

STUDENT WITH A JOB OR NO JOB? QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATORS TO HAVE A JOB DURING THEIR STUDIES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract:

This paper examines university students' motivations with regard to developing skills in a job during their academic years of study. In this respect, we conducted a piece of qualitative research by focusing on two different sub-samples of students, one represented by Romanian students and another one represented by foreign UE and non-UE students who come to study in Romania. Our main purposes are, firstly to highlight the motivation of students to be employed and secondly, to put the basis of more student-centred public policies with regard to improving the future labour force's complex skills and employers' consciousness by using it more efficiently. Hence, we herein present the advantages of creating, implementing and using a mutual platform both for universities which have high quality standards in developing skills and for employers who are socially responsible for teaching and orienting students so as to successfully face with the labour market challenges.

Key words: labour market, students' motivation, skills, job, academic studies

JEL classification: A22, I21, J24

1. Introduction

Romanian universities aim nowadays towards a strategy of internationalisation. This means that they try to respond to the globalised labour market on one hand, of Romania (where the biggest players are multinational companies whereas the most numerous players are small and middle-sized companies centred on entrepreneurship) and on the other hand, all over the world. Under such circumstances, this paper addresses the issue of the need of developing skills related to work during the studies with Romanian universities. If internship during studies is mandatory, students' main concern is whether to have a job when a student or not. Identifying students' motivations in this regard is the main aim of this paper. Therefore, we divided it into two parts, firstly starting with an analysis of the previous studies and secondly presenting our contribution organised as a qualitative piece of research.

2. Developing Skills when Studying in Romanian Universities: Competitive Advantage and/or Internationalisation?

Romanian universities offer today programmes of study in all the fields of education: medicine, agriculture, industry, technology, economics, law etc. Even if the majority of these programmes have Romanian as language of instruction, within their internationalisation strategy, universities have begun to develop programmes of study instructed in modern languages, English being the main foreign language used to teach students. This process, seen as a competitive advantage in the education market, is firstly implemented by having highly qualified personnel (both in teaching and in administration) and secondly, by using a reliable and consistent marketing strategy so as to attract foreign students of UE and non-UE origin.

Previous research has identified a key issue that may be applied to all Europe: Nartgüna and Özen (2015:2682) underline that being granted a university diploma seems to have no relevance if the holder does not have any experience on the labour market, if he or she is not already employed when graduating. However, students' confidence in

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universities has been decreasing. Gedye and Richardson (2016:1) identify, within a research on a specific programme of study (Marine Sport Science), that students' confidence in gaining graduate employment has decreased every year due to seven perceived barriers: competition, experience, location, degree quality, qualifications, economy and confidence. But is competition among universities really honest? Vershinina, Kurbanov and Panich (2016:296) highlight that international university rankings form models and set the standards of a modern university and therefore, it is many universities' goal to follow this pattern (in our opinion, not basing strategic goals on real research on students and the labour market needs).

This makes us conclude that transversal competences universities develop shall be re-designed to respond the highest labour demands. In this view, Gargallo López and Pérez Pérez (2014:308-309) present 23 key-skills considered as necessary for any university diploma holder to use on the labour market, which in general, are soft skills.

3. Qualitative Research on Students' Motivations to Work during Their Studies

3.1. Research aim and objectives

This research aims at presenting the concept of internationalisation of universities and at identifying how students matriculated in Romania perceive this process and if there is a correlation between internationalisation as a process and students' goals in meeting both their education and career objectives. In this respect, this research had two general objectives:

OG1: to identify students' perception on the advantages and disadvantages of working during their studies

OG2: to identify what Romanian universities have to improve so as to respond better to foreign students' needs.

3.2. Research methodology

We created a research instrument consisting of 3 major topics of discussion on which students had to give their free responses, presented in Figure 1. The first topic generated discussions on the labour market in general, our aim being to identify, according to students' opinions, the features of the international labour market and particularly, of the Romanian labour market. Moreover, this topic also included the discussion on the challenging occupations for Romanian and foreign students during their studies with Romanian universities and last, but not least, the challenges and limitations of working in Romania and abroad, analysing the students' perception on the opportunities offered to them studying and working in Romania.

