

Post-secondary/vocational education in Greece

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Abstract

Post-secondary education in the Greek educational system is mainly represented by Vocational Training Institutes (V.T.I.) public and private, which have existed in this area for almost thirty years. Their main purpose is the basic training of students (the majority of whom are adults), through a wide variety of specialties they provide and then their smooth transition to the labor market. In the article, first a bibliographic review is made, mainly in post-secondary education (institutional framework, sectors - specialties, apprenticeship, N.O.C.Q.V.Q. certification) and then a series of actions are proposed which have as main goal strengthening this sector of education.

Keywords: V.T.I., post-secondary education, labor market.

1. Introduction

The main characteristic of Greek family and consequently of the society was and is the demand for general education and university level studies. Vocational education was not in high demand, unlike in other European countries. between students. It was often considered a solution of necessity, especially for students with low performance or expectations, with the result that vocational schools are in a way "stigmatized". In this way the level of quality of vocational education was reduced, as it was not properly promoted in Greek society (Hanushek et al., 2008). Statistics show that over 70% of students choose general education and the prejudice regarding vocational education is constantly increasing (Ioannidou & Stavrou, 2013).

More specifically, according to A.Q.A.A.H.E. (Agency of Quality Assurance and Certification in Higher Education) Greece continues to record a continuous increase in the percentage of the population that has higher education in the ages from 25 to 34 years. In 2016 the percentage amounted to 41% and our country, together with Spain, Finland and Estonia, was slightly above the European average, which is around 40%. In a total of 28 countries of European Union, Greece, with a percentage of 6.58%, holds the highest position in terms of the proportion of students in relation to the general population and is much higher than the European average (3, 84%).

Unfortunately, our country, unlike the previous ones, is included in the countries with high unemployment rates for young people aged 25-34. During the period 2000 - 2016, unemployment in Greece increased by more than 10 percentage points, from 13.7% in 2000 to 28% in 2016, in contrast to all O.E.C.D. countries, where unemployment increased by only 1, 4%, ie from 5.2% in 2000, to 6.6% in 2016. In conclusion, Greece has the highest unemployment rate (28%) among university graduates (25-34) compared to O.E.C.D. countries, a fact that may be related to the time-limited demand for higher education of staff in Greece, a phenomenon more intense after the recent economic crisis (A.Q.A.A.H.E., 2018).



2. Post-secondary Education

During twenty-first and twenty-first centuries, there is an increasing rate of changes in most sectors of industry, the economy, the family and society. These changes naturally affect vocational and general education in many ways. The whole situation is very unstable and is obvious to any outside observer, especially in Greece (Needs Analysis for Greece, 2015). Vocational schools can be made more attractive to students and should not contain negative stereotypes.

In general, Greek society itself must understand that sometimes the prospects of finding a job are better for people with technical qualifications - degrees (CEDEFOP, 2014). And we must not overlook the fact that vocational education has some differences and special features compared to general education. Unfortunately, it has developed mainly through foreign influences, taking into account the needs and trends of other countries (Patinotis & Stavroulakis, 1997).

In Greek reality in the early 1990s vocational education was extended to a post-secondary level, with the creation of the first (public or private) Vocational Training Institutes (V.T.I.). The primary goal was the institution to have great flexibility in the frequent changes observed in labor market, a fact that is achieved by creating new specialties, which can be modified - reformed every year (Ioannidou & Stavrou, 2013).

At this point it is appropriate to mention that in the educational system of the Republic of Cyprus, which has several similarities with the corresponding Greek, there is a corresponding level of education, the Post-Secondary Institutes of Vocational Education and Training which offers education and training programs, two years, in developing sectors, providing citizens with the opportunity to acquire, improve or upgrade their professional qualifications and skills.

Their purpose is to offer modern study programs, which are characterized by great flexibility and adaptability to rapidly changes in employment, economy, professions and the content of professions and change according to demand, the needs of labor market (http://www.moec.gov.cy/mtee/mieek_genikes_plirofories.html).

In relation to post-secondary education and always in terms of Greek literature there is a lack of scientific articles, while on the contrary there is plenty for adult education in all its other forms (Vocational Training Centers, Second Chance Schools, Parents' Schools etc.). In V.T.I. which are part of the standard post-secondary education are attended by adults with the exception of specific specialties that are accepted and high school graduates.

Of course, in relation to adult education, the need at European level for continuing education and vocational training to update this knowledge has prompted the Member States of the European Union to design and implement new policies in the field of adult education. In Greece, the competent institution for this effort is Y.L.L.F "Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation" which aims to implement actions for Lifelong Learning with emphasis on supporting young people in their educational and professional path (Law No. 4115).

