

9-2016

BP Over VET? Theorized Consequences of Current Education System in Albania

Indrit Vucaj

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), and the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vucaj, Indrit (2016) "BP Over VET? Theorized Consequences of Current Education System in Albania," *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 5.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62608/2164-1102.1063>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela/vol4/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

BP OVER VET? THEORIZED CONSEQUENCES OF CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ALBANIA

by Indrit Vucaj

Abstract

Although significant investments have been made throughout the higher education programs and vocational education and training schools, Albania is currently experiencing a shortage of skilled labor. Despite recent developments, including the adaptation of the Bologna Process, higher wages offered in vocational fields and a series of laws supporting vocational education and training programs, the pursuit of higher education studies is the superior choice of the Albanian workforce. This conceptual paper takes stock of the current education system (including higher education and vocational and training programs) in Albania and describes the increased priori of a university degree over vocational education in spite of a labor shortage in technical fields. Finally, the paper theorizes that the attendance of higher education is progressively negatively impacting not only vocational education but also weakening the link between vocational schools and employment market.

Introduction

Albania has experienced significant transformational changes during its past years of democracy (Mane, 2010; CM, 2008) and education has been one element among those changes. In 1912, the nation of Albania was established and one of the problems that the new country faced was instability and weakness that would not allow the establishment of education systems; however, one element of The Education Act of 1921 was the inclusion of several public and vocational types of schools (Schmidt-Neke, 2007). Vocational and professional education was the highest degree one could obtain beyond four years of upper middle school (equivalence of high school). In Albania, the political changeover (from Communism to Democracy) progressed chaotically (Schmidt-Neke, 2007) and so did education system including vocational and professional formation training. By the time Albanian regime collapsed, vocational education institutions comprised 69.5% of total institutions enrolling more than 67.2% of total students attending education studies (Schmidt-Neke, 2007; Mykerezzi, 2003; European Training Foundation, 2002). In order to preserve dissipation of the values of education,

in 1990, then Minister of Education, Skender Gjinushi, undertook the first educational reform which he demanded a compulsory extension of basic education followed by one to three years of professional or technical education. Unfortunately, his plans were never implemented (Schmidt-Neke, 2007).

It wasn't until 1995 that Albania decided to establish more vocational and special schools, requiring students to either attend postsecondary education or vocational training. By this time, the state had relinquished market employment guarantees for vocational and technical training graduates but unexpectedly such move led to a decline of enrollment in vocational and technical training, opting for postsecondary education instead (Schmidt-Neke, 2007). Since then, Albania has already started another reform of education in training and employment (MES & MLSAEO, 2012) and it has achieved remarkable successful progress.

Latest education and vocational training reform started on March 29th, 2002 when the Albanian parliament passed law Nr. 8872 "*For Education and Professional Formation in the Republic of Albania* (AFPSH, 2012)" and secured the funding for vocational and technical training except in cases where schools entered into a commercial contracts (Schmidt-Neke, 2007). Education and VET reforms are advancing and they contribute directly to improve conditions in vocational education training (Oldroyd et al., 2011). However, the issue that labor market demands greater supply of skilled workforce still remains (MES & MLSAEO, 2012) and current statistics (INSTAT, 2012) show problematic disproportionate graduation rates. This paper seeks to explore the current state of vocational and technical training programs. Moreover, it theorizes on the attendance of higher education programs as a result of increased priori importance to traditional university degree over practical and regulating solutions provided by the vocational and technical training programs.

Current State of Education

In March 2000, European Council (EC) adopted the Lisbon Strategy agenda to confront two main challenges. One, to radically transform the European economy resulting from globalization and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy and two, to build knowledge infrastructures, enhance innovation and economic reform and modernizes social welfare and educational programs. In short, to transition to a knowledge-based economy, modernize social models and increase investments in people and lastly to sustain healthy economic outlooks (EC, 2000). Albania was one of the nations to support Lisbon Strategy agenda. It implemented new reforms grounded on the guidelines set forth by the agenda in order to fulfill its duties and obligations that derived from the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between Albania and the European Union (EU). One of the derived priorities set forth by SAA was related to vocational education and training. This particular priority stressed a considerable need to improve drop-out rates and to integrate employment and vocational education and

training strategies and techniques to serve to social, educational and economic policies (Oldroyd et al., 2011).

