

The Role of the Higher Education Institutions in the Career Development of Albanian Students

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Abstract The higher education is an investment in human capital. However, in Albania, the cost of this investment per individual is relatively high compared to the expected income. Students are influenced by a variety of factors when selecting a university, and often after graduation they encounter a job market gap. Career orientation, during and after the studies would serve as a way of positioning Polytechnic University for Tirana's students specifically, but also help them in the job market. Because of many years in transition, Albania and its education reforms have not been successful enough to create a structure for graduate professionals. Technology development has facilitated bureaucratic procedures and made it easier to obtain information. This study aims to analyze the importance of the university in the orientation towards the labor market and career development, students' expectations after completing their studies and their ability to adapt to market demands. The underlying target for this research is to build an online platform where students get an academic and professional profile, thereby creating a bridge to all businesses offering vacancies.

Keywords University, Career Counseling, Online Platform, Jobs, Students, Employment

1. Introduction

Since the investment to have a university degree is a rare purchase and for most students can be the first and last purchase, therefore the choice of university must be carefully evaluated. This means that the image and the university's perceived quality can be the main selection criteria by students [1]. Students make multiple decisions regarding their education and professional guidance. These decisions include choosing a university to attend, choosing a major to study, determining the depth of their involvement in their major and pre-professional activities,

and choosing a career or professional life after graduation [2]. A study by Counsell [3] established ten sources of career-related decision influences: information and advice from parents and close relatives; friends and acquaintances; work experiences; courses and subjects studied; tutors; role models; family ties and commitments; economic situation and job market; perceived needs; and perceived skills and abilities. Several other authors agree that relatives, friends, and tutors can influence career-related decisions [4, 5]

Career development is the combination of psychological, physical, sociological, economic and educational factors that influence an individual's overall academic life [6]. Most career development theorists, believe that career development is a process that takes place throughout life [7]. Many psychologists and sociologists recommend that individuals' progress through different stages of their career should be linked to their psychosocial needs, job growth and various concerns. Ginzberg et al [8] proposed that career development as a cycle of individuals' development and a professional choice for an individual occurs over a large number of years. In a similar way, Sears [9] defined career development as "the general constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and destiny factors that combine to shape an individual's career throughout life. Since the 1990s, globalization has created many new career paths with a wide range of professional choices. In some regions, this has been helpful to individuals suffering from unemployment and poverty. Making a positive career choice and then pursuing it lead an individual to personal growth, satisfaction and social consolidation [10]. Today, the higher education system is more diverse, sustainable and incorporates more technologies and resources [11]. According to Super [12], students are in the exploration phase, where they explore themselves and the world around them. They gain experience through different courses, different experiences, different populations, different clubs, organizations and sports. These experiences help students focus on different careers [13].

However, making a decision is often difficult for students. Students need to be confident in their ability to make better career decisions [14].

According to Jordaan, [15] there are various support services offered by colleges and universities designed to help reduce dropout rates. One of the main implications that relates to the role of education providers is to inform and educate students about career goals and career decisions. This should include factors such as ensuring that students are well-qualified for the job by providing relevant courses and subjects. Several institutions have founded bridging or extended programs in various faculties [15]. Career counseling is the implementation of specific and general interventions that affect an individual's self-understanding, career decisions, career satisfaction, and the balance between work, family, and leisure [16]. In addition, career counseling helps students make decisions about changing or choosing degrees, deciding the right direction, applying for a job, and getting resources to support students in career. Both career counseling and career development began in colleges and universities as a specialty area in 1984. In this era, ethical standards and credentials for the field of career counseling were established [17]. Previous research indicates that different career interventions can be effective. At the same time, different theories, empirical studies, and researchers suggest different perspectives on career intervention, literature, exercises, and treatment that are important in a career development class. Findings from several studies have demonstrated significant early career advantage for students with internship experience, as such experience exposes them to the reality of industry and gives them an indication of what a career in their chosen field of study entails [18, 19]. In a study by Piotrowski and Cox [20], the major motivation for undergraduate business students in terms of career goals was to enhance employment opportunities and income. The study of Jordaan, [15] has implications for certain interest groups that are, or should be, involved in the career decision making processes of higher education students. One of the main implications from this study that relates to the role of education providers is to inform and educate students about career goals and career decisions. According to Jordaan, [15] should include factors such as ensuring that students are well-qualified for the job by providing relevant courses and subjects. In the study of Mmqeta, [21], higher education institutions could consider graduate career portals for their alumni to help industry to locate experienced talent. Such portals could be used to market alumni directly to industry partners, thereby creating a meeting place where talent-seekers and job-hunters could meet.

