

The Structure of non-traditional students' motives for entering higher education

Struttura delle motivazioni degli studenti non tradizionali per accedere allo studio universitario

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Abstract

This study uses secondary data analysis to investigate the motives behind non-traditional students starting university studies. The data were collected during the first part of a longitudinal on-line survey conducted at Masaryk University amongst first-year students attending all of the university's bachelor's and master's degree programmes. The Academic Motivation Scale was the tool used in the original research to explore the university students' reasons for beginning their studies. A sub-sample of the primary study population, adult students 26 years of age or older who had taken a break from their educational trajectories, were identified as *non-traditional students*. We found that the hierarchy of non-traditional students' motives for entering higher education diverged from the hierarchy of the rest of the sample.

Keywords: motives; non-traditional students; adult education; academic motivation; engagement.

Abstract

Questo studio esamina le motivazioni degli studenti non tradizionali per accedere allo studio universitario sulla base di un'analisi secondaria dei dati. I dati provengono dal primo ciclo di ricerca a lungo termine dell'Università Masaryk effettuato tra gli studenti dei primi anni di tutti i programmi di laurea di primo e di secondo livello. Lo strumento di ricerca è stato il questionario AMS (Academic Motivation Scale), utilizzato per esaminare i motivi per i quali gli studenti universitari intraprendono il loro percorso di studi. Ai fini del nostro studio abbiamo considerato come studenti non tradizionali gli studenti di 26 anni o di età superiore che nel loro percorso di studi hanno sperimentato una qualche interruzione. La ricerca ha evidenziato come la gerarchia delle motivazioni che spingono gli studenti non tradizionali ad accedere allo studio universitario è diversa da quella che spinge il resto del campione di studenti universitari.

Parole chiave: motivi; studenti non tradizionali; educazione degli adulti; motivazione accademica; impegno.

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1. Introduction

This text focuses on the motives of non-traditional students for entering higher education. On a theoretical level, it builds on the adult student engagement concept. Empirically, the paper presents a secondary analysis of data from research into students of Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic) and it focuses on the results of measuring using the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992). In general, the research contributes to the search for answers to the following questions: Why do adults decide to enrol at a university at a certain point in their lives? What makes them enter a process that they know could threaten their current world view? What impulse initiates their decision to participate in education rather than focusing on their personal, work, and family life?

Chamahian (2011) stated that the return to education can be a real identity test for adults, since universities are a privileged place for younger students. Also, within both initial and continuing education, participation in education is the most important and often more or less the only social role for students. This declaration almost never applies to adults returning to education. Non-traditional students do not enter university effortlessly from another type of education. Instead of a direct transition from upper secondary education to university, they complete one kind of education and then became involved in other life spheres (work, family, partnership); these other involvements continue to significantly affect their education and often limit it. This is why student engagement was selected as a conceptual framework; the concept takes into account this multiplicity of social roles, so typical of adult life – employee, parent, partner, citizen, etc. – and is often used in both theoretical and empirical studies of adults in education, especially by Francophone researchers (for example Crochard, 2007; Vallée, Artus, Delbecq, Roberti & Demeuse, 2010; Vertongen, Bourgeois, Nils, de Viron & Traversa, 2012).

Motives behind enrolment tend to be characterized as a summation of reasons given by the person being educated regarding their entry into education (Aubret, 2001), however, adults' motives for entering higher education simultaneously reflect the conflict between the discourse of employability, typical of education aimed at economic growth and which lays much emphasis on an individual's skills, and democracy (Thunborg, Bron & Edström, 2013), highlighting personal growth and active citizenship. For instance, Shaskova (2010) discovered that the motives of adult students in Russia were more affected by economic reasons, such as achieving better living standards, than by internal satisfaction and self-realization; she stated that this led to a lesser amount of participation in the changes taking place on the labour market and in society. Consequently, the participation of non-traditional students has significant relationships beyond the education system or labour market. Which is why it makes sense to pay more attention to this subject.

