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Diana M. Yanbarisova

COMBINING UNIVERSITY STUDIES WITH WORK: INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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*Diana M. Yanbarisova*¹

COMBINING UNIVERSITY STUDIES WITH WORK: INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT²

This paper analyses the influence of different combinations of work and study on academic achievement among university students of Yaroslavl region in Russia. The data was collected during the first wave of longitudinal research on the educational and occupational trajectories of graduates of schools and universities conducted by the Institute of Education, Higher School of Economics, Moscow in 2009. The sample consists of 1474 4th and 5th year university students. Five work-study types are defined on the basis of two variables: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty: full-time work outside the specialty field, part-time work outside the specialty field; full-time work in the specialty field, part-time work in the specialty field; and not working during university studies. The results show that working outside the specialty field (full-time or part-time) has a negative impact on academic achievement, whereas the other work-study types do not have any significant effect. The results partly support our hypothesis that different work-study combinations influence academic achievement in different ways and that job relatedness to the academic specialty is a significant characteristic in defining the influence. The paper contributes to the research field of studying attributes of student employment which are responsible for different effects on academic achievement.

JEL Classification: I21, J24

Keywords: academic achievement; job relatedness to specialty; student employment; work schedule; work-study types

¹National Research University Higher School of Economics. «Center for Cultural Sociology and Anthropology of Education», Institute of Education; junior research fellow; Email: dyanbarisova@hse.ru

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Introduction

Working during university studies is a widespread phenomenon in Russia and in Europe. In recent research on student employment there are accounts of an increasing number of working university students and the number of hours spent working (Beerrens, Mägi, Lill, 2011; Hall, 2010). The reasons for it are complex: there are more non-traditional types of employment (part-time, freelance, work with a flexible schedule etc.) which give students more opportunities to combine studies with work and are convenient for employees in terms of working conditions. On the other hand there is a certain decline in the quality of higher education, at least in Russia. As diplomas cease to provide signals for employers that the job seekers have competences needed for the role, this function moves to work experience. Young people try to start careers earlier in order to accumulate some experience before graduation (Roshchin, 2006). The broadening of student heterogeneity, with young people from working class families and with an increasing number of people getting a second higher education) also contributes to the continuing spread of student employment (Beerrens, Mägi, Lill, 2011).

From an institutional perspective it is very important to analyse this phenomenon in order to correctly assess it. Is the increasing number of working students a reason to sound the alarm or there is nothing to be concerned about? One possible framework to assess the effect of student employment concerns its influence on academic achievement which is one of the crucial questions in the field. There is a lot of research on the topic with sometimes contradictory results (Richardson, Kemp, Malinen, Haultain, 2012; Curtis, Shani, 2002; Watanabe, 2005). This paper contributes to the field by giving further evidence on the topic in a Russian context.

We assume that there are different types or strategies of combining work with studies which influence academic achievement in different ways. The main objective of this paper is to find out how the work-study combinations influence academic achievement.

Literature review and research evidence on student employment

Key questions in research on student employment usually refer to working students' characteristics and reasons for working during studies (Robert, Saar, 2012). An important tendency is that not only students from low-income families work during studies, but also those who do not have financial problems (Roshchin, 2006; Beerrens, Mägi, Lill, 2011; Vosnesenskaya, Konstantinovsky, Cherednichenko, 2001). It reflects different motives for student employment. In Soviet times financial motivation was the most important: students worked mainly to provide the means to live. The workplace distribution system after graduation guaranteed successful entry into the labour market, so there was no need to accumulate work

experience in order to ease the university-work transition. Nowadays financial motivation continues to play an important role in student employment but at the same time new motivations appear. Moreover motives can vary for students with different characteristics. Financial motivation can often be found among students from low-income families. The motives of students who work without considerable financial problems can be more heterogeneous, from the willingness to facilitate the labour market entry to the desire to fill free-time (Beerrens, Mägi, Lill, 2011). Other possible motives are: self-development, practical interest in their specialty, trying out different jobs in order to find something that would fit them best etc.

