

STUDY REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED BY CENTRE FOR CAREER COUNSELLING AND GUIDANCE WITHIN UNIVERSITY OF AGRONOMIC SCIENCES AND VETERINARY MEDICINE FROM BUCHAREST WITH THE AIM OF CONSOLIDATING CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGRIBUSINESS FIELD

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Abstract

Mobility is one of the aspects that define the current era, where distances are no longer a barrier both in terms of university studies and the possibilities of integration into the labour market or entrepreneurship. The skills acquired through extracurricular activities and digital skills are essential to have an easy path in professional development and access to a job focused on the field of university studies. The awareness of students and graduates regarding the accumulation of experiences from activities adjacent to the field of study and their sedimentation can bring them more personal and professional value. This paper aims to analyse the student perception and the importance of participation in extracurricular activities organized by The Centre for Career Counselling and Guidance (CCOC) for students and graduates of University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (USAMV) from Bucharest in accordance with the rigors of the labour market. The research methodology involves the analysis of specialized literature regarding the extracurricular training activities that must be considered for the consolidation of a career in the studied field. The case study is composed of a questionnaire that contains 13 questions applied to USAMV Bucharest students and graduates. The resulting data were processed and analysed by statistical methods and the results obtained after interpretation give us an overall picture regarding the students/graduate's awareness of the importance of extracurricular activities. However, the adaptation of activities must be a continuous process and the link between the university environment and the field companies should be strengthened for mutual benefits. Placing graduates in jobs that coincide with professional training remains a challenge. For this reason, a better understanding and application of the process of gaining professional experience during the higher education cycle is a key factor towards a successful career.

Key words: extracurricular, competences, activities, students, agribusiness, education

INTRODUCTION

According to EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Title II "Freedoms" access to education, vocational and continuing training is a human right [9]. Education is a powerful tool of development, and an element that could make the difference in health improvement, stability and reducing poverty. Education can be correlated with earnings, health, economic growth, innovation, stability and a strong society cohesion [21].

As Jacob Mincer demonstrates in his research, there is a connexion between the income as wages, years of schooling and years of labour market experience. Summarising the single

equation earnings function of Mincer, the more years in education and the more experience in labour market results in higher wages [13].

The Mincer equation explains the return of investment in schooling which is presented in a simple format and allow people to use the results for decision making. As a conclusion, education is a substantial investment for people. As the countries' economies vary, as well as the income returns based on gender, some studies concluded that on average the return of investment for each year of schooling is between 5-8% meaning that investment in education in one of the best an individual may achieve [11,16].

Recent studies based on Mincer equation, shows that globally the biggest returns are 17% from university education, followed by primary education with 10% [14].

Higher education as investment has been linked in human resources theories with benefits mostly in a social and private context [3].

On the other hand, employability is one of the most important outcome as result of higher education. According to researchers the employability is a combination of four factors regarding high education: 'understanding of subject matter' (cognitive skills and technical skills which are obtain through education which are meant to successfully perform a specific job), 'skilful practices' (the generic and soft skills which are meant to bridge the theoretical and practical knowledge, 'efficacy beliefs'(cognitive processing from the perspective of possible threats, 'metacognition' (skills that implies individuals self-assessment as what a person knows, want and can do) [2, 12, 19].

Soft skills may be developed throughout both formal and informal activities. In Europe the formal activities are recognize by the universities through ECTS credits. On the other hand, the informal activities are not regulated through academic curricula. The informal activities may generate soft skills by extracurricular activities such as formation courses, internships, volunteering, leisure activities [8, 20].

From the companies approach the students' informal activities attendance may result in cost reduction in case of internships, because the employer can train the employee for their future job and the student accumulates the training content which is relevant to the future job assignment [15].

Studies confirm that for universities it is an effective strategy to offer to their students the possibility to attend to internships to enhance the employability of their graduates [4, 18].

In terms of volunteering although it is not proved yet that it has a major impact towards employability the results being subjective and empirical [10] from the student/graduate perspective it helps for self-developing skills. The array of impact of volunteering activities

for students/graduates may reflect in personal development, transferable skills, academic life, employability process self-confidence, culture and social. Studies have shown that volunteering activities have benefits upon the volunteers. Also, it brings enjoyment and rewards in terms of social networking, new skill acquisition and self-esteem [5].

