

THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRAINEESHIPS IN ENHANCING THE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM RURAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

This study analyses the impact of traineeships in vocational and technical education on the labour market opportunities of young people in rural areas, with a special focus on Ilfov County. In the context of the economic and social challenges faced by young people in rural areas, traineeships are highlighted as fundamental tools for developing professional skills, facilitating the transition from theoretical education to effective integration into the labor market. Through them, students gain valuable practical experience, improving technical skills, developing professional networks, and becoming familiar with modern organizational cultures. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of integrating complementary dimensions, such as the digitalization of the educational process, promoting social inclusion and ecological awareness, in order to increase employability and reduce disparities between rural and urban areas. The conclusions emphasize the role of traineeships as essential elements in increasing the competitiveness of young people and recommend their expansion, strengthening partnerships between schools and the economic environment, as well as continuous investments in the digitalization and modernization of educational processes.

Key words: traineeships, vocational and technical education, insertion on the labor market, rural youth, school-work transition

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of the Romanian economy, the integration of young people into the labor market is an essential priority for the economic and social development of the country, and this process becomes even more difficult in the case of young people from rural areas. This group of young people faces multiple challenges, from limited access to quality education to the poor infrastructure of the localities in which they live. In this sense, vocational and technical education, with an emphasis on traineeships, is becoming a crucial tool for increasing the employment opportunities of young people from rural areas. Traineeships, regulated by national legislation, allow students to gain direct experience in their field of study and to apply theoretical knowledge in a real work environment, which

significantly contributes to enhancing their employability [7] [8].

In Romania, the pre-university vocational and technical education system has been regulated and supported through a series of reforms aimed at improving the vocational training of students and responding to the demands of the labor market. The pre-university Education Law emphasizes the importance of vocational education, explicitly mentioning traineeships as a fundamental element in the training of students. Moreover, through the National Strategy for Vocational and Technical Education (SNIPT), the Romanian authorities have recognized the need to connect schools more closely with the economic environment, especially in rural areas, in order to ensure that young people have real opportunities to integrate into the labor market. Traineeships carried out in partnership with economic operators play a vital role in this process,

providing students not only with technical skills but also with a thorough understanding of the requirements of the labor market. [7] [8] [10]

The contribution of traineeships in pre-university vocational and technical education in Romania is particularly relevant for young people in rural areas, who often face the absence of an adequate vocational training framework. According to a report by the European Commission (2018), young people in rural areas are often less prepared to meet the demands of the labor market due to limited access to vocational training and insufficient educational infrastructure. However, traineeships can reduce these disparities by offering rural students opportunities to learn directly from professionals, as well as to build connections with local or national employers. In addition, these traineeships significantly contribute to the development of transferable skills, such as communication, teamwork, and flexibility, essential skills for success in a dynamic and competitive work environment [1] [5].

Studies conducted by specialists in the field highlight the importance of traineeships as an effective method of integrating rural students into the labor market, with a direct impact on their employability. These traineeships contribute both to increasing the level of knowledge and skills specific to a given professional field and to facilitating integration into professional networks and the creation of employment opportunities. At the same time, they offer rural student's valuable exposure to labor market realities, thus contributing to improving working conditions and reducing economic and social inequalities [3] [9] [15]. Moreover, traineeships are a tool for preventing school dropout, especially in rural areas, where young people are often more likely to drop out of school due to a lack of economic prospects. According to research by Ioniță and Cojocaru (2020), involving students in practical activities within sustainable educational partnerships can significantly reduce the school dropout rate, as they begin to perceive education as a direct form of investment in their professional future. Thus, traineeships not only provide theoretical and

practical training but also offer real employment opportunities, contributing to the development of an educational system adapted to the demands of the current economy [2] [3]. Traineeships in vocational and technical pre-university education play a fundamental role in increasing the employment opportunities of young people in rural areas. By integrating training methods adapted to the needs of the labor market and by establishing effective partnerships between educational institutions and economic agents, these traineeships can become an important driver for reducing economic and social inequalities, but also for stimulating the sustainable development of rural areas [4] [6].

In this context, the purpose of this research is to assess the impact of traineeships in vocational and technical education on the labour market opportunities of young people in rural areas, with a special focus on Ilfov County.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to assess the perceptions of students in technological and vocational pre-university education in Ilfov County regarding the effectiveness of traineeships, a research methodology based on a sociological survey, implemented through an online questionnaire, was employed. The research was conducted over four school years (2021–2025), involving a significant sample of 2,510 students from seven pre-university technological and vocational education institutions in Ilfov County. This longitudinal approach allowed monitoring the evolution of students' perceptions over time, providing an overview of the impact of traineeships on their educational process and on employment opportunities, especially in rural areas [11] [13] [14].