In the literature we found two main frameworks to investigate the role that work during studies plays in student lives. The first pertains to the influence of student employment on further integration into the labour market (Robert, Saar, 2012; Pemberton, Jewell, Faggian, King, 2012). Robert and Saar (2012) define two types of institutional contexts that influence the school-to-work transition: the occupational labour market (OLM) and the internal labour market (ILM). OLM is characterized by a rather close connection between qualifications gained at university and the requirements of the labour market. In other words: a graduate's qualifications (confirmed by a diploma) are considered sufficient in the assessment of a job seeker's competence. In ILM, a diploma is not a relevant signal of necessary competences so more attention is paid to work experience. Personal characteristics are more important than special knowledge (Stiwne, Jungert, 2010) in the context of the 'employability' discourse (Moreau, Leathwood, 2006). These characteristics of the labour market are also seen as an illustration of the concept of 'new capitalism' introduced by Sennett (1998) which is characterized by the flexibility of the labour market and increasing requirements for the human capital characteristics of job seekers. Work during studies can be considered an indicator of motivation, ambition, discipline, and time management skills. We suggest that this is what is happening in Russia. As the quality of higher education decreases a diploma is no longer a filter screening unsuitable candidates and more and more students start working before graduation in order to accumulate experience to facilitate an easier entry into the labour market after finishing university (Roshchin, 2006). By this logic, work during studies is considered an investment in human and social capital and not as an obstacle to studies (e.g. Tam Oi I, Morrison, 2005). In both perspectives questions about quality, content, motivation and the number of working hours are still important. For example, a situation where students sacrifice some of their time in order to get applied specialty skills which they do not learn at university is completely different from a situation where students work as waiters in order to pay for their studies. In the first case working in addition to studying can strengthen motivation to study (Hakkinen, 2006).

Another focus in the research on combining studies with work to which we contribute in this paper is on academic achievement and drop-out rates among working students compared to those who do not work (Rochford, Connolly, Drennan, 2009; Derous, Ryan, 2008). It is usually based on the assumption that time spent on work is taken away from studying therefore work during studies has a negative influence on academic achievement and increases the possibility of dropping out. But research evidence on this topic usually shows that the connection between student employment and academic achievement is not so straight forward it is mediated by other factors such as job content, physical or intellectual labour, in a specialty field or not, at the university or outside, and the number of hours spent at the workplace (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011; McKechnie, Hobbs, Simpson, Anderson, Howieson, Semple, 2010; Huie, Winsler, Kitsantas, 2012; Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, Davidson, 2012). One more observation concerns the issue of when students are engaged in employment: working during the two first years of studies has more negative effects on academic achievement than working during later years (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011). The main conclusion is that part-time work may have no negative effects on academic achievement. This assumption already meets some institutional responses for example such as university 'job-shops' in the UK which are aimed at helping students find part-time jobs (Little, 2002). But at the same time in Little's work such responses are presented as problematic because of the possible negative impact on academic performance.

In some studies student employment is compared to other types of extracurricular activity such as leisure (Deraus, Ryan, 2008). It is suggested that time spent on leisure activities has a positive influence on attitude to study, well-being and academic achievement, although this relation is non-linear because the influence is mediated by the amount of time. At the same time the number of hours spent working has a negative influence on these variables and this relationship seems to be linear. The negative impact of work on attitude to study and well-being was confirmed, but not on academic achievement. In this study attention is paid not only to the high number of hours spent on extracurricular activities but also to its perceived relevance to study. In this sense working in the specialty field probably would have a less negative impact on student studies than working in other fields because of its perceived relevance towards studies, as, for example, another source of learning.

