

# Practical Training – A Challenge for Higher Education. Analysis of Students’ Satisfaction with Traineeships

**Sorana Săveanu\***

**Claudia Bacter\*\***

**Raluca Buhaș\*\*\***

University of Oradea, Oradea

**Abstract:** Students’ practical training is the key element that facilitates the transition to active life. Throughout traineeships, students gain important knowledge, skills and experiences that prove to be extremely useful when entering the labor market. If the content of practical training complies with the occupational requirements, the methodology and strategy used for organizing and implementing the traineeships prove to be successful. The present study aims to investigate the way of organizing and implementing practical activities within three Romanian universities: University of Oradea, University of Bucharest and “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad. Data were collected within the project “*Traineeship Program for Students: Child Protection from theory to practice*” (mentioned in the paper as PractiPASS), and represent the results of monitoring and assessment activities. Students included in the PractiPASS project participated in three academic traineeships and the evaluation of their activities was carried out at the end of each stage. The research was conducted on three waves: the first wave included 498 subjects, the second one 437 subjects, and the last wave 496 subjects. The analysis focuses on investigating students’ satisfaction with their practical training. The main results show that the students’ satisfaction follows an ascending trend on all three waves, with a higher increase between the first and the second stage of traineeships. At the same time, the levels of satisfaction differ according to universities and educational cycle.

**Keywords:** *practical training; students; levels of satisfaction; PractiPASS project.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *pregătire practică; studenți; nivele de satisfacție; proiect PractiPASS.*

## Introduction

School-to-work transition is a very important step for graduates and a successful path towards labor market is marked by specific key-elements, among which graduates’ practical training. EU’s higher education institutions provide a variety of study programs comprising, in most cases, mandatory

traineeships for students. However, a meaningful traineeship has to overlap labor market conditions and requirements, so it has to transmit and develop proper skills and competences for graduates’ future jobs. EU institutions and authorities are facing this issue through numerous regulations that promote and support high-quality and transparent

---

\* University of Oradea, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Work, 1–5 Universității street, Oradea, Romania. E-mail: soranasav@gmail.com.

\*\* University of Oradea, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Work, 1–5 Universității street, Oradea, Romania. E-mail: claudianbacter@gmail.com.

\*\*\* University of Oradea, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Work, 1–5 Universității street, Oradea, Romania. E-mail: ralubahas@gmail.com.

traineeships and apprenticeships for students. Researchers also tackled various themes related to students' practical training and their satisfaction with traineeships (Quintini, Martin and Martin, 2007; Butt and ur Rehman, 2010; Temizer and Turkyilmaz, 2012; Voicu, Tufiş and Voicu, 2010; Gruber et al., 2010; Stiwnne and Alves, 2010).

Also, literature highlighted both the need for qualified personnel within social services institutions and other organizations with relevant activity in the field, and the necessity to train specialists who should develop necessary skills and abilities in order to work at individual, family and group level on specific areas like child protection, protection of disabled children and adults, protection of the elderly etc. (Trevithick, 2000; Roth, Ducu and Rebeleanu, 2008; Agllias, 2010). Therefore, the project "*Traineeship Program for Students: Child Protection from theory to practice*" (PractiPASS) was implemented with the goal of increasing the chances of higher education graduates to integrate on the labor market, and of training specialists on specific areas, especially in child protection. The present paper approaches aspects of students' practical training in three higher education institutions in Romania: University of Oradea, University of Bucharest and "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, based on data collected within the PractiPASS project. Our analyses focus on investigating students' satisfaction with their practical training and it was conducted on three waves. After approaching the theoretical aspects regarding the situation of higher education graduates on the labor market, as well as their satisfaction with the study programs and traineeships, the paper is structured around three research objectives delineated in the methodological framework. Likewise, the research results are presented accordingly.

## Theoretical framework

### *Participation in higher education and student's employability*

The Bologna Process for higher education aims to increase the number of student population, regardless of their social background, to facilitate their access to higher education and to help them complete their university studies. Although, enrolments in higher education had lately increased at European level, each country has its own specificities when it comes to this matter (EACEA, 2012; James, 2007). Romania has adopted the Bologna Process as well, but lately, the higher education context was subject to important changes: the enrolment of students in higher education decreased constantly since 2009 both in the case of public and private universities, and the number of Romanian higher education institutions has also decreased (MEN, 2016). Student participation in higher education can be seen as a dependent variable influenced by various and interrelated factors, but specialists agree that the most important one is the systems' capacity to meet students' needs (EACEA, 2012; James, 2007). From a more specific view, a lower number of high school graduates, demographic decrease in the total population, pronounced migration processes are among the factors responsible for the decrease registered in students' enrolment in higher education (MEN, 2016).

Another worrying process to be considered for higher education refers to the dropout rate. According to Eurostat (2017) in UE, 10.6% of the 18–24 olds had completed at most a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training. The percent of early leavers in Romania is 18.1%. But even if students get in the universities, there is a significant number of them who do not complete their program. For Romania, the average period of higher education attendance, for 2015/2016 academic year, is 1.55 years (MEN, 2016). This number shows

us that we should pay more attention to early leavers and especially try to identify who are those students with high dropout risk and why are they leaving.

One of Europe 2020 strategy's goals is a better functioning of the labor market by developing better skills for people and increasing their geographical mobility. Although the Europe 2020 Strategy aims to increase the employment rate up to 75% for the 20–64 years olds, negative trends were registered at European level in this regard especially during the economic crisis (European Commission, 2012). The unemployment rate is relatively high especially among young people in many OECD countries and various factors are responsible for this situation, among which the mismatch between skills acquired in school and labor market requirements (Quintini, Martin and Martin, 2007). However, unemployment is linked with the level of education, which means that a high level of instruction increases the chances to be employed – approximately 4 months after graduating from higher education (Isăilă, Miron and Andrei, 2011; Voicu, Tufiş and Voicu, 2010). Even so, recent graduates are facing various issues and difficulties in the labor market because they need to find a job that matches their competences and skills acquired during their education years (CEDEFOP, 2010). Research conducted on Romanian graduates shows that both graduates and employers consider that higher education institutions face a gap in transmitting practical skills to their students, and therefore, graduates feel the need to apply for additional training courses (Voicu, Tufiş and Voicu, 2010). Moreover, researchers state that the type of study programs is a determinant in finding a meaningful job (Isăilă, Miron and Andrei, 2011; Voicu, Tufiş and Voicu, 2010). In Romania, students from social sciences, law and engineering are facing the lowest job offer after graduating (Horga and Apostu, 2010).

