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Vocational counselling in the opinions of pedagogy students¹

This article uses the results of a study on students' knowledge about counselling, their expectations in relation to counselling services and their experiences. The study was conducted by means of a diagnostic survey of a sample of 200 students of pedagogy. The results of the study enable learning how they perceive counselling and what competences, in their opinion, a counsellor should have. This knowledge can be helpful in building the professional knowledge and resources of vocational counsellors and lecturers educating students on career guidance and counselling.

Keywords: career counselling, vocational counselling, counsellors' competences, pedagogy students' knowledge about counselling

One of the consequences of living in unstable times is individuals' uncertainty as to their position on the labour market. External risks influenced by factors that are outside the control of individuals, or even larger social groups, and internal risks (including risks associated with psychological functioning of individuals) are part and parcel of the "functioning" of the modern society in which life is associated with danger that consists in living in a state where emergencies are no longer surprising (Beck, 2002, p. 101). This thesis of Ulrich Beck from 1986 becomes even more relevant today, due to the global pandemic. Living in a world of threats, unexpectedness (Giddens, 2008), liquid modernity (Baumann, 2006), we are repeatedly forced to make individual, often difficult, choices, some of which are related to the career path. Every individual is responsible for the course and shape of their own career which nowadays has more and more often the form of a patchwork (Wojtasik, 2003; Minta, 2014), while the quality and quantity of the accumulated experiences is relevant for the choice of the career direction and career path (Bańka, 2007). When described from the latest perspective, career is a lifelong process and it assumes the possibility of existing and developing in the state of constant change; it does not consist of iterating cycles, but of unexpected events, and it must take into account failure and success, both of which influence its course. According

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to Augustyn Bańka (2007), the achievement of professional objectives set by an individual is exposed to multiple risks and shifts due to the individual's interactions with the constantly changing social and cultural environment, labour market, education market and other structures.

The solving of employment problems that occur at different stages of life and are directly connected with an individual biography of every single person should be facilitated by career counselling (Bańka, 2007). Both the researchers of social life and the representatives of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development the European Commission) (2004) see "career guidance" as a help for individuals in building their careers. Such career guidance is understood as assistance to people, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. With this understanding in mind, Marcin Szumigraj (2011) writes about career guidance that is not limited to the professional sphere, one that does not constitute a process supporting a selected fragment of biography, but is closely related to it and lasts throughout the entire life. A similar definition is found for "lifelong guidance", the purpose of which is to support individuals in gaining experiences and knowledge, important from the perspective of their entire life, to be used for career building (Guichard, 2018; Council of the European Union, 2008; Savickas, 2012; Wojtasik, 2003). The latest paradigm of career guidance – "life design" – assumes that the counsellor is primarily supposed to help individuals find an answer to the question about the type of activity through which they can assign meaning and perspective to their existence in which professional life occupies an important place (Guichard, 2018). According to Jean Guichard, the life-designing approach is much more complex than simply considering the possibilities of practising professions or discussing career paths to choose from.

The types of support, although referred to by different names, are related to perceiving the counselling service as assistance provided to individuals to construct and reconstruct their career paths that are lifelong in nature and, therefore, not fully foreseeable. Thus, they require constant adjustment to the current conditions and redefinition of one's place on the labour market, which is directly connected with a constantly updated perception of oneself at a given place and time. Lifelong learning is also necessary to meet these requirements. Lifelong learning encompasses all educational activity undertaken in different contexts with the aim of improving knowledge, acquiring skills and competence; hence, it is a process that, being a certain continuum, takes place in institutions and everyday life, and is divided into formal level (formal learning), non-formal level (non-formal learning) and informal level (informal learning) (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). By recognising all the dimensions of the learning phenomenon as the elements influencing development, we go beyond the traditional thinking about the methods of acquiring knowledge and experiences, also professional ones (Malewski, 2010).

When discussing different ways of living in the modern world, developing a career and helping people, it is worthwhile to differentiate between two classic terms describing professional support: guidance and counselling. According to Alicja Kargulowa, guidance is a

“form of assistance or a social action involving providing advice, guidance, information, etc. to one person who is in a problem situation (counselee) by another person (counsellor), but also an assistance-based interpersonal interaction, as well as an organised activity conducted in institutions (counselling centres)” (Kargulowa, 2006, p. 206).

Counselling has a narrower conceptual scope. It is defined by Kargulowa as

“advising which is a social event consisting in an ad-hoc activity that improves the behaviour of individuals or groups through the advisor’s participation in the process of solving the problems of people who are being advised, problems that are noticed not so much by these individuals or groups themselves, but by the advisor. Therefore, in counselling, the competence advantage of the advisor is undeniable” (Kargulowa, 2006, p. 198).

With regard to supporting a broadly defined career, the most commonly used term is “vocational counselling”, which refers to support focused on helping individuals in their professional development, which is provided by giving advice, information, diagnosing professional aptitudes, enabling a realistic choice or change of employment, as well as achieving the required level of vocational adjustment (Lamb, 1998; Wojtasik, 1994).

The difficulty in using the above terms and concepts becomes visible when we attempt to relate them to the descriptions of the counselling practice the representatives of which, ignoring the scientific terminology choices, use the terms vocational guidance and counselling or career guidance and counselling interchangeably (Kławski-Zduńczyk, 2014). A similar, unjustified, equation of both types of support activities is visible in the names of institutions, legal acts, national regulations and in the translations of international documents, and even in the names of academic fields of study and individual courses lectured at higher education institutions. In her article entitled “The quandaries of a counseling scholar vis-à-vis conceptual chaos and discrepant practices” Violetta Drabik-Podgórna discusses this problem more broadly, from the ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological and existentialist perspectives (Drabik-Podgórna, 2019). At the same time, she underlines that practising vocational counselling differs from the presently adopted model of providing assistance, which nowadays is not a directive model (cf. Wojtasik, 1994) according to which the counsellor is supposed to indicate specific optimum solution for the counselee. Currently, the counsellor should present different possible solutions and give the counselee freedom of choice, as per the dialogic, or even liberal, model.

The differences in the modern approach to providing counselling services entail many questions, such as: To what extent can vocational counselling in the classic understanding still be provided? Is there a chance to apply the new models of support at every stage of life? What is the current role of a counsellor? How should the category “support” be understood? What methods of work should a counsellor use? On the other hand, questions are asked concerning the counselee, including questions about the expectations that the counselee has towards the counsellor, the knowledge that he/she has about counselling services, or how he/she defines them, etc.

Certain Polish and foreign researchers attempted finding answers to these, and similar, questions. In Taiwan, for example, it was discussed what types of career services should be provided at higher education institutions (Ho, Huang, & Hu, 2018) to improve the graduates' chances of employment. Participants of the survey were graduates in various fields, who had been active in the labour market for several years. What the researchers found to be the most important services of academic career offices in the context of preparing the students for entering the labour market were the trainings organised by universities, building a strong university-business cooperation, as well as the independent development of specialist knowledge and skills, and the acquisition of interview skills. Although the conducted survey demonstrated a differentiated assessment of the quality of the counselling services provided at different universities, almost all the respondents admitted that improving job search skills and job interview skills as a result of the counselling services was of key significance in finding their first job. The results also demonstrated differentiated expectations of the respondents working in different industries.

