

The Modernization Opportunities of Manicure and Nail Extension Training in an International Context

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Abstract: Manicure and nail extensions are among the fastest-growing parts of the beauty industry, meeting not only aesthetic needs but also hygienic and social expectations. In Hungary, vocational training is organized within a state-regulated system, based on detailed textbooks and a unified exam structure. This has clear advantages, such as ensuring thorough professional knowledge and quality control. However, it also has weaknesses: most of the curriculum focuses on traditional techniques, while modern methods (e.g. reverse tip, gel tip, gel polish) get little attention, and business, digital, and marketing knowledge is often neglected. The study is based on literature review and the analysis of international examples. In Germany, flexibility is the main principle; in the United Kingdom, competency-based and portfolio-focused training is typical; in the United States, the licensing system and mandatory continuing education dominate; while in Japan, a strict multi-level exam system emphasizes precision. These examples show that modern technology, practical competencies, and strengthening the prestige of the profession are all essential in developing vocational training. According to the results, modernizing Hungarian training would require including new technologies in the curriculum, allowing the use of gel polish and electric files during exams, and putting more focus on business and digital skills. These improvements could help Hungarian professionals gain up-to-date, competitive knowledge, and ensure that training keeps pace with international trends and the objectives of the Vocational Training 4.0 strategy (Vocational Training 4.0, 2019; CEDEFOP, 2022; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2021).

Keywords: manicure and nail extensions; vocational training in Hungary; traditional vs. modern techniques; international educational models; lack of digital, business and marketing skills; Vocational Training 4.0 strategy

1. Introduction

The beauty industry is one of the most dynamically developing sectors worldwide, including in Europe. Manicure and nail extensions represent an important area within it. These services not only enhance the clients' appearance but also contribute to their comfort and hygiene. The social prestige of the profession is

continuously increasing. Well-groomed appearance and personal style are becoming increasingly important in everyday life.

In Hungary, manicure and nail extension training were regulated for a long time within the framework of the *National Qualification Register (OKJ)*. After the vocational training reform of 2020, the training continued in a new structure, yet it still remains state-regulated, based on a central curriculum and a unified examination system. Professional handbooks play a crucial role — they ensure consistent knowledge and help students build a solid professional foundation.

The aim of the study is to:

- present the Hungarian manicure and nail extension training system;
- compare the national framework with German, British, American, and Japanese practices;
- analyze similarities and differences;
- propose updates for curriculum renewal and alignment with international trends.

This analysis is essential for developing vocational education and can contribute to the improvement of teacher training as well. It also considers technical, methodological, and competency development aspects.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Fundamentals of Hungarian manicure and nail extension training

In the Hungarian vocational education system, manicure and nail extension training are conducted within a state-regulated framework. The backbone of the curriculum is provided by two core professional handbooks:

- **György Székely (2023):** *Hand and Foot Care, Nail Extension* (Perfect Nails Publishing)
- **Crystal Nails (2023):** *Manicurist, Nail Technician, Pedicurist – Theoretical and Practical Manual*

These manuals cover in detail:

- The anatomy of the hand and nails,
- The structure and function of the skin and nail,
- Hygiene and disinfection regulations,

- Recognition of skin and nail diseases,
- Material and tool knowledge,
- Steps of manicure and nail extension procedures,
- Examination requirements.

Among the strengths of the Hungarian training system are its broad theoretical foundation and its thorough instruction of classical techniques. The curriculum is standardized, and the examination system is state-controlled — ensuring that every graduate possesses a uniform level of fundamental knowledge and skills.

However, several shortcomings have also been identified:

- Modern technologies such as *reverse tip*, *gel tip*, and *gel polish* receive insufficient attention.
- The use of an electric nail file (e-file) is limited during exams, even though it is an essential salon tool.
- The curriculum overemphasizes traditional nail polish, while *gel polish* dominates the salon market.
- Business, digital, and marketing skills receive minimal focus, despite being crucial for professional success.

Overall, the Hungarian training system rests on strong foundations but requires updates in line with technological advances and labor market needs.

2.2. International Examples

The education of manicure and nail extension professionals differs from country to country. Regulations, examination requirements, and curriculum structures vary widely. Below is an overview of four representative systems — Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan — which are often considered exemplary in international comparisons.

Germany

In Germany, the nail technician profession is *not subject to state certification*. Anyone can open a salon without an official diploma. Training is typically offered by private institutions, ranging from short workshops lasting a few days to multi-week courses. Regulation mainly focuses on hygiene requirements, resulting in significant differences in professional standards. Professionals working in high-end salons usually hold multiple private or international certificates.

