

Job skills: What gender are they?

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Abstract: The purpose of the research is to find out which job skills Greek graduate students of high school and their parents consider as important qualifications for the youngsters' entry into the active working life with regard to their gender. The sample, consisting of 215 graduate students of high school and their parents (210), evaluated the importance they think the examined job skills have for the students' future entry into the labor market and also the extend to which the youngsters possess these skills. Results have shown that there were significant differences between students' and their parents' opinions with regard to gender concerning job skills that are considered as important for finding a job. This was also confirmed by the factor analysis applied. Significant gender differences were also found concerning the degree to which teenagers possess the examined skills. In concluding, male young students and their fathers believe that skills related to self-management, self-discipline and the use of technological means are more important for finding a job, whilst female young students and their mothers outline a more positive and social profile, confirming typical and stereotypical attitudes and vocational choices.

Key words: job skills; gender; youngsters; parents; entry to labor market

1. Introduction

The world of labor changes rapidly due to evolution in society, economy, bio-technology and science that have changed the patterns of our life and work. Scientists estimate that the meaning of "labor" will not be the same in the future (Rifkin, 1995), and that a new kind of "intelligence" will appear, consisting of a mixture of knowledge and skills, which is going to be a valuable asset for each worker (Thurow, 1996).

The high unemployment rates of young people highlight the difficulty of finding a job for this age group. Indeed, one of the most important issues concerning national and European policies on education, training and employment is the inclusion of certain groups into the labor market—like the young people and women and their career management. On the other hand, parents play a very important role in their children's entrance to the world of labor. Specifically, their expectations and values often influence the educational and vocational choices of their children (Herr & Cramer, 1996). Within this scope, the present study aims to explore the relationship among vocational skills and the entry into the labor market of the youngsters with regard to their own and their parents' gender.

1.1 Vocational skills

The term vocational or job skills includes a huge range of skills and more precisely a combination of different groups of basic skills, which are imperative for a successful job entry. The USA National Board responsible for appointing "vocational skills" (National Skills Standard Board, <http://www.nssb.org/bg/>

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fact.28/7/99) includes in the definition of “vocational skills” the knowledge, competencies and attitudes that a person needs in order to succeed in his/her professional activities. Vocational skills, therefore, refer to the general ability of a person to adjust into the labor market and coexist in harmony within his/her working environment, in order to work efficiently and use the maximum of his/her potential.

Richard Nelson Bolles in his famous book *What Color Is Your Parachute?* examines thoroughly the vocational skills, the attitudes and the qualifications that an employee should have today, in order to find a job. He groups skills into three basic categories: management of data and information, management of human relationships and management of situations. Other researches about the required skills among different professions at the labor market (Morreau & Bruiniks, 1991; Brown, Bimrose & Wilden, 1999) have shown that:

(1) The initial level of skills needed to enter a profession continuously raises;

(2) Although the skills’ level of most employees continuously raises since the middle of the 1980s, at the same time, an important number of people have not managed to upgrade their skills;

(3) Apart from the particular technical skills connected to each profession, there has been an increased demand in skills such as: communication; social skills; skills for using new technological means, especially computers and the internet.

1.2 Gender and vocational skills

In general, women as well as younger employees, encounter many problems and difficulties in the labor market¹. Women over thirty seem to face greater difficulties in finding a proper job, due to their double roles at home and at work but also due to their difficulty in keeping up with new demands in the labor market (Super & Sverco, 1995; Moses, 2003). This dual roles can explain to a certain degree, the high rates of part-time jobbers among women over thirty. It is interesting, though, that according to a BBC News report (16.09.2003), young female students seem more self-confident, hoping that in the future they will have better jobs with a higher salary than their male classmates.

