

Career Path and Private Life in the Context of Lifelong Learning

Ágnes Engler

Institute of Educational Studies University of Debrecen

ABSTRACT The study examines the relationship between education and demography in the perspective of life-long learning. The worsening demographic indicators are traced back to several factors, one of the first is the prolonged learning time of the young generation. As a result of the expansion of education, most young people continue their studies. Regular training is also necessary in the world of work and education, therefore learning—in addition to work—further postpones the time to start a family. According to the results of various researches, young people are family-centered with high potential fertility, but the plans after graduation are often left unfulfilled. Our question is how it is possible to help the young to match their plans of a career and a private life. Another question that we attempt to answer through our research results is whether it is possible to achieve lifelong learning and career development when one has a family.¹

Keywords: *lifelong learning, higher education, family life education*

1. Assisting Young People in Implementing their Plans for the Future and Shaping their Future Roles

One of the reasons for the loss of population in Europe today is that the time when young people start a family is delayed, partly by their extended study periods and partly by changing social and economic conditions. Traditional feminine roles are particularly difficult to bring into harmony with a career now, as high numbers of better and better qualified women appear in the world of paid work. Starting a lasting partnership and having a family are at the top of the priority lists of young people, but these things tend to take place at a later and later stage in life. This particularly applies to young intellectuals, who enter the labour market at an older age and it requires a longer existential preparation and period of gathering experience. In the course of our research we noted that there is now a considerable amount of attention focused on the coordination of private life and career among young men and women studying in higher education (Engler 2011). With the data gained from our representative regional research project, we established so-called career-centered, family-centered and present-centered clusters. Members of the career-centered cluster (21% of the sample) place career plans in the foreground, putting off family plans to their mid-thirties, and wish to earn several degrees, make rapid progress in their work and

¹ This paper was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

lasting placements abroad. Those in the pro-family group (40%) wish to start a family and arrange their private life in the near future, following graduation, and employment is plainly subordinated to preparing for a family life.

Coordinating private life and career is particularly difficult for women, as they need to depart from their work to have a child. For them, any investment into education will yield a return later than in the case of men, as having and bringing up a child takes time. In spite of this, the proportion of women earning a college or university degree is high in Europe and it has been on the constant increase in most of the member states over the past decade (Chart 1). Women appear to be more active learners all over Europe; even in the Scandinavian countries, where there is a generally positive attitude to studying, women have an edge of 10-15% over men in terms of degrees earned (Europe in figures 2011). In the member states of the European Union there is an average of 124 female students to 100 male students and the increase is continual. In the first decade of the 21st century the average increase was approximately 10% (Key data on education in Europe 2012, 84). Hungarian data also show a majority of women in the application process and among the recruited students (Szemerszki 2012), but their proportion is significant among the students with unsuccessful admission (Veroszta 2012).

Chart 1
The Proportion of Female Students in Higher Education in the European Union, per cent

	2000	2005	2010
EU (27)	53.5	54.9	55.4
Austria	51.0	53.7	53.1
Belgium	52.3	54.4	55.2
Bulgaria	57.3	52.1	55.5
Cyprus	57.1	52.0	46.1
Czech Republic	49.8	52.6	56.8
Denmark	56.9	57.4	58.1
Estonia	58.5	61.5	60.9
Finland	53.7	53.6	53.8
France	54.2	55.2	55.0
Germany	48.1	49.6	51.3
Greece	50.0	51.1	49.8
Hungary	53.9	58.4	56.5
Ireland	54.1	54.9	52.4
Italy	55.5	56.6	57.6

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Latvia	63.4	63.2	62.7
Lithuania	60.0	60.1	59.4
Malta	53.3	56.3	56.3
Netherlands	50.0	51.0	51.8
Poland	57.5	57.5	59.2
Portugal	56.5	55.7	53.3
Romania	51.8	54.6	56.4
Slovakia	50.4	55.3	59.7
Slovenia	56.1	57.8	57.8
Spain	52.9	53.7	53.9
Sweden	58.2	59.6	59.4
United Kingdom	53.9	57.2	56.6