Currently, the education sector encourages and promotes entrepreneurial learning skills, just as all other EU Member States (Oldroyd et al., 2011). This is particularly a challenging issue and rather an urgent one. If Albania continues to foster and reward skills that promote traditional university degrees with less emphasis on vocational education and training, it will soon face an increasingly difficult problem to resolve in the labor market in attempting to match labor market demands and skilled-labor supply. Albanian National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) has measured the number of graduate students in traditional university degrees and vocational education and training programs and the results are startling. According to INSTAT (2012), technical education has experienced an astonishing percentage increase of student enrollment in the last decade in technical programs at roughly 29% rate. However, this rate is minimal compared to the exponential increase that traditional university degree programs have experienced in the same period at over 61% rate in public institutions and more than 72% rate in private institutions. The increased disproportionality has and will continue to negatively influence the basic labor economics. Moreover, the increased tendency to obtain traditional university degrees and to attend higher education programs have unarguably and indisputably affected and contributed to the decline of enrollment rates for technical and vocational education programs and thus has led vocational schools empty handed and unable to fulfill labor gaps. Thus, a vacuum in skilled labor force due to a shift of education model attendance has been created. In order to address this concern, Albania took other measurements.

In March 2010, Albania adopted Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF), a new legislation structure that introduces a new VET structure, to create new opportunities that would integrate education and vocational training to support the development of the economy. Whilst adaptation of a new national qualifications framework, whereas public policies are expected to support strategically reinforcement of country workforce development, is not anew, implementation of such public policies is more often than not a liability that can be difficult to cope with (Oldroyd et al., 2011). Hence, it still is to be seen whether a new legislature of adaptation is going to be claimed as a national success or rejected as transitional failure. Irrespective of the outcome, the result will rectify the way to converge vocational education and training with market demands and attract further exposure to prompt more action. A joint report by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MLSAEO) (2012) have revealed that education sectors from secondary to tertiary have experienced permanent changes to adjust to socioeconomic transformations. The most central aspect of participation in vocational education and training is most closely linked to the need of participants to acquire new sets of skills that will increase chances of employability. Enrollment of more students into vocational programs would not only practically and numerally increase participation rate but it would also almost inevitably increase the quality of the system and the relevance of the industry sector. In order to create such conditions, as the joint report addresses (MES & MLSAEO, 2012), it is necessary to undertake a more comprehensive and systemic

reform aimed at directing and resolving vocational education and training issues for the Albanian population.

Some of these issues are attributed to the heavy and influential “brain drain” that Albanian research and educational institutions have experienced in the past two decades (Mane, 2010; Zhllima et al., 2013). Other issues are attributed to numerous research institutions in Albania that vary in size and scope with substantial scientific personnel but carry limited research (Xhafa, 2013; Zhllima et al., 2013). Private research is almost non-existent, mostly because of lack of funding and incentives to advance research work (Zllima et al., 2013). Other factors such as high student to academic staff ratios, large gaps between part- and full-time students and poor efforts to ensure compatibility (Xhafa, 2013) are deemed to affect and contribute to the detrimental level of education in general.

Implications between Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training

In general, chronic lack of resources has weakened the education system as a whole and as a result, quality of education has suffered considerably (European Training Foundation, 2002). During the years, however, Albania attempted to amend its education system by passing a series of laws that would align its education system to European education structure. Most notably, in July 2003, The Higher Education Law was amended to establish a higher education system built upon study cycles in congruence with the Bologna Process (BP) education model (International Bureau of Education, 2011). In a separate law, The Vocational Education and Training (VET) Law defines the basic principles, organization, structure and the development of a common VET system based on collaboration between governmental agencies, partners and stakeholders in the VET field (International Bureau of Education, 2011).

But the issue of frequent educational changes and development of new resolutions may have capped the capacity of the system to perform to its fullest impact. Frequent changes are issues of great concern because they engender and infuse confusion among students and educators. The natural concern is to understand the underlying forces that drive factors of general education and vocational education that either contribute to students’ education constructively and effectively or unknowingly leash and hinder the unrecognized potential. The latter is self-destructive and unwanted. What has the new education system (Bologna Process) done for the Albanian population? Why are students choosing general higher education over vocational education while knowing they are unprepared? Why has the vocational education stayed stagnant and even declined in later years? These are some of the questions that make us think through about how higher education and vocational education conflict, or complement, one another. Hence, a more elaborative analysis is required to apprehend the

differences and commonalities between higher education and vocational training and education.

Higher education was, mainly and in general, transformed upon becoming a signatory country of the Bologna Declaration during the Berlin Conference in 2003. A new set of reform changes in education, including higher education but excluding vocational education, was born. Accordingly, the new reform changes that included the implementation of the Bologna Process intended to reform and structure the curriculum taught, accreditation and assessment of the quality of higher education and the financial independence gained from autonomous governance (Olldashi & Koka, 2014). However, even though the number of students that attend and chose general higher education, including conduct of research work has reached 124,000 students (INSTAT, 2012), education programs and rigorous scientific research are yet to develop (Xhafa, 2013). The massive attendance of higher education has led to an increased percentage of unemployed individuals by at least 1 point (INSTAT, 2012). In sum, there is an intention to *massify* university and to equip every student with the skills stemming from a university degree. In the process, circumstantial consequences, including increases in unemployment, are occurring.

