

Development of youth professional interests in accordance with labour market requirements

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Abstract

This article analyses the European Commission, OECD and Eurostat data, and the Latvian labour market data on youth unemployment rates during 2008–2014. It also examines the results of the empirical study on the Latvian youth's development of creativity in the formation of intents about profession and its conformity with demands of the present labour market. For determination of the professional interest, methods of analysis and synthesis, time series analysis and mathematical statistics were applied. For the interpretation of models and facts, survey method, expert interview method, focus group discussion analysis, SWOT and PEST methods were applied. A questionnaire was used to examine the professional intents of youth from Latvian secondary schools, and a focus group discussion with parents and teachers of students was organised to determine concepts about the issues of vocational choice in the context of supply and demand in the labour market.

Keywords: Vocational choice, career, employment, labour market.

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1. Analysis of Youth Employment in the EU and Latvia

Recent OECD data demonstrate that the youth unemployment rate in Latvia is higher than that in the EU on average. It is important, therefore, to find the reasons for youth unemployment and develop political instruments that could promote the integration of youth in the labour market. Special attention in the analysis should be devoted to the NEET group (NEET—not in education, employment or training) (Delebarre, 2015).

The first part of the research analyses the youth unemployment rates in Latvia and the EU and clarifies the main trends for the increase in youth unemployment. The youth unemployment analysis was performed pursuant to the International Labour Organisation directives on promotion of youth employment and decrease of unemployment rates. The research provides analysis of the core indicators of youth unemployment: (1) youth unemployment rate in the 15–24 age group, where the unemployment rate is a percentage of such people (aged 15–24) from the total number of the employed in this age group; (2) total youth unemployment indicators in comparison with all age groups on the labour market. The research uses and analyses data from the OECD, the European Commission, Eurostat, the Latvian Ministry of Economics, the Latvian Central Statistical Bureau, the Latvian State Employment Agency from 2008 up to this period. When analysing the economic and social aspects of the country’s development, the unemployment rate is considered as one of the core indicators (See Table 1).

Table 1. Youth (aged 15–24) unemployment rate in Latvia and the EU in 2008–2014 (%)

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Latvia	33.3	36.2	31.0	28.5	23.2	23.4
EU-28	19.9	21.0	21.7	23.2	23.6	23.5

[Source: Eurostat (2014)]

Data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that, during 2009–2014, the youth unemployment rate in Latvia exceeded the average EU unemployment rate. When analysing the reasons for the high youth unemployment rates in Latvia and the EU, one has to state that some of them can be explained by the influence of the economic crisis on employment in the country, whereas other indicators can be explained by the differences that result from changes in the GDP main indicators. Yet, it has been acknowledged that the reasons could mostly be explained by the influence of other factors: lack of motivation among youth with regard to the choice of profession, formation of vocational interests, insufficient development of creative skills and entrepreneurial competence, etc.

The Eurostat (2014) data show that the youth unemployment rate is much higher than in other age groups. The EU youth unemployment rate in 2014 was 24.1%, which was twice as high as in other age groups. In Europe, 7.5 million young people aged 15–24 had neither work, nor education, nor professional skills. The high youth unemployment rate directly demonstrates that there are real difficulties with the successful integration of youth in the labour market. The OECD research analyses the youth unemployment rates and highlights the fact that the NEET data show a critical situation with youth employment (See Table 2).

Table 2. Analysis of youth unemployment rates in the age group of 15–24 (%)

