



Integrating work and studies in higher education

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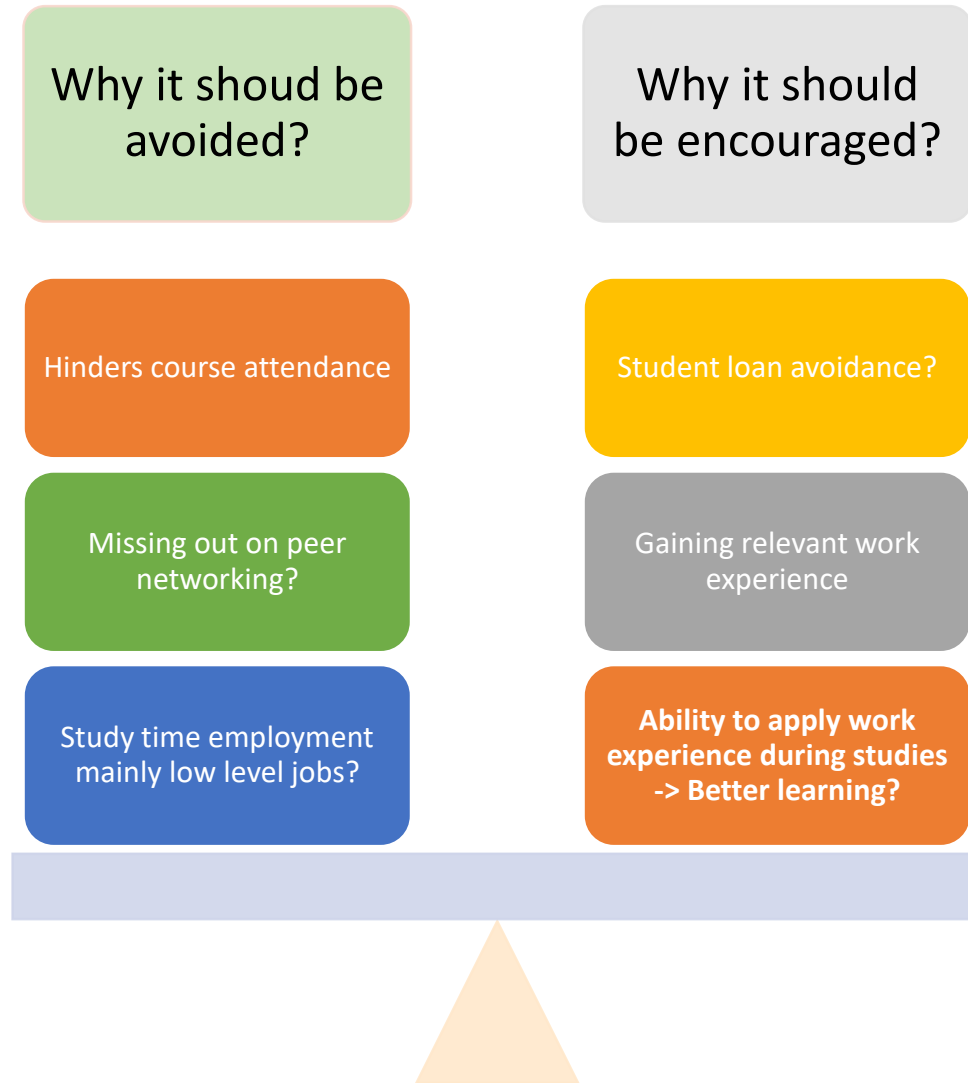
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How the topic of student employment is currently discussed



Introduction

Work experience, neither employment during studies, has so far not been systematically recognized or validated in higher education studies.

(Vanhanen-Nuutinen, Kotila & Mäki 2016)

Measures will be sought that support earlier start of working life and ensure better fit between formal education and work.

(Finland, a land of solutions; Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government 29 May 2015)

Aims of our presentation

- Field of study relevant work during semesters has been overlooked in the public discourse. We argue working students are a resource that HE teaching practises should embrace and provide means to better integrate work in their studies.
- Assessing the means to quantify field of study related work through EUROSTUDENT data.
- Demonstrate that field of study relevance of employment during semester is not only dependent on one's field of study but rather has a substantial social dimension as well as the institutional setting of HE.

Assessing the pool of relevant work experience, why not just look at register based statistics?

