

The Change of Strategy at High Secondary Vocational Schools in Kosovo

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Abstract:

The economy of one country is dependent on the skills and the abilities of its workers and employees respectively. Vocational training is an education that prepares people for specific vocations, career professions. In this context, many of the countries of the European Union have considered the vocational education as an important step for economic and professional development of their countries. The population of these countries is educated in this aspect based on the requests of the global market that had directly influenced in generating new working places, as well as the evident decrease of unemployment, increase of the economic productivity, apparent improvement of the quality of education at national levels and in the country's financial stability.

The Kosovo education system does not fulfil the pedagogical and vocational education needs for the youngest population in Europe (the age average for the year 2011 is estimated to be 30.2 years), therefore this results in high number of unemployed youngsters, without skills and qualifications that are required by the increasing global economy.

The time has come to face theoretically and practically with the path that that we are supposed to follow in this area as well. The time has come to adapt with a new contemporary concept which is accurately is the vocational education.

The market requirements are changing nowadays and together with them through the same trend the change of the strategy for the

higher secondary vocational schools, more precisely the teaching curricula, the way of organizing vocational trainings in particular and support for the private businesses that enable the holding of the vocational trainings.

Key words: European Union, vocational education, qualification, unemployment, economic development, vocational education schools, market, strategy.

Introduction

One of the main requests that the market puts forward today, as the main sector for economic development of the global sphere, is the thorough vocational qualification in all the relevant disciplines where vocational trainings based on the affinity in accordance with the high academic standards are included.

The official system of the pre-university education that existed before and during the conflict in Kosovo, it is formalized currently with a number of superficial reforms that are not considered dynamical enough for these days' level. The educational system is overburdened by a very high number of populations of the urban dwellings, which resulted from a fast migration from the rural areas to the urban ones (the data from 2011 show that 38.3% live in cities) (The Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Kosovo 2014, May 2014, Pristina), especially after the conflict. The access is uneven as a result of a great contrast between schools in the sense of quality, a situation that is worsened further by the low norm of finishing schooling by the community, the unsatisfactory results of the Matura achievement test, whereby about 90% of the secondary school students pass it (the Central State Matura Commission CSMC). Despite the recent developments, teacher professional development is weak, the curricula is inadequate and old, whereby there is the lack of schooling equipment and materials, there is no complete budget autonomy by the schools'

management, and also insufficient financial support by the MEST (the final audit report for the financial statements of the DANIDA program for the year ending as per December 31st of 2008 and 2009, June 2010, Pristina).

Statement of the high secondary education in Kosovo

According to SNKA the high secondary education presents the third (3) level and it functions at the public and private (licensed) schools. According to the objectives and content these schools are organized in gymnasiums and vocational schools. The higher secondary schools are profiled schools. The gymnasiums are divided according to the profiles into: societal, general, natural sciences, math-informatics and linguistics. The studying period for these schools is 3 years long. Vocational schools as well are divided into profiles such as: technical, agriculture, economical, medicine, music, trade, theology, art and competency centres. The studying period for these schools as well is 3 years long. At all the secondary high schools general subjects are taught that aim to increase the general knowledge of the students, such as: Albanian language, foreign language, history, geography, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, physical education, etc. The grading scale for evaluating the students is from 1 to 5. At the schooling end the students undergo through a national Matura test. This evaluation as well is evidenced at the school roster and the registry book. For passing the state Matura test the achievement must reach up to 50% of the scoring meaning minimum 100 points from the total of 200 as it is the nowadays' format. The exam is carried in two days. The first day contains questions from subjects such as Albanian language, English and math while in the second day the subjects are from professional (vocational) fields. After this the students are entitled to apply for university studying, which can be public and private (licensed). From 116 secondary schools, the teaching/learning in Albanian language is carried

in 101 of them or 87.0%, in Bosnian language 1 or 0.9%, in Turkish language 1 or 0.9% while in other 13 schools or 11.2% the teaching/learning is carried in more than one language.

For this schooling level at the public schools the teaching/learning process is evaluated with the following figures: 100.437 students or 21.8% from the total in all the levels, concerning gender 53.4% are males or 53.641 and 46.6% or 46.796 are females. For their education the teachers of general and practical subjects depending on the specific profiles encounter the figure of 6.023 teachers (M 3.693 and F 2.330) from which 753 have Master degree or Magister (the old schooling system of 7 years), 4.845 have finished 5 years university studies, while 425 have high school degree and most of them carry the subjects of professional practice. The teaching/learning is carried in 116 schools, from which 97 are kernel schools and 19 are separated. The divider teacher/student is 17 students per one teacher, while the divider of student number per classroom is 28.4. Two thirds of the classrooms (62%) at the high secondary level belong to vocational education. In general there are 55.800 students that go to the secondary vocational schools, where female composition is 40% of the overall figure compared to 55% of females that go to other high secondary schools or Gymnasiums. There are 100.437 students that undergo through the high secondary schools while 22% of them (21.937) are no longer children (meaning below the age of 18 years old). (The Statistics of Education in Kosovo 2013/2014, December 2014, Pristina).

