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Participation in VET in Spain during Crisis

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Abstract

During the economic crisis in Spain the number of students in VET increased by more than 50%. In no other sub-system of the Spanish educational system did anything comparable happen during this period. The paper analyses this expansion of VET and how this affects the relationship to other sub-systems of the educational system.

Keywords

Spain; South Europe; participation in VET; economic crisis

1 Introduction

From academic year 2006/07 to academic year 2015/16 inscription to initial VET increased by 55.1% in Spain. Besides this massive expansion of VET provision, VET's image in Spain is improving. That is quite an exception in the European context (Cedefop, 2017, p. 3). But even though the general economic indicators improve and the Spanish economy is growing since 2014 again, it is one of the European countries where there is limited recovery of youth unemployment (Meierkord, Meyer-Hamme, & Thies, 2017, p. 12). The slow, but constant decline in the unemployment rate from 2013 on did not stop the expansion of VET.

Table 1 Overview educational indicators for Spain; Source: Eurostat & MECD

Year or Academic Year	2007 2006/07	2010 2009/10	2013 2012/13	2016 2015/16
Students in initial VET	453,543	537,571	661,047	703,551
Early leavers	30.8%	28.2%	23.6%	19.0%
Graduates from lower secondary	303,685	317,723	324,309	358,094
Tertiary educational attainment	40.9%	42.0%	42.3%	40.1%
Youth unemployment (less 25)	18.1%	41.5%	55.5%	44.4%



In the same period of time the number of early leavers from school lowered from more than 30% to 19%. In comparison to other European countries this is still a very high percentage of young people aged 18 to 24 years, who have not completed upper secondary education. But this development indicates a rising demand for secondary schooling during the crisis. Also, the number of graduates from lower secondary schooling (ESO = *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*) rose during the crisis. In Spain to enter in VET-courses it is obligatory to have finished ESO successfully. That is why all early leavers, who leave school before finishing ESO, do not count as potential demand for fully qualifying VET-courses.

A distinct polarization of the educational systems' output is a long-lasting peculiarity of the Spanish educational system. On the one hand the number of young people without any qualifying diplomas is high; on the other hand Spain is one of the first countries in Europe where since 2007 more than 40% of the 30-34-year-olds successfully completed tertiary studies. In comparison to the vocational educational system there has not been a strong boost in the matriculation at university during the crisis.

When the economic crisis hit Spain in 2008 the unemployment rate rose fast. Especially young people were affected. In the worst moments more than every second young Spanish person was unemployed and still in 2016 with a growing economy the unemployment of young people stayed high at 44.4% (Eurostat).

In comparison to former economic crisis since the 1970s there is a new phenomenon regarding the labor market impact: Those persons with low or no educational diplomas have been hit much harder during this crisis than those who hold higher educational degrees. In no other crisis before has education had such a strong influence on the risk of becoming unemployed (Martínez García, 2015, p. 106).

Despite this, the public debate was dominated by migration of young unemployed academics, over-qualification of many young career-starters and – surprisingly during a crisis - a lack of skilled workers. In educational politics the strengthening of vocational education and implementing reforms orientated on the German dual VET-scheme have been presented as reactions to the crisis.

Germany and other countries with a high proportion of young people in VET have had much lower youth unemployment rates. Therefore in European educational policies the strengthening of VET is promoted as a reaction to youth unemployment. This new orientation of the debate about education becomes especially clear in the *European Alliance for Apprenticeships*, which was launched in 2013 as a joint declaration of the European Commission, the European Council and social partners' organizations to fight youth unemployment by promoting work-based learning (EU, 2013).

2 Research Question and Methodology

To what extent or if at all it is possible to implement elements of foreign VET systems to another country is controversial. For sure the results of policy transfer like the implementation of elements of the German dual apprenticeship system in other contexts are very difficult to predict (Barabasch, 2010; Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Rappleye, 2006). The interaction between a vocational educational system, other sub-systems of the educational system and the labor market is influenced by a wider set of historically and nationally routed factors, which constitute a specific regime of collective skill formation (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012) and work culture (Greinert, 2004): Each combination of institutional and legal frameworks, economic structure, type of well-fare state and many other factors creates a unique case; usually on nation state level. Therefore, methodologically we concentrate on a case study of the Spanish VET system.

The massive expansion of VET provision seemingly took place without a matching expansion or decrease of other sub-systems of the educational system. Even if the VET-system

seemed not to have interacted directly with the other elements of the Spanish education system, the theories of skill formation and work culture let us expect a re-calibration of the complex relationships around the VET system, if this sub-system is changing its size that fast and massively. We analyze a ten years period from academic year 2006/07 to 2015/16.