The question whether stereotypes are connected to the educational and professional choices of the youngsters has been underlined by scientists, especially from the social psychology field. Panek, et al (1977) have tried to find out if there are stereotypic gender preconceptions for different (25) professions. Their results have shown that many of the professions are still thought to be stereotypically “male” or “female”, and it is necessary to change this attitude with regard to women’s dynamic participation in the world of work. A study conducted by the Psychology Sector of Philosophy-Psychology-Pedagogy Faculty in Athens University, examined the factors that contribute to the formation of attitudes and apprehensions during the teenagers’ transition to adult life, concerning their educational and professional choices and also, the stereotypical images of the high school students about professions (Bezevegis, 2000). Research results confirm the existence of gender stereotypic patterns among young students, but it is worth noting that this picture can be improved after an appropriate counseling intervention. Recent researches state that the stereotypic attitudes about professions have started to decrease (White, et al., 1989) and the progress that interested Panek, et al. in 1997 has been, partly, accomplished. However, even nowadays, stereotypical vocational attitudes still exist not only as far as high school is concerned, when primary educational choices are made, but even later, when the young adults make decisions about their vocational future (Bezevegis, 2000).

¹ According to the National Statistical Service of Greece (1997), women’s participation in the country’s work force comes up to 38.8%, with a representation in the total number of the unemployed in 16.5% and full-time unemployment rate of 67.1% over the total number of the full-time unemployed population.

Firms and organizations have been deeply concerned about the skills of their personnel and the way productivity is affected by these skills. Head hunters note that the skills in demand today could be characterized “female”, since they are considered as women’s characteristics (Adler, 1998). Studies, with regard to what employers demand from their future employees, show that the skills obtained through typical education are now less important than the basic capacity of an employee to communicate and learn through the job (Dowd & Liedtka, 1994). In a similar research among American employers, it is pointed out that more than half of their male employees—particularly the newcomers—have difficulties in cooperating with their colleagues and they also lack sufficient self-discipline and social skills. It seems that employers seek for employees with verbal communication and interpersonal skills, as well as people who can work well in groups (Goleman, 1998), with skills that usually characterize female candidates (Adler, 1998).

According to the above, the question lies on whether gender plays a role on what an individual conceives as important qualifications, in order to deal with—the biggest possible—success to face the threat of unemployment.

In an effort to explore some of the above mentioned vocational skills, the purpose of the current research was to locate the skills that Greek graduate students of high school and their parents consider as important qualifications for the youngsters’ entry into the active working life, in relation to their gender. The research aims of this study were the following: (1) Identification of the most important modern vocational skills for the entry into the labor market; (2) The extend to which students of high schools and their parents estimate that young students hold these skills; and (3) Grouping of the 21 initial vocational skills into broader groups (both for students and their parents) and the correlation of these new groups to students and parents’ gender.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

The sample included 215 graduate students of the General Lyceum² and their parents (210), forming two subgroups. All participants were citizens of Athens and its suburbs—the broader area called Attiki—and they were selected randomly, using the snowball method.

2.2 Research procedure

Data was collected using a prototype questionnaire formed by the author in 2001. The two sub groups wrote down their opinions concerning the importance attributed to each of the examined skills (Table 1) for the entry into the labor market and also the extend to which they estimate that young students have every skill, according to each group’s perceptions.

2.3 Data analysis

Firstly, a frequency distribution has been made for the answers given by the two groups, while the variance of the twenty one vocational skills was examined using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), having as a criterion on the students and parents’ gender. For the purpose of the analysis answers were coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1=“not at all” to 4=“a lot”. Skills grouping into broader categories was also attempted using a Principal Component Factor Analysis, which was attempted with Varimax rotation. The lowest limit for each factor’s loading was set to 0.40. Only those factors with eagenvalue over 1 were chosen. In order to identify statistical significant differences among the values of the correlations derived from factor groups to gender, regression techniques were used.

² Upper secondary education in Greece.

Table 1 The examined job skills³

Communication	Decision-making
Cooperation	Problem-solving
Leader qualifications	Time management
Negotiation skills	Data collection
Self-confidence	Data processing
Responsibility	Data evaluation
Flexibility	Transmission of information
Creativity	ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills
Working under pressure	Ability to use various technological means
Positive thinking and coping	Initiatives undertaking
Self-presentation	

3. Findings and discussion

Overall, 215 graduate students of the General Lyceum took part in the research, 123 boys and 92 girls, as well as 210 parents, 77 fathers and 133 mothers (Figures 1 and 2).

