

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES ACCORDING TO THE BENEFICIARIES

**ROXANA PLEȘA, ROBERT PRODANCIUC, IRINEL STEGAR,
CRISTIAN ILIONI ***

ABSTRACT: *The quality of an education system is reflected not only in the educational performance of the educational actors, but also by the measure to which it ensures an adequate professional integration. Today's student, tomorrow's graduate needs information as accurate as possible regarding the labor market, this fact can't be accomplished only with their own resources it also requires career guidance services. In universities counseling is in a debut phase and tries to consolidate its status by various adequate informing and promoting actions focused on the beneficiaries of this type of counseling. The motivation for choosing this research subject resides in observing the growing number of people that become aware of the need for and the utility of this type of counseling.*

KEY WORDS: *career guidance, career counseling, beneficiaries, performance, educational system*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *J24 (Occupational Choice)*

1. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The career guidance, orientation and education services, regarding the organization, methods, structure, and human resources as well as the occupational structures available have evolved significantly in the contemporary society.

The educational and vocational counseling and orientation supports the individuals in building their own careers, thereby helping them fulfill a dignified destiny in life.

* Lecturer, Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, rpmita@yahoo.com

Lecturer, Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, robertprodanciuc@yahoo.co.uk

Lecturer, Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, irinel_sf@yahoo.com

Assist. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, c_ilioni@yahoo.com

This process implies: competence, competition, selection, success, failure, assuming responsibilities etc. (Jigău, 2006, p. 5).

The educational and vocational counseling and orientation process regards aspects of the following nature:

- Cognitive – supplying information and training in job searching techniques;
- Affective - improving self-image and establishing a positive attitude towards work;
- Actional - decision-making, planning and implementing the action. (Jigău, 2001, p. 82)

The educational orientation activities precede the vocational orientation, but both of them are components of the career guidance. The educational orientation activities are focused on the ones that begin new stages of initial training. These activities are grounded on the idea that each person can achieve the maximum only if the training process is based on their strongest aptitudes or general personality characteristics. (Jigău, 2001, p.89)

The transition from educational orientation to vocational orientation is taking place gradually as the end of the educational cycle is approaching. These moments are potential “exits” from the educational and training system attended by the adult population that is unemployed, or wants to change the job, or to raise the personal level of competence, or the ones that just want to better cope with the new tasks modified by the technological progress. (Jigău, 2003, pp. 54-55)

Educational and vocational orientation and counseling tends to simultaneously solve two extremely important and actual aspects:

- They ensure social equity through the permanent democratization of the access to education and vocational training;
- The continuous improvement of the good use of human resources available to society. (Jigău, 2005, p. 22)

Counseling is also a form of socialization and/or social learning in that it offers individuals new experiences and information through which they can better outline and develop their identity and self-image, to successfully integrate and in a way that is satisfying for them or to facilitate overcoming certain critical contexts of their lives.

Career guidance is the process of maximum synchronization between personal and social aspiration regarding work seen as a source of personal satisfaction and as a means of general economic progress. The main task of career guidance is to ensure the consistency between the characteristics of a certain person and the objectives of the formative process undergone by that person.

Career guidance is a social phenomenon that emerged in society, together with the multiplication of the social forms of activity, as well as with the growing personal liberty, in order to ensure the possibility to choose a career for the young generation. It aims at adapting the person to the working conditions, to the wide range of existing professions on the labor market in accordance to the abilities, skills, general personality characteristics, aspirations of the person and to the social necessities pursuing to establish a balance within the relationship between humans and social activities. (Szilagy, 2008, pp.98-102)

The process of career guidance and counseling elevates from aptitudes to personality, from task solving possibilities to satisfaction attaining possibilities, from the man that executes to the man that creates. Career guidance and counseling doesn't necessarily presume removing the obstacles from the path of an evolving personality, but warning the individual that they exist and that most of them can be avoided and teaching him how to do it. (Ghivirigă, 2006, p.89)

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SUBJECTS

The study was conducted between January and March of 2017 and the participants were students/graduates of the three faculties from the University of Petroșani, beneficiaries of the services of the Centre for Career Guidance and Counseling within the University.

