

STUDY VISITS – CONNECTIONS WITH THE LABOR MARKET, A STUDY IN ROMANIA*

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study based on student's responses to a survey applied in an extracurricular project carried out in 2022, who have made study visits, as an extracurricular activity, to present their role for labour market integration.

Through extracurricular projects, including study visits, students can discover new equipment and technologies used in companies and identify the workflow at different workplaces. Study visits provide students with the opportunity to gain a real-time perspective on the field they aspire to work in and connect with professionals in that domain, establishing direct contact with various departments and functions within an organization. The study highlights the need to identify students' preferences so that activities carried out throughout the years of study respond as best as possible to their needs.

Key words: *Study visits, Extracurricular project, Connection to the labor market, Survey, Responses.*

1. Introduction

Considering the technological progress of recent years and the speed at which new products/processes are developing, and new concepts are being defined, the introduction of the notion of sustainability in education is necessary. We consider that sustainable education is a lifelong activity that involves connecting individuals with new discoveries/developments in the technical, economic, and social fields through

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education. Thus, stakeholders in education must promote the latest advancements in the field, undergo training, and acquire skills in line with technical development. The concept of sustainable development must be implemented throughout society, with education, in general, and higher education, in particular, playing a decisive role. Starting from the idea that education is the primary tool for sustainable development, the involvement of higher education institutions in community life is necessary through collaboration, the expansion, and dissemination of knowledge, and the strengthening of active specialist training capacities (Berchin, de Aguiar Dutra, Guerra, 2021). In a study conducted on 567 students from Iran in 2021, it was found that they had a good level of sustainable development competencies, such as systemic, creative, and anticipatory thinking, empathy, and participatory capacity (Pouratashi, 2021). For the development of society, it is necessary for many individuals to possess and develop such competencies. Without these competencies, many students cannot adapt to the university education system and end up dropping out of studies.

It is known that school dropout is a problem faced by all educational institutions in the education system. According to the latest Eurostat statistics on early school leaving for young people aged between 18 and 24, in 2022, Romania ranked last in Europe with a percentage of 16%, while the EU average was 10% (Eurostat, Two-fifths of EU population with tertiary education. 2023). This fact was determined by several causes, such as the degree of poverty, migration, etc. In the Report on the State of Romanian Higher Education 2021/2022 by the Ministry of Education, it is stated that the majority of students who drop out of universities in the first year are those who enrol in engineering faculties. In this case, the main causes of dropout are determined by the inappropriate choice of the field/specialization, failure to adapt to the requirements of the study program, etc. Globally, the pass rate in the academic year 2021-2022 at the undergraduate level was 87% (Ministry of Education, 2022). According to an analysis conducted for the 2015 generation, the dropout rate after the first year of study was 25.385% (Alexe-Coteș, Păunescu, Hâj, 2022). According to the same analysis, the undergraduate fields with the highest dropout rates were mechanical engineering 61.76%, electrical engineering 52.17%, marketing 51.02%, business administration 55.02%, accounting 47.63%, administrative sciences 48.38%, sociology 46.95%, etc.

At Babes-Bolyai University (UBB), according to the 2021 report, the first year of study had the highest dropout rates. Thus, for 3-year bachelor's programs, the percentage of students who dropped out in the first year was 75% of the total number of students who dropped out during the years of study, and for 4-year programs, the percentage was over 40%. The overall dropout rate at the UBB in 2021 for 3-year programs was 33.9%, and for 4-year programs, it was 25.1% (Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, 2021). In Romania, there are universities where the dropout rate reaches up to 40% (Safta, Stan, 2020).

At the European Union level, in 2022, 23.3% of individuals aged between 25 and 74 had a low level of education, while in Romania, this percentage was 22% (Eurostat, Distribution of the population aged 25–74 by educational attainment level, 2022). According to the same analysis, the percentage of individuals with higher

