

## Part 5

# Educational development strategies in different countries and regions of the world: national, regional and global levels

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## VET/TVET TERMINOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY FROM CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

### **Abstract**

The paper provides a cross-national analysis of the term ‘vocational education and training’ in relation to the progressivist economic, social and political approaches to its definition. A wide spectrum of opinions brightly illustrates existing disparity in its understanding within international scientific community. Special attention is given to the instrumental characteristic of the studied VET/TVET terminological agenda.

*Keywords:* vocational education and training, technical and vocational education and training, lifelong learning, international integration

The contemporary world is dynamically developing under the influence of globalization and revolutionary inventions in the information and communication technologies. On the one hand these processes stimulate a rapid progress of the knowledge economy, free-market system, and commercialization of all life loci; on the other hand they strongly challenge the world labor market demanding a new type of skillful specialist not only with high vocational potential but also with strong employability skills (i.e. entrepreneurship, problem solving, team work, information, technology, communication etc.) helping find and secure a job in an increasingly competitive world. Nevertheless, developing these soft skills does not lessen the importance of basic technical and vocational ones obtained within various traditional vocational education and training (VET) programs incorporated into the national systems of vocational education perceived as a guarantee of the future countries’ technological and socio-economic progress and leadership.

The term ‘vocational education’ also known as ‘vocational education and training’ (VET) or ‘technical and vocational education and training’ (TVET) is rather ambiguous and multi-valued having many representation forms and various terminological content within different nations that maybe easily found in educational and pedagogical literature. However, the background does not change

greatly since it is usually associated with formal, informal and non-formal vocational education programs and courses aiming at preparation of the learning for the future vocational career, gaining professional recognition and getting better chances for employment. VET today is undoubtedly a priority for any state seeking stable socio-economic status and progressive development. The definition of VET as 'any formal, post-compulsory education that develops knowledge, skills and attributes linked to particular forms of employment' offered by Harvey (2004) in the online continuously complemented Internet option as a core one may be easily enriched and contextually specified due to a number of reputable sources.

Rather conventionally all analyzed concepts may be associated with one of the further indicated approaches where economic, social or political component respectively predominates. Thus, *progressivist economic approach to VET definition* is foremost connected with the ideas of the American theorist Venn (1964) who sees the inner etymological sense of the described phenomena firstly in its 'calling' and then 'change' effects that are identified with a strong necessity for the stable and secure career and profession powerfully differentiated by the surrounding reality. The Australian National Training Authority (2004) also supports the idea of VET being a mechanism of providing skills for work, enhancing employability and assisting learning throughout life. The British Council (2011) explaining the meaning of vocational education and training and using the UK as an example concludes that it implies not only training for commercial, technical and professional development but also for transferable personal skills that are constantly renewable in line with global challenges and economic and technological breakthroughs; they allow to respond immediately to the changes due to the existence of quality framework with high vocational standards. Nevertheless, many contemporary researchers sharing similar views when defining VET stress their attention on the drawbacks of its present national systems pointing at the almost ever-present bottom position in the hierarchy of the knowledge and value, seeming simplicity and highly utilitarian and industrial character (Stevenson, 2005, pp. 335-336), highly economic character (Morgan-Klein & Osborne, 2007, p. 24) at the same time indicating its 'focus on quantity rather than quality, voluntary approach to skills investment by employees' (Patel, 2012, p. 227) and associating it in a broader sense with 'any form of activity and experience leading to understandings or skills relevant to work' (Stasz, Hayward, Oh & Wright, 2004). An indicated negative description criterion prioritizes VET theoretical and practical *re-development* due to the widening of its limits in social and political dimensions.

UNESCO terminological vocational education definition is differentiated into technical and vocational education and training (TVET) or simply technical and vocational education (TVE) as nowadays technical component predominates and stands somewhere closer to the *social approach to VET definition* being of more comprehensive character. 'All forms and aspects of education that are technical and vocational in nature, provided either in educational institutions or under their authority, by public authorities, the private sector or through other forms of organized education, formal or non-formal, aiming to ensure that all members of the community have access to the pathways of lifelong learning' are referred by UNESCO to technical and vocational education (UNESCO Recommendations, 2001, p. 7). Comprehensive character is provided here with a wide area of TVE

application starting from general education where special technologies and relevant subjects are taught to the work-based learning in a number of social and economic sectors of life. It is argued that TVE is ‘an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship, an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development and a method of facilitating poverty alleviation’ (UNESCO Recommendations, 2001, p. 7).

