

SOURCES OF INFORMATION, LOCATION AND REPUTATION OF A UNIVERSITY CENTER – KEY FACTORS FOR DECISION-MAKING TO BE TRAINED AS A PHYSICAL THERAPIST AT "VASILE ALECSANDRI" UNIVERSITY OF BACAU

Dan Iulian ALEXE*

"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, e-mail: alexedaniulian@yahoo.com

Gabriel MAREȘ

"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, e-mail: gabimares@yahoo.com

Daniela CRĂCIUN

"Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, e-mail: danielacr@usv.ro

Abstract: Career orientation, factor analysis in making a decision, but also sometimes strong indecision in making a final decision, can constitute complex aspects of a process involving completely the person envisaging a professional career in a particular field. Making a decision involves a previous accumulation of information, but it also depends on less controllable factors (social, financial, material). This study aimed to analyze a series of aspects concerning the influences of various factors, influences that made 92 candidates choose to train professionally as physical therapists at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, during the main admissions in the summer of 2016. The candidates' opinions were collected using a 12-item questionnaire. This was administered before the admission examination. It can be concluded that at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, in making the decision, the candidates who chose to train as physical therapists, the influence of the human factor is significant in the finalization of the orientation process.

Key words: decision, factors, profession, physical therapist

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation represents the factor determining the body to act and focus toward other purposes (Șoitu, 2013). Also called the "engine" of the entire human activity, motivation is at the basis of one's contact with the world process (Zlate, 2009), the foundation of all human decisions, including the ones regarding the choice of a career. Often enough, the people entering this decisional process remain at one of the base components of motivation - the preference, not passing to the initiation and engaging stages.

For some of the admission candidates, the career decisions have a deeply subjective motivation, their choice or preference for a certain profession being influenced by their personality type, the objectivity of their self-assessment, etc. (Constantin et al., 2008).

* Corresponding Author

Indecision influences the career decision, through a sometimes too deep analysis of the intrinsic factors (individual values, skills, aspiration, needs) and/or extrinsic factors (social context, reputation of the training center, financial benefits, conditions and terms of the institutions, location, etc.).

On the other hand, the efficiency in making a career decision is determined by the trust of individuals, which would generate behaviors involving the engagement of individuals in activities associated with choosing a professional path or a career training path (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

The professional training engagement could be influenced by a personal model of making the career decisions (Gati, 1986), a model in which each individual eliminates sequentially the occupational alternatives in order to reach certain decisions regarding their career; overcoming the obstacles encountered by the candidates during the information process about the physical therapist profession (Mareş, 2017).

There are multiple factors influencing the choice of a career path based on higher education, this being highlighted clearly in the professional literature. Starting from the personal characteristics (McManus et al., 1996; Soethout et al., 2008; Vaidya, 2004), their gender (Crişan and Turda, 2015), specialized human resources (teachers, former graduates – Bălan, 2013), the factors influencing the decision of choosing a career can arrive to the perceived benefits and the attractiveness of certain study programs or specializations (Kiker and Zeh, 1998; Zinn et al., 2001; Arnold, 2005) and even factors associated with school programs and experience of the chosen specialization (Zinn et al., 2001; Ward, 2004; Maiorova et al., 2008; Stagg, 2009).

The elimination of the orientation alternatives toward certain professional training is based on the analysis of the intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors, each factor having its importance, on the subjective or objective scale of each individual.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This study aimed to analyze a series of aspects concerning the influences of various factors, influences that made 92 candidates choose to train professionally as physical therapists at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, during the main admissions in the summer of 2016.

HYPOTHESIS

Starting from the fact that today the internet offers essential data for the educational offer of every university and that getting information from the virtual environment is prevalent, especially among young people, one can presume that making the decision to train as a physical therapist was influenced also by the online sources of information.