### *Student's academic engagement and satisfaction*

High quality learning outcomes, and, further, a positive professional integration, are related to students' engagement during their study period (Roberts and Styron, 2010). Being subjected to many analyses and defined in diverse ways, the concept of student engagement can be simply referred as the time and resources students invest in educational activities: studying, interaction with teaching and academic staff, collaboration with peers, involvement in activities inside and outside the classroom etc. (Kinzie, McCormick and Gonyea, 2016; Krause and Coates, 2008 apud Trowler, 2010; Whitt, 2007; Roberts and Styron, 2010; Butt and ur Rehman, 2010; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005 apud Roberts and Styron, 2010). A high level of engagement in educational activities will provide various benefits for students and generate positive outcomes such as increased performance and satisfaction (Kuh et al., 2007), but also cognitive development and persistence (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005 apud Roberts and Styron, 2010).

Therefore, the more time students dedicate to learning activities, the more they will benefit from. Student engagement is a complex process and many social players need to combine their efforts in order to foster it: students, academic staff, other institutions (Whitt, 2007; Trowler, 2010; Chalmers, 2007). However, most of all, the level of student engagement is directly influenced by the quality of educational services provided. Thus, educational institutions must promote learning activities and experiences and implement strategies to engage students at high levels (Kinzie, McCormick and Gonyea, 2016; Trowler, 2010; Whitt, 2007).

Students' satisfaction had become one of the major goals of higher education institutions due to the fact that its level is a good indicator for the quality of educational services (Leckey and Neill, 2001 apud Gruber et al., 2010). A high level of students' satisfaction is linked with loyalty and retention,

and it can also attract new students (Butt and ur Rehman, 2010). Therefore, universities should implement strategies in order to meet the needs and expectations of students. The literature does not provide a unique definition for student satisfaction with higher education institutions, but the concept refers to student's own assessment of various aspects related to education, from environment to academic achievement (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Gruber et al., 2010). Student satisfaction is a complex and multi-dimensional concept (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005; Richardson, 2005) and it has been analyzed in several studies. Regarding students' experiences of university teaching and learning, Australia is a leader with the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (Chalmers, 2007). Some researchers (Butt and ur Rehman, 2010) also developed a Student Satisfaction Index (SSI) model for the higher education institutions underpinned by the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI). The index measures the level of students' satisfaction in relation to aspects such as quality of educational services, image of the university, perceived value, students' expectations, loyalty, etc.

There are many researches worldwide which aimed at identifying and explaining the factors that can lead to higher education students' level of satisfaction, and, therefore, many determinants were depicted in this sense. Among these factors we can mention university image (Palacio et al., 2002), academic interests (Mayo et al., 2004), quality of teachers and their expertise (Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004; Mai, 2005; Navaro et al., 2005), possibilities to use knowledge and skills after graduation (Garcia-Aracil, 2009 apud Stiwnne and Alves, 2010). Anyhow, one of the most important predictor of students' satisfaction in higher education is linked with the educational offers and quality of education (Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004; Mai, 2005; Deshields et al., 2005; Butt and Rehman, 2010; Temizer and Turkyilmaz, 2012). Students tend to be more satisfied with the study program if it provides practical knowledge and skills, and facilitates the

access to good jobs (Garcia-Aracil, 2009 apud Stiwnne and Alves, 2010).

While if in most European countries a majority of students is rather satisfied with their study programs, in Romania we register the lowest shares of higher education students satisfied with the organization of studies and quality of teaching (below 40%) (Hauschildt, Vögtle and Gwosć, 2018). However, some studies showed that Romanian students tend to give a rather positive evaluation of the higher education system (Voicu, Tufiş and Voicu, 2010), and they state that tertiary education plays a major role in their future career (Horga and Apostu, 2010).

### ***The importance of practical training in the development of human resources***

For an efficient transition from school to labor market, higher education institutions should provide high quality study programs for their students. Such a program should integrate both theoretical and practical knowledge which should work hand-in-hand so that students can develop necessary competences and skills for their future jobs. Although studies state that practical learning needs to be supported by theoretical learning and, therefore, students should be supported in linking the theory with practice (Katajauor, Lindblom-Ylänne and Hirvonen, 2006; European Commission, 2013b), this is a major challenge for universities (Isăilă, Miron and Andrei, 2011). Research showed that both Romanian tertiary students and employers consider that study programs are providing more theoretical knowledge than practical one (Voicu, Tufiş and Voicu, 2010; Zaharie, 2011). Even if employers emphasize that practical skills and competences tend to lack more than the theoretical knowledge, academic staff tends to state that Romanian higher educational system has the capacity to deliver well-prepared graduates on the labor market (Isăilă, Miron and Andrei, 2011).

Representatives of higher education institutions, but also graduates and employers, consider that traineeships are a key element to increase students' chance to find a proper job after graduation (Lowden et al., 2011; European Commission, 2013a; Quintini, Martin and Martin, 2007; Council of the European Union, 2014; European Commission, 2013b). Moreover, the results of a research showed that 85% of the Romanian respondents believe that their traineeship can increase their employability rate (European Commission, 2013a). Giving the benefits of practical training programs for school-to-work transition, an increased interest for implementing policies in this regard is registered at European level. The European Commission is the first upholder of traineeships and apprenticeships for students (European Commission, 2013b).

Although there are different types of traineeships, we will further on refer to those associated with higher education study programs. These types of practical trainings for students “form an optional or compulsory part of study curricula” (European Commission, 2013b, 6). The European Commission defines traineeship as “work practice (either as part of a study curriculum or not) including an educational/training component which is limited in time” (European Commission, 2013b, 7). Tutors' supervision, assessment and feedback that helps students reflect on their activity and tasks, as well as self-assessment and self-study are features that distinguish traineeships from other types of practical trainings and active learning (O'Neill, 2010; Katajavuor, Lindblom-Ylänne and Hirvonen, 2006). At European level traineeships vary by type, duration and objectives. Even so, they are generally structured and linked with the study programs and share some common features among which: an educational goal, practice-based learning and a limited period of duration (European Commission, 2013b).

