Nóra Hegyi-Halmos

THE ROLE AND PRACTISE OF LIFELONG GUIDANCE IN HUNGARIAN PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Teachers’ perceptions about the role of lifelong guidance in high schools

Doctoral (Ph.D.) Dissertation Theses

Supervisor: Orsolya Kereszty, Ph.D., habil. Associate Professor

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1. Theoretical overview

Fitting into the concept of lifelong learning, career guidance in schools is only one stage in the system of lifelong guidance; however, it has an important and definitive role in the foundation and development of career building competences. An individual’s life and career is influenced by a number of independent factors: the structural transformation of the economy, the rise of the capital market, the decline in employment, the polarization of salaries, and the generally unstable labour market environment make adjustment more and more difficult not only for the individual but for society as well. An individual’s career is hardly plannable, the fast changes in circumstances and the need to perform well in multiple roles results in uncertainty and puzzlement. In such a social and economic environment it is important to prepare the individual – taking their opportunities into consideration – to be able to take advantage of arising opportunities, be able to react to circumstances adequately, to be able to change and make changes, and manage their own learning and career paths. Career building competences, that is, the ability to find one’s way in the world of work, knowledge of professions, job search skills, knowledge of learning paths and training opportunities, and self-knowledge development can help individuals overcome difficulties even if we know that career paths have an objective economic definiteness that individuals cannot change. Career guidance in schools can be one of the pillars of founding and developing the above described competences.

In my dissertation I understand career guidance as a process through which an individual learns about their traits and characteristics (interests, skills, values) that can be definitive both in short and long terms in choosing schools, planning and building their careers. Though the continuous development of these skills and competences individuals will be able to plan their careers and manage all aspects of their lives. The above definition is close to the 2008 definition of the European Committee on career guidance (ELPGN Glossary, 2008). The most common expressions in connection with career guidance (career choice, career guidance, career counselling) approach the phenomenon from different angles and see this activity as an increasingly complex task. Career choice and career counselling usually seek answers for the problems of school-age children regarding choosing a career while career guidance understands the issue as a process, highlighting its planned and conscious preparation (Rókusfalvy, 1969., Völgyesy, 1976., Ritoók, 1986., Kenderfi, 2012). Career guidance does not concentrate only on school-aged children but adults as well and gives special attention to the dissemination of information (Szilágyi-Völgyesy, 1996., Borbély-Pecze, 2010). Career-supportive guidance sees career guidance as a process that accompanies individuals throughout their lives but builds on the individuals’ autonomous activity to a great extent. In order to be able to manage their careers independently, the individual needs to be able to plan, build and rethink their life paths (Borbély-Pecze, 2010., Borbély-Pecze – Gyöngyösi – Juhász, 2013) for which they need to have sufficient
career building competences. The development of the concept of career guidance and the expansion of its content can be seen in the models and studies that appear both in the international and Hungarian literature. The classic theories (Parsons) discuss a person-career correlation in which they highlighted the influence of personal skills in career choice. Later theories discuss needs, motivation and the importance of socialization (Bordin, Roe, Holland) while Super, who arguably had the greatest effect on career choice theories, discussed the lifelong development of careers and saw career choice as a series of decisions. Models of decision theories gave the diversity of considering possible alternatives to complex theories (Lange, Busshoff), while others researched the effect of socialization of career choice (Musgrave). Hungarian research and theories went through similar development (Csirszka, Rókusfalvy, Völgyesi, Ritoók, Szilágyi). Modern (Savickas, Lent-Brown-Hackett, Krumboltz, Peterson-Sampson-Reardon-Lenz) and post-modern theories (Bezanson, Brousseau) can be understood as the synthesis of older models, whose common elements are the life-path approach, highlighting decision-making situations during one’s life, and emphasizing the individual’s independent activity in the process of career building (Szilágyi, 1993, 2004., Ritoók, 1986., Zakar, 1988., Budavári-Takács, 2009., Borbély-Pecze, 2010., Savickas, 2002). The career approach appearing in modern theories, connected to the idea of lifelong learning, became the basic motif in the directives of the European Union’s educational and employment policies as one of the tools of solving economic issues. In European Union documents (Memorandum 2000, Lisbon Strategy, 2000, Education and Training 2010., 2020., Europe 2020., OECD, 2004., 2011) and directives the development of skills and key competences, the fulfilment of leaning needs that accommodate individuals, innovative pedagogy and the flexibility of the system of institutions appear as a recurring motif, which are indispensably important from the point of view of supporting individual learning paths and acknowledging competences gained through different learning paths. The change of attitude appeared on the level of national strategies as well, but a number of countries consider the EU directives to be no more than recommendations in real every-day practice and their implementation is scarce.

