

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN LITHUANIAN GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND ASPECTS TO BE IMPROVED

Gintautė Žibėnienė

Rita Virbalienė

Mykolas Romeris University
Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work, Lithuania

Abstract. *This paper summarizes the achievements and aspects to be improved in vocational guidance in Lithuanian general education schools in order to stimulate discussion about the experience in vocational guidance. The object of the research is an analysis of achievements and challenges in vocational guidance in Lithuanian general education schools. The aim of the research is to present and summarize the results of the analysis. The results suggest that Lithuania has managed to develop a vocational guidance system with infrastructure and monitoring. However, further development of the system of vocational guidance is hindered by changes of vocational guidance priorities, ongoing discussions about the concepts of vocational guidance and its definition as well as their interpretation within the system, lack of professional research, absence of systemic evaluation of the competence of the authorities that coordinate vocational guidance, difference in the experience of specialists and structural units in collaboration with scientists, when such cooperation is poor or even non-existent.*

Keywords: *vocational guidance, general education school.*

Introduction

Vocational guidance is one of the most important areas of the European Union (hereinafter - EU) education system. The European Commission Communication „Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth strategy for the next decade” of March 3, 2010, imitative „New skills and jobs agenda”, stressed the importance of modernization of labour market in order to increase employment rates and ensure sustainability of the EU social model. The initiative foresees the following actions: to improve labour market flexibility and security, i.e. flexicurity, to motivate people to invest in skills training and continuing education so as to meet the needs of the labour market, to ensure satisfactory working conditions, to encourage generation of jobs, etc. The following EU documents are also related to the upgrading of the vocational guidance system: European Union Council's Resolution „New skills for new jobs” of 2007; European Union Council's resolution „Better integrating lifelong guidance in education and lifelong learning strategies” of 2008, which stresses the promotion of acquisition of career competences as a priority activity; and European Commission's strategy „New Skills for New Jobs: Anticipating and

matching labour market and skills needs” of 2008, which raises the issue of prediction of demand of labour and relevant skills starting from school.

After the restoration of independence (1990), Lithuania implemented a number of projects in the field of vocational guidance, some of them having been related to the creation of the national strategic guidance system. However, even at present the Lithuanian system of vocational guidance is being upgraded and its infrastructure is being reformed. The aim of vocational guidance in Lithuania is to assist persons in informed selection of possibilities of education and occupations relevant to them, create conditions for acquisition of career competencies, to actively shape the career (i.e. via a lifelong succession of the person’s educational, self-realization and work experiences important both to the person and the society). Vocational guidance is implemented by providing services of career education, vocational informing and vocational counseling. (Vocational guidance performance procedure, 2012). Legislation that regulates the performance in vocational guidance has been undergoing constant revisions. One of the possible underlying reasons and also a problematic issue is lack of systematic research into and consistent overview of the development of vocational guidance in Lithuania. The ongoing research studies and problems analyzed are local and focused on individual elements of the infrastructure of vocational guidance. The study conducted by V. Indrašienė et al (2006) on informing, guidance and counseling of students in schools revealed that the guidance system lacks legal regulation of the activities, consistency and coherence. It does not cover the entire spectrum of services to be provided. Also, V. Indrašienė, L. Grinytė (2007) studied the activities of a classroom teacher with regard to the provision of information, advice and guidance for students at school. A. Sokolova (2007) distinguished the theoretical and political prerequisites for the vocational guidance system in Lithuania, and this study is one of integrity and importance. The study conducted by S. Lažauninkienė (2008) includes all the essential functions of guidance, but it covers vocational information, guidance and counseling only for students in their 8th to 12th year of studies in one Lithuanian district general education school. K. Pukelis, L. Navickienė made the study (2008) „Designing career: new concept. Overcoming intercultural and linguistic barriers”. L. Navickienė (2010) examined career counselor training simulations. E. Nazelskis (2010) performed research into educational and vocational guidance in the context of business development issues. A. Railienė (2010) studied the development of vocational adviser’s competency within the framework of education of social pedagogues. In their studies of collaboration between business and education in the area of vocational guidance, E. Nazelskis, A., Laurinaitis (2014) reported an increasing tendency when university graduates choose to continue studies in vocation-oriented colleges, because university education does not grant employment. The fact that a number of professionals who have gained university education continue education in vocational schools indicates a strong depreciation of