An interesting comparative study on the expectations about guidance among Icelandic and American students was conducted by Stefania Ægisdóttir and Lawrence H. Gerstein (2004). The study conducted with a group of 844 students from Iceland and the USA indicated, *inter alia*, that nationality, sex and previous experiences with counselling do play a role and differentiate the expectations regarding counselling activities. Due to, among other things, poorer access to counselling services in the country and the fact that they were paid services, Icelandic students had less experience in using the services than the American ones, which translated into the study findings. American students had lower expectations with regard to counsellor expertise than Icelandic students. As opposed to Icelandic students, American students also looked for a facilitation with regard to introducing changes in their life, rather than specific tips. It should be added that differentiation based on sex was highly exposed in the study. Women who took part in the survey in Iceland openly declared that they expected the advice to facilitate change and expected to be personally committed to the counselling process, whereas men primarily expected the counsellor to have more expertise and provide them with the freedom of choice.

On the other hand, a study concerning students' awareness and use of counselling service, conducted among 605 students at a public university in Ethiopia, showed that the majority of the students (67.8%) had not heard about the presence

of counselling service at the university, and as few as 7.8% did know about the existence of a career centre established at the university or its location. Despite an extensive and attractive counselling offer which encompassed individual and group guidance concerning educational, professional and personal development, crisis intervention, consultations, etc., as few as 2.6% students knew what the centre was dealing with. Only a small percentage of students used the counselling service in the career centre, and the majority of them believed that the meeting with a counsellor contributed to their academic success (Getachew, 2019).

The topic of students' expectations with regard to counsellors, the different profiles of counselees and their experiences was also investigated by Polish researchers, such as Małgorzata Bartosiak (2015), Daniel Kukla & Marta Zając (2016), Ewa Padechowicz-Rugała (2017), Magdalena Piorunek (2010), Marcin Szumigraj (2015, 2016), Bożena Wojtasik (1994) to name a few; the findings they arrived at will be cited in the analysis of the present study.

Organisation and conduct of the study

The study discussed herein was conducted in a group of two hundred students of pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU) (99 first-year and 101 second-year students of the full-time Bachelor degree programme), which constituted 96% of the population of all first-year and second-year students of pedagogy. Only the second-year students participated in a mandatory course entitled "vocational counselling" taught at NCU over 15 hours. The first-year students, on the other hand, largely possessed common knowledge concerning "career guidance". It can be assumed, however, that the members of both groups had, before taking up studies, acquainted themselves with the entire curriculum in their selected field of study and had specific expectations about the individual courses listed therein, including the "vocational counselling" course, and certain experiences connected with the use of counselling services. Therefore, the research aim was not only to explore the students' opinions about counselling, but also to learn how relevant their participation in "vocational counselling" course was for the knowledge, experiences and expectations they have regarding counselling services. In other words, the question was whether the knowledge gained during the classes included in this course differentiates the respondents.

It should be mentioned at this point that during 15 teaching hours, the following topics were discussed: basic terms connected with the topic of the course; counselling institutions; counsellor job description; work with the client and the consultation interview; diagnosing the resources and professional aptitudes and planning the career path. The vocational counselling²-related content was supplemented with

² The survey used the term "vocational counselling" rather than "vocational guidance", which was connected with the fact that this was the name of the course taught under the curriculum.

more detailed topics concerning the “career” term and modern transformations in the provision of counselling services. Therefore, the survey questionnaire contained questions concerning an extended topic range taught in the course, which was an intended action, aimed at learning how broad the students’ perception of the counselling topic is.

The survey was conducted in June 2019 by means of a diagnostic survey through a survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaires were completed by the students anonymously and upon the students being awarded final grades, which could increase the probability of receiving honest answers. The survey questionnaire contained 18 questions, 11 of which were closed-ended and 7 open-ended. For the purpose of this paper, however, the analysis leaves out several questions that were not directly connected with the topic analysed herein.

Thus, the main research problem investigated in the empirical project had the form of the following question: What significance for the students’ knowledge, experiences and expectations regarding counselling services does their participation in the vocational counselling course have?

Moreover, the answers to three specific research questions were sought:

- ♦ what knowledge about counselling services do the surveyed first-year and second-year students have and what are its sources?
- ♦ what expectations with regard to the counsellor (and professional assistance) do first-year pedagogy students have and what expectations do second-year pedagogy students have?
- ♦ what opinions on the social role of counselling do the students participating in the survey have?

Analysis of opinions of first-year and second-year pedagogy students

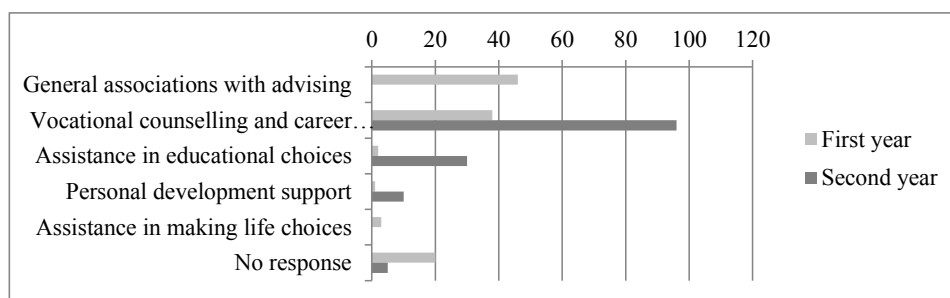
Knowledge about counselling services, as declared by the students

Contrary to common belief, professional assistance is not equivalent to help offered by non-specialists in everyday life situations. Apart from domain-specific expertise, it requires the acquisition and correct use of specific skills and an adequate attitude of the helping person. Moreover, the discourse of counselling has distinctive vocabulary and a clearly separated object of research (cf. Kargulowa, 2009) and is therefore not easy to command. This is confirmed by the results of my study. The surveyed students – depending on whether they completed a vocational counselling course or not – perceived the problems analysed herein differently.

The majority of first-year students defined counselling by using quite colloquial expressions. Only 38% identified counselling with vocational counselling and career counselling, and 20% did not provide any terms or definitions of their own. The majority of first-year students provided answers that indicated general associations between counselling and the performance of certain actions which would

probably come to everyone's mind when asked: advising someone, providing advice, directing someone (46%). This was followed by responses that belonged to the category of vocational counselling and career counselling (38%), as they included answers concerning the choice of a job (14%), a profession (12%) and career planning (12%). The remaining responses represented only a small percentage and they equated counselling with assistance in making life choices (3%), educational choices, i.e. with regard to schools, fields of study, courses (2%) and help in personal development (1%). One person associated counselling with "boring substitutions in high school".

