

NINTH GRADE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADMISSION,
CAREER PATH AND SUCCESS IN LIFE.
CASE STUDY REGARDING THE FIRST DUAL VOCATIONAL
SCHOOL IN ALBA COUNTY

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Abstract

Choosing a career and career path is very important and difficult for many young secondary school graduates, especially since very few students in Romanian schools benefit from personal and professional counseling and guidance during their high school years or in the period immediately preceding the enrollment in the high school or professional cycle. In this sense, even if in many county events are organized in which each school promotes its educational offer, after the end of the admission process and enrollment of students, too little emphasis is placed on the reasons that led high school graduates to choose a certain educational institution. This study accomplished in a technological high school in Alba County captures exactly this aspect, while highlighting students' perceptions about success in life, counseling and career guidance, as well as the factors they consider to be determinants of academic and professional success. This educational unit was not chosen by chance, here operating the first dual vocational school in Alba County and among the first of its kind in the country.

Keywords: education, dual vocational school, admission, counseling and guidance, professional development, career, career path;

Résumé

Le choix de la carrière et du itinéraire professionnel est très important et parfois assez difficile pour beaucoup d'élèves qui finissent le premier cycle de l'enseignement secondaire et cela parce qu'il y a un nombre insignifiant d'élèves dans les écoles roumaines qui bénéficient de conseils en évolution professionnelle et d'orientation personnelle et professionnelle, tout au long de leur scolarité ou bien quelques mois avant leur inscription pour l'entrée au lycée ou aux cours professionnels. En ce sens, même si dans de nombreux départements du pays, on organise des événements de présentation d'offres éducationnelles, après avoir fini le processus d'admission et d'inscription des élèves dans le cycle supérieur d'enseignement, on n'accorde pas trop d'intérêt aux raisons qui les ont conduit à

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choisir tel ou tel établissement scolaire. Cette étude menée dans un lycée technologique du département d'Alba, surprend exactement cet aspect, tout en mettant en évidence les perceptions des élèves sur la réussite dans la vie personnelle et professionnelle, le conseil et l'orientation professionnelle, ainsi que les facteurs qu'ils considèrent décisifs dans la réussite scolaire et professionnelle. On n'a pas choisi fortuitement cet établissement scolaire, car il figure parmi les premiers de la Roumanie qui aient institué une école professionnelle en système Dual: L'Ecole professionnelle allemande de type Dual.

Mots clés: éducation, enseignement professionnel, admission, conseil et orientation, évolution professionnelle, carrière, itinéraire professionnel;

Abstract

Alegerea carierei și a rutei profesionale este una foarte importantă și dificilă pentru foarte mulți dintre tinerii absolvenți ai școlii gimnaziale, cu atât mai mult cu cât foarte puțini dintre elevii din școlile românești beneficiază de consiliere și orientare personală și profesională pe parcursul anilor de studii gimnaziali sau în perioada imediat premergătoare înscrierii în ciclul liceal sau profesional. În acest sens, chiar dacă în multe județe se organizează evenimente în care fiecare școală își promovează oferta educațională, după încheierea procesului de admitere și înmatricularea elevilor, se pune prea puțin accentul pe motivele care i-au determinat pe absolvenții de gimnaziu să aleagă o anumită instituție de învățământ. Acest studiu realizează într-un liceu tehnologic din județul Alba surprinde exact acest aspect, scoțând totodată în evidență percepția elevilor despre reușita în viață, consilierea și orientarea profesională, precum și factorii considerați de aceștia ca fiind determinanți în reușita școlară și profesională. Aceasta unitate de învățământ nu a fost aleasă aleator, aici funcționând prima școală profesională duală din județul Alba și printre primele de acest tip din țară.

Cuvinte cheie: educație, învățământ profesional dual, admitere, consiliere și orientare, dezvoltare profesională, carieră, rută profesională

1. Introduction and research context

The education process is based primarily on trust and future perspectives (Alexandrescu, 2009, p. 496). High school graduates who want to choose between high school and vocational school, must first keep in mind that admission to theoretical high schools is the first stage in the rise to university. Thus, only those high school graduates who have the competences to become specialists in the field should have access to university (Achiri, 2014, pp. 178-179). This does not mean that for the rest of the students, the access to high school education is blocked, but the alternative of vocational schools can be much more beneficial for them in the medium and long term. In this way, it is possible to avoid situations in which university graduates are hired after graduation in totally different fields, which in many cases are related to vocational school training. At the same time, young people who choose to start training in a vocational school can continue their studies and further their education, even by pursuing university studies.

