

TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG STUDENTS WHO TAKE UP GAINFUL ACTIVITY

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to assess the intention to leave one's current job among students who start full-time university education and take up gainful activity in the course of their studies.

Design/methodology/approach: The empirical material was obtained through a survey carried out by means of a questionnaire. The survey was conducted in 2023 on a sample of students of the Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management of the University of Szczecin who were starting their first-cycle full-time courses. The sample comprised 53 out of 205 respondents who were taking up gainful activity.

Findings: The investigated population of students who were engaged in gainful activity showed practically no skewness when it comes to the shape of the analysed construct of turnover intention. The distribution of the investigated variable develops towards a regular distribution. No significant differences in the synthetic measure (construct) in selected groups of respondents were noted either. Therefore, this research does not allow identification of sensitive groups for whom support instruments should be directed.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis is based on respondents' subjective declarations. The research was carried out on a fragment of the sample (53 respondents) and also, as a consequence, on not too numerous sub-groups.

Practical implications: With a view to supporting combining studies with gainful employment, motives that students are guided by, including turnover motivation, should be constantly monitored.

Originality/value: The subject matter of turnover intention among working students is not addressed in literature. Thus, this research fits this lacuna.

Keywords: turnover intention, gainful activity, combining work with studies.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Time spent at the university mainly involves acquisition of knowledge necessary to take up – in the future – positions that are related to the specialization studied. It is also a time of obtaining other professional experiences (future students usually gain their first work

experience at earlier stages of education). Reconciling the role of a student and an employee may hinder full participation in classes and individual studying which may translate into specific shortcomings in this sphere. This gives rise to a conflict of roles. On the other hand, work experience acquired during studies builds future potential of a graduate who enter the labour market after completing their studies. Thanks to this, the basic goal of education – the utilitarian goal – is being realized.

It also needs to be noted that students usually work in low-paying jobs not directly related to the specialization studied, markedly below the opportunities that they will present themselves before them when they enter the labour market as graduates. The research carried out in this paper also confirms this. Thus, students may not see themselves at the current employer in the future and treat this activity as something temporary. This may entail specific consequences in the sphere of motivation to work, including strong motivation to leave their current job, manifested in the research by high turnover intention. This subject matter is not addressed in the relevant body of literature, hence this study fills the resulting scientific lacuna.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the intention to leave one's current job among students who start full-time studies and take up gainful activity in the course of their university education. This paper is both theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part focuses on questions of taking up gainful employment during studies, the conflict of roles that accompanies this activity and the subject matter of identification of turnover intention. The work's empirical sphere presents results of the survey on professional experience and gainful activity of students who begin their first-cycle full-time university education. The research sample was made up of 205 students at the Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management of the University of Szczecin, though due to the subject matter examined, this work focused on a fraction of the sample – students who take up gainful activity (thus combining studies with work), which clearly limited the scope of the cases analysed in the research ($n = 53$). Conclusions drawn from this research cannot be generalised for the total group of students.

2. Theory

The research of the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) identifies first professional experiences among secondary school students in the group of 85% of boys and 67% of girls (Kołodziej, 2015). The latest research carried out under the Eurostudent¹ project shows that more than 60% of those that begin their university studies have already had some work experience. This percentage grows along with the expansion of the analysed population (to include students of further years). For example, in research by Sarzyńska-Mazurek (2021),

¹ This analysis was carried out on the basis of data made available at: <http://database.eurostudent.eu/drm/>, 2024.09.05.

carried out not only among freshmen, this percentage was 70%. The same research shows that university years are a period of getting one's first professional experiences for only 13% of respondents (who have not had these at earlier stages of education). The remainder of the structure includes passive persons not interested in taking up any gainful activity. This population is estimated, depending on the research, at between 11% (Krause, 2012) and 25 % (Malicki, 2013).

Another issue concerns covering the entire period of studies in the analysis in the context of combining university education with gainful activity. When it comes to this we also have some estimates. Research by Chu, Creed, Conlon (2021) shows that in English-speaking countries the percentage of students who combine studies with work is between 70% and 80% (with a constant rising trend – Hall, 2010). Polish research estimates of similar structures are markedly lower. It may be assumed that half of the students both work and study at the same time (Krause, 2012; Sarzyńska-Mazurek, 2021), though there are also some studies in the light of which this population is only 12% of the total (Nyćkowiak, Kołodziej, 2014 – therefore, the range of the percentages of these structures is quite great).

