

OVERCOMING VOCATIONAL STEREOTYPES - A STEP TOWARDS RAISING THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN GEORGIA

Anastasia Kitiashvili, Associate Professor
Nana Sumbadze, Professor
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science
Tbilisi State University

Abstract:

With the aim of improving Georgia's economic and social development, the government over the last decade has prioritized raising the attractiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET). Though little is known about the attitude of key stakeholders towards VET as well as a contribution of various measures implemented for improving the attractiveness of VET. Assessing these efforts is the main aim of this research, which presents an evaluation of the attitudes of the key stakeholders towards VET and three constructs related to what makes VET attractive: 1) its public image, 2) participation rates and 3) its relative esteem in comparison to other options. The study includes secondary data, survey with 350 ninth-grade students and twelve focus groups made up of employers, VET students, and parents. Research findings show that stakeholders have negative attitudes towards VET, that is particularly the case for the companies. Besides relative esteem, rather than attitudes, contributes more to the attractiveness of VET in Georgia. Taking into account the strong stereotypes around VET in Georgia it should be the primary priority to improve VET parity by improving links with higher and secondary education as well as to raise VET's attractiveness by enhancing its quality standards and vocational training excellence.

Keywords: vocational education and training, attractiveness.

1 Introduction

Vocational education and training (VET) offers valuable benefits to individuals and enterprises as well as for overall economic and social development. However it is generally not as highly esteemed as other educational options such as upper secondary or higher education (Cedehop, 2014). Improving the attractiveness of VET has been a key priority of the EU education and training policy set out by the Lisbon-Copenhagen processes and later by the Maastricht and Helsinki communiqués (EC 2004, 2006).

The Copenhagen Declaration (EC 2002) and the Council Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (European Council 2003) identified important outputs in quality assurance, transparency and recognition to improve the performance and attractiveness of VET. The Maastricht communiqué reviewed the priorities for VET as defined in the Copenhagen process and emphasized the need to increase its attractiveness in comparison to secondary, higher and adult education in Europe.

The concept of "attractiveness" is complex and can be defined in different ways, though it has two main focuses: 1) its subjective nature, or how the beholders see it and 2) factors such as quality assurance, relevance to the labour market, recognised qualifications, and others.

According to Tchibozo (2009) in a very simple form, attractiveness means that VET is of interest to people, that they have information about it, that they consider it as a valuable educational option and that they have a positive view of it or its graduates.

For Leney et al (2004) attractiveness depends on stakeholder opinions and priorities. His definition combines the subjective element of attractiveness with concrete measures to increase

attractiveness.

According to Lasonen and Gordon (2009) attractiveness is observed as the preferences, attitudes and related behaviour of individuals, groups and their families. They find that Initial vocational education and training (IVET) attractiveness depends on such factors as improving access and entry to employment, career progression and other issues. Their analysis is based on parity of esteem in comparison with general/academic education, which has been assumed to be a more attractive educational option for both students and their parents.

Winch points out that “attractiveness” in relation to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) refers to its “preference” ability compared with alternatives.

VET attractiveness can be assessed by different indicators such as participation rate, image, and relative esteem compared to general/academic education (Cedefop 2014), although these indicators are not correlated and they reflect only some aspects of VET attractiveness.

Students are key stakeholders for assessing VET attractiveness, and especially the ways they make decisions on their future education. This has been the focus of much research; current evidence shows that the labour market demand is likely to be one of the most important factors for student decision-making, along with their personal interest in the subject. Perceptions on the possibility of finding a paid job after completing VET are positively correlated with relative esteem and student decision-making. Other important stakeholders are families, employers and society the general society.

When we talk about VET attractiveness it is important to consider broader issues like supply and demand. Economic, demographic and labour market trends have a crucial influence on attractiveness.

The Maastricht study conducted by Leney et al. (2004b) found that the EU-25 Member States used different strategies to raise the attractiveness of VET, and were principally related to measures of quality, progression from VET and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Six main measures implemented by different countries include:

1. Quality management as the key component to making VET attractive. Many countries have relevant legislation and policies that contribute to high quality and relevance of IVET (Cedefop 2014).

