

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' CAREER MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY IN VOCATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract. The current dynamic change of the situation in the labor market and in society at large points out that the context of career education and career support in vocational secondary schools plays a vital role in students' career development. Simultaneous learning and training of the chosen profession is both, a challenge and embarrassment how to understand oneself and to discern the purpose of learning in connection with own career goals, as well as to understand the supply and demand of the ever-changing labor market. In order to cope with this it is necessary that career guidance is integrated in the school education environment. It helps provide a link with the knowledge and skills necessary for students' personal development, activity of citizenship, social inclusion and employment in order to be able to manage own career.

Keywords: career management competency, career guidance, students of vocational secondary schools.

Introduction

At present education has a key role in the development of each individual's personality and their wholesome inclusion in the multicultural society. Vocational education offers two options for young people – to be employed and educated. It can help them become aware of the importance of acquisition of the practical skills and abilities, performing different types of work and finding a place in the continuously changing job market. As stressed by *The Bruges Communiqué* [1], to ensure these two choices Europe must remember that ~ 10 % of young people leave school for various reasons, without obtaining a certificate of completion of education or qualifications. Scientists E. Watt and R. Vuorinen [2] have figured that it is often mistakenly assumed that those young people who are already undergoing initial vocational programs have already knowingly decided what career they want to build, and that they already have acquired career management skills during formal vocational practice or at work outside the school. This is contrary to the evidence and experience that shows that students' learning in vocational education often is not of their own choice, but because they are directed there by the traditional general education system or if they have not had a better chance. Sometimes these students are choosing a certain profession, but undergo the vocational training program which is mismatching their interests and abilities. Guidance might help such learners. Secondly – they often have a negative learning experience. Students do not see the link between formal education and the working life. Career management as a process of human life-cycle requires decision making and investment of various resources for achieving career goals. The contemporary labor market requires from the new specialist good skills of communication, knowledge in mathematics, natural and social sciences, the ability to communicate in foreign languages and to use advanced information technology. Therefore, beside acquisition of these subjects in vocational education programs students must acquire additional skills such as critical and creative thinking, accepting challenges and working in rapidly changing conditions, being able to make decisions and acting which is the foundation for developing of career management competency.

The author put forward the following study questions: What skills does career management competency consist of? What are the necessary conditions for the developing the students' career management competence in vocational secondary schools?

Materials and methods

The scientific article is expanding the theoretical discussion about topicality of the development of students' career management competency in vocational secondary schools. The scientific article analyzed theoretical cognitions of career management competency and its content, as well as practical experience of Latvian, EU, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and American scientists in developing of students' career management competency in vocational secondary schools.

Results and discussion

The rapid economic changes, development of information technology and globalization have modified the career awareness and content; defined new skills and competencies needed for a person to successfully manage own career. The changes in the paradigm of career management influenced the content and objectives of career guidance. Instead of the concept of *professional orientation* the concept *career guidance* shall enter. The changes of the concepts underline the need to treat this as a cross-sectoral initiative – education, employment, activities of youth and social policy that show correlated relationships among three groups of skills – general skills, entrepreneurship skills and career management skills, which are necessary for an individuals' personal growth throughout their lives. Amendments to the Education Law [3] defined the concept of career education as an interaction between a person's work and private life. Consequently, viewing the interpretation of *career* concept in the modern point of view, it is a process of developing work-related attitudes, values, skills, abilities, interests, traits and knowledge throughout an individual's life. It means that career is one of the key elements that determine the quality of life, because a successful career gives a person an opportunity to implement his abilities and interests in personal, professional and social spheres [4]. D.T. Hall [5] points out that the contemporary concept of career at the same time also includes personal freedom, self-exploration and personal understanding of success. Thereby, one of the conditions for a successful career is the balance among work, family and leisure time. If to look through the prism of the student's career development, then it can be assumed that successful career conditions are: learning and free time, which can give an important contribution to the career development of young persons.

