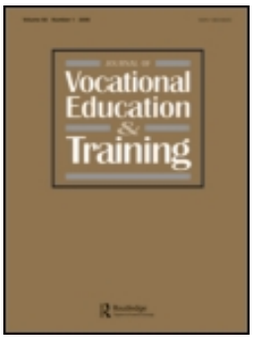

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VET teachers in Europe: policies, practices and challenges

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The objective of making vocational education and training (VET) globally competitive and attractive by the European Union has put vocational teachers in the spotlight. As a result, the VET teacher profession in Europe is facing many challenges and demands expressed constantly by the general public, representatives from the world of work, public authorities and political decision-makers. On the other side, VET teachers are often overshadowed by their counterparts in general education as societies place greater emphasis on academic education and credentials. With this backdrop, the paper provides an outline of the VET teacher training system in European member states; it attempts to understand VET teacher training in European countries, analyses the different policies and approaches adopted in Europe to train VET teachers, reflects upon core VET teacher training challenges in Europe, discusses the professionalisation of VET teacher issues, and suggests initiatives for the continuous professional development of VET teachers with a hope that 'European and other societies will offer due recognition to competent VET teachers who are constantly producing a qualified VET workforce for a better world economy'.

Keywords: vocational education and training (VET); VET teachers; VET teachers in Europe; professionalisation of VET teachers in Europe

Introduction

The objective of making vocational education and training (VET) globally competitive and attractive by the European Union has put vocational teachers in the spotlight. Despite this, empirically, the role of vocational teachers is often overshadowed by their counterparts in general education as societies place greater emphasis on academic education and credentials. This is embodied in the fact that many international studies do not make particular reference to the peculiar problems of teachers in vocational education (Grollmann 2008). Whereas, the success of any educational initiative is highly dependent on the teachers who carry it out in classroom situations. In this background, the present research was conducted to:

- Understand VET teacher training systems in European countries.
- Analyse the different policies and approaches adopted in Europe to train VET teachers.
- Reflect about core VET teacher training challenges in Europe.
- Discuss the professionalisation of VET teacher issues.

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- Suggest needed initiatives for the continued professional development of VET teachers.

Methodology

The methodological approach to conduct this research included two main phases: documentary work (desk research) and interviews in the field.

The documentary work was mainly based on existing national standards, the country-based information contained in Cedefop's database on VET systems, as well as other available literature and statistics on the national VET contexts.

The field research was conducted mainly in Denmark. The researcher visited different VET teaching and training institutions and conducted semi-structured interviews with VET teachers, representatives from VET teacher unions, VET policy-makers at the government level, VET teacher educators, and VET researchers and experts. Besides this, a number of VET researchers and experts from other European member states were also interviewed via phone and email.

The researcher would further like to clarify that data collection and analyses for this research are mainly qualitative in nature and based on a limited sample of profiles. This has of course some implications on the validity of the results, but the conclusions of the study should be seen in the context of the scope of the analyses and the objectives of highlighting issues.

Vocational education and training (VET) in Europe: evolution and present trends

The major importance of VET for individuals, enterprises and society is widely acknowledged, and is perceived as a key element of lifelong learning (Tessaring and Wannan 2004). It is widely acknowledged that vocational education and training (VET) has a key role to play in alleviating potential negative effects that demographic change can have on EU economies and societies. Increasing labour-force participation and productivity by developing measures which encourage 'active ageing' and 'learning ageing' – including continuing vocational training – is high on the policy and research agenda (Cedefop 2009a, 14).

Meaning and role

In simple terms, vocational education is learning about a particular trade or job which involves hands-on experience and technical training that sometimes involves apprenticeship. According to the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) of the UK, 'Vocational learning can be defined as any activities and experiences that lead to understandings of and/or skills relevant to a range of (voluntary and paid) work environments'. There are many subjects and qualifications that could be classed as vocational.

According to Cedefop (2009a, 18):

> Vocational education and training (VET) comprises all more or less organised or structured activities that aim to provide people with the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to perform a job or a set of jobs, whether or not they lead to a formal qualification. VET is independent of venue, age or other characteristics of participants and

> previous level of qualifications. VET may be job-specific or directed at a broader range of occupations. It may also include elements of general education.

