

Study on the Criteria by Which High School Graduates Choose a University

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Abstract: *This research aims to identify the preferences of future high school graduates to attend university and criteria by which they choose where they continue their studies. The study was done at the end of 2011 on a sample of 91 high school pupils in the final year of studies, from the North-East Region of Romania.*

In order to find the preferences and criteria by which high graduates choose a university, we realized a sociological research. The information was collected by means of anonymously completed questionnaires.

In the current circumstances, the universities from Romania need to know what the future students want and adapt the curricula to their needs. Also, the universities must take into consideration the qualifications required by employers.

This study appears as a result of the research from the project entitled European Management Development Project of academic qualifications and putting into value the informal expertise, POSDRU/86/1.2/S/63252.

Keywords: *higher education, academic qualifications, skills, university curricula*

Introduction

At the end of 2011 (i.e., in November and December) it was conducted a survey in *European Management Development Project of academic qualifications and putting into value the informal expertise*, financed by EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND, the Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013, Priority 1 - education and training in support of growth and development of knowledge, area of intervention 1.2 - Quality in higher education. The period of the project is 1st December 2010 and 30th November 2013. The beneficiary of the project is the Danubius University in Galati, and the partners are: Romanian-American University of Bucharest, the George Bacovia in Bacau, the West University in Timisoara, SC CISPRO Ltd, Manchester, Universita degli Studi di Camerino, Italy, University of Toulouse, France, University of Dortmund, Germany, Agronomic Institute in Chania, Greece, SC AIDS S.R.L., Italy.

The overall objective is to increase efficiency and effectiveness by restructuring curricula and improve education and training (in accordance with the application of professional profiles of the labor market), in the context of establishing a European university consortium to exploit tertiary programs.

The specific objectives of the project activities are [1]:

- implementation of the National Qualification in Higher Education;
- reviewing and improving undergraduate and master programs under the National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education in the economic and legal structures to define a divided staff skills are in line with labor market demand;
- strengthening innovation activities, cooperation and training in the context of a network of universities from different EU Member States, businesses and research centers to support mobility and speed up the principles of the European Qualifications Framework;
- defining the complementary training programs to highlight and integrate technical skills with skills and personal skills at work;
- improving the supply of highly qualified university adapted the continuous changes of labor market requirements.

The project activities are aimed at strengthening the capacity of universities to provide the private sector and labor market needed to develop their professional profiles, allowing a certain extent

penetrate these markets and professional development of youth. The project provides for a university consortium open, consisting of universities in Romania and other EU member states attended the (initial) the eight partner universities in the project. By applying the *Principle of Transparent Qualifications* and of the revising methodology specified by NQFHE aims:

- encouraging mobility and lifelong learning;
- support all citizens' access to education and training programs in higher education;
- improving the capacity of managers and entrepreneurs to assess the profile, content and integrity of diplomas on the labor market;
- enabling training providers to compare their profiles and study programs with other institutions;
- defining a common approach to transfer learning outcomes from one system to another;
- defining a common reference code for the training systems based on learning outcomes.

1. The Purpose of our Survey

The survey was conducted on a questionnaire and was part of activity no. 1 (analysis) of the aforementioned project, interviewing the students / graduates, managers, employees and students (potential future students) from the North-East of Romania. Thus it was formed a database that can be used not only to adapt, teaching perspective, of course (based on the model provided by NQF - National Qualifications Framework) and to update / define / implement tools and methods necessary implementation skills of *Entrepreneurial culture*. The project intends to build on experience gained in this early stage, turning it into a *Permanent observatory of regional economic dynamics*, coordinated by an inter-university consortium. In this way, data obtained in this project will be continuously updated and supplemented by additional information.

In this article we will refer to surveys of students. There were part of sample a number of 90 students from six high schools: the *Stefan cel Mare* National Pedagogical College in Bacau (9 surveyed students), the *Anghel Saligny* Technical College in Bacau (11 surveyed students), the *Ion Borcea* Technical College in Buhusi (15 students respondents), the *George Asachi* Technical College of Science (15 surveyed students), the *Puiesti*, Agricultural School Group in Vaslui County (20 surveyed students) and the *Petru Rares* High School in Botosani (20 surveyed students).