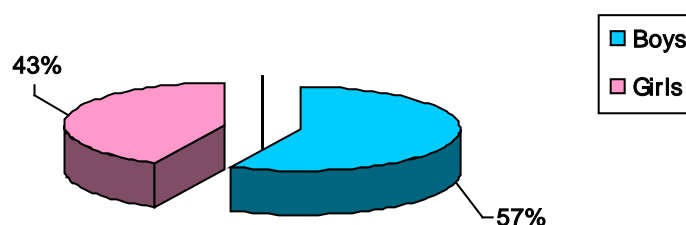


Figure 1 Frequency distribution of students' sample with regard to gender

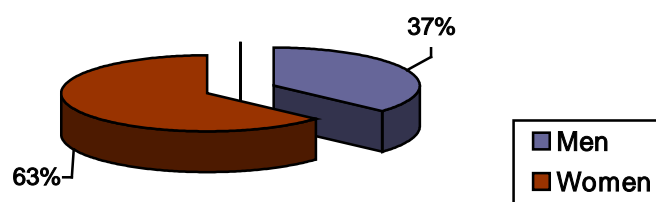


Figure 2 Frequency distribution of parents' sample with regard to gender

The comparison of the vocational skills was checked with the method of the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) regarding the students' gender.

3.1 Identification of the most important modern vocational skills for the entry of young students into the labor market

(1) Students' views

Results have shown that in the question "which vocational skills you considered as important in order to find a job", gender was significantly differed with students' opinions in six skills (Table 2).

These findings could be characterized typical, since it is expected for boys to consider as more important the

³ The definitions of skills were included in the questionnaires.

traditional “male” skills such as the leadership skills and those related to the ICT use and other technological means, whereas, girls consider as more important skills related to the interaction and management of human relations, as well as skills related to successful self-presentation.

Table 2 Comparison of means of students’ evaluation concerning the importance of vocational skills in order to find a job in relation to gender

Skills	Gender				Total
	Boys		Girls		
	M	SD	M	SD	
Communication	3.4	0.2	3.5	0.9	213
	F-value=14.64; $p<0.01$				
Cooperation	3.0	0.2	3.8	0.5	211
	F-value=15.7; $p<0.01$				
Leader qualifications	3.7	0.5	3.7	0.8	213
	F-value=12.6; $p<0.01$				
ICT skills	3.5	0.0	3.7	0.7	213
	F-value=10.35; $p<0.01$				
Ability to use various technological means	3.1	0.7	3.5	0.4	213
	F-value=7.41; $p<0.01$				
Self-presentation	3.5	0.5	3.7	0.1	213
	F-value=5.30; $p<0.5$				

Notes: Means: M; Standard Deviations: SD; F and p : values.

(2) Parents’ views

Results have shown that parents’ views, concerning the importance of the twenty-one vocational skills in order for their children to find a job, are significantly different with gender, only in the case of two skills. More specifically, fathers (M=3.64) considered the ability to use different technological means more important ($F_{(1,207)}=8.68, p<0.01$) than mothers (M=3.38), while mothers (M=3.32) rated positive thinking and coping skills as more advantageous ($F_{(1,208)}=6.26, p<0.05$) compared to fathers (M=3.03) (Figure 3).

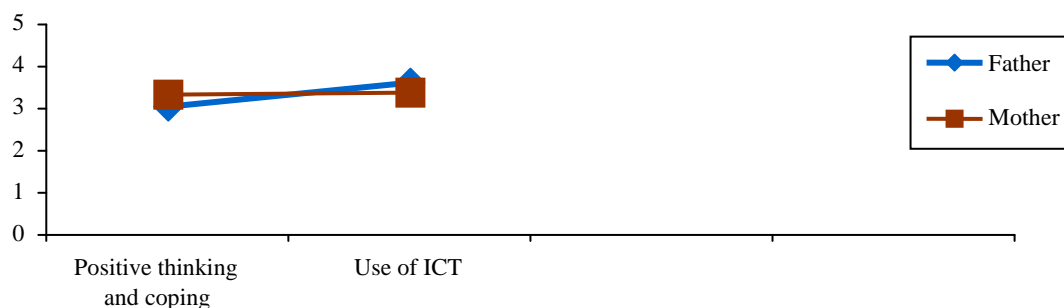


Figure 3 Parents’ beliefs whether the skills of positive thinking and using ICT are important in job-hunting with regard to their gender

