

## Article

# Analyzing Career Counseling and Guidance Services Among Romanian Universities: A Quantitative Approach to Students' Perception

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to evaluate Romanian university students' perceptions of career counseling and guidance (CCG) services provided in 2022–2023. A quantitative methodology was employed, analyzing survey data ( $n = 7402$  respondents from 18 universities) to explore awareness of, utilization of, and satisfaction with such services. Data analysis via SPSS included descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation), bivariate correlations (Pearson, Spearman), and Chi-Square tests to identify significant relationships between variables, such as academic year, knowledge of CCG staff/services, and overall service evaluation. Preliminary results suggest low rates of CCG awareness and use, highlighting a disparity between student needs and available resources. This study contributes to understanding the Romanian CCG context by integrating theoretical perspectives from the international literature on dropout prevention, workforce adaptability in the digital age, and higher education quality assurance models. Limitations regarding reliance on secondary data and subjective response biases are discussed, and directions for future research aimed at improving CCG efficacy and student career transition support are proposed. Complete findings will be presented in the full work, providing an empirical foundation for CCG policy and strategy development aimed at enhancing career guidance services in Romanian higher education.

**Keywords:** students; counseling; career; academic services



Academic Editors: Louis Moustakas and Gregor Wolbring

Received: 7 February 2025

Revised: 20 March 2025

Accepted: 28 March 2025

Published: 1 April 2025

**Citation:** Coman, C.; Bucs, A.; Dalban, M.; Gavriluță, C. Analyzing Career Counseling and Guidance Services Among Romanian Universities: A Quantitative Approach to Students' Perception. *Societies* **2025**, *15*, 92. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15040092>

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## 1. Introduction

Career counseling is a complex process, and throughout history, several theories have been developed that try to better explain this phenomenon. Briggs's theory [1] is based on Carl Jung's approach to personality typologies. Holland's theory [2] emphasizes the importance of identifying individual traits and, based on them, finding a suitable career path. Super [3] developed a theory of career development, arguing that people have a view of their own identity and how they want to be perceived by others, and this view should guide their professional goals. Our study aims to analyze university students' perceptions of career counseling programs and understand how they use and benefit from these services.

### 1.1. Literature Review

Litoiu and Oproiu [4] state that about half of the students surveyed in seven of the top-rated universities in Romania said they needed support in career planning and guidance.

Stăiculescu, Lăcătuș, and Richițeanu Năstase [5] state that starting in 2014, CCOC services became mandatory in all Romanian universities according to a decision of the Ministry of Education. Andronic and Andronic [6] point out that in Romania, counseling services are mostly reactive, focusing on specific problems instead of adopting a proactive approach that guides students in making career decisions.

Recently, studies have also highlighted that the active involvement of teachers in the career guidance process can generate positive results, improving students' ability to adapt to the labor market and facilitating their transition to higher education [7].

The directions of this research are in line with the results obtained by international research, which emphasizes the need to develop career education programs in universities. For example, a study of students in China shows that higher education institutions should actively promote the development of skills necessary for career adaptability and encourage educational policies aimed at supporting this process [8]. Another important factor that influences the academic and professional paths of students is mental health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, studies indicated a significant increase in psychological health problems among students, driven by uncertainty about the future, social isolation, and economic hardship [9].

Counseling, regardless of the format in which it is offered—physical, online, or hybrid—has proven to be an essential factor in increasing students' quality of life and, implicitly, in improving their academic performance and educational satisfaction [10,11]. In another study conducted in Romania, it was shown that career development depends not only on the educational experience offered through the curricula of the subjects but also on participation in extracurricular activities, such as sports. These activities contribute to personal and professional development, providing students with complementary learning opportunities and improving their leadership, collaboration, and time management skills [12].

The objectives of this study are to analyze the awareness and use of career counseling and guidance services among students as well as to assess their satisfaction with these services. The first objective of the research is to assess the level of awareness of students regarding the existence of career counseling and guidance services. This study also aims to analyze the degree of use of these services by students, exploring the frequency and ways in which they access the support offered by counseling centers. Another key objective is to determine the level of student satisfaction with career counseling and guidance services. Finally, this research aims to identify the existence and degree of knowledge of tutoring programs and specialized people in universities.

### *1.2. On a National Scale*

It is important to contextualize the presence of these objectives in the Romanian space. We start from the fact that the university abandonment rate is a problem, and career counseling can influence this fact. Some authors define dropout as “the intentional renunciation of the student from the educational system due to the loss of interest or motivation for learning or the lack of economic resources necessary to continue his studies” [13].

