The Motivation of Vocational Education - Educational Alternative in the Member States of the European Union

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Abstract

The structures of the education system respect the system in our country. Practically, in most cases, the four cycles are followed as forms of education: primary education, high school education, high school or professional education, and higher education (for adults). In many countries, vocational education attracts more and more young people, in Austria, Germany, and Portugal a fairly high percentage of 2/3 of the total number of students choose the path of vocational education. The permanent needs existing in the labor market lead very much to the area of trade, compared to the theoretical one which is very difficult to prove in the labor market. Another reason why professional studies take the place of higher ones is also represented by the very high costs regarding the graduation of higher education in the universities of the member states of the European Union, such as Sweden, Poland, and Germany. In this article, we will analyze professional/vocational education in Austria, France, and Germany.

Keywords: curriculum, education system, vocational profession, motivation in education.

JEL Classification: I20, I21, I23, I29.
1. Introduction

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE) has as its fundamental principle the free movement of workers. This principle implies the elimination of any discrimination based on citizenship between the workers of the member states, in terms of employment, remuneration, and other working conditions. Education has a very important role on how to optimize the way current societies/institutions’ function.

The efforts that are taking place at the level of the European Union, have the role of improving this sector, leaving aside the financial part and consolidating the quality of professional training, which will lead to a high labor market, training and the use of the digitization system in the education system, platforms used during the pandemic, the telework system used are elements of today's society, essential elements for the formation of responsible and future-oriented people, towards development.

Next, we will make a presentation of some education systems of some EU member states considering aspects related to their structure, policies related to the specialization of young people, and their motivation for adapting to the needs of the labor market in terms of education professional, and vocational.

2. Literature review

The initial education and professional training of young people and adults occupy an important place nowadays. Emphasis on excellence and skills is key, as well as on the improvement and retraining of adults, it emphasizes the essential characteristics of education and professional training, characteristics of high quality, to respond to current needs, and to be oriented towards the future. Romania’s national challenges and priorities in terms of education and training initial and continuous professional – improving its relevance and quality is closely related to those at the EU level. Nowadays there are many alternative programs for students who give up routines and impersonal aspects of conventional schooling but despite these progressive ideas, the educational climate of the last decade has been affected by the permanent change. It was a realization that as public-school systems became less flexible and adaptable to progress, the possibility became apparent that thousands of families and educators to turn to more democratic values centered on people and turn to/profess alternative schools and home education.
In a democratic, information-rich society, learning should happen everywhere in the community, and young people should have access to mentors who nurture their different personal interests and learning styles. We have a long way pass before this type of system is implemented, but if our society is indeed headed in this direction, it may be alternative educators who lead the way (Miller, n.d.). In the last decades, certain member states of the European Union have undertaken reforms of education and professional training systems. This thing started with the signing of the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002, which started The Copenhagen process and a complex documentary production by the EU institutions over the years, including their reform proposals in the form of conclusions and recommendations for member states.

During this cycle of reforms, it played a critical role at the European level by influencing Spain and other southern countries. As Zaunstöck et al. (2021) stated:

*The Copenhagen Declaration, the process leading to it, and its consequences were ultimately relevant to Spanish stakeholders in terms of discussing intentions and the Spanish VET directions. Spain did not just adopt the back wording of The Copenhagen Declaration, but also aligned in the same direction: the foundation of its current VET system can be clearly linked to the Copenhagen Declaration, principles, and pillars.* (Zaunstöck et al., 2021).

Decision makers, to face the challenges of national VET systems, "don't try to reinvent the wheel and therefore look for models and best practices that have worked elsewhere" (Maurer and Gonon, 2014). Throughout this inaugurated reform cycle through the Copenhagen Declaration, the German dual VET system, together with other European systems of dual VET, was the most relevant model of good practice in the public imagination of the reforming countries of the South (Martín-Artiles et al., 2019).

Currently, in Austria, the Vocational School represents one of the two places of learning in dual training. The vocational school has the task of completing training within the enterprise and expanding general education. Students can attend a secondary vocational school (BMS) after graduating from the 8th grade. This lasts between one and four years. BMS with a training duration of one or two years provides basic professional training, and those with a training duration of three to four years with a final exam provide complete professional training. As far as the French education system is concerned, it is similar to the one in Austria, any change in the
law of the French education system is carefully analyzed and adopted by the Ministry of Education. Regarding fees, schools are free and compulsory for students aged between 6 and 16, but there are also private schools for a fee, but they are not under the direct coordination of the Ministry of Education.

The vocational education system in Germany includes over 300 recognized professional qualifications, for some professions, the training takes place only theoretically in school, for example in the social, commercial, or medical fields, and can be completed with internships. A necessary emphasis must be placed on the assessment of learning, this being viewed through the prism of selection and competition, thus obtaining an increased return on the degree of learning.