VET takes a variety of forms in different countries and also within a given country. It can be organised as prevocational training to prepare young people for transition to a VET programme at upper secondary level. VET has two popular forms in Europe – IVET and CVET. Initial vocational education and training (IVET) refers to training that leads to an initial (upper secondary) vocational qualification. The qualification can be taken in an institution-based system or in apprenticeship training. IVET is in most cases education and training for young people aged 16–19, but can also be adult education.

Continuing vocational education and training (CVET) refers to education or training taken after initial education and training or after entry into working life. CVET aims at helping individuals to improve or update their knowledge and skills, to acquire new skills for a career move or retraining and to support their personal or professional development. CVET is provided by a variety of organisations. These can be public or private and regulated by public administration or by the market. In many countries social partners play an important role in CVET (Volmari et al. 2009)

Historical perspective

According to Wollschläger and Guggenheim (2004, 2):

> Vocational education and training followed in the distant past the same pattern of apprenticeship everywhere in Europe through trade guilds, it is equally true that with the Industrial Revolution and the abandonment of the apprenticeship system national systems of vocational education and training came to differ widely in accordance with the societal characteristics of each nation.

The roots of VET in the European Community can be traced in the introduction of VET provisions in the European coal and steel community in order to help to alleviate (through support to retraining and to furthering the mobility of labour) the huge structural problems on European labour markets in the aftermath of World War II, through the introduction of the article on VET in the Treaty of Rome, and to the subsequent introduction of 'the 10 principles of VET' and the action programmes of 1965 and 1972 (Cedefop 2004, 5).

Since the mid-1980s, the trend towards convergence in vocational education and training in Europe seems to have speeded up. In Bruges in 2001, the Directors General of vocational education and training in the countries of Europe adopted an initiative, confirmed by the Declaration of 31 Ministers of Education in Copenhagen in 2002, by which the states of Europe committed themselves to a process of greater cooperation in vocational education and training, as a somewhat veiled way of encouraging convergence through objectives such as transparency, quality of training, mutual recognition of skills and qualifications, expanded mobility and access to training throughout life (Wollschläger and Guggenheim 2004, 3).

The first review of the Copenhagen process was undertaken in Maastricht on 14 December 2004 and a second review of process carried out in Helsinki on 5 December 2006. The reviews emphasised the need to maintain impetus and to ensure continued implementation of the principles and instruments adopted. The European Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on new skills for new jobs highlighted the urgency

of anticipating future skills needs in order to equip people for new jobs within the knowledge society, by implementing measures which aim at matching knowledge, skills and competences with the needs of the economy and preventing potential gaps.

The 2008 Joint Progress Report of the European Council and of the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme stressed that further work is needed to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, and that work on an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training should begin. In response to the increasing skills shortages in a number of sectors, the Council invited the Commission to present a comprehensive assessment of the future skills requirements in Europe up to 2020, taking account of the impacts of technological change and ageing populations. The Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on promoting creativity and innovation through education and training advocated that greater synergy should be fostered between knowledge and skills on the one hand and creativity and innovative capacity on the other, at all levels of education and training.

Image, attractiveness and participation

Although VET contributes to economic and societal performance of individuals and companies, in some European countries it is not as attractive as general education, as reflected by participation rates of students in upper secondary vocational streams. Most European countries (except Cyprus and Hungary) have high proportions of young males in vocational pathways, while rates for females are lower. The proportion of young people in initial VET, compared with general education, is increasing in most of the 'old' member states (except Germany, Italy, Luxembourg), but decreasing in most of the new ones (Tessaring and Wannan 2004. 18).

In EU-27 the total number of students at ISCED 2–5[1] was around 68 million in 2004. The majority of the students in 2004 were in general educational streams: around 71% in general, 2% in prevocational and 27% in vocational streams. Since 2000 the percentage in vocational streams slightly decreased by 0.3%. Of all the students in vocational streams 78%, 14.3 million people, are in upper secondary education (ISCED 3). Overall, at upper secondary level a larger proportion of students enrol in prevocational and vocational streams than in general education. In the EU as a whole in 2004 around 61% of students enrolled in prevocational and vocational streams against 39% in general streams. These proportions have remained stable since 2000 (Cedefop 2009a, 30).

The distribution over general, prevocational and vocational streams (ISCED 2–5) is rather diversified between European countries. More than two thirds of students, in both 2000 and 2004, were in prevocational and vocational streams in Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and the UK. On the other hand, more than two thirds of students, in both 2000 and 2004, were in general streams in Estonia, Ireland, Cyprus and Hungary. Particularly, Denmark, Lithuania and Poland showed relatively large decreases in the proportion of students in prevocational and vocational streams in that period (Cedefop 2009a, 30).

