Quality of employee education, training needs in small and medium enterprises in the Slovak Republic

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Abstract. The article analysis the quality of employee education, training needs in small and medium enterprises in Slovakia. The analysis is based on survey among educational institutions and enterprises. Based on the survey, educational needs and requirements on cooperation of institutions and recommendations are proposed and elaborated. These are further incorporated in a quality control system requirements and structure to ensure open and flexible educational environment able to fulfill current and future needs of the Slovak industry.

1. Introduction
Social systems are currently forced to operate in very demanding, variable, and turbulent conditions, characterized by increasing complexity and dynamic change. These changes are of a different nature. The democratic processes of our society were caused by changes in social and political conditions, while the scope of diapason of the changes affect whole society and all its social systems. The result is, on the one hand, a number of stimulating impulses for the development of related economic, social, cultural conditions, but on the other hand, the increasing pressure on people operating in social systems towards the necessary adaptation to changing conditions and thus the revaluation of traditional values, value systems and value orientation.

The people, directly concerned, are continually contemplating ways and solutions to the effects of a certain synergistic effect of turbulence [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. Realizing that changes in traditional functioning affect both social systems and individuals, they strongly support the rise of the value of education and education itself. This process takes on a modified social function and becomes an integral part of social systems. From the traditional perception of education and development, social systems have shifted to the philosophy of lifelong learning and learning beyond the originally age and social groups.

This trend is not random, but it is based on some empirical experience. In particular, it supports the fact that the principle of lifelong learning leads, on the one hand, to the development of both the professional and the personal aspects of the individual. According to Charted Institute of Personnel and Development, the increased adaptability and employability of people are also beneficial [3]. On the other hand, education and training have a socially beneficial effect. It helps to improve economic competitiveness and employability and, according to the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, it is the optimal way to combat social exclusion as well as enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the organization [5].
The philosophy of lifelong learning in Slovakia began to be implemented on the basis of the Lifelong Learning Strategy and Lifelong Guidance in Slovakia. The original version was created in 2007 and has been applied over time at the level of secondary schools and universities, employers as well as by personnel agencies and interested public [4, 5]. The current state of implementation of the Strategy's objectives and the level of success of its implementation has brought empirical surveys into these areas, supplemented by information from interviews with experts from lifelong education field. Specific objectives were also set within the objective of the empirical survey:

- to identify and analyze implementation of the Lifelong Learning (LLL) and Lifelong Consulting (LLC) in to the real life,
- to identify and analyze opinions and attitudes towards the LLL and LLC,
- to propose corrections and updates to fulfill the mission strategy in accordance with EU policies.

Survey questions focused on:
1. The current situation in LLL and LLC,
2. Monitoring and forecasting of educational needs,
3. Quality management system in formal and non-formal education,
4. Employability, readiness for the labour market,
5. Interconnection of subsystems and approval of results,
6. Advisory services,
7. Motivation to participate in further education,
8. Statistical data on LLL and LLC,
9. Information level about the LLL and LLC strategy.

In the following section we will discuss the results of the empirical survey. Findings of this survey are decisive information for improving the quality of LLL and LLC, particularly in the context of lifelong learning in small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia.

2. The current situation in LLL and LLC
In the first question of the survey, it was important to analyze the way of providing lifelong learning at the secondary schools and universities levels, as well as at the level of employees as well as interviewed individuals. The result was satisfactory concluding that educational activities were carried out to the required extent in all areas analyzed. In the school environment, the activities were focused on expanding, deepening professional knowledge and skills; in the corporate environment, educational activities were carried out to deepen and extend knowledge and skills in the relevant field (in the workplace or outside the workplace), on the level of individuals, the activities were focused mostly on their workplace, expanding and deepening their knowledge and skills in the field they work in. Individuals who stated they had not been educated, mentioned reasons as high costs of courses or the lack of courses with their specialization.

Educational activities were mostly carried out by the classical form of education (lectures, seminars), and modern methods such as e-learning or distance learning were used only minimally. In terms of educational content, the need for teaching soft skills in formal education prevailed, and schools in particular expressed a critical attitude to teaching new knowledge about technology in formal education, which lags behind the demands and ideas of employers. From the point of view of the labour market, all respondents expressed the same opinion - the need for better communication between schools and employers in order to create a better balance between workforce qualification and employers' real demands.

