employers, are the reasons for the high unemployment of the youth. Due to this, students of higher education institutions try to combine study with employment that creates multiple contradictions, reduces the level of education, leads to physical and mental exhaustion of students, which, ultimately, dramatically deteriorates their health and decreases the quality of their training. The aim of the survey was to evaluate the possibilities of combining education and employment through research, main reasons and motives for employment, the impact of employment on academic performance, as well as to determine the effect of employment on the rational use of time budget and future career advancement of students. The study published for the first time is mainly based on the materials of the sociological survey conducted by the authors in 2018-2019. Also, data from the National Statistics Office and research materials from various organizations and individual researchers have been used. The survey revealed the irrational, intensive nature of students' labour activities and its negative consequences. In order to provide high quality workforce to the Georgian labour market, it is necessary to strictly regulate the labour activities of students and, in the long run, to introduce a flexible and mixed regime of the educational process.

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Keywords: Student, education, employment, labour market, working conditions



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1. Introduction

Unemployment has been a major social problem in Georgia for the last thirty years. Despite its declining dynamics, it still remains a major threat to the formation of a stable society. Unemployment is particularly high among young people that increases their social dissatisfaction and enhances immigration sentiment. Intensive labour immigration of the youth lowers the labour potential of the country and further aggravates the demographic crisis. The labour market of Georgia increasingly demands young skilled workforce. However, due to irrational segmentation of the market, young people obtain employment mainly on the secondary market, which often leads to frustration. That is why part of the youth tries to acquire certain work skills from their student days, in order to be able to find higher-paying jobs after graduation and to establish themselves more firmly.

2. Problem Statement

Due to a high unemployment rate among the youth in Georgia that has been continuing for years, the demand of students for employment has increased. They expect that after the graduation, they will become more competitive. The article discusses the link between the students' labour activities and learning outcomes.

3. Research Questions

The motivation of students for employment, their professional orientation, ways of finding a job, fields of employment, content of work, working regime and working conditions of employed students, academic performance, gender-related specifics of employed students.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the survey was to study the experiences that students get through employment and to identify the problems arising as a result of combining learning and work, as well as to assess the appropriateness of combining learning and work during the study period.

5. Research Methods

The study is based on the information obtained from a selective sociological survey that has been conducted by the authors in 2018. The information was processed using the SPSS program. A structured questionnaire was applied as a research tool that included 24 questions with up to 140 possible answers. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. The study was conducted by face-to-face survey and by random selection, which involved 458 respondents. Undergraduate 3rd and 4th year students were interviewed. Selection was made according to employment sectors and areas of activity.

The paper also uses and generalizes information from the National Statistics Office, papers of Georgian scientists working on youth issues in our country and materials of the researches conducted by international organizations.

6. Findings

6.1. Motivation for the employment of students

According to the international research Eurostudent VI, the average age of students in Georgia is very low, 22. The reason for this is that after graduating from general education schools, most of the entrants become students of higher education institutions. In addition, it was found that the student employment rate is small compared to other countries (30%) that is partly due to the shortage of jobs in the labour market. The motivation for work, according to researchers, is to acquire the skills, which are necessary for the labour market (Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe 2016-2018, 2018.).

Our research also confirms students' aspirations to gain formal work experience. This is due to the fact that the employer is focused on selecting more experienced staff from among the young people who have graduated from higher education institutions. A person with high qualifications who has already worked in his area, is given precedence over a young, inexperienced specialist. "What can we do? All employers require work experience, „record of service"- this is how the respondents explained the main motive for their employment. However, in addition, other interests were identified (Figure 1).

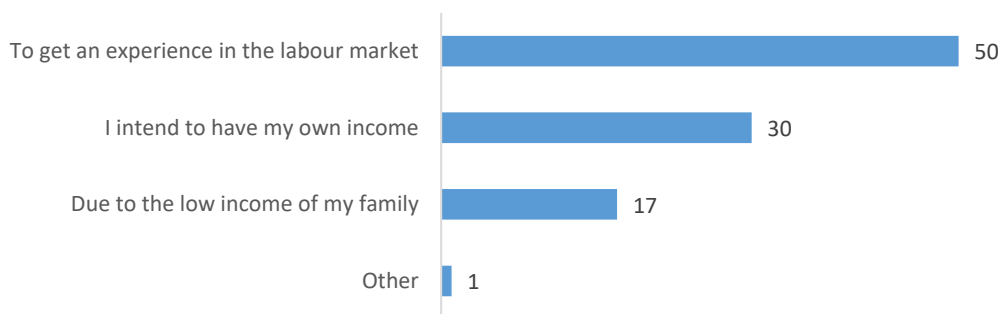


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents according to the answers to the question: “Why did you decide to work when studying “? (%)