Taking into account that high school graduates, as the main category of candidates for higher education admission, are still dependent on the material and financial support of their family, one can presume that home would be one of the main factors influencing the decision to choose the location considered by the candidates wanting to be trained as physical therapists.

Success in the future profession would be guaranteed also by the quality of the education in the university where an individual is training. Starting from this premise, one can presume that the reputation of the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau can be a strong factor in influencing one's decision to professionally train as a physical therapist.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The subjects were 92 candidates (34 males, 58 females) who chose to be trained professionally as physical therapists at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau (UBc), during the main admissions in the summer of 2016. The subjects expressed their agreement to participate in this research.

The age distribution (N=92) of the subjects was as follows: 18 y.o. - 23.91%, 19 y.o. - 28.26%, 20 y.o. - 7.61%, between 21-25 y.o. - 16.30%, between 26 - 30 y.o. - 9.78%, between 31 - 40 y.o. - 10.87%, between 41 - 50 y.o. - 3.26%.

Out of the 48 subjects (52.17%) aged between 18-19, 89.58% (43 subjects) have graduated high-school in the summer of 2016, right before the main admissions that were the basis of this study.

The time from when the subjects ended their high school studies to the 2016 admission was between 0 years (the year when the research was conducted - 2016) and 29 years (1 respondent who graduated high school in 1987).

The research instrument was a 12-item questionnaire, applied before the admission examination. The questionnaire items comprised either choosing certain answers from a list, or writing other options than the ones presented, or freely expressing certain arguments that formed the basis for the subjects' decision.

RESULTS

The analysis of the first item asking the subjects directly to say why they have chosen to study physical therapy allowed the following observations:

- for 40.21% of the subjects, the decision to train as physical therapists was based on their "attraction for this field", or "the desire to have a career in this field" (Figure 1);
- "a profession for the future" and "successful profession" represented other two basic reasons for which 17.39% of the candidates chose to enroll in the physical therapy and special motor skills program at the university studied in this research;
- for 13.04% of the subjects, the decision to train as physical therapists was motivated by the desire to "help people", to "offer help to the people needing rehabilitation" and to "help the people with health problems" (Figure 1);

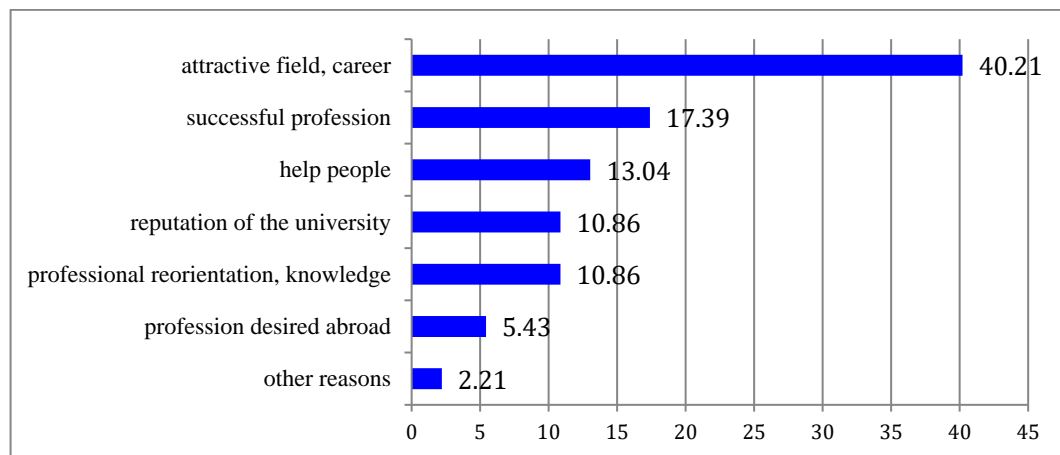


Figure 1. The ranking of the subjects' reasons to enroll in physical therapy university studies

- "the reputation of the university" represented a reason for which 10.86% of the subjects chose this program;
- for 10.86% of the subjects, the decision to train as physical therapists was based on "professional reorientation" and "gaining more knowledge" (5 subjects already working in the therapeutic, medical field);

- "it's a profession desired abroad" represented a reason for which 5.43% of the subjects chose this program;
- the rest of approximately 2.21% chose to enroll in this study program for other reasons, but not going over 2.00%.