The responses of second-year students were significantly different from the ones provided by their younger colleagues, because the majority identified counselling with vocational counselling or career counselling. One-third connected counselling with assistance in educational choices, and 10% with personal development support. In the case of those students, 96% of their responses referred to classic definitions of vocational counselling and career counselling. Therefore, what was mentioned was assistance with decision-making when choosing a profession (39%), a job (35%), a career path (16%), and with entering the job market (6%). The second most popular understanding of counselling was describing it as assistance in making educational choices (30%), and the third – as personal development support (10%). Considering the cited examples of associations and definitions, one can say that the majority of the students who participated in the course, when thinking about counselling, identified it primarily with vocational counselling and its various forms cited in the literature on the subject. This means that they referred to theoretical knowledge acquired in the course of their studies. The breakdown of these responses is presented in graph 1.



Graph 1. The term "counselling" in the understanding of the surveyed students

Source: own elaboration.

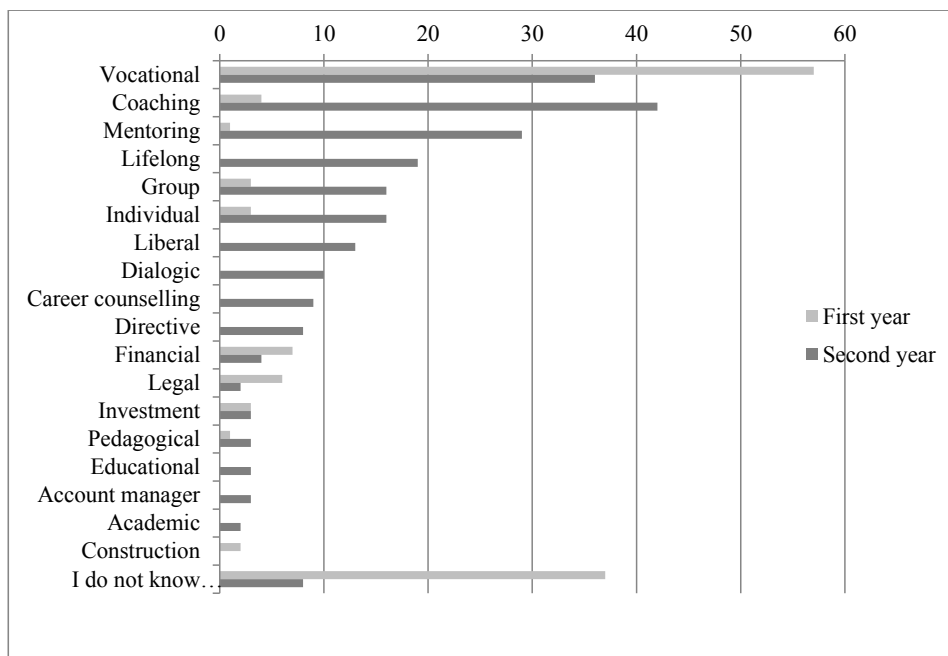
The study also verified the students' familiarity with the diversity of counselling in the social life (by using an open-ended question). First-year students declared primarily their familiarity with vocational counselling (57%). What was mentioned

by them much less frequently was: financial consulting (7%), legal counselling (6%), coaching (4%), group counselling, individual counselling and bank advice (3% each), and construction consultancy (2%). Individual responses pertained to mentoring, pedagogical counselling, HR consultancy, tax counselling and consulting related to EU grants. Importantly, as many as 37% first-year students did not provide any response or wrote “I do not know any type of counselling”.

The responses of second-year students in this respect were quite surprising. The majority (42%) named coaching, considering it a type of counselling, while coaching received little attention in the course, which was limited to providing the definition and listing the types of coaching; this was similar to mentoring, which was the third most frequently named type of counselling (29%). The second most popular response was vocational counselling (36%). What should be noted when interpreting these results, in my opinion, is the popularity of both forms of development support (here: coaching and mentoring) in public discourse (especially in the media) in which they are associated with life tips, business advice or, for example, training offers. When compared with the responses of the first-year students from among which only 4% named coaching, it can be assumed that associating coaching with counselling took place after taking the “vocational counselling” course, although the name itself of this form of assistance had been probably known before. As the next type of counselling, second-year students named not so much the types of guidance, but the forms of its provision: lifelong guidance – 19%, group and individual guidance each were named by 16% of respondents, liberal guidance by 13%, dialogic guidance by 10%, career counselling by 9%, directive counselling by 8% and the same percentage declared that they do not know any type of counselling. Pedagogical, educational counselling, bank advice and “account manager” were named by 3% each, while legal and academic counselling by 2% each – these types of counselling were identified on the basis of the professional specialisation of counsellors.

The gathered data indicate that students acquired their knowledge on this topic not only during the course, but also acquired it and continue to do so from, among others, mass media and social media. A significant source of knowledge for them is also the everyday life and personal experience – many respondents associated counselling with situations where life advice is provided, e.g. concerning the management of one’s finances, receiving legal advice or advice in the field of construction (cf. Drabik-Podgórna, 2013).

The breakdown of the students’ responses is presented in graph 2.



Graph 2. Students’ familiarity with types of counselling – survey results

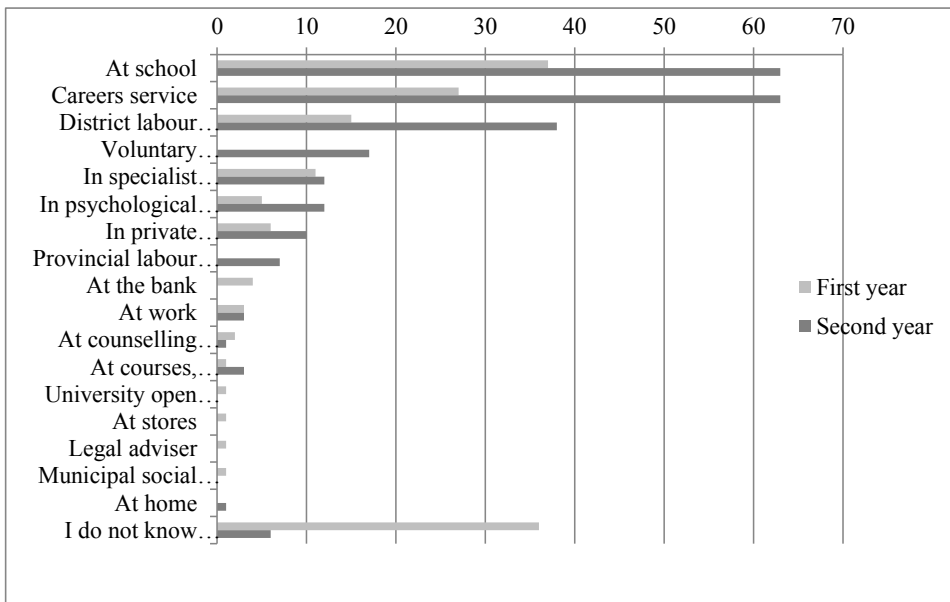
Source: own elaboration.

