

VET Teacher Preparation in Slovakia and the New Professionals – Entrepreneurship Trainers for VET

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Abstract - The article aims at the training of General Economic Theory teachers in Slovakia. It also deals with the ENTANGLE project which we are trying to analyse. The project is built on the relationship of vocational education students towards enterprising. The project itself should involve teachers of vocational subjects in terms of teaching about entrepreneurship opportunities in the EU. It is an international project including other countries except Slovakia: Lithuania, Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Cyprus. There is described the educational system of Slovakia and the position of GET teachers in preparation. Similarly, it deals with the issue of GET teacher's training. There is also description of Complementary pedagogical studies besides proper GET teacher education. We are trying to uncover the common problems of young people unemployment in the EU countries as well as to outline possible solutions in terms of support for education in the given context, with an impact on the increase of entrepreneurial competencies. Since the implementation of the project, teachers are expected to acquire competences that will lead them to meaningful GET teaching towards the future realization of graduates in business. The paper is complemented with the results of qualitative research that was trying to monitor the situation of entrepreneurship practices and entrepreneurial teaching in partner countries.

Keywords – GET teacher, GET training, employment of young people, entrepreneurial competencies, educational system in Slovakia.

1. Introduction

The goal of the paper is to analyse the system of VET teacher preparation in Slovakia and briefly describe partial results of ENTANGLE project (Entrepreneurship Trainers for VET: A Novel Generation Learning Approach) in which the authors participated as a partner of international consortium. The project has an innovative practical approach to stimulating entrepreneurship among students in VET institutions by providing their teachers with the tools and materials to educate inspire and motivate their students for them to be able to pursue a career as entrepreneurs. The ENTANGLE project addresses entrepreneurship in (Secondary) Vocational Education institutes. The project aims at reaching the biggest number of VET teachers possible and start a lively discussion with them on entrepreneurship teaching and policies in the EU. Similar as in a paper of authors Ros-Garrido and Chisvert-Tarrazona, “that the requirement to adapt youth to the labour market that is expected of this training provision, would bring these trainers towards the technical theory, where priority is given to defining objectives and establishing evaluative instruments” [1]. For example, “Niklas Luhmann's social system theory has been applied to the analysis of assessment practices as a communication act between the VET and the employment systems“ in research of authors Ümarik, Loogma and Hinno [2].

A review and analysis of relevant text documents and a qualitative methodology is employed.

All partners of the project wrote a country report, which includes general information about the country, demographical and economic statistics about the target group and a qualitative analysis in the form of a summary of a questionnaire from the VET teachers and students. In the paper are summarized only the results of the Slovakian partner.

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2. Key points of educational system in Slovakia and VET teachers preparation

Although slightly changed in the 1990s and in 2008, the Slovak education system is still substantially based on the Czechoslovak system as established by a fundamental reform from the 1970s. It featured a strong secondary VET originally designed for 85% of respective age cohort, complemented by a slim, strongly academically oriented general education stream and restrictive access to tertiary education. The education system was designed to supply qualified secondary VET graduates with at least ISCED 3C education level. Thus, the Slovak education system still features a high share of secondary VET graduates and a low share of early school leavers. Many secondary VET school graduates enter universities that dramatically expanded in number of institutions as well as students. Bachelor studies aimed at entering the labor market are, however rare and students massively progress to master studies. Post-secondary studies offered by secondary VET schools leading to higher professional level of education (ISCED 5B), although originally highly valued by the labor market, has been weakening, in particular in comparison to university studies boom. Initially, only universities were recognized by legislation as higher education institutions, which hampered development of a non-university segment of tertiary education. [3].

The education policy of the European Union calls for the support of school development and the modernization and improvement in quality of education [4]. Eurostat data show that seven of 10 people between 15 and 64 have a medium level qualification (ISCED 3-4) in Slovakia. This is well above the EU-28 average and, after the Czech Republic, the second highest in the European Union. The country has one of the lowest shares of low- or unqualified (14.6%; 26.8% in EU28), but also of high-skilled (18.9%; 26.5% in EU-28). Since 2005, education attainment has accelerated. The increase in attainment is driven by population decline, leading to a surplus of available places at schools, free of charge higher education, and the culture of entering the labor market at a relatively high age. However, the general trends hide negative developments for particular segments of the population. There is a strong difference between the young (30 to 34) and older (60 to 64) population age cohorts. Participation in, and the share of graduates from, VET are high. More than 70% of all pupils at secondary and post-secondary level graduate from VET. The 2015 reform has recently introduced the so called dual VET providing work-based learning in companies based on contracts with individual learners [5].

