

## CAREER ORIENTATION, A STRATEGIC TOOL IN THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO THE LABOR MARKET

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***Abstract:** The main theme of this paper is the presentation of new concepts identified in the literature related to career guidance as a complex activity that evolved as a result of changes caused by social, economic, educational factors and as a strategic tool in the transition from school to labor market. The aim of the research on which the theme of the paper is based is the knowledge of the behavior of choosing a university/faculty by the students of Argeș high schools. Within the methodology, the authors have used the research type survey. The structured questionnaire, as a data collection tool, was applied to a sample of 1168 pupils from 16 Argeș high schools. The results obtained can be used by the modern university to develop the strategy of dealing with the main stakeholders.*

**Key words:** life planning; career guidance; career counseling.

**JEL Classification Codes:** A2.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Career guidance and life planning are considered strategic tools in the transition from school to the labor market. Career guidance is a complex activity that has evolved as a result of changes caused by social, economic, educational factors that have interacted over the past 100 years. In Dima A.M. opinion (2009, p.14), career is defined as the permanent process through which individuals progress through a series of stages, and career planning is a preparatory phase for career development and is closely linked to the planning of the labor market. The complex process of personal development with goals related to each stage of life is defined as life planning. The paper “Guide on Life Planning Education and Career Guidance for Secondary Schools” (2014) recommends the principles of life planning and relevant career guidance that should be applied in schools as well as a model which includes three components, respectively: Self Understanding and Development, Career exploration, Career Planning and Management, which are in correlation. Among the principles of life planning and career guidance relevant to school compliance is the principle according to which life planning and career guidance help young people manage their adaptation to the transition from school to active life and in the long run to prepare for lifelong learning to ensure a high level of quality of life.

In Romania, career counseling and guidance services are in line with the European counseling and guidance networks Euroguidance, Euress, Ploteus, Eurodesk and Europass. The success of career counseling is also strongly influenced by forms of co-operation between school and other labor market actors in supporting young people to explore existing opportunities and



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move forward towards a future that will allow them to integrate well in the labor market with effect on economic and social development.

According to Annex III Common Order M.E.C.T.S.-M.M.F.P.S. no.4469/2012/ and 1804/2012, school and professional orientation aim at personal development and equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage their own educational and professional path, representing a process of preparing and directing pupils to disciplines and areas appropriate to their personality structure, and career counseling helps individuals to clarify their goals and aspirations, understand their own identity, make informed decisions, be responsible for their own actions, manage their career and transition from school to the labor market, from a place of work to another.

The transition from school to active life is currently a process that takes place over a longer period of time, as initial education takes place over a longer period of time, and the entrance into active life is realized later. This process influences two systems of society: school and labor market. Within these two systems there are different players and institutions:

- the family supporting the career choice process, although it has an imperfect picture of developments in the field of education and labor market. It makes recommendations based on its own experience, but these recommendations are not able to correlate children's skills and potential with the labor market outlook;
- friends and colleagues have a major influence over the influence of school and family;
- the virtual world that is very attractive to young people but not well managed in school education and professional orientation;
- other players: economic agents in the labor market, social partners, institutions with responsibilities in the extracurricular field of youth.

The strategy in the field of School and Education in Romania proposed by the Romanian Academy (2015, p.19) promotes the following 7 values necessary for the Romanian national system to re-establish itself on a performing basis, respectively: trust, flexibility, diversity, excellence, equity, transparency, well-being. Among the defining elements of the National Education System vision, there is also the autonomy of career choices strongly influenced by the level of education, culture and knowledge, increased mobility with emphasis on the blurring of career boundaries, personal development, free time, freedom in building the educational path from the point of view of competences and of the chosen moment and form, and career flexibility.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research was carried out within the project AG-GUIDING-CAREER, CNFIS-FDI-2016-0037 and ran from September to November 2016. The main objective was to know the behavior of choosing a university / faculty by the students of the Arges high schools.