The knowledge about professional counselling also includes the knowledge of the types of centres where assistance can be obtained. When asked where the services of a counsellor can be provided, the majority of first-year students identified the school (37%), but almost the same share of students did not name any place (36%). The careers service was named by 27%, and the labour office by 15%. The category that could be generally referred to as “institutions providing counselling service” was mentioned in 11% of responses; 6% of the respondents mentioned private offices or private practice; 5% – pedagogical counselling centres; 4% – the bank; 3% – the workplace; and 2% – counselling courses. Single responses also mentioned other places for providing advice (municipal social services centres referred to in Polish as “MOPS”, educational centres and – surprisingly – stores), special events (here: university open days) and experts (here: legal adviser).

The responses of second-year students formed a much shorter list. The most popular answer was careers services (63%), schools and district employment labour offices shared the second place (38% of responses each). Additionally, 7% of respondents entered the provincial labour office, including the centre for information and career planning. According to 17% of second-year students, the services of a counsellor can be accessed in the Voluntary Labour Corps (Polish: *ochotnicze hufce pracy*, abbreviated as OHP), in psychological and pedagogical counselling

centres (12%), in specialist centres (educational, social, training centres) (12%), in private counsellor offices (10%), in the workplace (3%), at home and at courses organised at universities (1% each). 6% of the students did not provide any response.

The gathered data clearly indicate that second-year students acquired the knowledge shared in the course (first-year students do not have this knowledge yet). It should be added, however, that the knowledge concerned mainly vocational counselling which was the subject taught, and not counselling/guidance in general. The knowledge about the possibility of using different types of counselling not mentioned by second-year students was acquired by their younger colleagues independently from other sources (cf. graph 3).

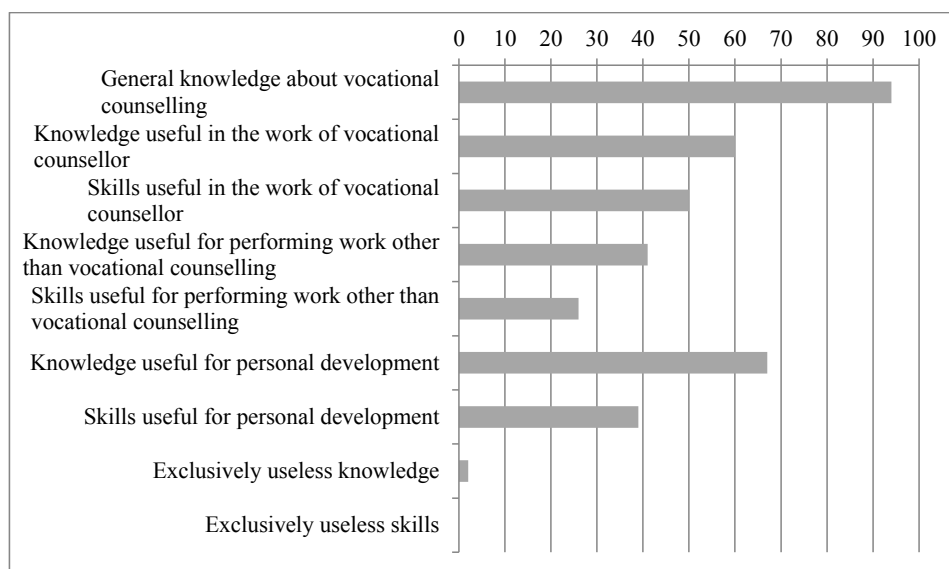


Graph 3. Places where the services of a counsellor can be accessed – survey results

Source: own elaboration.

The assessment of the pedagogy students' knowledge about counselling also encompasses their evaluation of the course taken. Because it was only second-year students that participated in the classes conducted as part of the "vocational counselling" course, only they were asked to present their opinions about these classes. Almost all respondents declared that they acquired general knowledge about vocational counselling (94%); 67% acquired knowledge necessary for personal development, 60% – knowledge useful in everyday work of a career counsellor, and half of the students said that apart from knowledge, they also acquired certain skills necessary in the work of a professional counsellor (50%). The acquisition of knowledge that is useful in performing work other than vocational counselling was declared

by 41% of the students, and a slightly smaller group was certain that they acquired skills useful for personal development (39%). 26% of the surveyed students concluded that they acquired skills that can be useful in pursuing a profession other than that of a counsellor. Only 2% of second-year students claimed that they did not acquire any useful knowledge at all, and no one said that the skills that they acquired were completely unnecessary. Students also had the possibility to enter a comment in an additional field entitled “other, specify”. By writing *what was most interesting were the practical topics that we managed to discuss, which included the topic concerning our strengths and weaknesses, writing a CV or conducting job interviews*, the students appreciated the practical nature of the course, which involved being taught the knowledge and skills that are useful on the broadly defined job market. These encompassed writing application documents, preparing for job interviews, identifying one’s strengths and weaknesses, and also planning one’s own career path. The knowledge acquired during the studies thus proved to be important and interesting for the students, largely thanks to its usefulness and possibility of using it in the future. This is presented in detail in graph 4.



Graph 4. Knowledge and skills acquired from the course of studies in the opinions of second-year students

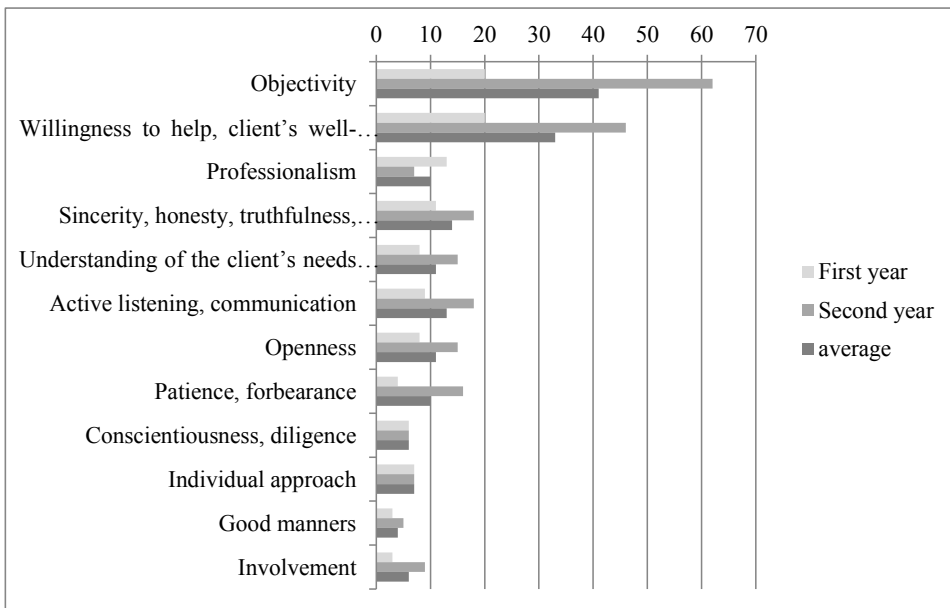
Source: own elaboration.

