

CONTROVERSIES AROUND RESEARCH ON THE FATE OF GRADUATES OF PEDAGOGICAL STUDIES

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Abstract. This article is intended by the author to be a space for presenting a fragment of own research carried out in the area of the professional careers of graduates of pedagogical studies. The author combines the results of own empirical studies with the data resulting from the implementation of the nationwide programme of monitoring professional careers of graduates and data from the statistics of powiat (regional) labour offices.

KONTROWERSJE WOKÓŁ BADANIA LOSÓW ABSOLWENTÓW STUDIÓW PEDAGOGICZNYCH

Słowa kluczowe: badanie losów zawodowych, szkolnictwo wyższe, absolwenci, rynek pracy, zatrudnienie, dane statystyczne, badanie ekonomicznych losów absolwentów, powiatowe urzędy pracy

Streszczenie. W zamyśle autorki, artykuł niniejszy stanowi przestrzeń do zaprezentowania fragmentu badań własnych zrealizowanych pod kątem losów zawodowych absolwentów studiów pedagogicznych. Autorka zestawia uzyskane rezultaty własnych badań empirycznych z danymi wynikającymi z realizacji ogólnopolskiego programu monitorowania karier zawodowych absolwentów oraz danymi pochodzącymi ze statystyk powiatowych urzędów pracy.

Introduction

By starting an analysis of the subject matter with the adoption of basic theoretical assumptions, it should be stated that research on the fate of graduates is a type of research which, as noticed by U. Jeruszka, covers the diagnostics of the current situation of respondents regarding:

- 1) “starting work in the studied profession,
- 2) starting any work generating income in compliance with labour market needs,
- 3) starting work compliant with the studied profession and socio-economic needs,
- 4) unemployment,
- 5) continuing education,
- 6) not starting a career of their own will”¹.

It is worth underlining that the tradition of researching the fate of graduates in Poland is rich, yet diversified. Analyses of literature on the subject conducted by the author indicate a significant interest in the subject matter of researching the fate of graduates in the 60s, 70s and 80s of the 20th century, as well as their career – in the 90s of the 20th century and in the first decade of the 21st century. However, at the same time, it should be noticed that this research was primarily conducted within individual initiatives. Considering the fact that research on the professional careers of graduates constitutes a significant tool to increase the quality of education and to adjust the educational offer to the requirements of the contemporary labour market, the lack of a national system of researching the fate of graduates in the timeframe analysed above seems to be especially severe. Changes in this scope were only brought about in the second decade of the 21st century. The source thereof should be recognised as included in *the Act on Higher Education*² guidelines, introducing the obligation to monitor the careers of graduates by universities. It should be mentioned that the concept of *monitoring the careers of university graduates* should be understood as the obligation formulated in the aforementioned act (initially imposed on universities and, currently, on the relevant Minister) concerning research

¹ U. Jeruszka, *Bezrobocie absolwentów szkół – wciąż trudny problem. Działania na rzecz poprawy efektywności zewnętrznej kształcenia zawodowego*, „Pedagogika Pracy” 2001, nr 39, ITE – PIB, Radom 2001, s. 124.

² Ustawa, Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym [The Act on Higher Education], Dz.U. 2005 r. Nr 164, poz. 1365, source: www.prawo.sejm.gov.pl (2.01.2020).

aimed at identifying the professional situation of graduates. The author of this study associates career monitoring with researching the fate of university graduates, which is based on, among others, further ministerial actions leading to the development of the ELA project – the Polish Graduate Tracking System³. A characteristic feature of the system adopted in Poland is the fact that administrative data from the bases⁴ of the Social Insurance Institution's system and the POL-on system constitutes the source of information concerning the fate of graduates. Data obtained on the basis thereof is anonymised – in the analysed group, graduates are distinguished on the basis of a randomly given number. Based on the obtained data, three types of automatic reports are generated that correspond with the three levels of analysis: “syllabus”, “university”, “Poland”. Each class of graduates is studied in the research three times – in the first, second and third year after finishing studies, and the reports are shared on the website⁵. A full content analysis based on this study seems to be impossible. However, it is worth focusing on several fundamental elements characterising the system and the results at our disposal. Thus:

