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## **Development of Teaching Competences of VET Teachers and Trainers in Germany, Italy and Lithuania**

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### **Abstract**

The goal of this comparative study is to reveal common and diverging trends in the development of teaching competences of VET teachers and trainers in Germany, Italy and Lithuania as part of the Erasmus+ project TEACHVET. The study focuses on the following research questions: 1. To what extent and how are issues of VET teachers and trainers training and competence development regulated by national laws and legal acts? 2. What are the responsibilities of different stakeholders in the design of VET teachers and trainers training curricula, organization of training, assessment of acquired competences and qualifications? 3. What are the instruments and mechanisms of the legal regulation of the competences and qualifications of VET teachers and trainers? 4. What are the main similarities and differences of the competences of VET teachers and trainers in the countries indicated above? Applied research methods include comparative content analysis as well as qualitative research methods as interviews.

### **Keywords**

teaching competence; VET teachers and trainers; competence profiles; competence assessment.

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## 1 Introduction

Competences of VET teachers and trainers and their development increasingly attract the attention of researchers and policy makers as highly important factors of the quality and accessibility of VET and its acceptance in society. Day (2017) reminds us that in addition to benefits, such as criteria for teaching quality assurance via a minimal/threshold standard for teacher education, competence-based approach in teacher training also brings significant drawbacks, such as favouring of atomistic and reductionist learning outcomes, and difficulties in ensuring acquisition of holistic capabilities required by increasingly complex tasks of the teaching profession. Application of the competence-based approach in teacher education is strongly influenced by the spread of corporate management values and parameters in the identification and assessment of the teacher performance and competences leading to the development of an “entrepreneurial” identity of teachers (Day, 2017). Wuttke and Seifried (2017) note that competence-based teacher education approaches are heavily influenced by behaviourism and characterised by over-specification and fragmentation of learning. In order to overcome this drawback, current approaches of modelling of teaching competence draw on a more holistic teacher competence model, which consists of professional knowledge and beliefs, motivation and self-regulation (Wuttke & Seifried, 2017). The study of Tacconi and Gomez (2013) on the factors of success of the Salesian VET centres in Italy revealed that professional expertise and competence of those VET teachers who really made an impact on successful training and further employment/career of their students were strongly integrated and linked with a wide range of personal skills and values. The ability of teachers to apply their professional competences and personal capabilities and values in the training process is what makes a real difference to students (Tacconi & Gomez, 2013). The presented study will seek to provide comparative perspective of the development of teaching competences of VET teachers and trainers in the context of the changing content of their work and institutional context of teacher training.

## 2 Institutional aspects of development of competences of VET teachers and trainers in Germany, Italy and Lithuania

This section covers comparative overview of the recent trends in the field of legal regulation of VET teachers and trainers training and competence development, as well as institutional settings of the governance of this field in terms of involvement of state, social partners and stakeholders.

### 2.1 Legal regulation

Comparing the legal regulations of the competence development of VET teachers and trainers in Lithuania, Germany and Italy offers to outline the following similarities and differences in this field:

- 1) Activities and competences of VET teachers and trainers are objects of national legislation in all three countries, although at different level.

The activities of VET teachers and trainers and their competence development in **Lithuania** are legally regulated in a centralised way with significant role played by the key national laws and legal acts and the functions of regulation in this field delegated to the Governmental institutions. The activity of a vocational teacher is characterized by the content of the activity defined by the Law on VET, other normative documents and requirements of curricula. According to the Law on Vocational Education, the work of a vocational teacher is regulated by the venue (professional theoretical training usually takes place on the premises of the institution; practical training may also take place in the field, for example in a training farm, in a greenhouse, on roads, in the forest, etc.). The Education Law establishes the obligation of

a teacher to participate in professional development events for at least 5 days a year. Obligatory participation in the training is paid by the VET institution at the expense of the student basket. Law on Amendment of the VET Law (2017) states, that VET teachers must comply with the qualification and competence requirements set out in VET programs and the Education Act, qualified personnel must be suitable for the planned VET and quality assurance of VET.

In **Germany** and **Italy** the national legislation on the VET teachers work and competence development delegates many functions in this field to the regions.