The results of UEFISCDI [14] show that almost half of the students enrolled in a bachelor's degree in 2015 dropped out of classes, with a dropout rate of 47.96%. At the master's level, this rate was 42%, and at the doctoral level, over 70% of those enrolled abandoned their studies. These figures reveal, for the first time, the real dimension of the phenomenon at the national level. The lack of a standardized methodology for measuring university dropout has so far prevented a detailed analysis of student cohorts, essential for identifying the causes and adopting effective measures [14]. The study also highlights the fact that previous academic performance is the best predictor of academic success.

The lower the academic average, the higher the probability of dropping out—over 62% of students with an average between 6 and 7 drop out of school. On the other hand, a high level of academic performance during high school education (averages between 9 and 10) significantly reduces the dropout rate, up to 30% [14]. Another factor with a significant impact on the school performance of Romanian students is the educational level of parents [15].

According to [16], the rate of early school leaving in Romania for the 18–24 age group was 16.4% in 2018, down from 18.1% in 2017. However, this rate remains one of the highest in the EU, exceeding the European average of 10.6% and the national target for 2020 of 11.3%. According to [17], school dropout can be affected by a number of factors, such as personal characteristics, social circumstances, and educational experiences. These factors are consistent with the variables identified within the Social Cognitive Career Theory [17]. Gorghiu et al. [18] point out that early school leaving is the result of causal complexity and represents a difficult and sensitive issue for the whole of Europe. The factors influencing this phenomenon can be analyzed from three perspectives: pedagogical, social, and economic.

Abandonment leads to unemployment. According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), between July and September 2024, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 was 25.3%, significantly above the European average of 15% [19]. This situation indicates major difficulties in the transition from the education system to the labor market for young Romanians. In 2022, only 2% of young Romanians (aged 15 to 29) were employed during their studies, placing Romania in last place in the European Union, along with Slovakia (5%) and Hungary (6%). This share is significantly lower than the European average (25%) and extremely low compared to countries such as the Netherlands (73%), Denmark (52%), and Germany (45%). This substantial difference can be explained by the structure of the Romanian labor market and the limited employment opportunities for young people but also by the lack of integrated educational policies that facilitate the transition from school to work [19]. If the education system does not reinvent itself, the school dropout rate could increase [20]. The current job structure is changing rapidly due to digitalization. In order to cope with the new demands of the labor market, young people need a flexible educational system oriented towards the development of critical thinking and non-routine skills [20].

With this in mind, there are several important reasons why it is valuable to study career guidance: first, career guidance is a key motivating factor that influences individuals' career choices and self-management behaviors [21]. A study by [22] highlighted that career guidance has a significant impact on students' professional development. By understanding their personal interests, abilities, and values, students can make more informed and appropriate decisions about their future careers. In addition, guidance programs play an important role in facilitating adaptation and improving long-term performance [23]. In addition to all these aspects, career counseling programs decrease the school dropout rate due to a sense of belonging, social support, and increased motivation to complete their studies [24]. Career counseling and guidance have multiple benefits at the individual, social, and economic levels. At the societal and economic levels, career counseling and guidance result in improved social capital, economic growth, and better living standards [25].

Nowadays, careers are increasingly oriented towards the individual and not towards organizations. It is no longer enough to simply follow a path predetermined by an organization or choose a career just for the material benefits it can offer [26]. According to [27], career guidance is a person's concept of the professional self, which involves understanding the available careers and the professional lives of employees. It was [28] who defined this new approach as protean career guidance. A protean career is characterized by the fact that the individual assumes control over his or her own career and pursues his or her personal

interests and values [29]. Protean career guidance has two dimensions: self-direction and personal values [30]. People who use protean career guidance manage and develop their own careers based on their values, not those of the organization [30].

Another study showed that protean career guidance is significantly correlated with career optimism and has a positive relationship with job search [31]. Ref. [32] argued that people who are optimistic about their career potential are interested in their future career, engage in learning geared towards that image of the future, and feel that they are on the path to career success. In this context of changes in the labor market, many young workers have adopted a protean orientation in their careers [30].

Students' needs for career counseling and guidance are diverse and can range from personal awareness and skill development, career planning, decision-making, career information, and academic information to job search skills and interviews, stress management, and labor market information [25].

Scholars in the field have positive findings related to student retention and academic success as well as student satisfaction and experience. They encourage higher education providers to invest in programs aimed at retaining students by providing them with a personalized experience through counseling [33].

Looking at recent trends in the digitalization era, [34] points out that adequate career counseling resources are not always available in educational institutions. An alternative to these are online career counseling tools (CACGs), such as online platforms, apps, and role-playing programs. However, online career guidance systems should not be used in isolation. They work best when integrated into a broader framework of in-person interventions and traditional psychological counseling [35].