United Kingdom

Education is based on a *modular, competence-based* system (NVQ, VTCT). Students build a portfolio documenting their work, development, and practical experience. The training strongly emphasizes *client-handling skills* and *business knowledge* – including marketing and entrepreneurship. Progression depends on demonstrated competencies, making the system flexible and practice-oriented.

United States

In the USA, regulations differ by state. Practicing the profession requires a *state license*, obtained through an examination. The exams consist of theoretical and practical parts, often including legal and hygiene components. Licenses are time-limited and must be renewed through mandatory *continuing education*. The system strictly ensures that only licensed professionals may work in the field.

Japan

In Japan, the profession is regulated by the *Japanese Nailist Examination Center (JNEC)*, which operates a multi-level examination system. The three grades (beginner, intermediate, and master) each include theoretical and practical components. The Japanese model places great emphasis on *precision and artistic execution*; therefore, decorative and detailed techniques are essential. Although certification is not legally required, the market strongly expects it — most salons employ only certified professionals.

2.2.1. Comparative Analysis

The following table summarizes the main features of the four examined training systems:

Country	Regulation	Examination System	Curriculum Focus	Distinctive Feature
Germany	Not state-certified	Private school certificates	Hygiene requirements	Large differences in quality standards
United Kingdom	Modular, NVQ/VTCT-based	Portfolio + competence verification	Practical work, client relations, business knowledge	Strong portfolio-based approach
United States	State license required	Written + practical exam, continuing education	Legal, hygiene, and technical knowledge	Only licensed professionals may work
Japan	JNEC examination system	Multi-level (Grade 3, 2, 1)	Precision, artistic performance	Considered de facto mandatory

3. Methodology

Various research methods were applied in this study to provide a comprehensive comparison between the Hungarian and international training systems and to identify possible directions for improvement.

3.1. Literature Review

As a first step, the professional handbooks used in Hungarian manicure and nail extension training were analyzed (Székely, 2023; Crystal Nails, 2023). These determine the content, structure, and regulatory framework of the curriculum and the examination system.

Next, international sources and official documents were reviewed:

- **Germany:** BIBB – Vocational Education and Training in Germany (2022)
- **United Kingdom:** UK Government – National Vocational Qualification Framework (2021)
- **United States:** State Board of Cosmetology Regulations (2023)
- **Japan:** JNEC Official Examination System (2023)

These materials provided a reliable foundation for conducting the international comparison.

3.2. Comparative Analysis

The second methodological element of the research was the comparative analysis. The key characteristics of the training systems in different countries were summarized in a table (see Table 2.2.1), allowing for the identification of their strengths, weaknesses, and development opportunities.

The following aspects were taken into account during the analysis:

- The strictness of regulation;
- The structure of the examination system;
- The organization of the curriculum;
- The balance between theoretical and practical components;
- The role of professional prestige;
- The importance of entrepreneurial and digital skills.

This framework helped to evaluate the Hungarian training system within an international context.

3.3. Methodological and Pedagogical Aspects

To strengthen the methodological foundation of the study, several didactic approaches were integrated. The most significant ones include:

- **Project-based learning:** students complete practical assignments that require mastering complex techniques (e.g., comparison between built French and painted French nails).
- **Differentiated instruction:** assignments are personalized based on the students' existing knowledge and skills.
- **Portfolio method:** students document their own work to encourage self-reflection and track progress.
- **Error-correction exercises:** students practice identifying and correcting deliberate mistakes, enhancing problem-solving abilities.
- **Reflective learning:** encourages students to consciously process experiences, which is essential for building a strong professional identity.

These methodological approaches ensure that training does not only provide technical skills, but also supports independent, creative, and competency-based development.

4. Results and Experiences

The research clearly revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of the Hungarian training system. By examining international practices, several insights emerged that could contribute to the further development of domestic vocational education.

4.1. Strengths of the Hungarian Training System

- **Comprehensive theoretical knowledge:** Hungarian textbooks and teaching materials provide detailed information about the anatomy of the hand and nails, as well as the recognition of skin and nail diseases and material knowledge. This ensures that students build their practice on a solid professional foundation.
- **Mandatory teaching of classical techniques:** Every student must master the fundamental steps of traditional manicure and nail extension methods.
- **State-controlled examination system:** Centralized requirements guarantee a uniform minimum level of professional competence.
- **Availability of professional handbooks:** The curriculum is supported by well-structured manuals that promote consistency in theoretical and practical learning.

