

HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ECONOMICS – THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE

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Abstract

The high school economic education in Romania has the main purpose to cover the scientific knowledge but also to develop the practical skills of young students. The requirement of applied economics courses in colleges has elevated because of the deficiency of practical abilities of graduates and consequently, because of the difficulty of their integration on the labour market. The Romanian school of economics is focused on diverse economic qualifications and comprises applied classes developed in partnership with local companies. Our research paper objectives are related to expose the students' awareness about the importance of the applied trainings developed by partners firms and about their perception of the effect of the economic high school education upon their career. This pilot research may be a typical periodic survey for every single high school with economic profile and furthermore, could be a support for an analysis of the technological educational system in correlation with market changing requirements. The results of this survey demonstrate the reality of the actual education system in the economical field related to the high school level and could be extended to other surveys in different sphere of education.

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Economic, education, high school, applied, students.

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Introduction

Economic disciplines develop pupils' ability to put their ideas into practice. This involves creativity, originality, risk-taking, and the ability to plan projects to achieve the goals. It also provides support for pupils in private and public life, increases awareness of their work and increases their ability to take advantage of opportunities, while also providing a basis for entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is included in school curricula in almost all European countries. In some countries (Spain, Poland), participation is mandatory, but in most cases, entrepreneurship is optional. In Romania, the exercise firm was introduced as an interactive method for the development of entrepreneurial skills.

Based on a 2014 report resulting from a survey applied at an economics university, where the newly high school graduates were questioned about the choice of the field of university studies, the following were stated: "because this is a family tradition", "I apply because I did not pass the English exam to go to England and I want a backup faculty so I will not stay for a year", "I graduated my baccalaureate with 9.20 and I enrolled at the International Business School because it is the only one that has to do with what I want to follow", "I want business with economy in London". Others say that, following college, they will have a stable job, or simply did not attract anything else.

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Following a research conducted in 2013 with the title "School and School Option for High School Students", the following conclusions were identified:

The growing number of graduates intending to engage at the end of high school correlates with the socio-economic situation at the national level, which has a negative impact on the family budget.

Starting from graduate aspirations and parent expectations, it can be explained why a larger number of graduates from the urban area want to continue their studies and why education is more valuable in this environment.

Enhancing information on opportunities to study abroad determines the targeting of increased numbers to universities outside the country. Higher education institutions in other countries are increasingly promoting their schooling offer among Romanian pupils by: attending educational fairs, well-organized websites, and maintaining an e-mail relationship with interested students (Hatos, 2006).

In general, there is a continuity between the specialization in the faculty for which the students choose and the profile graduated by them. However, the existence of options towards a completely different field of study entitles us to consider that either the initial orientation of the students was not appropriate to their interests and competences, or their current choice is not well founded.

Own aspirations and material gain are aspects that are found in the first two positions in the hierarchy of criteria according to which graduates choose both their faculty and their profession. This reflects, on the one hand, the stability of their motivational system and, on the other hand, the modality of adapting the graduates to the current socio-economic context (Stoian, 2016; Cucuș, 2013)

In large cities there are many variants in terms of continuing university studies. Studying economic disciplines in the pre-university environment is an advantage for the student because it offers them a longer period of time in which they can assimilate numerous information for a future successful career (Apostu, 2015).

Learning economic knowledge is essential for both students and graduates of high school education. Market economy is a superior form of the exchange economy in which key mutations are required to which practically all those engaged in economic activities are required to participate. That is why the appropriation of economic disciplines must be done actively. This means that in the process of learning, pupils and students will be able to pose problems, to ask questions about the problems studied, to seek answers and solutions to the studied subject, either by relying on already accumulated knowledge or by acquiring new knowledge.

There is also a clear rethinking of the study of economic disciplines in the idea of promoting interdisciplinarity, their knowledge merging with those of natural sciences, technical sciences, etc.

It should not be forgotten that the correspondence between the content of economic disciplines and reality must be achieved, because, many times, content units refer to the developed market economy and not to our economic reality.

Establishing a career plan is very important for young people. For such a move, they have to go through three stages: self-evaluation, labor market research and decision-making to reach the goal.