### 1.3. Social Cognitive Career Theory

This research aims to analyze students' perceptions regarding career counseling and guidance services within Romanian universities, based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). This theory, derived from Bandura's work on self-efficacy and general social cognitive theory, provides a global framework for understanding the career development process [36]. SCCT emphasizes personal career beliefs, including variables such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals, motivations, and situational factors. This approach is essential in the current context, characterized by an ever-changing labor market.

According to [37], self-efficacy, expectations of results, environmental support, and progress in setting goals are fundamental factors influencing students' job satisfaction. Through a meta-analysis conducted on a sample of 7967 respondents, they demonstrated that the mentioned factors are essential in determining professional success. Another relevant aspect for our research is the role of self-efficacy in career decision-making, confirmed by the study in [38]. They compared SCCT models in Asia and Europe, identifying significant cultural and social differences that influence career guidance.

This result underlines the importance of developing educational and counseling policies tailored to the specifics of each region. Regarding the applicability of SCCT in real life, ref. [39] conducted a case study on a student in transition from high school to university, demonstrating that programs aimed at strengthening self-efficacy and social support can improve decision-making and career development. This theory was also used by [40] to explore the factors influencing the choice of a career in auditing. Their study highlighted how individual beliefs turn into professional decisions, providing a concrete example of the application of SCCT in guiding students towards the labor market.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The method used to carry out this study is based primarily on the documentation process but also on secondary database analysis. During the literature review process, a comprehensive range of documents covering various disciplines was examined. This approach was undertaken to meet the objective of this study, which revolves around the career counseling and guidance provided by universities to students.

The main purpose of this research is to examine students' perceptions of the career counseling and guidance services offered in Romanian universities in the period 2021–2023. This study takes a quantitative approach, which involves examining secondary data obtained by distributing questionnaires to students using the Google form feature.

### 2.1. Research Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** *Most students are not aware of the existence of career counseling and guidance services in their universities.*

**Hypothesis 2:** *The use of career counseling and guidance services is low among students.*

**Hypothesis 3:** *The level of student satisfaction with career counseling and guidance services is medium or low.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *Knowledge of tutoring programs and specialized people is limited among students.*

**Hypothesis 5:** *There are significant differences in the perception of career counseling and guidance services between students in different cycles of study and years of study, with students in higher cycles being more aware of and satisfied with these services.*

The main analysis indicators found are represented by the following:

- A. Cycle of studies.
- B. Year of study.
- C. The degree of knowledge of the services offered by the CCOC and of the specialized staff.
- D. Assessment of these services.
- E. Existing tutors and tutoring programs.

### 2.2. Research Questions

To investigate these aspects, our study relied on a set of research questions designed to understand the degree of utilization and satisfaction with career counseling services. The research questions used in the questionnaire are as follows:

- What is your level of study? (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD.)
- What year of study are you in?
- To what extent are you familiar with the services offered by the CCOC and the specialized staff? (Measurement scale.)
- How do you evaluate the services provided by the CCOC? (Measurement scale.)
- Do you know your tutors and the tutoring programs within your educational institution? (Binary response.)

A study similar to ours was conducted in universities in Pakistan, where factors such as students' lack of interest, gaps in communication regarding career counseling services, and insufficient resources from institutional management were identified as significant findings [41]. Although a different research instrument (semi-structured interviews) was used, career management and institutional support were also referenced in studies on students

in China [42] and South Africa [43]. Regarding student satisfaction with career counseling services, a cross-sectional study conducted on a sample of 200 respondents in Ghanaian universities explored this topic [44]. Using the same theoretical model, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), an online survey was administered to Vietnamese students [45]. Thus, the present study aligns with an international research trend in career counseling services across various educational institutions, highlighting their potential to significantly influence students' future development.

The research design used in this study is descriptive and quantitative, focusing on students enrolled in 19 of the universities in Romania during the specified period 2021–2023. A convenience sample [46] is used, which is considered appropriate for exploratory studies or studies focusing on perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, where the goal is to understand trends rather than to provide an exact estimation of a general population. The diversity of universities ensures a national distribution, and the large sample size (N = 7402) validates relevant conclusions regarding students' perceptions.

For data analysis, the study uses SPSS 23 as its primary tool. Analysis techniques include descriptive analysis to summarize data using measures such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation and Pearson and Spearman bivariate correlations. In addition, statistical tests such as Chi-Square were conducted to identify significant relationships and differences between variables.