(Edited by the author from 2012 data of Eurostat. Lichtenstein did not supply data, so the country is missing from the list)

The inequalities between the genders are arranged by Frey (2009) into three problem categories. The first is the issue of having a child and entering a job. Employees are supposed to decide upon the length of maternity leave, the timing and way of returning to work, a possible change of job, or having another baby. The second category in Frey's classification is the issue of education and employment. As the level of education increases, men have more chance to retain their job and avoid unemployment. The third gender-related problem is the sectoral division of employees, horizontal and vertical segregation. The characteristics of the female side of the labour market may not all be rooted in the comparison of women with men, but also in the fact the women give up some of their positions 'voluntarily' or, as Elgarte (2010) argues, the disadvantageous image may be the result of 'statistical discrimination.' Women, as they often play a multiple role in life, make efforts to find a job that they are easily able to coordinate with their duties in the family. The situation is further complicated by the priorities women set up for their career and private life. It is possible to categorize these priorities as family career, job career and dual-type career (Koncz 2006). Alternatively, it can be stated that highly qualified mothers are able to care for their children at a higher level (Kates 2004), and they can model educational success for their children (Haleman 2004).

It is important to be familiar with the process of preparing for gender roles, as it helps us a lot in seeing and, if possible, solving the problems mentioned previously. Preparing adults to be parents, to bring up children is an age-old activity, but in earlier times it was exclusively the responsibility of the family and close community. The example of the older generations, the shared wisdom of the people in the village, the guidance received from the local doctor and midwife informally shaped

young people into husband and wife and parents. Training parents was institutionalized in the 19th century, and in this way the responsibilities were partly transferred from the family to society. The representatives of a number of professions were involved in the activity, including: education, psychology, mental hygienics, sociology, genetics, medical studies, social work, family therapy, nursing, churches and law. Messages and information related to family life appeared at a government level, in education and social organizations, and a plurality of values emerged in the media.

Research into the education to family life focuses on five particular areas (Brillinger–Brundage 1989, 123). The first is family planning, preparation for the parental roles. The second deals with developing parental skills, including the care of children with various disabilities. The third is extending the financial and management skills of the parents. The fourth is the terrain of factors influencing parental roles: media, society, financial circumstances. The last one is taking care of the welfare and education of the child. Mihalec (2011, 97) compresses the activities into three categories: tackling the problems affecting families, preventing future problems, and developing individual and joint family competences.

In Brillinger and Brundage's (1989) opinion the objective of education to family life is developing interpersonal connections, presentation of the human relations enriched by education, as all these reinforce family bonds. The authors approach the issue from the aspect of adult education, and they find it important to induce changes in the knowledge, attitudes and competences of grown-up people. The specific areas of education to family life comprise organic elements of andragogy in the highly developed countries where institutional forms were first introduced. In the United States, the National Council on Family Relations issues accredited certificates of participation in adult educational programmes. The programmes include modules like parent education and guidance, interpersonal relationships, family resource management, family law and public policy, professional ethics and practice, human sexuality, human growth and lifespan development across the life span.

A wide range of learning material is available for young people in the highly developed countries. Tárkányi (2011) provides a good survey of these materials. There are teaching aids for relationship and marriage education, character education, family and consumer education science. Relaying knowledge and developing competences in relation to family life have been independent school subjects in northern and western Europe. In Hungary churches, NGOs and educational institutions run by churches have offered educational and consulting work in connection with relationship and family. From the next school year on (2013/2014) the National Curriculum will also contain education to family life as a subject to be taught and developed at school, incorporating traditional family values. The educational purposes permeating the entire programme appear in the curricula, the methodology and extracurricular school activities. Local curricula offer the possibility of introducing it as an optional course, so today it is not yet a required subject. The new

