

Athens Institute for Education and Research

ATINER



ATINER's Conference Paper Series

EDU2012-0161

**Employer's and Teacher Cooperation
in Development of Vocational
Education Programs Content in
Latvian Republic Vocationan
Education System:
Description of the Situation**

Anita Zaļaiskalne

Methodologist

Riga Food Producer's Secondary School

PhD Student

University of Latvia

Latvia

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.
All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the source is
fully acknowledged.

ISSN 2241-2891

12/09/2012

An Introduction to ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

Zaļaiskalne, A. (2012) "Employer's and Teacher Cooperation in Development of Vocational Education Programs Content in Latvian Republic Vocationan Education System: Description of the Situation" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: EDU2012-0161.

Employer's and Teacher Cooperation in Development of Vocational Education Programs Content in Latvian Republic Vocationan Education System: Description of the Situation

Anita Zaļaiskalne

Methodologist

Riga Food Producer's Secondary School

PhD Student

University of Latvia

Latvia

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyze the participation of the employers and vocational secondary education teachers in professional educational programs and in the development process of professional standards. The introduction of the article provides general information about Latvian vocational education reforms in historical perspective. The first chapter deals with the general principles in the development of education programs, focuses on the specifics of developing professional education programs. This chapter also includes information about the mandatory content of Latvia's professional secondary school programs. The second chapter describes the involvement of employers' organizations in the development of the content of vocational education. The third chapter is an overview of the quantitative study made where a survey of vocational education teachers and employers was used as the research instrument. Results of the study provide an opportunity to evaluate the level of cooperation of the employers and the professional education teachers, to analyze the involvement of teachers in the development of vocational education. Key findings: at the secondary school level there are different opinions on the mandatory content of vocational secondary education, employers rating the quality of vocational education as a whole is positive, the employers are participating in the development of occupational standards, assessment of the vocational qualification exams, but the employer involvement in the development of vocational education programs is minimal. Based on the results, recommendations have been developed for employers and educators to improve cooperation and coordination.

Keywords: vocational education - vocational education programs - the content of vocational education

Contact Information of Corresponding author:

Introduction

Vocational education as a part of the Latvian Republic education system during the period from the restoration of independence in 1991 to the second decade of the 21st century has undergone significant structural and substantial reforms. The main objective in the initial phase of these reforms (1991 - 1995) that was put forward was the transformation of the education system, moving away from the Soviet years of ideological control and the politicization of the educational process, centralization. An important stage of the reforms is associated with the Law of Vocational Education adopted in 1999, where the national vocational education standards, professional standards and training programs were identified as the key documents in regulation of the content of vocational education. A qualitatively new stage of reform began in 2002 in connection with the integration of Latvia into the European Union. In the sphere of the vocational training, by joining the European Union in 2004, Latvian students and teachers of the vocational education institutions were given the opportunity to engage in international cooperation projects, to familiarize themselves with organization of education systems in other European countries. In the concept of education development for the period of 2006 – 2010, the improvement of an education appropriate to the needs of economic development and labor market and expansion of access to education according to needs of the population lives were referred as the main courses of action. At the same time lack of cooperation between employers and training institutions has been marked as a problem, linking the solution to this problem to the development of professional standards, attraction of experts to the standard-setting process and the creation of tripartite co-operation councils. In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia developed the concept of "increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and the participation of social partners in professional quality assurance". The main problems in need of solving at the national level that were singled out:

- the low prestige of vocational education;
- non-compliance of the professional qualification levels system with the European Qualifications Framework;
- non-compliance of the vocational education program for the needs of education of adults;
- non-equality of the conditions for gaining general secondary education and vocational secondary education;
- no recognition of knowledge, skills and competence gained outside of formal education.¹

The need for the development of a new Latvian qualifications framework based on learning outcomes, was facilitated by the recommendation of European Parliament and Council for the development of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. the introduction of this framework would facilitate functional links between education, training and employment, as well allow to recognize the results of

¹ (MoES concept of "increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and the participation of social partners in professional quality assurance", 2009).

training obtained by experience at a formal education level¹. In 2010, Latvia has started the set-up process for a National Qualifications Framework, including all levels of education.

Conclusions

The need for improving vocational education quality is highlighted in the vocational education planning documents of the Latvian Republic. One of the aspects characterizing the quality of education is compliance of vocational education to the labor market. This compliance can be ensured by promoting the cooperation between educational facilities and employer organizations.

