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## **Trainee dropout from PVTI Patras**

### **Giotopoulos Georgios**

PhD(c), M.Ed. M.Sc., Deputy Director of PVTI Patras

[ggiotop@gmail.com](mailto:ggiotop@gmail.com)

### **Apergi Olga**

M.Ed., Teacher of General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning-Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation

[apergiolga@yahoo.gr](mailto:apergiolga@yahoo.gr)

### **Summary**

The present survey investigates the trainee dropout from the Patras PVTI. The survey took place in the summer of 2020, 53 participants who dropped out participated and the data was collected based on a questionnaire.

The investigative questions were about the motives of training, reasons for the dropout and included propositions of the participants for the improvement of the studies – services offered by the Patras PVTI. Finding employment relevant to their chosen specialty is the most powerful motive for enrolling while obtaining a second study certificate is the second one. The reasons for dropping out include the Institute’s timetable, finding a job and financial emergencies that came up during the studying period. Regarding the improvement propositions, changing the timetable, eliminating absences or increasing their limit as well as lack of material and technical resources are the dominant ones.

Key words: trainee dropout, vocational training, PVTI, CEDEFOP, trainees.

### **Introduction**

The trainee dropout is an issue that troubles the Public Vocational Training Institutes (PVTIs) of the Ministry of Education and Religion. The trainee dropout is both a personal and a societal problem (Beilmann & Espenberg, 2016 · Feixas, Gairin, Munoz, & Rodriguez-Gomez, 2015) that also brings financial cost on the educational and training infrastructures (Apergi, 2019 – Giotopoulos, 2020B).

At the Patras PVTI, the largest in population PVTI in the Western Greek Prefecture and one of the largest ones in the country, the interruption of studies troubles the management and the educational staff (Apergi, 2019) even more so because Western Greece has the highest

rate of long-term unemployment – as high as 32 months – in the entire country (OAED, 2020, p. 20).

PVTIs are institutes of initial vocational training but are also part of the lifelong learning focused on vocational training (Boeren & Holford, 2016, p.121; Giotopoulos, 2020a; 2020b). They are the main public infrastructures where an adult employee can update his knowledge and capabilities regarding his profession or acquire new ones to change profession and unemployed can get help in order to be introduced or re-introduced into the labor market.

Under the 4753/2020 Law, starting from autumn 2021, in every PVTI a Career Services Office (CSO) will be established, staffed with specialized personnel and career consultants. Information on initial vocational training, briefing and consultation of the trainees are among the responsibilities of this office (article 32, par. 2). We feel that the operation of the CSO will contribute to reducing the dropout rate of the trainees, which takes place mainly in the first semester of enrollment (table 1). At this point, it should be noted that the third semester can also be considered one of enrollment since vocational senior high school graduates can enroll then if they choose a specialty relevant to their certificate and it may be the reason why there is a small increase of dropout in that semester compared to the second one.

Table 1. Patras PVTI trainees’ dropout per training semester and course semester

<b>Course semester</b>				
<b>Training semester</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>2013B</b>	24.26%			
<b>2014A</b>	24.59%	4.2%		
<b>2014B</b>	29.23%	17.02%	14.97%	
<b>2015A</b>		9.26%	2.43%	5.23%
<b>2015B</b>	30.55%		8.16%	4.62%
<b>2016A</b>		5.94%		0.39%
<b>2016B</b>	25.37%		10.89%	

<b>2017A</b>		6.82%		1.11%
<b>2017B</b>	34.96%		3.40%	
<b>2018A</b>		9.02%		1.32%
<b>2018B</b>	34.18%		15.12%	
<b>2019A</b>		8.22%		2.19%
<b>2019B</b>	37.60%		11.63%	
<b>2020A</b>		7.83%		2.94%
<b>2020B</b>	43.11%		7.79%	

As surveys have showed that the causes of the dropout can differ per geographical area, even in the same administrative region (De Witte & Van Klaveren, 2012; Boudesseul, Grelet & Vivent, 2012, ref. to Mpitsakos, 2021, p.41), it is important that they are investigated at a local level.