	Not in education				Total (employed + unemployed + inactive)
	Employed	NEET (unemployed + inactive)	NEET Unemployed	Inactive	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Austria	45.0	9.6	4.3	5.4	54.6
Belgium	38.0	14.9	7.1	7.8	52.9
Czech Republic	39.8	13.2	5.8	7.5	53.1
Denmark	28.5	11.7	4.4	7.3	40.3
Estonia	37.3	14.8	6.3	8.5	52.1
Finland	32.4	12.3	5.2	7.1	44.8
France	36.3	16.3	9.6	6.8	52.7
Germany	37.5	9.7	4.1	5.6	47.1
Greece	24.3	28.5	21.7	6.7	52.8
Hungary	33.9	20.5	9.2	11.3	54.3
Ireland	34.4	19.2	9.9	9.3	53.7
Italy	27.9	26.1	11.7	14.4	54.0
Luxembourg	36.0	6.1	3.4	2.6	42.1
Netherlands	36.6	8.9	3.4	5.5	45.5
Norway	45.7	9.1	3.0	6.1	54.8
Poland	34.2	17.0	8.7	8.3	51.1
Portugal	31.1	17.3	12.6	4.7	48.4
Spain	26.8	26.8	20.2	6.6	53.7
Sweden	38.3	9.4	5.0	4.4	47.7
United Kingdom	42.5	15.6	6.9	8.7	58.1
Latvia	38.7	15.8	8.6	7.2	54.5
OECD average	36.8	15.2	7.0	8.2	52.0

[Source: OECD (2015)]

The OECD data show that the United Kingdom has the highest percentage (58.1%) of youth aged 15–24, who do not continue their education. Whereas Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal have the highest proportion of NEET youth, and Italy has the biggest number of youth who are not employed and are not registered as unemployed. All the indicators show that the bulk of the youth registered in the NEET group are those who are registered as unemployed, i.e., they have not integrated into the labour market successfully, which demonstrates the insufficient process of formation of vocational interests in general. When performing this analysis in conformity with the NEET percentage indicators, the authors have divided all countries of the EU into three groups: (1) low youth unemployment, NEET < 10%; (2) medium youth unemployment (NEET 10–16%); (3) high youth unemployment (NEET > 16%) (See Table 3).

Table 3. Youth unemployment rates in conformity with the NEET indicators (%)

Low youth unemployment (NEET < 10%)			Medium youth unemployment (NEET 10–16%)			High youth unemployment (NEET > 16%)		
State	Unemployed	NEET	State	Unemployed	NEET	State	Unemployed	NEET
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Austria	10.3	9.6	Belgium	23.2	14.9	France	25.2	16.3
Germany	7.7	9.7	Czech republic	15.9	13.2	Greece	52.4	28.5
Luxembourg	19.6	6.1	Denmark	12.6	11.7	Hungary	30.4	20.5
Netherlands	12.7	8.9	Estonia	15.0	14.8	Ireland	25.9	19.2
Norway	19.3	9.1	Finland	20.5	12.3	Italy	42.7	26.1
Sweden	19.9	9.4	Latvia	19.6	15.8	Poland	26.9	17.0
			United	16.9	15.6	Portugal	34.8	17.3

Kingdom	Spain	53.2	26.8
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[Source: Eurostat (2014)]

Summarising the rates of Table 3, the authors conclude that the total youth unemployment rates in the countries where NEET youth unemployment rates are below 10% are also lower and do not exceed 20%. The total youth unemployment rates increase in countries with a high NEET youth unemployment rate, exceeding 50% in Greece and Spain.

The European report identifies the chief socio-economic factors of youth unemployment that characterise the youth included in the NEET group:

- (a) Those who have insufficient professional orientation and, hence, low motivation to study and obtain a professional qualification.
- (b) Youth in risk groups (youth who are under the influence of socially unfavourable circumstances, including single mothers, ex-prisoners, drug and alcohol addicts, etc.).
- (c) A special group that includes disabled persons, i.e., physical and mental disabilities ('Developing Key Competences at School in Europe', 2012).

The figures characterising the Latvian labour market show that, currently, a positive trend could be observed and the youth employment rates are growing, with a decreased total number of unemployed youth (see Figure 1).

