

Educational and Career Trajectories of Extramural Students and Graduates of Higher Education

[G. Cherednichenko](#)

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Galina Cherednichenko

Doctor of Sciences (Sociology), Chief Researcher, Institute of Sociology of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Address: 24/35 Krzhizhanskogo St, 117218 Moscow, Russian Federation. Email: galcher221@gmail.com

Abstract. The results of a 2019 sociological survey conducted on a nationwide structured sample of extramural students (2019) and graduates (2000–2018) of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)¹ are used to construct the social portrait of extramural students and graduates and identify the types of their educational strategies as well as the motives that led them to extramural studies. We compare the expected and experienced effects of education on graduates' positions in the labor market and analyze their movements within the socio-occupational hierarchy as a result of obtaining that education.

Extramural students differ from full-timers in that they feature a more democratic socioeconomic composition, possess a different amount of educational resources at the enrollment

stage, and have specific needs, the most important one being that of entering the labor market and/or compensating for one's reduced competitiveness. A large proportion of extramural students already have a vocational school diploma, which reflects the growing popularity of the bypass strategy to access higher education among certain social groups, which allows them to slip past the obligatory high-stakes testing. Educational capital of HEIs candidates (corresponding to four types of educational trajectories of extramural students) correlates with their socioeconomic backgrounds. The advantages and disadvantages of educational background at baseline extend into the next stage of education. Similarly, differences in social and occupational status at entry further translate into different degrees of success in converting qualifications into degree-matching statuses.

Keywords: higher education, extramural studies, college students, graduates, educational trajectories, application of HEIs degrees in the labor market.

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¹ Higher Educational Institutions (all Russian higher education) are represented by colleges and universities at the same time. They may now be called a university (for example Lomonosov Moscow State University, Tyumen Industrial University), an academy (for example the Altai Academy of Economics and Law), an institute (for example Voronezh State Institute of the Arts) or a school (for example the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences).

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Expansion of higher education in Russia has involved growing enrollment in full-time as well as extramural programs. Between 2010 and 2015, extramural students accounted for 52.1 to 46.9% of total enrollment and extramural graduates for 48.4 to 43.3% of all Higher Education (HE) graduates, the last few years showing a slightly downward trend (39.3% and 40.5% in 2018, respectively) [National Research University Higher School of Economics 2020: 181, 194]. However, higher education research is mostly focused on full-time programs. Meanwhile, extramural students play a significant role not only as a substantial percentage. By combining work and extramural study, broad social groups can satisfy their vital needs and get the otherwise inaccessible opportunity to upgrade their educational level and qualifications, adjust to the volatile demand, and become more competitive in the labor market.

On the one hand, massification of higher education has solved the vital issue of democratization in education. At the other hand, it has resulted in degradation of education quality standards, devaluation of degrees in the labor market, and a growing imbalance in fields of study in higher and vocational education [Zubok, Chuprov 2015; Klyucharev 2015; Konstantinovskiy, Popova 2015; Klyachko 2016; Belyakov, Klyachko, Polushkina 2018].

The quality of human capital formed by extramural HE depends not only on how educational processes are organized or the structural indicators of such organization, but it is also largely determined by students' educational, cultural and social characteristics. For this reason, it is important to construct the social portrait of extramural college students to find out what educational backgrounds they bring to college and how they use the acquired knowledge and skills in their professional life.

1. Trending Areas in Research on Educational and Career Trajectories of Youth

Russia's recent sociological studies on youth's educational and career trajectories feature comprehensive and differentiated analysis. The main focus is on how real choices are affected by a set of factors, including objective and subjective factors, external social determinants and young adults' strategies. A series of methodologically related projects [Cherednichenko 2001; 2014; Konstantinovskiy, Voznesenskaya, Cherednichenko 2014] explore the influence of demographics, labor market conditions, education system quality and, most importantly, ascribed characteristics (parental education and socioeconomic status, place of residence, gender, etc.) on educational and career trajectories of different groups of youth, including high school graduates, vocational school graduates (two types of programs), young blue-collar workers and rural youth. Educational and career trajectories are investigated from a chronological [Konstantinovskiy 1999; Konstantinovskiy et al. 2015], cohort [Konstantinovskiy et al. 2011] and regional [Kharchenko 2008] perspectives. More specific issues, such as grad-

uate career tracking or correlations between accumulated educational capital and employment, have been studied for particular occupations groups or universities [Donetskaya, Dovgal 2018; Sandler et al. 2018; Yushkina 2019].