On the other hand, it is extremely important for young people, in addition to vocational training, to acquire notions and to understand early on certain aspects related to career planning and development (professional development), with the main goal to acquire knowledge that they will use both on a personal and professional level (Clenciu, 2016, p. 34). All this knowledge being extremely important in the new paradigm of lifelong learning, both in a formal, non-formal and informal setting (Samoilă, 2011, p. 61). However, many of the high school students who have reached high school or vocational schools do not know essential and very important aspects about the profession they opted for at the beginning of the high school or vocational cycle, this being very common even at the end this cycle of studies (Ion, 2015, pp. 25-26). Consequently, this fact shows us the lack of strategy of the Romanian education system regarding the counseling and orientation of students, but also the need to establish an educational trajectory according to the interests, skills and competences of students.

Educational policies based on school choice have become increasingly popular, thus solving problems related to segregation and equal opportunities in education (Gheba, 2018, p. 103). In this way, in order to harmoniously shape the future prospects of students so that they acquire desirable behaviour from all points of view, it is extremely important that the family and the school have common principles and objectives regarding the school and professional orientation of students (Jigău, 2009). Therefore, if there is concordance between the strategies that the two institutions offer, then students have the chance to benefit from a good educational trajectory, this being supported by the consensus between the most important decision-making institutions for their direction and school and professional future. And if to these are added the involvement of the business environment, the professional future of young people can be a solid basis for their individual development, with strong implications for the social welfare felt throughout society. Precisely in this sense, in our country, dual vocational education has been implemented, which provides a partnership between the school, parents-children and economic agents.

On the official website of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, dual education is presented as: “a form of organization of vocational and technical education, tripartite, based on a partnership contract between the economic operator, the educational unit and the unit administrative-territorial, as well as individual contracts for practical training between the economic operator, student/parent-guardian and the educational unit”. Also on the same site is specified the fact that 2017 was declared “the year of vocational and technical education in Romania”, therefore, using the same source we note that “the essential stake of the campaign is to change the perception of this route of education and training, as initial vocational education and training play a key role in acquiring the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to integrate into a dynamic and competitive labor market”. In this sense, the present study is carried out in a technological high school, exactly one year after this campaign of the ministry, more precisely the respondents who during the campaign were in the

8th grade are now participants in this study, and a part among them being students of the dual vocational school.

2. Study objectives and methodological aspects

This study captures the perception of high school students or vocational students about the importance of career and success in life, but also the reasons that led them to choose a certain profession and a certain educational institution, namely the Technological High School “Alexandru Domșa” from Alba Iulia, as a place to continue their studies. It should be mentioned that this high school also has the first dual vocational school in Alba County (“Școala Profesională Germană Alba” - SPGA), established in 2013 and being among the first educational institutions of this type in Romania. This form of vocational education follows the German model, a model in which students practice during vocational school directly to the partner economic agents of the school, in this way their professional training is achieved almost entirely in factories. On the other hand, this type of education brings students more benefits in addition to the opportunity to practice directly in companies, they also benefit from other facilities, the most important being the professional scholarship paid by the partner economic agent, this being offered additionally, in addition to the professional scholarship offered by the Romanian state to all students attending vocational school courses.

A second objective of this sociological study was to capture the perception that ninth grade students in the 2018-2019 school year within the educational institution where the study took place about their perception about career in general, through by reference to success factors, to daily activities with an influence on the career or to the influence that the family, the group of friends and the society show in the career choice.

A final objective of the study was to identify the perception that students have of counseling and career guidance, whether we are discussing participation in high school during such classes, courses or workshops, or whether we are discussing the current assessment of school hours. Counseling and vocational guidance, from the educational program of students enrolled in dual vocational school.

An integrated approach based on the combination of concepts that help achieve the objectives of this research was used for the present study. This research was conducted using a questionnaire-based sociological survey method. The tool used in this exploratory study was built to be self-applied, with each student answering questions individually in a class. The data collection period was February 19-21, 2019. Thus, a number of 110 questionnaires were distributed, completed and entered in the database, representing all the ninth grade students within the school, who were present in the courses during the study.