The analysis of the information source as a possible dominant factor in making the decision to train as physical therapists, for the subjects of this research (item 2) envisaged the identification of the main information ways of the candidates. They had the opportunity to tick one or more of the following answer choices: high school teachers/school counselors, promotion of the educational offer by the universities, friends/acquaintances, graduate students of physical therapy, internet - the universities' websites, and internet - social networks. In order to determine the variety of the information sources or the importance of certain sources in making the decision, the questionnaire did not specify the number of answer choices that a subject can tick. Thus, for item 2, the analysis of the data revealed the following aspects (figure 2):

- "friends/acquaintances" represented a source of information that has determined the subjects' enrollment in the 2016 admission session in 45.65% of the cases;
- "graduate students of physical therapy" represented a source of information for 33.70% of the subjects;
- "high school teachers/school counselors" represented a source of information for 9.78% of the subjects;
- "promotion of the educational offer by the universities" represented a source of information for 7.60% of the subjects;
- "internet - the universities' websites" represented a source of information for 19.57% of the subjects;
- "internet - social networks" represented a source of information for 3.26% of the subjects;

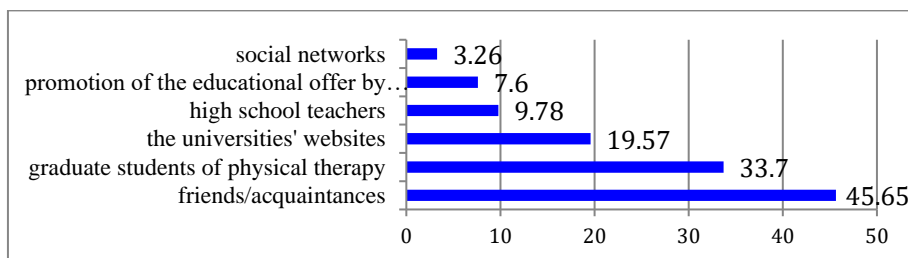


Figure 2. Ranking of information sources according to the subjects' opinion

Analysis of item 5 ("What made you choose the study program 'Physical therapy and special motor skills' at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau?") allowed the calculation of the subjects' determining reasons in making the decision to enroll in this university. As one can see in figure 3, the reputation of the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau in the field of physical therapy represented a determining reason for which 29.35% of the subjects chose to enroll in this university in the summer of 2016. This importance, given by the reputation of the university, is due, in the authors of this paper's opinion, to the fact that this university has the only accredited part-time physical therapy and special motor skills of Romania. This is a determining reason for 11.11% of the subjects.

The subjects' home being close to the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau (16.30%), the fact that physical therapy is considered a successful profession (15.21%), and the subjects' attraction to this field (13.04%) represented other determining reasons (figure 3). For 10.89% of the subjects, other reasons were determining in choosing to train as physical therapists at the "Vasile Alecsandri"

University of Bacau (the individual values did not go over 2%; examples of reasons: acquaintances in Bacau, friends who are students at this university, continuation of high school studies done in Bacau with university studies also in this city, recommendations from other people who have indicated this university, etc.). Helping people (9.78%) and gaining more knowledge (5.43%) represented two determining reasons, but ranked lower in the total expressed options.