Improving the attractiveness of VET is one of the education and training policy priorities and objectives set by the Lisbon–Copenhagen processes and its follow-ups such as the Maastricht and Helsinki communiqués (European Commission 2004). Making vocational education and training (VET) systems more open, flexible and attractive has been identified as a major part of the European economic, employment

and social agenda. Opening and consolidating a range of new pathways between VET and higher education as well as VET at tertiary level are defined as key aspects of improving education and training systems which have a dynamic role in developing labour force, human skills and economy.

VET teachers in Europe: policies, profiles and roles

Given the basic importance of vocational learning for economic success, it is remarkable that its practitioners so lack the level of social recognition needed to establish it as a well-regarded profession that attracts societal affirmation as well as attracting appropriate individuals to practise as vocational educators. In many societies, vocational education and training is merely associated with conditioning for specialised jobs for the non-academic population instead of a process that almost any member of society goes through and in which he or she develops attitudes, skills and knowledge that are substantial and necessary resources for the individual to take part in economic and social life (Winch 2000).

Grollmann and Rauner (2007, 2) observes:

> Given the increasing emphasis on lifelong learning, teachers and trainers as learning facilitators can be regarded as one of the core professions in the knowledge society. Improving teacher quality is therefore a significant lever for increasing the quality of vocational education.

Dsespite such activities, empirically, the significance of vocational learning is often overshadowed by the greater emphasis societies place on academic education and credentials. Given the basic importance of vocational training for economic success, it is remarkable that in many countries VET has failed to achieve the level of social recognition that is needed to establish VET teaching and training as a well-regarded profession that attracts societal support, including attracting appropriate individuals to practice as vocational teachers (Grollmann 2009, 1185).

Teachers are key to a successful VET system but remarkably little is known about patterns and contrasts of VET teacher training across the EU. As regards to VET teachers, it will be worth mentioning that many of the international studies do not make particular reference to the peculiar problems of teachers in vocational education. The last comprehensive international studies on vocational teachers occurred more than 30 years ago (International Labour Organization 1964; UNESCO 1973). Before discussing further on these issues, it is important to define teachers in vocational education and training (VET) in Europe.

Profiles

In practice the divisions between VET teachers and VET trainers vary differently in European countries and boundaries are often blurred. There are different definitions of teachers and trainers across Europe. Basically, three different ways of defining teachers and trainers can be identified:

- Based on learning context: teachers work in educational institutions (typically the public system) and trainers work in enterprises and organisations (typically the private system) (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal and the UK), or teachers

work in the education world and trainers in the industry and commerce (Germany, Ireland, and Austria).
- The concept of teachers are primarily used in the IVET system, trainers in the CVET system (Belgium and France – in France, the term 'trainer' is used for all learning facilitators in CVET).
- Based on 'content' (theory-practice dimension): teachers are responsible for the theoretical part of VET, whereas trainers are responsible for the practical part of VET (e.g., Greece and Spain).

The term 'VET teacher' generally designates personnel in secondary level schools and VET colleges, regardless of the level of education: according to Grollmann (2008, 536), 'The convention is to refer to all those categories of teaching staff as vocational teachers who are working in institutions mainly devoted to the purpose of vocational learning and education, and not in enterprises or directly within the work process'.

Role and expectations

In the Maastricht Communiqué (2004), VET teachers and trainers were identified as a target group who require urgent action at national and EU level on their continuing competence development reflecting their specific learning needs and changing role. Continuing on this approach, in Helsinki on 5 December 2006,[2] European Ministers of Education stated that 'highly qualified teachers and trainers who undertake continuous professional development are essential to improve the quality of education and training systems'. These expectations from VET teachers are rooted in The Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualification (adopted jointly by the European Council and the European Commission during the year 2004) declaring that teaching is a graduate profession, a profession placed within the context of lifelong learning, a mobile profession and a profession based on partnership.