There are studies that combine intra-university (based on academic achievement and drop-out rates) and labour market logic through the study of the influence of academic achievement on earnings of graduates three years after graduation (Donhardt, 2004). Another interesting question concerns the relationship between the combinations of work and studies and the future professional trajectories of students. This question will be answered in the next wave of the research.

Data and method

In this paper we use data from the first wave of the longitudinal study of the educational and occupational trajectories conducted by the Institute of Education, Higher School of Economics, Moscow in 2009. Participants of the study are 4th and 5th year university students from Yaroslavl region, a historical Russian region which capital, Yaroslavl, is situated 282 km from Moscow. The sample size is 1474 students. The sample is representative of universities of the region.

We use descriptive statistics and an ordinal probit regression to verify the hypothesis that different combinations of work and study influence academic achievement in different ways. We assume that job relatedness to the specialty can reduce the negative effects of student employment on academic results.

Academic achievement in our study is measured by self-estimation. There is criticism of this type of measurement, clearly self-reporting cannot be equated with actual academic results (Pike, 1996) but they are suitable for the goals of this research.

Combinations of work and study

We used two variables to mark out different combinations of study and work: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty. From 1474 respondents 38,8% did not work during their university studies, 44,3% worked from time to time, or part-time, 16,9% worked full-time either during their senior years or from the 1st-2nd year. 68,3% of respondents worked outside their specialty. Full correspondence of a specialty area and a field of work was mentioned by 13,5% of respondents.

Five work-study types are defined on the basis of two variables: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty.

Tab.1. Work-study types

Work-study types	Number of students	Percentage
Full-time work outside the specialty field	165	11,5%
Part-time work outside the specialty field	429	29,8%
Full-time work in the specialty field	79	5,5%
Part-time work in the specialty field	197	13,7%
Not working during university studies	569	39,5%
Total	1474	100,0%

81,4% of the respondents have their studies financed by the government, 15,9% by their family or relatives, 0,5% by an organization or company. And only 2,2% of those whose studies are not financed by the government pay themselves, without any help. There are certain differences in the sources of finance for studies among the respondents from different work-study types. The largest percentage of students whose studies are financed by the government do not work (89,6%). The percentage of those whose studies are financed by the government among students who work full-time in their specialty field or outside their specialty field is almost equal (65,4% and 67,3%). The same is true for part-time workers: job relatedness to specialty does not differentiate between students whose studies are financed by the government and others (80,7% of students have their studies paid by the government and work part-time in their specialty field, 81,9% outside their specialty field).

There is a correlation between work-study types and student estimations of the influence that working has on their academic achievement. More than 40% of students working in their specialty field (either full-time or part-time) indicate a positive influence of their work on their academic achievement. Full-time workers chose this response alternative slightly more often than part-time workers (46,8% and 43,1%). Most part-time or full-time workers not in their specialty field mark that their job does not have any influence on their academic results. At the same time more students from these work-study types indicate a negative influence of their job on academic achievement than students using other strategies (especially full-time workers outside their specialty field).

Tab.2. Work-study types and perceived influence of work on academic achievement

Work-study types	Does your job influence your academic achievement?			Total
	Yes, rather positively	No influence	Yes, rather negatively	
Full-time work outside the specialty field	10,9%	60%	29,1%	165
Part-time outside the specialty field	8,4%	72,1%	19,4%	427
Full-time work in the specialty field	46,8%	39,2%	13,9%	79
Part-time work in the specialty field	43,1%	47,7%	9,1%	197
Total (N)	176	532	160	868

Motives for entering a particular university and a particular department

We analysed whether there is a connection between combinations of studies and work, and student motives for entering a chosen university and specialty. In general the distribution of motives between groups is quite homogeneous although there are some differences. The most popular motive for all groups is the prestige of the diploma (57,4%). Non-working students chose this significantly more often than others (70,3%). Those who work full-time outside their specialty field chose the ease of entering university and having necessary social ties more often than non-working students. The desire to study together with friends is more important for students working part- or full-time outside their specialty field than for those who work full-time or part-time in their specialty field or who do not work at all. The chance to establish new contacts is more significant for students who work part-time in their specialty field than for the other groups. The least popular motive for all the groups is a safe environment (6,4%).