The training of VET teachers in **Germany** is based on the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz), Art. 12 and in the field of training competence and development of VET teachers the federal system confers so-called cultural sovereignty on the federal states and accords them the right to pass legislation in school-related matters. This produces a complex and rich body of ordinances and federal state laws such as federally standards for the educational contents regarding the training of (VET) teachers, federally framework agreement for the training and examination of the teaching profession, training act regarding teachers in public schools including VET-teachers, etc.

The Ordinance on Trainers Aptitude (*Ausbildereignungsverordnung, AEVO*) stipulates approval of the vocational and occupational pedagogical qualifications of trainers by taking a trainer aptitude test (*Ausbildereignungsprüfung*) needed by all trainers.

In **Italy**, national legislation on VET also does not provide a mandatory teacher training course as regards vocational training (in particular with regard to VET centres), because the Italian VET system is not managed (for the most part) directly by the central government. At regional level, within the framework of the State-regions Agreement of 22 January 2015, each region and autonomous province is responsible for setting its own standards for teacher training to ensure high quality VET services financed by public funds.

## **2.2 Institutional setting of the governance of the VET teachers' and trainers' training and competence development: involvement of state, social partners and VET providers**

What regards the initial training of the VET teachers, there can be noticed a trend of national standardisation and at least minimal legal regulation of this issue in the all analysed countries, although with some differences and specificities.

The most centralised governance of VET teachers initial training is typical for **Lithuania**. Here the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is responsible for planning of VET teachers training and their competence development. Another state institution – the Centre for Development of Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training is responsible for the development of the curricula for the training of VET teachers. Currently there is being designed occupational standard for the qualifications of the education sector which will also include descriptors of qualifications of VET teachers, trainers and the assistants of VET teachers. These descriptors will serve as a basis for the development of unified curricula for training of VET teachers and trainers. Currently there is no institutional framework of the provision and awarding of the qualifications for VET teachers. Existing national legislation foresees only minimal educational requirements for VET teachers' qualification. All vocational teachers must have vocational (professional) qualifications. Pedagogical qualifications are not necessary: they can have it or have a course in pedagogical-psychological knowledge. Subject qualification is obtained after graduation from higher education (college, university) or after completion of a vocational training program.

Due to the absence of institutionalized provision of training of VET teachers and trainers, the VET providers now overtake this responsibility. VET centres themselves organize the training of VET teachers, provision of necessary pedagogical and professional competences. One of the widespread practices in this field is recruitment of the graduates or former VET

students in the teaching positions. One of the key challenges is lack of attractiveness of the VET teachers career due to low salaries, what pushes the qualification requirements for VET teachers down. VET centres tend to resist the introduction of higher level qualifications of VET teachers (for example, LTQF/EQF level 6 qualification with higher education), because a big part of VET teachers and trainers currently have qualifications referenced to level 4 and attracting people with higher education to work as teachers and trainers in the VET system is highly challenging.

In the federalised VET policy of **Germany** some features of centralised coordination of the VET teachers training curricula can be noticed in the fact, that the ministers of education and cultural affairs of the German States participate in a standing committee (KMK). This committee ensures a certain degree of uniformity and comparability in school and higher education policies, including resolutions on education standards. The KMK defines educational contents as nationwide standards to make the quality of degrees in Germany comparable. Universities implement nationwide standards of the KMK and state regulations in the university education. These standards are divided into 4 areas of competence: teaching, educating, judging, and innovating. Eleven competences are assigned to these spheres of competences, which are acquired via theoretical training sections and practical training sections. Becoming a VET teacher requires absolving the Bachelor's degree program, 6 semesters, 180 CP, standard period of study 3 years, then completing of the master degree studies in the education science: 4 semesters for all types of school, 120 CP, standard period of study 2 years. The "Referendariat" (practical training in VET schools, duration in Bremen: 18 months) and Second State Examination follow these academic courses.

German VET teacher education regulations do not foresee any active/mandatory role of social partners or chambers. However, such cooperation takes place on the voluntary basis. For example, delegates from industry and handicraft are invited to comment on study modules whilst re-accrediting of VET-teacher study programmes. Social partners also play important role in the VET trainers teaching at the companies. Employer organizations and trade unions are also the drivers when it comes to updating and creating new training regulations and occupational profiles or modernizing further training regulations.