Compulsory education in Slovakia is 10 years and takes the longest to end of the school year in which child reaches 16 years of age. The tenth year of compulsory school pupils take to attend the high school. The structure of educational system consists of pre-primary education (facilities for pre-school children) primary education (elementary school 1st level, classes 1st- 4th), lower secondary education (elementary school 2nd level, classes 5th - 9th or the lower stage of 8 year gymnasia- prima-quart). Upper secondary education is divided into grammar schools (gymnasia), vocational specialized schools, conservatories (artistic schools). After completion of basic school, students, typically at the age of 15, make their choice of secondary school. They can decide for VET at secondary specialized schools, for conservatory or for grammar school. Tertiary education is provided by universities.

Continuing education includes further professional education, not only to schools and educational institutions but also enterprises to workplaces, as well as civic education and interest. Education in schools belongs to a subsystem of formal education. Further education belongs to a subsystem of non-formal education. Adult education belongs to both subsystems education. Adult education in both subsystems is implemented as an organized activity directed to acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities required for the performance of specific activities, in both subsystems is carried out institutionally, and is structured according to the objectives, learning time and support for learning. This is done well in school along the main direction of education, but also in other educational institutions, enterprises, workplaces. In adult education in the current period a considerable degree of participating school system (subsystem formal education). In addition to its primary function while providing a second chance for those who for some reason could not get an education or skills during schooling.

The further education takes place in institutions of further education in the form of various short-term and long-term educational activities: seminars, training programs, courses, part-time studies in secondary schools and universities, complementary, extension, special, or retraining studies. At present, besides secondary schools and higher education institutions, nearly 300 various educational establishments provide the further education. The further education is accredited on the basis of the Accreditation Commission of the Ministry of Education for the Further Education.

The accreditation, as the state verification of the competence of an educational institution, is granted by the Ministry of Education on the basis of the approval by its Accreditation Commission. The

accreditation is conditional on the relevant professional educational orientation of the institution, project submitted by this institution, which must meet all requirements, appropriate educational documentation of the educational activity, qualified staffing and the appropriate material and technical facilities of this institution. The accreditation is granted for five years. Graduates from accredited further education courses are issued certificates by the respective educational institution, which are valid on the whole territory of Slovakia. The expenditures for the further education are covered partially by participants themselves and partially from the funds of employers, from special-purpose subsidies, from the budget of the Centre of Labor (only for accredited retraining education), from budgets of local self-administration, from contributions by foundations and from other sources.

Despite strong progress in reforming VET since 2008 in Slovakia two weak points have remained unaddressed and must be therefore permanently stressed:

- Low investment in education causes lower quality of equipment and low attractiveness of IVET for young professionals to become teachers or trainers. Thus, even the best shaped qualification documents are insufficient provided a quality training staff is not available.
- Low investment in VET research and labor market analyses hampers understanding of labor market needs. Data on transition of graduates into work and national employers' surveys are the most urgently missing tools to identify skills needs and skill gaps at workplace level [3].

3. Training of VET teachers

There are traditionally three categories of VET school teachers officially recognized by the education sector legislation: teachers of general subjects, teachers of vocational subjects and teachers of practical training. Teacher training is traditionally offered by universities. VET teachers, who are university graduates from other than teacher programs look for receiving full teacher qualification by completing complementary pedagogical studies aimed at acquiring of pedagogical competence. Act No. 317/2009 Coll. on pedagogical staff and professional staff introduced the credit system for standards driven continuing training. Accreditation of continuing training programs is carried out by Accreditation Council for Continuing Training of Pedagogical and Professional Staff established in November 2009 as an advisory body to MŠVVŠ. The law also specifies personal and qualification prerequisites concerning all categories of pedagogical and professional staff for four career

levels representing a career path: beginner, independent worker, worker with the first and the second attestation [6].

