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Is the satisfaction of the graduate students in the educational sciences an indicator of their future professional career?

Ionela Roxana I. Urea*, Special Education Department, University of Bucharest, 050663 Bucharest, Romania

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Abstract

Today, developing a professional career in the same field that persons have an academic degree is very difficult to accomplish. The statistical data in Romania pointed that about 39.7% of the university graduate students work and try to have a professional career in another field than the one in which they have a university diploma. There are a lot of studies that have been done during the last four years focusing on revealing the necessity of working in interdisciplinary teams in elaborating the professional master curricula in relation with the employer's requests, the specificity of occupations, the local or regional resources, etc. This paper tries to reveal the implications that the satisfaction towards the bachelor training programme in educational sciences has upon pursuing a continuous professional career in the same field.

Keywords: Career development, student satisfaction, students' attitudes, well-being, professional development.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Ionela Roxana I. Urea**, Special Education Department, University of Bucharest, 050663 Bucharest, Romania. *E-mail address:* roxanaurea@yahoo.com / Tel.:+ 4-031-425-3456

1. Purpose of the article

The pressure of demographic distribution of people in a specific social environment is felt at global, European, national and sector levels as affecting the institutions and the components of the social realm. The attempts at sketching their coordinates go beyond the values of the mental exercise, most often invoking research and educational determinations. This study approaches a penetration into the basic or derived processes connected with the wish to analyse the *influences* of the satisfaction of the graduate students towards their formation in the educational sciences on their future professional career in the same field. There is a real spiral of criticisms regarding the university training system with a real community awareness of the long-term implications resulting from the social policy that operates in the educational field under a certain model. The analyses are focused on revealing the differences that are significant beyond the current information in the process of professional career addressed to graduate students in the educational sciences.

2. Conceptual analyses and background

Today, choosing a professional career in any occupational field seems to be a complex process which is related, more and more, to an interdisciplinary approach by all the interested parties: the person situated in the position of choosing a career, the family members of the one situated in the position of choosing a career, the counsellors who provide the career counselling services, the future potential employers and last, but not least, the features and the dynamic of a labour market.

The concept 'career' is mainly related to 'occupation'. Occupation, as viewed by Dumitru, aims the concrete development of a productive activity associated with a profession, in an economic-social unit (firm, institution, enterprise/company), at a certain job, through which a person earns his/her living (Dumitru, 2008, p. 203).

So, different people will have different occupations. The manner in which one's occupation is chosen depends on the occupational stereotype that exists in one's culture/nation and most of them come from the collectives (customs, social mentalities, etc (Urea, 2016, p. 25)

Occupational stereotypes are preconceptions about: (a) a particular occupation; (b) persons performing that occupation and (c) finding a suitable occupation for each person. These stereotypes limit the process of occupational exploration and hamper the teenager's/adult's interests for certain areas of activity. The formation of occupational stereotypes begins very early in the process of ontogenetic development. They include:

- gender stereotypes: 'women are more suited to domestic occupations and men to those which are more technical';
- stereotypes about the schools that students have in mind: 'that school is for rich/poor people';
- stereotypes about professions that students have in mind: 'If you are a doctor, you'll earn a lot of money'.

Despite these occupational stereotypes, through serious studies and researches, the following elements of an occupation were highlighted (Dumitru, 2008, pp. 203–204):

- a) *Work* is what we make of pleasure, proving a certain 'vocation' or 'calling' without necessarily being paid. We need to find the kind of work/activity that gives us aspirations and ideals, for which we feel attracted (see also Belkin, 1984).
- b) *The job*, which involves: performing an activity for money; a certain professional training (knowledge, abilities, skills, etc.); use of certain tools and special working tools; performing concrete actions and operations in a workplace arranged as a 'job place'; duration of work (work programme); salary (depending on certain parameters and indicators of quantitative and qualitative performance) and compliance with norms and rules: deontological, protection, quality, etc. (see also Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006).
- c) *The profession* which is considered a specialised social activity, where the person responds to requests, capitalising on his/her potential at a certain moment as a result of specific learning and training programme. Practising a profession requires general (theoretical and practical) training and specialised training in an institutionalised setting (school, university, etc.) and effective practice (learning, apprenticeship and training at work). The profession is the specialty or qualification obtained through studies and it is certified at graduation.