In major cross-cultural and monitoring studies of the recent years, trajectories have been approached as a many-staged cumulative process unfolding as a function of family background, types of educational institutions, employment history, etc. The life course approach suggests concentrating research efforts on a human being's journey through the education system where past decisions and behavior affect decisions and behavior in the future. Researchers analyze the primary and secondary effects of social background on the learning process and educational choices of middle and high school graduates, describe specific strategies of different social groups [Bessudnov, Malik 2016; Kosyakova et al. 2016; Khavenson, Chirkina 2019] and examine how institutional and cultural changes prompted by social development affect gender segregation in the labor market [Kosyakova, Kurakin 2016].

2. Project of the Institute of Sociology of FCTAS RAS

An integrated sociological study of demand for extramural higher education among certain population groups, their social behavior in education, the quality of extramural education across HEIs, application of such education and how it is converted into careers and qualifications-matching positions in the labor market has been administered by the Institute of Sociology of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research. The study includes a dynamic analysis of primary statistics for 2000–2017 posted on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia and in official statistics reports [Cherednichenko 2018], analysis of the findings of the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey conducted by the Higher School of Economics (RLMS-HSE) [Cherednichenko 2019], a 2019 online survey of extramural students 2019 and extramural graduates 2000–2018, and 42 in-depth interviews with 19 extramural students and 23 extramural graduates with 3 to 15 years of post-graduation work experience (from among the 2019 online survey participants).

In this article, we only use the survey results but not the interview transcripts. Such definition of empirical basis entails inevitable limitations in some research aspects, such as in identifying the social groups that would be outsiders in the competition for HEI admission if they had no access to extramural programs, outlining the specific needs, limitations and life circumstances associated with choosing the extramural mode of study, characterizing the key types of educational and career trajectories pursued by extramural students and the specific aspects of trajectory planning and implementation, describing extramural HE graduates' pre- and post-graduation positions in

the labor market and their strategies of applying and converting the skills they have acquired, etc.

A survey of extramural HE students 2019 and graduates released in 2000–2018 was administered online in May 2019 by the Tiburon Research agency, which ensured a representative sample by providing a nationwide online panel of 550,000 respondents structured by 12 indicators including gender, age, personal and family income, marital status, financial standing, occupation and position held. The sample included extramural HE students and graduates from all Russian cities with population over 500,000. The student subsample was obtained with regard to government statistics on participation of youth (population aged 17–25) in all types of higher education programs (31.8% in 2016) and the percentage of extramural students in total HE enrollment (40.8% in the academic year 2017/18). The graduate subsample was obtained with regard to government statistics on the percentage of extramural graduates in the total population of HE graduates (for every year between 2000 and 2017) and youth participation in all types of higher education programs (for every year between 2000 and 2017). Statistics was compiled using questionnaire responses from 212 extramural students and 213 extramural graduates. Both subsamples feature the same proportion of male to female respondents, which equals 35.3 to 64.7%. The student subsample had 11.8% of the respondents aged 18–20, 38.7% aged 21–25, 32.1% aged 26–30 and 17.4% aged 31–35. In the graduate subsample, 3.4% were aged 18–25, 14.5% aged 26–30, 31.6% aged 31–35, 27.6% aged 36–40 and 23.0% aged 41–45.

The survey was based on two questionnaires, one for students (28 items) and one for graduates (29 items). Twenty-eight items are nearly identical in both questionnaires, except that seven of them have two alternative wordings to ask students about their current/projective situation and graduates about their past experience or outcomes (e.g. “How the distance education that you receive will be useful for you?” vs. “How the distance education that you received was useful for you?”) Special attention was paid to improving credibility and reliability of data obtained for several critical measures of objective situation, such as personal and family socioeconomic status, college ranking, major, etc. Data was collected from 14 written responses to open-ended questionnaire items, which were encoded by researchers using the Rosstat² classifiers and their clickable links as well as the RAEX Russia’s university rankings.