The study had as universe of research (the population from which a certain number of persons investigated directly is extracted) all the ninth grade students from the 2018-2019 school year of the Technological High School “Alexandru

Domşa” from Alba Iulia. During that school year there were two ninth grade classes for high school education and three classes for dual vocational education. It cannot be said that a sampling method was used, but only ninth grade students participated in the study. A total of 110 people were interviewed, regardless of the form of education they were enrolled in (high school or vocational), gender or background. At the same time, the students who graduated the middle school within the same educational institution were not divided into a special category, nor if the students came from repetition or transfer.

3. Profile of respondents

Given that we are talking about a technological high school, mainly with a mechanical and electromechanical profile, the share of boys is higher than that of girls, a fact that emerges from the questionnaire. Thus, regarding the sex of the respondents, 81.7 percent of them are male and 18.3 percent are female, and their age is between 14 and 18 years. Most of the ninth grade students, 65.7 percent, being 15 years old at the time of study. They are followed by 26.9 percent who are 16 years old. The rest of the respondents are grouped as follows: 4 children are 14 years old; 3 children are 17 years old and one student is 18 years old. Regarding the environment of origin, even if the school is located in Alba Iulia, 68.8 percent of ninth grade students are from rural areas and 31.2 percent are from urban areas.

Discussing the annual average of the last year of study of the respondents, more precisely, the annual average of the 8th grade, it is, according to the students, between 5 and 9.8. Discussing the average at the National Assessment of the ninth grade is between 1 and 8.62. It should be noted that there are respondents who did not participate in the national assessment. These data should be taken only as an informative title, in order to have a correct picture of these aspects, the official statistics of the school, compiled at the beginning of the school year, following the completion of the admission process, should be consulted. Thus, the data presented above, regarding the environments are in line with the information provided by the surveyed students.

The distribution of classes of the respondents is as follows: 33.6 percent represents the students from the high school classes (17.3 percent - the field of electronics, automation and 16.4 percent - the field of electricity) and 66.3 percent are the students from the vocational school (dual vocational education). The 110 respondents being distributed by classes as follows: 19 students in the ninth grade A high school (17.3 percent); 18 students in the ninth grade B (16.4 percent); 25 students in the ninth professional A class - SPGA (22.7 percent); 24 students in the ninth grade B professional - SPGA (21.8 percent) and also 24 students in the ninth grade C/D - SPGA (9.1 percent class C and 12.7 percent class D). It is thus observed that the presence and number of children in vocational education classes are higher than in high school classes. A possible explanation is the penalties made by cutting apart (amounts) from the professional scholarship, depending on the number of unmotivated absences made each month.

4. Reasons that determined the choice of school

Equal opportunities in education mean, first of all, equal access to educational resources, students' school results being directly influenced by these resources. One of the processes that seriously affects the equality of school opportunities is the differentiation of schools, more precisely the socio-economic characteristics of students become much more important than the facilities that distinguish schools (Hatos, 2008, p. 141). In this sense, there are significant differences between high schools, theoretical and national colleges and the rest of the technological, vocational and vocational schools.

The mechanism used in the distribution of students in high school and vocational schools in Romania is based primarily on a meritocratic criterion (Gheba, 2018, p. 124), before discussing the perception that students in the ninth grade have about career and vocational training, we wanted to establish the reasons behind the choice of this school. Thus, the respondents had at their disposal a list of reasons or they could offer another reason, which was not found in that list, but which determined them to enroll in this educational unit. Most of the ninth grade students who participated in the study (39.4 percent) say that they themselves chose to enroll in this school, without being influenced by any of the reasons we will present further. However, 38.5 percent of them say that one of the reasons they chose this school was their friends who were already studying here. And if to this percentage, we add the 14.7 percent of students who told us that their former classmates chose to study here, and they wanted to study with them at the same school, we can see that the desire to study in the same school with friends or former general colleagues was quite high for many of the freshmen. This fact is easy to explain, because we are talking about young people in their early teens, a period in which the influence of the group of friends is significant, and this aspect emerges from the study.

