

# The Power of Social Influence

Students' Choice of Higher Education: the Case of Brăila,  
Romania

Andra Corina Tureac

Institute of International Education  
Department of Education  
Master Thesis 30 HE credits  
International and Comparative Education  
Master Programme in International and Comparative Education  
(120 credits)  
Spring term 2015  
Supervisor: Dr. Mikiko Cars



# The Power of Social Influence

## Students' Choice of Higher Education: the Case of Brăila, Romania

**Andra Corina Tureac**

## Abstract

In a fast paced, modern world, with massive volumes of information circulating across mass media and the internet, real time communication through social media allowing for continuous contact and increased peer influence, in a world of high diversity and competition between the best products and the best services, it becomes more and more difficult to make a choice. The pressure of variety and emerging information flows makes any decision process challenging in all areas of human existence: choosing the best job, the best employer, leading the best possible life. People are faced with the uncertainty of choice from their early years, but the first important step they have to make when entering the adult world is deciding upon their education. Every year high school graduates are troubled with choosing their future studies. Education has a major impact on individuals' future career, the opportunities they later encounter in life, the people they meet and their personal development. In their turn, educational institutions are well aware of the challenge this decision process implies. They try to market themselves and attract students, contributing thus to the increased volume of information and the difficulty of selection.

This research takes a close look at what influences students in their choice of post-secondary education. What are the main characteristics of the decision making process? Since it involves many different influences, how do family and friends impact the choice? What is the influence of the mass media? Which are the information sources students rely mostly on? A quantitative approach has been used to explore the influence of external social factors. The study investigates the post-secondary educational choices of 213 high school students, selected from two different high schools in Brăila, Romania. The selection of participants was based on the performance of the high school in the previous years, one of them being considered a top performing high school and the other one a low performing one. From these two high schools, two Humanistic profile classes and two Mathematics/Science classes were randomly selected per high school, thus covering a large number of students with different interests, competencies, performance records, but also socio-economic backgrounds. The data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed by means of correlations and distribution, percentages and means.

### **Keywords**

Post-secondary education, choice, influencers, family, friends, media

# Contents

- Abstract ..... ii**
- Acknowledgements ..... iv**
- Table of Contents ..... v**
- List of Abbreviations ..... vii**
  
- Chapter One: Imtroduction ..... 1**
  - 1.1 Background ..... 1**
  - 1.2 Statement of the Problem ..... 2**
  - 1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study..... 3**
  - 1.4 Significance of the Study ..... 4**
  - 1.5 Limitations of the Study ..... 5**
  - 1.6 Structure ..... 7**
  
- Chapter Two: Key Theories and Concepts..... 9**
  - 2.1 Introduction ..... 9**
  - 2.2 Decision Making Theories ..... 10**
  - 2.3 Process Approaches ..... 13**
  - 2.4 Factors Approaches ..... 14**
  
- Chapter Three: Research Methodology ..... 18**
  - 3.1 Introduction ..... 18**
  - 3.2 Research Location ..... 18**
  - 3.3 Core Variables ..... 20**
  - 3.4 Method ..... 22**
  - 3.5 Sample Selection ..... 24**
  - 3.6 Data Collection and Processing ..... 26**
  - 3.7 Validity and Reliability..... 27**
  - 3.8 Ethical Considerations ..... 28**
  
- Chapter Four: Setting ..... 31**
  - 4.1 Background of the Analyzed Country..... 31**
  - 4.2 The Educational System in Romania ..... 33**
    - 4.2.1 The General Structure of the Educational System in Romania ..... 33**
    - 4.2.2 The Structure of Post-Secondary Education..... 34**

<b>4.2.3 Past and Current Trends in University Choice.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter Five: Research Findings: Analysis and Discussion .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5.1 Data Presentation.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5.2 Gender, School Performance and University Choice .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>5.3 Family Influence.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>5.4 Friends Influence .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>5.5 The Influence of the Media .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>6.1 Concluding Remarks.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>6.2 Verification of Theoretical Perspectives .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>6.3 Recommendations and Further Research .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>References... ..</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire in English .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire in Romanian.....</b>	<b>74</b>

# List of Abbreviations

BAC	Baccalaureate Exam
CC	Correlation Coefficient
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EU	European Union
IT	Information Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
PUL	Personal Data Act
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

After the meeting of the European Council in Lisbon in 2000, the European Union decided to develop the most performing knowledge based economies, so that their citizens can access more and better work opportunities. In this view, education became one of the most important desirable social goods. Its “consumption” by individuals has external positive effects that combine both individual and social benefits: well educated individuals are expected to grow into productive members of society, contributing to its development. As a consequence, for knowledge based economies to function, their members need to have a strong theoretical and practical knowledge, compatible with the growing demands of the labor market. The rapid developments of the modern society led though to a diversified demand, increased specialization and implicitly a high number of educational paths.

The educational offer of schools and universities is rapidly increasing, creating more and more development opportunities, a larger number of academic programs and qualifications. Given all these changes and challenges, it becomes relevant and even imperative to research the process through which individuals choose their education and specialization, their choice of a higher education program.

The current research is an attempt to evaluate the way Romanian high school students choose post-secondary education. Given that teenagers’ decisions are not independent from their previous experiences, the examples surrounding them, the people they meet with their particular educational backgrounds and opinions, this paper will study the way they select post-secondary education as a result of social influence, looking at the impact of various factors on their decision making process.

The main objective of the research is to demonstrate that their interest in pursuing tertiary studies is closely related to social external factors such as the economic status of their family, the education level of their parents, the influence of their friends and the influence of the media. Where there are no official programs of professional counseling, high school students will decide what suits them through their relationship with other significant factors such as family, peers etc. Students rarely make the final decision regarding their studies alone. The process involves dialogue between and among students, parents, advisors, teachers, friends, relatives, and representatives from institutions. Starting from these premises, the current research will try to define the decision making process, determining to what extent the decision is controlled by the student or by other individuals. The study takes the particular example of Romanian students in their final year of high school, right before the moment of choosing their post-secondary education.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

There is one crucial moment in the evolution of individuals which has the power to influence their entire journey through life: the moment of choosing their higher education. Every year graduating high school students are faced with the problem of having to decide on their future

education. In their turn, universities are challenged trying to attract good students, in competition with other universities.

Given the many various alternatives that they have to investigate, the choice becomes a critical turn in students' lives. The decision they make at this time will later determine their future, their job and implicitly their life quality, their contribution to society, the people they meet, who they become as individuals. The final selection is affected by many external, social factors. The goal of this study is to analyze the main influences or the aspects that are considered by recent high school graduates in this decision-making process and determine to what extent they impact the rationality of the choice. The study takes as an example high school graduates in Romania and looks at the correlation between their choices and their contact with family and friends, as well as the influence of mass media and the internet.

## 1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to investigate if the university selection process is based on environmental, social factors, by looking at the particular choices of Romanian students in the city of Brăila. The attempt is to analyze if decision is determined by social external aspects, focusing on three particular influencers: parents, friends and the media and trying to examine how much students' choices are decided by these factors in their environment, instead of their rational view on life. The three influencers were selected after the literature review, as described in section 3.3 Core Variables later in the study.

The participants in the research are high school students in their final years of study, selected from two high schools with different performance records: a high performing and a low performing high school. The students belong to two Humanistic and two Math/Sciences classes randomly selected in each high school, totaling eight classes and 213 students with different profiles, interests, performance and socio-economic backgrounds.

The research has three main objectives:

1. Present the current trends in university selection for Romanian high school students.
2. Analyze three selected influence factors (family, friends, the media) and establish their impact on students' choices; in other words who they turn to first and who they rely on most.
3. Depending on the results, examine possible measures that students, parents and other stakeholders can take in order to ensure a balanced, well informed and rational decision process.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

The study is significant for students, parents, teachers and educational planners. The analysis benefits all of these categories, as it helps them understand the selection process and how each of the involved parties can contribute to it. Knowing the impact of social influencers can help students

become aware of their own position and can encourage them to listen more to their own needs and preferences and filter the information carefully before choosing an educational career that might not suit them, but which their parents or friends consider to be the right one. Becoming aware of the power of social influencers also helps parents support their children, help them discover their own interests and make a choice based on their potential, not on what brings a well-paid job. Last but not least, this research is also significant for teachers and educational planners, as it shows the importance of professional counseling, a service which is currently missing in Romanian schools and which could otherwise make a difference in students' selection of a university and educational program (Gașpar M., 2004, pp. 37 – 40).

The study also has a practical significance, since the results can provide valuable information to post-secondary institutions, colleges and universities, helping them improve their recruitment process and answer the needs of the students. It can contribute to the improvement of universities' marketing strategy and help in adding relevance to the information disseminated by these institutions to their future students.

High schools and study counsellors may also benefit from this study, as it can provide them with a better understanding of the process and the students' needs. It is critical for advisors working with students and parents during the selection process to be aware of the decision mechanisms and influential factors in order to provide good guidance.

The current research can serve as a basis for future investigation of the decision making process and the social influencers, aimed at identifying methods and strategies that help students find the right path and choose a field of study that matches their interests and capabilities. It can also contribute to what is already known about the selection process in choosing a college or university and may increase knowledge about factors that are considered influential.

## 1.5 Limitations of the Study

Although similar research exists at an international level, the behavior and educational choices of Romanian students have not been thoroughly investigated so far, making the present attempt difficult, with scarce data and statistics to rely on.

An important limitation is the fact that participants are asked to remember and describe situations that occurred in the past. Although most of the questions refer to the recent past, the limitations of memory must be considered. In addition to this, when asked to remember recent situations, people tend to be more rational and objective than at the time of the decision, eliminating the lack of self-awareness and the emotional reactions that might have impacted the process. All of these aspects, inherent to the retrospective approach, might become a source of error in the study.

The current research starts from the assumption that the participants are willing and capable to provide the requested information and that they are honest and accurate in their answers. Given the fact that the information cannot be verified, but relies on the subjective and willful contribution of the participants, an error margin should be considered when reading the results of the study.

The questionnaires that are distributed to participants are written in Romanian and then translated to English. Given the fact that two languages are involved and exact translation is not always possible, some of the translation of both the questions and the answers might influence the interpretation.

The investigation is limited to 213 students, aged 17-19. It does not include younger and older individuals, who may provide a different input and does not include a higher number of students, although a much larger sample would allow better for generalization. Due to time, costs and other practical limitations, the size of the sample cannot be increased and generalization becomes difficult. Thus, the results of this research are valid for the particular age, location and characteristics described in this study and cannot be generalized or applied to other locations and situations.

Given the small size of the sample and the high number of aspects under investigation, another consequent limitation is the fact that the use of correlation coefficients could have an impact on the validity and reliability of the results. Where the number of participants is not very high, there will be also few possible combinations of the values of the variables, thus increasing the probability of obtaining a certain combination by mere coincidence (Bryman, 2012, pp. 197-198, 349-350). As a consequence, when interpreting the results, one should bear in mind that due to the rather small sample size, it is probable that the identified correlations can also be the result of chance, thus representing a potential source of error.

Another limitation of the study is its cross-disciplinary nature. It is difficult to analyze the decision mechanisms of teenagers from the unique perspective of education, given that a great part of this process requires very good knowledge of human behavior and psychology, disciplines which can provide very good theories and clarifications, and can shed light upon the selection process. Further and more in-depth, extensive studies which take on a holistic approach involving several other disciplines, might be necessary in order to properly understand the decision making process.

With these limitations in mind, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on the relationship decision – social influencers. The purpose of this study is not to clearly predict individuals' choices and draw rules and patterns on how they behave and what decisions they make, but to understand the importance of social influencers, their power and how they can be optimized in order to help students make suitable choices for their future.

## 1.6 Structure

The study is divided into six chapters, each of them describing a different aspect of the research. The thesis opens up with an overview of the project and summary of objectives, to later develop into an increasingly specific and detailed description of results, also following the chronological stages of investigation. Following this structure, the first chapter draws the frame of the research, introducing the reader to the issue under investigation, the aims and objectives, as well as the significance and limitations of the undertaking.

The second chapter builds upon the key notions defined in the first chapter and offers a theoretical basis for the analysis of educational choices, looking into similar literature and previous studies on this topic. An overview of the main theories on university selection is made here, organizing them in two large categories: the process approaches, describing the different stages in the choice of an education and the factors approaches, describing the factors that impact the choice. While the process approaches are presented as a reference, the factors approaches constitute the main focus of the research and are later on verified through the results of the investigation.

Starting from this theoretical basis, the third chapter introduces the reader to the actual research, describing the methodology, location and sample selection, as well as how the data was collected and processed, how validity and reliability were ensured and the ethical aspects taken into

consideration. This section also proposes several research hypotheses for testing, the hypotheses being constructed on the three main variables of the study: the influence of family, friends and the media.

Growing even more specific, the fourth chapter places the research into context and provides essential information for understanding the study, by describing the premises of the research, the background of the country and presenting its educational system, patterns in university choice among Romanian students and thus tackling the first objective of this study.

The fifth chapter presents the results of the investigation, taking into consideration the gender, performance records and socio-economic situation of the respondents. The results are structured around the variables family, friends and the media, presenting the connections between student's choices and their relationship with these units and testing each research hypothesis proposed under the methodology section, while also answering the second objective of the study.

The final chapter closes the frame of the study by connecting the results to each other, offering interpretations, recommendations for further research, drawing conclusions and thus looking in to the third objective by examining to what extent the findings are relevant for the stakeholders involved in the process: students, parents, teachers, school personnel, university management etc.

# Chapter Two

## Key Theories and Concepts

### 2.1 Introduction

It was not until the 1970's that the university selection process and its inherently influential factors became a popular topic for researchers. An increasing number of universities started to build a new "market" in their attempts to attract and keep good students. In addition to this, the growing focus on public expenditures for higher education, study subventions, student equality and access to opportunities, raised the interest of researchers in investigating the topic and helping universities promote themselves.

Since then, several studies have been rolled out to establish a list of factors that influence the selection process. Students, parents, teachers and school counsellors have been interviewed and surveyed in an attempt to identify and describe the decision making mechanisms. Nowadays, there is a general agreement among researchers regarding the most influential factors in the process. Understanding these has later allowed them to rank their importance, evaluate the results of internal and external influences and compare students' choices.

This chapter is an overview of the main concepts and theories on decision making and university selection, also summarizing the findings of the most important researches in the field. The main theories on decision making are examined in the first section, to later move on to two different types of approaches: the process approaches and the factors approaches. The process approaches describe the stages of decision making, including several three stage theories, a six stage theory and a multiple stage theory. The factors approaches focus on the influential factors that impact university selection (Beswick, 1989, pp. 9-12).

### 2.2 Decision Making Theories

From a neuro-scientific perspective, decision making is a cognitive process that occurs in the brain, simultaneously with hundreds of millions other processes that are produced every minute. The area where this happens is the prefrontal cortex, the most evolved part of the human brain. Although it has long been believed that decision making is a purely rational process with no emotional involvement, nowadays it is commonly agreed that emotions are an indispensable part of it. There is no decision made out of pure rationality: the prefrontal cortex, mainly responsible for this seemingly rational process is strongly connected to the limbic system, which is responsible for managing emotions. As a consequence, emotions of variable intensity impact to a greater or smaller extent the functioning of the prefrontal cortex. It becomes important to acknowledge that emotions do play an important part in decision making, are part of everyday life, every action and thought and are created in relationship with the environment, different events, but mainly in relationship with other people (Pleşuvescu, 2012, pp. 14 – 17).