After the end of communism in Hungary, the part of the legislation concerning education and training (especially the 1993 and 2012 public education act NAT 1995, 2003, 2007, 2012) defines it as a goal to supply students with as much information as possible, to ensure the possibility to gain a wide range of experiences, and to develop their self-image and self-esteem. All this in order to help the student prepare for founding their career plans and to solve decision-making situations that may arise during their career. Career guidance appears in the current public education act and NAT (National curriculum) as the emphasized task of the teacher, but there are no specific instructions regarding its exact system or organization. According to the legislative requirements there is only a very narrow time range allotted for this task.

In the Hungarian literature most authors understand the content of career guidance – similarly to the legislation – as self-knowledge, career and profession knowledge,
and knowledge of the labour market and education market (Rókusfalvy, 1969., Völgyesy, 1976., Ritoók, 1986., Szilágyi, 1996., Borbély-Pecze, 2010., Kenderfi, 2012., Sultana, 2011). The lack of knowledge and competences necessary for career guidance might pose as a difficulty for teachers in the process of career guidance in schools. In preparation for becoming teachers they almost only receive support for the development of their students’ self-knowledge, while knowledge on professions, careers, education opportunities and the workings of the labour market are not present in teacher training. It would be essential that teachers learn about competences necessary for career building as part of career guidance, and that they learn about modern methods that support their development both in teacher training and further education.

I consider those developments important from the point of view of career guidance in schools, that can contribute – if not always directly – to a more conscious preparation and organization of career guidance activities. As part of the HEFOP 3.1. action, competence-based learning material was developed and further trainings were developed and carried out in order to methodologically develop teachers. The professional network, trainings and National Career Guidance Portal created as part of TÁMOP 2.2.2. can contribute to keeping the knowledge of both teachers and students up-to-date and developing their self- and career-knowledge (Borbély-Pecze, 2010., Birher – Szántó, 2009).
2. Presentation of the Research

2.1. The Goal and Hypotheses of the Research

The main goal of the research is, on the one hand, to gain a better understanding of the practice of career guidance in Hungarian secondary schools, and on the other hand, to explore what teachers think about the role of career guidance in schools, about their own related tasks and preparedness.

In order to successfully achieve the research goals I have formed the following research questions and hypotheses:

1. What Hungarian documents regulate and define the practice and system of career guidance in schools? Do these conform to the spirit of international and European Union documents?

   H1 Career guidance and career counselling appears in Hungarian educational policy documents as the emphasized task of the teacher, but its appearance in the pedagogical practice of the studied schools is not consistent and self-evident, it depends on the type of institution and whether the teachers working there have met with the concept and topic of career guidance during their teacher training and further education.

2. How does the career-approach appear in connection with the concept of career guidance in the thoughts of those teachers who participate in the research?

   H2 My hypothesis is that the interviewed teachers associate career guidance with helping their students to make decisions about their further education, and their thoughts on career guidance are influenced by the concept of the career-approach to a lesser degree.

3. Is there an established practice in the studied Hungarian secondary schools, and if yes, what activities characterise it? Do the teachers of the studied secondary schools consider career guidance in school important, and if yes, to what degree, and to what degree do they consider it to be their task to participate in this activity?

   H3 My hypothesis is that the teachers working in the studied institutions realize the significance of career guidance, they can identify its elements and understand it as part of their own pedagogical activities. Due to the fact that they primarily identify career guidance as helping the further education of their students, they mostly report activities which are connected to helping these decisions in both their own practice and in the practice of the school.
4. What knowledge, and competences are considered important by the interviewed teachers in order for them to be able to successfully and effectively help their students’ career guidance? Do they consider themselves to be prepared for these tasks, and what would they consider to be of help in their career guidance work?

H4 My hypothesis is that teachers, based on their practice and opinions, can outline knowledge and competences necessary for career guidance activities, but do not consider themselves to be prepared for the task.

5. Have the results of the Hungarian developments in supporting career guidance activities appeared in the every-day practice of teachers, and if yes, to what extent?

H5 My hypothesis is that teachers know little of and rarely use the results of the latest developments aiming to support career guidance activities.

2.2. The methods and Target Group of the Research

I sought answers for my questions with the analysis of documents, a focus group interview and questionnaires.

As part of the analysis of documents I reviewed how the concept and content of career guidance developed, the development of Hungarian and international theories on career choice, and studied the most recent appearance of career guidance in the legislation on public education, and whether these conform to European trends. After this, I identified the components of the content of career guidance and the teacher competences necessary for supporting career guidance, and then discussed the roles and opportunities of teachers in career guidance in schools.

