

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN ROMANIAN SMES

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ABSTRACT: In this research I would like to stress that not only the society and the government has to support the vocational Education. Romanian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) benefit from vocational training and thereby increase considerably their competitiveness in the global economy, so the Romanian economy must partially finance the vocational education. To improve education in Europe and especially in Romania and to increase the number of internships for future employees in the economy, the benefits of practice-oriented trained skilled workers in industry need to be more discussed. The message to the economy of the future should be: Romanian SMEs benefit from vocational training and thereby increase considerably their competitiveness in the global economy. Therefore, in addition to the vocational schools, SMEs and the trades are also responsible for the training of technicians and skilled workers.

KEYWORDS: SMEs, vocational learning, practice-oriented education, skilled workers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to demographic changes in almost all European countries (the reduction of the European population and an increase of the world population), the work of all young people will be needed in the future. Therefore it is necessary to remedy weaknesses of the European and Romanian educational system. The aim to reduce the unemployment of skilled workers, lifelong learning should be complemented by practical and theoretical training opportunities. Only through these advanced measures can Europe maintain and improve its prosperity and competitiveness in the global economy.

2. CONTENT

As in several European countries, in Romania the training is conducted in vocational schools. Because of the independent school-based training, the risk of divergence between the objectives of learning at school and the expectations of industry and commerce exists in these countries. The transition between the school system and the labour market is thus more difficult. This social problem has been recognized in recent years and has been supplemented in some professional fields through new qualification requirements. Despite these changes, a direct transition for a skilled worker from the school into the work environment is possible only with difficulty.

After attending secondary education I and passing the national examination, the pupils can attend an art and vocational school, the supplementary year and the technical secondary education II (Licee Tehnologice). "The end is here, too, the baccalaureate, in parallel, the graduate acquires the vocational completion of level 3 of the Romanian professional qualifications framework. The general educational content of the technical secondary education are broadly in line with those of the academic branch. The technical training is divided into three areas: natural resources, services, and technical occupations. In each of these three areas, different professional qualifying degrees are acquired" [4]. After the last school reform, Romanian young people could complete a two-year training at an arts and vocational school (Școli de arte și meserii). The graduates can acquire the skills of level 1. This is followed by the "Supplementary year" with the completion of the qualifying stage 2. These two training phases take over three years. With this basic vocational training, the graduates can attend the technical secondary education II level (two-year course) and get a dual qualification - a professional qualification and a university entrance qualification, and the

qualification level 3 [4]. The number of vocational qualifications changed very often in recent years, because of the great dissatisfaction of the labour market, new learning content and learning objectives for new careers are being developed in the vocational school.

Improving the transition from school to vocational training. Already 500 years BC, Confucius realized: "Tell me, and I will forget, Show me, and I may remember, involve me and I will understand." The pedagogue Georg Kerschensteiner determined, approximately 2400 years later, that: education is what is left, when everything learned is forgotten. In the knowledge-based society of the 21 Century, where the educational content and professional requirements consistently convert and flexible "just-in-time" learning is becoming more and more a requirement for a successful career, application of specific integration and learning techniques such as self-directed learning are of greater and greater importance in educational concepts. That is why our children and young people need more guidance to self-directed learning, from kindergarten to university. If children at a young age already become "small researchers", then it is more likely that they will later include and practice self-directed learning more easily and more successfully. For teaching in schools that means that the learning process based on field trips, exploration, and action in practice, but especially on longer guided internship is required. Excursions and exploration in practice can be carried out by means of school or university events. A longer guided internship must be prepared and coordinated with the help of industrial and business enterprises. The content of the internship work can be prepared at school. The pupils will then recognize more clearly the relationship between educational content and the competencies required in industry. A considerable number of representatives of industry, schools and the public sector mention in the survey: Longer-term internships or even vocational training promote and improve the transition from school to the professional field. These interesting and important considerations for vocational training are realized in only a few communities in Germany.

The process of career guidance can be performed in several steps: In the first stage the pupil should recognize his/her weaknesses, but above all recognize his skills through diagnosis and the vocational aptitude test. In the directly adjoining one-to-one counselling, the importance of the profession in one's life should be shown also to the less motivated pupils. In individual counselling both the low and the well-developed skills will be discussed and after these results the pupil will get proposals for various internships or apprenticeships. The teachers should not advice, but experts from vocational schools, industry and the community could perform individual counselling. It is likely that the pupils will be more motivated by external diagnosis and individual counselling and through internships they will identify the link between theory and practice. Part of this consultation process would also be advisable for Romanian students. It may be argued that the costs of such an additional external consulting team are too high. Against this objection one must consider, however, those only well-trained and highly motivated employees have in the future a chance on the labour market. Unemployment among young people in Europe is in each country three times higher than the overall unemployment rate. This abuse can be, at least partly, solved by means of an improved consultation process and a closer integration between theory and practice. This raises the question: How can the vocational training in Germany and in Romania be improved? It is of course important to educate through dual training also educational material, which is useful in other neighboring professions (e.g., industrial mechanics and mechatronics). That is why changing essential parts of the dual vocational training encounters incomprehension. Past experiences show clearly that knowledge in a globalized world is not only constantly increasing; it is also an ongoing process of field specialization. In this context we refer to the key concept of "lifelong learning", by which is understood in principle the need for continuous training. Lifelong learning is important firstly because it is the basis of innovation, on which the economic performance of many European countries depends. Secondly, demographic changes increase the qualification pressure on the older generations and industry. In the coming decades the relationship between generations, both working and unemployed, will change. The majority of the workers will be on average older than today

