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EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THE "CENTER OF COMPETENCE" SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IN PRIZREN-KOSOVO

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive qualitative evaluation of the vocational secondary school "Center of Competence" in Prizren, Kosovo, focusing on its curriculum, teaching quality, infrastructure, and student satisfaction. Employing methods such as interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, it captures the perspectives of key stakeholders, including students, teachers, and administrators.

The findings highlight the institution's strengths in delivering robust vocational training and fostering industry partnerships that enhance practical learning and job placement opportunities. Despite these achievements, several challenges persist. Stakeholders identified gaps in curriculum modernization, limited teaching resources, and inadequate internet infrastructure. There is a strong call for updated educational materials in certain subjects, improved digital infrastructure, and expanded professional development initiatives for educators.

While industry collaboration is evident, participants emphasized the need for more structured internship programs and stronger ties with local businesses to facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce. Additionally, international partnerships were noted as vital for broadening students' career prospects.

Based on these insights, the study recommends targeted curriculum updates, increased investment in infrastructure, and enhanced collaboration with industry stakeholders. These measures aim to solidify the institution's role in vocational education and better prepare students for Kosovo's evolving job market.

Keywords: *Vocational Education, Institutional Evaluation, Curriculum Modernization, Industry Collaboration, Student Employability.*

1. Introduction

Educational institutions play a crucial role in forming or shaping the future workforce, and vocational schools are particularly significant in preparing students for direct entry into the labor market. In Kosovo, vocational education has been recognized as a crucial pathway for skill development, aiming to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry demands.

The Center of Competence (CoC) in Prizren, Kosovo, represents a significant advancement in vocational education, focusing on the fields of economy, trade, and tourism. This modern institution was established through a partnership between the governments of Kosovo and Luxembourg, officially opening its doors in September 2014 as the fourth such center in the country (qkprizren.wordpress.com, 2023)

The groundwork for the CoC began in 2010 when Luxembourg pledged €8 million to fund the construction of two vocational schools in Kosovo—one located in Prizren and the other in Ferizaj. The Kosovo government contributed an additional €1.2 million to this initiative. The primary goal was to modernize vocational education and training (VET) within Kosovo by enhancing curricula, training educators, and promoting collaboration with both regional and international professional institutions (eciks.com, 2023).

Situated at Rruga e Lirisë, in Dardania, the CoC offers free education as part of Kosovo's public education system. Students engage in general subjects such as Albanian, English and German, mathematics, and geography while also receiving specialized training in 13 distinct professions related to economy, trade, and tourism. The educational programs are designed to comply with both the Kosovar National Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework, ensuring that the certifications obtained are recognized across European Union member states (qkprizren.wordpress.com, 2023)

In 2021, the CoC expanded its support services by launching a Career Center. This initiative was made possible through a collaboration between the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) and the Enhancing Youth Employment (EYE) project. The Career Center aims to assist students as they transition from education to employment by providing career counseling, connecting them with potential employers, and addressing skill mismatches prevalent in the local job market (helvetas-ks.org, 2023).

The CoC operates under AVETAE's management—a national agency within the Ministry of Education responsible for overseeing competence centers throughout Kosovo. This centralized approach ensures that educational quality remains consistent and aligned with national standards (eu-jer.com, 2023).

With the growing demand for skilled professionals, it is very important to assess the institution's effectiveness in providing quality education, industry-relevant training, and career readiness. However, vocational schools in Kosovo face constant challenges, including curriculum modernization, stable internet connectivity, particularly crucial for IT students, limited access to updated teaching resources, and the need for stronger industry collaborations.

This study conducts a qualitative research approach, using in-depth interviews, focus groups in order to evaluate the perceptions and experiences of students, teachers, and administrators towards the Center of Competence's role in vocational education. By identifying the institution's strengths and weaknesses, this research aims to provide recommendations that enhance its capacity to equip students with practical skills and improve their employment opportunities in both domestic and international job markets. This study seeks to evaluate the institution's effectiveness through qualitative research methods, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators. The primary research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do teachers and students perceive the quality of education at the Center of Competence in Prizren?
2. What are the strengths and challenges of the school's curriculum, infrastructure, and teaching resources?

