

Managing the Need for Career Guidance and Counseling for Students

Case Study – The Bucharest University of Economics Studies

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Abstract

This article discusses the management of career guidance and counselling need of students. Choosing the right career and going through the necessary steps of forming a young specialist, is a complex process. Career guidance and counselling programs provide multiple benefits to individuals, community and society. Namely, they support the maximum professional development potential of people in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, reduce college dropout, improve youth transition between different levels of education, increase participation in education, develop social inclusion and equity or simplify the access to the labor market. This paper emphasizes on both the need for career guidance and counselling activities for students and the positive impact this activities have on the academic life. The present article conducts a research regarding the needs for career guidance and counselling, felt by students from the the Bucharest University of Economics Studies. Moreover it underlies the necessity of psycho-pedagogical counselling.

Keywords: *career guidance, counselling services for students, managing the need for career guidance and counseling activities for students, students career development, professional and personal development, academic life*

JEL classification: I20; D71; M14

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1. Introduction

In Romania, career guidance and counselling services for students were introduced relatively recently, namely in 2005, through the OM 3235 from February, 2005 (order of the ministry). This order requires that universities have to establish Career Guidance and Counseling Centers, which endorse students to take appropriate decisions, in structuring their own training path. Furthermore, the Education Law no. 1/2011 provides that “the principle, governing the student’s activities within the academic community and the principle to health and free public complementary services in higher education, is expressed through: students counselling and awareness conducted by teachers, career guidance and psycho-pedagogical counselling”⁶. In addition to this law, in 2014, November, through OM 650/2014 (order of the ministry), the methodology framework regarding the organization and operation of the Career Guidance and Counseling Centers in higher education in Romania, which compel universities to establish and support these centers, was approved.

The studies conducted by the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR), show that the “career guidance and counselling services in universities, are still in their initial phase regarding the efficiency, they have in relation to the objectives they were created for” (2014)⁷. Likewise, they present that “it is necessary that students have access to psychological counselling” and that “students should benefit from quality career guidance and counselling services” (2016)⁸.

Beyond the legislative provisions, we consider that the need for career guidance and counselling is poorly recognized by Romanian students for various reasons, particularly there is no culture of counselling among them, there is still the mentality that those who use such services, have problems or even if there are such services, they are slightly promoted.

2. Problem statement

At European level, the requirement for universities to manage properly and to adapt their services to students needs is provided in public policy documents. This document stipulates that the management of these services should focus on the students, assuring them a good professionalism and should develop their professional and transversal skills, which will exploit their own potential, ensuring

⁶ Legea Educației Naționale nr. 1/2011, art. 202, alin. 1, pct. b.

⁷ Alianța Națională a Organizațiilor Studențești din România, *Serviciile de consiliere și orientare în carieră – Perspectiva ANOSR*, 2014

⁸ Alianța Națională a Organizațiilor Studențești din România, Raport narativ dezbateri ANOSR Bologna în Universități Dimensiunea socială a educației - cum facem învățământul superior să fie accesibil pentru toate categoriile sociale și cum facem față provocărilor demografice? 26 aprilie 2016, Cluj-Napoca

their integration and employability. (Bologna Declaration, the European Commission Strategy for Higher Education).

American universities have a good tradition in offering advice and guidance to students. Iowa State University⁹ offers a variety of counselling therapies, based on short-term individual or group intervention, for example interventions in crisis, career counselling, couples counselling or interventions, which improve performance and mental health. Creighton University¹⁰ provides career counselling services designed to help students to: deal with everyday problems; personally develop; increase their self-esteem; improve their relationships; manage stress and anxiety, loneliness or depression; operate with alcohol or drug abuse. Furthermore, they support students to learn easily, to be successful and deal with mental health, couple or family problems.

Virginia Commonwealth University¹¹ offers counselling services to ensure the well-being of students, personal development, prevention and mental health.

Trinity University¹² offers six types of counselling, namely psychological assessment, individual counselling, psychiatry, medication management, crisis interventions and clinical care.

The expertise of the Career Guidance and Counseling Center from the Bucharest University of Economics Studies shows that the student needs for career guidance and counselling results from two directions: school integration, management of academic problems and career debut.

If we refer to the school integration problems, they typically appear in the first year of studies because of spatial separation of parents, especially for those who leave their hometown, new school demands, social relationships, characterized by a greater degree of neutrality (with colleagues and teachers) and more responsibilities regarding financial, time and materials management etc.

