



AN EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS THAT UNDERLIE THE CAREER DECISION THROUGH THE STUDENTS' OPTICS

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Abstract: *The career decision is a complex process that begins long before the actual choice of career alternative; it is a process that is consumed by consciously going through several stages under the careful guidance of specialized staff. At least, these are the natural landmarks of this approach: time, clear objectives, specialized support, and the existence of realistic and accessible opportunities. In the current context, of the information explosion, the dynamics of the labor market, the rapid reconfiguration of occupations, and implicitly of the required and expected competence profile, the need and urgency with which career counseling is to be carried out in schools and universities is increasing. This study aims to investigate aspects of career decision-making among students, exploring in this regard the opinions of 702 respondents who attend university studies at both technical and non-technical majors. The questionnaire used is composed of 28 items and was applied to students from Transilvania University of Brasov.*

JEL classification: I23

Key words: *counseling, career, decision, needs.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In different periods of history, job choice was not so much influenced by the personality of the person as it is today. The vision of work has also changed throughout history, and since the pandemic the working conditions have changed in some cases, moving from working in the office, where the space was well defined, to working from home, in the personal space.



In addition, the dynamics of the labor market have changed more and more in recent years, which attracts attention, among other aspects, to the educational and career counseling of graduates. This is all the more so as they are increasingly confronted with various states such as fear and insecurity, uncertainty (whether we refer to future individual preferences or those related to future career options) (Gati & Levin, 2015), difficulty transitioning to a higher education level, superficial self-knowledge, lack of professional experience (Santili et al., 2019; Fouad et al., 2016), the digital revolution and economic globalization (Obi, 2015), and career advice, with a focus on investigating determinants, it is undoubtedly an urgent and necessary intervention that is meant to help shape a plan for accessing the labor market (van der Horst et al., 2021; Whiston et al., 2017; Kleine et al., 2021).

The concept of career counseling has many meanings that have been highlighted in the occupational field and in the literature. To understand the evolution of this concept, we can briefly recall that the first national conference on career orientation was held in Boston in 1910, the second in New York in 1912, and the third in Michigan in 1913. Career counseling was created to meet the needs of society during times of transition (Zunker, 2016). Spokane and Oliver (1983) defined career or vocational intervention as an effort aimed at improving an individual's career development or enabling him to make the best career decisions (Gati & Levin, 2015). Other acceptances (Hartung, 2010; Lent & Brown, 2012) consider that this process is defined as a way to explore, choose, prepare for, enter, adjust to, advance in and leave occupational roles and construct lives through work, a process that covers three categories of problems: assistance in making and implementing career decisions, assistance in adapting to work and career development, and assistance in ensuring career transition and achieving work-life balance. Many of the mentioned points of view are kept up to date, along with a wide range of actions such as individual counseling, group activities, professional training courses, and self-help interventions.

Despite the very good and convincing results regarding the effectiveness of individual counseling, however, it has been found that little is known about the processes and mechanisms that effectively lead to or produce their own counseling action (Whiston and Rose, 2015; Whiston, Rossier, and Hernandez, 2016), thus, it is undoubtedly necessary for specialists or career advisors to identify the process variables that influence these very good results by knowing what works with one client or another.



In higher education in Romania, most educational institutions offer counseling services to students through specially organized centers. In this respect, in Romania, the legal framework for the establishment of career counseling and guidance centers exists and is represented by OMECS no. 3070/14.01.2015 for the modification of the methodology – a framework for the organization and functioning of counseling and career guidance centers in the higher education system in Romania. Among the services offered free of charge to students are counseling and career guidance by assessing professional interests and skills and exploring the opportunities existing in the labor market; psycho-pedagogical assistance for overcoming various difficulties encountered by students; assistance in the realization and optimization of personal marketing elements (CV, recommendation letter); facilitating the relationship between students and the labor market by organizing various thematic events; workshops; mentoring activities, professional practice, volunteering. Many students enter higher education immediately after they finish high school, but there are also adults who return to the university education system and need counseling to cope with different roles in adult life, but also to adapt to the new educational requirements.