The purpose of the survey was to highlight the criteria for high school students choose their university in which he will continue his university studies as education, location (at home or abroad), etc..

The questionnaires were anonymous and included a total of 22 open and closed questions divided into five parts, as follows:

- A) general questions about the specializations will choose prospective students;
- B) expectations concerning the conditions of study (course organization, requirements - study framework, orientation materials delivered content);
- C) qualifications and skills acquired to date;
- D) expectations regarding future profession;
- E) demographic data (sex, year of birth, citizenship, etc.).

2. Interpretation of the Answers to the Questionnaire

The questionnaires were completed by a number of 59 girls and 31 boys, students in senior year.

Graduation means, for most graduates, a cause for celebration, accompanied by a sense of self - accomplishment. But the joy that accompanies these moments is accompanied (unfortunately) by feelings of doubt, fear, and incertitude in the future. [2] It should be noted that while students were in the twelfth grade, 31.11% of them were determined in the university where they study (they want to continue their studies but have not yet chosen a university Except for one student who said he did not want to become a student), only 62 students indicating the name of a university (Figure no. 1).

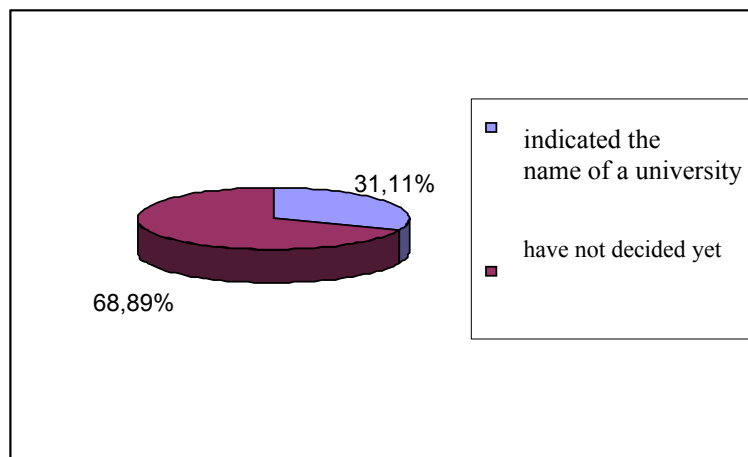


Figure no. 1. The Decision to follow higher education studies

As regards the matters that have influenced prospective students in choosing specialization, they said that the greatest importance is the prospect of attractive career by studying such specialization (51.11%), followed by the prospect of better earnings (44,44%) and self-interest for the chosen specialization. It can be noted that young people ignore the recommendations and suggestions made by others (only 8.88% and choosing this option), choosing the profession who believe that they will embrace with pleasure and, moreover, earning a considerable income. Note that at this question, students were able to select multiple options (Figure no. 2).

