



Brief note of national developments on curriculum policies and practices

Country: Italy

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The concept of “Outcomes” is not new to education and training; what is now undoubtedly evident is the massively increased salience and prominence of this concept over the past few years in national and European policies and in any discussion about curriculum reform. In common with “learning outcomes”, “outputs”, “attainments”, “products” “aims”, “objectives”, “capacities”, “assessment standards” or “(key) competences”, outcomes of learning feature in many official curricula and other documents. However, there are important conceptual differences between these terms and not yet a clearly marked delimitation. Taking into consideration these different understanding, we would like you to provide some brief information on the following issues:

1. Up to what extent curriculum policies in your country consider/introduce outcome-oriented approaches? Please indicate which levels/types of education and training such reforms address.

The outcome-oriented approach is becoming a prominent and central issue for defining and guiding education, training and lifelong learning strategies, even in systems traditionally not very much output-oriented as, for example, general education.

Conceptual, political and practical developments are increasingly referring to Learning Outcomes (LO) when setting overall objectives for their education and training systems and when defining and describing qualifications.

Outcome-oriented approaches in curriculum policy have started, in Italy, at national level in 1999 (even though there had been several experiences before), in Higher Technical Vocational Education and Training pathways (post-diploma), named IFTS (Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore). They are defined on the basis of minimum standards of competences and described in terms of common minimal basis/units of competences to be acquired as a result of a learning process.

IFTS experience has been then followed by other developments of outcome-oriented approaches in the VET system, in particular in the three-year courses ruled by local authorities (IVET).

In 2010 a reform addressed both IFTS pathways and the three-year VET courses, but above all, the Secondary level Education was renewed as well. Changes in the way of understanding learning (from input to output) has influenced the way curricula were designed.

2. What is the rationale behind these reforms? What do they aim to achieve?

The *ratio* behind these reforms is quite complex and diversified for the three different systems (Secondary level Education, IFTS and the three-year VET courses), but there can be identified common principles guiding these reforms, such as:

- contributing to modernising both Education and VET systems towards an increasing permeability of systems through the development of common principles and approaches, progressive curricula, etc.
- fostering transparency of educational and training processes in order to facilitate mobility of people;
- creating a new perspective in which the focus has changed from training activities to individual activities which could be realized, during the entire life, also in contexts less formalized and institutionalized, but equally important and crucial for the growth of qualification of citizens;
- increasing awareness and motivations of individuals/learners/students in their own learning opportunities, through more flexible pathways of validation and recognition of learning acquired in all different contexts;
- encourage an easier dialogue with the Labour Market in terms of required competences described in terms of knowledge, skills/competence and other personal resources;
- increasing coherence with European reforms (EQF, ECVET, validation) to support mobility of citizens.

3. What are the new features/characteristics/principles that these new outcome-oriented curricula introduce?

The adoption of an outcome-oriented approach reflects an important and innovative approach of describing, assessing and validating learning.

Developments implemented:

- Curricula are described in terms of Learning Outcomes (knowledge, skills and competencies)
- Occupational standards have been developed in the VET system
- Minimum requirements for specific vocational qualifications have been defined
- Labour Market requirements have been gathered

4. What is the current stage of implementation of these reforms?

The concept of an outcome-based education is high on today's Education and Training Systems programming, with a great direct impact on how learning is conceived.

In fact, the shift from an objectives-oriented approach to an output-oriented approach is taking quite a long time, especially in systems which are not very flexible (such as general education for instance), because it provides a deep change in the development of curricula, learning programmes, teaching and assessment processes, etc.

5. What are the main challenges faced?

The attention is no longer on learning inputs typical of the teaching process (contents, length of the learning experience, type of institution), but on learning outcomes, typical of learning processes.

A common language for defining curriculum, qualifications, etc. is becoming more widespread among different systems.

VET and IVET curricula changes have been implemented.