The above Figure 3 depicted some typical characteristics related to traditional perceptions and differences between the two genders according to which men consider new technologies to be of high importance, while

women deem a positive attitude as a more important skill. Goleman (1998) considers optimism as an important skill that refers to the persistence and readiness of a worker to fully take advantage of the opportunities presented. In a recent research examining emotional intelligence's dimensions in the Greek workplace by Triliva and Roussi (2000), it was underlined that optimism can be described as a characteristic that allows a person to set out a long-term goal since he/she sees future in a favorable light. In this framework, optimism could be related to young's vocational future.

3.2 Possession of vocational skills degree

(1) Students

Students' views, concerning the degree in which they believe that they possess the twenty-one vocational skills, were significantly differentiated with their gender in the case of four skills (Figure 4). Particularly, boys (M=2.62) believed more ($F_{(1,213)}=43.12, p<0.01$) than girls (M=1.85) that they possess the skill of using ICT. In addition, boys (M=3.12) believed more ($F_{(1,213)}=63.20, p<0.001$) than girls (M=2.16) that they possess the skill to use various technological means. The above mentioned findings were expected since boys tend to occupy themselves more than girls with the various technological means. On the contrary, girls (M=2.20) believed more ($F_{(1,213)}=10.12, p<0.01$) than boys (M=1.91) that they can be responsible. Also, girls (M=2.1) believed more ($F_{(1,213)}=22.06, p<0.001$) than boys (M=1.65) that they can be creative.

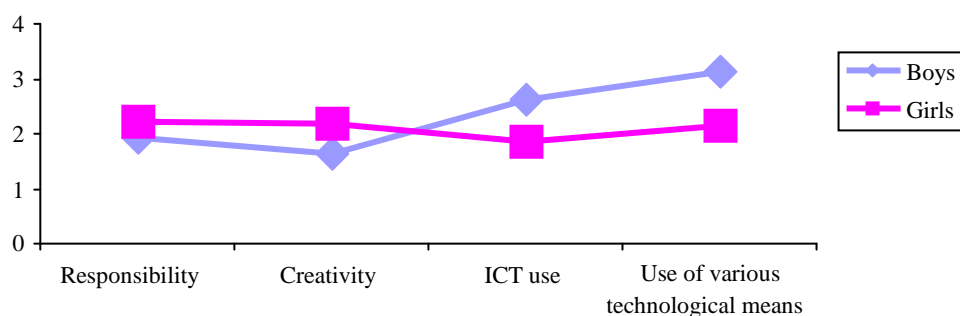


Figure 4 Students' beliefs whether they have the skills of responsibility, creativity, using ICT and other various technological means with regard to their gender

Table 3 Comparison of means of parents' answers concerning the possession degree of the vocational skills by their children in relation to gender

Skills	Gender				Total
	Father		Mother		
	M	SD	M	SD	
ICT skills	1.82	0.90	2.21	0.92	207
$F\text{-value}=9.0; p<0.01$					
Ability to use various technological means	2.19	1.04	2.70	1.01	208
$F\text{-value}=6.26; p<0.05$					
Self-presentation	3.14	7.02	3.42	0.85	207
$F\text{-value}=4.35; p<0.05$					

Notes: Means: M; Standard Deviations: SD; F and p: values.

This differentiation could be the result of different socialization processes for boys and girls, who are

prepared for different social roles as adults (Super & Sverco, 1995; Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Indeed, both family and the educational system pay more attention in preparing girls to be responsible, obedient and cooperative (Vasilou-Papageorgiou, 1995), while boys are expected to be aggressive and successful.

(2) Parents

Parents' views concerning the degree to which they believe that their children have the twenty-one vocational skills, are differentiated significantly with regard to their gender in the case of three skills (Table 3). Mothers seemed to be more impressed by their children's knowledge concerning new technologies and contemporary ways to present themselves, since they, probably, were not familiar with such means and techniques, especially within the framework of their working reality.