If participation rates remain unchanged, the number of students in prevocational and vocational streams at ISCED 2–5 is expected to decrease from 14.2 million in 2005 to 11.9 million in 2030, a decline of 17% according to the Eurostat baseline variant. In the high population and low population variants the number of students will fall to 13.7 and 10.2 million respectively (Cedefop 2009a, 15). As a result, there will be a greater need for continuing VET and lifelong learning programmes. The challenge for European VET will be to target the diversified groups adequately as they have different needs. More flexible arrangements might be necessary for shorter courses, refreshing courses, more on-the-job training and better arrangements to combine (part-time) jobs, education and childcare (Cedefop 2009a, 72). The VET teachers are expected to be the core of these initiatives.

Teachers in IVET: entry, qualifications and training

In general, the term IVET is used to describe the 16+ VET systems, i.e., VET systems primarily targeted at young people and aimed at preparing them for specific jobs or employment in specific areas of the economy. The teachers responsible to teach in these systems are normally referred as IVET teachers. IVET teachers are recruited among skilled workers or craftsmen who represent the crafts in VET. This teacher type can teach practical as well as theoretical subjects according to the educational system. The only prerequisite is that the teacher has a craft background (Frimodt et al. 2006).

Regarding teachers in IVET, the tendency is rather uniform – a distinction is made between general subject teachers and vocational subject teachers (technical subject/ practical teacher).

- General subject teachers have a university degree/a degree at tertiary level and a teaching qualification.
- Vocational subject teachers have a vocational qualification, work experience and a teaching qualification.
- The teaching qualification in many countries often acquired as in-service training, i.e., at the beginning of the teaching career (for example in Denmark, Iceland and the UK). In a number of countries the teaching qualification is a pre-service qualification (for example in Germany, Greece, France, the Netherlands and Portugal).

Entry and qualification requirements

In all European countries, the IVET teacher profession is regulated via the national legislation on IVET or through a national standard or qualifications framework. Parsons et al. (2009, 82–3) noted that among most member states:

- A minority of member states (Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, the UK) have a general education requirement for any IVET teaching practice set at sub-degree level, although there may be higher-level requirements imposed by individual providers.
- Many member states have a general education requirement set at first degree level for all IVET teaching (but not usually training) posts, although this commonly combines a requirement for this to include a pedagogical course (typically of two to four semesters) conducted within this programme or in parallel.
- The majority of member states have a dual track system, usually specifying first degree or similar general educational attainment for vocational theoretical teaching posts, and a lower standard for those teaching practicum or tutors for specific skills.

Pre-service training provisions

Three main traditions dominate the training of teachers for IVET in Europe. These traditions do not have any generally used names, but here we will call them the 'general subject teacher' tradition, the 'craftsman-turned-teacher' tradition and the 'professional VET teacher' tradition (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). All countries have two of these traditions; usually the two first mentioned, and some countries (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden) have all three traditions.

In most countries two or three different types of pre-service training are offered. An exception is Denmark, where only a postgraduate training programme is offered, and Belgium, where four different pathways are available for teachers in secondary education. The training available depends on school level (secondary school, further education) or professional sector (e.g., school for agriculture) and subject taught (general subjects, core subjects, vocational or practical subjects). In general, teaching practical subjects needs less pre-service education than theoretical or general subjects. In some countries (e.g., Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal), a state selection exam is the decisive point for becoming a teacher.

In-service training provisions

There seem to be substantial variations between European countries regarding in-service, continuing training and development (continuing professional development – CPD) for IVET teachers. In some countries (Iceland, Ireland, Italy) CPD for IVET teachers is in principle voluntary, or the teacher's own obligation (Iceland), but at the same time, teachers are more or less expected to participate in some kind of continuing training. This ambiguity is exemplified in the Italian case, where while CPD is voluntary for teachers, it is also a teacher's right and duty.

In Denmark, the focus has shifted from individual competence development to organisational competence development, which means that: 'Teaching and commercial colleges are increasingly taking over responsibility for competence development by formulating human resource development policies and conducting in-service training'. This seems to be a trend in other countries (e.g., Belgium, Finland, Germany, Norway) too.

In couple of countries (e.g., Germany, Norway) there is a fundamental difference between 'in-service training' and 'further education'. In Germany, in-service training should not be confused with further education, the aim of which is to enable teachers to teach a different subject or to teach in an additional special field. This is probably in line with the Norwegian case that distinguishes between in-service training to keep the trainers' competences up-to-date and further education, which leads to formal qualification.