education at the EU level was over 33%, whereas in Romania, this percentage was below 20%. For the age group between 25 and 34 in 2021, 41.2% of the European Union population had a tertiary education level ISCED 5-8. The same document specifies that this percentage should reach 45% by 2030. In comparison, in Romania, the regions with the lowest levels of tertiary education were Center (17.5%), Southeast (15.9%), and South-Muntenia (15.3%) (Eurostat, Romania, first place in early school leaving among 18–24-year-olds, 2022). Given the low percentage of individuals with tertiary education at ISCED 5-8 in Romania, there is a need to find diverse solutions to increase interest in continuing studies, especially at the university level. Although the higher education system benefits from funded positions from the Ministry, there are still many barriers for individuals from small towns or villages that hinder their access to the university system (Prakhov, Bugakova, 2023) or lead to dropping out. In certain fields, such as Information Technology and Communication, there is a demand for many specialists, hence the increasing number of young people applying for studies in this field. However, approximately 33% of them fail to complete their studies, and the most common reasons for university dropout are (Bağrıacık Yılmaz, Karataş, 2022): a) Financial, professional, and personal problems, especially for students coming from a disadvantaged social background (Razouki *et al.*, 2019 and Pusztai, Fényes, Kovács, 2022); b) Different expectations of students who wanted to acquire more knowledge or study something else but were not accepted into the desired program and opted to study ICT (Altın, Rantsus, 2015); c) Lack of motivation and self-discipline, self-directed learning skills, organization of the study process, pedagogical communication, or the attitude of some teaching staff (Gintere, 2022).

To adapt students to the university environment and, consequently, reduce dropout rates, various solutions have been identified, including:

- Implementation of an orientation program for first-year students to facilitate their adjustment to the academic, social, and cultural environment (Dilekmen, 2007). This special program designed for freshmen contributes to increased self-confidence, reduced feelings of loneliness/fear, identification and establishment of new friendships/collegial relationships, and faster adaptation to the socio-cultural and academic environment;

- Development of a unified set of rules for monitoring the student population to detect situations with a certain degree of risk of academic dropout (Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, 2023). At Babes-Bolyai University, a procedure has been developed as the basis for adopting a strategy to reduce the risk of dropout. It involves creating a database containing information about students at four points in the academic year (November 1, December 2, March 15), information that forms the basis of the decision for a student to enter the monitoring procedure or benefit from a series of interventions from the university (implementation of measures to prevent and combat academic dropout at the department level managing the student's enrolled program of study);

- Organization of study visits to companies in the relevant field (Spunei, Tănase, Tănase, 2020). By participating in these visits, students can identify opportunities for internships and employment, learn about working conditions, facilities provided, and employer requirements regarding the knowledge and professional/transversal skills

they must possess. These visits contribute to group unity, increased empathy, improved interaction and communication, etc. They provide networking opportunities, contact with potential employers, understanding the demand in the labour market, and gaining practical experience in students' areas of interest;

- Organization of additional courses with specific topics related to the field or disciplines where students have difficulties in understanding. Additionally, counselling sessions, career development courses, and training for effective learning strategies can be organized (Mendoza, Flores, 2007). These courses help students adapt, improve their knowledge and learning capacity, offers the possibility to identify their own career path, helps in the process of self-knowledge by identifying limitations and strengths, and contribute to personal development by finding solutions to time management, stress, and solving borderline situations (Johnson *et al.*, 2020);

- Organization of internships and practical training. These activities help to create connections between theoretical concepts learned (often too abstract) and their practical applicability. A fundamental and lasting understanding leads to increased confidence and self-esteem. These activities also help to form specific language, consolidate knowledge, and form/develop skills, to adapt more quickly to the rules and rigor of a company, and promote healthy personal development through meeting deadlines, assuming responsibilities, involvement, and discipline (Hsu, 2018);

- Using teaching methods adapted to the target group, capable of explicitly presenting the subject matter (Guilmois *et al.*, 2019), stimulating interaction, interest, and facilitating cooperative learning, such as peer tutoring, teamwork, and exchange of opinions (Norin, Norina, Pukharensko, 2018);

- Providing material support for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Li, Carroll, 2020 and Cardak, Ryan, 2022). This support can consist of scholarships (Ortega *et al.*, 2020), reducing or eliminating tuition fees (Bussemakers, Denessen, 2023);

- Providing academic and social support from teachers (tutors and others) to help vulnerable students feel understood, accepted, and stimulated in their professional and personal development.

It follows that, for all universities, finding specific and combined solutions capable of facilitating the integration of students into the academic environment and discouraging dropout is crucial. As observed, one of these measures is organizing visits to partners in the business environment. These activities can be carried out through extracurricular projects or other activities distinct from the educational ones.

