

THE COUNSELING AND CAREER GUIDANCE CENTERS ROLE FOR EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DECISIONS

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Abstract

The hiring opportunities after going through the license cycle for a graduate in 2016 Romania are very low. This fact is due to malfunctions that appear between the education and training providers (superior learning institutions), employers and the potential employee. The existence of the Counseling and Career Guidance Centers (CCGC) substitutes the mediator role and binder between these entities, which most of the time work independently, although the functionality of the socio-economic system they define needs interaction, so dynamic and adaptability. The research targeted the evaluation of students' perception about the CCGC's role in drafting the career way and the services' quality offered by these. The results of the study show that these counseling forms are at start, they are in full development and consolidation progress and they are fundamental connected to the educational management at each institution's level, and to the public policies and educational management at central public administration's level. Further developments of the research will study the students' expectations from CCGC and the counseling needs and the ways of increase their role in career design and strengthening the link between the education providers and the labor market.

Key words: educational management, public policies, career way, services, performance

JEL Classification: I23, I28, M12

Introduction

The permanent changes of the social and economic environment in the Romanian reality impose reorientation for the universities towards viable specializations in the new conditions (Grigorescu, 2015). These orientations must be projected over the educational consumer for reducing its introduction and adaptability in this environment, which is dynamic, represents a trajectory with multiple flows (Grigorescu, 2008; Chițescu et al.,

2015). Therefore, since 2005 by the Environment Order number 3235 published at 10th of February 2005 is introduced, at national level, in the superior learning system the Counseling and Career Guidance Centers (CCGC) “to support the student to take adequate decisions in structuring his own forming way” (MO 3235/2005, art.4). This comes in addition to Cooperation and Economic Development Organization (CEDO) for the European states to “adopt and develop assurance mechanisms for the counseling and orientation services for students in sketching the reforms from the learning system” considering that “career counseling and orientation represent key factors that can influence the transition from learning to work” (CEDO, 2004). The Romanian National Education Law 1/2011 defines, in article 351, the activity types that take place through this centers, as information regarding the job market, choosing and developing the career through education, learning “abilities to choose when it comes to education, forming, work”, by offering some “opportunities to experiment different roles in the community life or in the professional life, instrument for planning the carrier” (1/2011, art. 351). In the same time appears the project “Graduates and Labor Market” (POSDRU/60/2.2/S/41750), financed by the Human Resources Development Sectorial Operational Program 2007-2013 on the priority axe two, “Correlation of all Life Learning with Labor Market” (2011-2013) whose objectives consolidate and individualizes the role of the counseling and orientation centers in universities. The European Commission, World Bank and CEDO define the career consolidation like this: *Career consolidation refers to the services and activities that intent to assist the person, of any age and in any moment of his life, to make chooses in educational, forming and working plan so he can develop his own career. These services can be organized in schools, universities, forming institutions, hiring public services, working place, volunteer and community activities sector and in the private one. The activities can take place with persons or groups, face to face or at distance (like the ones on phone or the ones on web). These services offer data regarding the career (printed, online or others) evaluation and auto evaluation instruments, counseling interviews, education programs for career development (to help the person to have a better self-image, to be conscious of the opportunities he can benefit and to develop the career management skills), testing programs (to exercise his options before choosing them), job and transition services searching programs”* (CEDO, 2004).

Romanian universities introduce among their structures these counseling and job orientation centers with the purpose of developing these kinds of functional relations in the economic and educational environment. Their activities portfolio starts from the main action domains mentioned by law and which regard educational, psychological and professional counseling. This is different from an institution to another through the action and treatment way (Grigorescu, 2008a). Their importance is continuously growing even if it is low in percentages. (according to ANOSR) in the university year 2012-2013 1.8% were psychological counseled, with 0.1% more than in the university year 2011-2012. Of career, counseling benefited in the university year 2011-2012 a percent of 8.6% from the students, a percent that rose to 10.61% in the year 2012-2013.

The services offered by these centers are free (with the University’s support), but most of the activities are financial supported by accessing and developing national or international financing projects (Grigorescu, 2016).

