
EXISTING PRACTICES AND CONSTRAINTS OF PART-TIME STUDIES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *In Bologna process there is a need for flexibility in higher education, in a way to try to enable individuals to learn differently in terms of time and modes of delivery of learning and in this way to adapt education to their needs. There are different programs in various EU countries that are available and adopted for part time learner in all type of degrees to their needs. One of the flexible ways is a possibility of part-time student status, which exists in some EU countries. This paper is presentation of main characteristics and constraints in two European countries with different historical development of higher education: Germany and Slovakia.*

KEY WORDS: PART-TIME, STUDIES, EUROPE

JEL CLASSIFICATION: I21

1. PART-TIME EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

In Bologna process there is a need for flexibility in higher education, in a way to try to enable individuals to learn differently in terms of time and modes of delivery of learning and in this way to adapt education to their needs. One of the flexible ways is a possibility of part-time student status, which exists in some EU countries. What is also important in this aspect is the recognition of prior learning in access and also progression in higher education.

The definition of part-time learner: „Part-time adult learner also part-time learner (PTL) refers to a subset of non-traditional learner who pursues higher education, typically after reaching physical maturity,

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while living off-campus, and possessing responsibilities related to family and/or employment. Many are from a minority or disadvantaged group (disability, immigrant status, etc.).⁵

There are different programs in various EU countries that are available and adopted for part time learner in all type of degrees: bachelor, master and PhD degrees and also short cycle education degrees. The courses can be taught traditionally face to face but also on-line and all other variations of these two types are possible. The part-time learners are often those who work full or part-time but also individuals with many different personal reasons that prevent them to study full time.

In some countries there is no strict formal difference between part time and full time learners. Sometimes the difference is only in enrolment of credit or courses per semester, part time learners enroll smaller number of credits or courses than full time learners. In some countries minimum number of credits or courses that student can enroll is fixed and strictly defined. Part-time students are then defined as students that enroll less than some standard student load (e.g. less than 30 credits per semester which is standard students load in EU countries).

There are many formal or informal barriers with which part time learners are faced in higher education. There are different policies in some countries that make attendance of part-time students difficult. However, there are more and more possibilities in various countries that are specially tailored for needs of part time learners. It proved to be the most convenient to them to study on-line or blended (combination of on-line and face to face learning). This will solve their time-management problems.

There are EU countries that recognized necessity to provide special rules and conditions for students which would like to continue their study while working and/or to gain work experience while studying. The full-time student status is mostly clear at most of the EU countries. On the other hand, it is not only clear and easily understandable what type of students are part time students, since 'part-time' mean different things in different countries – sometimes strictly time of studying per week or per semester and sometimes something connected to funding arrangements.

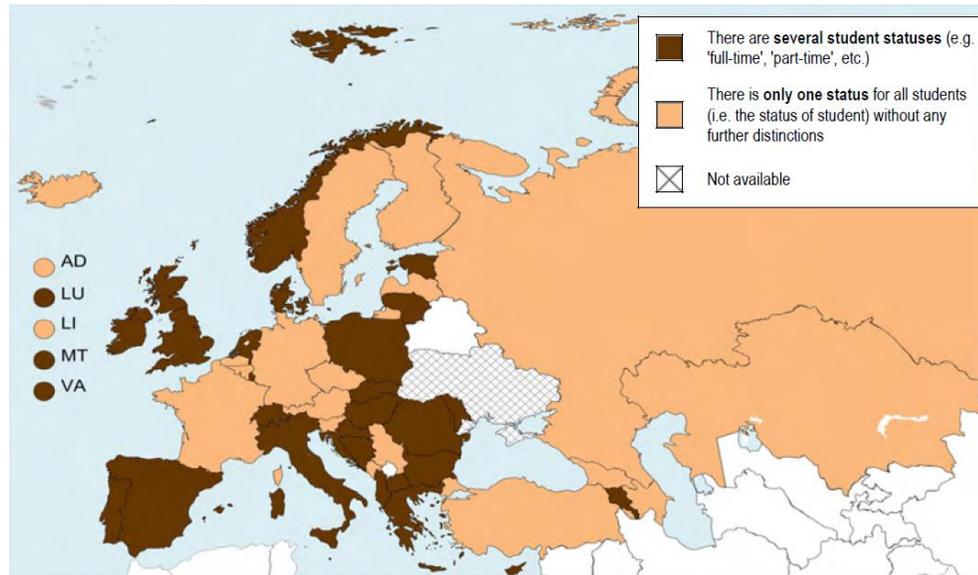
In Figure 1 we can see European Higher Education Area where countries are shown which formally recognize more than one different student status. As shown in the figure, majority of countries recognize other statuses than status of full-time student (around 2/3 countries for which the data are available). In other countries there is no formal status of part-time students, but usually such students study within the existing system, although they are not officially recognized as a particular category of students.

