

Improving governance of vocational teacher education in Ukraine within Erasmus+ project

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Abstract

The paper aims at discussing the governance of vocational teacher training based on partnership and cooperation with different stakeholders and its implementation within the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education project carried out in Ukraine.

The problem of the weak linkage between vocational schools, universities that offer pre-service vocational teacher training and the employment sector is typical of the Ukrainian vocational teacher training. It causes discrepancies between expectations of vocational schools from young ongoing teachers and the competencies prospective teachers are equipped with at universities. Within the project four Ukrainian partner-universities developed different concepts for improving the relevance and quality of provided pre-service teacher education by implementing mechanisms of “collaborative” governance and partnerships, which involves different stakeholders in teaching, content defining and quality monitoring processes. The initial implementation of these models offers solutions to above-mentioned problems in vocational teacher training.

Keywords: *Vocational teacher education; partnership-based governance; cooperation; Ukraine.*

1. Introduction

The governance of vocational teacher education and training can hardly be considered as a topic of active scientific discussions. Partially it can be explained by the fact that the initial (or pre-service) teacher training is carried out by universities, which fall under the jurisdiction of state executive bodies for higher education in a country. In this sphere, either universities have the freedom and autonomy to define the content and methods of the training or the respective Ministry of Science defines the standards and the content of the training. Such an approach leaves unaddressed the needs and expectations of vocational schools from ongoing teachers.

Some countries like Germany have a lengthy process of teacher training, which consists from an obligatory master's degree in vocational pedagogics and 18-24 months of preparatory service (Rahmenvereinbarung über die Ausbildung und Prüfung für ein Lehramt der Sekundarstufe II (berufliche Fächer) oder für die beruflichen Schulen (Lehramtstyp 5), 1995). This second phase of the training is aimed exclusively at equipping young teacher-trainees with practical pedagogical skills relevant to vocational school realities. However, in most countries, the process of vocational teacher training is reduced either to university studies or to advanced pedagogical training for specialists from industries (OECD, 2021). Consequently, equipping ongoing teachers with relevant pedagogical skills, vocational competence and industry knowledge within bachelor's and master's degrees or further training is a task, which requires much cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders, such as vocational schools and employers.

Surprisingly enough, vocational schools are, however, hardly involved in the curriculum development or teaching process in the pre-service vocational teacher training. Mostly, vocational schools are passive end-users of educational services provided by universities. This reinforces a subordinate image of vocational education and creates discrepancies between the competencies acquired by young vocational teachers in the system of higher education and the competencies needed by vocational schools. As a result, it affects the quality of the vocational training and creates tension between the different educational spheres.

The situation looks different with the pre-service teacher training for secondary education. University-school partnerships are recognised as an effective approach to fostering pre-service teacher engagement, improving teacher identity and enhancing the formation of the relevant pedagogical skills (Allen, Howells, & Radford, 2013; Gabureanu, 2015; Maskit & Orland-Barak, 2015). Recognising the complexity of training for the teaching profession, partnerships and school-based teacher education tackle the main problem of the pre-service teacher training: the theory-practice gap. It has three main features that make it particularly effective and beneficial: congruous learning and developmental possibilities for all partners,

professional development and the professionalization of teachers and curriculum development relevant to school realities and settings (van Velzen, Bezzina, & Lorist, 2009).

Based on findings of the cooperation between schools and universities in pre-service teacher training for secondary education, an Erasmus+ project was launched in 2020 in Ukraine, which deals with governance in vocational teacher education (VTE) in Ukraine. The project aims at developing and piloting governance structures and mechanisms between Ukrainian partner higher education institutions (HEIs) and regional vocational schools. The focus is on overcoming the theory-practice gap between university education and teaching requirements in vocational education and training, and on setting up governance in a new, i.e. partnership-based manner between relevant institutions in VTE.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Theory of modes of governing teacher training

As an analytical tool for explaining the governance of vocational teacher training the notion of modes of governance developed by Gideonse (1993) is applied. The theory of modes of governing teacher training suggests that depending on the dominant role of the stakeholder (state, universities and schools or professional unions) certain mechanisms of interaction, decision-making and management are formed, which make up a mode of governing. Three modes can be distinguished (political, institutional and professional), however, hardly any of them exists in a pure form. Gideonse remarks that usually these modes are determined by the context and time and may change or complement each other.

