



The 6th International Conference Edu World 2014 “Education Facing Contemporary World Issues”, 7th - 9th November 2014

## A Need Assessment on Students’ Career Guidance

Claudia Crișan<sup>a</sup>, Anișoara Pavelea<sup>b</sup>, Oana Ghimbuț<sup>c\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Babes Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Science of Education, Sindicatelor Street, nr .7, Cluj 400029, Romania

<sup>a</sup>Babes Bolyai University, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Science, Traian Mosoiu Street, Cluj 400029, Romania <sup>b</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Babes Bolyai University, CCARMA, Universităților Street nr.1, Cluj-Napoca, Romania <sup>c</sup>

### Abstract

The present study consists of a needs assessment on students career guidance and career counseling programs in the university. The research is based on a survey developed on a sample of 130 students from the College of Political, Administrative and Communication Science, Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca. The collected data has been both qualitative and quantitative. The students have been inquired about their professional path, about their career decisions, personal and professional values, abilities and competencies, intentions for the future etc. The most relevant results of the study show that: students are poorly informed about job opportunities, their expectations for the future are not connected with their own knowledge and abilities, they do not have a coherent career plan and encounter major barriers in the career decision process. The results are important for career counsellors as they can be used in the development of career guidance programs in the university environment.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociatia “Educatie pentru maine”].

*Keywords:* career counseling, students, screening research

### 1. Introduction

Often research that aimed to identify career counseling needs addressed this issue in a wide sense, without making a clear distinction between need and desires, the boundary between the two concepts being proven to be relatively fragile (Gonzales, 1997; Bernes and Magnusson, 2001; Witko, Bernes, Magnusson, Bardick, 2005; Witko et al., 2005).

Kaufman was the first to point out the necessity to approach the concept of needs in terms of a noun and not a verb, accurately emphasizing the ease with which one can fall into the trap of not taking into consideration a

\*Claudia Crisan .  
[claudiacrisan75@yahoo.com](mailto:claudiacrisan75@yahoo.com)

series of variables, not formulating assumptions and jumping to erroneous conclusions (Kaufman, 1997; Kaufman et al., 2003; Kaufman, 2006; Kaufman, Rojas and Mayer, 1993). As Kavale (2012) found out, career counseling needs of youth and adolescents were often approached in terms of attitudes, beliefs, potential solutions to the problems, faiths, satisfactions / dissatisfactions, level of aspiration or desires.

Among the studies that have addressed more objectively this issue, there is the study offered by Fouad et al. (2006) who investigated the needs of awareness and use of counseling services among students.

The authors of the study analyzed counseling needs in terms of three dimensions, respectively: the need of assessment, the level of awareness and the degree of utilization of services offered. Based on the data obtained, the research team found that students have shown counseling needs both in terms of career decision making and on issues related to stress caused by this stage. Dogar, Azeem, Majoka, Mehmood and Latif (2011) conducted a study on 60 final year students in order to identify the main counseling needs. Of the five main assessed needs categories (educational, vocational, emotional, social and behavioral) the vocational needs occupied the largest proportion, namely 45%.

A study of a much larger complexity was conducted by Răduleț (2013) on a sample of 724 students, aiming particularly the way they make career decision. Starting from the identified data, the author found that students are rather confused than career oriented, highlighting the urgent need of vocational guidance and counseling services that assist young people in the process of clarification of their own interests, abilities, skills, values, on one hand and on the other to help them understand the many factors having an active role in their career planning, which also influence their decision.

Therefore, the assessment of counselling needs must always be proactive, indicating gaps between the current situation and the desired situation being followed by the identification of optimal solutions to improve factual situation (Watkins et al., 2012). This implies a constant comparison between what is and what should be (Kavale, 2012).

According to the definition given by UNESCO (2000) career orientation can be defined as the process by which an individual is assisted in the discovery, acceptance and proper use of their abilities, skills and interests in accordance with their aspirations and values. (Guez, 2000 cited. Tanveer-Uz-Zaman Choudhary, But, 2014). According to Tanveer-Uz-Zaman Choudhary, But, (2014) career orientation is both a concept and a product. Analyzed in terms of a concept, career guidance aims optimal development of the individual, while viewed from a process perspective, it seeks the guidance of the individual in their own process of self-knowledge (identifying strengths and limitations, interests and personal values) and self-direction (ability to make decisions, solve problems, make choices).