Another approach referring volunteering activities as direction to employment is that individuals may be helped to identify their motivation, targets and goals.

The connexion between volunteering and employment is a complex one. Volunteering can help improving individual employability but the effect directly to employment is not determinant [15].

Digital skills and digital comprehension is a must have for students/graduates as they become vital for economic growth, innovation and day to day job related operations. From the employers approach the future employees must be 'digitally ready' [6]. The digitally readiness presumes knowledge of computer fundamentals, key applications and the online environment. Digital skills combined with other soft skills may positively affect and facilitate the insertion into the labour market.

In order to obtain a good job in the studied related field the students/graduates must be concerned of shifting between education environment and work environment. A person who achieved significant academic results will be more successful if they have soft skills and they can reveal to the potential employer both the aspects above throughout a letter of intention and a curriculum vitae. These instruments may be the first interface between the candidate and the employer human resource department. An organised and well-structured CV and a well-drafted letter of intention may give the candidate the possibility of attending to first interview for the job applied.

Studies confirmed that the recruiter's perception on the candidates is a mix between academic qualifications, work background and other activities [7].

Students and graduates must understand as well the industry's requirements and expectations when selecting possible

candidates. The candidates should have to take proactive measures to take the opportunities they have been providing during their studies. They should focus both on academic and non-academic acquired skills even during the period of their academic formation [1].

As for students/graduates' revenue needs and expectations there are many factors which may be involved. The government policies of minimum wage, the productivity in the targeted sector, the country standard of living, the GDP, lifestyle, social welfare, international mobility possibilities, are the main macro factors that influence the starting wage and time of initial insertion into the labour market. The empirical researches underlined the difference of wage expectations between first year students and final year ones, the expectations being lower for the students in the last year as they are supposed to be more connected with the labour market. Thus, the educational institutions have a determinant role to properly form and prepare the students attitude towards labour market integration [17].

In this context, the goal of this research is to analyse the student perception and the importance of participation in extracurricular activities organized by The Centre for Career Counselling and Guidance (CCOC) for students and graduates of USAMV from Bucharest in accordance with the rigors of the labour market.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methods of the study combine the analysis of specialised literature related to the benefits of higher education studies, additional skills and abilities acquired during the formation curricula and the student/graduate expectations and awareness towards the integration in labour field. The quantitative survey method consists in 13 questions applied to the targeted group. The target group was represented by students and graduates of University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine from Bucharest (USAMV from Bucharest). The

questionnaire was developed and applied in an online form on the subjects. The time range of gathering the responses was October 2021 and had 129 responders.

The evaluative questions of the survey were as follows:

Please indicate the faculty you attend to. Please indicate the level of studies. To what extent do you consider the knowledge and skills acquired during the bachelor's / master's / doctorate program are useful in finding a job in the studied field? During the study program did you participate in training courses organized by USAMV from Bucharest? Do you consider that participating in these training courses will or has helped you to find a job or in your personal development? Have you participated in an Erasmus+ mobility program facilitated by USAMV from Bucharest? Did you participate in any internship program during your years of study? Did you participate in volunteer activities during your study years? Do you consider that doing an internship program or volunteer activities is beneficial for professional development and the facilitation of obtaining a job? To what extent do you think it is necessary to prepare a CV already during college? Do you think that accessing recruitment platforms, such as www.usamvjobs.ro, help you find the job you want? Please indicate the degree of importance from your point of view regarding career counselling and guidance support since college. Please indicate if during studies or after graduation you were employed.

The survey covered the following aspects:

- the perception from self-evaluating point of view of students/graduates regarding skills acquired during the formation period;
- the extra academic activities provided by university participation and perception;
- labour market integration taking into consideration the studied field

The evaluation limits were given by:

- the data collected was at technical and perception level;
- the survey was applied to students and graduates of the 7 faculties of USAMV from Bucharest;

-data processing was interpreted throughout descriptive statistical methods.