Career management is defined with life, training and continuing education related decisions adopted by an individual during his life independently or in collaboration with the career counselor. It is an ongoing process of preparing, implementing, and monitoring career plans [6]. In this context, J.H. Greenhaus, G. A. Callanan and V. M. Godshalk [7] have figured that an individual must do the following steps: firstly, manage own career exploration and set the career goals; secondly, develop strategies and implement them; thirdly, intend to progress and provide assessment of the career management process. This process may successfully occur in a school educational environment where organized and systematic development of career guidance exists that encourages students to think and act in the direction of their chosen profession. But it may be provided when the school educational environment is shaped by teachers who are aware that in the education process career management and support must be integrated. As shown by the experience of foreign countries, an important role is played by the teachers, who have integrated acquirement of career management competency in their school subjects [8; 9; 10; 11]. It encourages students to think and understand real motives why they want to acquire the chosen profession. As recognized B. Lowe [12], without understanding it is not possible to decide how to proceed. Acquiring of career skills means from the past explaining prediction of the consequences in future, because action is always related with risk. On the other hand, E. Ginsberg [13] explains that professional choice as a part of career is a long process that involves the whole range of decisions. It starts with previously weighted and taken decisions and ends with a compromise between the internal and external factors.

The development of the career management competency is provided by career guidance, which consists of three components [14]: 1) *Career counselling*, conducted on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, in which attention is focused on the distinctive career issues faced by individuals. 2) *Career education*, as part of the curriculum, in which attention is paid to helping groups of individuals to develop the competences for managing their career development. 3) *Career information*, provided in various formats, concerned with information on courses, occupations and career paths. The view of A.G. Watts [15] is recognized that all students who attend vocational education training programs, first of all should be informed about career education support activities which are integrated in the school education environment, and secondly – career counseling must be available for quality support in the decision-making process. In this way, career guidance can promote development of students' competency through varied learning and educational work.

R. Anderson [16], A. Špona [17] and T. Koke [18] emphasize that competency cannot be perceived standardized, because society is constantly changing. Therefore, learning and reflection skills are becoming crucial as they ensure enrichment opportunities for individual self-experience and

contribute to the development of competency. In addition, as any experience, it is viewed from the aspect of the congenital, acquired by the individual and the social experience. Development of students' career management competency in vocational education environment is viewed and explained based on the way of their behavior and thinking in most situations, which are persistent sufficiently long time.

Nature of the competency is described by the following levels [19]. *Features and motives* are the most difficult evolved level, because constitute the core of the individual's personality. Here motives are managing and identifying the individual behavior and actions aimed to a certain goal for which the individual is constantly thinking and trying to achieve. For example, a student whose achievement motivates constantly puts forward challenging objectives, assumes personal responsibility for achieving them and uses feedback for doing it better and better. On the other hand, features are physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information. The next level is the *"I" concept and values* which components are the attitudes, values and self-image. For example, a student's self confidence that he can effectively take a decision in connection with his career development, is a part of the way he perceives himself. But the most easily evolved level of competency – *knowledge and skills* can be achieved through cognitive skills *to learn* and *to teach*, which includes analytical thinking (to process knowledge and data, to determine causal link, to organize information and create plans, etc.) and the conceptual thinking (for example, to discern correlations in a complex box of information) that are essential for development of career management competency [19]. However, *attitude* is not least important, which is manifested by the individual's responsibility, decision-making, ability to manage, to develop and maintain communication [16]. The students create and develop their competency through operations of the active learning process. It means that their morality is changing and evolving. They are able to think critically and to assess as well as to discern the moral dimension of problem solving, including thinking about their career development.

Scientists, who are currently exploring the career management competency, defined it as follows: competency is the *ability to perform (productive operation or action) and mobilize skills and knowledge in certain situations* [20]. One may agree with P. Hawkin [4] assertion that career management competency is systematic long-term work in the development of individual's ability to form a successful life with strong focus on the learning outcomes rather than to completion of a particular stage or spending time of school. It promotes individual learning and personal development rather than an advice of the career counselor to draw a difficult choice or to overcome challenging moments of crisis. P. Hawkin deemed the main career management skills: *self-awareness, exploration and creation of career opportunities; planning of action, compliance and decision-making, ability to cope with uncertainty* [4]. Further the acquisition of the skills needed for secondary vocational school students is explained (see Fig. 1.)