The research method used was the indirect survey based on a self-administered questionnaire. Through this research we intended to highlight the importance of a functioning career guidance and counseling center, meant to develop the beneficiaries' skills needed to find their own professional path. Also, research results represent the foundation of the next step namely the design of a counseling plan through which the future graduates can improve their skills and shape their attitudes in line with employers' expectations.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The career counseling process is bidirectional. It is starting from the expectations of the beneficiaries in relation to the services that can be offered by a career guidance center (<http://apubb.ro/cpspis/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/A4-Raport-analiza-nevoi.pdf>).

The need to use career counseling and guidance services throughout all school years is positively appreciated by more than three-quarters of the surveyed graduates, this measure being considered of key importance for a successful life.

As primary milestones in building a career, more than 70% of respondents assign a crucial role to career counseling services for self-knowledge, professional exploration, decision-making and professional development as well as effective planning for the career development.

The actual guidance and counseling activities attended by more than half of the study's graduates, focused mainly on free talks regarding professions or trades and career choices (more than 40%), counseling sessions that took place at the Career Counseling Center, participating at internships at certain companies or institutions (both at a rate of 28%) and volunteering activities (at almost one fifth of the cases). The percentages are relatively low and a possible explanation is that the activities of counseling graduates on their professional path are in the debut phase.

It is already known that when graduating university life goals are loosely formulated and perceptions regarding the professional future is vaguely outlined. The graduates, being in a period of self-knowledge, will need tools, strategies and techniques to help them discover themselves professionally and to understand their

individual resources, but also their limitations in order to be able to build medium and long term objectives starting from these personal assessments, to discover what their abilities are, but also the weaknesses that they have in relation to the career they want to build.

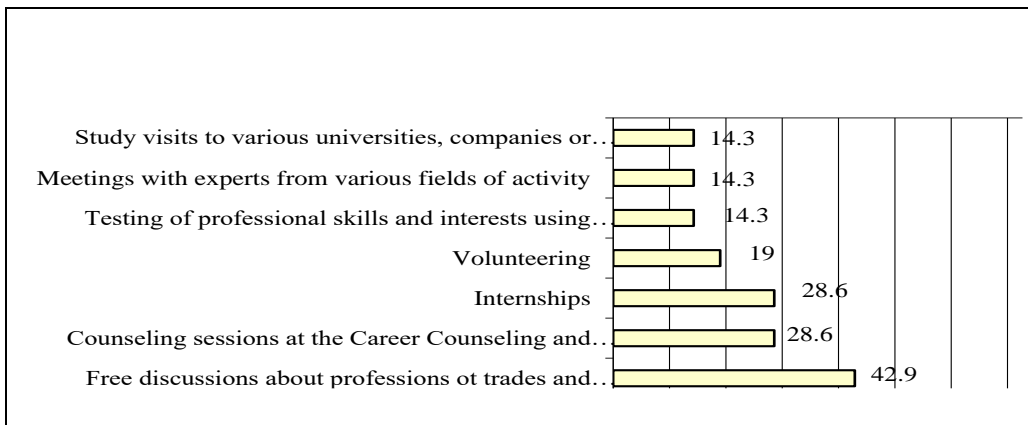


Figure 1. Counseling and Vocational Guidance (%)

Figure 2 points out the wide range of areas and activities that the specialized career guidance and counseling services support.