A developed traineeship system and high quality practical training is easing graduates' transition to the labor market and increases

their chances to be employed (Council of the European Union, 2014; European Commission, 2013b; European Commission, 2012). Likewise, those who completed a low quality traineeship encountered difficulties in finding a job afterwards (European Commission, 2012). The November 2013 Eurobarometer survey on the quality of traineeships in the EU countries points out that there are cases of low standard traineeships, having inappropriate and insufficient learning content, or the tasks and activities that trainees had to accomplish are too menial (European Commission, 2013a; Council of the European Union, 2014). In order to be successful, a traineeship must combine some elements among which we mention: meaningful learning content, a strong cooperation between social partners involved (higher education institutions, employers, students, authorities), theoretical knowledge combined with practical one, targeted information, existence of a traineeship agreement, a high quality supervision and feedback from tutors, applied skills required by the labor market, outline of specific career opportunities (European Commission, 2013b; Council of the European Union, 2014; O'Neill, 2010).

A high-quality traineeship should be structured and developed based on a quality framework, which also enhances its transparency (Council of the European Union, 2014). In this sense, the EU's Council of Ministers adopted a Quality Framework on Traineeships and required all EU Member States to comply with this framework and adjust their legislation accordingly. Moreover, all Member States committed to the Youth Guarantee (proposed by the European Commission in 2012 and adopted by the EU's Council of Ministers in April 2013) which militates for good quality traineeships, among others, as central element for the professional development of young people under the age of 25 (Council of the European Union, 2014).

## Methodological framework

The main highlight of the present study is to investigate the way practical training for students was organized and implemented in three Romanian universities: University of Oradea, University of Bucharest and “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad. Three waves of academic traineeships for students were developed at the level of each university involved. In this regard, we aim at analyzing the satisfaction of higher education students with their traineeships. Following, three specific research objectives were delineated and further discussed: O1. Synthetic presentation of the methodology for organizing traineeships within a practice program implemented in three Romanian universities; O2. Assessment of students’ general satisfaction with their traineeships developed within a practice program organized in 3 Romanian universities; O3. Investigation of covariates regarding the level of students’ general satisfaction with their traineeships.

Data were collected within the project – *Traineeship Program for Students: Child Protection from theory to practice* (PractiPASS) where higher education students participated in three academic traineeships and, at the end of each practical stage, they were asked to fill in a self-administrated questionnaire in order to assess their practical training. The questionnaire approached several relevant aspects related to their engagement in the traineeships. A total of 498 subjects were included the first wave, 437 subjects in the second one, and 496 subjects in the last wave. Based on these quantitative data, we conducted a comparative analysis on all three waves of developed traineeships for all universities involved. Further, results are presented and discussed following the aforementioned research objectives.

## PractiPASS practice project. A possible success model

The project PractiPASS, implemented between 01.10.2010 and 30.09.2013, was funded by the European Social Fund – “Invest in people!”, Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, Priority Axis 2: Linking life long learning and labour market, Major Intervention Domain (MID) 2.1 “Transition from school to active life”. The project aimed at facilitating students’ transition from school to active life by increasing the competitiveness of the educational system and rendering practical training more efficient in order to meet the requirements of the labor market. The target group was represented by students from three Romanian universities: University of Oradea, University of Bucharest and “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad. The project was led by University of Oradea and implemented in partnership with other 13 public and private institutions from Oradea, Bucharest and Arad developing their activity in child protection area.

One of the main objectives of the project aimed at implementing a new methodology for practical training of students from BA and MA level in Social Work, Sociology, Psychology and Special Psycho-Pedagogy. Several stages were necessary for the elaboration and implementation of the methodology. First, practice programs and several working tools were elaborated: *the Practice Guide* provided students and specialists with relevant information regarding traineeships, child protection legislation, as well as theoretical information on working methods / tools used in practice; *the Practice Book* provided students and tutors with relevant information on scheduling practical assignments for each internship and study program; *the Institution Observation Grid* helped students in structuring the information related to the way institutions/services work in the service delivery process; students’ practical activity was assessed by

the tutors based on the *Tutor's observation sheet for students' activity*; the *Career Guide* provided various relevant information on career counselling and planning, as well as on labor legislation. Secondly, 65 practice tutors and 6 tutors' coordinators from partner institutions were selected and trained within two modules: Developing skills for working with students and Practical application of working tools. The third step was to organize, implement and monitor all practical trainings. 603 students from the above-mentioned universities participated to different *practical trainings*, 3 hours/week, within partner institutions where they got familiarized with the institutions and their services. At the beginning of each stage all working tools were distributed to students and tutors. The *intensive practical training* was of 60 hours, while students, tutors and project team members periodically met in order to discuss and monitor the entire practical activity. At the end of each phase, students' activity was assessed in all three universities involved. The assessment followed two directions: the evaluation made by tutors on a scale from 1 to 5 regarded several items and was based on the assessment sheets, and the evaluation made by practice coordinators from universities based on the elaboration of working tools and the oral presentation. The mean of the two assessments represented the final mark of each student. A *training session on project writing* in child protection area was also carried out on three directions: volunteering activities, protective measures proposals for children in difficulty, and educational activities for children. Students worked in teams based on a project development guide and were coordinated by project team members.

In addition to their practical trainings, 69 students with best practice results benefited from two exchange experiences: 30 students and 15 specialists and teachers participated at the first exchange organized at Katho-Ipsoc University (Belgium), while 39 students and 6 teachers participated at the second exchange experience organized at University of Debrecen (Hungary). These study visits allowed students to familiarize themselves

with child protection systems in both countries, and facilitated a comparative analysis of methodologies and tools used in traineeships implemented in the two host universities. These two exchanges add value to the integration of higher education graduates into the labor market.

Another complementary activity carried out during the PractiPASS project was a campaign for the promotion of children's rights in 20 rural areas from Bihor county. Students worked in teams and had the possibility to specifically use the skills and competences achieved during their practical training. Each group of students developed its own class and working tools. Also, a brochure containing information on children's rights presented as a story was elaborated and distributed to pupils in primary school during the promotional campaign classes.

All students involved in the project benefited from counselling services in order to facilitate their transition from school to active life, and to increase their employment chances after graduation. The information provided through these services regarded personal promotion, techniques for finding a job, elaboration of CV and intention letter etc. In addition, students were initiated into self-knowledge, self-evaluation and inter-knowledge techniques, career planning, work-related values etc., which are key elements for a future career.

### **Students' assessment of the traineeships held in Oradea, Bucharest and Arad**

In this section we propose to present the results of the monitoring activity carried out within the PractiPASS project. The presentation is a comparative one, following several relevant aspects at the level of the three universities: University of Oradea (UO), University of Bucharest (UB) and "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (UA).