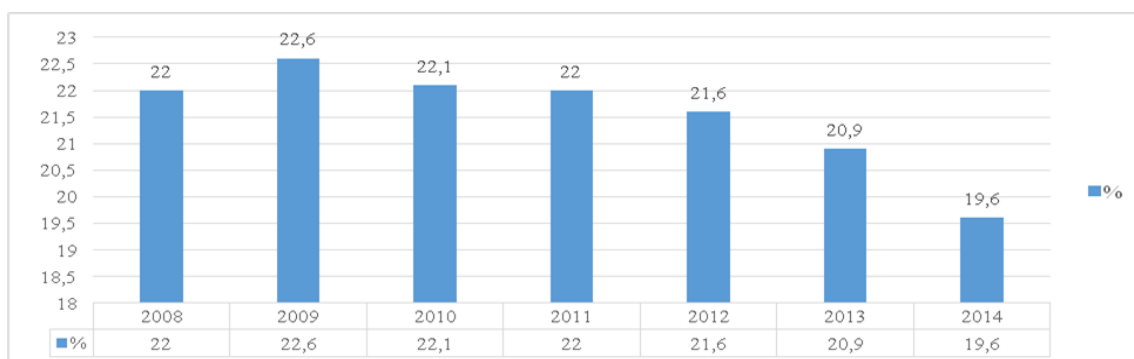


Figure 1. Youth (15–24) unemployment rates in Latvia in 2008–2014 (Employment and Unemployment, 2015)

When analysing the unemployment rates, the Latvian Ministry of Economics, in its report for the 'Growth and Employment' work programme on youth unemployment reduction in the country, indicates that successful integration of youth in the labour market is prevented by:

- (a) a big proportion of youth with insufficient education
- (b) the low prestige of vocational secondary education
- (c) insufficient information about the labour market and professional fields
- (d) a mismatch between the formal education offer and the labour market demand ('Programme Growth and Employment', 2014).

The report notes that the successful development of the labour market is influenced by issues related to education, including professional qualifications. There are (1) insufficient knowledge of sciences studied and the low interest of youth currently at secondary schools; (2) insufficient information about career opportunities at the secondary education level; (3) a high percentage of youth chooses general secondary education ('Programme Growth and Employment', 2014).

At the end of a study year, these concepts in particular – choice of profession, employment – become topical for students who are about to finish school. School leavers have to apply efforts not only to achieve the best results in assessment of their knowledge, but simultaneously they have to

take a decision on their future path in life. Research on the integration of youth into the labour market indicates that special attention needs to be drawn to the problem of the choice of profession by the young, as later it will determine their position and behaviour on the labour market and in the community. Summarising, it can be concluded that the choice of profession is a continuous process during which a person uses information about himself/herself and the surrounding world, analyses and applies it, in order to choose his/her activity area and the specific profession in accordance with his/her interests and professional intentions.

The choice of profession is influenced by several factors. Often, it is very hard for a teenager to understand what exactly he would like to do, what his capabilities are, in which profession he could express himself/herself better and achieve success. Besides, the time for thinking about it becomes increasingly shorter. Quite often, a decision about future studies or attempts to start a working life is taken depending on the youth information awareness, i.e., where and on what conditions one can acquire the selected speciality, what the future employment opportunities are and how to obtain funds required for the studies (Bikse, 2011).

1.1. Research methodology

To clarify the professional intentions of Latvian youth and their views about current requirements of the labour market, research was performed on the vocational intentions of students and their views about professions. The research consists of several stages: (1) investigation of vocational intentions of students; (2) interviewing parents (focus group discussion), to have an idea about the opinion of parents in profession selection issues, in the context of the labour market supply and demand; (3) interviewing teachers (focus group discussion), to find the opinion of teachers and their participation in vocational choice issues.

In the first stage of the research, the participants were 633 young people from schools aged 16–18 of which 402 were girls (64%) and 231 boys (36%), including 346 students from city schools (55%) and 287 from rural district schools (45%). The general group was formed of 12th Form students from all Latvian general education day schools. In accordance with the general group, its units (n) were selected. Stratified sampling was used in the research: the general group was divided into typical, internally homogeneous groups. Students (633) from the 12th form of Latvian general education day schools were included in the sampling, i.e., 5% of the total amount of the 12th Form students, to achieve the data credibility level.

A questionnaire was developed for research purposes, which contained questions on plans of the respondents after finishing secondary school, the vocational choice motives, the selection of further education and profession, views of students on professions that are promising in the labour market. When preparing the questionnaire, anticipating different levels of education and competence among students was required. The structure of the questions was simple and easily understood, so that a respondent would not get confused while filling in the questionnaire. In the course of preparing the questionnaire, attention was devoted to the content of questions. The questions were formulated in such a way that it would allow plans of the future, views, motives and evaluation of students found, whereas information about the respondent's status was obtained with the help of demographic questions. The bulk of the questions were of dosed type, only some questions were open, where respondents could express their views and evaluations. To check the truthfulness of the replies provided, the quality of the information obtained and the stability of the respondents' opinion, control questions was included in the questionnaire (Libkowska, 2012).