2. Labour market relevance is a crucial factor to be addressed for raising the attractiveness of VET. VET pathways can be attractive for young people if they lead to qualifications that make their education relevant to the labour market.

3. Progression pathways - it is essential that learners be able to progress smoothly from one qualification level and type to another. Informal or non-formal learning should also be recognized. This type of mobility is best facilitated through the establishment of internationally referenced qualification frameworks.

4. Status and image - VET must be appealing, have a high status and a positive image. Demonstrating the attractiveness of high quality, IVET that is relevant to young people depends on how it is promoted. In Georgia, much needs to be done to portray VET pathways and qualifications in different and more attractive ways.

5. Information and guidance - The image of IVET can be improved through information that is presented in an attractive way. Involving employers, successful people with VET qualifications and young people in promotional activities can demonstrate that IVET is up-to-date, and leads to attractive careers. The provision of appropriate career guidance prior to enrolment and during

training increases interest and attractiveness.

6. IVET learning facilitators - A learner's experience and perceptions are greatly influenced by their teachers and trainers. Qualified professionals, up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience have positive impacts on IVET quality and attractiveness.

2 Overview of the Georgian VET System

In Georgia VET is part of the education system, along with general (primary, basic and upper secondary) and higher education. School students have access to VET after they complete basic education (ISCED 2). The VET educational network unifies 126 institutions, among which 88 are VET colleges (20 public and 68 private), 29 are higher educational institutions (14 public and 15 private) and nine are general educational schools (all private). A total of 115 vocational education programmes are currently available, and 18,752 students are registered in the Education Management Information System database (EMIS 2016).

During the Soviet period vocational institutions were usually seen as a “punishment” for students who were not high academic achievers. Today vocational education is still affected by the stigma related to former negative prejudices. Prejudices is defined as an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason. VET is perceived as only qualifying students for low status, manual, and poorly paid jobs, with little personal fulfilment and limited opportunities for career development.

Georgia is in the process of modernising its VET system to meet European standards, transforming the existing supply-driven system to a demand-led model to meet economic needs for a skilled workforce. Important policy initiatives can be identified that are aimed at improving its attractiveness, however.

A Georgian Law “On Vocational Education” (2007; amended in 2010) defines the main priorities of the VET sector, which includes raising its quality, relevance and attractiveness. The Strategy of VET reforms (2013-20) emphasizes access to a diversified vocational education system and life-long learning possibilities for all citizens. This Strategy supports labour market relevance and flexibility of educational pathways.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF 2010) consists of eight levels, and is based on the Lifelong Learning System provided by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning. Steps to develop the Georgian NQF will ensure compatibility with EQF; they will support the transparency of existing qualifications and their recognition abroad.

The Law “On Education Quality Enhancement” (2010) defines internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Improvements in VET qualifications mean that internal and external verification processes will be gradually implemented to ensure qualifications awarded by different entities have equal credibility. Legislation defines the conditions and rules for Validation of non-formal and informal learning, or VNFIL, although the system has not yet been established.¹

Strengthening social partnerships within the system and at sectoral and local levels is a main priority for improving the quality and relevance of VET. (See Torino 2016)

The challenge of increasing the Labour Market Relevance of VET programmes has been addressed through using labour market information for planning VET programs; linking VET programmes with occupational standards prepared in collaboration with employers; specifying requirements for contracts with employers who provide training positions in their companies; and improving work-based learning (WBL) practices. Since 2013 Tracer Studies of VET graduates have been carried out systematically.

Labour market indicators according to education levels show remarkably low performance at the higher education level (unemployment rates were 19.1% for VET-educated adults and 39.2% for higher education in 2014, and 19.8% and 38% in 2015). However the unemployment rate of

¹Order About Conditions and Rules for Approving Informal Vocational Education” (2011)

youth with VET is higher (35.6 % and 30.85% respectively in 2015). The mismatch between supply and demand is a main obstacle for young people with a VET education when they try to enter the labour market (Torino 2016).