On the other hand, a high percentage of students, 35.8 percent, admitted that they chose to come to this high school, due to the average and/or poor results obtained in the National Assessment, so they did not have the opportunity to be admitted to another school. Most likely, the respondents refer here to the theoretical high schools (colleges), because only in Alba Iulia there are at least two more technical high schools where admission is possible with small averages and/or without presentation at the National Assessment exam. It can be said that if the media did not allow them access to a theoretical high school, therefore the students chose this educational unit at the expense of other technological high schools.

Proximity to home was a good enough reason to choose this school for 23.9 percent, and 20.2 percent of respondents wanted to be students at this high school for the material basis of the school. At the same time, 13.8 percent of those surveyed said that the reasons why they chose this school were determined by the desire to learn a trade or to obtain a specialization for the future job, in the technical field they wanted. Also here are those who wanted to come to this high school for material benefits, more precisely for the vocational scholarship offered

in the dual vocational school, but also for the possibility of employment immediately after graduation, at the economic agents where they did their internship.

Last but not least, the family also played a role in this choice, although this, according to the students, was not a very significant one. Thus, 8.3 percent of the respondents claim that their parents chose this school for them. On the other hand, 7.3 percent of young people have or have had at least one brother or sister who has been to this school in the past.

In addition to establishing the reasons that determined the students to choose the school, the study aimed to determine with whom they consulted before choosing the school and how often these discussions (consultations) took place. The **Table 1. Frequency of consultation with various people in choosing the school**, presents the results related to this aspect, obtained from the sociological study organized in the school. Analyzing the data in the table, we notice that each time, 52.3 percent of the children who chose this school consulted with their parents before making this choice. Parents are also the ones who appear with the highest frequency of consultation by children. This shows us the importance that parents have in establishing their children's professional trajectory. At the same time, the opinion of other relatives (including siblings) matters when a child chooses the school in which he or she is to study.

Table 1. Frequency of consultation with various people in choosing the school

	Every time	Often	Sometimes	Few times	Never
Parents	52,3 %	19,3 %	19,3 %	5,5 %	3,7 %
Brothers/sisters or other relatives	15,1 %	17,9 %	30,2 %	20,8 %	16 %
Friends, neighbors or acquaintances	11,4 %	14,3 %	29,5 %	24,8 %	20 %
My former teachers	13,1 %	15,9 %	22,4 %	19,6 %	29 %
The school / educational counselor	5,7 %	4,8 %	11,4 %	14,3 %	63,8 %

Therefore, if we add up the percentages, it is observed that students have, most frequently, consultations and discussions in choosing the school, within the family. It can be considered that the family is the entity with which a child consults in the choice of school and implicitly of the career, thus the impact of the family's decision is implicitly reflected on it through the child's future. Certainly consulting with family or siblings and other routes is beneficial for the student, as long as the parents take into account the children's options and their interests, skills and passions.

One aspect that attracts attention is the frequency of consultation with former teachers and friends. The study shows that former teachers are more often consulted (29 percent) in choosing high school than friends (25.7 percent). However, young people also take into account the opinion of friends, 29.5 percent

of respondents say they consulted „sometimes” with their friends before choosing to enroll in this high school.

Following this study, a situation is observed in which most schools are lacking counselors or counseling and career guidance programs. This can be observed from the fact that 63.8 percent of the students enrolled in the ninth grade stated that they have never consulted with a school counselor when they chose this school. Specifically, 78.1 percent of high school students who began their studies in the school where the study took place, did not receive specialized support, or if they did, it was only to a very small extent, in choosing the type of high school (branch), profile or specialization. At the opposite pole are 10.5 percent of children, they always had (5.7 percent) or often (4.8 percent) the support of the school counselor in choosing the high school.

In conclusion, it can be said that most students enrolled in the ninth grade, whether we are talking about high school or professional, made this choice influenced by family, but also by the desire to be colleagues with friends or neighbors who they were already students at the school. On the other hand, some of them did not have a high enough average to be admitted to a theoretical high school, and others chose this school for the benefits that dual vocational education offers.

5. Students' perception of career, counseling and career guidance

Before discussing students' perceptions of everything that means career and/or personal and professional training, it should be noted that in all dual professional classes, there is an hour of „counseling and career guidance”. During these hours, the main topics of discussion are: self-knowledge and personal management, interpersonal communication, learning management, career planning and development, the labor market and lifestyle and work. During these classes the students' activity is not noted in the school catalogs, but absences are made, so the students participate in the same way as in any other class. Thus, 65.1 percent of the ninth grade respondents say that they participated in counseling and career guidance activities organized in the school, referring to the counseling classes mentioned above. The remaining 34.9 percent state that they did not participate in any professional counseling activity carried out in and by the school, and here it is the case of students attending high school because in the curricula for high school classes such classes are not provided. From this point of view, the students who opted for the vocational school have an advantage over the students who have opted for high school.