4.2. Weaknesses of the Hungarian Training System

- **Underrepresentation of modern technologies:** The curriculum gives little attention to popular, up-to-date techniques such as *reverse tip*, *gel tip*, and *gel polish*, even though these are the most requested services in salons.
- **Limited use of electric files (e-files) in examinations:** While this tool is indispensable in salon work, its use during official exams is restricted.
- **Overemphasis on traditional nail polish:** Although approximately 90% of salon work involves gel polish, the curriculum still devotes excessive attention to classic polish techniques.
- **Lack of business and digital competence training:** Entrepreneurial knowledge, marketing, digital tools, and client communication receive insufficient focus, despite the fact that most professionals work as independent entrepreneurs.

4.3. Advantages of Foreign Training Systems

The analysis of foreign training systems highlighted several elements that could inspire modernization in Hungary:

- **Germany:** Flexible, market-oriented regulation allows quick adaptation to client demands, though it also results in varying professional standards.
- **United Kingdom:** Competence-based training, portfolio development, and business modules help learners align with real market needs.
- **United States:** The licensing system and mandatory continuing education ensure that professionals maintain up-to-date knowledge and high quality standards.
- **Japan:** The multi-level examination structure and emphasis on precision guarantee a high professional standard and strengthen the prestige of the occupation.

4.4. Summary

The Hungarian manicure and nail extension training system is built on a solid professional foundation but offers considerable potential for modernization. International examples demonstrate that the Hungarian model could remain competitive if it embraces technological and methodological renewal.

Greater emphasis should be placed on modern techniques and business skills, while supporting continuous professional development. Adopting elements from well-functioning foreign systems could enhance both the effectiveness of training and the profession's social recognition.

5. Curriculum Development Proposals

One of the most important areas for modernizing Hungarian manicure and nail extension training is curriculum renewal.

Although the current curriculum provides a solid professional foundation, it no longer fully reflects international trends or the actual needs of salon work. The following recommendations are based on international examples and professional considerations.

5.1. Integration of Reverse Tip and Gel Tip Techniques

Reverse tip and *gel tip* methods have become widely used worldwide, making nail construction faster, more comfortable for clients, and more economical for professionals.

Including these in the curriculum would help future graduates acquire competitive, up-to-date skills.

Methodological suggestion:

Students could complete a *project assignment* comparing the different techniques, supported by a *reflective portfolio* evaluating their own work.

5.2. Painted French Nails in Addition to Built French Nails

Painted French nails are at least as popular among clients as built French nails, yet they receive limited attention in exams.

Including painted French designs in examination requirements would better reflect real market demand.

Methodological suggestion:

Students could create one hand with built French nails and the other with painted French nails, allowing a direct comparison of techniques and results.

5.3. Use of Electric File (E-File) During Examinations

The electric file is a fundamental salon tool that significantly simplifies shaping and material removal.

Allowing its use during exams would make the testing environment more realistic and better aligned with actual salon practices.

Methodological suggestion:

After a *demonstration* by the instructor, students would perform guided exercises followed by independent work and *error-correction* tasks to strengthen problem-solving skills.

5.4. Prioritizing Gel Polish Application

Gel polish has become the primary service requested by clients, yet it remains underrepresented in the current curriculum. It is advisable to reduce the focus on traditional polish application and place greater emphasis on *gel polish* techniques.

Methodological suggestion:

Introduce *error-correction practices*: students intentionally perform flawed gel polish applications and then correct them.

This develops precision, patience, and analytical thinking.

5.5. Business and Digital Competencies

Most nail technicians in Hungary work as self-employed entrepreneurs.

Therefore, business and digital knowledge are essential for establishing and maintaining a successful salon.

Entrepreneurial competencies:

- Business plan development
- Pricing and cost planning
- Salon management basics

Digital competencies:

- Using online booking systems
- Digital client communication
- Basic IT skills

Marketing knowledge:

- Creating social media strategies
- Producing visual content
- Defining target audiences
- Client retention techniques

Suggested activity:

Students could work in groups to create a *business plan* for a fictional salon and then design a *social media campaign* to promote its services.

6. Summary and Evaluation

The findings of this study show that Hungarian manicure and nail extension training is built on a stable theoretical foundation. However, in practice, it lags behind several international trends.

Based on the international examples analyzed, the following key insights can be highlighted:

- **Germany:** Flexibility allows for quick adaptation to market needs, but also creates wide differences in professional standards.
- **United Kingdom:** Portfolio-based and competence-oriented training effectively monitors student progress while emphasizing business and client-handling skills.