One of the obstacles of Georgia's VET system is the 'dead end'—the barrier for VET students/graduates to either progress to higher levels of VET or to re-enter academic education. The main problem is that students can start VET after Grade 9, but to enter higher education they need to have a secondary education certificate. Students need to pass national exams to graduate from school, and at the same time they must pass national exams to enter university. A new law being developed considers eliminating all dead-ends in the system, and the new law on VET will adjust this process when it comes into force.

There is some progress but still a lack of information about VET among the public and specific stakeholders. Research in Georgia (UNDP 2015) showed that most respondents (88%) representing the general public had heard about VET; other studies (UNDP 2015) showed that 86% of employers had heard about VET.

Table 1 shows VET graduates have the most positive attitudes towards VET, followed by the general population and employers.

Table 1

Attitudes of stakeholders towards VET (%)

	Population N=2801	Employers N=297	VET graduates N= 2206
1 VET is a prestigious education.	66.0	40.0	91.0
2 VET graduates have fewer chances of finding a job than higher education graduates.	45.0	-	85.0

Source: UNDP, 2015

However, 37% of the population believes that vocational education is for people from lower social classes, and 51% think it is for those with low academic achievements. More than half of surveyed employers (53%) think that a vocational diploma does not indicate a graduate's qualification level, and 43% believe that graduates of vocational schools have a poor level of professionalism and need a lot of training.

The VET students' satisfaction survey showed that 18% of them decided on VET because of a lack of funds for other higher education; 38% chose this option while hoping to continue in higher education; and 93% consider it ideal to be able continue their education in Higher Education Institution (RCG consulting 2011).

Research (UNDP 2015) showed that almost all students are satisfied with their respective vocational schools (96%) and with their professional level (97 %). Most agree that the VET system is distinguished by high quality studies (94%); that the vocational education system produces trained professionals (94%); and that it is valuable for future employment (93%).

According to the VET reform² all persons in Georgia who are in the education system or the labour force, regardless of status (e.g. age, gender, disabilities, etc.) are entitled to quality information and services regarding professional orientation and career guidance. However, the guidance and counselling systems need strengthening, for example to provide support to learners before, during and after the training process and help them enter the labour market.

Learning facilitators play important roles for the VET attractiveness, however the VET teaching profession is not prestigious in Georgia and wages are very low. As a result, colleges find

²Decree on "The development of publicly available lifelong vocational counselling and career planning service in Georgia"(2014) and the Action Plan on its implementation for 2015-2017

it difficult to attract younger, qualified staff. The average age of teachers in 2014-16 was approximately 50. Research (UNDP) showed, however, that a high percentage of VET students consider that their teachers have a high professional level (98%) and good practical experience (98%). A study (2016)³ concerning the years 2013 to 2016, showed that National Vocational Education and Training⁴ members most positively evaluated progression in the following areas (on a 5-point scale where 0 means no progress and 5 means very much progress):

- Access to VET (3.86);
- Involvement of Social Partnerships (3.57);

Progression over these last three years in areas like relevance to the labor market, quality of VET and public image was evaluated slightly less positively (3.29 for each).

3 Importance of the research

There is a lack of systematic research on the attractiveness of VET in Georgia. It is important to understand how attractiveness changes over time, and to develop relevant VET policy.

Research objective

The objective of this study was to study policy measures and constructs that contribute to a higher attractiveness of VET in Georgia.

Key questions included:

1. Which policy measures are being implemented in Georgia to improve the attractiveness of VET?
2. What main factors contribute to the attractiveness of VET, according to three indicators:
 - Participation rate;
 - Relative esteem compared to general and higher education;
 - VET's image.

4 Methodology

A combined methodological approach used both quantitative and qualitative tools. For assessing three indicators of attractiveness, the study referred to secondary data and statistics, as well as primary data collected through surveys with 350 ninth grade school students and 12 focus group discussions.