The first mode of governance is political. In this mode of governance, public officials and state legislatures fully exercise their authority and hardly delegate it. On the one hand, it recognises the importance of the schools and teachers on the political agenda. On the other hand, the disadvantage of this mode is preventing “professionals [from] defining and maintaining preparation and performance standards” (Gideonse, 1993, p. 402). In addition, it creates a public perception in which changes are determined by the regulatory process and happen only top-down as prescribed by the government. The teaching profession receives an image of a servant of the state, who implements the state policy within their professional activity (Young & Boyd, 2010).

According to the institutional mode of governance, the governance is exercised predominantly by providers of the pre-service teacher education (HEIs, schools, colleges and school districts responsible for internship). Gideonse states that “the strength of governing through the institutional mode is that it is the closest to where the teacher education action is” (1993, p. 403). However, the challenge of this mode is the diversity of the types, capacities

and status of the institutions and, consequently, the governance mechanisms may have very local solutions.

In the professional mode of governance, professional units and agencies are delegated by the government the function of governance and policy setting. They define standards and have authority over preparation. Composed of professionals from the teaching profession and being able to execute policy power, these bodies enhance the occupational status of this profession. The shortcoming of this mode is possible problems in the internal institutional processes and structures of such bodies. As well, there is a danger that the public perception may allege the protectionism of vested interests (Gideonse, 1993; Young, 2004; Young & Boyd, 2010).

Though vocational teacher training is considered to be more complex than teacher training for secondary education, since vocational teachers are expected to be pedagogues and professionals (Deissinger, Braun, & Melnyk, 2019), its governance can be analysed through the theoretical lens of modes of governing. The main reason is the composition of actors is similar and the goal of trainings shares the same fundamentals. The difference lies in the fact that in vocational teacher training employers come into play because of the twofold professionalism of vocational teachers. In addition, the structural configuration and standards are rarely distinguished from the teacher training for general schools. In most countries, vocational teacher training similarly to teacher training for secondary schools is carried out at universities or other institutions of higher education.

2.2. Ukrainian vocational teacher training at a glance

Vocational teacher training is a complicated topic for the Ukrainian education policy. For many years a clear regulatory framework for the profession of a vocational teacher was absent (Melnyk, 2019; Radkevych, Romanova, Artiushyna, & Borodiyenko, 2019). Thus, occupational standards for vocational teachers and educational standards for vocational teacher training programmes were developed just a few years ago (in 2019 – educational standards for a bachelor's degree, in 2020 – educational standard for a master's degree) by working groups set up by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Universities, academies and other types of HEIs provide training to teachers of special theoretical subjects. The minimum requirement for entering the profession is at least a bachelor's degree in a relevant industrial speciality with additional pedagogical training or a bachelor's degree in a vocational teacher training speciality. Trainers who deliver practical training at vocational schools are usually recruited directly by vocational schools from industries and there are no requirements for them for entering the teaching profession what concerns pedagogical skills. The accreditation of study programmes in vocational teacher training at HEIs is performed by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. However, this is not a specialised agency for pedagogical professions but a non-profit organisation, which on behalf

of the state monitors the quality and transparency of education services and research in higher education.

The governance is built in a hierarchal way in which the determining role belongs to the government. HEIs are granted the autonomy and freedom of teaching and research by the Law on Higher Education but there is a financial dependence on the government: study programmes can be fully cut off from financing and even be closed by the Ministry if there are too few applicants. It is especially dangerous for vocational teacher training programmes, which constantly suffer from extremely low enrolments and have to fight every year to prove their right to existence. Vocational schools in this system have marginal or no influence on the quality or content of the training at HEIs and remain on the periphery of policy-making in the sphere of vocational teacher training.

