

CAREER GUIDANCE: WHAT WE GOT WRONG & HOW WE CAN IMPROVE

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Abstract. *The problem of career guidance is an actual one, that has a great impact on a country's society. In this article, we attempt to look into the problem, by researching both the Republic of Moldova as well as other countries in order to better comprehend the practices that we have wrong and how we can improve our own system, by taking their example. This way we can learn from our peers and provide our future generations with a better education in terms of vocational counselling.*

Keywords: *Career orientation, education system, mentorship programs, job market, students, curriculum*

Introduction

Career guidance can be defined as the assistance given to people (especially young people and students) in order to help them make an informed decision as to which professional path they wish to take. It plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of individuals. By providing students with knowledge, resources, and different career options, career guidance can help them achieve success in their chosen field. It can help people to figure out what they're interested in, their abilities, and whatever their goals are and guide them in the right direction for them in terms of their future careers. The development of necessary skills for their selected professions is another support provided by career advice, along with information on work prospects and support in exploring alternative career options.

There are numerous ways that career counselling has an influence. First off, because people can find and pursue acceptable occupations, it lowers unemployment rates. Second, because people are more likely to be employed in positions that are compatible with their skills and interests, job satisfaction and retention are improved. Thirdly, it helps the economy expand by guaranteeing that the labour force has the skills required for the job market. As such, career guidance has become essential over the years, significantly as the job market widens and people are given even more opportunities than ever before.

Furthermore, career counselling improves people's well-being by helping them identify fulfilling occupations that fit with their values and interests. It aids people in realising their objectives, giving them a feeling of direction, and enhancing their general quality of life. Career counselling is thus a crucial service that helps people, companies, and society as a whole.

The State of Career Guidance in Moldova

As our country experiences economic challenges due to a vast number of factors, career guidance has proven reasonably necessary. Moldova faces the issue of high levels of unemployment among youth, so it is essential that students are given all the required tools to properly finish their education and transition into employment [1].

However, it can be observed that the state of career guidance in Moldova is quite limited. The aid the government does provide is scarce, poorly implemented, and not universally available, making it almost always the case that students finish their education feeling uncertain and unprepared as they struggle to navigate the job market.

Career guidance in Moldova is quite simplistic and several things should be improved in order to provide an effective service to all students:

The legal framework in Moldova has built-in features that are meant to facilitate career guidance, however, their implementation is scarce and there is a great need for better coordination and collaboration between employers, schools, and universities alike [2].

Another shortcoming of our system is its availability. Though some schools and universities do provide career counselling, they are not universal. Most students, especially those outside major cities, unfortunately, have no semblance of career guidance available to them. There is a great need for investment in the provision of career guidance services around the country, as well as to students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not have the same reach and access as some of their peers.

Quality of service is another great pitfall of our system. Though these programs get implemented, they are quickly pushed to the side and even forgotten. In truth, the quality of career guidance services can vary widely based on the resources of the schools. This pushed for a more standardised implementation and greater quality assurance, as well as better training of guidance counsellors and more opportunities for self-development all across the board.

Another problem that our system has is its lack of linkage with the labour market. Education rarely has any connection to the labour market (especially school-level education). Most students have no understanding of the skills they would need to develop for the specific careers or fields they are interested in. This creates the problem of a lot of young people being underqualified for the careers that they desire and that might otherwise excel in if given the opportunity. There is a tremendous need for better collaboration between universities, schools, and potential employers to provide students with all the information needed to excel in the job market.

Ways that other countries provide career guidance to its citizens and what can be learned from it

A lot could be said for examining some of the practices of other countries such as Finland, Norway or Germany and implementing bits of their strategy into our own.

To that point, Finland is often considered to have one of the best education systems worldwide. Their career guidance programs seem to be no exception. Finland was found to have one of the lowest unemployment rates among youth in Europe, with 83% of young people being employed [3].

We found that Finnish schools provide comprehensive career guidance services to their students all through the course of their education. They have been found to particularly focus on developing the self-awareness of their students as well as their entrepreneurial mindsets and their career decision-making skills. Career guidance has become an integral part of their entire curriculum. Students are given access to counsellors, career coaches, and teachers that help them deep dive into their interests and skills to discover potential career paths [4]. Curriculum integration is a thing that could greatly benefit the development of our career guidance, though, of course, it would take a long time to implement and quite a large number of resources.