3. Educational Trajectories

3.1. The Social Portrait of Extramural Students and Graduates

It would be quite natural to expect that extramural HEIs learners come from lower sociocultural backgrounds than their full-time peers and students of selective universities. Back in the Soviet times, extramu-

² Federal State Statistics Service of Russia

ral programs were explicitly designed to provide access to higher education for young blue-collar workers and rural youth, i. e. those who could not afford not working while studying.

Graduates of vocational schools accounted for 31.7% of fathers and 42.0% of mothers of the respondents, constituting the modal group among parents by the level of educational attainment (measured at respondent graduation from secondary school). They are followed by HE-educated parents, who account for 29.2% of fathers and 32.6% of mothers. The lower educational levels of primary vocational school and middle school are found more often among fathers (16.6 and 13.4%, respectively) than mothers (10.1 и 11.0%) of extramural students and graduates. As for the socioeconomic distribution of parents assessed at respondent graduation from secondary school, the modal group and those adjacent to it appear to be highly polarized between fathers and mothers. The highest frequency group among fathers is “skilled workers” (35.7%), followed by “semiskilled workers” (23.5%), while the modal group among mothers is “mid-level professionals” (25.9%), immediately followed by “highly skilled professionals” (21.9%). The major aggregate groups of blue- and white-collar workers are polarized likewise, accounting for 61.7% and 29.3% among fathers and 21.9 and 73.2% among mothers, respectively. Therefore, the trajectory of accessing higher education via extramural study is used most often by students taking a social elevator from blue-collar fathers and mothers employed in white-collar jobs most of which require no higher education degree.

Of all the respondents, 25.2% had attended rural schools, and 20% of those were raised by single mothers. When asked to rate on a five-point scale the financial standing of their family at the time of their being school graduates, 39.3% of extramural students and graduates selected the middle option (“We had enough money to afford decent food, clothing and even some durable goods”) and 37.9% rated their family status one point lower (“We only had enough money to cover such basic needs as modest food, clothing and shoes, utility bills and household maintenance”).

It follows therefore that extramural learners are recruited from low socioeconomic backgrounds, i. e. they have “weaker” positions in terms of their sociocultural capital and financial standing as compared to high school graduates who most often enroll in full-time higher education programs [Khavenson, Chirkina 2019:547–550]. The extramural mode of study thus serves to make higher education more accessible and promote social mobility in the current context of growing inequality of resource and opportunity.

The socioeconomic status affected directly the motives that the respondents used to explain why they had not enrolled in a full-time program. Being free to select up to three out of eleven possible reasons suggested, they mostly chose income-related ones. The option “I had to start working and making money” was chosen by 52.0% of the re-

spondents, “I considered combining work and study to be a more rational choice” by 29.9%, and “I had no money to pay for full-time education” by 22.5%. A low level of self-perceived competitiveness was mentioned much less often as a reason behind choosing extramural studies, only 12.9% of the respondents selecting either “I failed to be admitted to a full-time program” or “I was not eligible for a government-subsidized place in a full-time program”.

3.2. Pre-Higher Education Trajectories

Admission to extramural higher education programs is far less selective than to full-time ones. According to government statistics, in 2016 there were 2.23 applications per place in extramural programs as compared to 6.77 in full-time programs across public universities and 1.26 and 2.76 in private ones, respectively [Cherednichenko 2018:255]. Low selectivity is a critical factor of choosing this mode of study for some consumer groups. Candidates for extramural HEIs programs differ essentially from those applying for full-time programs in the level of educational attainment. Government statistics indicate that full-time program candidates are largely—about 90% from 2000 through 2016—represented by high school graduates, predominantly those who have just finished school [Cherednichenko 2018:261]. The distribution of extramural candidates by educational background according to the survey results is shown in Table 1. The majority (59%) hold certificates of vocational education mostly (49.9%) obtained in mid-level professional programs (MLPP), and only as few as 2.6% are graduates of skilled worker programs (SWP). High school graduates account for a significantly lower proportion of extramural enrollment (26.8%), most of them being graduates of regular secondary schools and 6.5% holding certificates of gymnasiums and lyceums. Among extramural students and graduates, 14.4% are pursuing a second HE degree—this is regulated by law, as getting another HEI degree in Russia is only possible within extramural programs.