The second topic centred on the employers who hire students, we focusing on how students perceive that employers create jobs responding their needs as students. Thus, we were curious to find out what motivates students to have a job during their studies, more precisely which are advantages and consequently the disadvantages of working. We also were interested in knowing if students perceive their jobs as internships and if they properly benefit from qualitative internship programmes (which in Romania are mandatory within the bachelor programmes of study).

The third topic was aimed at identifying students' future intentions with regard to their careers. This topic was divided into four sub-topics, of which one identifies again students' motivation in having a job during academic years and it is continued with a short description of the ideal job from students' points of view. Then, the topic is highlighting major soft and hard skills developed during their years of study in a university located in Romania and more precisely, those skills that students felt like missing when performing a job or internship that universities should focus more in their academic curricula.

Topic: Universities' response with regard to students' education needs and labour market trends	
1. On the labour market	1.1. Features of the labour market from students' perspectives
	1.2. Challenging occupations for students in the present
	1.3. Romania or abroad? Where to study and work? On the opportunities offered to students
2. On the jobs especially designed for students	2.1. Advantages and disadvantages regarding work during academic years of study
	2.2. On internship programmes for students during academic years of study
3. On the future jobs	3.1. On students' motivations in having a job during academic years of study
	3.2. On the ideal job for students
	3.3. On the soft and hard skills mostly developed during academic years of study
	3.4. On the skills lacked during jobs had when studying

Figure no. 1. The research topic and sub-topics
(source: original)

Furthermore, we created a research interview questionnaire in order to identify the characteristics of the future sample and their appropriateness in the research. This questionnaire consisted of 11 open questions out of which, 4 questions referred to respondents' gender, age, official residence in urban or rural areas whereas the next 4 questions requested information about their studies: the city and university they study with, the field of study and the year of study. The last 3 questions implied their personal career objective, the desired job and the worse work experience with the aim of understanding if our subjects are career-centred and if they had already identified their future field of work.

3.3. Description of researched population and sample population

In 2015, in Romania, there were 535,218 students matriculated with universities, their number decreasing by 1.90% compared to 2014. Of this number, as presented in Figure 2 below, 85.69% are students matriculated with public universities whose number increased in 2015 by 0.19% compared to 2014, whereas the number of students registered with private universities decreased by 9.42% in the same observed interval.

According to data offered by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, students are observed by three main categories: students attending to bachelor study programmes, students attending to master and post-graduate study programmes and students attending to PhD and post-doctoral study programmes. The variables according to which these groups are observed are the ownership of the universities delivering study programmes (public or private universities), forms of education (full-time, part-time, evening classes and distance learning) and groups of specializations (academic fields as technical, industry, transport and telecommunications, architecture and constructions, agriculture, forestry, medicine and pharmacy, economics, law science, arts).

Students matriculated with bachelor study programmes are the most numerous in the total number of the researched population (students matriculated in universities located in Romania) of 76.73% in 2015, as presented in Figure 3. Their number decreased by 0.13% as compared to 2014 and so did the number of students matriculated with private universities in Romania, from 16.02% in 2014 to 14.43% in 2015. In the reference year of 2015, we remark that there are some fields of study less represented in the total number of

students matriculated with private universities (2.07% of students were matriculated with natural sciences, mathematics and statistics and 1.09% with agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary science) whereas other fields are very well represented, like business, management and law (54.90%) and health and social care (10.65%). Moreover, an important increase of 2.33% may be noticed with the number of students matriculated in full-time education with public universities, they representing 78.67% in 2015.

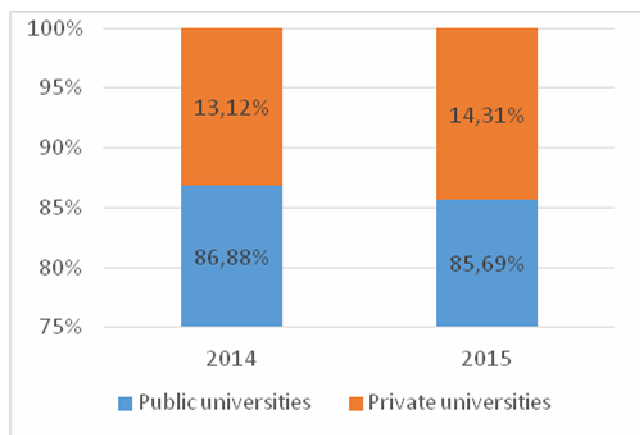


Figure no. 2. Students matriculated with Romanian universities (source: www.insse.ro)

