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Comparing Public-Private Partnership of Vocational Education and Training Schools and Centres of Competence in Kosovo

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Abstract: Kosovo's education system has two different vocational education and training schools: professional schools and centres of competence. The local authorities-municipal directorates of education manage the professional schools, while the centres of competence are managed at the national level by agency for vocational education and training and adult education (AVETAE), operating under the Ministry of Education. This paper compares the collaboration between public schools, centres of competence, and private businesses. For this research, we used the mixed research methodology by interviewing coordinators of career centres from two professional schools and two centres of competence, and four managers of different firms. The research included a questionnaire filled by teachers from both institutions, prepared using the Likert scale. We analysed the data from this research to identify the differences in how those institutions develop partnerships with private businesses to secure better internship opportunities for their students. The study will provide data about the sustainability of cooperation between these two institutions in the creation of employment opportunities for their graduates. The outcomes will help professional schools and centres of competence to improve their cooperation with the labour market. It will help the career centre coordinators and business owners to create new job opportunities for development.

Keywords: *Centres of competence, labour market, professional schools, vocational education training.*

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Introduction

As a new state, Kosovo is building its institutions to increase its economic development, while aspiring to attain the EU standards (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM]-National Development Strategy 2016-2021 [NDS], 2016). Since the average age of Kosovo's population is 26 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics-[KAS], 2019), the focus for economic growth is the education and employability of its youth. Despite the young average age, Kosovo continues to face significant problems in the political field, reflecting on its citizens' quality of life, including the quality of the education system. With its large youth population and its slow economic growth, unemployment remains a critical issue, demanding the attention of central institutions and other international bodies. Unemployment is due to a lack of job opportunities, a weak labour force, and inadequate skills to fulfil the market requirements due to the disparity between labour supply and demand (Kosovo Education Center, 2019).

This situation has arisen from the impact of politics on the education system. Notwithstanding the existing strategic plans, there is still a tendency for cabinets to promote their own agendas. Since 1999, there has been no stability in educational policies and their implementation in Kosovo. Frequent and unplanned changes have directly affected the preparation of teachers and the quality of schools in general.

The Kosovo education system has undergone many changes in the last two decades. A few years ago, Kosovo's pre-university education started the implementation of the new curriculum framework on a country-wide level. Simultaneously, Kosovo's government approved the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021 (following the previous plan KESP 2011-2016), aimed at establishing guidelines for the future direction of education (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2016). This strategic document's relevance increased after the publication of the PISA results, where Kosovo's education level was ranked very low (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018).

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However, despite the attempts to prepare the curriculum framework for vocational education, it remains incomplete. The plans and programmes of schools and centres of competence have been drafted in cooperation with various international organizations. In terms of legal and strategic framework documents, Kosovo is not behind the other countries of the region. As stated in the European Training Foundation's Human Capital Development report of Kosovo (2020):

“There is no shortage of national strategies and action plans in Kosovo, notably the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016–2021 (OPM, 2016), the National Programme for the Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, the Strategy on Education and Career Orientation 2015–2019, the Quality Assurance Strategy for Kosovo Pre-University Education 2016–2020, Kosovo's Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017–2021 (Ministry of Education Science and Technology [MEST], 2016), and the Action Plan: Increasing Youth Employment 2018–2020 ” (European Training Foundation [ETF], 2020).

Most of the strategic objectives of Kosovo's education are aligned with the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 (MEST, 2016). Among other education areas, the KESP 2017-2021 outlines the importance of vocational education and training (VET) education and its alignment to the labour market as a crucial economic development factor. The six strategic objectives of KESP set a goal for VET: "Harmonizing VET with labour market requirements in the country and abroad" (MEST, 2016,p.6).

According to the KESP 2017-2021, the envisaged results of this objective are:

- alignment of vocational profiles in VET schools with labour market needs,
- increased enrolment of students in deficient profiles,
- development of teaching and learning material for at least two vocational subjects,
- VET and adult education curricula aligned with the pre-university curriculum framework and NQF,
- students acquiring practical experience in schools and the private sector through functional career guidance,
- affording full financial autonomy for VETs,
- developing human and infrastructure capacities for adult education and
- increased education offers for post-VET (MEST, 2016).

Despite the objectives set by KESP, the attention of policymakers to vocational education is still not at the desired level. Vocational education should receive the state's full attention through investment in in the building of schools' infrastructure, quality, and professional development. Unlike state institutions, many international organizations supported vocational education in Kosovo. Numerous international professional organizations continuously support Kosovo's Ministry of Education and Science for improving VET education through a holistic approach, including infrastructure, curriculum, occupation standards, career guidance, and teacher professional development (Van-Meel, 2010).

The functioning of VET in Kosovo is regulated by the Law for Vocational Education and Training, No. 04/L-138 (MEST, 2013b). The purpose of this law is to regulate the national VET system, following the needs of the economic and social development of the Republic of Kosovo, including economic and technological changes, demands of the labour market, and the needs of individuals during the transition towards a market-based human and infrastructure resources (MEST, 2013b). The law for VET regulates the structure, organization, and management of institutions that provide vocational education and training (MEST, 2013b).

The VET sub-sector in Kosovo is a part of the upper-secondary level, the international standard classification of education (ISCED 3) and serves the age group 15-18. These students' study in 59 public VET schools and four more specialized VET schools (Centres of Competence), which operate under shared responsibility between the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology at the national level and the Municipal Directorates for Education at the local level. There are 17 vocational areas of studies, 90 profiles, 60 modular qualifications, and 20 occupational standards (MEST, 2013b).

Vocational upper secondary schools serve as potentially important mechanisms in increasing the competitiveness of the local and regional economies. If the orientation of vocational secondary school students at the provincial and municipal level is analysed, “it is easy to document the significant discrepancies between the regional economic sectors and the supply of vocational schools” (MEST, 2019, p.11).