2. Adult students and why they engage in education

As a concept, adult students can be defined on the basis of age, cognitive maturity, or a designation as *non-traditional* (Chao, 2009); this last definition is used especially for adults in formal education. The differences between younger students and adults in education are not so much due to the age difference, but to the different kinds of educational and professional pathways and the fact that “adults have more experiences, adults have different kinds of experiences, and adult experiences are organized differently” (Kidd, 1973, p. 46). Regarding these experiences accumulated in a different way, Merriam, Caffarell and Baumgartner (2007, p. 424) observed that not only did they differentiate adults from

children, they also differentiated adults from one another, given that adults derive their identity from their experiences, and therefore, they represent a significantly heterogeneous group on their own.

Adults also see their entire life as a fulfilment of their needs and ideals, or as a constant cycle focused on the achievement of closer and further social and individual goals (Hartl, 1999). This view of adulthood is markedly similar to some approaches to motivation conceptualization. Knowles (1973; 1980; 1984) mentioned motivation as an inherent characteristic of a learning adult. In adult education, the motives of adults lie primarily in the needs, interests, abilities, and hobbies of the individual as well as in their character/will properties (sense of duty, attempts to improve their skills in their line of business, acquiring qualifications, seeking promotion, etc.) (Hotár et al., 2000). In this way, the motives summarize needs, endeavours, desires, interests, opinions, and aspirations within a single construct. All of these intrapsychic aspects can become sources of a motivational activity (ibidem) and the construct of motive is considered an umbrella term for a summary of the energizing factors of motivation.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to distinguish causes from motives: whereas a cause has a direct effect on participation that can be denoted as mechanical, the motive, and also the motivation, depends on other causes that are directly connected to individual dynamics (Fenouillet, 2011). Boutinet (1993) had already warned that motives are merely visible parts of an individual project and that the motive itself is not the cause of participation, but rather a project that it is a part of. Therefore, the utilization of the motive concept does not guarantee a researcher the ability to investigate the cause of a given behaviour. Nuttin (1980) postulated that the determination of goals within the motivational process is important whenever a need cannot be satisfied immediately and some action that does not have a motivational strength on its own is necessary for its satisfaction. In this way, on a certain level, a person transits from a qualitatively lower level of need satisfaction to a specifically human state characterized by the process of forming projects leading to the achievement of the goal (Nuttin, 1980, p. 13). Apart from the determination of the goal itself, it is necessary to determine a path to its achievement, by which means long-term prospective goals become strong motivational factors (Hrabal, Man & Pavelková, 1984). Also, in accord with Nuttin (1991), the relationship between a human and the world is twofold: it is both dynamic (characterized by the need for self-development) and cognitive (manifested by setting goals, making plans, and having projects). The motives of engagement are understood in this perspective, in which the entry into education becomes a project to achieve a specific goal that might even consist of education itself. However, the concept of engagement as one of the possible ways to approach the research of adult non-traditional students tends to be denoted as *multidimensional* (Brault-Labbé & Dubbé, 2008; Christenson, Reschly & Wylie, 2012) or *polysemic* (Molinari, Poelhuber, Heutte, Lavoué, Sutter Widmer & Caron, 2014): it is a concept that is being used both within the initial school education and in the field of adult education, in which it is used both to model the motivation of adults to enter education and to investigate student wellbeing (Brault-Labbé, 2006; Dubé, Jodoin & Kairouz, 1997). In the first case, the process leading from the first declaration of intent to the factual initiation of education is considered *engagement*; this concept thus describes adults' entry into education very well. According to some sources (Crochard, 2007; Wyatt, 2011), the question of engagement occupies a central place in research on university education for non-traditional students.

