INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NEW HORIZONS IN EDUCATION
INTE2012

Influence Of Socio-Demographic Characteristics To Attractiveness And Success Of Initial Vocational Education And Training In Latvia

Jurijs Lavendels\textsuperscript{a}, Vjaceslavs Sitikovs\textsuperscript{a,\ast}, Marina Uhanova\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a}Faculty of Computer Science, Institute of Applied Computer Systems, Riga Technical University (LATVIA)

Abstract

The ongoing project “Detailed Methodological Approach to understanding the VET educational system in 7 European countries (7EU-VET)” tries to improve understanding of what particular factors influence on VET system attractiveness and success. The project tries to answer to questions what’s new in human perception of VET systems and how they see the future job opportunities, career development and mobility; how effective and successful are advising and informing systems? For these reasons the project implemented empirical study among VET schools’ pupil which results are intended for decision makers, experts and VET managers. Results derived from research made in Latvian institutions of initial VET are presented.

1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Developing the attractiveness of vocational education and the quality of vocational education and training (VET) system is one of the goals of Lisbon strategy. The ongoing project “Detailed Methodological Approach to understanding the VET educational system in 7 European countries (7EU-VET)”, implemented with the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Transversal KA-1) of the
European Union, tries to improve understanding of what particular factors influence on VET system attractiveness and success.

The 7EU-VET project builds upon common European strategies, frameworks and tools that have been developed and supports them with the research action among seven European countries – Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and UK (7EU-VET, 2010a). The project addresses the following scientific and research objectives (7EU-VET, 2010b): a) are educational and training systems flexible enough to correspondingly respond to different and changing needs; b) how efficient and successful are the systems of advising and informing; c) what are the perceptions of young people of VET systems and how they see their future possibilities for career building and mobility? One of the instruments envisaged to find an answer to mentioned above questions is wide survey in each participating country among initial VET (IVET) schools’ pupils (7EU-VET, 2010c). Research results are intended for decision makers, experts, VET managers and secondary school pupil who plan to enroll into VET. Presented paper contains results derived from research made in Latvian institutions of initial VET. Preliminary results of survey in Latvia presented in (Lavendels, 2012) elaborated further in this paper.

2. SAMPLING AND QUESTIONNAIRE

To be statistically valuable sample list for Latvia contains all IVET schools existing at the moment. The target group of survey is 17-18 years old pupil.

Selection of classes participating in the survey was made on the base of school size. If there were more that 2 classes with pupils’ age 17/18 in school that is smaller than 600 pupils, then 2 classes were selected occasionally. If there were just 2 or 1 such class then all of them participated in survey. If there were more that 4 classes with pupils age 17/18 in school over 600 pupils then 4 classes were selected. If there are just 4 or less such classes then all of them participated in survey. However if there were in selected classes pupil with other age they also were invited to take part in the survey.

The questionnaire consists of core part, which is the same for all participating countries and nationally-dependent part reflecting particularities of national educational systems. In the questionnaire there were closed, partial open and open-ended questions. Majority of them were closed-type and require from participant only selection of the most appropriate answer from proposed. Essential number of questions was content dependant (specializing) and these questions were asked to answer only in the case of particular selection on previous question(s).

3. RESPONSE RATE AND SOME SOCIO-BIOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Survey was made in May-June 2011 when 82 IVET schools were invited to participate in the survey from which 179 classes have to participate according to sampling described in section 2.

Really in survey participated 72 schools (88% of invited), 169 classes (94% of supposed), 3038 pupils (80% of supposed). In participating classes 3775 pupils are registered, 3105 of them (82%) were presented during survey. 67 pupils from presented (2%) decline to fill questionnaire, so 3038 filled questionnaires (80% of sampled population) were collected and handled. Distributions of ages of participants were as follows: 16 years old - 7%, 17 years – 30%, 18 years - 37%, 19 years and more – 26%. After filtering of 17-18 years old 1888 questionnaires were considered.

Pupils enrolled to approximately 200 VET programs were presented in the survey, from them 54% boys and respectively 46% girls that approximately corresponds to ratio of population enrolled to IVET in Latvia at all (60% of boys and 40% of girls). Majority of respondents (83%) are enrolled into programmes combining both vocational and secondary education giving ability for further education in high schools or universities, from them 49% represents industry-oriented programmes while 51% -
service-oriented. Regarding place of living – 37% of IVET student live in big cities or their suburbs, 31% in towns or small villages while 32% - in country villages or farms.