Teachers in CVET: entry, qualifications and training

The term CVET is used to provide the recognised vocational qualification for practice in a particular trade or profession. In majority of European member states, CVET is used to describe VET which is targeted to adults. While the UK reports see CVET as a means to provide the recognised vocational qualification for practice within a particular trade or profession. The teachers responsible to teach in these systems are normally referred as IVET teachers.

Entry and qualification requirements

For CVET, the picture is more diverse. In countries where CVET is provided by public education and training institutions, there are in general national requirements for the recruitment and qualifications of CVET teachers. These are often identical to the requirements imposed on IVET teachers (e.g., Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the UK). Formal requirements for CVET teachers exist, namely in those countries where part of CVET is provided via the public sector (e.g., Denmark, Italy, Austria, Finland).

Pre-service training provisions

In general, in countries where CVET is provided by the public sector and where school-based CVET thus is a part of the formal education system, there is a tendency to have legal requirements to pre-service teacher training (e.g., Denmark, Austria, Finland). In many cases the requirements are similar to those existing in IVET (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Norway) and in some countries it is even the same teachers

teaching IVET as CVET and thus there is no distinction between the pre-service requirements (e.g., Finland, Norway, the UK).

Generally, in countries with a compulsory teacher training structure, the teacher training programme follows subject-specific education and is separated from general education – the so-called consecutive model. In some countries no distinction is made between teachers and trainers (e.g., Greece, France) and in France, trainer is a generic term used for anyone involved in training. In both countries there is no mandatory training of the trainer.

In-service training provisions

The provision of in-service continuing training for CVET teachers does not yield a clear picture throughout the European countries. However, three general tendencies are present:

- In-service training for CVET teachers is similar to what is offered for IVET teachers. The courses have a general content and are focused on IVET as well as CVET (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Finland, Iceland, Sweden).
- No specific courses offered for CVET teachers as in-service continuing training. Usually, there are general courses at universities but none focus on what is needed for a CVET teacher (e.g., Germany, Greece, Ireland).
- A broad and numerous provision of continuing training for CVET teachers provided at universities, training centres, etc (e.g., France, Italy, the UK).

Continuing training is in a few cases compulsory and a part of the employment structure (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland) but in the majority of countries continuing training is voluntary but by and large encouraged by the employers as well as the government who often subsidises the area making the tuition fee relatively small or free of charge (e.g., Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain).

VET teachers in Europe: key challenges

Recent changes in the learning environment and in societies have put VET teachers and trainers under pressure to update their core skills and competencies. The development trends are global. Today and in the near future VET teachers and trainers should be able to, for example, act as tutors and mentors, guide and council students of different ages and cultural backgrounds, take care of administrative work, design curricula, and cooperate actively with other colleagues and with working life (Mahlamäki-Kultanen et al. 2006). Whereas, Troger and Horner (2007, 115) identified three main problems with which TVET teachers in the twenty-first century are confronted: (i) the decline of performance of the students in TVET classes; (ii) the generalisation of alternating education and training (between school and workplace); and (iii) development of continuing adult education.

Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training report (European Commission 2005) came up with three main messages for improving the quality of teachers and trainers (in both general education and VET). The first concerns the need for motivating teachers of whom a large proportion in Europe are over the age of 50, to undertake continuing professional development. The second underlines the variation

in the pupil–teacher ratios and the third concerns the need for high recruitment from 2005 to 2015 to replace teachers who will retire. In continuation to these observations, this research has identified the following as specific challenges for VET teachers in Europe.

Lack of professional recognition

A key problem for vocational teachers and trainers is their lack of recognition. Though essential to supporting skill development of the workforce, they do not generally enjoy a high status (European Commission 2004). This discrimination is clearly evident from the fact that school teachers can and often do teach in VET institutions but VET teachers cannot teach in schools (Thomas 2001, 9). Similarly, Volmari et al. (2009) observe that in many countries VET teachers are still considered a 'lower class of teachers' compared to their colleagues in general education. Consequently their job satisfaction and well-being at work can suffer.

Almost all EU country reports mention a fall in the attractiveness and prestige of the vocational teacher's profession particularly due to low salary levels. This has led to a situation where teaching becomes an alternative to unemployment rather than a first choice and has made it difficult to attract young people to the profession (Faudel 2002). This lack of professional recognition is also compounded by the fact in common parlance the word teacher refers generically to 'school teacher' and people hardly realise the contribution of VET educators as school teachers.

