

## GRADUATING STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THEIR RELATION TO THE LABOUR MARKET

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*The goal of our research is to discover and analyze the impact of the Bologna process on students, who studied in Hungary's, Romania's and the Ukraine's Hungarian-speaking tertiary educational institutions. Due to high unemployment rate caused by the recent (2008) economic changes, university students graduating in 2009, who are facing the challenges of entering the labour market, are in a difficult situation. Having a university degree does not necessarily guarantee success in the labour market because of the expansion of higher education and the rapidly changing nature of the labour market. Graduating university students have to accommodate to these growing expectations, which necessitates that - apart from their higher educational studies - they have to obtain practical experience, as well as certain qualifications and competences that may partly be obtained during practical learning and partly at the institutions of adult education. Therefore, in our research, *The Impact of Tertiary Education on Regional Development (TERD)* we examined BA/BSc students, who participated in adult education besides their higher educational studies. Our aim was to map the different kinds of knowledge and skills that are required by BA/BSc students but are not provided by higher education. At the same time we intended to find out which are the special areas of adult education that students most often choose on in the hope of becoming successful in the labour market. The research was carried out among 1,361 students, who studied at Hungary's, Romania's and the Ukraine's Hungarian-speaking tertiary educational institutions, which places the research in a European perspective.*

**Keywords:** higher education, adult education, labour market, regional research.

### The research and its method

The research called, *The Impact of Tertiary Education in Regional Development (TERD)* intends to discover the effects of expansion of higher education on regional development and its consequences on social and economic changes which occurred in 1989/1990 in a region called Partium, which is a borderland area of Hungary, Romania and the Ukraine. The

TERD research was supported by OTKA (Hungarian Scientific Research Fund; T-69160 project), and in our analysis we used its database.

We carried out the research among Hungary's (University of Debrecen, College of Nyíregyháza, Ferenc Kölcsey Reformed Training College), Romania's (The Outsourced Institute of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University in Szatmárnémeti, University of Oradea, Partium Christian University) and the Ukraine's (II. Ferenc Rákóczi Hungarian Teacher Training College of Transcarpathia) Hungarian speaking tertiary education institutions in 2008.

The empirical research was based on a 21-page questionnaire and two blocks of questions directly referred to the participation in adult education of graduating BA/BSc students.

The sample of the research is representative in each faculty, as the students were asked to participate in the research according to their proportion. We took samples using the method of group questioning. Whole seminar groups were questioned on a random basis (N=1,361).

The first phase of the research was carried out in 2008 among graduating BA/BSc university and college students while the second phase of the research in 2010, among MA/MSc students. In this study we only focus on BA/BSc students' participation in adult education and their relation to the labour market.

Our main research question is the following: whether graduating students want to reach a better position in the labour market by taking part in adult education on purpose. Thus we wanted to know what kind of knowledge and skills they regard necessary to be more competitive in the labour market that are not provided their higher education institution.

We also wanted to find out those special fields of adult education that are graduating students consider as fundamental to being successful in the labour-market.

Our research has the following dimensions of understanding and exploring adult education: the socio-economic background of graduating students, the secondary studies of graduating students and their other studies in higher education, graduating students' experience and attitude's towards work, their purpose of participation in adult education, and finally, the graduating students' future plans.

Therefore the main goal of the research is to reveal the relation of graduating BA/BSc students who have participated in adult education with the labour market.

## Theoretical framework of the research

During the past few decades the social demands for higher education and its following institutional changes (expansion) have changed the system of higher education. Because of the massification of higher education, the labour market situation of recently graduated HE students has become difficult. One way of dealing with this problem is investing into human resources (Harbison, 1968; Varga, 1998) or more precisely into human capital (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961).

We assume that those higher education students who are taking part – or planning to take part – in adult education programmes are convinced that their investments will be profitable in the future.

All in all, we regard adult education as a way of improving human resource development, a way of improving human capital and participating students are expecting their investments to be profitable.

Finding a proper and widely acknowledged definition of adult education is not an easy task since it has lots of approaches and interpretations. We could cite definitions of scholarly or / and international organisations but we cannot start this because of lack of spaces.)

From our point of view adult education – in its broader sense – refers to all kinds of intended and planned educational activities of educating adults. However – in a narrower sense –, we interpret adult education as educating adults for the purpose of giving them knowledge which might help them to becoming successful at the labour market (Erdei, 2007:13).