**Table 1:** Samples in the three waves

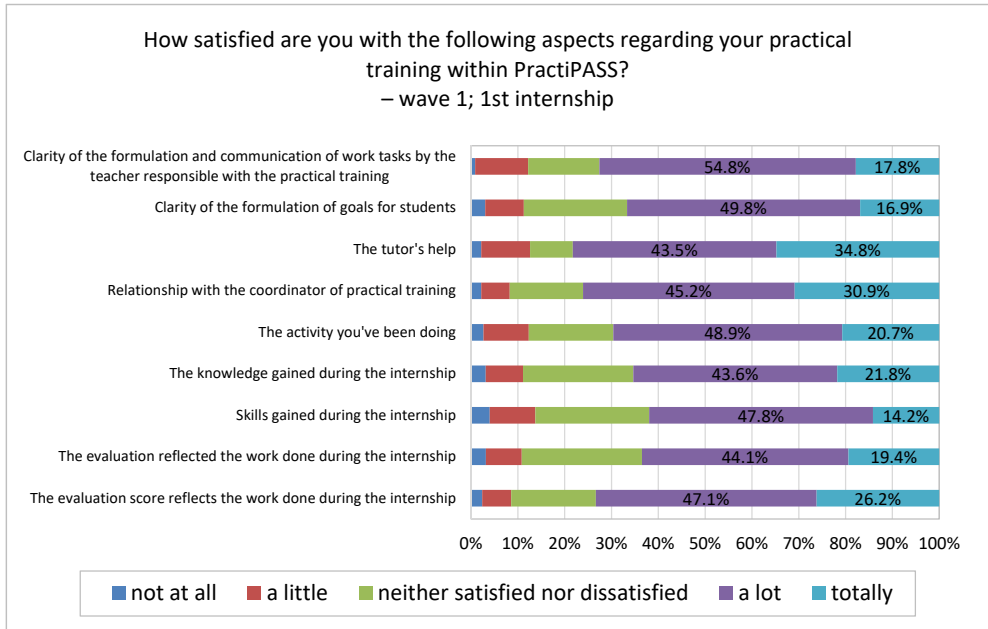
	Wave 1 Internship 1 Oct. 2011-Jan. 2012		Wave 2 Internship 2 Feb. 2012-Jun. 2012		Wave 3 Internship 3 Oct. 2012-Jan.2013	
	No. cases	%	No. cases	%	No. cases	%
University of Oradea	176	35.3	154	35.2	172	34.7
University of Bucharest	183	36.7	159	36.4	130	26.2
“Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad	139	27.9	124	28.4	194	39.1
Total	498	100.0	437	100.0	496	100.0

At the end of each traineeship, students completed self-administrated student engagement questionnaires. These questionnaires were structured on several dimensions, such as: assessment of practice activities (indicating needs), students' expectations regarding practical training, students' aspirations regarding traineeships (commitment to objectives and activities), assessment of the initial/ongoing/final (summative) assessment within PractiPASS and relationships with colleagues and faculty members (academic integration and social integration). In the next sections we used the general satisfaction scale in order to see differences between the initial (first traineeship), ongoing (second traineeship) and the final assessment of the practical training within PractiPASS. The scale included items referring to the communication of tasks and goals, relationship with tutors, general activity, knowledge and skills

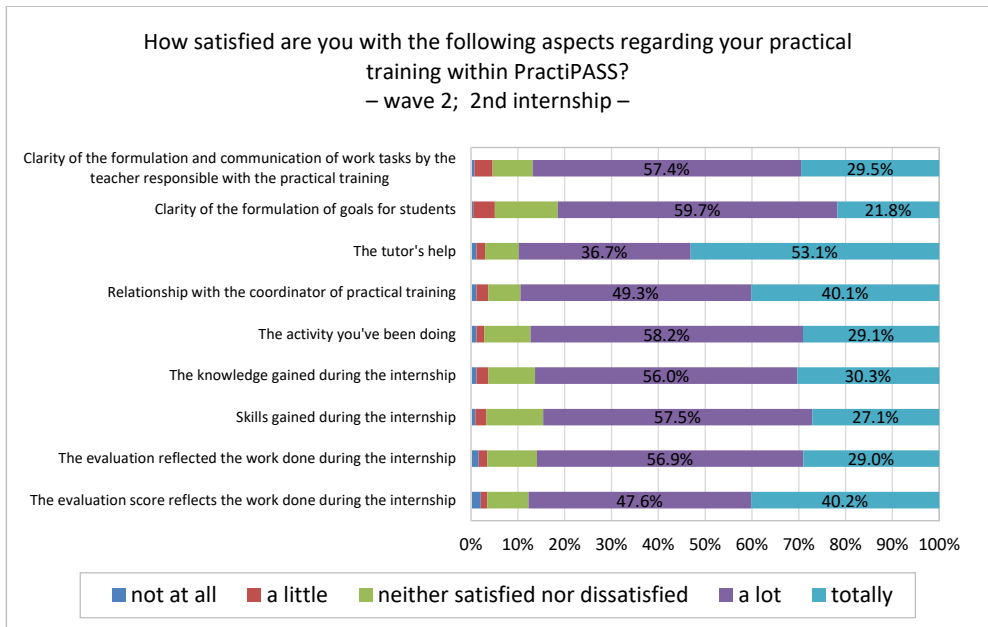
gained and the evaluation at the end of the traineeship.

Figures below show differences between the first traineeship and the second and third one. Students are more satisfied with their practical training after the second traineeship. The situation applies for all items. Students mostly appreciate tutors' help and the grade that they received after completing the traineeship. Less satisfied are with the skills gained after the traineeship and with the way their goals were formulated at the beginning of the practical training. We don't find increases in satisfaction between the second and third traineeship. Results are similar in these two waves. It is important to state that the satisfaction with the relationship with the coordinating professors shows higher values at the end of the program, compared to the first stage, respectively the second stage.

