

University of Debrecen

Farkas, Éva

Systemic Changes in Vocational Training

The transformation of the structure and content of vocational training in Hungary after 1989 with special regard to the characteristics of the reform of vocational training in the school system from the perspective of the training institutions

- Summary for a Ph.D thesis -

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The transformation of the structure and content of vocational training in Hungary after 1989 with special regard to the characteristics of the reform of vocational training in the school system from the perspective of the training institutions

Consultant:
Juhász, Erika, Ph.D
College Assistant Professor

Written by:
Farkas, Éva
Ph. D. Candidate

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OBJECTIVES AND TOPIC SUMMARY

The study focuses on **vocational training**,¹ - mainly on the vocational training system within the general school system since, on the one hand, compliance of human resources with the requirements of the market economy is not possible without organised and permanent training and, on the other hand, during the past decade vocational training has developed most dynamically within the educational system; with the realisation of lifelong learning the number of students in vocational training has grown tremendously in Hungary. Third, none of the objectives of any European Union public policy goals may be implemented without taking direct educational and training measures.

It is reasonable to study **vocational training in the school system**, because people under the age of 24 years typically acquire their first vocational qualifications within the school system. The Government guarantees that each student acquires his or her first vocational qualification in the public educational system as listed in OKJ free of charge. At present two thirds of students aged between 14 and 18 years pursue their studies at vocational schools, while in 2004 only 2% of students aged between 15 and 24 years acquired their first vocational qualifications in training outside the school system (Köpeczi-Bócz-Büki, 2006:6). Therefore the acquisition of **the first qualification** in Hungary to a great extent may be identified with studying in the vocational school system, which is conducted fundamentally within the framework of the general public educational system. Apart from this, although Hungarian laws do not regard the training programmes at higher educational institutions, the result of which are higher educational qualifications, part of the system of vocational education, the qualifications and vocational qualifications acquired in this way entitle such graduates to practise relevant occupations, among them also regulated occupations, in the labour market. Following the changes in the political regime it was necessary to fundamentally transform and modernise the system of vocational training within the school system in order to make it compliant with the situation as the outcome of thorough changes in the Hungarian and international economic and political environment, and in order to satisfy the

¹ What is understood in a broad sense under *vocational training* is all types training within and outside the regular school system, which train the students for qualifications, which are recognised in the labour market. Many narrow down this concept to vocational training in the school system and to qualifications listed in the Országos Képzési Jegyzék – National Training List – (hereinafter: OKJ). This is done so mainly for practical reasons since for some decades in the past vocational training was identical with vocational training in the school system, which was the dominant form of this type of training. OKJ contains officially recognised qualifications, which predominantly have prestige in the labour market. The qualifications as determined in OKJ are the outcome of theoretical and practical vocational training according to the professional requirements of the relevant Government Minister. The aim of training may be the acquisition of a range of vocational qualifications, to study at or to prepare for higher educational institutions. Training may be conducted in the school system or outside of it in the form of courses or distant education (Act LXXVI of 1993). Hereinafter what is meant by vocational training is training within or outside the school system with the aim to acquire qualifications as listed in OKJ.

rapidly changing needs generated by the newly developed labour market, and the changed requirements of the market players.