There are also differences in the educational paths that bring students and graduates to extramural HE programs. Nearly all the respondents fall into four major tracks defined as different combinations of school education and any other type of pre-HE training. Three of the four tracks are of comparable size: “middle school to vocational” (27.8% of all extramural students and graduates), “high school to vocational” (31.1%) and “high school” (26.3%). About half of candidates in track 3 were admitted to HEI the same year they graduated from school, and the other half did it later. The fourth track, “high school to 1st HE degree”, followed by those who obtain a degree (mostly full-time) immediately after high school and then apply for another one extramurally, is noticeably less popular, accounting for 13.6% of all extramural students and graduates. Only 2.2% of all the respondents do not fit into any of the four categories described.

The largest proportion of extramural students have completed a vocational school, which points to a popular bypass strategy for ac-

Table 1. Educational background of extramural HE candidates (%)

| Level of educational attainment; mode of study | Percentage of sample |
|--|----------------------|
| High school, gymnasium, lyceum; full-time | 26.8 |
| MLPP, full-time | 49.9 |
| MLPP, extramural | 6.4 |
| SWP in combination with secondary education | 2.6 |
| HE, full-time | 11.1 |
| HE, part-time/extramural | 3.3 |
| Total | 100.0 |

N of respondents = 425.

cessing HE in Russia's education system (with some modifications introduced in 2017—see below) that allows slipping past the obligatory high-stakes testing of the more selective high school academic track. Sociological studies demonstrate that accessing HEI via vocational school is popular among middle school graduates from families of comparatively low socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural capital. Based on their perceptions of benefits, costs and risks, they choose the path that offers additional confidence in the labor market in the form of a MLPP certificate and, hence, an opportunity to get a HE degree [Alexandrov, Tenisheva, Savelyeva 2015; Konstantinovskiy, Popova 2018]. The HSE's Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations (MEMO) revealed that, apart from socially disadvantaged candidates, this strategy is also adopted by students from the most favorable backgrounds whose level of academic achievement is too low to succeed in the high school final test [Kosyakova et al. 2016:92, 95]. Presence of such students from well-educated families in the "middle school to vocational" track may explain some deviations in the general trends of characteristics observed across the four categories (see below). The "high school to vocational" track is another version of accessing HE via vocational school. About half of students in this track apply for HEIs the same year they graduate from vocational school. It is highly probable that one of the reasons for making a detour like that is the opportunity to submit a certificate of vocational training instead of low USE³ scores when applying to HEIs.

Some changes were made to HEIs admission rules for candidates with MLPP certificates in 2017. From then on, such candidates

³ Unified State Exam

Table 2. Socioeconomic family background characteristics of extramural students and graduates in different educational tracks (%)

| Pre-HE educational track | Percentage of HE-educated mothers | Percentage of blue-collar father | Percentage of families with incomes lower/higher than average |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Middle school to vocational | 27.5 | 67.0 | 48/15 |
| High school to vocational | 26.2 | 69.7 | 45/13 |
| High school | 37.5 | 57.5 | 42/18 |
| High school to 1st HE degree | 43.1 | 43.1 | 39/24 |

N of respondents = 425.

can be admitted based on either USE scores or the results of internal admission tests administered by the HEI, faculty or department—most often, at candidate’s discretion. As the percentage of same-year MLPP graduates among accepted HEIs students remained at the level of 11% between 2014 and 2018, according to government statistics [HSE2020:58], it can be safely stated that the reform has not affected the strategy of accessing HE via vocational school significantly. Extramural candidates’ behavior has been affected to an even lesser degree, considering that competition for admission to extramural programs is lower than to full-time ones, and extramural candidates rarely apply to top-ranking universities.

Let us now dwell on correlations between extramural students’ background and their choice of educational trajectory. Table 2 shows a number of sociocultural and economic background characteristics of extramural students’ and graduates’ parents at the time of their graduation from secondary school.