One more widely discussed question is that vocational education perceived as an integral part of education and a peculiar bridge between education and labor market may serve as discrimination and poverty damper and a guarantee for social balance. Here thematically close is the political approach to VET definition and consideration since socio-economic sustainability indisputably should be supported by multi-level legal argumentation. Thus a vivid illustration of the complexity of such debate is provided in the sector of vocationalisation of education and overcoming gender inequalities in different regions and countries of the world. Referring to the data offered by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics it becomes clear that for instance girls representation in education differs from country to country and may be either over-estimated or under-estimated that is also connected with the inner policy and role of the state. When discussing the case of Africa according to Oketch (2007) the situation stays complex due to the existing gender barriers and even in cases of certain gender alleviations in TVET girls stay in unfavorable position as this sector of education in Africa is very small and associated with low educational level. State policy in labor market is crucial for VET understanding and development; it makes VET an exclusively political phenomenon defining in Lasswell interpretation ‘who gets what, when and how’ (Education International, 2009, p. 7).

There is no unity among theorists worldwide both about VET definition or its types, yet it is possible to single out three of them. The first two types of VET – initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) or IVT and CVT in Descy and Westphalen version (Descy & Westphalen, 1998) – coincide in Communication (2010) and Cedefop paper (2009). Although the interpretation focus is different; in the first case more emphasis is given to the description of the educational environment and financing options and in the second one competence based explanation is a priority. Thus, IVET is provided for 15-16 year old teenagers having obtained compulsory education and ready to enter the labor market. As a rule young learners attend school-based or different apprenticeship programs and are equipped with crucial labor market e-skills and digital and media literacy competences. These programs are usually financed through public funds, enterprises or individuals themselves; the amount of funding is decreasing in the defined order. The necessity of mid-life changes in vocational routes of adults highly actualized CVET i.e. flexible (part-time and rarely leisure time) education and training for adults offered at labor market and financed by social partners, enterprises or individuals; funding depends on the type of training program, policies at different levels (state, region, company) and individual needs and aims at obtaining new skills for new jobs. Descy and Westphalen identify one more VET type – vocational education and training for unemployed (UVT) aimed at training persons without work, currently available for work or seeking work within governmentally funded educational programs. Financing is also possible through

relevant organizations, but rarely through certain individuals. Thus, vocational education prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers in various trade and craft fields usually non-academic and practically based or professional positions in engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, architecture, pharmacy, law etc. that require longer academic study not within secondary, post-secondary or further education levels or apprenticeship systems but at a higher level of tertiary education and each level at that having an extensive and rich history of establishment and development.

VET today is a significant tool in overcoming multiple global issues as well as an easily adaptive, flexible and attractive mechanism of social inclusion and international integration for the individuals worldwide. It is also closely connected with internationally accepted concept of lifelong learning and continuous self-development based on the idea of 'learning biography' introduced by du Bois Reymond and Chisholm perceived as a contrary to the 3-cycle standard biography implicating training-work-retirement (Brooks, 2009) and providing the youth and adults with an opportunity to create their own biographical projects and turn from disengaged into productive learners, choose the character of transitions from education to work which nowadays more often than not go from linear to non-linear or reversible ones with multiple available pathways not excluding the opportunity of coming in and out of education, labor market etc. It is obvious that 'VET is important as it enriches a person for life and it provides the competences which are necessary in a democratic society. Societal and economic development depends on the strength of VET as it provides access to skills and entry routes into the labour market. For under-privileged and marginalised groups in particular, it can be an important route towards a better life' (Education International, 2009, p. 3).

At present VET is also seen as a strategic means of 2008 world financial crisis recovery and reducing its social impact – a field actively changing and dynamically developing under the influence of global trends and easily responding to the flagship initiatives connected with the new skills and jobs agenda, increasing job mobility and new youth employment framework (Communication, 2010). Such serious expectations implied to the indicated system urge for restructuring and reexamining the whole spectrum of VET methodologies, policies and practices that may be crucial for understanding and managing the mechanisms of better skills development in the current world competitive vocational environment reinforced by the emerging and actively developing Chinese, Brazilian and Indian economies and job markets.

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