More than two thirds of students in the regular school system in the 2004/2005 academic year pursued their studies in either of these two types of vocational schools however the composition of the students according to the types of schools has changed significantly since 1989. The share of vocational schools, which also prepared the students for their maturity examinations, rose from 33% to 45% (in complete harmony with the intent of the Government to raise the ratio of the types of schools, which provided an opportunity for students to pursue their studies at tertiary level), while the ratio of students, who studied at the other type of schools, decreased from 44% to 24%. Some of the reasons behind the significant decline of the popularity of apprentice schools and their successors, the vocational schools were the ever growing impact of the declining number of births and the related recruitment procedures of schools based on adverse selection as well as the obsolete structure, infrastructure, content and methodology of training. As a result of the privatisation of one-time large, state enterprises, the practical training pursued at workplaces and at corporate workshops was doomed to lose its dominance since the new owners of such enterprises often did not carry on undertaking the training of the students of vocational schools (the Government of the Hungarian Republic, 2005a). A modernisation process for vocational schools was launched in the 1990s however, especially in the case of apprentice schools and in many respects, is still waiting for completion even today. The transformation of the system of vocational training, which was launched in the 1990s, started with a number of reforms concerning the structure, management system, financing and the content of education. This process was preceded by several new acts and laws (see in Fehérvári-Liskó, 1996; Lannert, 1999; Mártonfi, 2003). The renewal of this system was part of the overall transformation process of the Hungarian educational system, but the economic and social significance of vocational training was more and more recognised by policy makers in Hungary. As a result, this has become one of the **key areas** in the policy of the Government, the aim of which is to develop a modern, effective system in vocational training, which also includes the elaboration of a flexible and differentiated system of qualifications, in order to meet the economic and social requirements in Hungary in harmony with the laws in the European Union.

The **aim** of the thesis on the one hand is to present the legal, social, economic and environmental context of vocational training in Hungary together with the changes in these areas after the changes in the political regime and, on the other hand, to assess the characteristic features of vocational training in the school system and its reform from the perspective of the training institutions. The thesis is seeking to find an answer to what changes were brought about by the political, social and economic changes in the overall regime in the whole of education with special regard to vocational training, and whether the tendencies of

vocational training in Hungary are in compliance with the development of Hungarian economy and the directives of the European Union. It is important to assess how the function and role of vocational training have changed in Hungary during the past 17 years, what changes have occurred in the number and activities of vocational institutions, how flexibly the system of vocational training within and outside the school system has been able to adapt itself to the requirements of the labour market and what measures will be taken in the development of the vocational training system. It is also a relevant idea to present a picture of the training environment at the training institutions, and also how they “live through” the transformation of the structure and content of vocational training, and what problems they have to tackle.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Act LXXVI of 1993 on vocational training created a framework for a transparent system of vocational training by containing provisions on the development of an OKJ by the fusion of earlier lists. Thus the OKJ contains all the qualifications as recognised by the Government at every level (ISCED² 2-5). The Act also contained regulations on the determination of professional and examination requirements for general and vocational qualifications as listed in the OKJ. Based on the new legislation it was possible for students to acquire qualifications as recognised by the Government both within and outside the school system however there are still some qualifications, which may only be acquired exclusively within the school system or during courses in adult education. The most important factors behind the fundamental structural changes in the vocational training within the school system were the fact that the age limit for **compulsory school attendance was raised** to 16, then, as of 1998, to 18 years of age (Act LXXIX of 1993), and also that general and vocational training was clearly separated, and education with the purpose of laying the foundation for general knowledge was extended to the 10th grade at general schools. The most important steps in the re-organisation process of education were as follows (Köpeczi Bócz-Büki, 2006/9):

- The transformation of vocational schools in a way that during the first four grades they provide general training and professional orientation training (this latter is not mandatory). Pure vocational training is provided for students only at higher-than-secondary levels;
- The transformation of apprentice schools into typical 2+2-year vocational schools;

² ISCED (international Classification of Education) is a uniform classification system of education. It was first elaborated at the beginning of the 1970s by the educational and cultural organisation of the UNO (UNESCO) with the explicit aim to make available for professionals a tool, which enables the comparison of national and international statistical data concerning education.

- The introduction of so-called higher vocational training , which provides qualifications as listed in the OKJ at ISCED 5B level.

In spite of the development processes in the system of training for vocational qualifications as mentioned above there are still important areas, where further reforms are needed. A **Vocational Training Development Strategy** was adopted in 2005 for the period between 2005 and 2013. The main objective of the strategy is to ensure the continuation of high level vocational training, which is in compliance with the individual and social requirements in the 21st century, and which contributes to the social and economic development of Hungary, and which, through the development of skills, trains individuals for successful career paths (see in the Government of the Hungarian Republic 2005a). The most important objectives of the reform measures as contained in the Government Resolution of 1057/2005 (31st May) were as follows: the provision of high quality vocational training for every student, the development of a more cost-effective management and financing system in vocational training, and further development of the information and statistical system in vocational training. In November 2005 the Hungarian Government adopted a strategy for lifelong learning for the period until 2013, which contains an overall development programme by focusing on the development of individual capabilities (see in: the Government of the Hungarian republic). This strategy breaks with the sectorial approach tied to the existing institutional system in order to create an approach, which provides Governmental responses to overall social and economic problems.

