

## ASPECTS OF CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING FOR TEENAGERS

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**Abstract:** *Academic and career guidance, seen as a component of the instructional-educational process, constitutes one of the fundamental objectives of the education system. Hence the important role that school plays in the training and education of individuals and, therefore, in their academic and career guidance. The most important role in academic and professional orientation lies with the school, as it trains the personality of the student (and implicitly the traits necessary for choosing an educational and career path). If school is considered the main factor in education, having a major importance in orientation, the role of family and other decisive factors should not be minimized either when it comes to the students' choices. The purpose of the investigation was to evaluate the weight and influence of the factors involved in teenagers' choice of academic and career path. We assumed that the role of the school in the decision of academic and professional orientation of teenagers is diminished in comparison to the role of the other factors, in which case taking measures regarding the revaluation of the importance assigned to schools in the academic and professional orientation process could lead to an optimization of the process. In this context, we consider it necessary to emphasize the role that school has to play in this regard, especially by intensifying the activities of the school counsellors in the direction of academic and professional orientation, in parallel with increasing the collaboration with the teenagers' families, in order to achieve influences that are well-grounded, motivated and concordant between the school and the family.*

**Keywords:** *academic and professional orientation; teenagers; the factors of academic and professional orientation; the opportunities for career development;*

### **Introduction**

Given the circumstances of contemporary society, academic and career guidance and counselling is of particular interest for most aspects of social life. The fact that it has been proven to be an efficient method of harmonizing the tendencies of individual self-realization with the requirements of development demanded by society has transformed this into a complex problem of great and general interest.

Academic and career guidance, seen as a component of the instructional-educational process, constitutes one of the fundamental objectives of the education system. Hence the important role that school plays in the training and education of individuals and, therefore, in their academic and career guidance (Tomşa, Drăgan, Ozunu, 2005).

The two facets to orientation – academic and professional –, initially parallel to one another and relatively independent, have now become simultaneous. Any action that is focused on academic orientation is approached from the perspective of professional orientation and aimed at carrying out its tasks, while career guidance is a natural continuation of academic guidance. Based on this interdependency, school and professional orientation represents an ensemble of psycho-pedagogical, social and medical actions and influences that is constantly exercised and applied with the purpose of helping individuals achieve their academic and professional goals in accordance with the particularities of their personality and the requirements of the social context to which they relate (Tomşa Ghe., 1999). Academic and career orientation represents an intrinsic component of educational action but also the result of certain more or less organized influences.

### **The role of the school in providing academic and career guidance for the students**

The defining note of orientation, on which more and more specialists insist, is its educational character. Subordinating the orientation process to the educational one essentially expresses the interdependency of the two. Both orientation and education are aimed at developing human personality. Educational actions are aimed at developing human personality in accordance with the requirements of the educational ideal, while orientation is aimed at developing those aspects of personality that would allow the individual to achieve certain educational and professional goals in accordance with his own possibilities and the requirements demanded by exercising his chosen profession (Bersan O.S., 2016). Education and orientation thus appear as two complementing facets of the same process: preparing the individual to be socially integrated.

The aim of academic and professional orientation is adequately choosing the educational training and future career (in accordance with the students' abilities and the social needs), so that the individual can obtain the maximum level of work efficiency and professional satisfaction (Jigău M., 2001).

Academic and professional orientation carries a double significance:

- Social importance: contributes to the social integration of individuals and conditions work productivity;
- Personal importance: determines the moral and material satisfaction of the individual.

The main goals of academic and professional guidance are tasks of the instructional-educational process in schools:

- Developing interests, aptitudes, skills;

- Uncovering the students' personality and developing their capacity for self-knowledge;
- Informing students about the evolution of workforce demands and requirements;
- Providing them with advice in matters of academic and professional choices – namely, the academic and professional guidance.

Academic and professional orientation is conceived as an educational action in which the students are psychologically prepared for choosing their educational and professional path. By 'psychologically prepared' we understand acquiring particular knowledge and skills, developing interests, abilities (general and particular), cultivating high aspirations and professional ideals, developing stronger motivations for the choice of educational and professional path, developing certain qualities of will and character (the capacity for effort, consistency, self-demand) (Lemeni G., Miclea M., 2004).

The most important role in academic and professional orientation lies with the school, as it trains the personality of the student (and implicitly the traits necessary for choosing an educational and career path). If school is considered the main factor in education, having a major importance in orientation, the role of family and other decisive factors should not be minimized either when it comes to the students' choices (Călineci, M.C., 2008).

Academic and professional orientation is a continuous and lengthy educational process, lasting throughout the school years and finalizing with choosing a career path. Student guidance is not a task reserved for the end of an educational cycle and done only in certain moments (Tomşa Ghe., 1999). It starts early on (the first grades), undergoing certain stages of maximum intensity when the student is forced to make particular choices.