3. Non-traditional students in tertiary education

A discussion on the role of tertiary education in contemporary society is taking place at a global level (for example Biesta, 2009; Nussbaum, 2010; Ramaley, 2014). Continuation with study at university is becoming almost a standard; the status of the university student has become commonplace in our society (Grignon & Gruel, 1999; Romainville, 2000). The current trends of tertiary education include massification (Trow, 1974) and diversification of the student community (Prudký, 2009). The general dramatic increase in university students is due to the change from an elite system to a mass system of tertiary education (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002) that occurred in the 1990s. This expansion has fundamentally impacted the nature of university education itself in its structure, purpose, and social and economic roles (Unesco, 1998). The character of university education is quickly moving in the direction of lifelong education: “While in elite systems, in accordance with Trow, students come to universities from high schools and focus only on education, in the mass phase, more and more students are coming only after a certain period of time of employment and they also tend to work during their studies; this trend peaks in the universal phase” (Prudký, Pabian & Šima, 2010, p. 139). According to the authors, these different student careers that are becoming the current trend can be identified on the basis of various types of data, consisting predominantly of the increasing age of students, including those attending day studies, employment during studies, the increased number of students in combined programmes, and the ratio of students employed alongside their day studies.

The concept of the non-traditional student was created in connection with the diversification of the student community. The term non-traditional students is used to describe underrepresented groups in tertiary education (Bron & Lönnheden, 2004). It can include students from underprivileged socio-economic conditions (lower socio-economic status or minority ethnic groups), students with physical disabilities, older students, and students from groups threatened by study failure. In their researches on non-traditional students in tertiary education in Sweden, Thunborg, Bron and Edström (2012; 2013) also referred to young adult students who are the first generation in their family to enter tertiary education. Since this is a concept whose importance is linked to the context in which it is used, it is *context-dependent* (Rosário et al., 2014). In addition to age, work, and family viewpoints, the multicultural perspective is also being taken into consideration in some countries. Thus, it is symptomatic for the academic definitions of non-traditional student to differ between experts. In accordance with Australian psychological research reviews on various definitions of this concept, it is fluid, its meaning changing according to the social, geographical, and system context (Chung, Turnbull & Chur-Hansen, 2014). Some authors consider adult or mature students to be *non-traditional*; this is our own perspective in this paper.

In the literature on non-traditional students the age viewpoint is the one that appears most often and is considered a *traditional* criterion of the definition (Kim, 2002). For traditional students, the most commonly stated age is between 18 and 25; non-traditional students are thus 25 years of age or more (Bourgeois, De Viron, Nils, Traversa & Vertongen, 2009). In the literature, adult students are mostly differentiated from traditional students by the aforementioned limit of 25 years of age, but also by a break in their educational trajectory (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Kasworm, 2005 – cited in Vertongen, Nils, Traversa, Bourgeois & De Viron, 2009). However, the age criterion has not been fixed unanimously; although it is 25 years of age in Spain, in neighbouring Portugal, the lower limit for non-traditional students is set at 23 years (Rosário et al., 2014). In the United States, researchers have

introduced the following demographic characteristics of non-traditional students on a national level: financially independent from one's parents, having one or more dependents, a single parent, not having a traditional high school diploma, having postponed university studies, and/or employed full-time (Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996; Kim, 2002; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). The plurality of life roles, in which the student plays roles other than that of a university student, such as partner/spouse, worker or parent, represents another aspect of the non-traditional student definition (Chung et al., 2014; Kim, Sax, Lee & Hagedorn, 2010). Non-traditional students acquire these roles during the break in their formal educational trajectory; Schuetze and Slowey (2002) saw the importance of a complementary criterion regarding the life trajectory of non-traditional students in the fact that some students could be *traditional* in some ways and *non-traditional* in others; they proposed "to base the distinction between traditional and non-traditional students on the typical educational biographical sequences a student passes through on his or her route to higher education" (p. 314). Changes in the student population can also be connected to the later transit to maturity, which is currently being postponed from the early 20s to the late 20s. In connection with this, we can speak of *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000); this phenomenon may also be a factor in the delayed entry of students into university studies and the increasing number of non-traditional students. Despite the variety of criteria and explanations, the students' age is always taken into account in defining non-traditional students, either explicitly (as one of the criteria), or implicitly (if some of the criteria contain a necessary postponement of study for a certain period of time).

4. Structure of motives for entering education in non-traditional students

The objective of the following part of this text is to present the results of empirical research on Masaryk University students in the first year of their studies (i.e. entering higher education), the results of which were investigated more deeply in a secondary analysis focusing on adult non-traditional students.

