

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

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Received: May 4, 2000

Abstract

This paper analyzes in detail the improving of the VET system in Hungary in the 1990's and also introduce the changes in the VET System in the end of the 1990's. The paper examines the teacher training system correlation with the VET reforms. This paper also shows the new problems of the VET system.

Keywords: VET system, education, curriculum.

1. Introduction

From 1950, i.e. the spread of Europe's east-block ideology till the change of order of society recently the Hungarian VET system can be characterized in a very special way containing many contradictions of the desired and undesired features. Ideological and professional aspects had been mixed very frequently. According to the guidelines of the politic the vocational training was identical to the education of the so called 'working class'. In this period the obligatory education lasted for 8 years, which means that primary school had to be completed unconditionally by everybody. There were vocational schools for three years, following the 8 years primary schools providing skill qualification without matriculation.

In 1961 the earlier technical schools (i.e. technikum) had been changed into vocational secondary schools copied the Russian system. These vocational secondary schools provided both matriculation and vocational qualification.

This vocational training, however, was not closely related to the demands of the national economy and industry. Some of these schools had occasional relation with industry but many of them not. We can say this relation was occasional. The situation has even been worsened, because the Hungarian industrial technologies were very much underdeveloped referring to the state-of-the-art high-tech.

80% of the young generation of 16 has received qualification in this kind of educational system.

Only a minority of the young people (20%) completed grammar schools (gymnasium)

This type of system in Hungary was considered to be on an appropriate level. The weak point of the Hungarian educational system was definitely the vocational education.

2. Improving the VET System in Hungary in the 1990s

2.1. Continuously Changing VET System from the Beginning of the 1990s

After the political changes in the first period of the 1990s one of the primary goals of the education was to prevent the vocational training against downfall. Apart from the short-term crisis management legal, financial and organizational conditions were created for providing the efficient operation of market economy with qualified labour. Parallel with the crisis management responding to the new conditions of vocational training, the reforms of the content and methods of practical training have begun within the framework of various pilot projects. A new training model integrating, as opposed to previous practice, general and vocational skills to meet user demand and improve the employment chances of school leavers by introducing post GCSE (General Certificate for Secondary Education), specialization was launched on World Bank credit and the contribution of the European Union's PHARE program¹ with the active participation of several vocational schools.

The law of public education (1993 LXXIX) introduces the obligatory education for 10 years based on the National Core Curriculum (NCC). The vocational training is to start only at the age of 16 after the completion the obligatory 10 classes. The vocational educational schools start at the age of 14 after finishing 8 classes. The first two classes provide general education (e.g. mathematics, literature, history, grammar etc.) and a preparation for the would-be vocational education. The real vocational education takes usually only two years from the age of 16 to 18.

There are some cases, when it takes 3 years.

In order to have a clear picture the educational career choices in Hungary are summarized as a table:

Age 3: Kindergarten

Age 6: Primary school

Age 10: Should he/she apply to enter to an 8 year grammar school

Age 12: Should he/she enter to a 6 year grammar school

¹Phare is an acronym standing for 'Poland and Hungary: Action for the Restructuring of the Economy'. Phare is a programme established in 1989 by the European Union to assist Poland and Hungary with the changes taking place in their countries. Later on, however, the programme has been extended and now covers 13 partner countries in central and eastern Europe. The Phare Programme is currently the main channel for the European Union's financial and technical cooperation with these countries.

Age 14: Should he/she go to a 4 year grammar school, secondary vocational school, apprenticeship school, or vocational school, which provides the last two years the National Core Curriculum.

Age 16: End of the compulsory education. He/she can take the basic education examination and receive the General Education Certificate (GEC), attest to completion of the NCC, or he can stay at school or go to another school (in the latter case the GEC is a basic requirement and any of the forms of training below can be chosen): grammar school (prepares for higher education, provides school leaving certificate) or secondary vocational schools (along with the GCSE, give basic professional education within an occupational family) or apprenticeship school (offering vocational training of a lower level, but enabling getting a job), or vocational school (which prepares for a lower level of vocational qualification).

Age 18: He/she has one of the following options:

- grammar school leaving certificate: he/she can enter to a higher education, or secondary vocational schools, or start a course offering a qualification required for a job, or can start an accredited higher education course.
- secondary vocational school leaving certificate: he/she may enter higher education, can start a course providing special training in the sector he/she was awarded or can participate in accredited higher vocational training, or can take a simple course to obtain a qualification necessary to obtain a job.