The goal of the research was to clarify the future intentions of youth after finishing school and their views about professions. The research procedure was arranged in such a way as to ensure the correct understanding and completion of the questionnaire. Prior to collecting the data, respondents were acquainted with the goal and practical usefulness of the research; they were also motivated for cooperation. The respondents were given the chance to complete the questionnaire in writing. Polling

was performed in class teams without time restrictions. The questionnaires were completed in the presence of performers, in order to provide clarifications on unclear issues when required.

The research method applied at the second stage of the research was the focus group discussion. The discussion participants were parents whose children had to make a vocational choice shortly. The discussion was conducted with the goal of clarifying the opinion of parents about the development of youth creative abilities in the formation process of professional intentions, the vocational choice issues, youth awareness of the labour market requirements, the content of the profession and professional training opportunities. During a discussion with teachers, i.e., at the third stage of the research, the attitude of teachers was clarified and their opinion about the youth vocational choice issues and the development of youth creative abilities in the process of formation of professional intentions.

1.2. Results of the research

In recent years, significant changes in the development of the national economy branches and the labour market have been observed. Increasingly, more attention worldwide is devoted to the development of the creative abilities of people and the requirements of the labour market, as well as to obtaining the appropriate profession. At the end of the 20th century, with the changing perception of professional education, it became necessary to reconsider the content of the career concept. Initially, the career concept was not used in connection with the vocational choice. It was considered the professional development of a person at different stages of life. Nowadays, this concept is used in a wider sense, characterising all stages of a person's life and personality development as a whole ('Career Development of Work', 2008).

In modern circumstances, it is quite hard for a young person to find his/her way in a wide range of professions without the advice of adults, come to understand one's talents and abilities, as well as coordinate them with the labour market requirements. This problem has always been topical. Yet, its significance has increased even more at present, as new professions develop rapidly and different types of work set different requirements. One profession requires a high culture of movements, fast reaction, observation skills and agility, while another profession – the ability to communicate with people, teamwork, being a manager to others or being a subordinate, etc. Moreover, not every person, in view of his/her state of health, physical and mental development, character and other personal features can be equally useful for all professions.

To make a vocational choice, first, one has to understand which profession and the professional field a young person would like to obtain through studies at an educational establishment, later acquiring the corresponding qualification. When analysing the questionnaires of young people, we could see what they devoted more attention to, when choosing their future profession: their abilities, interests or the labour market requirements. During the research, it was important to find out how young people evaluate their abilities, as well as determining which skills will be required for the chosen profession. In the course of the research, young people were asked questions about their opinion regarding the required skills for their future profession. This article will provide analysis of the replies to the different survey questions.

When replying to the question, 'What skills have you developed at school?', students were unanimous, according to the summarised results. Three main skills developed at school are: (1) the skill of communicating in the official language, which was ascertained by 33% of the respondents; (2) the skill of communicating in foreign languages, which was noted by 43%; and (3) the skill of studying on one's own and obtaining new knowledge, which was confirmed by 24% (see Figure 2).