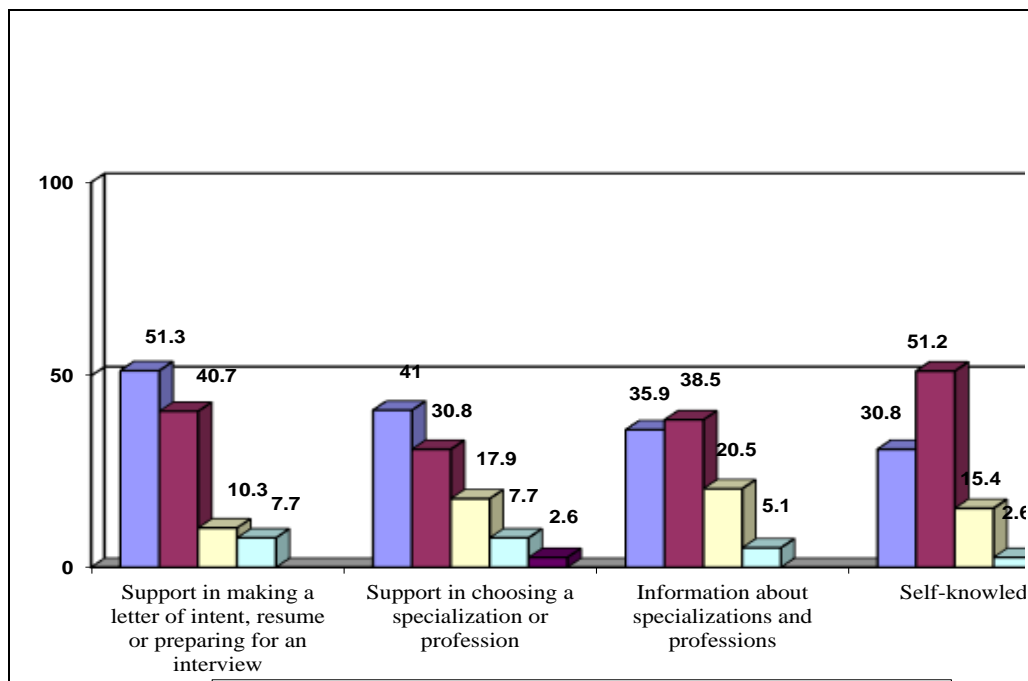


Figure 2. The Utility of Career Guidance and Counseling (%)

There is a close connection between subject matters studied in school and the chosen profession. The way that the subject matters studied in school are linked with the future professional developments depends on the choice of the young person to continue along the same area as the graduated educational level.

Good school performance leads to certain professions with a greater possibility and also it facilitates career achievements, or, in other words, being able to have certain professions implies certain abilities.

Realizing the connection between the career guidance and counseling activities and the subject matters taught in school is also reflected by the significant percentage (of about 90%) of respondents that declare that they support the cause and effect relationship that exists in between the two elements.

The necessity for these specialized career guidance services is also underlined in Figure 4 where the importance of having a continuous and uninterrupted educational guidance and counseling process is highlighter in order to achieve performance.

Educational and vocational counseling and guidance as an activity aims at finding a job within a liberal model of market economy simultaneously with taking into consideration the individuals' skills, abilities and conceptions regarding themselves and work with all the psychological individual diversity, which differs according to the social structures and hierarchy in which they live in and with the particular way in which they represent the world through the information and messages that are offered and interpreted to them by individuals and institutions that possess the social authority to do so.

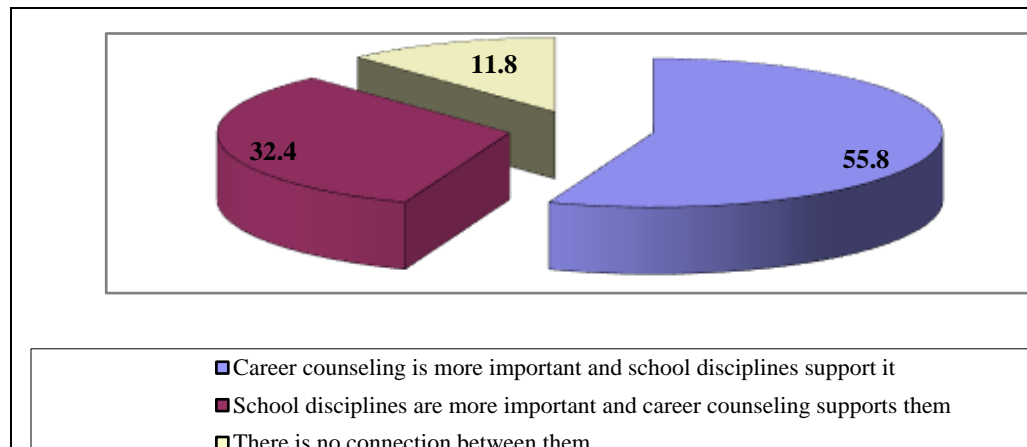


Figure 3. The Connection between Career Guidance and Counseling and Subject Matters Learned in School (%)

Out of all these information suppliers the educational environment occupies a leading place. Asked to evaluate the academic program that they attend or that they graduated almost half (48%) of the investigated subjects consider it to be “professionally oriented” fulfilling the requirements of the labor market, while 40% assess the educational program they attend or have graduated as being prestigious. But

there is also the opinion of 30% according to who the educational program is excessively demanding.