2. Methodology

In this quantitative research study, the focus was to

assess whether the effectiveness of a career development intervention could be generalized to students at the Polytechnic University of Tirana. The purpose of this study is to conduct a detailed analysis of students' expectations after graduation and their need for career counseling during their studies, with the aim of obtaining employment. In order to accomplish the goals of the study we set out some objectives as follows: to examine the theoretical aspect of the importance of university in career development; to identify the factors that influence career orientation; to identify how variables affect the importance of an employment and career platform; to confront students' expectations with the current reality, to highlight the importance of an online portal as a bridge between students and business.

The sample in this study met the required conditions and represented itself and not the population. Specifically, the representative sample consisted of 500 students. The students were part of the Polytechnic University of Tirana. Sample number determination was followed by the criterion on which sample size is determined by the ability to answer research questions and the interruption of their distribution became the point of information saturation. It was intended to use this data in order to relate quantitative information to the different perspectives of the respondents' personal experience. The sample size is thought to be about 436 students, as the sample size and the strategy of selecting the appropriate sample may place limitations on the generalization of results. In addition, we consider that we are limited by the number of students enrolled in the study, as students of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering were considered as part of the research. Furthermore, we used the confidence interval 85% the selected sample of 436 students. The sample selection procedure was based at probability sampling - simple random sample, current students at bachelor and master level of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering. The students were explained the purpose of the questionnaire and how to complete it. The data collection period was 2 weeks. To collect the information in the interest of the study objectives, the instrument used was the questionnaire which was designed by the study group and distributed to students. The questionnaire was physically distributed, providing as much information as possible. The design of the questionnaire was based on literature, research questions, study needs and study objectives.

Once the questionnaire was designed, it was tested with a group of 10 Industrial and Mechanical Engineering students –Master studies involved in the target population. Students were explained in advance the purpose of the study and the fact that they were randomly selected to test the questionnaire, and asked to evaluate it responsibly. The evaluation process of the questionnaire was proved to be very valuable as it brought improvement in the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in several sections.

After the test proved successful, the questionnaire was distributed to the students. The questionnaire completion time was 15 minutes on average and the aim was to increase the response rate and accuracy of the answers through the presence of a classroom teacher. Out of 500 questionnaires distributed, 436 of them were used for data analysis. The rest, 64 questionnaires turned out to be invalid unanswered questions or more than one answer alternative. The final processing of the data was carried out with IBM SPSS Statistic software (Version 25.0).

3. Data Analyses

54.4% female and 45.6% male participated in the study (table 1). In terms of age group we have 18-21 years old with 66.7%, age group 22-25 years old with 30.5% and over 26 years old with 2.8%. While the level of studies has 68.6% bachelor and 31.4% master.

Table 1. Demographic data

		n	%
Gender	Female	237	54.4
	Male	199	45.6
	Total	436	100.0
Age	18-21	291	66.7
	22-25	133	30.5
	over 26	12	2.8
	Total	436	100.0
Level of studies	Bachelor	299	68.6
	Master	137	31.4
	Total	436	100.0

Source: Author's findings from the study

Of the 237 female students, 82.7% had no counseling sessions and 17.3% had counseling sessions. Of the 199 male students, 74.9% had no counseling sessions and 25.1% had counseling sessions.

	Value	df	p
Pearson Chi-Square	4.012	1	.045

According to the Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (1, N=436) = 4.012, $p < .05$ there is a significant relationship between gender and counseling sessions. The crosstab table shows that men (25.1%) have a higher rate of counseling sessions than women (17.3%). In other study, the result shows that unfortunately, many believe that career counselling services in University are insufficient or even non-existent [22, 23], and if higher education institutions encourage students to set career goals, students will be able to take responsibility for their careers, and they thus become more skilled and therefore more useful to industry [24]. Even in this study it turns out that the University is inexistent and inefficient in career counseling

and to encourage students to set career goals.

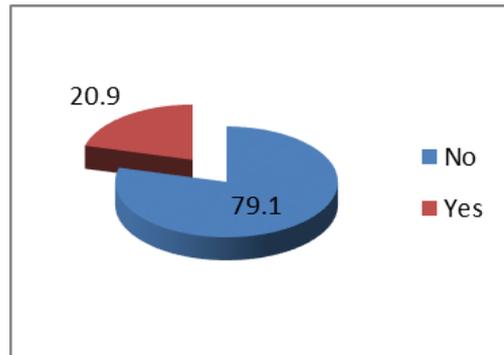
The majority of students chose the University (table 2) based on the suggestions of others (59.9%) and based on previous job market studies (40.1%), whereas they did not choose university based on different fairs (89.9%) and career office consultations (86.5%)

Table 2. Choice of university.