Respondent group characteristics:

129 respondents of which 84 students, 16 students at master, 27 graduates, 2 PhD students. The information was processed using descriptive statistical methods and the results were presented in graphs, tables and interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present study contains a 11-questions questionnaire and the input data is related with the students/graduates participation in activities for soft skills acquisition and their perception whether these activities may influence in a positive way the access to labour market insertion in the studied field. The distribution of respondents covers the 7 faculties of USAMV from Bucharest, observing a larger number of participants within the faculties of Management and Rural Development with 41 and Agriculture with 38 corresponding to the number of students registered in the study programs. All 7 faculties respondents are represented in a share pie Figure 1.

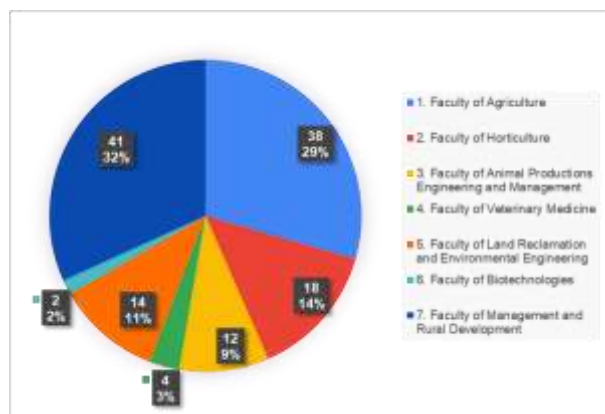


Fig. 1. Share of participants of the 7 faculties
 Source: own processing

Figure 2 share pie represents the level of studies of the respondents. We note that from a total of 129 respondents most of participants are students 84 (65%), followed by graduated students 27 (21%), master programs students 16 (12%) and 2 PhD students.

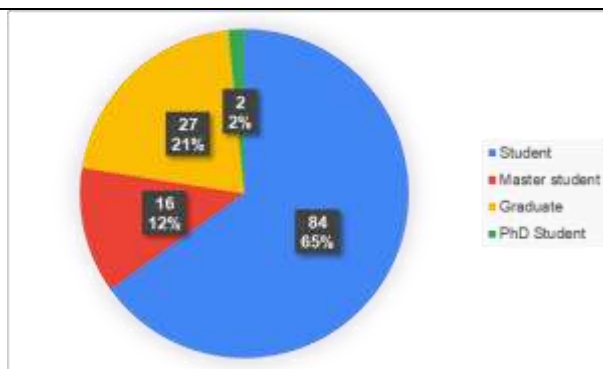


Fig. 2. Share of participants by level of studies
 Source: own processing.

The question no. 3 measures the perception level of the respondents considering if the knowledge and skills acquired during their formation studies are useful in order to achieve a field related job. It can be observed that together “very useful” 59(46%) and “useful” 53(41) answers represents a % of 87% while “not useful” 12(9%) and “I don’t know” 5(4%) represents 13%. The figurative results are presented in Figure 3.

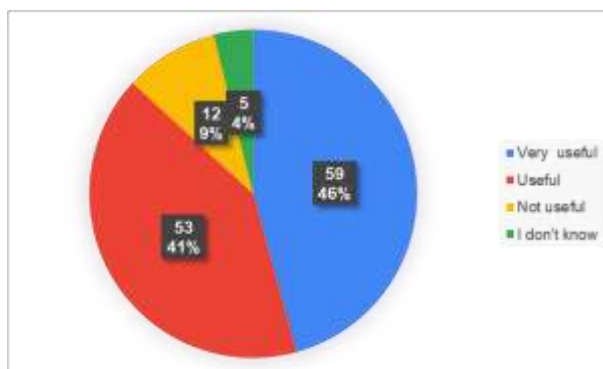


Fig. 3. Share of perception level
 Source: own processing.

Question no. 4: *During the study program did you participate to training courses organized by USAMV from Bucharest?*

75 (58%) of the respondents have not participate during the study programs to training courses organised by USAMV from Bucharest through the Centre for Counselling and Career Orientation (CCOC) while 54 (42%) have participate. The results are showing moderate results in student participation but still motivating to be increased. The participation is represented in graph below (Figure 4).