The importance of human relationships in opinion building and decision making has been long investigated. Researchers have looked at oral communication and the different influences that strong and weak social ties generate within relationships. In most situations, studies showed that strong ties such as those between family members are more influential than weak ties, and are more likely to be relied upon as sources of information. When it comes to the weak social ties, researches showed that their main role is circulating information from one group to another (Johnson and Renigen, 1987, pp. 350 – 362).

Starting from these premises, Berry and Keller (2003, pp. 37 – 45) investigated decision making and rationality and discovered that for example in the process of choosing different products, consumers are always speaking and listening to each other, they discuss. It turned out that people found the information coming from other consumers more reliable than the one coming from the company. In support of the previous findings, it also turned out that not all consumers were considered equally reliable by the others, as the opinion of some of them was highly credible and had a greater impact on the group. The authors named them *influentials*, and demonstrated that the opinion of one in 10 people has a great influence on the opinions and behavior of the other nine.

Gillin (2007, pp. 63, 135 – 139) adds to Berry and Keller's idea the fact that nowadays' influentials are not only people, but also virtual players, such as the internet, blogs, social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. whom he named *new influentials*.

Charles H. Cooley (2009, pp. 225 – 229) developed also a theory that goes back to the idea of influentials, the one of *the looking-glass self*, according to which people become aware of their personal capabilities through relationships with other people. As a consequence, they will base their choices on their own perception of themselves through others and the opinions of those around.

Theoretical models for decision making go as far back as to 1980, when Angus Campbell et al. (1980, pp. 24 – 31) described *the funnel of causality* in the paper "The American Voter". In formulating this model, the four American researchers attempted to explain the way people reach a stable opinion and which are the factors that influence its creation. They also suggested that these factors act both separately and in conjunction: the influence of family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and the influence of their own judgment. Although it has originally been used for explaining the shaping of political opinions as a result of external influences, Angus Campbell and his collaborators' model has been later used in explaining decisional processes in various fields. In this light, the model could also be applied to the current study, explaining the selection process of students in choosing a university. Starting from the model, we can assume that selection takes place gradually, along several time sequences where, at each level, different influences are combined. For example, during the first time sequence (A), the subject finds out what suits him through interaction with the family. In the next stage (B), the influence from parents is combined with the influence of peers and friends who tell him what is seen as successful and what can lead to a well-paid job. The resulting opinion will then be taken through the filter of his/her own thoughts and opinions during the final time sequence (C), when it is assumed that the subject has investigated the subject himself and has more information about options he/she has. Personal judgment is present from the beginning through the end of the decision making process. It is therefore important to establish the subject's attitude towards the topic in general, in this case the student's attitude towards post-secondary education.

Another important decision making model that could be applied here is *the elaboration likelihood model*, formulated by Richard E. Petty și John T. Cacioppo (2000, pp. 65 – 67). The two researchers showed that people interpret information in two different ways. The first and also dominant one is through the central, analytical, rational route which is focused on the content of communication. The second one is through the heuristic, experiential route which is focused on the form and the way communication content is presented. They also highlight the fact that strongly motivated individuals will generally take the central route, evaluating mainly logically the pros and cons of each issue, while low motivated subjects will interpret information mainly through the peripheral route.

The funnel of causality model does not take into consideration other influences such as the mass media, but only influences from the social environment with which the individual comes into direct contact. In addition to that, it is a model that is based on the dominant, central and rational choice route. The question that stands thus is whether the mass media sources on which people rely on more and more nowadays, actually help them make the right choice.

Looking at decision making in the context of higher education, one could say that the selection of a particular study program is a complex process, subject to multiple social influences. When asked why they choose a certain educational line for their future, many students will either say that they feel it suits them or that it is a successful field. Nevertheless, the decision making process is not visible to the one who asks the question, since he/she cannot know what the student actually means by “it suits me” or by “successful”.

Higher education is an industry in itself, with professional organizations, own journals and publications, conferences, different channels of advertisement. This makes the choice of a university a complex process which can include several sequential decisions, influences and decision makers, combining both rationality and emotion (Johnston, 2010, p.16). Taking a look at the theoretical models presented above, one could easily notice that some of them are based on the different steps of the decision process (the funnel of causality), while others focus mostly on the different factors that influence the decision (the influentials model, the looking-glass self). Many of the theories in this field can be split into these two categories, the process versus the factors approach. This process/factors classification will be the basis of the next two sections of this study, where we will present the findings of other researches and also move from a general view on decision making to the particular purpose of our investigation: student’s choice of a university.

## 2.3 Process Approaches

The process approaches to decision making, describe the building of an opinion or choice as a linear process involving several different stages. A good example is *the three stage model* developed by Kohn, Manski, and Mundel (1974, pp. 21 – 46) in investigating how American students choose university studies. This research plays an important role in the field, as it is the first one describing the choice mechanisms in three steps and has inspired and functioned as a reference point for subsequent research. Their findings revealed that the first stage in the process for many students is deciding whether they want to commute to the university or live in the campus. The aspects that are considered at this stage are such as the distance from home to the university and the family income. In the second stage, based on the choice they made at the first stage, they will identify the best available university as allowed by the living situation decided previously. The aspects considered at the second stage are such as fields of study, tuition fees and family income. In the third stage, students decide whether to go to the best university or not go at all. The aspects considered here are the benefits and attractiveness of the best university, parents’ education and advice and the family income. Similar three stage models were later on developed in other studies, although with slightly different descriptions of the different steps, but all having in common the choice to attend a university, analyzing the options and making the choice as the last step.

A similar approach was developed by David Chapman (1981, pp. 409 – 505) who adds an element of novelty by the fact that he considers it critical to take into consideration the students’ main characteristics, family, socio-economic background, relationships to the people around, as well as the characteristics of the university and the way the university communicates with potential students, in order to be able to understand the connection between the two and the decision mechanisms. All of these elements have an impact on all the three stages and the final choice.

Another three step model is proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987, pp. 207 – 221) who describe different stages in the decision making process: those of predisposition, search and choice. The predisposition stage can be seen as a development stage where students decide to look for university studies. The search stage is represented by the active investigation students undertake in order to discover the different universities and get a clear picture of the options they have. The choice stage occurs as a result of the second stage and takes the form of the list of different institutions the students decide upon and later apply to. Several models have been later developed, including six step and multiple step models (Beswick, 1989, p. 12.), but they will not be explored for this study. The process approaches to decision making are presented here mainly as a reference and will not be examined in depth for the purposes of the current research.

## 2.4 Factors Approaches

The exploration of educational choices in the current study finds its theoretical fundament in the factors approaches, which are also the prime focus of the research. Unlike the process approaches, which are concentrated on the different stages of decision making, the factors approaches look at the elements that influence students when choosing their future post-secondary education. Although easily predictable, the influential factors are multiple and very diverse, ranging from clearly identifiable, concrete and rational aspects such as the characteristics of the institution, tuition fees, admission requirements, to subtle, unconscious and irrational aspects that also leave their mark on the decision making such as the student's particularities, the environment and people around, the financial situation of the family etc.

Several extensive studies have been made on this topic, in the attempt to make out a list of top influential factors that have the highest impact on the final decision. One of particular significance is the study made by Thomas Bowers and Richard Pugh in 1973 in Indiana (Bowers and Pugh, 1973, pp. 220 – 224). The two researchers ran a survey including 4 215 students and 2 941 parents, who were asked to identify and rate the importance of 22 factors they would consider in the selection process. Their answers were then compared in order to find resemblances and single out the priority factors. Results showed that both students and parents consider the reputation of the university and that of the faculty as the most important reasons for selection. These were the only factors on which the two groups were in agreement, their opinions differing in terms of the other 19 factors, out of which nine were considered important mostly by students, such as social, cultural, informal advice factors and 10 mostly by parents, such as financial, geographical and academic factors. Bowers and Pugh's study is one of the most important researches in this field and has been referenced in many subsequent studies, not only due to the fact that it sheds light on this topic, but because unlike other studies, it does not only investigate the opinion of students, but also that of their parents.

Another research within the factors approaches was rolled out by Jeff Hoyt and Andrea Brown who reviewed a total of 27 studies with less than 10 choice factors and several studies with 20 and more choice factors. The researchers made then an extensive literature review of 22 of these studies, including 10 or more factors and listed out the most important ones. Their approach, as described in their paper was: "Using these studies, the number of times a factor placed in the number one spot, top three, top five and top 10 was summarized. The factors were then sorted in a spreadsheet so that the factors appearing most frequently in the number one spot were listed first, followed by those appearing most frequently in top three, top five and top 10" (Hoyt and Brown, 2003, p. 5). Their analysis revealed nine factors that were placed at number one in several studies: academic reputation, location, quality of instruction, availability of programs, quality of faculty, costs, reputable program, financial aid and job outcomes. The next 12 more important factors identified in the 22 studies were: variety of offered courses, size of the institution, surrounding community, availability of graduate programs, student employment opportunities, quality of social life, class size, extracurricular programs,

friendly/personal service, affiliation with another reputable institution, admission requirements and attractiveness of campus facilities (ibid., 2003).

One common element though of these studies is that they focus mostly on rationally selected factors that students are perfectly aware of. Few of the studies take a closer look at the irrational, emotional factors that impact the selection at a subconscious level, without being acknowledged. Many of the influences students are not aware of come from their immediate surroundings, from the interaction with other people and their preferred sources of information. Approximately 60% of future university students claim they investigate post-secondary educational options together with their parents, while 61% of parents declare that the students decide together with them which university to apply to (Noel-Levitz Inc., 2011. p. 3).

Valuable material to support the findings of Noel-Levitz, can be found in the endeavors of Butoi Carmina Lidia and Platon Carmen (2012) who have also investigated the influence of irrational factors, organizing them into two large categories. The first category comprises psychosocial factors where the main influencers have been identified to be the family, the school, the group of friends, the demands of the labor market, popularity and respectively the prejudices connected to certain professions. The second category comprises individual factors which have been identified to be the intellectual potential, personal competencies, motivation and personality features. In order to test the identified factors, the researchers conducted a study covering 104 students in their final years of high school, asking them to identify what helps them in making the right choice for their future. The results revealed that the strongest influence comes from the family with 63.88 % choosing it as number one. According to the authors, the family is the one choosing the first school in the life of any individual. Parents' attitudes, self-confidence, ambitions, expectations, their social status and socio-economic situation as well as their own evaluations of different educational and professional fields play a very important role in the choices their children make. The family's possibilities of influence are various and can manifest itself in discussions on educational and career choice, direct and indirect suggestions, discussions with teachers, encouragements, provision of information etc. The group of friends was selected as being the most important by only 8.33 % of the respondents, but it was still identified as an important influence, particularly by producing informal evaluations and images of the different educational and professional fields, through the lens of cultural norms and own system of values, specific to the group and age.

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The current study aims at determining how graduating high school students in Brăila, Romania, choose their post-secondary studies and how important is the role of certain external social factors in this process. It is assumed that students' final choice is not entirely the result of rationality, but also that of influences from the environment. The question is how much is actually decided by them and what is the role of the people and other elements in their immediate surroundings.

A quantitative approach has been adopted in order to analyze students' decision making process. The study has been conducted in Brăila in the participants' natural setting, at two previously selected high schools. Questionnaires with both open and close ended questions have been distributed to eight different classes of students in the two high schools.

### 3.2 Research Location

There are several reasons for choosing Romania as a target country. One of them is the fact that the great majority of high school students who decide to pursue post-secondary studies, go to a university immediately after high school graduation. Very few take a break in their studies after high school to enter the labor market and continue to study later. Particularly in the urban area, people study until late, the competition is extremely high and employers often find themselves in the difficult position of choosing between several overqualified candidates, leaving many of them without a job.

The way Romanian students select their future studies seems to be a very practical one, visibly guided by materialistic values and based on what the labor market demands at that moment. They look at what is considered "successful" and what brings well-paid jobs. As a result, many of them end up studying subjects that they are not genuinely interested in, that they do not have capabilities for and that simply do not match them, to later become mediocre or low performers in jobs they do not like, but which are seen as important and well-paid, jobs to which they do not manage to bring an added value. (Realitatea, 2013)

This phenomenon of choosing post-secondary studies only based on "what brings money", the large number of young people studying until late and the high competition have been growing visibly in the past years and continue to grow, making Romania a very interesting country in which to investigate the decision making process and to find out who actually prompts teenagers to make their choices this way, who is the most important influence in their choice of "successful" post-secondary studies.

Brăila was chosen as the study location for three different reasons. The first one is that it is one of the largest cities in Romania, allowing for a wide variety of high schools, families and students, with different economic situations and incomes. Placing the research in a small city would

have not yielded enough information, while the capital would have provided a different picture of reality since it is the most developed city in the country, offering a wide variety of opportunities and with a high tempo and competition in both school and work. The views of high school students from the capital might offer the picture of a small population (2 million), while the majority is represented by the rest of the cities (18 million).

The second reason why Brăila was chosen as the study location is that it is not the capital and that it is very similar to all other cities in the country. A city such as Brăila might also allow for identifying others factor in the decision making, such as leaving home and moving to another town or the capital to study. Brăila is located in the South East of Romania, at a reasonable distance from Bucharest, Constanța, Galați and Brașov, all large university centers with many faculties. Placing the research right between them could reveal whether students choose a certain post-secondary program simply because of its location.

The third reason for selecting Brăila is a practical one. It is also the hometown of the researcher, allowing for a better knowledge of the high schools in the city, an understanding of the socio-economic situation and background, as well as a good network of contacts within the education world which made data selection possible. The researcher could obtain thus permission to conduct the study in the selected high schools and the cooperation of all the parties involved.

## 3.3 Core Variables

As there are many factors that can influence the selection of a university, the study was narrowed down to those considered the most important influencers in the decision making: their family, their friends and the media. These are the three variables the research builds on.

The *family* has been analyzed from the perspective of the values it promotes, the information and examples it offers. In this paper, the term “family” has a narrow meaning, referring only to the student’s first-degree relatives, their parents. The research takes into consideration their parents’ professions and attitudes towards their own former education, the attitude and the respect students show towards their parents’ educational background, the parents’ income and educational level. Parents are considered a source of information, a model and an important support and adviser for the adolescent when making a choice.

The *friends* variable includes the persons who are close to students, with whom they have relationships based on sympathy, trust and mutual respect, with whom they share interests, ideas, attitudes and spend the greater part of their time. Friends can be in their turn a source of information and behavioral models. The terms “friend” and “colleague” must not be mistaken though, as the latter represents the persons with whom the teenagers learn and work with side by side, without having a close relationship.

The *media* includes in this study both mass media and social media, from the internet, television, radio to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs etc. Both represent one of the most common activities of today's children and adolescents. They do not only allow for social interaction, but also for entertainment and circulation of knowledge and have grown exponentially in recent years, becoming some of the most important sources of information for the young population.