Ageing and decreasing workforce

Many European countries face a shortage of vocational teachers and trainers in VET institutions, or expect to face such a shortage soon as the current workforce approaches retirement age (Cort et al. 2004; OECD 2009). For example, the Swedish national agency of education (Skolverket) estimates that in Sweden more than half of the vocational teachers and trainers in upper secondary VET schools are over 50 (Skolverket 2007). This ageing and decreasing workforce is having significant impact on the quality of VET in countries. This situation can be understood by taking the example of Sweden. The upper secondary school where the major part of vocational education is carried out need about 1000 examined teachers every year. Today, only 300 are examined per year in the entire country. As a result, Sweden has a growing number of vocational teachers working at the schools with no formal teacher education (Johansson and Hedman 2005).

Lack of attractive recruitment and training policies

This study establishes that European member states lack attractive policies to attract workers from industry to join as VET teachers. Faudel (2002) writes that there is in general no system to encourage people from industry to take up a teacher's position in a vocational school apart from Poland where an employer is obliged to release an employee for six hours per week or 24 hours per month to take up part time teaching. Though mandatory requirements have been introduced in many European countries for continuing training for VET teachers, the challenge remains to develop recruitment and training policies which can attract individuals from different backgrounds (Lasonen and Gordon 2008). Whereas, Mahlamäki-Kultanen et al. (2006, 5) observes,

'Although the work-based learning tradition is much stronger in some European countries than in others, there were signs of diminishing motivation and lack of interest in vocational education among trainers and workplace tutors'.

Coping with additional working demands

Moos et al. (2006) conducted a comparative study on the 'Training of VET teachers and trainers in Europe' and pointed out a number of the skills and knowledge teachers need to acquire and teacher training to provide. These include: new pedagogical skills in line with the learner centered approach of modern pedagogical theory ('pedagogical update') and on-the-job learning techniques; up-to-date 'vocational' skills related to modern technologies and work practices ('vocational update'); awareness of the needs of business and employers; skills for teamworking and networking; managerial, organisational and communications skills. Besides, the VET teachers are also expected to take on increased workloads, especially administration tasks, involvement in quality assurance tasks and managing the learning environment (Volmari et al. 2009).

VET teachers in European countries are in dilemma to fulfil these working demands. The reasons behind these situations are many. The first and foremost reason is that VET teachers are not being trained for these changing demands. The existing training patterns hardly have components in the curriculum to train VET teachers about these additional responsibilities. The need for teachers to develop general work-life skills is not well met by the current projects. The teachers need these skills, for example, in their daily work and in the cooperation with their work-life partners. There are a few projects targeting the development of VET teachers' knowledge of sectoral development (changing technology and work processes) but because of the rapid technical development, the needs are much greater (Mahlamäki-Kultanen et al. 2006, 5).

Increasing demand for higher level and newer teaching skills

The VET teaching and learning situations are changing quite rapidly in Europe. There is more and more emphasis towards individualistic and constructivist learning approaches. This situation is prompting VET teachers to constantly up-date as well learn newer teaching skills. Nielsen (2007, 93) states:

> Both students and teachers must learn how to learn and tough there seems to be general agreement that students must assume responsibility for their own learning, the requirements made of teachers are still relatively vague. It is the teacher's job to provide optimum conditions for students to learn, even though the actual learning is the responsibility of the students. This is both an obvious and a great challenge for teachers who have been used to having the sole responsibility, or at least the overall responsibility, for the teaching process.

Fulfilling theory–practice requirements

In Europe, there are two main orientations to train VET teachers. The first approach emphasises sufficient work-based experience (like in Denmark where a minimum five years work experience is required to become a teacher) and second approach emphasises academic experience (like in UK, where a university degree is required to become a VET teacher). The main challenge before European countries is to maintain

a balance between theory and practice requirements for VET teachers as some of them are poorly equipped to teach because they lack recent workplace experience (OECD 2009). Parsons et al. (2009, 37) clarifies:

> In much of Europe, VET teachers working with vocational theory and knowledge are now becoming a graduatised workforce, although for some in newer member states this transmission may take a long time to complete against a legacy of very liberal entry requirements, where vocational aptitude and experience may have substituted wholly for any pedagogical or didactical knowledge.