Ethical considerations play a critical role in this research, with measures in place to protect participants' anonymity, obtain informed consent, and comply with data protection regulations regarding personal information. Our study was approved by the Committee of UNSR Romania (National Union of Students from Romania), decision number: 17, approval date: 2 February 2022.

This study acknowledges several limitations that may affect the results of the research. These limitations include constraints related to the availability and quality of secondary data as well as the potential impact of participants' subjective responses on the validity of results.

### 3. Results

The responses of 7402 students from 19 universities in Romania were analyzed, as shown in the table below (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents according to university of origin.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	3	0.0	0.0	0.0
	"Henri Coanda" Air Force Academy, Braşov	162	2.2	2.2
	"Ferdinand I" Military Technical Academy	57	0.8	3.0
	Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest	494	6.7	9.7
	National School of Political and Administrative Studies	373	5.0	14.7
<b>Valid</b>	"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi	911	12.3	27.0
	"Iuliu Haţieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca	775	10.5	37.5
	"George Emil Palade" University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology of Târgu Mureş	909	12.3	49.8

Table 1. Cont.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
"Emanuel" University of Oradea	15	0.2	0.2	50.0
University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca	65	0.9	0.9	50.9
University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Bucharest	451	6.1	6.1	56.9
West University of Timisoara	57	0.8	0.8	57.7
Maritime University of Constanta	21	0.3	0.3	58.0
University of Petroșani	158	2.1	2.1	60.1
<b>Valid</b> "Titu Maiorescu" University of Bucharest	764	10.3	10.3	70.5
"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău	196	2.6	2.6	73.1
Polytechnic University of Bucharest	765	10.3	10.3	83.4
Transilvania University of Brasov	660	8.9	8.9	92.4
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	330	4.5	4.5	96.8
"Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi	236	3.2	3.2	100.0
Total	7402	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS processing.

The answers come from universities located in the main educational and regional centers in Romania, thus ensuring a balanced geographical representativeness: Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj, Timisoara, Brasov, Constanta, Bacau, Targu Mures, Oradea, Petrosani (Table 1).

Thus, the significance of this research is underlined by the incorporation of views from a multitude of regions in Romania, comprising not only major university centers but also institutions located in smaller cities, thus presenting a comprehensive and complete description of the higher education framework in Romania. The universities are among the top teaching and research institutions in Romania, as reflected in international rankings [47].

Moreover, the research encompasses feedback from a diverse range of university types, such as technical, economic, medical, military, and art institutions, highlighting the wide range of academic disciplines and fields of vocational training present in the higher education sector. This inclusive approach ensures that the study captures the distinct characteristics and nuances of different types of institutions, thus enriching the analysis and providing valuable insights into the diverse educational offerings available in Romania.

In addition, the large volume of responses collected for this study, which amounts to 7402, is substantial, not only demonstrating the extensive coverage and involvement of the research and also conferring a high level of statistical robustness, allowing for in-depth examination and reliable inferences about perceptions and use of career counseling and guidance services.

The division of students by study cycles is mainly oriented towards bachelor's degree students with a percentage of 80.3% (N = 5943), followed by those studying in master's programs, 17.8% (N = 1318), and finally students registered in a doctoral cycle, totaling 138 respondents, i.e., 1.9%.

After presenting the sociodemographic data about the target audience, the first reference indicator analyzed was the degree of awareness regarding the services offered by the CCOC and the specialized staff.

In relation to their distribution in each academic year, attendance notes the total number of academic years completed by students up to that point. Essentially, when

examining a student enrolled in the second year of a master’s program, one must take into account the three or four years spent pursuing a bachelor’s degree in addition to one or two years dedicated to the master’s program. This method of presenting data is chosen due to our focus on the quantitative aspect of the time invested in academic activities, thus capturing the depth of knowledge and skills acquired. It can be inferred that a student in the sixth year of a medical program is expected to possess a higher level of expertise compared to a student in the third year of a bachelor’s degree program. Progression through different levels of study is reflected in the completed years of study, highlighting each student’s evolving educational journey.

From the table below, it can be seen that most of the representatives are from the second year of study, –29.7%, so they have a certain experience related to academic services, followed by those in the first year and later the third year of study (see Figure 1).