### **Intellectual framework**

Several researchers have developed various models that attempt to incorporate all the parameters that are related to the dropout of a person from an educational program, especially one of higher level or of adult education (Spandy, 1971; Cullen & Tinto, 1973; Bean & Metzner 1985; Cabrera, Castaned & Nora, 1993; Kornbeck et al, 2013; Cabrera et al, 1993; Donalson & Graham, 1999). The most recent model is the product of team work of the Students Study Committee of the German Center for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (Deutsche Zentrum für Hochschul und Wissenschaftsforschung), (DZHW, 2014, ref. to Heublein 2014, p. 504) and it is the European version of Tinto. It depicts the acquired knowledge via a contemporary standpoint and constitutes the intellectual framework of the present survey. The contribution of the particular model lies to the number of parameters it presents and not in their linear interconnection. For example, we consider that information plays a significant role not only during the time of studying but also in the previous stage, during the selection of the course.

Based on the DZHW model (figure 1), the decision to drop out of an educational course is the result of a procedure that can be divided in three (3) phases. Different factors are active during each of these phases.

The first one includes all those elements that pre-exist within the trainee, before they even start studying at the specific course. Their background (social, educational, related to immigration) affects their personality (extroversion, emotional balance, perception, friendliness, sense of responsibility) and both those elements affect the socialization achieved during their previous education (i.e., the kind of secondary education they have received, their professional training and/or working experience, the potential qualifications they may have acquired and are relevant to the specialties etc.). Whatever has preceded, defines their choice of studies (the specialties, the type of education and the expected benefits).