Participation rate

The EMIS (Education Management Information System) database and Geostat statistical data was used to assess the participation in VET. EMIS was created in 2012 under the Ministry of Education of Georgia, which is responsible for collecting and disseminating education data. Geostat is a legal entity responsible for producing and disseminating statistical information.

Comparative esteem of VET

Primary data was collected through survey research and focus group discussions. A survey was carried out with 350 ninth grade students (55% male and 45% female) in 20 Tbilisi schools, to study their attitudes and perceptions, and how/why they made the decision to continue with VET. The average age of the participants was 14.5 (from 14 to 16) years. Convenient sampling was used for data collection. On average, survey interviews lasted about 20 minutes.

A total of 12 focus groups with a total of 90 participants were selected from the following cohorts:

3 A .Kitiashvili. Evaluation of the NVET functioning. Unpublished

4 NVET council is the highest advisory board in VET

- Four focus groups of employers who had experienced a partnership with VET institutions (28 participants from industries such as tourism, construction, industry, health care, service sector and agriculture);
- Four focus groups made up of VET school students who had decided to continue the VET route (33); and

Four focus groups made up of parents, who are important for the decision-making process of young people (29 total). On average, focus group discussions lasted 1.5 hours and were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

The image of VET

The image of VET was assessed according to the perspective of these stakeholders and through secondary data collected by Analysis and Consulting Team (ACT), funded by UNDP (2015), to cover the general population (N=2801), employers (N=297) and VET students (N=2206).

5 Results

Quantitative data were analysed by the program SPSS 23, and qualitative data by content analysis.

5.1 Participation rate

The VET reform strategy embodies the principles of inclusive education, which gives everyone an equal opportunity to acquire vocational education. In 2014 out of a total student population within general educational institutions 1.7% entered VET programs, and 8.2% went on to higher educational institutions (calculated by Geostat 2014; EMIS 2014); In 2015 1.9% entered VET and 7.5% went on to higher educational institutions (calculations based on Geostat 2015; EMIS 2015).

Table 2

Applicants and students admitted to public VET programs 2012-2015

Years	Applicants	Admitted students	Acceptance rate %
2015	17 527	10 405	59.4
2014	16219	9363	57.7
2013	13036	8345	64.0
2012	5127	5035	98.2

Source: EMIS, 2015

The percentage of VET applicants who passed their exams decreased over the last 3 years with the increased transparency of the admission process (see table 2). Transparency had been a problematic issue. According to regulations students now need to pass unified exams to start studies in public VET institutions. However the unified examination also creates access barriers for socially disadvantaged students. Research (MES, 2015) identified several barriers for different groups: a lack of Georgian language skills to get into VET schools for ethnic minorities, non-adapted physical environment/equipment and insufficient resources for people with disabilities, geographical inaccessibility to VET institutions for those from outlying areas, difficult financial situations (a challenge for all groups) and the low esteem associated with vocational education.