In the second year of undergraduate studies, we refer to problems in terms of school tasks, professional debut, (first employment, internship at a potential employer) or couple problems.

The last year of undergraduate studies, comes with academic challenges related to graduation and choosing the best educational and professional path.

The postgraduate students also present specific features in terms of counselling. Being at the very beginning of their careers, students mostly face identity issues. Even though very important, the academic activities is often perceived as a pressure element. Thus, we consider that students face an identity confusion - employee or student?

All this social changes take place at the same time with profound transformations in terms of personality (18-25 years), a period characterized by instability, concern for establishing identity, intense efforts to adapt, an incomplete vision of the professional environment or employers requirements, insufficient

⁹ <http://www.counseling.iastate.edu/counseling>

¹⁰ <https://www.creighton.edu/chc/studentcounselingservices/aboutus/>

¹¹ <https://students.vcu.edu/counseling/>

¹² <https://inside.trinity.edu/student-success/counseling-services>

knowledge, the desire for self and freedom assertion, avidity for knowledge of new social media etc. (Richițeanu-Năstase, 2009; Diaconu, Stăiculescu, 2012). Psychologically, the features of adolescence coexist a period with those of maturity. This situation is deeply felt by the young people. Responsibilities are increasing and social and economic pressures as well. (Green, Șchiopu, 1995; Diaconu, Stăiculescu, 2012).

In our opinion, counselling services have to take into consideration the following activities: to help students get to know themselves better, to properly manage resources, to take responsibilities, to solve their school integration, social, professional problems, to ensure mental health etc. Therefore, by creating a wide range of activities, CCOC should find a suitable way to manage and to satisfy student's career guidance and counselling needs.

3. Research questions

The present research aims to show whether there is a direct dependency relationship between the career guidance and counselling need, felt by students, and the students informing activities about the counseling services offered by the university.

Moreover, this research also refers to an existing relationship between the career guidance and counselling need, felt by students, and the complexity of the career guidance and counseling services.

4. Purpose of the study

In the conducted approach we focus both on the management and systematization of students career guidance and counselling needs and on their perception on the career guidance and counselling services, offered by the Career Guidance and Counseling Center from the Bucharest University of Economics Studies, in furtherance of a starting point in designing its future activities.

5. Research methods

In order to identify the counselling needs of the students from the Bucharest University of Economics Studies, we conducted an empirical sociological research in October-November 2016 that allowed direct observation by applying investigation based on a questionnaire.

The survey was conducted among students, enrolled in undergraduate programs, from the Bucharest University of Economics Studies.

The study involved a total number $N = 473$ of student's respondents, belonging to the following departments:

- The Faculty of Theoretical and Applied Economics (ETA) year I, II and III: $N = 121$ (year I: $N = 35$, year II: $N = 46$, year III: $N = 40$)
- The Faculty of Economic Cybernetics, Statistics and Informatics (CSIE), year I: $N = 79$

- The Faculty of Business Administration (in Foreign Languages FABIZ) year III: N = 70
 - Faculty of Finance and Banking (FABBV), year I: N = 79
 - The Faculty of Management (MAN), year III: N = 30
 - The Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems (AMIS) master CAIG – CIG-RO, year I: N = 13
 - The Faculty of International Business and Economics (REI) year III: N = 45
 - Various specialties (egg. students enrolled in the Teacher Training Department DPPD), year II: N = 36
- Dividing the years of study is as follows:
- Year I: N = 193
 - Year II: N = 82
 - Year III: N = 185
 - Master: N = 13

The types of samplings we used in this work were: judgmental sampling and sampling group.

As research tool, we utilize a standardized questionnaire with 8 questions, 2 Closed-Ended Questions (Yes / No) and 6 Open-Ended Questions. The questionnaire was administered directly as follows:

- In information sessions on the activities of CCOC, conducted by CCOC employees.
- At lectures and seminars, conducted by teachers, members of CCOC.

6. Findings

One first question CCOC and ASE raised was to what extent did the university students know/hear about the CCOC services. At the moment of the study, the CCOC had been active in the university for almost 2 years (December 2014), and during this time efforts had been made towards both development of the services rendered, and their promotion.