After the conflict in Kosovo there are other schools that have been established private and non-public that are licensed with the MEST (the Ministry of Education Science and Technology). At the private schooling of the third (3) level according to the SICE (Standard International Classification of Education) the teaching/learning is followed by 2.601 students (males 1.532 or 58.9% versus 41.1% females or 1.069). The

number of schools reaches 15 of them. The overall number of teachers is 351, which lecture to 140 classes, from which 95 are Gymnasium classes or 68% of the total and 45 classes are vocational classes or 32% of the total. The divide student/teacher is one teacher for 7 students. (The Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Kosovo 2014, May 2014, Pristina).

Besides the above mentioned figures, in Kosovo there are special schools dedicated to the persons with disabilities, appended and supported classes. The high secondary education for this society category lasts 3 years and during this process the number of students attending the public schools for the school year 2013/2014 according to the KSA (Kosovo Statistical Agency) was 147 students from which 59 are females or 40.1 versus 88 males or 59.9%. The number of teachers of the special education schools is 40 where 27 or 67.5% are females and 13 or 34.5% are males. These students study in 6 special schools where all of them are kernel schools. At the non-public schools there are no separate classes for the students with special needs. In general the number of students in this schooling level is 109.512 students for the school year 2011/2012.

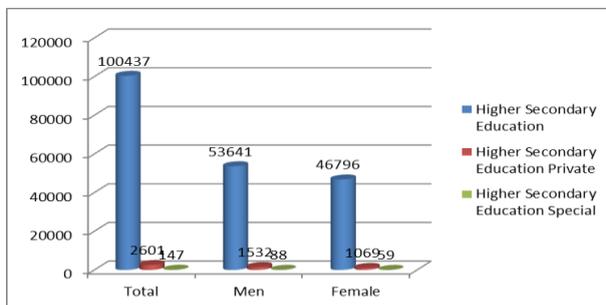


Chart1. The number of students at the high secondary education level

According to KSA, 1% of the students of the high secondary schools (Gymnasiums) have not passed the exams during the school year 2012/2013 and from 587 that have to reiterate the classes 25% are females and 75% are males. 5% of the students

of the high secondary vocational schools have not passed the exams during the school year 2012/2013 and from the 2932 that had to reiterate the classes 30% are females and 70% are males. This fact results with a negative misbalance for vocational schools.

Vocational education and unemployment

The sub-sector for VET (Vocational Education and Training) in Kosovo is part of the secondary school level and serves for the students 15-18 years of age. These students are dispersed to 59 vocational schools and in 2 other specialized schools known as Competence Centres that function under the responsibility of MEST and MDE (Municipal Directorates of Education).

According to the KCF (the new Kosovo Curriculum Framework), the programs for professional practice are part of the curriculum for vocational schools that present the following framework:

- ✓ grade 10: theory 60% versus practice 40%
- ✓ grade 11: theory 50% versus practice 50%
- ✓ grade 12: theory 40% versus practice 60%.

With a very high level of unemployment and a low level of employment (28%), Kosovo has the frailest profile in Europe concerning employment and the level of participation of 48% of the population with the appropriate age for employment, is visibly under the average of all the economies in transition (KSA, 2009). The youngest age group from 15-24 is faced with the highest rate of unemployment with 73% and with the highest unemployment flow of 0.7% (KSA, 2009).

Kosovo continues to suffer an education system that limps in all the levels in focusing on the pedagogical needs and on preparing the students for the market and economic requirements respectively. Kosovo remains the poorest economy in the region facing high levels of poverty, massive

unemployment that in average is calculated to be round 45%, in comparison to Macedonia with 33%, Bosnia and Herzegovina 23%, Serbia round 20%, Montenegro and Albania with 14%; high dependency in imports and with a very small sector of export, as well as with a lack of strategy for vocational trainings according to European standards. The core problem remains concerning the school infrastructure and the subsequent equipment, the high number of informal economies and the lack of sufficient autonomy by the school management in governing the financial means.