As mentioned in the theory section above, there are many different factors that play an important role in students’ decision making process. Due to time, costs and other practical limitations, the current research focuses only on the three influencers described here. These three elements were selected after a thorough literature review, where “family” and “friends” were identified as the recurrent

and most influential factors in different studies across time (Noel-Levitz, 2011, Butoi and Platon, 2012, Ivan, Pricopie and Frunzaru, 2008). Another important influencer that distinguished itself during the theoretical investigation was “school personnel”, represented mainly by teachers (Ivan, Pricopie and Frunzaru, 2008). Teachers play a significant role in the process, as they can identify aptitudes and abilities and encourage students to take certain educational or professional paths. In addition to this, through their pedagogical skills, knowledge, attitude and personality, teachers often serve as role models who can cultivate students’ preference for a certain subject or educational field, thus indirectly influencing their choices in life. The researcher considered initially focusing on family, friends and teachers as main variables for the study. Nevertheless, since these influencers have been traditionally analyzed in older studies, relevant for that particular moment in time, the researcher decided to remove the latter of them and investigate instead another potential influencer which is characteristic for the information society of our times: the media, including both mass media and social media. Access to information has been growing exponentially in the past years. The rise of the internet and social media, a very recent phenomenon dating only a few years back, has radically changed people’s lives in a short time. In an attempt to anchor the study in the current times and identify whether these non-personal factors also leave their mark on how people make their choices, the third considered influencer and also an element of novelty in this type of endeavor was chosen to be “the media”.

Starting from each of the key variables identified above, the current research tries to determine how much students are influenced by these factors in choosing their post-secondary education. Consequently, the researcher has phrased a series of research questions aimed at analyzing the proposed variables. The research questions are as follows:

For the first variable, *the family*, it was investigated how much respect students show towards their parents’ occupations, how often they take their parents’ educational background as models in life and to what extent the educational level of their own family influences students.

When it comes to *the friends*, the researcher looked at how important the educational choices of friends are for students. More specifically, to what extent the fact that the group had already chosen a higher education program, pushes them to make a similar decision faster and how often they opt for the same education that was chosen by their friends.

In investigating *media*, the researcher verified how often students turn to the media to obtain information, how much they trust the information provided by these channels and how they impact their choices.

## 3.4 Method

In order to understand the influence of the above identified factors, the researcher initiated a quantitative sociological study based on the survey method.

In *the first stage*, the objectives of the research were established and the theories written on the subject up to the present were reviewed.

In *the second stage*, starting from the theoretical knowledge gathered in the first stage, the researcher phrased the research questions and hypotheses aimed at verifying and finding an answer to the research questions. The investigation was then started from four hypotheses that correspond to all three variables of the study: family, friends and media.

There were two research hypotheses connected to the *family* variable: the first one claimed that “*students choose their future education in the same field of activity as at least one of their*

*parents*". Parents' educational backgrounds are the first ones children are exposed to. They listen carefully to the parents' stories related to their student years, colleagues, how the school day looked like and they observe adults' attitudes towards school, borrowing unconsciously some of their opinions. The second hypothesis related to the family, claimed that "*students coming from families where at least one parent is a university graduate will opt for educational programs which they consider to be appreciated by society*". It was assumed that families with a high level of education would place more emphasis on status and social prestige and students growing up in such environments were encouraged from early childhood to search for the others' appreciation and respect in everything they do, including the education and then the profession they choose in life.

The *friends* variable had one research hypothesis associated to it, according to which "*students whose friends have already chosen higher education, make their own decision faster than the others*". An student who is part of a group where everybody had already decided what they want study after high school graduation, would feel an increased pressure to make his/her decision as soon as possible, in order to feel integrated, to be able to actively participate in group discussions on the subject. Moreover, the researcher also tested if students' specific educational choices coincided to the ones their friends had made.

There was one research hypothesis corresponding to the *media* variable: "*Students who rely on media as their main source of information will opt for educational programs that are presented in the media as popular and brining well-paid jobs*". These students would look for "fashionable" programs that bring them well-paid jobs, while those who do not rely so much on media would choose programs that are in line with the education of their family or friends.

After formulating the research hypotheses, in *the third stage* the researcher selected the population for the study and a representative group reproducing high school students' characteristics in a small scale.

In *the fourth stage* the researcher built surveys that were later self-administered, in order to explore students' opinions and choices.

In *the fifth stage* of the research, the information was collected, organized and the results were analyzed starting from the initial objectives and hypotheses.

## 3.5 Sample Selection

Both purposive sampling and random sampling were used in order to select the population for the research.

Purposive sampling as described by Bryman (2012, pp.186 - 187), implies purposely selecting particular respondents, based on their qualities. In this study purposive sampling has been used in selecting the high schools and classes where the study was deployed. There are approximately 25 secondary schools in the county of Brăila, out of which 24 are public and one is private. As the great majority of teenagers go to public schools, two of the public high schools were selected for the study: The Theoretical High School "Nicolae Iorga" and The Theoretical High School "Panait Cerna".

For a better understanding of the "theoretical high school" concept, it is important to know that the secondary education curricula in Romania is structured on three main directions: theoretical (general Humanistic and Mathematics/Sciences profiles), vocational (Military, Theological, Pedagogical, Arts and Sports profile) and technological high schools (Technical, Services, and Natural Resources and Environment) , according to the National Education Law as presented in The Official

Journal of Romania, 2011, Title II, Art. 31. The reason why theoretical high schools were chosen in this study, is that they are the most common form of secondary education in Romania and are represented in a much larger number than vocational and technological high schools across the country, covering the majority of students, with their different backgrounds and interests. Most importantly, selecting vocational or technological high schools would have offered a singular, biased and irrelevant picture of the selection process, since it is much more likely that the highly specialized students in these high schools would choose the same field of study as their current one, being in line with their school profile. From theoretical high schools though, students proceed to a wide variety of post-secondary studies, offering a more complex picture of the process and allowing for the identification of different preferences and potential environmental influences.

In order to allow for a realistic representation of reality and a wide variety of cases, the two theoretical high schools were selected based on their results in the previous year. One of the high schools has been selected from the top performing, “best” high schools in the city and the other one from the low performing high schools. The sample on which the research has been built is representative for the final years of high school. The sampling has been rolled out in two stages. In the first stage, the two high schools were selected based on their results in the previous academic year. The first selected theoretical high school was at the top of the list as number three, while the second one was at the bottom of the list, as number 16 (Răduță, 2014) . In the second stage, four classes were selected from each high school: two from the Mathematics/Sciences profile and two from the Humanities profile (Figure 1). As a consequence, the questionnaires were applied to a total of eight classes: four Mathematics/Sciences and four Humanities classes. The purpose was that of covering a wide variety of cases, from top performing to non performing students, from Mathematics/Sciences to Humanities oriented students, in an attempt to discover whether there is a correlation between their performance and field of study and the post-secondary education they choose.

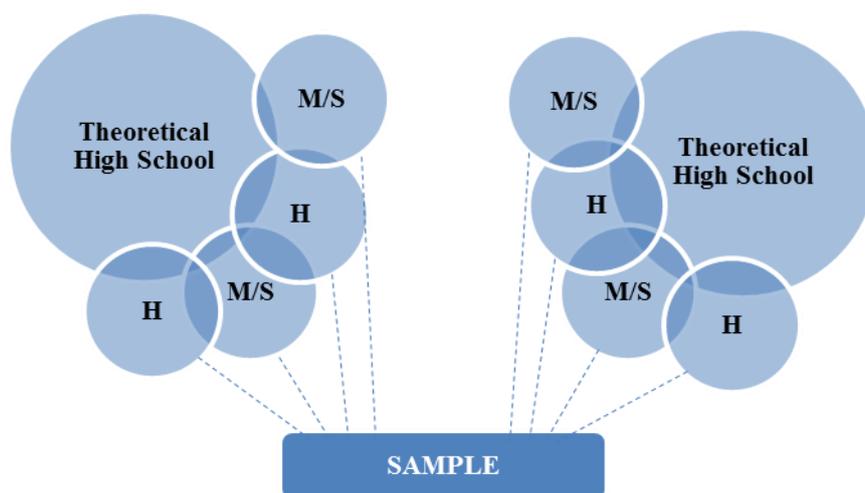


Figure 2. Sample selection.

Random sampling has been used in selecting which exactly of the Mathematics/Sciences and Humanities classes were involved in the study. As there are several of these classes in every high school, two of each were randomly selected for applying the questionnaires.

## 3.6 Data Collection and Processing

The data collection method used in this study was the questionnaire with closed questions. The questionnaire is often used as part of a survey and can be defined as a list of questions designed and distributed by a researcher. Bryman himself described surveys as appropriate for exploratory and explanatory investigations, which are aimed at describing a phenomenon or behavior (ibid., 2012, pp. 231 – 240). In drafting the questionnaire, the researcher generated a list of items based on personal judgment, used clear, specific questions, keeping a logical flow and that tested each research hypothesis. The questionnaire includes two sections: the first one consists of closed questions with one or multiple choice answers, focused on opinions, attitudes and motivation. The second section consists of identification questions and establishes details such as gender, the participants' educational level etc. A pilot study was conducted with 10 test persons, one month prior to applying the questionnaire, with the purpose of verifying the validity of the survey and potential improvement points. When the questionnaires were later applied, they were distributed to eight class teachers who later distributed them to their students, asking them to fill them in before the class starts. At the end of the class, the teachers collected the completed questionnaires and returned them to the researcher. All answers in the questionnaire were anonymous.

The questionnaires were drafted and distributed in Romanian. Both the Romanian version and its English translation are attached at the end of this study. A total of 213 questionnaires were filled in by the students. No drop-out rate was registered and all questionnaires proved to be filled in accordingly upon return. The main reason for the high response rate was the fact that the questionnaires were handed out by the researcher, but by students' teachers themselves. Appealing to teachers' authority, the researcher handed the questionnaires and instructions to teachers before the beginning of their class. Upon entering the classroom, teachers then presented the researcher and the study, its purpose and asked the students to fill them in, while the researcher was present, ready to answer any questions and clarify where needed. The teachers then distributed the questionnaires, waited for the students to fill them in and collected them. Since the initiative came from the teachers themselves and the questionnaires were filled in during the class, while both the teacher and the researcher were waiting, there is a higher probability that students treated the research with high seriousness and answered the questions in an honest and accurate manner, this being also the reason for the high completion rate.

The collected data have been processed and analyzed with the SPSS Statistics software package. The data consisting of each question and answer alternative in the questionnaire for each of the 213 respondents were entered in columns in SPSS, with each column being set up as a separate variable and then processed through complex data analyses and various methods such as cross-sectional analysis and correlations into tables and diagrams describing the choices of the respondents and their connection with the pre-defined influencer under investigation in this study. Correlation coefficients (CC) were used in order to determine if there is a straight line relationship between students' trust in the media and their choice of a university. CCs are numerical values between -1 and 1, defining how strong the relationship is between two variables. A value closer to 0 indicates no significant relationship, while a value close to -1 indicates a negative relationship and a value close to 1 indicates a positive linear relationship between the chosen variables. For the purposes of this particular study, a Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was calculated for each combination of variables below: students' trust in the media represented by the internet and their choice of IT, their choice of Technical and the choice of Finance studies. The findings will be described in section 5.5 towards the end of this study.

## 3.7 Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure that the study actually measures what it needs to measure, the researcher considered in her approach several types of validity, as described by Bryman (ibid., 2012, pp. 151 – 152). Taking into account face validity, the researcher made sure that the questions are phrased appropriately and the answer options make sense to the participants. The main purpose was to formulate the questions in such a way that they measure the selected variables. In order to test the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher ran a pilot study and applied it to 10 test persons, before distributing it to the participants. Looking at content validity, the researcher made sure that the questionnaire covers all important aspects of the investigated issue, that definitions and terms are clear. Looking at criterion validity, the researcher checked that the scores in the questionnaire are drafted in such a way that they can clearly indicate a certain type of behavior. As concurrent validity focuses on the extent to which scores on a new measure are consistent with results of other established measures, it was not considered in this case.

By taking all these aspects into account, the researcher drafted the questionnaire in such a way that it represents the selected issue, it is appropriate for the selected population, it is comprehensive enough to collect all the needed information and answers the suggested research questions. All the three variables – family, friends, media – are tested by at least two questions in the questionnaire, in order to allow for correlations and consistency.

Last but not least, validity is inherently dependent on reliability. No study can be valid if it is not first of all reliable. When it comes to reliability, Bryman argues that one important aspect to be taken into consideration is the stability of results (ibid., 2012, p. 149). The latter implies that no variation in results is obtained if the same situation is tested several times. In order to ensure reliability and stability, the researcher used a 5 step Likert scale in drafting the questionnaire, allowing also for the use of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the interpretation of results.

## 3.8 Ethical Considerations

There is a high level of moral and social responsibility associated with every research, as the collected information can easily be used to harm the participants. It becomes thus imperative for the researcher to take all possible protection measures and display professionalism in conducting the investigation. As mentioned on the CODEX platform, aimed at providing rules and guidelines for research, “the researcher's own ethical responsibility forms the basis for all research ethics” and “has the ultimate responsibility to see that the research is of good quality and is morally acceptable” (<http://www.codex.uu.se/index.shtml>). The same source also mentions that “the researchers' ethics, regardless of field, expressed in Robert Merton's CUDOS norms (1942), name (among other issues) universality, altruism, and organized skepticism as distinguishing characteristics of good research”. In an attempt to correctly address ethical considerations during the study, the researcher followed national and local rules, directions and norms regarding school conduct and paid special attention to rules and regulations during both preparation and implementation of the research. This involved obtaining permission to distribute the questionnaires and allowing for informed consent and anonymity.

In terms of informed consent and following the CODEX guidelines, the aim and objectives of the study were explained to the participants prior to distributing the questionnaires, along with the methods that were used, the name of the researcher and contact details. The students were also informed about the potential risks that the research can imply and it was emphasized that participation is completely voluntary, and that they have the right to decline or interrupt participation if they do not feel

comfortable with the subject or the questions. All participants filled in the questionnaires upon their own initiative.

In terms of data processing and anonymity, the researcher considered the Personal Data Act (PUL), as implemented by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe's Directive 95/46/EC. PUL governs how personal information is used, personal information being defined as "all kinds of information that directly or indirectly can be attributed to a living, individual physical person. It can be information on the person's name, personal number, birthdate, nationality, education, family or employment conditions. Other types of information of a less personal character can also be considered personal data" (CODEX). The same source also states that coded information is still considered personal, as long as a code key exists. In respecting the use of personal information, the questionnaire was drafted in such a way that names, contact details or other personal information of the participants could not be identified. During data processing, each participant questionnaire was coded with letters and numbers and the code was not revealed to anyone. The researcher also made sure that everybody received her contact details and that there is a clear understanding that communication is open and the researcher is available at any point in time, even after the research, for questions, additional information or sharing of results. The researcher also informed the participants which information will be used and how and clarified that they have the right to ask for the resulting information, as well as ask for incorrect or incomplete information to be corrected or completed.

In addition, all questionnaires included on the front page a disclaimer stating the clear purpose of the research, the benefits it will bring and the importance of each participant's answer. The disclaimer stated also clearly the purposes and the ways information will be used and ensured participants of full confidentiality and support. Moreover, each participant was provided with contact details for additional questions or concerns that they would like to raise during or after the research. The communication between the researcher and the subjects has been open and honest at all times. The results of the research are available for the involved parties and the general public upon request, with the purpose of allowing others to compare, confirm, identify possible inaccuracies or debate the results, thus complying to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, where the United Nations states that everyone "has the right freely to share in scientific advancement and its benefits" (<http://www.codex.uu.se/index.shtml>).