Overall, for the whole sample, the percentage of students who have heard about the CCOC slightly surpasses the number of students who do not know about its existence (53.49% versus 46.51%).

When it comes to the number of students who have heard about CCOC, one can observe that among freshman year students, there is a significantly higher percentage of students who do not know about its existence, than the percentage of the ones who have heard about it. The percentage of the students who have heard becomes larger with the increasing in the year of study. The number of master students who participated in this research is very small, therefore the conclusions for this subsample should be interpreted with caution.

It is worth mentioning that the time of research included the last week in October and the first weeks in November (approximately weeks 4-7 of the university year). Therefore, it is possible that the freshman students had not yet

been accustomed to student life, fact that could have had an influence on the small percentage who have heard about CCOC. On the other hand, we should mention that the sampling was not randomly made, but through access at the courses of the professors who represent the faculties in COCC, who have it in their tasks to promote the center. Therefore, it is possible that for the entire university, the percent of students who have heard of CCOC to be even smaller.

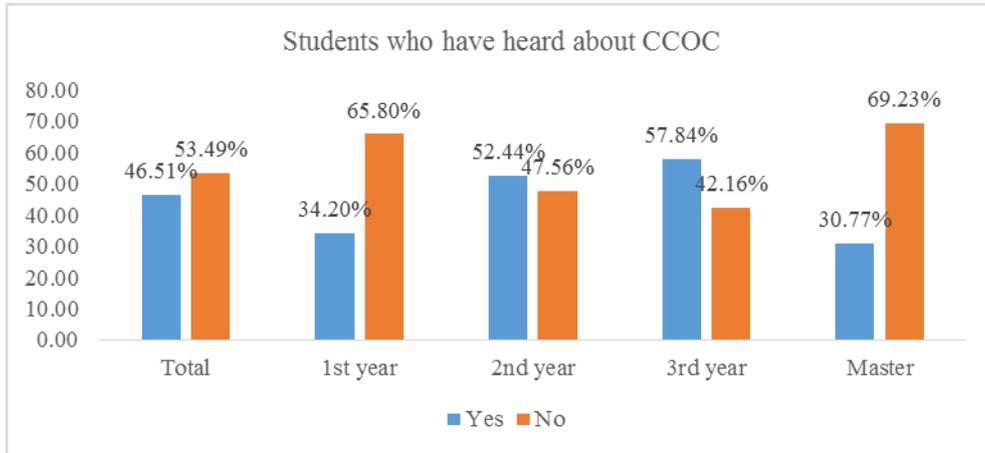


Figure 1 – The weight of students who know CCOC

The participants have also been asked about the context they had heard about the CCOC services in.

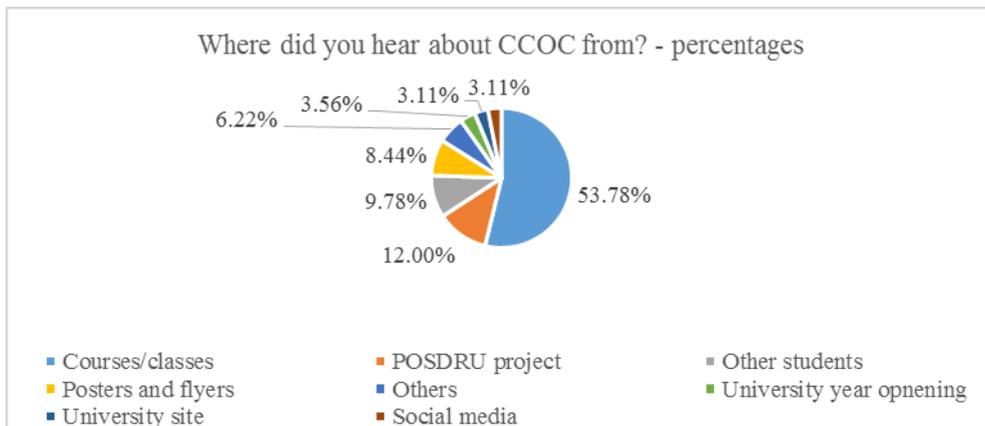


Figure 2 – The context the participants have received information about CCOC in

As one can see above, most of the respondents have heard about CCOC in courses/classes (53.78%), especially the ones taught by the professors involved in the CCOC activities (DDPD professors and the representatives of the faculties in CCOC).