3.3 Factor analysis

A factor analysis was attempted in order to narrow down the initial twenty-one vocational skills in broader categories for both groups (students and their parents). The factor analysis was based on the question "How important do students and their parents believe that the 21 initial vocational skills are in order to find a job".

(1) Students

The principal component factor analysis for the students' group formed three groups that accounted for 58.82% of the total variance. The extracted factors and the names given, according to Richard Nelson Bolles' proposal, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 The three new factors for the students' group, as they were extracted from the factor analysis attempted of the 21 initial vocational skills

Initial vocational skills	Factor
Initiatives undertaking	Managing situations in workplace skills
Responsibility	
Leader qualifications	
Time management	
Working under pressure	
Self-confidence	
Creativity	
Decision-making	
Problem-solving	
Communication	Managing interpersonal relations skills
Cooperation	
Positive thinking and coping	
Flexibility	
Self-presentation	
Negotiation skills	
Ability to use various technological means	Managing information and technological means skills
ICT skills	
Data processing	
Transmission of information	
Data evaluation	
Data collection	

The skills within the first factor, "Managing situations in workplace" are taken into significant consideration for a large number of jobs and professional activities. They mostly characterize the experienced workers and are usually related with high administrative positions. They could be characterized as those "dynamic" skills that

shape a leading profile for the experienced workers. It should be noted also, that these skills require self-discipline in order to be applied (Brown, 1998, 2000; Bimrose, 1999).

The second factor for the students' group was being referred to as "Interpersonal relations management skills" that allows a person to build the appropriate relationship among themselves and the others, especially in the workplace (Adler, 1998; Josien, et al., 1995). Goleman (1998) believes that these skills are very important in the working place and sees them as a complex skill with which a person can evoke to the others the reactions that he wants.

The third factor included skills related to "Information and technological means management skills", as it was defined by many researchers (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, 2001; Brown, 1998, 2000; Bimrose, 1999). It is, clearly, a field of skills related to contemporary needs in the working environment (Bolles, 2001; Dell, 1999), where the employees connect their professional achievements with their communication through electronic networks as well as with their continuous provision, transmission and upgrading of information (Jackson, et al., 1996; Bridges, 1995; Harpaz, 1985).

Means and statistical significance of the three factors that were extracted by the factor analysis of students' answers are as following:

The variance of students' answers in the three factors extracted by the factor analysis was checked using the method of One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with regard to their gender⁴. Results showed that students' views were significantly differentiated with their gender in the case of two of the three factors. Particularly:

(1) Boys considered the factor 3 as more important ($M=3.33$) in order to find a job ($F_{(1,213)}=7.45$, $p<0.01$) in comparison with girls ($M=3.11$);

(2) While girls considered the factor 2 as more important ($M=3.46$) in order to find a job ($F_{(1,213)}=9.06$, $p<0.01$) in comparison with boys ($M=3.24$).

A possible interpretation for the difference between students' views with regard to their gender could be based on the family and social stereotypes, the attitudes that often underline human relationships, as well as the differences in seeking a social status for the two genders (Munroe & Munroe, 1981). It has been mentioned by social mainly, researchers that work distribution between genders defines those social powers that not only affect but also determine, in their turn, different socialization practices for the two genders during their childhood. As a result, each gender learns different skills at a different degree (Irvine, 1983). Although bibliography cannot support a relevant interpretation for the vocational skills learning, the study could become a stimulus for future research. The different job choices made by boys and girls could be an extension of the social stereotypes and the learning of different vocational skills. It is possible that girls pay more attention to social skills, such as communication and cooperation, because the professions that they choose give eventually more emphasis on these skills (Kosmidou & Krivas, 2000; Moses, 1998).

(2) Parents

The principal component factor analysis for the parents' group extracted four factors that accounted for 71.27% of the total variance. The skills that constitute those factors, and the names given to these new vocational skills groups, are presented in Table 5.

⁴ For the calculation of the means, there has been a coding of the answers using a 4-point scale as follows: 1="not at all", 2="a little", 3="some", 4="a lot".