In some countries system recognizes the possibility of prolonged studying within the status of regular students, in some countries regular students can study two years longer or even they can study double period than the one that is planned for the curriculum. This would enable some students to choose twice less credits (or courses) per year than regular students, and still they would keep the regular student status. Only this would mean in some countries that they should have to pay some additional fee.

In this text we will describe more specifically the situation with part time students in Germany in Slovakia, it is one of countries where more than one student statuses exist.

⁵ Part-time learner in higher education, Wikipedia. <https://www.wikipedia.org/>

Figure 1. Existence of different student statuses in EU area (Source: Eurydice (2015) *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process – Implementation Report*, pp. 153)



There is a difference among countries related to financial aspects of part-time studying. There are two possibilities of financial arrangements throughout the EU: either part-time students pay the same levels of fee as full-time students or they pay higher fees than full-time students. Regarding the levels of support, sometimes part-time students pay the same level of fees, but they are entitled to lower levels of support. Finally, there are also countries where part-time students pay the same fee and have the same level of support as full-time students. There are also opposite countries, where part-time students have to pay higher fees and they do not receive any financial support.

Part-time studies are those in which learner enrolls courses at a high education institution, choosing courses according to his needs, and as many of them as they fit into his life, work, family and other commitments. In general, (depending on the country and the higher education institution), part-time learner has access to numerous programs and tracks of study to pursue. These programs can be enrolled in certificate, diploma, undergraduate or graduate degrees, in credit or non-degree credit courses.

According to the 2012 Implementation Report, most European countries have flexibly implemented higher education, in order to enable studies to those who could not enroll full-time programs. In addition, it turns out that mature students are those who are the most likely to study part-time.

Table 1 is showing the part-time students enrolled in tertiary education and their share in total student population from 2013 to 2015 in European countries. These are the latest available data from Eurostat database. The share of part-time students varies significantly from country to country. The largest share of part-time students in 2015 is in Finland (41.80%), while the smallest share is in Portugal (5.51%). Some countries don't have part-time students at all, like Austria and Italy.

Table 1. Number and percent of students enrolled in tertiary education (levels 5-8)

WORKTIME	Part-time					
ISCED11	Tertiary education (levels 5-8)					
SECTOR	Total					
GEO/TIME	2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Belgium	136390	27.92	141486	28.53	:	:
Bulgaria	87239	30.72	86790	30.64	85270	30.57
Czech Republic	11634	2.72	17084	4.08	:	:
Denmark	34257	11.77	31906	10.59	:	:
Germany	400886	14.42	423774	14.55	384583	12.92
Estonia	9593	14.80	9094	15.16	8028	14.54
Ireland	30797	15.44	31695	15.54	:	:
Spain	525718	26.69	517875	26.13	510233	25.98
Croatia	48173	29.26	49655	29.90	:	:
Cyprus	5703	17.84	6204	18.42	7739	20.82
Latvia	25815	27.32	24554	27.38	23329	27.16
Lithuania	44736	28.01	39038	26.31	34294	24.39
Luxembourg	:	:	:	:	1222	17.72
Hungary	112585	31.36	100992	30.65	89921	29.22
Malta	2733	21.74	2665	21.13	3035	22.96
Netherlands	:	:	:	:	149370	17.73
Poland	892240	46.89	618219	35.07	:	:
Portugal	16921	4.56	17959	4.96	18595	5.51
Romania	67601	10.94	54900	9.49	46925	8.66
Slovenia	22108	22.63	18621	20.55	16010	18.70
Slovakia	65412	31.22	57135	28.88	49704	26.96
Finland	135353	43.80	132043	43.14	126446	41.80
Sweden	207001	47.41	198895	46.31	:	:
United Kingdom	669320	28.05	621546	26.42	:	:
Iceland	5539	29.00	:	:	:	:
Liechtenstein	247	29.23	251	30.24	214	28.53
Norway	95090	37.23	97885	37.05	95395	35.56
Switzerland	65924	23.56	69287	23.91	69928	23.75