Both employers and interviewees agreed that positive attitudes to adult learning prevail in the public, as confirmed by nearly three quarters of employers and three-quarters of individuals (79.5 percent respondents). A dominant position was equally positive for consultancy services, and 41 percent of respondents considered this service absolutely necessary. In the area of LLL and LLC, the
lack of interconnection of theory with practice has proven critical, often the education does not meet market requirements.

3. Monitoring and forecasting educational needs
In the area of monitoring of educational needs, it was important to recognize how schools select and open their learning and educational courses and programs. The priority for the selection at secondary schools and universities is the interest of students and their parents and consequently the situation on the labour market. Furthermore, it was necessary to find out what factors affect particular educational institutions in planning of educational events. Employers are most affected by the prognosis of educational needs in relation to employers' needs. Further education institutions plan their educational programs, depending on requirements of individuals, and then follow the labour market situation, and personnel agencies plan mainly in the context of the labour market situation. The monitoring of educational needs is influenced by additional factors, such as those that dominate the choice of the field of study of individual’s children and the choice of further education. In the case of secondary school, the choice of parents was influenced by the possibility of a good preparation of the child for university and the choice of the university was influenced mainly by the child's interest. In the selection of further education, the potential participant does not give a significant role to obtaining a certificate or the quality of the course, but primarily the potential participant considers as important the content of a course.

4. Quality management system in formal and non-formal education
The attitude of schools to the system of accreditation of study and study fields was in balanced with a higher relevance of the negative assessment of the accreditation system. Other educational institutions responded differently to the question of certification and accreditation experience, with accredited programs prevailing. However, the other educational institutions had a stronger attitude compared to schools, with positive views on the accreditation system. They accentuated the accreditation system more positively as a quality management system in the form of certification. Personnel agencies have largely assessed negatively the accreditation system and the same attitude has also been expressed by agencies providing mostly non-accredited and only non-accredited courses. The quality management system in the form of certification is considered by the personnel agencies to be more suitable than unsatisfactory.

5. Employability, readiness for the labour market
The market requirements were met by students of both secondary schools and universities at the level of theoretical knowledge, to a greater extent at universities. Schools ranked as second the positive assessment of graduates skilled in practical skills. Least positive was the readiness in soft skills. According to employers, university graduates are ready for the labour market in some selected key competencies and soft skills more than secondary school graduates. Similar assessments were presented by personnel agencies.

With regard to the employment of secondary school graduates, the greatest obstacle to obtaining a job is the lack of experience and the required practical skills. In the case of university graduates, the low salary of the offered job is a drawback.

6. Interconnection of subsystems and approval of results
In the survey, most schools consider the linkage of formal, non-formal and informative learning systems to be functional. Other educational institutions were more critical in this context, and up to 65 percent rated linkage as malfunctioning. The link between systems by personnel agencies was also largely negative.

In the area of approval of the results of non-formal education and informative learning, schools and employers have agreed that formal education is most important in recruitment. The second important factor is the knowledge and skills acquired in an informal way. Employers recruiting graduates have given minimal importance to certificates and certificates obtained in non-formal education.
Interesting was the comparison with the attitudes of other educational institutions and personnel agencies, which considered work experience from previous jobs and the level of education acquired at school as a decisive reason for recruiting of new employees.

7. Advisory services
The interviewed schools have said they have the position of adviser used by pupils, students, but also parents. More than half of other educational institutions also provide counseling services, especially in the selection of another educational pathway. In particular, personnel agencies provide consultancy for employers.

Individuals are interested in counseling services in education, career counseling and career choices.

8. Motivation to participate in further education
In the survey, it was important to find out which employers' use as motivational tools to motivate their employees to participate in further education It has been found that companies prefer non-financial motivators such as job retention and career growth. Furthermore, it was examined how motivational tools are evaluated for their effectiveness. Most employers evaluate motivational tools as effective.

However, they would like to add tax reliefs. Surveys have found that other educational institutions consider further education and getting employed as most motivating factors. According to personnel agencies, adults are motivated to maintain a job by continuing their education. The interviewed individuals often considered as a motivator the professional growth, personal growth, a desire for education and gaining new information.

9. Statistical data on LLL and LLC
Statistical data refer to the school's awareness of the number of graduates who have found employment on the labour market. Most of these schools have information and are mainly obtained from the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. However, they also use other sources, internal statistics or their own surveys from graduates. Other education institutions use to a much lesser extent access to statistical data, they obtain information from their own statistics, from the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and also from Eurostat.