	No		Yes	
	n	%	n	%
Career office consultation	377	86.5	59	13.5
Labor market research	261	59.9	175	40.1
Suggestions of others	175	40.1	261	59.9
Studying the study program	264	60.6	172	39.4
Different fairs	392	89.9	44	10.1

Source: Author's findings from the study

As is shown in the figure below, 20.9% of students had counseling sessions and 79.1% did not.



Source: Author's findings from the study

Figure 1. Providing counseling sessions by the University

Of the 291 students aged 18-21 years, 81.1% had no counseling sessions and 18.9% had counseling sessions. Of the 133 students in the 22-25 age group, 75.2% had no counseling sessions and 24.8% had counseling sessions. Of the 12 students over the age of 26, 75% had no counseling sessions and 25% had counseling sessions.

	Value	df	p
Pearson Chi-Square	2.059	2	.357

According to the Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (2, N=436) = 2.059, $p > .05$ there was no significant relationship between age group and counseling sessions.

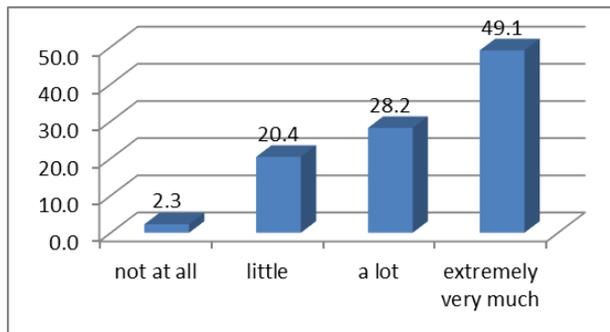
Of the 299 bachelor students, 81.3% had no counseling sessions and 18.7% had counseling sessions. Of the 137 master students, 74.5% had no counseling sessions and 25.5% had counseling sessions.

	Value	df	p
Pearson Chi-Square	2.645	1	.104

According to Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (1, N=436)

= 2.645, $p > .05$ there was no significant relationship between the study cycle and counseling sessions.

The majority of students perceive the role of the university in orientation for the labor market as very important (figure 2). In our study and in previous studies; when students are adequately equipped with career related information, it will facilitate their employability skills enhancement [25].



Source: Author's findings from the study

Figure 2. The importance of university in orientation for the labor market

To see if there are significant differences between the gender regarding the importance of the university in the orientation of the labor market we used the T-test

Table 3. T test of the importance of university in orientation for labor market by gender.

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
University importance for labor market	Female	237	4.23	.948	.349	.727
	Male	199	4.20	.899		

Source: Author's findings from the study

From the table above, we see no statistically significant differences between the gender for university influence on labor market orientation, since the p value is greater than .05. ($t = .349, p > .05$); $\mu_1 - \mu_2 = (M_1 - M_2) = 0.03, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.145, 0.205]$.

Table 4. T test of the importance of university in orientation for labor market by level of studies.

Level of studies		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
University importance for labor market	Bsc	299	4.27	.849	1.525	.129
	Msc	137	4.11	1.069		

Source: Author's findings from the study

To see if there are significant differences between the level of studies in terms of importance in university orientation for the labor market, we have used the test T. From the table above we see that there is no statistically significant differences between the level of study as p value is greater than .05. ($t = 1.525, p > .05$); $\mu_1 - \mu_2 = (M_1 - M_2) =$

0.16, 95% CI [-0.0273, 0.3473].

We used the AVOVA test to see if there are significant differences between age groups regarding the importance of university in the orientation of the labor market.

The result of our study support the study done from Amani [26]. In her study she argues that when students develop and maintain confidence in making career decisions through various sources and experiences in their course of life, they could choose academic majors and/or programmes and subsequent careers from a list of alternative job options available. Thus, university counsellors should pay attention to various sources of career self-efficacy, which are critical for both female and male students as they shift from college to join the labour market.

Table 5. Test ANOVA the differences in the average of the university's importance for the labor market orientation according to age group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p
18-21	291	4.27	.865	1.393	.249
22-25	133	4.13	1.011		
over 26	12	4.00	1.279		
Total	436	4.22	.925		

Source: Author's findings from the study

From the table above, we see no statistically significant differences between the age groups since the p value is greater than .05. ($F = 1.393, p > .05$).