4. SOME OBSERVATIONS

The following issues are considered: a) transition to VET; b) level of satisfaction of programme and school; c) characteristics of study behavior and acquired knowledge; d) future career aspirations and self-assessment; e) acquired skills and abilities. These issues are considered taking in mind such characteristics of pupil as gender, programme enrolled, pupils’ and their parents’ country of origin and pupils’ place of living. Analyze was made in intention to find what are the strongest and what are the weakest factors influencing on decision making, present attitude, future plans etc. Majority of questions analyzed propose to rank given expression using a scale from 1="Not at all" to 5="Very".

4.1. Transition to VET

The research objective was to find which factors are most important for enrolment into current VET. More than half of surveyed pupils in Latvia stated that it was quite or very important for them that the programme offered good job prospects (53%), essential number of pupil (39%) considers that occupation(s) related to selected programme appeals to them, more than each third selected their programme because it was the most appropriate within a reasonable distance from their home (36%) whereas almost each third thinks that reputation of selected programme is attractive (32%). A smaller proportion of pupils indicated the importance of the following aspects: friends who have chosen to undertake the same programme (22%), parents suggested enrolling in this programme (20%) and previous examination grades which prevented the pupils being able to enroll on more preferable programme (11%). The weakest factor influencing pupils’ decision on programme selection is former teachers’ encouragement to enroll on this programme (just 7%).

The examination of certain socio-demographic characteristics shows that parents’ suggestion is more important for girls than for boys (23% vs. 18%) as well as reputation of programme (34% vs. 29%).

Friends’ advices have more influence to pupils born in other than Latvia EU countries (66%) rather than for born in non-EU countries (42%) whereas just 21% of born in Latvia have mentioned this factor as quite or very important for selection of enrolled programme.

Influencing of parents to pupils’ decisions is the most strong in case when both parents were born in other than Latvia EU country (29% of pupil has mentioned that parents opinion was quite or very important in selection of enrolled programme) whereas the weakest dependence on parents is when both of parents were born in Latvia (18%). The same is related to influencing of friends advices – for 38% of pupils who’s both parents were born in other than Latvia EU country friends’ advices are quite or very important comparing to 19% of pupils who’s both parents were born in Latvia.

It is predictable that distance from home to school is more important to pupils from towns or small cities (40%) than for pupils from big cities or their suburbs (32%).

In addition to important aspects we were interested in the information sources pupils use when deciding on a certain programme.

The most important information sources for pupils when choosing their programme were parents and family members (29%), online information and other public media, e.g. newspapers (27%), followed by informative days, fairs and open days at schools (26%) whereas aptitude test offered by an educational establishment (14%), previous internship or work placement (13%) and teachers (12%) were less important in Latvia. The least important information source when choosing the current programme was
the job centre. Here, only a bit more than 8% of the pupils states that this was quite or very important for them when choosing the programme.

Review of information sources influencing on decision for current programme strengthen consideration that parents have more impact on girls than on boys (33% vs. 26%). Moreover for female pupils are more important than for male such sources like informative days, fairs, open days in school as well as online information and other public media, e.g. newspapers (about 33% vs. 22%). Regarding last set of information sources is necessary to point also that they were more important of pupils enrolled in programmes related to service than for pupils enrolled for programme related to industry (30% vs. about 22%). Despite of the fact that job centers are the less important source of information in general (just about 8% of respondents considered them as quite or very important) for pupils born in other than Latvia EC countries it was second by importance source of information – 39% considered it as quite of very important.

The pupils were also asked whether they considered any alternative programme when they were selecting their current programme: 37% of the pupils have considered one alternative programme, 21% considered two other alternative programmes and 8,5% considered three or more alternative programmes whereas 33% did not consider any alternative programme at all when they were deciding for the current one. Pupils born in Latvia less often stated that they didn't considered any alternative programme (33%) than pupils born in other EU country (39%) while more than a half of pupils born in non-EU countries (53%) have no alternatives considering programme to enroll. Also pupils from country villages or farms more often didn’t consider any alternatives than pupils from any other place of living (38% vs. about 31%).