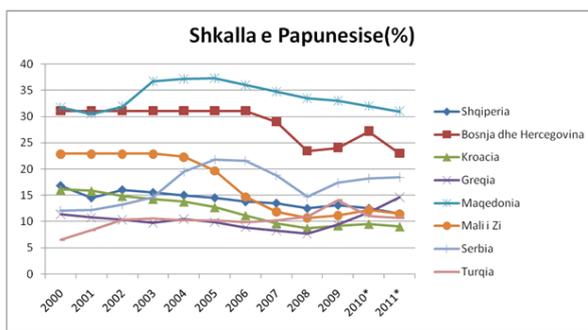


Figure1. The level of unemployment in the region, 2000-2011

Source: The results of the Labour Force Survey 2012

The GNR (Gross National Revenues) per capita are estimated to be € 2885, therefore, Kosovo is ranked 93rd in the world level, behind Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (World Bank, World Development Indicator 2012). The youth unemployment varies to about 70%, which may represent a potential for riots, knowing the fact that more than half of the population belongs to the age of lower than 25 years or 21% belong to the age of 15 to 25 years. The World Bank estimates that 34% of the Kosovo’s population lives in the margins of poverty with 45€ or 60\$ per month (World Bank, World Development Indicator 2012). Facing this reality of unemployment and poverty, we will not exaggerate by saying that Kosovo’s stability and development perspective is

dependent on creating new job positions and in changing the quantity of vocational education.

The change strategy at Secondary Vocational Schools

Concerning the strategy I will pose some questions to which I will answer including the limitations that may hamper their implementation.

- ❑ The question arises: Can we assume that students at various schooling levels are ready for the labour market?

Many arguments that come up from various researches carried in Kosovo bring us to a negative answer: 18% of the vocational schools do not offer learning based on practice because of the lack of infrastructure/workshops and mechanisms in order to achieve the cooperation with the enterprises that could accommodate a certain number of students to carry their practical training (Kosovo Pedagogical Institute for the year 2011). The percentage of students that do not undergo through any sort of practical training is relatively high reported as 40% from all the students that attend secondary vocational schools. As an immediate result of this, these students will enter the labour market as untrained or trained to some extent, by having thus a low perspective in finding employment which as a consequence leads to the trap of poverty.

The limitations come from the fact that Kosovo's budget has a minor increase from 1.316 billion Euro in 2013 it has reached 1.76 billion Euro in 2015, while in 2016 it is expected to be around 1.6 billion Euro, this means not such a promising increase for any fast fundamental change. Public expenditures in education for the year 2011 were 4.06% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) while in 2012 were 4.03% (Kosovo's Ministry of Finances, 2013).

- Can the effect of applying the vocational education as an extension of the teaching/learning and researching process, make a difference?

Based on the results that come up by interviewing students of the high secondary schools we will come with a standard response, yes, of course. If we analyse the structural processes of the European Union countries, than in Kosovo we will have to build a modern education system directed towards vocations, since the education system is not a tool of a free market but it is a generator for shaping and forming the individual on accessing the free labour market as a specialist for the respective branch. The state should guarantee a functional and modern education system which responds to the societal and economical needs. An education based on professional training would have economical perspective as a result and a positive impact on decreasing the unemployment that would in a horizontal way stop the youth migration towards western countries, a phenomenon that is growing nowadays in Kosovo.

The state in this aspect should increase the cooperation with the private sector, knowing that this sector is the key factor for the country's economic development. The state should build proper facilities at schools; prepare new curricula in relation to labour market, while the private sector or the businesses should take responsibility for the linkage between labour trend the content and vocational training. In other words a proper management of professional practices should be created pursuant to European standards.

The limitations may come from the fact that Kosovo has a low scale of employment because it has a large informal sector. The extent of the informal sector is about 40-50% of the GDP (the Government's Program on preventing the informal economy in the country 2010-2012). A very high rate of non-registered businesses limits the number of potential places for vocational training for the students of secondary vocational

schools. The combat against informality should be one of the biggest challenges of the Kosovo Government.

- Should the Kosovar businesses that support vocational training have benefits?

The answer should explicitly be yes, and as such comes as a result of the interviews with the business owners, school managers and by the declarations of the economy experts as well as from the high officials of the relevant institutions. The state should provide customs' relief services for such enterprises or businesses in order to import the raw material, the appliance of special lower tariffs for the electricity, support their projects with matching funds with foreign donors, subventions by the relevant ministries, logistic support, etc.

The Government should have a symmetrical cooperation with the businesses, since they need support and recognition of their contribution for professional enhancement of the new generations which can be achieved through benefits that the state provides through administrative, fiscal or financial assistance. The Government of Kosovo through the Law for VET according to article 33, paragraph 3 suggests the decrease of taxes for enterprises that agree to host students for vocational trainings at their companies.

The limitations may be numerous concerning this question since Kosovo must change many laws to determine which businesses and which fields may benefit from the state, to prepare mutual contracts, to enable good working conditions and safety for the students attending the trainings. Transport means must also be provided to transport students to the enterprises that are far from the school as well as the physical safety of the students during their training time.

- ❑ Will there be any benefits for the candidates and their families that enter to vocational schools?