The students’ expectations regarding counsellors and professional assistance

Academic knowledge acquired from the university and personal knowledge gathered from experience shape the students’ expectations about the assistance offered by professional counsellors and the counsellors’ professional role. The respondents

were asked to answer questions concerning, among other things, the principles that a counsellor should follow, the competences and characteristics that this type of specialist should have.

According to the respondents, the most important principle by which a counsellor should be guided in their work is objectivity (this was claimed by 41% participants; cf. graph 5). The second most commonly selected principle was the willingness to help others and being guided by the well-being of the counselee (33%). This was followed by: sincerity, honesty and truthfulness (14%), active listening and communication skills (13%), openness and understanding of client needs (empathy, understanding) (11% each). Patience, forbearance and professionalism were selected by 10% of the students, and the following by less than 10%: individual approach to customers (7%), conscientiousness and diligence (6%), involvement (6%), well-mannered behaviour (4%). From among second-year students, 7% additionally identified ethical conduct as a principle that a counsellor should follow, 2% – discretion, and another 2% – knowledge of the job market. Younger students, on the other hand, claimed that a counsellor should be creative (3%), firm, serious, self-possessed, and able to motivate people to take action (2% each).



Graph 5. Principles that a counsellor should follow – survey results

Source: own elaboration.

What seems interesting is the similarity of the students' responses, who regardless of the acquired academic knowledge mention similar principles that

counsellors should follow. In general, it could be stated that they expect the counsellor to be guided in their relations with the counselee by universal principles, i.e. objectivity, willingness to help others and the well-being of the supported person; to follow the principles related to active listening and proper communication, to be truthful and trustworthy, forbearing (patient), empathic and open. The students' responses correspond with the M.S. Corey and G. Corey's (2002) classification of principles that a good coach should follow. As one of the most important principles, the respondents distinguished objectivity that can be interpreted according to Corey and Corey's classification as readiness to accept otherness, interest in the client's well-being, sincerity, openness, and personal involvement.

Some respondents equated the principles to be followed by a counsellor with competences³. First-year students considered the knowledge acquired from the university, trainings and courses (26%) to be the most important constituent of competence (cf. graph 6). This was followed by information concerning, among other things, the knowledge of the job market, professions, schools and the possibility of providing support to counselees (13%). Further, they identified competence elements associated with the counsellor's methods of work: communication skills and active listening (9%), openness to people (7%), experience (4%). They also mentioned such characteristics of a "good counsellor" as objectivity (3%), creativity (2%), diligence (2%), ability to advise well (2%); one-off responses included: managerial competence, patience, resourcefulness, fully fledged personality, involvement, responsibility, knowledge about humans.

For second-year students, of primary importance are the communication skills and active listening (this was claimed by 36% of them; cf. graph 6). Almost the same share (35%) selected education (completion of their studies, courses, trainings). These were followed by knowledge concerning, *inter alia*, legal regulations, the job market, educational offers (34%), which was succeeded by openness as well as patience and forbearance (27% of the responses each). The competence components that second-year students appreciated in a counsellor also included the willingness to help and involvement (19%), and empathy (13%). According to the respondents, a counsellor should be sincere, honest, loyal (11%), nice, friendly (9%), objective (8%), diligent and conscientious (8%), trust-inspiring (7%), able to make assessments and predictions (6%), creative (4%), self-possessed (4%), trustworthy (3%), flexible (3%), responsible (2%), inquiring (2%), as well as ambitious, intelligent, straightforward, businesslike, stress-resistant, and also able to advise rather than order.

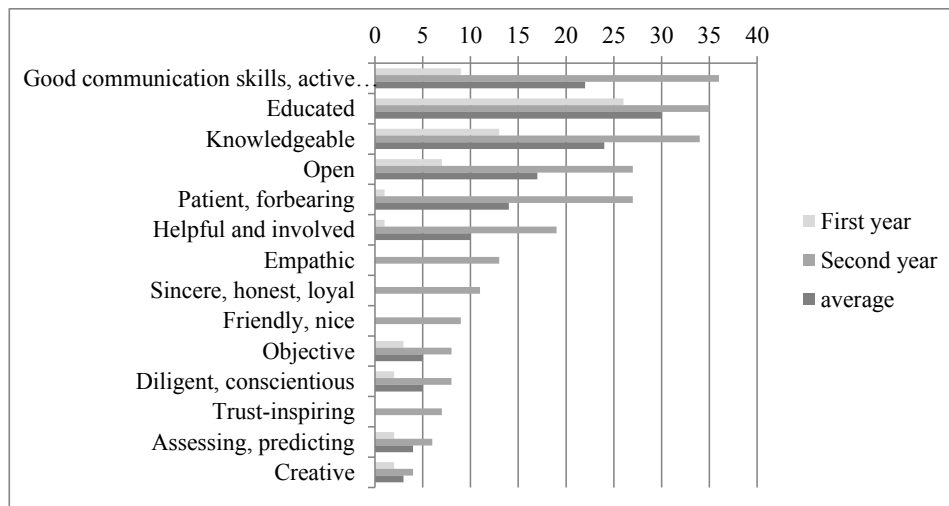
In an attempt to generalise these results, it can be claimed that the most important competences of counsellors according to the surveyed students were expertise ensured by proper education (30%), general knowledge (24%), and personality

³ Competences are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. Official Journal L 394 of 30 December 2006).

characteristics: communication skills (22%) and openness (17%). The remaining responses were for the most part proposed by second-year students, who had bigger expectations with regard to professional competences of counsellors, which did not stem from their experience, but much more from their knowledge acquired during the course. The expectations of the surveyed second-year students refer, among other things, to a classification of characteristics of a good counsellor, which corresponds with Carl Rogers's (1991) concept of client-centred therapy that includes empathy, kindness (here: patience, forbearance), authenticity (here: sincerity, honesty) and openness.

When comparing the respondents' opinions to the results of other studies conducted in this regard, it can be noticed that they partly overlap with those that are discussed in the scientific studies of Piorunek or Padechowicz-Rugała. The students surveyed by Piorunek (2010) identified education (45.8%) as the most desired competence of a "good" counselling specialist, which was followed by effectiveness (45.3%) which can be, in my opinion, compared to helpfulness and involvement, as selected by my respondents. In the studies of Piorunek, many respondents mentioned empathy (38.9%), while in my study only 11% of the students selected empathy to be the principle that a counsellor should follow, but 13% of the second-year students considered it not so much a principle, but rather a characteristic which should be part of the counsellors' competence set. Patience in the study of Piorunek was ranked fourth (31%), while in the present study, 10% of the students identified it as a desired principle, and 14% as a competence (including, interestingly, 27% of the second-year students, and merely 1% of the first-year students). When comparing my findings to those discussed by Padechowicz-Rugała (2017), it should be noted that the competences valued in counsellors by unemployed people differ from those valued by students who have not had any contact with the labour office. What was of major significance for the unemployed was for a counsellor to be friendly and nice (58.4%), experienced (37.2%), able to motivate the client to take action and cooperate (31%), calm and self-possessed (28.3%), and able to establish and maintain contact with ease and flexibility (21.2%). Only the fourth choice of the unemployed corresponds to the opinions declared by the students that I surveyed: 22% of these identified communication skills of the counsellor and his/her ability of active listening as the third most important competence, while 13% as the fourth most important principle to be followed by counsellors. The presented comparisons manifest the differences between the choices of students and those of the unemployed. Both groups seem to value in a counsellor what they consider a value themselves: the students value primarily knowledge and education, while the unemployed – experience. When making references to their own experiences, the clients of the labour office emphasized in their choices a good atmosphere during the consultation interview (a counsellor should be kind and nice), as well as the counsellors' abilities to motivate clients to take action. As for the students, their choices were more imaginary and wishful in nature, and not "experience-based",

which makes the students' expectations about the wide array of competences that a counsellor should have seem too idealistic. The lack of, or only sporadic, contact of students with professional counsellors (i.e. failure to counselling services) may be also a reason for them overlooking the principles related to counsellor's experience. Detailed results of the conducted study are presented in the graph below.