4.1. Methodology

The results presented in this text come from a secondary analysis of a longitudinal on-line survey (Study Roadmap, 2017) carried out at Masaryk University every six months. This involved investigating more deeply a sub-set analysis of a group of non-traditional students, given that the original research worked exclusively with the established dichotomy of full-time versus part-time students. The dataset on which the secondary analysis was performed came from the first wave of this research survey, which took place between 25 October and 22 November 2017. This first wave was selected for the secondary analysis because it contained specific data concerning students' motives for studying at university. The basic set consisted of all the students in their first years of bachelor's and master's programmes at Masaryk University, representing a total of 6.802 students on the day the research began. All the students in the given years could access the questionnaire through the university information system. Altogether, 2.323 students answered the questionnaire, a return rate of 34%. A selective sample of non-traditional students ($n = 99$) was subsequently extrapolated from this original set. The definition of non-traditional students in accordance with the age criterion is the most common approach in empirical research. For this reason, the non-traditional students in this research were also defined primarily by age. The definition of non-traditional students varies in accordance with their social, geographic, and system context (Chung et al., 2014). The set age criterion should therefore be reasonable for the

context of the given country. Consequently, we set the lower limit at 26 years of age, building on the definition of students established in Czech legislation as a *dependent child* in accordance with Section 11 para. 1 of Act No. 117/1995 Sb., On State Social Support: “A child until the end of compulsory schooling, and thereafter, not later than the age of 26, if he/she is continuously preparing for a future profession, is considered a dependent” (Section 12 to 15). This is also the age at which students lose their external benefits deriving from the status of being a student. A break in the educational trajectory was a complementary criterion that concerned the return of adults into education. This break was found through a question in the questionnaire: *I have begun my current studies at Masaryk University* with two possible answers: right after leaving secondary school or after some interval of time after leaving secondary school. Only the students who selected the option after some interval of time after leaving secondary school were selected for the group of non-traditional students. This option was further specified in the next question: “Between the end of secondary school and my entry into the current education at Masaryk University, I have primarily focused on”. The first four responses concerned education; the respondents who selected these options were not included in the non-traditional student group.

4.2. Measurement tool

The original research used a Czech translation of the Academic Motivation Scale Questionnaire (Vallerand et al., 1992), which was used in the Czech environment for the first time by Slezáčková and Bobková (2014). The questionnaire also contained other items; the Academic Motivation Scale constituted only a part of the entire research tool. The Academic Motivation Scale originates in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to the authors (Vallerand et al., 1992; 1993) who created this tool, academic motivation manifests as a construct in the form of a continuum of individual sub-types of this motivation depending on the degree of self-determination in one's actions. There are seven motivational concepts in total: (i) intrinsic motivation to know; (ii) intrinsic motivation to accomplish things; (iii) intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation; (iv) identified regulation; (v) introjected regulation; (vi) external regulation; and (vii) amotivation. There are thus three types of intrinsic motivation, three types of extrinsic motivation, and an amotivation that is not differentiated further in any way. In the Academic Motivation Scale Questionnaire, academic motivation is operationalized by expressing the degree of agreement on a scale from 1 to 7 with the proposed formulations of motives to study at university, i.e. the question of why the respondents decided to study at university. The motives proposed are assigned to individual sub-types of motivation on the basis of the theory created by Vallerand et al. (2002).

4.3. Results

More than two thirds of the non-traditional students at Masaryk University were women (69,5%) and less than a third were men (30,5%). The results showed 72% of non-traditional students in the first year study in a part-time programme; 12,7% in full-time studies; and 15,3% attending both day and combined studies. Bachelor's degree programmes were more frequently attended (86,4%) than master's degree programmes (13,6%). In terms of previous experience of higher education, more than half of the non-traditional students (56,7%) had experience of some form of tertiary education, and 32,1% of the non-traditional students had already acquired a tertiary education degree. To a rather large extent, the current education at Masaryk University is not the first experience of the non-

traditional students with tertiary education; it can be considered their return to this type of education.