4.2. Level of satisfaction of programme and school

The research objective was to find which factors the most influence to satisfaction of present programme and school. The majority of pupils indicated that the programme provides useful practical experience for entering the workforce (61%) and prepares them well for further education and training (57%). It is quite unexpected that more than half of the pupils (56%) believe that their programme prepares them for a job that is important for society.

Exactly half of pupils ensures that their programme offers them a broad perspective for a professional career, a bit less (48%) that the programme is recognized within society as having a good reputation, while 42% consider that the programme prepares them for starting their own business or becoming self-employed. The least accepted (39%) is that the programme ensures employment in the job market.

Female pupils’ evaluations of enrolled programme are sufficiently higher than male pupils’ (differences from 5 to 9 percents) in almost all proposed for consideration aspects except of employment in the job market where their visions coincide. Pupils from service sector appreciate their programme more than from industry sector absolutely by all aspects (differences from 7 till 9 percents).

Pupils were also asked how satisfied they are with their school facilities, teachers, computer equipment and with their programme in general. More than 60% of all pupils in Latvia are all in all satisfied with the programme. The satisfaction with the programme is higher for female pupils (67% vs. 57%) and for pupils with service-oriented programmes rather than for industry-oriented (65% vs. 58%).

Nearly 40% states that most of the attended classes are interesting; meanwhile female pupils agree with it in a greater extend than male (44% vs. 37%).

More than half of the pupils agree with the statement that most of their teachers are usually well prepared when teaching their subjects (58%). Female pupils agree to a greater extent to this statement than male (62% vs. 55%) as well as pupils living in country villages or farms greater than pupils from towns or small cities and big cities or their suburbs (62% vs. 59% and 53% respectively).
Half of the pupils agree that most of their teachers are usually interested in helping them to learn; meanwhile female pupils feel it stronger than male (55% vs. 46%). Even more differences depend on country of pupil’s origin. The whole 72% of pupils born in non-EU countries agree with the statement that most of their teachers are usually interested in helping them to learn, whereas so think just half of pupils born in Latvia (50%) and only 13% of pupils born in other than Latvia EU countries. Also the same figures are for perception that schools offer enough learning and training material (73% of non-EU vs. 50% of Latvia-born vs. 22% of other EU country born). To the perception of this aspect influences also place of pupil’s living. Pupils from countryside are more satisfied with learning and training materials (53%) than pupils from big cities and their suburbs (45%).

It is necessary to stress also that pupils from countryside agree to a greater extent to the statement that most of their teachers are usually interested in helping them to learn (53%) comparing with big cities’ and their suburbs’ pupils (47%).

To the perception that schools offer enough learning and training material in addition to pupils’ country of origin influence also countries of parents’ origin. Pupils from families where both parents were born in other than Latvia EU country agree to a much greater extent to this statement than pupils from families where both parents were born in non-EU countries (69% vs. 39%). However with the statement that schools’ facilities are well maintained in a lesser extend agree children of Latvia-born parents (42%) whereas in a higher extend again agree children of non-EU countries’ parents (73%). There is also difference in such perception between pupils from country villages and farms (48% are satisfied with schools’ facilities maintenance) comparing to 42% of such consideration by pupils from the rest of a country. Agreement with this statement for female pupils is higher than for male (47% vs. 41%). Female pupils also agree on a higher extend that computers at schools are up to date (49% vs. 40%); however regarding the statement that “The number of computers available at school is adequate for the needs of pupils” both female and male pupils were solid (43% of both female and male pupils agree with it).

As the main aim of the project is to understand factors influencing on pupils' decision regarding educational path it is quite important evaluate availability at school of information on careers and training. Overall about 45% of respondents agree that such information is easily accessible at schools.

4.3. Characteristics of study behavior and acquired knowledge

The research objective was to find which factors the most reflect to progress of pupils learning and skills. Nearly two thirds (64%) of the pupils in Latvia agree that they are interested in practical subjects. Almost two thirds (58%) stated that it is important for them to fully understand what they have to do/learn. More than a half (52%) agrees that they want to make a good impression on potential employers by achieving good grades. For the most important goals there are not big differences between girls and boys considerations with the exception of understanding what to do/learn - this goal is slightly more important for female than for male pupils (65% vs. 53%). More than each third pupil (38%) strives for the highest possible marks and for female pupils it is more important than for male (43% vs. 33%). Very close figures to that is also for desire to make a good impression on their teachers by achieving good grades (36%) without big difference between female and male pupils. Almost one third (32%) confesses that want to keep up with their fellow pupils when female pupils do it more often than male (35% vs. 30%).