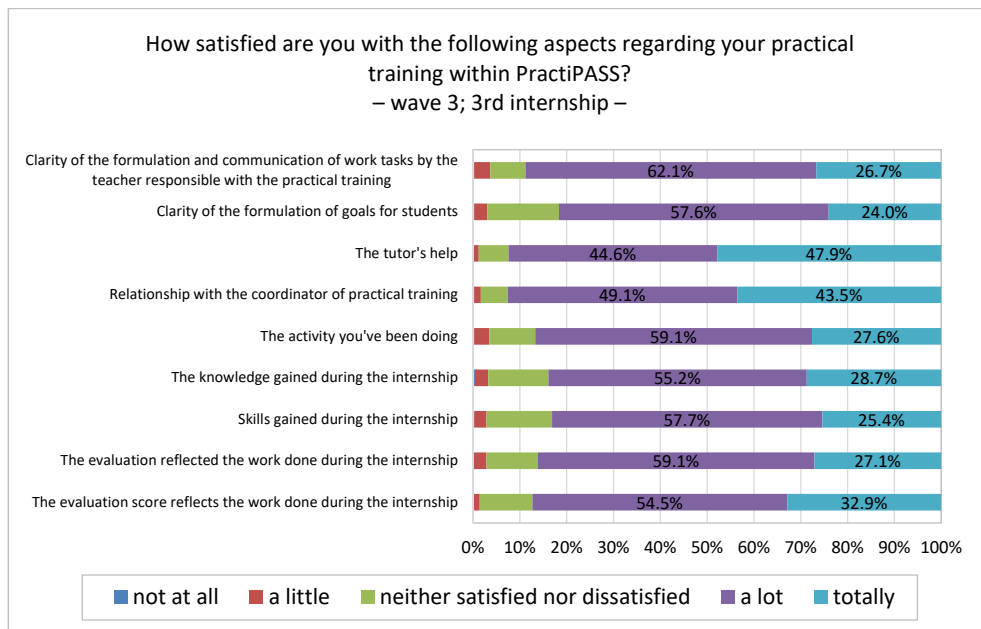




**Figure 1:** Satisfaction scale – results from the first wave



**Figure 2:** Satisfaction scale – results from the second wave

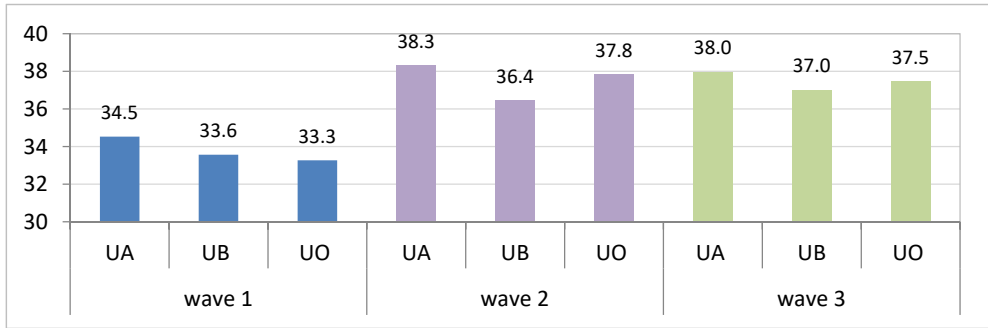


**Figure 3:** Satisfaction scale – results from the third wave

The scales of student satisfaction with the practical training used in the three research waves are valid and unidimensional (Cronbach Alpha: 1<sup>st</sup> wave = .943, 2<sup>nd</sup> wave = .915, 3<sup>rd</sup> wave = .743). We further summed up the items to calculate the satisfaction scores for the three waves. In the first wave, the mean value for satisfaction is 33.81 with 7.07 standard deviation. In the second wave mean value is 37.48 with 5.3 standard deviation and in the last wave we have a mean value of 37.52 with 4.9 standard deviation.

Figure below shows lower levels of satisfaction at the beginning of the program, in the case of all universities and higher levels after completing the second and third traineeship. From this point of view, we can say that the program has successfully achieved its objectives, because it brought improvements that had positive implications on student satisfaction with their practical training.

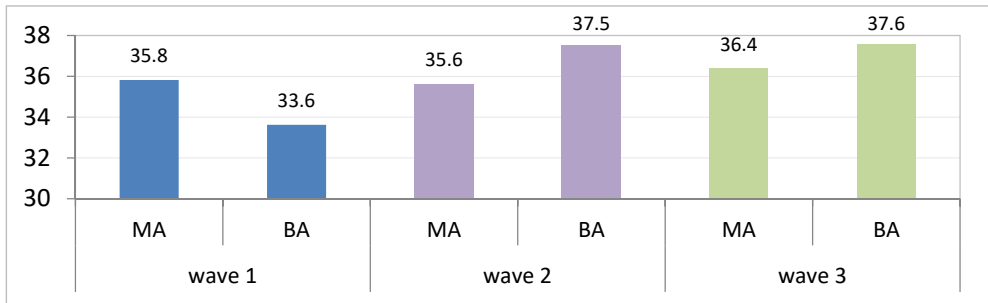
We have also similar values for students from University of Oradea and University of Bucharest, and higher values for those from University of Arad. In the second wave we found significant differences in the case of University of Arad (with higher levels of satisfaction compared with the other two universities;  $t=-2.04$  and  $p=0.042$ ). In the case of students from Bucharest, we identified significant lower levels of satisfaction compared with students from the other two universities ( $t= 2.9$  and  $p=0.003$ ). It is interesting to point out that if in the case of Arad and Oradea we notice a small decrease of satisfaction between the second stage and the last one, in the case of students from Bucharest the ascending trend is continuous until the end of the program. In the third wave there are no significant differences between the levels of satisfactions for students from the three universities.



**Figure 4:** Satisfaction mean values in all three waves, for each university

The highest increase in satisfaction with traineeships is recorded at the BA level. At the beginning of the program, we found significant lower levels of satisfaction for BA students compared with MA students (for  $t = 2.1$  and  $p = 0.042$ ). At BA level, students have a mean value of 33.6 at the beginning

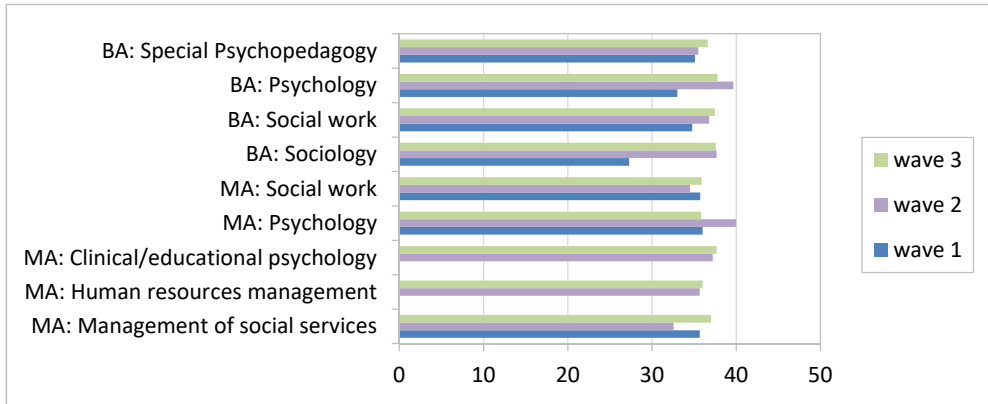
of the 3 year program, and at the end this value is 37.6. This increase occurs especially after participating in the first two traineeships. Regarding students enrolled in the Master programs, satisfaction remains relatively constant after the first two traineeships, but increases in the last.