Since 1990 the total supervision of the VET has been belonging to the recreated Ministry of Labour. In the beginning of the 90's there was an urgent need of the quick reorganization of the VET. *The Employment Act adopted in 1991* clearly determines the assistance to be provided unemployed school-leavers and new graduates in order to make business. *The 1993 Vocational Training Act* determines the National Vocational Qualification Register (NVQR), the new examination rules and creates the Institution of Students Contract. In the activities of the Ministry of Labour priority has been given to the development of the Hungarian VET system, because the development of the market economy requires labour of highly trained staff. As a consequence of the earlier failed plans of the VET system, 40% of the total earning population was insufficiently or unskilled and therefore it is an enormous burden for the Hungarian economy.

2.2. Changes in the VET System in the End of the 1990s

The long-term VET development program was produced at the end of 1995 and approved by the Government in *Resolution 1996* sets strategic objectives for the next decade.

The program identifies the main strategic aims. The Hungarian vocational training will have to shape up several challenges in the long term. The rationalization of these challenges is planned in the future, but not yet determined.

- the first challenge is the demand of society to make available training opportunities to school leavers (and especially younger drop-outs from the education system) which will furnish them with a chance to find employment
- the second challenge, which makes the first particularly difficult, derives from the fact that the registered demand for labour is only some 5–6 percent of those looking for work
- the third is the challenge of the European integration, especially the technical harmonization of educational system of the similarly developed countries as Hungary, such as considering the structure of professions and VET teaching materials.

One pre-condition of the free flow of labour is the mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates. Hungary is making great strides along the path to accession through reforms of VET system consistent with EU trend.

In the area of mutual recognition of certificates and degrees, a government resolution defines 19 different vocational training qualifications recognized mutually by Austria and Hungary. In the area of health care, curriculum development and transfer is already set on mutually agreed norms.

The VET requirements set into the National Vocational Qualification Register, and the prescribed curriculum, have been based on European practices.

Since 1997 some changes have happened in the organization of the Hungarian educational system, regarding the new ministerial structure raised after the new parliament election of Hungary in 1998. The former Ministry of Labour does not exist any more, so all the tasks in connection with the vocational training became the ones of the Ministry of Education. Naturally, these changes gave some new aspects of the education but the main strategies didn't change.

After the economic transition there were a number of serious problems with the inherited education and training system. Secondary level vocational training was provided in too specialized form and too early (age 14). Specialized vocational education and training provided detailed practical instruction for high specific occupations but little theoretical instruction in the underlying scientific and quantitative principles. The graduates of these programs were productive only within the confines of these narrow job specialization and they were not equipped to adapt to changes in the evolving market economy. Moreover training relied heavily upon on-site practical experience in enterprises. Under the market pressures of the transition, many of these enterprises have closed or lost their capacity to provide such training. Finally, the training programs were almost exclusively pre-service and concentrated in industrial and agricultural specialization.

Recognizing the limitations of its prior programs of vocational education and training, Hungary moved early in the transition to make its education system more flexible. The Ministry of Labour or as it was described above now the Ministry of

Education, implemented the most extensive reform of vocational education undertaken in any of the transition countries; designed to make the system more flexible, more efficient and more responsive to student demand and evolving labour market needs.

The main features of the reform are:

- Major decentralization of responsibility for management training, including the involvement of employers and trade unions in the management of vocational training.
- Extension of general education by two years (grades 9 and 10) prior to the start of vocational education.
- Development of vocational orientation in the form of 13 broad job families in place of well over 100 separate occupational specialization previously offered.
- Development of career counseling for students to inform them of employment prospects and associated training opportunities in alternative occupations.
- Development of post secondary training including a network of Regional Human Resource Development Centers, to update skills, to upgrade skills, and to support a move from one occupation to another.

The objective of these reforms is to extend and improve general education in basic quantitative, scientific and problem solving skills for all young people while still providing vocational orientation prior to post secondary specialized vocational training. Taken together these changes are developing a more cost effective education and training system which is more adaptable to the skilled manpower needs of an evolving economy, and more consistent with education and training systems in the OECD countries. Implementation of these reforms is being supported by EU Phare and by the previous Human Resource Development Project.

2.3. The Teacher Training System Correlation with the VET Reforms

However, the main characters of the Hungarian VET system has already changed since there is already a post-sixteen vocational education, the main characters of the teacher training system for VET is very similar to the former one.

There are two levels of training for vocational teachers:

Prospective teachers learn the methods and the pedagogy of teaching for theoretical and practical vocational subjects at universities.