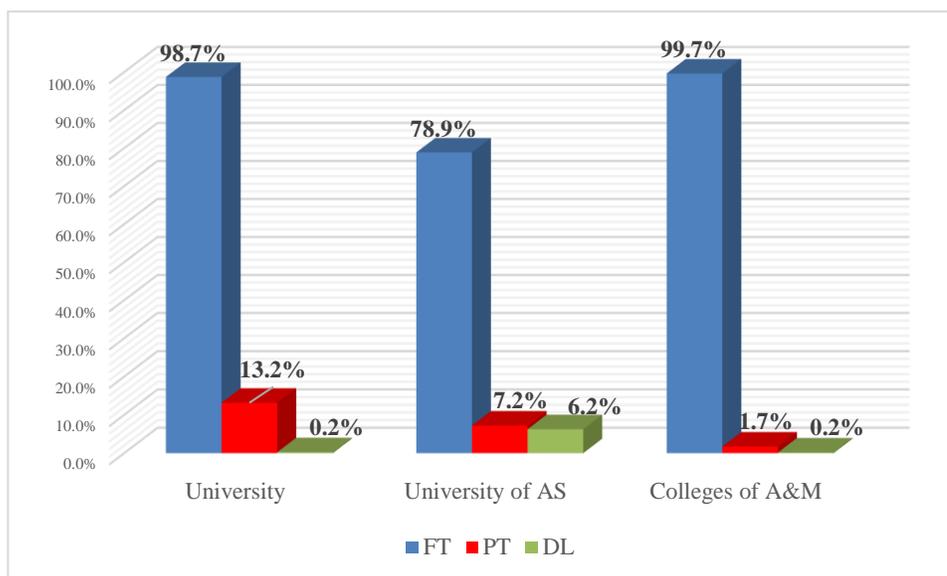
Source: Eurostat, 2016.

2. EXISTING PRACTICES IN GERMANY AND SLOVAKIA

There are several types of studies in Germany and we will focus on the three following types: full-time (FT), part-time (PT) and distance learning (DL). Out of 10156 first cycle programs 9305 (91.6%) have the option of FT studying, 1051 (10.3%) have the option for PT, and 244 (2.4%) option for DL. Both options, FT and PT have 868 programs (8.5%), while PT and LD options have 846 (8.3%) of the first cycle programs.

At second cycle programs there are 7856 programs with FT option (89.1%), 1357 (15.6%) with PT option, and 281 (3.2%) with DL option. Both PT and FT options are offered in 959 (10.9%) programs, while 114 (1.3%) have PT and LD options.

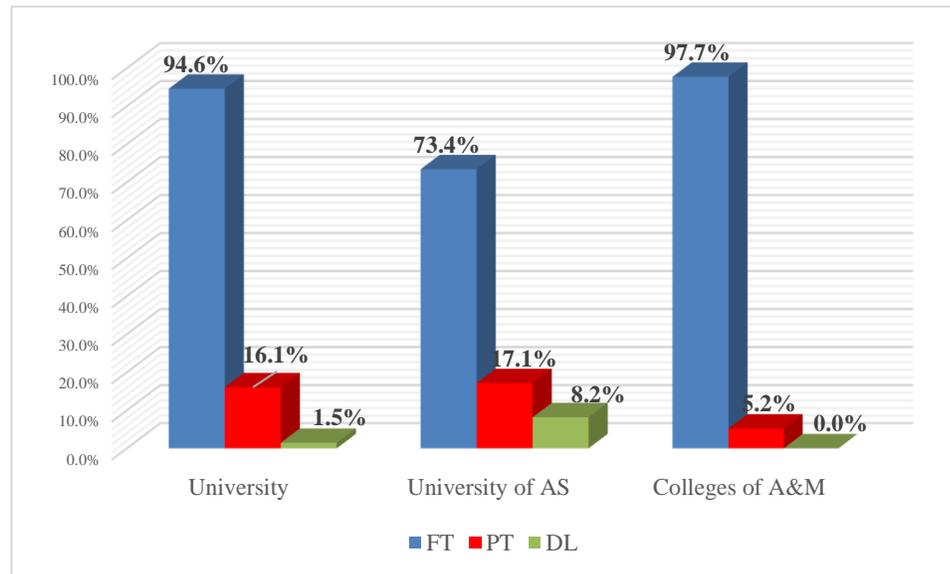
Figure 2. Types of studying at first cycle programs across different types of HEIs in Germany



