

THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION IN THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS FROM POLITEHNICA UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST

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Abstract: *The aims of any education that take place within a higher education institution are to provide those skills absolutely necessary for any graduate to enter the labor market in as possible as short time from graduation. The school-to-work transition in Romania is subject of analyses made by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (NISES), but, these studies are based on monitoring the human resources since they leave the education system until their entry into the labor market. The proposed paper aims to highlight the perception of students from Politehnica University of Bucharest (PUB) on opportunities that have to find a job and to use the information received during the study years on the labor market.*

Key words: *education, school-to-work transition, labor market*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present the perception of the students from Politehnica University of Bucharest on their chances to join the labor market after graduation.

The subject has not been broached in terms of student perception but only in terms of time elapsed between the graduation and finding the first job, significant or not for the studies followed.

The author of the paper has started her research since the academic year 2008-2009 by publishing the paper "Knowledge management in education. A Case study on the Polytechnic University of Bucharest" in the Proceeding of 13th IBIMA Conference on Knowledge Management and Innovation in Advancing Economies.

The questionnaire that was used for that study is now completed with additional relevant questions in order to highlight the perception of students on their school-to-work transition.

The survey results will be clearly detailed in the paper contents and they want to be a basis for extending the study. In this way the result of the survey it can become a useful tool in monitoring the perception of the students as well as for the management of universities to provide an educational model that meet the needs of future graduates when entering the labor market.

2. PAPER CONTENTS

The proposed paper is based on a statistical survey that comprises a total of 28 questions and has been carried out in the academic year 2009-2010 on a total of 303 students from the final years (III-IV) of 4 faculties of Politehnica University of Bucharest:

- Automatic Control and Computers (ACC),
- Power Engineering (PE),
- Engineering and Management of Technological Systems (EMTS),
- Biotechnical Systems (BS).

Out of the total of 303 students participating in the survey 76.2% are in the penultimate year of study and 23.8% in the last

year of study. They were elected based on several considerations among which we can mention:

- First, we wanted to avoid double records and as a result, students who answered the questionnaire are from other faculties or other specializations than those included in the survey carried out in the academic year 2008-2009.
- The ability of students in their final years to be able to form an opinion on the quality of education received.
- The share of students who work part time or full time is greater for the final years, and they can appreciate the usefulness of information received over the study years on the labor market.

Regarding the reasons underlying the choice of specialization is found that they vary greatly depending on the faculty.

Thus, for the Faculty of Automatic Control and Computers ranked first and with the largest share is passion for the field of study, while for the Faculty of Engineering and Management of Technical Systems and Power Engineering Faculty the main reason was to find a better and more secure job. Besides, this reason occupied the first place in the top of reason given by students during the investigation achieved in the academic year 2008-2009. (Nicolae, 2009).

The Faculty of Automatic Control and Computers (included in the analysis for the first time in 2009-2010) is, also, one of the best faculties of the Politehnica University of Bucharest primarily due to the perspectives for its future graduates on the market labor.

Moreover, analysis of the share of students who has a job correlated to their specialization strengthens our assertion: only 12.5% of students of the Faculty of Automatic Control and Computers do not have a job correlated with their specialization, while for the students of others mentioned faculties this percentage varies between 68.5% for the Faculty of Engineering and Management of Technological Systems and 89.6% for the Faculty of Biotechnical Systems.

Along with these perceptions, significant is the fact that about half of students surveyed (45%) not necessarily aimed finding a job related to their specialty. This percentage can be interpreted like a flexibility issue but if it is correlated with high percentage of those who believe they have little chance to find a job in the same specialty, we realize that these students have not substantiated their choices on a sufficiently long time horizon or knowingly the labor market requirements. Furthermore, about 78.1% think that they will apply or already is applying less than 50% of information received during the study years and 70.8% of them considered that only about 50% of information is updated knowledge. Thus, students who receive relevant vocational skills in school are more likely to focus on developing a work role identity and acquiring job-related skills and, therefore, often experience less difficulty in STWTs (school to work transitions) as well. (Ng & Feldman, 2007) Also, structured work experience has clear positive effects on the ability of graduates, firstly, to find employment within six months of graduation and, secondly, to secure employment in graduate-level jobs. (Mason et al, 2009)

In addition, 66.5% of them still want to continue studies after graduation at the Politehnica University of Bucharest. This apparent non-sense may have the explanation in the lack of information they have about the labor market needs. This argument is supported by the high percentage of students (79.9%) who do not work during the study years.