Literature Review

Vocational schools continue to face the great challenge of harmonising themselves with the labour market demands and consequently, the quality of vocational education is not sufficient nor is the need satisfied. The VET system faces numerous challenges. The most pressing concerns are the weak systematic link between the VET system and the

economy and bridging the gap between the education system and the demands of the labour market (Wanklin, 2018). In addition to vocational schools, there are also competence centres in Kosovo, managed by the AVETAE. These centres are proving to be more successful and more harmonised with the labour market, as these centres are "better-equipped" VET institutions and are supported by the development partners. They aim to prepare young adults for the labour market by following a competency-based curriculum, offering tertiary VET (Wanklin, 2018). The labour market always seeks better professional development for young people. And because there is no harmonisation between knowledge and skills, they need what good professional education offers. If the professional education is not aligned with the labour market needs and does not support the industry, it reduces the opportunities for economic growth. Ineffective VET systems result in significant mismatches between the demand for and supply of skills in a national or regional labour market (Remington, 2017). This impacts the labour market and economic growth (European Commission, 2017). Therefore, in recognition of the importance of well-functioning systems of skill formation, experts and policymakers in many countries and international organisations have called for greater attention to upgrading the quality and effectiveness of VET (Remington, 2017). Countries are increasingly aware of the correlation between quality VET training and development. Economically, there is a rising recognition of a mismatch between the available supply of skilled labour and the demand therefor; socially, rising inequality has created greater barriers to social and geographic mobility (Remington, 2017). VET is frequently perceived as the solution for improving the opportunities of youth who lack the resources, skills, or motivation to continue higher education (Eichhorst et al., 2012). In the context of students' professional development, there is a vital role in the professional practices they must perform in vocational education. Therefore, Kosovo's Ministry of Education, besides approving the KESD, has also cleared the Strategy for Improvement of Professional Practice 2013 – 2020, providing insights into the logic of how the MEST wants to follow the mission of developing a "mutually beneficial and supportive partnership between VET schools and businesses" (MEST, 2013a). For both firms and schools, joint investment in new types of VET is institutionally costly. Schools may be reluctant to invest in new partnerships with the business since they must adapt their curriculum, give up part of the training to a firm, upgrade the quality of instructors, and at the same time satisfy regional and national curriculum standards (Remington, 2017).

However, the inclusion of businesses in the vocational education system is still not at the desired level, although "VET system in Kosovo aspires to have a high-quality competency-based professional practice which supports business growth and give for all students the knowledge and skills they need in a safe and healthy work environment" (MEST, 2013a).

Students do not have the necessary support to have a safe place that helps them develop professional practice during their internships. It is only from the 2018 budget cycle that the government's education budget provides for accident insurance for students in grades 11 and 12 while undertaking internships in companies as part of the curriculum (Meyn & Sauer, 2018). VET secondary schools in Kosovo offer two main types of work-based learning programmes – work-based learning in VET school workshops and professional practice in enterprises (MEST, 2013a). Despite well-meant rhetoric, the private sector's structured participation in setting policy priorities, designing and revising curricula, determining or selecting profiles on offer, assessment, and skill certification are lacking (Meyn & Sauer, 2018). With the lack of support from the schools and the lack of incentives from the governments, the cooperation of vocational schools is focused more on the public sector's offer than the private sector's (MEST, 2013a). The private sector's structure and capacity – being dominated by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and with a tiny manufacturing base – is a crucial limiting factor in delivering workplace-based training models at a scale sufficient to address the labour market needs (Meyn & Sauer, 2018).

VET students are generally placed in the enterprise of their choice, reflecting the type of work they plan to do after completing their studies. For most of them, the professional practice is their very first experience of the workplace (MEST, 2013a).

There is an enormous potential for the private sector to be more engaged in drafting new curricula and requesting new qualifications from VET institutions' (Hapçiu, 2017). Professional internships also tend to be undergone in the public sector rather than the private sector (Wanklin, 2018). There has been an acknowledgement among the stakeholders of VET education that an improved and dynamic dialogue is the best means to resolve the existing skills gap (Hapçiu, 2017).

The greater involvement and cooperation of the vocational education sector with the private sector would significantly develop the country's economy (ETF, 2021). It would also encourage young people's entrepreneurship development. Vocational education institutions should serve as the industry's backbone in providing qualified labour for the private sector's needs. Functionalising career guidance and counselling centres in all education institutions (including lower-middle schools) could potentially help in this regard (Hapçiu, 2017).

The insufficient cooperation of vocational schools with the private sector results in the non-harmonisation of supply and demand, which is immediately reflected in the students' lack of professional competencies (Kosovo Education Center, 2019). Awareness of the importance of vocational education needs to be raised among lower middle school students and their parents, given that most employment potentials are in vocational profiles. For the moment,

vocational schools are seen only as an alternative to gymnasiums, instead of as a career choice. Changing this mentality certainly requires a lot of time and effort, but the process should necessarily begin (Hapçiu, 2017). The main reason for the structural imbalances in the labour market is the mismatch between the supply of qualifications by the education system and the demands by the private sector, which is due to the low quality and lack of practical relevance of the education and training system (Roux, 2019).

Despite high unemployment rates, the private sector complains about a lack of access to skilled labour. However, the private sector's commitment to training and creating attractive jobs for young people remains low (Hapçiu, 2017). Cooperation between education, politics, and industry to tackle the labour market's significant challenges has also been inadequate so far, as political, and economic actors are not making sufficient efforts for common approaches to promote youth employment (Roux, 2019).

To take advantage of this private sector offer, vocational education schools must collaborate with the business sector in creating new and market-required profiles. Simultaneously, schools must be bold enough to abandon outdated profiles that are not a part of the job market. EU support and policies promote education reform at all levels, including strengthening education and business links (Van-Meel, 2010).

Development experts and donors consider VET to be a specific human capital development instrument that can effectively promote socio-economic progress. Investments in VET are viewed as an approach to increasing economic competitiveness and reducing poverty in the triangle of productivity, employability, and sustainable growth (Wallenborn, 2010).

