

STUDENT ACTIVITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on student employment during higher education and explains why many students decide to work while studying. The topic is important because university studies are no longer only about gaining academic knowledge and completing a degree programme. For many young people, this period is also a time to earn money, gain first work experience, and become more independent in everyday life. Student employment is also linked to changes in the labour market, where employers increasingly value practical skills and previous experience. The article highlights that working during one's studies can bring both benefits and challenges. On the one hand, employment may support the development of useful competences such as responsibility, communication skills, and time management. On the other hand, combining work with academic duties may create difficulties related to limited time, tiredness, and stress. The second part of the article presents the results of the author's own research. The study was carried out using an online survey conducted between 2 and 16 May 2025. A total of 372 students from universities in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship (including Rzeszów) participated in the research. The survey explored students' employment during their current studies, their motivations for taking up paid work, and their opinions on how working may influence academic life. In addition, the questionnaire included questions about students' ability to balance studying with professional duties, as well as the reasons why some students decide not to work during higher education.

Key words: study, student employment, work during studies, labour market, motivation for employment.

JEL: J21, J22, J24, I23.

1. Introduction

Student employment during higher education is currently one of the most important social and economic phenomena related to the lives of young people. This is because studying is increasingly not only a period of academic learning, but

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also a stage when many students begin to participate in the labour market. They start earning an income, gain experience, and become more independent in everyday life. The literature highlights that student work can be treated as a form of non-academic activity that influences competency development and future career decisions (Bącik, Gawarkiewicz, and Siewicz, 2010). In this sense, employment may shape students' attitudes towards work, responsibility, and long-term planning.

The importance of the topic is also connected with changes in the labour market. On the one hand, employers often expect young candidates to present not only a diploma, but also practical skills and some experience. On the other hand, students may decide to work because of financial pressure, the wish to become more independent, or the desire to improve their competences (Krause, 2008; Wronowska, 2011). Therefore, student employment may be viewed in two ways: as a development opportunity and as a possible burden that can make academic life more difficult. This dual nature makes the issue particularly interesting and worth researching.

For these reasons, it is important to analyse the scale of student employment, students' motivations for taking a job, and the perceived consequences of work for studying. A key question is whether employment affects academic performance and whether students are able to balance professional and educational responsibilities. This article presents the results of the author's own research on student employment among university students from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, conducted using an online survey.

2. Student employment – the context and importance of the phenomenon

Students constitute a unique group of participants in the labour market, as they combine the roles of students and employees. This means that their professional activity is often determined by class schedules, exam periods, and university requirements. Many students, therefore, choose jobs that can be tailored to their studies. The literature indicates that students take on various forms of employment, such as full-time and part-time work, seasonal work, or temporary work, allowing them to fit their professional responsibilities around academic life (Wronowska, 2011). In practice, this often means working evenings, weekends, or more hours during the summer holidays and fewer hours during exam periods.

At the same time, students are also important to employers. Many organizations view young people as flexible workers who can learn quickly and adapt to new tasks. Hiring students can also be beneficial, as it allows companies to train future employees and identify promising talent early (Bącik, Gawarkiewicz, and Siewicz, 2010). In this way, student employment can bridge the gap between education and long-term employment. It is also worth noting that student work is

not just about earning money. It can be part of the process of transitioning into adulthood and taking responsibility for daily life. Work can influence students' independence, lifestyle, and social skills such as communication, teamwork, and responsibility (Zielińska, 2017). These skills can later become important assets in their professional lives, even if the work performed during their studies is not directly related to their field of study.

Motivations for working during studies vary, but many publications emphasize that financial considerations often play a major role. Working helps students cover living costs, improve their financial situation, and become more independent (Wronowska, 2011; Ostoja, 2016). This aspect is particularly evident when students incur higher costs for accommodation, transportation, and daily needs. For these students, employment is not just a choice but sometimes a necessity. These observations are consistent with the results of this study, in which financial need was the most frequently cited reason for students to work. This confirms that economic factors remain a key factor determining student labour market activity.

However, student work can also have developmental implications. Some students view employment as an opportunity to gain experience, acquire practical skills, and build competencies that can increase their competitiveness after graduation (Krause, 2021). In this case, work is viewed as an investment in the future. It helps students understand workplace expectations, familiarize themselves with professional routines, and verify whether a given career path matches their interests and aptitudes (Bącik, Gawarkiewicz, & Siewicz, 2010). Motivations related to gaining experience and developing skills remain relevant, as evidenced by current research, although they are less frequently mentioned than financial motives. This suggests that while developmental motives are present, they are secondary to economic needs.