As of 2009, 41 vocational and technical institutions operated in Albania whereas only 28 of them focus on professional development while the rest operate in conjuncture with general public compulsory high school and other sociocultural schools (Tabaku et al., 2009). By 2011, this number had increased to 55 with only 14 of them focusing on social, cultural and sports education (Pullumbi & Alushi, 2012). The yearly increase in vocational institutions has been led by a minimal yearly increase in student participation rates with a debilitated link of strength and low performance levels between leading enterprises who hire majority of the vocational training graduates and vocational trainings institutions (Tabaku et al., 2009). Hence, the role of vocational schools is relatively inconsistent for what they stand to play a role in. This position has also been previously voiced by the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training which expects the new reform to change and increase the role and the impact of vocational education and training in the Albanian workforce. After a substantial investment in Albanian VET programs (Zhillima et al., 2013) and a study conducted by the same agency showing lack of a dual vocational education system improvement (DIHA, 2013), the German Agency of Industry and Trade in Albania has expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of vocational programs. In sum, even though reform changes and more attention has been placed on vocational education, the quality of vocational schools in Albania, as self-reported by vocational schools, has been rated at a disturbing average or lower than average level rates (DIHA, 2013).

Comparatively speaking, both education systems have stemmed prominent issues with imminent and immediate impact on the Albanian population. It seems that frequent changes between systems and continuous reforms in a relatively short period of time have impacted the education system not as intended. University and vocational education and training are not sufficiently aligned with the labor market nor do they meet its current needs. The exponential increase of general higher education

attendance (that of the Bologna Process) is a direct interpretation of the great valuation impact that the Bologna Process has had in Albanian students. Even though there is a shortage of qualified applicant for technical jobs (German Society for International Cooperation, 2012), the increase of enrollment rates in the general higher education under the Bologna Process is almost six times higher than vocational studies and the gap of attendance between two systems is increasing yearly in favor of higher education. This type of development, that shows no signs of discontinuance and reversal, has created a large obstacle in the development and modernization of the Albanian's economy (German Society for International Cooperation, 2012).

Jointly speaking, both systems were intended to harmonize the overall Albanian education system goals to the European education system. That has been achieved to some extent although its costs and tandem consequences have questioned the worthiness of their implementation. Regardless the near effect, it remains that the both education systems have the potential to harmonize the education of Albanian population to the standards of the European Union. It still remains to be seen how competitive and effective Albanians become in near future with their countering European partners to regulate the labor market bouncing between higher education studies and vocational education and training.

The cause of the gap between general and vocational education has been attributed to system inefficiencies as a whole (McBride, 2011). More specifically, it is suggested that the general higher education may not be an ultimate destination for VET students and for some students, VET programs would provide a better rate of return on human capital than the successful pursuit of a higher education degree. Therefore, for some students, attendance of general higher education studies can be a cumbersome experience undermining their potential whereas it could be better fulfilled and utilized elsewhere.

Conclusive Remarks

Both changes in general higher education and vocational education and training have stemmed issues that Albania is trying to cope with. Albeit slowly, imminent results show a slight progress. However, this progress is insufficient to fulfill vocational labor market demands or balance the employment market for general education graduates coming out of university classrooms. Hence, a short-term solution is required to survive the long-term effectiveness of current reform changes in higher education and vocational education and training.

Speaking from a holistic perspective, Albanians' human capital skills have increased. Studies (Mane, 2010) have shown that these skills are being greatly awarded monetarily abroad including the United States. But concerns at home (Albania) still remain and enterprises or policy-makers cannot afford to ignore them. These concerns are of great importance to not be properly considered and appropriately addressed.

One great concern that Albania is currently facing is the lack of uncertainty of the labor market and transferability of skills and knowledge that unfortunately inhibits and hinders flexibility (European Training Foundation, 2002) to move centrally within profession or laterally among jobs and industries. This issue has been particularly problematic because it does not allow the workforce to easily move across jobs. Lack of mobility for existing workers who want to change jobs or profession to other in-demand jobs that require training to obtain new skills is damaging to industries as the enterprises fail to find the qualified workforce to fill position lines and further expand.