The research adopted a descriptive approach, seeking to identify and analyze students' perceptions regarding the relevance of traineeships within pre-university vocational and technical education. The main objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of these traineeships in preparing students for integration into the labor market, with a special

focus on the rural environment. In addition, the research aimed to identify avenues for improving traineeships and to compare how students from different schools perceive their impact on their chances of employment and professional integration [12] [14].

The primary data collection tool was an online questionnaire, administered through the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire was structured in several sections, each addressing a specific dimension of the traineeships: the level of student satisfaction, the perception of their usefulness for developing professional skills, their impact on career choices, and the degree of integration of traineeships into the school curriculum. The questionnaire also included items on student's perceptions of working conditions during traineeships and their relationship with trainers from partner companies. The questionnaires were administered online, allowing for efficient data collection.

The sample consisted of 2,510 students from high schools with a technological and professional profile (including dual education programs) in Ilfov County, selected according to criteria of geographical and institutional representativeness. The participants were divided into four groups, corresponding to the four years of study: first year (658 students), second year (502 students), third year (679 students), and fourth year (671 students). This sample structure ensured a balanced coverage of the various stages of professional training, facilitating the analysis of the evolution of students' perceptions as they progressed in professional and technical education.

Each educational unit involved in the research was selected considering the diversity of educational profiles and geographical distribution, so as to obtain the most comprehensive picture of the educational context in Ilfov County. In addition, the research aimed to maintain a balance between students from urban and rural areas, given that the main purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of traineeships on employment opportunities in rural areas.

The questionnaires were distributed online, and students were invited to participate in the research through invitations sent via email,

social networks, or direct messages on the educational platforms used by the partner educational units. Participation was voluntary, and data confidentiality was ensured throughout the data collection process. To guarantee the completeness and validity of the data, the questionnaires were structured so that they were easy for students to understand and complete, and the questions were formulated in accessible language, adapted to their level of comprehension.

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively, and the results were processed through descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and percentages, to highlight relevant trends and correlations between students' perceptions of traineeships and their employment chances. In addition, longitudinal analyses were conducted, which made it possible to observe the evolution of students' perceptions over the four years of study. These analyses were essential to understand how traineeships influenced the students' educational process and their level of preparation for integration into the labor market, especially in rural areas.

Regarding the validity of the research, the selected sample was representative, and the geographical and institutional distribution met the diversity requirements of the study. However, the research was limited by the self-reported nature of the data, which may introduce a certain degree of subjectivity in the assessment of students' perceptions. Nevertheless, by applying a standardized and well-structured research instrument, rigorous data collection was achieved, which contributes to the validity and reliability of the results.

The methodology used was appropriate for the purpose of the research, and the data analysis enabled a detailed assessment of the impact of traineeships on vocational and technical education students in Ilfov County. Through a quantitative and longitudinal approach, the research provided relevant information for improving the educational process and traineeships, in order to increase the employment opportunities of young people in rural areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of data obtained in Ilfov County from the 2021-2022 to the 2024-2025 school years, which reflects the opinion of over 2,500 vocational and technical education students, most of whom come from rural areas, highlights the importance of traineeships in their professional and personal development and in increasing their chances of integration into the labor market. Here are some key aspects that highlight their impact:

Familiarization with labor market requirements

For many young people from rural areas, traineeships represent the first opportunity to interact directly with an organized work environment. Participating in activities within companies, production units, or service organizations offers students the chance to understand the hierarchical structure of an organization, the norms of professional behavior, and the dynamics of workplace relations.

This exposure is essential to mitigate the discrepancies between students' expectations and the realities of the labor market. The lack of such experiences could result in major difficulties adapting to formal employment, and some young people might resort to migration in search of informal work or risk leaving their profession.

Developing a portfolio of professional and transferable skills

Students participating in the study consistently emphasized the importance of traineeships in developing key skills, including:

Technical skills specific to the training field: using equipment, applying technical procedures, and solving problems in real work contexts.

Transversal skills: communication skills, time management, teamwork, adaptability to change, and the ability to assume responsibilities.

Digital skills: familiarity with online platforms and the use of digital tools for planning, reporting, and monitoring. These skills are increasingly valuable, given the trend toward digitalization in both education and the professional sphere.

These skills not only increase students' self-confidence but also improve their employment prospects.

Clarifying career options and increasing motivation for employment

Many students emphasized that traineeship experiences provided them with a clear picture of the field in which they were specializing, helping them decide whether it aligns with their personal aspirations and abilities.