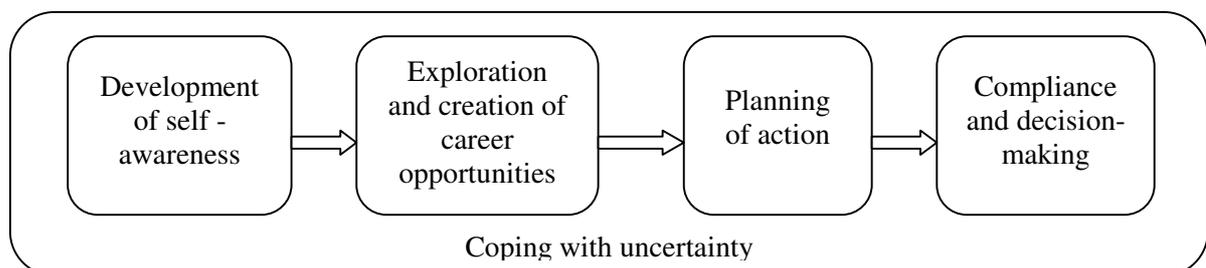


Fig. 1. Acquisition of career management competency for secondary vocational school students

In the educational context, including vocational secondary education, the first step of the development of career management competency is *development of self-awareness* because the career decision extreme version is adopted by the student himself and it is rooted in his identity. In order to succeed in career development, the key is to know self. It means that students must clearly know and understand in which direction to design own life and careers. In this context self-exploration issues are recommended: *Who am I? What I can?* – To assess own skills and suitability for the chosen profession. *What I want to be?* – To assess the personal interests, motivations and efforts. *What should*

I do? – To assess individual needs and investments in training and work. Based on the theory of D. Supers [21], secondary school students are located in the research phase of their career, when they form a clearer understanding of the environment and themselves. Development of self-confidence enables them to see clearly the personal learning need – because if it is greater, the stronger is the desire for self-education and self-develop. The authors of the self-awareness theory S. Duval and R. A. Wicklund believe that when the individual is focusing self attention on himself, he becomes self-aware and self objectively evaluates own current behavior with own internal standards and values [22]. Scientists A. Demetrious and A. Raftopoulos have figured out that self-awareness develops systematically from the moment of humans' birth and continues throughout the life span and it is a key factor for the development of processes of the general deficiencies [23]. In turn, researchers of the self-determination theory observe an important role of self-regulated motivation in personality development, as it is largely influenced by social environment [24]. This theory solves the three universal, innate and psychological needs: *competency* – be able to control own progress and experience of mastery as well as to act and interact with the environment; *autonomy* – to control their own life course; *relatedness* – the desire to interact, join, to be related and to take care of others. If these needs are being satisfied, then people optimally realize their inner potential in social environment. The self-determination theory principle is to develop a sense of intrinsic motivation, but the majority of 16-19 year old young adults do not have this capability, therefore, in their development both, the students' parents and teachers must participate. In addition, the self-determination theory focuses on the belief that nature of an individual shows persistent positive features: effort, free will, commitment to move forward resolutely in life and growth of personality.