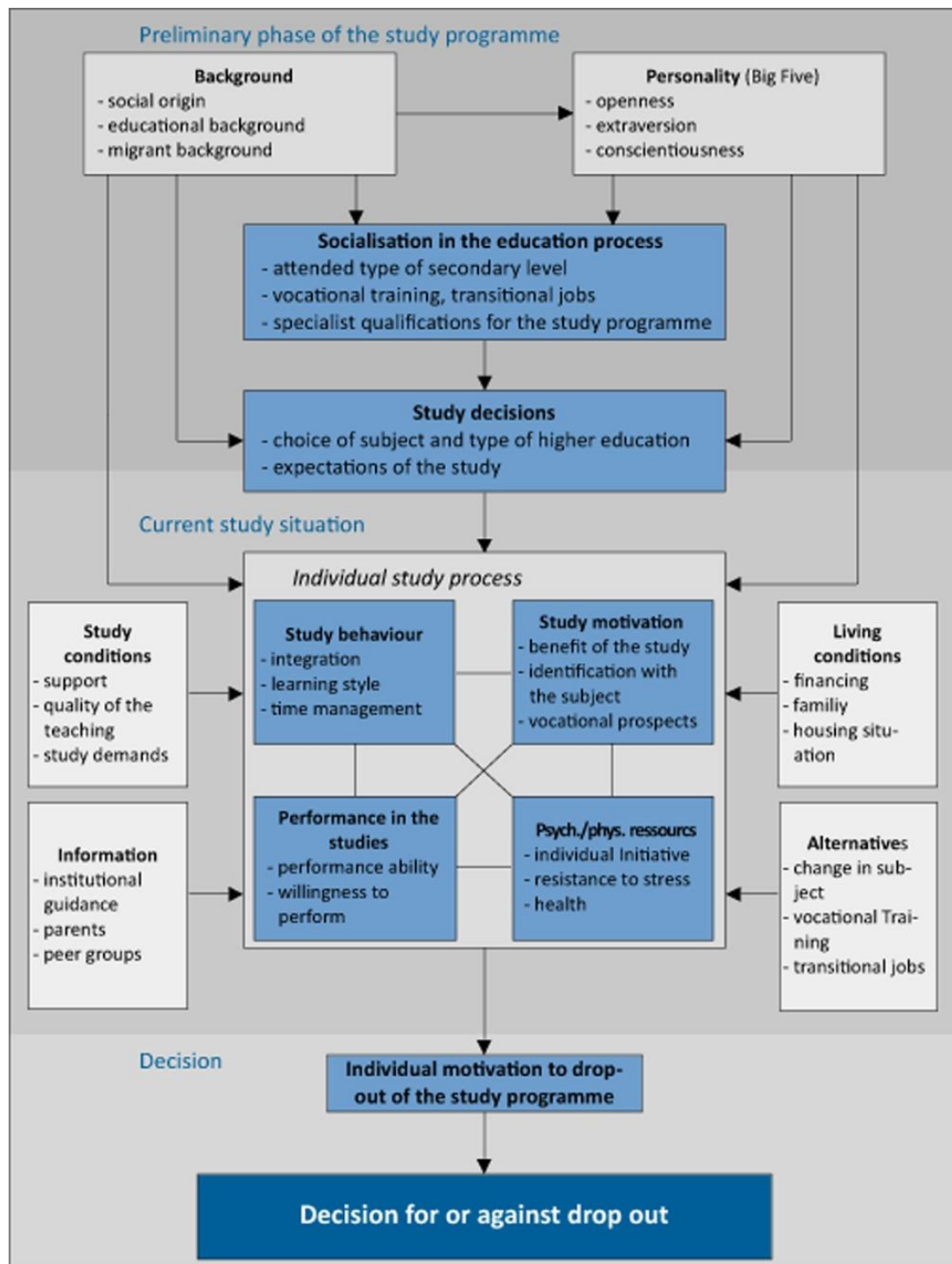


Figure 1 Drop-out model DZHW 2014. (Source: Heublein 2014, p. 504)

The second phase has to do with the situation of the studies. It includes the personal study course – which continues to be affected by all the aforementioned factors – and the external factors that affect it, such as the conditions of the studies, the information, the living conditions, the potential alternative choices. The course of the studies includes the attitude (inclusion, learning style, and time management), the motive (benefit from the studies, identification with the subject, professional

perspectives), the performance (ability and willingness to perform), the psychosomatic personal data (self-motivation, resistance to stress, health), all constantly interacting. External factors (such as family, financial and social living conditions, the requirements of the studies, the teaching quality etc.) affect the personal course of study as well. Ultimately, the decision to either drop out or complete the studies, which is the final phase, is the result of the personal motive as it is presented after all the aforementioned effects.

## **Methodology**

### *Aim, goals and investigative questions*

The present survey intends to detect the reasons for dropping out of training at the Patras PVTI through the eyes of the drop-outs. More specifically, the survey seeks to detect the motives that drive the drop-outs to initially enroll the reasons that lead them to drop out and at the same time investigate their point of view on the quality of the provided training.

The investigative questions that we dealt with were the following:

What motivated the trainees to enroll to a training program of the Patras PVTI from which they dropped out later on?

Which are the reasons why they dropped out of their training program at the Patras PVTI?

What propositions do the dropouts have regarding the improvement of the provided studies-services of the Patras PVTI?

### *Investigative approach – investigative tool – Sample*

This is a quantitative survey and uses a questionnaire designed by the researchers with choices of answers to questions that measure, mainly, variables in nominal scales (Creswell, 2011, p.203). The questions measure demographic, educational and professional characteristics of the dropouts. To measure the motives for enrolling in the training program and the reasons for dropping out the 5-point Likert scale was used (Creswell, 2011, p.203). Of the 32 total questions of the questionnaire, 19 are closed type, the 11, apart from the multiple answers, also allow for recording additional versions of the answers while there are also 2 open-ended development questions. The first of the latter ones is directly about reasons for the dropout that were not covered by the previous questions and the second one is about propositions for improvement on the provided studies and services the dropouts have to make.