The student needs to have an active role during his school and career guidance, participating in 'designing' his own future. For this reason, he needs to know himself in an objective a fashion as possible, to be informed, to 'self-train' (develop his own interests, skills, qualities of will and character), so that he may be able to 'self-orient'. Academic and professional guidance relies on an accord between the subjective factor – the individual (with his personality traits) and the objective factor – society (which has certain demands). The main factors of academic and professional guidance are: school, the family and mass-media.

#### School – main factor of orientation

Orientation is, essentially, an educational activity that is aimed at developing the human personality and preparing it in accordance with the ulterior requirements and demands of education and work. Based on this idea, the fact that schools represent the main factor in academic and professional orientation is widely accepted. It is known that the appearance and manifestation of skills does not happen by itself and neither does it happen simultaneously, some skills manifesting earlier, others later. To promote their emergence, effort and practice are absolutely necessary. School, through the educational process, provides the necessary

conditions that are favourable to developing said skills, laying the grounds for orientation.

Research has shown that professional success or failure is determined, to a greater extent, by motivational and personality factors than by intelligence and aptitude. Important here is the formation of a positive motivation (interests, aspirations, attitudes) and certain character traits (perseverance, determination, working power) that will mark any professional pursuit. From this perspective, school has unlimited possibilities for their development.

The role of the family in academic and professional orientation

Regarding the educational action of the family, it is only effective when the goals pursued are in line with those pursued by the school. The educational action of the family when it comes to school and career guidance is only possible on a basis of cooperation with the school.

The tasks of the family could be concentrated around two fundamental objectives: to know the child and to educate him from a mental point of view (aptitudes, motivations, character traits), with the goal of offering guidance in accordance with his physical and psychological particularities and society's requirements. The means available to the parents for them to carry out these tasks are multiple: observation, conversation, tracking the child's academic results, describing some career options, stimulating the child to carry out activities (intellectual or practical), personal example, etc.

The role of mass-media in academic and professional orientation

Orientation involves informing all those involved in its achievement (teachers, parents, and children) about the schools and professions that could be the object of choices to be made. Media has an important role to play in this regard. The advantage of these means (radio, television, film, press, printed materials) is that they provide valuable information on various aspects that one profession or another requires in a form that is accessible and available to a large number of beneficiaries. These can directly influence the choice itself or indirectly, through a prior psychological training. Researchers believe, however, that mass-media means do not cover the problem of information entirely, the intervention of the school being absolutely necessary in this regard, whose action is in accordance with the students' individual particularities and society's demands.

### **Methodology**

By applying a questionnaire to a group of first year students, we aimed to identify which of the factors contributed decisively to their decisions regarding academic and career orientation at the completion of their high school education and what is the most relevant source of information for teenagers before making their professional orientation choices. The items in the questionnaire through which we have investigated these aspects are:

1. Which of the following factors contributed in a decisive manner in your choice of academic orientation at the end of high school?
  - School;

- Family;
- Mass-media (internet, TV, radio, magazines, specialized printed materials, etc).

2. What is the main method through which you informed yourself when it came to deciding on an academic and career path at the end of your high school studies?

- The different programs offered online on the Internet for school and career guidance;
- Psycho-pedagogical assistance offices/centres belonging to pre-university education institutions;
- Newspapers, magazines, specialized publications;
- Family;
- Friends.

*The purpose* of the investigation was to evaluate the weight and influence of the factors involved in teenagers' choice of academic and career path.

*Research objectives:*

- Assessment of the proportion of the three main factors that influence academic and career orientation in teenagers: school, family, mass-media;
- Identifying the role of school in regards to academic and professional orientation of teenagers;
- Identifying the main information source for teenagers when it comes to their choice of a career path.

*The research hypotheses:* we assume that the role of the school in the decision of academic and professional orientation of teenagers is diminished in comparison to the role of the other factors, in which case taking measures regarding the reevaluation of the importance assigned to schools in the academic and professional orientation process could lead to an optimization of the process.

*Target group:* the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 100 students, from their first year of study in different faculties of a university in Cluj-Napoca.

### Results and discussions

Following the application of the items in the questionnaire to evaluate the weight of the factors involved in the decision of academic and professional orientation of teenagers at the end of their high school studies, we recorded the following results:

**Table 1.** Factors that influence teenagers' decision in terms of academic orientation

	Frequency	%
School	25	25
Family	34	34
Mass-media	41	41

<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100,0</b>
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**Table 2.** Sources of information regarding academic and professional opportunities

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Programs offered on websites on the Internet	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>
Psycho-pedagogical Assistance Offices/Centres	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>
Newspapers, magazines and specialized publications	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
Family	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>
Friends	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100,0</b>

We find thus that the choice in terms of academic and professional orientation in the cases of teenagers is decisively influenced for the majority of teenagers (41%) by the information in mass-media (internet, specialized publications, etc), followed by influences from the family for 34% of the respondents and only 25% of them considered school to be the main factor in their decision regarding academic and career path at the end of their high school studies.