Extracurricular projects are activities led by various educational institutions or educational organizations aimed at transferring theoretical knowledge accumulated in the standard education program into practice, allowing for the identification/use/strengthening/implementation of theoretical knowledge. At the same time, these projects contribute to the formation and development of the student's personality, the consolidation of the participants' group, the formation/development of personal and interpersonal skills, creativity development, and attracting young people to innovative activities (Gao, Liu, An, 2015 and Demura *et al.*, 2011). It has been demonstrated that extracurricular consulting projects offer many benefits to

participants, such as stimulating interest, providing a certain autonomy in learning, developing problem-solving skills, critical thinking, communication, and innovation (Ford, Goana, Gill, 2023 and Guo *et al.*, 2016). Also, through extracurricular practical teaching, the participant makes connections between theoretical concepts learned and practical things, and forms practical skills, leadership skills, teamwork, contributing also to their personal growth (de Prada Creo, Mareque, Portela-Pino, 2021). Starting from the idea of providing each student with an individual educational trajectory, the impact of extracurricular activities on foreign language learning has been analysed. The research found that these activities were effective, leading to increased learning motivation (Kolmakova, Ovinova, 2017). In another context, students identified that active involvement in extracurricular activities is a benefit in their job market insertion, and the experience gained can be useful in their future careers (Thompson *et al.*, 2013). From the conducted studies, it can be observed that these visits and especially the students' internships present a series of benefits: integrated and applied learning, transitions to future and current jobs, as well as connecting the university environment with the community. At the same time, a series of physical and emotional risks have been identified, such as the fact that the partner entity fails to support the student, non-compliance with occupational health and safety provisions, emotional stress caused by leaving the comfort zone without the support of teachers, and specific cultural risks for foreign students who are not familiar with the specifics of local institutional systems (Odlin, Benson-Rea, Sullivan-Taylor, 2022).

The purpose of the research presented in this article is to highlight the perceptions of students participating in an extracurricular project. The objectives of the extracurricular project were: Creating connections between theoretical concepts learned at the university and the practical aspect found in business partners; Establishing connections between students, between students and the teaching staff involved in the project, and between students and business partners; Acquiring new knowledge and skills specific to the field of study; Stimulating students' interest in learning and continuing their studies to reduce university dropout rates; Providing information on the conduct of the activity, employer requirements, and the techniques and technologies used to facilitate the transition from student life to employee life.

These objectives complement the needs for professional and personal students development, enabling them to become active and engaged citizens in the social life of the local community.

To assess the effectiveness of the activities related to the extracurricular project, at the end of it, the students who participated in the project completed an anonymous questionnaire expressing their opinions on the activities conducted. Students were not obliged to complete the questionnaire, as it was optional for each participant. The questionnaire also included proposals for improving the extracurricular activities in the project. The analysis revealed that the project achieved its goal, with over 90% of students expressing satisfaction and high satisfaction with the activities.

Similar projects were implemented in 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022. During the project implemented in 2019, a similar survey was applied to assess the students' satisfaction level and identify opportunities for improvement. The overall satisfaction

level resulting from participation in the projects of 2019 and 2022 was compared, along with the degree to which the experience corresponded to the personal and professional development needs of participating students. The analysis indicates that compared to 2019, the activities in the 2019 project were more appreciated, resulting in a 2.94% increase in the percentage of respondents who declared themselves satisfied and very satisfied. Furthermore, the comparative analysis reveals that the activities organized in 2022 better met the needs of students, experiencing a significant increase of 16.92%. Respondents' feelings may also be influenced by the fact that during the pandemic, the communication and socialization aspects were restricted. Regarding the main students' suggestions offered in the 2019 and 2022 projects they considered: organizing more visits to as many economic partners as possible, involving and motivating students to participate in projects and organizing more similar projects.

2. Methodology

2.1. Description of the methodology

For the exploratory case study presented in the paper, a self-proposed survey was used, which was administered upon the completion of the extracurricular project. Through the survey, we investigated the students' level of satisfaction and contentment regarding the activities implemented through the project and, implicitly, the potential for creating connections between students, students-faculty involved in the project, students-employers, theoretical concepts learned, and their practical applicability.