In the order the four trajectories are listed, we generally observe an increase in the percentage of HE-educated mothers (from 26.2 to 43.1%) and that of families with incomes higher than average (from 13 to 24%) and a decrease in the percentage of blue-collar fathers (from 69.7 to 43.1%) and that of families with incomes lower than average (from 48 to 39%). The “middle school to vocational” track stands somewhat out, probably due to the heterogeneous sociocultural composition of students in this category, featuring representatives of disadvantaged social groups as well as those from highly resourceful families.

The order in which the four tracks are given in Table 2 represents a certain hierarchy illustrating, through the example of extramural study, the well-known correlation between academic achievement and socioeconomic status of parents. Theory of primary and secondary effects of social background has been widely used by international research-

ers and some experts in Russia [Bessudnov, Malik 2016; Kosyakova et al. 2016; Khavenson, Chirkina 2019] for analyzing this correlation, which is largely interpreted as reproduction of social inequality in education. Primary effects of social background are generally believed to manifest themselves in inequality of educational attainment, while secondary effects add to inequality of educational trajectories unrelated to differences in attainment. Available empirical findings do not allow drawing a clear line of demarcation between primary and secondary effects but do indicate a cumulative impact of parental education, social status and financial standing on both performance and educational choices of students. On the one hand, academic attainment improves from the first to the fourth track, as evidenced by increasing competitiveness: (i) better performance in middle school allows students to proceed to high school (track 2) instead of dropping out after the 9th grade (track 1); (ii) better performance in high school allows them to enroll in an extramural HE program (track 3) instead of going to a vocational school (track 2); (iii) excellent performance in high school leads to pursuing a first (mostly full-time) HE degree (track 4). On the other hand, this hierarchy is structured from lower to higher levels and types of training and captures the increase in educational capital accumulated prior to engaging in extramural study, thus reflecting the secondary effects of social background on inequality in education as well. Such secondary effects become obvious when their influence is reproduced at subsequent stages of extramural students' and graduates' educational trajectories.

3.3. Further Educational Trajectories

Table 3 shows the relationship between the type of pre-HE educational track and the ranking of HEI chosen for pursuing an extramural program. Higher position of the track in the hierarchy identified above correlates with a higher percentage of its followers (increasing from 6.1% in track 1 to 22.4% in track 4) admitted to the best-reputed HEIs ranked among the top 50 of RAEX-100⁴ and a lower percentage of those who enroll in colleges unranked in RAEX-100. There is a minor deviation from the general trend though, particularly an increased proportion (15.8%) of track 1 representatives in HEIs ranked in the lower half of RAEX-100 and, consequently, a somewhat reduced percentage of such students in HEIs unranked. This is where we probably observe, again, the effects of using the bypass strategy of accessing HE via vocational school by two social groups that differ in size and socioeconomic backgrounds. Perhaps, this is where the more socially advan-

⁴ RAEX Analytics rating agencies have produced annual rankings of Russian colleges since 2012, using statistical indicators and data from surveys of 30,000 respondents including teaching and academic staff, HE students and graduates, and employers. This study uses data of the 2018 rankings: <https://lugasoft.ru/ok/okz/2014>; <https://lugasoft.ru/ok/okved/2014>; <http://www.edu.ru/abitur/act.9/index.php?rating/rating-2018.html>

Table 3. **HEIs ranking: positions relative to the RAEX-100**

| Pre-HE educational track | Top 100 | | Unranked | Total |
|---------------------------------|---------|--------|----------|-------|
| | 1–50 | 51–100 | | |
| 1. Middle school to vocational | 6.1 | 15.8 | 78.0 | 100 |
| 2. High school to vocational | 11.4 | 8.3 | 79.6 | 100 |
| 3. High school | 14.3 | 9.8 | 75.1 | 100 |
| 4. High school to 1st HE degree | 22.4 | 10.3 | 67.2 | 100 |

N of respondents=425.

tagged representatives of the “middle school to vocational” track can convert the benefits of their socioeconomic status into a slightly more frequent choice of prestigious HEIs ranked in the Top 100, on the one hand; on the other hand though, they can only access HEIs ranked 51st to 100th as a result of their low academic achievement.