### 3. Research Methodology

This article represents critical research on the educational systems of Austria, France, and Germany. In carrying out this study, we used materials, articles, reports, and communications from the ministries of education. Education has always had multiple roles for each of us, the significant implications in terms of economic prosperity, technologies, and their rapid evolution represented an important thing in choosing the three analyzed states.

The three countries such as Austria, France, and Germany were chosen for analysis because they have very well-developed educational systems, respecting the political approaches regarding the division of labor and the prioritization of training areas. The education system in the three member states of the European Union places great emphasis on the specialization of young people and their adaptation to the needs of the labor market, with special attention given to professional and vocational education, this educational system is included in the central Sustainable Development Objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

#### 3.1. AUSTRIA – the educational system

The Austrian educational system consists of the diversification of the school program. Austria has a very well-developed educational sector, with approximately 82% of the graduates of compulsory state education choosing this pathway. Between 2000 and 2021, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment in Austria increased albeit at a slower pace than on average across OECD countries, by 19 percentage points (from 23% in 2000, to 42% in 2021). In
Austria, 42% of 25-34 year-olds had a tertiary qualification in 2021 compared to 47% on average across OECD countries. (Austria – Overview of the education system, EAG, 2022).

Compulsory education is up to the age of 15 and starting with the years 2016-2017, all young people who had not reached the age of 18 were obliged to opt for either theoretical education or vocational training. Vocational education in Austria represents one of the most effective forms of professional-vocational education in the European Union.

The system has an education-type formula completed with internships carried out through partnerships with various private and state organizations. Along with general education programs, students can choose from various forms of pre-university education and professional training. Professional education options – professional vocation – are:

a. One- or two-year education during which students obtain a general education level, key competencies, and basic professional skills that prepare them for further professional education and simple jobs on the labor market.

b. Three or four-year education during which students improve their knowledge and learn how to acquire the respective professional skills and qualifications to obtain medium-level jobs. Those who complete an add-on program or pass the Berufsreifeprüfung will gain general access to higher education.

c. Education with a five-year schooling base represents the combination of theory with practice, which offers a high quality of training for occupations related to training while consolidating the general process of the students, which leads to double qualification for management positions in the field of business and general access to higher education.

d. Apprenticeship being two-way training for approximately 200 occupations and trades, for students aged 15 and over, after completing compulsory education. Graduates can progress to qualify as master craftsmen, and after some additional exams access to tertiary level training in a related field.

Austria has put in place a strong vocational education sector, in recent years, Austria has adopted different strategies to enable access to dual vocational training and higher education. As shown in the Schematic Structure of the National Education System below, in Figure 1, Austria has introduced dual qualification certificates for the simultaneous acquisition of a professional diploma and an entry qualification for higher education.
According to the information found in the Schematic Structure of the National Education System, a very important thing about the Austrian school system is the strong diversification of programs at all levels of education. Austria has created a strong vocational education sector.

In September 2010 obligatory kindergarten attendance was introduced for 5-year-olds. School education is compulsory for nine years and starts at the age of 6. Primary school is the general compulsory school for pupils aged 6-10 (years 1 to 4).

The lower secondary level (years 5 to 8) comprises:
- Compulsory secondary school (Mittelschule);
- Lower level of academic secondary school (Allgemein bildende Höhere Schule).

The upper secondary level (years 9 to 13) comprises:
- a general education branch;
- a vocational branch.

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**Fig.1.** Schematic Structure of the National Education System - Austria.
Higher education is provided by:

- Public Universities (the biggest sector);
- **Private Higher Education Institutions** (HEIs);
- **Universities of Applied Sciences** (Fachhochschulen);
- **University Colleges of Teacher Education** (Pädagogische Hochschulen).

Adult learning programs may lead to legally regulated qualifications (also called formal qualifications):

- the **compulsory schooling qualification** (Pflichtschulabschluss);
- the **apprenticeship-leave certificate** (Lehrabschlussprüfung);
- the **final certificate from schools for people in employment** (Berufsreifeprüfung).

### 3.2. FRANCE – the educational system

The French education system is represented by the power of the state in the organization and financing of education, being regulated by the Department of National Education, Higher Education and Research. It governs within the framework defined by the Parliament and establishes the fundamental principles of education. With a long tradition, the state plays an important role in governing a centralized French education system, defining the details of the curriculum at all levels of education; organizing the admission procedure for teaching staff, defining the content, recruiting teaching staff who become civil servants, provides them with continuous training; recruit and train inspectors, responsible for quality control of the education system; it is the main funding body of the public education system and subsidizes "private charter schools" which receive about 20% of the school's students.