From the total number of first cycle programs, universities almost all programs offer as FT study (98.7%), while 777 programs (13.2%) have PT option, and only 14 (0.2%) have DL option. At universities of applied sciences situation is significantly different, where 229 programs (6.2%) have option DL, 264 (7.2%) with option PT, and FT option is offered at 78.9% of first cycle programs. It is important to mention that these institutions are conducting also programs from dual system of education, but these program are not the subject of our analysis. At faculties of arts and music almost all programs are with FT option (99.7%), while PT option is offered at 10 programs (1.7%).

There is significant difference in distribution of study programs across different types of institutions. From 244 programs offered with DL option, 229 (93.9%) are conducted at universities of applied sciences, and only 14 (5.7%) at universities. Situation is totally different in the case of FT studies. 5833 (62.7%) are conducted at universities, 2891 (31.1%) at universities of applied sciences, while 583 (6.2%) at faculties of arts and music. Significant part of programs with PT option is conducted at universities: out of 1051 there is 777 (73.9%) at universities, while 264 (25.1%) are at universities applied sciences, and only 10 programs at faculties of arts and music.

Figure 3. Types of studying at second cycle programs across different types of HEIs in Germany



From the total number of second cycle programs, universities almost all programs offer as FT study (94.6%), while 933 programs (16.1%) have PT option, and 85 (1.5%) have DL option. At universities of applied sciences situation is significantly different, where 196 programs (8.2%) have option DL, 410 (17.1%) with option PT, and FT option is offered at 73.4% of first cycle programs. At faculties of arts and music almost all programs (601) are with FT option (97.7%), while PT option is offered at 32 programs (5.2%).

There is significant difference in distribution of study programs across different types of institutions. From 281 programs offered with DL option, 198 (69.8%) are conducted at universities of applied sciences, and only 85 (30.2%) at universities. Situation is totally different in the case of FT studies. 5499 (70%) are conducted at universities, 1756 (22.4%) at universities of applied sciences, while 601 (7.7%) at faculties of arts and music.

In Slovakia, like in other countries of this group mature students are those who mostly study part-time, while younger students mostly study full-time.

Countries from European higher education area have implemented different policy measures for flexible delivery of higher education. Slovakia belongs to the portion of around two thirds of all the countries in which there is more than one student statuses (besides full-time students there are also students of other types).

Slovakia is one of the countries (like e.g. Greece) in which part-time studies are defined in terms of expected hours of study per week. While in Greece, the part-time students are defined per number of study hours per week, in Slovakia, the required hours are defined as study hours per academic year, with a range of 750-1440 hours for part-time students, and 1500-1800 hours per academic year for full-time students.

Therefore, Slovakia belongs to a group of countries where formal programs for part-time students are provided under flexible arrangements.

Regarding the budget, in most of the countries and also in Slovakia, higher education institutions do not have a public budget specifically for lifelong learning or part-time students (only eight EU countries have a specific budget for lifelong learning provision, and it is only a partial contribution to lifelong learning funding.) Resources for lifelong learning come mostly from general public budgets, often combined with other financial resources, such as private contributions from students or businesses. As already mentioned, usually part-time students receive lower funding than full-time students. In Slovakia part-time students are required to make higher contributions than full-time students, they receive lower financial support than full-time students, but are entitled to a student loan.

Higher education institutions in the majority of EU countries are autonomous in deciding if they wish to offer other types of program than full-time. Only in France and Spain, higher education institutions should provide a mode for part-time studies.

