



The secondary school experience and career orientation of students dropped out of higher education

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Abstract

We examined the characteristics of the respondents before entering higher education along the clusters. We have discovered the characteristics of secondary school studies and further education, the circumstances for applying for higher education. During the analysis of secondary school studies we took into account the type of class they studied in high school (in Hungary they can study in high school, vocational high school and secondary school), and how many times they changed school. In addition, we compared the results on the basis of school maintainers. There is a significant correlation between the reasons for high school experience and the dropout rate. In terms of cluster-based differences, it should be emphasized that the expectation of social mobility was overrepresented among the dropouts due to financial reasons and work, but it was also an important aspect that they did not have to pay fees in the programme where they studied. In addition, in the case of those who were disappointed in training and further education, it was most common to apply to the university because they did not want to work and could afford it. Our results can help to develop more effective drop-out protection for students entering higher education, both in public and higher education institutions and career orientation.

Keywords: higher education, drop-out, career orientation

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Introduction

Higher education expansion in Hungary has increased the number of its students, but also the number of those who leave higher education without qualification (Szemerszki, 2018). The Bologna system (introduced in Hungary since 2006) has not been able to effectively eliminate the large number of dropouts. (Wolter et al., 2014, quoted by Pusztai, 2018). Although experts agree that the reasons for dropouts do not necessarily arise during the years of higher education, their remedy is, however, a priority for this educational level. (Pusztai, 2018). In the framework of the NKFI research of the Center for Higher Education Research and Development of the University of Debrecen, we conducted our analysis using the questionnaire survey database (DEPART 2018) among the drop-out students. The research team formed four groups of dropouts: 1) students who are disappointed in their studies and further education; 2) students who are uncertain about the reason for dropping out; 3) due to learning difficulties; 4) drop out due to financial reasons and work (Kovács et al., 2019).

Secondary-school studies

As the first step in the study, we were curious about what experiences the respondents had in their secondary school studies. Of the 605 respondents surveyed, 12 percent of respondents switched schools during their high school years. Of these, 4.5% four or more times went to other secondary schools, 11.9% of the respondents three times, 19.4% of the respondents changed schools twice, and 64.2% once. 38.4% of the respondents completed their secondary education in secondary school and 61.6% did in high school. The majority of drop-out students went to state schools (81.2%), and 15.6% went to church schools. In lower numbers, 13 and 5 people are represented by

foundational and private secondary schools (2.4% and 0.9% respectively). 75% of the respondents got to the higher education institution they had originally wanted. There is also a connection between school changes and school types. 13% of those graduating from secondary school belonged to school leavers, while 11.9% of high school students came to another institution, which rate is not considered to be extremely high overall (Figure 1).

