

FACING THE FUTURE: VET SKILLS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

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Abstract

The new information and communication technologies, COVID-19, the dynamic changes are leading to changing world of work brings and the key importance of VET. Nowadays a key factor for success is the ability to develop the skills needed in the labor market that employers are looking for. Therefore, those changes are following by the important structural changes in the educational system and the need to re-engineer certain parts of VET systems in some countries to make them more resilient. It is argued that high-quality Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a key role in ensuring that the population has the relevant and necessary skills of today to help them meet socio-economic challenges and thrive both personally and professionally with a plan. The place of inclusive education is particularly important - both for today's youth, for whom vocational education and training ensures a smooth entry into the labor market after completing compulsory education, and for adults who need to upgrade their qualifications and retrain to adapt to the changing world of work. The methodology applied in the study includes searching and analyzing factual information. This paper aims to highlight the fundamental role of vocational education and training in the preparation of personnel for the future, presenting a detailed picture of the current situation and prospects for VET, the labor market and individual professions, which will present a view of the future. This paper was developed within the framework of a scientific research project "A model for evaluating the effectiveness and quality of inclusive education, training and lifelong learning" with contract № КП-06-Н80/1, funded by National science fund of Bulgaria.

Keywords: *Lifelong learning, Vocational Education and Training, new skills, future professions.*

1. Introduction

People's skills have always been a key factor in human development civilization, but in the nowadays dynamic, globalized and strongly individualized 21st century, as if they were the main engine of development and success, and high value. It is human skill that is an opportunity for success in the solution of every task and in the initiation of every undertaking. It depends on the ability, from the maturation and from the exercise of the individuals.

In modern Society of Knowledge precise communication tools open new levels of coverage and profitability for the business entities involved in LLL. On the other hand LLL learners may consistently develop better their skills, receive self satisfaction and certified approval while using communication tools. (Yankova et al., 2017)

In an age characterized by rapid technological transformation and a range of changes, including demographic crisis and changing workplace dynamics and demands, the importance of vocational education and training (VET) has never been more perceptible. As our society adapts to the emerging challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, the skills required of workers continue to transform. This report explores the critical importance of VET in preparing the workforce for today's and tomorrow's work environment, focusing on the skills needed for sustainable growth in an ever-changing environment.

2. The importance of VET for achieving innovation, inclusive and sustainable growth

Change is an inevitable part of life. The value of skills is also changes, as well as the environment in which they are formed, developed and implemented. The transformation of requirements to modern valuable skills determined by several global trends: an increase in life expectancy; entry of smart machines and systems into life of people, societies and economies; exponential data growth; use of new communication tools and channels; transformation of jobs and professions, and the emergence of such a phenomenon as "global a workplace' full of diversity, cultural and subcultural differences;

emergence of new organizational structures defined by changes in manner at work, and he – influenced by innovative technologies and social networks. (Vasileva, 2020)

Accessibility, rapid updating and effective management of educational resources are the absolute basis for modern quality education and continuing education, as well as the application of innovative methods of pedagogical interaction and the acquisition of new generation digital skills. (Vasileva et al., 2020)

Today, we are observing a significant change in industries and existing professions, which inevitably leads to a change in the requirements of the labor market and, accordingly, to the requirements for employees. Vocational education and training (VET), especially if it is of high quality, plays a fundamental role in ensuring that people have the necessary skills to meet socio-economic challenges and achieve impressive results both in personal, as well as in professional life. VET is important both for today's youth, for whom it seeks to ensure a smooth transition from compulsory education to the labor market, and for adults who have a vital need for upskilling and retraining to adapt to the changing working world. (Vasileva et al., 2019)

According to the European commission's definition for 'vocational education and training' is 'education and training which aims to equip young people and adults with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market' This type of training can be provided, in both formal and non-formal settings, at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). VET is the education and training sector that is closest and most closely related to the labor market. VET is considered an extremely important and effective form because it provides skills that prepare workers for specific careers and occupations, while providing valuable transferable skills and responding effectively to economic needs. (European commission, 2022)

The European Union (EU) is leading the way in promoting and investing in VET. The Council Recommendation on VET for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Equity and Sustainability, published in 2020, sets out the EU's overarching vision for the future of VET. Our aim is to make VET a high-quality, attractive opportunity for all learners.