The specific objectives of the research were:

- Q1 Identify when students decide to pursue higher education;
- Q2 Identify when students choose a university (university center) to pursue higher education;
- Q3 Measuring the degree of importance of the various criteria underlying the decision to choose a particular university;
- Q4 Measuring the degree of influence of different groups on the student's decision to choose a particular university;
- Q5 Identify channels through which students are informed about universities / faculties / study programs;

- Q6 Measuring the knowledge of the labor force demand existing on the labor market by the Argeş students;
- Q7 Measuring the students' interest in the study programs existing in the educational offer of the University of Piteşti.

The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire that contained 12 closed questions, one with multiple answers and one open question. In order to measure the variables concerning university selection criteria, the influence of different groups on the decision to choose a university and the degree of utilization of the different communication channels was used a 5-semantic scale of differential semantic type in which 1 - to a very small extent, 5 to a very large extent. In order to measure the pupils' interest in the University of Piteşti program of study, a multiple answer questionnaire was introduced in the research questionnaire, with students being able to express their interest in up to 3 study programs in the educational offer. The questionnaire also started with a filtering question by which the students who were not determined to pursue higher education were excluded from the survey sample. In the SPSS database, there were 72 variables (42 being represented by the study programs introduced in the evaluation). The research involved 1168 students from 16 Argeş high schools.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

#### Q1. The moment when the students decide to pursue higher education

According to research results, 61.4% of respondents decided to pursue higher education in the 9th grade, while 13.4% decided this in the 10th grade, 11.4% in the 11th grade, while 11.3% took the decision to pursue higher education in the 12th grade. 2.5% could not clearly state when they adopted this decision. According to the central trend determined at the level of the sample, it is observed that a large number of students decide to study higher from the entrance to high school education.

#### Q2. The moment of choosing a university

According to the research results, the moment of decision on the choice of a university / faculty is not concentrated in a certain period of high school studies. Approximately 50% of pupils decide this in grades 11 and 12, while 43% of students take this decision early, namely in the 9th and 10th grades. 6.3% of respondents could not clearly state the moment of the decision.

#### Q3. Assessing the degree of importance of the criteria underlying the decision to choose a university

In the research was assessed the degree of importance for the following decision-making criteria for the choice of a university (table 1): (1) the prestige of the university, (2) the study fee, (3) the proximity to home, (4) the opportunities offered by the university, (5) the material basis of the university.

**Table no. 1 Hierarchy of criteria that influence the decision to choose a university, depending on the degree of importance**

Criteria	Average	Degree of importance location in hierarchy
Opportunities offered by the university	4.11	1-high level of importance
University prestige	3.91	2-relative high level of importance
University material base	3.89	3-relative high level of importance
Study tax	3.19	4-medium level of importance
Proximity to home	2.70	5-low level of importance

**Q4. Assessing the degree of influence of different groups in the student's decision to choose a university**

The degree of influence of the decision to elect a university was assessed for the following groups (table 2): (1) friends, (2) colleagues, (3) family, (4) teachers, (5) teacher, (6) high school counselor, (7) student / graduate of a university.

**Table no. 2 The ranking groups that influences the student's decision to choose a university**

Ranking group	Average	Hierarchy level of influence
Family	3.83	1-high level of influence
Students/graduates	3.43	2-relatively high level of influence
High school teachers	3.17	3-medium level of influence
Form master	3.04	4-medium level of influence
Friends	2.80	5-relatively low level of influence
Colleagues	2.57	6-low level of influence
High school counselor	2.53	7-low level of influence

**Q4. Identifying channels / sources of information used by students to analyze alternatives when deciding on choosing a university**

Within the research, the following channels / sources of information were evaluated (table 3): (1) mass media (TV), (2) media (written press), (3) media (RADIO), (4) on-line press (5) university / faculty websites, (6) flyers, (7) direct meetings with university / faculty representatives, (8) students / graduates.

**Table no. 3 Ranking channels / information sources used by students according to their degree of usage**

Channel/information sources	Average	Ranking
Universities websites	3.99	High level of
Students/graduates	3.62	Relatively high level of usage
Direct meetings with university representatives	3.45	Relatively high level of usage
Mass-media (online press)	3.39	Medium level of usage
Flyers with educational offers	3.26	Medium level of usage
Mass-media (TV)	2.73	Relatively low level of usage
Mass-media (written press)	2.39	Relatively low level of usage
Mass-media (radio)	2.23	Relatively low level of usage

**Q5. Level of knowledge of the labor market and employment opportunities**

Research results reveal that pupils are only slightly aware of the labor market and job opportunities. Thus, the choice of a study / qualification program is only slightly correlated with the existing demand on the labor market.