As regards the actual characteristics of non-traditionality, the average age of the adult students in the first year of their programmes was 35,36 years (SD=6,72). However, the most frequent age was 26, which is also the lower age limit for non-traditional students. In terms of groups, 62% of the non-traditional students were in the first age group (26-35 years of age), 48% were in the second (36-45 years of age), and 6,8% of the respondents fell into the last age group (46-55 years of age); the oldest respondent in the sample was 53 years old. An absolute majority of the respondents focused on work or business during the break in their educational trajectory (68,6%). The second most common option was *other* (16,9%). After a closer review of verbal specifications from the respondents, we can affirm that this mostly concerned a combination of education, work, and family, with 11% of respondents caring for their family exclusively; 2,5% of the non-traditional students in the sample spent this break travelling. The smallest portion of respondents focused exclusively on searching for work during their break (0,8%); surprisingly, only one student was unemployed during the entire break. The relationship of non-traditional students to work is also an important finding. A large portion of these students, up to 81,2%, work regularly during the entire year. This option was followed by *other* (5,9%) in which almost all the students specified the number of hours a week spent working or on maternity leave. The smallest portion of respondents worked occasionally throughout the entire year (5,1%), from time to time (2,5%), or not at all (3,4%). A slim majority of non-traditional students have children (53,4%). In comparison with the entire set of surveyed students, most first-year Masaryk University students were childless (97% did not have children). The fact that a significant portion of non-traditional students already has a family of their own is characteristic for non-traditional students in general and this was confirmed at Masaryk University among the first year students. The fact that the average age of the children of non-traditional students was 11,33 years of age is important. The youngest children of non-traditional students were less than 1 year old at the time of data collection; the oldest offspring in the research set was 33 years old.

A hierarchy of study motives different from those of the entire set of first year students was discovered in the subset of non-traditional students during this research. In these non-traditional students, the pleasure of acquiring knowledge on a subject they are interested in is the most important reason to study at university (For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me). The second most common motive for engagement, pleasure and satisfaction from learning new things, is similar (Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things). The third most common motive behind non-traditional students entering university is that because of their studies, they can learn about things that interest them (Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me). Clearly, among non-traditional students, the interest in studying as such clearly predominated over external motives for which the studies were merely a means. We could say that on the basis of these findings, knowledge and the derived pleasure are essential conditions of the university study of non-traditional students and their commitment. The most common motive is followed by motives from the same category – pleasure from discovering new things and from surpassing one's personal achievements (For the pleasure I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments), which refers to the *identity* part of the studies. Identity relations appear in connection to operative objectives; they can take the form of seeking to fulfil a positive image of oneself or to avoid a negative image of oneself (Bourgeois, 2015). In contrast, on the other side of the spectrum, there is a

motivation (all four of the least popular motives are a sign of absence of motivation), which corresponds with the results within the entire set, however, the means of non-traditional students are lower than in other students, which suggests that non-traditional students are less unmotivated in their studies and that their motives to study are clearer to them.