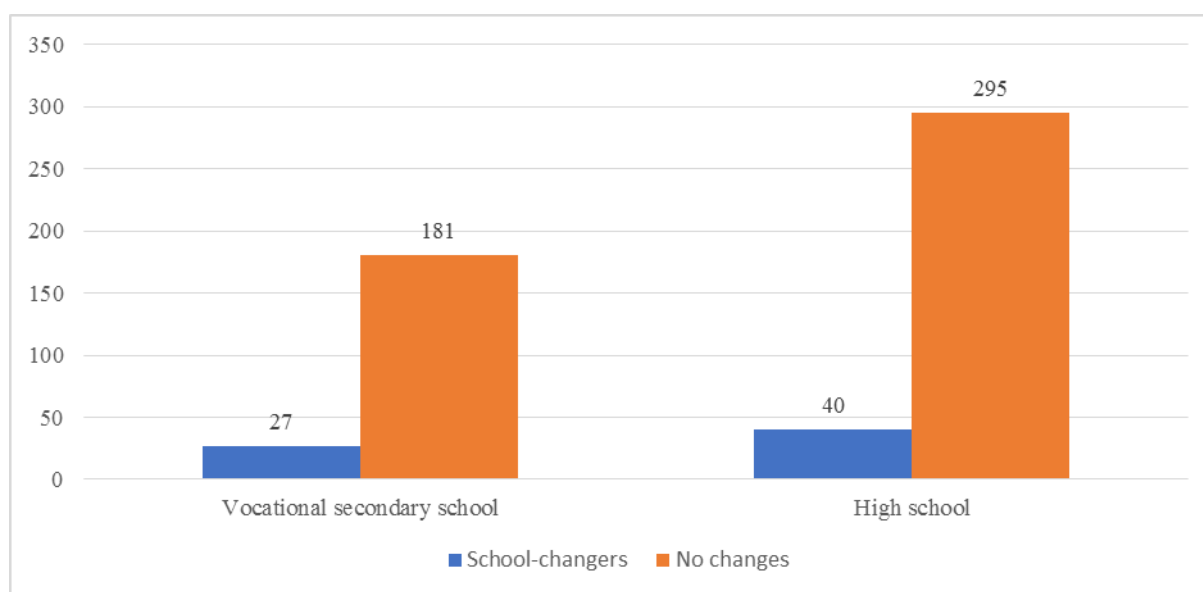


Figure 1. The number of school-leavers and their proportion among vocational secondary school and high school students. (N = 476). Source: DEPART 2018.

However, the highest proportion of pupils in foundational schools changed schools during their high school years. Regarding the number of school changes, there is a significant correlation between the number of school changes and the school maintainer (Chi-square test, $p = 0.016$). At the same time, there is a correlation between the possibility of school change and the type of training attended in the year of graduation ($p = 0.030$): in the case of students studying in the evening classes, the proportion of school-leavers is the highest, while in the case of full-time students it is less typical. Based on the figure below, it can be clearly seen that multiple school changes are more

likely to occur in the case of full-time students, but there is no significant correlation (Figure 2).

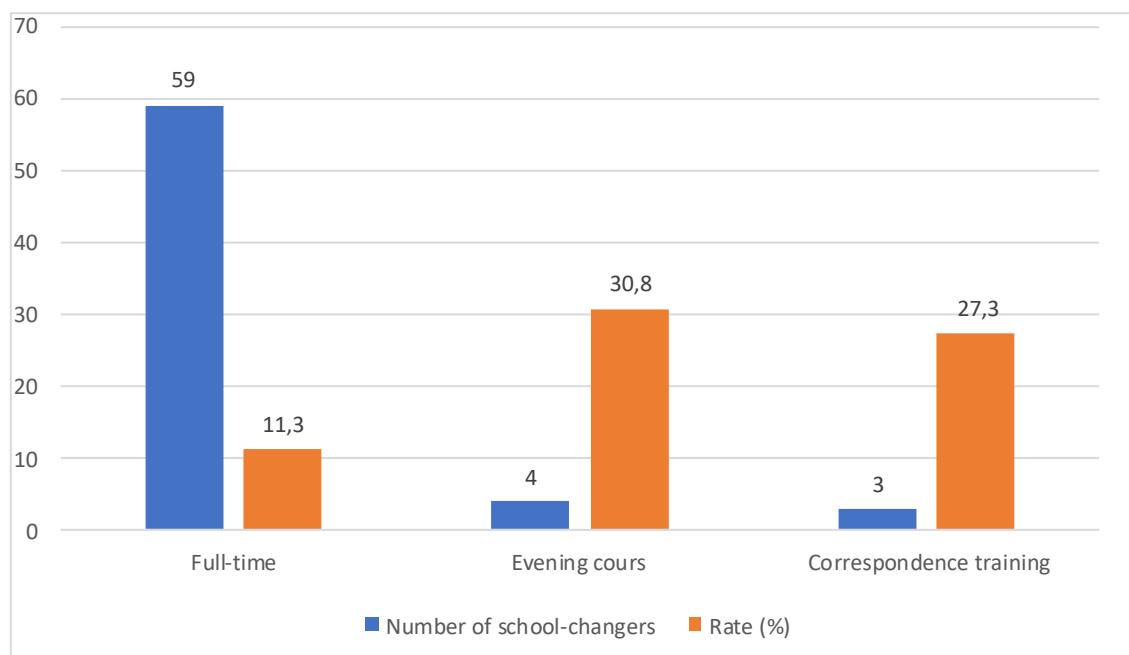


Figure 2. Number of school leavers in each class (66): Source: DEPART 2018.