public and personal resources invested in the earlier professional education at universities. This implies problems in the system of vocational guidance in Lithuania. R. Sargautytė, D. Juozapavičienė, E. Šatienė, (2013) investigated vocational guidance as a vocational rehabilitation service among disabled people and demonstrated that the methods for vocational guidance for disabled people are efficient, which may be proved by good results in education and employment. However, D. Liukinevičienė (2011) in her study on Youth Employment Policy and Career Guidance of Schoolchildren in North-western Lithuania disclosed a shortage of services of vocational guidance and problems in the area of vocational guidance. J. Surgėlienė, N. Bankauskienė (2014) researched the historical context of career education in Lithuania.

The object of the research is the analysis of achievements and aspects to be improved in vocational guidance in Lithuanian general education schools in 1992-2014. Achievements are expressed in terms of the results of activities in vocational guidance, whereas aspects relate to the approach to vocational training. The aim of the research is to present the results of achievements and aspects to be improved in vocational guidance in Lithuanian general education schools. The following **methods of research** have been used: overview of scientific literature, analysis of documents, historical analysis, synthesis, generalization. Tidikis R. (2003) defines generalization as a separate important research method, because in the course of generalization common concepts to be applied to new situations are formulated as a result of search for a relationship between what is individual and common, or between what is common and individual (p. 389).

Vocational guidance in Lithuania from 1990, when the country's independence was restored, to 2008: achievements and issues to be improved

In 1992 Lithuania approved the concept of education that covered career education aspects and expressed an explicit goal for an educated person to be able to make responsible decisions, act independently and be ready for professional activities, be capable and willing to adapt to and improve the ever changing social, economic life (Concept of Education in Lithuania, 1992). Yet a truly significant and biggest input in the field of vocational guidance was made in the 2004-2008 EU funding period: large-scale projects were carried out, which actually contributed to shaping and developing vocational guidance. During the period the Lithuanian Ministry of Education implemented two strategically important projects: development and implementation of vocational guidance system (BPD2004-ESF-2.4.0-01- 04/0065) and creation and development of an open information, counselling and guidance system (AIKOS) (BPD2004-ERDF-1.5.1-04-04 / 0003). The EU's structural support phase helped to create the basis for career education services in Lithuania, i.e. education

programs and methodological tools were developed, legal documents important for career education were prepared. The Lithuanian Minister of Education approved the Vocational Guidance Strategy in 2003 and together with the Minister of Social Security and Labour in 2004 approved the Vocational Guidance Strategy Implementation Plan, and thus the actual conditions for the development of vocational guidance were created in Lithuania. The main priorities as stated in the Vocational Guidance Strategy Implementation Plan (2004) are as follows:

1. To create a legal framework for vocational guidance.
2. To improve the methodology for vocational guidance.
3. To develop a training system for vocational guidance staff.
4. To develop a planning and coordination system for vocational guidance.
5. To develop the infrastructure for vocational guidance.
6. To improve the financing system for vocational guidance.
7. To develop the system for auditing the performance in vocational guidance.

Much attention has been given to the development and improvement of human resources, namely, vocational guidance professionals (teachers, school psychologists, social educators, vocational counselors, career counselors), education of professionals, including in-service training. Training standards were established for the preparation of vocational advisers, vocational counselors; continuing education programs for vocational advisers and vocational counselors were elaborated. Since 2007, the continuing education and requalification of vocational guidance professionals and the staff of career information centers has been taking place, with great attention being paid to the professional ethics of vocational guidance specialists.

The National Vocational Guidance in Education Program was approved in 2007 and helped to achieve strategic objectives of vocational guidance. Its major purpose was to enable the development of the system of vocational guidance by ensuring integral and consistent transition from the secondary school to vocational or higher education, diversity as well as high quality and availability of vocational guidance services to all participants in the education system, development of tools and training of specialists for vocational guidance, involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in the development of vocational guidance services.