RESULTS

The *main objective* of the study was to examine the psychosocial and individual factors underlying career decisions. Adjacent, we also investigated the students' interest in job market prospecting, the level of self-knowledge, the emotional states associated with career decision-making, and the willingness to access various activities related to career counseling and guidance.

The *method* used was a questionnaire composed of 28 items developed in the context of the study.

The *group of subjects* was composed of 702 students from Transilvania University of Braşov, of which 292 were male and 410 were female (whose distribution by faculty and level of study is presented in Table 1), and the data collection period was September - October 2022.

Table 1. The distribution of respondents

Faculty	Total respondents	Percentage of sample	Male	Female	Bachelor`s degree	Master`s degree	Doctoral studies
Food and tourism	10	1.42%	1	9	9	1	-
Civil Engineering	6	0.85%	3	3	4	2	-



Furniture Design and Wood Engineering	65	9.26%	35	30	65	-	-
Law	165	23.50%	40	125	146	19	-
Material Science and Engineering	11	1.57%	8	3	9	2	-
Economic Sciences and Business Administration	61	8.69%	19	42	51	10	-
Physical Education and Mountain Sports	10	1.42%	5	5	9	1	-
Electrical Engineering and Computer Science	132	18.80%	103	29	125	5	1
Mechanical Engineering	13	1.85%	10	3	9	4	-
Technological Engineering and Industrial Management	48	6.84%	26	22	47	-	1
Letters	23	3.28%	5	18	21	2	-
Mathematics and Computer Science	7	1.00%	3	4	6	1	-
Medicine	37	5.27%	7	30	35	2	-
Music	13	1.85%	2	11	8	5	-
Psychology and Education Sciences	59	8.40%	6	53	49	10	-
Silviculture and Forest Engineering	11	1.57%	7	4	11	-	-
Sociology and Communication	22	3.13%	3	19	20	2	-
Product Design and Environment	9	1.28%	9	-	9	-	-

Some of the most important decisions people make throughout their lives are career related (Gati & Kleiman, 2008; Gati & Levin, 2015). As is predictable, such decisions, considered extraordinary, have serious long-term implications for both personal and professional life. In the context of this fragile and unbalanced world, marked by a profound crisis in its various sectors, more so by the nature of recent years (COVID 19 pandemic, for example), most people are guided by the desperate need to find a job urgently, not considering an essential aspect in this process: self-knowledge (Cojocariu & Puiu, 2014).

The first aspect investigated was the factors that were the basis of the decision on the university educational route. The students had the opportunity to choose several options of the answer, starting from the consideration that such a decision, of an extraordinary type, involves the corroborated action of several psychosocial factors (family, school – teachers, school counselors or psychologists, group of friends, etc.), various consistent conceptions about the professions in the labor market, etc.), and individuals (personal skills, level of intellectual development, motivation, various personality traits, etc.). Students' answers are summarized in Table 2. We note that the decision to attend a college based on personal abilities was made at a



rate of 65.7% (N= 472), which means that the self-knowledge declared by the respondents is high even. Awareness, but especially knowledge of personal abilities, help them manage their professional development. A positive self-concept includes an understanding of personal strengths, abilities, interests, and values. Professional self-assessment is also possible based on personal aspects like skills, motivation, self-confidence, and personal values.

Personal abilities, as the first decisive factor in shaping the decision on the educational path, have been seconded and supplemented by others such as the profile of the high school followed, the guidance of parents and teachers, the financial situation that a potential job can provide and even the opinions or decisions of the group of friends.

Table 2. Analysis of the factors underlying the choice of educational path

Factors	Frequency
Personal skills	472
High school profile	228
Financial situation of the future job	211
Guidance from parents and teachers	146
Guidance from school counselor	21
Group of friends	17
Other (unspecified)	70

Second, the top factors that contribute to shaping the decision on the future educational path are represented in a percentage of 32.2% by the profile of the graduated high school (N=228). This situation revealed by the respondents can also be linked to the one regarding the moment when the decision to attend a college was outlined, respectively during high school and after its completion. In the first situation (during high school studies) there were registered the most answers (46.2%), which can lead us to the idea that former high school students, and current students, have identified their areas of professional interests also considering their personal abilities, their personality, their identity, but also depending on the preferences toward a particular subject, since high school, so the decision on the career had a solid foundation, which should continue with the graduate of university studies.

