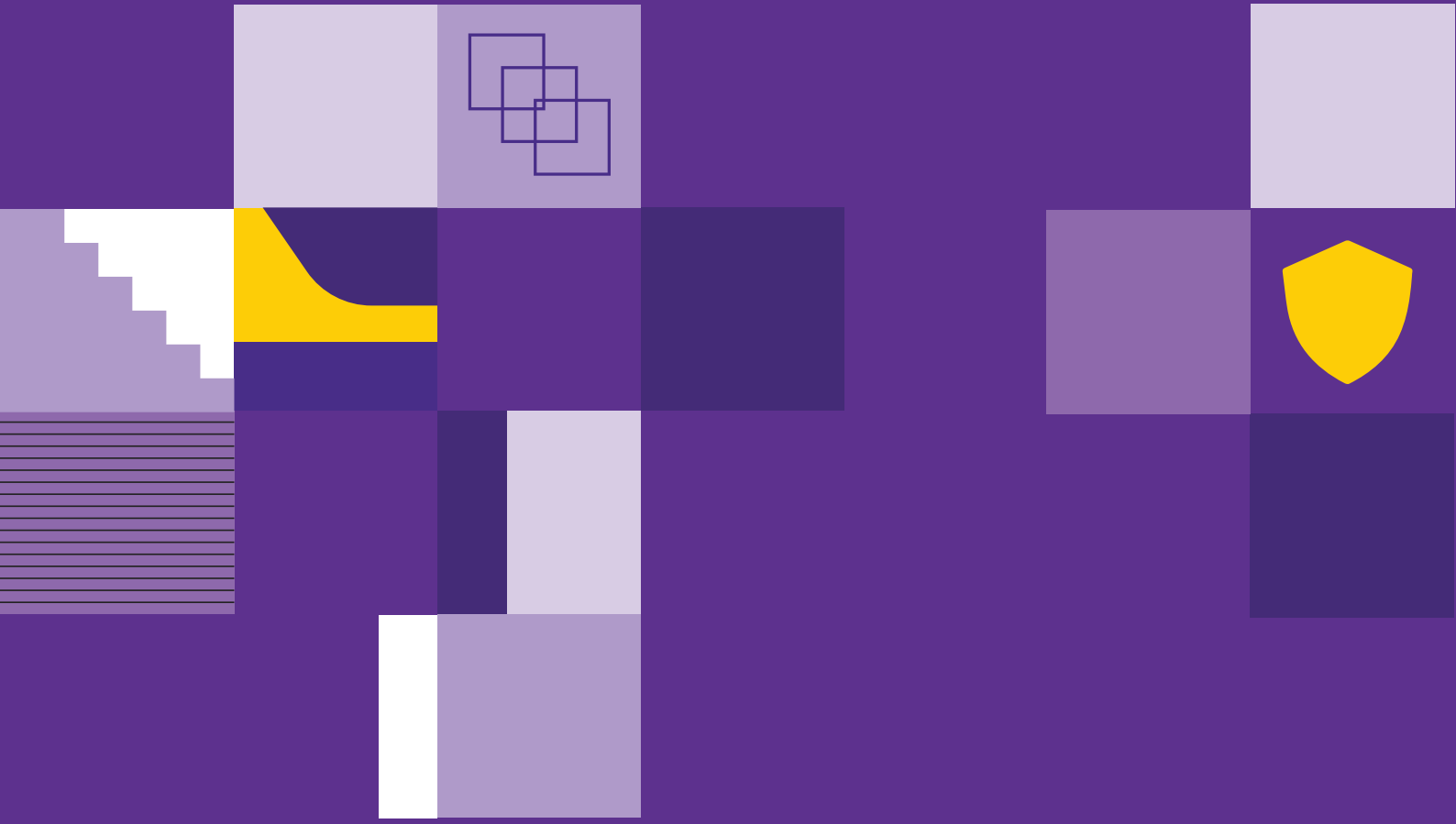




Saving Vocational Education in Lebanon



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Even though Lebanon's first vocational education institution was established in 1904, this sector still lacks a professional identity in the educational arena due to a lack of understanding of its specialized paths and their networking with the Lebanese labor market. Many educators – and non-educators – regard vocational education as a lifeline for students who have repeatedly failed in academic education and are transferred to vocational education to maintain the social status of the educational institutions to which they belong on the one hand, and their families on the other. However, the process of transforming the educational path necessitates the application of various criteria related to the most appropriate selection of study tracks and their branches in light of each student's abilities, tendencies, and capabilities of the surrounding environment, all of which contribute to academic success and adaptation.

Air conditioning, metal construction mechanics and maintenance, electricity, general mechanics, aircraft mechanics, electronics, industrial mechanics, and other specializations, for example, are related to the availability of scientific capabilities in mathematics and physics; whereas health inspectors, dental assistants, and industrial chemistry workers require scientific abilities in natural and chemical sciences. Each of the specializations of nursery education, sales and commercial relations, and visual or spatial intelligence and artistic personality in the disciplines of cosmetic arts, interior cosmetology, advertising arts, and architectural drawing requires linguistic intelligence and language possession. This emphasizes the importance of vocational guidance for young people when selecting vocational and technical specializations that provide the applied and executive sides of the profession with their certificates.

The publication of this article coincides with the ongoing strike of Lebanon's 15,000 public vocational education teachers, of whom only 1,500 are tenured and the rest are contract teachers. Currently, due to a lack of privileges, only about half of the curriculum can be completed annually, with classes that are not fully implemented during the academic year, compared to an almost non-existent attendance rate of approximately 60,000 students annually. The irony is that they pass official exams and specializations that are chosen at

random based on available grades within the intended institution with a near-perfect pass rate. These students also benefit from the equivalency system, which allows them to enroll in a university. In other words, in Lebanon, the choice of vocational education is exclusively linked to a temporary stage that guarantees success and entry to the university level.