In order to deepen this aspect, the students were asked to express their opinion about the importance that they consider to have the activities of counseling and professional orientation, done within the school, on the success in life. A high percentage, 53.6 percent of respondents, consider that the importance of these activities is high (38.2 percent) and very high (15.5 percent). However, 41.8 percent of students surveyed believe that these activities are of medium importance, and 4.5 percent attribute low (1.8 percent) and very low (2.7 percent)

importance of counseling and career guidance. Following the discussion, students were asked to prioritize, according to importance, various aspects of training or situations in which they consider that counseling and career guidance are needed. The four aspects that students must prioritize according to the importance they consider to have are the following: to know each other better (tests of interests, skills, personality); to obtain information about high schools, faculties, professions; to receive support in preparing a letter of intent, a Curriculum Vitae (CV) or preparation for job interviews and support in making the decision to choose high school/faculty/profession.

Following the analysis of the data, 40.2 percent of students consider that counseling and career guidance are needed in order to know themselves much better, by applying tests of personality, interests or skills. At the same time, 33.3 percent of the ninth grade respondents consider that counseling and guidance is needed in schools, in order to support them to make the best decision regarding the choice of high school, faculty and profession (profession). The **Table 2. Need for self-knowledge and support in making important decisions**, shows the frequency distributions according to the importance assigned by young people to the two aspects discussed above. If we link the two aspects that are in the top of students' preferences, we can consider that they first want to discover their interests, skills and abilities, and then, knowingly, to choose their high school, or the faculty they want to traces and later the profession or profession they want to embrace.

Table 2. Need for self-knowledge and support in making important decisions

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not at all important
The need for self-knowledge (tests of interests, skills, personality)	40,2%	23,5%	21,6%	14,7%
The need for support in choosing the high school / faculty / profession	33,3%	29,4%	13,7%	23,5%

These very high percentages show the very high desire of students to know themselves, first of all they want to discover themselves and then to discover the world in which they live. This desire of young people is justified because, before we understand the world and those around us, we must understand ourselves; or if we can understand ourselves, we can understand what is going on around us and change the world we live in. On the other hand, the high importance that students attach to the need for self-knowledge and the informed choice of education and profession may also lie in the lack of access to self-knowledge programs. Thus, by attaching high importance, they should also express their desire to participate in such courses or counseling and guidance programs aimed at self-knowledge and personal and professional development.

At the same time, 29.1 percent of the surveyed students believe that in the classes or activities of counseling and career guidance, they need and need information about high schools, colleges or professions. Their share is followed

by 16.7 percent of respondents who believe that it is important and necessary to focus in such hours or activities on drafting a CV, writing a letter of intent or preparing for a job interview. The **Table 3. Need for information and preparation for employment**, shows the frequency distributions according to the importance of the need that students assign to the issues discussed.

Table 3. Need for information and preparation for employment

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not at all important
The need for information about high school / faculty / profession	29,1%	28,2%	21,4%	21,4%
The need for support in preparing a CV, a letter of intent, preparation for the job interview	16,7%	25,5%	27,5%	30,4%

Despite the general belief that students need to know information about preparing for employment, the study shows that students are not so interested in this pre-employment process. This is natural and should not be a concern because, in the case of ninth grade students, interest in immediate employment is lower. Therefore, they are more interested, as I said, in discovering themselves first. Thus, making a CV or preparing for a job interview is part of their interests, but they are in a more distant plan. It is also natural for this to happen, for example, a ninth-grade student does not have enough activities to pass on a resume, unlike another student who is preparing for graduation, and on the other hand, those who are just now beginning their high school or vocational studies, are at the beginning of their vocational training. Last but not least, if we take into account their age, it is easy to understand the lack of interest in employment and integration into the labor market.

