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Research note

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THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL MODULES IN SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS FOR THE SELECTION OF THE FIELD OF COLLEGES

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Abstract: This paper examines the connection between secondary vocational education and continuing education. The influence of professional subjects and their impact on students and the creation of attitudes about further education, as well as the implementation of various, combined training models, are studied in particular. For the purposes of this research, a total of 201 students from three secondary vocational schools in the fields of trade, catering, tourism, economics, law, and administration were surveyed using a random sampling method. The educational profiles of the tested students are economic technician, tourist technician, cook, and waiter. The research objective was to determine whether the quality of professional subjects is important when choosing further tourism studies. In addition to the fact that teaching professional subjects develops certain students' competencies, the application of the quantitative methodology in the research showed that it also affects the choice of future educational profiles with high school students. The surveyed students have significantly opted for the choice of faculties and colleges of applied studies in natural and social sciences and humanities.

Keywords: sustainable tourism; secondary education; vocational study; professional modules; Serbia

1. Introduction

Education and its quality is extremely important for choosing a route in the education of young people. The correct way of creating a syllabus has an influence on the students' selection of further education. Bearing this in mind, in this paper, the authors deal with the research of this influence in the selected vocational schools.

Professional subjects deserve greater attention in education because they should form the basis for human resources in certain areas (Clifford & Montgomery, 2015; Fidgeon, 2010; Štetić et al., 2019). Their curricula are the basis for understanding the entire activity that is studied. Thus, if good curricula and their presentation are not done, the students leave the area they have chosen when enrolling in certain high schools.

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In this paper, the focus of research is professional courses in secondary vocational schools and the influence that this form of pedagogical work has on students' decision-making in choosing future educational profiles of higher education (Gamble, 1992; Šimičević & Štetić, 2017). The goal of this research is to examine, with the help of quantitative methodology, the degree of influence of vocational subjects in secondary schools on the choice of future higher education institutions for further education.

The curricula of professional subjects include various teaching modules that aim at developing students' educational and qualification competencies (Jovanović, Živković et al., 2016), both for work in the vocation as well as for the continuation of their education (Coll-Ramis et al., 2023; Korkmaz, 2015). During the three-year or four-year schooling, students have the chance to recognize their desires, opportunities, and the knowledge acquired, and to make a decision on their further education based on the assessment of their competencies (Qiu et al., 2017). Parents, teachers, and professional orientation teams have a significant role in this process (Jovanović et al., 2015). The role of different teaching models and teachers as implementers of professional subjects as well as professional practice can be of great importance in the choice of future higher education (Koech et al., 2016; Yan & Li, 2023).

Vocational orientation is an important segment of education for students of all ages (Kelly, 2006; Palmer et al., 2017; Stone, 2002). Choosing an occupation is an important decision that shapes every person. According to Alberts et al. (2003), the choice of one's occupation influences social and economic circumstances to a great extent (Bos et al., 2015; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). Some studies survey high school students' attitudes on choosing their future profession (Vukić et al., 2021), i.e., the factors that influence students to choose scientific disciplines that are characteristic of their affinities and motives (Shulruf et al., 2010).

When choosing a future career, a problem arises due to the discrepancy of educational profiles with the needs of the tourist market (Coll-Ramis et al., 2023). Individual research lists various factors that influence the decision to continue education and choose a faculty (Francis & Yasué, 2019; Liang et al., 2015). Family, social environment (Coles, 2009; Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013), and the work of teachers in secondary schools stand out among the most significant ones (Cheung & Law, 2002). An important fact is that certain teaching contents develop different interests among young people (Jovanović, Gatarić et al., 2016), which can be used in modeling and designing individual operational plans of teachers (Coll Ramis, 2021; Goodenough & Page, 1993; Šimičević & Štetić, 2017). According to Wilhelm (2004), professional subjects and the quality of teachers' work contribute to the choice of a future faculty (Dick & Rallis, 1991; Trišić et al., 2020).

2. Materials and methods

The research examined the level of influence of professional subjects on the choice of future higher education profiles in the selected secondary vocational schools in Serbia with the help of descriptive statistics. The research was conducted using the survey technique, i.e., a written questionnaire as an instrument was applied. We selected six departments applying a random sampling method, i.e., 201 respondents in three secondary vocational schools. The respondents were high school graduates from the fields of Trade, Catering and Tourism, Economics, Law, and Administration.

The paper describes the sample structure using descriptive statistics. The significance of differences in students' responses were examined using One-Sample Test. The ultimate task of

the research was to analyze the responses regarding the choice of the type of higher education institution. The level of influence of professional subjects on future higher education choices was examined with the help of descriptive statistics. The planned sample size was about 220 respondents. The respondents were students in the final grades of secondary vocational education. The research instrument used in the survey was a written questionnaire. The questionnaire model was designed according to the research model of Palmer et al. (2017) and it was adapted to the survey of high school students regarding the impact of professional subjects on the choice of higher education occupation. Completely anonymous answers were ranked using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = *I completely disagree*, 2 = *I partially disagree*, 3 = *I neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *I partially agree*, and 5 = *I completely agree*. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions concerning the elementary characteristics of the respondents. These are gender, year of schooling, and the educational profile that the students attend. The second part of the questionnaire contained 14 items, i.e., statements that referred to certain influences of teaching professional subjects. Items 11 to 14 concerned the influence of teaching professional subjects on the choice of higher education according to certain scientific disciplines. Using the software SPSS v.21, a descriptive statistical method of analysis of a sample and the level of the given answers was applied.