1. The data included in the reports is of a hard nature and is most often presented with the use of average or percentage share.
2. Universities in Poland included in the report are enumerated therein directly – with the use of full name; particular faculties have been grouped in larger compilations.
3. The comparison indicators prevailing in the reports are as follows: general remuneration, remuneration with regard to the place of permanent residence, the time of searching for a full-time job, the risk of unemployment and the risk of unemployment with regard to the place of permanent residence.
4. As a result of an analysis of the reports concerning the graduates of second level degree studies at the faculty of pedagogy (who constitute the population in the research project, the results of which will be analysed herein), commonly known theses can be confirmed: earnings of social faculties' graduates are modest with a simultaneously high unemployment risk (a lower result in comparison with 2017 was obtained only by agriculture,

³ www.ela.nauka.gov.pl (3.01.2020).

⁴ A similar solution is applied in Scandinavian countries, Austria, Spain, Lithuania and Hungary.

⁵ www.ela.nauka.gov.pl (3.01.2020).

forestry and veterinary faculties)⁶. Therefore, it seems that despite meeting the criteria of objectivity and full access to the research population, the system generates general data. On the basis of this observation, the postulate for implementation of individual research projects on the fate of graduates by universities, which will be of global scale and will be based on the use of qualitative methods, seems even more significant.

Own study

Inspired by, among others, the above deliberations, the author conducted research on the fate of graduates of pedagogical studies in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship⁷. This study is devoted to an analysis of the results of empirical research aimed at finding an answer to the research problem in the following wording: “What are the professional careers of graduates of pedagogical studies?” The problem’s characteristics have been described with the use of the global variable I: “Fate of graduates of pedagogical studies” (GVI) and specific variable 1: “Formation of the fate of graduates of pedagogical studies” (SV1). The scope of the given specific variable has been specified with the following indicators:

- a) starting professional activity;
- b) work in the studied profession;
- c) work in other profession;
- d) type of workplace;
- e) starting own business activity;
- f) economic migration abroad;
- g) starting a family.

Deliberations consistent with the aforementioned research problem should be started by indicating data allowing for determination of the professional situation of graduates of pedagogical studies in the scope of starting professional activity and the nature of the latter (Diagram 1).

⁶ Raport ogólnopolski 2017 [Polish national report 2017], source: www.ela.nauka.gov.pl (21.09.2018).

⁷ Research project carried out in 2012–2017 in the quantitative (with the use of a survey questionnaire) and qualitative (with the use of an interview questionnaire) perspectives. The research covered the same group of respondents – graduates of pedagogical studies: at the moment of completing education at second level degree studies (724 subjects) and again in the period between one year and six years after obtaining pedagogical education (293 subjects). The obtained empirical data was expanded upon by conducting individual interviews focused on the problem.

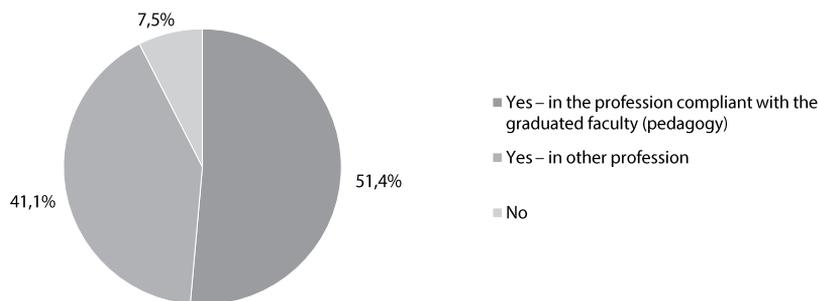


Diagram 1. Professional activity at the moment of conducting the research (N=293)

Source: own study.