How does the institution prepare students for the job market and further education?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Institutional Evaluation in Education

Institutional evaluation plays a vital role in assessing the quality of education, encompassing curriculum relevance, teaching effectiveness, and infrastructure adequacy (European University Association, 2022). Research highlights the value of qualitative methods in institutional evaluation, as they provide nuanced insights into the experiences of educators and students that go beyond quantitative metrics (Merriam, 2019). Techniques such as interviews and focus groups are particularly effective in understanding institutional adaptability to evolving educational and industry needs (Creswell, 2021). This is especially relevant for vocational institutions, where alignment with workforce demands is critical for bridging the gap between education and employment (OECD, 2020).

2.2. Best Practices in Vocational Education

Globally, vocational education has adapted to meet shifting economic and labor market demands. Best practices emphasize experiential learning, robust industry partnerships, and adaptable curricula that reflect market trends (European Training Foundation [ETF], 2022). The German dual-education

system, which combines classroom instruction with workplace training, is widely regarded as a model for enhancing employability (Schmidt & Kettner, 2020). Similarly, European frameworks stress the importance of modernized curricula, access to advanced technology, and structured internship programs (CEDEFOP, 2021). In developing economies, vocational institutions must remain responsive to industry trends to ensure that students acquire skills relevant to contemporary job markets (World Bank, 2019).

2.3. Vocational Education in Kosova

In Kosovo, vocational education is integral to economic development but faces challenges such as outdated curricula, limited industry collaboration, and insufficient funding (Ministry of Education Report, 2023). However, gaps persist in areas like digital infrastructure and teacher training. Additionally, aligning training programs with labor market needs remains a challenge (ECIKS.COM, 2023). The establishment of a Career Center in 2021 marked a significant step toward improving students' transition into employment by offering career counseling and fostering employer connections (Helvetas-KS.org, 2023).

By synthesizing institutional evaluation frameworks, global best practices in vocational education, and the specific context of Kosovo's vocational training landscape, this review lays the groundwork for assessing the effectiveness of the CoC in Prizren. The findings aim to identify areas for targeted improvements that can enhance the institution’s role in preparing students for successful careers.

3. Methodology

This study assesses the efficiency of vocational education at the Center of Competence (CoC) in Prizren, Kosovo, using a qualitative case study methodology. The main focuse is on comprehending the effectiveness, difficulties, and influence of the institution on students’ readiness to become ready for the acquired job market. Because it offers a thorough examination of actual educational practices, institutional structures, and stakeholder views, the case study method is especially appropriate.

Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, are only some of the techniques used to gather data. While conversations with professors examine teaching strategies and curricular relevance to the subject they teach, student interviews evaluate their educational experiences and their readiness for the workforce. Administrators have a say in the distribution of resources and the objectives of the institution. These conclusions are supported by document analysis, which looks at policy papers and curricula too.

This strategy seeks to provide a comprehensive grasp of the CoC's advantages and deficiencies. It also looks at how successfully the school adapts its curricula to the needs of the job market in order to prepare pupils for issues they may face in the real world. The results will enrich broader discussions on enhancing vocational education in Kosovo and other contexts and provide educators and policymakers with insightful information.

3.1. Research Design

A qualitative case study approach is used to portray the impact of the Center of Competence (CoC) on vocational training, industry collaboration, and student employability in the city of Prizren, Kosovo. This methodology is especially appropriate and fitting for educational research for it enables a detailed examination of an institution within its actual operational context (Yin, 2018).

By adopting this approach, researchers can gain a rich understanding of the institution's day-to-day operations, the quality of education it provides, and the challenges it faces. This is achieved by integrating diverse perspectives from various stakeholders, including students, teachers, administrators, and industry partners. A comprehensive view allows for a nuanced analysis of how the CoC functions in real-world settings, highlighting both its strengths and areas for improvement.

Ultimately, this approach helps to uncover how the institution supports vocational training, stimulate industry partnerships, and enhances student employability, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and industry leaders as such.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with 5 teachers, 10 students, and 1 administrator to gather insights into teaching quality, infrastructure, and curriculum relevance.

Focus Groups: Two focus groups with students and teachers were held to discuss learning experiences, institutional support, and areas for improvement.