3. Specialties - Students

Specialties provided by public V.T.I., must meet the needs of labor market and be immediately adapted to changes. Knowing that one of the main pillars of Greek economy is agricultural production, tourism and shipping, some of the specialties must be related to these sectors. Also, the geographical distribution of the specialties should be done carefully, always based



on the needs of the local community, but also the special geographical relief of Greece (mountainous isolated areas and isolated islands).

At the same time, it would be advisable to announce the specialties at the end of the previous training year (end of June). With this schedule, students will know in time the specialties that will work (especially important information, especially for students in the province). At the same time, the management of each V.T.I. will have the opportunity to inform the prospective students earlier and to proceed with the planning of the educational project (composition of departments and selection of instructors) of the next year more smoothly.

We must not forget the fact that at the end of June the grades of the students participating in the national exams are announced at the same time, with some of them continuing their studies at the V.T.I. Of course, the key point for their selection is the announcement of the bases of the schools, usually at the end of August.

4. Internship - Apprenticeship

The students of V.T.I. carry out an internship either in parallel with their studies in the third or fourth semester of study (something that is done by most students), or after the completion of their fourth semester of studies. In correspondence with vocational schools where from school year 2017-2018 a pilot study program was implemented for certain specialties (lasting one year) for the Preparatory Program for the Certification of Graduates of Post-Secondary Year - Apprenticeship Class (educational system in which the study time alternates between workplace and training structure). The corresponding practice could be applied in V.T.I. reforming the internship framework to allow students to complete their education, and then integrate more smoothly into job market.

5. Future prospects

Initially, the offered specialties and the respective study programs of V.T.I. at local and at the same time at regional level. Of course, a long-term research is needed to achieve such a plan. In this way, a significant reorientation of high school education towards technical education will be achieved, which currently gathers the minority of students in contrast to the general one.

Greek society must realize that, unfortunately, people with higher education have high levels of unemployment. According to studies in 2017, the unemployed with higher education (including in this category holders of master's or doctoral degree) almost tripled from 94,000 to 260,000, an increase of about 180%. (Education and labor market in Greece: Impact of the crisis and challenges, 2018). Important in this direction would be the creation of V.T.I. supervised by the Ministry of Rural Development and Food with the respective specialties related to agricultural production and the processing of its products and V.T.I. supervised by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Island Policy with specialties related to navigation where Greece has a long tradition.

Students should also be given the opportunity to continue their studies in higher education (we are referring mainly to university departments that are relevant to the specialty they are attending), through a fair selection system. At this point it is worth mentioning that based on the new draft law for higher education universities will be able after a decision of Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, which is issued after the consent of the Senate of



the relevant Institution to organize two-year study programs for graduates of Vocational Junior High Schools which will lead to level 5 diplomas of National and European Qualifications Framework. The specific level 5 already includes the graduates with a Technical-Vocational High School Diploma with apprenticeship, V.T.I. Degree and Post-Secondary Education Degree. The graduates of V.T.I. can also attend these programs. (Draft Law "Organization and operation of Higher Education, regulations for Research and other provisions").

It would also be important to include vocational guidance course in fourth semester of studies in all specialties. The specific subject should be taught by instructors specializing in vocational guidance and aimed at providing students with information about the labor market, but also more specialized knowledge such as making a CV, cover letter, and interview techniques. At the same time, taking advantage of the internet services offered by the portal of N.O.C.Q.V.Q. (more specifically the Adolescent and Youth Vocational Guidance Counseling Portal) students could take an online vocational guidance test and build an individual skills portfolio. (<https://www.eoppep.gr/teens/>). These activities are stored and accessible to students at all times for future use. Finally, it would be useful to contact professionals in the field, whose experience is particularly important.

In the framework of law 4547 Reorganization of support structures of primary and secondary education and other provisions'' and more specifically in the establishment of Educational and Counseling Support Centers (E.C.S.C.) which have an educational orientation and one of their responsibility is provision of vocational guidance services. This action could be extended to post-secondary education for the graduates of V.T.I. (Law No. 4547). They should be informed about the existing specialties but also the prospects that exist for them in the labor market. At this point, an important parameter would be the cooperation with the local services of L.A. which also provide consulting services for career management, job search and entrepreneurship. Also in the EURES Advisors Network of L.A.. Students have the opportunity to be informed immediately about job opportunities that exist in another European countries (https://www.eoppep.gr/teens/images/eoppep_syep_triptyxo.pdf).

It is worth mentioning in general that regarding the counseling in the secondary education that precedes the post-secondary one, we had the abolition of teaching of the didactic subject of S.V.O. (School Vocational Orientation) in the 3rd Class of Junior High School (teaching took place throughout the year) but also in the 1st Class of High School (teaching took place only in the 2nd semester). The only contact between students and vocational guidance is realized through the Career Education programs which are voluntary, refer to a part of the student potential and are not realized in all school.