The Eurostudent research shows that Polish students carry a relatively heavy work burden. This is shown by a rather high share of the time devoted to work in their total time budget. There is a markedly high percentage of Polish working students who believe themselves to be more employees than students (59.4%). This burden may, of course, have a negative effect on combining studies with work, though at the same time it brings them practical experience, so important from the point of view of their future position in the labour market (Lenart, 2014; Creed, French, Hood, 2015). It is worth noting that in the light of research by Sarzyńska-Mazurek (2021), 53 % of students declare that working while studying is not very problematic for them.

Therefore, a conflict of roles may be detected between work and studying². These roles may overlap. A crucial issue in this context is boundary management determined by understanding how students manage their roles and how they balance them distributing their resources according to their capabilities and preferences (Greenhaus, Collins, Shaw, 2003).

Boundary management strategies may be focused on roles separation (e.g. clear separation of work hours from activities associated with studying) or on their integration (e.g. possibility to talk at work about studying) (Kossek, Lautsch, 2012). Separation facilitates creating boundaries of roles but may also make it difficult for individuals to move between roles. In turn, integration may intensify role blurring, which may be stressful, but at the same time helps individuals to move between these roles (Winkel, Clayton, 2010).

² Just like other conflicts, such as work–family or family–work conflicts, are identified in the literature (Kreiner, 2006).

People create, maintain and adjust their boundaries, to simplify their beliefs on roles and to reduce stress associated with conflicts of roles especially in the perspective of incapability of assigning an adequate amount of resources to meet too many expectations (Ashforth, Kreiner, Fugate, 2000).

Does the perspective of conflicts of roles not infer risks of higher motivation to leave a job or frequent turnover? This research perspective is not present in the literature; hence the present study fills this scientific lacuna.

Research on employee turnover involves a lot of methodological difficulties since it maybe only be conducted post factum, when the employee is no longer a member of a given organization. The decision to leave the organization may mature in one for a very long period of time on the one hand, and on the other, may be difficult to capture when the period between the decision to leave the organization and the fact of leaving is short. A solution to mitigate these methodological inconveniences is to investigate turnover intention among employees who might be close to taking a decision (intention) to leave, but nevertheless have not left the organization. Thus, intention precedes actions that will be taken at a later stage. This intention, therefore, reflects willingness to leave the organization quickly and unwillingness to establish a relation between them and the organization in the long run (when the decision to leave the organization matures) (Hughes, Avey, Nixon, 2010; Long, Thean, Ismail, Jusoh, 2012).

An employee leaving entails a number of negative consequences for the organization, starting with losing human capital when a talented employee quits, to costs of recruitment and training, to negative feelings accompanying a colleague departing (survivor syndrome) or to fear accompanying arrival of new members of the organization (Bibby, 2008; Avery, Luthans, Jensen, 2009; Hwang, Lee, Park, Chang, Kim, 2014). It is estimated that turnover costs account for 15 to 30% of total costs of organizations (Wong, Laschinger, 2015).

3. Methodological aspects of the research

The material analysed comes from a survey on professional experience and gainful activity of students who begin their first-cycle full-time studies. This was the second mutation of this research project³. The research was conducted among students of the Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management of the University of Szczecin. They were representatives of six fields of study (IT in business, Logistics, Engineering logistics, Entrepreneurship and Investment, Management and RES management). The survey comprised 33 questions, of which 8 were placed in the particulars section. Some of these questions allowed identification of groups of respondents taking into account the following classification criteria:

³ Empirical material in the first edition was gathered from November to December 2021.

- gender (question 1),
- place of residence (question 3 – variants of responses: major city, town, town-commune, village),
- household (question 4 – variants of responses: living with parents, living on one's own in a separate apartment or halls of residence, living in a rented room),
- family's financial situation (question 5 – five variants of responses: very good, good, moderate, bad, very bad).

The structures of responses to these questions are presented and discussed in the Table 3 – related passage.