Register data on study time employment

- Full coverage (+)
- Time series not dependent on survey infrastructure
- Correspondence based on occupational classifications (+/-)
- Register based linkage to other variables costly (-)
- Definitions are less flexible (employment status on a specific date)

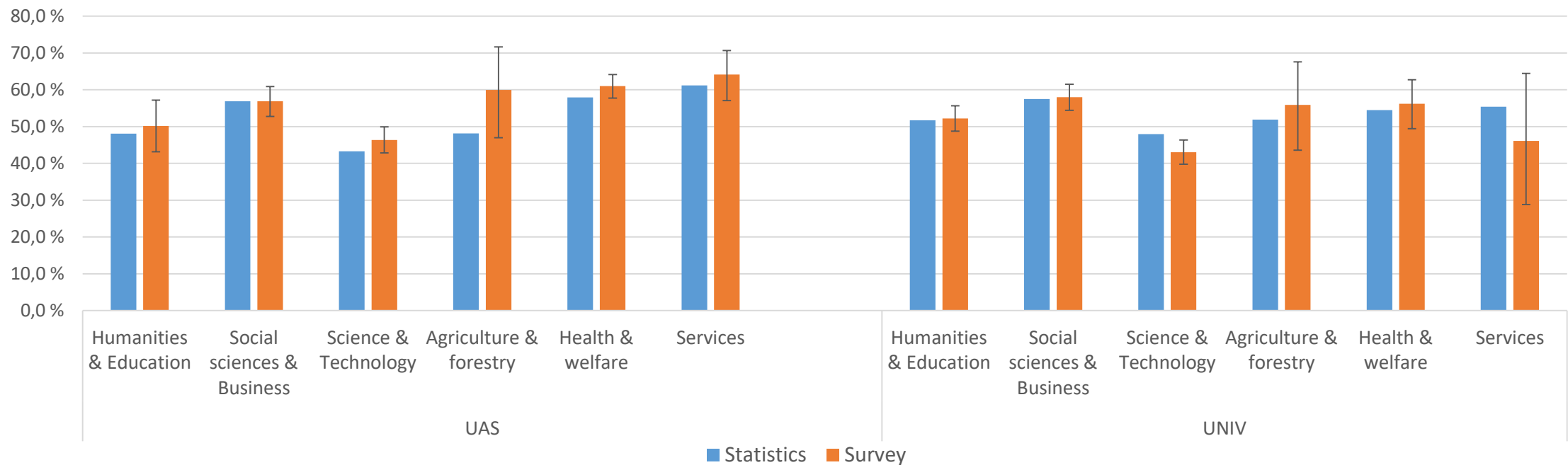
Survey estimates

- Sample based -> both sample as well as nonresponse error (-)
- Biannual (-)
- **Measure based on subjective experience (+)**
- **Able to link with other survey variables of interest (+)**
- **Students are able to assess employment status over a more flexible period of time (+)**

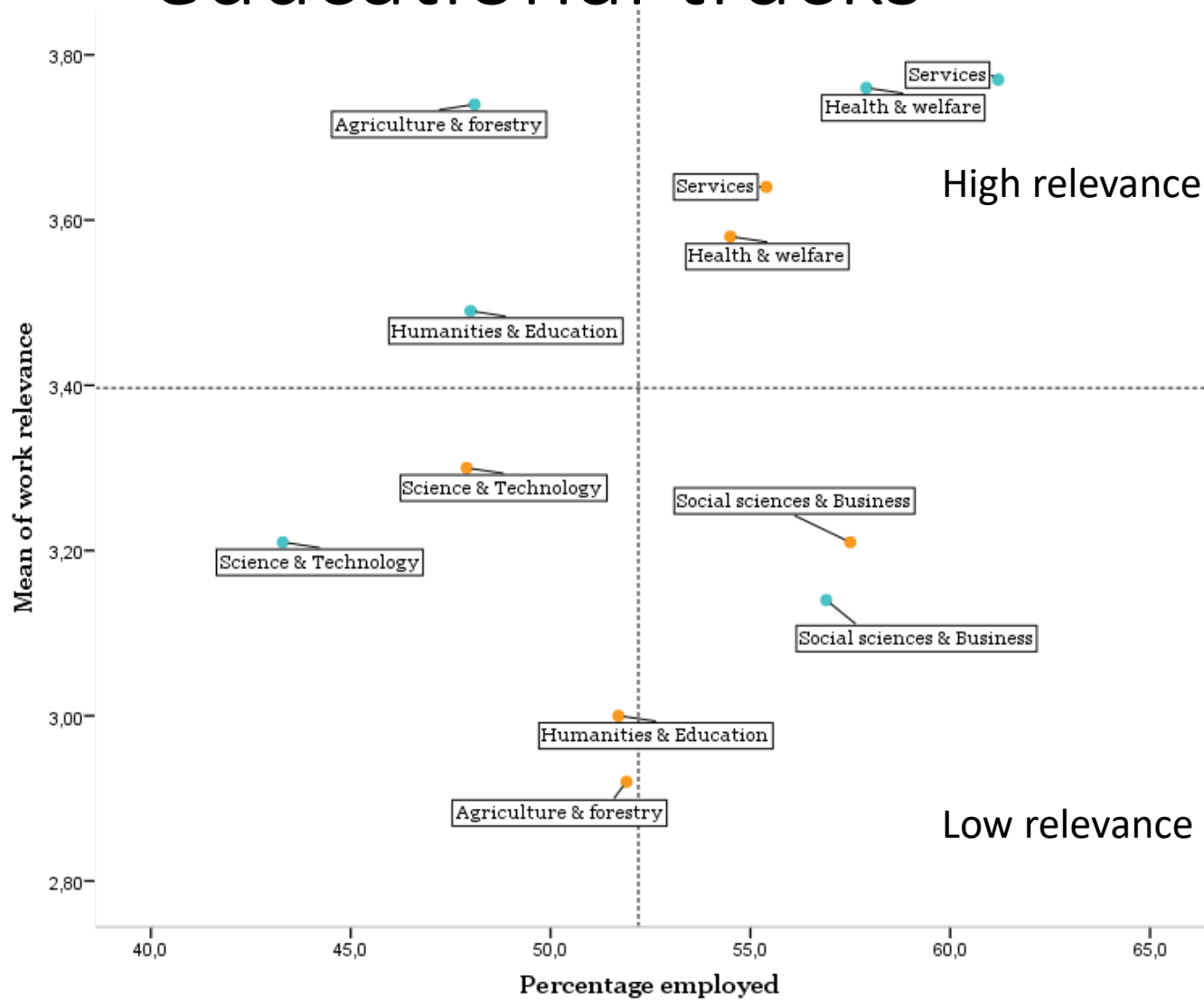
Student subjective notions are intrinsically important because they tap the pedagogic relevance experience well beyond administrative classifications – that's one of the reasons the ES exists!