During the research BA/BSc students had to choose between different types of adult education programmes (such as language courses, computer science, skill-developing training, driving course etc.) which can be gained through school-based and out-of school adult educational institutions.

The European dimension and significance of the research is highlighted by the fact that those countries (Hungary, Romania and the Ukraine) have recently implemented the European reform of higher education, known as the Bologna process (Kozma & Rébay, 2008; Szolár, 2009). This challenge meant structural change of the systems of HE in these countries, and undergraduate and graduate students have also had a major role in this process.

## Results

### General Features of BA/BSc students who participated in Adult Education

The analysis shows that 58.2% is the participation rate of adult education which means the majority of university and college students have taken part in adult education before and during their higher educational studies. Therefore, the large proportion of participating students underlines the significance of our research.

The most popular courses, programmes and qualifications were the driving courses (63.1%), foreign language courses (40.5%), and the qualifications of the National Register of Examinations (30.7%). Besides, the proportion of graduating students – who taking part in extracurricular activities (such as sport pursuit or music learning; 24.5%), and computer science (21.6%) are also considerable. The proportions of the participants in skill-developing training (14.9%) and post-secondary education and training (10.2%) are relatively low compared to courses such as driving courses or foreign language courses.

The vast majority of graduating students taking part in adult education prefer one (25.7%), two (15.3%), or three (8%) qualifications and trainings. The number of graduating students who have participated in from four to eleven trainings is not considerable, however, there is a relatively small proportion (4.8%) of students who participate in twelve or thirteen training and courses. Thus, we can assert, that the majority of BA/BSc students take the chance to study in adult educational institutions to acquire certain knowledge, skills and qualifications.

The majority of graduating students have taken part in adult education – besides their higher education studies – because they would like to have certain knowledge and skills, which are expected by the labour market and besides, personal interest also plays an important role in their participation. Foreign language courses, computer sciences, vocational education and training and post-secondary education are the most frequently chosen types of adult education in the aspect of labour market. As far as the skill-

developing trainings and driving courses are concerned less than one third of graduating students referred to them as needs to the labour market.

### The Socio-demographic and Socio-cultural Dimensions of graduating BA/BSc students who studied in Adult Education

As far as gender differences are concerned, it is clear that the proportion of women outnumber the proportion of men in the overall sample (70.2%) as well as in the sample of participants (71.6%) in adult education.

There are no significant correlations of participation in adult education and gender or the type of resident variables.

By analysing the impact of parents' school levels on the participation of adult education, we came to a conclusion that the fathers' school levels significantly (Chi-Square Test: \*\*\* 0,016) influence the level of their children's participation rate in adult education. However, the mothers' school levels do not influence it significantly (Chi-Square Test: 0,054), although the influence is strong.

Therefore, in the case of adult education, we can observe unusual effects of parents' school qualification on their children participation in adult education, since generally the mothers' qualification determines the intellectual development of their children, whereas in the case of adult education the fathers' school level have a stronger impact on their children's participation in adult education.

There is a considerable difference between the BA/BSc students and the BA/BSc students who have taken part in adult education concerning the school-leaving examination results. On the one hand, in the overall sample, 29.8% of graduating students have excellent school-leaving certificates, on the other hand, in the sample of participating graduating students 33.7% have excellent school-leaving certificate. In the overall sample the proportion of satisfactory (16.3%), and pass mark (3.8%), students having the majority, whereas this proportion in the sample of adult education participating students are 12.8% and 2.2%.

By making further analyses, we can assert that there is a significant (Chi-Square Test: \*\*\*0,000) correlation of one's school-leaving examination result and the participation rates in adult education. This means that the better the one's school-leaving examination result the more they take part in adult education.

In both samples the proportion of graduating students who came from state maintained secondary schools are more than 85%, this proportion of students who came from denominational maintained secondary schools are 12-13%, and finally this proportion of students who came from private and foundation maintained schools is 1.2%-1.6%.

There is a significant (Chi-Square Test: \* 0,021) correlation of the maintainer of secondary schools and the rate of participation in adult education. This means, that 58.6% of students from state maintained secondary schools, 64% of student from denominational maintained secondary schools, 31% of students from private maintained secondary schools and finally 100% of students from private maintained schools have taken part in adult education before and during their university or college studies.

49.5% of graduating students who have participated in adult education have at least one state-accredited language exam, while only 41.5% of the overall sample of students have state-accredited language exam.