It has been identified that making VET systems more open, flexible, and attractive is a significant part of the European economy, employment, and social agenda. Opening and consolidating a range of new pathways between VET and higher education, as well as VET at the tertiary level, are considered critical aspects of improving education and training systems with a dynamic role in developing the labour force, human skills, and the economy (Misra, 2011).

Further, in developing countries, youth's education with practically oriented vocational skills is considered a promising means to create flexible and self-responsible learning attitudes, which could better prepare youth for the modern workplace requirements. Moreover, given that poor skills and the consequent low productivity of firms is often seen as the reason for low levels of development, the investment in vocational education is often justified as a means to promote a bottom-up labour market transformation. Therefore, the establishment of an efficient vocational education system is conceived as an essential pillar of the change into a knowledge-based economy (Eichhorst et al., 2012).

The quality of VET in addition to the harmonisation of the requirements between the education system and the labour market affects the professional growth of individuals, their social well-being, as well as the economic development of the country, by increasing self-employment rates. Therefore, it is necessary to organise training and continuous professional development of the teachers and instructors of the narrow professional areas, development of teaching materials, and creation of vocational training workshops (Espeter, 2018).

Methodology

Definition of the Problem

The primary purpose of VET is to help youth in their professional preparation and develop their labour market skills. Education systems need to develop policies that support the vocational training of young people for the job market. The public-private sector partnership between vocational schools, competence centres, and the labour market is vital. Consolidation of this type of collaboration is a critical component in the organisation and functioning of practical learning (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1989). In this context, to increase the importance and quality of VET, the main goal is to align VET programmes with the labour market (Asian Development Bank, 2014).

Employers know best what skills are needed in the job market (Asian Development Bank, 2014). VET systems are expected to play a significant role in the free market, especially in a competitive economy, equipping individuals with the skills needed to succeed in today's labour markets (European Commission, 2017). European Network for Quality Assurance (European Network for Quality Assurance- [ENQA], 2014), emphasizes developing teaching and efficient learning by linking the enterprise with the institution as a common ethnicity. This is through innovation and teaching strategies that are precisely the functions of centres of competence (ENQA, 2014).

The Purpose of the Research

This study will develop partnerships between VET Institutions with private businesses, analysing the cooperation between the two. It will also focus on the organisation and functioning of practical learning and the impact of the labour market on VET profiles. Through this research, the development of partnerships with private enterprises for practical training is analysed. The focus of the issues addressed in this study is graduates' employment in partner-enterprises, highlighting the private sector's role in developing competencies and training young people for work and specifically,

to analyse the contribution of partner-enterprises towards creating a general and professional culture following the national qualifications framework and professional standards.

Research Questions

This study was conducted based on the following research questions.

1. How developed and sustainable is the partnership of vocational schools and competence centres with the public-private sector?
2. What are the approaches of vocational schools and competence centres towards the functioning of the alliance with private-public enterprises?
3. What impact does this partnership have on job creation for graduates?
4. To what extent are the study programme profiles of VET institutions related to the trend followed by the partner enterprises?

Research Design

This study was designed and conducted through a mixed method. "Mixed methods research is an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research). It recognizes the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research but also offers a powerful third paradigm choice that often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results" (Johnson et al., 2007). We have organised, semi-structured interviews with career centre coordinators to collect data from the field. The interviews were individual (with each participant separately) and lasted about 45 min for interviews. All interviews were recorded (with the approval of the parties), transcribed and coded. The coding was done to maintain the anonymity of the participants, which was a request of the respondents. Following the transcription, each of the participants received their interview report and approved the transcript compliance. Thematic analysis of qualitative data was used for data analysis. The total groupings of topics were four: 1. Practical training, organizing, and conducting practical learning, 2. Development of partnership with private enterprises for the organisation of practical learning; Sustainability of collaboration with private enterprises, 3. Employability of students after graduation in partner enterprises and the private sector's role in terms of competence development, 4. Employment training, following the profession and career of attendees according to the labour market's requirements.

Regarding the quantitative part, we have developed questionnaires based on the Likert Scale, and given to the intentionally selected teachers of professional practice, vocational schools, and competence centres, as well as owners of private enterprises were included in the study.

Due to the small number of participants from the vocational school. Due to the pandemic situation COVID-19, the interpretation of the data was done based on the number of respondents, in which case we cannot generalize their results. As far as the questionnaires of the center of competence are concerned, it is valid, and the presented data can present comprehensiveness (Table 1). In both cases the analysis of the results was descriptive.