# Chapter Four

## Setting

### 4.1 Background of the Country under Study

Romania is situated in central Europe, in the Balkan Peninsula, on the Western shore of the Black Sea, neighboring Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary. With a surface of 238 391 km<sup>2</sup>, it is the 80th largest country in the world and the 12th largest in Europe (Figure 2). The population of approximately 20 million people is represented by 70% Romanians and 30% minority groups including Hungarians, Germans, Russians, Bulgarians, Romani and Turks. Looking at the population, Romania is the 43rd largest country in the world and the 9th largest in Europe. The official language is Romanian, although English, French, Italian and Spanish are spoken by a large amount of the population.

From an administrative perspective, the country is divided into 42 counties, with the capital Bucharest which holds approximately 2.5 million inhabitants. Other important cities are Iași, Cluj Napoca, Timișoara, Constanța, Galați, Brașov, Ploiești, Brăila, with more than 300 000 inhabitants each (Mândruț, 2012, pp. 8 – 10, 34 – 36).

Apart from the geographic and administrative description, it is very important for the purposes of this paper to understand the political and historical background of the country. After the Second World War, in 1947 Romania is proclaimed a Communist Republic. Although never a part of USSR, the communist regime in the country is very much inspired by Russia and grows stronger, particularly after the rise of the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1965. Ceaușescu implements a harsh totalitarian system characterized by political repression, strict rules and a strong personality cult. During his 24 years rule, he increases exports to the maximum, creating food, energy and material shortages in the country, lowering living standards and impoverishing the population. He also maintains strict control over information and mass media, builds a Secret Police and keeps an extreme discipline in the country, ruling by fear.

In December 1989, a protest in Western Romania turns though into a popular riot which spreads over the country taking the form of a massive revolution against Ceaușescu's regime. Protests, street fights, demonstrations culminate with a coup d'état where the dictator and his wife are captured and executed. This is the moment which marks the liberation of Romania from communism, a very strong and painful moment in the history of the country, concluded with 1500 deaths out of which many of society's intellectuals and 3500 wounded (Djuvara, 2002, pp. 227 – 231).

Since 1989, Romania has been an independent, democratic republic, with a President elected by universal vote. The legislative power belongs to a bicameral Parliament also elected by universal vote, while the executive power belongs to the Government led by a prime minister. The latter is selected by the President and reports into the Parliament by oath. Nowadays, Romania is also a NATO and UE member.



Figure 2: A map of Romania showing location in Europe, national capital and international boundaries.  
 Source: [http://ian.macky.net/pat/map/ro/ro\\_blu.gif](http://ian.macky.net/pat/map/ro/ro_blu.gif).

## 4.2 The Educational System in Romania

### 4.2.1 The General Structure of the Educational System in Romania

The structure of the Romanian educational system is established through the National Education Law from January 4th, 2011. The law describes “the structure, the functions, the organization and the performance of the state, private and confessional education at national level” and offers all citizens the fundamental and equal right to education throughout their entire life (The Official Journal of Romania, 2011, Title I, Art. 1).

According to the Romanian Education Law, the system is made up of pre-university and university education. The pre-university stage includes: the anticipating pre-school level (0 - 3 years), the pre-school level (3 - 6 years), the primary level (6 - 11 years) which includes a preparatory

year and the classes 1 to 4 and the secondary level (11 - 18 years). The secondary level is made up in its turn by the inferior or gymnasial level (11 - 15 years) or the classes 5 – 9 and the superior or high school level (15 - 18/19 years) corresponding to the 10 – 12/13 classes. The secondary superior education can take place both in high schools with a theoretical, vocational or technological profile or in industrial schools, with a duration of six months to two years, as well as in the tertiary, non-university institutions or in post-high school institutions. (ibid., Title II, Art.23[1]). The general compulsory education for all citizens is 10 classes and includes only the primary and the gymnasial studies (ibid., Title II, Art.16[1]). Unlike primary and secondary education, post-secondary education is not compulsory. The latter is organized in universities, academies, institutes, superior study schools and other superior educational institutions which can be state owned, private or confessional and which have a legal presence, a non-profit and non-political character (ibid., Title III, Art. 114[2], [3]). These institutions offer advanced education in specific areas, covering a wide range of specializations.

The post-secondary studies are the ones that prepare individuals for their future career by visibly reducing the general character of learning and offering specific and advanced knowledge in specialized fields of activity. Universities are the ones that conclude the acquisition of knowledge and competencies of direct utility in society and profession. One of the most important objectives of education is achieved at this moment: social inclusion and the active civic participation in the functioning and development of a long-lasting economy, through employment in the labor market (ibid., Title I, Art. 2 [3] and Art. 4).

## 4.2.2 The Structure of Post-Secondary Education

According to article no. 108 from the Constitution of Romania and article no. 5, row 3 from the Law 288/2004 on post-secondary education with its subsequent modifications and additions, post-secondary or superior education in Romania is organized on three different stages: bachelor, master and doctoral studies. As stated in article no. 4, bachelor studies comprise a minimum of 180 credits (three year studies) to a maximum of 240 credits (four year studies), according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The only exception to this is medical and pharmaceutical studies which can last up to six years. As stated in article no. 8, master studies correspond to a number of credits between 90 and 120 and last between one to two years. Doctoral studies commonly last for a period of three years (The Official Journal of Romania, 2004, The Law no. 288/2004, Art. 31[3] – [9]).

Post-secondary education takes place in both public and private universities, institutes and superior schools. The academic year begins on September 15th and lasts for 42 weeks, split into two approximately equal semesters, each including an exams session and practice periods where the case (ibid., Art 25[1]-[2]).

Currently there are 56 public post-secondary education institutions in Romania, out of which 16 are in Bucharest (The Romanian Ministry of Education, 2014). In addition to these, there are 37 private post-secondary education institutions in the country, out of which 15 are in Bucharest (ibid.). Each university includes a number of faculties, offering a wide range of fields of study and specializations, from Finance and Accounting, Technologies, Information Technology, Administration, Medicine, Social Sciences to Arts, Media and Publicity etc.

The admission process for post-secondary studies varies from one institution to another. Each university is autonomous and has the possibility to establish own requirements based on their methodology, but within the legal frame and with approval from the Ministry of Education.

The admission criteria depend on the chosen faculty/specialization. Many faculties organize admission exams before the start of the academic year. These exams cover one to three disciplines and can be either written or oral. Other faculties admit students based on their grades during secondary studies, or the grade they obtained at the baccalaureate exam (BAC). The BAC is a national exam which marks the graduation of secondary school, covering up to five disciplines and including both oral and written exams. High emphasis is placed on the BAC, being considered one of the most significant exams in student life: high school students start preparing for it two years in advance and all individual results are published and discussed at national level. Many faculties use a combination of criteria, asking for the BAC results, the secondary studies grades and organizing separate admission exams.

The complexity of the admission does not have a visible impact on students' choice of a faculty though, as faculties with a more permissive admission process do not have a higher number of applications than those with demanding conditions. Students choose a faculty not based on their chances of success, but on other criteria.

Given that in Romanian schools do not have a consistent professional counseling service guiding students towards certain educational programs that match their capabilities (Gașpar M., 2004, pp. 37 – 40), other socializing factors such as family, teachers, peers or the student's own materialistic values are those who influence students in deciding what suits them.

## 4.2.3 Past and Current Trends in University Choice

In order to be able to place the current research and its finding in the appropriate context, it becomes essential to answer the first objective of the study before moving forward: "Present the current trends in university selection for Romanian high school students". The Revolution of 1989 marked the liberalization of the labor market, opening the way for foreign investments and increased economic development. Romania grew quickly from a communistic society where everything was controlled by the state and everyone was equally poor, with no major differences between people, to a capitalistic society with private companies opening more jobs, offering higher salaries and a wide variety of opportunities. The differences between people are increasing rapidly; living standards are not equal anymore for everyone and leading a good life depends on your education and career. As a consequence, ever since 1989 Romanian education has been witnessing a high interest for post-secondary education, with more and more students continuing their studies until late in life, in an attempt to keep competitive on the labor market, obtain good jobs and earn more money. The number of university applications is higher every year and in addition to this, the past years have also revealed changing trends in how students choose their university. (The National Press Agency AgerPres, 2013)

The "study trends" are visible and every year, mass media is following the admission process and reporting on the current trends. The past decades have seen high popularity for law studies, finance and lately business studies. Mass media continues to report and according to the well-known and trusted publication "Adevărul", new trends have started to take shape in 2013 when thousands of students applied for telecommunications and IT studies, leaving behind management and business administration which have been the most popular in the previous years.

It is not a coincidence that telecommunications and IT are also the best paid fields on the labor market, according to recruitment specialists. In a capitalistic, competitive economy such as the Romanian one, students no longer choose the studies they like or are fit for, but take instead a very practical approach. People choose nowadays specializations that are successful, indispensable in times

of economic crisis and well paid, regardless of whether they are suited for them or if they are truly interested in the field (Grădinaru et al., 2014).

According to the mass media which have been closely observing and reporting on this evolution, humanistic and social fields receive less attention nowadays, since the labor market is actively looking for IT specialists. A high demand for specialists in engineering and IT is noticeable both on the local market, but also internationally. At the same time, here is a deficit of specialists on the Romanian market, since the best ones are offered good jobs abroad and leave the country. In an interview for the same publication “Adevărul”, the academician Ioanel Sinescu, the head of the Medicine and Pharmacy University, says that they are happy to have so many students apply for their programs all of a sudden, as it gives them the possibility to select the best. Nevertheless, they are fully aware that students choose this faculty to receive good education recognized internationally and a diploma that is accepted by the European Union. According to him, a large percentage of their graduates leave Romania after graduation to complete their specialization abroad and very few return (Spiridon, Craciun, Nicolescu, Pop and Mihai, 2013).

# Chapter Five

## Presentation of Research Findings: Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1 Data Presentation

The survey was rolled out in the period 19th - 23rd of January 2015 on a representative group of students (N=213) in the 12th grade of high school, randomly selected and belonging to the urban area. The group was made up of 59% female gender students (N=125) and 41% male gender students (N=88), the participants belonging to the Humanities study profile in the ratio of 71% (N=151) and to the Mathematics/Sciences study profile in the ratio of 29% (N=62). The detailed distribution of the students depending on their gender and study profile is expressed in Table 1, where one can notice that the male gender students were almost equally distributed in both Humanities and Mathematics/Sciences profiles, while female gender students displayed a strong preference for the Humanities profile.

Table 1. Participants' distribution per study profile, depending on their gender

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mathematics /Sciences</b>	<b>Humanities</b>	<b>Total</b>
Female	19	106	125
Male	43	45	88
<b>Total</b>	62	151	213

The great majority of the questioned students came from families with an average income: 51% of them claimed that they could afford some expensive goods with sacrifices in other areas and 32% that they could live a decent life, but they could not afford goods that are more expensive. None of the respondents came from a low-income family.

When it comes to the educational level of their family, most students came from families where parents had high school and university studies: 49% of their mothers and 43% of their fathers were high school graduates, while 30% of their mothers and 30% of their fathers were university graduates or had finished post-university studies. None of the questioned students came from a family with no formal education, the lowest educational level for their parents being secondary school (8 classes) in the case of a single participant.

The greater part of the students in the test group had in the previous year an average grade result between 9 and 9.49 (32%), closely followed by students with average grade results between 8.00 and 8.49 (24%). No student had an average result of less than 5.50, only two participants falling between 5.50 and 5.99. In Figure 3, one can analyze the distribution of average grade results by gender, noticing that female gender students had better results than male gender students: the girls' grades start at 7.50 and climb up to 10, most of them having results between 9 and 9.49. In comparison, boys' grades start at 5.50 and climb up to 9.49, the greater part being situated between 8 and 8.49.

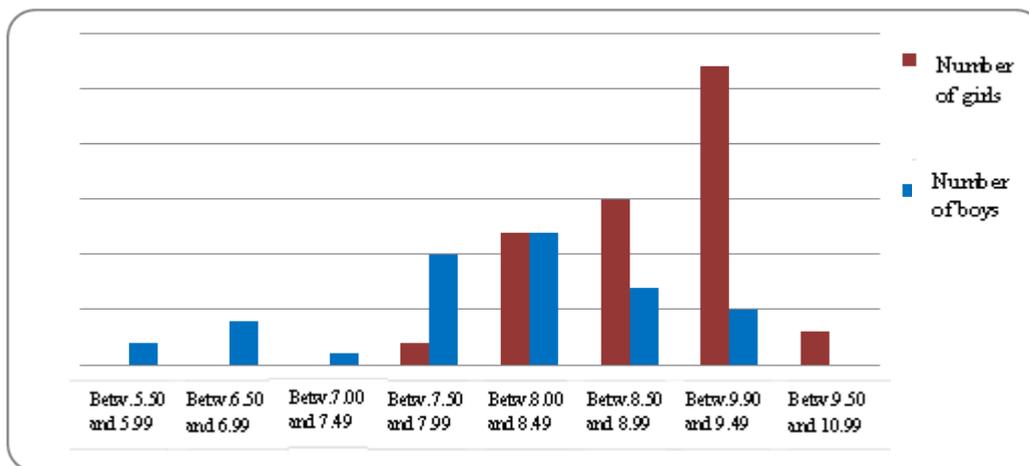


Figure 3. Average grade results from previous year – distribution by gender

When asked what it takes to succeed in life, 58% of the participants answered that a good job was very important. Students kept the job on the third ranking position in the top of life success conditions, placing ambition on the first place (89%) and intelligence on the second one (63%). Out of the participants who claimed that a job is very important, 60.3% were girls and 39.7% were boys, showing that female gender students generally place more emphasis on occupation than male gender students.

## 5.2 Gender, School Performance and University Choice

When it comes to choosing their future education, at the moment of the research, 96% of the respondents had already made a decision with regards to the study profile they wanted to follow after high school graduation. Only four of the participants declared that they have not decided yet, two girls and two boys. Although this particular research revealed that both girls and boys were equally decided when it came to their academic future, similar studies showed differences between genders in other situations. In 2008, during a research on the decision to choose a university among high school students, Loredana Ivan, Remus Pricopie and Valeriu Frunzaru (2008, p. 4) noticed: “We can say that the ones who decided first were the girls, the relationship between the variable <choosing a university> and the variable <gender> being a significant one. The relationship between the two variables can be an argument for the existence of a superior maturity level among girls, but at a second glance, if we take into consideration the variable <average grade results in the previous year>, we can say that it is not gender which is the cause variable, but performance”. The authors noticed that girls had better grade results in school and were more decided about their future. The grade results, the gender and the decision making process became thus three different factors which were tightly connected, showing that the most important element in making an early decision was not gender, but school results.

For the question “Which educational field would you like to study within after high school graduation?” the participants had the possibility to select a maximum of three answers. The results showed very different educational choices (Table 2), female gender students displaying a high interest in Humanities related fields, which entail working with people (Media/Publicity/PR, Medicine, Education, Law). Male gender students showed, on the other hand, an interest in a variety of fields, from Arts to IT/Computers and Finance, fields which belong to Mathematics and numbers, but also to

Humanities such as Law. Out of the participants who chose “Another field”, one wished to study Engineering Research and two chose Tourism.