Ultimately, empirical material was collected from 205 questionnaires. This study analyses fragmentary material. Partial questions on turnover intention were only answered by respondents who are currently in gainful employment (they chose the first option in the question about their engagement in gainful activity - Table 1). This option was chosen by 62 respondents (30.4% of the sample). Out of this group, 53 respondents gave their feedback to partial questions on turnover intention. After introducing additional criteria of classification of the study population, the different groups could have been, therefore, not very big; it is quite difficult to draw reliable conclusions in such a case (the numbers of students in each group are presented in the tables presented later. This is the shortcoming of this research. The research's time horizon is October-November 2023 (the survey was directed to respondents who were just beginning their studies).

Statistical significance of differences in declarations of respondents from groups identified out of the adopted criteria of division of population was specified in the case of two investigated groups using the t-Student test; in the case of a greater number of investigated groups (three and more) – on the basis of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA - in this case statistical significance for difference for the total groups was assessed on the basis of the F test result, there were no differences in pairs of groups on the basis of a series of post-hoc tests). A reference to the central limit probability $p = 0.05$ was specified as part of the p-value test.

Turnover intention was examined among the respondents using a four-time measurement scale designed by Hom, Griffeth and Sellaro (1984). Respondents could express their beliefs for each statement presented in the measurement scales given above under a five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant strongly disagreeing with a statement and 5 - strongly agreeing with the statement. Reverse adjustment procedure was applied to two positions in the measurement scale. Statements about turnover intention were directed content-wise towards an analysis of one's will to remain in the current workplace. The declining values of the synthetic measure, therefore, evidenced greater motivation to leave one's current post. The value of the synthetic measure of the construct for a given respondent was specified on the basis of an arithmetic mean of partial measures.

The mean of the values of constructs specified for individual respondents was analysed for the total study population and within the investigated groups of respondents. The data presented in the histogram was calculated for the entire study population on the basis of the measure of statistical description, while convergence in probability of a variable with regular distribution was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Working respondents were asked to specify the kind of work they did (which allowed general assignment of the job to the industry branch) and the form of employment and to declare whether their current earnings allowed them to support themselves. Respondents' declarations set criteria for assigning them to the analysed groups in which analyses of mean measures of the value of the investigated construct were also carried out (statistical significance of differences in groups according to the formula discussed so far - t-Student test or ANOVA, depending on the number of groups).

Respondents also specified the number of work hours a week and their monthly salary (based on which their hourly wage was estimated). Linear correlation was used to study related correlations with turnover intention. Statistical significance of correlation measures was examined by specifying the p-value calculated in the measurement procedure (referred to against the central limit probability $p = 0.05$).

4. Research results

In the first stage of the research, a statistical analysis of the variable reflecting the construct of turnover intention in the research sample was carried out. 30.4% respondents (62 students) declared that they were engaged in gainful activity at that moment (Table 1). Out of this pool, 53 respondents presented their declarations about their turnover intention in relation to their current job. This data was further analysed (a synthetic measure that reflected the investigated construct could be established for this group). Close to 70% of respondents did not combine their studies with gainful activity, of which 51.5% had some work experience and 18.1% of them - did not have any work experience at all.

Table 1.
Respondents' gainful employment status

Option	n	%
I am now involved in gainful activity (I am working)	62	30.4
I am not involved in gainful activity at the moment, but I do have some work experience	105	51.5
I do not have any work experience	37	18.1
Total	204	100.0

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

Figure 1 shows a histogram presenting the probability distribution of the variable: turnover intention, while Table 2 presents basic measures of descriptive statistics of the investigated sample fragment.