Table 1. Validity of the CoC questionnaire

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total's
1	1	-0,575	0,347	0,310	-0,736**	0,096	-0,791**	0,184	0,219	-0,854**	0,224	-0,598*	0,370	-0,389	-0,227
			0,050	0,270	0,326	0,006	0,767	0,002	0,567	0,495	0,000	0,485	0,040	0,237	0,212
2	-0,575	1	0,222	0,310	0,147	0,536	0,158	0,516	0,500	0,217	0,358	-0,239	0,188	-0,389	.674*
			0,488	0,326	0,648	0,073	0,624	0,086	0,098	0,497	0,254	0,454	0,558	0,212	0,016
3	0,347	0,222	1	.947**	-0,715**	0,530	-0,702*	.715**	.901**	-0,603*	.744**	-0,530	.876**	-0,781**	.695*
			0,270	0,488	0,000	0,009	0,076	0,011	0,009	0,000	0,038	0,006	0,076	0,000	0,012
4	0,310	0,310	.947**	1	-0,700*	.683*	-0,687*	.872**	.970**	-0,590*	.902**	-0,575	.944**	-0,890**	.818**
			0,326	0,326	0,000	0,011	0,014	0,014	0,000	0,000	0,043	0,000	0,050	0,000	0,001
5	-0,736**	0,147	-0,715**	-0,700*	1	-0,317	.932**	-0,593*	-0,644*	.843**	-0,576*	.638*	-0,736**	.662*	-0,255
			0,006	0,648	0,009	0,011	0,315	0,000	0,042	0,024	0,001	0,050	0,026	0,006	0,423
6	0,096	0,536	0,530	.683*	-0,317	1	-0,363	.740**	.765**	-0,267	.798**	-0,686*	.578*	-0,780**	.759**
			0,767	0,073	0,076	0,014	0,315	0,246	0,006	0,004	0,401	0,002	0,014	0,049	0,004
7	-0,791**	0,158	-0,702*	-0,687*	.932**	-0,363	1	-0,582*	-0,632*	.933**	-0,566	.756**	-0,722**	.676*	-0,217
			0,002	0,624	0,011	0,014	0,000	0,246	0,047	0,027	0,000	0,055	0,004	0,008	0,497
8	0,184	0,516	.715**	.872**	-0,593*	.740**	-0,582*	1	.921**	-0,500	.906**	-0,638*	.885**	-0,876**	.843**
			0,567	0,086	0,009	0,000	0,042	0,006	0,047	0,000	0,009	0,000	0,026	0,000	0,001
9	0,219	0,500	.901**	.970**	-0,644*	.765**	-0,632*	.921**	1	-0,543	.894**	-0,657*	.890**	-0,923**	.859**
			0,495	0,098	0,000	0,000	0,024	0,004	0,027	0,000	0,000	0,020	0,000	0,000	0,000
10	-0,854**	0,217	-0,603*	-0,590*	.843**	-0,267	.933**	-0,500	-0,543	1	-0,486	.761**	-0,621*	.648*	-0,091
			0,000	0,497	0,038	0,043	0,001	0,401	0,000	0,098	0,068	0,109	0,004	0,031	0,778
11	0,224	0,358	.744**	.902**	-0,576*	.798**	-0,566	.906**	.894**	-0,486	1	-0,535	.901**	-0,912**	.853**
			0,485	0,254	0,006	0,000	0,050	0,002	0,055	0,000	0,109	0,073	0,000	0,000	0,000
12	-0,598*	-0,239	-0,530	-0,575	.638*	-0,686*	.756**	-0,638*	-0,657*	.761**	-0,535	1	-0,522	.720**	-0,315
			0,040	0,454	0,076	0,050	0,026	0,004	0,026	0,020	0,004	0,073	0,082	0,008	0,318
13	0,370	0,188	.876**	.944**	-0,736**	.578*	-0,722**	.885**	.890**	-0,621*	.901**	-0,522	1	-0,829**	.764**
			0,237	0,558	0,000	0,000	0,006	0,049	0,008	0,000	0,031	0,000	0,082	0,001	0,004
14	-0,389	-0,389	-0,781**	-0,890**	.662*	-0,780**	.676*	-0,876**	-0,923**	.648*	-0,912**	.720**	-0,829**	1	-0,726**
			0,212	0,212	0,003	0,000	0,019	0,003	0,016	0,000	0,000	0,023	0,000	0,008	0,008
Total's	-0,227	.674*	.695*	.818**	-0,255	.759**	-0,217	.843**	.859**	-0,091	.853**	-0,315	.764**	-0,726**	1
	0,477	0,016	0,012	0,001	0,423	0,004	0,497	0,001	0,000	0,778	0,000	0,318	0,004	0,008	

Item 1: Number of students, Item 2: Cooperation, Item 3: Identification of the companies, Item 4: Identification of the companies from the students, Item 5: The companies select students based on the profile, Item 6: Continuous monitoring of students by the teacher in the company, Item 7: Periodic monitoring of students by the teacher in the company, Item 8: Ongoing reporting on student progress, Item 9: Ongoing assessment of student progress, Item 10: Profiles in line with labor market, Item 11: Student employability after internship, Item 12: Termination of cooperation with the company, Item 13: Private sector better opportunity for students, Item 14: Public sector better opportunity for students.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Validity and reliability of the qualitative part of the research questions consist of the fact that results were accurately interpreted representing the respondents meaning, with authentic responses and self-critical opinions. The data analysis of the research results is presented accurately as provided by the respondents. The authors ensured that every respondent's voice was heard and that the research findings accurately represented the participants' meanings.

Population and Samples

The population of this research comprises the coordinators of career centres, internship teachers, and representatives from businesses. The sampling was done intentionally due to the aggravated pandemic condition. In total, this research recruited 2 coordinators of the career centres functioning in two competence centres, 2 coordinators of the career centre operating in two vocational schools, 12 teachers of vocational practice working in two competence centres, 12 professional practice teachers working in two vocational schools of the Republic of Kosovo, and 4 owners of private enterprises operating in the domestic market.

Results

Below on the Table 2 are presented demographic information of respondents: gender, age, and work experience. The data analysis of the research findings is presented just as the respondents submitted it.

Table 2. Demographic Data of the Respondents

	Gender		Age				Work experience		
	F	M	A:25-30	A:31-40	A:41-50	A:51-64	0-5 years	6-10 years	Up to 10 years
PPS*	83%	17%	17%	17%	17%	50%	33%	8%	58%
PPC**	42%	58%	17%	25%	42%	17%	25%	25%	50%

*PPS: is an acronym for professional practice teachers of professional schools

**PPC: is an acronym for professional practice teachers of centres of competence schools

Regarding "Cooperation between VET institutions and consistency with the private sector," about 50% of the PPS[†]s stated that there is no consistency of cooperation between their vocational schools and the private sector, while one-third or 33% were unsure whether there is consistency in the partnership. Only 17% of the PPS agreed that there is a consistency of cooperation between their vocational school and the private sector.

Regarding this statement, 84% of PPC[‡] agreed that they have consistency in cooperation between their institutions and the private sector and only 8% of them were unsure whether the collaboration with the private sector is consistent, while the other 8% did not disclose their opinion. As Bol et al. (2019) consider that linkage between VET institutions and labor market can strengthen better labor market outcomes: "Workers with a stronger school-to-work pathway will have more specific skills that can be used immediately. Graduates from educational fields with a strong linkage to a (limited set of) specific occupation(s) will be more productive, which should be reflected in their earnings and unemployment risk". Özer and Suna, (2020) consider that linkage of VET institutions and labor market will help in increasing the attractiveness of VET. Analysing the responses to this statement, we conclude that VET does not have consolidated and sustainable cooperation with the private sector. Unlike the VET, the competence centres (CC) have a more favourable situation, as they have consolidated and sustainable collaboration with the private sector.