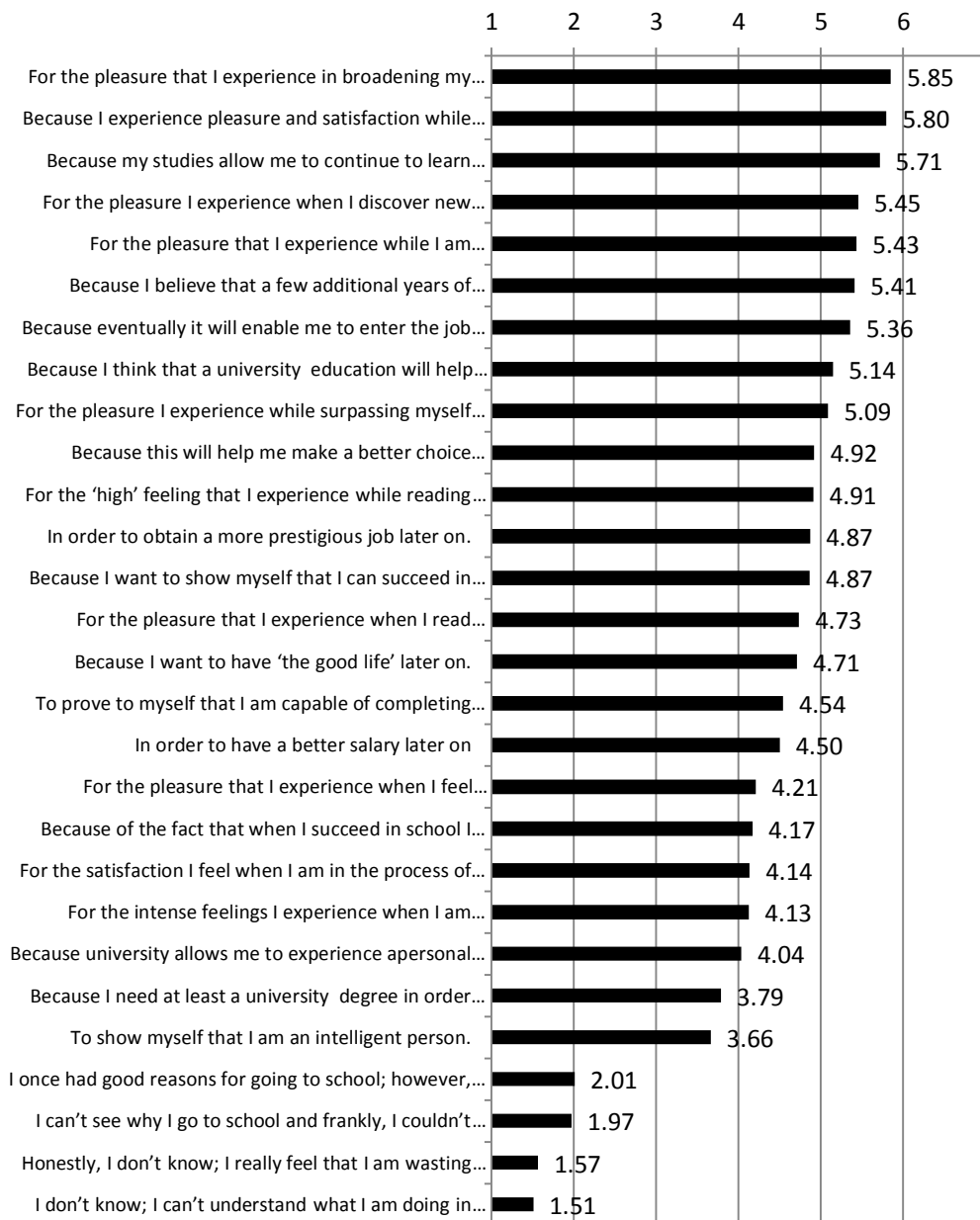


Figure 1. Average values of answers to the question: Why have you decided to study at university?

The entire hierarchy of motives of non-traditional students for entry into university differs from the motives of traditional students, who tend to demonstrate more orientation towards a direct use of education in future employment in selecting the three most popular motives, all of them connected to career choices. In the hierarchy of motives of non-traditional students, career motives are only listed later, since their motivations connected to work are

paradoxically less important to them when entering university, even if they come directly from the labour market. A total distribution of motives of non-traditional students is shown in Figure 1.

4.4. The Structure of Non-traditional Students' Motives

In order to understand the structure of non-traditional students' motives better, we used an exploratory factor analysis of the measurement results of the Academic Motivation Scale. The method of the main components was *extraction*, i.e. the method of searching for new factors around which the motives of non-traditional students cluster, so that the factors could draw the largest portion of variance (Římánková & Sedláček, 2016). This method was used to determine the number of factors and the size of the factor matrix. The first step of the factor analysis was to evaluate its suitability using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy. The second step was to identify a reasonable number of factors on the basis of the Kaiser rule, according to which the factor analysis only includes factors with variance above 1. The calculation of Eigenvalues and the construction of a scree plot determined that three factors appeared to be the most relevant. The non-rotated factor matrix is the first result of the non-rotated factor analysis; however, it is unsuitable for interpretation, since factors after extraction correlate with a higher number of original variables (Almašiová & Kohútová, 2016, p. 113). Therefore, the subsequent one applied was factor rotation, the objective of which is to find a reasonably interpretable factor matrix (Stankovičová & Vojtková, 2007, p. 87). Oblimin rotation was the method used. The results are available in Figure 2.