As for its topic the thesis may be divided into two major parts. **The first part** is built on domestic and international professional literature concerning the major topic and on secondary analysis. The secondary analyses are partly based on publications and Internet databases by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the OECD and the EUROSTAT, and partly on scientific research conducted earlier. The changes in the structure of vocational training were examined between 1989 and 2006, so the author concentrated on changes during the past 16 years as reflected also in statistical data. Although the time period examined is only one and a half decades, this is a peculiar period in that as a result of the changes in the political regime the institutional context has been transformed radically, thus creating new conditions for education and training and, within this, vocational training. The adaptation of the new school system and the training system to the new framework was a long process, which lasted for years, because some details were not clarified, some political interests clashed, and therefore the transition was somewhat prolonged, because the institutions and their owners had to prepare themselves both conceptionally and

financially for the changes. Besides changes in the legal environment³ some challenges, for which the Western-European countries could prepare, also had an impact. In Hungary these caused a “shock”, such as mass unemployment or the expansion of education (Forray-Híves, 2003:22). During the period examined by the author the social and economic significance of vocational training grew all over the world, and the common policies concerning vocational training and learning as such have also undergone fundamental changes.

In four chapters of the thesis some theoretical background of the topic is provided together with a summary on how the structure of vocational training was transformed after the changes in the political regime. Then the correlation between the economy of the country and vocational training is analysed, during which the processes concerning vocational training in the 1990s are presented and detailed including financing issues as well as the impact on Hungary’s accession to the European Union on vocational training. The present **vocational training reform** is described, as a result of which fundamental changes will take place and directions will be set for the next few decades in the area of vocational training. The legal, social, economic and environmental context of vocational training is also presented together with all the changes in this context in the 1990s. The different factors are not analysed as individual agents, but in their correlations, in a type of *systemic* approach. Most markedly the correlations between the economy of the country and vocational training are analysed, at the same time however the country’s economy is not a subject of the analytical process; the major analytical objective is to examine phenomena concerning vocational training and related social correlations. In the thesis the social environment for vocational training is not analysed, therefore demographical factors are not analysed, either, although it is known that these factors have a relevant impact on education. The area of vocational training outside the school system is also touched upon. This is an area, which is a lesser explored one. A status analysis is also given of the ongoing, significant transformation of vocational training, which is under-communicated. This analysis is placed in the context of lifelong learning. Proposals for the future development of vocational training are not provided (maybe it is not even possible to make such proposals); only some future tendencies and the related influences are described.

The introduction is followed by the presentation of *the employment situation* in Hungary. This presentation is based mainly on statistical analyses. Together with the vocational training reform the presentation of the employment situation establishes a frame of understanding, within which the process of the transformation of vocational training may be explained and understood. Therefore, besides describing the employment situation in Hungary, it is also

³ The first element in the changes in the legal environment was Act IV of 1991 on employment, which adopted training outside the school system into the general training system, then in 1993 acts on public education, vocational training and higher education were adopted; the OKJ was also published in that year.

