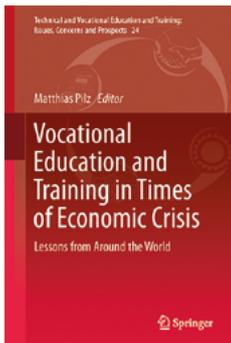


VET in times of economic crisis

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Vocational Education in Times of Economic Crisis

Lessons from Around the World

MATTHIAS PILZ (Ed.)

Springer, Cham/Switzerland 2017, 514 p., ca. 150 EUR,
ISBN 978-3-319-47854-8 (also available as eBook)

Context and relevance of the publication

Better late than never – such publication has been long-awaited since the financial and economic crisis emerged nearly ten years ago. It contributes to close a gap in the international debate on the role of VET in a context of economic crisis and high youth unemployment. Such context is increasingly challenging education and training systems around the world to better detect and respond to demand, to become more ‘agile’ and flexible as well as to increase the quality of its provision.

At the same time, the crisis had a negative impact on VET itself. As the editor (PILZ) rightly states, many countries have reduced state funding for VET, companies have changed their roles towards less investment in skills and an ‘academic drift’ of young people can be observed in reaction to the crisis. The book does not claim to have “golden bullet” solutions but offers a variety of international perspectives and diversity of approaches that shed more light on the role that VET can play in economic crisis.

Structure and subject

The publication collects a series of articles around the topic of how VET has responded and adjusted in different coun-

tries in times of economic crisis. It opens up the theme to the reader through some examples of international comparative studies, ranging from broader topics, such as the role of NQFs and apprenticeship policies in transitions to employment, up to more narrow research on learning and upskilling required in the digitised creative sector or the induction of job entrants with midlevel qualifications in health care and car service sectors.

The main bulk of the book provides country case studies from Europe, the USA, China and other Asian countries. These sections are characterised by the wide range and huge variety of research topics covered, reflecting the different key issues at stake in the national VET research. From Centres of Excellence in India, transferable skills in Thailand, competence assessments for VET teachers in China, why some companies in the USA offer apprenticeships and others not up to addressing mismatch in Spain or the reproduction of social inequalities in German VET.

The book concludes with a section containing a few articles of more conceptual and theoretical nature, with an emphasis on policy borrowing and policy transfer of VET.

Key findings and highlights

The publication offers plenty of interesting but different key findings as a result of the diversity and “standalone” of articles in the book. Though quite some articles are not closely related to the main topic of the publication, namely VET in times of economic crisis, their findings remain relevant in relation to youth transitions challenges. Just to mention a few:

- the article on NQFs (SINGH) concludes that a better understanding of NQFs could inform transition policies concerning youth, but cannot themselves promote alternative transition routes.
- LASSNIG concludes that apprenticeships policies are not an “easy fix” for problems on the youth labour market and identifies that not the apprenticeship system itself but rather the strong tradition of labour market policies are the main reason for low youth unemployment in Austria;
- a study testing the professional competence assessment concept for VET teachers in China (ZHAO, ZHANG, RAUNER) verified the usefulness of this tool and includes methodological findings on the need to improve the quality of some test tasks.

Reading between the lines a key finding and common denominator seems to be that VET can play a key role in transition from school to work if alternative pathways are provided and quality is ensured. However, VET cannot do much with regard to youth unemployment, unless it is combined with other, more powerful policies and measures.

Final conclusions and assessment

Overall, a valuable publication worthwhile to read and to consult. Though, readers who expect a more systematic and conceptual answer on how VET systems should adapt and respond in times of economic crisis, may be disappointed. However, the book is rich of information from latest VET research on the topic as well as in terms of variety of VET systems and geographical regions covered. And last but not least in terms of length. Almost 500 pages require some patience and long breath from the reader. But the book allows the reader “to pick and choose” articles of special interest. Particularly recommended can be some of the final chapters which are more theoretical and conceptual. This includes the VET system typology and “6 P Strategy” for Transfer analysis, introduced by PILZ, and the article of UNWIN. The latter is questioning “if current VET researchers are sufficiently concerned with the life and contemporary workplaces”. This may point to the ‘evergreen’ topic if and to which extent VET research is able to influence policy and practice. UNWIN’s suggestion to “recalibrate” VET research may be appropriate more than ever. The hope remains that these issues will be further discussed in the international VET research community and beyond. ◀

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