At present, Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) is only \$ 4274 (2020). One in five people is below the absolute poverty line, the Gini coefficient is 0.37 (2019), 12% of the country's population, or 441 thousand people receive a subsistence allowance. In such a situation, it was expected that most of the young people would refer to small family income as a motive for work. However, it turned out that every third respondent intends to be established in the labour market and achieve economic independence before the completion of studies.

In the Georgian society that is undergoing transformation, given a still high unemployment rate and high prices of consumer goods, distorted competition and partially priced health and education services, an overly selfish pursuit of personal happiness has been identified among the values of the youth studying in higher education institutions. A considerable portion of students has started looking for high-paying jobs. They do their best to achieve greater welfare, something they could not have achieved if they were financially supported by their parents and in the period of study. Obviously, the pursuit of economic

independence achieved through one's own labour is also to be welcomed, but when this is done at the expense of the time required for learning, it leads to unjustified losses of human capital.

6.2. Professional Orientation of Students and Ways for Looking a Job

It turned out that the surveyed respondents had an average of 1-year work experience. They have started looking for employment much earlier.

It was revealed that when choosing a profession, a hedonistic approach is important that considers having more opportunity to find a job in the labour market by a given specialty and higher probability of getting a high salary (54%). Only for 2/5 of the respondents, the chosen specialty is relevant to their own interests. Unfortunately, due to the unfavourable situation in the labour market, entrants have less freedom in choosing a profession. There is a severe shortage of jobs in the labour market. Often their aspirations are limited and they have to obey the strict demands of the market. The influence of parents and friends turns out to be negligible when choosing a profession and specialty (3%). On the other hand, parents take many efforts to employ students. In particular, when looking for a job, every fourth respondent used the help of acquaintances of their parents from the fields of their interest. Unfortunately, resorting to relatives and friends working in the areas of their interest in Georgia is still a preserved practice when seeking employment. The labour market infrastructure is still weak. In particular, only 13% of respondents applied to employment agencies, while 8% of employed students used the announcements published on the Internet and in the press. There are only few petitions from schools (5%), with the completely absent role of trade unions. 43% of employed students applied directly to employers. It is also noteworthy that together with the participation in the competitions, this way of finding a job was used more by the respondents employed in the public sector, while those employed in the private sector mostly got jobs with the help of the acquaintances of their parents.

6.3. Area of employment and nature of labour

According to the 2017 survey of graduates of vocational education programmes of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia, every third graduate is unemployed because they are mainly offered low pay or required to the work experience, which they do not have.

Every fourth employed graduate considers that his/her qualifications are more than required by the job (Youth Attitude Survey on Higher Education and Internship in Georgia. Research Report 2017, 2018). This situation is conditioned by the fact that at the current stage of economic development, the demand in the Georgian labour market is mainly for low-skilled jobs.

According to the 2018 data of the Employment Programmes Department of the Social Service Agency, the main demand is for the "blue-collar" workforce, whose qualification requirement is limited to low- and medium-level skills. The employer is mainly the non-governmental sector (82%). Vacancies are mainly announced in the field of trade and services, for the positions of salesman, cashier consultant, cleaner, cook, administrator, office manager, etc. (Analysis of Georgia's Labour Market, 2019, 2020). A similar situation was confirmed by our survey as well. Accordingly, four-fifths of our respondents work in the private business sector, with their main areas of activity and positions being almost the same. In particular, 31% of them are employed in trade, 26% - in the service sector and 25% - in the financial

(banking and insurance) sector. Students mainly work as salespeople, cashier-operators, office managers, credit officers, insurance agents, registrars, etc.

When assessing their own employment, respondents working in the field of trade state that their work is uninteresting, monotonous and gives nothing new (36%), provides a low income (21%). 73% of those working in this field do not participate in any training for professional growth. That is why they fail to provide the employer with rational or other innovative ideas about a better organization of labour. The only reason they continue working in this field is that "they still get some income." They want to have their own income. The same is the order of similar answers in the service sector, although the inconvenience the respondents experience in the field of trade is aggravated by the fact that the workplace is far from home. This increases transportation costs, which constitute a considerable share within their total revenue. Unlike others, the persons employed in the financial sector complain, most of all, of low incomes; however, they are confident that they are growing professionally or developing, at least, some work skills. Indeed, 2/3 of the employees in this field state that they periodically undergo professional training.

