

QUESTIONNAIRE TO IDENTIFY THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN COUNSELING

Sorina-Mihaela MARDAR

Assisting Professor, Ph.D., “Carol I” National Defence University,
Bucharest, Romania
sorinamardar@gmail.com

Adriana RÎȘNOVEANU

Assisting Professor, Ph.D., “Carol I” National Defence University,
Bucharest, Romania

Abstract: *One of the aims of the education system is social and professional integration of young graduates. But in the ever-changing world we live in today, choosing a career becomes a very difficult task. Today's students, subjected to the flow of information from a very young age, enter school with a great deal of knowledge about the world around them. The extracurricular activities in which they participate during the school years open their horizons of thought and many of them may be attracted to several areas, thus being in a very difficult position: what to choose, when I find that I am attracted to more things/professions and I think I can do them well? Therefore, career counseling becomes extremely important in the life of any young person. Counseling refers to a process in which a professional establishes a relationship – based on trust – with a person who needs support. During this process, the young student expresses his/hers ideas and feelings about a problem and receives support in clarifying their meanings, in identifying value patterns based on which solutions will be formulated. The counseling process involves guiding a young person to a profession for which he/she shows interests and skills. At the heart of this process one can find self-knowledge, vocational education, career education, exploration and career planning.*

Keywords: *education counseling; career counseling; vocation; skills.*

Needs identification

One of the most important functions of higher education institutions is to support students to find their path to the labor market, to smoothly make the transition from learning, studying and researching to the professional field, to creating solutions, to providing services, collaborating with their colleagues in work teams. Thus, Romanian universities have started housing counseling and career guidance centers, structures in which students can make use of the services of career counselors or can participate in various activities in which the labor market is presented, in which students can train on looking for a job, on performing in a job interview or adapting to a new job.

Facilitating the transition of students from attending faculty classes to finding a job and entering the labor market is the general objective of the START project running at the CAROL I National Defense University in Bucharest. Students enrolled in this project, 2 series of 162 students each, participated in career counseling and guidance activities, both in individual and group meetings, in order to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of each student, in relation to the occupational standards targeted by the various study programs, analyzing work motivations developed by each future graduate, identifying alternative career paths after graduation and analyzing these possibilities in correlation with the short, medium and long term goals of each student.

The counseling activity has turned out to be extremely attractive and very much needed as students make their study options around the age of 18, in most cases through the filter of the subject matters studied through their high school years and towards which they

felt passion, in terms of content, without projecting themselves into a career or profession after high school graduation. Towards the end of their undergraduate programs, students are viewing their career plan seriously for the first time and need to investigate, with the help of a counselor, the personal and professional resources they can use to sketch their professional future.

Another aspect that has led to elaborating a student self-assessment counseling needs tool is the major difficulty they face when they have to present themselves, with strengths and weaknesses, to an assessor or interviewer for a job. Students have a real difficulty in talking about themselves, identifying personality traits that add value in a professional field, displaying skills that they have developed over the years of study and that might be important in their future careers, in talking about their formative experiences that represent a valuable experiential asset for their future profession.

Another difficulty that START students show is to identify issues that need to be either corrected or improved on their own. The vast majority of the students tend not to point out any weakness or to identify a strength as a weakness (eg sincerity). Perfectionism leads students to believe that recognizing aspects that deserve improvement in one's own person is a sign of weakness and makes you vulnerable to potential evaluators.

Introduction

The concept of self-knowledge refers to the process of exploring and structuring one's own characteristics (abilities, emotions, motivations, attitudes, requirements, defense and adaptation mechanisms), which results in the person's self-image. Self-image is the essential landmark of behavioral and emotional self-regulation.

Efficient functioning in the contemporary socio-professional environment is facilitated by the person's ability to self-knowledge and efficient self-regulation. "The difficulties that some young people face, in their attempt to cope with contemporary demands, but also the specific difficulties of childhood and adolescence, seriously raise the issue of the need for students to acquire strategies for self-knowledge and personal development." (Lemeni Gabriela; Axente Anca coord. 2011)(27).

The questionnaire we propose is a tool of **self-knowledge** for the young person seeking guidance. These can be used by pupils or students before the counseling sessions or, it could even be applied by the counselor at the first meeting with the pupil/student. Each item in this questionnaire is, in fact, a topic to be reflected/discussed, so we do not consider that a standardized interpretation of the answers is needed. The most important role of this tool is to make the young person aware of certain personality traits that he/she probably did not know, to make him/her ask various questions. Positive self-image is very important, but it must be realistic. This positive self-image "It is a source of energy, stimulation and potential for career success" (Jigău 2001) (190).

The questionnaire is structured in four chapters (Janda 2003). We first try to find out your opinion about the counseling session. The second chapter identifies what the term career means to you, if you have a career plan and when you made it. The third chapter deals with personality, the former makes you think about your skills and how they might or may not help you in your chosen career. And the last chapter refers to how well you know the chosen field, to the actions you can take to follow the chosen career.

Another important aspect in the counseling sessions is to determine which are the most important values for you. Then, you can start analyzing whether the professions you are considering are right for you; and the best way to do that is to talk to people who carry out such professions. It is important to talk to several people to make sure you get a reasonable assessment of that area.

The questionnaire

I. About the counseling session:

I.1. Have you ever participated in career counseling and guidance activities?

- a) yes
- b) no

I.2. If yes, when? (what age?) _____

I.3. What information would you like to learn in counseling sessions and career guidance?

- a) about myself
- b) about jobs
- c) about job market
- d) about how to get a job
- e) about how to present yourself at an interview
- f) other _____

I.4. How you would like your career counseling and guidance sessions to go?

- a) face-to-face
- b) on-line

I.5. How long do you think a career counseling and guidance session should last?