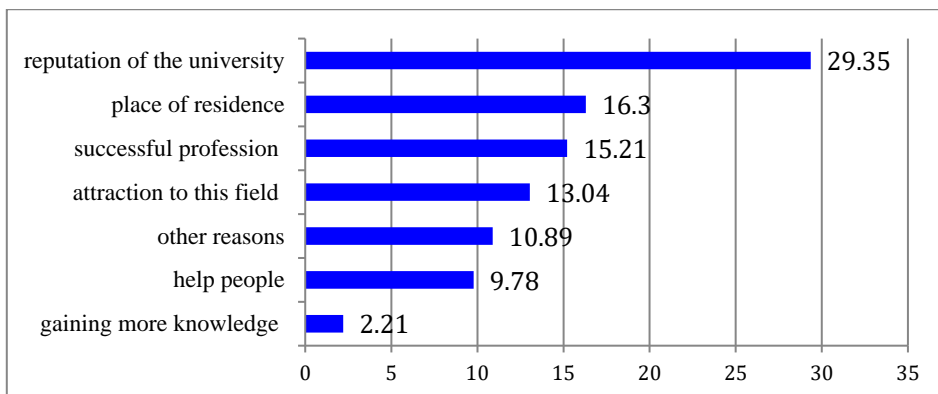


Figure 3. Ranking of the main reasons in choosing the study program at the 2016 admission

Item 6 - "What is the closest university to your place of residence?" and item 7 - "Was the distance between your place of residence and the university a criterion in choosing the study program Physical therapy and special motor skills at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau?" envisaged both to determine the closest university from the subjects' place of residence, and the possible correlation between their place of residence and choosing the university where they can study physical therapy and special motor skills.

The analysis of the item 6 data indicated that for 86.96% of the subjects, the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau was the closest one to their place of residence, the rest of 13.04% of the subjects being closer to universities of Iaşi (6.52%), Braşov (2.17%), Galaţi (2.17%), Bucharest and Grenoble - France.

For 51.09% of the subjects (figure 4) having their place of residence closer to the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau represented a criterion in choosing to train as physical therapists at this university. The data analysis shows that for 48.91% of the subjects, the distance between their place of residence and the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau did not represent a criterion in choosing their university. Thus, one could say that the distance between the subjects' place of residence and university was an essential factor in their decision to train as physical therapists.

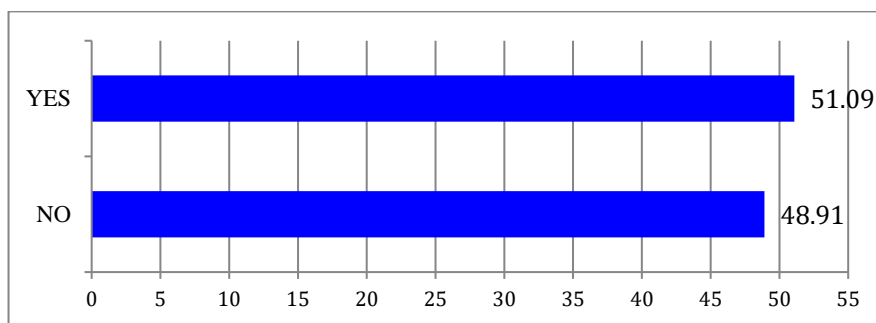


Figure 4. Percentage ranking of the importance of the distance between the subjects' place of residence and university in choosing to train as physical therapists at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau

Taking into consideration that for 16.30%, the university being close to their place of residence was a determining reason, for 51.09% the distance from the university was a criterion in choosing it, and 86.96% of the subjects have their place of residence close to the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, it can be said that the distance between place of residence and university represented an essential factor in the subjects' choice to train as physical therapists.

From the perspective of the subjects choosing their career path based on the reputation of other universities compared to the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau, item 8 asked the subjects "Did you apply to multiple universities of study programs during this session - July 2016?". The analysis of the answers show that only 8.70% of the subjects applied also to other universities during the admission session of July 2016, for 91.30% of them, the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau being the only choice.

In order to determine whether the reputation of the study program "physical therapy and special motor skills" from the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau would be a possible decision factor for the subjects, item 10 asked them what are the reasons why they decided to enroll in the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau and not another university from North-East or South-East of Romania, an university that also had this program and it wasn't very far from the subjects' place of residence (e.g.: Constanța, Galați, Suceava, Iași).