In the French education system, students are taught the same subjects until the age of 15, high school. At the end of the first two classes, the first stage of specialization takes place, students must practically participate in a general, technological or vocational high school program, with the aim of preparing students for obtaining the baccalaureate, and then follow higher education (ISCED 5 to ISCED 8) which is characterized by the existence of two systems. These institutions have a wide variety of legal statuses that are listed in the French Code of Education. There are two types of short-cycle studies (**Sections de Techniciens Supérieurs and Diplôme Universitaire Technologique**). Courses dispensed in French higher education institutions have different aims
and conditions for admission, but most of them are structured into three study cycles (Bachelor’s degree, Master’s degree, and Doctorate) and in ECTS credits, in compliance with the principles of the Bologna Process. Universities - public institutions that have an open admission policy, except for the University Institute of Theology and integrated training classes. As for the Elite School, with a very strict selection policy, open to students who obtained the baccalaureate and who followed two years of preparatory courses, it is very selective both in the admission process and during the studies. 

Non-tertiary post-secondary education is marginal in France, the only two ISCED level 4 diplomas that the French education system offers have a very low percentage. (Ministere de l’éducation nationele, Reperes & References Statistique, 2016). Initial professional education is offered to start with upper secondary education. It is a training path that follows lower secondary programs, which prepares young people for qualified jobs, from engineer to worker. The system is represented by flexibility, practically after obtaining the professional certification, additional education is also possible. The ministries develop and grant qualifications, university diplomas, and professional certificates on behalf of the state, respectively the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, but also the ministries responsible for agriculture, employment, social affairs, youth and sports, culture, or health, all these qualifications/diplomas are recognized at the national level and have no validity period. 

The higher technical program at the high school level provides a two-year program that leads to obtaining a higher technician certificate (BTS), the universities also offer a two-year technological specialization program with the DUT diploma, this being designed for entering the labor market. Learners can choose to complete a vocational program to obtain the professional qualification 6 and EQF, subsequently being able to pass to the master level for a qualification at the EQF7 level. Regarding apprenticeship, all certifications registered in the national register of professional qualifications, which includes all secondary or higher education certifications with CQP professional qualification certificates, are issued by professional branches. Young people who have an apprenticeship contract (from one to three years) have the right to a salary and status similar to an employee. 

The financing comes from the state budget, which offers companies tax amnesty and takes into account the contributions of employers for the amount of each apprentice employee, regional
councils (premiums for recruitment, apprenticeship), and companies (apprenticeship tax). Complementary vocational education applies to those entering the labor market or already employed, both young and adults. The objectives include promoting professional integration or reintegration, keeping people at work, and encouraging skills development and access at different levels for professionals. As we can see in Figure 2- The Schematic Structure of the National Education System - France, for the year of education 2022/2023, France has a very varied and flexible system, which basically allows access after obtaining professional certification and to additional education.

![Fig.2. Schematic Structure of the National Education System - France.](image)

Source: Eurydice, October 26th, 2022.

The French education system is characterized by a strong central State presence in the organization and funding of Education. The French education system is regulated by the Department for National Education, Higher Education and Research. It governs within the framework defined by the Parliament, which states the fundamental principles of education. The
State plays a major role in governance, as, by long tradition, the French education system is centralized.

3.3. GERMANY – the educational system

In the Federal Republic of Germany, responsibility for the education system is shared between the Federation and the Länder. The scope of the Federal Government's responsibilities regarding the education system is defined in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz), except where the Basic Law grants legislative powers to the Federation, with the Länder having the right to legislate. Within the education system, this applies to the school sector, the higher education sector, adult education and further education. The organization of the education system on these levels is under the direct subordination and competence of the states.

In Germany, compulsory education begins at the age of 6 and involves 9 years of full-time schooling. After completing the compulsory courses, they must follow an education system with a random program, with a duration of 3 years, in case they do not want to continue with a vocational or theoretical high school.

The tertiary level of education includes higher education institutions, universities, colleges of work and art, and other institutions that offer qualification courses for the profession, to students who have graduated from the secondary school level. Faschulen and Fachakademien in Bayern are continuing vocational education institutions that require for admission the completion of vocational studies equivalent to the secondary level, the qualifications obtained being equivalent to the first tertiary level according to ISCED.

In Germany, few students chose the general educational path, rather than vocational education, this being due to the fluidity of the dual system followed by the majority of vocational education students on the labor market. The double training system in Germany seems to be a successful mode for structuring the transition from school to professional life. The apprenticeship in the dual system is three years. Young people start vocational school between the ages of 16 and 18.