The motive for choosing a particular specialty described by the statement ‘This specialty will give me a job corresponding to my interests’ is more popular among students who work in their specialty field (part-time or full-time) than among those who work outside their specialty field, or do not work.

Job relatedness to specialty

Job relatedness to specialty varies depending on the specialty. The biggest disproportion between those who work in their specialty field and those who work outside is among the students of technological and engineering sciences, agricultural, and natural sciences specialties (only 21,5%; 25%; 26% respectively, work according to their specialty). This result is quite surprising for students of technological and engineering departments, as we expected them work in IT. There is possibly a methodological problem and the question about job relatedness to study specialty is different for different groups of specialties. There are a lot of technological and engineering departments whose names are very specific which could be a possible reason for estimating work as not corresponding to specialty. Unfortunately we cannot verify this hypothesis with the data we have because they do not contain sufficient information about specific fields in which students work. At the same time technological and engineering sciences include a range of specialties such as mechanical engineering, aviation, petro-chemistry etc. In these fields there are fewer opportunities to find a part-time job or a job with flexible schedule, which are the most widespread forms of student employment.

76.9% of students of culture have work which corresponds to their specialty. One possible explanation is that a group of specialties united under the word 'culture' includes a wide spectrum of domains, which can correspond to many different jobs. These students also probably have more opportunities to work in their specialty field even during the 1st-2nd year of studies. At the same time significantly more students of culture departments have some education beyond secondary school before entering university (for example some kind of vocational education or unfinished higher education): 30,8% in comparison with 7,6% in total. It probably increases their chances of finding a job corresponding to their specialty.

There is a correlation between working according to their specialty during studies and their willingness to work according to their specialty when entering university. 69% of students whose job corresponds to their studies wanted to work according to their specialty when entering university in comparison with 55,8% of those who do not work according to their specialty. At the same time the percentage of students who wanted to work according to their specialty when entering university is higher than those who did not want to or who did not care.

Among students working in their specialty field there is a significantly higher percentage of those who were able to describe in detail their future job when entering university (38,3%) in comparison with 27,6% of students who do not work in their specialty field, and compared to the whole sample.

Academic achievement and 'Grit scale'

An additional topic for the analysis of student academic achievement concerns the influence of motivational indicators (a 'grit scale') on academic results. The 'grit scale' measures an individual's ability to continue trying to reach certain goals even after failed attempts (Duckworth et al., 2007; Popov, Tyumeneva, Kuzmina, 2010). In our survey it consists of 15 statements. For example: 'New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones'. Answers were recoded in such a way that grit could take low, middle and high values.

We expected that 'grit' positively correlates with academic achievement. Grit is normally distributed, therefore, most of the respondents have average measures of grit. But at the extremes of the distribution there is a certain correlation between grit and academic achievement. If we compare low and high measures of grit in groups of students with different grades we see that among high achievers there are fewer students with low grit measures (10,2%) than with higher measures (18,9%). From high achievers to satisfactory achievers the percentage of those who have low grit measures increases (10,2% → 11,5% → 12,7%), and with high measures it decreases (18,9% → 10,6% → 7%).

Work during studies and academic achievement

There is quite a strong correlation between the work-study combination and academic achievement. The question of the influence of work during studies on academic achievement is one of the most pertinent from an institutional perspective. Our data includes the type of employment (part-time or full-time) and such parameters as its localization in time (primary or senior university years) and whether it relates to the specialty.

The greatest percentage of high achievers is among the students who do not work (43,8%) and those who work part-time in their specialty field (43,1%). The percentage of high achievers is significantly less among the students working full-time outside their specialty field (24,4%). The distribution of satisfactory grades can be seen as a mirror reflection of the distribution of high grades. The percentage of students who have satisfactory grades is the highest among those who work full-time outside their specialty field. This percentage decreases for those who work full-time and those who work part-time outside their specialty field.