Half of students and graduates in track 1, slightly less than half of those in track 2 and slightly more than half of those in track 3 enroll in extramural HE programs the same year that they graduate from a previous educational institution, and about one sixth of the sample do it within two years after graduation. That is, approximately two thirds of the respondents chose to engage in extramural study to keep their educational trajectories uninterrupted until they obtained a HE degree. Track 1 and 2 students and graduates, i. e. those with certificates of vocational schools, mostly selected the “I had to start working” option to explain their choice. The incidence of this motive among vocational school graduates is higher than the sample’s average. Track 3 representatives are much less likely to mention that factor, instead referring to their low competitiveness more often than others, although this latter motive also appears to be relatively significant for track 2 students and graduates as well. Only one in ten students and graduates in tracks 1 and 2 had no employment when starting their extramural studies, while the percentage among high school graduates (track 3) exceeds one third. Obviously, followers of tracks 1 and 2 choose to combine work and study deliberately, whereas track 3 students have to do it as a result of the forced choice in favor of a lower competition for admission. Track 4 stands out essentially, with only one third of followers applying for extramural programs right after getting their first HE degree. Nearly half of them pursue Master’s degrees, while representatives of other tracks are mostly enrolled in Bachelor’s and Specialist’s programs.

Therefore, the survey results confirm, on a new empirical material, the major findings obtained so far in research on secondary and vocational school students’ educational trajectories [Alexandrov, Teni-

sheva, Savelyeva 2015; Kosyakova et al. 2016; Yastrebov, Kosyakova, Kurakin 2018], specifically the bypass strategy of accessing higher education via vocational school pursued by a number of social groups and low-performing students, socioeconomic status as a critical factor affecting educational trajectory at every stage of education, and social advantages and disadvantages determining the start of an educational trajectory and preserving some of their influence throughout subsequent educational stages.

4. Changes to Position in the Labor Market

4.1. Expectations and Reality

All extramural students and graduates seek to improve their position in the labor market, regardless of whether they enter a HEI the same year they graduate from a previous institution (46.7% of students and 50.2% of graduates) or later. To compare expectations and outcomes, we analyze perceived potential effects of extramural study on students' position in the labor market and feedback obtained from graduates with some post-graduation work experience⁵. Table 4 displays the distribution of students' answers to question, "How the extramural education that you receive will be useful for you?", and Table 5 shows the distribution of graduates' answers as to how their extramural degree has actually improved their position in the labor market. Students were free to select up to three answers from the list suggested, so percentages of total respondents who selected each answer add up to more than 100%. Graduates were asked to choose between 'Yes' and 'No' on every item, Table 5 showing percentages of those who answered 'Yes' on each specific item.

The widest gap between expectations and reality is observed in the incidence of reporting no returns on the degree obtained. Only 5.7% of the respondents believed at the beginning of their study that they would not benefit at all from their extramural HE degree, whereas 42.3% of extramural graduates complain the education they received has not improved their position at work or in the labor market in any way. Expected value of promotion is perceived as higher than that of better working conditions, students being much more likely to seek promotion in general ("Take a position that requires a college degree"—53.8%, "Succeed in the labor market in general"—32.5%) than achieve any specific goals ("Get the job I want", "Start a business of my own", "Protect myself against being fired"—27.4, 20.8 and 6.6%, respectively). Assessing the actual outcomes of training obtained, graduates tend to mention legitimation of their employment or labor market positions ("Improved my labor market position in general", "Legitimized my right to hold my current position"—55.9 and 49.3%, respectively) more often than specific career improve-

⁵ Among the extramural graduates surveyed, 32.9% had 1 to 6 years of post-graduation work experience, 42.7% had 7 to 12, and 24.4% had 13 to 19 years of experience.

Table 4. “How the extramural education that you receive will be useful for you?” (percentages of total respondents)

| Students' expectations | % |
|---|------|
| Take a position that requires a HE degree | 53.8 |
| Succeed in the labor market in general | 32.5 |
| Get promoted at my current employer | 32.1 |
| Get a better job / the job I want | 27.4 |
| Compete with full-time HE graduates for employment on equal terms | 23.1 |
| Start a business of my own | 20.8 |
| Protect myself against getting fired or laid off | 6.6 |
| Will not affect anything | 5.7 |

No of respondents=212.