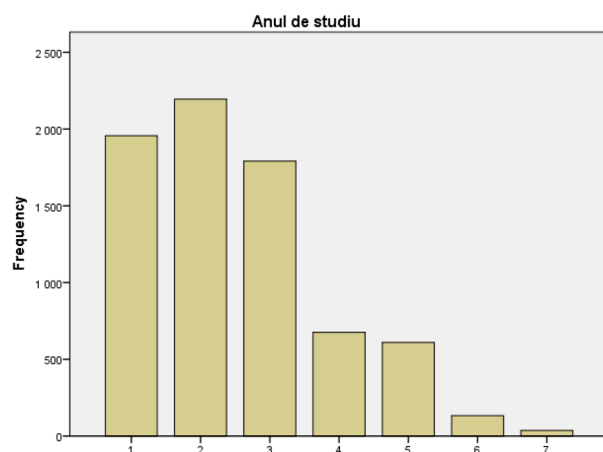


Figure 1. Distribution according to the year of study. Source: SPSS processing.

Out of a total of 7402 student responses analyzed, 63.2% (4680 students) stated that they did not know about the existence of career counseling and guidance services (CCOC) or had never used these services (Figure 1). The remaining 36.7% (2719 students) indicated that they were aware of the existence of these services and used them. In various international studies, it is shown that the lack of interaction of students with these support services can lead negatively to their professional and intellectual development Selma. According to international studies, the lack of access to counseling services is a widespread problem. For example, a study by the Healthy Minds Network found that 60% of students who needed counseling services did not receive help in the past year [48]. This problem is amplified by barriers such as lack of time, stigmatization, and limited resources of institutions [49].

Making a correlation between the student’s year of study, educational cycle, and degree of knowledge of these educational services, several aspects were found. The correlation between the study cycle and the knowledge/exploration of counseling services is  $r = -0.086$ . Basically, this is a weak negative correlation, suggesting that as the cycle of studies progresses, there is a very slight tendency for students to be less aware of career counseling and guidance services or to use them less (see Table 2).

Table 2. Pearson test on the correlation between cycle and year of study and CCOC knowledge.

	Cycle of Studies	Year of Study	Knowledge of CCOC Services
Cycle of studies	1		
Year of study	0.250 **	1	
Knowledge of CCOC services	-0.086 **	-0.048 **	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS processing.

Regarding the correlation between the year of study and the knowledge/exploration of counseling services, this is also a very weak negative correlation, indicating that as students advance through the years of study, there is a slight tendency to be less aware of counseling and career guidance services or to use them less (Table 2).

Throughout the study cycle, it was observed that a substantial part of the students, 77.2% in the first year, did not have knowledge about or did not use career counseling and guidance services, indicating a potential requirement for an adjustment period to acclimatize to the new educational framework. The following year, the percentage increased to 85.7% among second-year students who also did not know about or did not benefit from these services, an even higher percentage than the previous year. As the cycle progressed to Year 3, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of students who do not have information about or use these services; however, the figures remained significant, implying a limitation in the effectiveness of efforts to promote awareness and use of career counseling and guidance services.

In the first year of study, a notable 25.2% of students are aware of or have used career counseling and guidance services, showing a moderate level of familiarity and engagement with these resources (Table 3). Moving into the second year, this percentage increases slightly to 29.8%, indicating an increasing awareness and use of these services among students as they progress in their academic journey. However, by the third year, the percentage drops to 24.3%, suggesting a slight decrease in knowledge and use of career counseling and guidance services compared to the previous year. As students enter their fourth year and beyond, the percentages continue to steadily decline, indicating a worrying trend of declining access to and engagement with these crucial support services as students advance further in the study cycle. This persistent decline highlights a potential lack of improvement in ensuring adequate access to career counseling and guidance services for students in their higher years of study, which may have implications for their academic and professional development. Efforts to increase awareness, accessibility, and use of these services among students throughout all years of study are imperative to ensure a well-integrated and supportive academic environment conducive to their overall success and well-being.

**Table 3.** Distribution of students according to knowledge of CCOC services and educational cycle.

Existence/Knowledge of CCOC Services			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Right away	Missing	System	3	100.0		
		License	3612	77.2	77.2	77.2
	Valid	Masters	988	21.1	21.1	98.3
		Doctorate	80	1.7	1.7	100.0
		Total	4680	100.0	100.0	
Also	Valid	License	2331	85.7	85.7	85.7
		Masters	330	12.1	12.1	97.9
	Total	Doctorate	58	2.1	2.1	100.0
		Total	2719	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS processing.

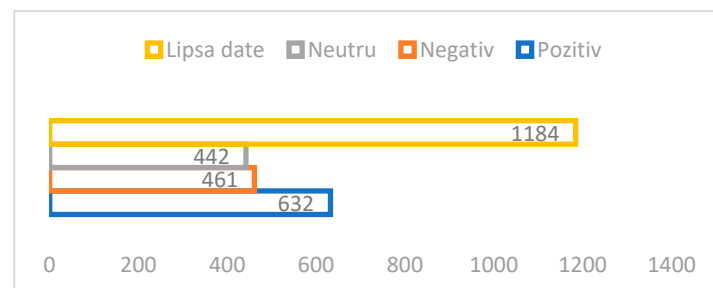
Our analysis continued with an evaluation of the counseling and guidance services from the students (Table 4). The students' responses were converted into a single variable, called "appreciation of career counseling and guidance services". This variable was classified into three categories: negative (0), positive (1), and neutral (2).