Methodology

The research we realized represents the involvement grade of the CCOC in the academic life from the students' point of view. This was made with the quality research method having as instrument the questionnaire and it followed all the steps of a sociologic research. The questionnaire contained 13 questions, structured on three main themes, whose answer can generate an ensemble view over the involvement way of the CCGC in crossing the educational and professional path. The respondents were students from the university centers in the center and east of Romania and were 600 persons.

The questionnaires were sent directly, through persons that made part from the teaching corporation, from the Students' League or personal, for a fast dissemination and to collect the data easier and in a more secure way. From the 600 questionnaires sent, a number a 498 persons answered, their repartition on different criteria being as follows:

1. Regarding the respondents' sex – 284 female persons – 57.02% and 214 males – 42.98%
2. Regarding the age – 448 respondents under 26 years – 89.95%, 50 respondents over 26 years – 10.05%
3. 316 students from terminal year (III and IV) – 63.45%, 38 students from the second year – 7.63% and 144 students from the first year – 28.91% answered.

The researches' hypotheses are:

H1 - CCGC are efficient mechanisms in managing the students and graduates' educational and professional path.

H2 –CCGC have an important role in establishing the universities' educational offer and of the bounds between these and economic environment.

H3 –CCGC offer quality services, known and accessed by most of the students.

The research realized with the help of a **research matrix**, which followed the institutional impact, choosing the professional career and educational intervention.

Table no. 1: Research matrix

<i>a-Institutional impact</i>	<i>b-Choosing professional career</i>	<i>c-Educational intervention</i>
1-Are you informed that inside the universe a CCGC exists and works?	1-Do you consider that CCGC represents the viable solution for the relation human – adequate career profile?	1-Do you consider that the CCGC's role in counseling the decision makers regarding the study domain and specializations choosing at the proposed license level in the University's portfolio is important?
2-Do you know the attributes and responsibilities of this center?	2-Do you consider that CCGC represents the efficient organism in counseling the students in order to explore career plans that are alternatives to the chosen academic route?	2-Does CCGC help to establishing the professional and transversal skills associated to your university's specializations?
3-Is there a visible way	3-Does CCGC from your	3-Do you consider

(own site) through which CCGC offers its services and promotes its actions and activities?	university organize individual or group activities that target the career management?	favorable the CCGC intervention in proposing optional courses and specialization master and doctorate programs?
4- Are this institutional organism's services interesting for you?	4-Does CCGC from your university assure permanent connection with the local and regional economic environment?	4-Do you consider that CCGC is involved in reducing the university failure?
	5-Does CCGC propose and assure practical internships as volunteer or not, needed to knowing and familiarizing/developing students' abilities with activities of different domains from the labor market?	

Source: authors' conception

The questions were opened leaving the possibility to the respondents to motivate their answer, if they wanted to. In the most of the respondents there were no explanations regarding their affirmations and their perception. This aspect limited our possibility to do a deeper analysis.

Research results

Question a.1. Most respondents heard about the existence of a Counseling and Career Guidance Center. The percentage is 76.97%, and this owns to the fact that a big number of them are in finishing year (86.71%) and the two or three academic years reflect positive in the information quantity they accumulated comparing to their schoolmates in the inferior years.

Question a.2. No. A percent of 83.24% of respondents do not know exactly the powers and responsibilities of this institutional organism, limiting these attributes by generalization, to the two big attributes that are in its' name and those are counseling and career orientation.

Question a.3. CCGC has a legislative and structural information page on all universities' pages from where the respondents were chosen. At this question, the answers were differenced on universities marking for positive answer in a percentage interval of 2-53.35. The interviewed ones accused the lack of information as for example: the job place, full or part time, the region, hiring opportunities personalized on study domain, opportunities to develop an own business or the lack of their update and, the dissemination way of all these kind of information through the social networks, messages or electronic mail.

Question a.4. The interest for this center's services is low – 34%. This reflects the answer to questions 2 and 3 through which is certificated the lack of information regarding the responsibilities and attributes of CCGC, therefore of the services these offer. Still, the ones that answered affirmative to this question limit the vast range of services towards what means hiring type after finishing the studies or assuring some practice/hiring stages in the school holidays.

Question b.1. Yes. The affirmative answer was given by 76.35% of respondents. The viability of the human-adequate career profile relation is formal known by a very big percent, but the comments that follow this answer underline the fact that choosing the educational and professional route, from choosing the license program to visiting a working place, remains an individual or family option.