educational concept meets the expectations of the entire society, as 70% of the population ascribed great importance to the introduction of education to family life, as reflected in the findings of a representative survey conducted in 2009 (Czettele 2011). The corresponding parenthood has a positive influence to education whereas the achievement is better of those young people who come from families where parents communicate regularly with the child, observe their education and lifestyle. (Pusztai 2004) In order to address young people effectively, the most advanced means of psycho-education and personality development are required, when learning is combined with practice-oriented elements, specific projects and drama pedagogy make learning an exciting experience, and the learners do not only acquire new knowledge but also identify with a value system (Hortobágyiné-Komlósi 2011).

2. Career Paths among Permanently Learning Adults

We will only have an opportunity to examine the effects of the institutionalization of education to family life in the forthcoming years. We are, however, able to make a comparison of private and career paths of graduates with the help of the alumni monitoring system created recently. As these research programmes primarily concentrate on the usability of the degree in the market, we relied on demographic background data and variables so as to find an answer to our questions. In our previous research (Engler 2012) we examined the efficiency of adult learners, and it was found that the performance of those who study when they have a family is not lagging behind the performance of the adults who ‘only’ need to coordinate job and education.

Our analysis is based on the research conducted by Educatio Társadalmi Szolgáltató Nonprofit Kft. [E. Social Services Non-profit Ltd.] in 2010.² In the course of the ‘Diplomás 2010’ [Those with a degree 2010] research, graduates of state colleges and universities who obtained their degree in 2007 were contacted (N=4,511). Out of the entire sample, consisting of personal questionnaire interviews, we selected the respondents who were not regular undergraduate students (N=1,715). Within the sub-sample we did not differentiate between evening and correspondent students and those who completed their studies in a distance learning system. The reason for that approach is that the latter two groups are underrepresented in the sample (7% each), whereas correspondent students amount to 86% of all part-time students. The proportion of correspondent students is overwhelming in the national average as well; in 2007 it was 28% of all the graduates, as opposed to the 1.2% of evening students and 2.5% of distance learners (data from the National Statistical Bureau). The enrollment tendencies of the past ten years suggest that the popularity of distance learning and evening courses were on the constant decrease between 2001 and 2011, whereas

² TÁMOP 4.1.3. head project titled “System-level Development of Higher Educational Services” 2010.

at correspondent learning there was a setback in the middle of the decade and there has been stagnation since that time, with an annual number of 30,000 new students enrolled a year.

3. Success Indicators of the ‘Adult Learners’

In our sample of part-time students the distribution of genders is the same as the national average, with women in a majority of 75%. The average age of men is higher at 37, while with women it is 32 years. As far as marital status is concerned, about 60% of both genders are married, though a lot more women than men have a child (70% as opposed to 57%). The statistics regarding the number of children is similar: 40% have one child, and the proportion of those with a big family is 15%. Our male respondents usually came from bigger towns and cities, whereas a lot of the women were from smaller settlements.

In terms of differences regarding secondary education, men preferred technical schools and vocational technical schools, whereas women usually came from grammar schools. As for college and university degrees, the horizontal segregation observed in the entire society was reflected within our sample as well: women dominate arts, the legal profession and health (but not medical studies). Men are found predominantly in the engineering professions.

In order to justify our hypothesis regarding the efficiency of learning it is necessary to look into the basic motivation leading to learning, as it is likely to influence further education. Internal motivation for learning was found to be extremely powerful in the whole sample, as 63% of the respondents named professional interest as reason to continue their studies. No considerable difference between the genders was observed. Far behind this element of motivation follow all the others, which are also similar between the two genders: somewhat more than 10% declared that they wished to earn a degree. The same number of respondents referred to their jobs where it was a demand for them to continue their studies. Other elements of motivation mentioned were negligible. The powerful primary motivation of correspondent students is also observable in other research programmes (Forray-Kozma 2009, Engler 2011), despite the fact credentialism (T. Kiss & Tábori 2003) and the form of work serving as a channel of mobility (Ladányi 1994) are often particularly characteristic of non-traditional students. Among adult students of higher education, professional devotion, a desire to learn more, is strongly present in their decisions regarding further studies. It is therefore important that teachers use this as a basis to build upon in their work.