The collected data implies that 51.4% of respondents, after completing academic education, started employment in the studied profession. The author interprets this result as surprising and optimistic at the same time. Data concerning difficulties in obtaining employment in pedagogical professions (originating from, among others, the aforementioned research conducted by the Polish Graduate Tracking System) seems to provide a strong basis for formulating a thesis on the probability of experiencing failures by a significant number of respondents in the scope of searching for employment, especially in positions related to the acquired education. Simultaneously, it is worth underlining that the profession of pedagogue in the years 2010–2015 was classified in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship as surplus, i.e. one for which there is lower demand in the labour market than the number of individuals searching for work in this profession. Apart from the year 2015, the number of candidates per one workplace in pedagogical professions exceeded fifty individuals. The research entitled “Occupational Barometer”⁸ implies that in 2017, the profession of pedagogue was classified in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship to professions:

- with a large surplus in 5 poviats (a kind of administrative districts in Poland): Bydgoszcz township and country poviats, Włocławek township and country poviats, as well as the Żnin poviat;
- balanced in 4 poviats: Brodnica, Chełmno, Świecie and Wąbrzeźno;

⁸ The Occupational Barometer is a short-term (one-year) forecast of the occupational situation. The research is of a qualitative nature. It is established during a group discussion (with the expert panel method), and thus, it is possible to share knowledge and take into consideration the opinions of participants observing the labour market from different perspectives: from the perspective of the unemployed and employers.

- with a surplus⁹ in the remaining 14 poviats¹⁰.

Meanwhile, the research results obtained by the author indicate a different professional situation of respondents in comparison with that referred to above. Furthermore, the low percentage (7.5%) of those unemployed should be considered optimistic. This data especially deserves attention in the context of the frequently found comments concerning pedagogical studies as a faculty significantly increasing the probability of unemployment.

Moreover, the results of recognition in the scope of the type of workplace as the place of employment of graduates of pedagogical studies may be considered interesting (Diagram 2). At the time of conducting the research, a workplace with a private ownership structure constituted the place of employment for 55.0% of the respondents (Diagram 2).

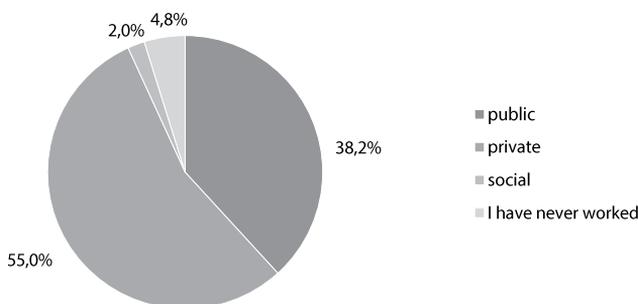


Diagram 2. Type of a workplace constituting a place of work for graduates of second level degree studies (N=293)

Source: own study.

Moreover, it seems that an analysis of the contents resulting from Diagram 3 also provides positive conclusions. It presents the experiences of respondents in the case of unemployment. In the common circulation of information, there are phrases suggesting¹¹ that unemployment results from graduating from pedagogical studies. Meanwhile, data from own studies allows one to state that

⁹ The division into surplus occupations and occupations with high surplus is of an arbitrary nature and results from the knowledge and opinions of experts of the *Occupational Barometer*.

¹⁰ Centrum Informacji i Planowania Kariery Zawodowej przy Wojewódzkim Urzędzie Pracy, *Informator lokalny o zawodzie. Pedagog*, www.wup.torun.pl (20.10.2017).

¹¹ Information suggesting that starting pedagogical studies constitutes a prelude to experiencing unemployment can be found in numerous press articles, e.g. *Gazeta Wyborcza* 24.08.2010, article entitled "Kierunek pedagogika – wylęgarnia bezrobotnych"; *Dziennik.pl* 25.06.2012, article entitled "Bezrobocie po studiach? Trzy najbardziej ryzykowne kierunki"; *Nowości* 9.12.2015, article entitled "Bezrobotny jak absolwent pedagogiki".

the actual situation of graduates of pedagogical studies (being the respondents in the analysed project) was not as drastically negative as presented by the media (Diagram 3).

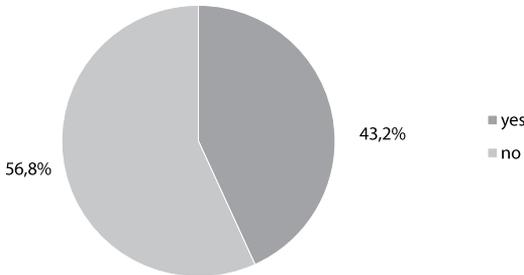


Diagram 3. Experiencing unemployment in the period from finishing second level degree pedagogical studies until the present (N=293)

Source: own study.