Adopting a career decision requires knowledge of personal skills, interests, concerns and values. Education and study of economic and social disciplines help young people to assess their informational potential, which makes a definite contribution to professional guidance. Choosing a career requires the analysis of many variables: those related to economic knowledge having the most importance, but the knowledge of labor market, wages, and about how companies operate, have a definite contribution in choosing a career.

Labor market research requires methodical spirit and knowledge on training requirements for each occupation, career development trends in the chosen field, experiences, opportunities and restrictions at a given time, etc.

Adopting the decision requires sufficient experience in the career choices, assuming the goals are adapted to the changes that occur along the way. Economic knowledge helps not only in training, but also in career stability in the light of existing economic circumstances. The market economy is based on the freedom of individuals and firms to act in their own interest. Fundamental market principles are, by their very nature, vulnerable and can be misinterpreted by people. That is why economic knowledge and rules on business conduct within organizations are so necessary.

Curricular reform in pre-university education implies the adaptation of economic disciplines to the requirements and conditions specific to the market economy, as well as to the European standards of exigency. The transformations of economic mechanisms, as well as the profound restructuring of the entire economic and social life, impose new requirements in approaching the methodology of economic and social disciplines. Economic subjects in pre-university education are taught by people who have undergone specialized higher education in this field. As such, the approach to these disciplines, both in high school and college education, should take into account

several "essential coordinates" (Ignat and Luțac, 1996): the scientific and practical needs of the Romanian economy and society; the accurate presentation of concepts, mechanisms, laws and economic theories, as well as the methods of assessing the correctness of economic thinking; the illustration of the variety of economic ideas and issues, their mechanisms, their good sides and their negative aspects, without any preconceived notions.

A successful career is based on accumulation of theoretical and practical information. The high schools deal with both the theoretical and the practical part by co-opting companies. Firms develop a partnership with the educational unit to program student activities by combining theory with practice. The internships programmed during pre-university studies help students to relate to the labour market. Students adapt to work schedules, employer requirements, team work and face deadlines. Practice training courses help students to develop their creativity and to decide the field or department they want to join in their future career. On the other hand, practical training stages help students to continue their university studies (Butnaru et al., 2013; Stăiculescu 2012).

Research methodology

Our study is based on a survey aiming to reveal the influence of the practical study of economics in pre-college and the importance of economic qualification for the decision to extend studies in the university environment. There were questioned a limited number of respondents by the "simple random" method. The research community is represented by the students of the final classes of an economic high school from Bucharest, the sample consisting of 113 people.

Results and discussion

Conducting our research, we have obtained results reachable in the following short description. Of the 133 respondents, 26.5% are younger than 17 years old and 73.5% between 17 and 20 years of age. This is the age at which a student is in the final years of the pre-university environment. Respondents in the last year of training have given over half of the answers to the questions asked. 59.3% of the total respondents are females, and 40.7% are males. Within the respondents, there are about 20% more girls than boys. Considering the specialization, most of the respondents (51.3%) study the specialization "Technician in economic activities", 37.2% "Technician in tourism" and 11.5% "Trader Seller"(figure no 1).

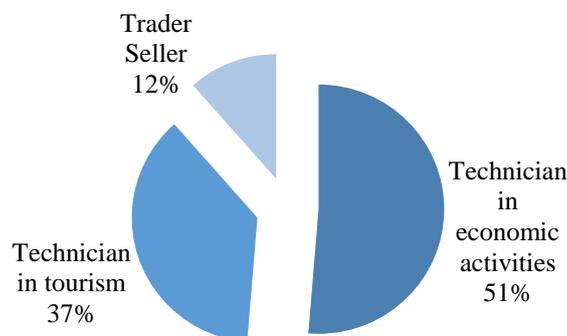


Figure no. 1: The specialization of respondents

Source: The authors' own design

As shown in Figure no 2, 21,4% of the respondents chose their specialisation by personal choice, parents decided for 8,9%, the electronic distribution was decisive for 20.5% of respondents, 6,9% following the guidance of a counsellor and 3% decided to choose the specialization upon the colleagues advice.