- **United States:** Mandatory licensing and continuous professional development ensure that practitioners maintain up-to-date knowledge and consistently high quality.
- **Japan:** The multi-level examination system and emphasis on precision contribute significantly to the prestige and professionalism of the occupation.

When evaluating the Hungarian system, it becomes clear that the curriculum and examination structure provide a strong professional foundation. Nevertheless, modernization is required to keep pace with technological and market changes.

It is particularly important that:

- gel polish and modern nail enhancement techniques receive more attention,
- examination requirements reflect real salon conditions — for example, by allowing the use of electric files (e-files),
- entrepreneurial, digital, and marketing knowledge become an integral part of the curriculum, as these are essential for professional success.

The greatest challenge for Hungarian vocational training lies in strengthening *practice-oriented* and *competence-based* approaches. Adopting best practices from international models can support modernization, increase the social recognition of the profession, and enhance its global competitiveness.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of manicure and nail extension vocational training shows that the Hungarian system rests on strong foundations, yet modernization is necessary. The comparative study demonstrated that several international best practices could be effectively adapted to the domestic context.

The most important directions for development are the following:

- **Technological renewal:** Incorporating modern nail enhancement methods such as *reverse tip*, *gel tip*, and *gel polish* into the curriculum would ensure that training reflects current salon practices and client demands.
- **Realistic examination environment:** Allowing the use of modern tools — such as electric files (e-files) — during exams would make assessments more authentic and practice-oriented. At present, e-files are only permitted for specific refilling tasks (removing

or thinning material) but cannot be used for final shaping, which does not reflect real salon conditions.

- **Business and digital competencies:** Teaching entrepreneurial, marketing, and digital skills is essential, as most professionals work independently. Knowledge of business planning, pricing, and digital client communication should be integral parts of the training.
- **Competence-based education:** The use of portfolios, project tasks, and error-correction exercises encourages self-reflection and professional development.
- **Alignment with international trends:** Continuous training and examination reform will enhance the competitiveness of Hungarian professionals on both European and global levels.

Hungarian vocational education occupies a unique position. On the one hand, it is among the most strictly regulated and well-structured systems in Europe — requiring an official certificate to practice, which sets a high standard of quality assurance. On the other hand, the *practical content* of the curriculum is somewhat outdated, as modern salon technologies and methods are only partially represented.

This duality means that Hungary can serve as a model in terms of regulation and quality control, but it also needs to *modernize* its practical training to stay relevant. If the proposed developments are implemented, Hungarian nail technicians will possess up-to-date, internationally recognized skills — strengthening both the prestige of the profession and the reputation of Hungarian vocational training.

8. Future Trends and Challenges

Manicure and nail extension belong to one of the fastest-evolving segments of the beauty industry. This profession is strongly influenced by technological, social, and economic processes. Therefore, modernizing training is not only about addressing current shortcomings but also about preparing for future trends.

8.1. Digitalization and Educational Innovations

- **Online learning materials and video-based education:** Digitally presented practical steps make learning more flexible and allow students to review techniques anytime.
- **Virtual portfolios:** Students can digitally document their work and progress, creating transparent records of professional growth.
- **Digital examinations and assessments:** These enable faster feedback and more objective evaluation of practical performance.

8.2. Sustainability and Environmental Awareness

- Incorporation of **eco-friendly, hypoallergenic, and vegan** products into the curriculum.
- Proper **waste management** and handling of hazardous materials.
- Introduction of **energy-efficient tools**, such as modern LED lamps and low-consumption devices.

8.3. Health and Hygiene Considerations

- Strict adherence to hygiene protocols.
- Proper use of **personal protective equipment (PPE)**.
- Integration of **modern disinfection and sterilization technologies** into training modules.

8.4. Social and Labor Market Challenges

- Strengthening **entrepreneurial knowledge** (taxation, legal framework, pricing strategies).
- Teaching **marketing and client communication** skills.
- Promoting **adaptability** to global labor market changes and expectations.

8.5. Globalization and Professional Prestige

The globalization of the profession means that trends and techniques spread rapidly between countries.

Hungary faces two key challenges:

1. With its strict, certificate-based training system, it can serve as an example for Europe — ensuring consistent quality and maintaining the profession's prestige.
2. At the same time, it must integrate modern, practice-oriented technologies to stay aligned with international standards.

Closing Thought

To meet future challenges, Hungarian manicure and nail extension training must remain **competitive and adaptive**.

It should combine the advantages of strict regulation with the flexibility of modern, practice-based education.

By achieving this balance, the Hungarian model could become both a **European benchmark** and a **professionally responsive system** that meets real market needs.

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