Another great concern that Albania faces is choosing between attendance of general higher education and vocational education and training. However, the choice of general education over vocational education does not constitute a major national problem *per se*, for as long as the labor scale balances out in terms of labor outcome and market demands. However, when an imbalance of general education graduates and labor market demands occurs, then we have a disproportionate output contributing negatively to labor market and social life resulting in high unemployment rates, unqualified workers, lack of rigorous research etc. This seems to have occurred in many Albanian sectors. Agricultural sector, for instance, has been heavily influenced by this uneven labor distribution of workforce population. The number of researchers affiliated with research institutions in the agricultural sector is estimated at 300 with four fifth holding a Ph.D. degree (see Zhllima, 2013) and yet, as discussed earlier in this paper, research is very limited in the public sector and almost non-existent in the private sector.

Evidently, students seem to choose general education due to the failure of vocational education to match the needs of emerging economic system (Zhllima et al., 2013) which in turn has encouraged students to continue pursuing university studies. However, the continuation of university studies is onto the expense of vocational training. Higher education programs have not increased the valuation of skills and knowledge obtained in university given the increase of the unemployment rates, predominantly new students completing their university studies. Moreover, it is obvious that the failure to match market needs with employment skills by the vocational training programs has indeed affected not only labor economics as a whole by misbalancing workforce skills but it has also delayed qualified employees to join the labor market due to an increased social pressure of pursuit of a university degree.

Today in Albania, it not uncommon to find a qualified worker with adequate technical skills carrying one or more university degrees. The wrongful pursuit of a university degree on sole basis of social recognition is a fruitless notion with negative effects affecting many intertwined life spheres that depend on to one another.

References

- AFPSH. (2012). *Ligji i Arsimit Profesional i Azhornuar*. Retrieved from Portali i Arsimit dhe Formimit Profesional:
<http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Lligji%20i%20arsimit%20profesional%20i%20azhornuar%20%281.pdf>
- CM. (2008, March 1). *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration; IMF Country Report 08/269; March 1, 2008*. Retrieved from World Bank Group:
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/Albania-PRSP%28August2008%29.pdf>
- DIHA. (2013). *Survey: Vocational Education & Training in Albania*. Tirana: Deutsche Industrie und Handelsvereinigung in Albanien.
- EC. (2000). *Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000*. Lisbon: European Parliament. Retrieved from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm
- European Training Foundation. (2002). *Central and Eastern Europe: Key indicators on vocational education and training*. Torino: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- German Society for International Cooperation. (2012). *Vocational Education Programme*. Tirana: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Retrieved from <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/20447.html>
- INSTAT. (2012). *Students Graduate in Albanian According to Specialty Between 1997-2009*. Tirana: Republic of Albania Institute of Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/arsimi.aspx>

- International Bureau of Education. (2011). *World Data on Education*. UNESCO. Geneva: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Albania.pdf
- Mane, K. M. (2010). *Wage Outcomes of Albanian Immigrants in the United States*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Graduate School.
- McBride, V. (2011). Albania. In J.-M. Castejon, B. Chakroun, M. Coles, A. Deij, & V. McBride, *Developing Qualifications Frameworks in EU Partner Countries: Modernising Educating and Training* (1 ed., pp. 251-256). London; New York: Wimbledon Publishing Company.
- MES & MLSAEO. (2012). *National Strategy for Vocational Education Training and Lifelong Learning*. Tirana: Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.
- Mykerezzi, P. (2003, April). The Potential Contribution of Vocational and Technical Education to the Future Social-Economic Development of Albania. *The Potential Contribution of Vocational and Technical Education to the Future Social-Economic Development of Albania*. Blacksburg, Virginia, United States of America: Virginia Tech University .
- Oldroyd, D., Nikolovska, M., & Xhillari, L. (2011). *Entrepreneurial Learning in Vocational Education and Training in Albania*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Olldashi, E., & Koka, E. (2014). Albanian Higher Education Strategy. *Academicus*, 1(9), 107-119.

- Pullumbi, A., & Alushi, E. (2012, June 22). Macro Planification of AFP and Multifunctional Centers. Tirana, Albania: European Training Foundation.
- Schmidt-Neke, M. (2007). Albania. In W. Horner, H. Dobert, B. V. Kopp, & V. Mitter, *The Education Systems of Europe* (pp. 11-31). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Tabaku, S., Rrapo, S., Reci, R., & Xhepa, N. (2009). *A study over current state of Professionl Education*. Tirana: Ministry of Education and Sciences. Retrieved from http://akafp-al.org/doc/Studim_dhe_Anekset_e_plota_AP_2009.pdf
- Xhafa, S. (2013). Development of Higher Education in Albania. *Journal of International Education Research*, 9(1), 91-96.
- Zhllima, E., Imami, D., Dishnica, T., Evensen, C., & Musabelliu, B. (2013). Albanian Research and Extension Services in Transition. In C. Chan-Halbrendt, & J. Fantle-Lepczyk, *Agricultural Markets in a Transitioning Economy: An Albanian Case Study* (pp. 241-256). Oxford: CABI.