Vocational Guidance aims to provide support to students during the various stages of their development, in order to realize their inclinations, to develop their skills and to claim their participation in social becoming (Law 1566/1985). In addition, it offers them opportunities for continuous self-development because the data prove the need to meet these needs of the student community by the school process itself (Korfiati & Brouzos, 2013).

In the context of a wider reorganization, it is now deemed necessary to teach the teaching subject of S.V.O. and in the third class of the High School but also in the corresponding class of Vocational High School, in order to inform students about the selection of V.T.I. and post-secondary education in general. Of course, in any case, the best information should be provided by the competent School Vocational Centers which are staffed by professionally oriented personnel.



Certification exams should be held twice a year (preferably November and April) on specific dates to enable a larger portion of students to participate. Also, in the standards of the institution of apprenticeship for the graduates of Vocational High Schools where certification exams are conducted (for the first time in the period 2017-2018) this institution could be extended to the internship of graduates of V.T.I. upgrading it.

It would also be important in parallel with studying at V.T.I. for students to obtain certification in basic skills (indicatively mentioned is the proof of language proficiency and use of computer). Regarding the proof of language proficiency, students could participate in examinations for the State Certificate of Language Proficiency, the examinations for which are taken twice a year. (Ministerial Decision 14420 / KB / 4-2-2008 Examinations - Exam bodies for the acquisition of the State Certificate of Language Proficiency) in parallel with their admission to the V.T.I. In relation to the certification of PC and more specifically the knowledge of handling the objects: a) word processing, b) spreadsheets, c) internet services. According to laws of Ministry of Interior the certification for graduates of University or Technological education is confirmed by qualifications from the analytical which shows that the candidate has attended at least four courses in Informatics or computer skills. In the case of V.T.I., in order to achieve it, it is necessary to reform the study programs and to teach a course related to computers in each semester for all specialties.

In the case of students from the province who are forced for a period of at least two years to move to another city, with the corresponding financial burden, the possibility of being hosted in a dormitory according to the standards of university students could be explored.

It would be important to gradually write books for all specialties. According to the current framework, the students of V.T.I. study notes, the writing of which is undertaken by the instructors based on the material proposed by the study guide for each specialty. The existence of manuals, the writing of which will be undertaken by Y.L.L.F. in collaboration with the instructors of each specialty, ensures the best preparation of all candidates and the greatest reliability of certification exams, because now all students nationwide will be taught the same subject.

A necessary element in any upgrade should be the development of innovative ideas and new companies for the graduates of V.T.I.. At this point it should be mentioned that in Vocational High Schools for school year 2018-2019 is planned the Creation of Action Plans, funded projects that will promote innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and will promote science, technology and culture (the action was piloted in a small number of highschools in school year 2017-2018). The action is managed and coordinated by the "Science Dissemination Center - Noisis", a supervised body of Ministry of Education. In the V.T.I. could be supervised by the Y.E.A. (Youth Entrepreneurship Association) (Government Gazette 3622, Issue Two).

Finally, the most crucial reform would be the gradual transition of the students of V.T.I. into labor market. Many EU countries are struggling with the transition from education to employment, especially as unemployment rates, and in particular youth unemployment rates, have started to rise. The term "transition" refers to various ways in which the education system is linked to the labor market. Countries such as Germany have established a strong link between education system and labor market, mainly because there are many career paths and choices that students can follow to have a normal transition (McKenzie, 2008).



In these standards, Greece must utilize the Institution of Apprenticeship, Strengthening companies that absorb young people who are employed in them through European programs. The first steps in this direction are already being carried out with the elaboration by the Institute of Educational Policy (I.E.P.) of a training plan which will include the selection of Vocational High Schools teachers. and V.T.I. instructors, who will be trained in apprenticeship issues. The aim of the act is the strengthening and the effective implementation of the institution of apprenticeship (<http://www.iep.edu.gr/el/component/k2/508-prosklisi-01-mis-93949-neo>).

6. Conclusions

Post-secondary education employs a large number of students each year, but also offers vocational rehabilitation opportunities to thousands of students who have successfully and certifiably completed their training. Also, in V.T.I. are employed every year part-time teachers with degrees of high academic qualifications, offering training of a corresponding level. A possible upgrade would improve the quality of education provided, creating graduates able to cope with the ever-changing conditions of the labor market in Greece and beyond. Of course, in-depth research is required in which officials from the Ministry of Education and Y.L.L.F., directors, deputy principals, trainers and students of V.T.I. productive bodies with the aim of its more complete reform.

7. Acronyms

- A.Q.A.A.H.E.: Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
- J.A.G.: Junior Achievement Greece
- N.O.C.Q.V.Q.: National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance
- O.E.C.D.: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- S.C.R.C.P.S.: Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection
- Y.L.L.F.: Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation

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