Table 5 The four new factors for parents' group, as they were extracted from the factor analysis of the 21 initial skills

Initial vocational skills	Factor
Responsibility	Managing situations skills
Leader qualifications	
Time management	
Working under pressure	
Creativity	
Decision-making	
Problem-solving	Managing interpersonal relations skills
Communication	
Cooperation	
Flexibility	
Negotiation skills	Managing information and technological means skills
Ability to use various technological means	
ICT skills	
Data processing	
Transmission of information	
Data evaluation	Successful personal management skills
Data collection	
Positive thinking and coping	
Self-confidence	
Self-presentation	Successful personal management skills
Initiatives undertaking	

By comparing the two factor analysis, those of students and parents, it can be observed that in the parents' factor analysis an extra, fourth factor, was extracted, named "successful personal management" based on the categorization of modern vocational skills conducted by the Conference Board of Canada (<http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/careers/1/7/1999>). The skills included in this factor refer to a successful "marketing" of ourselves.

Means and statistical significance of the four factors that were extracted by the factor analysis of parents' answers are as following:

The variance of parents' answers in the four factors extracted by the factor analysis was checked using the method of One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with regard to their gender⁵.

Results showed that parents' views were differentiated significantly with regard to their gender only in the case of one factor. Particularly, men believe that the situations management skills are more important to find a job ($M=3.46$), in comparison to women ($M=3.24$, $F_{(1,208)}=4.869$, $p<0.05$). In the other three factors, no differences were found.

It seems that parents pay more attention to the total ability of their children for an effective and self-disciplined work. Additionally, they reckon of equal importance interpersonal relationships and social skills. This finding comes along with Paulopoulos (2000) considerations according to which parents nowadays lay emphasis on social skills. In particular, he states that this could be attributed to the social development that took place in Greece, through which Greek society passed from the traditionally organized family, that of the extended

⁵ For the calculation of the means, there has been a coding of the answers using a 4-point scale as follows: 1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=some, 4=a lot.

family, to an urban and nuclear family with fewer members. Moreover, he notes that the Greek family has made a turn from the struggle for survival to the struggle for success that can be seen in families' emphasis, regarding children's excellences, laid on characteristics relevant to success, such as school performance and diligence, stressed out also by Flouris (2001).

4. Conclusions

This study confirmed that boys, like their fathers, tend to consider as important in job searching a leadership profile and strong ICT management skills, probably because their job seeking perceptions refer to higher or managerial positions. On the other hand, girls consider social skills to be of higher importance because girls, like their mothers, believe that a positive and communicative profile is necessary, by stressing on cooperation, creativity and successful presentation of themselves.

Fathers tend to underline skills related to new technologies while mothers emphasize on social skills related to interpersonal relationships. Generally, males, younger and adults, believe that skills related to self-management, self-discipline and the use of technological means are more important for finding a job, whilst females outline a more positive and social profile.

Attention paid by women to communication could be attributed, in general, to their emphasis on emotional aspects within family and work life (Josien, Vagiatis & Giannouleas, 1995). In relation to this, men's preferences in leading qualifications could be grounded on stereotypical perceptions according to which boys—and consequently the male gender—must inspire and lead groups, have to take tough decisions, to undertake obligations and have influence. Goleman (1998) notices that even though initiatives and dynamic profile, typical men workers' characteristics, are generally laudable characteristics of every worker, these skills should be in balance with social awareness, so as to avoid any negative effects.

5. Epilogue

The new patterns and demands in the labor market, and the new professional activities and roles, lead to new skills needed in the working environment. Summarizing the views of the labor market experts, it is evident that, apart from a specific level of education and job experience, the skills demanded by employers are female. The social skills (e.g., communication, cooperation, time management, negotiation, problem-solving, team working, etc) are characteristic qualifications of women (not necessarily working or job experienced), as it is obvious that every mother and housewife, based on relevant skills, manages her home and family.

Recent approaches in career counseling have introduced vocational skills and their roles in the area of personal vocational development. These approaches suggest that skills could be used as a central axis for career planning, since skills' contribution to vocational success is estimated to be double in relation to intelligence and qualifications (Goleman, 1998). Such an approach would help people not only to realize and put down the skills that they possess and to what level, but also to be prompted to develop them so as to adjust to the new labor market trends (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, 2001).

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