Regarding our investigation concerning the sources of information that teenagers turn to in this context, we once again find that mass-media, via programs offered by different web sites online, represents the preferred method of obtaining the information necessary to making their choices in orientation (for 45% of the questioned), followed by family (for 21% of the teenagers questioned), then their group of friends (13%) and only 12% of them acknowledge Psycho-pedagogical Assistance Offices/Centres as being their main source of information, through their guidance programs and other such activities.

Informing individuals about the opportunities for career development represents one of the activities that lies at the foundation of career counselling and orientation, alongside other complementing activities, such as: discovering and assessing their personalities, educating them with the purpose of facilitating them choosing a career path, as well as the actual guidance and counselling.

This activity needs to take place throughout the entire life of an individual: in the initial stages of choosing an academic and professional path, later on – after finishing their professional training, when the individual is looking for a job, or throughout his active life, whenever the individual desires to change his workplace. The activity implies informing the individual in regards to: the types of studies that he could follow and their profiles; the professional world and its dynamics; the possibilities and different forms of professional qualifications; demand and offer on

the job market; the most sought after professions; the most useful methods for finding a job; self-knowledge methods and improvement of individual performance; the social work offers available in different fields.

Online career guidance and counselling programs have ascertained their importance especially due to the low number of institutions and experts that provide orientation and counselling services when considering the demand for such services. They are either perceived as a modern alternative to services that require direct contact with a counsellor, or as a means to improve the quality of such services, as a tool to be used in complement with the direct approach, a tool which cannot entirely replace direct counselling. (Jigău M., 2003). But the information gathered this way should be evaluated and interpreted by a counsellor, who is able to find the relevant elements for each individual's professional interests. The use of these programs in career orientation and counselling presents advantages as well as disadvantages.

Among the advantages are: solving the problem related to the low number of counsellors and high number of individuals who need these services; the possibility of correlating personal characteristics of individuals to the jobs which require those skills and abilities; the possibility to use these sources during a period of time suitable to the individual; the possibility to repeat certain experiences, which facilitates the acquisition of information; the presentation of information in a flexible manner, allowing quick selection with the help of key words; the possibility to improve the efficiency of classic counselling; helping support people who live in isolated areas or suffer from certain disabilities which prevent them from reaching counselling centres.

The disadvantages of using programs offered by web sites for career orientation and counselling are: the need to constantly improve the programs, because the information they contain quickly becomes obsolete; the impossibility for individuals to obtain any other information than the one on the web site, to practice hypothetical situations or find solutions to their own problems; the absence of the counsellor's skills, making the act of counselling impersonal; the passive reception of information by the individual; the existence of certain unprofessional web sites, which include mistakes and haven't been validated and might mislead the individual. To avoid this risk, it is advisable to use these programs together with consulting a counsellor. The counsellor: will recommend professional, relevant web sites; will offer additional information; will warn the individuals on the programs' limitations; will interpret the results and complete the evaluation through other techniques; the long term use of the Internet can bring about a feeling of loneliness and isolation.

The beneficiaries of these career orientation and counselling programs are:

- students in secondary schools and high schools, especially those in senior years: they use these programs to inform themselves and make realistic decisions;
- students in Arts and Crafts schools: they particularly need information about employment and the work market;

- university students: they use the programs for information about the work market, requirements of certain jobs, techniques of finding a job or making a decision;

- young people who have abandoned studies and are looking for a job or special qualification courses;

- adults who are looking for a workplace or want to change theirs or participate in training courses.

For the students in secondary and high school system, another possibility of information and career counselling are the Centres of Psycho-pedagogical Assistance. School counsellors who work there have numerous responsibilities related to career orientation and counselling: they support the self-evaluation of students and make assessments; guide the students to making a stable, grounded career choice; provide information and material about the educational and formation systems and about the work market; bring attention to the educational offers of the school system; present the students the Jobs Classification in Romania; organize visits in various institutions with a professional informational purpose; support students in developing communication skills and preparing to look for and occupy a position: writing CVs, letters of application, preparing for interviews, telephone conversations and newspaper announcements; support the placement of graduates; make surveys regarding the students' options and choices; build a partnership between school and family for a better career orientation.

### **Conclusions**

Although school is considered the main factor of academic and professional orientation, a function fulfilled mainly through the services performed by the school counsellors within the Centres/Offices of Psycho-pedagogical Assistance, the reality shows that a major role in the decisions regarding teenagers' school and career orientation is played by the career guidance programs offered online and the information available on the Internet. In this context, we consider it necessary to emphasize the role that school has to play in this regard, especially by intensifying the activities of the school counsellors in the direction of academic and professional orientation, in parallel with increasing the collaboration with the teenagers' families, in order to achieve influences that are well-grounded, motivated and concordant between the school and the family.

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