



**Embedding entrepreneurship
competence in vocational
education and training
in Europe**

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Online conference

#KeyCompetences
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Background paper for session

11.10 – 12.10 Interactive parallel sessions: navigating the paradoxes and solutions

1. The conceptual paradox: is the term ‘entrepreneurship’ supporting or hindering the development of the competence?

The conceptual paradox is about how we use and misuse the term ‘entrepreneurship’. Is it right to label everything that seems creative and innovative in VET as ‘entrepreneurship’? Can the entrepreneurship label hinder the embedding of the entrepreneurship competence?

The European definition of entrepreneurship competence has been largely taken onboard at policy level by most Member States that were part of Cedefop’s study on entrepreneurship competence in VET, conducted in 2021-23. It refers to the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas, transforming them into value for others. This competence is rooted in creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, initiative, perseverance, and the ability to collaborate effectively to plan and manage projects of cultural, social or financial significance. Yet, entrepreneurship has not managed to distance itself from its business origins within the learning environment, including VET.

Our research indicates that entrepreneurship is a contested and politically charged concept, whose nature, definition and purpose generates mixed feelings among VET teachers. Some of them still see it as linked to money-making and guided by corporate business values, while others see entrepreneurship as a vehicle to developing simultaneously technical, personal, and social competences that reinforce VET learners’ professional profiles, employability, and future career prospects. Still, teachers report feeling confused by unclear definitions and guidelines, while for some, entrepreneurship is not a priority. The term ‘entrepreneurship’ carries ideological connotations or biases. As a result, certain VET teachers and school leaders are cautious about incorporating it into the curriculum, sometimes even refraining from using the term altogether. Further, teacher attitudes towards entrepreneurship are influenced by the specific VET field or subject they teach, as well as their personal industry background and motivation.

This lack of conceptual clarity among VET teachers on the nature and purpose of entrepreneurship competence development echoes the results from a long line of research in the VET context highlighting the fuzzy nature of the term (e.g. Onstenk, 2003; Huddleston, 2010; Järvi, 2012; Morselli, 2018; Fejes et al., 2019; Loogma et al., 2021).

Insights from academic literature

Some 20 years ago, Dutch vocational and higher education teachers were sceptical about the possibilities to develop entrepreneurial competences (e.g. teachers’ own limitations, students’ lack of interest, lack of necessary preconditions at schools, and industry-related factors, such as high employment (and pay) levels (Onstenk, 2003).

There is a need for developing an understanding of, and clarity on, what enterprise/entrepreneurship is and what it means in the further education context (Huddleston, 2010).

The goal of entrepreneurship education was not very clear for VET Finnish teachers (Järvi, 2012). Italian VET teachers overlooked the holistic dimension of the key competence, although some of its constituent elements were present in their teaching (Morselli, 2018).

Swedish VET teachers did not have a clear understanding of what entrepreneurship education is. Problems were particularly acute when it came to understanding the results of the broader definition of entrepreneurship in an educational context. Regardless of how the teaching and learning activities are framed (narrowly or broadly), VET teachers see entrepreneurship education as largely and essentially connected to a market/business logic (Fejes et al., 2019).

The broad definition – turning ideas into actions that generate economic, social or cultural value for others – may help in circumventing some of this resistance and appeal to a wider audience, but it also creates conceptual challenges in understanding what is expected from VET teachers. By the same token, some VET teachers are reluctant to frame initiatives and activities that contribute to developing transversal skills, such as teamwork, under the umbrella concept of ‘entrepreneurship’.

Key discussion points:

- Is there a definition of entrepreneurship that suits VET?
- Is the term ‘entrepreneurship’ supporting the development of the competence?
- Is it right to label everything that seems creative and innovative in VET as ‘entrepreneurship’?
- Can the entrepreneurship label hinder the embedding of entrepreneurship competence (in its broad definition)?
- How does the lack of conceptual clarity impact the development of entrepreneurship competence in learners in the field?
- How can we better clarify the concept and goals of entrepreneurship for VET teachers/trainers, school management and learners?

References (in addition to [Cedefop research papers 2022-23](#))

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