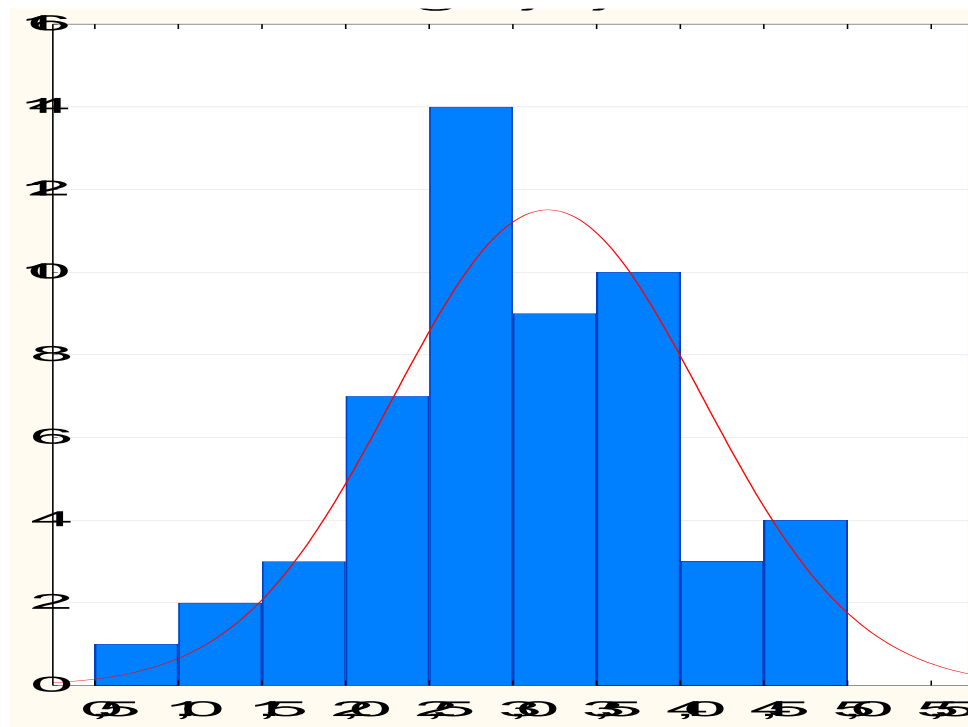


Figure 1. Histogram of probability distribution of the variable: turnover intention.

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics on the variable: turnover intention

measures	value
minimum	1
first quartile	2.8
mean	3.19
median	3
third quartile	3.8
maximum	5
standard deviation	0.92
typical area of variation	2.27- 4.11
skewness	0.7
kurtosis	-0.09

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

The distribution of the investigated variable is convergent with a regular distribution. It is also confirmed analytically by results of the Shapiro-Wilk test ($W = 0.977$, $p = 0.381$ – p -value above central limit probability $p = 0.05$). Most of the observations focus on the typical area of variability (2.27 – 4.11 range), thus on measures that reflect a neutral approach to partial statements. This is also confirmed by measures of the central trend hovering around 3. That is the value that the median takes. The arithmetic mean for the total respondents (against which mean measures in the analysed groups of respondents will be juxtaposed) is slightly

higher at 3.19. The value of the median below the average points to a slight right skewness of the distribution of the analysed variable. This is confirmed by the measure of skewness above zero (0.7). This skewness does not seem profound, but it evidences that options that evidenced respondents' greater motivation to leave their current jobs were selected more often. The probability distribution may be said to be mesokurtic (confirmation of convergence with a regular distribution) because the kurtosis hovers around zero.

In the next step mean values were calculated for the synthetic measures that reflected turnover intention in groups of respondents singled out taking into consideration four criteria of division of the population (particulars). Relevant data is presented in Table 3. It may also be juxtaposed against the total respondents (3.19). The table also presents the structure of the sample in the four dimensions listed below (in the sample fragment created by persons who engage in gainful activity – active – and in the entire sample – column 4).

Table 3.

Characteristics of groups of respondents singled out taking into account criteria of population division in the context of turnover intention

categories/options	n	%		turnover intention
		active	total	
criterion: gender (p = 0.802)				
women	24	45.3	45.3	3.20
men	29	54.7	54.7	3.15
criterion: place of residence (p = 0.561)				
major city	30	56.6	52.5	3.08
town	7	13.2	14.4	2.96
town-commune	9	17.0	15.8	3.50
village	7	13.2	17.3	3.36
Criterion: household (p = 0.909)				
living with parents	31	60.8	60.3	3.11
living on one's own (in a separate apartment)	14	27.5	20.1	3.14
living on one's own (halls of residence, rented room)	6	11.8	19.6	3.29
Criterion: family financial situation (p = 0.657)				
very good	16	32.7	18.7	3.27
good	22	44.9	52.8	3.25
moderate	8	16.3	31.2	2.69
bad	2	4.1	4.1	ND
very bad	1	2.0	3.1	ND

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

The first analysed criterion of division of the population was respondents' gender. The structures of the population of students in gainful activity and of the total respondents do not differ. Women prevail slightly in the group at 54.7%. No significant differences were noted in the mean measure reflecting turnover intention in both groups (p-value for t-Student test slightly above the central limit measure $p = 0.05$), though slightly greater motivation to leave one's job was observed among men.