If the perception of students on finding a job related to their specialization is somehow clear, here are their answers related to the possibility of taking into their own hands the economic and social destiny by starting a business.

At the question "Are you thinking to start a business on your own after graduation?" 25% of respondents answered "yes, in the area of my specialization", 37.6% answered "Yes, in other area" and 37.4% do not want to start a business on their own. In the academic year 2008-2009 the number of those who wanted to start a business in an area unrelated to their specialization was 47% while those who did not want to start a business had a share of 35%.

However, the desire of about 62.6% of students is to become independent. The answer is also sustained by the weight of those who are willing to invest a sum of 10,000 Euros on the capital market (63.8%) but also, by the general attitude of students in front of the dynamic changes of the economy in general and the labor market in particular.

Thus, at the question "what is your attitude in front of unpredictable and dynamic changes occurring in the economy?" 10.1% have considered them as an advantage, 63.7% of them is preparing to confront them and 26.2% fears of them.

The same desire to start a business (although with a lower weighting) is also supported by 51.2% percentage of students who would opt for a bank loan to launch their business.

Since more than half of respondents see in starting a business the way to achieve the school-to-work transition, is important, in this respect, to present their point of views on the existence and usefulness of information received over the years of study.

Thus, Figure 1 synthesizes the answers to these three questions:

① Have you been provided the necessary information on starting a business during the study years?

② Have you been presented during the lectures how to access European Union funds?

③ Have you made during the years of study a business simulation and watch for it for at least a semester?

The large percentage of those who gave the answer "no" to these three questions entitles us to say that from this perspective the study programs do not meet their information needs in this area. And this fact is overlap on the increasing of the percentage of students who see their professional fulfillment outside the national borders (from 54.9% in 2008/2009 to 74.8% in 2009/2010).

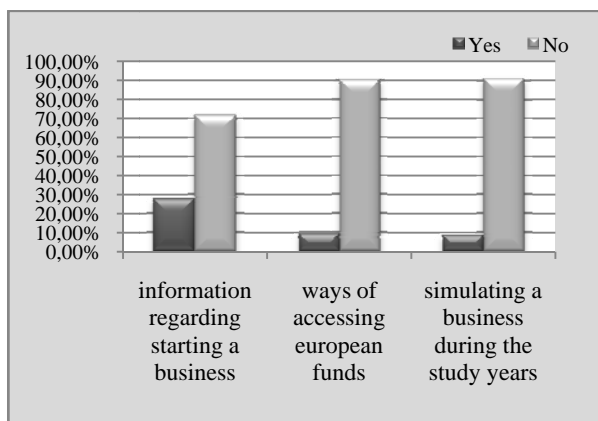


Fig. 1. The perception of students on the receiving necessary information for starting a business

3. CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed to highlight the perception of students from the Politehnica University of Bucharest on school-to-work transition.

The link of school to work must not be done only in a single direction, namely from the educational system to labor market but also vice versa. Furthermore, we believe that the labor demand is the short-term solution for the fluidity of this relationship, even if it is partially. (Nicolae, 2004)

Also, another structured strategy for improving the success of young graduates' integration into the labor market is to develop the *institutional contacts* between universities and companies. Through *internship programs* established between faculties and companies corresponding to their field of specialization, *work shadowing* (students working together more experienced employees) students could get practical experience. (Zaharie, 2007)

But, the paper has intended to present this time, just one side of this long and important road towards the labor market.

By the quality of outputs from the educational system depends the inputs on the labor market and we refer here at quality as a sum of information, attitudes and opportunities for students.

The paper is far from the pretension to exhaust the subject but we consider that is a starting point for extending the research at a broader level.

Choosing a specialization it supposes that gives to the future graduates a major part of what they needs on the labor market. In the case of Politehnica University of Bucharest this assumption is not confirmed by the students' perception.

Given that the option for chosen specialization of a significant weight of students was motivated by the hope of getting a more secure and a better paid job, we can say that this goal is far from being achieved.

In this respect we suggest a closer correlation of information received by the students of Politehnica University of Bucharest with requirements issued by the labor market. This will have as a consequence a more effective and a shorter transition from higher education to labor market and also will diminish the brain drain phenomenon.

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