Why have you decided to study at university?	Factors		
	1*	2**	3***
For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments.	0.839		
For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me.	0.808		
For the 'high' that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects.	0.807		
For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before.	0.795		
For the pleasure that I experience when I feel completely absorbed by what certain authors have written.	0.754		
Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.	0.705		
Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.	0.670		
For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others.	0.419		0.307
In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.		0.894	
Because I believe that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker.		0.834	
Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.		0.805	

Because I think that a university education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen.		0.757	
In order to have a better salary later on.	-0.336	0.750	0.353
Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation.		0.680	
Because I want to have 'the good life' later on.		0.638	
To show myself that I am an intelligent person.			0.800
Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.			0.760
To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my university degree.			0.746
Because of the fact that when I succeed in school I feel important.			0.741
For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments.			0.662
For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies.			0.624
Because university allows me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies.	0.372	0.585	
For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities.	0.474	0.482	

Figure 2. Factor structure of motives and their matrix in non-traditional students (Pattern Matrix).

After a closer review of the motives assigned to individual factors, such as those depicted in Figure 2, we can affirm that they are grouped in a new manner, i.e., they do not consistently match the original differentiation in subscales of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Therefore, the motives of non-traditional students in this research create a motivation profile that behaves in a different manner than the original continuum of self-determination by Vallerand et al. (1992) and that represents traditional students and their motivation to participate in university study in a quite appropriate way.

The first factor stresses the joy of learning and has a significant epistemic polarity, which is, however, also significantly affected by the identity of the non-traditional students in accordance with the individual representation of motives. These adults study for the intense experience achieved during direct contact with knowledge (For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before); for them, the most intensive feeling during contact with knowledge is connected to surpassing what they have already achieved (For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments). University education represents a challenge for the non-traditional students, and therefore it stands as a strong motive on its own. When they finally enter a programme, it becomes a source of *self-surpassing* for them. For non-traditional students, there is an interconnection of motives that relate to the motivation to learn and to the intense feelings experienced during learning within academic motivation. It cannot be said that this is a mere combination of two neighbouring subscales, since there is another scale between these two subscales which does not permeate this factor in any way. This is also supported by the manner of grouping motives together with other factors, where it is not only the subscales that merge within their type of motivation.

The second factor is connected to the work sphere. Education is supposed to help non-traditional students in their work life, to increase its quality and thus the quality of their entire life (Because I want to have *the good life* later on). University education helps to increase qualifications or salary (Because I believe that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker, In order to have a better salary later on). However, in comparison with the original scale, a significant change lies in the fact that work-related motives are not encountered together with other incentives from the field of external regulation. This indicates the specificity of professional orientation of motives for non-traditional students.

The third factor indicates the need to prove to oneself that *I am an intelligent person* or that *I can succeed in my studies* or that *I am capable of completing my university degree*. The non-traditional students try to prove something to themselves by participating in education. They prove to themselves that they can surpass themselves and achieve success (For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments, For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies). For non-traditional students, the motivation to achieve success combines with the need for self-confirmation, and the motives for satisfying this need correspond with the introjected motivation in the Academic Motivation Scale subscale. The last two motives that appear within this factor (Because university allows me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies and For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities) indicate, in a specific configuration, that the performance of complex academic tasks and the delivery of excellent study performance provide intense feelings for non-traditional students, but rather than merely exemplifying the pure joy of knowledge, they tend to have more of an identity meaning for them.