Finally, a causal analysis of students' employment revealed that expectations for employment decisions are largely met (Table 1), although not in the order shown in Figure 1 and not to the degree they expected to achieve. This is confirmed by a study of their working conditions, the time worked and remuneration.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "What do you like and what do you not like in your current activity?" (%)

What do you like about your current activities?		What do you dislike about your current activities?	
I am acquiring at least some work skills	29	The work is meaningless, monotonous and gives nothing new	28
I am getting at least some remuneration	24	It brings low income	27
The work is light and does not require much responsibility	14	The workplace is far from home	13
Free working mode	12	The work is demanding and difficult	9
The socio-psychological environment is favourable	12	Does not allow combining study and work	8
Other	8	The socio-psychological environment is unfavourable	6
		Other	9

Source: Compiled by the Authors.

6.4. Work Mode and Working Conditions

The survey found that the majority of respondents' jobs are permanent (57%), with one in four having a temporary or seasonal job, while one in six students works part-time. Most of the employees in the financial and trade sectors have permanent jobs, while persons with temporary and part-time jobs are more employed in the service sector. It was revealed that two thirds of the respondents have a normal mode of work. However, every fourth pointed out that their work is physically hard or requires great psychological stress. This is indicated by the respondents who have seasonal or temporary jobs.

Also noteworthy is the fact that those working in the private sector than in the public sector complain more often of working conditions.

Labour motivation also varies according to working conditions. In particular, the main reason for employment of respondents with normal working conditions is the acquisition of skills required by the labour market, for those with light working conditions- their own income and for those working under hard working conditions- low family income.

Studies show that students employed in Western European countries work an average of 23-28 hours per week, in Eastern Europe more than 30 hours (Masevičiūtė et al., 2018). Georgia also belongs to the latter category. Our survey found that an employed student works an average of 35 hours a week. His working week consists of 5 days, with an average of 7 hours worked a day. It should also be noted that the worked hours vary according to the working regime and working conditions. Employees working full time (35 hours) and performing heavy physical work (42 hours) have the highest average weekly workload (Table 2).

Table 2. Respondents' worked time according to work regime and working conditions

According to the working regime	Worked time		
	Average per week (days)	Average per day (h)	Average per week (h)
Permanent	5	7	35
Temporary	5	6.7	33.5
Seasonal	4.7	6.5	30.5
With a reduced working day	4.4	5	22
With a reduced working week	3.6	8	28.8
Domestic work	3.4	5.2	17.7
According to working conditions			
Normal	5	7	35
Light	4	6	24
Physically heavy	5.1	8.3	42
Psychologically tense	5.2	5.2	27

Source: compiled by the authors.

According to the labour legislation, the work time in Georgia comprises 40 hours per week. According to the National Statistics Office, in the fields where most of the students are employed, the working time per week worked by the employees is above the norm. For example, there are 49 working hours in trade and services and 43 working hours- in financial activities. Our survey found that students' work time is not more than the statutory time of 38 hours in trade and 35 hours in the services and finance sector (35 hours).

A specific study revealed that the salary of a student employed during a given period is half of the average salary in the country, while the salary of those employed in the financial system is only one third of the average salary in this field. Students consider low salary as one of the negative aspects of their activities (Figure 2). The salary of employed students varies according to the working regime and conditions. They have the highest average hourly wages for seasonal work (\$ 1 and 61 cents) and for

domestic work (\$ 2), as well as for physically hard work (\$ 1 and 79 cents). It is almost the same in the main areas of employment, \$ 1 per hour and 43 cents on the average.

Unfortunately, the minimum hourly wage has not yet been established by law in Georgia. We think that this is hindered by a strong lobby of employers in the legislature. The fact is that low wages and poor working conditions increase the social dissatisfaction of young people (and not only) and lead to high-intensity labour immigration, which has become one of the most acute socio-economic problems in the country.

Thus, the survey has shown that an employed student spends a significant portion of the day in low-paying, unskilled activities. There is little time left for the learning process, which actually affects his/her academic performance.