Combining work and study can be beneficial. It can improve time management, self-discipline, and responsibility. Work can also boost self-confidence and help students feel better prepared for future professional roles (Bącik, Gawarkiewicz, and Siewicz, 2010). At the same time, combining work and education can create pressure. Too many work responsibilities can lead to fatigue, stress, and limited time for studying (Zielińska, 2017). In such situations, students may struggle to meet deadlines, prepare for exams, and complete academic projects. However, some students are able to develop effective strategies for balancing work and study, as evidenced by the study participants. However, negative effects have also been reported, supporting the notion that an excessive workload can lead to difficulties.

International studies also show that the relationship between student employment and academic performance is not straightforward. A meta-analysis suggests that work can have a neutral, positive, or negative impact, with one key factor being employment intensity, such as the number of hours worked per week (Kroupová, 2021). This means that student employment does not automatically

reduce academic performance, but it can become a real barrier if the workload is too heavy.

Taking into account the above considerations, it can be assumed that student employment is a complex phenomenon influenced by both economic and developmental factors. However, the scale and specific characteristics of this phenomenon may differ depending on the region and group of students. Therefore, it is justified to conduct empirical research that allows for a more detailed analysis of student employment in a specific context. The following section presents the results of the author's own study conducted among students in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship.

3. Author's research – characteristics and results

In order to examine student employment during the studies and the factors influencing it, an online survey was conducted. The research took place between 2 and 16 May 2025. A total of 372 students from universities in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, including Rzeszów, participated in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions. It included demographic questions and questions concerning students' experiences and opinions related to paid work during their studies. In the surveyed group, women made up around two-thirds of respondents. The largest age group was 21–23 years old, which is typical for students at this stage of education. Most respondents studied full-time, and both Bachelor's and Master's students were included. This structure makes it possible to consider student employment across different stages of higher education.

Are you professionally active (i.e. have a paid job)
during your current studies?

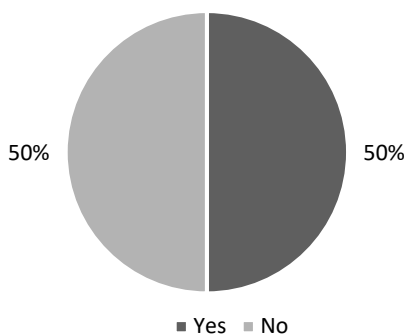


Figure 1. Employment status of students during current studies

Source: own work.

A key question in the survey asked whether respondents currently had paid employment. The results show an equal distribution: exactly half of the students worked during their studies, while the other half did not. This indicates that employment is common, but it does not apply to all students. It also suggests that students may follow different strategies during the university period.

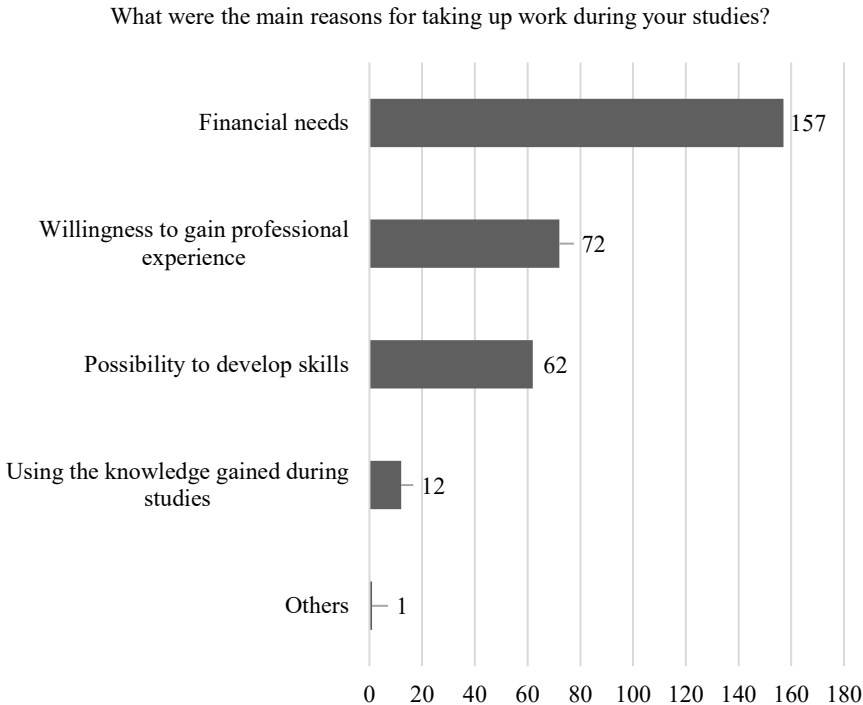


Figure 2. Main reasons for taking up paid work during studies

Source: own work.