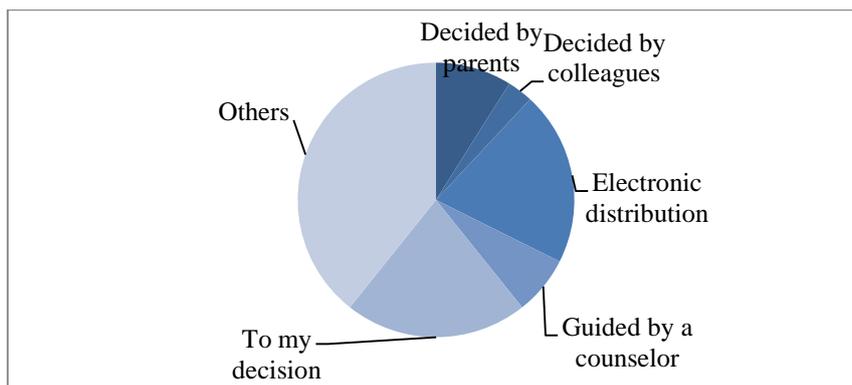


Figure No. 2: The way in which the specialization was chosen

Source: The authors' own design

The choice of specialization for pre-university students is necessary to be correlated with their skills. Considering the answers, we may observe a large percentage of electronic distribution, meaning the student or their parent was not advised about the abilities of the candidate.

Starting to the incorrect decision of a specialization, a quarter of the respondents (13.3%) declare that they changed their profile during pre-university studies (figure no 3). 64% of the surveyed students who changed their profile during their pre-university studies moved to the technician in economy specialization, 19,4% to tourism and 6,5% to another profile.

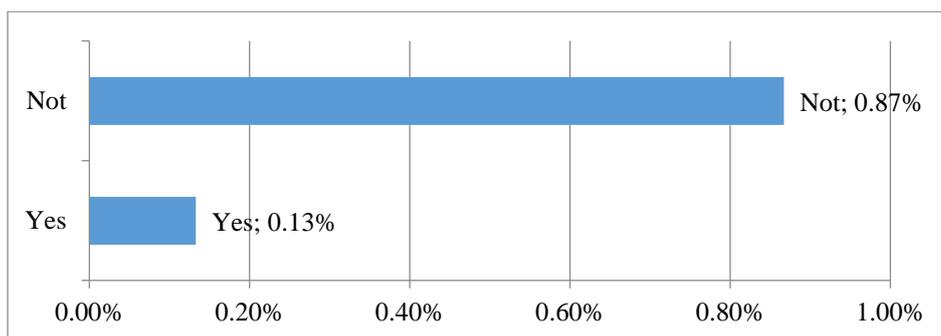


Figure No. 3: The changing of the specialization of respondents

Source: The author's own design

The students were also questioned about the importance of the changing of their initial school speciality during the course of the school. 53.1% of the students consider as very important to maintain the profile during the studies and 1.8% consider it not important (fig. no 4).

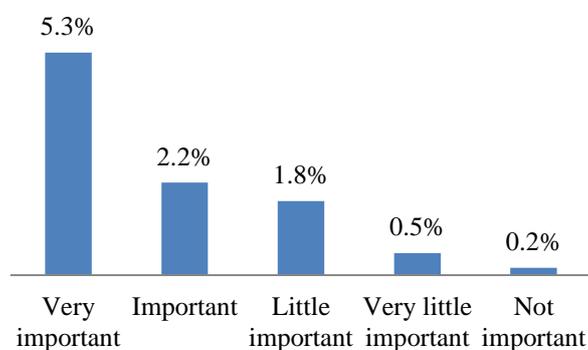


Figure no. 4: The specialization of respondents

Source: The author's own design

The students, mostly, are convinced that changing the specialization does not modify their professional training. Our study aims also to observe if the parents' profession or domain of activity is influencing the future specialization of the high school students.

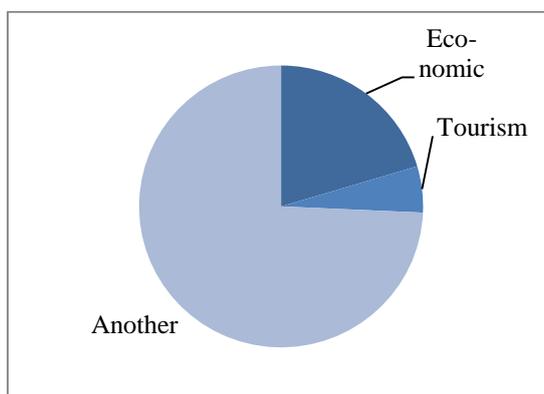


Figure no. 5: The specialization of respondents

Source: The author's own design

As the figure no 5 reveals, respondents' parents work in a proportion of 20.4% in the economic field, 5.3% in tourism and 74.3% in other fields, indicating that the field in which parents work did not influence the students' choice.