Therefore, career counseling is an educational construct where the individual is supported in knowing oneself and then use this information to become useful and effective inside the society to which one belongs. This implies from the individuals side, the development of ones capacity to explore ones own vocational profile and potential, but also ones limits, the problems ones faces and the identification of realistic and rational solutions to solve them under the supervision of a specialist. Numerous studies indicated that counseling and career guidance offered to young people and adolescents in order for them to discover their abilities, skills, interests and values significantly correlates with academic and professional satisfaction and implicitly with career success (Makinde, 1993).

So the issue of career guidance directly impacts youth employability phenomenon (Paul, 2013). As Martinez and Dănălache (2008) mentioned "current reality shows that the main problem of young people is not finding a job, but rather getting a job as stable and appropriate for the individual concerned" (Martinez and Dănălache 2008, quoted by Pavelea, 2013, p. 13-14). By appropriate and timely identification of career counseling needs, appropriate, more sustainable and at the same time, at much lower cost, solutions can be offered.

Consequently, exploratory action of assessment needs should be considered as a first and unavoidable step in planning interventions in career guidance and counseling (Kava, 2012) in an educational system focused on the needs and interests of the individual.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Participants*

Our research was conducted on a sample of 130 participants, with ages ranging between 19-21 years ( $M=20.3$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ), 46 males and 84 females. All participants were students in Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty Political, Administrative and Communication Science sector,  $N=75$  on PR, and Public Administration ( $N=55$ ).

Demographic data offer us an image of the 130 bachelor students. Almost half of them are first year ( $N=60$ ), 46 – second year and 14 - third year students. A quarter of the respondents are paying for their studies, while the other  $\frac{3}{4}$  are budget students. 130 students participated during the entire study, and 22 of them were agreed to take part to a focus group or to an interview.

Participation in the investigation was voluntary and anonymous. Participation agreements, data confidentiality and other ethical aspects were assured.

## 2.2. Measures

The self-administered questionnaire consists of 47 questions. The main investigation themes include: academic choice motivation, students' abilities and competencies, interests and values, factors influencing the career choice, decisional style, academic and professional experience, career decision information sources and students' future intentions and objectives.

For the qualitative approach we conducted 2 focus-groups and 5 interviews. 22 students were agreeing to participate in this part of the study. During discussions we approached 10 major themes: the motivation for studying in the current field, major factors influencing career decisions, professional experience, the field of future, work, exploratory strategies for career, personal branding, career counseling needs.

## 2.3. Research design

In the first stage all participants were informed about the purpose of the present investigation and about the instruments used to collect the data. To avoid any measuring error that might have been due to the data collection procedure, all participants were given a collective briefing before questionnaire completion. After this stage every participant had individually completed the form in a paper-pencil format.

The participants completed the questionnaire individually, at the faculty. For any questions, there was a person able to help them understand the questions. It took 30 minutes for a student to complete the questionnaire. It was anonymous, and all answers were collected in a data base.

Using email we invited students to participate in focus groups and interviews. 22 of them agreed to participate in focus groups meetings.

## 2.4. Procedure

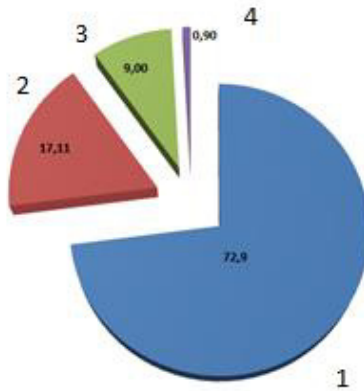
In the first stage all participants were informed about the purpose of the present investigation and about the instruments used to collect the data. To avoid any measuring error that might have been due to the data collection procedure, all participants were given a collective briefing before questionnaire completion. After this stage every participant had individually completed the form in a paper-pencil format.

The participants completed the questionnaire individually, at the college. For any questions, there was a person able to help them understand the questions. It took 30 minutes for a student to complete the questionnaire. It was anonymous, and all answers were collected in a data base.

Using email we invited students to participate in focus groups and interviews. 20 of them agreed to participate in focus groups meetings. One meeting was for one hour and was conducted by 2 researchers. Also, 5 persons agreed to participate in individual interviews conducted by one of the researchers. Each interview was semi structured and the discussions took place for half an hour.