5. Discussion

Some sources indicate that a typical non-traditional student is a woman, or, in other words, it is more likely that a non-traditional student at university will be a woman over 30 years of age (Allen, 1993). This was partially confirmed by our own research, because there were more women among the non-traditional students in their first years at Masaryk University (69,5%). The presumption concerning age could have been confirmed in a similar manner, since the average age of non-traditional students in this research set was 35,36 years of age (SD = 6,7), and, specifically, the average age of the women was 35,93 (SD = 6,9). The average age of the children of non-traditional students of Masaryk University was 11,5 years, which surprisingly accurately confirms the research findings of Pons-Desoutter (2018), in whose research the average age of non-traditional students also exceeded 11 years of age. This finding may be due to the fact that at this age, children are older and more independent, enabling parents to focus more on their own education pathways.

For 56,7% of the non-traditional students, this study programme constituted a return to tertiary education, since their current studies were not their first experience of tertiary education. Vallée et al. (2010) found that more than 90% of the non-traditional students in their research had previously participated in tertiary education, but their number was higher partially with regard to the fact that only 50% of these students had taken a break between their studies; such a break was one of the entrance criteria for selection of non-traditional students in our research. The term *return of adults to formal education* used in scholarly texts applies not only to adults returning to a formal type of education after a certain break,

but also to those who often have some direct experience of university education and have decided to return for some reason. This discovery can shed more light on the character of the motivation of non-traditional students to enter university and it also confirms the presumption of the importance of determining these motives, since adult non-traditional students certainly decide to return for a specific reason and do not enter education automatically, so to speak, as is the case of young adults who enter university immediately after leaving secondary school.

In this study of non-traditional students, the following types of motives to participate in university education have been identified: *epistemic*, *professional*, and *identity*. This designation of motive category partially originates in the taxonomy of motives by Carré (2001), which originally concerned adults in professional education, but was later adapted and verified by research among adult university students too (Vertongen et al., 2012). The hierarchy of motives discovered in non-traditional students by Vertongen et al. (2012) corresponds with the determined structure of motives in our own research, since Vertongen et al. (2012) identified the following motives, sorted by importance, among non-traditional students, to be the most important: *epistemic*, *identity*, *professional*, and *professional-operational*. The first two types match, but the designation of *professional motivation* is wider in this research, since it includes both professional and professional-operational motives.

The structure of motives of non-traditional students has also been described by other authors. For example, Landry, Pilon and Beauvais (2005) discovered similar categories of motives leading to university education in adult students returning to education: search for knowledge, search for competence, and search for meaning. In our own study, the search for knowledge matched the desire for learning, i.e. epistemic motivation, the search for competence overlaps with professional motivation, and the search for meaning can be attributed to the identity motivation of non-traditional students. Another but very similar category of motives of non-traditional students is the hierarchy in accordance with Pons-Desoutter (2018), which features the return to education dictated by some work context, motives connected to a personal domain, the desire for intellectual growth, and the search for one's own identity and social recognition. The return to education dictated by some work context is similar to the professional motivation discovered in this study, the desire for intellectual growth is linked to epistemic motivation, and the last two categories (search for one's own identity and social recognition together with motives connected to a personal domain) are related to identity motivation. The research by Bourgeois, Nils, de Viron & Traversa (2012) discovered that regardless of the main motive that mobilizes adults to study, the return to education always represents a more or less significant relation to self-presentation and self-evaluation of the adult.

6. Conclusion

The results of the secondary analysis presented in this study are not in conflict with the previous research. They complement the research with the motivation profile of non-traditional students, with some specific aspects that differ from the population as a whole. We discovered that adult students at Masaryk University were driven to higher education studies mainly by a kind of philomathy, a *strong desire to acquire new knowledge and a passion for learning new things*. Moreover, higher education is an identity issue for them. A peculiarity in their professional motives should be investigated more deeply in future research. The sample of students was the main limit of this study. Masaryk University,

whose students were the subject of interest, is a university of a wide focus in the Humboldtian tradition, but it does not include technical programmes. Therefore, the results of the analysis cannot be generalized to all non-traditional university students. However, the study does reliably prove that the structure of motivation of non-traditional students is not unilateral and that it cannot be perceived merely through the lens of the labour market, as in some current analyses. Further research on wider populations is necessary in order to cover the entire extent of the subject.

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