In order to measure the efficiency of learning we established indicators that are based upon variables related to the process of learning and the willingness to participate in further education. The variables include the successful completion of studies, postponed and passive semesters, the number of credits earned and language exams possessed by the students concerned. An indicator is also the time lapsed between the final exam and the reception of the degree, which is 10.4 months on the average in our sample. Furthermore, we also believe that commitment

to further studies is also an indicator of the success of the time spent at a college or university, so entering into formal education after the first diploma, or an intention to do so, is also listed with our indicators.

According to the variables used, the indicators constitute a five-grade scale, on which 1 applies to the students who have performed best in the fields examined, that is, they completed their studies within the specified time frame, they met all their obligations, there was no difficulty in obtaining their diploma (e. g. the lack of a language exam), entered another (postgraduate) training course, and remained devoted to learning. (A person who had all, or all but one, of these attributes received the highest grade.) In the case of those whose performance was the weakest in these aspects (group 5) we found problems with every one of the variables. Our original hypothesis regarding the efficiency of learning has not been justified, as it is reflected by the data summed up in Chart 2.

Chart 2
Indicators of the Efficiency of Learning in a Breakdown According to the Genders Per cent, (N=1,593) p=0.000

	Groups of Efficiency				
	1	2	3	4	5
Men	10.9	48.6	30.0	8.9	1.5
Women	5.1	49.4	35.5	9.7	0.3

Men appear to be more successful alumni than women: they represent 11%, as opposed to the 5% of women. In the second group, which is also relatively successful, the distribution of the genders is nearly equal (close to 50% at each gender). Women only have an edge in the group of the intermediately successful learners (36% vs. 30%). In the fourth group the two genders are again close to each other, approximately 9%. Men constitute a majority in the weakest group, but the total number of people in that group is very low (6 men and 3 women). Because of the low number of elements the two weakest – the fourth and fifth – groups will be merged in the further analyzes.

4. Factors Influencing the Success of Learning

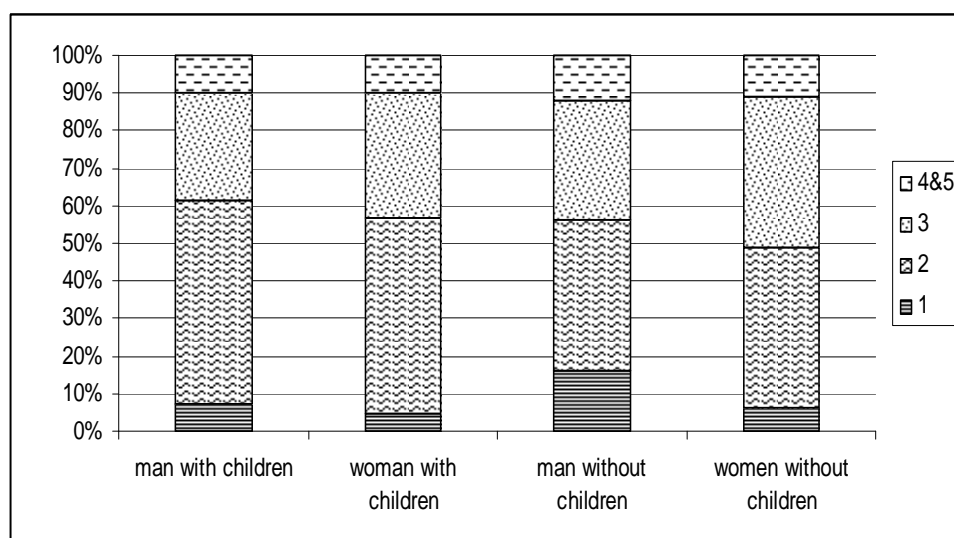
The results suggest that highly motivated large groups of female students do not prove to be similarly successful when they are adult learners. In his study about autonomous and independent student types Leathwood (2006) argues that most of the successful and independent adult students are men in the majority of cases. It appears to be rooted in gender attitudes, as powerful concentration on the goal, striving for success and strong ambitions are characteristics that are often attributed to men. Women, on the other hand, require guidance, regular consulting and a community to learn in. Severiens and Ten Dam (1998) in their research into learning strategies conclude that women tend to think in solution patterns, they are open to new perspectives whereas men mostly