While the Commission leads the way with a wide range of policy initiatives, support instruments and funding mechanisms at EU level, Member States have the power to make the necessary reforms a reality.

In today's fast-paced world, industries and professions are undergoing significant transformation, which necessitates a corresponding change in the demands of the labor market and, gradually, in the skill set required by employees. In this context, vocational education and training (VET), when delivered to a high standard, takes a central role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills to meet socio-economic challenges and develop both personally and professionally.

VET serves as a cornerstone for today's youth, facilitating a seamless transition from education to employment. Furthermore, it addresses the imminent need for upskilling and retraining among adults, enabling them to adapt effectively to the dynamic nature of the modern workplace.

The European Union (EU) is leading the way in engaging and investing in VET initiatives. The Council Recommendation is on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social justice and sustainability, set in 2020, setting out the EU's overarching vision for the future of vocational education. The EU's mission is to position VET as a beacon for high-quality, attractive education accessible to all learners.

Although the European Commission implements a diverse set of initiatives supporting these instruments and funding mechanisms at EU level, it is essential to recognize that they are now exerting significant influence in translating visions into tangible reforms on the ground. Cooperation between EU countries, national governments, educational institutions and stakeholders is paramount to realizing the transformative potential of VET.

By embracing collaboration and embracing innovation, additional potential is being harnessed for vocational education and training to empower people, improve employability and promote sustainable socio-economic development around the world. Shaping a future where VET serves as a cornerstone for inclusive growth, social cohesion and lifelong learning for all takes a long-term view of VET and its relevance to society today.

3. Current landscape of VET skills

Today, VET encompasses a wide range of skills, ranging from technical expertise to so-called "soft skills" such as communication, problem solving, crisis and conflict management, etc. The demand and supply of highly skilled employees in fields such as healthcare, information technology, green energy and advanced manufacturing is constantly increasing. This leads to a necessary change of VET in terms of curricula, educational content and delivery formats. They need to be adapted to provide learners with the appropriate knowledge, skills and competences that are in line with the needs of the labor market.

4. Technical proficiency

Basic technical skills play a key role in various areas of public life. In the digital age, where every profession intersects with information technology, skills in coding, data analysis, digital literacy and artificial intelligence are crucial. These professional knowledge and skills are concentrated not only in the information technology sector, but also in all other spheres of business and science.

VET programs need to be updated and to reflect the latest technological trends to ensure that learners acquire the modern skills that are needed in the labor market.

5. Adaptability and lifelong learning

In an age of rapidly evolving technology, adaptability and lifelong learning is essential. Vocational education and training graduates must not only be aware of the changing demands of the labor market, but also be prepared to adapt to them. Acquiring skills that are relevant and applicable then becomes an ongoing process that lasts throughout life.

Organizations in the field of VET need to apply more innovative and modern approaches, because of innovation and entrepreneurship, providing an incentive for constant learning and development, which in turn attracts today's generation, which is tied to a large extent to ICT.

Today, flexibility and resilience are critical to successfully navigating the uncertainties brought about by the period of change and the challenges of the work activities of given professions on a global scale. The ability of today's employees to cope with stress, adapt to changing circumstances and withstand unexpected challenges.

Flexibility is another important aspect of VET training. The ability to adapt to rapidly changing conditions, accept different roles and adapt to different situations is extremely important for competitiveness in the labor market.

When talking about vocational education and training, it is clear that adaptability, resilience and flexibility are essential. Only by investing in programs that incorporate the qualities listed above can it be ensured that learners will be ready to face the challenges of the future and achieve success in their careers and personal lives.

6. Critical thinking and problem-solving

In an age of rapid change and uncertainty, the ability to think critically and solve problems creatively stands out as a hallmark of successful professionals. Curricula in the field of VET must focus on the development of these key skills, which are crucial for successfully meeting the challenges of today's digital and informational world.

Analytical reasoning and decision-making are fundamental to understanding the complex problems that arise in any field of activity. VET programs should provide training that stimulates the development of these skills by providing real-world scenarios and tasks that require analysis, evaluation and informed decision-making.