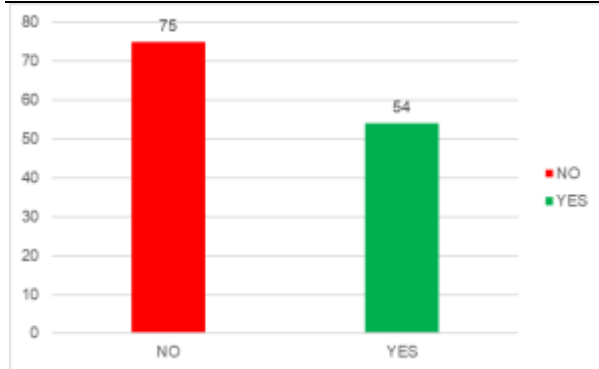


Fig. 4. Student participation to training courses
 Source: own processing.

Question no. 5: *Do you think that participating in these training courses will/has helped you in finding a job or in your personal development?*

The question combines the aspects of technical participation with the perception of usefulness of participation. The results show that 106 (82%) answers were positive while 23 (18%) were negative (Figure 5).

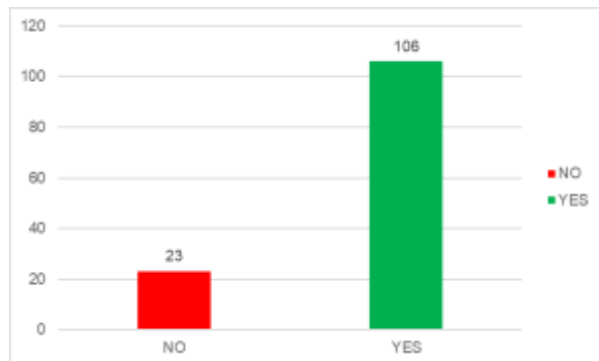


Fig. 5. Student perception towards training courses
 Source: own processing.

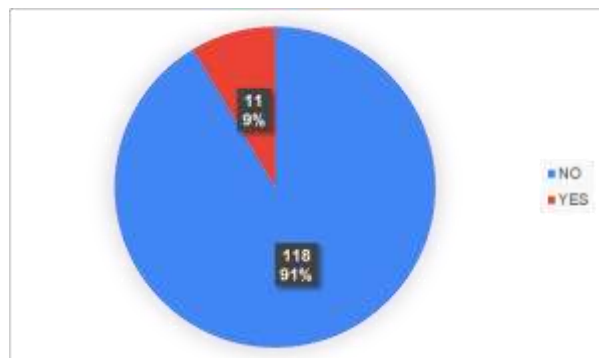


Fig. 6. Student participation to Erasmus + programs
 Source: own processing.

To question no. 6 which refers whether students have participated in an Erasmus + mobility program 118 respondents which represents 91% of the total of 129 have not

participated and 11(9%) participated (Figure 6).

Question no. 7: *During your study formation did you participate in any internship program?*

We note that the participation to an internship program facilitated by USAMV from Bucharest through Centre for Counselling and Career Orientation in partnership with agribusiness field companies shows that 27(21%) of the respondents did participate while 102(79%) did not participate (Figure 7).

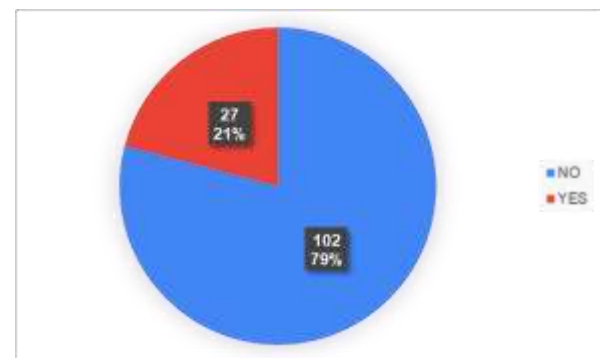


Fig. 7. Student participation in internship programs
 Source: own processing.

Question no. 8: *During your study formation did you participate in any volunteering activities?*

Taking into consideration the wide range of volunteering activities which may imply organization of sports and cultural events, entertainment events, fairs, exhibitions, conferences, study visits and more the student participation is increased versus Erasmus + and internship programs. 42(33%) students have already participated in volunteering activities while 87(67%) have not. The share pie Figure 8 presents the results.