A small pilot research was done using data from three dropouts of the Patras PVTI, which the researchers approached through the Institute's telephone number. After they answered the questionnaire, they were asked to evaluate it based on how comprehensive the questions were and to add any questions related to the questions of the research. The final questionnaires were designed with taking into consideration the few recommendations of the pilot group as well.

The research took place from June 23<sup>rd</sup> until July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and was focused on the trainees that dropped out from October 2016 until June 2020 which amount to 481 persons. Of those, 53 answered, a participation rate of 11.02%. The questionnaires were sent electronically through Google Forms.

Initially a link to complete the questionnaires was sent to the emails of the participants but it was then found that either the emails were wrong, or they belonged to a friend or relative which resulted in not being completed. Based on the above reasons, communication through telephone was decided so the total of the dropouts could be informed where possible. The verbal denial of a group of dropouts to complete the questionnaire over the telephone is recorded as well as a general negative attitude - not polite in rare cases - towards the callers.

At this point, it should be noted that the research is not looking to generalize the results to include dropouts of other Public VTIs apart from the dropouts of the Patras PVTI at the specific period. The application of convenience sampling or opportunity sampling cannot secure that the sample of the dropouts was the most representative of the population, so the findings of the research cannot be generalized to the reference population. (Halikias, Lalou & Manolesou, 2015, p.39 and 179).

#### The profile of the participants

The sample of the research consists of 53 individuals. Their demographic, social and educational background is as follows: almost 3 out of 4 dropouts are females (71,7% to be exact) and 28.3% is male. As regards the age of the participants, 7 out of 10 are aged up to 30 years old. 66% of the participants live alone, while 11.3% is married with a child. Additionally, a large percentage of the participants (71.7%) stated Patras as a place of residence while the permanent residence of 15.1% is outside the Achaia prefecture. In addition, about 9 out of 10 dropouts (90.6%) have received a General Lyceum certificate. The remaining 9.4% are graduates of various Vocational Lyceum specialties. Moreover, 24.5% of the sample studied at the same time in a University, a Technological Educational Institute or a post-graduate program. An especially important finding of the research is that 60.4% of the participants were working while studying.

Regarding the enrollment year at the Patras PVTI, half of the participants (50.9%) enrolled in 2019 and 18.9% in 2017. Furthermore, the participants stated that they started studies in a variety of different specialties in the PVTI, of which the most popular one was the “Music-Singing” specialty with 11.3% followed by the “Tourist Units Operator and Accommodation Businesses Operator (reception service – floor service – commodity knowledge)” with 7.5%.

## **Results**

### Motives for enrollment

A large percentage of the participants stated as a motive to enroll to a Patras PVTI specialty (extremely and very): a) finding employment related to the specialty they chose (60%) and b) acquiring one additional study certificate (58%), so that c) they do not have just a Lyceum certificate as their only qualification to find a job (30%). This motive was not strong enough and it was a reason to drop out (extremely and very) for 9% of the participants as they succeeded in a specialty that was not their first choice or it weakened during the course of the training as 15% realized it wasn't what they wanted.

Apart from the motives that pre-exist the enrollment in a training program, there are the motives that are cultivated during the training and are related to the professional opportunities (Heublein, 2014). The results of the present research showed that just 18.9% searched for employment relevant to the specialty they had studied immediately after they had stopped the training at the PVTI. About 6 out of 10 participants (60.4%) are working today, and 9.4% of them said their employment is relevant to the specialty they did not complete.

The answers to the question “which of the below do you consider that are/were critical in seeking employment relevant to the type of your studies at the PVTI” are also interesting. The participants responded (extremely and very): Accreditation from EOPPEP (53%), Doing internship (47%), Certificate of Tertiary Education (47%), Vocational Training Certificate (41%). In other words, only two out of five participants consider that the Vocational Training Certificate, a title acquired at the PVTI, will help them enter the labor market for the profession they desire.