The economic high school profile includes a compulsory annual training session. We are interested if the students appreciate this type of development of competencies and if they consider it significant for their school education (figure no 6).

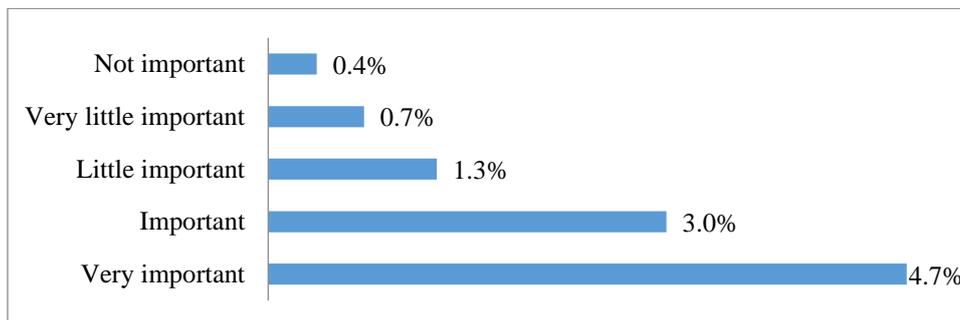


Figure no. 6: The importance of practical training

Source: The author's own design

Students consider that practical training sessions are very important (47.3%) and only 3.6% do not value it. The students agree that practical training sessions help to disseminate the theoretical notions and to test them, being an interactive method for learning.

As we mentioned previously, practical training courses help students to decide the field or department they want to join in the future career and help students to continue their university studies (Butnaru et al., 2013; Staiculescu 2012). As we may observe in the results (fig. no 7), 84.7% of the students surveyed intend to continue their pre-university studies at university and 17.1% are not interested.

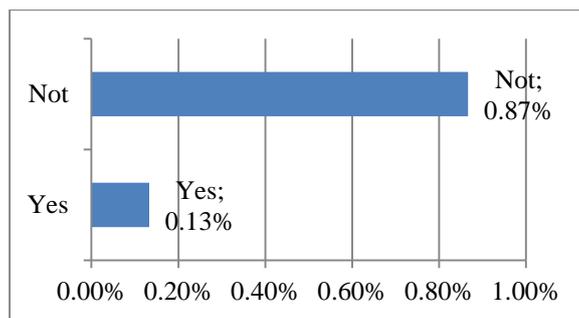


Figure no. 7: Respondents' intention to continue their studies to the university

Source: The author's own design

We consider very interesting to extend the interview in a future survey, to the small part of those young people whose decision not to continue their studies, and do not have any intention to get a job, as they declare.

As the figure no 8 exposes, the most preferred university by students is the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, thus confirming that practice may decide to continue higher education studies in the field they studied in high school.