I clarified the system of hypotheses and finalized the questions of the questionnaire by recording and processing a focus group interview.

My questionnaire contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions, the closed-ended questions included both single choice and multiple choice questions, and the questionnaire included rate and scale type of questions. The majority of my research is based on the descriptive analysis of the questionnaire results and the mathematical statistical analysis of the data. During the analysis of the data, I explored the connections between variables and explored cause-and-effects. After recording the basic data characteristic of the samples, the questionnaire focused on the following four blocks of themes:

1. The concept and content of career guidance – the first part of the questionnaire measures teachers’ knowledge, opinions, assumptions and attitudes regarding career guidance with open-ended questions and scales.
2. Established practice of career guidance in schools – the second part of the questionnaire measures the knowledge of teachers on the career guidance activities in their workplace, schools with open-ended and closed-ended questions.

3. The role and practice of teachers in career guidance activities – the third part of the questionnaire measures the career guidance practice and activity of teachers with open-ended and closed-ended questions.

4. Knowledge necessary for career guidance activities and its development – the finishing part of the questionnaire measures the opinions of teachers in connection with competences and knowledge necessary for career guidance activities, their opinion on the degree of their own preparedness with open-ended and closed-ended questions and scales.

487 teachers working in public secondary schools, teaching in 9th to 12th grade classes, filled out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was queried in three regions: Northeast Hungary (Nyíregyháza), West Hungary (Győr and Szombathely) and Budapest, the capital city, between 2015 May and July while the data was analysed between September and December in 2015.

The incoming data was analysed with SPSS after coding, the open-ended questions were analysed with qualitative content analysis and with the aid of word-frequency analysis.

2.3. The Results of the Questionnaire Study

Below I summarize the results of the questionnaire hypothesis by hypothesis.

**H1 Career guidance and career counselling appears in Hungarian educational policy documents as the emphasized task of the teacher, but its appearance in the pedagogical practice of the studied schools is not consistent and self-evident, it depends on the type of institution and whether the teachers working there have met with the concept and topic of career guidance during their teacher training and further education.**

In the theoretical framework of the dissertation I reviewed the Hungarian educational policy documents (Public Education Act, NAT, frame curriculum) and established that career guidance appears in them as the emphasized developmental task of teachers. One of the goals of the questionnaire was to map out how career guidance happens in Hungarian secondary schools. However, we did not study the schools as institutions in the questionnaire, we considered the schools’ activities to be researchable based on the answers of the teachers working there. According to 80% of the teachers, career guidance activities are present in the schools they represent, and
50.6% claimed these activities to be organized. Nearly two thirds (73%) of the teachers who reported organized career guidance activities claimed that their school also has a staff member responsible for career guidance, and they usually (46.9%) represent the issue on the level of the deputy headmaster. My hypothesis is that career guidance is more emphatically present in those schools in which someone is responsible for its organization and it is included in the school’s pedagogical program. According to my research results, a more diverse and more complex activity structure is carried out with career guidance as its goal in these schools. From a geographical point of view, teachers from Budapest reported the most organized career guidance in their schools (64.5%) while a smaller number of teachers from Nyíregyháza (36.6%) claimed to have organized career guidance in their institution. We can only draw cautious conclusions from comparing institutions based on regions or maintaining organizations because we can only make observations based on the opinion of the interviewed teachers. When I compared the schools based on the maintaining body, teachers from church schools answered yes most often (60.1%) to whether there is career guidance in their schools. Whether the teacher has met the concept of career guidance during his or her teacher training is in close connection with how career guidance activities appear in the schools’ practice. Those teachers who have been familiarized with the concept of career guidance in their teacher training or further training report the presence of career guidance activities in their school in bigger numbers, and mention more types of activities both regarding school practice and as part of their own career guidance activities as well. Thus, based on the research results, a teacher’s level of preparedness for career guidance fundamentally defines both the school’s and the teacher’s career guidance activity.

H2 My hypothesis is that the interviewed teachers associate career guidance with helping their students to make decisions about their further education, and their thoughts on career guidance are influenced by the concept of the career-approach to a lesser degree.

The career approach appears more markedly in the European and Hungarian educational policy documents reviewed in the theoretical framework of this dissertation, which influences the issue of career guidance as well. In Hungarian practice the interviewed teachers rarely connect the career-approach to career guidance during free association tasks (25 answers of this type were recorded). It is more characteristic that teachers understand career guidance as helping further education-related decisions and choosing a career (88 people). A similar number of respondents (84 people) consider the identification of students’ skills, talents and interests to be important in choosing a career. Through the scale-type questions the research showed that teachers think that the implementation of the lifelong learning approach is important for career guidance as 92.1% agreed with this statement. The majority (98.2%) thought that they have to prepare students to be able to build their own careers, but many (68.6%) thought that their decision about further education is only one act which influences their later career but does not define it permanently. Based on
the above answers, we can draw the positive conclusion that the career-approach is present among teachers, but based on the free association task we can assume that it is only present in a hidden form.