External validation of student employment measures

- Assessing student employment with external register based benchmark data as a method to analyse the degree of nonresponse bias (Groves 2006)
- Comparing survey estimates to official employment statistics provides an excellent means of external validation of the survey.
- We observe slight underestimation observed for students majoring in fields of science & technology (University), possibly associated with lower response rate of male students?



Differences between fields of study and educational tracks



- Fields of study are strongly differentiated by the degree to which their respective students are able to access relevant jobs during study semesters

Is there more to the puzzle?

- Fields of study differ by their corresponding student labour market: Students of various fields have different study time employment opportunities: Best opportunities available for students of health and service fields?
- Which factors not clearly associated with the content of study (field) are associated with the quality of study time employment?
 - Socioeconomic background?
 - Gender, age?
 - Employment experience prior to HE studies?
 - Are better jobs also more time consuming?

Results of the OLS regression

- We define quality of work (1-5) as the dependent variable and observe the following effects after controlling for field and track of education:
 - Students from financially better well-off families tend to experience better study time work relevance to their studies. Parental education was however not significant in the model
 - After controlling for other factors we see no effect related to one's educational track
 - Prior work experience did not show a significant beta somewhat contrary to our expectations
 - Gender and age at the beginning of studies both did not show a significant effect
 - Mixed results for work hours
- Important to note that the results may also reflect the differences in students ability to recognize field of study relevance even when the content of employment stays the same!

Conclusions and policy relevance

Studying in higher education is not an isolated entity, but integrates into students' other objectives in life, such as work or voluntary and civic work.

Improving work-life practices within HE is not a zero sum game, even though it is important to recognize that various student groups may have variation in their ability to grasp field of study relevant jobs. Learning cannot be however outsourced and individual study units cannot be built upon the assumption of the employed student.

- 1) Problems of integrating study time employment to studies are among the main reasons of dropping out and delays in graduation. Better work life practises are first aimed towards these groups of students.
- 2) Better practises helping students integrate their work experience into studies will most likely benefit also full time students with study relevant employment opportunities through networking and group working with their employed peers.

Furthermore, field of study related employment raises students' employability and awareness of relevant skill sets during their studies. Previous research has shown that improved work life practises contribute both to study motivation as well as better learning (Saari, Vanhanen-Nuutinen, Mäki, Kotila 2017)

Conclusions and policy relevance

Increased flexibility and recognition ... are being developed in a number of projects that are being funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

- 1) Recognizing student employment as a possibility to learning and competence development in higher education.
- 2) Integrating employment to studies.
- 3) Validating learning at work in study credits.

(www.amkverkkovirta.fi; www.amktoteemi.fi; Mäkelä & Moisio 2017)

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