

**Topic 1: The impact of learning outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices
(in school-based programmes)**

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Explicit vs implicit use of learning outcomes

- **Explicit use:** learning outcome descriptions are established in reference documents (e.g., standards, curricula) and may inform VET delivery, including planning, preparation for lessons, choice of teaching and learning approaches and methods, and assessment tasks and criteria.
- **Implicit use:** learning outcomes approaches are associated with various principles, e.g., teachers becoming enablers and facilitators rather than instructors of learning, active and experiential learning approaches being more used, etc., but VET teachers and trainers do not associate these with the use of learning outcomes.
- **Explicit vs implicit differentiation helps to explore the extent to which the shift to learning outcomes has influenced teacher practices.**

Policies, school leadership: macro- and meso—level influences on using learning outcomes in teaching and learning


- Study focus is on **the motives behind the form and function of learning outcomes and associated pedagogies** – and how they have been shaped by **different stakeholders**, and the **extent of autonomy in the VET system**.
- **National/regional/sector-wide rules and regulations create conditions** in which learning outcomes are used. Here, the intended learning outcomes are usually designed and theories related to teaching and learning are developed and promulgated
- **School-level influences** on teaching include provision of **didactical and pedagogical tools and procedures** to support learning outcomes approach, **training**, as well as discussion with employers, on **learning in work-based settings**.

How learning outcomes are defined

- In all cases, **learning outcomes descriptors for VET qualifications are developed at the national level** in collaboration between a **national authority** responsible for VET and a range of **stakeholders**.
- Most of the studied countries categorise learning outcomes into **knowledge, skills and competences/attitudes**. **Transversal skills** and competences might be included but usually are treated separately.
- **Above all, learning outcomes are typically formulated using active verbs**, such as 'define', 'apply', 'create', 'collaborate', 'be responsible for', etc. The intention is that students demonstrate not only knowledge but also ability to apply that knowledge.

Implications of the learning outcomes approach: curriculum

In principle, **curricula are designed around learning outcomes, rather than subjects**. This provides the opportunity to combine courses, bring theory- and practice-based learning together.



The focus is on competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes), and not just knowledge (Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012)



More modular approaches in the structure of VET programmes, with more flexibility in how modules can be combined, and assessment of prior learning (Cedefop, 2010).

Implications of the learning outcomes approach: learning and assessment


Teaching and instruction methods are based on intended learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2022). There is more focus on mixing theory and practice and on experiential and active learning (as opposed to instruction) (Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012).

Active learning approaches are encouraged, e.g. dialogue and discussion, group/project work, inquiry-based methods and technology-enhanced immersive and interactive learning experiences.

The key role of assessment is to determine the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Using a learning outcomes-based approach allows collecting evidence for comparing intended learning outcomes with the performance of a learner.

Implications of the learning outcomes approach: teachers


Teachers are facilitators of active learning rather than instructors of learning (Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012). The role of a teacher is “to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes” (Cedefop, 2022a)



Teachers also have greater autonomy in their decisions around teaching and learning (Cedefop, 2010). They are also **allowed flexible delivery**, hence can choose from a range of teaching methods and assessment approaches (Cedefop, 2022a)

Implications of the learning outcomes approach: learners

The approach is **learner-centred and encourages self-directed, autonomous learning** (Cedefop, 2022a). This means that **the learner is treated ‘as an active constructor of knowledge** and not just a passive receiver, who not only ‘assimilates’ but also ‘accommodates’ knowledge, skills and competences based on previous experiences, mental structures and beliefs” (Cedefop, 2016).



The learner is also encouraged to take a more active role in the **planning of learning, take control of their own learning process and monitor their progress** (Adam, 2006)

School and teacher autonomy, and approaches established at national level

Two types of teacher autonomy: autonomy in **what** to teach (i.e., curriculum and learning outcome descriptors) and autonomy in **how** to teach (i.e., pedagogies, learning materials and activities, and assessment).

The level of autonomy given to schools and teachers varies across and even within the EU Member States. Variation is mainly on the level of detail and prescription of learning outcomes at national level.

Another aspect is the extent to which they can add their own optional modules and learning outcomes.

Curriculum integration and content of VET

From the implementation perspective, it is crucial to comprehend how these national standards are translated into VET curricula and whether VET curricula structure aligns with expected learning outcomes for each qualification.

In some countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Malta), relevant legislation and/or provider level documentation regulates structuring VET curricula into modules/units of learning outcomes.

Introduction of learning outcome descriptions in VET systems has taken different forms. In the 10 countries in this study, 2 key paths have been identified: (1) defining learning outcomes work of VET curricula/programmes and/or (2) doing so in qualification standards (requirements).

Poland, and Slovenia define learning outcomes exclusively in VET curricula/programmes at national level. Higher level documentation on qualifications (e.g., occupation, education, qualification standards), do not refer to learning outcomes explicitly.

Pedagogical Autonomy

In most studied countries, how learning outcomes should be achieved (teaching content, methods, theories, training activities, evaluation strategies, etc.) is defined by VET schools and teachers.

National VET systems also vary in terms of training and guidance on learning outcomes offered to VET teachers and trainers. While some countries have established extensive teacher support at the national level (e.g., Finland and Lithuania), others have only ad hoc training, e.g. offered by teacher training institutions (e.g., Bulgaria and France).

Across studied countries, the level of pedagogical autonomy is usually higher than the level of autonomy linked to the adaptation of learning outcomes that have been established at national levels into curricula at the school level.

Summary of findings

Taken together, study findings show that national policies and administrative arrangements have been adopted which are ensuring (or have ensured) that learning outcomes have become a key principle/concept for the (re)design of qualifications and programmes,

it is much less clear how far progress has been made in implementing associated changes around pedagogy in light of the fact that teachers exercise considerable autonomy in this area,

in many countries school-level autonomy is high, and in many countries little or no support and guidance has been provided -- e.g. concrete examples on the use of learning outcomes approaches in VET delivery.

Figure 2. A heatmap of how learning outcomes are embedded in national policies and support structures (21)

	Policy embedding of learning outcomes in VET	Learning outcomes in reference documents	Support and guidance offered to schools at national level	Overall assessment on national level support for learning outcomes approaches
Bulgaria	Advancing embedding	Advancing embedding	Advancing embedding	Advancing in embedding
Finland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded
France	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Advancing embedding	Firmly embedded
Ireland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	No data	Firmly embedded
Lithuania	Advancing embedding	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding
Malta	Advancing embedding	Advancing embedding	Firmly embedded	Advancing in embedding
Poland	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded
Portugal	Advancing embedding	Advancing embedding	Advancing embedding	Advancing in embedding
Slovenia	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Advancing embedding	Advancing in embedding
The Netherlands	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded	Firmly embedded

Source: Authors.