The professional career is given by all the activities, occupations related to professions, functions, positions, status-roles of a person during his/her life (extended acceptance). Thus, if 25 years ago Super (Urea, 2016, p. 25) gave a particularly professional meaning to the term *career*, afterwards there were added connotations related to personal, community life, etc.

The professional career may be dealt with economically, sociologically or psychologically:

- From an economic point of view, career consists of a sequence of professional positions occupied by a person, as a result of his/her training and professional merits.
- From a sociological point of view, career is a succession of roles played by a person.
- The professional career is the result of work performance. The career is different from 'careerism' which is an exaggerated desire to succeed professionally, socially, economically at any cost!
- From a psychological point of view, career (professional development) depends on the person's skills, interests, values, needs, previous experience and aspirations (Iman, 1998).

Generally, having a professional career implies all the aspects of the human life development and with a specific dynamic in different planes (apud. Geysers, 1994), such as: self-knowledge and the formation of interpersonal relationship skills; initial education and training; assuming different roles in life; how to integrate, live and plan the different events of life (see also Nugent, Barker, Welch, Grandgenett, Wu & Carl Nelson, 2015).

The experts, particularly from social sciences, during the last decade, have tried to reveal the factors that may produce certain influences or can conditionate or determine the decision making process related to a professional career: family through functions and roles; the school—addressed to a multi-level way through direct influences (educational process) and indirect influences (values, human resources, material resources, etc.); friends/the reference group—approached in terms of modelling a person's relational-value criteria for choosing a career; the demands of the labour market—approached through the limits and directions provided in choosing a professional career; the occupational stereotypes related to choosing a professional career; mass-media—approached through the information process regarding the dynamics of the labour market, professional mobility and the existence of successful models in professional careers; the special aptitudes/skills required for some professions; motivation for professional career—approached through the esteem needs and also to the self-achievement needs; the personality features, etc. (see also Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Gati & Saka, 2001; Neacsu, 1978).

Having a professional career involves first of all a specialised professional training, which is different and implies a series of basic requirements. So, there are occupations for which it is necessary to

graduate from high school, as there are occupations for which a bachelor degree or master degree is needed.

Universities, through quality management, analyse not only the number of students who have completed either bachelor or master degree studies but also focus on measuring the satisfaction experienced by them, thereby enhancing the quality and efficiency of the university's training programmes. Thus, during the past 10 years, in Romania, the graduate' level of satisfaction regarding bachelor's degree or master training programme has been taken, more and more into consideration, as an indicator of the quality of the training programmes provided in order to perform a career. (Rotaru, 2011, p. 176)

3. The structure of research

3.1. Objectives and hypotheses of the research

The professional career in Romania is done by reference to the basic requirements of an occupation and requires either graduation from high school, either graduation from university studies.

In order to facilitate access to study programmes, to ensure the mobility of students and skilled labour, specialisation groups are used in Romania in accordance with ISCED-F 2013 International Standard Classification of Education: Fields of Education detailed levels. These specialisation groups are: Educational Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Journalism and Information, Business, Administration and Law, Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, information and communication technologies (ICT), Engineering, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary Sciences, Health and Social Work, and Services (MEN, 2017).

Choosing a career in the field of education sciences has had a specific dynamic during the last 7 years in Romania, and the number of graduate students coming from Educational Science represented, at the end of 2016, 3% of the total number of graduate students (MEN, 2017).