The second step – to acquire skills of *exploration and creating of career opportunities* in early young age period is linked with higher or critical thinking skills and their use: the ability to think creatively, to make decisions, to solve problems, to look for the causes and correlations, to analyze, interpret, and to know *how to learn*. H. Lee [25] argues that the critical thinker qualities are persistence, flexibility, metacognition, transfer of knowledge, orientation of problem, open-mindedness, use of moral standards and independence. In order to prepare such specialists for the labor market, M. Chalupa [26] believes that it is important to teach young people how to think, not what to think. If self-exploration and career exploration focused on provision of assistance to students to become aware of their interests, skills and values and corresponding career options, then the third step – *career planning and management* is focused mainly on the forming of the ability how to find the work and learning opportunities that develop further potential of youth for successful professional career development after graduation from vocational secondary school. F. Hudson [27] believes that career planning and management as an ongoing process of self-evaluation and definition of new tasks involves a rational process in which the individuals raise a number of goals in their career development as well as identify the ways how to achieve them. These skills help students think about how they will continue to develop career readiness skills, work habits, behaviors and characteristics that are associated with commitment to find new ways to gain the skills and experience that increase the possibilities of their employability. Therefore, justified means a finding of the creation of self achievement description (portfolio) in learning and extracurricular activities, which a student can use as evidence readiness skills of own career. It is important to be aware that students' careers are linked with their life roles, when planning a career. When they look at them, they are considering the internal and external events that have influenced their career choice. Since it is a complex process that is created through the many influences and circumstances; it may seem that career development occurs by him. These young people actually have control over their career management process under the condition if they understand it well and plan well. Therefore, recognition of E. Ginsberg [13] is justified that for 16-17 year-old young people it becomes essential to establish a direct link between individual personal interests and obtained achievements so far. In turn, during the period from 17 to 22 years the so-called *period of real choice*; individuals shall gather and store information about physical and mental requirements for certain professions in order to clarify the career decisions and make a wise choice.

The fourth step – *compliance and decision-making* – to acquire skills how to help develop awareness of personal priorities and balance among learning, work and the rest of their life, as well as the possibility of correlation among the skills, knowledge and interests in order to plan and manage a

balanced career. J. D. Krumboltz [28] believes that career decisions are the result of countless social learning experiences where an individual's genetic abilities, a given context, a personal learning experience and ability of solving problems are working together in order to determine an individual's self-image, as well as exploring and understanding the world of work. Career decisions are crucial decisions that require assessment, consideration and weighted action. It means that making a decision, an individual bases it on interests, abilities and expectations, which are necessary not only for his particular profession, but also for the overall well-being. An interesting idea is expressed by G. Egan [29] that individual decision-making rarely has a rational path; it is never a linear process but hidden, intangible, unsystematic and sometimes irrational, because it combines feelings, deep emotions, values, interests and the individual's understanding how things are arranged in a social level.

For students acquiring the skills *to cope with uncertainty* is important to understand the relationship between the variables: self-efficacy, optimism of career and ability to cope with the situation and its difficulties. K. Coon [30] considers that most frequent inter-correlated barriers for a young person in career decision-making are the following: low self-esteem, indecision, unconvincing, external locus of control, negative thoughts of career, psychological anxiety. The foregoing cultivation and developing of career competency in vocational secondary schools weakens the problems related not only with the choice of profession, but also with the students' motivation to learn, to attend school and not leaving without the certificate of graduation, particularly in the circumstances when the labor market requires highly skilled specialists. We can agree with R. Vuorinen and A. G. Watt [2] assertion that in many countries, including Latvia, career management skills in vocational secondary school curriculums are not paid due attention to or the way of teaching does not guarantee access for everybody to acquire these skills. Only a few countries such as New Zealand [8], the U.S. [9], Canada [31], Australia [31] and the United Kingdom [12] have clearly created a framework, which provides rationale and content of the career management skills program for different target and age groups. These countries show that career management skills can be acquired in different ways: a separate subject, or as integrated themes in different subjects or extracurricular measures. P. S. Jarvis [32] has investigated the schools where students take comprehensive development of career management competency through the curriculum learning. He concludes that students' learning outcomes are improving; they have less behavior problems; much more positive and friendly atmosphere that encourages them to be socially active.

Conclusions

Career management competency is a result, which is characterized by an individual's willingness or abilities to take responsibility for personal decision making and appropriate actions to plan, to organize, to manage and to control self internal and external resources for efficient use for achievement the life goals. Career management competency in vocational secondary education may develop within the condition where the whole school learning and educational process is integrated into systematic career guidance and organization of activities is carried out by a qualified career specialist together with the teachers and the school board. When the necessity of the development of career management competency is understood, its acquiring can help descry and solve the persistent problems of the career guidance structure in a definite secondary vocational school.

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