In 2004-2008 the network of career education structures, the so called Career Information Points (hereinafter - CIP) was created in general education and vocational schools, and formed the basis for career education and infrastructure development. According to the Vocational Guidance Strategy Implementation Plan (2004), 41 CIP had to be set up in 2004, 280 CIP should have been established and endowed with the necessary equipment in 2006, and 360 CIP in 2007. However, the CIP development fared worse than other

activities in the field of vocational guidance. Another important priority was the creation and development of an open information, counseling and guidance system. There was access provided via Internet networks to AIKOS data in the general education and vocational schools, connection to the single European vocational guidance information system was enabled, arrangements for transfer of persons who left the general education system to vocational guidance centers and delivery of computerized data to the related vocational guidance organizations were undertaken. The established career information management AIKOS to this day ensures dissemination of the most important information in the field of vocational guidance.

It can be assumed that by 2008 many strategically important activities which enabled the development of vocational guidance had been implemented, four elements can be distinguished: guidance planning and management; guidance infrastructure; guidance content; guidance staff.

The development of vocational guidance in Lithuania was not easy as it was necessary to build up a new system and infrastructure. Researchers believe that the experience of the Soviet years had a negative impact; for example, according to L. Navickienė (2010), „negative attitude to the concept of vocational guidance is also associated with the fact that during the Soviet period forced guidance of pupils to vocational schools existed in order to meet the needs of the planned economy” (p. 18). There still remain many things to be done in the process of creation of the new vocational guidance system. According to the National Program of Vocational Guidance in Education (2007) and other documents and studies, as well as basing on the opinion of Lithuanian students and information on the website of the career department of the non-formal education centre, the weaknesses of vocational guidance are classified by four elements: guidance planning and management, guidance infrastructure, guidance content, guidance staff (see Table 1). Planning and management of vocational guidance, including managerial tools, need to be improved because the system does not encompass all levels of educational institutions; there is no full range of services; the system lacks consistency and coherence; the activities and functions of vocational guidance service providers are not well defined or properly differentiated. And no plans were being made to establish a system of vocational guidance quality assurance (with regular monitoring and assessment of the vocational guidance system in conformity with the set criteria, identification of the condition, strengths and weaknesses, development and implementation of activities to rectify weaknesses); monitoring activities by the authorities that administer vocational guidance are scarce, inefficient and random. There have been no systemic analysis, evaluation or forecasting of the situation or the development of career education. Scientific publications, social and education policy reviews and reports highlight the lack of a coherent legal framework, with clearly enshrined structure of career education services and its operation mechanism (Barkauskaitė, 2007; Lažauninkienė, 2008;

Liukineviciene, 2011; Nazelskis, Laurinaitis, 2014; Sokolova, Stanišauskienė, 2007; Vocational Guidance Strategy Implementation Plan, 2004).

Table 1. Vocational guidance aspects that can be improved in Lithuanian general education schools for 2003-2008

Vocational Guidance Planning and Management	Infrastructure for Vocational Guidance	Vocational Guidance Content	Vocational Guidance Staff
Systems of planning and management of vocational guidance should be improved; No system for the assurance of vocational guidance quality has been created, only some elements of such system have emerged.	CIP activities are not well coordinated; CIP differ in terms of efficiency, financial and methodological support; CIP conditions do not lead to improvement of social equality between pupils of rural areas and those of urban areas because of inadequate infrastructure.	Lack of specific measures targeted at vocational guidance components: vocational counseling, career education, career monitoring organization; social partners are not sufficiently involved in shaping the content of vocational guidance; lack of different forms of vocational training services, when often only information services are provided; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ students/pupils received an inadequate amount of information on how to choose a profession, on the relevance of the profession and further learning opportunities, situation in the labour market; ▶ the general competence of students has grown, whereas their competence in career planning, management skills or their professional career has not. 	Shortage of professional providers of the services of professional guidance; the competence of the existing ones has to be improved.

The infrastructure of vocational guidance needed to be improved because CIP activities were not appropriately coordinated; there were differences in their efficiency, financial and methodological support. The network of providers of services of vocational guidance needed to be improved as it failed to cover all educational institutions and there was a shortage of regional structures able to ensure the availability of guidance services in rural areas. The vocational guidance system did not encompass all students, it did not contribute to the decrease in social equality between urban and rural students; the biggest emphasis was placed on work with older adolescents. The content of vocational guidance also needed to be improved as there was a clear shortage of legal regulatory acts, programs, methodologies or other special tools for vocational