6. Career choice and success in life

Continuing the study, we wanted to capture the perception that young people have about certain factors that influence their career choice. Seven factors were listed (family, group of friends, school / teachers, media and social networks, own personality, marketing of a company, but also society in general) that can influence young people in choosing a career, and respondents have been asked to specify how much they consider these factors to influence their choice of future career or profession. The results obtained from the study are presented in the **Table 4. Degree of influence in career choice**.

Table 4. Degree of influence in career choice

	Very much	Much	Neither much nor little	A little	Not at all
Family	57%	25,2%	10,3%	2,8%	4,7%
Group of friends	14,4%	31,7%	31,7%	14,4%	7,7%
School/teachers	16,3%	29,8%	20,2%	20,2%	13,5%

	Very much	Much	Neither much nor little	A little	Not at all
Mass-media and social networks	22,1%	13,5%	13,5%	23,1%	27,9%
Own personality	50,5%	24,3%	8,7%	4,9%	11,7%
The marketing of the company	8,7%	19,4%	17,5%	25,2%	29,1%
Society in its ensemble	10,5%	24,8%	20%	19%	25,7%

Most students (57 percent) believe that family members influence young people in choosing their career and/or profession. This result is expected, because in the previous section dedicated to the reasons for choosing the school, most of the respondents stated that their parents influenced them in this choice. This result once again confirms and supports the importance that young people attach to the family when it comes to making an important decision or choosing a school, in this case. On the other hand, 50.5 percent of those surveyed believe that young people choose their own career based on the influence of their own personality. On the other hand, is the marketing of a company (a company), only 8.7 percent of respondents believe that young people are influenced in choosing their own career by the marketing campaigns carried out by companies. Apart from the two very high percentages discussed above, the rest of the distributions do not require further analysis.

Discussing success in life, the students surveyed were asked to express their opinion on how important several factors are for success in life, such as: school, family support, individual training, friends, volunteer activities and sports. An overwhelming percentage of 84.4 percent of ninth grade students consider family support to be very important for success in life. As previously noted, when it comes to support or influence in choosing a career, but also consultations and discussions prior to making an important decision, the family is put in the forefront by most respondents. This is explainable because, at the beginning of high school, students are still children, and the dependence on everything that means family support is very high. The *Table 5. The importance of aspects that help success in life*, shows the five factors and the importance that the responding students assigned to each of them for success in life.

Table 5. The importance of aspects that help success in life

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not at all important
School	47,7%	46,7%	3,7%	1,9%
Family support	84,4%	12,8%	1,8%	0,9%
Individual training	34,3%	53,3%	11,4%	1%
Friends	25,2%	48,6%	22,4%	3,7%
Volunteer activities	18,3%	39,4%	29,8%	12,5%
Sport	43,9%	28%	24,3%	3,7%

Observing the data in the table, we note that volunteering (18.3 percent) is considered by the fewest students as very important for success in life. Unexpectedly, but also friends are considered by few respondents (25.2 percent) as very important to succeed in life. On the other hand, sport have a higher share (43.9 percent) than individual training (34.3 percent). A higher importance is given to the school (47.7 percent), which is located as a hierarchy immediately after the family (84.4 percent), but at a significant distance from it if we take into account the percentage distribution.

In order to observe a clearer differentiation of the aspects that students consider important for success in life, to sum up the percentages given to the important and very important aspects, and those offered to the less and not important aspects. Thus, these percentages are further discussed from a dichotomous perspective. Thus, as mentioned earlier, ninth graders consider family, school, and individual training to be much more important in terms of success in life than volunteer activities, sports, and friendships. On the other hand, we note that 42.3 percent of respondents believe that volunteer activities are not at all important for success in life. From here we can see how much the culture of volunteering is missing among young Romanians who are at the beginning of high school or vocational school. Even if it is promoted in various environments that volunteering is important for professional training and why not for personal training, a fairly high percentage of respondents do not value this form of social involvement.

In the last section of this study, the intention was to analyze the futures plans of the ninth grade students. For this analysis the respondents were asked to choose one of the four options for their professional futures, or to opt for a variant of the lack of opinion, and also the variant that offered them the possibility to say that they have not yet thought about their professional future.

A high percentage of the students who participated in the study, representing 55.8 percent, told us that in the long run, from a professional point of view, they want to work in the field for which they prepared at school or college. This high score shows us the high degree of confidence of students in school, but also their desire to prepare now for their professional future. On the other hand, this large number of students who want to work in the field in which they began their training, shows us that the choice of high school and career was not accidental, based on this choice being their desire to learn later. To have the job for which they are preparing.