In **Italy**, VET centres play a very important role in the training of teachers. Each VET centre and / or each VET federation is free to manage teacher training. Consequently, the training of VET teachers depends either on the will of the management of VET centres or on their free personal initiative. Governance of continuing training of VET teachers is more delegated to VET providers and social partners, although recently it is made compulsory and regulated by law (Law 107/2015). There is no national regulation and standardisation of the qualifications of VET teachers, nor nationally recognised register of trainers or formal recruitment procedures. Similar like in Lithuania, there are established rather minimal requirements to the training profession by the National Collective Work: a degree or an upper secondary school diploma and work experience in the relevant sector. The training of trainers is decentralised and delegated to the different training providers and social partners. Each Region and autonomous province can provide their standards for trainers' training with a view to ensuring high-quality VET services financed by public funds (at the moment, only the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano have institutional VET-teachers training). Inside the Italian VET system, the training and employment of VET teachers in State vocational schools and in centres for adult education (Centri per l'Istruzione degli Adulti - CPIA) is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Work – but they represent only a small part of the VET system.

In concluding this section there can be noticed, that mainly school-based VET systems of Italy and Lithuania, differently from the institutionally diverse and mature VET system of Germany, often lack maturity and sufficiency of the institutional settings and infrastructure of

the VET teachers training and competence development. It has rather diverse implications for the initial and continuing training of VET teachers and trainers – from the stronger state regulation and intervention to compensate the lack of involvement of social partners and stakeholders, to the delegation of many functions and responsibilities for VET teachers training and competence development to the VET providers by the recently implemented reforms.

### **3 Competences of VET teachers and trainers in Germany, Italy and Lithuania.**

Research of competences of VET teachers and trainers in Lithuania, Germany and Italy involved content analysis of the existing standards, profiles or other descriptors of qualifications, as well as focus groups with VET teachers and trainers. The findings of this research provide information for the development of the competence matrices of VET teachers and trainers. These competence matrices refer to the activities and competences typical for VET teachers and trainers working in school-based or dual models of VET provision.

Competence matrix of VET teachers describe the core work processes and competences of VET teachers in supervising the students when they are learning in the companies during the traineeship or apprenticeship schemes typical for school-based provision of VET (also recognizing, that such activities and competences are not typical for VET teachers working in the ‘traditional’ or well established dual VET provision in German speaking countries).

Comparing the findings of this research there can be noticed, that VET teacher competence profile from **Germany** is more strongly focused on the different didactical and methodological competences in the field of curriculum design, application of teaching and learning strategies and methods.

The competence profile of **Lithuania** stronger focus on the field of management and organisation of the education and training processes. This difference, at least partially can be explained by the influence of recent methodological approaches in the field of VET curriculum design. Strong and fast implementation of the modular competence-based curricula in the VET system of Lithuania leads to a re-focusing of the functions and competences of VET teachers from the didactics of the subject-based training that prioritise provision and practical application of vocational knowledge and basic skills to the approaches of integrated training in the real work processes. This requires to pay more attention to the different organisational aspects of training and learning.

As training and standards in **Italy** are organised resp. set by the regional VET centres, it is impossible to figure out a common focus or level.

This also explains striking difference of attention to the different socio-pedagogical and socio-psychological competences of the VET teachers in the compared competence profiles. Whereas in the profiles from Germany there can be noticed rather strong focus on these competences, in the profile of Lithuania they are very marginal and strongly integrated with the pragmatic and managerial functions of the organisation of training and learning aimed to facilitate employability and employment.

Notwithstanding of these differences, there have been identified common core work processes and phases of competence development of the VET teachers. Due to limited space, only the respective core work processes are indicated:

- Planning of vocational education and training, which covers preparation of training and learning materials, planning and teaching of lessons (micro-planning) and piloting of training and learning materials and other activities.
- Implementation of vocational training and learning processes in VET school covers assisting more experienced VET teachers in preparing and adjustment the physical environment of vocational training and learning (workshops of practical training),

organisation of vocational training and learning processes in schools, independent provision of individualised learning and training and other activities.