3. Results and discussion

For this research, six departments of final grades of two vocational schools (tourism and economics) and a high school in Serbia were selected by random sampling. Schools are located in urban areas of Serbia.

The sample consisted of 201 respondents. They filled in the questionnaires anonymously during the class teacher's class. All questionnaires were validly filled in. By analyzing the data, the majority of the respondents were girls (58.2%). The respondents in the fourth year of schooling made up the majority (88.1%). The structure of the respondents consisted of students of the following educational profiles: economic technician (23.9%), tourism technician (64.2%), cook (8%), and waiter (4%).

The first 10 items from the questionnaire refer to examining the value of the results that professional instruction achieves in the teaching process and education of students, together with the development of various competencies and interests. Respondents' answers to items 1 to 10 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of answers (items from 1 to 10)

Item		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Σ	Valid	201	201	201	201	201	201	201	201	201	201
	Invalid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average		3.71	3.81	4.7	4.91	4.55	4.35	4.55	4.36	4.73	4.68
SD		1.06	0.77	0.45	0.29	0.50	0.73	0.50	0.71	0.56	0.58
Variance		1.13	0.59	0.20	0.08	0.25	0.54	0.25	0.50	0.32	0.34
Minimum		1	3	4	4	4	2	4	2	3	3
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Total		745	766	948	987	915	874	915	876	951	941

Analyzing the data presented in Table 1, we can conclude that the answer to question 4 has the highest value, i.e., the claim that the teaching of professional subjects contributes to

the development of practical skills (4.91). This means that the respondents largely emphasized practical skills as a significant outcome of professional instruction. Moreover, the possession of practical skills is an important prerequisite for further professional development. This coincides with the research of Alberts et al. (2003), where the choice of occupation indicates a significant impact on social and economic opportunities that future professional possibilities and circumstances bring to the respondent. This also coincides with the research of Šimićević and Štetić (2017) that students believe that professional subjects and practice in education in tourism have a crucial role in their employment and their stay in the profession. This information can be important in designing professional subjects and in making up individual operational work plans for professional subject teachers (Cooper, 2002). The lack of connection between skills and knowledge acquired in secondary vocational education and the needs of the labor market can affect a number of different problems (Dornan & Truly, 2009).

The respondents' answers to the statement (item 3) that professional instruction contributes to the development of knowledge and skills have a significantly high value (4.72). The value of this answer complements the answers to questions five and seven, i.e., the claims that teaching contents of professional subjects is actual and interesting (4.55) and that teaching professional subjects helps develop the competencies of the educational profile (4.55). The actuality of certain teaching contents is an essential basis in developing students' interests, which results in the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Developed competencies of some high school students' educational profiles significantly create affinities in their future professional orientation (Buissink-Smith et al., 2011; Falk et al., 2012; Wilhelm, 2004).

While implementing teaching, the teachers of professional subjects prepare students in the final grades for the continuation of their schooling, which is largely indicated by the answers of the respondents (4.68). The item under number one has the lowest value (3.71), which means that, to a certain extent, such teaching develops students' interest in studying various contents within a professional subject. This indicates that not all the students have equally developed interests in certain contents within professional subjects. This coincides with the research of Dick and Rallis (1991), where teaching content has played a significant role in defining the affinity for choosing a future educational profile. When analyzing students' goals and achievements, this information can provide significant assistance in evaluating the results of the teaching process or certain segments of the education.

The assessment of the relevance of differences in respondents' answers can be carried out using One-Sample Test. Respondents' answers to all 14 items from the questionnaire were subjected to testing methods. The entered test value is .05 (Tenjović, 2000). The results can be seen in Table 2.

Regarding the survey results of all 14 items, statistically, significant differences in the respondents' answers can be noticed, as indicated by the obtained values (Sig. (2-tailed)) which are lower than the test value of .05.

Students chose certain educational profiles when enrolling in the secondary schools they attend, and in this way they are formed as experts in those fields. Then they look at the possibilities for their future. In Table 3, you can see the results of the analysis of respondents' answers related to the choice of future higher education in certain scientific

fields, and the ones which concern the educational profile that students are currently attending.