The second source of information about CCOC is represented by the POSDRU projects (12.00%). It is exclusively the case of the FABIZ students, who have been beneficiaries of a POSDRU project where they have been presented the services offered by CCOC.

Other important sources of information are represented by other students, including the bachelor degree graduates (9.78%), CCOC posters and flyers (8.44%).

The “Others” category consists in isolated answers representing information sources, such as students associations, secretarial offices, educational offer and the Big Brother project (organized by CCOC in November 2016).

It is worth mentioning the small number of students who have found out about CCOC at the notice boards in the university and online (especially Facebook). When answering another question, the students highlight these two contexts as being the one they are the most exposed to.

Most of the students supported the necessity of the counselling services.

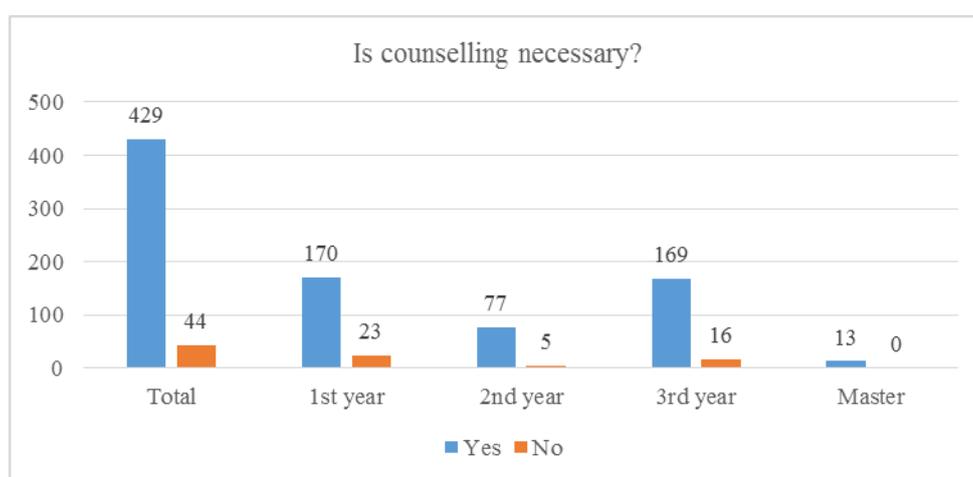


Figure 3 – The necessity of counseling services, as assessed by the participants

From the analysis of the responses there can be seen that the overwhelming majority of students consider that the counseling services are useful.

When asked about the way counseling could help them, the respondents offer multiple ideas.

The respondents consider that the main usefulness of counseling is the help in defining their professional route. This answer is offered by 62.85% of them, in

the following forms: career guidance, choosing the right job or choosing a right career path for them.

Counseling could also be useful for self-knowledge (15.58%) and personal development (9.61%).

Isolated responses are included in the “Others” category, such as: development of self-confidence, extension of the personal horizon, adaptation to student life, socialization etc.