It is necessary that compulsory education has been successfully completed before being admitted. In the dual system, a vocational school is an autonomous place of learning, its task is to provide the basis of specialized professional training and the extension of the previously acquired general education, the student should be able after graduation to perform his tasks
efficiently on duty. He acquires the qualities of being innovative, autonomous, and able to collaborate with others.

Regarding the final exams, they are oriented towards vocational practice. A final exam covers four/five fields relevant to the respective occupation. Performance in general subjects is evaluated through school reports. For schools that do not offer a full professional qualification, participation can only be credited under certain conditions. The admission requirement is passing lower secondary school, it is called *Realschule* and it is full-time.

Vocational schools are regulated by the state, by the Ministry of Education, except for those of medical assistance which belong to the federal law. Higher secondary or professional education programs last between 3 and 4 years and lead to higher education with a general qualification.

In Germany, socially disadvantaged young people with learning difficulties or medical problems and young migrants have advantageous possibilities to take up a place and be received separately. There are many regular and dual programs that involve professional training in higher education, this being presented in *Figure 3 - Schematic Structure of the National Education System - Germany*, for the academic year 2022/2023.

![Schematic Structure of the National Education System - Germany](image)

**Fig.3.** Schematic Structure of the National Education System - Germany.

Source: Eurydice, October 26th, 2022.

The Federal Republic of Germany responsible for the education system is divided between the Federation and the Länder, which is presented in *Fig.3*. The scope of the Federal Government's
responsibilities in the field of education is defined in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz). Unless the Basic Law awards legislative powers to the Federation, the Länder has the right to legislate. Within the education system, this applies to the school sector, the higher education sector, adult education, and continuing education. Administration of the education system in these areas is almost exclusively a matter for the Länder.

4. Discussions

Regarding our article on the Motivation of vocational education - educational alternative in the member states of the European Union, respectively Austria, Germany and France analyzed and presented in the article, we can see the special importance given to the education system based on the motivation to occupy a profession, being constantly related to market requirements. The need for work is a decisive factor for educational policies, in Germany, decision-makers are in constant dialogue with representatives of employers and trade unions, so that the educational system is correlated with the demands and trends of the market. In terms of the French education system, education is a training pathway that prepares young people for jobs ranging from executive worker to manager. At the opposite pole, Austrian legislation offers the most favorable conditions for education, after which professionals have the right to work in the country and obtain a residence permit. According to statistics, about 1/3 of students in Austria are foreigners. Education gives each individual the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and develop the attitudes and skills necessary to become an informed and active person who contributes to his and the nation's progress. An important role of education is represented by personal development, every person must have the opportunity to develop, so that they can to ensure the independence and prosperity of the family he finally decides to have and the groups he decides to be a part of. Personal development continues through continuous learning, being essential in contemporary society. The values on which education is built are trust, equity, solidarity, effectiveness, and autonomy. The school offers future adults a functional literacy in all areas, which will contribute to individual well-being and the community. The future adult must be able to access and understand any type of information enough to use it as a resource in carrying out one's actions or in excellence, educational institutions are obliged to ensure the necessary to achieve the objectives.
5. Conclusions

The present research gave us the chance to observe that a very important thing both at the level of theoretical education (internships) and professional education (apprenticeship), is represented by the special emphasis placed on the practical part, together with the theoretical part of preparation. This practice has motivated many states to integrate a balanced curriculum between theoretical and practical aspects of the desired occupation in their secondary education. Member States have encouraged educational institutions to enter into partnerships with various entities offering traineeships, thus motivating them to access a career.

Educational policies are applied after long and detailed analyzes at the level of the education system, in Germany, great emphasis is placed on permanent collaboration with representatives of various entities so that the education system is permanently coordinated with the needs and trends of work market. Basically, education must be as dedicated as possible to the working conditions on the labor market, in order to be able to successfully fulfill the most difficult path, that of training future specialists.

We also want to mention that a low situation on the labor market resulting from recent graduates or even the maladaptation of the high school and post-high school education system (university studies but also professional or professional studies) may lead to the need for specific legislation of a member state in order to solve possible crises on the labor market. The development of higher education should not be neglected as investment in education can play a key role in economic recovery. The experience of educational trainers, together with the innovative spirit of young people, as products of a quality higher education, can find the solution of a new development strategy. The results of our research show that educational institutions must permanently contribute to the modernization and development of society, being the starting point for national and international values.

Our conclusion is that studies/education together with market demands must be in a complementary relationship. For easy and efficient insurance on the labor market, it is necessary for the student to have permanent access to news and professional experiences, which will help the permanent development of future specialists on the labor market. Their motivation for continuous development is the key to success within an organization.
Therefore, the educational institutions together with the ministries and other bodies that are subordinate to the education system should create an attractive learning system with many opportunities, based on regulated and constantly updated professions, new courses and appropriate qualification exams.

References


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