Table 2. Chosen educational fields – participants’ distribution by gender

<b>Educational Field</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
Finance	15	32	47
Technology	2	13	15
IT/Computers	9	20	29
Law	38	20	58
Administration	39	15	54
Medicine	41	14	55
Commercial	19	17	36
Constructions	2	4	6
Humanities/Social Sciences	38	6	44
Arts	32	16	48
Media/Publicity/PR	51	11	62
Another field	6	2	8
I don't know, I haven't decided	2	2	4

The girls’ preference for Humanities related fields, initially identified when analyzing the students’ distribution per study profiles in high school, was thus confirmed by their future education choices. Boys showed a clearer inclination towards technical, practical domains but also kept a preference for other professions, many also selecting Arts and Law apart from their favorite fields. After analyzing the data, one can confirm that the most popular and wanted field at the moment is Media/Publicity/PR, chosen by 62 participants, followed by Law (58) and Medicine (55). The least preferred professions are within Constructions, chosen by only six respondents.

## 5.3 Family Influence

One of the most important variables of this study is the family, which plays multiple roles, being at the same time a source of information for students concerning existing educational options, an important support and adviser in making a decision, a model and an influence factor. In an attempt to find out who students go to for information related to educational options, the researcher split the potential sources into two categories: “Media” which includes the television, internet, social media, the written/online press and “Acquaintances” which includes parents, friends, teachers, relatives. The results of the research showed that the source students used most frequently was the internet (Mean=4.56), followed by friends (Mean=4.18) and parents (Mean=4.06). Surprisingly enough, although these were the most popular sources, when it came to the level of trustworthiness associated to them, students did not rely on these sources to the same extent. Participants claimed that the most reliable and loyal source of information were their parents (Mean=4.57), followed at a good distance by friends (Mean=3.83) and the internet (Mean=3.49). As a conclusion, even if they turn to certain sources to gather information, these sources are not necessarily the ones students trust the most. A good example in this sense is the category “friends” who – although used very often as an information source – were not considered trustworthy by the majority of students.

One could say that parents are indeed the most reliable source of information for students. Nevertheless, regardless of where they collect this information from - the internet, friends or family - most students would still ask for someone’s advice when making their final career choice. With the help of the questionnaire, the researcher tried to find out who is the most important person they speak to before choosing. The results showed that 79% of the participants spoke to their parents (Figure

4). More than half of these 79% were girls (59.5%), boys speaking to their parents in a slightly lower number, 40.5%. The next position, but at a great distance, was taken by friends and teachers. None of the participants declared that they spoke to their relatives or colleagues, the strong preference for their parents' advice confirming the important role the latter play in students' decision process.

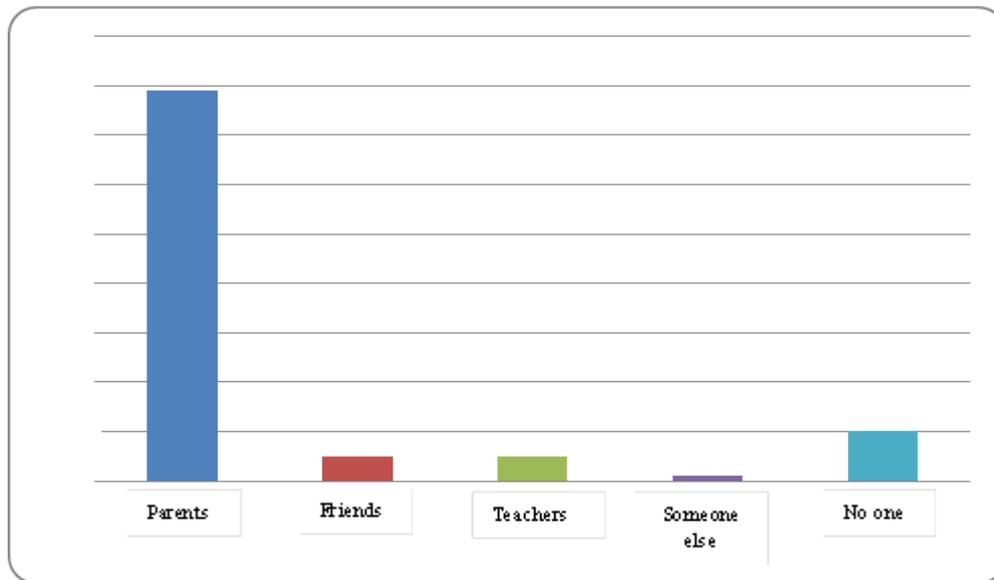


Figure 4. Persons students ask for advice (%) when choosing their future education

An important conclusion so far is the fact that parents are the most trustworthy source of information and the main adviser for students when choosing their post-secondary studies. In what follows, the researcher also tried to verify the indirect influence parents bring on students' decisions. Parents are the ones, who initially choose the education of their children when they are very young, offer them information about educational options and initiate their contact with the school. Children often talk to their parents about school, they listen to their stories from when they were students, about how their school day went, their experiences and stories about relationships at school and they involuntarily take on their parents' opinions and attitudes. The degree of respect teenagers develop towards their parents' education can have a strong influence on them: if they respect their parents' choices they can be tempted to choose themselves studies and later on a profession in the same field of activity; if on the contrary, they do not respect them, they will exclude that particular educational field from their list of options.

When asking the participants if their parents had made a good choice concerning their own education, the great majority answered "yes" (Figure 5). One could tell though that respondents showed higher respect for their fathers' jobs than for their mothers'. Evaluating their mothers' education, 96 of the participants claimed that they had made a good choice and 81 that they had not, the difference between the two numbers being very small. On the other hand, when it came to their fathers' professions, 132 answered "yes", a much higher number than the 45 who selected "no". Nevertheless, looking at the overall results, the number of students who showed respect towards their parents' education, both mothers and fathers, was much higher than the number of those who did not respect them and those who did not know or did not care (36 respondents). This proved that parents' education could be considered an existing and valid indirect influence and that their choices could act as models for adolescents.

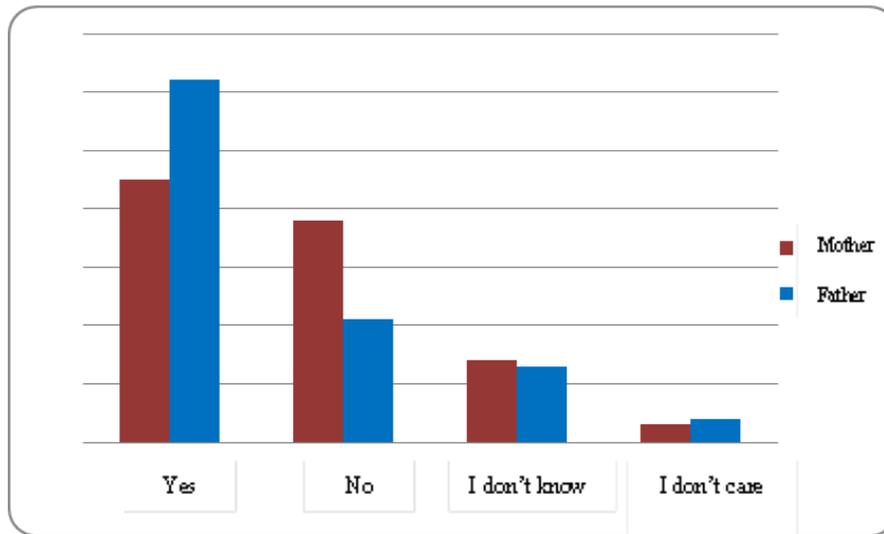


Figure 5. "Did your parents make a good choice with regards to their own education?"

After analyzing the above data, one can confirm that parents can be a major influence on students from three perspectives: 1. they are the most reliable source of information, 2. they are the first persons students ask for advice before making their final choice and 3. parents earn the respect of students through their own education, most participants agreeing that their parents had made good educational choices. Given the fact that parents play such an important role in students' lives, it remains to be established to what extent the latter take their parents' education as a model for the future. The researcher tried thus to test the first hypothesis connected to the "family" variable: "*Students choose their future education in the same field of activity as at least one of their parents*". Consequently, the researcher compared all the educational fields which the participants chose with the fields they parents studied (Table 3). The results differed from one field to the other: the students who seemed to take most after their parents were those who chose the Commercial field. It was natural though for their number to be this high if one took into consideration the fact that the number of parents with commercial education was the highest (107). A visible match between parents' choices and students' choices could be noticed in the field of Law: the total number of students whose parents had studied in this area was 10. Out of these 10, nine wanted to follow the same path in the future. The field Constructions showed surprising numbers, where out of 45 students with parents in this field, only four wanted to follow their example.

<b>The Educational Field of Mothers/Fathers</b>	<b>Number of Students Who Wish to Study in the Same Field as Their Mothers</b>	<b>Number of Students Who Wish to Study in the Same Field as Their Fathers</b>	<b>Total Number of Students</b>
Finance	4	0	<b>4</b>
Technology	0	6	<b>6</b>
IT/Computers	-	0	<b>0</b>
Law	3	6	<b>9</b>
Administration	6	2	<b>8</b>
Medicine	6	2	<b>8</b>
Commercial	14	4	<b>18</b>
Constructions	-	4	<b>4</b>
Humanities/Social Sciences	4	2	<b>6</b>
Arts	-	-	<b>-</b>
Media/Publicity/PR	2	-	<b>2</b>
Another field	0	2	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>67</b>

Table 3. Number of students who wish to work in the same field as their mothers/fathers

Out of the 39 respondents who wished to study in the same field as their mothers, 23 were girls and 14 were boys. In a similar manner, out of the 28 respondents who chose the same field as their fathers, only eight were girls, the rest of 20 being boys. It is visible that although both parents could be a good example for students, the latter tend most frequently to follow the parent of the same gender as them. Looking at the total number of respondents who follow family tradition (68 from a total of 213 participants) one could conclude that in spite of the respect students show towards their parents' professions, the number of those who choose the same education as their parents is quite low. This is even more visible if one compares the total number of students who chose a specific field with the number of students who chose that field by following their parents' example (Figure 6). For example, if we look at the Finance area, out of the 47 who selected it for their future studies, only four have their parents educated in this field, which means that only 9% of all choices could be connected to family influence, the others being the result of other factors. A very interesting case is the one of the Law area where out of 10 families in this field, nine students wish to follow the same path. The nine students represent though only 16% of the total number of choices, as 58 participants want to study Law, not by following family tradition, but for other reasons.

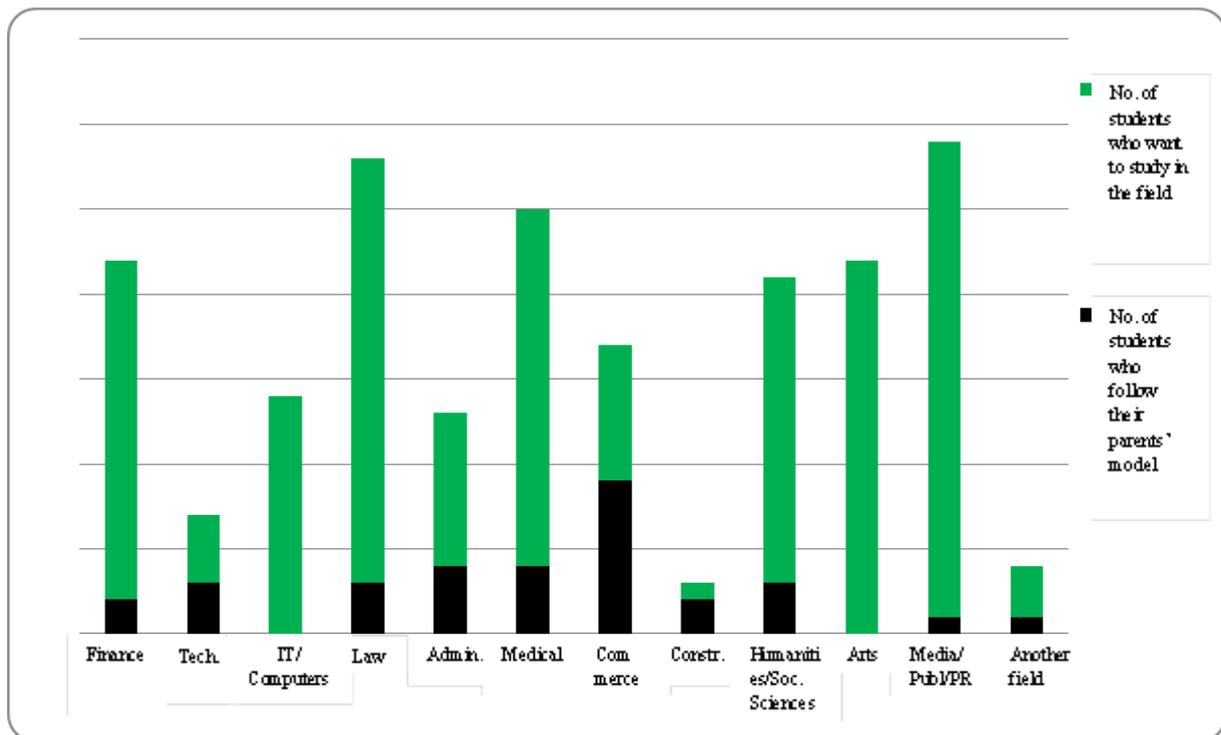


Figure 6. How many students out of the total number chose the same educational field as their parents?

Another interesting case is Media/Publicity/PR, which is the most popular field: 62 students wish to study media, although only two of them have a parent in this field. This means that only 3.2% of the choices could be owed to family influence, all the others having different causes. Similarly, 48 students wish to study Arts, although none of the participants' parents is an artist.

The only fields where the number of choices owed to a potential family influence represented more than 50% of the total choices, was the Commercial field where 18 out of the 36 teenagers who selected it, had their parents in the same area (50%) and Constructions where four out of the six students who selected it, also had their parents in the same area (66.6%). By taking this example as a reference and connecting it to all the previous data, one could observe the following: 45 of all participants had their parents in Constructions. Out of these, only four wished to turn to this field for their future studies, the rest opting for something else. The four who wished to turn to this field for the future, represented 66.6% out of the total number of students who selected it (six). This was the only high score that could support the first research hypothesis. Unfortunately, apart from the Commercial and Constructions area, in the case of all other fields the number of students who followed the example of their parents was well below 50%, showing *that the proposed hypothesis cannot be confirmed*: apparently, students do not choose their future studies in the same educational field as at least one of their parents. A possible explanation could be the fact that, although they respect their parents' choices and know very well both the advantages and disadvantages of their jobs, students might consider these fields as uninteresting, non-challenging, trivial or outdated. Moreover, the status associated with certain educational fields might have changed completely from their parents' teenage years up to the present. This leads them to consciously search for fields they know less of and that seem to bring something new. If in the past, many young people chose the same education and profession as their parents because it was safe, something they knew very well, nowadays' young generations might, on the contrary, focus on studies which are completely different from their parents', in a search for novelty and challenge. The results described above showed that family could indeed be an influential factor for students, but not strong enough to considerably modify their educational choices.