The issue of the urgent need for vocational education graduates in the Lebanese labor market arises here. The structure of job descriptions in the public sector significantly depends on graduates of vocational education, particularly those in the third and fourth categories, as well as many executive, technical, and technical professions in private institutions that require official certificates in subspecialties, particularly factories, laboratories, service, and agricultural institutions. Vocational education also provides many young people with opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship if the process of selecting a career path and specialization is based on specialized guiding criteria, beginning with studying and knowing individual abilities, aptitudes, and tendencies, as well as sufficient and correct knowledge, to adopting specialized tests and standards to study personality traits and appropriate professional environments.

Orienting students toward vocational education is important not only for professional self-determination but also for helping students accept their roles and recognize their importance in the world of professions, allowing them to achieve the highest level of professional compatibility possible.

After reshaping the trends in vocational education selection and educating parents on the value of vocational education in community development and growth, vocational education graduates will be able to define their professional identity and their self-image.

All the above requires an action plan by The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in which the Directorate General of Vocational Education, the Directorate General of Education, and the Directorate General of Higher Education participate to organize the opening of tracks based on specialized guiding standards. This is in addition to approving mandatory career guidance to determine the appropriate tendencies and abilities for each specialization, as well as regularly identifying the societal needs of the Lebanese labor market, with the need for a specialized guidance team, whether under supervision by the Ministry's Department of Guidance and Counseling or in implementation within educational institutions. This team will work on the basis of periodic studies conducted in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations in Lebanon to identify specialized needs as part of a national project to activate the partnership between the vocational education sector and its technical labor market both within and outside Lebanon.

There is no doubt that such specialized guidance work will contribute to the effectiveness of vocational education on the one hand, and on the other, it will work to relieve pressure on some specialized sectors in university higher education that has become oversupplied in terms of outputs, while also leading to disguised unemployment for workers with a university degree working in a technical profession.

As a result, vocational education should not be left without a strong guiding vision.

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