The analysis is based on the official statistical data published by the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte and own calculations based on the Encuesta de Población Activa (EPA – Labor Force Survey). The EPA is a trimestral survey conducted by the Spanish Statistical Bureau; the sample consists of around 65,000 families/180,000 persons. We explore:

1. How the expansion of VET has changed the relation between upper secondary and higher post-secondary initial VET as well as the relation of the VET sector to general secondary and tertiary education?
2. Who are the new students that entered vocational education and how the expansion changed the composition of students of the VET sector regarding age, gender, previous educational and social class background?
3. What contribution has the new dual apprenticeship scheme to growing VET and how does it change the Spanish VET system?

3 Educational participation in VET 2006/07–2015/16

In the current Spanish educational system based on the LOMCE from 2013 there is an obligatory schooling until the age of 16, consisting of six years of primary school and four years of secondary school, called ESO (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*). After the obligatory school the students have the possibility to continue with a two years general upper secondary school, called *Bachillerato*. Finishing the *Bachillerato* offers university access by passing an entrance examination.

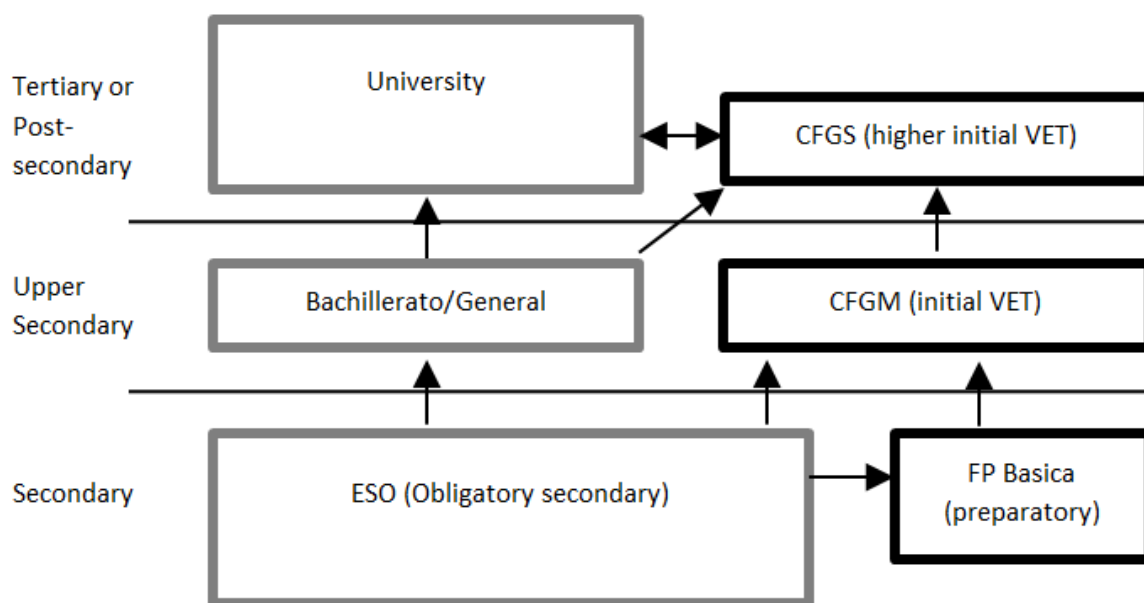


Figure 1 Current Spanish educational system after the reform from 2013

Vocational education exists on three levels:

- *Formación Profesional Básica* (FP Básica), which is a newly introduced two years course for students that have not finished successfully the obligatory secondary school ESO. Therefore it presents a form of preparatory vocational schooling. Probably it will be seen as a reservoir for all those students with a problematic school career, especially because usually the FP Básica-classes are part of a general school.
- *Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio* (CFGM) are initial vocational education and training courses on a medium level with duration of two years (ISCED 4), which can be accessed by students who have finished successfully the ESO or the FP Básica. Therefore, the CFGM are to be seen as the alternative to *Bachillerato* in the upper secondary.
- *Ciclos Formativos de Grado Superior* (CFGS) are initial vocational education and training courses on a higher level with a duration of two years (ISCED 5), which can be accessed by students who have finished successfully the *Bachillerato* or a test for students with CFGM background. Therefore the CFGS are to be seen as post-secondary higher education and an alternative to university studies.