Table 2. Examination of differences in the respondents' answers

Items	Test value = .05			
	t	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
The teaching of professional subjects develops students' interest in studying various contents within a subject	48.8	200	0	3.66
The teaching of professional subjects contributes to socialization	69.18	200	0	3.76
The teaching of professional subjects contributes to the development of knowledge and skills	146.4	200	0	4.67
The teaching of professional subjects contributes to the development of practical skills	240.7	200	0	4.86
The teaching contents of professional subjects are actual	128	200	0	4.5
The teaching contents of professional subjects are useful in everyday life	83.07	200	0	4.3
The teaching of professional subjects helps to develop competencies of the educational profile	128	200	0	4.5
The professional subjects influenced me to make a decision on continuing my education at a higher education institution	86.29	200	0	4.31
The teaching of professional subjects influenced my choice of future higher education profile	117.8	200	0	4.68
Through classes, teachers of professional subjects prepare us for taking entrance exams for continuing education at the selected higher education institutions	112.9	200	0	4.63
Professional instruction influenced me to opt for natural sciences (tourism)	37.2	200	0	3.8
Professional instruction influenced me to opt for art sciences	23	200	0	1.26
Professional instruction influenced me to opt for social sciences and humanities (economics)	31.23	200	0	2.69
Professional instruction influenced me to opt for technical-technological and biotechnical sciences	30.19	200	0	2.49

By analyzing the data in Table 3, we can conclude that the respondents' answers regarding the choice of natural sciences have the highest average values when continuing education (3.85). They are followed by social sciences and humanities (2.74), technical-technological and biotechnical sciences (2.54), and artistic sciences (1.31).

Considering the obtained values, we can conclude that the teaching of professional subjects significantly influences the choice of future higher education profiles. Students from the educational profiles of economic technician, tourism technician, chef, and waiter are mostly determined to continue their education at faculties and colleges of applied studies in the field of natural and social sciences, which are akin to the current work areas in secondary education attended by the surveyed students.

Table 3. The structure of respondents' answers related to the choice of future higher education profile (items 11 to 14)

	Educational profile	Σ	Mean	*SD*	*SE*	Minimum	Maximum
Natural sciences (tourism)	1	48	2.77	1.61	0.23	1	5
	2	129	4.66	0.48	0.04	4	5
	3	16	1.88	0.81	0.2	1	3
	4	8	1.25	0.46	0.16	1	2
	Σ	201	3.85	1.45	0.1	1	5
Art sciences	1	48	1.29	0.74	0.11	1	4
	2	129	1.33	0.8	0.07	1	4
	3	16	1.38	0.88	0.22	1	4
	4	8	1.13	0.35	0.12	1	2
	Σ	201	1.31	0.78	0.05	1	4
Social sciences and humanities (economics)	1	48	3.79	0.9	0.13	2	5
	2	129	2.29	1.108	0.09	1	5
	3	16	2.88	0.88	0.22	1	4
	4	8	3.5	1.19	0.42	1	5
	Σ	201	2.74	1.22	0.09	1	5
Technical-technological and biotechnical sciences	1	48	3.46	1.03	0.15	1	5
	2	129	2.1	0.99	0.09	1	5
	3	16	2.88	0.88	0.22	1	4
	4	8	3.5	1.19	0.42	1	5
	Σ	201	2.54	1.17	0.08	1	5

Note. *SE* = Standard error; 1 = economic technician; 2 = tourism technician; 3 = three-year-course chef; 4 = waiter.

4. Conclusion

The secondary education in Serbia is divided into the area of high school education, secondary vocational schools, and art schools. In secondary vocational schools, there are educational profiles that are completed for the duration of three and four years. After completing secondary education, students can continue their education in vocational and academic studies. Monitoring the progress of high school graduates shows that a number of students continue their education at faculties that are related to the educational profile in which they obtained their high school diploma (Dick & Rallis, 1991). The research in this paper supports this claim. The influence of the instruction of professional subjects on the choice of the future higher education profile is examined in this survey. All the examined influences of professional subject instruction are rated higher than average. The influence of the teaching of professional subjects on the development of practical skills has the highest value with the examined students. In addition, professional practice significantly contributes to the development of knowledge and skills among students. The respondents also point out that the teachers of professional subjects prepare students in the final grades to continue their education during the realization of their classes. The surveyed students significantly chose the faculties from the scientific fields of natural sciences, and social sciences and humanities to continue their education, while faculties in the field of art had notably lower values. An important result of the research is that the teaching of professional subjects contributes to the choice of a future higher educational profile to a significant extent.

Education policy, i.e., personnel policy, represent a significant part of the development policy of one country (Pavlović et al., 2016). Positive legislation should provide effective mechanisms for ongoing cooperation between business and vocational high schools. Existing education curricula need to be updated frequently in the light of technological changes in the economy. The business success of education relies, among other things, on the competence and satisfaction of employees, so this segment of work in schools must be given special attention (Štetić et al., 2019). Students from our vocational high schools need to be competitive in the region and other countries. This is achieved by their knowledge and willingness to adapt to market demands. They must be ready to adapt to the requirements of the workplace and specific job positions, which must be the result of the acquisition of knowledge in professional subjects.

The obtained results of this research will be of great use for the continued study of this issue. The new paper will be about the importance of prior knowledge in professional subjects for successful enrollment at certain higher education institutions. In addition, it will be assessed to what extent prior knowledge from vocational subjects in secondary schools helps them to acquire knowledge at faculties and universities of applied studies. The results of this research can be significant for the creation of different project teaching. In this way, students can independently analyze the acquired competences and potential opportunities. In particular, this kind of research can be used to examine the wishes for the choice of future educational profiles of higher education.

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