Regarding, "The necessity of selection of the enterprise for the realisation of practical learning from the school (either by the career coordinator or by the coordinator for practical training)," 58% of PPSs declared that it is indispensable that the school determines the partner companies, while 17%, are not sure that the school should define the partner enterprise, and another 17% do not think the school should define the partner enterprise. A small percentage, 8% did not disclose their opinion. As for the PPC views, about 75% of them fully agree that it is vital for schools to select their partner enterprise, while 25% of them are unsure about it.

Analysing PPS's answers regarding the selection of partner enterprises by the school, it is noticed that VET schools, at a satisfactory level, have consolidated and stabilised the definition of practical training by the career coordinators / helpful training coordinator regarding the private sector. Contrary to vocational schools, the CC has a more consolidated and consistent definition of practical training by the career coordinators/helpful training coordinator, related to the private sector. Selection of partner enterprises by the school increases the potential of better training provided to the students of VET (Fawaz-Yissi & Vallejos-Cartes, 2020). However, in vocational education, the selection of cooperative enterprises partnering with VET institutions is a complex decision-making process impacted by expert opinions, evaluation indices, and evaluation methodologies (Wu & Wang, 2018).

[†] PPS: is acronym for professional practice teachers of professional schools

[‡] PPC: is acronym for professional practice teachers of centres of competence schools

Regarding the opinion that *"It is essential for the students themselves to determine the enterprise that will carry out the practical training,"* 58% of the PPS fully agree that it would be vital for the students themselves to determine the enterprises where they will complete the practical training. While 25% of the PPS are unsure, the rest is divided between 8% of the PPS who disagree and 8% who offer no opinion. On the other side, 83% of the PPCs fully agree that it would be crucial for the students themselves to determine the companies for undergoing practical training, while 17% are unsure about this. In case of students being able to determine themselves the enterprise where they will carry their practical training students would be more motivated and more responsible during the practice. It would be easy for them to adjust to a new working environment in any agency or organization, students can participate in numerous training courses regarding the living environment and experience throughout the learning process, part-time job, and so on (Hang & Huan, 2020). Analysing the responses to this statement, we conclude that PPSs agree that the approach is welcome when students determine for themselves where they will complete the practical training. In this regard, PPCs are better organized, and they welcome the approach of students deciding for themselves where they will complete the practical training.

Regarding the statement *"To create stability in the function of practical learning, continuous monitoring of the student by the supervising teacher, in the partner enterprise is essential,"* 75% of PPSs fully agree that monitoring students during the practical learning in the enterprise is necessary and creates stability in cooperation, while 17% of PPSs are not sure about this and 8% disagree. Regarding the same idea, 83% of the PPCs fully agree that monitoring students during practical training in the enterprise is necessary and creates stability in cooperation, while 8% are unsure and 8% disagree. In research from Arinaitwe (2021), when there is a continuing monitoring of a student by a teacher in the partner enterprise students may conduct action research in a workplace, with the goal to improve existing practice. Continuous monitoring will help a better communication between supervising teaching and supervisor at the partner enterprise leading to basic components of professionalism, overall work ethic, time management, suitable wardrobe, interpersonal communication (Karasik, 2019). Analysing the answers related to this statement, we conclude that PPSs and PPCs should continuously monitor students' practical learning in partner enterprises.

Regarding the statement *"Reporting the assessment of the student by the head of the enterprise during the practical lesson is very relevant in the assessment of professional practice and helps in more efficient cooperation,"* 75% of the PPSs fully agree that reporting a student assessment by the responsible person of enterprise is very relevant for practical learning and helps in closer cooperation between the vocational school and the enterprise, while 17% were indecisive and 8% do not agree. Regarding the same statement, 92% of the PPCs fully agree with it, while 8% of them are unsure. According to new research reporting the assessment of the student by the head of the enterprise will increase the effectiveness of cooperation between labor market and vocational education system will increase (Terentyeva et al., 2018). This can help improve the discontent with students theoretical learning and their professional practice. At the same time, according to new research (Welsh, 2021) it helps establishing a communication between VET providers and businesses to ensure training quality. Analysing the responses to this statement, we conclude that PPSs and PPCs are convinced about the enterprise managers' evaluation report for students completing practical training and see this as a very relevant factor in creating more effective cooperation between these institutions. Companies' roles include not just employing and managing apprentices, but also setting the content of the apprenticeship and the competencies necessary to achieve a certain certificate (Korber, 2019).

Regarding the statement *"Vocational school profiles are in harmony with the partner enterprise/s for conducting practical training,"* 67% of PPSs fully agree that their schools' profiles are in line with those of the enterprises where students complete practical training. One-fourth of the respondents are unsure whether school profiles are more appropriate than those of enterprises, and 8% do not have any opinion on the matter. Regarding this statement, 83% of PPC fully agree that competence centres are in harmony with the enterprises where students complete the practical training, with 17% unsure about it. In cases when the vocational school profiles are in harmony with the partner enterprise/s for conducting practical training the benefits are triple, for the student, VET institutions and partner enterprise. According to current research Schüller (2021), this is likely to lead to more sustainable partnerships that in turn can continue to open additional opportunities for collaboration and transfer of knowledge. Analysing the answers related to this statement, we conclude that the vocational schools' profiles are relatively in line with the partner enterprises for conducting practical training. Hence, we conclude that the profiles of CCs are in harmony with the partner enterprises for conducting practical training.