In initial VET the *Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio* (CFGM) as well as the *Ciclos Formativos de Grado Superior* (CFGS) can be attained as full-time classroom training (*presencial*) or as distance-learning (*a distancia*). During the investigation period especially the modalities of distance learning, which are commonly used by older and/or working persons, multiplied from 8,088 in 2006/07 to 61,810 in 2015/16. Accordingly, its share of all inscribed VET students rose from less than 2% to nearly 9%.

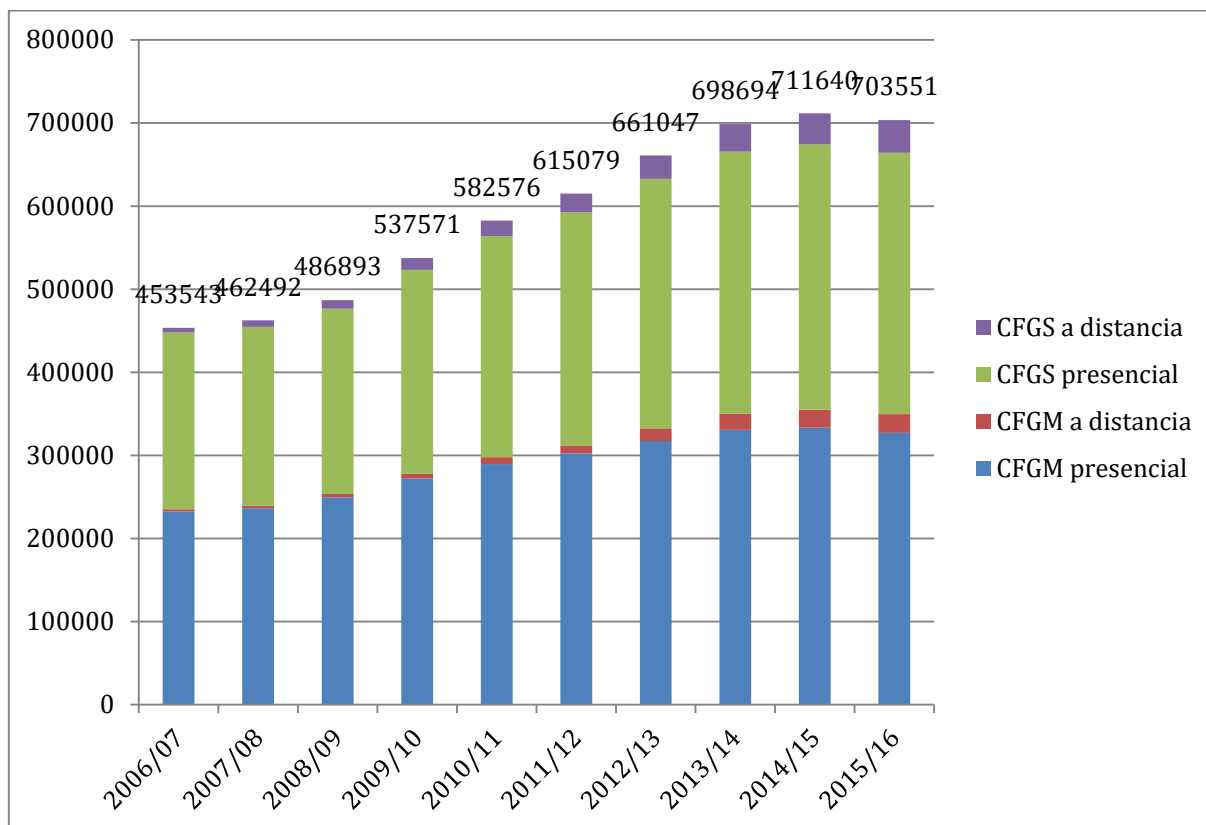


Figure 2 Students in initial VET 2006/07 to 2015/16. Source: MECD

During the investigation period 2006/07–2015/16 the matriculation at CFGS was growing faster than at CFGM. So, the share of higher post-secondary VET rose from 48,1% to 50,3% of all VET-students.