The questionnaire developed by the authors underwent critical evaluation by a team of 3 faculty members. Following the evaluators' suggestions, some questions and answers were removed or reformulated. At the evaluators' recommendation, new questions were introduced. The corrected survey was tested by a team of 5 university graduates who had participated in similar projects in previous years. Following the recommendations made by the testing team, minor modifications were made to the survey. These changes did not alter the structure but focused on language to ensure accessibility to the respondents. Questions that could have affected the prestige of the respondents or the involved actors in the research were also reformulated.

In the context of this research, the considered variables are qualitative nominal classification variables, such as the faculty in which students are enrolled, the study program they are following, as well as the year and level of studies (undergraduate/master's). The research method used was direct survey research in the form of an occasional survey, a quantitative research approach. The instrument employed was a survey created and distributed using Microsoft Forms. It was disseminated through institutional email addresses and Teams workspaces. The short link to the survey used is SATISFACTION FORM (office.com).

All students participating in the project were informed about the survey and had the opportunity to access it. Legal provisions regarding confidentiality conditions were strictly observed in students' surveying. Consequently, no personally identifiable information was collected, and the person completing the survey could not be identified. The estimated completion time for the survey was 20 minutes.

The questions of the survey were designed to measure certain attributes such as

attitude, factor, behaviour, etc. The analysis of the satisfaction level was conducted by operationalizing 5 variables. Each variable was described by a series of items from the survey. It includes both open-ended and closed-ended questions, respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with certain statements, make choices from multiple options, or select a response on a classic Likert scale, depending on the agreement/disagreement and its intensity regarding the analysed item.

To validate the survey results, they were analysed based on the completion rate. Following the analysis, it was found that all questionnaires met the completion criteria and were retained for analysis. Consequently, a total of 98 questionnaires were used in the research.

Schematically, the survey applied considered the items shown in Figure 1.

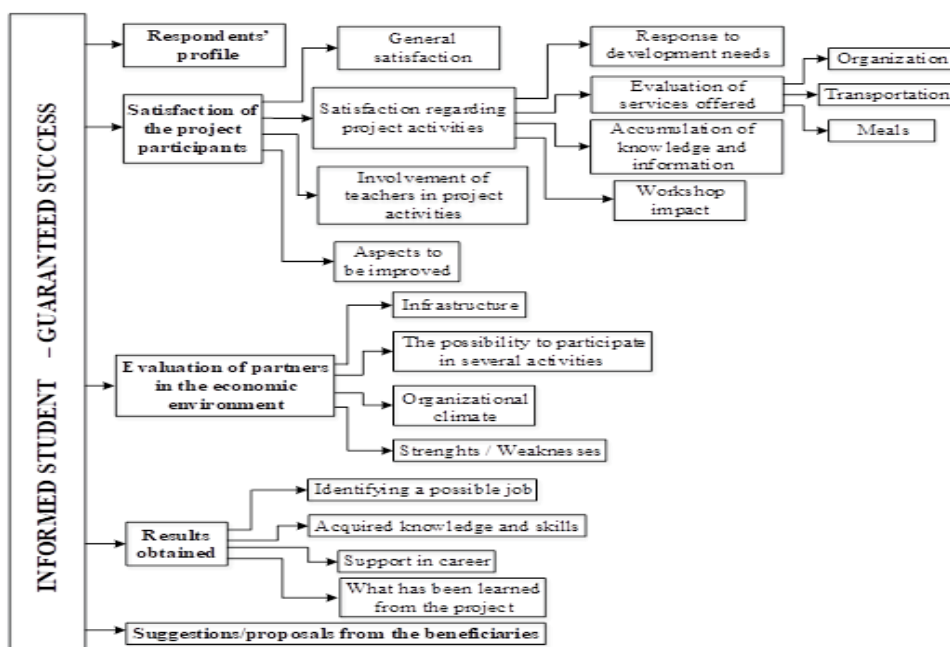


Figure 1. Block diagram of survey items

3. Results

The extracurricular project presented in the case study was titled "Informed Student – Guaranteed Success," implemented in 2022 and funded by the Romanian Ministry of Education. The suggestive title aimed at the main benefit of study visits, namely familiarizing students with the economic/organizational environment, connecting learning to real world expectations. Students identified the usefulness of what they learned on campus and the requirements of a specific job.