In Romania, the professional career in the field of educational sciences knows an initial stage conditioned by the graduation of specialty university studies at the bachelor's level: Pedagogy, Special Psychopedagogy, Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education and Social Pedagogy. Each specialisation has a specific training curriculum focused on forming specific competences that are presented in RNCIS (Romanian National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education, 2018) as well as specific training conditions regulated by the orders of the Romanian Ministry of National Education.

The completion of the professional career in the field of education sciences is accomplished by attending the specific master programmes.

Special Psychopedagogy, as a specialisation of Educational Sciences, is aimed to providing training to future specialists that will deal and work with persons with special educational needs/deficiencies, either in their education in relation to the type and degree of deficiency, or in socio-professional insertion of people with special educational needs/deficiencies (Universitatea din Bucuresti, 2018).

There are four state universities in Romania that provide training in Psychopedagogy: 'University of Bucharest', 'Babes-Bolyai University' from Cluj- Napoca, 'West University' from Timisoara and 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza University' from Iasi.

The number of candidates for the Special Psychopedagogy Department, Faculty of Psychology and Educational sciences, University of Bucharest, at the bachelor's level training programme and master training programmes has increased during the last three years. Most of the candidates are graduates from high school and only 15% are candidates who have a bachelor degree in another field and want to attend the specialisation programme in Special Psychopedagogy as a second specialisation. The main competences that a person will achieve after graduating the Special Psychopedagogy bachelor's level are: 'Specific Intervention Programmes (compensation-recovery therapy) for people with SEN,

Designing educational programmes adapted to different levels and target groups, Complex assessment (psycho-socio-pedagogical) of children, youth and adults with special needs (SEN), Counselling, guidance and psycho-pedagogical assistance of various categories of persons/educational groups (children/students, families, teachers, employees, etc.) and Facilitating the school, professional and social inclusion in society inclusive of people with SEN, Self-evaluation and continuous improvement of professional practices and career development' (Urea, 2015, p. 230)

The dynamic of the labour market in the field of offering specialised interventional educational services for persons with special educational needs/disabilities/vulnerabilities has recently increased the demands regarding the professional background of the teachers, counsellor and therapists. Therefore, it has become a necessary, but not enough, condition to complete a master programme. Why is it not enough? Because, in Romania, the quality of the educational services provided by teachers, educators, counsellors—teaching staff—is regulated by the Statute of the teaching staff—part of the Romanian National Education Law no.1/2011 with the subsequent modifications and complements, where the need for continuous professional development and the teachers' development is specified by attending training courses, participation in scientific events, participation in methodical commissions, etc. and the need to accumulate 120 credits during 5 years.

This situation has raised the following question: is pursuing a professional career in Special Psychopedagogy related to satisfaction of graduate students towards the formation in Special Psychopedagogy?

To answer this question, we performed an educational exploratory research, aiming at revealing the implications that the satisfaction towards the bachelor training programme in Special Psychopedagogy has upon attending a continuous professional career in the special education field.

Our research focused on two major objectives: (a) revealing the satisfaction towards the training programme in Special Psychopedagogy at Romanian bachelor's level in Special Psychopedagogy; (b) revealing the well-being level from the perspective of being an educator/teacher who works with persons with special educational needs

We started from the following hypothesis: *taking into consideration the specific personality traits of the Romanian bachelor graduate students in Special Psychopedagogy, we assume that we will find specific influences of satisfaction regarding the graduate training programme upon the specific well-being for a continuous professional career in the special education field.*

3.2. The procedure of the research

Our research had an initial testing procedure on 26 Romanian candidates to admission to master training programmes in 'Psychopedagogy of Inclusive School', Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, in 2015 and the obtained Cronbach Alpha index ($\alpha = 0.751$) allowed us to proceed to an extended research that had three stages: (a) investigation of the personal satisfaction towards the training programme in Special Psychopedagogy at Romanian graduate students in Special Psychopedagogy, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest; (b) investigation of the well-being level from the perspective of being an educator/teacher that works with persons with special educational needs;

4. The target group: characteristics of the investigated population

The research was done between 2015 and 2018 on 127 candidates for admission to master training programme called 'Psychopedagogy of Inclusive School', Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, 88 women and 39 men, aged 22–49 years (with mean of 33.8 years and median = 33.3 years); all of them coming from the urban environment. The participation of the Romanian subjects was volunteered. All of these candidates worked, at the moment of the research, in the special education field as teachers (64.5%), as educators (29.8%) and as counsellors (5.7%).