Despite female pupils enjoy learning more than male (31% vs. 21%) the overall rate of pupils who like to learn is very low (just one of four). Even worse is the situation with general subject. Also despite female pupils are a bit more interested in general subjects (e.g. maths, foreign language) than male (25% vs. 20%) this factor is the least important for VET students – actually a bit more than one of five pupils (22%) expresses some interest in general subject.
In an additional question the pupils were asked how they rate the proportion of practical training within their current programme. In Latvia most of the pupils rate the proportion of practical training as good (59%) or average (27%), when good rates came more from female than male pupils (64% vs. 55%), whereas amount of practical training was estimate as average otherwise – 29% of male and only 24% of female pupils. Meanwhile just 6% percent state the amount as fair and only 3% rate the proportion of practical training as poor without big differences in female and male opinions. Just 6% of pupils evaluate the amount of practical training as excellent with total coincide of male and female considerations.

Evaluation of the appropriateness of the practical training highly depends on the country of pupils’ origin: majority (60%) of pupils born in Latvia consider the amount of practical training as good and each forth (26%) as average whereas more than a half (56%) of pupils born in other EU country rate it just as average and each forth (26%) as fair while only small 4% consider it as good. The percentage of pupils born in non-EU countries that rated the amount of practical training as average or good are close (30% and 38% respectively) whereas percentage of pupils rated such amount as excellent is much more for pupils from non-EU countries (19%) rather than born in Latvia (6%) or other EU country (9%).

We were also interested in the activities of pupils outside the programme. Do they hold down a paid job which is not part of the programme? More than a half of the pupils (58%) hold another job during the last year outside their programme. However just each fifth of them declares that he/she works regularly, while another four answer that they worked for payment, but only during the holidays. While 66% of the male pupils hold down a paid job fewer female pupils worked for payment outside the programme (48%). It concerns both to regular work (14% male vs. 9% female) and working only during the holidays (52% male vs. 39% female pupils). Non-working pupils are more between service-related (47%) than on industry-related programmes (32%). Meanwhile non-working pupils of parents born in other than Latvia EU countries are much less (23%) than in any other cases (from 42% till 48%). However majority of children whose parents born in other than Latvia EU countries have just occasional work during holidays (69%) while children of Latvia-born parents more often have regular work (till 17%) comparing to abroad-born parents’ children (just 5% in the case when both parents were born in non-EU country).

At the same time 40% of working pupils do not see any similarity of what they are doing outside the programme to those pupils undertake during their programme, almost 41% sees few of similarity while only 19% of working pupils consider that most of the task in outside work are similar to those their undertake during their programme. It is interesting that partially similarity is more often for industry-related programmes (47% vs. 36% in service sector) while more often working pupils in service sector are occupied with absolutely different tasks than in their programme (45% vs. 31% in industry sector).

4.4. Future career aspirations and self-assessment

Another goal of the research study was to measure the pupils’ perceptions about their life goals and their future possibilities for employment, career building, and mobility. In Latvia, the most important aspect with regard to personal and professional life goals are “having a job that makes one happy“ and “making and maintaining relationships with others (e.g. family and friends)” – about 70% each. A bit lesser important with almost equal scores are gaining job security (67%), having a good relationship with colleagues (67%) and receiving a high income (66%).

Absolutely all considered aspects are more important for women than for man. For instance, obtaining solid occupational proficiencies (63% vs. 56%), having a job that makes one happy (74% vs. 66%) and having a good relationship with colleagues (69% vs. 64%). Also absolutely all considered aspects are more important for service-sector programme’s pupils rather than for industry-sector’s. For instance, last two described aspects – “having a job that makes one happy” (73% vs. 65%) and “having a good relationship with colleagues” (71% vs. 63%). The same is related also to making and maintaining
relationships with others (e.g. family and friends) – it is quite or very important to 73% of pupils from service-related programmes comparing to 67% from industry-related.

