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A Study of the Motives of Doctoral Students

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to find answers to the question of why young people decide to continue studying at the postgraduate level after completing their master's programme. At the heart of the study is the analysis of the motives which lead young, qualified persons that could take up employment, to become doctoral students.

Motivation for doing something is commonly referred to as a set of internal and external factors that influence the decisions or behaviours. Motivation changes at different points of time and in different situations. In this project we assessed the motives to become a doctoral student through the memories of PhD graduates. A qualitative analysis concentrated on the narration of 10 doctoral graduates who are currently working as instructors at Czech universities. All of them specialized in the field of educational studies and worked at a university for a maximum of five years after completion of doctoral studies. They were hired for the position of academic staff member, not for the position of postdoctoral fellow.

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1. Introduction

Being an academic worker is not currently considered as a prestigious profession. Working in research and passing on new knowledge to others is not the desire of young people. However, working at a university is the

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meaning of life for a group of people who allowed me to share their feelings during their career path and to show what this choice meant, what difficulties this choice caused in their case and what joy it has brought them.

The completion of academic training is related to doctoral studies. This is a study programme that is accredited and has certain subjects prescribed, but also obligations that the candidate must pass. Doctoral studies are completed by defence of a doctoral dissertation, which precedes the Ph.D. exam. Postgraduate studies have a freer composition of study subjects than for example master's degree programmes. This is natural because the preparation of the doctoral candidate should be primarily focused on the acquisition of research skills and this is also related to Ph.D. student profiling. It automatically envisages that the study will not be very structured, although this doesn't mean that there aren't clearly defined rules.

Doctoral studies are the third level of university education and with their focus and content they should teach students to orientate in research, methodology and strategies of scientific work. In terms of the subject of its research, each discipline has specific characteristics that predispose its methodological focus. This is also true in the field of educational research. Educational research is unique in that it is aimed at the systematic description, analysis and clarification of the phenomena of the educational reality from which the existence of different methods and approaches follow. It focuses on people and their possibilities and limits of the development of educational postulates.

The rules set out by universities in the preparation of doctoral students vary in individual study programmes. Differences are provided by the specificities of the university, respectively the faculty in which the degree programme is created. To obtain a doctoral programme is a prestigious matter for individual university departments. Accreditation for doctoral studies means for the university:

- increasing of the professional reputation of the workplace (a workplace, which has accredited doctoral programmes, has higher credit in the Czech Republic),
- obtaining of a higher level of financial remuneration of the workplace (inter alia, the quality of the university is evaluated by the number of doctoral students who have successfully graduated),
- the possibility of obtaining grant projects and portfolios (opportunities for the involvement of Ph.D. students in grant projects are generous in the Czech Republic),
- improving of publishing activity of the workplace,
- improving of teaching process,
- the existence of generational discourses that contribute to the professional status of the workplace.

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on improving the quality of doctoral studies in the programme Pedagogy. The Accreditation Commission of the Government is paying attention to scientific training concept, personnel background, research activity of the guaranteeing workplace, the quality of the publishing activity of guarantors and tutors, as well as the quality of the defended doctoral theses. (J. Mareš, 2013a)

Available statistics in the Czech Republic reported that the number of Ph.D. graduates in the programme Pedagogy has been declining in recent years. On the one hand it can be inferred that this phenomenon was caused by stricter inspection activity, but on the other hand it is also possible to talk about the disinterest in the third level of university study, which is losing its prestigious position in the society. It often happens that in practice, graduates of the first or second level of university study get more lucrative work positions.

There are several reasons why this is so:

1. The prestige of science and research is rather marginalized in contemporary society. There are also internal mechanisms of tension in scientific disciplines. One type of quality assessments is related to natural sciences, another to social science fields of research. Science and technology-oriented research is more in the foreground, it has a significant impact on the activities of enterprises and thus the public economy. Social science research does not seemingly bring new patents, new production processes and so on.

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