guidance, even though some strategic documents on some important issues did exist. Social partners were not sufficiently involved in the shaping of the guidance content. As shown in the CIP staff survey of 2008, individual counseling was the most common service provided (affirmed by 96.5 per cent of respondents), other most common services were organization of events, tours and excursions (CIP staff survey, 2008). J. Sirgėlienė, N. Bankauskienė (2014) note that after Lithuania regained independence (1990), the concept of conscious choice of profession based on the student's needs, abilities and possibilities was prioritized. However, even if the concept was established, major importance should have been attached to factual activities in the area of vocational guidance. Thus, efficient provision of services in vocational guidance was difficult to achieve. In general education schools CIP did not consider the diversity of career education services, they normally provided introductory information services only. Consultations, vocational practicing tools and activities were scarce, and therefore no opportunity to gain initial experience in accordance with the students' professional intentions was granted. Vocational guidance focused on the development of key competences of students, but not on career planning and management competencies that could help them to act responsibly in planning the professional careers. Practical activities were irrelevant in terms of consistency in rendering services in vocational guidance. Basing on the existing documents, vocational guidance is to be performed by providing services aimed at career education, vocation-based information and vocational counseling (Vocational guidance performance procedure, 2012). It was also irrelevant in terms of activities important for vocational guidance, as highlighted by M. Barkauskaitė (2007) in her systematic survey of central issues identified in strategic documents and researchers' reports, i.e. „identification of matching criteria for each career, highlighting of personal properties important for the career, introductory knowledge of requirements for each career, availability of real-life experience, counseling of and concrete activities with the specific career-oriented students by motivating them, helping them to adapt, etc.” (Barkauskaitė, 2017, 9. 110)

Vocational guidance in Lithuania since 2009

As the labour market undergoes changes, it is necessary to improve the vocational guidance system. According to the National Vocational Guidance in Education Program (2007), by 2014 it was important to carry out the most important activities: to create tools for vocational guidance, organize continuing education of professionals; develop the infrastructure of vocational guidance; create a model for secondary school students' career education and begin its implementation; install career education and career monitoring infrastructure in general education schools; develop AIKOS. While implementing the project on „the creation and development of career education and monitoring models in

general education and vocational training”, a career education model was established for general education schools and vocational training schools; the model of the monitoring system in career education, and recommendations for its implementation were developed; the software (information system) was designed and installed for the realization of the model of the monitoring system in career education, new curricula and methodologies were devised (National Vocational Guidance in Education Program, 2007). The project involved nearly 2,000 education support professionals (teachers, school psychologists, social pedagogues) from 700 general education schools and 70 vocational training institutions. During the implementation of the project (completed in 2014) career education services were provided for 88,000 students in Lithuanian general education schools, vocational schools and municipal career education centers. In 2014, the Lithuanian Minister of Education and Science approved a career education program designed „to ensure the effective career competencies needed to consciously and successfully develop and manage the careers (i.e. a lifelong sequence of personal experience of learning, self-expression and working activities significant for the individual and the society) and education, while respecting the student's aptitudes, values and skills that help him/her learn, develop and realize himself/herself” (Career education program, 2014, paragraph 2). The career education program also defines the career education objectives, scope and tasks, as well as career competencies, i.e. holistic knowledge and understanding, abilities and attitudes towards them, learning, self-realization and job opportunities, career decision making, career planning, coordination with other areas of life and the realization, career competency development framework, career competency development guidance, career skills assessment of students in schools with general education and (or) vocational training programs (Career education program, 2014). However, the criteria and tools developed earlier for monitoring career education in the general education and vocational schools do not provide any assumptions that would allow to state that a quality assurance system is functioning in vocational guidance. One of basic drawbacks is failure to carry out a methodological, systemic assessment of the activities of the staff or to monitor changes in staff competency at the institution responsible for coordination of vocational guidance. The review of existing legislation, normative documents and implemented projects allowed to distinguish career education and career monitoring as an obvious priority in vocational guidance. In point 5.8 of the Vocational guidance performance procedure (2012), a particular reference is made to career education as a priority area in vocational guidance, whereas vocational information and counseling are complementary to career education and also help individuals to solve specific career issues. However, there is no study that would reflect changes in career education in general education schools. If reference is made to the national study of 2009, it could be seen that career education has been one of the weakest aspects of the vocational guidance