Changing classroom patterns

The other core challenge before VET teachers in Europe is to adjust to changing classroom patterns. VET teachers are of the view that their classes are now more heterogeneous in terms of educational achievement, motivation and ethnic background. As result, the teachers have to use different methods and strategies to deal with VET students. The other notable issue is the behaviour pattern of vocational students. In a study conducted by Volmari et al. (2009), the teachers frequently mentioned the increase in disruptive behaviour among the students.

Besides the above discussed challenges, this research further identified that professionalisation of VET teachers in Europe is another major challenge. Fortunately, the majority of the above discussed challenges, including the professionalisation of VET teachers, can be met effectively and efficiently by adopting the appropriate measures for ensuring the professional development of VET teachers on continuous basis. A brochure from European Union (2009) supports this notion:

> Quality of Vocational Education and Training systems – covering initial and continuing vocational education and training – is closely linked to the quality of VET teachers and trainers, and hence to the quality of their initial education and continuous professional development throughout their career.

Professionalisation of VET teachers in Europe: key issues

The professionalisation of VET teachers and trainers is an important theme for continuing European cooperation as it is intrinsically connected to the quality of teaching and the attractiveness of VET. It is not possible to define professionalisation as a single model for the many aspects of VET found in European countries (European Union 2009). In general the professionalisation of VET teachers in Europe may be perceived as an effort to update, upgrade and develop VET teachers and trainer's competences so they can meet the challenges facing their profession and act professionally in their daily work (Moos et al. 2006, 10).

The professionalisation of VET teachers has repeatedly been emphasised in European policy documents. The Maastricht Communiqué (2004) identified VET teachers and trainers as a target group which required action at national and European level, in particular with regard to 'the possibilities of making their profession more attractive, including continuous updating of their professional skills'. Closely linked to the priority of improving the attractiveness and quality of VET, the Helsinki Communiqué (2006) underlines the importance of 'highly qualified teachers and trainers who undertake continuous professional development'. In the 2006 Joint Interim Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work

programme it was stated that 'the professional development of vocational teachers and trainers remains a real challenge for most countries'.

Instead of these polices, the status of the vocational teacher as professional has been under debate in recent years. The fear has been expressed in some quarters that teachers are being deprofessionalised; in others that it is thought that changes in education are reprofessionalising teachers (Palmieri 2004, 8). Similarly, Schofield, Walsh, and Melville (2000, 8) report, 'On the one hand [teachers] have a heightened sense of professionalism deriving from their involvement in online VET while organisational pressures seem to challenge their sense of professionalism and their professional identity'.

In examining theories of professionalism, Seddon (1997) concludes that a number of these theories support the assertion of deprofessionalisation. This is evidenced by 'the growing disparity between educational and other occupations in terms of pay, status and conditions' and the fact that they are 'more subject to managerial regulation, less autonomous and self-regulating, less involved with educational decision making, and less well paid and satisfied' (Seddon 1997, 231). Taking a philosophical view about professional identity of VET teachers, Heikkinen (2000, 10) observes that instead of being proponents of their occupation, teachers are becoming providers of education and training services; instead of being co-definers of occupations and occupational life-forms, vocational institutions are becoming enterprises satisfying companies' training.

According to the European Commission (2008):

> In many countries there is already a wide range of teacher training and development programmes, but it is often not clear how these can contribute to addressing the particular issues for teachers arising out of increased autonomy. Many teacher training programmes are focused on subject specialist skills and competence, whereas increased autonomy of schools requires all teachers to adopt new practices, for example in teamwork.

Similarly Mahlamäki-Kultanen et al. (2006, 5) observes:

> There are also urgent development needs, which are not covered very well. These include the teachers' own lifelong learning skills, skills for independent pedagogical development work and site-based management in general.

Professionalisation of VET teachers is not dealt in detail in many of the national reports consulted for this research, even though a major challenge for increasing the attractiveness of VET (both initial and continuing) lies in increasing the access to education, training and retraining for both VET teachers and trainers. Though measures are being implemented by public authorities as far as VET teachers are concerned, the training and retraining of trainers does not appear to be well developed (Lasonen and Gordon 2008). There is no uniform policy about continuing professional development (CPD) as traditions remain very different, with great diversity between – and often within – member states reforms and adjustments. A report from Cedefop (2009b, 26) observes:

> Although it is by means of CPD that most gains in quality and responsiveness of VET can be realised, CPD of VET teachers and trainers in Europe is mostly self-regulated and self-motivated.