Table 5. “In what ways has your extramural HE degree improved your position at work or in the labor market?” (percentages of graduates who answered ‘Yes’)

| Graduates' assessments | % |
|---|------|
| It hasn't | 42.3 |
| Improved my labor market position in general | 55.9 |
| Legitimized my right to hold my current position | 49.3 |
| Helped me find a new job that requires a HE degree | 46.5 |
| Legitimized my right to be paid my current salary | 42.7 |
| Helped me find a new job matching my acquired specialty | 40.8 |
| Got me a pay rise | 39.9 |
| Helped me get a job promotion | 38.5 |
| I got promoted as a result of getting a new job | 35.7 |

N of respondents=213.

ments (pay rise-39.9%, job promotion-38.5%, promotion as a result of finding a new job-35.7%). In their assessments, general improvements (“Improved my labor market position in general”—55.9%) prevail over specific ones (“Legitimized my right to hold my current position”—49.3%; “Got me a pay rise”—39.9%). Finding a new job that requires a HE degree is reported somewhat more often (46.5%) than finding a new job matching the acquired specialty (40.8%).

Table 6. Status of extramural graduates at HEI entry and at the survey (%)

| | At HEI entry | At the survey |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Leaders | 1.9 | 14.6 |
| Highly skilled professionals | 18.8 | 50.7 |
| Mid-level professionals | 29.1 | 6.6 |
| Data entry and information processing workers, clerks | 5.6 | 1.9 |
| Sales, service and public utility workers | 12.7 | 2.3 |
| Skilled workers | 10.8 | 3.3 |
| Semiskilled workers | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Unskilled workers | 3.3 | 0.5 |
| Other | 3.3 | 4.7 |
| Unemployed / No data | 12.2 | 13.1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

* N of respondents=213.

As we can see, extramural students expect professional growth, promotion and better salaries from their prospective HE degree, but the real outcomes most often reported by graduates include improved position in the labor market and legitimization of the current position. Cases of promotion and professional growth are reported much less often by respondents with post-graduation work experience.

4.2. Changes to Status

Data on changes to the respondents' social and occupational status could be a better evidence of changes in graduates' employment positions. Respondents described their status by answering a series of open-ended questions with subsequent response coding. Table 6 displays two distributions of extramural graduates by social and occupational status—at HEI entry and at the survey, when most of them had been employed for a while after graduation.

Among graduates, the most dramatic change is observed in the percentage of individuals whose occupational status matches their HEIs qualifications, which increased 3.2 times to 65.3%. Highly skilled professionals account for 50.7% of this group (a 2.7-time increase), and leaders for 14.5% (the sharpest increase of 7.7 times). Obviously, the formal HE certificate requirement plays the most important role in accessing a leadership job. Percentages of leaders and highly skilled professionals increased at the expense of all other occupational levels, in particular mid-level professionals (a decrease from 29.1 to 6.6%) and skilled workers (from 10.8 to 3.3%), which indicates a change of

occupation upon obtaining a HE degree among graduates of mid-level professional programs, the most popular type of pre- HE education. The greatest reduction (from 12.7 to 2.3%) can be seen among sales and service workers, occupations that are fairly popular as first jobs. The percentage of semiskilled and unskilled workers remained low-5.6% at HEI entry and 2.8% at the survey. Therefore, 16.9% of extramural HE graduates in the sample have not succeeded in converting their HE degrees into qualifications-matching jobs. In addition, 13.1% of the graduates were unemployed at the survey or no data was available for them, and 4.7% were in the military or freelancers.

Of 65.3% extramural HE graduates employed as leaders and highly skilled professionals, 20.7% already had their current positions at HEI entry. However, only 8.0% had a first HE degree prior to enrolling in an extramural program—those in the “high school to 1st HE degree” track—while others were holding the positions of leaders and highly skilled professionals without the formal right to do so, so they enrolled in extramural HE programs to consolidate and legitimize their positions.