Regarding the fields of study, at national level, there are fields which register increases, like education science (by 10.81%), health and social care (by 5.30%), social sciences, journalism and information (by 4.84%), engineering, processing and construction (by 3.79%), arts and humanities (by 1.32%) and services (by 0.46%).

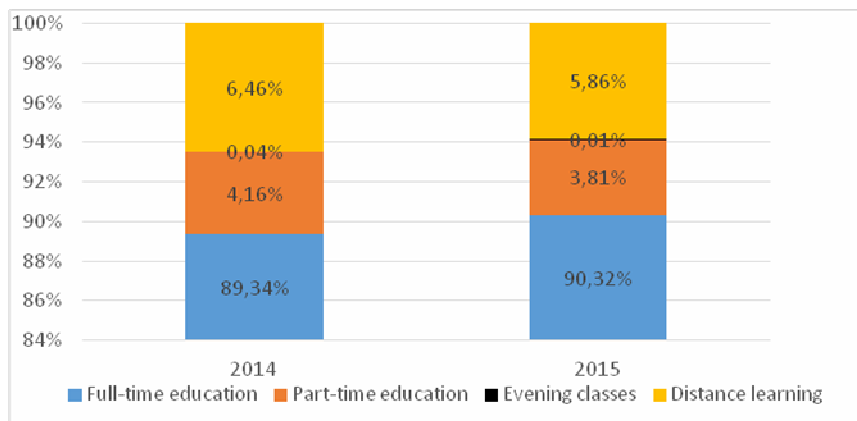


Figure no. 3. Students matriculated with Romanian universities for bachelor studies (source: www.insse.ro)

Students matriculated with master and post-graduate studies represented 20.04% of total number of students matriculated in Romania. Their number also decreased by 3.46 compared to 2014. As shown in Figure 4, these programmes of study are only offered as full-time and part-time education and distance learning. The number of students matriculated with private universities was 10.04% in 2015, of which 62.26% study in the field of business, management and law (decreasing by 6.76% from 2014) and 20.45% in social sciences, journalism and information (increasing by 4.85% from 2014). There are two major fields of study little represented in the total number of students matriculated with private universities: health and social care (0.35%) and agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary service (0.38%).

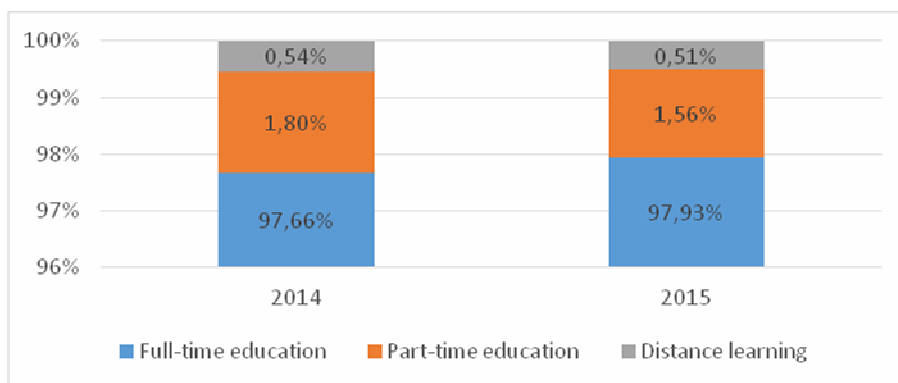


Figure no. 4. Students matriculated with Romanian universities for master and post-graduate studies (source: www.insse.ro)

With regard to public universities, the highest represented fields are engineering, processing and construction with 24.80% (increasing by 1.13% from 2014), business, management and law with 24.17% (decreasing by 3.04% from 2014) and social sciences, journalism and information with 10.83% (decreasing by 5.09% from 2014). At national level, we underline that students started to choose more such fields as education science (registered an increase of 21.52%), services (registered an increase of 7.71%) and agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary science (registered an increase of 1.51%), the other fields being in a decreasing trend, except industry, processing and construction which seems to be stable.