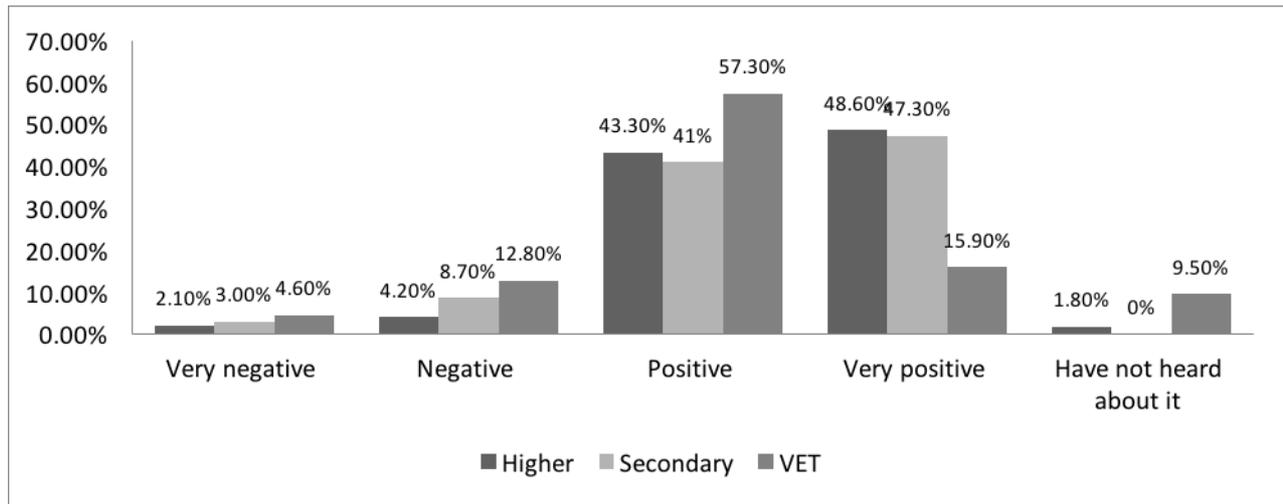
5.2 Attitudes of stakeholders towards VET

Grade nine school students

School students have to make an important decision when they are in grade nine, thus understanding their attitudes, future career plans and perceptions is crucial. Surveys were conducted with 350 school students in 20 schools of Tbilisi. The results showed that 17.4% have a negative or very negative attitude towards VET, while 72.2% have positive or very positive attitudes; 9.5% have not heard about VET at all.

Overall, 11.7% of students in general education have negative or very negative attitudes towards VET, while 88.3% have positive or very positive attitudes. Regarding higher education, students with negative or very negative attitudes are 6.3%, while 91.9% have positive and very positive attitudes. Only 1.8% has not heard about it.

Based on these findings, the attitudes of the most important stakeholders of VET are most positive towards higher education, followed by general education and finally towards VET. The difference in positive attitudes to leaving school for VET compared to (continuing) their general education is +16.1% (88.3%-72.2%) compared to +19.7% for going on to higher education (91.9%- 72.2%) (see Graph 1).



Graph 1

Attitudes of grade-nine students towards Secondary, VET and Higher Education.

Employers

Focus groups with employers who have experienced partnerships with VET institutions (24 out of a total of 28 employers who participated) believe VET lacks attractiveness because of quality and qualifications. Only four employers stated that they are happy with the skills level of VET graduates who began working in their company.

Employers said the students not only lack relevant skills and knowledge, but that *career counselling in VET institutions is weak* and does not help potential students to make appropriate choices in the early stages of vocational training.

Limited work-based learning opportunities was one of the employers' positions, which accurately summarised the attitudes of employers: "How can students have high skills and relevant experience when they have very limited work-based learning experience?! They don't know what is happening in a real working context. Learning by doing is the best way, but it is very limited in Georgia." (Male, 53; Construction).

Low qualifications of VET teachers - Most of the employers (23) thought VET teachers have very limited qualifications and skills; they do not have access to modern technology and developments in the Labour Market; and they have low salaries, which is a demotivating factor.

Most employers (18 participants) stated they would not attend these colleges themselves given the present level of VET.

Employers pointed out that for attracting more motivated students the following critical measures should be implemented:

- Improve quality and relevance through better business-educational partnerships;
- Begin dynamic awareness-raising campaigns to change negative public stereotypes towards the VET system.

Students who decided to go to VET

Focus groups with students who decided to go to VET (33 Students participated in four focus group discussions; ages 14-16; 8 girls and 25 boys). “VET is less attractive” for the following reasons:

Negative attitudes of parents, teachers and the public. Students say that VET appeared attractive for them but in general VET is considered to be mainly for pupils with lower academic achievement and a low socio-economic status. Also these colleges are less prestigious than universities. Attitudes in schools are much more negative towards VET than to higher education, however even though students sometimes preferred higher education, but if they remained in school they couldn't start working and earning as quickly.