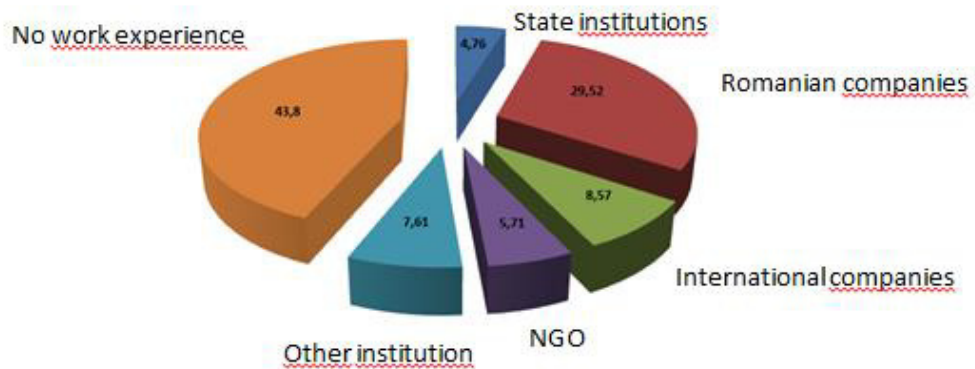
## 3. Results

Data interpretation allowed us to have a better image of our group. We looked into students' professional status and we have seen that most of the them are inactive, as seen in the pie-chart below:



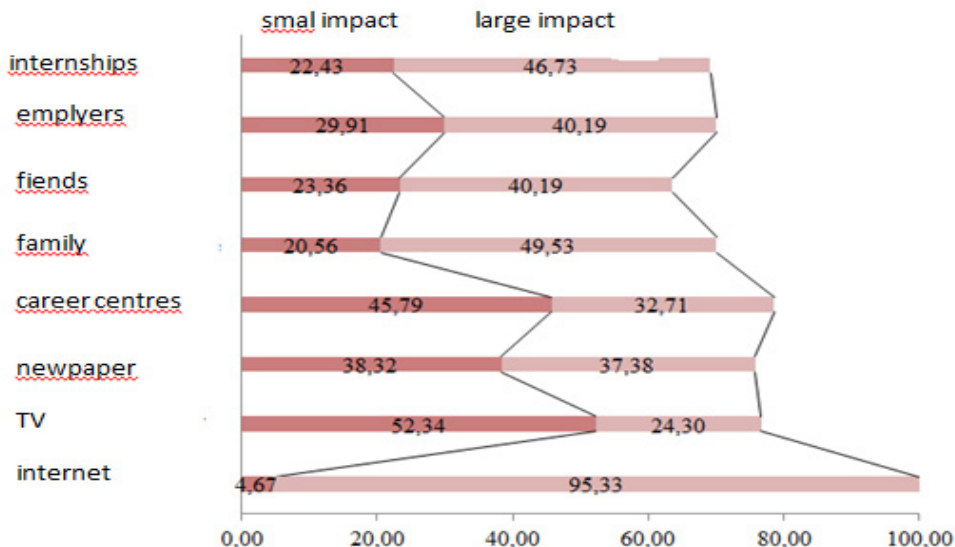
Graphic 1 – Professional status: inactive in the field work, active on the field work, occupied person, employees

Even if only a percentage of 17.11 students have declared themselves as active on the labor market, almost half of them have had several contacts with the employers, such as:



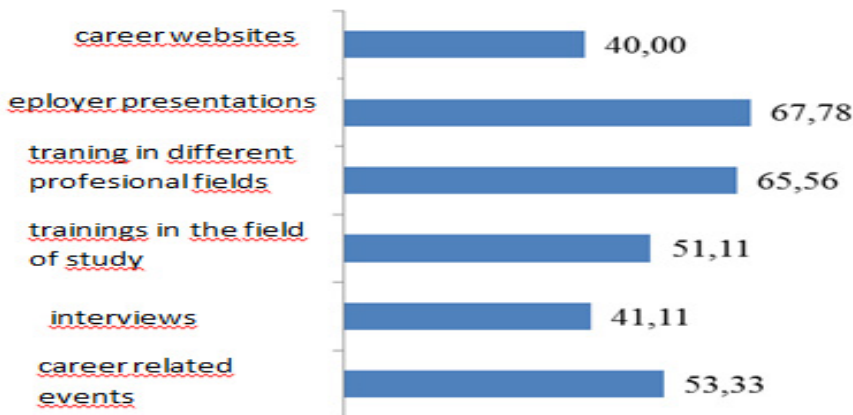
Graphic 2 - Employers

Students’ main information sources are internet, television, written media, family and friends, as well as career centers. Not surprisingly, according to the specific of their age, the great majority place internet as the most important source of information used when confronted with career decisions. This can be both an advantage, due to the quick access to wide information, and a disadvantage, because of their lack of training in selecting relevant and veracious content. We have identified a small impact of career centers, almost half of the students declaring that they haven’t received any assistance from career counsellors. There are two main reasons for this situation. First, students are uninformed about the existence of the Career Center, and second – they have no idea about their activity in the University, nor about the services offered. Students place a great importance on information coming from family and friends, this indicating a low level of autonomy in making career decisions.



Graphic 3 – Impact of information sources about career

Despite their declared high interest in finding relevant job-search information, we have detected an extremely low level of engagement in actions that might lead students to a regular employment. Therefore, the graphic below shows the percentage of students who have not benefited from active sources of information in career counselling. Students find the discussions with the employers as the most useful for shaping their vocational path, but, at the same time, they fail to exploit the opportunities to contact the employers at job fairs, company presentations in university or other networking events.



Graphic 4 – Sources of information used by students for their career

Few of the students have attended trainings and workshops related to their university major, which can be explained in terms of lack of information on these kind of services, not necessarily as a low interest on behalf of the students. Low usage of active career-information sources could also explain the fact that most of the students rely on

family, friends and support groups when taking career-related decisions, rather than consulting specialized career counsellors.

Bill posters seem to be the most useful source of information for students. 96 out of the total 130 students use bill posters when looking for information concerning job opportunities. Along with the internet adds, these are the most frequent used sources of information by students. But it is not necessarily a wise decision, as these are both passive sources of information, as the students reads the information without critically analyzing the content, therefore he is simply exposed to the content, but does not filter it.

Information bureaus, alongside job fairs and training sessions are the least accessed sources of information by students, as they do not perceive them to be useful instruments. The interviews have clarified this problem, showing that students are not aware of the projects developed in the Career Center, do not have information about the free access to career counselling services and are not aware of the possibilities for managing these resources on a medium and long term base. This problem, combined with the influence of families and friends in the decisional process, weakens students' vocational decisions and makes their path not to be a solid one. The lack of self-knowledge, the problems encountered in finding job opportunities, the focus placed on a single employer, without a proper match between student's personal interests and values and the professional environment turns the entire decisional process into an incondite matter. At the same time, most of the students affirm that they tend to either avoid taking decisions and standing up for them, or taking decisions on the spur of the moment.

Half of the students place themselves in the self-knowledge stage of career, only 11% are looking for a job and 10% are developing a career that has already started. 24% of them are either exploring career options or taking career decisions. When asked whether they have a career plan, 1/3 of the respondents declared that they do not have one. Only 6% of the students say they have a career plan for the next five years or 10 years. This clearly shows that they are not future-oriented, have no clear objectives for the future, and they postpone the decision as much as possible. More so, an impressive percentage of the respondents (88%) show an interest on a master's degree usually in the same field of study as their bachelor's degree.

Students place their career indecision on the lack of information concerning the possible alternatives or on the contradictory interest for different domains, showing once again that they do not have an active interest on taking career decisions. They do not hold the necessary information to make career related decisions, either do they have the necessary tools to decide between different options.

60% of students have a CV and 82% own a social network profile, showing the importance they place on social networking via internet. And about a ¼ of the students have developed a profile on the job searching networks.

When asked about who holds the responsibility for developing students' abilities and competencies in order to increase their employability, more than half of the respondents believe that it is the University's responsibility, about 20% that it is the students' and only 5% that it is the employers'.

Concerning students' expectations from a Career Center aspect, we have identified wide range of activities, such as: career assessment, career counselling, career decision support, workshops on career search instruments, job interview preparation and career orientation. We have also identified among students a preference for face-to-face counselling services rather than online, doubled by a preference for group activities, rather than individual. This shows once again that students hold an interest on career counselling activities, but it is a passive one and they do not like to be confronted directly, on a one-to-one scale with their interests, values, options and decisions. We have also identified a special interest on information coming from employers, but the route students' prefer is a quite unconventional one. They would rather have the employers come in the university to display company presentations and job openings than seek information themselves and address a specific company for hiring.