The response rate was 53.55%, indicating that the research's validity is adequate. This assessment is made considering that the response rate for surveys has decreased in recent times due to the large number of surveys applied in many fields.

3.1. Identifying respondents' profile

The participants in the project who were willing to respond to the survey came from different faculties (Faculty of Engineering – 60.21%, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Management – 11.22%, Faculty of Political, Administrative, and Communication Sciences – 9.18%, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work – 10.21%, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences – 9.18%).

Depending on the level of study, 10.2% of respondents were master's students, and 89.8% were undergraduate students, enrolled in various study programs (16 programs). The largest number of respondents came from the Electromechanical Engineering program (26 students – 26.53%), followed by Mechanical Engineering (19 students – 19.39%), Industrial Informatics (11 students – 11.22%), Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education (9 students – 8.16%), Social Assistance (7 students – 7.14%), Applied Informatics in Electrical Engineering, and Public Administration (6 students – 6.12%). Specializations with less than 6% representation included Accounting and Management Informatics, Conception and Testing of Mechanical Systems, Accounting Expertise and Firm Evaluation, Advanced Electromechanical Systems, Business Administration in Tourism, Trade and Services, Marketing, and Business Communication. The distribution of respondent students by study year was as follows: the first year – 12.24%, the second year – 41.84%, the third year – 28.57%, and the fourth year – 17.35%.

3.2. Identifying the degree of satisfaction of the project participants

Identifying overall satisfaction. Regarding the overall satisfaction resulting from participation in the project, 70 students (71.43%) declared themselves very satisfied, 25 students declared themselves quite satisfied (25.51%), and 3 students responded that they are satisfied to a small extent, don't know, or did not respond (3.06%). Therefore, the percentage of students declared satisfied with the project was 96.94%, indicating a very good percentage. This implies that the project was well received by the respondents and, by extension, the participants.

Identifying the degree of satisfaction of the project participants:

A. As simply participating in the project was not considered sufficient for students, there was a need to assess the extent to which the project met the students' needs for personal and professional development. Through the project, students had the opportunity to socialize, learn from each other, ask questions during organized visits, discover new things/technologies/equipment together, meet new people and requirements / opportunities, share their opinions, ideas, and visions. Out of the 98 responding students, 58 stated that the experience of participation corresponded to a very large extent (59.18%), 36 to a large extent (36.74%), 2 students (2.04%) to little extent, and 1 student each (1.02%) declared that they don't know or did not respond. So, out of all respondents, 94 students (95.92%) declared themselves satisfied, resulting in a slightly lower percentage than the one presented earlier.

B. To evaluate the services they benefited from through the project, students gave a whole score between 1 and 5 (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest).

Regarding the organization of the visits, 77.6% of respondents declared themselves very satisfied, 18.4% quite satisfied, and 4.1% satisfied. Regarding the meal

services offered, 74.5% declared themselves very satisfied, 20.4% quite satisfied, 4.1% satisfied, and 1% less satisfied. The majority of meal services took place in the University Campus. And regarding the transportation services offered, 65.3% declared themselves very satisfied, 24.5% quite satisfied, 9.2% satisfied, and 1% very dissatisfied.

C. The accumulation of new information/knowledge during the conducted visits was seen as a necessity to create connections between theoretical notions presented and learned in academic activities and practical notions, which often can only be found in workplaces. The survey aimed to identify the achievement of this objective. It was observed that 96.94% of respondents stated that such connections were made, 1.02% did not know, and 2.04% did not respond.

D. After visiting partners in the economic environment, a specific workshop was organized for each field of study (8 workshops). Representatives from the respective field were invited to these activities, highlighting the specific activities of the company and the field, the advantages and disadvantages of accessing a job in that field, as well as the challenges and opportunities offered. In the end, through an open discussion, they answered the students' questions. Regarding this activity, 93% of respondents stated that the workshop captured their interest, 3% were indifferent, 1% considered them boring, and 3% did not respond or said they did not know.

Appreciation of the teachers' involvement in the project activities. Regarding this activity, 80 respondents (81.63%) appreciated that the involvement was to a very large extent, 17 respondents (17.35%) to a large extent, and 1 respondent (1.02%) stated that he did not respond.