concentrate on their own learning procedures. The lower performance of women may therefore be the consequence of their less efficient learning methods, not so successful organization of their own studies and weaker learning strategies.

We may also include external factors in our quest for answers. A potential explanation may be that women are busier, as they have a household and a family as duties in addition to learning. According to international research women's working time is 30% longer and their contribution to the national budget is 170% higher when their unpaid work at home is also taken into account (Frey 2001). In our sample we did not have an opportunity to measure the time spent on household activities, but we were able to make calculations based on the marital status and the size of the family of the individuals. We assumed that those who had children did not have as much free time as the childless women. 75% of the women in our sample had a child, and only 57% of the men. It may partly explain the higher success rate of men in their learning career, since they are able to devote more time to studying.

The results contradict our preliminary expectations. Chart 3 contains student efficiency in a breakdown according to the genders, and this time the family status is also included. The most outstanding students in Groups 1 and 2 have a child, and this particularly applies to men. When women are excluded, men with a child are generally more efficient than childless men, although the number of childless men is slightly higher in the absolutely top level in Group 1, which is the category of the most successful students. These findings do not apply to women. Among women, the childless respondents were somewhat less efficient.

Chart 3
Learning Efficiency in a Breakdown According to Genders and Family Status, per cent (N=1,589) p=0.016

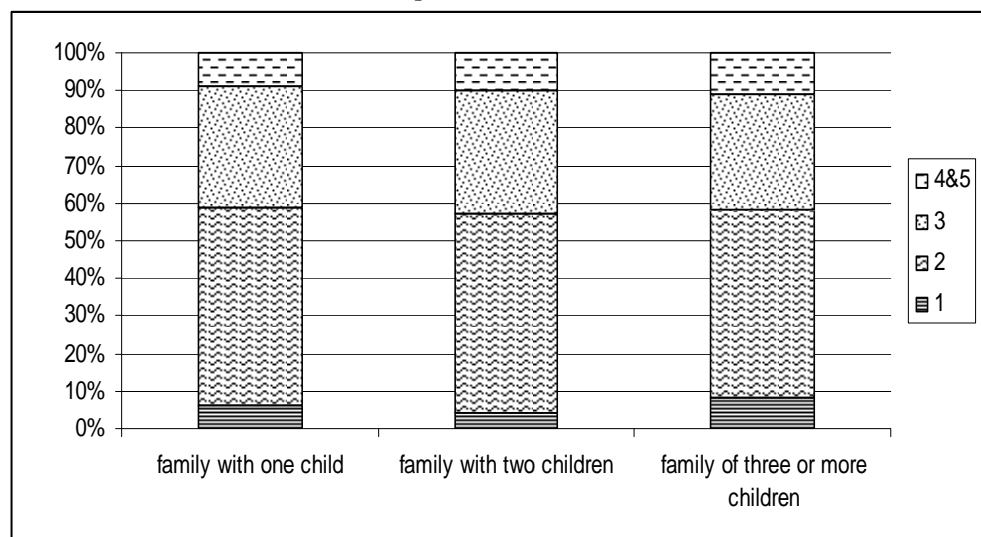


A comparison of the two genders indicates that men with children performed somewhat better than women with children did, which may refer to the advantageous situation of men mentioned previously. As for

childless men and women, men have a definite edge over women, which may to a lesser extent be explained by the traditional family roles.