In the period between finishing studies and conducting the research, 56.8% of graduates had never been unemployed. To a large extent, these results seem to confirm the thesis that having a higher education remains a crucial factor in decreasing the risk of unemployment. It is worth remembering that the analysis of the level of registered unemployment proves that, in recent years, the situation of young people (especially those having a diploma for graduating from a university) in the labour market has been improving. In 2011, the percentage of unemployed below 25 years of age amounted to 21.0%, and in 2015, it dropped to 15.1%. In the studied period, unemployment among individuals with general secondary education dropped by 1.8%, and post-secondary education and secondary vocational education – by 1.3%. Unemployment among young people with lower secondary education and below dropped by 1.2%. This does not change the fact that precisely in those groups, the percentage of individuals remaining without work is the highest and amounts to 3.1%, 4.2% and 3.4%, respectively. Unemployment in the group of individuals with basic vocational education dropped by 0.9% in 2015 and reached a level of 3.3%. Unemployment registered among young people with a diploma from a university in the five analysed years dropped by 0.7%, reaching a level of 1.2% at the end of 2015¹². On the other hand, it would seem that since pedagogy is a mass faculty (in the academic year 2016/2017, pedagogy placed second among the most popular faculties – in Po-

¹² Report, *Kapitał ludzki w Polsce*, GUS, Gdańsk 2016, s. 77.

land, it was studied by 70.7 thousand individuals¹³), the percentage of those experiencing unemployment, obtained as a result of the presented empirical research work, should be higher. The above deliberations lead the author to constitute a belief that searching for features-factors providing grounds for differentiating the professional situation of pedagogy graduates can be stated as interesting, not only from the scientific point of view. It seems that individual factors (character features, engagement in education and then searching for employment and many others¹⁴) have an impact on the fact of finding by a pedagogy graduate a place in the social division of work in a successful manner, or encountering difficulties in this scope. This can be seen not only by the undertone of the above data, but also the statements given by the respondents participating in the qualitative research. On the one hand, the author obtained data indicating the fact that respondents did not have to search for employment; they obtained it straight after completing education, as in the case of a graduate whose fragment of a statement has been quoted below:

I did not search [for work] – I was offered work immediately [...]. I immediately started working in the profession obtained during studies.

(female, 30 years old, marital status: married, with children, employed at a public institution, the activity of the institution is related to pedagogy).

On the other hand, during interviews with respondents, the author heard comments indicating an engagement in the search for employment in the profession that ended in failure, as in the given case:

At the beginning of second level degree studies, I applied for a position at a psychological and pedagogical clinic, where I had had an internship. The only obstacle was unfinished second level degree studies. Then, I applied to other institutions; however, they did not offer vacancies. I was searching for work in the profession for 2 years.

(female, 25 years old, marital status: single, no children, employed in a privately owned institution, the activity of the institution is not related to pedagogy).

The thesis on the impact of personal-dependent factors on the professional situation of graduates of pedagogical studies seems to be also confirmed by the statements given by respondents covered by the quantitative research:

¹³ Source: www.biznes.onet.pl (2.01.2018).

¹⁴ A benchmark for designing the research process and implementation thereof consisted in the author's compilation of features-factors resulting from the comparison of systems of describing employability categories, available in the publication: Tymon Alex, *The student perspective on employability, Studies in Higher Education*, [in:] "Studies in Higher Education" 2013, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 841–856.

Judging from my experience, if I had not engaged in voluntary work (for almost 3 years) in kindergarten, where I had had internship during studies, I would not have found my first job so quickly, and for sure not in such a good atmosphere. I proved that I wanted to work, and I was suited for the job despite an excess of duties (other work, household duties and full-time studies). I managed to find time to visit the kindergarten. Apart from helping teachers, I was learning myself; it was a time that I was missing at the studies.

(female, graduate of pedagogical studies in 2015, employed, the activity of the institution is related to pedagogy).

The professional usefulness of a graduate does not depend on the completed specialisation, but individual personality traits.