**Figure 5:** Satisfaction mean values in all three waves, for BA and MA study levels

The comparative analysis carried out according to the study programs where students are enrolled support our previous results, namely that an increase in satisfaction is registered especially for the students from the undergraduate programs, and less in the case of those from MA level. The greatest increase in satisfaction is found in Sociology,

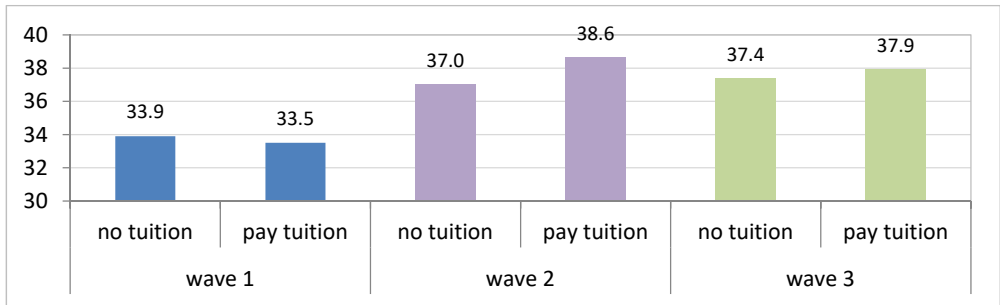
followed by those in Psychology. The trend is upward for the four BA programs, between the three waves. In contrast, for MA students, it can be noticed that the values recorded at the end of the practical training do not change greatly; moreover, those from Psychology are more dissatisfied at the end, compared with the first two traineeships.



**Figure 6:** Satisfaction mean values in all three waves, for each study program

Data show us that in the first wave there are no differences in satisfaction between students who pay tuition and those who don't. In the second wave we identified significant higher levels of satisfaction in the

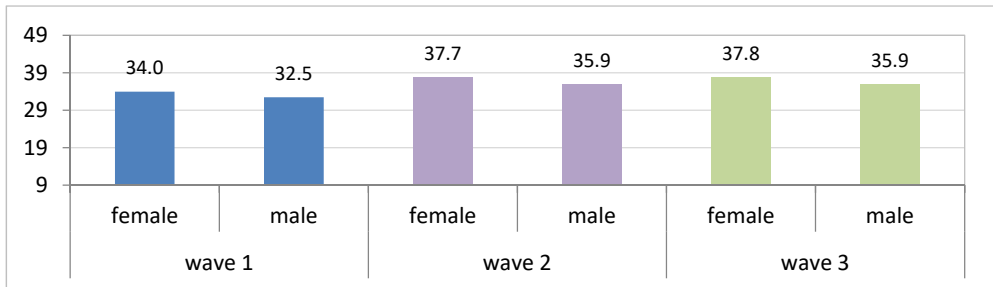
case of students who pay tuition (for  $t=-2.89$  and  $p= 0.004$ ). In the third wave the values among students who pay tuition and those who don't pay are similar.



**Figure 7:** Satisfaction mean values in all three waves, according to tuition payment

According to our data, girls are more satisfied with the traineeship than boys. We have higher levels of satisfaction for girls in all three waves. Significant differences are

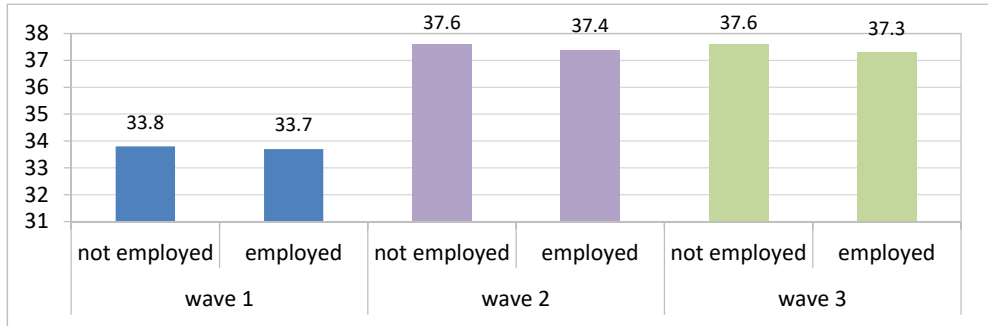
found in the second wave ( $t=2.17$  and  $p=0.030$ ) and in the third wave ( $t=2.94$  and  $p=0.003$ ).



**Figure 8:** Satisfaction mean values in all three waves, according to gender

We tested if there are any differences regarding the satisfaction with traineeship according to the age of students. We found significant differences only in the first wave, suggesting that older students are more satisfied (Pearson coefficient = 0.142,  $p = 0.043$ ). This result comes to support previous data according to which students from MA level are more satisfied with their traineeship program in the first wave.

Students' practical training is directly related to their future professional activity. We investigated if there are differences in satisfaction between those students who are already employed and those who are not working. Analysis didn't revealed any significant differences. Values are almost equal in all three waves.



**Figure 9:** Satisfaction mean values in all three waves, according to employment

Further, we used regression models in order to test the impact of these variables in all three waves of our study. We included variables regarding the university where students

are enrolled, their academic situation (level of study, tuition payment, scholarship) and social-economic profile (gender, occupational status and age).