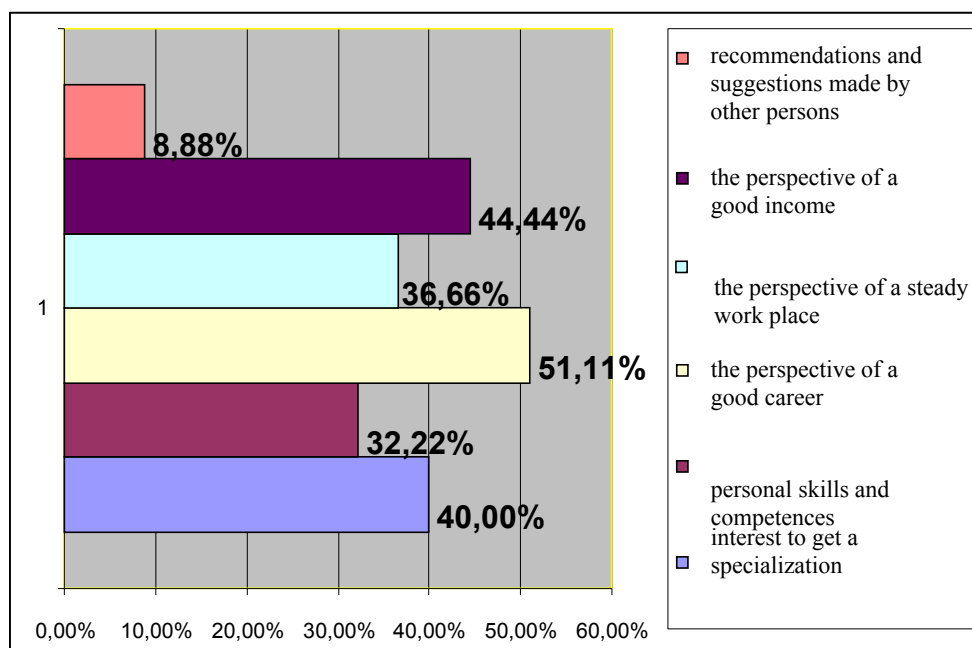


Figure no. 2 Aspects influencing the choose of a specialization

Related to the reasons for choosing a university, students responded that it is important for them the diverse package of specializations within the respective university (38.88%) and its reputation (37.77%), not giving importance to study maintenance costs (only 7.77% mentioned this as being important in choosing a university) and only one student mentioned that he takes into account recommendations made by the others (figure no. 3). Note that at this question, students were able to select multiple options.

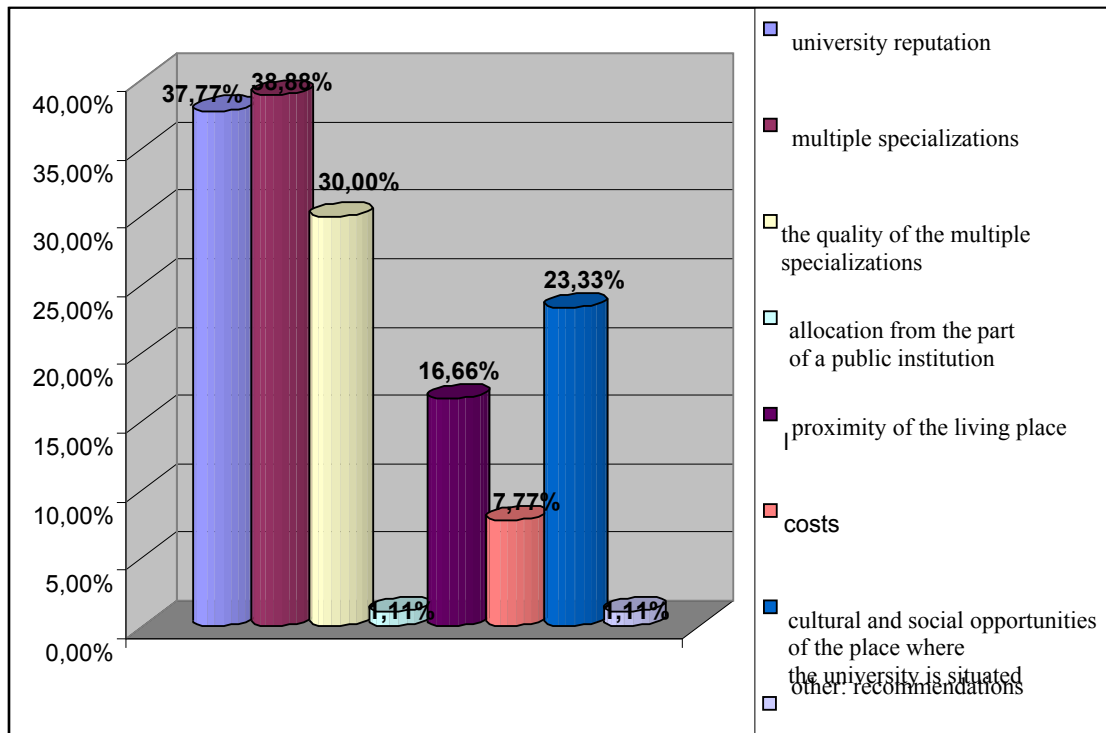


Figure no. 3 Reasons for which students choose a university

Among the surveyed students, 46 said that they want to attend college in the form of day classes, 13 of them would like to study part time, distance learning 7 and 24 has not decided yet on the form of education (figure no. 4).