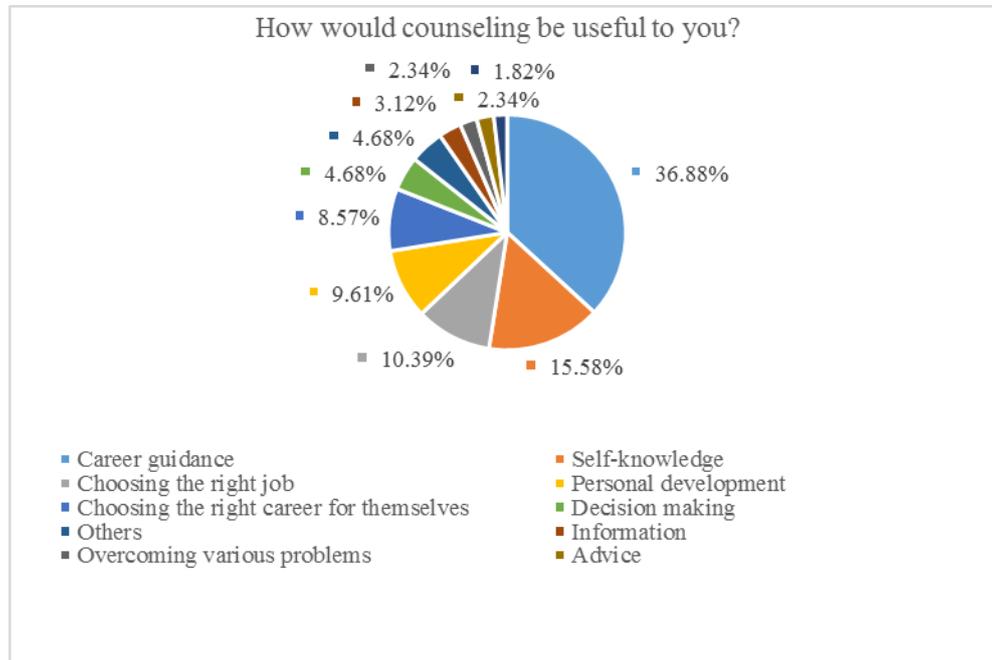


Figure 4 – Assessment of how counseling could help the participant students

It is worth mentioning the fact that the first year students offer fewer answers to this question than the ones in the other years, or offer rather vague answers. This may mean that even if they think that counseling is useful in general, they do not know what it means or do not find a way to capture this usefulness for them.

When asked about the types of counseling activities they would like for CCOC to organize, the student’s answers range was very various (the question was one with open ended answers).

The figure above reveals the fact that the students expect CCOC to organize a wide range of activities, including workshops, psychological testing, career counseling and discussions.

The “Others” section includes suggestions mentioned by one or two respondents. These include: job offers, psychotherapy, surveys, contests, brainstorming, fairs, sports activities, parties etc.

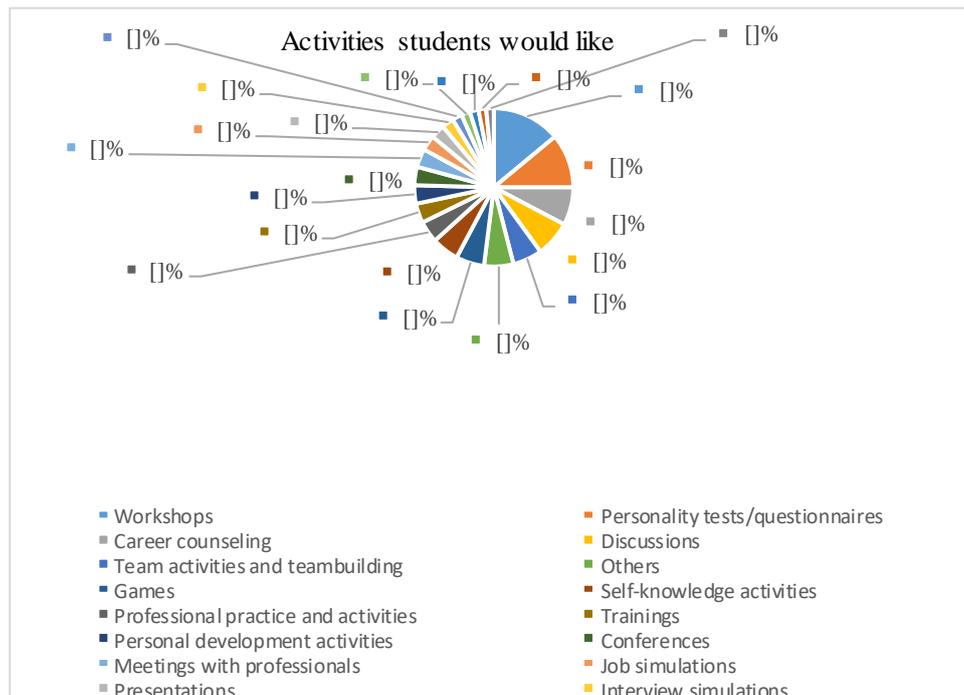


Figure 5 – Activities CCOC should organize, according to the respondents

As it can be seen, the students express their expectations in various terms.

Summarizing, we can say that there are several types of activities, the students want that CCOC organizes for them. These activities emphasize some of their basic needs: the need for self-discovery and personal development (testing, self-knowledge activities) and information (workshops, trainings, lectures etc.) and the need for interaction and play (team activities, interactive games). One can also see their interest in the future (career guidance, interview simulations, employers’ visits, CV writing etc.) Below, in Figure 6, there can be seen the results of the systematization of the students’ needs.

One can see that there are no differences between faculties or study year regarding the types of activities they expect from CCOC.