Theoretical aspects of the development of educational programs

In the context of the article, educational program is viewed as a set of training subjects that help to provide the objectives set by the educational program. In the scientific literature, the concept of need is pointed out as one of the concepts in the development of educational programs - the educational program must satisfy the needs (Pratt, D., 2000). An important aspect also highlighted is the evaluation of the content of an educational program, the purpose, the resources involved in assessment (Tanner, C.K. and Lackney, J.A., 2006). Vocational training and education as part of an educational system that combines both the goals of general education and the needs of the labor market, was characterized by Bjørnavold J., Mouillour I. (2009). Competence as a qualitatively new indicator describing the quality of vocational education is emphasized by Bohlinger (Bohlinger, S., 2008). The following steps in the development of the educational programs were determined: identification of the need for a case study (development/improvement of the educational programs), determination of the goals and objectives for the educational program, development of the content for the educational program, planning for the realization of the education program (resources involved, evaluation of the results obtained). In the paper the author suggests a structural model of the development of vocational education programs (Figure 1).

The development process of vocational education programs is governed in Latvian Republic by legal documents: the Law on Education, General Education Law, Law on Vocational Education, professional standards, the internal rules of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ministry Education and Science. Vocational Education Law (1999) defines three levels of vocational education:

1. Vocational basic education;
2. Vocational secondary education;
3. Professional higher education:
 - 3.1. First level professional higher education (college education);
 - 3.2. Second level professional higher education.

The content of vocational secondary education programme is defined by the state vocational secondary education standard and the relevant occupational standard (*profesijas standarts*). Vocational secondary education programmes are elaborated and implemented in conformity with all lines of economic activities in Latvia. The

¹ (European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), 2009).

content of educational programmes is defined by the vocational secondary education standard comprising:

- Theory and practice in the ratio of 50:50;
- Subjects of general education and vocational subjects in the ratio of 60:40;
- The division of general educational subjects is as follows:
- Languages and communications 45%;
- Mathematics, natural sciences, technologies 33%;
- Social sciences and cultural studies 22%.¹

Conclusions

The vocational education programs must be considered as a core element in the vocational education system. The background for the development of vocational education programs through the lawful acts is prepared. The vocational education institutes and the employers' organizations must work together with the same aim – the improving a quality of vocational education content.

Employers' organizations involved in the development of the content of vocational education

CoM Regulations (27.02.2007) No.149 “Procedure of Developing Occupational Standards” stipulate that MoES and the State Education Content Centre (for professions of the Latvian professional qualification level 1-3) in cooperation with the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment arrange designing and expertise of draft occupational standards engaging also representative from sectoral ministries and professional organizations and providing organizational and methodological support in the development of draft. Draft occupational standards may be developed also by trade unions, employers' organizations, sectoral organizations, education establishments and other individuals and institutions.

Sub-Council of Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation is a part of the National Tripartite Cooperation Council institutional framework, run by representatives of the government, the Latvian Employers' Confederation and the Latvian Free Union Association. Functions of this organization in relation to vocational education content:- to evaluate proposals and give recommendations to government institutions and public organizations involved in vocational education and employment: about cooperation agreements and projects with the European Union and other institutions in the sphere of vocational education, human resource development and employment; about the development and updating of professional standards and educational programs; about the organization of examination in vocational education and training institutions and examination centers and the allocation of vocational qualification; about the organization of accreditation for licensing of vocational education programs and professional education, training and

¹ CoM Regulations (27.06.2000) No.211 “Regulations on the state vocational secondary education standard and the state vocational education standard”

examination centers and vocational training programs. In order to improve the development and sustainability of the system for the insurance of the content of vocational education system, 2011 the Latvian Employers Confederation has joined in the realization of the EU Structural Funds project "Development of sectoral qualifications system and enhancement of the efficiency and quality of vocational education", which aims for: - improvement and adjustment of the content of vocational education to the findings and needs of a research of the economic sectors;- improvement of cooperation between sides involved in vocational education; - reviewing and updating the content of the occupational standards.

Conclusions

Employer organizations are involved in the planning of vocational education development strategy of Latvian Republic. Development of the professional standards is implemented by cooperation of the employers and educational institutions. Despite this, there are still problems related to the quality of vocational education. There is a need for cooperation with employers at the level of development of the educational programs that has a direct impact on learning outcomes.