The top three factors include the potential financial situation that the accessed job can provide (N= 211), thus investing in the professional skills acquired during university studies. The job



market is constantly changing, and this is not yesterday, but today. The same trend is expected soon. Therefore, it is always recommended for students to prospect, to analyze the labor market to identify the various oscillations and reconfigurations precisely in the idea that students adjust their career plan early (or even on the go). This item is related to another item that we have investigated in our study, namely the extent to which students have prospected the job market regarding the world of professions and employment possibilities after completing their studies. Thus, the situation is between the borders: 31.7% say they have prospected at a neutral level (which means neither in one direction nor in another: Uncertain this position, points to uncertainty, blurring), and 29.9% say they have largely prospected for opportunities in the labor market. Too few, 15.4% of the total respondents say they have shown a particularly high interest (to a very large extent) in prospecting the dynamics of the occupational space.

The most important factor is the counseling provided by the school counselor or a specialist. We note that in only 21 cases, the guidance of a school counselor was an important factor in shaping the decision on the educational path. In addition to these data, respondents, 54.4%, said they had received very little counseling during high school, followed by 21.8% (low measure) and 18.5% (moderate measure). This reality is worrying more as, through the organization of the education system on curricular cycles, starting from the 7th grade (until the 9th grade), students pass into the observation and orientation cycle. The main objective of the project is to optimize the future school and professional options. More specifically, this is the moment when the student discovers the aspirations and values to build a positive self-image, forms the capacity to analyze the set of skills acquired through learning to orient toward a certain professional career, it develops communication capacity using different specialized languages and, finally, develops its autonomous thinking and responsibility for integration into the social environment. This is how important it is that in this educational stage the student is supported and even assisted by the services of a career counselor precisely to give a more specific character to the future educational and professional life.

In addition, according to the data collected, during high school, the services of a school counselor or another specialist in the field of counseling and career guidance are rarely used. Regarding the level of self-knowledge, the investigated students are placed in a favorable perspective. 65.8% of respondents said they had completed a battery of psychological tests for self-knowledge by the time of the survey. Then, looking at their career plan, 58.3% confirm



that they have achieved a career plan during their university studies. These objective facts are complemented by the following: Respondents (63%) believe they do not need confirmation about the right career choice; 58.5% are not worried about the fact that professional interests may change in the meantime; 65.1% know their strengths; 63.8% say they are sure that the occupation they want to pursue is right for them; 58.8% say that they have not had a hard time making a career decision, and 75.1% disagree with the statement that no profession attracts them strongly.

Finally, what do students want? To participate in career-related activities, various events organized in the university, especially career days, etc. 87.9% of respondents did not participate in career planning workshops but declared that they wanted to do so. They would also be willing to get involved in projects that the university organizes and pursue careers. For their training to be more efficient and in line with the requirements of the labor market, most answered that they want to do more practice and develop a closer relationship with the representatives of the companies, through the various events held in the University.

CONCLUSIONS

From the data collected, we identified the needs that respondents have regarding their careers, what are their concerns, and what activities they want to carry out at the career Counseling and Guidance Center. The confidence they have about what they are going to do after completing their studies we are happy and we notice that they have had documented themselves before deciding, that they have information about the labor market, and financial possibilities if they follow a profession in a field. They are eager to develop and participate in workshops and events. We have situations where their career choice was based on other criteria: entering a college on a budgeted place, the influences of friends, and parents, the financial situation after completing studies, etc., and these aspects led to reorienting after the first year of college, sometimes abandoning or even anxieties and fears because they did not know where their life was going. In these cases, the level of self-knowledge was low, and they had difficulty making a new choice, the fear of failure increased, and the guidance of a specialist was necessary. Our intuitions have been confirmed. Those who have decided on their academic path considering their skills, personality, and the route they had until the completion of high school, are confident, know what path they will follow, have made career plans, know their strengths, but



also the aspects that they can improve and have very little recourse to individual counselors, but they want activities to help them develop.

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