Information on training and internships is obtained most from friends with 39% and online media announcement with 32.6%. while the data clearly show a lack of information obtained from the university (83%) and the career office (96%).

Students say that the best ways to find a job today are informal ways (friends, nepotism or bribes) with 69.5% as well as online portals (29.8%). While they believe and perceive that things will change in the future, the ways to find a job will be through the labor office (47.3%) as well as through internship (43.3%).

Table 5. Finding a job today and perception of how to find a job in the future

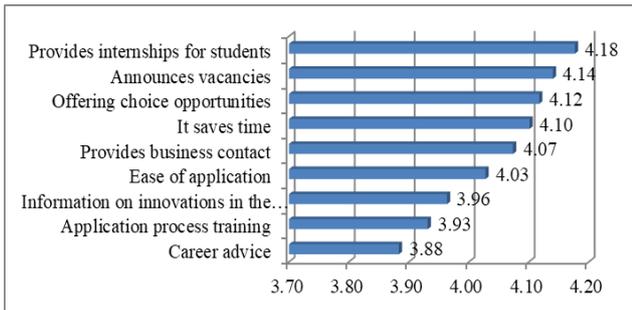
	Finding a job today (%)	Finding a job in the future (%)
From the contests	13.3	36.2
By internship	9.2	43.3
From the University	8.7	37.2
Self-employment	26.8	29.4
Portals online	29.8	31.4
Directorate of Public Administration	8.7	26.4
Labor Office	19.0	47.5
Informal routes	69.5	7.8

Source: Author's findings from the study

According to Jackson [27], university plays a big role in

ensuring that, students are well oriented for the future employment. Even in our study, students (85%) believe that it would be a necessity the use of an online portal that can provide contact with businesses, which saves time, offer choice opportunities, announce the vacancy or offer internships for students etc.

Students think that using an online portal (figure 3) would have a major impact on providing internships for students (M = 4.18, sd = .961), but also on job vacancies, in the ability to contact businesses thus saving time. Meanwhile, students find the impact of the online portal on career counseling less important (M = 3.88, sd = 1.065).



Source: Author's findings from the study

Figure 3. The importance of the elements that make significant use of the portal for career development.

Even in this study, as in the study done by Mnqeta, [21], higher education institutions could consider graduate career portals for their alumni to help industry to locate experienced talent. Such portals could be used to market alumni directly to industry partners, thereby creating a meeting place where talent-seekers and job-hunters could meet. Students highlighted the need for greater collaboration between universities and employers, supporting earlier calls [28].

Table 6. T test of the validity of an online portal for career development by gender.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p	
Validity of online portal for career development	Female	237	4.53	.871	1.890	.059
	Male	199	4.36	.985		

Source: Author's findings from the study

To see if there are significant gender differences in the validity of an online career development portal we used T-test. From the table above we see no statistically significant gender differences since the p value is greater than .05. (t = 1.890, p> .05).

To see if there are significant differences between the age groups regarding the validity of an online portal for career development we used the ANOVA test. From the table below we see no statistically significant differences between the age groups since the p value is greater than .05. (F = .999, p> .05).

Table 7. ANOVA test of validity of an online portal for career development by age group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p
18-21	291	4.41	.948	.999	.369
22-25	133	4.55	.892		
over 26	12	4.42	.793		
Total	436	4.45	.927		

Source: Author's findings from the study

The following table shows no statistically significant differences between the study level as the p value is greater than .05. (t = .357, p> .05).

Table 8. T -test of the validity of an online portal for career development by level of study

Level of study	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p	
Validity of online portal for career development	Bsc	299	4.46	.909	.357	.721
	Msc	137	4.43	.969		

Source: Author's findings from the study

4. Conclusions

The majority of students chose the University based on the suggestions of others and based on previous job market studies, whereas they did not choose based on different fairs and career office consultations. Most of the students had not counseling sessions and in this study it turns out that the University is inexistent and inefficient in career counseling and to encourage students to set career goals. The study show no statistically significant differences between the gender, age or the level of study for university influence on labor market orientation. According to students, the best ways to find a job today are informal ways (friends, nepotism or bribes) with as well as online portals. While they believe and perceive that things will change in the future, the ways to find a job will be through the labor office as well as through internship or through university. In our study, most of the students believe that it would be a necessity the use of an online portal that can provide contact with businesses, which saves time, offering choice opportunities, announcing the vacancy or offering internships for students etc. Higher education institutions could consider graduate career portals for their alumni to help industry to locate experienced talent. Such portals could be used to market alumni directly to industry partners, thereby creating a meeting place where talent-seekers and job-hunters could meet.

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