Prospective teachers learn to teach only practical vocational subjects only at colleges.

One of the best organized teacher training systems for VET is the technical teacher training: In technical teacher training the student is required to obtain an engineering diploma first in order to receive a university-level teaching diploma, and after this the student teacher must undergo a post-graduate engineering teaching course to gain his/her certificate as an *engineer teacher*.

Those engineers were graduated in college level (B.Sc.) and want to be teachers have to undergo a college level post-graduate teaching course to gain a certificate as a *technical teacher*.

Skilled workers with a school leaving certificate and working experience can gain a teachers' skills diploma through a three-year training course, after that they can undertake vocational practical teaching as a *technical trainer*.

In health vocational training there is no university level training for teachers of specialized theory despite its being compulsory under *the General Educational Act*.

Any other teacher training is specified by the General Educational Act. The teachers shall take part in further training at least once in every seven year. Teachers do not have to take part in further training in seven years after passing a professional educators' examination or other examination prescribed by law. (After the tenth year following award of the qualification for the job and the issue of the certificate of professional qualification, it is a condition of employment in a teaching position that the professional educators' examination should be taken in a relevant further training course at a college level.). The Ministry of Culture and Education and the National Institute of Vocational Education provide numerous further training courses for teachers. However, there is still a big lack in the organizational work for professional teacher training with special attention for the changed post sixteenth VET system in Hungary.

3. New Age New Problems of the VET System, Post-16 Strategies

The 3rd thousand years are such *challenges* for the economy and the vocational education, for the development of the vocational education that should play a significant role in the reform process. The answers of vocational education to the challenges have an effect on the economical development, the improvement of the quality of the life, the personal and social rising. Such kind of challenges are for example:

- the want of capital and the low added value will be continuously characteristic in the economy,
- the regional organization of the manpower market and the economy will increase,
- due to the application of the information technology the borders among the branches will fade, new spheres will appear,
- realization of the integration between general and vocational education
- reception of the new technologies makes more and more difficulties, the education and vocational education will have significant role
- it is harder to make a forecast about the change of the spheres and qualifications
- international cooperation has been needed for the free exchange of the manpower

- development of new forms of the international cooperation is necessary for sharing of the intellectual products,
- the education will be more and more output orientated, the integration of vocational education with economy and manpower market will get stronger,
- demand of regional and local education will increase and the decentralization will prevail.

So that the modernization of the education will be carried out in a general way improving the chances and positions of young and adult people at the manpower market and the developing of capacity of self accommodation and innovation demanded at the course of the *European integration*, the government's program sets as an aim for the standardized educational politics which means the harmonization of the modernization of its directive.

3.1. Developing the VET System in Hungary in the Future

The government's program regards the development of manpower the investment of the future from social and economical point of view. Education of manpower and its development that may creatively accommodate to changeable economical circumstances and the circumstances of the manpower market – in vocational, educational system connecting to public and higher education's institutes and the organizations that constitute manpower market – can be realized on the basic of comprehensive man power developing's strategy to be formed.

Elements of the developing strategy:

- increasing of the vocational education's effectiveness, (international programs, supports, strengthening of the bilateral connections), increasing of rate of the people reaching vocational education
- development of the vocational infrastructure, development of the institution's network of the disadvantaged people (in an integrated way)
- modernization of vocational education system, to make the vocational skill competitive, strengthening of school basics, reinforcing the role of the enterprise in the specialization (National Vocational Qualification Register!)
- development of the quality assuring system
- guarantee of the continuous further education of the adults
- developing of the choice of profession system

For the sake of the above mentioned aims and the structural planning and forming the financial frames of the assistance to be given through the European Union in the future, we take the initiative in modifying the law about the contribution to the vocational education and the assistance of developing the vocational education.

In course of this the restoration of the independence of the vocational, educational funds assuring the primer financial means of the national human power

source's development will be placed on the agenda. In addition the more significant independence in decision of the economical organizations can be realized which can reach even the one third of the inpayments while the degree of the inpaying obligation has been unchanged.

The government's program deals extended more than ever with the case of the education and included with the case of the vocational and higher education serving the acquiring of the qualification needed for pursuing a certain sphere, profession or activity.

The development of the human power sources is strategically question as balanced economical and social development can be founded and carried out only with the comprehensive modernization of education.

Education is the most effective investment in the future, therefore even on the field of the vocational education must be prevailed the strategy that wants to assure the obtaining of the first qualification by the means of state guarantees and the quality control for the widest social circle.