Country of pupil’s origin influences essentially pupils attitude to having a good relationship with colleagues – just one of three pupils born in other than Latvia EU country decides that it is quite or very important, while so consider two of three pupils born in Latvia and even 81% of pupils born in non-EU country. Almost the same proportion are in consideration of advancing to a high level of status in society – 41% of pupils born in other than Latvia EU country, 59% of Latvia-born and even 94% of non-EU country-born consider that it is quite or very important.

Desire of “undertaking interesting tasks in the workplace” slightly depends on place of pupil’s living – for inhabitancies of big cities or their suburbs it is more important (63%) than for pupils from towns or small cities (58%) and pupils from country villages or farms (56%).

When pupils were asked about the sector in which they would like to work in, the answer option “service sector (e.g. nursing, policing, hairdressing)” was quoted the most with 44% following with 36% voting for trade (e.g. banking, financing, business). Other considered sectors are far away from two leaders.

For male pupils the sector of trade is the most quoted (33%), however female pupils’ willingness to work there is even stronger – 40%. For male pupils after trade (33%) and service (30%) third the most popular sector is industry (e.g. producing industry, steel, motor, oil). While 26% of the male pupils quoted that they would like to work in this sector only 4% of the female pupils stated that they strive towards working in the industry sector - this sector is the least popular between female pupils. Almost the same attitude is for agriculture, forestry and fishery – 18% of male pupils desire to work there (forth by popularity between male) whereas just 5% of female pupils have the same opinion (second from the end by popularity for female). For female pupils after service (60%) and trade (40%) third the most popular sector is public administration (e.g. local government, education) with 12%; however here isn’t sufficient difference with male choice (14%). Opposite than attitudes for industry are perception of non-governmental organizations (e.g. charities, not-for-profit organizations) – with 10% this sector is fourth by popularity for female and with just 5% the least by popularity between male pupils.

With regard to the service sector, pupils who are born in Latvia more often chose this sector (45%) rather than born in a non-EU country (32%), while just 14% of pupils born in other than Latvia EU country select this sector as preferable. Pupils from big cities or their suburbs more often than pupils from towns or small cities and even more often than pupils from country villages or farms strive towards trade (42% vs. 36% vs. 29% respectively). The same is concerning the sector of public administration (15%-13%-9%) whereas for agriculture, forestry and fishery the situation is opposite – just 7% of big cities inhabitancies are thinking to be involved in this sector, while 10% of pupils from towns or small cities and whole 20% of pupils from country villages or farms are going to be occupied there.

We also asked the pupils whether they consider continuing schooling or participating in further education after they have finished their current vocational programme. In Latvia, most pupils have a positive attitude towards further education - only 10% state that they do not consider continuing schooling or participating in further education. In total, 39% of the pupils strive towards continuing their education while 33% are still not sure. Though, amounts of doubtful are almost equal between boys and girls, female pupils are much more intended to continue education (46%) rather than male pupils (33%). Also pupils from service sector are more aiming for further education than from industry sector (43% vs. 30%). Desire to continue education more often express pupils from big cities or their suburbs (48%) than pupils from towns or small cities (38%) and pupils from country villages or farms (30%).

We also were interested what qualification pupils would choose if they continue learning. Another programme related to what pupils are doing currently was the option that was quoted the most by the pupils who want to continue their education (30%). It was followed by a higher level of vocational
programme (29%) and another programme not related to what pupils are doing currently (20%) while academic programmes at universities or universities of applied science are the least planned (10%).

The preferences for the different pathways differ between male and female pupils. While male pupils more often consider another programme related to what they are doing currently (33% vs. 27%) female pupils are the most interested in higher level of vocational programme (that not sufficiently differs from male opinion - 31% vs. 28%) and in another programme not related to what they are doing currently (23% vs. 17%). Pupils from industry sector more often than from service sectors desire to perfect themselves in already chosen area (33% vs. 24%) whereas pupils born in other than Latvia EU country or non-EU country more often (56% and 41% respectively) than pupils born in Latvia (just 12%) prefer more specialized programme.

