Technology-based teaching perspectives and distance learning methods in vocational education and training in Albania

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to contribute to the knowledge of how new technology teaching methods will shape the future of vocational education and training in Albania (VET) and the use of distance learning. As an innovative and educational center for youth between the ages of 12 – 18 years old, TUMO Tirana will be the case of this study. The article has the further aim of looking for eventual benefits from technology and distance learning in vocational education. However, it is important with empirical evidence to understand how this new teaching and learning are enhancing students' skills in the digital area. The present study aims to illustrate, compare, and analyze the TUMO Tirana activities via tablets, computers, laptops and what significance these factors have for students learning in a more digitalized form of education. Main questions are: What abilities and challenges appear in the new technology methods? How can distance learning methods improve learning technics for students? For the methodology of this study, a qualitative method was used in which 25 semi-structured interviews were used. The sample is composed of 20 students and 5 coaches of TUMO Tirana center. The results obtained from the interviews and online researching of the official social media pages and websites of the TUMO centers in Paris, Beirut, Moscow and Tirana during 2020 to March 2021, at the end of the article are intended to provide some recommendations that demonstrate the importance of using new teaching methods in vocational training supported by new forms of technology for the education and professional learning.*
KEYWORDS: *vocational education; technology-based teaching methods; TUMO Tirana; digital area*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Vocational education, increasingly known as career and technical education, is a longstanding programme whose place in education continues to evolve (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). It is a major and essential part of any educational system worldwide. According to Smith (2006), if education is the key to economic and social development then technical vocational education and training is the master key that opens the doors to poverty alleviation, greater equity and justice in the society. Jarvis (1983) has stated that the aims of vocational education should be more meaningful and realistic. It should produce recruits to the profession that have a professional ideology, especially in relation to understanding good practice and service. In addition, it should provide students with sufficient knowledge and skills. This article aim is to contribute to the knowledge of how new technology teaching methods will shape the future of vocational education in Albania (VET). Through Tumo Tirana as a case study we will have a more in depth understanding on how Albanian vocational and training education is moving toward new use of technology in teaching and learning methods.

The objective of this article as follow:
- ❖   To show through the review of literature the latest studies and theories regarding vocational education and training in Albania.
- ❖   To answer the question: What abilities and challenges appear in the new technology methods?
- ❖   How can distance learning methods improve learning technics for students?
- ❖   To analyze TUMO Tirana as a new and innovative center.

II.   METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is review of the literature regarding the vocational and training education in Albania, distance learning, and combining qualitative methods within online researching of the official social media pages and websites of the TUMO centers in Paris, Beirut, Moscow and Tirana during 2020 to March 2021. This study has its limitations due to the measures taken and physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

III. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Technology and vocational education in Albania:

Our culture and the whole world have been transformed by globalization and the advent of new technologies. Digital literacy is a necessary skill for anyone nowadays, but children and young students, must use these new skills in education, in their future careers, and in their daily lives. Innovative learning methods are needed to become competent in the digital world. Albania operates forty-one institutions of vocational training. Most are concentrated especially in populated urban areas; (Tirana, Durres, Shkodra, Vlora, Elbasan, Korça, and so on.). In current years, the vocational education and training in Albania, has long gone via many adjustments inside the structure and content, to improve it and its methodology in accordance with market demands. Distance learning methods are newly used in the last years due to COVID- 19 pandemic. The new teaching methods using distance learning has been quiet an challenges to the Albanian educations institutions both public and private ones. How includes teaching staff , how had to adapted and learning in a short amount of time this new technology methods not used before, students and also parents. The main purpose of vocational schooling policy is to reduce the level of unemployment, way to a prime qualification of students inside the labour market[1].