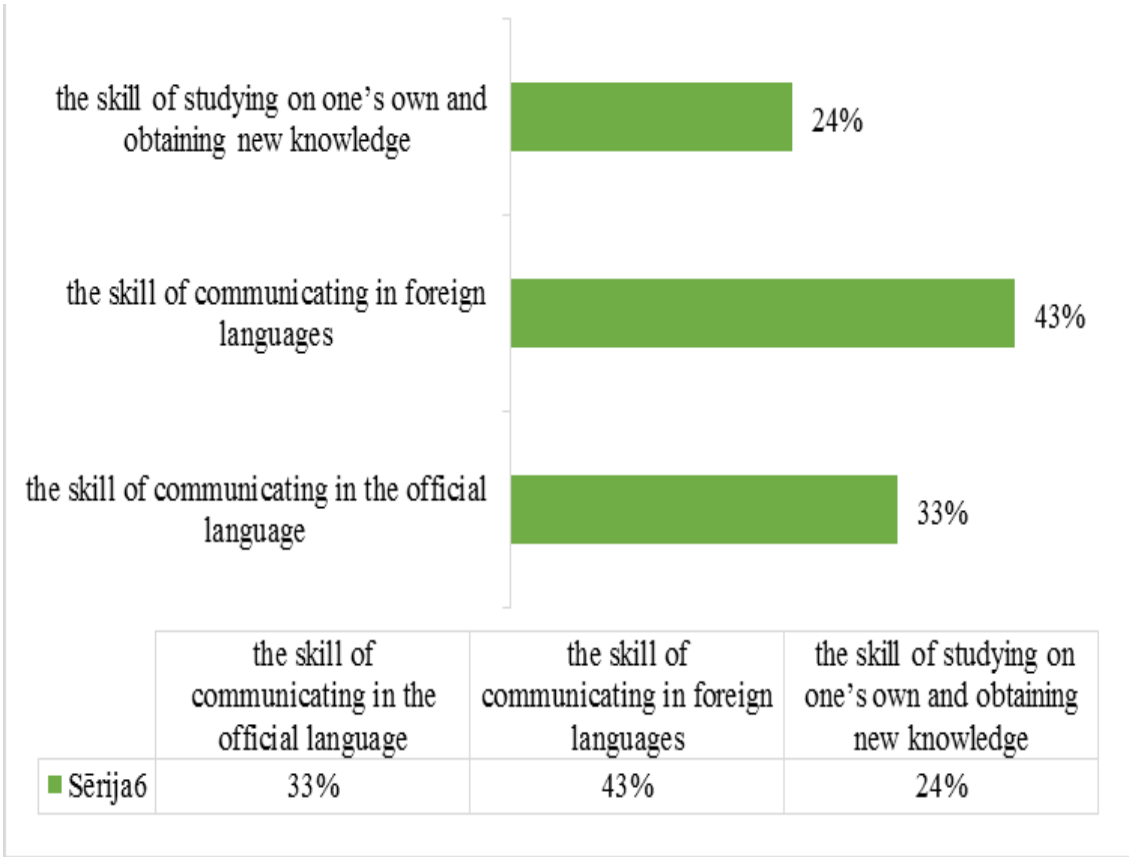


Figure 2. Views of students about their developed skills (%) (made by the authors, pursuant to the research data)

Students are capable of obtaining new knowledge on their own. It was noted that according to young people, the school does not provide such an important thing as self-confidence; it does not encourage initiative and enterprise in young people and does not devote much attention to preciseness and accuracy, though such features, in the opinion of the authors, could be useful in the future.

When replying to the question, 'What skills are required for your chosen profession?', young people note: (1) the skill of communicating in the official language (27%); (2) the skill of communicating in foreign languages (24%); (3) the skill of studying on one's own and obtaining new knowledge (15%). When analysing the data, we were surprised to see that initiative (2%), enterprise (2%), preciseness and accuracy (4%) were noted as less important skills. It was concluded that students do not consider these skills be important and significant and that they could be required in their chosen profession.

When replying to the question 'What criteria influence the choice of your next educational establishment?', students noted as insignificant such criteria as family traditions and recommendations of teachers to study at a specific educational establishment, popularity of an educational establishment and the criterion that the chosen profession can be obtained only at this educational establishment. It was noted that these criteria were also named as rather insignificant in the selection of an educational establishment. Similarly, 29% of boys and 18% of girls (in both cities and rural areas) do not think that the recommendations of teachers can influence their choice of educational establishment.

When replying to the question 'Who do you consult with when there are problems with the profession selection?', 14% of the respondents stated that they ask for advice from their classmates. Advice from parents is important for 25% of the respondents, 14% get advice from teachers at school and only 6% get advice from specialists beyond school. For 1% of the respondents, no advice was needed in the selection of a profession. Summarising the data obtained during the research, it can be concluded that students choose to consult with friends and classmates, not trusting the opinion of specialists. It was noted that young people trust even less the advice of their family.