The pupils were also supposed to report their opinion about what further education will enable to them. With 74% the statement “to enhance my career options” received the highest agreement in Latvia. It is followed by “to gain a good qualification/education” (71%), “to earn a high income later in life” (69%) and “to become an expert in my field” (68%). With the statement that further education enables them to fulfill their parent's expectations agree more male pupils than female (43% vs.32%), however for the rest of considered factors female pupils agree with more extend than male, e.g. “to gain good qualification/education” (75% vs. 67%), “to enhance career options” (78% vs. 70%), “to experience pupil’s exchange programme” (44% vs. 35%). However the most essential difference is regarding professional interest – 58% of female pupils consider that further education enables them to follow their professional interest while just 44% of male have the same opinion.

Except of fulfilling of parent’s expectations where industry sector students agree more than service (43% vs.37%) whole the rest of considered aspects of further education are more appreciated by service sector students. For instance, “becomes an expert in my field” (71% vs.65%), “gain a good qualification/education” (72% vs. 65%), “experience a pupil exchange programme” (44% vs. 36%) and “enhance my career options” (78% vs. 68%). The highest difference in service and industry sectors students’ opinions is regarding ability of further education to follow pupil’s professional interest. Here 56% of service sector’s students consider it as further education enabler while the same opinion has just 44% of industry sector’s students. A higher proportion of pupils who were born in Latvia agree with the statement that further education enables them to gain a good qualification/education (71%) compared to pupils who were born in another EU country (68%) and even more compared to pupils who were born in a non-EU country (just 25%). Almost the same proportion is regarding opinion that further education enables to enhance pupil’s career options (75% vs. 46% vs. 35%). While fulfilling of parent’s expectations is more important to pupils with parents both born in other than Latvia EU country, pupils with parents both born in Latvia much lesser agree to this statement (52% vs. 36%). All aspects of further education are slightly more important for inhabitancies of big cities or their suburbs than for pupils living in towns, small cities, country villages or farms. Especially it concerns to following pupil’s professional interests (57% vs. 48%) and ability to postpone starting of full-time work (49% vs. about 40%).

Pupils in the vocational education system may also benefit from the personal development prospects abroad. We asked pupils whether they have ever participated in an international exchange programme. The majority of pupils in Latvia (84%) have never participated in an exchange programme for pupils – 79% of female and whole 89% of male pupils. Only 16% of the pupils stated that they have taken part in an exchange programme either in their vocational (8%) or general (8%) school. For vocational schools there is not big difference between girls and boys, however females being general schools’ pupils more often participated in such endeavors than male (11% vs. 5%).

When asking those pupils who are not interested to participate in international exchange programme about the reasons, aspects which were quoted the most are that they would not benefit from this experience (19%), that they are not familiar with exchange programmes (21%) and most often that they
don’t want to leave home (22%). Despite of the fact that just 9% of pupils consider that organizing of international exchange is too laborious, it is interesting that male pupils are thinking such more often than female (11% vs. 5%) as well as industry sector students more often than service sector (11% vs. 5%).

4.5. Acquired skills and abilities

In addition to their acquired knowledge pupils were asked about their acquired skills and abilities. Therefore pupils were asked to assess their current level of several soft skills relevant for the work sphere.

Being able to work as a team member received the highest rating. Here 62% of the pupils in Latvia assessed themselves as being skilled in this ability. Next places with almost the same rates took the ability to approach and engage with others with confidence (e.g. networking) and the ability to quickly familiarize oneself with new occupational tasks (58% and 57% respectively). The aspect pupils assessed themselves least skilled is the ability to perform well under pressure (40%). The gender and the sector in which the pupils are undertaking their programme also have an influence on the skills’ assessment. Female pupils assessed themselves higher by all of proposed soft skills than male, e.g. “manage occupational tasks independently” (51% vs. 46%), “approach and engage with others with confidence” (61% vs. 55%) while the highest difference is in assessment of ability to work as a team member (66% of female vs. 58% of male pupils consider that they obtain this skill). Pupils from service sector estimate themselves higher than from industry sector also by all of proposed to consideration soft skills. Foremost it concerns to ability of networking (63% vs. 53%), working as a team member (67% vs. 59%) and quick familiarization with new tasks related to job occupations (61% vs. 53%).

