

IS GRATUITOUSNESS A REASON FOR JOINING AN EDUCATIONAL MASTER PROGRAMME IN AUDIT? SURVEY EVIDENCE USING STATISTICAL METHODS

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The study shows the reasons taken into account by the students in choosing an academic preparation. Free courses and employment opportunities during or after graduation are the most important advantages students expect to receive from an educational program that aims to follow. The empirical section results emphasize the efficiency and performance of the master program financed by the European Social Fund.

Keywords: student employment, free courses, European Social Fund

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I. Introduction

Preparing students requires a specific attention as they are closest to the time of their entry on the labour market. Practice has demonstrated there is a serious discrepancy between the students' preparation and the requirements in practice that students must meet (Nistor et al, 2011). The masters program we propose aims to achieve an effective collaboration between the academic and practical fields in order to increase graduates' chances of finding a job. The program study is organized and financed from the European Social Funds and the courses are free.

The empirical study conducted by us intended to analyze the evolution of the perceptions students have regarding the employment opportunities offered by this program and the benefits of its gratuitousness. Our research involved applying the same questionnaire in two consecutive years in order to observe how the students' opinion regarding the two advantages of the master program has changed. The results of the study are intended to emphasize the efficiency and performance of the master program.

As the analysis has a high level of complexity, the paper presents partial results of the study meant to put into light the above mentioned ideas.

II. Overview

The university education system is responsible with the preparation of the future practitioners who will occupy the vacancies on the labor market. Although requirements are constantly changing due to the increasing complexity of the economic, financial and social context, the academic preparation of the students do not fully meet the professional needs in practice. The master program “Audit and financial management of the European funds” financed by the European Social Funds, aims to form specialists in writing, implementing and monitoring the European projects. The benefits of the program include free courses and specialized theoretical and practical training in the European funds leading to increased employment opportunities.

The role of academic preparation in finding a job is a recent subject of the educational studies. Many researches demonstrated that there is a correlation between students’ or graduates’ employment and their academic preparation (Watts and Pickering, 2000; Riggert et al. 2006; etc). Moreover, there are studies that reveal the fact that during their education many students choose to work because following an academic preparation involves many expenses (Bozick, 2007; Roksa and Velez, 2012).

Our study shows the importance of free courses or employment opportunities in choosing a master program.

III. Methodology

The aspects presented in this paper deal with:

- the reason for enrolling in this master courses,
- the time considered as necessary to find a job in the field after graduating,
- the field of the bachelor degree,

In the original questionnaire where also assessed aspects related to:

- different average grades obtained at the end of the bachelor period, at the entrance exam, etc,
- demographic variables.
- the most important consequence of the programme,
- the proportion in which the programme is considered to influence the finding of a job in the field,
- the status on the labour market.

The questionnaire was applied on the group of 60 master students from the second year of the programme, in Cluj-Napoca. The sample is made up of approximately 20% men and 80% women, with ages ranging from 21 to 50. Their perceptions were analyzed in time by applying the same set of questions at different moments in the evolution of the study programme.

The methodology employed belongs to the group of statistical and data analysis methods.

IV. Results

Starting from the idea that the programme is sponsored through structural funds, we were first curious to see if this was the main reason for the students to choose the programme. Comparative results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the students based on the main reason for enrolling in the master programme (%)

Answers	1st year	2nd year
It is free	8.8	14.8
I was working in the field	10.5	11.1
To obtain a supplementary qualification	50.9	40.7
I considered it offered me more employment possibilities than the field in which I have the bachelor degree	29.8	33.3
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: authors' calculus

Having in mind that it is the same group of students analyzed, we were not expecting any changes in the share of each group in volume of the sample. However, results show slight differences from the answers given at the end of the 1st year of study and the ones from the 2nd year. For example, while at the beginning of the period analyzed not even 10% of the master students declared they have enrolled because it was a free programme, their percentage slightly increased at the end, towards 15%. More complex questions and analyses will be needed in order to see why these changes appeared. However, the modal group remained the same – the ones that wanted a supplementary qualification. They are followed by the students that were looking for a field to offer them more employment possibilities than the one they were specialized in after graduating university. Only around 11% of the students were actually working in the field of structural financing.

Taking this information into account, the next step was to assess the distribution of the students based on the field of their bachelor degree. The results have shown in both cases that:

- approximately 35% of the students have graduated Accounting or Audit,
- around 53% have graduated an economic field, but other than Accounting or Audit,
- about 12% of the students have their bachelor degree in other fields than Economics or Business.

In both rounds of the survey, we have tested the relationship between the bachelor field and the reason for joining this educational programme. With critical values of Sig. = 0.015, < 0.05, we can conclude that there is a connection between the reason for joining the master courses and the specialization graduated by each individual at university level.

Also in relation with the first set of results presented above, we analyzed the period of time considered as necessary to get a job in the field of the master programme. We expect changes to occur once with advancing in the programme. If the quality of it is good and the professors are able to put into light the practical part of the courses, there should be an improvement. If the quality of the education process is poor, the students should become more pessimistic in what regards finding a job in the field and the expected output of the programme. Results are presented once again comparatively, in table 2.

Table 2. How much time do you think you will need to get employed in the field after graduating the master courses? (%)

Answers	1st year	2nd year
I do not intend to work in the field	3.8	4.5
0 – 3 months	17.3	27.3
3 – 6 months	32.7	36.4
6 – 12 months	28.8	9.1
1– 3 years	17.3	13.6
More than 3 years	-	9.1
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: authors' calculus

The share of the students not willing to work in the field has remained approximately the same. A new group has appeared, made up of students considering they will be needing more than 3 years in order to find a job in the field of the master programme. These are students that graduated Economics or Business (other than Accounting or Audit) that enrolled in the programme to obtain a supplementary qualification or gain more development possibilities. All of these students are employed, aspect that could have prevented them from a better understanding of the field or, simply, could have prevented them from being present at the courses scheduled for the programme. The multidimensional data analysis has emphasized that the ones that do not want to

work in this field are already working in Accounting or Audit. The most optimistic students belong to all of the groups studied at their employment status. What is interesting is that the majority of the students that consider they will find a job in the field of structural funds in maximum 6 months after graduating are students that are not employed anywhere.

All in all, improvements can be seen in the perception of the students regarding the efficiency of the master courses, as almost 65% of them consider in the second year of study they will need no more than 6 months to get employed in the field of the programme, in comparison with approximately 50% after the 1st year.

V. Conclusions

The results of our study show there are some changes in the evolution of the perceptions students have related to the educational program they are involved in. In nowadays crisis the gratuity of education is a reason to follow a master`s courses. The possibilities of employment increase the efficiency and performance of the program.

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