Reasons for school-changing and dropout

90.2% of the respondents who indicated financial and employment problems did not change schools. The highest percentage of school dropouts due to learning difficulties can be found at secondary school, while the correlation is not significant. If we compare the reasons for the dropout and the type of secondary school of the subjects, we can conclude that the reasons for the dropout and the fact that the respondent graduated from secondary school or high school have a significant correlation ($p = 0.048$). 61.5% of those who drop out for financial reasons completed their secondary school studies at a high school. The highest proportion of high school students are among those who lose their motivation (70.8%), and the lowest rate is found in the cluster of dropouts due to learning difficulties (54.4%). Among the dropouts due to learning difficulties are the

highest number of vocational secondary school students (45.6%), and the lowest proportion in the cluster of those who are dissatisfied in their studies and the institutions (29.2%) (Figure 3).

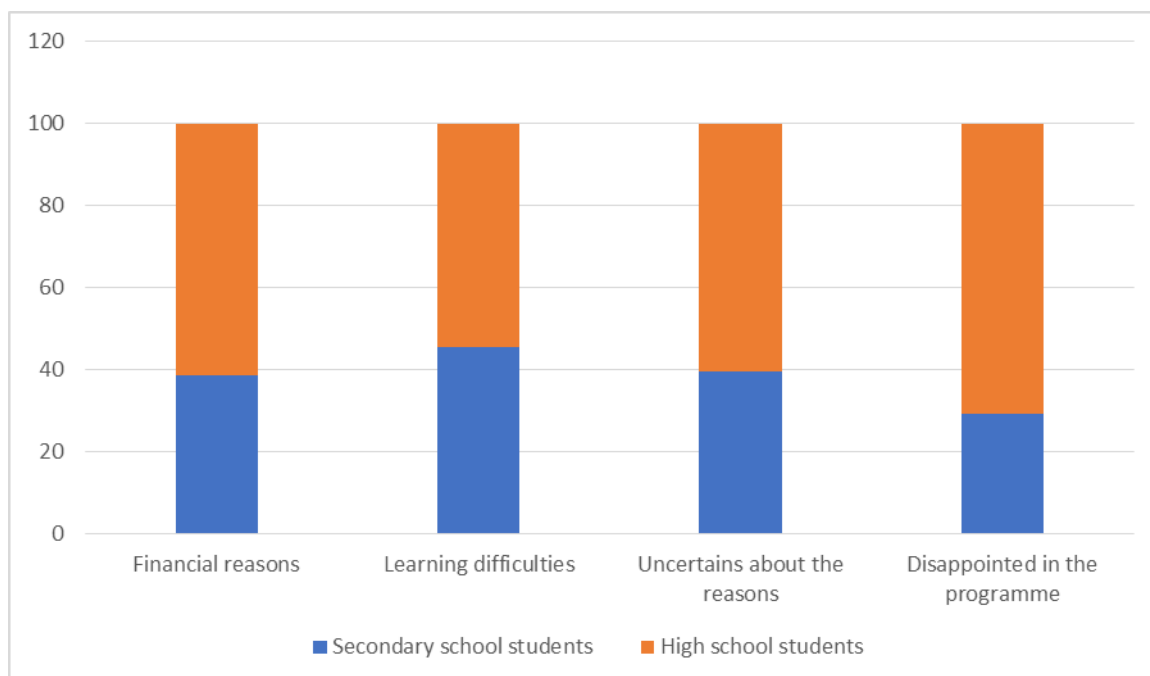


Figure 3. Reason for dropping out and type of high school (Chi-square test, NS) (N = 553). Source: DEPART 2018.

We did not find any significant correlation between drop-out clusters and whether the students study in full-time, evening or correspondence time training ($p = 0.079$). Among the uncertain subjects, the proportion of evening-training students is the highest (5.1%), and the correspondent time-training students are the most represented here as well. The highest rates of full-time students (98.5%) are among those who are disappointed in the programme and further education. Compared to drop-out clusters, the highest number of students who are uncertain in reason is the evening, (61.5%) and the correspondent (50%), but based on the answers, there is no significant correlation between the graduates and the reasons for drop-out. The division between clusters does not show a significant correlation with the school maintainer. However, it can be stated that dropouts due to learning difficulties and uncertain reasons are the highest among

students coming from state schools, while those in church schools have nominated financial reasons and loss of motivation (Figure 4).