At the opposite pole are 13.5 percent of young people, they believe that in the future they will embrace a profession in a different field from the one in which they are training now. At the same time, 7.7 percent of the respondents want to start their own business in the future, here it is not possible to specify if it is a business carried out in their field of training or in another field. A slightly higher percentage than those who want their own business is 8.7 percent, represented by those who want to emigrate to another country in the future.

On the other hand, it should be specified that 14.4 percent of those surveyed said that at the moment they have not yet thought about their professional future. The percentage is relatively low, and considering that we are talking about students at the beginning of high school or vocational school, they have all the chances to crystallize in the future an idea related to their professional training and the profession they want. However, the sooner students identify their desire for a career, the more beneficial it is for them, and the preparation for the desired career can begin from the end of high school.

7. Conclusions

The sociological research carried out between February 19-21, 2019 in all ninth grades of the 2018-2019 school year at the Technological High School „Alexandru Domșa” from Alba Iulia, captured the reasons behind the choice of this high school. It can be said that most students enrolled in the ninth grade, whether we are talking about high school or professional, in the school year 2018-2019, made this choice influenced by family, but also by the desire to be colleagues with friends or neighbors who were already students at the school. Somehow this was predictable, because at this age the influence of the family is still quite strong, despite the fact that young teenagers generally reject parental recommendations, mostly due to the age-specific period. On the other hand, some of them did not have a high enough average to be admitted to a theoretical high school, this situation is frequently encountered when discussing high school admission, in this sense the study reconfirms a well-known fact for the Romanian education system.

At the same time, other respondents say that they chose this school for the benefits that dual vocational education offers, these benefits have become more and more visible in recent years. And now the dual vocational education benefiting from a favorable publicity, trying in this way to change the perception on this form of education in Romania. At the same time, a decisive role in the choice made, for a smaller share of respondents, was played by former teachers or friends of adolescents. In this way it is observed that the group of friends, usually considered very important for teenagers, does not significantly influence the choice of school. Very few of the respondents said that they consulted with a school counselor when they chose their high school, this fact shows the lack of vision and predictability of the Romanian educational system.

Developing the skills of school counselors to use in practice different models of career counseling may meet the different counseling needs, which are found among high school students (Axinte, 2018, p. 158), but the situation is not so well developed when we talk about high school students, especially in rural areas. According to the data presented above, very few respondents benefited from the support of the school counselor (from the general school) when they chose the school in which to continue their studies. To some extent, this lack of counseling and vocational guidance is made up for by the counseling and vocational guidance classes of students enrolled in vocational education (in the

high school where the study took place), but not all vocational and vocational schools have in their structure of such classes, this study discipline being part of the differentiated curriculum, and not of the common core, in this way, even if its importance is perceived by the students studying it, many Romanian students do not benefit from the information disseminated in during these hours. On the other hand, this study shows that some aspects such as self-knowledge, CV development or presentation at the job interview, approach to a healthy and balanced lifestyle, information about the labor market, were considered by respondents as very important for success in life. And, all these aspects and many others are studied in the counseling and personal development classes in the vocational education classes that have included this class in the differentiated curriculum.

The perception of students and young people in general about success in life is extremely important and needs to be made known both to teachers and parents and to society in general. Therefore, the study shows the perception of the respondent students about the importance of some aspects for success in life, as well as their future prospects, as they are seen, now at the beginning of the ninth grade. The results of the study show that 50 percent of respondents say they want a job in the field in which they are preparing now, which is a good thing, these young people receiving the right training to achieve their future goals. At the same time, most of them rely on the support of the family, the school and their own work to achieve their established educational and professional goal, which shows to some extent their degree of maturity.

Such studies are necessary to build effective educational strategies that take into account students' perceptions of aspects they consider important, whether we are discussing the reasons why a particular school is chosen, or the factors that influence them, in this choice. At the same time, if this information is combined with their perception of desired professional goals, career and success in life, we can paint an overview of a generation that began high school or vocational education before the pandemic caused by coronavirus. At the same time, the study can be conducted for current generations of students who were enrolled in the ninth grade in the year of the pandemic, thus observing whether there is a difference in intergenerational perception in the current pandemic context.

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