Students matriculated as PhD candidates or registered with post-doctoral studies represented 3.57% of the total number of students in 2014 and 3.22% in 2015. The decrease may also be observed in their total number by 10.68% in 2015 compared to 2014. We may observe in Figure 5 that the highest number of PhD candidates and post-doctoral students is represented by students registered in full-time education, of which only 1.37% in 2014 and 1.07% in 2015 were matriculated with private universities. Private universities have registered only students with full-time education and there are only two major fields of education offered: business, management and law and health and social care.

Regarding the fields of education, the highest number is represented by students in the engineering, processing and construction field (27.80% in 2015 decreasing by 7.88% from 2014), arts and humanities (16.62% in 2014, decreasing by 5.07% from 2014) and health and social care (14.36% in 2015, decreasing by 33.35% from 2014). The major increases were registered with the number of students matriculated in the fields of services (by 52.83%), information and communication technology (by 37.71%), business, management and law (by 35.59%) and education science (by 34.27%). The number of students which registered the major decreases are social sciences, journalism and information (by 42.28%), health and social care (by 33.35%), agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary science (by 9.28%) and natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (by 8.68%).

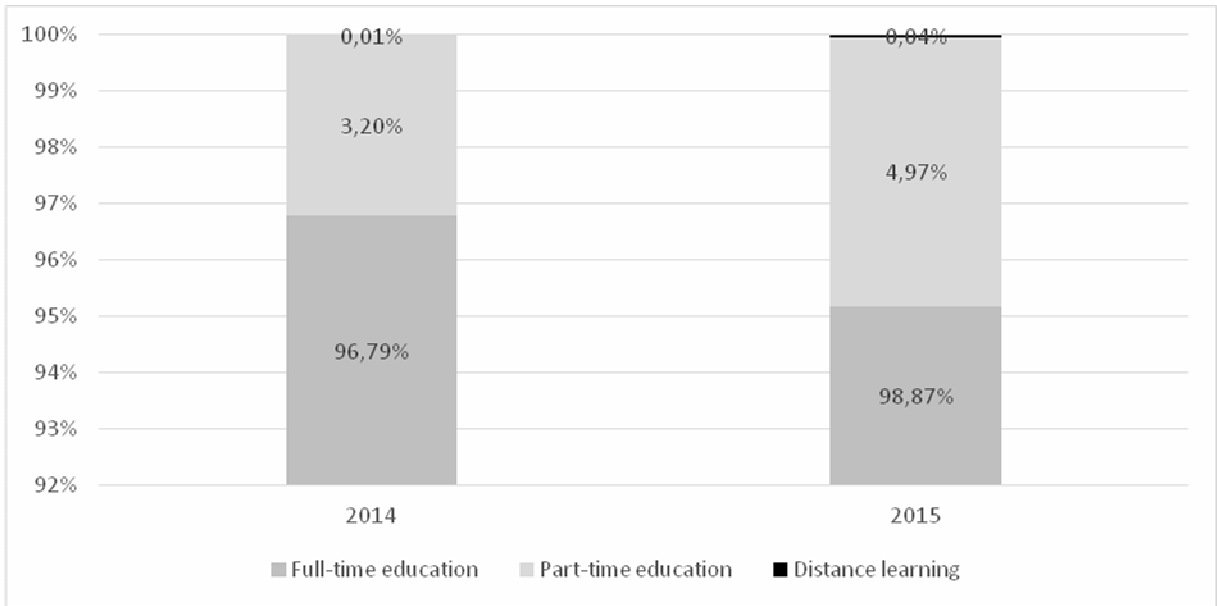


Figure no. 5. Students matriculated with Romanian universities for PhD studies (source: www.insse.ro)

The two samples used in this research shall be characterized as follows, see Figure 6:

a. we formed the first sample for the first focus-group interview of six Romanian students. With regard to subjects' gender, in this research there were 50.00% males and 50.00% females with an average age of 22 years. Their residences were 66.66% in the county of Braşov, 16.67% in Covasna and 16.67% in Buzău. Of the researched sample, 66.66% live in the urban area and 33.34% in the rural area. They are all students in the city of Braşov, with a state university studying economic sciences and business administration in the second and third year of study.

