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THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER GUIDANCE: PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS AT WEST SUMMER UNIVERSITY (2021-2024)

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Abstract: *This quantitative, retrospective study evaluated 89 West Summer University participants (2021–2024) regarding the perceived role of extracurricular activities in their educational and career guidance. The findings reveal highly favorable evaluations for clarifying academic options (M = 4.48) and identifying compatible career paths (M = 4.46), with a positive correlation between both dimensions (r = 0.337, p = 0.002). Ultimately, while direct long-term causal effects cannot be drawn, the results underscore WSU's practical utility in guiding young people.*

• Introduction

Extracurricular experiences and pre-academic summer programs support adolescents in exploring career paths, enhancing adaptability, and facilitating their transition to university life. Grounded in this literature, the study evaluates how former West Summer University participants perceive the contribution of non-formal activities to clarifying their academic and professional options.

• Material and method

This observational, cross-sectional study surveyed a voluntary sample of 89 high school students across four editions (2021–2024) of West Summer University, a two-week academic simulation camp. Using an online Google Forms questionnaire based on validated CDMP and CDDQ scales, data were processed via IBM SPSS 23 using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and one-way ANOVA tests.

• Results and discussions

Across all four editions (2021–2024), participants evaluated the West Summer University (WSU) program highly favorably, with overall mean scores ranging between 3.99 and 4.56 on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents reported particularly strong agreements regarding the clarification of their future academic options (Item E5) and the identification of viable, compatible career paths (Item E8). Statistical analysis demonstrated a positive and moderate Pearson correlation between the utility of academic information received and information provided by company representatives ($r = 0.337$, $p = 0.002$, $N = 84$). Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA across editions revealed a nominally significant difference only for Item E8 ($F = 2.948$, $p = 0.038$), though this significance is lost under Bonferroni adjustment ($alpha = 0.00625$). Overall, these empirical findings align with current literature emphasizing the practical utility of non-formal pre-academic programs in supporting youth career exploration and educational decision-making.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by West Summer University edition

Edition	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
2021	5	5.6
2022	13	14.6
2023	23	25.8
2024	48	53.9
Total	89	100.0

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for evaluation items E1-E8

Item	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Item E1	84	1	5	4.56	.782
Item E2	51	1	5	4.42	.881
Item E3	84	2	5	4.39	.807
Item E4	84	2	5	4.38	.863
Item E5	84	1	5	4.48	.828
Item E6	84	1	5	4.26	.958
Item E7	84	1	5	3.99	1.092
Item E8	84	1	5	4.46	.870

Descriptive statistics in Table 1 confirm consistently high ratings across all evaluated parameters, highlighting overall program satisfaction ($M = 4.56$) and the effective clarification of academic choices ($M = 4.48$). Furthermore, Table 2 illustrates a growing participation trend over the four cohorts, with over 94% of respondents either actively intending to pursue or currently enrolled in higher education studies.

• Conclusions

Participants evaluated extracurricular activities and information provided during West Summer University favorably. The study documents relevant perceptions of academic and career guidance within a Romanian summer school context.

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