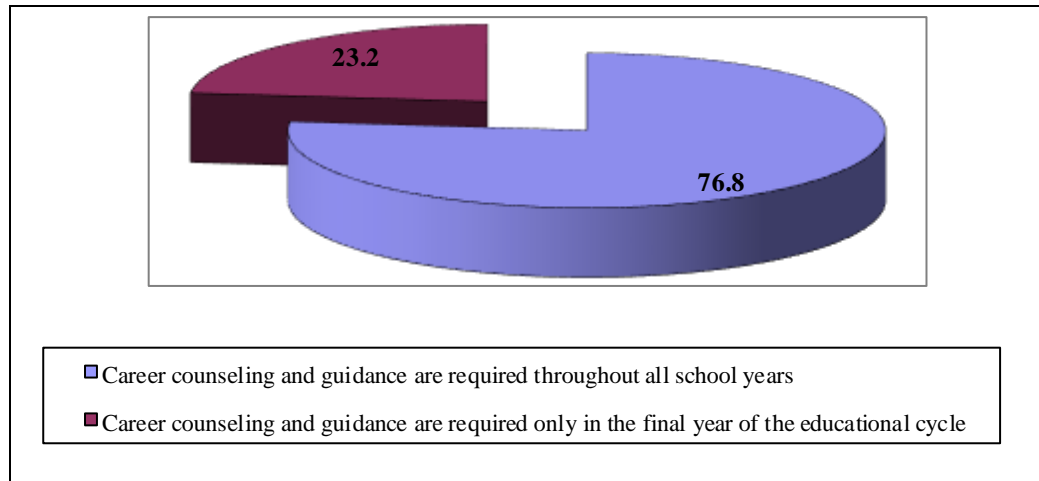


Figure 4. The Subjects' Opinion Regarding the Best Period for Career Guidance and Counseling (%)

Given the psychological and social characteristics specific to the graduate age segment, the information that comes to them, the trust in the sources of information, as well as the critical thinking, the way information is handled are important factors in the career decisions they take.

We wanted to highlight the information sources of the graduates, their direct experiences with these and the perception and trust allocated to different sources of information. All of the information sources contribute positively towards reducing the lack of information regarding the chosen career field. This was declared by more than two thirds of the respondents.

Graduates had the opportunity to choose from a variety of sources of information, all of which could be a starting point for choosing a job. Among the items allocated to information sources, to which graduates declare that they have called for information, three refer to the direct contact of the graduate with factors of influence in deciding over the future profession. Thus, job fairs are preferred by approximately 85% of the subjects, direct contact with the employers (38%), but also Public Placement Agencies (28%). Mainly the internet but other types of mass-media also are used by more than three-quarters of graduates and more than half of them also call upon their families, friends and acquaintances to find out information about possible jobs. The Career Guidance and Counseling Centre is considered a source of information by only a fifth of the respondents This can be justified by the fact that only 51% of them ever had any contact with a career management center. These answers are a pertinent indicator regarding the popularizing of career management centers and familiarizing the students with the services that they can benefit from.

An important issue for addressing the materials and methods of popularizing career guidance services is the student's perceived impact of the information sources and the trust placed on different sources when faced with career decisions. The career guidance materials for students should demonstrate the opening of career management centers to collaborate with private or state institutions. Job opportunities or internships need to be presented, the importance of direct contact with employers should be mentioned as such services are considered important and are therefore sought after when students or graduates call on career counseling services. At the same time, students and graduates need to be informed that career management centers can offer more than mediation between them and potential employers.

Despite the increased interest in searching for information on finding a job, there can be found a lower level of engagement in actions that could result in finding a job, hence the rather low importance given to these sort of activities (Figure 5). Although graduates say that they appreciate discussions with employers as revealing for their future career path, but, at the same time, they do not seem to exploit the opportunities to get in touch with them by attending career fairs or other events where they can come in direct contact with potential employers, such as company presentations.