H3 My hypothesis is that the teachers working in the studied institutions realize the significance of career guidance, they can identify its elements and understand it as part of their own pedagogical activities. Due to the fact that they primarily identify career guidance as helping the further education of their students, they mostly report activities which are connected to helping these decisions in both their own practice and in the practice of the school.

Based on the research results it can be said that teachers indeed realize the significance of career guidance and that both schools and teachers have a definitive role in career guidance. Since they primarily identify career guidance as supporting their students in their further education, they primarily highlight those elements from career guidance which are connected to this activity (e.g. communicating information about the recruitment process in groups, visiting open days at colleges and universities). However, it can also be said that they are unsure regarding a number of other areas of career guidance (e.g. teaching job searching techniques, encouraging and supporting getting a summer job) and they do not clearly see where these tasks fit in the system of either the school or the teacher’s career guidance activities (whether it should be an independent subject or if it is sufficient to include them in other subjects). They primarily mention those activities in both their and the school’s career guidance practice which are connected to further education, similarly to when they identified content elements.

H4 My hypothesis is that teachers, based on their practice and opinions, can outline knowledge and competences necessary for career guidance activities, but do not consider themselves to be prepared for the task.

The majority of the teachers who participated in the research (74,7%) felt that they need special, well defined knowledge and information to perform career guidance activities. By this they primarily meant following the changes in the labour market, the economic situation, changes in the structure of professions, further education, and changes in the educational system. They also feel the need to have information related to developing students’ self-knowledge and skills.

The majority of the teachers (76,2%) does not consider the Hungarian teacher society in general to be prepared for career guidance activities, and as such, they underrate their own level of preparedness (e.g. in relation to career knowledge, understanding training structures, developing job search skills, or related to the content of career guidance). They evaluate their own knowledge of further education and students’ self-knowledge development opportunities positively but they do not consider themselves to be prepared for developing job search skills or to disseminate knowledge about professional training structures.
My hypothesis is that teachers know little of and rarely use the results of the latest developments aiming to support career guidance activities.

I reviewed the results and tools of those development projects that have an effect on career guidance in the theoretical part of the dissertation, and I measured how much the target group knows about them. Unfortunately most of the tools were unknown to the teachers: the only tools they reported to have used in larger numbers were different tests: self-knowledge (55.3%), interest measuring (38.6%), talent identifying (39.9%). Over half of the respondents (53.1%) had not heard about the online developed, openly available, up-to-date National Career Guidance Portal. This fact is especially interesting because when we asked the respondents in the questionnaire what they think would help develop career guidance in schools, and if they could suggest anything that would aid teachers in their guidance activities, many of them replied that they would like to use an online portal which contains all available information, tests and profession descriptions. While this portal exists (eletpalya.hu) our research confirmed that only a small number of people know about it or use it (8.6%).

3. Opportunities to Use the Results

I have reviewed the literature on the theory and practice of career guidance, presented the career counselling-related documents of the European Union, and have highlighted the fact that the career-approach is present only to a limited extent in the thoughts of teachers and is either not or seldom present in day-to-day practice. The results can supply additional information for the preparation of the content and structural transformation and development of teacher training. During the development of career guidance we have to give special attention to system-level developments, to building a common content and structure for public education, vocational training, adult education and tertiary education, to building a network of supporting institutions and training supporting staff.

More emphasis should be put on career guidance in the job description of school psychologists, and school management should create the necessary conditions for this job.

It would be worthwhile to study the content of teacher training and further education for teachers from the point of view of preparation for career guidance, and, based on the results, implement career guidance in the teacher training curriculum. As part of the development of the curriculum I suggest that the ratio of preparation for career guidance should be increased in teacher training in terms of both theory and practice.
Theoretical and methodological preparation for career guidance should be considered one of the key areas of teachers’ further education and this should be presented as an organic part of the state funded further education programme.

The results of the research can be taken into consideration in writing European Union calls for proposal targeting education development which can contribute to initiating research directed at developing career guidance in schools and – at least during the funding period – it can also contribute to creating the necessary financial conditions to implement the developments in practice.

The empirical database of the research is available online and is available for use for any further research or development project with similar goals or content.

The schools and teachers who participated in the research will be directly contacted regarding the publication of the data, but information which can help the development of career guidance is freely available to any school community.
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