- Implementation of vocational training and learning processes in the enterprises covers organisation and provision of infrastructure of practical training and organisation of processes of learning and training.
- Teaching students having special needs covers different activities related to identification of the special needs and requirements and provision of specialised training.
- Assessment and monitoring of learning outcomes of students covers activities related to executing diagnostic, formative and summative assessment, preparation of assessment tasks, etc.
- Advising students and parents on the issues of vocational education, employment and career.
- Project work and involvement in the development of VET provision like participation in national and international projects, organising skills competitions, etc.
- Own professional development.
- Management of students' conflicts and emotions.
- Development of digital competences.

There have been identified the following core work processes and steps of competence development of VET trainers:

- Analysis of the training pre-requirements in the companies, which covers assisting more experienced trainers and other representatives of enterprise in promotion of in-company training and its benefits, identification of students' training needs and the potential of company to provide work-based training.
- Preparation of practical training at the workplace, which covers organisation of the time and space for practical training, preparation of groups of trainees / apprentices and other activities.
- Implementation /execution of practical training, which covers autonomous facilitation of learning and work tasks, selecting materials, measures and tasks for practical training, executing practical training in a stable and standard, as well as in the dynamically changing, emerging and highly specific work processes and other activities.
- Assessment and monitoring of the achieved competences of learners, which covers assessment and monitoring of advancement of apprentices, execution of diagnostic assessment of the achieved competencies, preparation of trainees/apprentices for the final assessment of competencies, accompanying assessed apprentices and learners to employment and other activities.
- Own professional development.

These competence matrices will serve as a basis for the design of an online tool for self-assessment and competence development. By using these online instruments VET teachers and trainers will have the opportunity to identify the level of attainment of these competences, as well as to plan and manage their competence development activities. The platform will also provide access to information and guidance materials needed for the development of different identified competences.

## **4 Conclusions**

Training and competence development of VET teachers and trainers is an object of national legal regulation in the all analysed countries, although to a different extent and intensiveness.

In **Lithuania** legal regulation and institutional governance of initial and continuing training of VET teachers and trainers was changed by the recent educational reforms. It can be noticed rather strong influence of neoliberal competence-based reforms of VET curricula and VET provision by focusing of teacher competences and responsibilities to the satisfaction of the needs of labour market, organisation of flexible, outcome oriented training and learning processes.

In **Italy** the initial training of VET teachers is strongly influenced by the holistic reforms of the all education system (e.g., good school reform), what enhances more holistic and education-oriented change of the functions, responsibility, competences and qualifications of VET teachers, like importance of the competences related to cultural education and the requirements of higher education and pedagogical competences.

**Germany** in this regard presents the case of well-established, mature and complex legal and institutional setting of training of VET teachers and trainers with well balanced requirements of holistic education (attention to the didactic competences of subject based education, requirements of higher education degree for VET teachers) and skills needs of the world of work (significant element of professional experience and internship in VET schools).

Ministries responsible for education and training play significant role in the governance of the processes of VET teachers' and trainers' initial training, although at different levels of governance: in Lithuania this governance is more centralised (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and it's agency Centre for Development of Qualifications and Vocational Training govern and coordinate initial training of VET teachers), whereas in Germany and Italy this function is delegated to the regional authorities. Social partners play rather different roles in VET teachers training and competence development: whereas in Germany they are sustainably involved in the activities of teachers' training curriculum design and development, assessment of their competences and other activities on the voluntary basis, in Italy, and especially in Lithuania the involvement of social partners is much more fragmented, what often requires stronger involvement of state to compensate it. Social partners are more engaged and have more influence in the training of trainers in Germany and Italy.

What regards instruments and mechanisms related to standardisation of competences and qualifications of VET teachers and trainers, there can be outlined absence of coherent and systemic standardisation in Lithuania and Italy. Introduction of national occupational standards in the education sector with the included qualifications of VET teachers and trainers should help to solve this problem in Lithuania.

Despite of different orientation of the analysed competence profiles of VET teachers and trainers to the didactic and cultural competences (bigger attention to these competences in Germany and Italy, less attention in Lithuania), comparison of these profiles permits to develop common competence profile in the format of competence matrices – instrument for the assessment / self-estimation and development of pedagogical and professional competences.

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