Another hypothesis that was tested in order to evaluate family's influence on students, states that *“those coming from families where at least one parent has university education will opt for*

*an education that they consider to be appreciated by society*". The research question the study tried to answer is to what extent the level of education of the family influences the decisions of teenagers. The premises the researcher started from was that in families with a high level of education, greater emphasis is placed on status and social prestige and children are encouraged early in life to look for the respect and appreciation of the people around. Once grown up, in adolescence years, these children will search for an education that allows them to earn the respect of others. The participants in the study were asked how important it was to them for their future education to be respected by society. Their answers were then connected to their identification data, which offered information on their mothers' and fathers' educational level. All results can be viewed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The connection between parents' education level and how important it is to students that their future education is appreciated by society

		To what extent is it important to you that your future education is appreciated by society? (no. of answers)					Total
		Not important	Less important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	
Last school graduated by the mother	Industrial school or unfinished high school	4	0	2	4	6	16
	High school (12 classes)	0	2	23	30	49	104
	Post-high school studies	2	0	11	2	6	21
	University or post-university studies	0	2	23	19	19	63
	I don't know/I'm not answering	0	2	2	0	2	6
Last school graduated by the father	Industrial school or unfinished high school	0	2	2	6	6	16
	High school (12 classes)	2	0	21	21	47	91
	Post-high school studies	2	0	17	6	2	27
	University or post-university studies	0	2	19	19	23	63
	I don't know/I'm not answering	0	2	2	2	4	10

At a first glance, one could notice that social appreciation is more important for respondents whose parents have high school studies, than for those whose parents have university studies: 49 of the students whose mothers have only graduated from high school and 47 of the students whose fathers have the same educational level answered that social appreciation is very important in their future studies. By comparison, only 19 of the adolescents whose mothers have graduated from university and 23 whose fathers have university studies answered the same thing. Nevertheless, one must not forget that inside this representative group, the total number of students coming from families with only secondary education studies is larger than the number of students from families with post-secondary of education; hence it can appear natural to have more such answers from families with high school education level. Nevertheless, when calculating the respective percentages depending on the type and number of families, the proportion stays the same: respondents whose mothers and fathers have high school studies have answered in the ratio of 46%, respectively 51% that social appreciation is very important. Teenagers whose mothers and fathers have university studies have answered the same only in the ratio of 30%, respectively 36%. The differences between percentages are not high, but they highlight the fact that it is not adolescents from families with a high education that seek for social appreciation through their educational choices, but those coming from families with secondary educational level. *The proposed hypothesis cannot be confirmed*, teenagers from families with a lower educational level being those who place more importance on status and prestige.

The explanation could be the indifference of adolescents coming from an environment with a high level of education. Those whose families have only secondary studies could be more ambitious and motivated to prove their abilities, rise above their social condition and earn the respect of others. Although the hypothesis has not been confirmed, one cannot claim that the educational level of the family does not influence students' choices. Indeed, it does not influence them in the way the hypothesis anticipated it, but it can influence them in a different way, stimulating certain preferences and decisions and pushing students from families with a lower education level to search for prestige.

Looking back at the *family* variable, the following conclusions could be drawn: parents play a very important role in students' educational choices; they are their most reliable source of information when it comes to professions, their most important adviser when making a final decision and an example to follow, most students showing respect towards their parents' own education. Nevertheless, when choosing their future studies, students do not follow the family tradition to a great extent, most of them opting for fields which are different from those of their parents. The educational level of their family cannot be considered a clear influence factor either, the research showing that this does not modify in a predictable way adolescents' choices and what they look for in their studies.

## 5.4 Friends Influence

For a deeper understanding of students' decision process when it comes to post-secondary education, the researcher analyzed other factors that can influence their choices. The second variable that was studied was *the circle of friends*, that often leave their mark upon the group members. The research question the study tried to answer was "How important are the educational choices of the students' circle of friends, when they make their own educational choice?" The premises the researcher started from was that a student who is part of a group where all the others have already chosen their future studies, will feel a subtle pressure to make his/her own decision as soon as possible just "to be like the others". Teenagers compare themselves continuously with others in their age. A slight competition can often occur, making them carefully observe one another and imitate the others' actions, sometimes with the purpose of performing better than them. The hypothesis that was tested starting from this idea, claims that "*students whose friends have already chosen their post-secondary studies, will make their own decision faster than the others*". The researcher investigated thus how many of the participants had a clear image of their educational future and how many of their friends had an equally clear picture. It is assumed that where students have not made any choice, their friends were not decided either. Moreover, the researcher also investigated which were the educational fields students wanted to enroll in and compared the results with their friends' preferences, in order to discover potential overlaps that could indicate an influence from their friends. The participants in the study had to answer two questions: "Which educational field would you like to study within after high school graduation?" and "Which educational field would most of your friends like to study within after high school graduation?" both with the same multiple choice answer, out of which they could select a maximum of three choices. In the first stage the researcher checked how many participants had or had not made a choice and if their respective friends had made a choice or not. Secondly, a comparison was made between the fields chosen by the students with the ones chosen by their friends. The answers to the first question are included in Table 5.

Table 5. How many students had already chosen an education/ how many had not? How many of their friends had already chosen an education/ how many had not?

Students	Their friends		Total
	Have chosen a profession	Have not chosen a profession	
Have chosen an education	198	6	204
Have not chosen an education	9	0	9
Total	207	6	213

The results showed that at the time of the research, out of the 213 questioned students, 204 had already made a decision concerning their future education and nine had not decided yet. All the nine that had not decided, came from circles of friends that had already made a choice. Surprisingly, the circles of friends where no decision had been made yet, belonged to participants who knew very well what education they wanted for the future (6).

The first test of the circle of friends showed thus that there was no connection between the students' decision process and the one of their friends', the latter bringing no influence on the participants. In other words, *the proposed hypothesis cannot be confirmed*. What is left to verify is whether the educational fields selected by the 204 students who had decided, coincide with the ones their friends had chosen. The answers differed from one activity field to the other (Figure 7). The highest score was registered by the field IT/Computers, where out of a total of 29 participants who have selected it, 19 followed their friends' example, which means 65%. The next high score could be found in the Medicine area, where out of 55 teenagers, 26 claimed that their friends had picked it as well (47%). Another interesting situation could be noticed in the case of Media/Publicity/PR that has been chosen by a total of 62 students. Out of these, 25 claimed that their friends also wanted to work in media, more specifically a percentage of 40%. The lowest percentages could be seen in Constructions and Administration, where no participant seemed to follow the example of the circle of friends. An overview of the results shows that the number of students who want to study within the same field as their friends is below 50% for most of the fields, with the exception of IT/Computers.

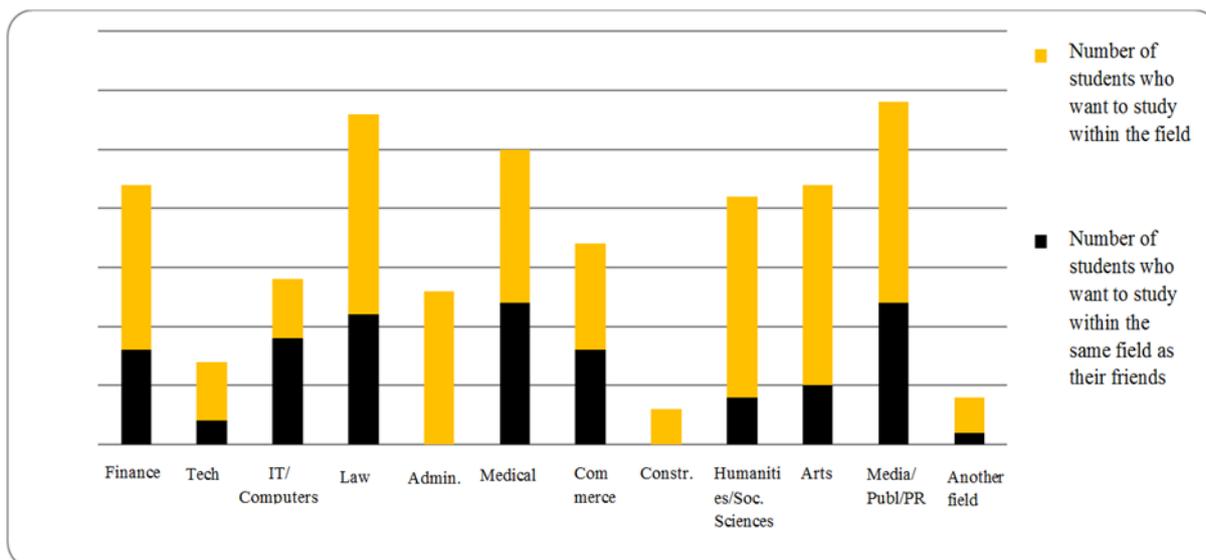


Figure 7. How many students out of the total number chose the same field as their friends?

This result, together with the one from the previous test, supports the fact that *the suggested hypothesis cannot be confirmed*. Although students do take into consideration the choices of their friends, the latter cannot be considered a major influence factor. This result can easily be correlated with the data that was obtained at the beginning of the research, when the study evaluated the level of confidence that students show towards the various information resources. The numbers back then showed that although respondents frequently turned to their friends as good sources of information, they did not trust them. Moreover, one of the first tests in this research showed that in choosing a profession, only 5% of the participants asked for their friends' advice. All this information supports the fact that although teenagers carefully observe their friends, they do not always follow their example, an explanation being the lack of reliability also indicated by the results of the investigation.

Before moving on with the data analysis and interpretation, a connection needs to be drawn between the data that was obtained when analyzing the "family" variable and the information obtained when analyzing the variable "friends" (Table 6). One can notice that in seven out of the 12 listed domains, the number of students who wished to study in the same field as their friends was higher than the number of those who wished to study in the same field as their parents. Only in the case of three educational fields (Technical, Administration and Commercial) parents' example seemed to be stronger than the one of friends, but even so, two of the areas are almost at the same level. The report between numbers shows that although they are not strongly influenced neither by parents, nor by friends, students more likely tend to choose fields that were also selected by their friends, their parents' education not being the most compelling example for them. If one adds up the number of participants who have chosen according to their friends' educational fields with the ones who have chosen according to their parents' educational fields, one could notice that the number of teenagers who were "inspired" by the people around verges on 50%. The highest percentage is obvious in the case of the Commercial field, where out of a total of 36 students who selected it, 18 have parents who have studied in the same field and 18 have friends who made the same choice, with no overlap in students who have both parents in the field and friends who made the same choice. The next one is the Technology field that has been chosen by a total of 15 participants. Out of these 15, six have parents who have studied in the same field and five have friends who also want to study Commerce, therefore a total of 11 out of 15 (73%).

Table 6. How many students chose the same educational field as their parents and friends?

<b>Educational field</b>	<b>Students who chose the same educational field as their parents</b>	<b>Students who chose the same educational field as their friends</b>	<b>Total number of students who have selected the field</b>
Finance	4	17	<b>47</b>
Technology	6	5	<b>15</b>
IT/Computers	0	17	<b>29</b>
Law	9	23	<b>58</b>
Administration	8	0	<b>54</b>
Medicine	8	26	<b>55</b>
Commercial	18	18	<b>36</b>
Constructions	4	0	<b>6</b>
Humanities/Social Sciences	6	9	<b>44</b>
Arts	-	11	<b>48</b>
Media/Publicity/PR	2	26	<b>62</b>
Another field	2	2	<b>8</b>

When joining the results from the family test with the ones from the friends test and comparing the total number of students who "feel inspired" by parents and friends with the total number of students who have selected that particular field (expressed in Table 2 above), one could notice that for the greater majority of the professional domains, approximately 50% of the choices are the sum of family influences and friends influences, the rest of 50% being the result of other factors. Several

important conclusions could be drawn: although neither the friends, nor the parents radically influence teenagers' choices, friends could have a greater impact on them than their parents. A second conclusion is that although the proposed hypotheses could not be confirmed so far as anticipated, family and friends together visibly influence students and do act as two important factors in their decision process. Taken separately, their impact is not as strong as the tested hypotheses assumed, but together they have a remarkable effect and can influence 50% of students' choices.

## 5.5 The Influence of the Media

There was one research hypothesis corresponding to the media variable: "*Students who rely on media as their main source of information will opt for educational programs that are presented in the media as popular and providing well-paid jobs*". What the hypothesis implies in other words, is that there is a significant correlation between students' trust in the media and their choice of a university. These students would turn to studies that prepare them for professions that are increasingly popular, register a high demand both on the national and European job market and can indirectly ensure them a good working place, a good salary and successful career, following the trends as described in section 4.2.3 above, regardless of their actual competencies, natural desires, talents. On the contrary, those who do not rely as much on the media would choose programs that are in line with the education of their family or friends or programs that are not considered as successful and "in demand" at the moment.

This hypothesis is strongly supported by the results of the second question in the survey, where participants were asked what it takes to succeed in life. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, their answers revealed that 58% of the participants consider that a good job is very important, right after ambition (89%) and intelligence (63%), education not being one of their top three choices. The results can be considered a good indicator of the practical, materialistic approach to higher education of students. One could say that education in this case is not necessarily seen as a way of growth and personal development, but more as a tool in obtaining successful and well-paid jobs. Nevertheless, these results alone would not be enough to confirm the hypothesis, as the relation between their choices and their use of the media needs also to be investigated.

The approach of the researcher in testing the media hypothesis consisted of two stages. In the initial stage it was measured which sources students most often turn to when collecting information about their future educational options. In this same stage it was also tested to what extent students rely on the selected sources, their level of trustworthiness, determining thus to what extent the media represents an important source of information as compared to all the other sources that were considered. In the second stage, the researcher took a closer look at which educational choices were made by the respondents who mostly rely on the media for information. Their choices were then compared with the current educational trends as announced by the mass media and mentioned in section 4.2.3, to identify if those who rely on the media also choose the fields of education that the media advertises as successful. The given assumption, that would also confirm the hypothesis, was that those who chose the media as their main source of information would select further studies that are in line with the country's social development and trends (telecom, business studies etc.), while those who turn to their parents and friends would most likely choose the same educational line as the latter or other programs, regardless of what is generally considered popular, modern and successful.

In the first stage, in an attempt to find out who students go to for information related to educational options, the researcher split the potential sources into two categories: "Media" which includes the television, internet, social media, the written/online press and "Acquaintances" which includes parents, friends, teachers, relatives. As mentioned above, the results of the research revealed that the source students used most frequently was the internet (Mean=4,56), followed by friends

(Mean=4,18) and parents (Mean=4,06), television and the social media playing an insignificant role in students' choices. Another surprising result was the level of trustworthiness respondents associate to these sources: although popular, they do not rely on them to a proportionally large extent. On the contrary, students claimed that the most reliable and loyal source of information were the parents (Mean=4,57), followed by friends (Mean=3,83) and the internet (Mean=3,49). As a conclusion, even if they turn to certain sources to gather information, the same sources are not necessarily the ones students trust the most. A good example in this sense is the category "friends" who – although used very often as an information source – were not considered trustworthy by the majority of students. Looking though at the media resources, one could say that the internet plays an important part in the decision making, being both a popular but also reliable source of information, at a great distance from social media, television and the radio.

In order to verify the hypothesis, one needs though to take into consideration the educational choices that students made as well. It becomes therefore important to check whether those respondents who rely on the internet to a large extent, also choose the studies that are popular and well promoted by the media as bringing well-paid jobs. As described in section 4.2.3 above, several trends in educational choice have been identified in the past decades, with mass media closely keeping an eye on the admission process, students' preferences, reporting every year which universities are at high demand and the number of applicants for each of them. As the recent years showed an increased interest in studies related to the "jobs of the future", such as those within telecom, finance, technology and IT, it becomes important to see how many of those who rely on the media have chosen one of these fields and if there is a significant correlation between their choices and their use of the media.