(female, graduate of pedagogical studies in 2015, employed, the activity of the institution is related to pedagogy).

While proceeding to further analysis of the professional situation of graduates of pedagogical studies, it is worth indicating that in spite of the existing stereotype, the respondents did not have numerous experiences related to economic migration. 9.9% of graduates started working abroad in the period between finishing second level degree pedagogical studies until the time of conducting the research (Diagram 4).

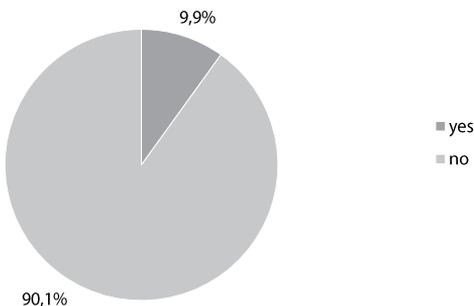


Diagram 4. Starting work abroad in the period from starting second level degree pedagogical studies (N=293)

Source: own study.

At the time of the graduates' participation in the research project, work abroad was performed by only 2.7% of the respondents (Diagram 5).

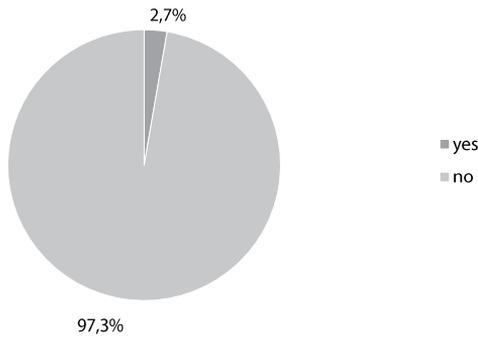


Diagram 5. Professional activity performed abroad at the time of conducting the research (N=293)

Source: own study.

Among the reasons for starting work outside the borders of the homeland, the graduates predominantly indicated the willingness to quickly accumulate funds for achievement of important goals and the wish to learn about other cultures. Often, economic migration also resulted from persuasion of individuals considered as significant, originating from the feeling of difficulty in finding employment in Poland or an unsatisfactory offer regarding earnings.

In order to diagnose other declared indicators in the scope of the research problem regarding the professional careers of pedagogy graduates, it should be indicated that at the time of conducting the research, 51.5% of respondents were single, and 44% were in legally formalised relationships. Only 4.5% of the population selected the category “other” among the possible answers, indicating, among others, that they live in informal partnerships, or they intend to legally formalise their relationships soon. In the researched group, 35.6% of respondents had children, and 64.4% did not (Diagram 6).

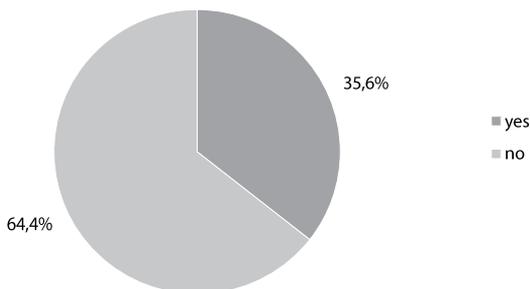


Diagram 6. Respondents with children (N=293)

Source: own study.

As a result of the analysis of the obtained research results, it was found (in the answer to the research problem: *What are the professional careers of graduates of pedagogical studies?*) that the vast majority of graduates of pedagogical studies (92.5%) were professionally active. At the time of participating in the research, only 7.5% of the respondents experienced unemployment. Just over half of the respondents (51.4%) performed professional activity which was related to the studied profession, and 41.1% of the respondents held a position in the industry not related to the completed pedagogical studies. A place of employment for 55.1% of the respondents was provided for by a private enterprise, of which 2.7% of the respondents conducted own economic activity. Another 38.4% of the graduates held a position in a public institution, and 2% in a social institution. 2.7% of the surveyed graduates worked abroad, and 9.9% of the respondents had experience in working abroad in the period between finishing second level degree pedagogical studies until participating in the research. 51.5% of the respondents were single, and 44% were in legally formalised relationships. Every third respondent (35.5%) had children.

