

# SIG 13

Special Issue

news



# EARLI Conference 2009

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Format	Paper
Session F	13.30–15.00, G-Block, Level 1, Room 11
Title	Specific Aspects of Civic Competence: The Views and Beliefs of Students in Different Forms of Hungarian Vocational Education on Societal and Economic Participation
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**ABSTRACT**

The aims of the study are to explore Hungarian students' planned social and economic participation as well as their beliefs, attitudes and views related to economic phenomena in different types of vocational training programmes. Informed by the general framework for research on civic life (Hoskins et al., 2008) the present paper discusses: (1) How do students in vocational education conceive their future societal and economic participation? (2) What degree of state involvement do they consider justified in different utilities services? (3) How do they think about issues of their future employment? (4) To what extent are motives of self-development related to participatory fields of civic competence present in their thinking?

A sample of 3633 participants from vocational training schools, secondary vocational schools and accredited post-secondary vocational schools was examined. Subjects judged 32 statements about aspects of the private sphere of their lives and their careers on 1-5 Likert-type scales. Quantitative analyses were run to compare responses regarding the state involvement in different utilities services, to identify the role of motives of self-development in citizenship competence and to explore the characteristics of the actual and future citizenship competence.

The results show that students participating in accredited post-secondary vocational programmes have a significantly stronger trust in a balanced family life as well as in having fulfilling jobs than other groups in the sample. Secondary school students are disposed to formulate rather unrealistic expectations about the degree of state involvement in services, whilst unrealistic demands are less frequent in the older age group (18-25-year-olds).

Important differences surfaced between the two age groups with respect to certain actual and future forms of engagement and beliefs and attitudes of civic competence, with the means of 18-25-year-old students significantly higher than those of 14-18-year-olds. Such findings suggest the need for further research in international context.

**EXTENDED SUMMARY**

**Background**

In recent years there is a revival of theoretical and empirical studies on civic education, placing the investigations of civic competence into the limelight of educational sciences. Both academic discourse and education policy initiatives have articulated the need for raising

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sing the societal, political and economic awareness of youths and adults (Josef & Veldhuis, 2006). The commitment to the themes of civic education are also confirmed by the Learning for Active Citizenship 2006 Programme of the European Council and the research project on “Active Citizenship for Democracy”. The latter has had definitive influence on educational research through the original theoretical model developed (see Hoskins, 2006), and its refined version (Hoskins, Villalba, Van Nijlen & Barber, 2008), which is considered as the general framework for scientific investigations into civic life. For example, this was the basis of the re-examination and the meta-analysis of the IEA Civic Education Study results (Hoskins et al., 2008). Until recently, studies of civic competence have concentrated mainly on the exploration of students’ political, social and cultural participation. However, students’ views and beliefs on social and economic phenomena, as well as the exploration of relationships between different forms of civic participation, are still largely uncharted areas.

### Aims

The aims of the study were to explore Hungarian students’ planned social and economic participation as well as their beliefs, attitudes and views related to economic phenomena in different types of vocational training programmes (vocational training school, vocational secondary school, and accredited post-secondary vocational programmes). The paper proposes to answer the following questions: (1) How do students in vocational education conceive their future societal and economic participation? (2) What degree of state involvement do they consider justified in different utilities services? (3) How do they think about issues of their future employment? (4) To what extent are motives of self-development related to participatory fields of civic competence present in their thinking?

### Methods

The research project was carried out in three sequential phases, from February to June 2008. In the first phase, an initial exploratory study was conducted among accredited post-secondary vocational school students at the University of Szeged Faculty of Teacher Training (SZTE JGYPK Training Centre,  $N_1=926$ ). In the second phase, the instrument was revised and improved before being administered to two new sub-samples: secondary vocational school students ( $N_2=666$ ) and students in other accredited post-secondary vocational programmes ( $N_3=757$ ). It proved to be a reliable instrument appropriate for the examination of the actual and predicted civic engagements of students (Cronbach- $\alpha=0,88$ ) and thus in the third phase, it was digitalised in order to gather data on-line from a nationally representative sample of 14-15-and 17-18-year-old secondary vocational school students ( $N_4=1284$ ).

Subjects judged 32 statements about aspects of the private sphere of their lives and their careers on 1-5 Likert-type scales. The internal structure of the instrument was revealed through exploratory factor analysis (KMO=0,785; explained variance 68%). The relations between background variables were characterized with Pearson’s correlation coefficients.  $\chi^2$ -tests were used to compare the students’ responses regarding the state involvement in different utilities services, while paired t-tests were run to identify the role of motives of self-development in citizenship competence. The characteristics of the actual and future citizenship competence of students studying in different school types were explored with independent samples t-tests.

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**Results**

Students in the SZTE JGYPK Training Centre's accredited post-secondary vocational programmes (18-25-year-olds) have a significantly stronger trust in a happy and balanced family life as well as in having fulfilling jobs than other groups in the sample.

Students showed different expectations regarding the role of the state in the provision of services. With the exception of education, 14-18-year-olds consider significantly greater state involvement in different services justified than 18-25-year-olds do. Though unrealistic and utopistic demands are less frequent in the older age group (18-25-year-olds), 64% of the 14-18-year-olds in the sample would exclude private companies from gas provision. Similarly, in this younger age group 41.4% regarded cable TV services and 44% Internet services as state responsibilities. The results of paired t-test show that students all school types examined are aware of their own potentials for development, because significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were found between actual and future participation forms, beliefs and attitudes. Important differences surfaced between the two age groups with respect to certain actual and future forms of engagement and beliefs and attitudes of civic competence, with the means of 18-25-year-old students significantly higher than those of 14-18-year-olds.

**Conclusions**

The results confirm that secondary school students are disposed to formulate rather unrealistic expectations about the degree of state involvement in services, therefore it seems to be reasonable to put greater emphasis on the complexity of the relationships between the state and the citizens in civic education. Special attention should be paid to presenting the possibilities and constraints of state involvement as well as to promoting entrepreneurial thinking. The greater intensity of the civic engagement in the older age group can probably be explained with age and schooling differences. In the future, development may be facilitated through content-based skill development and attitude formation programs and strategies, which make younger students interested in taking a more active role in civic activities. The findings suggest that further research is needed, locating relationships between forms of civic participation and age, family background variables and school-related factors in an international context in order to identify subtleties and cultural differences.

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