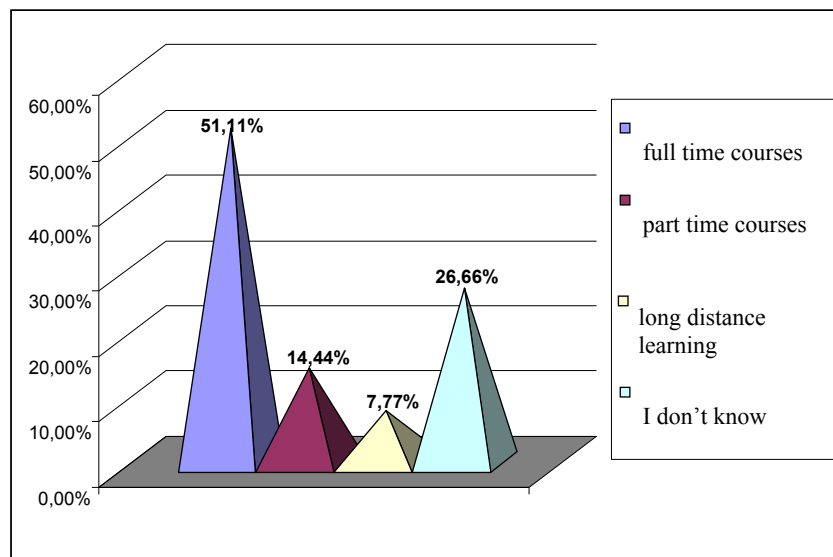


Figure no. 4 Form of study

Concerning the students' expectations for learning conditions, they said that important and very important is, first, the issue of study fee accessible and in installments (65.55% although in Fig. 3 it is observed that only 7.77% focus on maintenance costs at the study site). Downwards it follows the availability of teachers to communicate and support – offer advice (60%) and the possibility of a scholarship - 57.77%. Note that 42 students also selected the possibility to get a place in the hostel, and 45 of them would like to benefit from mobility abroad. To our surprise, only 36 students have opted for interactive teaching in the university (Figure no. 5). Note that this question, students were able to select multiple options.

