

PRE-UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The process of reforming the didactics of economic disciplines focuses on the transition from mechanical learning (reproductive memorization), which involves the simple acquisition of information, notions, concepts and indicators, to active learning, which is based on logical-economic operationalization and intellectual exercise.

In order to ensure the prerequisites for successfully integrating graduates into the labor market, and to continue their vocational training, it is necessary to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to the types of competencies that have been identified as being required now and, above all, in the future, on a continuously changing labor market and in line with the various requirements imposed by economic development.

A very effective and highly attractive way for pupils to connect theory with practice is by solving problems and applications, the most interesting being the case study, the role play, as well as the projects aimed at creating advertisements or advertising materials.

The paper analyzes the main aspects of the Romanian pre-university education system of tourism profile, emphasizing the importance of professional competences acquired by future graduates.

Key words: educational process, pre-university education, professional skills, technician in tourism, training

JEL Classification: A21, I21, I25, Z30

I. INTRODUCTION

The structure of the pre-university education system in Romania includes: pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, upper secondary education, higher secondary education, vocational education and post-secondary education.

Higher secondary education, technical path, includes grades 9th to 12th on its direct path of qualification (day classes) and grades 9th to 14th on its progressive path of qualification (evening classes). In turn, vocational and technical education is composed of: vocational education, technical education and post-secondary education.

High school education includes the following paths and specializations (Methodological Guide for the application of school curricula, 2001):

- a) theoretical path (humanities and scientific studies);
- b) technical path (with the specializations: *services*, technical, natural resources and environment protection);
- c) vocational path (with the specializations: military, sports and physical education, theology, artistic and pedagogic).

High schools can have, according to the law, one or more paths and one or more specializations (within the main specialization there can be one or more vocational qualifications or sub-specializations) (Law no. 1/20011).

The initial vocational training covers the training programs in the compulsory education system

(up to the 10th grade) and those attended by graduates, after completing it, by which vocational qualification is acquired. The initial vocational training takes place in pre-university education via vocational education, high schools (technical path) and post-secondary education.

The strategic objectives of vocational and technical education consider the development of an educational system that responds to the demands of the current, knowledge-based society, that increases employment and economic development, that increases the degree of economical and social cohesion in our country and, last but not least, that develops the exercise of democratic citizenship.

In the context of inferior and superior secondary education, the vocational and technical education is organised through two vocational training paths:

1. *The direct qualification path*, also known as technical high school, which includes:

- The high school inferior cycle, the technical path (9th and 10th grade) leading to the acquisition of general skills for three profiles: technical, services, natural resources, and environment protection;

- The high school superior cycle, the technical path (11th and 12th grade) leading to acquiring the level 4 of vocational qualification.

2. *The progressive qualification path*, which includes:

- The high school inferior cycle, the technical path (9th, 10th and 11th grade), the 3 year vocational school leading to the acquisition of the level 3 qualification certificate (e.g.: hotel worker, cook,

waiter); this stage also represents a “passing bridge” towards the next qualification level;

- The high school superior cycle, the technical path (11th and 12th grade), leading to the acquisition of the level 4 qualification certificate (e.g.: tourism technician, banqueting organiser, gastronomy technician).

The vocational and technical education system also includes post-secondary education (masters school and post-secondary school). Post-secondary and masters schools are specialized qualification routes, which last between 1 and 3 years and lead to a 5+ advanced level 5 certificate. (Potolea D, Neacsu I, Iucu R.B., Pânișoară - 2008) (Example: general nurse, travel agent).

The three training profiles relate to the core training areas as follows:

- The technical profile includes the following fields: electronics, automation, construction, electrical, polygraphic, energetic, mechanical, electromechanical, media production, transport, construction, oil and gas, facilities and works, transport, metallurgy, mining, textile and leather industries ;

- The service profile includes the following areas: tourism and food, economic, administrative, post, aesthetics and hygiene of the human body, health and pedagogical assistance, trade;

- Profile of natural resources and environmental protection includes the following areas: food industry, agriculture, forestry, environmental protection, industrial chemistry, wood products, veterinary.