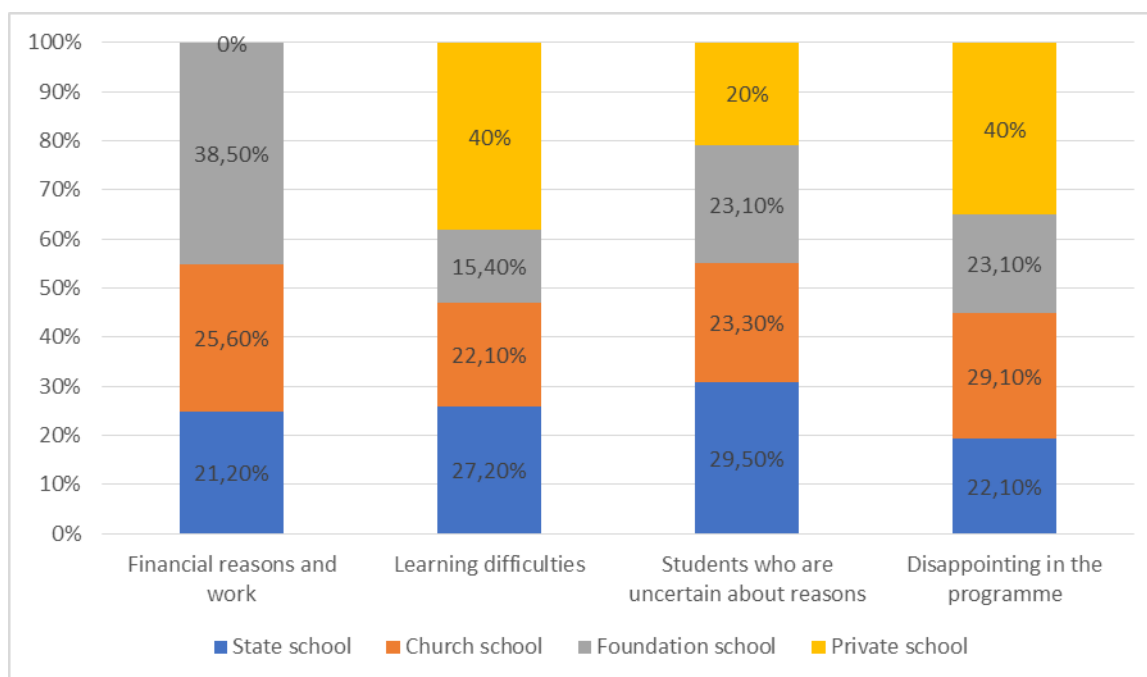


Figure 4. The relationship between school maintainers and dropouts (Chi-square test, NS) (N = 552).

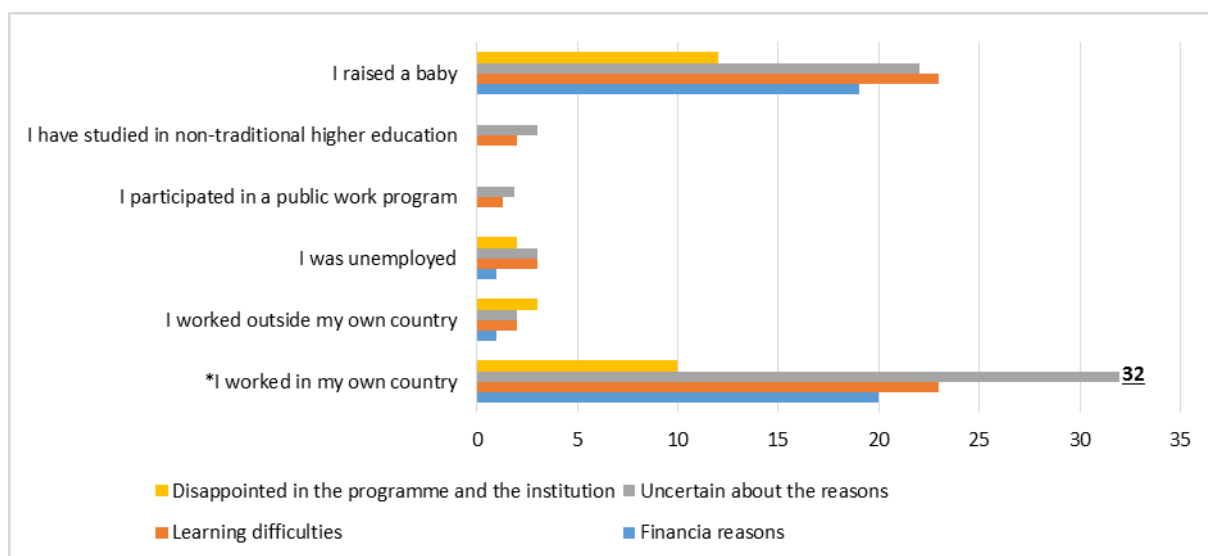
Source: DEPART 2018.