19% of the dropouts stated (extremely and very) that at some point they considered that it was a waste of time but for half of them this statement is related to the employment. The answer to the open question of one of the participants is defining: “Because the attendance hours were several, I thought I would like to invest more time on my work and I could not combine it with the PVTI, plus I had also some important seminars to attend”. Such answers can be interpreted as lack of motive to remain in the training program.



## Reasons for dropping out

As regards the reasons for dropping out, it seems that they drop out their studies (extremely and very) due to the afternoon timetable which is not convenient (45%), because they have found a job (34%), because financial obligations or difficulties have come up (30%), or because they did not know that there was compulsory attendance (22%). (Figure 2)

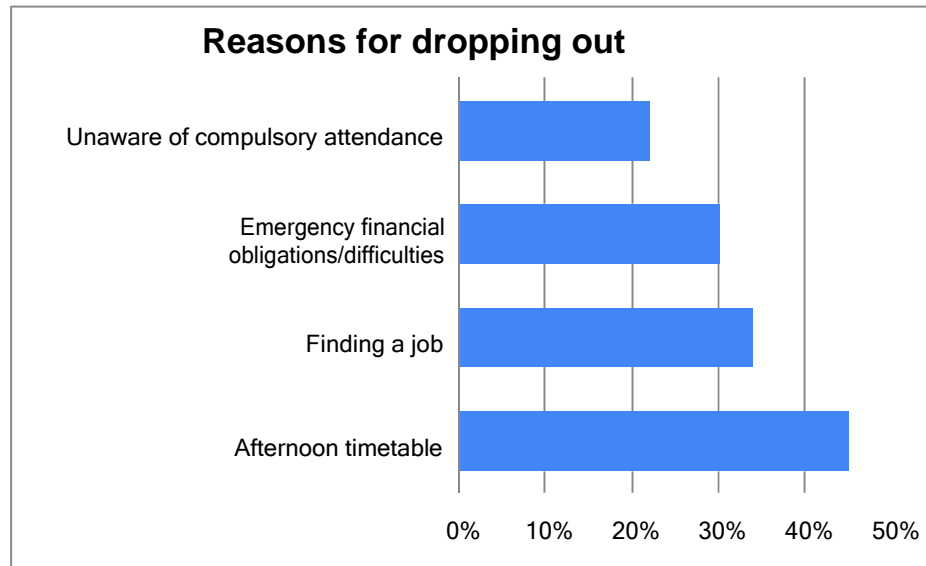


Figure 2. Main reasons for dropping out – scale degrees “Extremely” and “Very” (N=53)

The timetable, although it mostly concerns working individuals, seems to affect women with families as well. Characteristic is the answer of a female trainee at an open-ended question: “I had no one to baby sit for so many hours”. However, matters such as the timetable and compulsory attendance are set by the PVTI Operating Regulations (YA 5954/2014) and should be known to the trainees.

Of the ones that stopped because they found employment, only half stated (extremely and very) that emergency financial obligations came up. However, when we talk about a geographical region where the unemployed can remain unemployed for 32 months, as stated in the introduction, it goes without saying that finding a job comes before any training option.

The results presented above in the present section have to do mainly with the degree in which each of the sub-questions affected the decision of the dropouts to abandon the program. The most important question, though, the one that highlights the main reason for dropping out for each of the participants is the one they answer using their own words for the reasons they led them to stop the training.

Based on those data of the 37 answers we collected from the question that required completion (open-ended questions) from the participants, the main reasons for the dropout are: a) employment (41%), b) the requirements of the studies (35%) which include the timetable and the absences, c) family obligations (14%), and d) inclusion in the study group (10%). (Figure 3)

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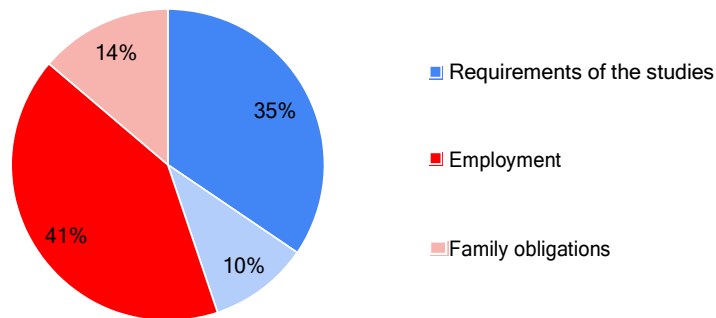