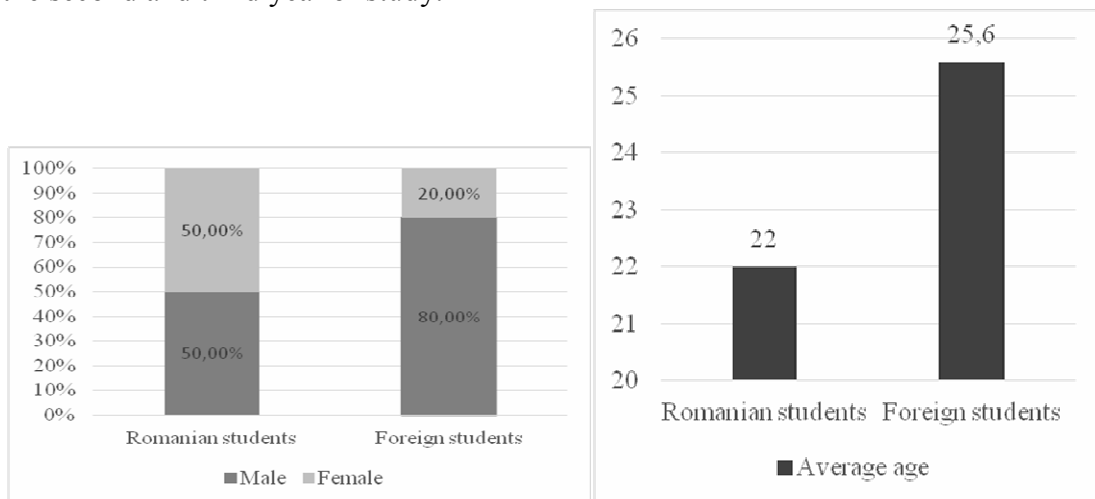


Figure no. 6. The features of the sample used in this research (source: original)

b. the second sample for the second focus-group interview consisted of five foreign students, with the following nationalities: Jordanian, Syrian, Nigerian, Turkish and Bulgarian. Of them, 20% are females and 80% males with an average age of 25.6 years. They have all student visa to reside in Braşov as students with a state university studying also economic sciences and business administration in the first and third year of study with a state university.

In describing the two samples, we have addressed two questions so as to identify if the students are suitable for our samples:

a. one regarding their personal career objective and the future job desired: 90.91% responded that they would like to be their own boss running their own business and 9.09% said they would like a managerial position in a company ("a job not consuming all the time and energy")

b. one regarding the worst work experience: the answers received from 63.64% of our subjects were that it was impossible to have a job during the academic studying years (of which 27.27% were foreigners who had a part-time working visa of 4h/day but employers wanted to hire on a full-time basis) so they had only internships and practical stages; the rest of them said that jobs in restaurants, hotels and call-centres are available to students, but not suitable according to their qualifications and future career plans whereas having to do others' tasks is not something to enjoy.

3.4. Research results

After the general topic was introduced, the subjects were presented the first sub-topic regarding the features of the labour market whether encouraging or not students in having a job in Romania. Subjects started discussion with providing examples of fast-food restaurants internationally recognised as brands which offer students the opportunity of having a job, but not of starting a career. The idea of temporary jobs was highlighted, students stating that they accept such jobs only as part-time and for short periods of time, as they are low paid, stressful and easy to do. In general, students appreciate that the main two advantages of these type of jobs as waiters or personnel preparing food are that they offer money needed for paying for schooling or buying food, clothes or IT devices.

With regard to the features of the labour market, respondents concluded that not every field of activity is accessible to students, who do not have the necessary experience, enough education or the proper age (being too young for what many jobs require). Such constraints, from our point of view, may be responded by employers by designing and promoting specific jobs for students, more precisely part-time jobs. With regard to the means companies do job advertising, students forming our samples stated that they have never been to job presentations in university. We conclude that there seems to be a dis-rupture in this process resulting from two possible causes: either companies do not advertise properly their jobs in the educational institutions (or job fairs are not properly advertised) or students' motivation in searching for a job or in participating to such job promotion activities is low, topic that shall be analysed in a future research.