The first analysed criterion of division of the population was respondents' place of residence. Most of the persons investigated lived in a major city and a relatively similar share (around 15%) is observed for other analysed options. Among persons in gainful employment

there is slight under-representation of persons living in villages, which boosts the participation of respondents living in major cities. The mean reflecting turnover intention was in the range between 2.96 (students living in a town with poviat rights – relatively greatest motivation to leave their jobs) to 3.5 (respondents living in towns that are at the same time capital cities of communes). In this case too, no statistically significant differences were recorded for respondents (p-value for ANOVA, $p = 0.561$ – slightly above the central limit value) singled out taking into account the investigated criterion.

The third analysed criterion of division of the population was respondents' household situation. A marked majority of respondents (60%) still lived with their parents (no difference is seen between persons engaged in gainful employment and those that are not; in the group of persons engaged in gainful activity there is certain under-representation of those staying in halls of residence or rented rooms, as relatively more persons in gainful activity live in their own flats. Relatively greatest motivation for turnover is expressed by students who stay with their parents (mean 3.11 – lower risk of deciding to quit); at the other end of the scale are respondents who stay in halls of residence or in rented rooms (mean 3.29). However, we need to approach the emerging differences with caution. They are not great enough to call them statistically significant (p-value for ANOVA greatly above the central limit value).

The last analysed criterion of division of the study population was the financial situation of respondents' families. Persons who declared their families were in a very good financial situation took up gainful activity markedly more often. Thus, persons in gainful employment are under-represented in groups selecting option two and three (good financial situation and moderate financial situation, respectively). It needs to be noted that majority of respondents selected positive variants of responses to questions about their families' financial situation. Those who chose the option of a bad or very bad financial situation were in the clear minority (below 10%). With a relatively small representation of person engaged in gainful activity, only three of them chose option four and five. As a consequence, these options were removed from the analysis (no data). Taking all of the above into consideration, no statistically significant differences were observed for the mean reflecting the construct of turnover intention in selected groups of respondents (p-value at 0.657). There is a downward trend of the analysed mean as the financial situation of respondents' families worsens (taking into account, however, only three analysed options).

Selected characteristics of respondents in gainful activity in the context of turnover intention are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.*Selected characteristics of respondents in gainful activity in the context of turnover intention*

categories/options	n	%		turnover intention
		active	total	
Industry (p = 0.404)				
catering	11	24.4	ND	3.3
trade	12	26.7	ND	2.9
IT	4	8.9	ND	2.8
industry and logistics	7	15.6	ND	3.4
services	11	24.4	ND	3.5
Form of employment (p = 0.996)				
employment contract (full time)	0	0.0	1.8	ND
employment contract (part time)	5	10.4	8.9	3.40
mandate contract/a specific work contract	34	70.8	67.9	3.18
apprenticeship/scholarship	0	0.0	0	ND
self-employed (company owner)	4	8.3	10.7	3.25
no contract	3	6.3	7.1	3.67
Earnings sufficient to support oneself (p = 0.190)				
yes	26	52.0	50.9	2.98
no	24	48.0	49.1	3.33

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

Respondents were asked to identify the work they did. On this basis, their work was assigned to a particular industry branch. Ultimately, the list of respondents' declarations was reduced to 5 industry branches for which a mean value of the construct of turnover intention was calculated. 12 respondents worked in trade (usually as shop assistants), 11 respondents, based on the work they did, were classified to quite a homogeneous catering group (usually as waiters/bartenders) and another 11 to a heterogeneous group of services (e.g. accountancy, beauty, modelling, security, rescue services or insurance). Respondents were also assigned to a very broad and capacious group representing jobs in industry and logistics and to the least populous group of those working in IT. The greatest mean values of the construct of turnover intention was observed for respondents representing the services sector (3.5). A relatively lowest turnover motivation was noted in this group. At the opposite end sits the IT industry with the mean value at 2.8. Differences in declarations of respondents in individual groups also in this case are not big enough to consider them statistically significant in the light of ANOVA results (p-value at 0.404).