We can conclude, that a significant (Chi-Square Test: \*\*\* 0,000) correlation exists between the participation in adult education and owning a language examination certificate. 70.6% of graduating students owning at least one state-accredited language exam – have participated in adult education, whereas 51% of graduating students who do not have any language exams have taken part in adult education.

This fact shows that those BA/BSc students who own at least one state accredited language exam have the knowledge and skills which derives from attending private lessons, courses, which are also forms of adult education.

#### Adult education participant graduating students' relationship towards the labour market

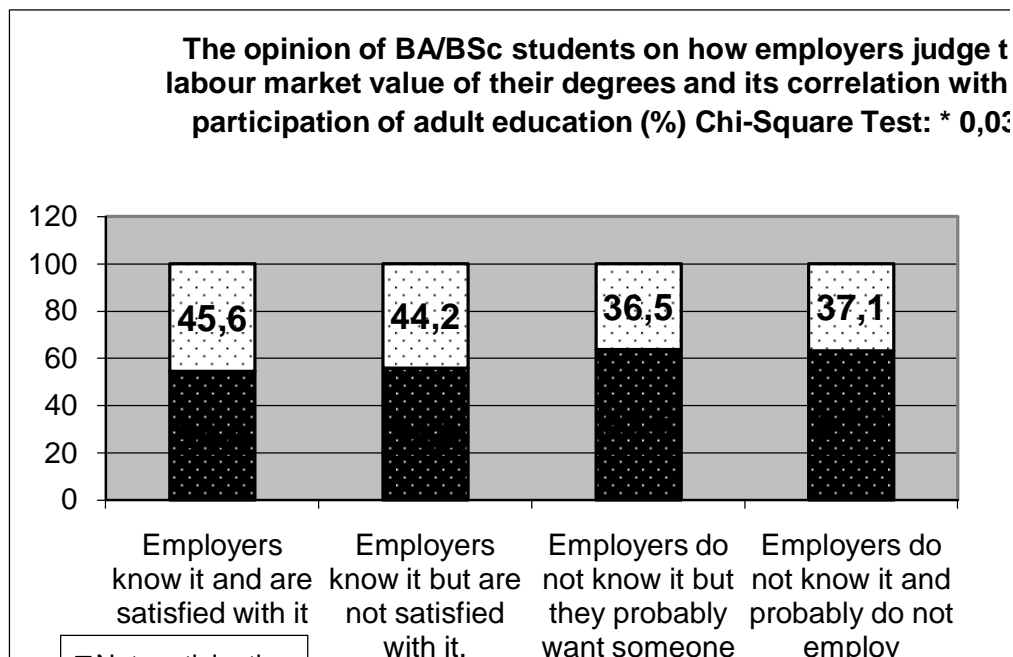
We examined the employers' judgement and opinion on the labour market value of BA/BSc student from the perspective of graduating students.

Nearly 40% of graduating students believe that employers do not have much knowledge of the value of BA/BSc degrees, although they hope that they will be employed with them. Approximately 10% of respondents are pessimistic about their future prospect with a BA/BSc degree and they think that employers do not know this qualification and would not be willing to employ them in the future with this qualification. A quarter of graduating students state that even though employers have certain information on this qualification, they are not satisfied with it. Similarly, a quarter of respondents said that employers know the BA/BSc degrees and they will probably employ these students in the future.

It is clear that there is a significant (Chi-Square Test: \* 0,030) correlation of all of these results and the participation in adult education. Those graduating students who assume that employers have certain information on the BA/BSc degrees are less active in participating in adult education, than those students who think that employers do not have any information on this qualification.

Thus, the phenomenon of participating in adult education can be interpreted as a critique against the BA/BSc qualifications, because those graduating students who reckon that employers do not have proper information on the labour market value of BA/BSc degrees are more active in participating in adult education during their higher educational studies in order to have certain knowledge, competences and qualifications to be more competitive when entering in the labour market.