Whatsoever, the most challenging occupations seem to be, according to students' opinions, those in the field they graduate, they are experienced or they have proper knowledge and skills. Students nominated the following jobs as the most interesting nowadays: transporter, assistant manager, chef, manager, public relation specialist, entrepreneur, human resources manager/inspector, financial analyst, accountant, secretary, doctor, sales representative, promoter, IT specialist. Corroborating these occupations with their field of study, business administration, we are able to identify two major groups of students: those who consider that they made a good choice when they decided to matriculate in their field of study and they consider that their career will be successful in this field and students who may think that the economic and social conditions have changed since they chose their field of study and there are currently more challenging fields of work (this latter group may be less motivated in working in their study field).

Furthermore, we were interested in finding out if students consider that their careers should develop in Romania or abroad. We state that there were differences in the two samples formed according to the citizenship. Romanian students considered 100% that

they must work in Romania as our country offers opportunities both for working and studying for the following reasons: being close to the family and home, the spoken language, the culture, the knowledge of Romanian laws, the economy, the people to help, the EU funds to be accessed only in Romania, more and more foreign companies move to Romania and offer jobs. But 60% of the foreign students state that Romania does not offer the opportunities needed to develop the management career they would like to have. But, all students nominated the following major advantages: salary, experience, learning a new language and culture, going from home, visiting other countries and companies, challenges, self-confidence, meeting new people, interacting with a multinational culture, developing a tolerant and team working behaviour.

Our second topic analysed students' opinions with regard to the manner in which employers offer and advertise jobs especially designed for them. Thus, we highlight that students (100%) consider that there are no jobs designed for students, but adapted for students which may motivate their massive missing of academic classes and explain their lacks in knowledge and their low exam results. In addition, foreign students find working in Romania difficult if the job is not in a language they know as they do not speak Romanian and they have a 4 hour schedule to work as a work permit – employers need an 8-hour schedule at least during periods of training, which is considered as a high risk against the law. Hence, the advantages of working when a student are: possessing experience (developing skills or having what to present in CV's), managing personal time, having extra money, having a status on the labour market (employers see students as a particular category which positively differentiates them from other social categories), having own money, taking responsibilities, easily going up on the hierarchy, having new ideas, experiencing a smoother transition from student life to working life, practicing foreign languages, being oriented in career (if a person does not like a field of activity, he or she has the opportunity to change it). The main disadvantages, according to our respondents' opinions, are: not having time to study, living a higher level of stress, not having enough time, missing classes, tiredness, spending more money on the transfer from university or work, lower salaries as compared to others', not knowing their rights – vulnerability on the labour market, not having personal time and life, wasting time (valuable time - as academic life is not a long period of time) and being asked to do others' tasks.

In terms of internship done during study years, students considered such experiences with an employer as “easy, great, good, interesting, enjoyable, pleasant and new”. Most of them did only the number of hours scheduled according to the academic curriculum, but in general, they did tasks easier than they had expected. The persons in charge with the internship were employees in the middle management of the receiving company and they were described as “understanding, nice, helpful, old, hard in accepting the new, negative (not taking the internship in serious), gossiping, very stressed, bad negotiator”. Hence, there are two typologies of internship coordinator created: a. that of the person who is very responsible and interested in educating the future employees, being open to knowledge transfer and knowing the importance of educating students and b. that of the person who does not teach anything or does not care about students' integration and orientation on the labour market. So universities and companies should provide more control and evaluation in the process of transferring knowledge to students. On an average, the internship was scored 3 out of 5 with regard to the degree in which internships were helpful for the future career.

Thus, universities should have been more open to students' needs by offering a better process of finding a company where to work as an intern and by making it easier by reducing bureaucracy; furthermore, coordinators should be more helpful, well-prepared, well-trained about their responsibilities with students' internships, making procedures

simpler and more structured, respecting deadlines and tasks, offering correct information and helping students integrate easier on the labour market.