The same perception influences the answer at **question b.2** where, even if 72.23% responded that this center is efficient in counseling students so they can explore career plans alternative to the chosen academic route, the respondents consider this fact is due to some personal choices influenced by, in a strict moment, a social or economic event.

Question b.3. 97.54% respondents think that actions are accomplished. From these, a percentage of 54.71% knows and mentions at least 4 activities organized by the CCGC in their universities, activities focused on the development of communication abilities, management and correct information procession, stress control, establishing the career development plan or activities that regard the efficient approaching way of all the steps needed for obtaining a working place meaning the CV's wording, interview preparation, wording hiring papers, etc.. 13.72% of the interviewed ones identify themselves with students that participate at different projects of the universities as for example "Counseled student – excellent future employee!" (www.studentul-consiliat.unatc.ro), with the program *Work and travel USA* (<https://caep.ro/work-and-travel/jobs>).

Question b.4. The answer yes in proportion of 67.87% at this question is motivated through answers at **question b.5**, meaning the CCGC involvement in accomplishing internships, strategies/practice programs (especially on summer holiday) and volunteer actions. These are completed by actions as student meetings (on some categories – women, persons with disabilities persons from rural society or on some themes - workshops), job fairs developed in association with Local Hiring Agencies, employers – firms, research centers, etc., with role in facilitating the interaction with the job market and with its representatives. Although these actions are recognized by the asked ones many expressed, through their comments, their complaints regarding the number of working places for the ones with superior studies, the lack of part time jobs, the selection criteria, aspects that are less in CCGC's powers.

Question c.1. 97.24% consider as important the CCGC's role in choosing the specialization portfolio of the University, arguing this through the fact that CCGC, through its meaning, knows the best the labor market, the regional one or the national one, it knows the students' insertion level in it and so the hiring opportunities among or at the end of the educational track. Even if the role of CCGC is known, it is clearly mentioned its low importance in choosing the disciplines that define de specialization, by the universities. The answers are in the ANOSR study implementation "*The Bologna Process Insertion in Romania from the students' perspective 2013*" which shows that "77% of the universities don't answer or answer in small measure to the need of competences" (ANOSR, 2014, 9) needed finding an optimum job, regarding on the things studied in the license cycle or in the masters or PhD. From this question can be connected and question c.3, at which a same high percentage of respondents (91.32%) consider timely the intervention/ proposal of some optional courses or specializations by the CCGC, underlining the importance of the applicative practice side easier to realize in the optional courses. 17.84% of these think that the presence of a specialization module/course like this – the course in Diploma Supplement (Chițescu, 2016). represents an advantage in the employer's eyes.

Question c.2. Is the only one that raised problems because the students knew what professional and transversal competences associated to the courses inside the chosen

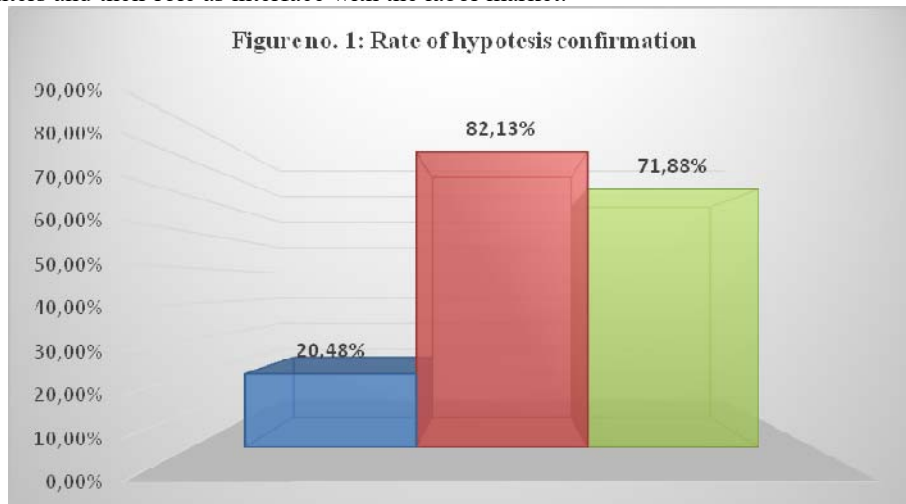
license programs mean? These were confronted with the gathered specialization notions by participating to courses. We considered that the answers are inconclusive even if 86.09% responded positively.