Career orientation, extra points when applying for higher education

We can categorize the factors that influence further education. In addition to individual and contextual systematization (Patton & McMahon, 1997; Guay et al., 2003; Papula, 2008; Olteanu, 2015), some typologies focus on material, social or cultural capital-like components (Pusztai & Verdes, 2002; Bright & Pusztai, 2004; Lannert, 2004). In order to have a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach, we focused our analysis on post-secondary studies, learning motives, and extra points on different titles. In Hungary, when applying for higher education, students can receive extra points in addition to the entry points for graduation and studies, which will be explained later. In our research, we discovered that the dropout students who did not start their higher education studies directly after graduation, what they did after graduation. The majority of the respondents spent time with work (most of them in their own country) or with learning.

The proportion of those who were unemployed (9 people), those who were in „GYES” (childcare assistance in Hungary) (6 people) or were involved in a public work program (5 people) could be considered relatively low in the detour group. From the comparison with the clusters, it can be seen that, before entering higher education, the proportion of people working in the home country was overrepresented among the uncertain students (Adj. Resid. = 2.1), but the same was the most typical form of activity for the dropouts for financial reasons. Those who drop out for study and institutional reasons, in addition to learning, have also indicated this at the highest rate (Figure 5).

As an explanation, students' employment is becoming more frequent and the causes of this phenomenon are complex (Gáti & Róbert, 2013; Bocsi, 2015; Kocsis, 2017). Making money-seeking activities - especially for non-traditional students participating in state-funded training - has enabled the financial conditions needed to maintain student life (Bocsi, 2015), which may extend to the period before inflow into higher education. In the case of respondents disappointed in the programme, working was also at the second place, but several of them did not study in traditional higher education (eg higher-level vocational training). According to the literature, in the case of disadvantaged students with weaker academic performance, higher-level vocational training can be a kind of opportunity to facilitate entry into BA / BSc level training (Reisz, 2009; Polónyi, 2014; Fehérvári, 2014).