Additionally, innovative problem-solving techniques are essential for developing creative and effective solutions. VET curricula should encourage learners to use a variety of problem-solving methods and strategies, which will prepare them to deal with complex real-life situations.

Encouraging learners to face real-world challenges gives them valuable experience and confidence to solve problems. This practical approach to the learning process prepares learners for the diverse demands of the modern labor market and provides them with the necessary skills and resources to adapt and successfully cope with the challenges that await them in their professional careers (European commission, 2022).

7. Communication and collaboration

Effective communication and collaboration are the engine for the successful functioning of any profession, regardless of the sector. Communication skills play a crucial role in any work environment. Verbal and written communication, as well as the skill of active listening, are essential to build clear and effective communication both within the organization and with external partners and users. VET programs should develop these skills alongside vocational skills, enabling learners to practice communication in different contexts and with different audiences.

Collaboration is another key aspect that should be emphasized in VET programs. Teamwork is an integral part of everyday work, so developing teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with different people is vital. By creating an educational environment that encourages collaboration and

interaction, VET programs can prepare their learners to be successful in a variety of team projects and tasks.

Effective communication and collaboration are essential aspects of success in any profession. Developing these skills in learners prepares them for the dynamic and modern work environment into which they must fit.

8. Ethical and social responsibility

Today, with the advent of technology, our society faces new ethical challenges that graduates of vocational education and training must be prepared to meet. These are the ethical dilemmas that arise as a result of the use of technology, while affecting contemporary values and beliefs. It is therefore important that VET integrates ethical reasoning and social awareness into its curricula and learning content.

VET programs should create an educational environment where learners consider the ethical aspects of technological innovations and their possible implications for society. By providing critical analytical tools and stimulating debate on ethical issues, VET can help learners better understand the ethical challenges they face and develop skills to overcome these challenges.

It is important that VET encourages learners to think broadly and consider the impact of their actions on individuals, communities and the environment. By instilling a sense of ethical responsibility, VET prepares society to take an active role in setting ethical standards in society and to contribute positively to the betterment of society.

So, by completing VET programs, learners not only acquire technical skills, but also prepare themselves to deal with the ethical challenges they face in today's world. By embedding ethical principles and social responsibility into the curriculum, VET plays a key role in shaping citizens who are capable of making a positive difference in the world around them (European commission, 2022).

9. Future trends and emerging skills

Looking to the future, several trends stand out that will transform the overall skills picture in vocational education and training (VET). Increasingly noisy and entering many spheres of public life - artificial intelligence (AI), automation and robotics are factors that cannot help but leave their mark on the professions that we are familiar with at the moment and the new perspectives before them, caused of these innovative and technological solutions. These changes will transform not only job roles, but also the required knowledge, skills and competencies of future workers.

Therefore, it is vital that VET programs are constantly updated and adjusted to meet these challenges and opportunities of the new age. Not only the enhancement of technical skills, but also the development of skills that are sustainable over time should be envisaged. Other important factors are Emotional Intelligence, creativity and the ability to solve complex problems, key to the success of future workers in the world of AI and automation.

It is important to emphasize that despite technological changes, humans bring unique qualities that can complement and enhance activities that machines cannot perform. The development of these human skills, which are difficult to control by automation, becomes a key factor for successful adaptation to future technological requirements (European commission, 2022).

10. Conclusions

Facing the challenges of the new information society and the prospects of tomorrow, the role of professional education and training is key in providing individuals with the skills necessary for success and successful realization in personal life and in the work environment. The combination of foundational competences and emerging skills requires VET institutions to cope with dynamic changes and enable learners to navigate the labor market with confidence and resilience. Through collaboration, innovation and a commitment to lifelong learning, VET can serve as a cornerstone for building a skilled, adaptable and future-ready workforce.

In conclusion, the future requires a workforce equipped with a diverse set of skills and a mindset ready for continuous adaptation. By seeing innovation as normal and vital in the transformation and adaptation of vocational education and training institutions, fostering collaboration and prioritizing the development of both traditional and emerging skills, VET can play a crucial role in shaping the workforce of tomorrow.

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