Regarding the statement *"Students who undergo practical training in partner-enterprises with VET manage to secure employment in these enterprises after graduation,"* only 17% of PPSs agree that their students, after graduation, are usually employed in companies where have completed the training, while 25% are unsure and 58% having no opinion in the matter. On the other hand, 75% of PPCs agree that their students, after graduation, are usually employed in companies where have completed the internship. A small percentage of respondents, 8%, do not agree with the statement, and 17% have no opinion. Özer and Suna (2020) consider that VET graduates in a situation like this would have an employability advantage in transition to work. Recent research Calero López and Rodríguez-López, (2020), shows that VET institutions are giving more importance to the employability, focusing in providing the skills, knowledge and attitude required to get a job. Analysing the attitudes related to the PPS responses, we conclude that

while vocational schools and enterprises may have cooperation agreements, they do not exchange information regarding the employment of vocational school graduates; or there is a possibility that graduates are not employed in enterprises that have been partners with their schools. PPCs appear to have enough information regarding the employment of their students.

Regarding the question *“In the context of effectiveness, cooperation, functioning, employment of graduate students, which of the sectors (private or public sector), are considered the best and most appropriate opportunity”*, 58% of PPSs choose the public sector. One-third of the respondents see the private sector as appropriate, while 9% of PPSs have not voiced an opinion. In this, while 58% of PPCs see the public sector as the most suitable for professional benefits either for their institution or for the students, 42% of PPC do not agree that the public sector is appropriate. One of the reasons for those opinions is the fact that Kosovo’s economy is in transition and employees see more security and benefits in public sector employment. (European Training Foundation, 2020). Analysing the responses related to this statement, we conclude that PPSs do not see the private sector as an excellent opportunity for effectiveness, cooperation, and functioning with the VET schools, considering the public sector as offering excellent opportunities for effectiveness, cooperation and functioning with the VET. As for the PPC, the public sector is not seen as a good opportunity in respect of collaboration, functioning, opportunity in the workforce and teamwork.

The Role of Career Centres in Vocational Schools and Competence Centres

The role of career centres in vocational schools and CC is seen as crucial in helping students to develop their professional skills suitable for future employment. In the publication of the ETF: *“The Role of Centres of Vocational Excellence in Work-based Learning”* (ETF, 2021), professional orientation is considered as something that: *“may be continued all through the school system, up to and including vocational education institutions, in which all students continue to receive career guidance.”*

From the interviews with the career centre coordinators, it was noticed that the career centre within the vocational schools plays a significant role in creating and advancing the opportunities for establishing collaborations with the public and private sector, for the practical learning of students. These centres remain a bridge between the partner institutions (business sector, enterprises) and the internal actors (school, teaching staff, students). The same attitude is seen in respect of the career centres, which operate within the CC. In research from Korber (2019) having a certified professional practice is considered an advantage to employment. He states that: *“it is also possible that workers with a VET certificate hold an advantage throughout their entire career”* (Pg. 204). The professional practice organised by career centres with VET schools or organisations can help development. In research from Klauser and Schlicht (2013) they *“assume that competence development resulting from the learning process is influenced by the interaction between the learning environment and characteristics of the student”*.

The statements of the coordinators of the career centres functioning within the vocational schools regarding the practical training were as follows:

“I can say that the practical part is the main part, as the student reinforces the theoretical part ... with practical work, the student has the opportunity to gain skills which of course cannot be acquired without work and experience...”[§]

“... the goal is to coordinate the work as much as we can as a school in partnership with private and public companies so that students connect the theoretical learning with the practical ...”^{**}

Statements on this issue were also made by the coordinators of the career centres which operate within the CC.

“With practical training, we prepare students for the labour market. The skill component is completed, because in vocational school, students acquire knowledge, skills and create an attitude about the profession, qualification ...”^{††}

“This means that practical learning is a priority for students, so it is called a vocational school. A vocational school without practical training would not be a vocational school. This is also the mission of the coordinator of practical training...”^{‡‡}

Following this, the representatives of companies that have collaborations with vocational schools and CC state:

“... theory in most cases differs from practice. However, at first, each student expresses insecurity, but they adapt to the work and the clients/consumers over time. The knowledge they gain in school is average. It cannot be said it is bad, but it is not to be praised either...”^{§§}

[§] Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

^{**} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

^{††} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

^{‡‡} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

^{§§} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

Organising and Conduct of Practical Learning

According to the coordinators of the career centres functioning within the vocational schools, organising practical training remains a classic form of organisation, which tends to appear often as a traditional form. The school defines the enterprise, and the student attends the practical learning. The statements of the coordinators also support this.

"... part of the practical teaching is done in school, as we have some laboratories, even though they are slightly damaged. However, we direct some of the profiles to different companies that fit that profile. The profiles are related to the labour market. We have had many collaborations with different companies; for example, we have continuous cooperation with KEC (Kosovo Energetic Corporation) ..."^{***}

According to the coordinators of the career centres operating within the CC, the way of organising practical training is contemporary. The student has freedom of action (in selection), and the school makes efforts to provide it through the private sector. For this, each student is evaluated.

"We try to adapt to the job market. We have opened directions that suit the labour market: a concrete case is "Computer-led driving of cars". However, most other profiles are traditional study profiles, derived from the profession standards."^{†††}

" Practical learning is done according to a division. The first-year student (grade 10) holds an internship in the school laboratory. In the second year, (step 11), 80% of the training is done in the laboratory and private enterprises. In the third year (grade 12), almost 100% of the students are systematised for internships in companies, public or private. Most of the practical training we have is in private businesses "^{‡‡‡}

Contrary to the statements of the coordinators of the career centres of vocational schools and CC, the representatives of the companies find the effort from the vocational schools for collaborations inadequate. According to them, *"... Demand is average, depending on the situation ..."*^{§§§}

"Even when we have requests, we take care not to reject them and take them into account ..."^{****}.

The Eventual Impact of the Labour Market on the Organisation of VET Profiles.

The labour market should be the key mechanism to organise VET profiles. It is up to them to create and update the profiles of vocational schools to adapt to the labour market.