Description of research

Aims and Methods

The aims of the case study – to provide a through analysis of a particular situation. Teachers and employers survey as a research instrument is used. To find the views of vocational education teachers on vocational education program development process, in the period from 2010 /11 school year, a teacher survey was conducted that included 278 teachers from 19 vocational education institutions. The study sample was formed by a regional principle, so that educational institutions of the capital Riga and four Latvian economic planning regions of the Republic would be represented. Distribution of respondents by region can be seen in Table 1. The research tool is a survey, which includes three blocks of questions. The first block contains general information (length of service of the teachers, subjects taught by the teacher). Distribution of teachers by the length of service can be seen Table 2. The second block of questions is related to teachers' participation in the development of secondary vocational education programs and the content of the professional standards. The third block of questions is related to the quality of the evaluation of vocational education. An employers' survey was also done in the duration of the school year 2010/11, which was attended by centralized professional qualification examinations commission agents of 19 vocational education institutions. The total number of respondents is 56. Distribution of respondents by region can be seen in Table 1. The employers survey was structured on a similar basis as the teacher survey to obtain general information about the employer (education, work experience in the industry), identifying the degree of participation if the employers in the development of educational programs and professional standards content. The view of employers on the quality of vocational education was also found.

Results and discussion

By the analysis of the survey data of professional education institution teachers and employers, it can be determined that:

1. Vocational education teachers use educational subject programs already compiled in their work, as well as develop their own. Teachers with greater seniority use more of their own developed programs in their work (Figure 2).
2. Only part of the teachers is involved in the development of educational programs. There is a statistically significant correlation between the subjects taught by a teacher and his participation in the development of educational programs. Involvement of general subject teachers in this process is minimal (Table 3).
3. Teachers with greater seniority and teachers who teach professional subjects are more involved in participation in the development of occupational standards. Overall, a small number of teachers are involved the development of professional standarts (Table 4).
4. Knowledge of vocational education graduates is seen by employers as a satisfactory, score is higher for the theoretical knowledge of graduates, rather than professional skills (Table 5.)
5. Both educators and employers name desired values different from the legislated distribution of the contact hours for the education subjects and vocational subjects in secondary vocational education programs.
6. Surveys for the employers indicated a need to increase the number of hours of practical instruction in vocational subjects.

Recommendations

There is a need at the national level for a coordination between employers and vocational education institutions to work together to ensure a better quality of vocational secondary education program content development.

Educational programs jointly developed by employers and educational institutions that include the needs expressed by the two parties is one way to improve the quality of vocational education.

References

- Chancery Database of Policy Planning documents <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv> ,reieved on 2012.04.04.[in Latvian].
- Björnnavold J., Mouillour I.(2009). Learning outcomes in validation and credit systems.*European Journal of Vocational Training*, No 48, 27-45.
- Bohlinger,S.(2008).Competences at the core element of the European qualifications framework. *European Journal of Vocational Training*, 2008bNo 42/43, pp.96 – 118.
- Brodhead,C.W.(1991). Image 2000: A Vision for Vocational Education . *Vocational Education Journal*, 66/1. pp. 22- 25.
- Lanka A., Mūrnieks E.(2006). Vocational Education and Training in Latvia.*The Problems and Solutions. The Transformation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the Baltic States – Syrvey of Reforms and Development*. Springer.pp. 47 – 68.
- Pratt, D.(2000). *Curriculum planning. A Handbook for Professionals*. Riga: Zvaigzne ABC. [in Latvian].
- Tanner,C.K.and Lackney, J.A. (2006), *Educational Facilities Planning: Leadership, Architecture, and Management*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA.

Figure 1. Structural model of the development of vocational education programs

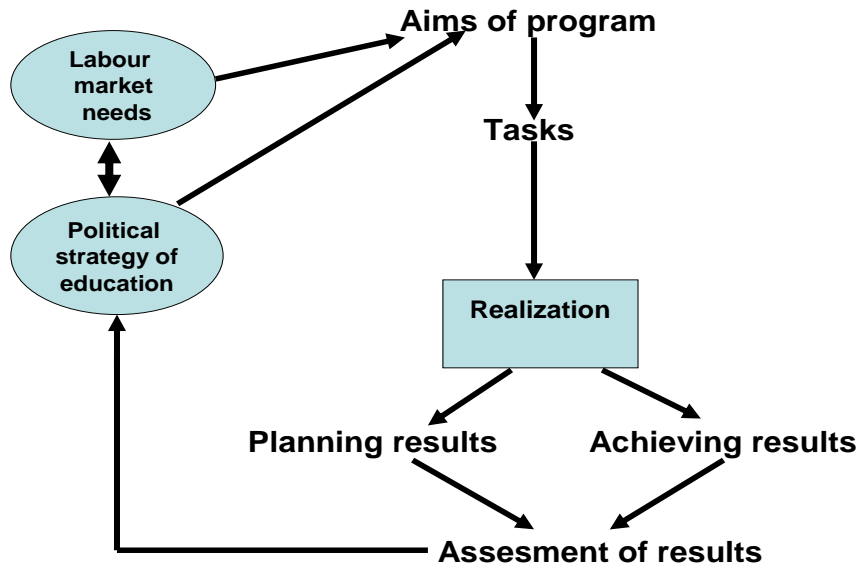


Figure 2. Teacher's participation in the vocational education programs development process.