necessary also to analyse the impact of Hungary's accession to the European Union on the present labour market in Hungary. Based on all this, and also relying on Hungarian professional literature, *research efforts in the area of vocational training* in the 1990s and related results are also presented, which are taken into account in later chapters of the thesis. Economy and vocational training are in close correlation. The mutual impact of *the economy of the country and vocational training* was a major issue in the 1990s, when there were radical changes in Hungary, which had a fundamental impact on both these systems. In chapter four these changes are presented from the perspective of the economy first, then the impact of the changes in the economy on education is analysed. Here mention is made on the *financing* of vocational training since the financial support system and set of tools are the most important and most effective policy tools, the synergic effects of which are especially interesting and important concerning the development of the economy. In chapter four of the thesis the basic principles of the ongoing *vocational training reform* are described. The key concepts of the new training structure are modularisation and competence-based training. Together with all these, the content of vocational training has also been renewed, and new professional and examination requirements have been developed together with central programmes. The concept of competence as capacity potential is established, by which it is proved that it is indispensable to link this concept to the professional requirements of pedagogical and human resources development. Following the review of different types of understanding the concept of competence, various job competences are detailed.

METHODS AND PROCESSES FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In **the other major part** of the thesis the results of empirical research conducted at vocational secondary schools in 2006 are processed in a wider analytical context. **The research goal** was to acquire a general picture of the work conducted at vocational secondary schools in vocational grades, of the training of youths, who participate in vocational training after their maturity exams and of the opinions of head teachers of vocational institutions about the changes in vocational training; to what extent they were aware of these changes and their relationship with the ongoing and expected changes. In harmony with principles in the European Union, in order to build prestige and relevance in the labour market for vocational training, the transformation of the structure and content of vocational training began also in Hungary in 2004. The socio-economic and, naturally, the education policy changes in the past decade have made it necessary to carry on with the modernisation process, which was started earlier, and to develop a list of qualifications, which is more up-to-date than the present list, in order to enhance the school efficiency of students and the requirements in the labour market. The ongoing transformation process of the structure and

content of vocational training between 2004 and 2007 will set the direction for the future of vocational training therefore it is of utmost importance to know the views and opinions of vocational institution representatives concerning the vocational training reform.

The research method was primary data collection through structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were developed for vocational institutions, where vocational training was conducted within the school system, and the questions concerned tasks related to vocational activities at secondary level; in other words through the questions vocational activities conducted in grades 13 and 14 were examined. The questionnaires were filled in by the interviewees. The clarity of the questions was tested during test interviews, as a result of which some questions in the questionnaires were adjusted. The questionnaires were divided into two major parts. In the first part the questions concerned features of work conducted at vocational secondary schools, while in the second part they concerned information and opinions related to the transformation of the structure and content of vocational training. There were closed and open questions alike among the 39 questions in the questionnaires. The questions mainly concerned quantifiable data however there were some questions, which concerned attitudes.

The **basic mass** was comprised of public educational institutions, in which regular vocational training activities were conducted. The Public Educational Information System contains all the data of public educational institutions and related owners, in which regular educational activities are conducted, and which function with OM (Ministry of Education) licences in the territory of the Hungarian Republic. The data collection was based on total sample involvement. Data collection through questionnaires was conducted in all the 845 vocational secondary schools throughout the country.

The research was conducted in September 2006. The questionnaires were sent by regular post and also electronically to all the vocational secondary schools. Out of the 845 schools 301 (35.62%) responded. 17 questionnaires were filled in with so many questions unanswered that it made processing impossible. 29 schools indicated that they either did not conduct vocational training or they had terminated this type of training in their vocational grades. The number of questionnaires, which were suitable for processing and evaluating, was 255, which was 30.17 % of all the questionnaires, and which enabled the author to assess the activities conducted in the vocational grades at vocational secondary schools, the views of head teachers and the rate of their preparedness for the introduction of the new vocational training structure. Out of the schools, which responded with appropriately completed questionnaires, which could be processed, 181 were institutions with a clear profile, where only vocational training was conducted. 69 schools had a profile mix, which means that at these schools primary and regular secondary training was conducted besides vocational training. In the case of 5 schools no clear training profile could be