Teachers of vocational subjects are trained at various university faculties according to their field of study in teacher study programs. The course lasts for five years and leads to a state final examination. It is offered by: Faculties of Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, Physical Education and Sports, and Faculties of Education. Graduates of Technical Universities, Universities of Economics and the University of Agriculture who wish to teach the subjects of their field of study at secondary school level can follow pedagogical training in accredited Complementary pedagogical study program at the university. For example at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra since 1964, students from different faculties have been trained and acquired the qualification of "Teachers" which gives them the chance to progress in the field of agricultural education and training. This qualification also gives the opportunity of the students of SUA to advance in the area of pedagogy.

Complementary pedagogical studies for teachers of vocational subjects are organized according to the law. Applicants have to be MSc graduates (e.g. of agriculture, forestry, horticulture or similar specializations) and it is organized mostly as a 4 semester combined study finished by final exam and it is also possible to study concurrently with corresponding MSc course at university (parallel study). Graduates obtain pedagogical qualification for teaching respective vocational subjects at secondary schools. The study program of Complementary pedagogical studies is at least 200 hours and lasts maximum 36 months, it is divided to 3 modules: pedagogical-psychological, module of special didactics, educational practice and module in field specialization.

4. General country analysis

European countries have some similarities and differences as well. Each country has its own economic and political development, but many of them, as was said earlier, have the same actual problem – high level youth unemployment rate. This phenomenon is intensified especially after 2008. The basic pillar VET trainings is clearly reducing youth unemployment.

Entrepreneurship is option how to overcome the contemporary situation; it is a necessary condition for economic growth and development. “The current and future workforce is challenged to adapt to changing environments and become lifelong, self-regulated learners” [7]. Modern states converge in treating entrepreneurship as a key economic resource. But

entrepreneurship is especially important in the period of structural change and changing global division of labor. Entrepreneurship according to the current demands is important part of education and especially of vocational education. There is a common need to develop and update VET-teachers' qualifications and competences in the EU. There are many reasons, for example: globalization meaning that industries and services need new abilities to meet competition inside and outside the EU; the population in the EU is ageing; the changing vocational qualifications; the pool of unskilled or semi-skilled labor and their willingness to learn new skills are challenging.

In the ever-changing environment of vocational education and training (VET), an individual teacher can create a learning environment which can inhibit or promote the success of a student [8]. There are several researches that are aimed at VET teachers in the European Union, for example about "Education and Training 2020" work program [9]. Similar research was realised in Poland, or Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey [10], [11]. These partial results were achieved in the Work Package 2 of the Entangle Project. Entangle consortium was composed of seven partners from six European Union countries. The consortium consisted of training material and methodology developers, business training and support organisations, VET organisations, universities that train future VET teachers and the EU-wide network association of VET providers (Fundación Maimona - Spain, First Elements Euroconsultants Ltd. - Cyprus, EfVET -European Forum of technical and Vocational Education and Training, *European Leadership Institute* -ELIN-Lithuania, CETEI- under *Joan XXIII Foundation-Spain*, Faculty of Economics and Management - Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra- Slovakia)

Vocational education and training (VET) teachers and trainers have a key role in ensuring that workers in business and industry are upskilled and up-to-date in a rapidly changing industrial, economic and technological environment. It follows that the VET practitioners should themselves keep up to date, not only with industry developments but also with the pedagogical skills needed to embrace technology and adapt to new sites for learning [12].

5. Project results

The unsatisfactory situation in teaching technical subjects was an incentive to search for the innovative forms and methods of education and modernizing the educational process, and a stimulus to apply them into educational practice [13]. The aim of the project was to equip VET teachers to teach students the emerging skills of entrepreneurship with a focus on the (start-up) micro enterprise. VET students who

finish their studies are usually expected to continue their education elsewhere or start a job. Some former students however start up their own firms. Most teachers are unaware of this next step a student takes after graduation. Relations between teachers and the world of work should be improved, especially the relations between VET teachers and former VET students of (start-up) micro firms. By applying the results of this project in VET institutes:

- 1) teachers gain insight to competences that are required for the entrepreneurs of today and tomorrow,
- 2) teachers can involve entrepreneurs (former students) in the classroom and together address the students of today, and
- 3) teachers can better interest, support and educate VET students to pursue a career as an entrepreneur.

The ENTANGLE project partners have been conducted a research in their countries to determine the current situation of entrepreneurship teaching in vocational education. This included the collection of background information on education systems, curricula, and conducting interviews with both VET teachers and students to get fresh information right from the work floor.