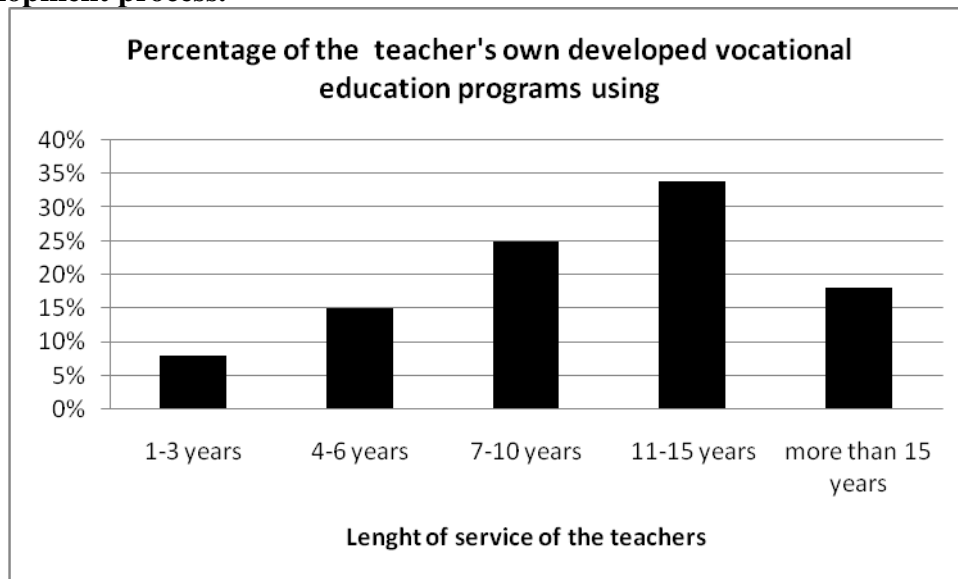


Table 1. Participants of the survey

Region	Number of the vocational education instituts surveyed	Number of the teachers surveyed	Number of the employers surveyed
Riga	8	144	24
Region of Kurzeme	4	42	12
Region of Zemgale	2	31	6
Region of Vidzeme	4	33	10
Region of Latgale	3	28	4

Table 2. Length of service of the teachers

Lenght of service	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 - 3 years	20	7,2	7,2	7,2
4 - 6 years	60	21,6	21,6	28,8
7 - 10 years	107	38,5	38,5	67,3
11- 15 years	61	21,9	21,9	89,2
more than 15 years	30	10,8	10,8	100,0
Total	278	100,0	100,0	

Table 3. Distribution of teachers' by subjects * Teachers' participation in education programs development- Crosstabulation

		Participation in education programs development		Total	
		Yes	No		
subjects	general subjects	Count	36	72	108
		% of Total	12,9%	25,9%	38,8%
	professional subjects	Count	56	41	97
		% of Total	20,1%	14,7%	34,9%
	both subjects	Count	50	23	73
		% of Total	18,0%	8,3%	26,3%
Total		Count	142	136	278

Table 4. Distribution of teachers' by subjects* Teachers' participation in occupation standart development – Crosstabulation

Teaching subjects		How often teachers' took part in occupation standart development				Total	
		Regulary	Sometimes, one-two times	Another answer	Never		
general subjects	Count	0	10	10	88	108	
	% of Total	0%	3,6%	3,6%	31,7%	38,8%	
professional subjects	Count	19	43	7	28	97	
	% of Total	6,8%	15,5%	2,5%	10,1%	34,9%	
both subjects	Count	15	33	5	20	73	
	% of Total	5,4%	11,9%	1,8%	7,2%	26,3%	
Total		Count	34	86	22	136	278
		% of Total	12,2%	30,9%	7,9%	48,9%	100,0%

**Table 5. Employers' participation in occupational standards development process
* Assesment of quality of vocational education - Crosstabulation**

Participation in occupational standards development process	Assesment of quality of vocational education					Total
		bad	almost good	good	very good	
regularly	Count	0	4	3	2	9
	% of Total	0%	7,1%	5,4%	3,6%	16,1%
sometimes, one-two times	Count	0	8	5	2	15
	% of Total	0%	14,3%	8,9%	3,6%	26,8%
never	Count	2	9	7	4	22
	% of Total	3,6%	16,1%	12,5%	7,1%	39,3%
another answer	Count	1	2	4	3	10
	% of Total	1,8%	3,6%	7,1%	5,4%	17,9%
Total	Count	3	23	19	11	56
	% of Total	5,4%	41,1%	33,9%	19,6%	100,0%