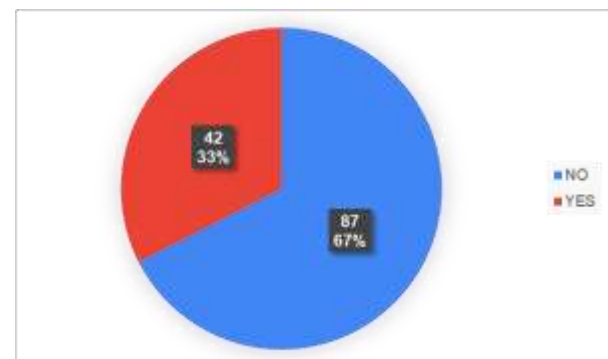


Fig. 8. Student participation in volunteering activities
 Source: own processing.

Question no. 9: *Do you consider that participating in an internship program/volunteer activities is beneficial for professional development and the facilitation of obtaining a job?*

The question is targeted to reach both perception level and technical level. We note that 108 (84%) respondents consider that to participate to an internship program and to volunteering activities do have benefits for professional self-development and may facilitate the insertion on labour market. 9(7%) respondents consider doesn't benefit while for 12 (9%) does not apply as in Figure 9.

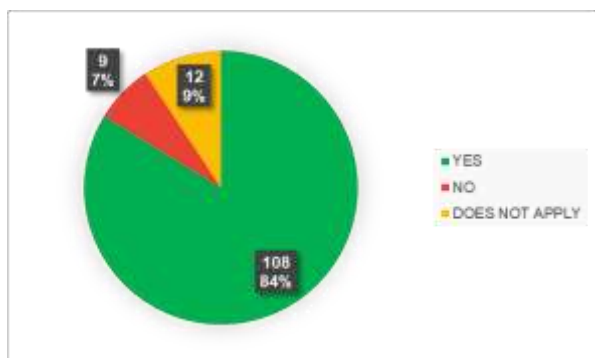


Fig. 9. Student perception towards benefits of internship programs and volunteering activities
 Source: own processing.

Question no. 10 *To what extent do you think it is necessary to prepare a CV already during college?*

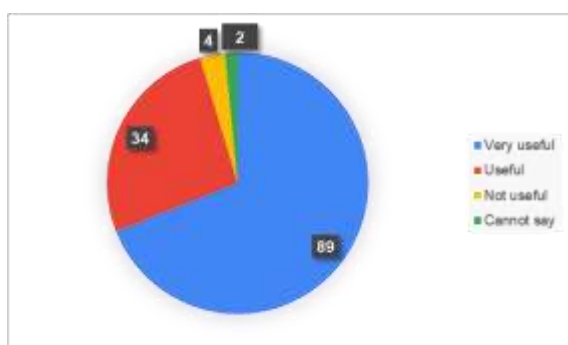


Fig. 10. Student perception towards building a CV during the studies
 Source: own processing.

This question purpose is intended to measure the students/graduate's awareness of Curriculum vitae importance as a tool for a smoother access to labour market. The results show that 89 (69%) of the respondents consider "very useful", 34 (26%) "useful", 4

(3%) "not useful" and 2 (1.55%) "cannot say". Graph 10 presents the results.

Question no. 11: *Do you think that accessing recruitment platforms, such as www.usamvjobs.ro, help you find the job you want?*

www.usamvjobs.ro is an official job platform own by USAMV from Bucharest which purpose is to facilitate the relationship between employers and USAMV students and graduates. It is and controlled environment which reflects the partnership between university and agribusiness field companies. The respondents' interest in the platform is significant as per results shown in Figure 11. 112(87%) of the respondents consider accessing the platform being helpful and 17 (13%) not being helpful.