Respondents in gainful activity also named their current form of employment. The great majority (70.8%) worked under a mandate contract or a specific work contract. Employment contract (part-time) was declared by 10.4% of study participants who were engaged in gainful activity. Some of them were also self-employed and three students worked without a contract. However, interestingly, the highest value of the analysed construct (3.67) was noted for the last group, which evidenced relatively weakest motivation to leave their organization. The lowest score of the synthetic measure analysed, close to the total average (3.18), was noted in the prevailing group of those working under a mandate contract or a specific work contract. Given the dominant position of this response variant in the structure, calculations of the synthetic measure in the context of informational value in the remaining groups need to be

approached with caution (these groups had only 3 to 5 respondents). Differences in declarations of respondents from groups singled out taking into account the analysed criterion of division of the study populations did not prove statistically significant (very low p-value – close to one).

Respondents were also asked to declare whether their earnings were currently sufficient to support themselves. Responses in the structure of declarations were distributed generally in equal halves. Quite a great differentiation of the mean synthetic measure that reflects the construct of turnover intention was noted. Interestingly, the fact of earning enough to support oneself does not mean that one will be less inclined to leave their job; quite the opposite. Differences in respondents' declarations in the analysed scope are not statistically significant, though it is worth noting the lowest p-value from the t-Student test analysed in such a case ($p = 0.190$).

Respondents who were engaged in gainful activity also specified the number of hours they devoted to work and their monthly earnings. Respondents' declarations were compiled according to the value of the construct for a given respondent. Linear correlation coefficients were calculated. No statistically significant correlations were found for either of these cases (therefore, one needs to approach with caution any associations between these analysed variables). Both linear correlation coefficients were negative. Therefore, in the first case an increase in the number of hours devoted to work meant lesser turnover motivation ($r_{xy} = -0.155$, $p = 0.190$). In the second case, an increase in the hourly pay (the reported monthly rate was divided by the number of hours devoted to work in a month) also resulted in a lesser turnover motivation ($r_{xy} = -0.099$, $p = 0.290$).

5. Discussion

This research fits the thesis that combining work with university studies under the Polish tertiary education system is relatively less common compared to other highly-developed countries (Chu, Creed, Conlon, 2021). The analysed percentage of students who take up gainful activity is also clearly below the consensus compared with other research carried out on Polish study samples (30 % of population) (Krauze, 2012; Sarzyńska-Mazurek, 2021). However, it needs to be remembered that the research was carried out among first-year students in their first months of studying. Therefore, the population of students who do not yet have experience working (an 18% share) is relatively broad (Krauze, 2012). Having said that, this population will certainly shirk as the end of university education nears.

This research confirms that a mandate contract/specific work contract is the dominant form of employment among working students (adequate percentage in agreement with the consensus – 70%) (Jelonek, 2011; Nyckowiak, Kołodziej, 2014; Wronowska, 2015). At the same time, the research shows that employment without a contract is rare (6.3% of cases).

The research focuses on the question of specifying how high motivation to leave one's current job (turnover intention) is among respondents who engage in gainful activity. Students usually work in low-paying jobs, not related to their future work specialization, markedly below opportunities afforded to them after they graduate (waiter, shop assistant, warehouse worker etc.). Thus, they do not see themselves working for their current employer in the future, as confirmed by a number of studies. The subject matter of turnover intention among working students is not addressed in literature. Thus, this research fills the said lacuna. It needs to be noted that there was practically no skewness in formulating the analysed construct of turnover intention for the investigated population of students who are engaged in gainful activity (not too populous, which must be looked at as a research limitation). The distribution of the investigated variable develops towards a regular distribution. It would certainly be worth juxtaposing this structure of results against a relevant distribution of the population of working persons for identification of differences (directions of future research). No significant differences were noted either in the mean measure that reflects the investigated construct in selected groups of respondents. Therefore, this research does not allow identification of vulnerable groups that should attract focus in the context examined and to which support instruments should be directed.

When looking for directions for further research it would be worth conducting longitudinal studies to identify trends. One could also focus on other constructs that are usually examined in employee populations but not in the population of working students (e.g. job satisfaction, involvement). With a view to supporting combining studies with gainful employment, motives that students are guided by, including turnover motivation, should be constantly monitored. However, it is worth remembering in the analysed context that combining work with studying may distort an individual's course of studies and cause a conflict of roles (with consequences mainly to be borne by the individual), which, if these consequences are to be approached broadly, may also entail great wastage of funds in the education system (Chu, Creed, Conlon, 2019).

Acknowledgements

Co-financed by the Minister of Science under the "Regional Excellence Initiative".



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