For young people in rural areas, who often do not have access to adequate career counseling, traineeships represent an important opportunity to observe the activity of a professional in the respective field and to gain a better understanding of labor market requirements.

Employment opportunities and professional integration

Although not all students received job offers immediately after completing traineeships, research shows that these experiences can represent a direct path to employment. Companies involved in traineeships often identify talented young people and can offer jobs as soon as they complete their studies.

For young people in rural areas, who face geographical limitations and a lack of professional networks, traineeships can provide a direct link to employers, sometimes even within their local communities.

Reducing migration and employment in the informal economy

A common problem in rural areas is the migration of young people to unskilled jobs, often abroad or in urban areas, in precarious conditions. Traineeships offer a successful alternative by developing certified skills recognized on the labor market, strengthening a sense of professional belonging, fostering the desire to remain in the chosen field, and opening communication channels with local employers.

Access to mentoring and professional role models

Another important benefit for students was the interaction with mentors or experienced professionals from the companies where they completed their traineeship. This experience involved not only technical training, but also of

counseling and mentorship, contributing to the professional development of young people.

Increasing professional and geographical mobility

Traineeships offered students the opportunity to adapt to economic environments different from the one they came from. This allowed them to broaden their horizons, both professionally and personally, more diverse opportunities to access jobs and educational programs at the local, national or international levels.

Reducing the urban-rural educational gap

By participating in traineeships in modern companies, students from rural areas gained access to cutting-edge technologies and professional practices. Thus, they managed to reduce the educational differences compared to students from urban areas, thereby becoming better prepared to meet the demands of the labor market.

Developing entrepreneurial skills

Some traineeships offered students the opportunity to become familiar with aspects such as resource management, customer interaction, and the initiation of micro-enterprises, essential skills for young people from rural areas who may pursue self-employment.

Building a network of professional contacts

Through traineeships, students had the opportunity to build a network of important professional contacts, which can facilitate their later access to jobs, professional recommendations, or even additional traineeship opportunities.

Improving discipline and professional ethics

Another significant impact of traineeships on students is the development of responsible professional behavior. Adhering to a work schedule, following rules of conduct, and meeting clear work objectives help students understand the requirements of the labor market and build a serious attitude towards the profession. This discipline, acquired in a real work setting, is essential for their professional development and for enhancing their employability in the labor market.

Building a professional identity and increasing self-esteem

The experience gained during traineeships contributes significantly to shaping a professional identity and enhancing students' self-esteem. Through feedback received from mentors and colleagues, they can validate their skills and gain a clearer understanding of the direction in which they wish to develop their careers. Especially for young people in rural areas, where professional role models are often lacking, traineeships can provide a framework in which they feel validated and encouraged to pursue a stable professional trajectory.

Stimulating lifelong learning

Traineeships promote an attitude of continuous learning, essential in a ever-changing professional environment. Through contact with specialists from various fields and the use of modern technological tools, students acquire not only technical skills but also openness to new fields and long-term learning opportunities. This mindset is particularly important in rural areas, where professional development opportunities are often limited.

Developing intercultural and social skills

Traineeships, which involve interacting with professionals from diverse organizational cultures and socio-economic contexts, are an opportunity for students to develop valuable intercultural and social skills. The ability to communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds, as well as the ability to adapt to diverse working and interaction conditions, are essential skills in any professional field. These skills contribute to the integration of young people into modern labor markets, favoring their inclusion into diverse and dynamic teams.

Promoting inclusion and reducing social exclusion

In rural areas, a significant proportion of students come from low-income families or vulnerable groups. Traineeships can be tailored to meet their needs, providing them with learning and professional integration opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. These experiences contribute to preventing social exclusion and increasing the employment chances of these young people, thus supporting their transition toward a stable and sustainable professional life.

Strengthening local and regional partnerships

Traineeships contribute not only to the personal and professional development of students but also to strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and local or regional companies. These collaborations are essential to ensure quality training, based on the real demands of the labor market, and to create a sustainable framework for the professional development of young people in Ilfov County.

Stimulating the use of green technologies and sustainable practices

In an era of climate change and the transition to a green economy, traineeships represent an essential opportunity for young people in Ilfov County to learn and apply green technologies. These traineeships can significantly contribute to their preparation for jobs in emerging sectors that are continuously evolving.

➤ Preparing students for jobs in emerging sectors: Organic agriculture, renewable energy, waste management, and other green industries are expanding fields that require specific technical skills. Young people who participate in traineeships in these fields become much better prepared for the demands of the green and sustainable labor market.