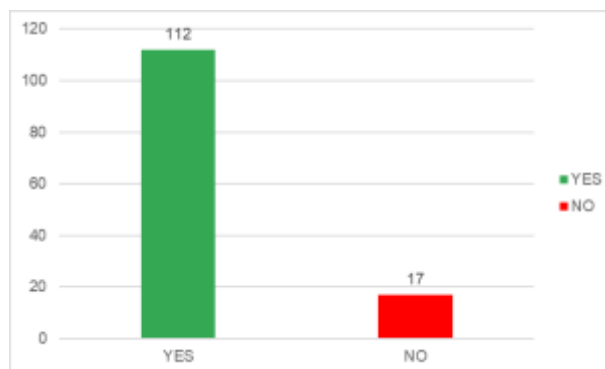


Fig. 11. Student/graduates perception towards accessing field targeted job platform
 Source: own processing.

Question no. 12: *Please indicate the degree of importance from your point of view regarding career counselling and guidance support since college:*

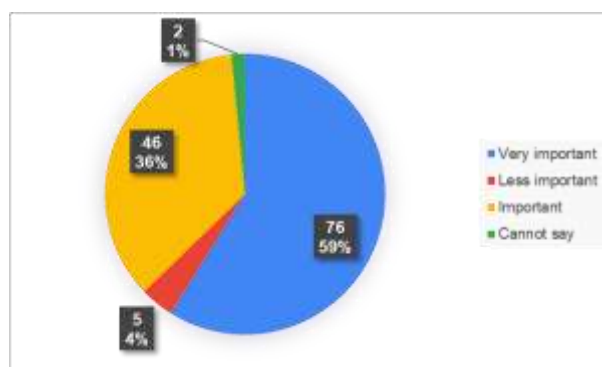


Fig. 12. Importance of career counselling and guidance
 Source: own processing

Centre for Counselling and Career Orientation within USAMV from Bucharest provides services for the student/graduates and alumni. Among the services, the career counselling and guidance is one the most relevant. Thus “very important” and important answer together represent a total of 122(95%) while “less important” 5(4%) and “cannot say” 2(1.55%). The figures are presented in graph 12.

Question no 13: *Please indicate if during studies or after graduation you were employed.*

We found that 68 (52.7%) of the respondents have worked or working in other field than the studied one while 61 (47.3%) work in the studied field (graph 13).

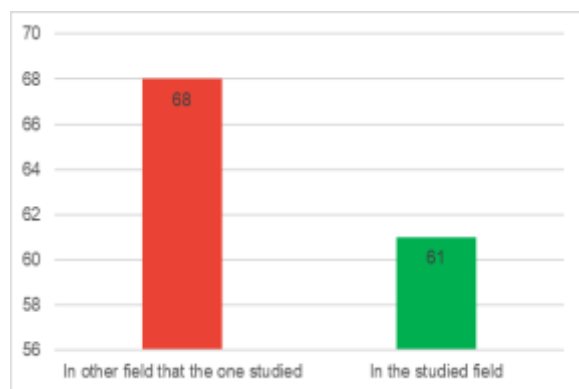


Fig. 13. Student/graduates working field distribution
Source: own processing.

CONCLUSIONS

Comparing and analysing the literature and specialized studies, to which we add the present study, the conclusions are that adaptability in terms of the competences acquired over the years of studies, corroborated with other experiences are defining for a successful insertion on the labour market for graduates. Universities in general have adapted study programs and extracurricular activities to support students and graduates. However, studying the obtained results, their interpretation and the corrective measures that must be taken should be considered as priority.

Digital skills, but also the other skills acquired through participation in internship programs, volunteering, workshops, conferences and other activities based on skills acquisition and

capitalization, can be a strong differentiator upon graduation together with the bachelor's degree. Completing a study program from university education can bring significant benefits both personally and socially. In addition, the awareness of the need to develop skills already during the years of study exists among students, and the present study confirms this aspect, at least at the level of perception. At the same time, taking into account the dynamics of the market economy in terms of the qualified manpower circulation, the geopolitical situation, climate changes, government strategies in the medium and long term, but also the adaptability of companies in terms of the above aspects, we suggest strengthening the ties between the university environment and the companies which acts in the field. The adaptation of training programs according to the inputs obtained from companies which carries out their activities in the agribusiness field can facilitate a better insertion into the labour market and can give an added value to students and graduates that can materialize in better salary packages and in the return of their knowledge and innovation to society.

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