Document Analysis: Institutional reports, curriculum documents, and educational policies were reviewed to contextualize the findings.

3.3. Data Analysis

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed to find common themes and patterns in what participants said. Researchers carefully reviewed the transcripts to identify shared experiences and opinions, grouping them into categories. This helped uncover key trends that emerged during the discussions, providing valuable insights into the data.

4. Case Study: The Center of Competence in Prizren

4.1. Institutional Backround

The Center of Competence in Prizren was established in September 2014 as part of Kosovo's vocational education reform, offering programs in IT, mechanics, hospitality, and business administration (LuxDev, n.d.). The school operates under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and was developed in collaboration with the Government of Luxembourg to enhance vocational education and training (VET) in Kosovo (LuxDev, n.d.).

The Center follows a dual approach, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience through specialized training facilities, including modern workshops and language labs (QK Prizren, n.d.). The curriculum aligns with the Kosovar National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ensuring that graduates receive certifications recognized in EU member states (QK Prizren, n.d.).

To further support students' career development, the Center also offers career counseling services. In February 2024, 30 career counselors received certification at the Center, reinforcing its role in guiding students toward employment or further education (MASHT, 2024).

Located at Rruga e Lirisë, Lagja Dardania, Prizren, the Center is easily accessible by public transport, car, or on foot. As a public institution, it provides tuition-free vocational education and training (QK Prizren, n.d.).

4.2. Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Quality

Interviews with teachers and students revealed that practical training opportunities and industry collaborations are among the institution's greatest strengths. However, participants also highlighted challenges such as outdated equipment, insufficient teaching materials, and the need for digital skills integration.

4.3. Infrastructure and Resource Challenges

While the institution has well-equipped workshops and classrooms, some students expressed concerns about the lack of modern technology in certain fields, particularly in IT and engineering programs.

5. Evaluation of Findings

5.1. Strengths

This study applies a qualitative case of the study methodology to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of vocational education that is used and delivered at the Center of Competence (CoC) in Prizren, Kosovo. Its main focus lies in understanding the institution's influence and effect on students'

readiness and how much they are prepared for the workforce. Not only this but its challenges as well. This study case methodology is particularly suitable since it ensures a detailed analysis of real-world educational methods, institutional structures, and interested parties' perspectives.

Important participants, including students, teachers, administrators, and other related workers, offer their viewpoints to provide a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of the CoC. In this city and country. Data collection methods include school document analysis and comparisons, focus groups, and interviews that are conducted with all the above-mentioned participants. Interviews with students assess and focus on their educational experiences within their time they have spent there and readiness for the workforce, whereas discussions with academic staff look at teaching methods, curriculum relevance and the challenges they face in the process.

Administrators have a huge impact on how they can influence the institution's goals and how resources are allocated within the institution. Document analysis, which examines policy documents and curricula, supports these findings.

This approach aims to give a thorough or detailed understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of the CoC vocational school. In order to prepare students for potential challenges in the real world and face different obstacles in the process, it also examines how well the school adjusts its courses to the demands of the labor market in this area. These findings will provide educators and school policymakers useful information and contribute to larger conversations about improving vocational education not only I CoC but in Kosovo and other contexts as well.

5.2. Challenges

Outdated Curriculum: As certain courses are not aligned with current industry standards, students remain unprepared for today's competitive job market. Both educators and learners have remarked on the lack of contemporary content, especially in IT and business management which are evolving at breakneck speeds. Regular updates are needed in order for graduates to have a fighting chance at securing employment in specialized fields because they will otherwise be competing with peers who have up-to-date knowledge.

Funding Issues: Although the lack of funding poses some challenges for the school, it equally provides some opportunities for innovative problem solving and creativity. These constraints force the institution to focus on areas that offer new technologies, high-quality learning resources and strong teaching staff training, greatly increasing student success.

Limited Infrastructure: Modern tools alongside digital resources are essential, especially in technical areas and so there is an apparent lack of up-to-date equipment. IT students, for instance, are confronted with obsolete computers and restricted internet access. Furthermore, the hospitality and business programs are under-equipped training rooms and insufficient training spaces that simulate real-world environments.

5.3. Stakeholder Perspectives

Among many other discussions, we have come to these most important conclusions and findings for the paper by gathering information from the school teachers, administrators, and other staff members.