Conclusions

While searching for circumstances explaining the discrepancies between the results of the research conducted by the Polish Graduate Tracking System and data obtained during own studies, the author analysed statistical data concerning unemployment. At the end of December 2016, 8,591 individuals with higher education were registered in labour offices in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. The faculties which produced the most unemployed graduates were the following: pedagogy (97 individuals), administration (94 individuals) and management (63 individuals). This structure did not change in comparison to the end of December of 2014 and into 2015. Pedagogy graduates registered in poviats labour offices constituted: at the end of 2014 – 17.0% of all unemployed graduates of universities; at the end of 2015 – 14.2%; at the end of 2016 – 12.3%. Despite the fact that the share of pedagogy graduates in the total number of those unemployed with higher education registered in poviats labour offices has a decreasing tendency, this seems to confirm the thesis on the impact of the mass character of pedagogical studies on the real possibility of graduates of this faculty to find their place in the social division of work. Taking this statement into consideration, it should be stated that the aforementioned comparisons of numbers used by public employment services are presented in a manner promoting

the construction of false beliefs regarding the level of threat of unemployment among graduates of pedagogical studies. While only indicating the number of a given faculty's graduates registered in poviats labour offices, there is no opportunity to consider two significant criteria:

1. The indicator of the share of unemployed graduates of a given faculty in the number of graduates of the given faculty in general. In the case of studies of a mass character, such as pedagogical studies, this criterion should be considered as extremely important. An analysis of statistical data does, in fact, provide the information that the highest indicator of the share of unemployed graduates in the number of graduates of a given faculty in the academic year 2015/2016 for faculties with a number of graduates amounting to 100 and more (the higher the number of graduates, the more the indicator reflects the scale of unemployment among graduates) occurred in the case of the following faculties: environment protection – 13.3% (135 graduates and 18 unemployed graduates); law – 11.4% (respectively: 404 and 46); administration – 9.4% (respectively: 1,003 and 94); geography – 8.1% (respectively: 135 and 11). The three most numerous faculties with regard to the number of registered unemployed graduates, the percentage share of unemployed in the number of graduates in general of a given faculty amounted to: pedagogy – 6.2% (1,559 graduates and 97 unemployed graduates); administration – 9.4% (1,003 and 94); management – 5.3% (1,199 and 63)¹⁵. Therefore, looking at the numeric data resulting from the comparisons above, it should be stated that while assuming the false approach of the logical conclusion being the number of registered unemployed individuals – graduates of a given faculty, a thesis is formulated that pedagogy is the faculty with the highest number of those without employment. Whereas if we enrich the comparisons above with the number of graduates in general, it turns out that pedagogy would rank last but one among the faculties enumerated above.
2. The indicator of the number of available job offers addressed at the graduates of a given faculty per one registered unemployed individual. It seems that with the low percentage of vacancies in the scope of pedagogy, the actual situation of the graduates of this faculty can be, in fact, considered as good.

¹⁵ Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Toruniu, *Bezrobotni absolwenci szkół wyższych w województwie kujawsko-pomorskim w 2016 roku*, Toruń 2017, source: www.wup.torun.pl (11.07.2018).

To sum up the above deliberations, it can be stated that researching the fate of graduates seems to be an ambiguous category. On the one hand, while analysing the hitherto collected research achievements in this scope, a thesis can be formulated that it primarily plays a diagnostic role. On the other hand, research on the fate of graduates constitutes an important test of not only the value of the university's work, but also verification of the social sense of higher education and its relation to social life as a whole¹⁶. Researching this fate can provide a lot of valuable information allowing for not only identification of the professional or educational-professional situation of a specific individual, but also diagnosis of the effectiveness of vocational education and analogous elements between the vocational preparation acquired by the graduate and the requirements of the job position. Researching this fate starting from the lowest levels of education allows for the tracking of educational-professional decisions, both at the individual level and in the perspective of broader groups. However, it seems that in order to obtain the aforementioned benefits, it is necessary to take into consideration a broader assortment of factors shaping the actual professional careers of graduates into the planned research.

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¹⁶ J. Szczepański, *Socjologiczne zagadnienia wyższego kształcenia*, PWN, Warszawa 1963, s. 336.