Each qualification has a number of credits, according to the European Union provisions for the implementation of the ECVET Transfer Credit System (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet_en.htm). Each school establishes the duration and content of the vocational training programs it offers, based on occupational standards, in consultation with local and county economic agents.

The vocational training programs are concluded with an exam to certify vocational qualification.

High-school graduates who have acquired formal, non-formal or informal professional skills are entitled to pass the examination of professional qualification certification, under the law. Graduates who pass the professional qualification certification exam acquire a certificate of qualification and the descriptive supplement of the certificate, according to Europass (www.europass-ro.ro).

The state supports and promotes high-school education, a technological pathway by:

1. Recognition of the studies obtained in the secondary education, technological branch based on own regulation;
2. Partial financing in the post-secondary schools, allocating a certain number of unpaid seats annually;

3. Providing scholarships and other forms of material support.

II. II. THE ORGANISATION OF THE EDUCATION-TRAINING ENVIRONMENT BASED ON EFFICIENCY AND SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA

The didactic process in secondary education is designed and accomplished according to the student-centric principles, both in terms of teaching and evaluation; the learning and evaluation situations are managed in such a way that the final educational acquisitions of the students are consolidated and fulfill active roles (adjustment, social, and professional); also, individual differences, such as students' needs/interests, become main landmarks of the didactic activity.

In order to observe the student-centric principles, the vocational and technical education uses modern strategies and methods that maximise the individual learning styles.

Special attention is also paid to both training and development of practical abilities and skills specific to these activities that are estimated to occur in the real working context provided by local companies. Thus, the curricula include classes in technical laboratories and workshops, as well as training internships with the relevant companies.

The practical activities performed in these companies favour the students' transition from school to the labour market, offering to potential employers the opportunity to make a rigorous selection aimed at employing the most suitable future graduates; they also consolidate the partnership between school and the labour market actually guiding the adjustment of the vocational training programs based on the requirements and necessities of the market.

The teacher should aim to promote active student-centered, participatory methods that contribute to the development of his / her thinking and encourage him to participate in the training process, develop his / her creativity, and thus make multidirectional communication possible.

Lesson activities need to be varied and diversified, so that all pupils acquire the skills involved; the aim is both to increase the attractiveness of the didactic act by carrying out activities that can contribute to the superior valorisation of the transmitted knowledge and the possibility of their effective transposition into practice.

Calendar planning is an operation by which the teacher anticipates his / her didactic activity and presupposes, on his / her part, a clear overview of the discipline as well as the detailed knowledge of the contents.

The following steps need to be taken into account when drawing up the calendar planning:

- the correct realization of the association between skills and content;

- identifying and classifying learning units in line with the internal logic of discipline;
- establishing the types of activities to be carried out (teaching - learning, recapitulation and systematization, evaluation) as well as specifying the speed of the material (the time allocated for each unit of education or chapter).

III. III. SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING STANDARDS FOR THE TOURISM TECHNICIAN QUALIFICATION

Competence implies "proven ability to use personal, social and / or methodological knowledge, skills and capacities in work and study situations and for professional and personal development" (www.tvet.ro). In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described from the perspective of personal responsibility and autonomy.

Depending on the complexity of the expected activities, the skill required to perform certain operations, or the difficulty of the problems to be solved, some qualifications are acquired over a longer period and require a higher work experience. Students following vocational and technical education and training programs may only acquire some qualifications from initial vocational training (up to the 5th EQF qualification level). The list of qualifications that can be obtained by graduates of pre-university education and of the nomenclatures are approved by Government Decision.

The professional qualifications are described in the vocational training standards, in the case of the initial vocational training, and in the occupational or vocational training standards, in the case of the continuous vocational training. The skill list of these standards is organised as follows (Vocational training standard, Tourism Technician Qualification, Appendix no. 2 to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 3172/30.01.2006).

