

Chapter 31

Aligning Educational Outcomes to Boost Employment and Workforce Employability

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the recent economic crisis, the unemployment rate, especially among youngsters, has reached painfully high levels in Spain. As education plays a central role in preparing individuals to enter the labor force, as well as equipping them with the skills to engage in professional development, it is time to analyze the job-education match. This chapter focuses on the role of public education policies in advancing the employability of lifelong learners. A deep understanding of what is required by the labor market needs to be matched by a common understanding of the learning outcomes achieved in education. This chapter explains how the Catalan education system is working to align education and job requirements. By showing best practices and initiatives, this chapter offers a perspective relevant to educational policy makers.

INTRODUCTION

Europe 2020 Agenda puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. To modernize labor markets and empower people by developing their skills is one of the initiatives to catalyze progress in the mentioned three priorities. At the same time, the European Union (EU) is committed to reach

an employment level of 75% of its workforce by 2020 (68.6% in 2011). In Europe, currently more than 23 million people are looking for a job. With its *Agenda for new skills and jobs*¹, the EU and the member states are stepping up labor market reforms, join forces to equip people with the right skills, attempt to improve working conditions and encourage the creation of new jobs. The reason is straightforward, “by 2020, 16 million more

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jobs will require high qualifications, while the demand for low skills will drop by 12 million jobs” (European Commission, 2010, p. 16). Now the rise of new higher-level skill requirements, a change of skill and competence composition of occupations, the necessity of multitasking and multiskilling employees, or the growth of new and hybrid occupations are some current phenomena in the labor market (Slingenberg, Rademaekers, Sincer, & van der Aa, 2008).

In countries such as Spain, highly affected by the economic crisis, they have also appeared some detrimental conditions in the labor market such as lower employability and underemployment in terms of over-qualification and under-qualification. These problems create job insecurity and contribute negatively to the development of Spanish labor force (Peiró, Sora, & Caballer, 2012). Economic crisis has also influenced the short evolution of youngsters’ unemployment. In July 2013 the highest rates were observed in Greece (62.9% in May 2013) and Spain (56.1%)². This is why there is a serious concern about a possible mismatch between the skills and competences of the labor force, especially amongst youngsters, and the requirements and demands of the work environment.

But, at the same time, the increasing importance of the knowledge economy –in particular the diffusion of ICT- offers great potential for the creation of sustainable jobs in Europe and Spain. Seizing this opportunity requires a labor force with updated skills. On one hand, the low skilled are more vulnerable in a labor market based on knowledge due to their difficulties to match labor market requirements. On the other hand, upgrading skills is also necessary for highly qualified in high-tech jobs. Consequently, specific professional training is required to perform the desirable new skills and tasks. But, are education systems really educating and training a highly skilled workforce?

Education and training systems must generate those new skills, including the basic skills and learning that are pre-requisites for both entering the labor market and for further updating of

skills. Educational systems must adapt their curriculum to the nature of the new jobs which are expected to be created, as well as to improve the adaptability and employability of adults already in the labor force.

This chapter discusses the labor market trends and related skills needs to better match education and job. This is an important issue because “education and training have a fundamental role to play in achieving the ‘Europe 2020’ objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.” (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 1). Investing efficiently in high quality education will provide people with more and better skills and competences. Thus, the content of this chapter will assist in the improvement of educational outcomes by showing some initiatives implemented in Catalonia (Spain) in recent years. Governments, educational authorities, business and industry can use this debate as the basis for designing and subsequently putting into action lines that allow improving the curricular profile of lifelong learners at different educational levels.

BACKGROUND

Job-Education Match

Labor market trends have implications for skills. For that reason, increasing emphasis has been placed on ‘skills gaps’ or “the divergence between an organization’s current skill levels and those that are required to meet organizational objectives” (Green, 2003, p. 309). There is a lot of research about characteristics and trends in Europe’s workforce profile. At a European level, the European Union Labor Force Survey (EU LFS), the Adult Education Survey (AES) and the European Social Survey (ESS) are important sources for understanding labor market trends and defining some of the main dimensions of occupational skills profiles and, the level and the field of education. Additional information on occupational skill profile can be found through The European Centre

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