Ability to manage occupational tasks independently more often stated pupils born in Latvia (49%) than born in non-EU country (26%) while pupils born in other that Latvia EU country estimated it even lesser (22%). The same tendency is for ability to work as a team member – 62% of pupils born in Latvia feel themselves as skilled enough for this while the same opinion have only 45% of pupils born in non-EU country and just 28% of born in other that Latvia EU country. It is interesting that self-assessment of ability to manage occupational tasks independently depends on the country of parents’ origin – just 21% of pupils whose both parents were born in non-EU country feel themselves able to do this comparing to about 51% of pupils in any other cases. As smaller is the size of municipality were pupils are living as lesser is pupils’ self-assessment, e.g. 62% of pupils from big cities or their suburbs stated that they are able to approach and engage with others with confidence, while only 57% of pupils from towns or small cities agree with it and the same opinion have just 53% of pupils from country villages or farms. Almost the same distribution is regarding ability quickly familiarize with new tasks related to job occupations (61%-56%-53%) and ability to communicate ideas und suggestions to others clearly (55%-52%-48%).

In addition to the self-assessment the pupils were also asked to what extend their current programme strengthens these abilities. About 41% of the pupils stated that their programme is quite or very able to prepare them to develop these skills and abilities (24% quite, 17% very). More than half of pupils (57%) stated that their programme prepares them fairly or slightly and only 1.4% think that their current education does not help them advance in these skills and abilities. It is difference of programme’s assessment by boys and girls. Male pupils more often assess that current programme fairly develops desired soft skills than female (46% vs. 40%) and in turn female pupils more often consider that the programme does it quite or very good (47% vs. 37%). Service-oriented students more often than industry-oriented consider that their current programme develops necessary soft skills very well (21% vs. 16%).

Pupils who were born in Latvia more often stated that the programme prepares them fairly or quite good (67%) than did pupils who were born in other EU country (45%). In contrast the percentage of pupils born in Latvia that have stated that their programme prepares them slightly is much lesser than for pupils that were born in other EU country (14% vs. 46%). Percentage of pupils who consider that their
current programmes do not develop their soft skills at all is much higher between born in non-EU countries (15%) comparing to born in other than Latvia EU countries (9%) and born in Latvia (just 1%).

In addition to soft skills also language skills are relevant for the work sphere. Therefore we asked all of the pupils in which of the selected world languages (English, French, Spanish and German) they have acquired at least basic knowledge. About 87% of the pupils stated that they have acquired at least basic knowledge in English. Nearly 20% have some basic knowledge in German while French and Spanish are not widely used in Latvia (just less than 5% and 4% respectively have mentioned that they acquired basic knowledge in these languages). Male pupils stated less often that they acquired at least a basic knowledge in German than female pupils (15% vs. 27%) as well as industry-related students comparing to service-related (15% vs. 26%) while for other languages there are not neither gender-related nor sector-related differences. Pupils that were born in Latvia more often stated that they acquired at least a basic knowledge in English (88%) than pupils born in other EU country (70%) or in non-EU country (49%). For Spanish and French we find a reversed picture. More often pupils that were born in a non-EU country stated that they have certain competencies in these languages (51% and 30% respectively) than pupils that were born in Latvia (just 4% for each language). Pupils from big cities or their suburbs are more familiar with German than pupils from towns, small cities, country villages or farms (27% vs. about 17%).

5. Conclusions

The results show that pupils’ path of transition to VET, level of satisfactions of programme and school, characteristics of study behavior, acquired knowledge, future career aspirations, self-assessment, acquired skills and abilities obviously depend on pupils’ gender, programme enrolled, pupils’ and their parents’ country of origin and pupils’ place of living. However to complete the picture is necessary evaluate also influence of such factors as pupils’ school achievement and grades, level of parents’ education and families’ socio-economic conditions.

Acknowledgements

The research was done within the project “Detailed Methodological Approach to understanding the VET educational system in 7 European countries (7EU-VET)” co-funded by Lifelong Learning Programme (Transversal KA-1) of the European Union – project Nr. 505480-LLP-1-2009-1-SI-KA1-KA1SCR-7EU-VET. Statistical data testing by Pearson criteria was done by Barbara Neza Brecko (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Centre for Methodology and Informatics). Methodology of data interpretation and template for results’ description are developed by Caroline Dahmen and Cornelia Neuert (Darmstadt Technical University, Institute of Sociology).

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