5. Methods of research

In our investigation we used the following methods: (a) The ‘Satisfaction questionnaire’ regarding the bachelor training programme in ‘Special Psychopedagogy’, created in 2014 by R. Urea for the Romanian graduate students from Special-Psychopedagogy (internal consistency index: 802, fidelity test-retest index: 758; (b) the ‘The Ryff’s Well Being Scale’, adapted in 2016 by R. Urea for Romanian young adult (internal consistency index: 701, fidelity test-retest index: 839); (c) 71 non-directive interviews and (d) statistical processing methods.

6. Results

6.1. Investigation of the satisfaction towards the training programme in special psychopedagogy at Romanian bachelor’s level in special psychopedagogy

The ‘Satisfaction questionnaire regarding the bachelor’s level training programme in Special Psychopedagogy’, created in 2014 by R. Urea, is an instrument aimed to investigate the following variables: qualities of the teaching/training process; qualities of evaluation of learning outcomes; utility of professional practicum, utility of pedagogical practicum, didactic resources provided, the level of training and the competences of the teachers. Each of these variables was evaluated on five-level scale, with minimum one point and maximum five points.

Each graduate student was asked to assess his/her personal satisfaction in relation with the graduate training process in Special Psychopedagogy. The distribution was uniform; the skewness index values were from 1.908 to 4.228, and with standard error of skewness from 0.742 to 0.1.091, kurtosis index values from 0.715 to 1.242, and with standard error of kurtosis from 0.709 to 1.821.

The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The satisfaction of the graduate students of special psychopedagogy towards the bachelor training programme

Variables	Average coefficient
Teaching	4.4–
Assessment process of the learning outcomes	4.4
Didactic resources provided	3.8
Utility of professional practicum	4.8
Utility of pedagogical practicum	4.6
The level of training and the competences of the teachers	4.4
Index of satisfaction	4.3

6.2. Investigation of well-being status at Romanian special psychopedagogical graduate students who teach/educate persons with special educational needs

This investigation was performed by using ‘The Ryff’s Well Being Scale’. ‘The Ryff’s Well Being Scale’ is a specific instrument aimed to investigate the following variables: personal autonomy, self-control, personal development, positive relationships, meaning of life and self-acceptance. It also computes the current level of well-being (see also Seligman, 2012).

In our research, we used all the variables of a Likert scale of five levels of assessment: from 1—the lowest level to 5—the highest level.

The distribution was uniform; the skewness index values were from 1.226 to 3.702, and with standard error of skewness from 0.795 to 0.1.407, kurtosis index values from 0.815 to 1.554 and with standard error of kurtosis from 0.803 to 2.031.

Table 2. The components of well-being at investigated subjects

Variables	Average coefficient
Personal autonomy	4.5
Self-control	4.2
Personal development	3.9
Positive relationships	3.4
<i>Self-acceptance</i>	3.90
Level of well- being (global index)	4.3

7. Discussion

7.1. Regarding the investigation of the satisfaction towards the training programme in special psychopedagogy at Romanian bachelor's level in special psychopedagogy

From table no.1, we noticed first of all that all the components that we took into consideration as been relevant for assessing the satisfaction of the graduates of university programme in Special Psychopedagogy have higher value (minimum 3.8 point to maxim 4.8 points from a maximum assessment point 5), including the global of satisfaction. The situation is not surprising and it reflects that the professional brand depends on the level of basic professional formation at our investigated subjects.