Graph 6. Characteristics and competences of a counsellor in the respondents' opinions

Source: own elaboration.

It seemed important to establish how the students perceive the role of a counsellor in the support process. The respondents were asked to select one out of two options to finish the following sentence: "The goal of a counsellor is to... a) indicate the best specific solution for the counselee, b) present different possible solutions and give the counselee freedom of choice." Although first-year students provided their answers intuitively, and second-year students used the knowledge acquired during the course, the vast majority of the representatives of both groups (78%) selected the second answer (72% of the first-year students and 84% of the second-year students). Option a) was selected by 28% of the first-year students and 16% of the second-year students, which constituted 22% of all students. This result does not correspond with the results of the study conducted by Piorunek (2010, p. 138), because the majority (i.e. 90%) of the students surveyed by this author declared that they expect a directive approach from the counsellor – obtaining ready solutions, specific advice, tips. This difference may stem from a change in the perception of the role of counselling, which took place over the last ten years, and also from the formulation of the questions. These were closed-ended in both cases and gave the possibility of providing one out of two answers, but in Piorunek's study, the question concerned a specific matter (*it is important for the specialist to give me specific*

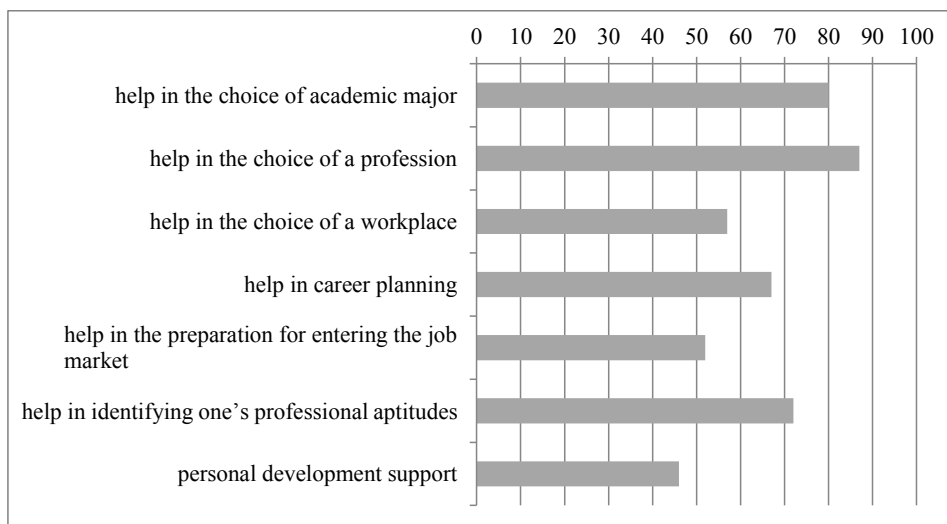
advice and tell me clearly how I should behave, what I should do), whereas in my study, the question concerned two opposite work models of a counsellor.

In the literature on the subject, the significance of the counselee's participation in the support relationship is underlined (cf. e.g. Czerkawska, 2018, Szumigraj, 2015, Wojtasik, 2011); therefore, it was important to verify the students' knowledge about the beneficiaries of the counselling services. The biggest number of both student cohorts surveyed (78% of the first-year and 83% of the second-year students) replied that the services of a vocational counsellor are addressed to people of different age groups and at any moment in their development. This was followed in the responses of first-year students by learners (63%) and in the answers of second-year students by the unemployed (81%). Next, in the third place, first-year students named the unemployed (56%) and second-year students – learners (79%). Subsequently, the respondents from both cohorts concordantly selected working persons (43% of the first-year students and 70% of the second-year students). The least popular answer was “people who do not work or search for a job” (26% and 31%). Considering the responses of all the students, it can be noticed that 80% of them recognise the potential of using counselling services by people of all ages and at any point in their life, but at the same time they underline that this should be primarily done by learners and the unemployed. With regard to this question, there was not a big difference between the responses of first-year and second-year students, which can be slightly surprising considering that the younger respondents had not participated in the “vocational counselling” course before.

Vocational/career counselling, as opposed to, e.g., psychological and pedagogical guidance, seems to concern a clearly specified subject of exploration undertaken by the counsellor and the client. When asked about what the topic of a consultation interview can be, the students specified the following: the interests and objectives of the counselee (83%), education possibilities, courses, trainings (77%), work experiences (75%), personality characteristics and attitude (72%), talents (68%), socio-economic factors (49%) and leisure activities (46%). The sequence of the responses of first-year and second-year respondents was the same, which again proves a good understanding of the topic among first-year students, who had not participated in the vocational counselling course. These findings also show that the students possess knowledge concerning the topics discussed during the consultation interview, which means that they are aware of the factors that are meaningful for career planning.

The students' attitudes to professional assistance were also identified by collecting their opinions about counselling services. The students were asked about how a vocational counsellor can help. This was a multiple-choice question (there was a set of seven answers to choose from). The sequence of answers in the case of first-year and second-year respondents was the same, and there were slight variations in the number of votes for each answer. Therefore, a cumulative analysis of opinions of the entire population will be presented. According to the respondents, a counsellor

can be helpful primarily in the choice of a profession (87%) (cf. graph 7), in the choice of an academic field of study (80%), in the client's identification of his/her professional aptitudes (72%). The fourth most frequently selected answer was help in career planning (67%), which was followed by help in the choice of a workplace (57%), followed in the sixth place by help in the preparation for entering the job market (52%). The answer "possibility of personal development support" was the least popular response, but relatively many students selected it – 40% and 53% of the first-year and second-year students respectively, which constitutes 46% of all the respondents.



Graph 7. Scope of help of a vocational counsellor in the opinion of all respondents

Source: own elaboration.