**Q6. The interest of the students for the study programs offered by the University of Pitești**

In this research, it was measured the students' interest in the study programs presented in the educational offer of the University of Pitești.

The results obtained reflect a potential demand in the recruitment area of the candidates. To measure the pupils' interest in this aspect, a multiple answer question was used in which students could select up to 3 variants of interest (study programs of interest).

For this question 3140 answers were registered, representing 275.7% of the total sample. On average, one student selected 2.7 study programs. This highlights the fact that, in relation to study programs, pupils have a rather low level of professional orientation, and at the time of data

collection a small number of students had a very clear option in relation to study programs. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that students have selected study programs from different fundamental areas.

According to research results, it is noticed that potential demand does not reflect the actual demand for study programs expressed by the number of candidates enrolled in the admission contest 2016. Thus, the faculties, respectively the study programs, have different competitive capacity, namely different capacity to attract and retain the potential demand. From one program to another, to a greater or lesser extent, potential demand goes to other universities (university centers). There are situations where a high potential demand has been identified, although after the 2016 admission contest, the minimum study program was not set up for those programs so that those programs did not start in the academic year 2016-2017. There are very low potential research programs (table 4).

**Table no. 4 Hierarchy of study programs according to the students' interest**

<b>Study program</b>	<b>Level of interest Potential offer</b>	<b>Study program</b>	<b>Level of interest Potential offer</b>
Law	16.2%	Accounting and Management Information Systems	5.4%
Management	14.4%	Service and Tourism Commerce Economy	5.0%
Computers	14.0%	Electro mechanics	4,5%
Psychology	13.5%	Telecommunication networks and software	4,4%
General nursing	11.4 %	History	4,2%
Finance and Banks	11.2%	Sacred art	4.1%
Road vehicles	9.9%	Pedagogy of primary and pre-primary education	4.0%
Marketing	9.8%	Environmental Engineering	3.9%
Business Administration	9.6%	Sport and motoric performance	3.8%
Romanian Language and Literature Modern Language and Literature	9.4%	Economic-industrial engineering	3.4%
Journalism	8.8%	Social assistance	3.1%
Machine building technology	8.3%	Ecology and environment protection	3.1%
Physical education and sports	7.5%	Applied Electronics	2.8%
Informatics	7.4%	Musical pedagogy	2.5%
French language and literature English language and literature	7.3%	Public Administration	2.4%
Modern languages applied	7.0%	Managerial assistance and secretariat	1.5%
Kinetotherapy and special motricity	6.8%	Horticulture	1.4%

Economics and International Affairs	6.1%	Orthodox theology social assistance	1.4%
Mathematics	5.7%	Occupational Therapy	1.3%
Transport and traffic engineering	5.4%	Energy and nuclear technologies	0.9%

\*\*\* within this hierarchy the Chemistry and Biology study programs were not introduced

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions are:

- generally, the students from Arges adopt the decision to pursue higher education rather early, although the choice of a university is relatively divided throughout the whole high school cycle;
- the main group influencing the decision to choose a university is the family;
- the university graduate occupies the second position among those who influence the decision to choose a university, so the graduate represents an important vector image for university;
- information technology is used by students with priority to get information regarding the university's educational offerings. The university's Web-site and Facebook page occupy the first position in the list of channels used; these are followed by the importance of direct meetings between university representatives and potential candidates. Mass communication channels (written press, TV, radio) are used to a lesser extent by pupils;
- in choosing a university, for Arges students are very important the opportunities offered by the university for personal and professional development.

Starting from the purpose of the work, namely knowing the behavior of choosing a university / faculty by the students of the Argeș high schools and taking into account the main conclusions of the research, it can be argued that career counseling and life planning play a significant role in promoting student self-understanding, in personal planning. These are strategic activities that can provide an effective way for transition from school to active life.

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