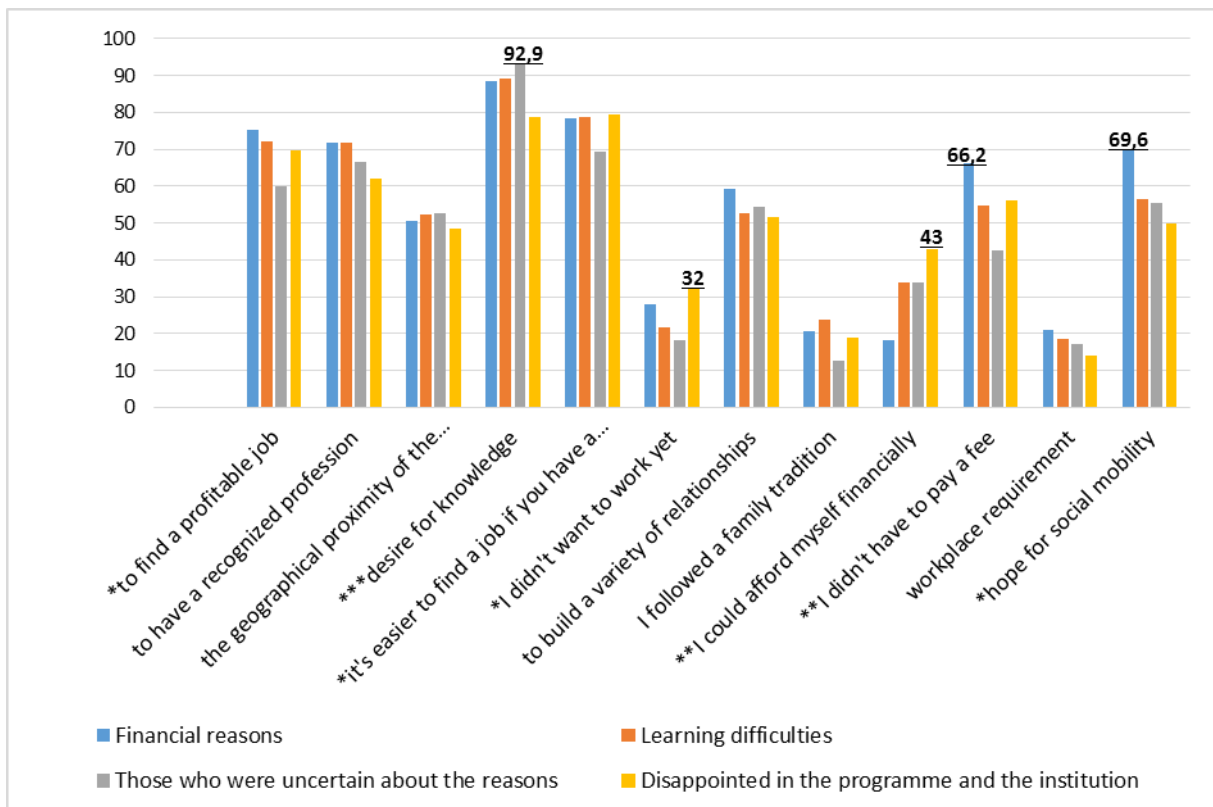


The absolute value of the adjusted residuals for the underlined values is greater than two. Figure 5. Distribution of activities performed in the period between secondary and higher education in the clusters of dropouts (%) (Chi-square test, $p = 0.027$) ($N = 605$). Source: DEPART 2018.

The majority of drop-out students came to higher education because of their desire for knowledge (87.5%). It has proved to be a very influential factor to find a job easier with a diploma (76.2%) and a profitable job (68.8%), as well as a desire for a recognized job (68.2%). More than half of the respondents had the hope of social mobility (57.5%) and the creation of multiple relationships (54.4%), as well as the lack of tuition fees (54.2%) and the geographical proximity of the institution (51.2%). However, it was less decisive in decision-making that the person could afford financially (32.5%), did not want to work (24.5%), follow a family tradition (18.8%) or meet the job requirement (17, 7%).

In the following, we examined the relationships between further study aspirations and clusters of drop-out students. Figure 6 shows that in all groups the decision of the respondents was mainly influenced by the increase of knowledge and easier positioning with the degree. Our results are in line with the results of Márkus (2015), who, based on the data of a large-scale, quantitative research on the Partium (an area inhabited by Hungarians in Romania), found that the main motivation of those applying for higher

education is the desire for knowledge besides the hope of more favorable labor market opportunities. Regarding the differences between clusters, it should be emphasized that the expectation of social mobility (69.6%, Adj. Resid. = 3.1) was overrepresented among the dropouts due to material reasons and work, and that no tuition fees had to be paid for the programme they participated (66, 2%, Adj. Resid. = 3.0). Furthermore, it was the most typical of those who were disappointed in their studies and further education that they did not want to work (32.0%, Adj. Resid. = 2.2) and could afford it financially (43.0%, Adj. Resid. = 2.8).



The absolute value of the adjusted residuals for the underlined values is greater than two.