The focus-groups have helped us to clarify some of the aspects included in the questionnaire. First of all, due to the fact that students do not hold relevant working experience, they have a vague image about the expectations of the employers. They tend to generalize the few encounters they had with employers in job interviews and this only increases their confusion. They define career success in terms of professional satisfaction, career preferment and promotions, personal and professional development, high income, professional prestige, respect, appreciation and stability.

Second, they tend to focus on developing transversal competencies without having a strong image on the professional competencies required on the labor market.

Third, the focus-groups clearly showed that students are not aware of their own interests. As defined in psychology, interests are crystallized preferences of a person concerning certain subjects or activities. Interests are

usually indicated by focus of attention on certain activities, positive emotions accompanying activities, a tendency to engage in certain activities and a positive attitude on the content of the activity, as well as by a high frequency in exercising a behavior, a preference over time (more than six months), intensity and persistence in developing an activity. None of the students interviewed in focus-groups displayed any particular interest. They have a vague idea about some activities they enjoy doing, but not at the level of interests or preferences.

This problem leads to the next one. Not being aware of their interests, the students find difficulties in shaping and articulating their own values. If not given a certain list of values to rank, only two of the students could specify three to five personal values. They like to express their feelings about certain values, but do not possess a strong concept of value. At the same time, they do not make the distinction between personal and professional values. Given the fact that they encounter major difficulties in defining their interests, the students face major problems when expressing their core values. Not surprising as values are usually crystallized through social models and personal experiences. As most of the students have had scarce working experience, they have not had the opportunity to set career anchors and to rank them and then act accordingly when searching for jobs. Schein (1996) clearly shows that career anchors enable people to recognize their preferences for certain areas in their job which can help career planning.

Fifth, the students hold a low level of information concerning the elements of the career decision process. Students' career decisions tend to be influenced (as supported by Lent, Brown and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory) mainly by proximal environmental barriers, such as: informal career contacts, the structure of opportunities, the emotional and financial support of the family, and exposure to discriminatory hiring practices.

#### 4. Discussion

Career maturity refers to the individual's readiness to make informed, age-appropriate career decisions and cope with career development tasks (Savickas, 1999). Through this study, we aimed to identify the level of career maturity of our students in order to develop proper career counseling programs in the university.

We have identified high levels of career immaturity, passive involvement in the career decision-making process and limited acquisition of information about the world of work. Students are passing through the emerging adulthood phase (cf. Arnett, 2000; 2004), placed between adolescence and young adulthood, an age of exploring identity, of instability, concentration on self, of the feeling-in-between and of multiple possibilities. This is a stage of exploration (cf. Super, 1980) possibilities concerning education, social activities and relationships, professions etc., a period of trying new experiences, gathering information, improving abilities, developing competencies, crystalizing identity and implementing occupational options.

The results showed as poor abilities in career explorations and also in the decision making process. The majority of our respondents are in a self-knowledge phase, trying to identify their strengths and also their limitations related with career. We found out that they enter in a decision making phase without have any kind of understanding about themselves or about the career field. They are orientated to find a job in their study related field, without knowing their career abilities or interest. Going further, we discovered that internet is the main source for information for them, but they are not using specialized websites or career platforms. They have a passive approach toward career exploration and that can be a result of poor information and also of an incomplete image of them as job candidates. They own a social network profile showing their career interest and applying for jobs, but don't have a long term career plan, they use only their CV when applying for a job and focus only on decision factors as many and personal development.

All these aspects have determined us to design career orientation programs that focus on increasing students' awareness on the importance of active involvement in pursuing a career, in assuming a critical perspective on accessed content and in developing the professional competencies employers are looking for. Career counselling services could raise awareness among students concerning the need to act responsibly when facing a career-related problem. We agree with Borgen's opinion (1991), according to whom individuals play an active role in their own career shaping process, both at the intellectual and behavioral level. Career counselling programs should play an important role in empowering students to take a more active role in the career decision-making process and to engage in activities that could increase their employability.