Technology knowledge are becoming more and more important. The Albanian VET system featured an element of dual training, by combining theory learning in VET schools with on-the-job training during internships and work periods in the attached state-owned or privet companies. One of most significant educational reform undergoing in Albania is the VET reform, together with active employment and job creation policies remain high on the Government agenda, which is reflected in budget increases for both areas[2]. The vision to develop 'higher skills and better jobs for women and men' remains unchanged, as do the four pillars of the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2014-2015), namely: (i) fostering decent job opportunities through effective labour market policies; (ii) offering quality VET to young people and adults; (iii) promoting social inclusion and territorial cohesion; (iv) strengthening the governance of the labour market and qualification systems.

Responsibility for VET is recently centralized under the Ministry of Finance and Economy that oversees a state-funded system composed of two types of providers: vocational schools for young people and vocational training centers, mainly for adults[3]. COVID -19 pandemic has changed in many ways the education systems in Albania. Schools had to adapt immediately to the new digital learning management systems, e-learning platforms and communication tools are playing a crucial role during this pandemic. Software and various applications can help to learn providers to manage, plan, deliver and track the learning process. Adaptation and understanding technology have been on the high agenda of the VET institutions, students have learned to use technology for learning academic textbooks, testing, and skills development. But the biggest challenge that students and teachers are faced is the lack of proper technology equipment and internet access for everyone. This inequality has led to delays in learning, receiving information and being left behind in school.

IV. THE CASE OF TUMO TIRANA AS INNOVATIVE CENTRE

Robots, automation, and artificial intelligence are becoming increasingly popular in technology. The question is whether Albania is ready to embrace these new trends. How can we keep up with a world that is constantly changing? The conventional educational system seems to be out of date in light of 21st-century demands. Schools and especially VET system must reinvent themselves if we are to raise a generation capable of working in the future. New digital learning centers emerging up around the world in response to student demand, providing modern educational models in which young people can specialize in various areas of the digital world based on their interests, skills and abilities. The TUMO Centre, which was founded in Armenia in 2011, is an excellent example of technology-based teaching perspectives in vocational education. What is TUMO? TUMO is a new kind of educational experience at the intersection of technology and design. At TUMO, students at the age 12 – 18 years old take charge of their own learning, gaining cutting edge skills in the fields that are important today. Students combine self-learning activities, workshops and learning labs, picking and choosing from whatever piques their interest. TUMO's learning targets are: programming, animation, game development, graphic design, filmmaking, robotics, music, 3D modelling[4]. TUMO's innovative path program combines activities, workshops, and labs into a personal learning plan, a constantly evolving timeline that can span two or more years. Students attending TUMO Tirana courses have a positive attitude towards the teaching techniques used during the courses they attend, and teachers are optimistic and think that Albania has made

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[1] Ermira Sela, "Analysis in the vocational education system in Albania", http://konferenca.unishk.edu.al/icrae2013/icraecd2013/doc/187.pdf
[2] National Reforms in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning, Albania, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-vocational-education-and-training-and-adult-learning_en
[3] National Employment and Skills Strategy, 2014 – 2020, https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NESS-ENG-8-1-15_final-version.pdf
[4] Data from https://tirana.tumo.al/

significant improvements in the use of technology and online learning. This new technology equipment and methods are currently lacking in the Albanian vocational education and training system and TUMO seeks to fill this gap. The aim is to prepare Albanian students to compete with students from developing countries.

V.   CONCLUSION

Albania's national policies express high goals for the role of vocational education and training in promoting growth, use of technology and employment. The new technology and distance learning methods will improve among the young generation the image towards vocational education and training. Albania continues to make efforts to reform the VET system, adapt governance models, modernize qualifications and curricula, establish professional institutions to support change processes, and have a better and more systemic link with the private sector. In conclusion, from all the above observations and findings, despite all efforts to reform the education and training system in Albania, there is still a fundamental lack of skills-building that has not been effectively addressed among the use of new technological methods and distance learning. It is recommended to consider and implement a support system that includes valuable digital resources for students and teachers to encourage them to participate more effectively in the preparation, development, and implementation of new teaching-based technology methods. TUMO Tirana is the first step to improve the gap between the education system and vocational training in the use of technology in Albania. But this is not enough. The opening of public and private institutions in the field of technology should be promoted through various funds. Please note that the findings are limited due to measures taken against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

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