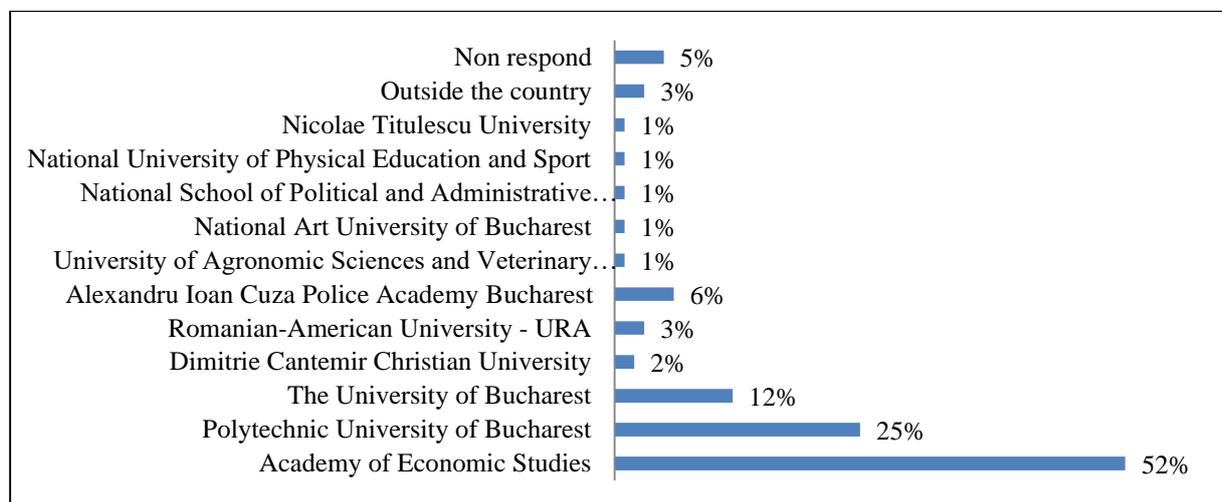


Figure no. 8: The university for which students intend to choose

Source: The author's own design

The questioned students responded that they wanted to apply at universities (92%) like: Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Polytechnic University of Bucharest, The University of Bucharest, Dimitrie Cantemir University, Romanian-American University, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Police Academy of Bucharest, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, National Art University of Bucharest, National School of Political and Administrative Studies, National University of Physical Education and Sport, "Nicolae Titulescu" University, 3% at universities outside the country, and 5% are not decided yet.

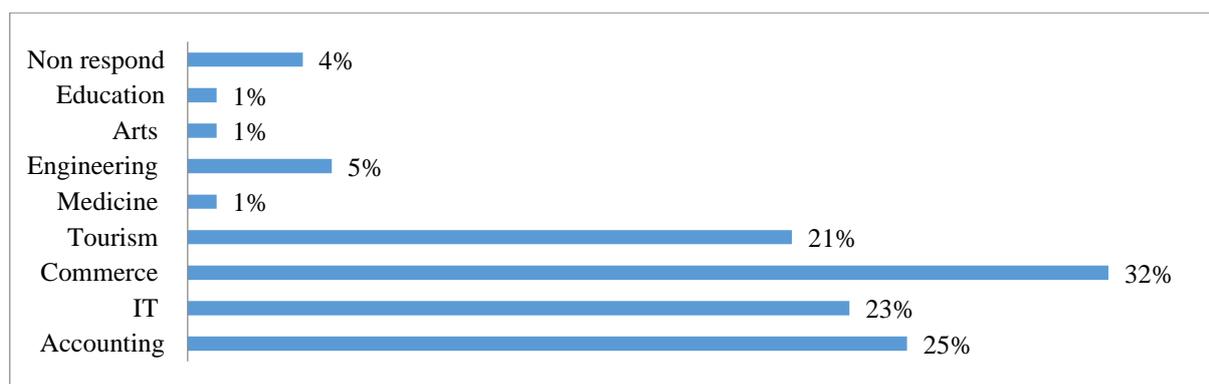


Figure no. 9: The areas in which students want to have a job

Source: The author's own design

The fields in which students want to find a job are most of them related to the economic profile, as: accounting, commerce, tourism, but there are also different areas for which students look interested: IT (a considerable proportion), medicine, engineering, arts and education. Considering the IT, we may assume that it could be assimilated also to economics, as: cybernetics or computer applications in the economy.

Conclusions

Practical training sessions help to disseminate and to experiment the theoretical notions, being considerate as well an interactive learning method for most students. The high school economic qualification is training many students, but most of them were not informed before about some skills required and what this type of education means (long practical trainings that cut the school holiday, a number of requested typical aptitudes and abilities, etc). A better informing before the access to the economic high school could redistribute students in accordance with the skills and abilities of each student. The economic high school qualification is considered to be insufficient for the insertion on the labour market by the majority of students who like better to extend their studies at the university level in the detriment of the employment. This behaviour is creating a serious gap in the national economy and should be taken into consideration by the education stakeholders that must understand the importance of unifying their efforts towards a better curriculum, the encouragement for the professional school, or the improving of criteria for high school and university acceptance.

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