**Table 4.** Distribution of students according to knowledge of CCOC services and year of study.

Existence/Knowledge of CCOC Services		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Right away	Missing	System	3	100.0		
		1	1178	25.2	25.2	
		2	1395	29.8	29.8	
	Valid	3	1135	24.3	24.3	79.2
		4	410	8.8	8.8	88.0
		5	452	9.7	9.7	97.6
		6	92	2.0	2.0	99.6
Also	Valid	7	18	0.4	100.0	
		Total	4680	100.0	100.0	
		1	779	28.7	28.7	28.7
	Valid	2	800	29.4	29.4	58.1
		3	656	24.1	24.1	82.2
		4	266	9.8	9.8	92.0
		5	158	5.8	5.8	97.8
Valid	6	41	1.5	1.5	99.3	
	7	19	0.7	0.7	100.0	
	Total	2719	100.0	100.0		

Source: SPSS processing.

Negative answers mean that students were dissatisfied with the services offered and that they want to improve them. Positive responses indicate a state of satisfaction of the students who participate in the activities of the counseling and guidance center, interact with different actors, or are aware of the activities carried out. The state of neutrality represents the responses of students who either want to maintain the status quo or show an indifference towards this educational service (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Students' perception in relation to CCOC. Source: own processing.

Thus, out of the total number of respondents who benefited from or heard of the services offered by the career counseling and guidance centers, the situation is as follows: out of the total of 2719 students who benefited from training from the career guidance and counseling centers or heard about their activities, it is shown that 632 positively appreciate these activities and services (Figure 2).

In an analysis using the Chi-Square test, a statistically significant association between the analyzed variables is shown (Table 5). In the context of this study, we can conclude that there is a significant relationship between "knowledge of services" and "appreciation of services". This means that the perception and use of career counseling and guidance services vary depending on the student's course of study.

**Table 5.** Chi-Square tests.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1658,448 a	3	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	1682,743	3	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	929,670	1	0.000
No. of valid cases	7399		

a. A total of 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 193.30.

The value of 1658.448 with 3 degrees of freedom is very high, and the associated  $p$ -value (0.000) is much lower than the significance level of 0.05. This means that there is a statistically significant association between the variables analyzed. Moreover, we find a strong and significant linear association, and the large number of cases (7399) ensures a high statistical power and accuracy of the results (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Symmetric measures.

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	a. Non	0.473	0.000
	b. Cramer's V	0.473	0.000
No. of valid cases		7399	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Furthermore, using Spearman correlations, a statistical method used to measure the strength and direction of the association between the two variables, a calculated Spearman correlation coefficient of  $r_s = -0.286$  can be observed, indicating a moderate negative correlation between these two variables. This value suggests that as the level of knowledge or use of services increases among students, there is a corresponding decrease in the appreciation of these services (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** The correlation between the knowledge of the services and their appreciation.

			Existence/ Knowledge of CCOC Services	Appreciation of Career Counseling and Guidance Services
Spearman's rho	Existence/knowledge of CCOC Services	Correlation coefficient	1000	-0.286 **
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	Appreciation of career counseling and guidance services	N	7399	7399
		Correlation coefficient	-0.286 **	1000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		N	7399	7399

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: own processing.

The statistical significance of the correlation was determined to be  $p < 0.01$ , meaning that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to have occurred randomly by chance (Table 7). Moving on to the interpretation and conclusions drawn from the analysis, the moderate negative correlation identified by  $r_s = -0.286$  highlights the trend in which students' familiarity with or dependence on services is associated with a decrease in their perceived value. This model may suggest the underlying issues of how the quality of these services is perceived by students.

As for the existence of tutoring programs, the situation is much improved. Over 3600 students said that they know their year advisor or tutor and that they had contact with them in order to carry out some activities. However, the percentage of respondents' distribution is influenced by the large number of missing data, which represents over 27% (see Table 8).

**Table 8.** Students' degree of knowledge of tutoring programs.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1704	23.0	23.0	23.0
	1	3636	49.1	49.1	72.2
	99	2059	27.8	27.8	100.0
	Total	7399	100.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	0.0		
	Total	7402	100.0		

Source: SPSS processing.

