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Proposal Information

In my presentation, I wish to deal with a group of students in higher education who usually receive little attention: the students pursuing their studies while they have a full-time job and a family. This group of students belongs to non-traditional learners (c.f. Bron & Agelii, 2000; Kasworm, 1990; Novotný, Brücknerová, Juhaňák, & Rozvadská, 2019; Wolter, 2000). Learning in higher education and earning a degree in adulthood are interpreted as an investment into human resources. Since the socioeconomic status of an orientational family is of the utmost importance from the aspect of college or university studies, this area has been well researched. As there is a wide range of theories available about the influence of the orientational family, I decided to place the role of the procreational family as investing community into the focus of my examination.

One of the important objectives of my research is a thorough analysis of the problems of the coordination of family and job, so I placed my theoretical model in the section of the lines of education, family, and work. An examination of advanced studies, interpreted as

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investment into human resource, should cover the entire academic space and all the processes taking place there: from the decision to embark on studies, the completion of the courses, the success of the project, as well as the life of the student and professional communities.

Out of the dimensions of private life, the family background of an adult student is an indispensable dimension in any education–sociological research, first and foremost from the aspects of the decisions regarding education and the success of the educational career. At the orientational family, I wished to go beyond the traditional education–sociological theoretical theses and find out how the social capital accumulated by the family influences the decision of the individual to embark on advanced studies and their results and success in education.

I interpreted the decision of adults to pursue advanced studies as an investment into human resources (primarily in accordance with the observations of [Becker, 1975](#); [Rosen, 1977](#); [Schultz, 1961](#)). The individual utilizes the knowledge, skills, and expertise acquired during their studies in the labor market, where they expect a return and yield for their investment. In my theoretical approach, I therefore reached back to childhood and youth to survey the criteria and motivation for starting studies at a college or university. Here, I concentrated on the social capital manifested in the socioeconomic background and family circumstances of the individuals ([Boudon, 1974](#); [Bourdieu, 1984](#); [Coleman, 1988](#)).

The aforementioned factors do not only play a motivational role in decisions of pursuing advanced studies, but also they follow and influence the entire educational career of the person. I interpreted success in the context of higher education in accordance with the ideas of Bean and Bradley ([1986](#)); Heuser ([2007](#)); Kenny ([2008](#)); Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort ([2011](#)); and Pusztai ([2014](#)). Therefore, I did not narrow down success to the educational statistics such as grades and the commitment of the students to their studies/institution, but included the network of connections created by the individual in the educational space, the contribution of the institution, and factors outside education, such as physical and mental health, professional aspects, and private life.

Methods

I would like to find out about the individual motivations for entering into higher education, to learn about the major motivating factors, what experience preceded the decision, and which persons played a role in making the decision. I also sought an answer to the rarely asked question that whether the effects of social background so powerfully tangible in childhood and youth are also present when an individual makes

a decision to embark on advanced studies in adulthood. Partly in connection with that, I intended to acquire data about the reasons for starting higher education studies, the elements of the courses, the activities of the individuals during their studies, and the efficiency and results of the studies. The aim of the research is mapping the reasons why adult men and women decide to take up formal studies, and what role the social background, the procreational family plays in the process. The quantitative research into the life of adult students took place in the three leading higher education institutions of the Northern Plains region of Hungary: the University of Debrecen, the College of Nyiregyhaza, and the College of Szolnok, targeting the part time/correspondent students. The survey was conducted online and respondents themselves filled the forms electronically through the electronic student registration and management system of the three institutions. A total of 5,845 part-time students received it at the University of Debrecen, 2,814 at the College of Nyiregyhaza, and 1,122 at the College of Szolnok. A total of 9,781 students were involved in the survey in the region, and I received 1,092 completed and analyzable answer sheets. For the analysis, the explanatory variables were examined with cross-table and Pearson's χ correlation. A cluster analysis was performed, using the motivations for studying.

Conclusions

An analysis of the educational career of adult students revealed, in accordance with my expectations, that in a young age the decision regarding studying of higher education in the socioeconomic background is of decisive importance. However, a new scholarly finding is that, at an adult age, the family background ceases to be that decisive, its importance declines, and the current circumstances of the individual determine the decisions most powerfully. My hypothesis was that the more commitments an adult individual has, the less efficient they are going to be in their studies in higher education. The coordination of the various tasks and responsibilities was really more difficult for those with a full-time job and/or children, which appeared in the time devotable to learning, in the ability to take up extra tasks and the number of consultations at the college or university. My findings, however, suggest that the quality of the time devoted to learning is more important than its quantity to achieve the desired result. The efficiency indicators are considerably better at students who have children, and the higher the number of the commitments of a student is, the better their performance proves to be. I explain this noteworthy result by asserting that the competences acquired in a job and in family life positively influence studying abilities. The maximum quality time devoted to learning was complemented by competences, such as precision, ethical behavior, purposefulness, good task, and time management. While the tension between work and studies may easily be reinforced by external effects (e.g., absence from work and the

sometimes negative attitude of the employer), the family background proves to be a powerful support in coordinating the various tasks and commitments.

Keywords: non-traditional students, motivation, success

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