system (CIP staff survey, 2009). It is stated that 90 per cent of CIP staff distinguished provision of accumulated systematic information as the most frequent activity. Advice facilitating decision-making was named as the most frequent activity by 86 per cent of those who responded to the question. Also, most of career counselors were evaluated as good at the study of the personality characteristics (68 per cent), helped people to adjust their education (59 per cent) and create an individual education plan (57 per cent). Minority of institutions within CIP organized education of career planning and management skills (35 per cent) and vocational practicing (23 per cent). (CIP staff survey, 2009). So far, no profound research into vocational guidance in Lithuania has been undertaken, except for a few more systematic studies (CIP staff survey, 2008; CIP staff survey, 2009; Liukineviciene, 2011; Navickienė, 2010; Nazelskis 2010; Nazelskis, Laurinaitis, 2014; Pukelis, Navickienė, 2008; Sargautytė, Juozapavičienė, Šatienė, 2013). The „Students vocational guidance (career education) in 2012-2013 monitoring report” published in 2014 does not provide analysis but just factual referential information, though the published data might be helpful for getting a clearer understanding and providing possibilities for analysis. It may be assumed that the failure to prepare a high quality report by the specialists of the institution that coordinates vocational guidance may be attributed, among other factors, to lack of collaboration with scientists and researchers (systemic cooperation with scientists, researchers and business representatives has not been confirmed after examination of information on the website, content of reports or other publicly available information of the company that administers vocational guidance.) Studies (Liukineviciene, 2011; Nazelskis, Laurinaitis, 2014) and reports (CIP staff survey, 2008; CIP staff survey, 2009) reveal the areas in which cooperation between vocational guidance specialists and social partners should be improved, but do not provide any conditions for qualitative changes in this aspect.

There are doubts whether the development of the guidance system is consistent, even when it seems that an important foundation has been laid: the strategic national projects were implemented, the creation of a legal framework and infrastructure was started. However, doubts are expressed even without giving a chance for the set targets to be fully achieved. As a result, destruction of the elements of the infrastructure started, with specially trained psychologists leaving the labour market of training services with no further assignments, loss of methodological tools and special licensed working instruments. Renaming of professionals who provide vocational guidance services is taking place together with renewal of discussions concerning the conception of vocational guidance because in the report of the only strategic coordinator of vocational guidance, i.e. the Career department of the Lithuanian students non-formal education centre, guidance was defined as career education (Students vocational guidance (career education) in 2012-2013 monitoring report, 2014). Hence, the problems observed and identified in the vocational guidance area by researchers

Navickienė L. (2010), A. Sokolova and V. Stanišauskienė (2007) five years ago remain relevant. These are the problems related to the concept of guidance because of the varying nature of the concept of vocational guidance, its different definitions depending on a broader cultural, social and political context. Lithuanian researchers developed important but not profound preconditions for the development of a holistic, consistent guidance system model, as the importance was attached to individual guidance elements. Such factors as difference in approach to the phenomenon of vocational guidance, insufficient communication between the institutions involved in the formation and implementation of vocational guidance policy, Lithuanian and EU documents that regulate the field of vocational guidance and their enforcement practices, have resulted in inadequacy of conditions for the design and development of a successful vocational guidance system.

Conclusions

In Lithuania national projects that have been implemented in the area of vocational guidance and the activities undertaken have created favourable conditions for the development of a system of vocational guidance with an infrastructure, because legal acts have been created and publicated, specialists of vocational guidance have been trained, new jobs have been generated, attention to methodological and financial support has been given. However, efficient development of the system of vocational guidance in Lithuania is hindered by change of priorities in vocational guidance, including the content and infrastructure of vocational guidance; failure to find a clear definition for concepts involved in the field of vocational guidance; lack of systemic studies at the national level and failure to assess, in a consistent and methodological manner, the activities or the competency of the staff of the institution that coordinates vocational guidance at the national level. To achieve an overall conception of quality assurance and an efficient system of vocational guidance quality assurance, it is important to abandon the concept of inspectorate, when specialists of the highest level assess, in a systemic and methodological way, their own activities and their activities are accredited according to the set criteria. Experience of specialists of vocational guidance and structural subdivisions in collaboration with scientists varies, the fact that such collaboration may be scarce or non-existent is a matter of concern.

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