Suggestions for improving the project. To improve the project, open-ended questions were addressed, allowing respondents to express their views on aspects that dissatisfied them within the project. Out of the 98 respondents, 75.51% mentioned that they did not identify aspects that need improvement, 19.39% did not respond to this question, and 5.1% provided specific answers such as: reducing the waiting time at economic partners before the visit; the information received was not in line with personal interest; the limited number of entities visited; the allocated amounts for transportation services were too small and the meal services were not satisfactory.

3.3. The evaluation by students of the partners involved in the economic environment in the project

Since the target group was heterogeneous, comprising students from the fields of engineering (electrical, mechanical, computer science), economics, administrative sciences, pedagogy, and social assistance, it was desired to determine the extent to which the visited units could be considered by students as a place with the possibility of professional practice or as a future workplace. Within the project, 20 economic/administrative units were visited (at least 3 for each field).

Infrastructure of the economic agent. Following the visits, students had the opportunity to observe the equipment and infrastructure of the economic agents. Out of the 98 responding students, 60.3% declared themselves very satisfied, 31.6% somewhat satisfied, 6.1% satisfied, 1% less satisfied, and some were dissatisfied with the identified infrastructure.

The possibility to participate in more activities. Regarding the willingness of companies/economic agents to offer students the opportunity to participate in various types of activities within them (involvement in certain practical activities on the visit date, the possibility of internships, offering a part-time work schedule, providing a job during holidays, availability for involvement in specific thematic visits), 7.2% of respondents were satisfied, 22.4% were somewhat satisfied, and 70.4% were very satisfied.

Organizational climate. During the visits to partners in the economic environment, students had the opportunity to observe the communication, interaction, and socialization among employees, between employees and students, and between company representatives and students, as well as their acceptance. As a result of evaluating this aspect, it was identified that 68.4% of respondents were very satisfied with the organizational climate, 23.5% were satisfied, and 8.2% were less satisfied.

3.4. Strengths and weaknesses identified in economic agents

Regarding the main strengths identified at the visited institutions, 28.57% of respondents did not answer or said they did not know. Of the 70 respondents who expressed their opinion about the identified strengths, they appreciated:

- The organization's structure, in line with current development requirements, appreciated by 24 respondents (34.28%);
- The staff of the company/institution, acknowledging professionalism, communication, and good collaboration, appreciated by 20 respondents (28.57%);
- The attitude of the staff in the company, demonstrated through passion and involvement, appreciated by 19 respondents (27.14%);
- The level of development of the company, which determines the possibility of identifying new opportunities for students and obtaining new information, appreciated by 17 respondents (24.29%);
- The willingness of the staff to provide information, to get involved in increasing students' knowledge, appreciated by 15 respondents (21.43%);
- Pleasant work atmosphere, appreciated by 9 respondents (12.86%);
- Presentation of information at a level accessible to students, appreciated by 6 respondents (8.57%);

Regarding the main weaknesses identified at the visited economic agents, 37.76% of the respondents did not answer or said they do not know. Out of the 61 respondents who expressed a specific point of view, 67.21% stated that they did not identify any weaknesses. The main weaknesses identified by the other respondents were related to: the too short time allocated for the visit (13.11%); organization, punctuality (8.2%); inadequate working conditions and outdated technology (6.56%); policy, system, and poor communication between similar companies (4.92%) and poor communication with staff in companies/institutions, characterized by the use of highly specific and unfamiliar terms to students, conveying a large volume of information, or their lack of interest (4.92%).

3.5. Identification by project participants of other results achieved and degree of achievement

By applying the survey, the aim was to identify the participants' perception regarding specific outcomes obtained through the project, such as identifying the field in which to work after completing their studies, the information, knowledge, and skills gained/developed, as well as the possibility for such projects to support the student's career.

Identifying the field in which to work after graduation. Following the analysis, it was observed that 62.25% of respondents mentioned that they identified the field in which to work. A significant percentage was represented by students who do not know (24.49%) or did not identify their preferred career field (8.16%). A percentage of 5.1% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

Knowledge and skills considered to be gained/developed through project participation. Regarding the knowledge and skills acquired in the project, students had the opportunity to choose one or more predefined answers or formulate their own response. The knowledge and skills considered by students to be gained/developed through the project include:

- Ability to work with the concepts and methodology specific to the specialization, identified as obtained by 60.2% of respondents;
- Skills such as autonomy and responsibility, open communication and relationship attitude, presumed to be acquired/developed by 42.86% of respondents;
- Abilities and attitudes of relationship and communication, presumed to be acquired/developed by 53.06% of respondents;
- Competence in planning, organizing, and leading, identified as obtained by 59.18% of respondents;
- Ability to understand the pace of work and adapt, identified as obtained by 64.29% of respondents.