The data analysis indicated that for 45.65% of the subjects, being close to their place of residence counted the most in choosing the Bacau university. 43.48% of the subjects chose the Bacau university instead of the other 4 universities offered as answer choices (Constanța, Galați, Suceava, Iași), to train as physical therapists, due to its reputation. Other reasons represented 10.87% (figure 5).

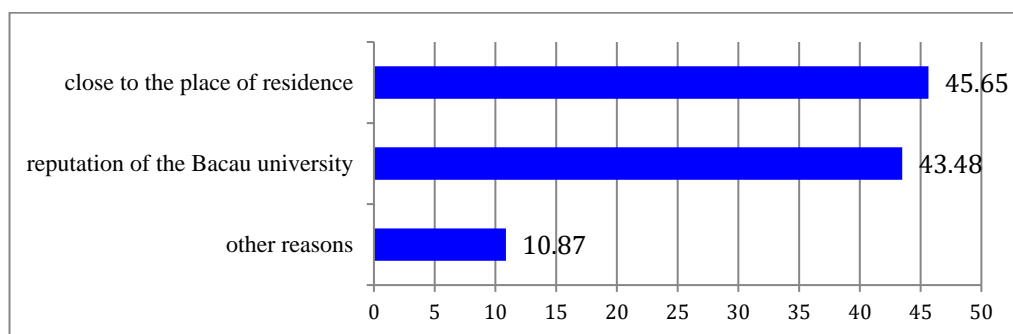


Figure 5. Reputation - a reason for choosing the Bacau university, compared to other universities

As figure 5 shows, the reason "being close to the place of residence" is chosen by 45.65% of the subjects, which indicates the important role played by the place of residence in the subjects choosing to train as physical therapists. This aspect could be interpreted also as follows: place of residence can represent an important factor why a large part of the subjects chose the Bacau university and not another one, this choice not being based necessarily on the university's reputation.

If the other 10.87% are taken into consideration, representing other reasons outside reputation, for which the subjects did not choose another university, it can be said that over 50% of the subjects (56.52% to be precise) did not consider "reputation" as a criterion of enrolling to the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau to study physical therapy.

However, a percentage of 43.48 for reputation, of the total reasons for which the subjects chose the Bacau university, indicates a high level of image and respect that the program "physical therapy and special motor skills" of the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau enjoys.

In order to verify the relevance of the proximity criterion, these authors wanted to determine how firm was the subjects' decision to train professionally when they chose in 2016 to enroll in the program physical therapy and special motor skills. Item 11, "If at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau there would be no graduate studies of physical therapy, would you have studied this subject at another university or would have chosen another program still at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau?", tried to verify this fact. The analysis of the data for item 11 showed that 67.39% of the subjects would have still enrolled in 2016 in the physical therapy program, but at another university (figure 6), in the Bacau university would not have offered this program. This percentage indicates that two thirds of the subjects were intrinsically motivated in their decision, the proximity criterion not having a significant influence.

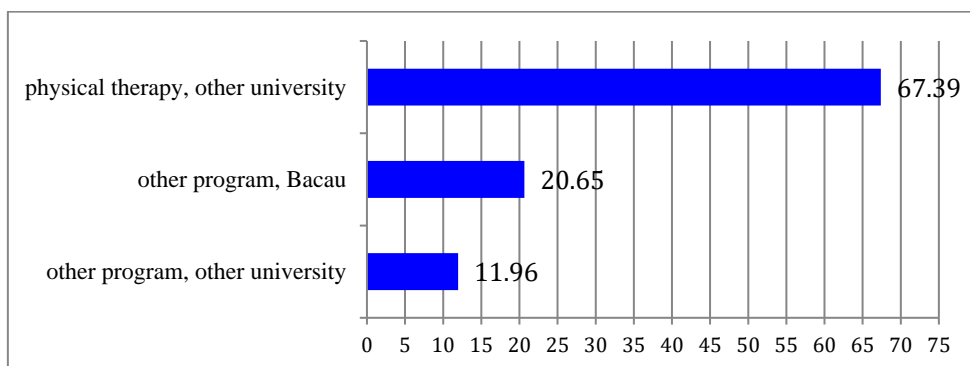


Figure 6. Firmness when making a decision, reputation, and home- important factors in choosing the professional training