The third topic was on students' motivation in having a job during studies. In this respect, the main motivations identified were: having own money or more money, having the possibility to keep the job after graduating, identifying less stressful and flexible jobs, having experience, having what to write down in the CV, seeing how theory works in practice, personal development, starting own career management as early as possible, socialising, team building, training, clearing everything in time, being more organized, having flexible time, helping family with money.

Therefore, the ideal job comprehends, in students' opinion, earning money, managing people, having more time, having success in a company, having own business (being own boss), having a flexible timetable and doing own schedule and having time for personal life. In such jobs, students shall use skills developed during studies: a. soft skills: foreign languages, business skills (management, accountancy, project development, making decisions, communication), socialisation, project presentation, reading – scanning and skimming, business etiquette, developing own schedule (getting up early) and b. hard skills: writing down projects and presentations, computer literacy (Excel, Word, SPSS, Geographical Data Systems).

Moreover, we have to highlight the skills that students have used for their jobs but that they have not developed in the university (or skills that students considered to be lacking during their jobs): up-drawing banking and accountancy documents, using specific software, data analysis and interpretation, product and service design and development, use of practical information from real companies.

4. Conclusions and Research Perspectives

We hereinafter present our conclusions according to the analysis of the research results on four perspectives on the Romanian academic system of education:

a. the main opportunities offered when a student with a job in Romania are firstly, that students gain experience and extra money so to take responsibilities and not always count on families' support; practical experience seems to be the main reason for which students search for jobs trying to validate their choice of their academic field of study. Students like to be introduced into the work field during their studies and consider that their main advantage offered to employers is their youth and interest in learning more and their ability to meet employers' expectations for the working process. Furthermore, the main threats are that a job implies missing classes with the consequence of getting low grades or failing exams. The academic timetable seems to be considered as random whatsoever, not matching the work programme so as the student to be capable to attend both studying and working.

b. Romanian law does not encourage foreign non-EU students to have a job as they should find jobs in their native language or English (which is hard to find according to students' opinions) and the law allows only a 4-hour job. With regard to foreign UE students, Romanian law is considered to be simple and it encourages work.

c. students go often to interviews and they are interested in analysing the labour market and in benefiting from the opportunities it offers, but there are not many choices offered. Moreover, if foreign students have relatives in Romania, getting a job/internship is simpler as they do it in the relative's own companies or employer.

In this respect, students' recommendations on our topic are:

- universities should encourage companies around to introduce more internship programmes by creating reliable partnerships in order to guarantee students a job after graduating from the bachelor programme

- employers should design jobs especially for students, not offering jobs having a rigid work schedule (they should also allow, where possible, working from home)
- employers should offer proper mentorship and design a specific orientation and integration programme for students
- Romanian law should encourage more multiculturalism, new ideas and diversity in the work environment which foreign students may bring when studying in Romania; we highlight that national policies should focus more on universities' internationalisation strategies, as attracting talents means improving labour quality and knowledge transfer, process developed the best by attracting students, as Bryła (2015: 634) states
- within the criteria for certifying Romanian universities, mobility of personnel should be included, as well as their capacity to matriculate foreign students and the conditions created for them to study and to benefit from proper internship programmes
- the academic path shall bring more successful PhD candidates in all the education fields and employers (not only education institutions) should benefit from their expertise. As Conti and Visentin (2015:1942) state, PhDs contribute to knowledge production and diffusion so there is a solid need of policies to reduce friction between the supply of PhDs and ideal employment students continuously seek
- students' orientation in a specific career shall be done before being admitted to universities, in high schools and colleges. This gives more importance to the level of education preceding the academic level and so, teachers in the pre-academic level of education are given a higher role in career guiding. This seems desirable in our country too, as Yu (2012:239) presents the case of China.
- as Mesquita, Marin and Dinu (2016:23) state, internationalization is nowadays not only international professors, international study programs and international curriculum, but it is also an international culture and an international social life offered to all the matriculated students.

To conclude, Romanian universities need strong partnerships with companies so as to deliver better designed internships programmes and jobs for students. A mutual platform where students and employers meet shall be created so as to improve quality of education on the real feedback received from the beneficiaries, students, employers and universities.

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