A series of materials were then analyzed in depth to determine the best way to use them developing the ENTANGLE Training Materials. Those were the following: the VIPIA training tool - which is a training package for would-be entrepreneurs, the BDF Methodology, additional materials provided by partners and the conclusions of the brainstorming sessions. As a result, a map on how to use the materials has been developed using the basis of the BMC model which is a tool used to analyze business model or to plan a business model innovation [14]. In the next steps VET teachers in all partners' countries tested the course in order to provide partners with suggestions to make it usable in different contexts. A draft of the course for teachers was discussed during the project meetings. The main reference for that is the model, supported by ICT and pedagogical tools.

The consortium was able to monitor the situation of entrepreneurship practices and entrepreneurial teaching in the partner's countries. Qualitative research used a questionnaire broadly distributed in VET institutes and collected the opinions of teachers and students.

The survey results highlighted a great difference among (and sometimes even within) partners' countries. In particular as regards:

- Law facilities in order to create an enterprise
- Entrepreneurial approach

- Different levels of government help for developing business
- Influence of the education system in boosting the entrepreneurial spirit

However, lacks of the system and the wishes perceived by teachers and students had quite of lot of surprising similarities. The following quotations are an example of that: (T=teacher; S=student) [14].

Do you think that knowledge of the VET lectors is helpful for starting business?

T-ES1: Yes, but teachers need more training on this issue.

T-ES2: Yes, but only if the teacher has been directly related to business creation, or if he/she has worked in a company.

T-LT1: Yes, but most of schools lack human resources thus entrepreneurship must be delivered by teachers who are not active in this field.

S-LT2: Yes, but teachers who teach entrepreneurship usually have never had a business themselves

S-CY1: Teachers certainly contribute to the start –up of an enterprise because their knowledge and this experience help a lot.

T-SK1: Yes, but there is lack of entrepreneurship education contained in our curriculum during the study.

Sometimes teachers think instead that the responsibility is more on students:

T-ES3: Yes, we transmit them the knowledge. But students do not have either the maturity or the intention necessary to start a business.

Entrepreneurship is often not offered as part of the VET curricula, but even when it is, there's not enough practical orientation to the labor market.

A very positive result for the ENTANGLE consortium is represented by many proposals done by teachers, which are in the direction of the project outcomes and objectives.

T-ES6: It is necessary to introduce units related with entrepreneurship in the training programs.

T-ES3: It is necessary to train VET teachers in entrepreneurship, especially to those teachers from areas that are not directly related to the business world.

T-ES4: It is necessary to increase the hours devoted to training entrepreneurship, so this way in the near

future entrepreneurial culture would be considered as an important part of education.

T-LT3: Entrepreneurship being the secondary occupation means no time for making engaging classes, a comprehensive portal with tips & tricks would help a lot.

T-NL1: It would be great to have materials that lead up to constructing a true practical final result, like a business model.

In general, teachers would like to acquire the knowledge about specific content about business models, ICT tools and pedagogy; instead students' expectations are to improve soft skills and to receive more concrete ideas.

Qualitative Analyses - VET teachers in Slovakia – results from questionnaires:

We were finding several categories of the qualitative research and selected the following theoretical groups: valuation of VET study, number of lessons, range of the practical training, study program, quality of VET lectors, socio-economic situation in country, added value of VET study.

1. valuation of VET study:

The documents that the student obtains when finishing the entrepreneurial course, would be the actual diploma as it is integrated in the education system (for those courses that have entrepreneurial courses in their education) or students gain Certificate after completing the entrepreneurship education.

2. number of lessons:

Amount of contact lesson really varies: from 4 till 90. It is up to the subject and the study program.

3. range of the practical training:

The answers to this question vary a lot between the teachers, because it depends on each subject. Ratio between theoretical and practical lessons is the following: 70:30.

4. study program:

The answer to this question depends on the subject that each teacher imparts. Type of study program is the following: pedagogy, psychology, educational technologies, engineering pedagogy, Course consisting of the Elements of Management, Company Administration, Accountancy, Calculations and Costs and Financial Management.

5. quality of VET lectors:

Knowledge of VET lectors is contributive for starting business (for example theoretical information, experiences, evaluating of business plans, etc.). Students receive theoretical information for business and advices for praxis. Teachers give students their experiences etc. Creating, discussing and evaluating of own business plan is contributive for starting business. Practice teacher can point out problems practically.