During the polling, students were asked to reply to the question 'Please note the factors that influence achievements in the professional field'. When analysing the data it could conclude the most significant factors: (1) social security – 16%; (2) health and physical fitness – 15%; (3) ability to study and develop – 14%; (4) personal connections – 13%; (5) achievements in the professional field – 12%; (6) recognition in the community – 10%; (7) recognition among friends – 8%; (8) harmony in the family – 7%; (9) material achievements – 5% (see Figure 3).

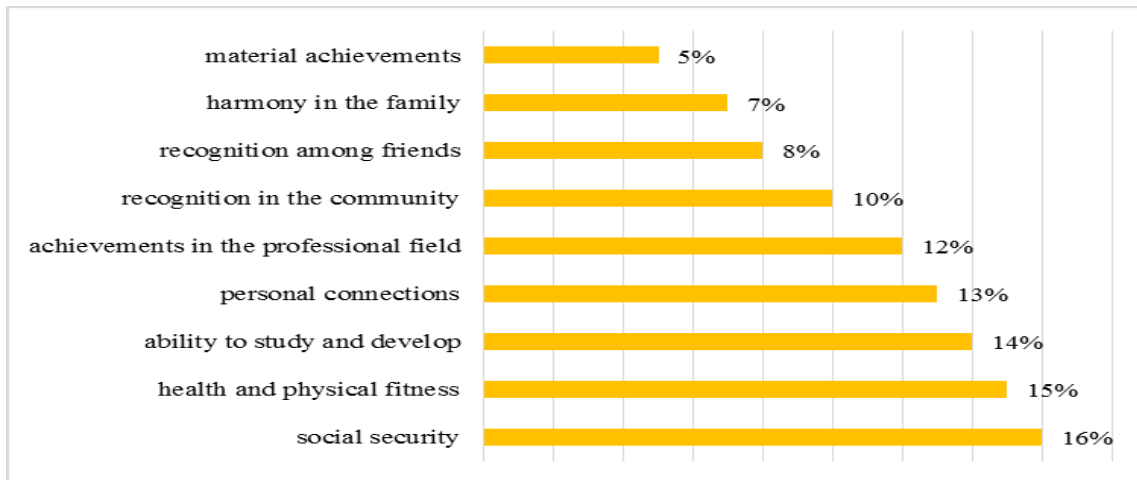


Figure 3. Replies of students regarding the factors that influence achievements in the professional field (%) (made by the authors, pursuant to the research data)

When summarising the results, it was concluded that students feel socially unprotected, as it is social security in particular which was noted as the most significant factor. Students evaluate to a similar degree good health and physical fitness, as well as the ability to study and develop. When analysing the polling data, it can be concluded that young people are incapable of choosing their future profession without assistance and that the development of their abilities in the process of formation of professional intentions is insufficient.

During the second stage of the research, discussion with parents whose children had to choose their profession and further education took place. The discussion participants were parents from both rural areas and cities. The main questions of the discussion were formulated based on the research tasks, and parents were asked to comment on the results obtained at other stages of the research. The article will analyse replies to different questions asked during the discussion.

When replying to the question about the professional choice of their children – Are you informed about the professional choice of your child?, it was concluded that parents understand that young people do not have a clear idea of what they would like to do after finishing school. When it is not evaluated at school what a young person can do better and he/she is not correspondingly directed to increase his/her knowledge in the corresponding field, cultivate his/her talent and create interest about it, then the young person will not have a clear idea about his/her future plans. When, during school years, a young person is involved in the development of different interests offered, i.e., project groups, music, art, sports, etc., then, in the course of time, an idea about his/her future plans takes a definite shape. Professional interests are formed, which promote the choice of profession and further education. It is very important for teachers and parents to notice at an early school age what a child can do better, what interests and excites him/her, to notice what features of character are most expressed, try to find out what interests a child has and develop his/her creative abilities. When young people are active, creative and enthusiastic at school, when they try to be engaged in different events, activities and projects, then they will be able to understand what they would like to do in their life, and what their professional intentions and interests are. The duty of parents and teachers is to help young people to make their choice, depending on their skills and abilities.