Table 2 Students in different educational offers 2006/07–2015/16

Academic Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Preparatory VET										
Garantía Social	45924	46973	3255	210	6					
P.d. Cual. Prof.			51659	74715	81775	84217	84009	83805	25421	215
FPB									39867	61909
Lower secondary general										
ESO	303685	311922	321195	317723	315667	319591	324309	327916	341824	358094
Upper secondary VET										
CFGM presencial	232653	236489	249506	271990	289568	302445	317365	330749	333541	327134
CFGM distancia	2571	3070	4010	5935	8309	9571	15130	19501	21579	22497
CFGM total	235224	239559	253516	277925	297877	312016	332495	350250	355120	349631
Higher post-secondary VET										
CFGS presencial	212802	215052	223098	245354	266012	280495	300321	315409	319305	314607
CFGS distancia	5517	7881	10279	14292	18687	22568	28231	33035	37215	39313
CFGS total	218319	222933	233377	259646	284699	303063	328552	348444	356520	353920
Higher initial VET										
VET TOTAL	499467	509465	541807	612496	664357	699296	745056	782499	776928	765675
Upper secondary general										
Bachillerato	595571	584693	589473	609072	623489	628753	634604	640978	638515	644165
Bachillerato distancia	34778	37440	39774	41491	48724	55423	57494	55670	52223	51392
Bachillerato total	630349	622133	629247	650563	672213	684176	692098	696648	690738	695557
University										
University total	1421651	1423425	1430147	1471719	1529862	1572617	1548534	1539709	1506179	1492741

During the investigation period there was a real run into vocational education and training in Spain. The growing participation in VET did not result principally from changed education preferences: After secondary school young people have the two educational options in upper

secondary education, CGFM (secondary VET) and Bachillerato (general secondary). The number of pupils finishing ESO rose by nearly 40,000 per year, most of them inscribed for Bachillerato as the number rose by nearly 50,000. But because the growth was stronger in vocational education the relation between students of Bachillerato to students of CFGM changed from 2.7 in favor of the latter to 2.0.

In the transition from upper secondary education to post-secondary CFGS or tertiary academic education the students have more educational and labor market choices. For this reason, the transition reconstructed based on matriculation statistics is less clear. Anyway, it shows that participation in tertiary academic education rose less. So, the relation between university students to students of CFGS (post-secondary VET) shifted constantly in favor of the latter from 6.5 in academic year 2006/07 to 4.2 in 2015/16.

4 New VET students entering during the crisis

The massive inscription into VET offers during the economic crisis is an anomaly in the Spanish educational system. To understand, who these new students are, we explore their socio-demographic and economic background. This work is still in progress. We hope to present findings during the conference in May 2019. We expect to find a rising age and a growing number of students that come back into the VET system, because they lost their job or could not successfully enter the labor market after finishing their studies during the crisis.

5 The Spanish Dual VET option

Since 2012/13 vocational schools can offer any formal CFGM or CFGS in a dual modality. That means that the students can do up to 85% of the learning-time in a private or public enterprise instead of the school. Anyway the school is responsible for the student and has to sign the necessary agreements with the cooperating companies and get this approved by the regional authorities. The Spanish dual VET is still very new, the law allows different ratios of in-company and school learning, the legislation of implementation of the national law differs in all 17 regions and there is few comprehensive data and evaluation published yet (Attwell, Garcia, & Garcia Pontydysgu, 2017; Bentolila, Cabrales, & Jansen, 2018; González Gago, 2015; Homs, 2016; Marhuenda, Chisvert, & Palomares-Montero, 2016; Molina, 2016).

In the academic year 2015/16 3.1% of all VET students studied in a dual modality; most of them in higher VET-courses CFGS. The impact of dual VET in the growth of matriculation in VET is therefore not significant. But it should carefully be analyzed, if by this modality a new form of distinction inside the VET system arises, that might devalue the value of VET diplomas on the labor market.

6 Conclusion

The expansion of VET in Spain was driven by the economic crisis. A crisis in a capitalist economy generates unemployment amongst workers, most affected are those who have less employment protection, which often means young people and unskilled workers. While they lose jobs, income and career-opportunities, they gain disposable time. VET-courses in Spain – in contrast to university – are free of charge and easily accessible as there is a dense network of vocational schools and low entry requirements. The Spanish rising VET participation might have been more a socio-political offer for the unemployed than an actual educational choice.

If this conclusion proves correct the rise of participation in VET could be a temporary phenomenon, which might disappear in the next years; depending on the labor market opportunities for low skilled works. Although, possible long-term effects like the changing social prestige, the recruiting of companies and the political attention for VET have to be consid-

ered. Regarding the new dual VET, its impact seems much higher on a political and ideological level, than the number of apprentices would justify for the moment.

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Biographical notes

Dr. Marcus Eckelt is currently working as a post-doc-researcher and teacher at the Technical University of Berlin, Department School Practice and TVET. In Summer 2017 he visited for several months the Universidad de La Laguna to study the Spanish VET system. He participated in the last iVET-Conference in Rostock presenting a paper and chairing one presentation group.

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