6. socio-economic situation in the country:

Mentions the risk of failure and its legal and social consequences in the context of entrepreneurship in Slovakia:- the risk of failure is high and the legal and economic consequences are proportionate to the risk. The situation is getting worse because of the economic crisis. It is possible to start again (by failure), the entrepreneur has always chance for success. The risk of failure is here nowadays, but it is possible to start again and the chance for success is always present. Current climate for start-up according to VET Lectures: Here is a possibility for entrepreneurship, but the situation is getting worse. The worsening of conditions for doing business, the low index of the business environment, the persistent economic crisis, insufficient activity of the Government, not addressed barriers to business, low clarity and stability legislation, low aid from country to business.

7. added value of VET study:

Yes, knowledge of the VET lectors is contributive for starting business (for example theoretical information, experiences, evaluating of business plans, etc.). Students receive theoretical information for business and advices for praxis. Teachers give students their experiences etc. Creating, discussing and evaluating of own business plan is contributive for starting business. Practice teacher can point out problems practically.

Qualitative Analyses - VET students in Slovakia – results from questionnaires:

We found several categories of the qualitative research and selected the following theoretical groups: motivation of the attending, outputs of VET study, expectation of VET study, satisfaction with the study program.

1. motivation of the attending:

That study will be contributive for them, they don't have time for university study, if he or she was long time unemployed, so decided to do something or they want to study something because didn't get to

go to the university. Most of the students chose their education based on the personal interest, the broad subjects that were offered, the practical approach that the VET institution offers and because some subjects, were only offered by a specific VET institution. The entrepreneurial courses are actually part of the overall study and compulsory. Therefore, the students attend the course.

2. outputs of VET study:

Some students plan to begin start-up, but are afraid whether their business idea will be fruitful and will be successful.

3. expectation of VET study:

They don't know what they can expect from the VET study, it's up to the age of the respondents. Older people know that they need information, younger people kill time at the course.

4. satisfaction with the study program:

VET students have mentioned that VET lectors have only theoretical knowledge, not practical, so that's a factor which causes that VET lectors aren't contributive for starting business.

On the other hand VET students are satisfied with the level of course.

6. Conclusion

Summary for VET teacher: "Learning through active participation and engagement in education and workplace settings is a prerequisite for effective professional competence development through Vocational Education and Training (VET). Equally important is that learning from multiple sites and sources needs to be purposefully connected and integrated to construct meaningful knowledge and understandings" [15]. In most countries, students attend VET courses to get certified. For example, the results of researches in Australia showed that "trainers were identified as having difficulties with interpretation, implementation and assessment of the competencies" [16]. Some countries do not give a certificate. In most countries, programs offer VET courses on entrepreneurship, but must also provide what the labor market is asking for, that such courses are technical orientation. The level and quality of VET teachers is mean and basically sufficient. Students feel that they lack practical business experience. Can anyone advise them on how to start a business that had never done so. This is a key question.

On the other hand, echoed is the opinion that the legal theorist follows more rules, laws and the possibility to get the money to start a business, so it is actually beneficial to the student. VET teachers are generally helpful, but too theoretical. Socio-economic situation is almost identical in all partner

countries. After the crisis began in 2008, a similar situation occurs; unemployment is increasing [17].

Summary for VET student: Students are attending VET courses for various reasons. For example, in Spain there are sent by their family. Getting the course is easier than getting into college. In the Netherlands are considering the course to be very practical. Students are satisfied with the programs and many of them would also like to start a business. Problem is that they do not know in what way they would like to do business. At this point, it is necessary to reflect on the justification study to start a business. Potential student should know what he wanted to do; a VET institution would have only had to show the way how to do it. It should not just be kill time studying. Their expectations are reasonable and sometimes a bit exaggerated. Improve your softskills, getting business ideas and making money [17].

To conclude the results we can say that there are many similarities between partner countries of the project despite there are also some differences. But the common aim is to improve quality of vocational education for the future social and economic prosperity of the countries. It is also crucial to promote transversal skills to help people adapt to new realities in the workplace and prepare them for newly emerging occupations. Opportunities to complement, update and upgrade skills which improve people's chances in life and help ensure a skilled labor force [5].

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