3. Rationale of Erasmus+ project

With the intention to contribute to fostering cooperation and partnerships in VTE and reconfigure the mode of governing vocational teacher training, the Erasmus+ project ‘New mechanisms of partnership-based governance and standardization of vocational teacher education in Ukraine’ (PAGOSTE) was launched on January 15, 2020, in Ukraine. The project aims at fostering the quality and relevance of VTE in Ukraine by establishing standards with respect to partnership-based governance (PBG) mechanisms between universities and vocational schools. Partnership-based governance is seen as an instrument to tackle problems of the ‘hierarchical’ governance, the theory-practice gap and the overall relevance of training in HEIs by including vocational schools in activities of pre-service training, such as curricula development and teaching methodology. It even could lead to establishing a governance system based on partnerships reaching beyond these two stakeholders. In more specific terms, the project pursues such objectives as to establish effective mechanisms of the partnership between HEIs, which are involved in VTE, and vocational schools (and other stakeholders if relevant); to employ mechanisms of PBG for in-service vocational teacher training; to enable educational institutions involved in vocational teacher training to use standards for PBG. The project consortium consists of nine partners, including three European universities, four Ukrainian universities, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the national research organisation in the sphere of vocational education and training in Ukraine. The project is a structural ‘Capacity Building’ project that is expected to lead to visible changes in the Ukrainian VTE system.

4. New visions of governing vocational teacher training

The Ukrainian universities in the project offer vocational teacher training in specific fields: Kyiv National Economics Universities offers a bachelor's degree programme for vocational

teacher training for commercial schools (economics), the South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University trains vocational teachers in apparel design; the National Transport University can provide a rare specialization of vocational teacher training for vocational schools of the transport industry. The exception is the Ukrainian Engineering-Pedagogics Academy, which is the only specialized HEI in Ukraine, which is responsible for training vocational teaching personnel for 24 industry branches. The preliminary need analysis conducted by the partner-HEIs identified problems of low enrolments in vocational teacher trainings courses, the weak cooperation with vocational schools in teaching and curriculum development and the theory-practice gap, which affects the quality of the training and the professional identity of their students. Within the project, each university developed a concept of how to involve stakeholders in the vocational teacher training at their institution, built a sustainable partnership and in such a way how to tackle the existing problems (PAGOSTE, 2021). Though the specializations of the universities, the number of students and their capacities are very diverse, all the approaches worked by the partners are united by such main actions which address the problems of the isolation and lacking collaborative governance in VTE in Ukraine: involvement of practitioners in the teaching process at the universities; setting up examination or accreditation boards with external experts from the field for quality monitoring and assurance; increasing the share of practical training or practice in the curriculum; organising common activities with vocational schools for exchange and networking.

On the institutional level, the universities create structures, which are to carry out these actions. These structures are based on the universities but obligatory must include the representatives from the vocational education sector as well as the employment sector. Since the partnership is expected to be reciprocal, HEI academic staff must be represented on advisory boards of vocational schools. Thus, the institutional interception creates a network of professionals, so the responsibility and ownership for the results and quality of the training are shared between different stakeholders. The expertise of practitioners from vocational institutions is expected to make didactics and pedagogics courses more relevant to real settings in vocational education. Due to the participation of HEI academic staff in advisory boards of vocational schools, insights into their needs and expectations are received. Moreover, vocational schools may profit from scientific approaches that HEI academic staff can employ when analyzing situations or problems in vocational settings. The implementation of the concepts of partnership-based governance started in June 2021 and it is hardly possible to make any conclusions because not even one year passed since piloting. However, all the partners reported that due to the first cooperation with vocational schools and conducting events for experience exchange and professional orientation at vocational schools the student enrollment into vocational teacher training programmes (predominantly the bachelor's degree) increased impressively as of the academic year 2021-2022.

5. Conclusions

Building an alliance between HEIs, vocational schools and experts from the employment sector is a step toward changing the mode of governance in Ukraine from the political one into a mixture of the institutional and professional ones. The subsidiary role of vocational schools in vocational teacher training makes the training offered by HEIs and governed by the Ministry of Education and Science detached from the reality of vocational education and training and the needs of vocational schools. By building the connecting bridge between the different spheres the urgent problems of the theory-practice gap, vague teaching identity and quality of vocational teacher training can be effectively solved. Given the twofold professionalization of vocational teachers, the change is quite promising and potentially can affect the vocational sector as well. As with any change on the institutional and systemic levels, it takes time to observe the real measurable and concrete results. However, the experience of other countries (Gerholz, Ciolek, & Schlottmann, 2020; Maskit & Orland-Barak, 2015; Pentelényi & Toth, 2011) proves to be positive and encouraging. Based on the results of piloting partnership-based governance at the partner-universities the national umbrella concept is to be developed and implemented in Ukraine. “Collaborative” or partnership-based governance of vocational teacher education and its implementation opens a new page for research not only for educationalists but also for organizational and political scientists.

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