10. Information level about the LLL and LLC strategy
Assessing the information level about the LLL and LLC strategy was the same for all interviewed, because they responded consistently that they know the strategy document only partially, depending on which part is more interesting to them. The survey results provided information that could be evaluated in order to be useful in the form of certain recommendations. These recommendations for LLL an LLC have a common denominator that is:

- systematic approach to LLL and LLC,
- cooperation and communication of stakeholders,
- willingness of motivation,
- openness of the subjects to changes leading to the improvement of the system of LLL and LLC.

These general recommendations can be specified for the area of companies that favor LLL and LLC. Employers in companies need to increase the level of connectivity with schools and help them to use new technologies in education. Similarly, a greater connection between employers and schools is recommended for the need to better meet the educational needs of practice at education and transfer of new information.

However, based on the results of the survey, employers also found certain facts, namely that educational needs to be prepared in line with labour market requirements so that different courses would not produce graduates who do not have a chance in the labour market due to low demand. They also highlighted the need for better promotion of LLL, especially for the younger generation.
They recommend incorporating various innovative forms of education in formal education and devoting themselves to leadership along with the development of soft skills already at secondary school level. They also pointed out the need for financial support from the state (e.g. tax reliefs) that they would use to create their own academies or to intensify their cooperation with existing educational institutions.

10.1 Evaluation and conclusion

In the context of a set of inquiry areas that represented a set of 10 above-mentioned issues, it was necessary to define a more specific recommendation for some of them, as the analysis of the results brought some shortcomings in the monitoring and forecasting of educational needs, a consistency of opinions was necessary to reach in the area of quality management system in formal and non-formal education. It was also necessary to define recommendations for employability, interconnection of subsystems and recognition of results in more details, as well as the motivation to participate in further education and advisory services. In the field of monitoring and forecasting, it is necessary to create compact information and to ensure continuity in forecasting. Demand needs to be forecasted - job development by sector, professions and qualifications and supply side - education and training by age and gender, all at macroeconomic, sectoral level and at the level of individual schools and employers. In forecasting, it is recommended to link an important information center - the National System of Occupations with the resources for forecasting educational needs, with sectoral analysis and studies that monitor the state of development of individual sectors in terms of economic parameters and follow up the development of skills needs. The national system of professions must also be linked to representative research on the employers' qualification needs, carried out periodically on the basis of a detailed questionnaire.

Employers should be obliged to cooperate with the relevant organizations, institutions, public authorities in defining those needs. The clear dominant recommendation is communication and solutions "win-win", with inspiration from abroad and from good domestic practice. It can also be stated that an intensified focus on modern forms of in-house training is part of the need to improve the quality of educational needs. These include: openness and flexibility of the system, functional expert centers, incubators of ideas, internal seminars and lectures and the like.

11. Recommendations in the area of education quality management system

Quality management system recommendations in formal and non-formal education aim at quality management through investment in quality and assessment of teachers and trainers. In terms of employment and readiness for labour market, the recommendations concern the acquisition of a skilled and flexible retraining lecturers through better education, better teacher appraisal, greater focus on skills and technical disciplines, equalization of formal and non-formal education, and in particular, active school-employer cooperation. The interconnection of subsystems and the recognition of results could be optimized by increasing employers' confidence in certificates acquired through courses, but also by guaranteeing the quality of output of these training programs. Motivation to participate in further education could be unambiguously increased by financial motivations based on recommendations. Following the example of Ambition 2020 from the UK, individual training accounts could be introduced for those who are not educated at ISCED to complete it. Another option is to create vouchers, similar to Germany and Austria. Another option is to create funds by sector, to which employers contribute to education. It is also recommended to introduce grants, loan funds for vocational education and savings and education. In addition to proposals of a financial nature, it is recommended to increase the motivation to educate people with low education and the reasoning behind would be an increase of the financial value after successful completion of courses. It is also very important to increase the availability of training courses for low-income groups. Higher awareness through campaigns is important, by increasing the assurance of use and subsequently evaluating the acquired knowledge and skills, and the public awareness of the general premise to "educate". Answering a question about advisory services revealed a lack of functional advisory institutions and recommendations are aimed at developing advisory services.
in the choice of employment, and at introducing the position of so-called advisory services, career advisor in all kinds of schools with formal education.

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