The governments program sets as an aim the standardized educational politics, the harmonization of the public, vocational and higher education, the modernization of the directive of the education which can assure educational course that are easier to survey, to penetrate, to plan as today, helping to shape a structure of expenses more effective for the economy, the individual and the society as well.

After the Ministry of Education had been founded the control of the whole educational system has gone under one portfolio herewith became possible the co-operation of the public, vocational and higher education closer than ever. September of 1998 brought overall changes in all institutions of the vocational education. Changes have ensued in the organization of the public and vocational education and in the instructed professions and structure, conditions of starting to instruct a profession. Stressed aim that everybody should take part in the school system's education at least until the age of 18th or before obtaining the first qualification. They should strive for the development of the traditional educational forms and in the last years involved new ones .

Should be involved and kept in the education even people belonging to the so called peripheral groups the disadvantaged, accumulatedly disadvantaged youth. In the interest of this a disadvantaged system of means should be created involving the closing up included the finishing of the lower education and the carrier orientation as well.

For the peripheral groups it is not necessary to accomplish a new, second institute's system but they should strive for the integration of the groups according to the being norms into the vocational education to assure its equivalence obtained by them.

They should take stronger the institute of social cooperation with the actors of economical life, the employers, the employee, the financial and vocational chambers and last but not least the represents of the vocational schools improving the cooperation, putting concretely the division of labour in choosing vocational directions and in the determining of essence's elements.

3.2. Challenges for the VET System in Hungary

We mean that the standardizing vocational policy makes more effective the state's role, it is able to enforce consistently the government's aims. It renders possible to create all of the sources and their effective using up that are necessary for the creative accommodation to the modernization of the man power's personal and material conditions, and suitable for the market's challenges.

The closer connection to the educational system, and especially to the higher education improves the prestige increasing of the vocational education and its society's appreciation. In public education system's respect it is important that in the course before the vocational education in the schools realizing skill-transfer would be optimized from content's point of view. They should strive such standardized four levels quality control system's forming that assures to pass through among different school types and levels and assures the effectiveness of the education and at the same time contributes to the unfastening of the tensions in schools. Should be urge the vocational schools if they apply the carrier orientation's and professional preparing choices.

They should help fast developing of the post-secondary education after the final examination with simplifying the present multipoled accreditive system. Should be assure equivalent choices – in this educational form that is supported and admitted by state – for the higher institutes and the secondary schools and make possible privat and public education's organizations to come into this educational form by certain conditions. Should be shape independent, accreditive institute of the school system education after final examination assuring social partner's taking part and expressing the demand of manpower market and making unambiguous the financing of this educational form.

The international *integration*, the aim to *come into European Union* determines the expectations more and more in the education.

Our coming into European Union claims to reform of the national professional structure.

In the European integration respect the demand is first of all the mutual securing recognition and passing through of the scholar and special qualifications. Should be made stronger the professional groups and the modularly building system in the course of the rationalizing tasks of the NVQR and should be strive to set to the European norms of NVQR.

To realize some of the above mentioned aims the financial system should be modernized, the priorities determined, looking after the most important and urgent tasks and assign the main directions of the planning changes.

This is the reason that the VET reform process had to speed up and had to be taken into consideration:

- forms of training that have been proved successful in the EU since its foundation
- the aims of the single European labour market, which is just taking shape for the next century

- the specialities of the Hungarian VET system considering its structure, staff and infrastructure, characteristics of the education system

The skills level of the labour force must be made competitive. This is in the interest of both individuals and the economy as a whole. The reform of VET must be approached from two perspectives: *accession to EU* and national economical demands.

The special reasons are as follows:

1. Adjusting the VET system in line with the changing of socio-economic system and the demands of the labour market.
2. The closure of privatization of large state enterprises led to the disappearance of practical training. The new small- and middle-size economy were incapable of filling in the gap, nor did they desire to do it. The VET policy responded by increasing the capacity of school workshops, so the students were able to complete their compulsory practical training within schools.
3. The proportion of unemployed among school leavers is very high. However, the Ministry of Labour has held training programs for them, this has not solved the problem. Since the middle of the 90's companies recruiting school leavers receive state assistance to top of their salaries, so the young people can gain practical experience. This solution seems promising, and is increasingly being used.

The development of the *European* VET system is one of the key challenges to the Hungarian system. The internal structure must allocate greater priority to secondary schools with vocational training options and facilities, and curriculum development programs must be started upon as a part of long-term development program.

The changes mean a long process: developing the requirements, outlining the curricula, implementing and adjusting the results will take several years to be completed.

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