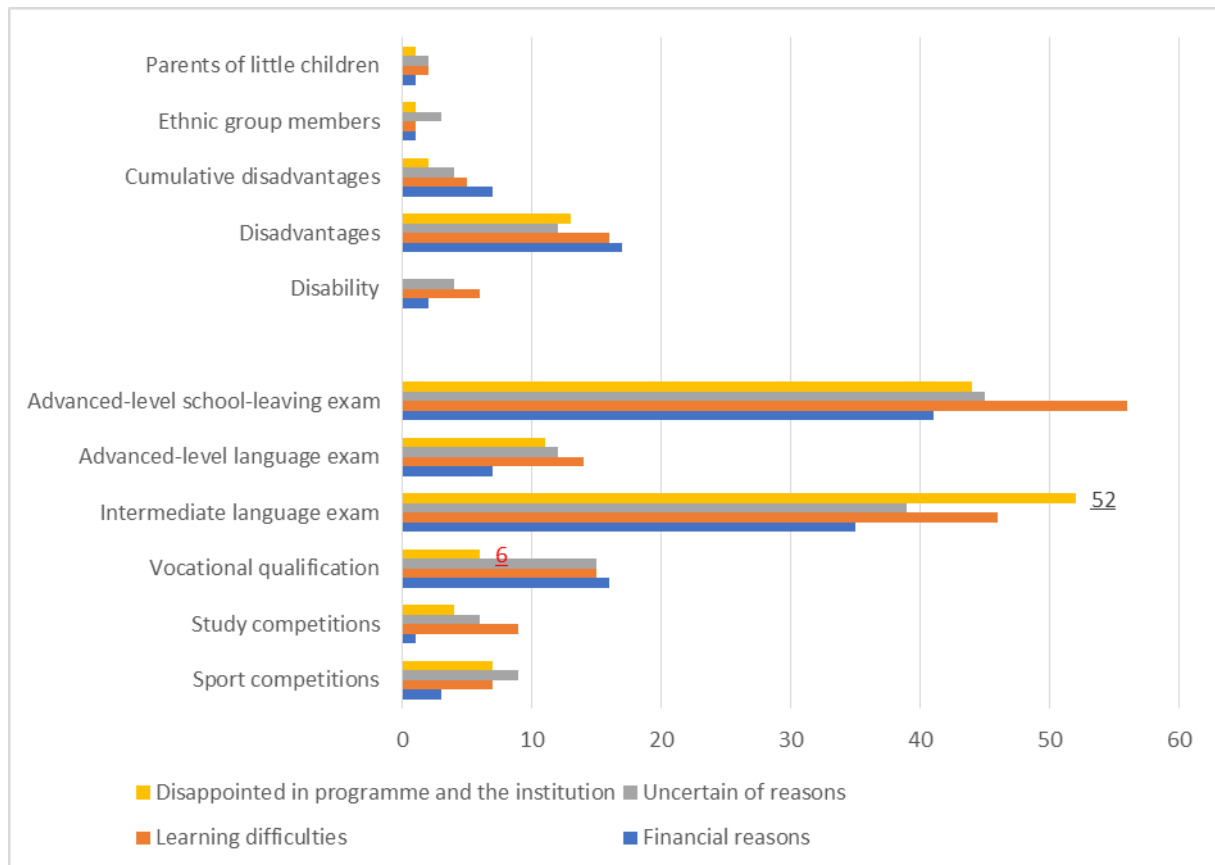
Figure 6. Distribution of learning motivation in dropout clusters (%) (Chi-square test, N = 605) (* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$). Source: DEPART 2018.

In the following, we examined how the clusters with different dropout patterns can be described based on the extra points used at the time of applying higher education. Based on the current Higher Education Act and the Government Decree on the Higher

Education Admission Procedure, extra points may be claimed on the basis of equal opportunities and study performance. According to the literature, students claiming extra points on equal opportunities can be classified as non-traditional students (among them are disadvantaged and cumulatively disadvantaged, disabled, ethnic group members, and parents of little children) (Attewell et al., 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Their appearance in higher education can be dated at the turn of the millennium (Pusztai, 2011; Fenyves et al., 2017; Pusztai & Szabó, 2014) and, according to the literature, they have a higher drop-out risk compared to traditional students (Fenyves et al., 2017).