Another part of the survey focused on motivations for taking a job. Respondents could choose up to three answers. Financial need was clearly the most frequently reported reason (157 responses). Other motivations were much less common, including gaining experience (72 responses) and developing skills (62 responses). Only one respondent selected “other” and explained this choice as having a lot of free time. Overall, this suggests that for many students, employment is mainly a financial solution, while career-building motivations are present but less dominant. This result confirms the findings presented in the literature, where financial factors are identified as the main reason for student employment (Wronowska, 2011; Ostojka, 2016). It suggests that the economic aspect of employment remains dominant also in the analysed group.

How do you assess the impact of work on academic performance?

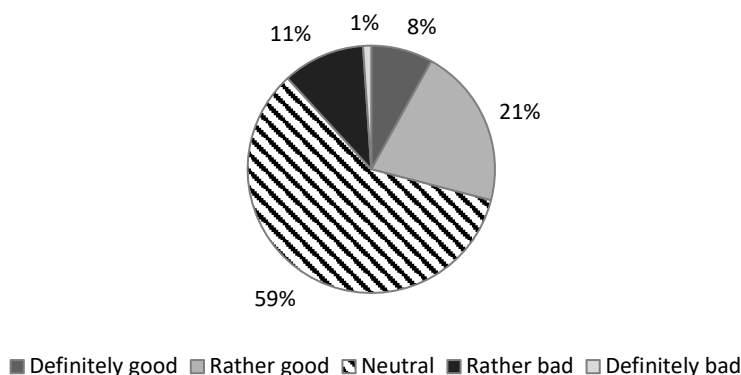


Figure 3. Perceived impact of work on academic performance

Source: own work.

The survey also examined how students perceive the impact of employment on academic performance. Most respondents (59%) reported that work did not affect their results. At the same time, positive evaluations (29%) were more frequent than negative ones (12%). This pattern may suggest that many students can organise their time and responsibilities in a way that protects their academic performance. For some students, work may even increase motivation and improve discipline, while negative effects may occur mainly in situations of overload or poor balance. These findings are consistent with previous research, which indicates that the impact of student employment on academic performance is not unambiguous and depends on factors such as the intensity of work (Kroupová, 2021).

To what extent are you able to combine work with studies?

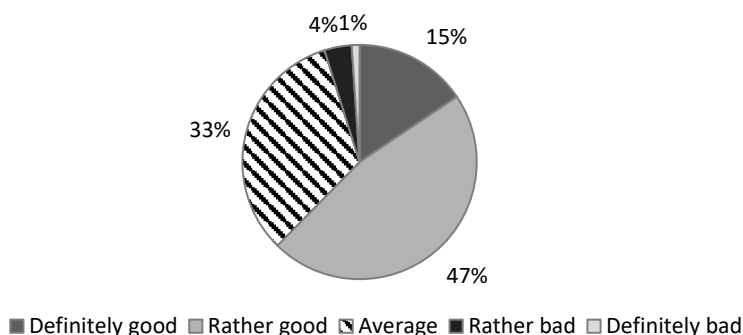


Figure 4. Ability to combine work with studies

Source: own work.

Respondents were also asked to assess how well they can combine work with studying. The results were largely positive: 95% of respondents rated their ability as at least satisfactory. The most common answer was “rather good” (49%). Only a small group reported serious difficulties. This may indicate that flexible employment and personal time-management strategies help many students manage both roles. This observation supports the conclusions presented in the literature, according to which flexible forms of employment enable students to combine work with studying more effectively (Wronowska, 2011).

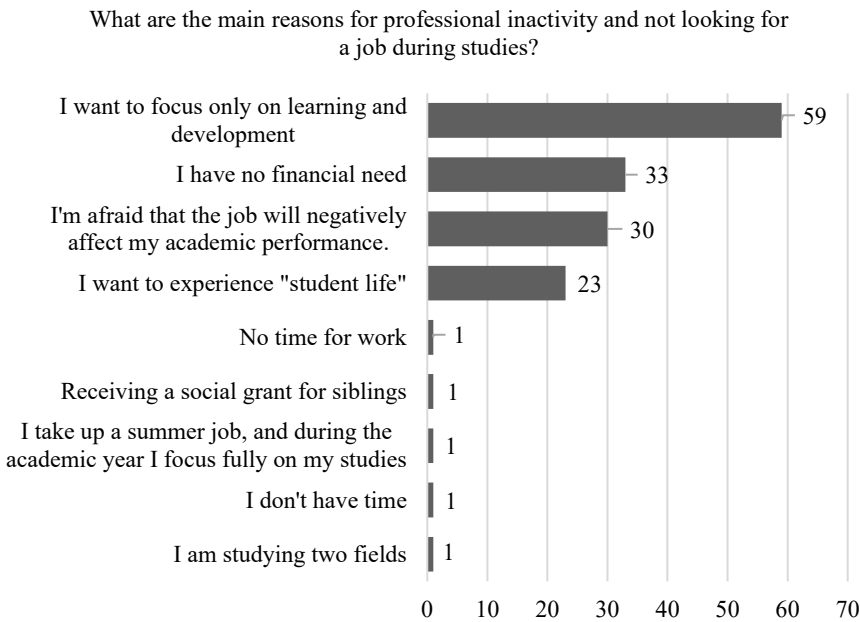


Figure 5. Reasons for professional inactivity during studies

Source: own work.