When evaluating replies of parents to the question 'Are you informed about the professional choice of your child?', it can be concluded that many parents are not at all informed about what a child can

do well, what interests him/her and what a child would like to do in the future. When analysing replies to the question 'What skills, in your opinion, will be required for your child in his/her chosen profession?', there is the impression that parents have quite a poor opinion about skills required for their children in the selected profession. The bulk of the received replies are negative: (1) are not enterprising; (2) poor language; (3) cannot express their views; (4) cannot evaluate information; (5) are careless and unenterprising. It must be concluded that parents are not informed where their child will study further on, what profession he/she would like to obtain, in addition, parents are not informed about the essence of the profession and the demand on the labour market. Parents are not aware of the creative abilities of their children and quite often cannot give advice in the selection of their future profession and further education.

At the third stage of the research, teachers of different subjects from all regions of Latvia participated in a discussion. During the discussion, the main questions were formulated based on the research tasks, and teachers were asked to comment on the results obtained at other stages of the research. The article will analyse replies to different questions asked during the discussion.

When replying to the question, 'What skills, in your opinion, have to be developed at school, to make the vocational choice more successful for students?', teachers noted that students have to develop their enterprising competence, in order not to be afraid to undertake responsibility. In the opinion of teachers, alongside enterprising competence, students have to develop creative abilities, in order not to be passive and be able to express their thoughts and visions to all, promote their creative ideas, as exactly innovative ideas are the potential of the future. Teachers noted that young people definitely have to develop oratorical skills, as, for many of them, speaking in public can be highly stressful, and therefore young people often cannot express their opinion, and their insufficient vocabulary prevents them from expressing themselves precisely and with good arguments.

When replying to the question 'Who, in your opinion, must provide information to young people about the labour force demand and supply on the labour market?', teachers said that such information must be provided by professionals. Teachers noted that schools have to arrange career educational programmes and specialists to tell students about further education opportunities and the essence of professions, as well as about the demand and supply on the labour market. Teachers noted that cooperation programmes must be arranged with companies, and students could be invited to practical training events at a company and consult with specialists representing a profession, as well as with people who already study this profession or have graduated from the corresponding educational establishment.

Teachers noted that such information should have the positive–negative aspects shown, as often, the idea of youth about their future profession is just a fantasy that has nothing to do with the truth and the real content of the profession. The replies of teachers show that in the ideal situation, a child would choose his future profession where someone from his/her family already works and a pupil has an idea about this profession. When analysing replies provided by teachers, it was concluded that teachers highly value the development of the creative abilities of youth as a potential for their future life after finishing school.

2. Conclusions

When performing analysis of the research, it was concluded that, currently, there is a high rate of youth unemployment in Europe, and successful integration of young people into the labour market is prevented by several factors. Therefore, different preventive measures are taken to reduce the forecasted youth unemployment. Special attention must be devoted to issues related to education, including the formation process of professional qualification, professional interests and enterprising competence.

Pursuant to the research data, the authors conclude that students are not aware of their abilities. Therefore, it is very important for them to understand that they could implement their potential in the

specific professional fields. The research data demonstrate that students lack awareness of what their abilities are, what professions they have to choose and how to plan their future. When analysing the data obtained, it was concluded that parents are not sufficiently informed about the vocational choice of their children and often have no idea about their abilities and interests. A number of the parents polled transferred the entire responsibility to the school and teachers, as they considered them to solve these issues and develop the creative abilities of children in such a way that they could be competitive on the labour market in the future. Whereas in the opinion of the teachers polled, the youth vocational choice was encumbered by unawareness of their future. When analysing the data, it was concluded that teachers do not think that selection of profession and further education of young people should be in the competence of teachers, it must be the issue of competence of the family and youth themselves.

Summarising the research data, the authors conclude that, only by being aware and developing their abilities and competences, can young people successfully choose their appropriate profession and later successfully integrate into the labour market. Therefore, it is required to implement career educational programmes in each school, by attracting career specialists, who can help students to form their professional interests, which will help teachers and parents of students to find their way in the career development issues that will promote vocational choice and further education of students, and in this way reduce possible youth unemployment.

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