➤ Increasing environmental awareness: Traineeships are an opportunity for students to learn environmentally friendly practices and technologies through direct application. This not only provides them with technical skills but also contributes to the development of environmentally responsible behavior.

➤ Adapting skills to current labor market trends: With an increasing emphasis on sustainability, green innovation, and social responsibility, young people who acquire these practices during traineeships become significantly more attractive to employers. Their training not only increases their chances of employment but also gives them a competitive advantage in an ever-changing labor market.

Strengthening civic spirit and social responsibility

Another significant benefit of traineeships is the development of a strong civic awareness

and a sense of social responsibility, essential for future community leaders.

➤ Taking responsibility: Active participation in traineeships helps students understand the importance of their work in the context of the community. Every task, even at a practical level, has an impact on those around them and on the environment in which they live.

➤ Community projects: Collaborating on projects that involve working with local communities allows young people to understand the active role of citizens in societal development and how they can contribute to solving social or economic problems in their area.

➤ Training active citizens: These experiences contribute to the formation of a mentality of involvement and social responsibility, representing an essential step in education for active citizenship. Young people will become more aware of the connection between education, work, and their contribution to the good of the community.

Integration into the formal education system and reducing school dropout

Traineeships can play a crucial role in preventing school dropout, especially in rural areas, where students may be more likely to drop out of school for various reasons.

➤ Linking theory to practical application: Practical experiences transform theoretical learning in school into a useful and relevant tool for everyday life. Students can see firsthand the applicability of knowledge and understand that education is the key to a stable job.

➤ Concrete learning purpose: Participation in traineeships gives a clear meaning to theoretical learning, reducing the feeling of abstractness of studies. Students recognize that what they learn can be directly applied in their future professional lives.

➤ Reducing the risk of school dropout: By actively integrating into the professional environment, traineeships help maintain students' motivation and increase their chances of completing their studies. This can lead to a significant reduction in school dropout rates in rural areas, where this phenomenon is often more pronounced.

Developing leadership skills and team responsibility

Traineeships are fertile ground for developing leadership skills and team-oriented responsibility, essential for success in any professional career.

➤ **Taking initiative:** Students are often encouraged to take on responsibilities within teams or projects, where they can demonstrate the ability to lead, make decisions, and propose innovative solutions.

➤ **Managing teams and responsibilities:** Another benefit of traineeships is that students learn to coordinate and collaborate effectively with their peers. This contributes not only to their professional development but also to the formation of a spirit of collaboration and solidarity.

➤ **Communication and negotiation skills:** In addition to technical skills, students also learn how to communicate effectively, how to negotiate, and how to reach constructive compromises. These skills are essential for any leader, but also for any employee in a collaborative work environment.

Improving perceptions of work and reducing stigma around technical professions

In many rural areas, technical professions are often perceived as inferior to theoretical ones. Traineeships can change this mindset by demonstrating the real value and complexity of technical professions.

➤ **Demonstrating the value of practical work:** Students are directly exposed to work in industry, realizing that technical professions are essential for the functioning of the economy. Through their experiences, they understand the complexity and importance of these professions.

➤ **Positive experiences:** By providing young people with a positive experience, traineeships help shift negative perceptions of technical jobs and increase respect for these professions. This can stimulate additional motivation to pursue a career in technical fields.

➤ **Increasing motivation for technical careers:** Young people who benefit from positive traineeship experiences are more likely to choose a technical career, thus responding to the growing labor market demands for qualified professionals in technical fields.

These dimensions reflect the significant impact of traineeships on young talents in Ilfov County, providing them with personal and professional development opportunities that offer advantages in the labor market and their communities.

The multidimensional analysis of the impact of traineeships on young people in rural areas of Ilfov County highlights their crucial role in facilitating the transition from education to the labor market. In a context marked by socio-economic disparities, low mobility, and limited access to professional opportunities, these traineeships prove to be an effective mechanism for mitigating these disadvantages and capitalizing on local human capital.

By developing technical and transversal skills, becoming familiar with organizational culture, expanding professional networks, and being exposed to modern work environments, young people from rural areas acquire practical training aligned with the current demands of the labor market. In Ilfov County, where both urban and rural areas meet, traineeships constitute effective platforms for experiential learning and career guidance, thanks to close collaboration with local economic agents. In addition, the complementary dimensions identified – such as the digitalization of traineeship processes, promoting inclusion, developing civic spirit, ecological education, and reducing the stigmatization of technical professions – strengthen the formative role of traineeships, integrating them into a broad framework of personal and professional development. They contribute to balancing the chances between students from rural and urban areas, supporting equitable socio-professional integration.