I also had negative attitudes towards VET-- not in general, but to study there; something dirty and dark was associated with VET for me; once by chance I went to a VET college and it was light and nice; it had such good facilities, just excellent. I shared with my parents but it was difficult to convince them it was really good.” (Ana, 15, wants to study sewing)

Having their child continue her/his education in a university was more attractive for parents and teachers of children in school. Sometimes teachers had an even more negative attitude towards VET than the parents. Students said that teachers do not like the decision to go the VET route, especially if they had good academic achievements.

Barriers to higher education

Students think that more students would decide to go the VET route after the ninth grade if there was a chance to continue higher education afterwards; it would be a motivating factor for them, their parents and teachers as well.

Lack of information

Students did not attend any career education lessons or career counselling either as groups or individually while they were in school. Twenty-six out of 33 said they don't remember anyone from VET colleges (nor employers) coming to their school to speak about their programs and study offers.

A main reason evoked by the focus groups (18 participants total) for attending a VET school was to have paid employment as soon as possible; fewer said they were mostly interested in a profession (9); others wanted to stop studying in school (3); and several wanted to learn the same profession that their family members/relatives have (3).

VET is very practical; I know people with higher educational backgrounds who are unemployed, even now. If you ask them what they can do, they can't say anything concrete. I think when I finish VET I will know exactly what I can do and what I can't. IT specialists are very much needed, so we have more chances to get employed and make money.”(Giorgi, 16)

Most focus group participants in VET schools say they are proud of their decision and are really interested in what they study now.

I love my future profession. I always wanted to do this but did not know it was offered by VET colleges; I am sure there are a lot of other interesting VET professions that we don't know; that's why pupils think that it is a shame to study at VET schools.” (Nika, 16, will study IT).

Students' visions for improving the attractiveness of VET:

- Employer visits in schools to speak with young people about jobs, their needs and specific requirements;

- Talk with parents—to help them understand that VET colleges give more realistic, more immediate job opportunities to young people compared to universities;
- Create VET courses in schools;
- Facilitate the option of getting a university education after VET; and
- *Offer real employment opportunities.* Even though now they are very enthusiastic, if they cannot get employed attitudes will turn negative towards VET.

Parents

Focus groups with parents (Four groups. Out of 29 parents of students that participated in focus groups, 27 were mothers and two were fathers.)

These discussions showed that VET is not an attractive option for about for half of the parents. Parents valued higher education more, but in poorer families it was not an option due to economic reasons. Ten parents said that they supported their children's decisions, as they did not have enough money to pay for higher education; others were against VET at first but later agreed. They said their attitudes became more positive after their children decided to go that route, yet they would be happier if there was a possibility for their children to get a higher education after VET.

Parents' recommendations for improving VET included:

- VET should be associated with successful cases and career advancement.
- It should have a more flexible approach: Students should be able to cover secondary education with a VET degree, and then enter higher education afterwards.
- Increase employment and self-employment opportunities;
- VET students should get a good education and become highly skilled with a high quality of education.

5.4 Relative esteem of VET

Relative esteem is discussed in relation to two groups:

1. Ninth-grade students. The assessment was based on primary research data.
2. The overall population. The assessment was based on secondary data (UNDP).

Relative esteem of VET by school students

For estimating relative esteem, the following questions were asked: "In which directions were students planning to continue their studies after grade nine?"

Concerning future career plans, 90% stated they would continue secondary education, 7% said they wanted to study VET and 3% wanted to stop school and start working. Thus a relative esteem for VET compared to general education was -83%, a large margin. Students (87%) said they had made this decision themselves but, based on consultation with their parents and relatives it appeared that in 11% of cases parents had suggested it, as had 2% of students and friends.

Relative esteem of VET within the overall population

This is a more indirect measure of relative esteem, and for estimating it the following question was asked: "What might your recommendations be about continuing studies for those young people who have already received a basic education?"