In order to find out whether (and how, if it does) baseline status impacts the effectiveness of converting an extramural HE degree into a qualifications-matching job, we suggest estimating the percentage of extramural graduates holding leadership and highly skilled professional positions across different baseline statuses. The groups formed on the basis of baseline status differ in the percentage of individuals in the “Unemployed / No data” category. This will affect estimation accuracy to some extent, yet we will still be able to compare changes in the percentage of leaders and highly skilled professionals across the groups, which matters the most in this case. As the results show, positions matching extramural HE degree qualifications are held by 89% of graduates who were highly skilled professionals at entry (no data for 5%), 73% of those who started as mid-level professionals (no data for 13%) and 56% of the respondents who were employed as service, sales or blue-collar workers at the baseline, treated as a single group (no data for 13%). The fact that the most favorable positions in the labor market are held by those who chose to access HEI via vocational school confirms “feasibility” of the strategy initially designed to achieve two goals—access higher education and ensure a guarantee of a relatively in-demand job. Work experience gained at such positions, combined with HE training, contributes to professional growth and promotion. Those who had “weaker” employment positions at the baseline find it harder to convert their extramural HEI degrees into degree-matching statuses.

In full conformity to cultural capital theory, students from families with no HE experience are much more likely to find themselves socially disadvantaged. Low awareness in this domain results in an inability to evaluate properly the differences among HEIs, analyze the labor market prospects offered by different institutions, compare different

programs, majors, modes of study, etc. Consequently, first-generation HE students often select majors, programs or departments of low quality or offering no good employment prospects. The existence of such low-quality majors and programs in higher education is an inevitable outcome of market mechanisms responding to the growing demand for HEIs degrees.

The previously revealed trend of social advantages and disadvantages that determine the start of an educational trajectory being partially preserved and extended into subsequent educational stages is thus applicable to further educational and career trajectories, too.

5. Conclusion

There are two major categories of extramural higher education program consumers. The first one is represented by young people determined to keep their educational trajectories uninterrupted until they obtain a HE degree. They use specific strategies to avoid submitting USE scores for admission and engage in intermediary vocational training instead to secure themselves an employment and/or to overcome the limitations imposed by their low competitiveness. Students in the second category enroll in extramural HEIs programs with two or more years of work experience; they are less numerous and use extramural study to satisfy their need for mobility and/or stability in the labor market.

Extramural degrees are mostly pursued by students from relatively low cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. They differ in the size of their educational capital at HEI entry, and their differences are manifested in four types of educational tracks preceding admission to HEI. The four types of tracks make up a hierarchy that mirrors the hierarchy of cultural and socioeconomic statuses of extramural students' parents. The advantages and disadvantages of baseline educational background across the four tracks are preserved to a certain extent and translate into qualitative characteristics of education obtained in HEIs.

Differences in social and occupational positions at HEI entry, associated with educational background, impact the effectiveness of converting an obtained degree into a high-status labor market position matching the degree qualifications. Subgroups that possess better educational and status resources at baseline get an advantage here. Successful conversion of extramural HE degrees into social and occupational statuses is much more typical of those who needed their degree to get promoted to a leadership position or legitimate such position in case they were already holding one. This group is followed on the success scale by those who sought to change their mid-level professional jobs for highly skilled professional and leadership ones. Students who wanted a degree to get promoted from positions of blue-collar, service, sales and clerical workers are in the least

advantageous situation, their success rate being lower than the sample's average.

Therefore, extramural study contributes a lot to democratization of higher education, making it accessible to students from relatively low socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. However, those who start off from less advantaged positions sometimes do not obtain the desired effects from HEIs degrees that they overwhelmingly seek in expectation of better salary opportunities in the labor market.

Socioeconomic advantages that most consumers of extramural higher education gain as a result of increasing their educational capital are crucial beyond doubt. Additionally, education has positive effects on personality development and social behavior and a number of other indirect effects, which is left beyond the scope of this study but nevertheless unquestionable. This study was aimed at shedding light on a number of social conflicts in extramural higher education. Designed to provide access to higher education for those who cannot afford being unemployed while studying, extramural programs become a platform for implementing bypass HE access strategies (alternative to the conventional "high school to higher education" academic track) by low-competitive candidates. Extramural HEIs programs perform the important function of democratizing the student composition in higher education, extending opportunity to students from low cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, but extramural students and graduates cannot avoid falling under theory of cultural capital. As a result, the lower educational and social background at baseline, the less likely it is that obtaining a HE degree will improve the employment or labor market position. It is vital for the government, society and educational institutions to know the sociocultural characteristics of extramural HE students and take them into account when making deliberate efforts to ensure a high quality of human capital formed by extramural higher education.

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