As a result, the researcher selected the most popular media tool as identified by the study – the internet – and took a closer look at the group of respondents that chose it as their most reliable source of information. In the next step, the researcher verified how many of these respondents chose one of the popular study fields as advertised by the media in the past years: Finance, Technology and IT/Computers. The results showed a Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of -0.049 for the Finance field, meaning that there is no significant connection between the choice of finance studies and the use of the internet. Nevertheless, the result was surprising for the Technology and IT/Computers fields, also the most popular in the past years. The correlation coefficients in these cases were of 0.174 for those who chose Technology studies, respectively 0.158 for those who chose IT/Computers studies, displaying a significant correlation between media use and student choice. As described in section 3.6 above, correlation coefficients are numerical values between -1 and 1 which reveal whether there is a linear relationship between students' trust in the media and their choice of a university, with 0 values pointing at no significant relationship, and -1 and 1 values pointing at negative, respectively positive relationship between the variables.

Given that the correlation with two out of the three selected educational fields was positive, one could say *that the hypothesis is confirmed*. Nevertheless, one must consider the probability if other aspects influencing this result. It happens that Technology and IT/Computers are very popular work and study fields in fast growing, mobile and technologically developed 21st century, unlike Humanities, Arts and other study fields which are no longer considered as attractive by practical, career-oriented individuals. The fact that these fields are chosen by students who highly rely on the internet could not necessarily be a result of the media influence, but also a natural tendency for teenagers who have a natural talent and interest in technology and IT. In other words, one could say that it is not surprising that those who spend a lot of time and rely on the internet will chose IT and technical studies, since they could have a natural preference for IT, which also explains their use of the internet. This does not dismiss the suggested hypothesis, neither its positive results, but must be considered when analyzing the study results and drawing the general conclusions.

Although most of the proposed hypotheses were not confirmed, the analysis of the three different variables above offers precious information on the dynamics of the decision making process, thus answering the second objective of the research "Analyze three selected influence factors

(family, friends, the media) and establish which of them has the greatest influence on students' choice; in other words who they turn to first and who they rely on most." Although the findings of the study provide much more detailed and valuable information, one could conclude based on participant's answers that there is a clear tendency for students to turn most often to their parents for advice and to the internet when they need a reliable source of information. This finding is nevertheless only one aspect of the complex conclusions that can be drawn from the results on the investigation and that will be explored and interpreted in the coming chapter.

# Chapter Six

## 6.1 Concluding Remarks

Adolescence is the time when individuals become for the first time realistically interested in their own future and start analyzing the matter of education from a mature perspective, looking carefully at the existing academic options, analyzing the people they meet and their personal choices, looking for inspiration around them. This is also the moment when they consciously make the first major decision in their life, opening the way for a long row of important decisions that will follow their journey through adulthood: choosing a career, a job, a partner, place to live etc.

The main premise for this study is the fact that the decision process has at its core various social factors that influence teenagers' choices. As a consequence, the current study took into consideration three guiding marks – family, friends and media influence – all elements that do impact the final decision. In order to test the impact and importance of each factor, the researcher built up several research hypotheses that were later on tested through a sociological survey based on questionnaires. The results of the research eventually proved that each element played an important, though different role in the decision process.

*Family*, represented mainly by parents, proved to be the information source adolescents trust the most and their main adviser in choosing their further education. Most teenagers showed respect towards their parents' professions and considered that they have made good choices. In spite of this, few of these teenagers actually wished to follow the family tradition, most of them choosing professions in different fields than their parents. Another finding was that although family occupations did not serve as an example and had no visible impact on respondents, the education level of their parents seemed to subtly direct their choices. For example, most of the teenagers who came from families with high school studies, wished for professions that would bring them social appreciation, placing more importance on status and prestige than those who came from families with university studies. One can say thus, that the influence the factor “family” exists, but it is not as strong as expected and does not influence their choices in the same way as anticipated, teenagers looking for inspiration somewhere else.

*Friends* were the information source teenagers turned to most frequently, the persons they observed and analyzed carefully. Nevertheless, the greater majority of respondents claimed that they did not trust their friends. The latter were not considered skilled advisers and teenagers did not resort to them when they needed to make their final educational choice. In spite of all this, the influence of friends seemed at a first look to be greater than that of parents. The number of teenagers who wished to work in the same area as their friends proved higher than the number of those who wished to work in the same area as their parents. This could be indeed a good argument in favor of the strong influence the circle of friends could bring, but one must not fail to consider that the overlap could be a result of the common preferences and activities, the similar ages, the current tendencies on the labor market or a mere result of coincidences. The relationship that exists between the variable “friends” and the educational choices of teenagers could be not only a causal one, but also a significant one. One could state in this case that the influence of friends exists, but it is not strong enough to radically modify teenagers' decisions. Nevertheless, by adding up the family influence with the friends' influence, *the two determine almost 50% of the total professional choices*. Taken separately, they are less visible, but together they do build an important influence factor.

*The media*, although represented by several sources such as the internet, television, social media channels and radio, proved to have a strong representative in the internet, which became

the most commonly used source of information and at the same time the third most reliable source for education related information, after parents and teachers. According to the results of the study, the media, here represented by the internet, leaves indeed its mark on university selection, as students who turn to the media seem to have a proven tendency to choose educational fields that are advertised as popular and successful by the media. As these educational fields happen to be at the moment IT/Computers and Technology, one might wonder though whether the use of internet actually determines these choices, or whether the mere potential and high technological competence of these particular students determines the choices, equally triggering their interest in using internet as well.

## 6.2 Verification of Theoretical Perspectives

Looking back at the key theories and concepts identified in Chapter 2, and particularly at the Noel-Levitz study according to which 60% of future university students claim that they investigate post-secondary educational options together with their parents, one could say that the findings of the current study are in line with existing literature and research on this topic. Although not identical, the results are also in line with the findings of Butoi Carmina Lidia and Platon Carmen in their study from 2012. The two professors identified the same sources of influence, with 63.88% of the influences coming from the family and 8.33% from friends. The studies were different in terms of structure, main objectives, number of respondents, questions and measurements, but they both identified the family as the main actor in the decision making process. The findings of this particular research identify a weaker influence from the family alone, but nevertheless a visible one. An even weaker influence is attributed to the circle of friends, but the two taken together become a strong factor in the decision making process. The different roles of the two influencers both taken separately and together is not a surprise since, as Johnson and Renigen (1987, pp. 350 – 362) also pointed out, strong family ties such as those between family members are more influential than weak ties such as those between friends or other acquaintances. Taking the results one step further, the findings of the study also confirm Cooley's theory of "the looking-glass self" (2009, pp. 225 – 229), which states that people interpret their personal capabilities through the relationships and feedback they receive from other people and base their decisions on their own perception of the self through others and their opinions.

When it comes to the media, its clear presence among the preferences of students, the level of trust it is given and the correlation between their choices and the use of the internet come to support that it is a growing influence that should not be ignored. This confirms Gillin's theory on "new influentials" from 2007 (pp. 63, 135 – 139) who predicted already by that time that influentials will no longer be only people, but to an increasingly larger extent also virtual players, such as the internet, blogs and social medias.

The general conclusion of this research is that the career decision process is characterized in the case of young generations, by an increased independence and a subtle idealism, specific to the young age. The influence of family and friends is visibly decreasing as teenagers' independence is growing. Although they are aware of the examples around and they analyze them carefully, they do not always follow them, making their own decisions based on other factors. The free access to information, the transparency and rapid development of information sources, the expansion of the labor market and the multiplication of professional options offer a wider range of occupations for teenagers to choose from. They make their choice indeed after asking their parents for advice, but they also manage to clearly detach themselves from the influences around. The subtle idealism specific to adolescence, is given by the fact that individuals at this age do not have a clear, well defined picture of what they expect from a profession. A similar research, performed with young adults who are already a part of the labour market, will most likely unveil priorities, preferences and expectations which are

better outlined, allowing for a more precise correlation between them and the presence of materialistic values.

## 6.3 Recommendations and Further Research

The effort of understanding how young generations decide upon their future education and choose a field of study is significant for all of the affected parties: students, parents, teachers, high school and university leadership and last but not least, educational planners. By understanding the dynamics of the process and the influence of external factors upon it, each of the mentioned stakeholders can draw a clearer picture of their own roles in the process and contribute to a smooth, accurate and objective choice.

The third main objective of this study was “to examine possible measures that students, parents and other stakeholders can take in order to ensure a balanced, well informed and rational decision process”, an objective which can now be answered based on the findings of the study. Although most of the proposed hypothesis were not confirmed, the research yielded important and useful information on educational choices as they are made by the young Romanian students in their last years of high school.

Given that the influence of family and friends resulted into 50% of the choices, it becomes critical for those who are near to the students to understand their role in the decision making process. Although a large part of this influence is exerted unconsciously in day to day interactions and discussions about school, work and life in general, parents should become aware of their power and help their children discover their own potential, interests and talents. This can be done by offering constant support, providing constructive feedback, asking open ended questions and most importantly, by listening without trying to change opinions, by accepting student’s points of view and encouraging them in their endeavors.

The same role can also be taken by teachers and school staff who should be able to assist the students at any time in related matters, providing information and guiding them. This can be done by organizing internal seminars on this theme, as well as presentations from universities, study trips to different campuses, one to one meeting sessions, sessions with parents etc. It is though critical that school staff and parents are collaborating in this matter and keep an open communication channel at all times.

The research provides valuable data also for high school management and educational planners, offering important information for the implementation of educational counselling in high schools. This service is missing in many Romanian schools and could make a difference in student’s selection of an educational program. It is critical for study counsellors to work not only with students, but also with parents during the selection process and be aware of the decision mechanisms and influential factors in order to provide good guidance.

It is recommended for post-secondary institutions, colleges and universities also to take into consideration the results of this research in order to better answer the needs and questions of students. This can be done by reviewing their marketing strategy and content, adding more relevant information to their materials, addressing not only the students, but also their parents and teachers. It can also be done by adding transparency to their activities and communication, providing complete and accurate information through all available channels, by visiting schools and presenting their educational offer, by offering free counselling meetings, organizing “open doors” days at the university, allowing potential future candidates to sit in and assist during classes, being open for meeting and questions and providing objective, clear and complete information to potential candidates.

Last but not least, the current research provides valuable information for the students themselves. By becoming aware of the impact of the environment on life decisive choices such as the one of post-secondary education, students should be able to acquire a better understanding of the process and themselves and learn to listen more to their own interests, needs and competencies, search for unbiased, complete and relevant information, analyze it carefully and make a well-informed, conscious decision regardless of what people around them think, say or do.

Little research has been done to this date on university selection in Romania and the factors that play an important role in this process. The current study does contribute to what is already known, but it can mainly serve as a basis for future investigation. Given the size and the practical limitations of this research, further investigations can provide more precious data if rolled out at a larger scale, including more high schools from different cities and regions of the country, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods and most importantly including also the potential influence factors in the study, by interviewing parents, friends and school personnel.

A more elaborated study can also look into which of the two parents has more influence: is it the mother, or is it the father? This would provide important information to universities who would have to adapt their communication not only to the student, but also to at least one of the two parents.

An interesting aspect that can be further investigated is also the influence of high school teachers and personnel as compared to the influence of university teachers and personnel in the decision process. Should the university communication be thus targeted to internal, or high school staff, or even both?

Other important elements that can be investigated are non-personal sources of information, such as visits to the campus, counselling meetings, seminars, and students' participation to university classes? What is their role? How much do these actions impact the final choice?

Although this research provides answers to many questions, there are still many other questions that have not been answered yet and that can constitute the basis of more advanced research. A similar effort at a larger scale, including several cities and a much larger number of high schools and respondents could provide precious information and allow for a clearer identification of environmental influences and their power.

A longitudinal research could be also be conducted several years later to discover potential shifting influences in decision patterns, reflecting the changing of societal contexts in the country. As Romania is witnessing an increased technological development, increased popularity and commercialization of the media such as the social media, higher mobility with the growing migration of well-educated individuals and skilled work force, and last but not least, a fast developing economy, with improved buying power, life standards and well-being, the choices people make with also shift and impact the decision making process on both educational, but also professional careers.

An international and comparative research could also be conducted in order to identify how the selected influencers differ between countries and to what extent they determine the decisions students make.

In addition to all suggestions made above and the questions that were already answered through this research, there is still one very important question that remains unanswered. If family and friends are important influencers and sources of information in the decision process, what are the most important influencers and sources of information for family and friends? What does influence family and friends in their turn? How far does influence go and how can we achieve an even better understanding of this process?

# References

- Berry, J., and Keller, E. (2003). *The Influentials: One American in Ten Tells the Other Nine How to Vote, Where to Eat, and What to Buy*. New York, United States: Free Press.
- Beswick, R. L. K. (1989). *A Study of Factors Associated with Student Choice in the University Selection Process*. Lethbridge, Canada: The University of Lethbridge, Alberta.
- Bowers, T. A., and Pugh, R. C. (1973). Factors Underlying College Choice by Students and Parents. In *The Journal of College Student Personnel*, 14 (3), 220 – 224, American College Personnel Association.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York, United States: Oxford University Press.
- Butoi C. A., and Platon C. (2012). Career Decision and Factors Influencing Career Choice. In *The Journal of Educational Assistance*, 1(1), 15-17, The Regional Center for Educational Resources and Assistance, Tulcea, Romania.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., and Stokes, D. E. (1980). *The American Voter*. Chicago, United States: The University of Chicago Press.
- Chapman, D. W. (1981). A model of student choice. In *The Journal of Higher Education*, 52 (5), 409 – 505, Ohio State University Press, Columbus.
- Cooley, C. H. (2009). *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York, United States: Transaction Publishers.
- Djuvara, N. (2002). *A Short Version of Romanian History Told to the Young*. Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas.
- Gaşpar M., (2004). *The Role of Understanding Students' Interests in Educational and Professional Counselling*. Iasi, Romania: Biblioteca Online.
- Gillin, P. (2007). *The New Influencers: A Marketer's Guide to the New Social Media*. Fresno, California: Linden Publishing.
- Hossler, D., and Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three phase model and the implications for policy makers. In *College and University*, 62 (3), 207-221.
- Hoyt, J. E., and Brown, A. B. (2003). Identifying College Choice Factors to Successfully Market Your Institution. In *College and University*, 78 (4), 5, Salt Lake City.
- Johnson Brown, J., and Reingen, P. H. (1987). Social Ties and Word-of-Mouth Referral Behavior. In *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (3), 350 – 362, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Johnston , T. C. (2010). Who and What Influences Choice of University? Student and University Perceptions. In *The American Journal of Business Education*, 3 (10), 16, Murray State University, Murray.
- Kohn, M. G., Mandki, C. F., and Mundel, D. S. (1974). *An Empirical Investigation of Factors which Influence College-Going Behavior*. Santa Monica, California: RAND.

Mândruț, O. (2012). *Geography: Europe – Romania – The European Union: Fundamental Aspects*. Bucharest, Romania: Corint.

Răduță, C. (2014). High School Admissions 2014 According to the Computerized Distribution of Edu.ro. High Schools Ranking in Brăila. In *Gândul*, 5 July 2014, Gândul, Bucharest.

The National Institute of Statistics. (2005). *The Educational System in Romania – Statistical Data*. Bucharest, Romania: INS.