**Table 2:** Regression models on general student satisfaction with practical training (3 waves)

	1 <sup>st</sup> wave					2 <sup>nd</sup> wave					3 <sup>rd</sup> wave				
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	31.568	3.095				32.365	1.818		17.798	.000	35.535	1.950		18.228	.000
UO01						<b>1.449</b>	<b>.640</b>	<b>.133</b>	<b>2.265</b>	<b>.024</b>	.786	.653	.077	1.204	.229
UA01	1.933	1.371	.129	1.410	.160	1.413	.797	.121	1.774	.077					
UB01	-.032	1.467	-.002	-.022	.983						-.243	.754	-.022	-.322	.748
BA01	-3.044	1.983	-.120	-1.535	.126	<b>2.326</b>	<b>1.127</b>	<b>.105</b>	<b>2.064</b>	<b>.040</b>	.509	1.124	.022	.453	.651
tuition01	-.750	1.253	-.051	-.598	.550	1.060	.669	.094	1.585	.114	.645	.586	.063	1.100	.272
scholarship01	.049	1.188	.003	.041	.967	.517	.612	.044	.844	.399	.769	.554	.071	1.389	.166
male01	-3.677	1.898	-.145	-1.937	.054	<b>-2.093</b>	<b>.794</b>	<b>-.131</b>	<b>-2.637</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>-1.831</b>	<b>.687</b>	<b>-.128</b>	<b>-2.667</b>	<b>.008</b>
employed01	-1.518	1.337	-.093	-1.135	.258	-.522	.699	-.042	-.746	.456	-.325	.554	-.031	-.587	.558
age	<b>.230</b>	<b>.098</b>	<b>.182</b>	<b>2.355</b>	<b>.020</b>	.087	.063	.074	1.384	.167	.054	.057	.048	.959	.338
<b>R Square</b>	<b>.063</b>					<b>.061</b>					<b>.030</b>				

Poor strength of association between variables is indicated by very low values of the coefficient of determination registered for all three waves (R-squared has values closer to 0%), and shows that variables included in

model have a rather small impact. In the first wave only age has a significant impact and in the third wave only gender is significant. Regarding the model for the second waves,

University of Oradea, level of study and gender prove to be significant. Regression models show us that at the beginning of the traineeship program students who are older are more satisfied with their program. None of the other variables have a significant effect. In the second wave, students who are more satisfied with their practical training are those from University of Oradea, females from the BA level. In the third wave the model explains less than the first two models and the only significant factor identified is students' gender, suggesting that girls are more satisfied with their traineeship. The low power of explanation of our models once again highlights the fact that student's satisfaction with their training program is a complex concept and it needs a deeper approach. For further research, we state that the use of mix methods could ensure the integration of qualitative research results with those resulting from quantitative analyzes.

## Conclusions

All European authorities in the field point out the need to increase graduates' employability and developed various policies in order to ease school-to-work transition, and require all EU Member States to adopt and implement these regulations. Higher education institutions also play a major role in the process of graduates' transition and insertion on the labor market. Where needed, educational institutions must restructure and provide high-quality study programs combining both theoretical and practical learning. The quality of practical training (traineeship programs) that students receive during higher education it is directly linked with their insertion on labor market and professional development.

At European level, and not only, undergoing research approaches themes like graduates' employability, skills matching labor market needs, the importance of traineeships in school-to-work transition (Lowden et al.,

2011; Quintini, Martin and Martin, 2007; Voicu, Tufiș and Voicu, 2010; Zaharie, 2011). Some research results in this regard were depicted in the present paper. Students' satisfaction with study programs and their practical training is also a subject of interest for specialists. A high level of satisfaction in this regard can decrease dropouts and increase students' retention and loyalty (Butt and ur Rehman, 2010; Gruber et al., 2010). An efficient traineeship must comply with the labor market needs and should transmit and develop skills and competences required by employers. Thus, graduates' chances to find a meaningful job will increase. At the same time, in order to provide high-quality services, a traineeship program must gather some elements among which: proper theoretical and practical learning content, cooperation between social partners, a high quality supervision, applied skills, outline of specific career opportunities.

The present paper investigated the way a traineeship program was implemented and developed in three Romanian universities within *project – Traineeship Program for Students: Child Protection from theory to practice (PractiPASS)*. The aim of the project was to facilitate students' transition from school to work by rendering practical training more efficient in order to meet labor market needs. By comparing the three universities involved, we presented the results of the monitoring activity carried out within the abovementioned project. Also, we analyzed students' overall satisfaction with their traineeships during the implementation of the project, as well as the covariates in this regard. Students involved in the PractiPASS project participated in three traineeships and their satisfaction with the practical trainings was assessed. Our results show differences between all three traineeships. For all items included in the assessment scale and at the level of all three universities involved, students' satisfaction is lower at the beginning, but increases after the second traineeship. We didn't find increases in satisfaction between the second and third wave of practical

training. Some covariates of students' satisfaction with their practical training programs are influencing the registered levels. Therefore, students from BA level, female students, students who pay tuition, older students and students from Sociology and Psychology tend to have higher levels of satisfaction with their traineeships.

In order to conclude, we can say that the traineeships implemented within the PractiPASS project provided students meaningful learning content. The PractiPASS project has successfully achieved its goals, because it brought improvements that had positive implications on student satisfaction with their practical training.

## References

- Agllias, C. (2010) Student to Practitioner: A Study of Preparedness for Social Work Practice. *Australian Social Work*, 63, 3, 345–360. Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0312407X.2010.498522>. Accessed on February 8, 2018.
- Aldemir, C. and Gulcan, Y. (2004) Students Satisfaction in Higher Education: A Turkish Case. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 16, 2, 109–122.
- Butt, B. Z. and ur Rehman, K. (2010) A study examining the students satisfaction in higher education. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 5446–5450.
- Chalmers, D. (2007) *A review of Australian and international quality systems and indicators of learning and teaching*. Australia: Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Ltd.
- Council of the European Union (2014) *Council recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships. Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs – Council meeting*. Brussels: PRESS.
- DeShields Jr., O. W., Kara, A. and Kaynak, E. (2005) Determinants of business student satisfaction and retention in higher education: applying Herzberg's two factor theory. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19, 2, 28–139.
- EACEA – Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2012) *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Brussels: P9 Eurydice. Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/EC-30-12-534>. Accessed on February 7, 2018.
- Elliott, K. M. and Shin, D. (2002) Student satisfaction: an alternative approach to assessing this important concept. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24, 2, 197–209.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2010) *The skill matching challenge. Analysing skill mismatch and policy implications*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission (2012) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Towards a job-rich recovery*. COM173. Strasbourg. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2012:0173:FIN>. Accessed on February 22, 2018.
- European Commission (2013a) *Flash Eurobarometer 378. The experience of traineeships in the EU*. Report. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl\\_378\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_378_en.pdf). Accessed on January, 17, 2018.
- European Commission (2013b) *Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes in EU27: Key Success Factors. A Guidebook for Policy Planners and Practitioners*. Available at [https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/Guidebook\\_Apprenticeship\\_Schemes\\_EU27.pdf](https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/Guidebook_Apprenticeship_Schemes_EU27.pdf). Accessed on January, 17, 2018.
- Eurostat. Statistics Explained (2017) *Early leavers from education and training, 2017*. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training). Accessed on January 17, 2018.