If we continue to look to nordic countries for inspiration, we can also consider Norway. In our research, we have come to the conclusion that their career guidance system is not only highly available but also very comprehensible [5]. The services are provided by the national government, municipalities, schools, universities, and private organisations. Their career guidance system is meant to aid people in understanding their abilities, figuring out their interests, and deciding on potential career paths. The system will also provide ample information on job opportunities, education and training options, various requirements for the desired occupations as well as information on the job market overall.

Another perk of the Norwegian career guidance system is its individualised career counselling, which plays a key part. Typically provided on an individual scale, the counselling is thus tailored to each person's specific needs and unique circumstances. This can provide a more detailed review of each situation. The counsellors use a plethora of tools from tests of aptitude and generic personality quizzes, to things such as interviews that then help each individual to better comprehend the places where they might be lacking or, in turn, the places where they excel. This can also better a person's understanding of their career goals.

A running trend when it comes to a better career guidance system is its integration coming quite early, in school. The integration of it in schools is quite vital, we found. It creates a helpful environment from the start. In Norway, for example, career counselling is provided even earlier than in most other countries. While most places start at the high school level, in Norway, career guidance is provided from elementary school. This way, children start their path, with somewhat of an idea as to what job they wish to pursue in life. This helps students develop awareness of different careers and educational pathways and make informed decisions about their future. Another option offered to students in Vocational Education and Training (otherwise known as VET) [6]. In schools, most career guidance programs tend to focus on VET options.

Another potential country we could take inspiration from is Germany. They took a more hands-on approach to their career orientation, offering vocational education [7] and numerous training programs which would combine classroom learning with work-based training. These kinds of programs could then lead to getting specific certifications and apprenticeships in a wide variety of fields from engineering to healthcare and skill-based trades. Germany also has the Federal Employment Agency, which provides information on job openings, training, and available apprenticeships [8].

Talking about a less western approach, we have Japan. There, high school students are required to choose a track based on their interests and abilities, either academic or vocational, which determines their course of study for the rest of their high school career [9]. The students who choose vocational-based learning end up participating in work-based programs and apprenticeships similar to the way Germany approaches career guidance. Another similar practice is the Hello Work job center which serves a similar purpose as Germany's Federal Employment Agency [8,10].

What can be learned from the practices of other countries and can be implemented in our system

In order to improve career guidance in Moldova, we would have to take a multifaceted approach that would address the various challenges we face.

The most important thing to do to improve career guidance would be to increase investment and develop a strategy to get career guidance more widespread and increase its availability. Increasing the investment through government funding (as well as through partnerships with employers and universities) will assure more resources that can be made available to schools and universities to provide extensively, as well as comprehensive career guidance. Additionally, developing a strategy that would outline the goals and priorities of such a project as well as the roles of different stakeholders would be super important. Such a plan could manifest through consultations with everyone from students and parents to educators and employers, managing to set clear expectations for all parties involved.

As can be seen from the examples above, a lot of the better systems in terms of career guidance incorporate it quite early on. A lot of them use apprenticeships and vocational programs to help their younger generations achieve good careers. Another important fact is that they integrate it into the curriculum. This ensures that everyone, no matter their status or their location benefit from the career orientation help provided.

Some other strategies that would do well to be implemented in our system would be things like career exploration programs that would provide students with the opportunity to learn about specific paths they might be interested in straight from the source, that is, from people who are already experienced in that field. This could be implemented through things like career Days or plain old seminars where a lot of specialists from a lot of domains would be invited to talk with the students and answer any questions they might have.

Hand in hand with that came mentorship programs that would connect one or a small group of students with professionals from whatever field they were interested in. This would give the students better insight into the job. This is a practice implemented in Canada, where high school students are provided the opportunity to work with a mentor. It was shown that this program helped increase students' understanding of their field as well as the job market overall, improving their job prospects after graduation.

Conclusions

Overall, it can be pretty much agreed that career guidance is a pretty important issue and the lack thereof is a problem for students all over who finish their education and find themselves utterly lost as to what they want to do with their life and career. What we stated above are just a few examples of the practices other countries use that could be extremely beneficial. In general, improving career guidance in Moldova, though it requires a lot of effort from the government and institutions such as schools, universities, and employers, by investing in career guidance services and learning from the practices of other countries, Moldova can provide the younger population with the support they need to make well informed and successful career choices that subsequently ensure a brighter future for the country overall.

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