Figure 3. The most common categories of answers in the open-ended question: “I stopped attending the Patras PVTI because...” (N=37)

We can, therefore, see another parameter that has to do with the attitude of the trainees, inclusion. There’s a characteristic answer of a participant: “In addition, some trainees did not show the maturity and seriousness needed for the completion of the training procedure”.

*Propositions for improving the provided studies – services*

As regards the propositions, we decided we should investigate it by providing the participants the freedom to express themselves, which is why the question was open-ended. It was answered by 30 individuals. The dominant issues in these answers as well are the timetables and the absences (40%) with the dropouts suggesting reducing the limit or even eliminating obligatory attendance (Figure 4). The infrastructure of the laboratories and their equipment is the theme of 30% of the propositions and is often combined with the issue of the trainers (23%), for example in the answer of a participant: “...laboratory classes with professionals in business areas” while administration is also mentioned (17%), for example in the answer of a participant: “It should not introduce specialties that cannot be properly introduced for the trainees (from the aspect of trainers and facilities)”.

### Dominant propositions of the dropouts

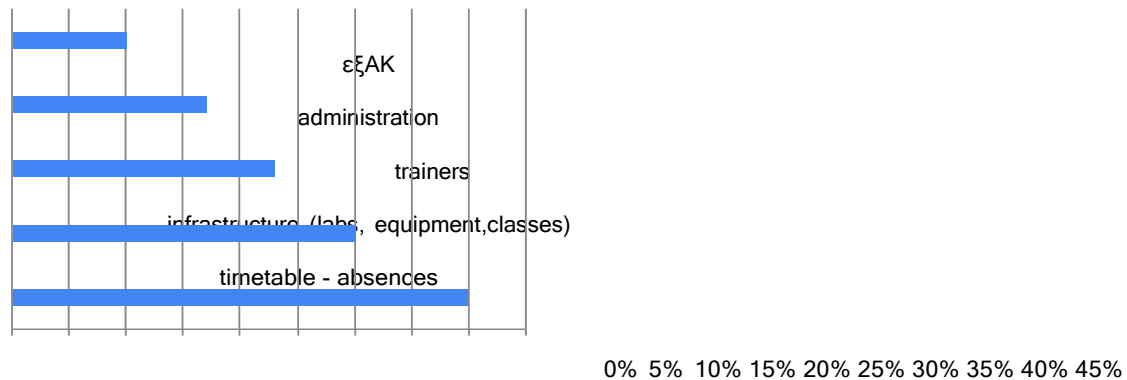


Figure 4. The most common categories of answers in the open question about improvement of studies and services.

Finally, the propositions for applying tele-training for either the theoretical courses only or for trainees that have worked on the subject. Example of an answer: “...If it could be possible for the trainee to not be subject to compulsory attendance, as they already possess the knowledge of the courses they study, it would greatly contribute to their completing their studies [...] A distance learning program in my specialty (dietetics) would be the perfect solution”. We believe that the implementation of the Law 4763/2020 (article 25, par.6) which states that VTIs can provide professional training either via live lessons or via distance learning, synchronous or asynchronous or mixed education/training, based on the Study Guides of the specialties would help in reducing the dropout rate of the trainees that find it hard to attend due to work, family and other obligations.

### Conclusions – Conversation – Recommendations

From the results of the study, it is obvious that most participants enrolled in a Patras PVTI program with finding employment in the training specialty and acquiring a study certificate as a primary motive. Main reasons for dropping out, defined by the dropouts themselves, are working at the same time, the study demands – which are mainly related to the afternoon timetable – family obligations and the lack of inclusion in the training group. The Patras PVTI timetable is reported as the main and most serious reason for dropping out. It has to do with the trainees that are already working but also with those that find employment during their training. Emergency financial obligations or difficulties as well as the unawareness of the study regulations that demand compulsory attendance contribute enough to the decision to drop out.

