Addressing Key Challenges in Vocational Education and Training (VET) In Albania, Ensuring Systematic Change, Competence Development, and Stakeholder Empowerment

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Abstract: The achievement of economic growth is the goal and objective of every country and it is possible only through the efforts of different educational institutions, providers, and beneficiaries, to educate and train experts in different sectors, based on the principle of lifelong learning. This paper aims to analyze the needs of employees to develop and improve hard and soft skills, providing the challenges of vocational education and to adopt the changes in the labor market, for both employees and employers. The data collected from Vehicle Services, Hotel and Tourism, Construction, and Logistics dialogue roundtables provide recommendations for providers and businesses in every job aspect. The analysis of the data resulted in the following: it is necessary to establish continuous contacts with public institutions which offer professional development courses for employees, both before and during employment, as for them the cost of training the employees is a continuous process.

1. INTRODUCTION

When employers intend to recruit new staff to join their company, they already know what they want, and focus on finding someone who has the skills to do the job well and can adapt quickly to the work environment. Businesses spend a significant amount of money trying to onboard new employees, as they must go through a training process and anticipate that there will be a learning curve for the employee on a new job (Jens-Henning, 2020).

This paper came as a necessity due to the lack of a study in the field of vocational education in Albania and the need to develop the hard and soft skills of employees in different technology sectors. The aim of the paper focuses on addressing the challenges of vocational education and training and also supporting the providers of this field. The goal of the study is to ensure systematic changes in vocational education due to the changes and needs of the labor market, but also to ensure the development of competence of the employees. For example, Hurrell (2009) defines soft skills as ‘involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts’. CEDEFOP (2006) explains that soft skills are context-dependent and attained from abstract and implied knowledge with experience and one’s reflection.

To collect the necessary data, local dialogue roundtables were set up, which brought providers together with the private sector and other stakeholders. The focus of these roundtables was to increase awareness and information exchange at the country level between education and training providers and companies, to facilitate coordination and partnership between providers and employers to reduce the gap between education and training and the world of work, to promote the development of skills required by the labor market through a participatory and comprehensive needs

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assessment process and to facilitate and increase the involvement of companies in both identifying skills and also providing new skills (Republic of Albania – Council of Ministers, 2022).

There were 4 (four) Local Skills Development Dialogue Roundtables organized, and each meeting was specifically based on different fields of expertise, as the roundtable dialogue of Vehicle Services, Hotel and Tourism, Construction, and Logistics. The actors participating in these roundtables were providers like public and non-public vocational schools, faculties in the university that offer vocational education, and vocational training centers. On the other hand, the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ), the Regional Employment Office (REO), the Regional Education Directorate (RED), the Industry Associations and Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Development Agency and the Directorate of Economic Development in the municipality of Elbasan, even businesses were invited to participate in these roundtables. Even though these institutions were highly interested to participate in these roundtables, not all of them were able to participate, so the roundtables were represented only by a few of them.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the paper is focused on a mixture of qualitative and analytical research. It focuses on obtaining data through communication with interested parties, in different business sectors. The meetings organized highlighted the needs of the employees working in vocational professions and the needs of the employers as well. At the end of the paper are outlined some recommendations for businesses and employers. These data were collected from a project in collaboration with Swisscontact in 2020 titled "Skills for Work". There were 4 (four) Local Skills Development Dialogue Roundtables organized, and each meeting was specifically based on the sector and the field of expertise.

The first roundtable dialogue was held with the sector of "Vehicle Services", on 03.11.2020. In this meeting participated representatives of the main public providers such as: "Ali Myftiu" Vocational High School, the Regional Directorate of Public Vocational Training Elbasan, and the University of Elbasan "A. Xhuvani". The meeting was also attended by other representatives of state institutions such as the director of the Elbasan Regional Employment Office.

The second-round table of dialogue with the sector "Hotel and Tourism" was held on 09.11.2020. In this roundtable participated: Vocational High School "Ali Myftiu", Vocational High School "Salih Çeka", Regional Directorate of Vocational Training Elbasan, and the University of Elbasan “A. Xhuvani.” The meeting was also attended by other representatives of state institutions from the Elbasan Regional Employment Office and the National Agency for Training and Employment.

The third roundtable dialogue with the "Construction" sector was held on 11.11.2020. In this roundtable participated: in Vocational High School "Ali Myftiu", Regional Directorate of Public Vocational Training Elbasan, and the University of Elbasan “A. Xhuvani”. The meeting was also attended by other representatives of state institutions such as the director of the Elbasan Regional Employment Office and representatives of the National Agency for Employment and Skills.

The fourth roundtable dialogue with the "Logistics" sector was held on 17.11.2020. In this roundtable participated: Vocational High School "Ali Myftiu", Vocational High School "Salih Çeka" and the University of Elbasan “A. Xhuvani”. The meeting was also attended by other
representatives of state institutions from the Elbasan Regional Employment Office and the National Agency for Training and Employment.

3. RESULTS

From the discussion in each roundtable, it emerged that the number of employees and their qualifications provides the main problems of business instability and ongoing challenges which directly affect their performance in the market. Often businesses are faced with situations where they seek to add services and staff but in the majority of cases, it is very difficult for them to find people who are professionally capable to take over the management and finalization of the work given. Businesses admit that jobseekers are not skilled at the right level or find it difficult to adapt to the changes and challenges faced at any time, the demands of the workplace, and societies themselves.

Based on the aforementioned, can be accepted that it is necessary to establish continuous contacts with public institutions which offer professional development courses for employees both before and during employment, as for them the cost of training the employees is a continuous process. This contact should be frequent and the exchange of information by the parties should be as efficient as possible so that businesses can easily express their request for employees in cases where they have or are informed about jobseekers seeking employment and who are registered at employment offices. On the other hand, businesses consider that cooperation with providers should be even more intensive and they should be acquainted with their current or new offers. However, the quality and qualification, training of young people in certain profiles, adapted to each sector remain the most urgent problems for this sector in the region of Elbasan.

4. CONCLUSION

Not only in Albania but worldwide, the labor market is changing very fast. Due to the phenomenon of migration, workers must have developed skills that are more useful not only to employees but even to employers who want good results in a short period. To do so, both employees and employers must collaborate to be able to adopt the requirements of the market and to improve a lifelong learning capacity.

On the other hand, besides the investors and businesses, a crucial role in this process plays the government and governmental institutions when making decisions regarding the resources, training, and policies to meet competing development needs. With these interventions from a very early stage for vocational education, students and workers should be more effective later on.

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