The answers of these respondents partly correspond with the results obtained by Kukla and Zajac (2016), who prove that there is a demand among students for information concerning the nature of the labour market, the employers' expectations, the demand of the local labour market (with respect to the in-demand occupations, professions and competences); for advice concerning continued career planning (including in particular the identification of needs related to professional training); and for support in a broadly defined process of employment search. These, however, differ from the expectations of the unemployed. When asked about specific counselling services, what was valued the most by the unemployed was advice concerning participation in professional development trainings (65.5%), advice related to participation in different types of courses (59.3%), advice concerning the change of a profession (37.2%) and help in writing a CV (31.9%) (Padechowicz-Rugała, 2017). When formulating their expectations with regard to the help of a counsellor,

the surveyed students mainly referred to both common knowledge and the knowledge acquired from the university, while the unemployed mainly built upon their own experience. The students' expectations are characteristic of people who only entered the job market, who plan their educational and professional career and expect support in the choice of a profession or academic field of study, while those of the unemployed are related to the non-formal education – the choice of such trainings or courses that will contribute to improving their professional qualifications or give them the possibility of acquiring new ones.

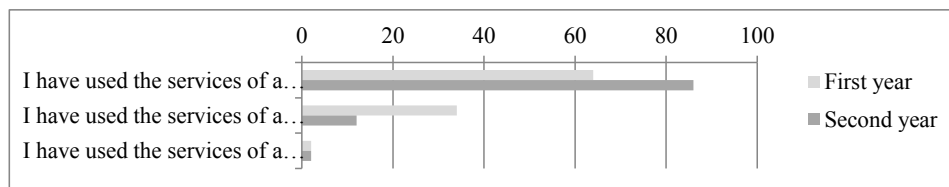
The above results can constitute a guidance for teachers and training organisers who prepare the students for the profession of a counsellor. In the light of these results, it is important for the students to not only possess knowledge concerning the scope of help of a vocational counsellor, but also be equipped with such skills that will allow them to identify the help that their clients want, which means being aware of the diversity of the expectations of various client groups.

Students' opinions concerning the role of counselling in the context of (not) seeking professional assistance

To verify not only the knowledge about the institutions providing counselling service, but to learn if the students in fact use the services of said institutions, a question was asked about their experiences connected with participation in the process of obtaining specialist counselling support. The answers of both first-year and second-year students were similar. The majority of respondents selected the answer "I have never used the services of a counsellor" (55% of the first-year students and 59% of the second-year students).

By the time of the study, the majority of the surveyed students (57%) had not had any contact with a counsellor, which can be explained by, for example, the fact that as learners they did not receive a compulsory course in vocational counselling (currently, such a course is run in schools pursuant to a Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 August 2018 on Vocational Counselling).

The analysis of the data provided by only those people who had used counselling services, i.e. 43% of all the respondents (45% of the first-year students and 41% of the second-year students) indicates that the majority had met a counsellor only once (64% of the first-year students and 87% of the second-year students). 34% of the first-year students and 12% of the second-year students had used the services of a counsellor several times. As few as 2% of the first-year respondents and 2% of the second-year respondents had used the services of a counsellor many times. This is presented in graph 8.



Graph 8. Frequency of using counselling services

Source: own elaboration.

The students who had participated in a meeting with a counsellor were asked about the type of counselling that they used. As the answer to this open-ended question, 80% of the first-year students named vocational counselling organised by the school (where 17% concerned the choice of profession, school, and academic field of study). The remaining (one-off) responses pertained to receiving advice at the bank when opening a deposit account (2%), coaching, and also random advice provided in general individually or in a group. Interestingly, the respondents from this group never mentioned (which suggests that they had probably never used) help provided at a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. The majority of the second-year students also named vocational counselling (78%). They used the services of a counsellor when choosing their high school and academic field of study. As the place of obtaining advice, they indicated the office of a vocational counsellor at a pedagogical and psychological counselling centre (7%) and the Voluntary Labour Corps (5%). As could be expected, the majority of the respondents – both first-year and second-year students – used the services of a counsellor at school (75% and 66% respectively). Other answers mentioned the careers service (11% and 12%) and the labour office (7% each).

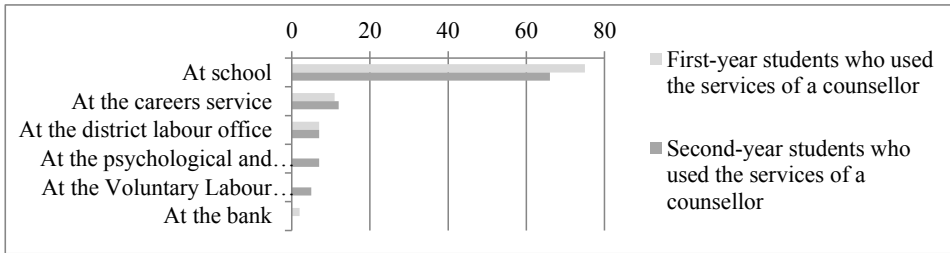
Particularly notable is the respondents' use of the counselling services provided by academic careers services. 11% of the surveyed first-year students and 12% of the surveyed second-year students obtained the assistance of this facility, which constitutes 5% of all 200 respondents. The services of a vocational counsellor at the Academic Careers Service of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU), where the respondents studied, were used in 2018 by a total of 1389 people, i.e. 5.8% of all NCU students (<https://www.biurokarier.umk.pl/statystyka>). The respondents thus constitute a representative group of the entire population of NCU students. The average of 5–6% of people using the advice of the Toruń careers service seems rather negligible, but as compared with e.g. the use of the careers service at the University of Warsaw⁴ or the Jagiellonian University⁵, it proves to be quite

⁴ In 2018, the assistance of professional counsellors was used by 740 people (i.e. 1.8% of the population of UW students) (<http://biurokarier.uw.edu.pl/informacje-o-biurze>).

⁵ The counselling services offered to the students of the Jagiellonian University were used in 2017 by as few as 128 people, which constitutes 0.3% of all students (https://biurokarier.uj.edu.pl/documents/2206025/0/Rapor_BK_2017/770852bb-6b4d-4224-b8f6-b502ed58b911).

significant. The data cited in the footnotes and the results of my research demonstrate generally little interest in the services of a vocational counsellor among Polish students. Similar results were obtained by the researchers who studied the degree of awareness of Ethiopian students and their use of counselling services. The study invoked in the beginning of this article demonstrated that despite an attractive offer of the Ethiopian university's careers centre, the majority of students have not heard about the possibility of using its services, and as few as 7.8% of the students were informed about the existence of the careers centre and its location (Getachew, 2019).

It should be also noted in this respect that the study analysed herein did not show a correlation between the knowledge acquired by the students in the "vocational counselling" course and the use of the services of a counsellor, which is shown in the graph below.



Graph 9. Institutions where the respondents accessed the services of a counsellor

Source: own elaboration.

What thus seems interesting is the evaluation of the different types of support received by the respondents. The students had the possibility to choose one out of four answers, and in both groups the responses were almost identical. The first one, "the counsellor was very helpful", was selected by as few as 13% of the first-year students and 12% of the second-year students who used the services of a counsellor. The second answer, "the counsellor was partly helpful", was selected by the largest number of students – 55% of the first-year and 59% of the second-year students from among those who had had contact with a counsellor. The answer "the counsellor was of little help" was selected by 31% of the first-year and 27% of the second-year students. None of the first-year students and one person from among the second-year students claimed that the counsellor was not helpful at all.