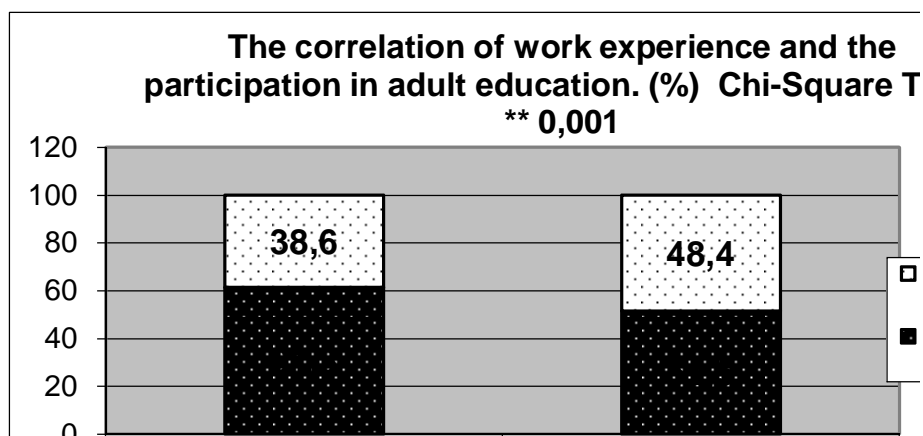
Figure 1. The correlation of the opinion of BA/BSc students on how employers judge the labour market value of their degrees and the participation in adult education (%)



70.9% of graduating students who have participated in adult education have worked during their higher educational studies to get some work experience in order to have more chances to get a job when entering in the labour market. On the other hand, the proportion of graduating student is less (67.2%) among those who have not participated in adult education, but have worked during their higher education studies.

There is a significant (Chi-Square Test: \*\* 0,001) correlation of the work experience and the participation in adult education and 61.3% of graduating students who participated in adult education worked during their higher educational studies.

Figure 2. The correlation of the work experience and the participation in adult education (%)



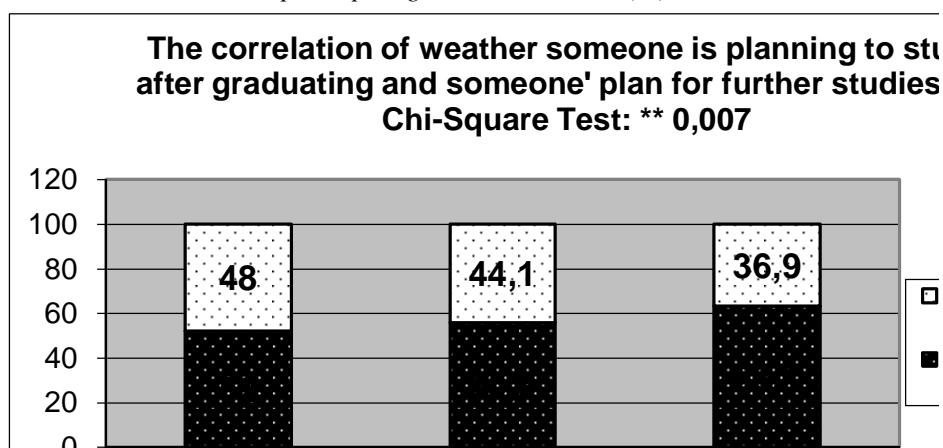
We also wished to know whether BA/BSc students are planning to enrol certain programmes or courses after graduating, and what sort of adult education programmes they are planning to participate in to obtain certain knowledge, skills and qualifications.

There is a significant (Chi-Square Test: \*\* 0,007) correlation of one's participation in adult education and their plans for studying in the future.

The proportion of participation in adult education is the highest (63.9%) among those graduating students who would like to have further qualifications in the future; and among those students who are not certain about their future studies this proportion is diminishing (55.9%). And finally, the rate of participation (52%) in adult education is the lowest among graduating students evidently refusing future studies.

As far as the future adult education programmes are concerned, the most popular were – similarly to the completed and the actual courses and programmes – the foreign language (62.4%) and the driving courses (35.2%). Qualifications of the National Register of Qualification (18.4%), computer science courses (11.6%), skill-developing courses (8.1%) and other courses (7.5%) are less popular for the future plans of graduating students, and finally only 13.7% are not planning to take part in adult education after graduating.

Figure 3. The correlation of whether someone is planning to study after graduating and participating in adult education (%)



## Summary

To summarise the major findings, we can assert that large numbers of graduating students have taken part in adult education – apart from their higher education studies – to obtain more knowledge, skills and qualifications in order to be more successful in the labour market.

The phenomenon of participation in adult education, on the one hand, shows openness to further studies, which can be regarded as an attitude and personal feature as well.

On the other hand, concerning the fact that the most dominant types of adult education are the driving courses and foreign language courses, and the costs of these programmes are relatively high – we can assume that the level of participation in adult education is not only an attitude and a personal feature, but rather an indicator of the parents' socio-economic status.

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