Individual responses were provided by 6.12% of respondents. These were categorized as follows: knowledge of new technologies, work methodologies, new terms; analysis and resolution of specific problems; formation of a broader vision of the economic agents partnering in the project; ability to respond to stress factors; teamwork skills and ability to remain consistent and perseverant.

Future career support. The possibility that the experience from the project helps in the career was identified by 86.74% of respondents. The remaining respondents answered that they do not know if it helps in their career (7.14%), that it does not help (3.06%), and 3.06% did not want to answer.

What has been learned from participating in the project. The desire was to identify some main ideas learned during the project.

Table 1. Ideas learned during the project

The perfect opportunity to see the theory put into practice;	Prioritizing public interest over private or personal interest;
Theory without practice is hard to understand;	Planning everything in advance and then taking action;

It is wonderful to be able to help others;	Being perseverant and involved is necessary;
Our communication and professional development start in this project;	Some of the things learned at university are outdated compared to the technology currently used in the companies visited;
Patience and control over emotions;	How is the life of an employee in an industry company;
Teamwork can lead to great results;	It is much more interesting when we see things in practice than when we only learn them theoretically;
It is very simple when viewed from the outside, but it is complicated when you are put in the situation to do that thing;	Liking what you do at work is important;
The opportunity to see another side of my city, much more human, of which I had not been aware until then;	Taking on responsibilities at the workplace;
The passion each person puts into what they do is important;	Confirming the chosen specialization;
How to combat bullying in everyday life;	Organization is essential in a company and it is important to surround ourselves with wonderful people from whom we can learn;
Communication is very important;	The effort done during the faculty is the key to success.

3.6. Identifying directions for optimizing/improving the project using the participants' suggestions and proposals

As we aim for the project to better meet the needs of students in the future, we wanted to identify areas where we can improve/optimize this activity. Thus, students had the opportunity to suggest how the project can be improved/optimized by responding to open-ended questions.

Analyzing all students' responses, it is noted that the participant group in the analysis is cohesive, with the percentage of those disinterested and neutral being approximately 3.06%. The students' responses indicate the need for conducting such activities throughout the years of study, as these are valuable for their personal and professional development. Additionally, from the analysis of the received responses, it can be observed that students express a desire for such activities and similar initiatives.

4. Conclusion

Following the analysis of responses from the questionnaires completed at the end of the extracurricular project "Informed Student - Guaranteed Success," implemented in 2022, it was observed that the percentage of students declared satisfied with the project was 96.94%. This assures us that such projects are appreciated by students as they address some of their needs. At the same time, some of the students who participated in the project were employed by the visited companies.

Another aspect that demonstrates the usefulness of these visits is the fact that some of the students who participated in 2019, continuing their studies at the master's level, requested enrolment in the target group for 2022. The majority of students have

requested the organization of more visits to as many economic partners as possible and the annual continuation of these types of projects. Considering the results obtained from processing the responses of the survey, the need to identify solutions to create connections between the actors involved in the educational process and between theoretical and practical concepts becomes apparent. Additionally, the importance of a strong theoretical foundation for achieving excellence in professional practice can be identified, and this is realized through study visits. This statement is supported by the fact that 60.2% of respondents believe that through these activities, their ability to work with the concepts and methodology specific to the program of study has improved. So, this objective is achieved through both on-campus learning experiences and practical activities both on and off-campus. Active and constructivist learning models also emphasize multiple teaching methods, including learning through practice and the idea that students can serve as teachers. Therefore, study visits maximize learning through observation, reflection, sharing, and applying course/seminar material both in the academic environment and in practical settings.

In conclusion, drawing an analogy between the determining factors in university dropout, especially academic and social integration (institutional experiences in the academic environment that include interaction with faculty and peers), goals, and final commitments (educational and career goals influenced by experiences throughout studies), we can observe the positive impact of extracurricular projects involving study visits on creating connections with the job market. Therefore, the assertion that "the effort done into college is the key to success" is accurate.

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