### 5. Limitations of the current study

The study was conducted in the Faculty of Faculty Political, Administrative and Communication Science, so our results can be extrapolated only in this field. The majority of our participants was first and second years students. We recommend implementing the same research also for post graduate students for a better understanding of the process.

For the quantitative part of the study we used a self-report questionnaire. It is very important to have students' perspective in what concerns their abilities and competencies, but we have to take into consideration the fact that their answers are subjective and the instrument does not offer us information about social desirability. This is one of the reasons we considered necessary to organize focus-groups and to conduct interviews. For a better understanding of the aspect, it is important to use mixed methodology. One of our future research directions is to organize more focus-groups and in-depth interviews with students and also to encourage them to keep a diary during their internships or their first month on the job. A longitudinal approach of career research can offer us a more comprehensive image of what our students want and, mainly, what are their needs related to career counseling.

### References:

- Arnett, J. J. (2000). "Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties", *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 5, pp. 469-480
- Borgen, F. H. (1991). "Megatrends and milestones in vocational behavior: A 20-year counselling psychology perspective", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 39, pp. 263-290
- Dogar , Azeem , Majoka , Mehmood Şi Latif (2011) Need Assessment of Students' Guidance and Counseling *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences ISSN: 2046-9578, Vol.1 No.2*
- Fouad, N. A., Guillen, A., Harris-Hodge, E., Henry, C., Novakovic, A. & Terry, S. (2006). Need, awareness, and use of career services for college students. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 14, 407-420.
- Gonzalez, M. P. (1997). Career education needs of secondary school graduates from Asturias, Spain. *Journal of Career Development*, 23(3), 215-229.
- Guez W, Allen J. Guidance. 2000; Available from: [http://www.unesco.org/education/mebam/module\\_1.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/mebam/module_1.pdf)
- Kaufman, R. (1997). Needs assessment basics. In R. Kaufman, S. Thiagarajan, & P. MacGillis (Eds.), *The handbook for performance improvement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/ Pfeiffer
- Kaufman, R. (2006). *30 seconds that can change your life: A decision-making guide for those who refuse to be mediocre*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press.
- Kaufman, R., Oakley-Browne, H., Watkins, R., & Leigh, D. (2003). *Strategic planning for success: Aligning people, performance, and payoffs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/ Pfeiffer.
- Kaufman, R., Rojas, A. M., & Mayer, H. (1993). *Needs assessment: A user's guide*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.
- Kavale (2012) Needs and Needs Assessment in Career Guidance and Counselling: Lack of Scientific Exploration and Justification? *Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning Journal of the Indian Association for Career and Livelihood Planning (IACLP)* Volume 1, Issue 1
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D. & Hackett, G. (1994). "Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance [Monograph]", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45, pp. 79-122
- Magnusson, K., & Bernes, K. (2001). *Expressed career planning needs of youth in grades 7 to 12*. In H. Suzin (Ed.), *Natcon Papers 2001*. Toronto, ON: Career Centre, University of Toronto.
- Makinde O. (1993). *Fundamentals of guidance and counselling*. Macmillan Publisher,.
- Martinez R., Dănălache P.(2008) Socio-professional insertion: the analysis of transition towards active life and adult life in the context of the European Union. *Sociologie Românească, Vol. VI, no. 2/2008*, pp. 61-75
- Răduleş A. (2013). *Orientarea în carieră a studenţilor*, Ed. Accent, Cluj-Napoca
- Savickas, M. L. (2003). "The Theory and Practice of Career Construction", Brown, S.D.; Lent, R.W. (ed.). *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons
- Schein, E.H. (1996). "Career anchors revisited: Implications for career development in the 21st century", *The Academy of Management Executives*, 10, pp. 80-88
- Super, D. E. (1980). "A life-space, life-span approach to career development", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16, pp. 282-298
- Tanveer-Uz-Zaman, Choudhary , But (2014) Guidance and Counseling for Science Students: a Need Assessment, *Indian Journal of Education and Information Management, Vol 3(4), 13-18*
- Watkins, R., West-Meiers, M., & Visser, Y. (2012). *A guide to assessing needs: Tools for collecting information, making decisions, and achieving development results*. Washington, DC: World Bank
- Witko, K., Bernes, K. B., Magnusson, K., & Bardick, A. D. (2005). Senior high school career planning: What students want. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 6, 34-49