The answers to this question give us the right to suggest an involvement of the CCGC in establishing the professional and transversals components for each course helping the each structure to reach them. The transversal components represent, in the light of a study made by Qualification National Authority, important attributes (in the expense of specific skills) in finding a job from both parts' perspective. The professors' counseling in this represents the guarantee of their knowledge by the students.

Question c.4.No, a 75.40% answer. The interviewed ones think that the school abandon reduction is adjusted by the socio-economic conditions, not through the intervention of some institutional organisms like CCGC.

The study's results interpretation confirm, partial, the first hypothesis of the research, from the research resulting that even if the services offered by the CCGC are known and qualitative, they are a little accessed, while the other two are checked totally even if their activities confuse many times with the activities specific to the students' activities.

The students don't know they can access these centers or what is their effectiveness. The few functions known are those that derive from the name centers - counseling and career guidance without knowing the principles of their functioning and role, the organized activities, the actions of communicational development, the students plans for career development or at least the ways for starting writing the resume, preparing for interviews, drafting employment documents. The extent to which this hypothesis was confirmed is very small compared to the main functions of these centers, only 20.48%. The other two hypotheses are checked in a large percentage even if their activities are often confuse with the specific activities of student organizations. Hypothesis 3 was confirmed in a high rate in relation to assumption 1. Although the CCGC roles are confuse, students aware of actions in the field of career guidance and career paths and they intuit the importance of these centers and their role as interface with the labor market.



Source: authors' computation

From this study's analysis, with a clear determined socio-economic context, and which confirms in different proportions the stated hypothesis, we can detach characteristics of the CCGC's mission:

- Youth are helped to discover their intellectual resources, capacities, talents, abilities in the purpose of showing the personal capacities which can be valued and explored
- The receive by the undecided ones over their professional future of some credible, exact and directly usable information, that can give them the liberty to choose
- To combine the labor world with the educative process, the integration research, acceptance, flexibility and realism of the future employees
- To fight the stereotypes regarding some jobs, to reduce the social inequality and to support the minority groups – gender, sex, ethnicity, handicap

We, also, identified a row of factors that influence decisively the working of these CCGC, among which we remind:

- The politics at macro level of the main social and economic domains
- Programs conducted by the Govern on long and environment term
- Political major changes with influences in the social and economic life
- The role and status of a human – in family, in society – the relations he develops
- A comprehensive and oriented legislative frame
- The relation between the central structures and the ones that apply effectively these politics

Conclusions

The importance of the conducted study is that we have an image about the stakeholders' perception of the role of CCGC. The existence of the CCGC represents a certitude for all the participants at the academic and university life whose students answered to our study. The importance of their involvement represents an unknown for many of the students from many reasons. From these reasons we can observe: the lack of an action mode (personal or professional) guided by the exterior mechanism, to their personal familial environment, lack of education in this way, disengagement in students' life beyond the participation in educational activity – courses, seminars, practice internships, like of an aggressive publicity of these centers and the limitation of their action, and these motives are always followed by the socio-economic environment that is always changing.

The guarantee of these centers' visibility, implicit the increase of their involvement, is given, firstly, by the conjugated action of the universities and economic environment in changing their mentality regarding the optimal educational and professional path choosing and completion, by valuing the practical abilities these students have or can get. The presence of the prevailing specializations, without connection with the economic market demands, remains a sensible point of the universities, in their rush towards the student, and the CCGC influence, although important; depend on the universities' existence, so it remains limited, but not without value in permanent growth.

At the same time, the study high light that cannot be not identify a general policy of the counseling services for career, because each institution develops particular intervention strategies, so they can be perfectly functional according to community's specific, social needs' specific or economic development, local, and total ineffective in an external context. Limits of the study come from the less appetite of the subjects to talk about and mistrust to show the activity is at the beginning and there is much to be done.

The study should continue with an analysis of the connection between the students and the center (services suppliers) to find out the need of assistance and the way of best providing. A second target to be studied is the link with the labor market and assistance to easy integrate at first job.

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