6.5. Academic performance of employed students

The survey found that the Grade Point Average for the academic performance of employed students is 2.3, or C + (77-79). Only 35% of the respondents can attend the lecture regularly, 37% of the employed students attend half of the lectures and only almost a quarter (24%) of them miss the lectures and attend only the midterm and final examinations. The highest GPA was found to be earned by the respondents who attended all the seminars (2, 8). The academic performance of those who attend half of the lectures is relatively lower. Their GPA is 2.0 and that of the students who only attend the examinations- 1, 7. Only 16% of the latter category of students managed to pass the examinations in all subjects. It was found that the academic performance of employed students is influenced by the duration of employment, working regime and working conditions. The longer the duration of employment, the less the opportunity to attend all seminars and lectures. Therefore, the more frequent the cases of failing the examinations the lower the academic attendance. For example, of those who have been working for 2 or more years, 80% have only average and below average academic performance. The survey demonstrated that public sector employees study better than those working in the private sector. It turned out that this is due to better working conditions in the public sector. Reduced working day allows the employees enjoying better conditions to combine study and work and to have higher academic performance. It was found that the more time students spend on work, the lower is the learning outcome (Figure 2).

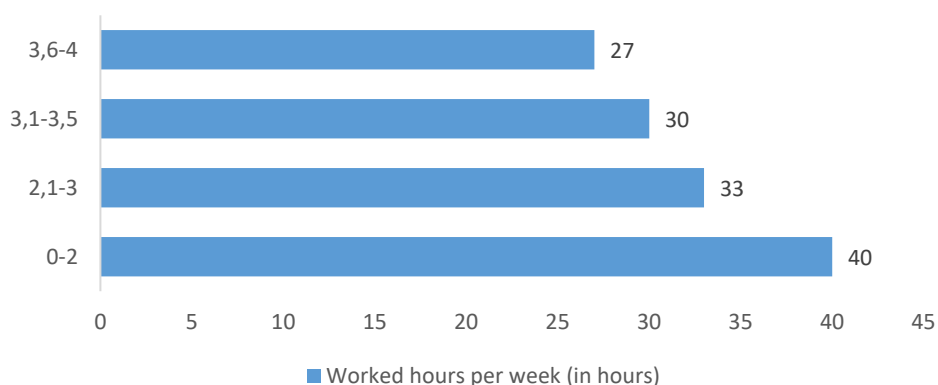


Figure 2. GPA according to the worked hours

6.6. Gender-related Specifics of the Work of the Employed Students

The survey has shown that the duration of employment of male students is longer than that of female students. Men tend to be more focused on gaining real work experience, while more important for women is to get formal work experience.

No significant gender differences have been observed in the main fields of employment. Women work in trade, financial sector and services, while men - in trade, services and financial sector. Men are more employed in full-time jobs, while women- in part-time jobs. Therefore, women are more able to attend lectures. Due to this, men tend more to fail examinations and to have lower academic performance. For example, women have a very high academic performance rate - 2.5 times higher than that of men.

Our survey revealed that creative activity of men is higher than that of women. For example, they propose innovations to their employers far more frequently.

Men are more likely to worry about large transportation costs, as well as about the disadvantages of combining work with learning. Instead, women are more likely than boys to express dissatisfaction with the low incomes they receive and at the same time, they feel that they are not learning anything new through work.

For researchers, the issue of integrating learning and work by a student has been the subject of active debate. Many empirical studies have been conducted on the example of both Europe (Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe 2016-2018, 2018) and individual countries. We would like to mention the studies conducted in Germany (Staneva, 2020), in France and Canada (Schuller, 2017), in Russia (Kliustov & Rumiantseva, 2018) and in Oman (Vicencioi & Banaag, 2019). The subject of heated debate is employment motivation, impact on academic performance, student's time budget and success of graduates in the labour market, as well as other issues.

In Georgia, a socio-demographic group of students has been a subject of research in terms of various aspects in parallel with youth research. In particular, their time budget (Kharadze & Dugladze, 2018; Tukhashvili, 2011), reproductive behaviour (Menabdishvili, 2017; Tukhashvili et al., 2018), immigration sentiment (Tukhashvili et al., 2018), health and self-care behaviour (Sulebaridze, 2017; Verulava & Jolbordi, 2018), students' attitudes towards higher education and internships, etc. were studies. Regrettably, the employed student's time budget and its impact on academic performance have been poorly studied.