I. Key skills: transferable skills that support the active integration into the labour market and social inclusion;

II. General technical skills: skills that target knowledge about the usual principles, context and practices that constitute the base of professional qualification in a certain area of vocational training, and are common to several qualifications;

III. Specialised technical skills: specific skills related to the relevant qualification.

The following elements are noted for each skill:

- *skill description*: refers to what a student should know, understand or be able to do following the learning activities;

- *performance criteria*: describes the significant elements of learning results, formulated through an evaluation statement that should allow the teacher to

make a pertinent evaluation regarding the students' success or failure in acquiring the relevant skill;

- *applicability of the performance criteria*: specifications regarding various situations and contexts in which the performance criteria can be applied, this decision being left with the teacher who teaches the relevant subject;

- *evaluation tests*: specifications and recommendations regarding the type of tests that highlight and prove the acquisition of the relevant skill.

The specialized disciplines studied at the curricular area Technologies in grades 9th to 12th are:

A. PROFILE: SERVICES

Basic training: Tourism and food- 9th grade:

I a. Specialty culture, weekly practice training and practical training

Module I. The basics of the restaurant

Module II. Organizing the activity of food and tourism units

Module III. Hygiene and safety of work in tourism and food

B. PROFILE: SERVICES

Basic training: Tourism and food

Field of General Training: Tourism (access condition for professional qualification Hotel Worker)- 10th grade:

I. Specialty culture, practical weekly training and practical training

Module I. Hotel services

Module II. Quality of hotel services

Module III. Economic management

II. Practical training combined

C. QUALIFICATION: TECHNIQUE IN TOURISM- 11th grade:

Specialty culture and weekly practical training

Module I: Business Marketing

Module II: Operational planning

Module III: Organization of Human Resources

Module IV: Organization of the travel agency

Practical training sessions

Module V: Hygiene, Safety at Work and Environmental Protection (Combined Practice)

Module VI: Technical operations of the travel agency (Combined Practice)

Local curriculum

Module VII: Typology of travel agencies

Module VIII: Marketing policies and strategies in the travel agency

D. QUALIFICATION: TECHNIQUE IN TOURISM- 12th grade:

Specialty culture and weekly practical training

Module I: The competitive environment of the business

Module II: Business Financing

Module III: Business Negotiation

Module IV: Offering products and services within the travel agency

Practical training sessions

Module V: Quality Management (Combined Practice)

Module VI: Public Relations in the Travel Agency (Combined Practice)

Local curriculum

Module VII: Sustainable Tourism Development

The teaching of the modules related to the “tourism technician” qualification aims to form certain skills related to “identifying opportunities on the market, drafting an offer of goods according to consumers’ needs and requirements, and identifying the best sources to finance the activities”.(Vocational training standard, Tourism Technician Qualification, Appendix no. 2 to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 3172/30.01.2006)

In addition to specific activities, the tourism technicians need to develop a series of key skills which are very important because they will allow them to have good communication with the people they interact with given that nature of their work, and with other team members.

The skills units (SU) that need to be achieved/acquired by the students that want to get the “tourism technician” qualification are presented in table no. 1:

Table no.1 : The skills units

SU	Key skills	Credits: 90
1.	Communication in contemporary foreign languages	2.0
2.	Critical reasoning and problem solving	1.0
3.	Interpersonal relations management	1.0
4.	Computer usage and information processing	1.0
5.	Communication	1.0
6.	Professional career development	1.0
7.	Numeric data processing	1.0
8.	Business start-up	1.0
SU	General technical skills	Credits: 6.0
9.	Competitive environment in business	1.0
10.	Business management	1.0
11.	Operational planning	1.0
12.	Human resources	1.0
13.	Quality management	0.5
14.	Business financing	1.0
15.	Hygiene, work safety, and environment protection	0.5
SU	Specialised technical skills	Credits:15.0
16.	Types of tourism agencies	2.0

17.	Technical operations of tourism agencies	2.0
18.	Organisation of tourism agencies	2.0
19.	<i>Products and service offer of the tourism agencies</i>	1.0
20.	Marketing policies and strategies for tourism agencies	2.0
21.	Public relations and protocol	2.0
22.	Negotiating and supporting the selling of touristic products and services	2.0
23.	Sustainable development norms	2.0

The secondary education uses the National Curriculum which is drafted according to the specific needs of students’ personal development and of the labour market of each community, based on the subsidiary principle.