One of the most important results is that academic achievement of students who do not work is comparable to academic achievement of those whose work is in their specialty. Between the groups of non-working students and students working part-time according to their specialty there are no significant differences in academic results. In this connection we can assume that work relatedness to specialty is a key factor that determines the influence of student employment on academic achievement. But at the same time the amount of working hours is still an important factor. Full-time employment significantly reduces student opportunities to attend lectures and seminars at university, and to do homework. That is why an optimal strategy of combining studies with work can probably be part-time employment in their specialty field.

Tab.3. Work-study types and academic achievement

Work-study types	I study satisfactorily, but sometimes fail exams	I study well, almost never fail exams	I have high marks in most of the subjects	Total (N)
Full-time work outside the specialty field	20,1%	55,5%	24,4%	164
Part-time work outside the specialty field	14,3%	56,3%	29,3%	426

Full-time work in the specialty field	12,8%	55,1%	32,1%	78
Part-time work in the specialty field	7,6%	49,2%	43,1%	197
Not working during university studies	6,9%	49,3%	43,8%	568
Total (%)	11%	52,4%	36,6%	100%
Total (N)	158	751	524	1433

To verify our hypotheses about the influence of different types of student employment on academic achievement and about how the job relates to their specialty we created an ordinal regression model controlling specialty, gender, academic activity, source of payment for studies, motives for entering a particular university and a particular department.

The dependent variable is academic achievement, which was measured by self-estimation and could take three values: low ('I study satisfactorily, but sometimes fail exams'), average ('I study well, almost never fail exams') and high ('I have high marks in most of the subjects').

The independent variables are combinations of studies and work, specialty (10 specialties were marked out: pedagogy; technological and engineering sciences; natural sciences; economics, management, social sciences; law; humanities; medicine; culture; building and architecture; agriculture), gender, academic activity (includes information about participation in conferences, competitions, publications and other educational merits), motivation to enter this university (multiple choice: 10 options), motivation to choose this particular specialty (multiple choice: 10 options).

Tab.4.Ordinal probit regression³

		Estimate	St. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	Satisfactory grades	-0,87	0,20	19,61	1	0,00	-1,26	-0,49
	Average grades	1,09	0,20	30,50	1	0,00	0,70	1,47
Location	Pedagogy	0,70	0,20	12,52	1	0,00	0,31	1,08
	Technological and engineering sciences	0,50	0,19	7,02	1	0,01	0,13	0,87

³Not all the independent variables are displayed in the Table 3, some variables with insignificant coefficients are not presented.

Natural sciences	0,44	0,21	4,36	1	0,04	0,03	0,84
Economics, management, social sciences	0,92	0,19	22,74	1	0,00	0,54	1,30
Law	0,76	0,30	6,50	1	0,01	0,18	1,34
Humanities	0,77	0,23	11,74	1	0,00	0,33	1,21
Medicine	0,27	0,20	1,71	1	0,19	-0,13	0,67
Culture	1,60	0,53	9,01	1	0,00	0,56	2,65
Building and architecture	0,24	0,35	0,46	1	0,50	-0,45	0,93
Agriculture	0a	.	.	0	.	.	.
Male	-0,45	0,08	34,39	1	0,00	-0,60	-0,30
studies not paid by the government	-0,41	0,09	18,80	1	0,00	-0,59	-0,22
My friends entered this university (motive-univ.)	-0,36	0,11	11,23	1	0,00	-0,57	-0,15
Safe environment (motive- univ.)	0,30	0,16	3,58	1	0,06	-0,01	0,61
Studying on this faculty will be interesting for me (motive- spec.)	0,16	0,07	5,34	1	0,02	0,03	0,30
Participation in conferences	0,25	0,08	10,25	1	0,00	0,10	0,41
Extra-curricular disciplines	0,25	0,09	7,23	1	0,01	0,07	0,43
Prizes for academic achievement	0,86	0,09	100,31	1	0,00	0,70	1,03
Publications	0,35	0,12	7,93	1	0,01	0,11	0,59
Full-time outside the spec. field	-0,29	0,12	6,45	1	0,01	-0,52	-0,07
Part-time outside the spec. field	-0,24	0,09	7,70	1	0,01	-0,41	-0,07
Full-time in the spec. field	-0,10	0,15	0,43	1	0,51	-0,40	0,20
Part-time in the spec. field	-0,05	0,11	0,17	1	0,68	-0,27	0,17
Not working	0a	.	.	0	.	.	.