Adequate data is not available to give a clear definition of the issue. Still, what is known is that vocational schools do not harmonise their profiles and the influence of enterprises in organising their study profiles. In this regard, the coordinators stated:

" The most dominant part is the part of informatics; we had training and courses for students because we had agreements with various companies, even international. Students have also received certificates. We have made the connection through a Swiss programme (Program "J") combining the theoretical and practical learning in 3 private enterprises..."^{††††}

CC continuously strive to ensure that their school profiles align with labour market demands, unlike vocational schools. Nevertheless, this does not depend solely on them. The respondents from the CC state should be involved in researching the labour market demands and issue reports, which would be in vocational schools.

" State-level research should be done to see what and how the labour market needs in specific directions. This is very important because we do not create only staff at the local level, but at the country level too..."^{††††}

"For this reason, the school-business relationship is vital. This connection must exist to achieve what VET aims at ..."^{§§§§}

Others' responses related to an exact measure being the quality of the practical learning, addressed through discussion with the representatives of companies:

" The knowledge that students receive in school is, on average, about the work that needs to be done in the company. They have some basics, but not a very satisfactory level..."^{****}

"In most cases not. Somehow, they are starting from the beginning ..."^{†††††}

Development of Partnership with Private Enterprises for the Organisation of Practical Learning: Sustainability of Collaboration with Private Enterprises

^{***} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

^{†††} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

^{‡‡‡} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

^{§§§} Statement of company representatives

^{****} Statement of company representatives

^{††††} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

^{‡‡‡‡} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

^{§§§§} Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

^{****} Statement of company representatives

^{†††††} Statement of company representatives

From the research data, a relative tendency can be found towards the organisation of practical learning, which also appears to be a traditional model. However, what is important is the sustainability of the partnerships. From this perspective, it cannot be said that vocational schools have a stable alliance with the private sector. Their collaboration is more substantial with the public sector. In this regard, some of the coordinators have stated: "... We are in contact with some companies to create cooperation with MoU, but the number is limited. It is worth mentioning that no memorandum has ever failed due to a misunderstanding or something like that..."####

"... There has been a lack of cooperation with private partners, although we have insisted several times. There was no interest in collaboration, and it is a problem to be achieved. As for the public sector, such as the Kosovo Centre of University Clinics (KCUC), we had certain agreements for individual profiles, but we did not have access to all study profiles. "

"... a lot depends on the profile we have ..."

"The work is done based on the plans that MEST has ..."#####

Unlike vocational schools, CC have a more stable partnership with the private sector than the public sector. The coordinators of the career centres, within the CC, regarding this issue, have stated thus: " We have cooperation with the private sector. We have over 50 agreements with the private sector. There have been cases when the collaborations have been interrupted, but not in the sense of separation for lack of interest, but not coping with the number of students. It means that they have requested a reduction in the number of students, but this year due to the pandemic, we had a suspension because the hospitals have moved to the emergency plan. Then there are cases when the cooperation is interrupted due to the company's bankruptcy, which usually happens in small businesses..."#####

" We are doing very well, but there is room for improvement. Law must regulate this connection. It should be handled by Law to have sustainability in the function of the partnership. We have memoranda, but they are only within the school, it comes to health insurance, this should also be provided in practical training. Practical education also carries risks, and the student must have health insurance regulated by law by the state. Within this, there should also be incentive either in the meal or in transport. In this regard, a specific business should have facilities, whether in tax or other things."+++++

On the same lines, we have statements from the representatives of enterprises: "We have cooperation with vocational schools, but not enough." #####

" We have not encountered requests from vocational schools for students to keep an internship with us; it has been the opposite. We have sent requests to schools for students to come to us for internships. The schools have welcomed our request. "#####

Employability of Students after Graduation in Partner Enterprises

The question of how well students manage to get employed in these partner-enterprises after they graduate sparked different opinions from vocational schools and CC. Regarding vocational schools, it can be said that not many graduates are employed in partner enterprises. The employment of graduates rarely occurs due to the skills that young people have shown during practical training.

The statements of the coordinators also contribute to this conclusion. According to them: "From the knowledge I have, they are extremely successful in employment, and I still say that it depends a lot on the study profile our students have. It can be said that there have been many cases when students have been hired, depending on the profile..."#####

" It also depends on the interest of the students shown during the practical learning ..."+++++

Unlike vocational schools, CC respondents state that their students manage to get employed in partner-enterprises after graduation. The employment of graduates is a result of their professional preparation, especially during practical training.

According to the statements of the coordinators of the CCs: "Since 2015, we have started real data research; we have received the contact numbers, and we have talked to each former student. The research shows that around 50% of former students are employed in their profession. Another 20% continue their studies, and the rest are in other professions." #####

While the statements of company representatives regarding the employability of graduates are: "... The student's interest depends entirely on them. We have hired most students we had from professional training, or they continued working in other similar places..."#####

Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

***** Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

+++++ Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

Statement of company representatives

Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

***** Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

+++++ Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

" This means they have managed to get a job. Now some have come for a waste of time, but the vast majority are employed as mechanics ... " *****

" If someone can do the job properly, we make an offer to come to us and get a job " ++++++

The private sector's role in terms of competence development and employment training, following the profession and career of attendees according to the labour market's requirements.

Regarding this issue, the private sector does so in the case of professional schools, although it is acknowledged by both PSCs+++++++ and CCCs§§§§§§§§ that the role of the private sector is very necessary for the issue. CCCs state in this regard: "Also, the partnership with enterprises that we have affects the development of competencies among students ... " *****

"The aim is to connect theory with practice. And at the same time, the competencies must be developed ... " ++++++

The opinions of the CC are on the same frequency: " It has a huge impact. We were holding student internships in places where a particular profile activity or service takes place directly. In this way, a particular standard is being achieved. We have all sorts of cases, as the profile differs from other profiles. Students' presence in places where the activity and service occur is necessary to achieve what is intended. Neither competencies nor the standards of the profession can be achieved without seeing the work. " ++++++

" Without a connection with the private sector, with businesses in general, it is impossible to achieve specific competencies. Internship in the private sector helps a lot in achieving students' competencies. However, to say realistically, there is always room for improvement, though we as a school with the laboratory tools we have, compete with the region's countries and some EU countries. "§§§§§§§§

The private sector's main contribution in achieving the intended results for the respective competencies is not clear and convincing from the data we have provided. So, it is affirmed but not argued.