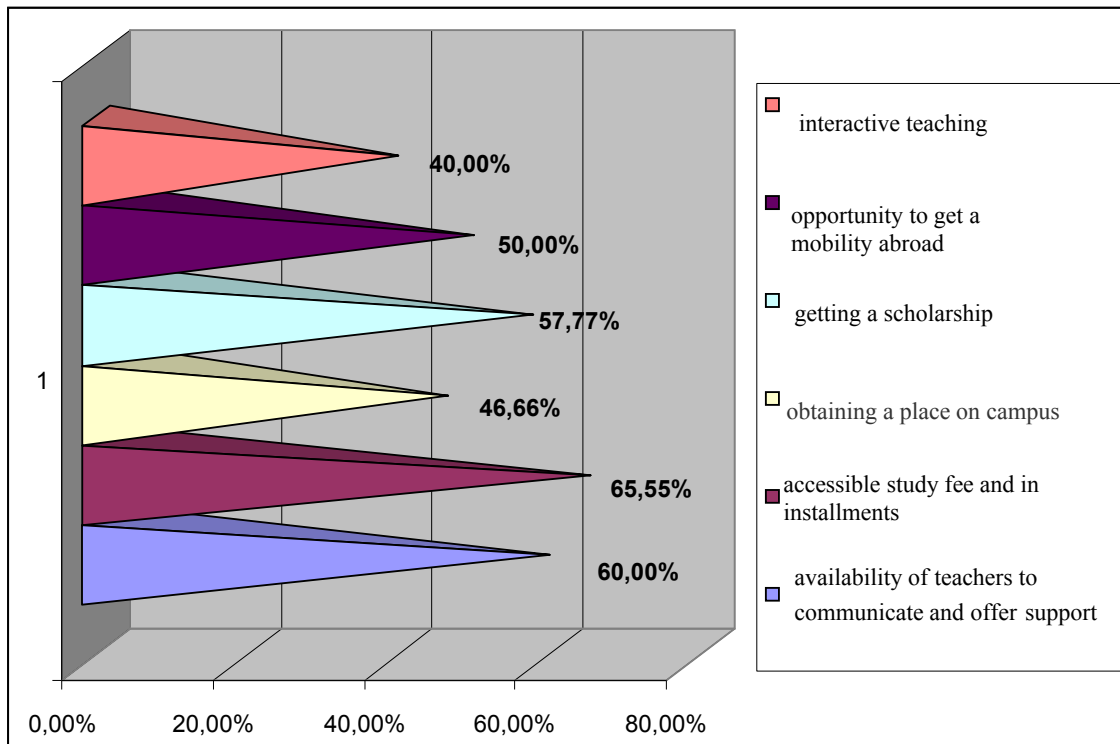


Figure no. 5 Study facilities

Among the surveyed students, only 27 have expressed interest in studying abroad, 44 of them want to go through internships during their studies, 33 found useful a foreign language learning, while only 16 opted for Informatics courses (figure no. 6). Note that at this question, students were able to select multiple options.

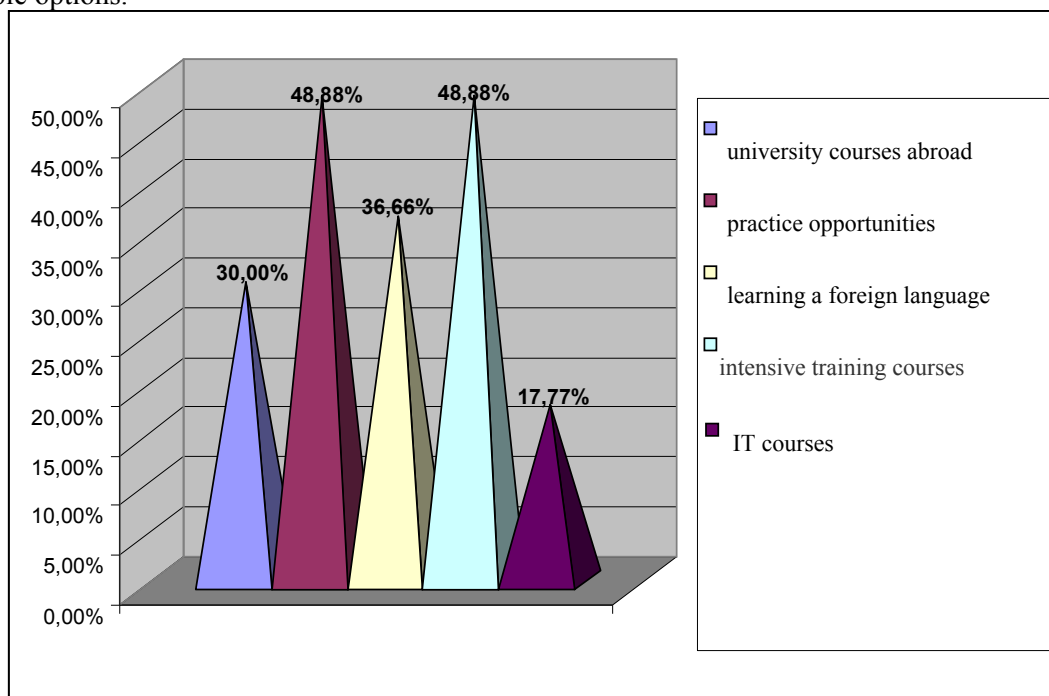


Figure no. 6. Options for different courses

The questionnaire included a question about what students want to do after completing their studies. Thus, most of them (50%) want to engage, 46.66% say they will attend master courses. 20 of the surveyed students did not select any option, saying that they are not determined (Figure no. 7). Note that at this question, students were able to select multiple options, except those who responded that they do not know yet.