The Official Journal of Romania, No. 614/07.07.2004. (2004). *The Law no. 288/2004 on the Structure of Tertiary Education*. Bucharest, Romania: The Official Journal R.A.

The Official Journal of Romania, No.18/10.01.2011, Part I. (2011). *The Law of National Education/04.01.201*, Bucharest, Romania: The Official Journal R.A.

Petty, R. E., and Cacioppo, J. T. (2000). *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*. New York, United States: Springer-Verlag.

Pleșuvescu, A. (2012). Reason and Emotion – The Road to Self-Accepted Decisions. In *Manager Express*, no. 10, Bucharest, 2012.

Spiridon, C., Craciun, O., Nicolescu, I., Pop, F., and Mihai, D. (2013). Faculty Admissions in 2013: the Most Desired Faculties. In *Adevărul*, 18 July 2013, Adevărul, Bucharest.

## Online references:

<http://www.codex.uu.se/index.shtml>

<http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/text/8399> (The list of public post-secondary education institutions on the official website of the Romanian Ministry of Education)

# Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire in English (Translated from Romanian)

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### SU IIE. Part of the Master Thesis at Stockholm University. The Institute of International Education.

We wish to understand the means by which highschool students choose their post-secondary education. Our research has a scientific purpose. You have been randomly selected to answer this questionnaire, to which there are no correct or incorrect answers. *The validity of this research depends on the truthfulness of your answers and we appreciate your cooperation.* Your answers will remain *confidential and anonymous*.

Thank you!

**For each of the questions below, please circle the number corresponding to your opinion.**

**1. To your opinion, in order to succeed in life, is it important to study at a university?**

5 Very important	4 Important	3 Slightly important	2 Less important	1 Not important	0 I don't know
------------------	-------------	----------------------	------------------	-----------------	----------------

2. In order to succeed in life, how important is it for a person to have [...]	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Less important	Not important
1. Ambition	5	4	3	2	1
2. Self confidence	5	4	3	2	1
3. Education	5	4	3	2	1
4. A good family, family support	5	4	3	2	1
5. Intelligence	5	4	3	2	1
6. Hard work	5	4	3	2	1
7. Good luck	5	4	3	2	1
8. Relationships and connections	5	4	3	2	1
9. A good job	5	4	3	2	1
10. Other. Please specify:					

**3. Which educational field would you like to study within after high school graduation?**

(please select a maximum of three options)

2. Finance
3. Technology
4. IT/Computers
5. Law
6. Administration
7. Medicine
8. Commercial
9. Constructions
10. Humanities/Social Sciences

- 11.Arts
- 12.Media/Publicity/PR
- 13.Another field. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- 14.I haven't decided yet
- 0. I don't know

4. How often do you resort to the below sources of information in order to find information about post-secondary studies?		Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Media	1. Television	5	4	3	2	1
	2. Internet	5	4	3	2	1
	3.Social media	5	4	3	2	1
	4. Radio	5	4	3	2	1
	5. Written/online press	5	4	3	2	1
Acquaintances	6. Parents	5	4	3	2	1
	7. Friends	5	4	3	2	1
	8. Teachers	5	4	3	2	1
	9. Relatives	5	4	3	2	1
10. Other. Please specify:						

5. To what extent is it important for your university studies to [...]	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Less important	Not important
1. Bring you a well-paid job	5	4	3	2	1
2. Be appreciated by society, bring status	5	4	3	2	1
3. Ensure your personal development	5	4	3	2	1
4. Allow you to meet people, make friends	5	4	3	2	1
5. Other. Please specify:					

6. Think of your parents' studies. Have they made a good choice? (please select a single option for each parent)	
Mother	Father
1. Yes. Why?	1. Yes. Why?
2. No. Why?	2. No. Why?
3. I don't know	3. I don't know
4. I don't care	4. I don't care

7. Which educational field would most of your friends like to study within after high school graduation?  
(please select a maximum of three options)

- 1. Finance
- 2. Technology
- 3. IT/Computers
- 4. Law
- 5. Administration
- 6. Medicine
- 7. Commercial

- 8. Constructions
- 9. Humanities/Social Sciences
- 10. Arts
- 11. Media/Publicity/PR
- 12. Another field. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. They haven't decided yet
- 0. I don't know

8. Which of the following are most reliable sources of information when choosing a university?		Very reliable	Reliable	Somewhat reliable	Less reliable	Not reliable
Media	1. Television	5	4	3	2	1
	2. Internet	5	4	3	2	1
	3. Social media	5	4	3	2	1
	4. Radio	5	4	3	2	1
	5. Written/online press	5	4	3	2	1
Acquaintances	6. Parents	5	4	3	2	1
	7. Friends	5	4	3	2	1
	8. Teachers	5	4	3	2	1
	9. Relatives	5	4	3	2	1
10. Other. Please specify:						

9. Who do you ask for advice when making a decision with regards to your future studies?

(please select a single option)

- 1. Parents
- 2. Friends
- 3. Colleagues
- 4. Relatives
- 5. Teachers
- 6. Someone else. Who?
- 7. No one

<b>Your basic information</b>
-------------------------------

10. The average study grade that you obtained last year:

1. Betw. 4 and 4.49	2. Betw. 4.50 and 4.99	3. Betw. 5 and 5.49	4. Betw. 5.50 and 5.99	5. Betw. 6 and 6.49	6. Betw. 6.50 and 6.99
7. Betw. 7 and 7.49	8. Betw. 7.50 and 7.99	9. Betw. 8 and 8.49	10. Betw. 8.50 and 8.99	11. Betw. 9 and 9.49	12. Betw. 9.50 and 10

<p><b>11 M.</b> Last school graduated by my mother:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No school</li> <li>2. Primary school (4 classes)</li> <li>3. Secondary school (8 classes)</li> <li>4. Industrial school/unfinished high school</li> </ul>	<p>11 F. Last school graduated by my father:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No school</li> <li>2. Primary school (4 classes)</li> </ul>
---	--

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. High school (12 classes)</li> <li>6. Post-high school studies</li> <li>7. University/Post-university studies</li> <li>0. I don't know</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Secondary school (8 classes)</li> <li>4. Industrial school/unfinished high school</li> <li>5. High school (12 classes)</li> <li>6. Post-high school studies</li> <li>7. University/Post-university studies</li> <li>0. I don't know</li> </ul>
--	--

<p><b>12 M.</b> My mother's education is within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Finance</li> <li>2. Technology</li> <li>3. IT/Computers</li> <li>4. Law</li> <li>5. Administration</li> <li>6. Medicine</li> <li>7. Commercial</li> <li>8. Constructions</li> <li>9. Humanities/Social Sciences</li> <li>10. Arts</li> <li>11. Media/Publicity/PR</li> <li>12. Another field</li> <li>0. I don't know</li> </ul>	<p><b>12 F.</b> My father's education is within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Finance</li> <li>14. Technology</li> <li>15. IT/Computers</li> <li>16. Law</li> <li>17. Administration</li> <li>18. Medicine</li> <li>19. Commercial</li> <li>20. Constructions</li> <li>21. Humanities/Social Sciences</li> <li>22. Arts</li> <li>23. Media/Publicity/PR</li> <li>24. Another field</li> <li>0. I don't know</li> </ul>
---	--

**13.** How do you consider the current incomes of your family?

- 1. They don't suffice for our daily needs
- 2. They suffice strictly for our daily needs
- 3. We can live a decent life, but we cannot afford to buy more expensive things
- 4. We manage to buy some expensive things, but with sacrifices in other areas
- 5. We manage to have everything we need, without refraining from anything
- 0. I don't know

**14.** Gender:

- 1. Female
- 2. Male

**15.** Current study profile

- 1. Mathematics/Sciences
- 2. Humanities

# Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire in Romanian

## CHESTIONAR

**SU III.E. Parte din teza de masterat la Universitatea din Stockholm. Institutul de Educație Internațională.**

Dorim să cunoaștem modul în care elevii de liceu iau o decizie cu privire la studiile universitare. Cercetarea noastră are o finalitate științifică. Ai fost ales în mod aleator să răspunzi la acest chestionar, la care nu există răspunsuri corecte sau greșite. *De sinceritatea răspunsurilor tale depinde valabilitatea studiului, și apreciem cooperarea.*

Menționăm că răspunsurile tale sunt *confidențiale și anonime.*

Mulțumim!

**Încercuiește, la fiecare întrebare, cifra corespunzătoare opiniei tale.**

1. După părerea ta, crezi că este important să urmezi o facultate pentru a reuși în viață?

5 Foarte important	4 Important	3 Oarecum important	2 Puțin important	1 Deloc important	0 Nu știu
--------------------	-------------	---------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-----------

2. Pentru a reuși în viață, cât de important este ca o persoană să aibă [...]	Foarte important	Important	Oarecum important	Puțin important	Deloc important
1. Ambiție	5	4	3	2	1
2. Încredere în sine	5	4	3	2	1
3. Educație	5	4	3	2	1
4. Familie bună, suport	5	4	3	2	1
5. Inteligență	5	4	3	2	1
6. Hărnicie	5	4	3	2	1
7. Noroc	5	4	3	2	1
8. Relații și pile	5	4	3	2	1
9. Un loc de muncă bun	5	4	3	2	1
10. Altceva. Ce anume?					

3. În ce domeniu dorești să studiezi după absolvirea liceului?

(încercuiește cel mult trei variante de răspuns)

1. Financiar
2. Tehnic
3. IT / Calculatoare
4. Juridic
5. Administrativ
6. Medical
7. Comercial
8. Construcții
9. Litere/Științe sociale

10. Artistic  
 11. Media / Publicitate / PR  
 12. Alt domeniu. Care? \_\_\_\_\_  
 13. Nu m-am hotărât încă  
 0. Nu știu

4. Cât de des apelezi la sursele de mai jos, pentru a te informa cu privire la studiile universitare?		Foarte des	Des	Uneori	Rar	Deloc
Media	1. Televizor	5	4	3	2	1
	2. Internet	5	4	3	2	1
	3. Radio	5	4	3	2	1
	4. Situri de socializare	5	4	3	2	1
	5. Presa scrisă și online	5	4	3	2	1
Cunoscuți	6. Părinți	5	4	3	2	1
	7. Prieteni	5	4	3	2	1
	8. Profesori	5	4	3	2	1
	9. Rude	5	4	3	2	1
10. Alte surse. Care?						

5. În ce măsură este important ca studiile tale universitare [...]	Foarte important	Important	Oarecum important	Puțin important	Deloc important
1. Să îți aducă un job bine plătit	5	4	3	2	1
2. Să fie apreciate în societate, statut	5	4	3	2	1
3. Să îți aducă dezvoltare personală	5	4	3	2	1
4. Să îți permită să cunoști oameni	5	4	3	2	1
5. Îmi doresc altceva. Ce?					

6. Gândește-te la studiile părinților tăi. Au făcut ei o alegere bună? (încercuiește un singur răspuns pentru fiecare părinte)	
Mama	Tata
1. Da. De ce?	1. Da. De ce?
2. Nu. De ce?	2. Nu. De ce?
3. Nu știu	3. Nu știu
4. Nu mă interesează	4. Nu mă interesează

7. În ce domeniu doresc să studieze cei mai mulți dintre prietenii tăi după absolvirea liceului?  
 (încercuiește cel mult trei variante de răspuns)

1. Financiar
2. Tehnic
3. IT / Calculatoare
4. Juridic
5. Administrativ
6. Medical
7. Comercial
8. Construcții
9. Litere/Științe sociale
10. Artistic

11. Media / Publicitate / PR

12. Alt domeniu. Care? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Nu s-au hotărât încă

0. Nu știu

8. Care sunt cele mai de încredere surse de informare în alegerea unei facultăți?		Foarte de încredere	De încredere	Oarecum de încredere	Puțin de încredere	Deloc de încredere
Media	1. Televizor	5	4	3	2	1
	2. Internet	5	4	3	2	1
	3. Siturile de socializare	5	4	3	2	1
	4. Radio	5	4	3	2	1
	5. Presa scrisă și online	5	4	3	2	1
Cunoscuți	6. Părinți	5	4	3	2	1
	7. Prieteni	5	4	3	2	1
	8. Profesori	5	4	3	2	1
	9. Rude	5	4	3	2	1
10. Alte surse. Care?						

9. Cu cine te consulți în luarea unei decizii cu privire la viitoarele tale studii?

(încercuiește o singură variantă de răspuns)

1. Părinți
2. Prieteni
3. Colegi
4. Rude
5. Profesori
6. Altcineva. Cine? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Nimeni

**Datele tale**

10. Media generală obținută în anul școlar trecut

1. Între 4 și 4.49	2. între 4.50 și 4.99	3. Între 5 și 5.49	4. între 5.50 și 5.99	5. Între 6 și 6.49	6. între 6.50 și 6.99
7. Între 7 și 7.49	8. între 7.50 și 7.99	9. Între 8 și 8.49	10. între 8.50 și 8.99	11. Între 9 și 9.49	12. între 9.50 și 10

<p><b>11 M.</b> Ultima școală absolvită de mamă</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fără școală</li> <li>2. Școala primară (4 clase)</li> <li>3. Școala generală (8 clase)</li> <li>4. Școala profesională / liceu neterminat</li> <li>5. Liceu (12 clase)</li> <li>6. Studii postliceale</li> <li>7. Facultate / studii postuniversitare</li> <li>0. Nu știu</li> </ol>	<p><b>11 T.</b> Ultima școală absolvită de tată</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fără școală</li> <li>2. Școala primară (4 clase)</li> <li>3. Școala generală (8 clase)</li> <li>4. Școala profesională / liceu neterminat</li> <li>5. Liceu (12 clase)</li> <li>6. Studii postliceale</li> <li>7. Facultate / studii postuniversitare</li> <li>0. Nu știu</li> </ol>
--	--

<p><b>12 M.</b> Domeniul în care a studiat mama</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financiar</li> <li>2. Tehnic</li> <li>3. IT / Calculatoare</li> <li>4. Juridic</li> <li>5. Administrativ</li> <li>6. Medical</li> <li>7. Comercial</li> <li>8. Construcții</li> <li>9. Litere/Științe sociale</li> <li>10. Artistic</li> <li>11. Media / Publicitate / PR</li> <li>12. Alt domeniu. Care? _____</li> <li>13. Nu știu</li> </ol>	<p><b>12 T.</b> Domeniul în care a studiat tata</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financiar</li> <li>2. Tehnic</li> <li>3. IT / Calculatoare</li> <li>4. Juridic</li> <li>5. Administrativ</li> <li>6. Medical</li> <li>7. Comercial</li> <li>8. Construcții</li> <li>9. Litere/Științe sociale</li> <li>10. Artistic</li> <li>11. Media / Publicitate / PR</li> <li>12. Alt domeniu. Care? _____</li> <li>13. Nu știu</li> </ol>
---	---

**13.** Cum apreciezi veniturile actuale ale familiei tale?

1. Nu ne ajung nici pentru strictul necesar
2. Ne ajung numai pentru strictul necesar
3. Ne ajung pentru un trai decent, dar nu ne permitem cumpărarea unor bunuri mai scumpe
4. Reușim să cumpărăm și unele bunuri mai scumpe, dar cu restrângeri în alte domenii
5. Reușim să avem tot ce ne trebuie, fără să ne restrângem de la ceva
0. Nu știu

**14.** Sex:

1. Feminin
2. Masculin

**15.** Profilul clasei

1. Real
2. Uman