Conclusions

For Vocational Schools (VS)

Through this study, conclusions have been drawn, which indicate that in VS, students are involved in the vocational practice, in line with what is foreseen by VET education policies. This research also shows us that VS do not have a well-established partnership with the private sector. Based on the researched and interpreted data, it turns out that VS has a more developed and stable collaboration with the public sector, which is confirmed by how practical learning is done, which tends to be developed traditionally. Therefore, the career centre coordinator selects the place for conducting the practical training more suitable and useful than other selection forms.

Although VS have established the form of cooperation with relevant actors for conducting practical training, the fact that collaboration has been severed, either due to changes in organisational policies or the redefinition of criteria, is quite disturbing. In general, VS have organised their profiles within traditional profiles, which are often outdated vis-a-vis the labour market. Moreover, there is no connection with the labour market, and consequently, they are at a disadvantage with private enterprises.

When such an approach exists, even the monitoring of practical learning in the partner enterprise turns out to be a problem. It is convincingly argued that in the VS, the mentor evaluation report (in-company) is more valuable than the ongoing monitoring and evaluation by the professional practice teacher as a supervisor. Analysing the perspectives elaborated so far, we cannot conclude firmly that there is consistent and robust compatibility of the VS profiles with the labour market, much less with that of the private sector.

In most cases, the private sector has refused to admit students based on the school's number, but not the public sector. Although the VS willingness favoured developing cooperative policies with the private sector, this was not extended to the extent possible or envisaged.

Consequently, the arguments for student employment in this regard were few and far from convincing. It could not be said that this did not happen at all, but it was much more represented in the public sector. A solid argument is that the preferences of the parties involved in this research have displayed the same attitude.

Analysing all the perspectives and considering the research questions, we can conclude that:

§§§§§§ Statement of company representatives

***** Statement of company representatives

+++++++ Statement of company representatives

+++++++ Professional school coordinator

§§§§§§ Centre of Competences coordinator

***** Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

+++++++ Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the vocational school

+++++++ Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centres of competence

§§§§§§ Statement of the coordinator of the career centre, from the centre of competence

- The partnership of VS with private business (sector, private enterprises) is not sufficiently developed. VS approach towards partnerships with private enterprises is contrary to the latter's profiles, which forced VS to have more partnerships with the public sector.
- Consequently, more jobs were generated by this approach in the public sector.

For Competence Centres (CCs)

Based on the profile of the CCs, the number of students holding the professional internship is appropriate and corresponds to what is provided by the VET education policies. From this research, we can conclude that the CC has a well-established partnership with the private sector. Based on the research data, it is evident that the CC is more developed and more stable in having a collaboration with the private sector than with the public. Organising practical learning has multidimensional implications. Even though the career centre does the organisation, the cases where the student self-determines the enterprise and where the enterprise can select the student, do not present any issues.

In general, CC's profiles are more harmonised with the labour market. CCs are in favour of cooperation with private enterprises. It is not that there are no outdated profiles, but the way they are organised, and the strategy used is more appropriate for the labour market in the private sector.

It is convincingly argued that in respect of practical monitoring of learning in the partner enterprise, in the CCs, the continuous monitoring of student progress is more valuable than other assessment forms. Analysing this perspective, we can affirm that there is stable and robust compatibility of the profiles that CCs have with the labour market, especially with the private sector.

This finding does not reflect adversely on the cooperation with the public sector. The private sector is expected to be the first address of a VET for advancing the VET development strategies.

Arguments for student employment in this regard are numerous and very convincing. Leading cooperative companies had many work requests, even exceeding the current capacity of the CCs. Based on what was said and the answers to the research questions, it can be concluded that:

- The CC approach towards the functioning of the partnership with private enterprises is in line with their profiles, and this has removed them to a significant extent towards collaboration with the public sector.
- Consequently, this approach generated more jobs than the public sector approach.

Public and Private Companies

The general conclusions from the interviews with members of the company show that:

- Enterprises had cooperation with VS and CC. In general, for the present, there were no collaborations; this is also due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, in the past, the cooperation sometimes turned out to be the fruit of the enterprise's initiative, sometimes of the VET, and sometimes of the students themselves.
- Students' interest in preparing professionally during practical training in the enterprise depends on their initiative and interest.
- Monitoring of practical training was not at the envisaged level. It should be the reference point of the supervising teacher. In all the cases investigated, the teachers were not even seen. This turns out to be problematic, and above all, a confirmation of the above argument that there is a lack of interest on the part of students. If the students were monitored continuously, their appeal would be subject to the teacher's goals to realize practical learning. The employment of students is also a function of this issue.
- In all the companies' statements, there is no connection between the theory that the students learn theory in school and practical work in the company. Even when this compatibility exists, it is still weak and inadequate.

Recommendations

Authors hope that this study will inspire further research on the topic, especially on the ways how to enhance the private-public partnerships between VET institutions and business community. The future research can look more closely into sustainable model of partnerships, particularly models developed by CoC. Further research can be developed regarding the apprentice system of supporting practical learning. Looking closer into the ways how to develop a dual learning system of VET education, financing practical learning, etc. Practitioners in the VET education should investigate the ways of getting involved in a professional practice, to improve their theoretical knowledge and acquire experience that would be beneficial for their future profession.

Limitations

There were some limitations of this study that need to be addresses. Limitations consisted of the lack of previous research in our country related to the topic. Also, another limitation was the small number of the respondents due to the pandemic COVID-19, which gives us an overview of the situation but for more accuracy a deeper and wider research would be recommended.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Beka: Contributed in drafting and designing the research paper, literature review, data analysis/findings, conclusions and discussions. Stubla: Contributed in data collection.

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