The correlation coefficient associated with the appreciation of career counseling and guidance services is  $r_s = -0.286$ , with a statistically significant  $p$ -value of less than 0.01, suggesting a noteworthy relationship (Table 8). Similarly, the correlation coefficient related to knowledge of the availability of tutors or mentoring programs is  $r_s = 0.082$ , also with a  $p$ -value less than 0.01, indicating a significant association.

When examining the assessment of career counseling and guidance services in relation to knowledge of tutors and mentoring programs, the correlation coefficient is  $r_s = -0.386$ , with a  $p$ -value below 0.01, highlighting a substantial correlation. Interpreting these correlations provides valuable insights into the dynamics at play within the education and career support systems. The correlation between awareness or exploration of counseling services and their appreciation, with a coefficient of  $r_s = -0.286$ , signifies a moderately negative relationship. This suggests that students who are familiar with these services or have used them may tend to underestimate their significance, potentially indicating problems in the perceived quality of these services (see Table 9).

**Table 9.** Spearman correlations.

			Existence/ Knowledge of CCOC Services	Appreciation of Career Counseling and Guidance Services	Do you Know About the Existence of Tutors?/Are There Tutoring Programs?
Spearman's rho	Existence/knowledge of CCOC Services	Correlation coefficient	1000	-0.286 **	0.082 **
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
		N	7399	7399	7399
	Appreciation of career counseling and guidance services	Correlation coefficient	-0.286 **	1000	-0.386 **
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
		N	7399	7399	7399
Do you know about the existence of tutors? /Are there tutoring programs?	Correlation coefficient	0.082 **	-0.386 **	1000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		
	N	7399	7399	7399	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: own processing.

Moreover, the correlation between knowledge or exploration of counseling services and awareness of tutors or mentoring programs, with a coefficient of  $r_s = 0.082$ , represents a weak positive correlation (Table 9). This implies that students who are familiar with counseling services are also likely to be informed about the mentoring programs and specialist assistance available to them. Finally, the correlation between appreciation of counseling services and knowledge of tutors or mentoring programs, with a coefficient of  $r_s = -0.386$ , demonstrates a moderately negative correlation. This suggests that students who do not highly value counseling services are more likely to be aware of the existence

of mentoring programs and specialized support staff. These findings shed light on the interconnectedness of support services in educational settings.

As for the results of the Chi-Square test, the analyses of the correlation between “year of study” and “knowledge of tutors” are as follows.

The Chi-Square value of 471.569 with 18 degrees of freedom is significant ( $p < 0.000$ ), indicating that there is a significant association between “year of study” and “knowing tutors”.

There was a significant linear association between “year of study” and “knowledge of tutors” ( $p < 0.000$ ) (see Table 10).

**Table 10.** Chi-Square test.

Indicator	Value	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	<i>p</i> -Value (Asymp. Sig. 2-Sided)
pearson chi-square	471,569	18	0.000
likelihood ratio	513,911	18	0.000
linear-by-linear association	48,757	1	0.000
number of valid cases (n)	7399		
non	0.252		0.000
cramer's v	0.146		0.000

Source: own processing.

Thus, the results of the Chi-Square test and symmetrical measures (Phi and Cramer's V) indicate a significant association between “year of study” and “knowledge of tutors”. Although the association is statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ), the strength of the association is moderate (Phi = 0.252) and weaker to moderate according to Cramer's V (0.146) (Table 10). These results suggest that the perception and knowledge of tutors vary depending on the year of study of the students, but the variability is not very strong. This can be interpreted as indicating that although there are differences in the knowledge of tutors between students in different years of study, these differences are not extremely pronounced.

#### 4. Discussion

Our study looked at the level of awareness and use of career counseling and guidance services among students. Out of the total of 7402 responses analyzed, it was found that 63.2% of the students were not aware of the existence of these services or had never used them. This indicates a lack of information and involvement of students in the use of these educational resources. It is important to note that the lack of access to career counseling and guidance services is a widespread problem internationally.

Previous studies, such as the one conducted by the Healthy Minds Network, have shown that 60% of students who need counseling did not receive help in the last year. This problem is amplified by barriers such as lack of time, stigma, and limited resources of institutions. Our results are consistent with the findings of other researchers.

Thus, through these analyses, Hypothesis 1 is fulfilled, according to which, “most students are not aware of the existence of career counseling and guidance services in their universities”.

The correlations calculated between the study cycle and knowledge of CCOC services ( $r = -0.086$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between the year of study and knowledge of CCOC services ( $r = -0.048$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicate a weak negative correlation. This suggests a slight tendency for students to be less aware of CCOC services or to use them less as they progress in their studies.

Hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed. Although the correlations are weak, they still indicate a trend of declining knowledge and use of CCOC services as students progress in their studies.

A study by [25] highlighted that students in developing countries make insufficient use of career counseling and guidance services. The authors note that “these services are underutilized by students, which can be attributed to both individual and institutional factors” [25].

This reflects the situation identified in our study, where a significant proportion of students have no knowledge of or have not used career counseling and guidance services. These findings have important implications for students’ academic and professional development. Lack of access to counseling and guidance services can lead to problems such as emotional turmoil and inappropriate decisions regarding education and careers [25]. International studies also highlight that students’ lack of interaction with these support services can have a negative impact on their professional and intellectual development [50].

The Chi-Square analysis indicates a statistically significant association between knowledge of services and their appreciation (Chi-Square value = 1658,448,  $p < 0.01$ ). The Spearman correlation ( $r_s = -0.286$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) suggests that there is a moderate negative correlation between knowledge of services and their appreciation.

This indicates that as students become more familiar with the services, their appreciation decreases. Hypothesis 3 is confirmed. There is a significant relationship between knowledge of CCOC services and their appreciation, but the relationship is negative, suggesting a potential problem in the perception of the quality of these services. Our results suggest that this decline in appreciation could be correlated with a discrepancy between students’ expectations and the reality of the services provided. As they interact with these centers, students may find that the support received does not fully meet their specific needs, indicating the necessity for qualitative improvements in counseling activities.

The analysis of correlations and the distribution of service appreciation by study cycles indicate that there is a decrease in satisfaction with CCOC services as students advance through the study cycles. Students in more advanced cycles of study tend to be less satisfied with these services ( $r_s = -0.286$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hypothesis 4 is confirmed. Students in advanced study cycles are less satisfied with the CCOC’s services. This trend can be explained by the maturation of students’ expectations and a greater awareness of the discrepancy between the educational offerings and the actual demands of the labor market. As they approach graduation, students become more critical in evaluating these services, as their impact on the transition to a career becomes more evident.

Ref. [50] also observed in their study that higher education students are more interested in obtaining official certificates and diplomas than in building a personal profile that will help them transition to professional life after completing their studies. This may explain students’ apathy toward and lack of interest in participating in the activities offered by career departments and faculties, which aim to improve students’ employment chances and achieve better results in terms of labor market insertion [50].

This finding is relevant in the context of our study, where we observed a decrease in awareness and use of career counseling and guidance services as students progress through the study cycle.

Tutoring programs are known and used by 49.1% of students, compared to 36.7% of students who know and use CCOC services. This indicates a greater knowledge and use of tutoring programs. Hypothesis 5 is confirmed. Mentoring programs are better known and used compared to career counseling and guidance services.

The study results highlight the need for institutional interventions to improve accessibility and utilization of career counseling services, as the lack of information and engagement negatively impacts students’ transition to the labor market [51]. An effective strategy involves integrating career counseling into the academic curriculum, ensuring each student has access to personalized guidance and aligning their skills with economic

demands. Simultaneously, promotional campaigns through digital platforms and academic events can enhance the visibility of these services.

At the governmental level, a key solution is the allocation of funds for the development of counseling infrastructure, the training of specialists, and the digitalization of the process [52]. An important aspect is the legal regulation of the process to ensure at least 1 counselor per 800 students, similar to the pre-university education system [53]. Given that universities have institutional autonomy, this can also be achieved by creating new positions and engaging career guidance experts.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the results of our study align with previous research and emphasize the importance of increasing awareness and usage of career counseling and guidance services among students. This study highlighted a significant lack of awareness and utilization of career counseling and guidance services (CCOC). This outcome underscores the need for greater efforts to inform students about and engage them in utilizing these important resources. However, there is a trend suggesting that students at more advanced stages perceive these services as less useful or relevant.

Moreover, the appreciation of these services is inversely proportional to the level of awareness, which may reflect a critical perception of their quality. Tutoring programs are better known and utilized than CCOC services, possibly because they are supported by students' classroom professors and perceived as more useful for their immediate needs.

These findings suggest that future research should focus on identifying effective strategies for promoting and integrating career counseling and guidance services, while universities can use these insights to develop more proactive and tailored policies to meet students' needs.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; methodology, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; software, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; validation: C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; formal analysis, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; investigation, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; resources, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; data curation, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; writing-original draft preparation, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; writing-review and editing, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; visualization, C.C., A.B., M.D. and C.G.; supervision, C.C.; project administration, C.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by UNSR (National Union of Students in Romania) Decision number: 17. Approval Date: 2 February 2022.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** We, the authors, declare that data are unavailable due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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