Finally, the survey asked students who were not employed about their reasons for not working and not looking for a job. Respondents could choose up to three answers. The most common reason was the desire to focus on education and personal development (59 responses). Another important reason was the lack of financial need (33 responses). Other answers, such as the fear of a negative impact on grades or the wish to enjoy student life, were chosen less often. These results suggest that not working is often an intentional decision, based on priorities rather than a lack of opportunities. This result is in line with previous studies suggesting that some students consciously resign from employment in order to focus on education and personal development (Wronowska, 2011).

Overall, these findings imply that student employment is a relatively common phenomenon, although not all students decide to work during their studies. The findings show that financial motivation plays a dominant role in the decision to take up employment, while developmental motives such as gaining experience or skills are of secondary importance. At the same time, most respondents perceive the impact of work on academic performance as neutral, which may suggest that students are generally able to balance their educational and professional responsibilities. This may indicate that the lack of employment is often a conscious choice, related to the desire to focus on education and personal development. These findings are consistent with the literature and provide a basis for further interpretation in the following section.

4. The student between education and the labour market – an interpretative view

The results of the present study indicate that student employment should be understood as a wider social phenomenon, not only as an individual decision. As suggested in the literature, student work is increasingly becoming part of the typical study experience and functions as a non-academic activity that can shape competences and career plans (Bącik, Gawarkiewicz, and Siewicz, 2010). In this sense, employment may be seen as an early stage of entering the labour market and learning professional routines.

An important aspect of the presented results is their regional context. The study was conducted among students from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, including Rzeszów, which is a dynamically developing academic centre, but still differs from larger metropolitan areas such as Warsaw or Kraków.

This regional perspective may help to explain the dominance of financial motivation observed in the study. In regions with fewer employment opportunities and lower average income levels, students may be more likely to treat work as a necessity rather than a form of professional development. This is reflected in the results of the present study, where financial motivation was clearly dominant among respondents.

These findings imply that student employment has at least two main dimensions: economic and developmental. On the economic side, work helps students meet everyday needs and become financially independent. On the developmental side, it may create opportunities to learn practical skills and gain professional experience. This suggests that the economic aspect plays the primary role, but the presence of developmental motivations suggests that for some students, employment is also a form of investment in the future.

Working during studies also involves the challenge of managing two roles at the same time. This may influence everyday routines, social life, and academic

engagement. As noted by Zielińska, employment can change how students experience university life and may push them towards a more task-oriented way of functioning (Zielińska, 2017). At the same time, many students appear to develop strategies that allow them to keep their academic performance stable.

International research emphasises that the impact of work on academic results depends on factors such as working hours and workload intensity (Kroupová, 2021). The survey results show that students more often perceive work as neutral rather than harmful, which may suggest that many of them limit working hours or choose jobs that fit their study schedules. Negative experiences may be related to overload, stress, or insufficient rest, which may occur when students work too much. This is consistent with the findings of the present study, where most students assessed the impact of work on academic performance as neutral.

It is also important to interpret the situation of students who do not work. The survey suggests that in many cases this is not a result of passivity, but a decision to focus on education and personal development. As described in Polish research, some students treat the university period as a time of intensive academic investment and postpone employment until later (Wronowska, 2011). The results of the present study clearly support this view, indicating that non-employment is often a deliberate and strategic choice.

Therefore, the findings of the present study contribute to a better understanding of student employment outside major academic and economic centres, highlighting the importance of local labour market conditions in shaping students' decisions.

5. Conclusions

The conducted research confirmed that student employment during studies is a common phenomenon, but not universal in the analysed group. Financial need was the main motivation for taking a job, while motivations related to experience and skill development were less frequent. Most respondents perceived the impact of work on academic results as neutral, and positive evaluations were more common than negative ones. Additionally, most students declared that they were able to combine employment with studying. At the same time, students who were not employed most often chose to focus on education and personal development. These findings show that student employment is a complex issue shaped by economic needs, personal priorities, and the ability to balance responsibilities. Understanding these patterns may support universities and employers in creating conditions that help students combine education and work without reducing academic quality or well-being. It is also important to emphasise the regional context of the study. The research was conducted among students from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, including Rzeszów, which may partly explain the strong emphasis on financial motivation. The results suggest that local labour market conditions

and economic factors play a significant role in shaping students' decisions regarding employment. Future research may further explore the issue of student employment and its impact on academic life.

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