The respondents mention various counseling activities subjects. Each of the subjects could be inserted in the general curriculum. For example: personal development, with the subjects: communication, leadership, public speaking, time management, teamwork etc.; career development with subjects like economy, CV writing, job interview participation etc. Each subject can be organized separately or included in the general curriculum, depending on the experienced necessities and

the students' characteristics. The variety of the mentioned subjects suggests the professionals who could be involved in the thematic counseling activities: career counselors, psychologists, psycho-pedagogues, professionals in the approached fields etc. The fact that the respondents mention a variety of specialized subjects show that they have various problems in dealing with them and need clarifying and specialized support from professionals in the economic field.

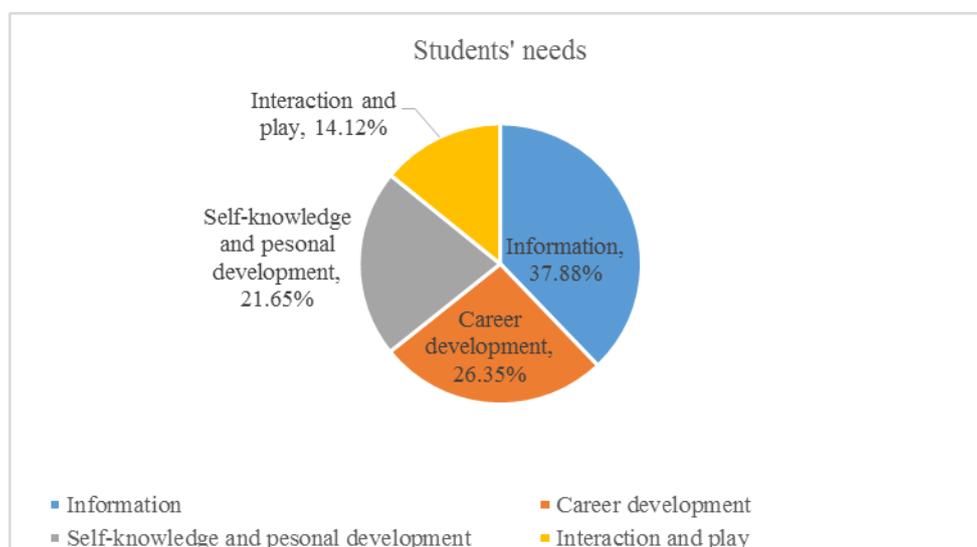


Figure 6 – The weight of the students' identified needs

The scores in Figure 7 represent raw scores, i.e. the number of respondents who made the respective suggestions.

The respondents suggest numerous workshop subjects. There can be distinguished on the first 3 places personal development (suggestion made by 72 respondents), career guidance (52 respondents) and economy/economic subjects (47 respondents).

The workshop subjects, suggested by the students, could be divided in hard skills (subjects regarding the faculty they attend), soft skills (subjects regarding their own person/personal development) and others. The suggestion "economic subjects" is mentioned by students regardless of their major, while others appear only to students with the respective majors (finance, IT, accounting).

Generally, the first year students show fewer wishes regarding the CCOC activity (they show a higher tendency to leave blank the space designated for the desired workshop subjects).

Besides the suggestions in the Figure, the students make another 44 suggestions, but each of them is mentioned by 4 persons at most. Among those there are hard skills and soft skills, but also cultural, hobby and social subjects.

It's worth mentioning the fact that even if the overwhelming majority of students say that CCOC could help them in the career guidance process, the range of workshops they want is much wider.