established. The questionnaires were sent to the head teachers of the schools, and the questionnaires were typically completed jointly by the head teachers, the deputy head teachers and heads of school departments with some regular teacher involvement. During the data collection process special attention was paid to the compliance with the ethical norms of social science research. Upon coding the data were processed with the SPSS⁴, computer-aided statistical method with frequency breakdown and cross table analysis along three major analytical dimensions: financing issues concerning vocational secondary schools, the adjustment of the training supply to the requirements of the labour market and the opinions concerning the changes in the new vocational education structure. In the case of the latter, based on the research outcome, the author calls the attention to the fact that as regards the new vocational training structure and content there is a high grade of information deficit concerning all the stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, head teachers and employers). Remedy for this must be found without delay by the education management authorities, because practical implementation may be seriously hindered as a result of inappropriate information, which may result in rejection and negative attitudes towards the vocational training reform, which otherwise sets a positive development direction.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The community of educators in Hungary is aware of and is naturally concerned with the new structure and content of vocational training, but is not appropriately informed, and **has developed incorrect concepts**. The research proves that the new information and expectations do not formulate a competence-based, pedagogical way of thinking in a coherent system in the mindsets of heads of vocational institutions.
2. The representatives of training institutions are aware of parts of the vocational training reform process, and express **their need for information**, which they consider extremely important. They recognise the necessity of reforms, and they agree with the efforts expressed in educational policies, their opinions and views may be characterised in almost every case by a certain type of emotional attitude. Besides real problems they also suggest fictitious ones. They consider extra work load on educators (e. g. curriculum modification) as the major challenge, and they do not feel certain that the new structure and content in vocational training may be implemented as set out in the theoretical blueprint. They **miss reliability** very much, and also the stability of the educational system.

⁴ Statistical Package for Social Sciences = a statistical programme package for social sciences

3. Individuals are rather defenceless when it comes to **supply structures** and quality. There is no real competition in this regard in the market of education and training. The measurable result of training institutions and corporations is not the fact that they function in compliance with the requirements of the labour market, the social and individual expectations, but that they survive and generate profits. *There is no* appropriate information, incentive, sanctioning and *career path monitoring system*. With the exception of a small group of schools this is the real situation in the educational and training arena both within and outside the school system. The institutional interests do not carry inherently an element of the need for adjustment to the labour market, and the legislative and financing system do not provide adequate incentives for modernisation and the promotion of social and economic cohesion (see in: Szép, 2003). The vocational institutions function along a course of exigency, and they make extraordinary efforts in order to recruit as many students as they are entitled to. Due to the demographical ebb this is a period of over-supply in training, and the institutions are competing for students, because below a certain limit of student headcount they may not be able to survive (see in Mártonfi, 2005).
4. Forecasts for training demands and needs and planning professional training courses accordingly, are areas for improvement and development in Hungary. At present the only forecast mechanism for labour market needs and skill gaps in Hungary is the one contained in the forecast reports for short term periods developed by the National Employment Service. Generally speaking, the possibilities for developing labour market forecasts are rather **limited** for several reasons: as far as needs and demands are concerned, there are significant differences depending on the size of enterprises and their location in various regions. Such reasons are furthermore the rapid development of alternative forms of employment, the size and openness of the economy, the weakness of the intermediary role of social partners, etc. (see in Mártonfi-Tordai, 2005). The present labour market forecasts therefore are mainly there to provide *short term prognoses* for the number unemployed persons and that of those, who leave training, and based on the information as provided by enterprises for labour needs. Such types of forecasts however are not really suitable for planning vocational training within the school system since the introduction of vocational training for new vocational qualifications takes at least three years. Although several national, regional or county counselling committees are functioning with the involvement of the social partners and economic chambers, the existing planning mechanisms for vocational training may still be regarded inadequate.
5. When determining their **training portfolio** the vocational secondary schools take into consideration the labour market demands. Besides these

the training portfolio of these institutions is also determined by the requirements of students, parents and the available material and human resources. These institutions typically acquire relevant information from labour market organisations. The vocational schools basically are aware of the labour market situations in their regions, and make appropriate lists of scarce qualifications and of ones, in the regard of which there is over-supply.