The teacher needs to follow the proper development of learning results through the taught scientific content, and the evaluation of the students’ performance will be centred on proving the acquisition of the relevant skills, and not exclusively on the assimilation of the theoretic knowledge needed.

The adjustment to the new requirements of the market economy entails that students need to acquire skills that will lead to the development of a high level of professionalism and initiative, as well as the ability to activate efficiently in a dynamic and highly competitive economic environment. Based on these aspects, the new curriculum was structured in major modules that target the clear and factual presentation of the essential concepts, principles and terms that constitute the theoretic system, as well as the capacity to apply the methods and procedures largely used in the actual work activities.

Making theoretic knowledge operational represents a challenge for the specialty teacher due to its high degree of abstractness. This activity targets the achievement of the following objectives:

- the teaching-learning process needs to be performed from an interdisciplinary perspective in order to capitalize on the information and knowledge students acquired from the subjects they studied in high school;
- highlighting the main theoretic-methodologic elements used intensively by the relevant companies;
- making relevant case studies available to students, for each specialty subject/module;
- professional improvement motivated by fast changes and adjustment to the increasing customer expectations.

In this context, the implementation of the “test company” concept in technical high schools was

proposed. The test company is a didactic concept based on learning by doing. This is a simulation of a real company that can be made with the direct involvement of a coordinating teacher. A test company is a simulated company that mirrors the real business operations in a given area.

The network of test companies that are active in schools is coordinated and managed by the Test Companies' Headquarters in Timisoara (www.roct.ro). This organization is part of the international network of Test Companies thus being able to cope with the requirements of the national and international economy and offering an education highly oriented towards the practical and specialty training of the students.

The test company allows students to apply their own way of understanding the content by drafting materials such as projects and portfolios. The teacher is responsible for the split of themed content based on its complexity and on the learning pace of the students.

The technical laboratory classes are held in schools (workshops, laboratories) or, if possible, in relevant companies by using activities split by student groups that facilitate the learning process.

The most efficient evaluation instruments that can be used in the specialty modules are the observation charts, self-evaluation charts, verbal presentation of the projects, and portfolios.

IV. CONCLUSION

It was found that the Romanian school is deficient in the easy integration of the high school graduates into the labor market due to the emphasis placed on the theoretical part at the expense of the practical one. The drop in students' disinterest towards school is becoming more and more important, the risk of dropping out is quite high, especially in the high school high school.

It is, however, remarkable that there is a high availability of the Tourism Services Profile with they are active, because it offers the opportunity to obtain some jobs sought on the work market.

On the one hand, it is reproached to the Romanian school that the methods used lead to less interest in the student, and on the other hand the educational units provide graduates unable to adapt to

the labor market because of the lack of knowledge / skills in the graduate field. Teaching and evaluation methods are known to have regular improvements, adding new milestones to their achievement and how they are applied successfully in the classroom.

The accessibility of the training process is achieved by: removing descriptive elements and the preponderant use of causal explanations and of the demonstration method; selecting the learning contents based on their importance and usefulness in acquiring certain skills; taking into account the peculiarities of age for each pupil, and their intellectual potential; teachers' use of clear, simple, concise and attractive language; working in teams/ groups; going from easy to difficult, from simple to complex and from the unknown to the known notions etc.

The organization and the development of the teaching-learning-evaluation process must scale to the real possibilities of pupils, especially taking into account the level of their previous training and the skills to be acquired. The teacher has to continuously and systematically explain, secure and control the training of pupils; it is necessary to forge reciprocal links between the previously introduced information and new information, to facilitate interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary connections etc.

Teaching methods, whether traditional or modern, are effective if the teacher adapts them to the student class, their needs and possibilities. The lack of coincidence between theory and practice, the fact that they are not stimulated in any way, the economic agents do not often get involved in school life so as to allow students to practice their practical training in real work environments, graduates very well prepared theoretically, but without real practical, enforceable skills.

The future of tourism depends on how it is approached, and it is the human resource that often makes the difference between a quality service and one that is characterized by its lack. That is why the student has to learn from the schools' banks how tourism should be done, so that they will not make any inadequate tourist services, who are dissatisfied with the clients and make them no longer cooperating with certain tourism economic agents.

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