Survey results showed that for most Georgians, the most desirable option (57% of responses) would be to graduate from secondary school and then enrol in a higher education institution. Thus slightly more than half recommend this. However, for almost a fifth of respondents (19%) the best option would be to graduate from secondary school and obtain a vocational education. Thus the relative esteem for VET compared to a general education is -38 %.

6 Conclusion and discussion

The objective of this research was to study the main policy measures and issues that contribute to the attractiveness of VET according to three indicators: participation rate; relative esteem and image.

The analysis showed that a wide range of policy initiatives has been attempted in VET to tackle its lack of attractiveness. However, more efforts are necessary to successfully carry out policy initiatives. There is a lack of data from monitoring effectiveness of different measures, so it is difficult to assess which initiatives have been most effective. This research shows that quality and relevance, as well as barriers to accessing VET, negatively impact its attractiveness.

It is possible to create an initial picture of the present level of VET attractiveness in Georgia by comparing it to EU countries. According to Cedehop (2014) 71% answer “positive” or “very positive” across all Member States while evaluating VET in their country; our research also shows the same tendency in Georgia. Georgian data suggest that attitudes towards VET among employers are less favourable than among the population, school students and VET students. Employers put more importance on future employment opportunities, while for the overall population VET is associated with low social status and less academic achievement.

Young people decided to go to VET mainly because it is the shorter way for them to enter the job market, even though higher and general education are much more attractive. Even so, VET students have the most positive attitudes towards vocational training because they are involved in courses and have more experience within the programs. Schools in general encourage successful students to continue studies in a university rather than to choose the college route (Hyland, and Winch, 2007).

Studies show that relative esteem, rather than attitudes, contributes more to the attractiveness of VET. Other studies also found that the image of VET is very positive in most countries (Cedehop 2014), but relative esteem shows the importance of considering VET in comparison to other educational pathways. In countries where the general upper secondary education is attractive, relative esteem is lower for VET, even if it is still considered an attractive pathway (Cedehop 2011).

In most countries, more people would recommend general rather than vocational education. The average value for the relative esteem indicator is -5%, which shows that the number of people who would recommend general education is five percentage points higher than those who would recommend vocational education (Cedehop 2011). In Georgia this indicator is even higher, indicating the lack of attractiveness of the VET pathway compared to general and higher education. The high prestige of university education in Georgia and the fact that the route to a university education is possible only through upper secondary education (not through VET after basic education) reduces its attractiveness. Again, these findings underline the importance of enhancing the parity of VET in Georgia.

Attitudes towards VET are more positive than relative esteem. Given such a mixed picture of viewpoints, it is important to examine how this translates into participation, which has increased over recent years in Georgia. Young people make the decision to go to VET mainly for reasons associated with socio-economic conditions in the family and for the immediate need of getting paid jobs. VET is seen as offering quick access to employment, but as the research shows the VET qualifications do not have a high social status. Young people generally had positive attitudes towards VET, but their intention to continue wasn't strong. This controversy can be explained according to the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Ajzen 2011). Attitudes are predispositions to behavior, but behavioral achievement depends other factors as well, including intentions (motivation – indications of how hard people are willing to try, how much of an effort they plan to exert to perform the behavior) and behavioral control (ability – confidence of a person in his or her ability to perform the behavior). Besides having positive attitudes, pupils need to make many changes in their thinking, and then form relevant intentions.

Based on these findings, we make the following recommendations:

- More systematic research is needed on concrete policy initiatives and their potential for improving attractiveness. This issue should be considered in a broader context to take into account factors affecting supply and demand.
- Improvement of quality and relevance is a priority for increased attractiveness. It can be achieved through effective business-educational partnerships, Work-Based-Learning, improving the quality of VET qualifications, continued professional development for VET teachers and instructors, etc.
- Barriers to VET such as situational (including lack of information), institutional and dispositional (attitudinal) need to be analyzed and addressed to improve the access to VET. To raise attractiveness VET learners must be able to progress smoothly from one qualification level and type to another. A National Qualifications Framework should facilitate the national and international mobility of learners, with a relevant system of validation for formal and non-formal learning.
- Four strategies would promote the parity of esteem between vocational and academic/general education. These include unification, linkages, enrichment and enhancement (Lasonen, J., and S. Manning, 2001; Lasonen 2010). The first three focus on promoting VET in relation to other educational pathways and the last focuses on VET itself.
 - “Unification” means decreasing the distinction between academic and vocational education, and supporting their unification into the same system.
 - “Linkages” refers to connecting them through a common certification framework and the recognition of credits.
 - “Enrichment” refers to cooperation between vocational and general/academic institutions by offering joint courses.
 - “Enhancement” means reinforcing the main characteristics of VET such as the quality of the curricula, teaching and learning to facilitate good employment possibilities or to permit access to higher education (Lasonen 2010).