6. The statistical data collected clearly prove that the **general educational level of society** is gradually *growing* (see in Central Statistical Office, 2005), which corresponds to the requirements of knowledge-based society. In the area of the educational level, apart from a region in the middle of Hungary, there are not any significant regional differences. What is more, the number of secondary graduates and higher educational graduates is the highest in the most deprived regions (see in: Central Statistical Office, 2005). The dynamic growth of the educational level however *does not entail* the growth of the rate of economic development. The growth of educational level in itself does not contribute directly to economic development, job creation and the decrease of the unemployment rate. Learning does not lead straight to the quantitative growth of knowledge. This is a simplified answer to why education and training are incapable of alleviating tensions in the labour market. Although the vocational institutions typically train students for qualifications as demanded by the labour market, at the same time these institutions are incapable of conveying to the students the relevant knowledge, which is necessary for them to practice those qualifications. From what has been said above it may also be derived that not every type of knowledge is relevant knowledge, which may be utilised in society. Therefore the development of vocational training in the future must concern the educational content rather than quantitative features, because the content of training is the real problem.
7. The planning of vocational training may only be conducted at **regional** level, based on the permanent analysis of economic and labour market processes. Out of all the educational systems and forms it is vocational training that is most exposed to economic demands. There are significant regional differences in the level of economic development and labour market processes. These differences have not decreased during the course of the past 15 years. The national labour market prognoses do not provide adequate guidance for institutions in certain communities for planning their training supply. The management of vocational training must be conducted regionally, and the interested parties must co-operate at regional level. Human, material and financial assets must be provided in every region for the analysis of economic and labour market processes.

8. Today there is not any single educational institution in the world, which would be capable of providing ready-made knowledge. This is impossible to do. This function shift gives *added value* to **competences** besides knowledge⁵. Knowledge becomes obsolete, and knowledge is a multi-dimensional asset. However one constant feature is the fact that natural curiosity needs to be developed permanently together with the capability of raising issues, thinking, formulating opinions, creativity, independent learning, etc. These competences need conscious development since the communication of a large amount of information, without the analytical understanding of facts, in itself does not contribute to the development of thinking and the capability of formulating judgements. A great step ahead in this area is the fact that it is a declared aim in vocational training today to develop *qualification-specific competences*, and this is now part of the examination requirements. It has been determined what tasks need to be accomplished in order to acquire certain qualifications, and what professional and social competences are needed for the accomplishment of such tasks.
9. The economic players are *not capable of articulating adequately* their demands for the labour force. On the other hand however, if they articulate the content of knowledge, which is important for them, it is not certain whether this content is easy to understand and explained by the vocational institutions. It happens many times that economic challenges are not understood at the schools by the educators. It is not clarified whether at a higher level of informatics it is a demand for the students to know the exact operational principles, the structure of pieces of software, software development, word processing, electronic mailing, programming, the application of graphic programs, etc. Since the demands are articulated in a simplified form, the educators decide on what relevant knowledge is according to their own sets of values and competences.
10. The vocational institutions typically receive **central finances** for their operations however the rate of Government capitation payment did not increase in 2006 compared to that in 2005, so each school has vested interest in seeking additional resources. The present financing system does not provide incentives for the school to adapt to the employers' needs. The capitation type financing, which is based on the number of students, motivates these institutions to consider to a much larger extent the demands of the students and their parents, and not the expectations in the labour market when they determine the types of courses they offer. Our research findings indicate that the vocational schools utilise the

⁵ Here mention must be made of the fact that the Ministry of Education will terminate the examination in general education, the original aim of which was to create an entrance to vocational training. Since it did not work according to expectations, it was replaced by „competence” as an entrance requirement.

resources of vocational training contributions to a much lesser extent than possible. Although the system of vocational training contribution payment is the most significant potential for these schools besides the central resources provided by the Government, it has several shortcomings. Since the basis of a considerable ratio of development support is a network of personal relations, this support has lost connection with the real demands in the labour market and from the original goal of the legislators, which is that the development contribution payment is supposed to support vocational training, the outcome of which is a new generation of qualified workforce. An impediment in the way of realising this goal is that the system of development contribution payment does not cover the public sector although it is of great significance to develop a new generation of workforce also in this sector.

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