According to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which also operates in Georgian higher education institutions, a student's workload is 50 hours per week. The survey found that an employed student works 35 hours a week. Therefore, for an average of 14 hours a day (students also study on Saturdays), a student is busy with study or work.

It is a well-known fact that people of this age need at least 7 hours for normal sleep in order to regain vitality. Therefore, they have only 3 free hours. A human being definitely needs time for eating, hygiene, physical exercise, transportation and social development. According to a study conducted with respect to a student's time budget in Georgia, the time required for eating and hygiene is 1 hour and 30 minutes, transportation time is at least 1 hour and 20 minutes (only between the higher education institution and home (Kharadze & Dugladze, 2018; Tukhashvili, 2011). Although, employed students need much more time to move between work, institution and home. It turns out that even 24 hours are not sufficient for the employed student to carry out all the above activities. The time required for such activities is deducted from

the time the employed students require for sleeping or study. Ultimately, this leads to the deterioration of their health and low qualifications.

The survey revealed an attempt by some of the employed students to undeservedly achieve better academic performance. Some of them try to defraud of undeserved scores from appraisers by referring to lack of time due to the work. Employed students exert a psychological pressure on lecturers with the following words: "I work and unfortunately, I cannot attend the lectures. Would you be as kind as to add a few scores for my activity;" "I work and therefore, I cannot earn enough points to pass the final exam, please help me;" „Could you please recover some seminars “. This mostly happens when the learning process is already over. Unfortunately, the learning process is more or less profaned.

There are a viewpoint and relevant projects as well regarding the fact that in order to further improve higher education and combine learning and employment better, more intense curricula need to be introduced extensively (3-year bachelor's programmes, 1-year master's programmes). We think this is in conflict with the interests of the development of Georgia's labour market. On the contrary, the strategic goal of our country is to maximize the expansion of the primary labour market and create high-paying jobs that requires highly qualified staff. This will not happen without the improvement of the educational market. Enhancement of the quality of learning requires the rational use of time, not its reduction. We should consider introducing a flexible regime of study time instead of reducing it.

In addition, students often ask to be employed during their studies. Instead, the focus should not even be on their employment, but on increasing the quality of their vocational practice, improving internship programmes in order to develop professional skills along with acquiring theoretical knowledge. The main goal should be to employ graduates instead of employing students.

Lacking the theoretical knowledge, graduates will not be able to get high-paying jobs. There is already a large number of graduates who are only suitable for low-level managerial. This happens at the time when the demand for new theoretical knowledge is growing in the context of the booming knowledge economy. This was confirmed by a survey of employers' demand in Georgia. For example, employers note that "Theoretical knowledge acquired through formal education is very important; this cannot be obtained by onsite retraining". The introduction of new equipment and modern technologies in all areas of activity requires a workforce armed equipped with new knowledge. The training centers operating in enterprises and organizations are not able to fully cope with this task. They do not take responsibility for it and they require the educational market to provide such well-trained staff." (Research of the Component of the Labour Market Demand, 2015.). High-quality, skilled workforce cannot be trained in such conditions of study and work in which our respondents currently carry out their activities. Therefore, we consider it expedient to regulate the issue of student employment at the legislative level as well. In particular, the Labour Law Code shall prescribe a limited working time for students. In our opinion, it should not be more than 20 hours per week, i.e. more than 4 hours per day. In addition, it should be prohibited for a student to work during night hours. It is likely that if free attendance at lectures is allowed, this will improve the rational combination of learning and work. Naturally, one may ask: Is not this a strict regulation for a poor country like Georgia? We think it is not. The main motive for student employment is to gain experience and not to escape poverty. In the formation of human capital, knowledge is no less important than

experience, especially for the labour market, where high-paying jobs must be created. This is the direction of the labour market strategy of Georgia.

7. Conclusion

To sum it up, the survey found that:

- Students are mostly employed by the private business sector.
- They are employed in the secondary labour market, in the jobs that are not relevant to their specialty, and in low-skilled positions.
- The main motive of their work is more the acquisition of the skills necessary for the labour market, and economic independence, rather than the pressure caused by poverty.
- Learning and work in a student's life can be combined with excessive tension and effort that deteriorates their health and academic performance. As a result, we get a graduate whose health is impaired and at the same time, who is a middle- or low-skilled workforce. Therefore, we consider it appropriate to strictly regulate students' labour, in parallel with expending assistance programmes for students from socially vulnerable families and introducing flexible, mixed regimes of teaching.

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