Taking into account the strong stereotypes around VET in Georgia it is important to reinforce two factors. First, improve VET parity by improving links with higher education. Second, raise VET’s attractiveness by enhancing its quality standards and vocational training excellence.

- Awareness-raising should target the relevant stakeholders with appropriate approaches that will portray VET qualifications in more attractive ways for school students, their parents and the general population;
- Youth need greater access to quality information, guidance and counseling to help them make informed decisions.

References

- Ajzen, I. 2011. “The theory of planned behavior: Reactions and reflections”. *Psychol Health* 26(9):1113-1127.
- Cedefop. 2014. *Attractiveness of initial vocational education and training: identifying what matters*. Research Paper No 39. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. 2011. “Attitudes towards vocational education and training”. *SpecialEurobarometer; No369*.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_369_en.pdf
- ETF (2016). *Torino process 2016 Georgia*. (unpublished).
- European Commission (2010). *The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011–2020*.
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf

- Fishbein, M., and I. Ajzen. 1975. *Belief, attitude, intention, and behaviour: an introduction to theory and research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Government of Georgia. 2010. *Law of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement*.
- Government of Georgia. 2007. *Law of Georgia on Vocational Education*.
- Government of Georgia. 2010. *National Qualifications Framework*.
- Government of Georgia (2013). *VET Development Strategy 2013-2020*.
- Hyland, and Winch, 2007. *A guide to Vocational Education*. London: Continuum
- Guthrie, S., C. Holmes, C.Stasz, C, H.Ertl, S. Castle-Clarke, S.Drabble , and L. Villaba van-Dijk. 2012. *Attractiveness of initial vocational education and training in Europe: What really matters*, Final report to Cedefop, PR-362, Cambridge: RAND Europe.
- Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (MES). 2015. *Access to VET education for Vulnerable groups in Georgia*. Report.
- Lasonen, J., and J. Gordon. 2009. "Improving the attractiveness and image of VET". In: Cedefop (ed.). *Modernising vocational education and training: fourth report on vocational training research in Europe: background report*, Vol.3. Luxembourg: Publications Office, Cedefop Reference series; No 71, pp. 15- 88.
- Lasonen, J. 2010. The status of vocational education and training. In P. L. Peterson, E. L. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (3rd ed., Vol. 8). Oxford, UK: Academic Press.
- Lasonen, J., and S. Manning. 2001. *How to improve the standing of vocational education compared to general education: a collaborative investigation of strategies and qualifications across Europe*. In: Cedefop; Descy, P.; Tessaring, M. (eds). *Training in Europe: second report on vocational training*.
- Leney, T. et al. 2004. *Achieving the Lisbon goal: the contribution of VET: final report to the European Commission*. London: QCA – Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/studies/maastricht_en.pdf.
- Watters, E. 2009. *Making initial vocational education and training more attractive for learners (Report for ENQA-VET)*. http://www.deqavet.de/_media/PDF_allgemein/TG_Report_MIVMA.pdf.
- Young, M. 2000. *Improving vocational education: trans-European comparisons of developments in the late 1990s*. In: Stenström, M.-L.; Lasonen, J. (eds). *Strategies for reforming initial vocational education in Europe*. Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research, pp. 147-162.

The text contains 2 tables and 1 graph

Article received 2018-07-28