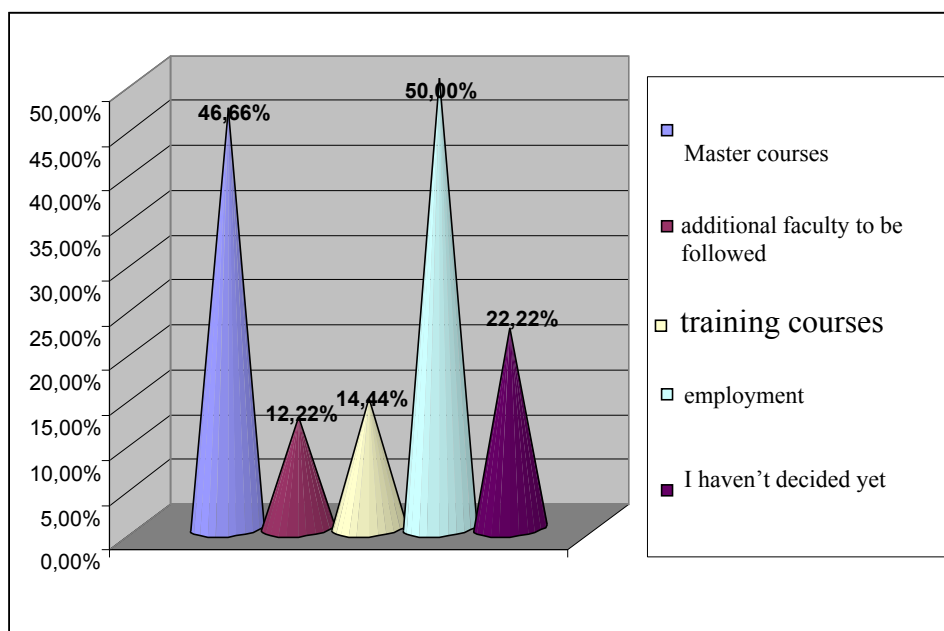


Figure no. 7. Ways to be followed after graduating

The questionnaires also included questions about school qualifications and skills acquired so far by students, their inclinations, cognitive and practical skills (organizational skills, planning, logical and analytical thinking, interconnected thinking, abstract and spatial thinking, improvisational skills, global perspective, attention to detail, medium – term remembering), social skills (communication skills, inter-networking, cooperation and teamwork, sensitivity, concentration, self-reflection, confidence), personal skills (challenges, emotional stability, optimism, ambition, dedication, enthusiasm, responsibility, creativity). There were also questions about respondents' expectations of the future profession. The answers to these questions will be analyzed and interpreted in our future studies.

Conclusions

As a final conclusion we can say that students in our sample have not a personal and professional development strategy on medium and long term, are not decided whether to follow or not a university (although they are in senior year). Note that among those who have indicated the name of a university that they want to attend (62 students), 10 chose a university that has no specialization they want to follow (for example, Medical Specialization at the George Bacovia University in Bacau).

Students also ignore the recommendations and guidance of others in the choice of university where they want to study, for them it is more important the university's reputation, the diverse range of specializations (although a student may follow one or maximum two specializations at the same time, so it offers no direct benefit that the university has several specialties besides the one they are attending).

Students do not necessarily want to continue studies in their native town or nearby (only 16,66% taking into account this aspect, too), although they would be offered advantages, both for them and their parents as regarding small costs of maintenance, a permanent connection with their family, mutual support, etc..

A great emphasis is put on internships and training (48,88%), 50% of students seeking employment after graduation, 44,44% choosing specialization according to a higher income potential that could be obtained on the labor market.

We believe that the final year of high school students are disoriented, confused and vague in terms of their future, and one of the reasons is the fact that they are not integrated in a process of vocational guidance in the first year of college, not developments are analyzed, skills and inclinations. Further more, in most cases, they choose university specializations unwittingly, not knowing what profession they will have, what skills they will gain, what are the chances of insertion into the labor market after graduation, if they have the skills to pursue a career in the respective field etc.

Thus, we are reinforcing the idea of carrying out career orientation programs in the first year of high school and the monitoring the students' evolution in order to be able to lead them to certain specializations matching the labor market requirements. We believe that there must be a change of students' and teachers' attitude regarding their involvement in preparing for a professional career.

A specialized assistance of students in career planning, self-discovery and personal development is essential in addition to specialized training that facilitates rapid insertion of graduates into the labor market.

References

[1] <https://sites.google.com/a/uni4-4.ro/home/?hl=ro>, accessed on April 2 2012, official site of The *Development of the European Management System of academic qualifications and informal competences expertise* Project

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