By considering the professional world that has global dimensions and goes through constant change and the bursting information flow, it is not enough the opening of just one professional profile at the secondary schools, but focusing on gathering facts and data so that families are able to guide their children on how to register to these schools.

This process should include the entire management of the vocational schools, the Office for Economic Cooperation for the Vocational Education and Training (OECVET), Kosovo Economic Chamber (KEC), the businesses, MDE-s, municipal mayors, school parental councils, in order to inform the parents for the benefits that this schooling level brings i.e. their children will gain the elementary practical experiences concerning vocational education. This should be the immediate step since the statistics show a tendency for the decrease of the number of vocational schools compared to gymnasiums in the recent years.

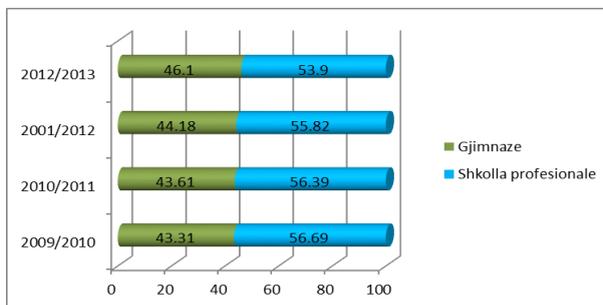


Chart 2. The number of high secondary school student presented in percentages

The parents should be informed that through this schooling the gap between the city and the village will narrow (from the statistics of the year 2011, 61% of the population of Kosovo lives in villages) (The Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Kosovo

2014, May 2014, Pristina) since the educational and schooling offer was minimal at the rural areas and at the same time degrading for the businesses in these regions, and the consequence was the overpopulation of the cities, that presents a problem on its own. This awareness campaign should be carried at the primary and lower secondary schools.

The challenges or limitations that face parents and children might be concerning the ambience where the vocational training is carried might not be safe or that they may subject to physical abuse by the businesses.

An informing handbook for the benefits of elementary vocational education as well as the attention of the electronic media will have a positive role in sensitizing the parents' interest to be able to orient their children towards vocational schools, since Kosovo is on the way of compiling its economic development strategy concerning the vocational education and training. The children of the families with social assistance should be provided with the means of transport, daily meals during the vocational training sessions and if possible solid scholarships. The children with disabilities should be offered special ambience for vocational trainings at the vocational schools including special paragraphs on the contracts with the businesses/enterprises that offer vocational training.

- To what extent should the high secondary vocational schools be assisted by the government of Kosovo?

The government of Kosovo should compile a special way in financing the vocational schools based on the priority branches and the capacities of the specific resources, simplifying the procedures for financial management of the vocational schools, decreasing the number of students in the classrooms, reviewing the number of vocational schools and changing the branches as per the market requirements in close cooperation with the businesses that offer vocational training facilities. Refreshing

the teaching/learning and programing curricula, digitalizing the schools especially in rural areas and in minority communities.

Analysis for the conditions of the workshops and the evaluation should be carried to evaluate the needs for basic equipment for all the vocational schools on the national level. Equipping of these workshops with work equipment according to the European standards. Training the teachers of high secondary vocational schools with European methods and their licensing for adequate profiles. Continuous monitoring of the labour market at the national and European level. Opportunities for exchanging students with EU countries in order to gain European vocational experiences.

The limitations in this aspect may be various because the Kosovo budget might not handle for this short period these requirements since it has foreseen for the budget of the years 2011-2016 the financial amount of 34.341.310 Euro (from which 20.140.950 are development expenditures and 14.200.360 Euro following operational costs) and an amount 4.298.360 Euro as additional operational costs necessary beyond 2016 (Kosovo Strategic Plan for Education 2011-2016, MEST, Pristina 2011).

Conclusions

History has shown that the most successful societies are those that accept and embrace faster the change. This fact should value for the entire Kosovar society as well, that through transforming of the vocational education become oriented towards economic development of the country and also towards decreasing the unemployment level. The development of vocational training through the support of the Kosovo Government can become a guarantee of success by knowing that it is undergoing through the compilation of European developing strategies. The challenges and limitations are numerous, but if European integration is required, than the

paving of the path must start from the changing of the strategies in education and in particular of the vocational training and education, the same way as many other countries have done by adopting education systems that have brought positive change.

The use of all the financial opportunities to build as soon as possible the development structure of the vocational schools, the provision of businesses that support and implement the vocational training, national informing and sensitizing and proper school infrastructure, would be a component towards the continuous upgrading of the vocational training process. Kosovo population should address these issues urgently if it wants to use its complete potential as individuals and its government as a state.

The identification and remodelling the professions according to modern conditions, the curricula oriented in practical work, continuous monitoring of the teaching quality, professional certifying, financial autonomy of the secondary vocational schools, are a European strategy for a new European country such as Kosovo.

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