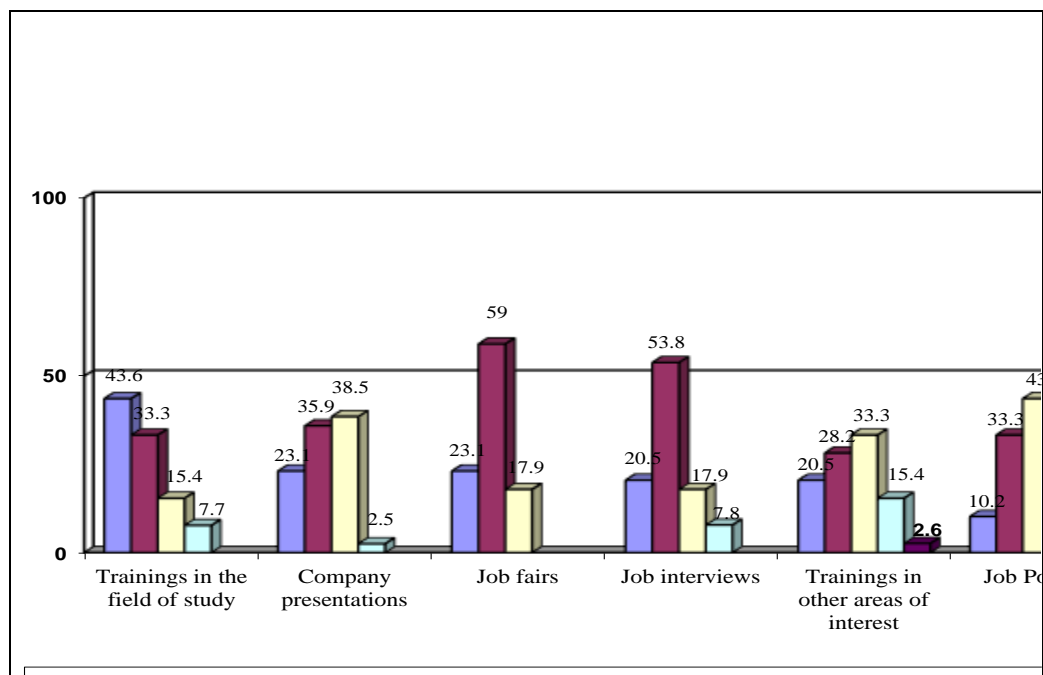


Figure 5. The Importance Given to the Following Sources of Career Information (%)

Taking part in training courses and workshops in the field of interest appear to be of a rather low importance in the evaluation of the graduates, which may be due not only to the lack of interest but also to the lack of information on these services. The low usage of the active information sources regarding the career can be a plausible

explanation for the fact that most of the graduates turn to their families, friends, support groups to determine their professional paths to the detriment of the specialized services.

The lack of the self-knowledge process, the exploration of employment opportunities, the predominant focus on identifying a possible employer, without balancing their own interests or values, makes the whole decision-making process deficient. To this it must be added that the majority of graduates place the responsibility of developing professional skills on the university and not on their own person.

The fact that they are supported on their professional pathways through their academic studies is a tangible gain for students because it meets the manifested needs and expectations. At the same time, however, we need to keep in mind that there is a great risk of turning the students into simple recipients. It is necessary to maintain the responsibility and trust attributed to the academic environment and, at the same time, to encourage the development and assumption of the students' own responsibility by providing practical exercises that can be done outside of the academic environment, by guiding them towards the labor market through the support given in order for them to develop personal brands and engage in social networking to help them on their professional paths.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is absolutely necessary that the process of educational and vocational guidance and counseling imposes as a final goal the "transformation" of the young people into co-participants to their own destiny (through information, education, counseling, self-education), if not entirely in the sole author of the entire career choice and development act.

Such conclusions urge us to think up vocational guidance counseling programs that firstly raise students' awareness of the importance of active engagement at all stages of building a career, assuming critical perspectives regarding the information obtained and developing practical skills for their chosen field of activity.

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