Second, at our investigated subjects, satisfaction with the graduation of the university programme in Special Psychopedagogy is related to the utility of professional practicum (4.8 points average from a 5 points maxim) followed by the utility of pedagogical practicum. This situation reflects the awareness of the role of practical-applicative knowledge in the daily activities of the investigated subjects. These acquisitions, although at a basic level, allow the investigated subjects to meet the challenges of educating people with special educational needs, not to panic and seek support/ask for help to their colleagues with wider experience in the field (see also Urea, 2015).

So, we can say that the satisfaction of the graduate students towards the university training programme *at our investigated subjects is related to acquiring useful practical skills that will define the professional brand and endorse the efficacy of the training programme.*

7.2. Regarding the investigation of well-being status at Romanian special psychopedagogical graduate students who teach/educate persons with special educational needs

From the data synthesised in table no. 2, we noticed that the higher value of the constituent elements of the well-being at our investigated subjects is *personal autonomy* followed by *self-control*. These two elements signify, on the one hand, that they become aware of the specific items that contribute to building the 'professional brand' (impact factor for personal autonomy = 0.804; impact factor for self-control = 0.801), but there are also the elements that, together with 'personal development', allow individual differentiation as a 'professional expert' (impact factor for personal autonomy = 0.795; impact factor for self-control = 0.800). The other two elements, 'the meaning of life' and 'self- acceptance' become factors that determine the individual status of 'professional expert' (impact factor for 'the meaning of life' = 0.828; impact factor for self-acceptance = 0.839) and they are specific, especially for those subjects who worked more than 5 years in the field (direct, significant correlation index with 'The meaning of life' $r = 0.869, p = 0.05$; direct, highly significant correlation index with 'self-acceptance' $r = 0.907, p = 0.05$).

The statistical data analyses also allowed us to establish the following correlations, between the values of components of satisfaction regarding the graduated university programme and the values of elements of well-being:

- direct, very significant correlation between 'Teaching' and the 'Meaning of life' (correlation index $r = 0.785$, $p = 0.05$);
- direct, very significant correlation between 'Assessment process of the learning outcomes' and the 'Self -acceptance' (correlation index $r = 0.799$, $p = 0.01$);
- direct, very significant correlation between 'Didactic resources provided' and the 'Positive relation' (correlation index $r = 0.767$, $p = 0.05$);
- direct, highly significant correlation between 'Utility of professional practicum' and the 'Personal autonomy' (correlation index $r = 0.914$, $p = 0.05$);
- direct, highly significant correlation between 'Utility of pedagogical practicum' and the 'Self-control' (correlation index $r = 0.931$, $p = 0.05$);
- direct, highly significant correlation between 'The level of training and the competences of the teachers' and the 'Personal development' (correlation index $r = 0.921$, $p = 0.05$).

So, we can say that the well-being of our investigated subjects is an expression of the accommodation to professional demands that shape the routes of professional career in the field of Special Psychopedagogy and generate specific conduct structures.

8. Conclusion

This research was aimed at revealing the implications that the satisfaction towards the bachelor's training programme in Special Psychopedagogy has upon pursuing a continuous professional career in the special education field.

In our investigation, we used instruments created and adapted for the Romanian young adults

With the help of statistical analysis, we found that the Cronbach's Alpha index is 0.869.

The research findings suggest:

1. The level of satisfaction regarding the graduated university programme in Special Psychopedagogy has a direct influence upon pursuing a professional career in the special education field;
2. The assumption of our research was confirmed.

9. Recommendations/future direction

The conclusions present in the paragraphs above can be used in:

1. Assessing the efficiency of the university training programme in terms of 'opening the way' for a professional career in the special education field.
2. Developing strategies for increasing the efficacy of professional practicum, stipulated on curricula of university training programme or on curricula of master programme.
3. Changing the curricula of the master programmes.

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