Figure 6 shows also that 20.65% of the subjects would not have chosen another university to train as physical therapists and would have chosen another program of the Bacau university. This aspect can be interpreted from multiple perspectives:

- *economic* - the impossibility of ensuring the subjects' lodging over the course of their studies, lacking the adequate finances;
- *social-relational* - emotional attachment to the support groups (parents, friends);
- *motivational-personal skills*. The study program was chosen on the basis of other criteria than interests, skills, and personal values;
- *the general reputation of the Bacau university*.

Thus, the data presented in figure 6, as a result of the analysis of the answers to item 11, confirm the tendencies highlighted by subjects in the other items, validating the subjects' attitude in their answers.

DISCUSSIONS

The subjects' place of residence and the reputation of the university could be two factors influencing their decision to train as physical therapists in a certain geographical area. The values calculated for these two factors are confirmed also by other similar studies (Bălan, 2013), the percentages being very close (as values, but not as representation of the category of the respondents), taking into account that the studies were conducted in separate universities.

Both the information sources and their ranking, analyzed on distinct criteria, can vary, not being able to be considered constants. Thus, although the information sources offered as variables in the research instruments are almost the same, some researches conducted on the Romanian population, on the same category of subjects (young, recently enrolled students - Bălan, 2013) indicate different rankings of the values, compared to the rankings recorded in this study.

Practically, for the subjects of this research, the decision to study physical therapy was based mainly on the data offered by friends or acquaintances, followed by physical therapy graduates, while in other studies, the universities' websites and brochures were the main sources of information (Bălan, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

Although today the internet and the media offer essential data regarding the educational prospects, data referring to a potential career path, there are certain categories of young people (who want to train as physical therapists) for whom the main source of information is completely different - their support groups (friends, close acquaintances). Together with these groups, the opinion of the teenagers who trained in the same profession is one of high significance. These observations reject the first hypothesis. This aspect can be interpreted as a diminished influence of the online information sources for the young people wanting to train as physical therapists.

Based on the recorded results, one can conclude also that the subjects' motivation for enrolling in the study program physical therapy and special motor skills would be intrinsic, the arguments for this choice being the result of a previous information correlated to a series of personal values such as altruism, desire to help people, or desire to know more. However, taking into account that in the North-East region of Romania (from which most of the subjects originated) the high school graduates, being the main category of candidates for university enrollment, are still dependent on their families for material and financial support, the authors of this study determined that the variable "place of residence" can be one of the main factors that could influence the subjects' decision to choose a particular location to train as physical therapists. This conclusion confirms the second hypothesis.

Success in a future profession can be guaranteed also by the quality of education in the university where an individual chooses to study, a fact that was confirmed also by this study. The recorded results have confirmed also the last hypothesis of this research, highlighting the fact that the reputation of a university (in this case, the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau) can be an influencing factor in deciding to train as a physical therapist.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has an observational quality, and its results cannot be extrapolated and presented as relevant for the identification of the reasons of all candidates that have enrolled during the 2016 session. The relevance of this study refers only to the aspects that have led the subjects to choose the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau as a place to train as physical therapists.

Another limitation of this research is caused by a lack of such previous studies, which would have helped in the comparative analysis of the reasons and tendencies of the subjects who choose an university to train as physical therapists.

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Submitted:
February 28, 2018

Revised:
April 22, 2018

Accepted and published online
May 9, 2018