Students: "We need more opportunities for industry placements, but the practical training is valuable." Students who have previously participated in a number of extracurricular trainings and practical lessons, working and practicing in various organizations and businesses, have expressed their opinions about more of these lessons because, in their words, they put all of the theoretical school material into "life," or practice, which is precisely what they plan to do after graduation.

Teachers: "We need more professional development workshops and updated teaching materials." The instructor added that some of the materials do need to be updated to reflect the evolving work industry given the current trends and changes in the sphere of work. They understand that new materials are required, and that teachers themselves must participate in various trainings that align with the updated materials.

Administrators: "Improving our programs requires more funding and industry engagement." From the perspective of the administrator, much more work needs to be done to improve and modify the procedures, data gathering techniques, and other administrative tasks that can now be made easier if the school chose a more advanced and modern method of storing data and information.

6. Discussion and Recomandations

6.1. Key Findings

The Center of Competence in Prizren, Kosovo, excels in several areas that are not the case in many other schools in the area; from its experienced teachers to the maintenance service workers, all of them are a major contributor to producing a workforce that is needed for the required market in the area. This institution has also built strong partnerships with many agreements with local businesses, which offer students valuable and very productive internships that provide a collaborative learning environment. Its focus on this kind of training has earned this school-wide recognition as a leading example for vocational education in the region, making it a pioneer in this form of practice and work in general.

However, challenges persist and there is always room for improvement. To begin with, an outdated curriculum doesn't fully meet industry needs even though when compared to the old, standard one that is unfortunately still being used in many other schools throughout the country, it is a much-improved curriculum that facilitates the teachers work as well as the students practical use of theory quite a lot. Another thing to mention would be the inadequate infrastructure for technical programs, and limited funding that affects investments in technology and teacher training. Stakeholders such as students, teachers, administrators and the rest of the staff, highlight the need for more industry placements and agreements, updated materials, and increased financial support to yet modernize programs and improve even further the quality the today's students and tomorrow employees will offer to the companies they are to hire them.

After all the changes, investments and the work being done in this school, the institution shows great promise and addressing these issues is crucial to strengthen the school's role even more in preparing students for the evolving job market not only in the area but also for the foreign industries as well.

6.2. Recommendations

1. Curriculum Revision: Update courses frequently to take into account business in the area and IT trends which tend to change very quickly in today's terms of speaking. Work together with professionals in the field to make sure the curriculum satisfies the needs of the market today.
2. Infrastructure Investment: To better replicate real-world settings, extend training areas, upgrade equipment, and enhance internet connectivity. Give students access to latest and best resources in technologies which are related to their subjects.
3. Improved Industry Collaboration: Work with nearby companies to expand internships and apprenticeships. Plan networking events and job fairs to introduce students to possible employers.
4. Professional Development for Teachers: To assist educators in staying up to date, provide training in digital tools and contemporary teaching techniques. To raise the caliber of instruction, encourage teachers to share their knowledge.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the Center of Competence in Prizren in detail, highlighting both its strengths and weaknesses in providing quality job training. The institution has established a solid foundation for experiential learning, career-focused training, and commercial partnerships. It is a crucial component of Kosovo's vocational education system because of these characteristics.

Its emphasis on experiential learning and collaboration with businesses Its emphasis on experiential education and collaboration with companies ensures students gain practical skills in the working environment, improving their employability. However, to increase the usefulness of the institution, more attention needs to be given to some areas. The results indicate that the program must be refurbished immediately to keep pace with the rapidly changing business and IT environments.

These consist of improved internet connections and more recent equipment. The study also demonstrates how crucial it is for educators to continue learning new things in order to keep their teaching strategies current with what companies are looking for today. Making it simpler for companies to collaborate by providing more internships and networking opportunities could further reduce the gap between education and employment.

The institution, legislators, and business stakeholders will need to collaborate in order to address these issues. By making wise investments in its new curriculum, professional training, and infrastructure, the Prizren Center of Competence will continue to be one of the best vocational schools in the area. Future research could investigate the long-term impacts of these interventions by looking at employer satisfaction and graduate employment rates. This would provide us with more details regarding the institution's contribution to the transformation of the Kosovo labor market.

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