and the reduced number of workers must be better trained to be able to successfully face these shifts, including global changes in the world of work. Thus, acquired knowledge does not suffice for a whole working life. After a course of studies knowledge must be continuously renewed, depending on professional requirements. The increased qualification pressure leads to the situation in which one needs to enhance knowledge directly after the dual training, either independently or through further education. That means, students nowadays must not only learn fundamental and technical knowledge, but also deal with methods of self-directed and individual learning. Especially in the current post-industrial phase the sector of professional training has a special significance. Lifelong learning in adult education and training takes place at various learning venues and has become in many areas a natural part of the knowledge society. Lifelong learning and thus the acquisition of specialist skills is becoming more and more necessary. Decreasing knowledge - the creeping de-skilling of the graduates of the dual system - can be stopped in the long-term only by continuous learning, thus bringing indispensable knowledge resources to the labour market, particularly for skilled experts.

3. CONCLUSION

The proposals to change the teaching and the inclusion of occupational learning content can only be achieved through close cooperation and coordination arrangements between vocational education and industry. Therefore, in future, the contacts between vocational school teachers and managers of industry in Germany, but mainly in Romania, have to be strengthened. Only a few Romanian companies feel responsible for vocational education. There is no dual vocational education as in Germany and professional qualification enjoys little or no recognition. The total numbers of students in Germany and Romania show very clearly the trend that an increasing number of young people in Romania want to complete their education at universities. On the other hand young people in Germany choose both university study and dual vocational education. In 2008 in Romania, 4.78% of the total population studied at university (907.353 out of 19 million Romanians), but in Germany only 2.34% (1.941.763 out of 82 million Germans) [3]. For some societies in Europe it is important to change the wrong attitude that "Only the looser works in handicraft business or industry production". The typical Romanian "apprentice" (vocational students) spends almost 90% of the training period in vocational schools. Work placements for vocational students are scarcely offered by industry, trades or crafts. "The trainees often lack the opportunity to gain practical experience during their training in small and medium businesses. As an alternative to experience in enterprises some schools have "founded training firms where trainees learn" [1]. A strong link between vocational teaching and professional practice is necessary and an introduction of practical modules is deemed essential. Consequently it seems advisable the vocational schools in Romania should plan more practice shares in companies, in industry or trades and should create correspondingly more space for such events in the curriculum. There are several ways to promote the relevance of practice. In some countries such as Germany and Austria young people can complete internships over weeks or three to four years of dual professional education or a bachelor's degree with dual vocational education in the economy. Long-term increased integration of these models of education for skilled workers within the training program in vocational schools and in the workplace would be a promising key to improving vocational education. During the Romanian training period companies could offer interesting practice-oriented work projects to the "trainees" in various types of production. At this point the companies in Romania could gradually extend the internship periods of one month to one year and work closely with the vocational school. The teenager would be familiar then with the latest technological equipment and modern working practices in industry and develop important professional skills and then be able to perfect with the teachers at the vocational school theoretical knowledge and general education learning goals. The young person would best prepare himself by this method for his future professional life and the companies in industry and the trades could employ highly skilled workers in production and administration. It is necessary to discuss the benefits of practice-oriented

trained employees for industry, for trade and for the craft intensively. The appeal to the young people of Europe must be: "You will need for your future life a qualified and practical education and our European society needs your work." Therefore it is necessary to eliminate two potential weaknesses of the European VET (vocational training system) system. To reduce the unemployment of skilled workers, on the one hand, the transition between education and work must be improved through professional consultation and guided internships and on the other hand lifelong learning must be supplemented through continuing education courses. Only by closely linking the operational practice and theoretical training can Europe maintain and improve prosperity and competitiveness in the global economy. "The initiative for the establishment and implementation of vocational (dual) education is a feasible solution, whose first models should be extended more widely to achieve national coverage" in Romania [2]. The message to the economy of the future should be: Romanian SMEs benefit from vocational training and thereby increase considerably their competitiveness in the global economy, so the Romanian economy must partially finance the vocational education. The significant aspect that I would like to stress is that not only the society and the government has to support the vocational Education. Therefore, in addition to the vocational schools, SMEs and the trades are also responsible for the training of technicians and skilled workers.

4. REFERENCES

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