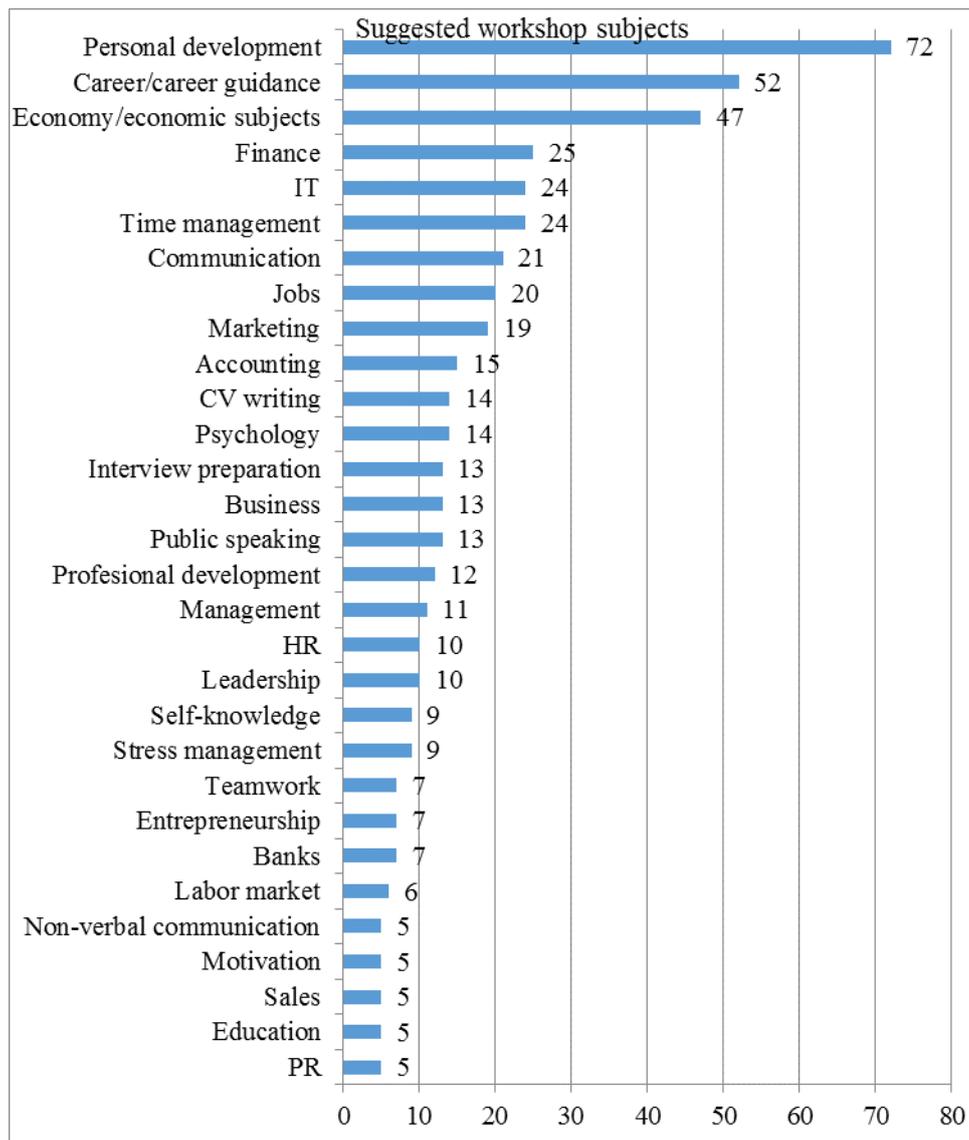


Figure 7 – The subjects CCOC should approach in workshops, according to the respondents

Some of the students offer suggestions of titles for the CCOC workshops, including: “How to present yourself at an interview”, “Discover yourself and see what suits you”, “The importance of one’s career for themselves”, “Qualities

required by different jobs”, “How to have a successful career”, “How to write our CV”, “The right job”, “Hiring opportunities”, “Get to know yourself”, “How we see ourselves in 5 years”, “The career ABC”, “The first job”, “The relationship employee-employer”, “What suits me best?”, “Work destination”, “What do I want from my career?”, “How to make yourself noticed even if you don’t have professional experience?”, “Top employers”.

7. Conclusions

Most of the respondents feel the need for counseling services, regardless of their university year or level of education. For them, the usefulness of counseling stems from the help offered in defining the professional path, self-knowledge and personal development.

The respondents want that CCOC organizes a large range of activities, workshops, psychological testing, career counseling and discussions, to begin with. These activities should meet the students’ needs for self-knowledge, personal development, information, social interaction and play.

The students make various suggestions of workshop subjects they want CCOC to plan. In the first places among their suggestions are personal development, career guidance and economy/economic subjects.

CCOC needs to promote more intensely its counseling services through various means: direct presentations at teaching activities, online on the Facebook pages of faculties and students groups, notice boards and administrative spaces of the university.

CCOC should permanently manage student’s needs, identified in a variety of individual and group counseling services in fields like: personal development, overcoming crises, improvement of interpersonal relationships, insertion and employability, dealing with academic issues etc.

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