When looking at these data, it can be noticed that the students from both cohorts evaluated the help received from the counsellor in a similar manner and the majority evaluated it ambivalently or rather negatively (86% each of the first-year and second-year students). Only one in ten respondents found the help received to be adequate and rated it highly. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Polish students are in principle not interested in using professional assistance in the future. Younger students said that they were "unlikely to" or "would certainly not"

ever meet a counsellor (48% and 3% respectively). However, there were also such students who said that they were “likely to” or “would certainly” use counselling services (43% and 6% respectively). Second-year students declared a more positive attitude to future meetings with a counsellor, because their most popular choice was the answer “likely to” (48%), and second most popular “unlikely to” (45%), followed by “would certainly” (6%), while “would certainly not” was selected by as few as 1% of the second-year students. The obtained results can be interpreted as an expression of indecision as to the use of the counselling services offer in the future, but also – considering the differences in the positive and negative answers of both cohorts – as a growth of trust in counselling services with the acquisition of knowledge about them. Nevertheless, these opinions of the respondents are mere declarations that are hard to verify. Equally hard to comprehend is the lack of interest in the services of academic careers service among Polish students, whose services – as shown in the studies of both Polish (cf., e.g., Rosalska, 2018; Nymś-Górna & Sobczak, 2018; Trojanowska, 2015) and foreign authors (e.g. Getachew, 2019; Staiulescu, Lacatus, & Richiteanu-Nastase, 2015) effectively support the professional and personal development of people receiving the help of counsellors working there. To give an example, the study conducted among Ethiopian students indicates that in the group of the few students who used the counselling services the majority claimed that they contributed to their academic success (Getachew, 2019), while university alumni in Taiwan claimed that sharpening their job-search and interview skills, as part of the counselling service at their university, was crucial in helping them find their first jobs (Ho, Huang, Hu, 2018). Not using the possibility of obtaining advice at the careers service by Polish students may result from failure to notice such need at a given point in time; such need is usually associated with seeking help in job search or the choice of an academic field of study. Maybe, the students will contact a counsellor at a time that they see fit, as signalled by their statement that they might potentially use the services of a counsellor in the future with respect to career planning.

At the same time, participation in the “vocational counselling” course proves not to differentiate the experiences of first-year and second-year students. The students’ experiences are based on vocational counselling services provided previously in high school, in the individual and group form, most frequently taking place as a one-off meeting. As few as 5% of the entire studied population used a careers service, which reflects a general trend in the population of Polish students.

Summary

Summarising the results of the study conducted with pedagogy students, it is a good idea to return to the questions which were attempted to be answered. They concerned the students’ knowledge about counselling services and its sources. It was

stated that if the students participate in the “vocational counselling” course, they possess broader and more structured knowledge about counselling services than the students who do not take such course. From among the students who did not take the course, as many as 37% were unable to mention any type of counselling. Following the participation in a 15-hour course, the proportion of such students is much lower, but when thinking about counselling, they equate it mainly with vocational counselling, and also (wrongly) with coaching and mentoring. Although the respondents correctly identify the places where the services of a counsellor can be accessed, naming in the first place the school, careers service, and the labour office, as many as 36% of those who did not take the course failed to enter any answer or wrote “I do not know” in response to this question concerning their knowledge of counselling. With respect to the question concerning the beneficiaries of counselling services, the majority of respondents (80%) replied that the services of a vocational counsellor are addressed to people of different age groups at any moment in their development, but in particular to learners and the unemployed. As for this question, there was not a big difference between the responses of first-year and second-year students, which indicates that they are in full agreement in this respect and their views are based on conventional opinions. The students from both cohorts have relatively broad knowledge about the services provided by a vocational counsellor. They claim that a counsellor can be helpful in the process of choosing a profession, an academic field of study, identifying professional aptitudes, career planning, in the choice of the workplace, in preparation for entering the job market, and in the process of personal development.

Considering the answer to one of the specific research questions, it should be noted that there are substantial differences between the expectations of first-year and second-year pedagogy students regarding the counsellor (and professional assistance). While the expectations formulated by the first-year students are considerably heightened, those of the second-year students are much more realistic and also more detailed.

The list of answers of all the respondents with respect to the competences that a counsellor should have clearly shows that the students value the subject-matter knowledge obtained from formal education, and also the knowledge of the labour market, professions, educational offers, and the regulations which will enable counselees to receive professional support. In this respect, similarly to the studies conducted among Icelandic and American students, those who are less experienced in the use of counselling services have usually higher expectations with regard to counsellor expertise than those who have used the services of such a person many times (Ægisdóttir & Gerstein, 2004). According to Polish students, what is important in the work of a counsellor are soft skills, especially those that concern good communication and active listening, and also personality characteristics such as patience and forbearance, helpfulness and involvement, empathy, sincerity, honesty and loyalty. When comparing the responses of first-year and second-year students

about the expected competences and principles that counsellors should follow in their work, it can be noticed that the first-year students' answers were more intuitive while the knowledge of the second-year students was more structured.

The students' opinions on the social role of vocational counselling are generally positive and not differentiated based on the respondents' participation (or lack thereof) in the academic course on this topic. It can be claimed that the students' ideas concerning this role are typical of young people who plan their educational and professional career and expect support in the choice of a profession or academic field of study, in line with modern trends in counselling (cf. e.g. Guichard, 2018). The students' answers regarding the social role of counselling did not show a statistically significant difference between both groups of respondents, which may indicate not so much the acquisition of completely new knowledge in the "vocational counselling" course during their studies, but much more the standardisation of expectations and the universality of the views on the role that counselling should play.

Answering the main research question: "What significance for the students' knowledge, experiences and expectations regarding counselling services does their participation in the vocational counselling course have?", it can be stated that their participation in the course contributed to the broadening of their general knowledge about types of counselling, it helped to structure this knowledge and to specify realistic and detailed expectations about counselling services; it did not, however, have a significant impact on increasing the scope of the students' experiences in using the services or of their attempts to start their own practise in this field.

Based on the conducted study, useful conclusions can be also drawn for the work of university teachers teaching the "vocational counselling" course. The general topics taught in this course, outlined at the beginning of this article, should be included in the curriculum in a much larger number of hours, so that they can be discussed from different perspectives; especially because the topics of guidance and counselling are discussed to varying extent in the mass media, which hence become the main source of usually unordered, incoherent and unverified knowledge of this topic. Other comments refer to methodological issues, because teachers have not only the possibility, but the obligation to inform about the changes occurring in the understanding of the career, to point out the consequences of these changes (cf. Lenart, 2017; Savickas, 2012), and simultaneously motivate students for personal development (Alheit, 2020; Malewski, 2010; Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 2018). Therefore, it seems important not only to transfer specialist knowledge, but also show new perspectives of professional development by: providing information about, among other things, the institutions that address their offers directly to students, such as academic careers services or academic business incubators; by conducting field research; and by developing aid projects and taking initiatives with the participation of students.

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