While we expected that the drop-out rate for outstanding academic performance among school dropouts would be low, the answers show the following distribution. Most of them were awarded extra points due to the passing of an advanced level school-leaving exam among drop-out respondents, representing 30.5% of the total sample. They also have a high percentage of required language exam points. Their proportion is 28.2%. Though the group of those claiming extra points for disadvantage is third, however, the proportion of those who have reached the advanced level school-leaving exam and language exam is lagging behind, whereas the proportion of those claiming extra points for disadvantage is 9.5%. The proportion of those with advanced-level language exam is 8.9% of the sample and 8.5% of the OKJ degree. Percentage of students requiring extra points for sports competitions is 4.3%, and, in case of study competition the rate is 3.3%. There is a low proportion of people with multiple disadvantages, people with disabilities, ethnic group members, and parents of little children. Their ratio is 2.9%, 1.9% and 1-1%. The low proportion of those claiming additional points on equal opportunities is the same as in the literature and earlier researches, which show that they are present in higher education in a very small number. If we look at the reasons for dropouts, among

those who got different extra points, it appears that dropouts due to educational reasons are among those with advanced level school-leaving exam, advanced level language exam, those who got extra points for study competitions, and people with disabilities are very high (Figure 7). The financial reasons are most common for those who are in a disadvantageous and cumulative disadvantage, as well as those who require extra points for OKJ certification. The disappointment in the programme is higher among those who have passed the intermediate language exam than other reasons, and the uncertainty in the causes is typical of students belonging to the ethnic group and requiring extra points for sports performance. In the case of qualified respondents, students who are disappointed in the course are underrepresented. This suggests that a certain degree of deepening in the professions of their choice has already taken place before the start of higher education. This deepening can increase the commitment to studies and the chosen degree of science, serving as a retaining force during the higher education years.



Note: The figure is shown separately for those who qualify for bonus points (above) and for extra performance (below). Figure 7. Proportion of those eligible for different extra points in clusters of dropouts (%) (Quarter test, NS) (N = 605). Source: DEPART 2018.

Compared to Figure 7, students who have received extra points for equal opportunities and outstanding performance, drop-out students have a higher percentage of those who have earned extra points for some outstanding performance, including advanced-level school-leaving exam and intermediate language exam. However, as the data is not suitable for examining how many percent of people who are eligible for the various extra points are crumbling, and the current results do not show a significant correlation along the clusters studied, we cannot make clear statements about which groups are more vulnerable to dropout.⁴ However, it can be said that while groups of students

⁴ According to Ceglédi (2018), in the absence of significance, we investigated the extent of adjusted standardized residuals, the results of which prove to be relevant and useful to our research questions in the exploration of certain hiding correlations.

asking for equal opportunities are generally experiencing financial difficulties - perhaps because they did not receive real assistance in their difficulties after entering higher education - paradoxically, for students who earn extra points for outstanding performance, the reason of learning difficulties is the most common in their drop-out.

Summary

Students who leave their studies as a result of unjustified career choices and disillusionment are a major camp. Beyond the walls of the higher education institution, this problem is highlighted by the end of the cycle of public education as a failure of the career orientation function of high school. In such a case, the dropout is about correcting an erroneous decision of further education, the costs of which (lost time, lost state-supported semesters, etc.) are paid by the student. On the other hand, disillusionment is often the result of the curriculum and work forms of higher education, as the student finds out whether what he is studying is useful, valid, and effective as it is taught. The institution has to find an answer to this question, and if useful, valid and effective education takes place in the institution, the student has to be involved even in his / her own development. Most of the students have also changed their programme because they were disappointed with the training. This could be done by developing a career guidance system, but in the meantime, shifting needs to be supported by a more flexible education organization and credit recognition.

In all secondary schools, more emphasis should be placed on career guidance programs. Career guidance programs would be needed where a well-trained team of professionals (who are well versed in the offer of higher education, the nature of the training and the labor market), in collaboration with the classmates and parents, helps students to take their own interests, goals, abilities and opportunities into account in their further

education decision. Complementing this with a series of lectures where invited speakers (such as instructors, graduate students, senior students, etc.) provide information on individual disciplines, higher education requirements, difficulties and opportunities, merit and social scholarship opportunities, mentoring programs and expected costs.

It would be advisable to complement the career guidance opportunities by raising awareness of the differences in studying in public education and higher education, and by presenting concrete experiences and learning methods, even if the candidate has proved successful in his / her public education years (for example, he / she has a language exam, or an advanced level school-leaving exam). In addition to learning methods, it can also help to reconcile work with studies, as well as focus on longer-term financial rewards for a degree.

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