It is therefore not possible to explain the more successful student career of men merely by the disadvantages women suffer because of their household chores. In the case of families the question of the number of children may arise, as a higher number of children obviously reduces the resources of the parents for learning. The diagrams in Chart 4, however, refute that idea, as the number of children does not appear to influence the success and efficiency of learning at all. The school results of parents with one, two, three or more children are approximately at the same level. One half of the learners from all family types are performing excellently during their student careers. In Groups 4 and 5, containing the lowest performers, the proportion of parents with several children is only marginally higher than in the other groups.

Chart 4
Learning Efficiency of Students According to the Number of their Children, per cent (N=1,050)



All these afford the conclusion that family status (including the presence or lack of children) and the size of the family in itself is not a factor that impedes adults in learning, and causes no shift of emphasis in the triangle of family, work and learning or any considerable loss of energy. On the contrary: students with children are often more willing to learn and more successful than others. Blair et al. (1995) examine various theories related to the way of life and learning career of adults. With reference to the seven transitory periods identified by Aslanian and Bricknell (1980), they show that experiences in connection with family (marriage, childbirth, children going to school etc.) have a serious influence on the learning activity of adults. The fifty recorded interviews are, however, not a sufficient source for us to set up clear categories. Some of the parents of small children, for instance, used learning as an 'escape' from household and maternity chores, whereas others regretted that they were kept away from the courses by their parental duties.

It is also possible that the informal knowledge and skills used primarily in family life but also applicable in organizing one's studies explains the success of the learners who have a family. Aslanian and Bricknell (1980) attribute great significance to the preliminary knowledge and abilities that adult learners acquired in a formal and informal way and bring those with themselves to the learning process. Experience acquired in a job is especially valuable from this aspect (see Derényi-Tóth 2011). Abrahamsson (1984) believes that skills and competences accumulated in family life are also important, in addition to the factors listed above. These competences, used to overcome difficulties like organizing the supervision of children, managing time, are a definite advantage in learning. One of the sites of spontaneous, unorganized learning is the family (Coombs 1985), but learning such skills, sometimes in an unconscious way, is not only possible in the family one comes from. In our conviction, the family plays a major role in the learning success and efficiency of adults. This role may include a background that provides support and incentive, but the daily life of a family is also a source of a number of skills and competences that are usable in the process of formal learning as well. Planning, organizing things, coordinating activities, logistics, timing are all part of the days of a family, and such experience will be integrated in the process of studying. Managing time is always a crucial element of learning, and it is likely that adult students who have a family are able to manage their time available for learning effectively. Similarly, such students are more likely to be able to set up and organize their most suitable learning strategies.

5. Summary

In our essay we deal with the coordination of private life and professional plans for the future among young people, focusing on continual learning. Seen from an early period in life, assessing, planning and timing events of private life, coping with the new roles emerging from time to time (employee, spouse, parent) is a great challenge for young people. The processes of preparing a young person for life has partly left the close circle of the family in the past two centuries; today the—conscious and unconscious—effects of various institutions, professionals and the media are observed in education. Education for family life has become a part of compulsory or elective courses at schools in the central and eastern countries of Europe only in recent years. Knowledge and competences relayed in direct and practical ways and through a proper value system may offer a serious help to young generations from the kindergarten to adult education.

With the results presented here we wish to point out that it is possible to coordinate plans for private life and profession, and the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the course of education for family life it is necessary to make learners aware that they should replace the dilemma of 'family *or* career' with the potential model of 'family *and* career' With the successful preparation for that, the individual will not only be able to exploit their abilities, skills and acquired knowledge in the labour market, but will also be motivated for lifelong learning.

Furthermore, after such preliminaries a person will be able to successfully coordinate their roles in their respective communities and in society.

This study is part of the 'Learning Regions in Hungary: From Theories to Realities' research project (principal investigator: Prof. Dr. Tamas Kozma) and supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA K-101867).

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