Link function: probit
Pseudo R-Square (Nagelkerke) = 0,342

Two combinations of work and studies show a significant influence on academic achievement: working full-time outside their specialty field and working part-time outside their specialty field. Both types negatively influence academic results. Working full-time (or part-time) in their specialty field does not demonstrate any significant influence on academic achievement. According to our model job relatedness to specialty does matter for effects of student

employment on academic achievement. Our results show that working in their specialty field is not significantly different from the strategy of not working, from the perspective of influence on academic achievement.

Specialty is a good predictor of academic achievement. Only two groups of specialties do not show any significant influence on academic results: medicine, and building and architecture. The other faculties have significant positive coefficients which indicate their positive contribution to the probability of having higher grades in comparison with the reference category, the agricultural faculty. Cultural studies has the highest coefficient. But it is important that groups of specialties are not quantitatively equal. There are only 13 students of cultural specialties, which limits the possibility of interpreting the results in a comparative perspective.

Male gender has significant negative coefficient decreasing the probability of higher academic achievement. This is consistent with the results of international research (e.g. Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011).

A significant predictor of lower academic achievement is tuition fees which are not paid by the government. This is not a surprising result because of the Russian system of university entry. Fee scholarships are available only if the results of entrance exams are good enough, otherwise self funding is an option. Therefore according to our model not having tuition fees paid by the government decreases the probability of having higher academic achievement.

Academic and extracurricular activity is also a good predictor of academic achievement. Four types of academic activity increase a probability of having higher grades: participation in academic conferences, studying extra-curricular disciplines, having prizes and rewards for academic achievement (which is certainly not surprising), having publications.

We included information about student motivation to enter a particular university and a particular department in our model. We assumed that motivation is a good predictor of academic achievement. But the results do not support our hypothesis. Only one statement characterizing motivation to enter a university has significant coefficient: 'My friends entered this university'. According to the results this type of motivation decreases the probability of having higher grades. The motive of a safe environment is on the border of significance (0,059) and increases the probability of higher academic achievement. Also there is one statement characterizing motivation to enter a particular department: 'Studying on this faculty will be interesting for me'. Having this type of motivation increases the probability of having higher grades.

Discussion and conclusions

We defined five combinations of studies and work depending on work schedule and work relatedness to specialty, including non-working students. Our hypothesis that different work-study combinations influence academic achievement in different ways is partly confirmed. Only two work-study types demonstrate a negative influence on academic achievement: full-time and part-time working outside their specialty field. Working in a specialty field and not working at all, do not show any influence on academic achievement. The results emphasize the importance of including different characteristics of student employment in the analysis of its influence on academic results. In our research we are limited only by two variables in constructing relevant work-study types so there is a need for further research to deepen our understanding of the constitutive elements of strategies of combining work with studies which actually matter both for academic achievement and for the future development of student educational and professional trajectories, and their entry into the labour market.

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Diana M. Yanbarisova

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia).“Center for Cultural Sociology and Anthropology of Education” Institute of Education.Junior research fellow;

E-mail: dyanbarisova@hse.ru, Tel. +7 (495) 772-95-99 *22123

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