Traineeships, in their modernized form and adapted to local specifics, constitute a strategic catalyst for enhancing the employability of young people in Ilfov County. Continuing investments in this type of training, strengthening partnerships between schools and the economic environment, and digitalizing educational processes will have a significant impact in promoting sustainable professional integration and reducing territorial disparities in access to quality employment opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of data collected during the four school years analyzed highlights that traineeships have been an essential component of the educational process, facilitating the transition of students from theory to practice and supporting their integration into the labor market.

Traineeships in vocational and technical education have a significant impact on the chances of integration into the labor market of young people from rural areas, representing an essential tool in preparing them for the current demands of the labor market. The practical experience acquired within these traineeships facilitates the integration of young people into various economic sectors, encouraging the development of technical and transversal skills, as well as familiarization with organizational culture and the professional environment. In Ilfov County, where both urban and rural areas coexist, these traineeships have proven to be an important vehicle for creating close links between education and the labor market, thus responding to the need for qualification of the labor force in rural areas.

Impact on labor market insertion

1. Development of skills and abilities required by the labor market: Traineeships allow young people from rural areas to acquire not only theoretical knowledge, but also essential practical skills to meet the requirements of employers. Thus, they become more competitive in the labor market, benefiting from practical training directly applicable to their field of study.

2. Access to professional networks: Participation in traineeships offer young people from rural areas the opportunity to build professional networks that can facilitate future employment. This is an important opportunity, given the reduced mobility and limited access to information and resources in rural communities.

3. Improving motivation for education: The close connection between education and the labor market, provided by traineeships, increases the relevance of theoretical learning and stimulates students' motivation to continue

school. This contributes to reducing school dropout, a phenomenon that particularly affects young people from rural areas.

4. Promoting social inclusion and reducing disparities: Traineeships, which integrate components of environmental education, digitalization, and social responsibility, contribute to reducing the stigmatization of technical professions and to promoting a fairer climate for professional development, supporting a more balanced socio-professional integration between rural and urban areas.

Recommendations

1. Expanding and diversifying partnerships between schools and the economic sector: It is essential for educational institutions to strengthen and diversify partnerships with local and regional economic agents. These collaborations will ensure traineeships that are better adapted to market requirements and will facilitate a better integration of young people in strategic economic sectors, such as organic farming, green technologies, or IT fields.

2. Digitalization of educational processes and traineeships: Investments in technology must be a priority, given that the digitalization of educational processes and traineeships will help continually update students' skills, improve access to educational resources, and facilitate distance learning. This will contribute to creating young people who are better prepared for the globalized labor market.

3. Incorporating education for sustainable development into traineeships: In the context of global concerns about climate change and sustainability, integrating green practices and education for sustainable development into traineeships is essential. Young people must be prepared not only for technical jobs, but also to understand the broader impact of their work on the environment and the community.

4. Continuous training and improvement of leadership skills: In addition to technical skills, it is important that traineeships include training sessions on leadership skills, communication, and team management. These skills are essential for the personal and professional development of young people and for developing local leader capable of contributing to the growth of the community.

5. Support measures for rural youth: To combat school dropout and the migration of young people from rural areas to cities, it is necessary to develop additional support measures, such as free transportation or traineeship scholarships. These initiatives would reduce the additional costs that may discourage the participation of rural youth in such programs.

Traineeships in vocational and technical education represent not only an opportunity for practical training among young people in rural areas, but also a determining factor in their integration into the labor market. In a context where disparities between rural and urban areas are significant, these traineeships become an effective tool for leveling opportunities, offering young people from disadvantaged areas access to real professional experience and networks of contacts that can open up new opportunities. They contribute to reducing economic and social barriers that can hinder professional mobility and support their integration into an increasingly diversified and technologically advanced economy. At the same time, by acquiring skills that are required on the labor market, these young people become more competitive, and the risk of exclusion from the economy is considerably reduced.

In addition, traineeships are an essential step in shaping a responsible workforce prepared to respond to current economic challenges, such as the transition to a green and digitalized economy. They not only improve technical and professional skills, but also contribute to the development of values such as social responsibility, civic spirit, and respect for labor. Moreover, these traineeships facilitate integration into emerging sectors, such as organic farming, renewable energies, and digital technologies, areas where specialization requirements are constantly increasing. Therefore, the continuation and expansion of this type of practical education will play a crucial role in reducing territorial disparities and ensuring a fair transition toward a sustainable and diversified professional future for young people in rural areas.

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