The propositions of the dropouts for the improvement of the provided studies and services are again related to the Patras PVTI timetable and the absences for which

they suggest limiting them or even eliminating them. In addition, they suggest more appropriate laboratories, taking classes to production areas and having trainers from the production. Finally, there were suggestions for long distance learning for individuals with working experience who wish to certify their knowledge by acquiring a title from the VTI.

Regarding the motives for enrollment in a training program, acquiring a certificate is a clear goal and the “commitment to the goal” is a motive for further education (Cullen & Tinto, 1973, p.41). As, however, it was demonstrated at the quantitative research which was realized among new enrollees in a training program at the Patras PVTI in autumn 2020, only 57% commits to completing the training at the VTI, 39% commits to trying and 4% is not even sure it will attend (Giotopoulos, Apergi & Aggelopoulou, 2021).

Among the reasons for dropping out, the issue of employment is mentioned as the cause in several researches of initial professional education and training (Aparicio-Chueca et al, 2014, Feixas et al, 2015, Hovdhaugen, 2013) but also as an obstacle in generally participating in training programs of Lifelong Education (Karalis, 2013, p.81). Employment, financial difficulties and family obligations are among the living conditions that constitute the main category of reasons for dropping out in the qualitative research that took place in 2018 at the Patras PVTI (Apergi, 2019). In that research, the researcher chose to put the employment issue in the living conditions category and not in the possible alternatives that the DZHW dropout model suggests, as since that time it was evident that the employment is related to the financing of the studies and the living conditions of the individuals and it is a fact and not a possible alternative. Moreover, although the lack of inclusion is not a dominant cause of dropping out, it adds to the decision to quit studies and at times it falls into the personal course of studies of the trainees (Holmegaard et al., 2010) and at times into the study conditions (Apergi, 2019).

The most common suggestion of the dropouts for improving the studies and services of the Patras PVTI that was detected was the change of the training timetable and limiting or eliminating absences, which was expected as it is directly relevant to the reasons of their dropout. The issue of proper laboratory equipment is a suggestion not only of the dropouts but a standing request of the training facilities as well. Having laboratory classes in proper laboratories or production areas particularly troubles the Patras PVTI and this is the reason why the administration makes efforts to reach deals with Higher Education Institutes (alfavita, 2021).

Regarding the proposition of the participants in relation to the selection of trainers – professionals, the law has changed and those that have working experience rank higher than those who have teaching experience in VTIs, based on the Regulation of Management of Trainers’ Registry (YA K1/104717, 2020) and as a result they are

recommended when hiring. Regarding the proposition of the participants for distance learning programs, according to the bibliography, the designing and organization of programs that are materialized using such methods is a demanding procedure with specific methodology (Holmberg, 2005, p.99). Distance learning programs can be designed in a central level and materialized by expert in distance learning trainers.

The present research participates in the scientific dialogue for the reasons of dropout in a post-secondary professional training level and investigates the reasons through the dropouts themselves, which alone presents practical difficulties at locating the individuals of the target group and also at their responding to questions of an institute they have dropped out of.

As the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) highlights, defining the trainees that leave training early facilitates the designing of proper measures for providing timely and proper support and such defining is best done at a local level, as we have seen. This is why it has developed a toolkit about how to deal with leaving professional education and training early (Cedefop, 2021). We believe the launch of the Professional Development and Counseling Office in every PVTI will substantially contribute to the prevention of the dropout and we hope the present article will help the staff of the PDCO that will be established in the Patras PVTI organize targeted projects. The PDCO could actively contribute to the briefing of the trainees as to the demands of the training programs and the professional perspectives they offer in order to increase motivation for their completion.

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