- Gruber, T., Fuss, S., Voss, R. and Glaeser-Zikuda, M. (2010) Examining student satisfaction with higher education services: using a new measurement tool. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 23, 2, 105–123. Available at [https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/bitstream/2134/11928/3/Examining%20Student%20Satisfaction%20with%20Higher%20Education%20Services\\_IJPSM.pdf](https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/bitstream/2134/11928/3/Examining%20Student%20Satisfaction%20with%20Higher%20Education%20Services_IJPSM.pdf). Accessed on March 27, 2018.
- Hauschildt, K., Vögtle, E. M. and Gwosć, C. (2018) *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. Eurostudent VI 2016–2018. Synopsis of Indicators*. Germany: Bertelsmann Verlag Publishing House.
- Horga, I. and Apostu, O. (2010) *EUROSTUDENT IV. Condiții economice, sociale și mobilitatea internațională a studenților din România*. București: Institutul de Științe ale Educației.
- Isăilă, Ș., Miron, A. and Andrei, D. (2011) *Relația dintre educație și învățare pe tot parcursul vieții și piața muncii în Regiunea de dezvoltare Nord-Vest*. Cluj-Napoca: Institutul de Formare Economică și Socială.
- James, R. (2007) *Social equity in a mass, globalised higher education environment: the unresolved issue of widening access to university*. Faculty of Education Dean's Lecture Series. Centre for the Study of Higher Education. University of Melbourne Victoria, Australia. Available at <http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/news/lectures/pdf/richardjamestranscript.pdf>. Accessed on January 25, 2018.
- Katajavuor, N., Lindblom-Ylänne, S. and Hirvonen, J. (2006) The significance of practical training in linking theoretical studies with practice. *Higher Education*, 51, 439–464.
- Kinzie, J., McCormick, A. and Gonyea, R. (2016) Using Student Engagement Results to Oversee Educational Quality. *Trusteeship Magazine*. Washington D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Available at <https://www.agb.org/trusteeship/2016/januaryfebruary/using-student-engagement-results-to-oversee-educational-quality>. Accessed on March, 27, 2018.
- Kuh, G.D. (2007) How to Help Students Achieve. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53, 41, B12–13. Available at [http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/2007\\_%20How%20to%20Help%20Students%20Achieve.pdf](http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/2007_%20How%20to%20Help%20Students%20Achieve.pdf). Accessed on March, 27, 2018.
- Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D. and Lewin, J. (2011) *Employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates*. London: Edge Foundation.
- Mai, L. (2005) A Comparative Study between UK and US: The Student Satisfaction in Higher Education and its Influential Factors. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21, 859–878.
- Mayo, D. T., Helms, M. M., and Codjoe, H. M. (2004) Reasons to remain in college: a comparison of high school and college students. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 18, 6, 360–367.
- Ministerul Educației Naționale (MEN) (2016) *Raport privind starea învățământului superior din România*. Available at [https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/transparenta/Stare\\_sup%20%202016.pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/transparenta/Stare_sup%20%202016.pdf). Accessed on May 8, 2018.
- Navarro, M. M., Iglesias, P. M. and Torres, R. P. (2005) A New Management Element for Universities: Satisfaction with the offered courses. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19, 6, 505–526.
- O'Neill, N. (2010) Internships as a High-Impact Practice: Some Reflections on Quality. *Peer Review*, 12, 4, 4–8. Available at <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/career-and-employment-hub/Internships%20as%20High%20Impact%20Practice.pdf>. Accessed on March 27, 2018.
- Palacio, A. B., Menesses, G. D., and Perez, P. J. (2002) The configuration of the university image and its relationship with the satisfaction of students. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40, 5, 486–505.
- Richardson, J. (2005) Instruments for obtaining student feedback: a review of the literature. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30, 4, 387–415. Available at [https://www.jcu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/104566/jcu\\_121465.pdf](https://www.jcu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/104566/jcu_121465.pdf). Accessed on May 8, 2018.
- Roberts, J. and Styron, R. (2010) Student satisfaction and persistence: factors vital to student retention. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 6, 3, 1–18.



- Roth, M., Ducu, V. and Rebeleanu, A. (2008) Practica studenților asistenți sociali, în M. Roth (ed.), *Caiet de practică pentru studenți asistenți sociali. Modele și recomandări pentru proiecte de intervenție*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 7–22.
- Quintini, G., Martin, J. and Martin, S. (2007) The Changing Nature of the School-to-Work Transition Process in OECD Countries. *IZAN Discussion Paper No. 2582*. Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/38187773.pdf>. Accessed on January 23, 2018.
- Stiwne, E. E. and Alves, M. G. (2010) Higher Education and Employability of Graduates: will Bologna make a difference? *European Educational Research Journal*, 9, 1, 32–44.
- Temizer, L. and Turkyilmaz, A. (2012) Implementation of student satisfaction index model in higher education institutions. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 3802–3806.
- Trevithick, P. (2000) *Social work skills. A practice handbook*. Philadelphia: Open University Press Buckingham. Available at <https://www.mheducation.co.uk/openup/chapters/0335206999.pdf>. Accessed on February 13, 2018.
- Trowler, V. (2010) *Student engagement literature review*. UK: The Higher Education Academy.
- Voicu, B., Tufiş, C. and Voicu, M. (2010) *Absolvenții recenți de învățământ superior și integrarea lor pe piața muncii*. Raport UECNCFPA, București: DOCIS.
- Zaharie, M. (2011) *Ocuparea forței de muncă cu studii superioare și nevoile angajatorilor – componente ale managementului calității în învățământul superior*. Teză de doctorat – rezumat. Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai Cluj-Napoca. Available at [https://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/sustinerea\\_publica/rezumat/2011/management/Zaharie\\_Monica\\_RO.pdf](https://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/sustinerea_publica/rezumat/2011/management/Zaharie_Monica_RO.pdf). Accessed on July 6, 2018.
- Whitt, E. (2007) *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter – Power Point presentation*. The University of Iowa Student Success Team Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice). Available at <https://studentsuccess.uiowa.edu/assets/Student-Success-in-College.pdf>. Accessed on February 15, 2018.