- a) 30 minutes
- b) 60 minutes
- c) 90 minutes
- d) other _____

II. About the term *career*:

II.1. Please indicate three words suggestive of the *career plan* concept:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

II.2. What is your opinion about *having a career plan*?

- a) it has a decisiv role
- b) it has no use
- c) other _____

II.3. Do you have a *career plan*?

- a) yes
- b) no

II.4. When did you make this plan, at what age? (approximate)

II.5. You made the career plan over a period of _____ years.

II.6. Is your career plan complete? (includes scope, purpose, objectives, terms, deadlines, payoffs)

- a) yes
- b) no

II.7. What led you to develop such a plan?

.....
.....
.....

II.8. Have you decided to put your career plan into practice?

- a) yes
- b) no
- c) later _____

II.9. Who influences you the most in your career choice?

- a) my family
- b) my group of friends
- c) a certain professor

III. About your personality/your abilities:

III.1. I'm not determined when I want to start living on my own.

- a) true
- b) false

III.2. How quickly you get used to people you just met?

- a) very quickly
- b) quite quickly
- c) not too fast

III.3. What kind of activities do you like?

- a) in-door activities
- b) out-door activities

III.4. Do you like:

- c) city activities
- d) nature activities

III.5. What kind of job do you want?

- a) an office one
- b) a job that involves getting out

III.6. Would you prefer a job that provides you with a lot of free time?

- a) yes
- b) no

III.7. I am willing to make many sacrifices to progress in my career.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.8. I'm the kind of person who turns my plans into actions.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.9. Would you be willing to leave the country to succeed in your career?

- a) yes
- b) no

III.10. Did you take a test to determine your professional skills?

- a) yes
- b) no

III.11. I set very high standards for myself.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.12. I know where I can find answers to the questions I have.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.13. I can decide what information I need.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.14. I know how to choose and use keywords to search for the information I need.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.15. I have many sources of information and I know how to select the important ones.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.16. I know how to make a list of important sites for the chosen profession.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.17. I know how to use search engines.

- a) yes
- b) no

III.18. I know how to change my search terms to detail what I'm looking for.

- a) yes
- b) no

IV. About actions related to the chosen profession:

IV.1. What profession would you like to pursue?

IV.2. Why did you choose this profession?

- a) it is well-paid
- b) it suits me
- c) it has an impact, it is a respected profession

IV.3. What personal qualities recommend you for this profession?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

IV.4. What are your interests that influenced this choice? (name at least 3)

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

IV.5. Did you find out about the skills required by your favorite profession?

- a) yes
- b) no
- c) there's still time to get informed

IV.6. In what field would this job be?

.....

IV.7. The program of study is consistent with the chosen career plan?

- a) yes
- b) no

IV.8. What criteria did you consider in choosing the optional courses?

- a)
- b)
- c)

IV.9. How the chosen extracurricular activities helps you in your future profession?

.....

.....

.....

IV.10. Do you intend to find a job since college?

- a) yes
- b) no
- c) I have not decided yet

IV.11. What obstacles do you think you might encounter in finding a job?

.....
.....
.....

IV.12. Do you think that the profession you choose now you will follow until you retire?

- a) yes
- b) no, I think I'll change it over the years

IV.13. You would like a job:

- a) very well paid, but with overtime
- b) average salary, without obligations over working hours
- c) part-time job

IV.14. In which city/area would you like to settle after graduation and find a job?

.....

IV.15. Know the forecasts regarding the development of the city/area in which you want to settle?

- d) yes
- e) not yet

IV.16. What books/magazines have you read lately on topics related to your chosen profession?

.....

IV.17. What sites have you consulted to help you choose your profession?

.....

IV.18. Do you know the requirements of employers regarding the chosen profession? List at least three:

- a)
- b)
- c)

Completing the questionnaire before the counseling session is important, but not sufficient. Because we did not make a standardized interpretation of the answers for this questionnaire, it would be good to allocate some time to complete the following table:

Chapter I		Chapter II	
Conclusions	Actions to be taken	Conclusions	Actions to be taken
Chapter III		Chapter IV	
Conclusions	Actions to be taken	Conclusions	Actions to be taken

Now we think you have a clearer picture of your strengths and weaknesses. We hope that, after you follow the counseling sessions, you will feel much more prepared to go out into the world, to go to an interview and to prove your ability to present yourself well.

Self-knowledge is a basic process in counseling and career guidance. The significance of this process may be more important than the results of psychodiagnostic examinations or

assessments, because self-knowledge means the appearance of problems, confronting one's impressions with others about oneself and drawing a realistic conclusion, balancing personal achievements, potentialities, individual qualities and traits, about which the individual must be made aware that he has them and can value them (Jigău 2001) (183).

Conclusions

In the economics of this questionnaire, we have allocated many items that refer to extracurricular activities or to the influences of the group of friends of which the young person belongs. This has a simple explanation: in Romania, career guidance is left mainly to the family. High school leadership classes (1 hour/week) fail to cover the issue of career guidance or college choice. School counselors are dividing their work between several schools and thus their program is not enough to provide counseling with each student. In the faculties, things are a little better than at the high school level, in the sense that there are counseling offices in each university. But even here, we can say that there are too few counselors compared to the students' request. Young people who want to get to know themselves better can, with the help of their families, access online tests to find their skills or turn to private professional counseling offices.

We think that before going to these offices, it is easier to try to do a self-knowledge exercise. And this is exactly what this questionnaire does: it offers the chance for self-knowledge; further, it is the task of each young person to reflect on their own strengths, on the skills they have and, especially, on those they want to develop.

The literature has shown that students who do not know what interests them will experiment and try various jobs. This process of trial and error is important in finding a successful career. Therefore, do not be afraid to make changes if you are not satisfied with the initial choice.

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