Slovakia is among countries where providing part-time studies is no longer a formal requirement. Institutions have autonomy and recent years only a limited number of institutions provide opportunities for part time-studies.

As natural, older students are much more likely to study part-time than their younger colleagues. In the countries from European higher education area (EHEA), fewer than 20 % of students between the ages of 18 and 23 study part-time. In opposite, the majority of students in their late twenties study part-time in half of the EHEA countries. Consequently, part-time studies are the most common study form for adults over 30 years of age, which is almost 63% of student aged 30-34 years, and even higher percentages in older age ranges. The older the students are, the more likely they are to study part-time in all countries. In Slovakia there is around 15% students that study part-time among the age of 20-24 and 87% that study part time among the age of 30-34.

According to Eurostudent-data, over 80% of students declare themselves to be full-time students in 14 countries. In eight countries at least 20 % of students declare themselves to be part-time students.

According to these data, in Slovakia: 81.3% declared themselves to be full time students, and 18.7% to be part time.

As previous data show, students may be considered as full-time students, even if they devote fewer hours to study than is often considered to be a norm for full-time studying. Conversely, in some countries part-time students may devote more hours to study than it is usually required for part-time students. Thus, there is not always direct connection (correlation) between official student status and hours devoted to studying, because full-time students sometimes devote less hours to studying than part-time students in the same country.

In Slovakia the related data are as follows: 85% of full time students study over 21 hours per week, which means that 15% of full time students study less than 21 hours per week. At the same time, in Slovakia, there are 46.2% of part time students that study over 21 hours per week (53.8% study less than 21 hours per week).

There is a statistically significant difference in numbers of male and female part-time students, especially in the Nordic countries (which also have high percentages of 'mature students') and in the Baltic countries. The gap between male and female students is also significant in Slovakia, where the proportion of 'mature students' is around 1.3 times higher among female students than among male students.

In Slovakia the percentage of students enrolled in tertiary education, e.g. in the school years 2011/12 which are 30 or more years old, is 18%, and among male students this percentage is 15.1% and among female students it is 19.9%. Median for EHEA (for all together) is 15.8%.

There are two types of older students participating in formal higher education: 1. older students in tertiary education who have not yet completed their initial studies or 2. adult returners who have re-joined the formal education and training system.

The second group is usually called delayed transition students. In some countries it is usual to make a break after secondary school and to continue studies after one years or more, or to move into the labor market directly after school with an upper secondary qualification and then it can happen that they decide, for whatever reason to pursue higher education at a later stage in their life.

Share of delayed transition students in the overall student population among Eurostudent respondents in Slovakia in 2013/14 were 14.2%. Some other countries have less than 5 % of delayed transition students which would suggest that the cultural norm is to move quickly into higher education after completing upper secondary education. In Slovakia, similarly to the Czech Republic and Italy, the percentage of delayed transition students in the younger age group is very low (which is 6.3% for the age group between 22-24 years). On the other hand, the percentage of the delayed transition students in the older age group (over 30 years) is in Slovakia 87.1% which shows that there is a large share of mature students starting their studies relatively late (after experiences in labor market or for woman e.g., after they gave birth to children).

The percentage of adults who acquired a higher education degree during adulthood (from 30-64 years) as a percentage of all adults in Slovakia is 2.8%. In some other EU countries this percentage is even less than 2%. Since in Slovakia the share of mature students is between 15-20%, this means that the non-completion rates of mature students are relatively high, or it can also indicate that the policies to support mature student participation in higher education is introduced recently.

3. CONCLUSION

On the basis of experiences from Germany, Slovakia and some other European countries, the project team of University of Novi Sad has developed their concept of part-time studies. The concept was tested at master study program of applied statistics at the same university. Several students enrolled part-time program and all features, positive and negative aspects were recorded and presented in the special report which is published in 2018. Additionally, Faculty of Economics at University of Novi Sad also has developed the specific type of part-time program at master level where lectures were organized in a way that is suitable for working students. At this point we can conclude that Serbian HEIs have developed their own model of part-time studies on the basis of experiences from other countries in European Higher Educational Area and recommendation emerged from pilot programs conducted under the project ERASMUS+ Introduction of part-time and short cycle studies in Serbia (PT&SCHE).

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