These observations clearly point out that the professionalisation of VET teachers in terms of CPD is very much required to maintain the quality of VET and making it

more attractive and useful to learners. A report from ETUCE (2008) suggests that VET teachers need a high level of skill in both their professional occupation/ background and to be able to transfer these skills on to learners (29). The report (2008, 30) further states:

> Teacher education is perhaps the most important element, or means, to secure quality in VET. The 'twofold skills approach' which is required of VET teachers places a special focus on their competence.

Providing guidelines on how to meet the professional development needs of VET teachers, the European Union (2009) suggests that measures for the professionalisation of VET teachers and trainers should be appropriate to the needs of the education and training system in which they operate and should support the continuous improvement of their operation.

Continuing professional development of VET teachers: recommended initiatives

Commenting on the importance of CPD for VET teachers, Nielsen (2010) recommends that the concept of 'continuous professional development' is a more promising strategy and may re-establish the social recognition of teachers as professionals and stakeholders of reform. A report from European Union (2009) observes that the professionalisation of VET teachers and trainers can be supported through appropriate initial preparation and qualifications, and through continuing professional development; it can also be supported through measures such as teacher/trainer registration, accreditation or licensing and the quality assurance of VET programmes.

Similarly, the different stakeholders that have provided their inputs for this research have also provided their views about the continuing professional development of VET teachers. Various reports consulted for this research have also dealt with this issue and suggested a number of initiatives like changes in the curriculum for teacher training for VET, establishing closer links with professionals, developing new standards and broadening the curriculum, promoting the responsibility of teachers as mentors to develop their roles in learning programmes centred on the individual (Lasonen and Gordon 2008) as the measures for professional development of VET teachers. Banking on all these inputs, this research suggests the following strategies for the continuing professional development of VET teachers. Although the focus of these strategies is VET teachers in Europe, the measures proposed have worldwide application.

Create a prosperous environment

Prosperous environment is must for the professional development of any teacher and VET teachers are no exception. Talking on this issue, Grollmann (2008, 545) observes:

> What is needed is a strategy for the development of quality vocational teachers which not only balances policies that improve the individual learning of teachers, their education and preparation for their job, but also takes into account the continuous reform and dynamics of their institutions and tasks. The institutions are the environments that need to allow for the teachers' knowledge and skills to be enacted quite autonomously, but they should also manifest the cooperation between different specific profiles of vocational teaching expertise.

The educational institutions can adopt an approach to provide a healthy atmosphere for the realisation of actual potential of the VET teacher for the benefit of learners and society. They can adopt a number of measures to fulfill this promise, as suggested by Moos et al. (2006, 10):

> Policy-makers should pay greater attention to teachers' professional wellbeing – reducing workloads, improving financial incentives and making efforts to provide them with a more satisfying work environment.

Adopt new standards for teacher training

A report from the ETUCE (2008, 31) observes that extensive cooperation between institutions/teachers and companies is crucial to guaranteeing quality and continued relevance to practice in VET. Furthermore, it is necessary for teachers in VET to renew their professional skills through the opportunity to work in the professional field in which they teach by way of sabbatical leave. Echoing the same sentiments, OECD (2009) encourage interchange and partnership between VET institutions and industry, so that vocational teachers and trainers spend time in industry to update their knowledge, and vocational trainers in firms spend some time in VET institutions to enhance their pedagogical skills.

In light of these observations, the VET teacher training institutions are required to adopt new standards for training VET teachers. VET teacher training should be aimed at meeting the differing needs of VET professions as well as local needs. Changes to training programmes should necessarily involve all stakeholders and allow teachers to develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the reform. Effective VET teacher training requires closer contacts between training institutions and industry. This can be achieved best by adopting an approach where theoretical training alternates with on-the-job learning in enterprises. Adopting new training standards, VET teachers should adopt a training approach consisting of a balanced mix of theoretical and on-the-job learning components.

Provide incentives for joining VET

When considering issues of prestige, attention can also be paid to vocational teachers and their own appreciation for their teaching work and how it could be affected. For example in Finland, vocational teacher education attracts persons who have strong vocational expertise and self-esteem. Each academic year there are much more applicants than can be admitted to vocational teacher training colleges (Lasonen and Gordon 2008). Considering this approach, European countries are required to devise and implement innovative schemes to offer 'awards and rewards' to motivate experienced and skilled professionals to become VET teachers.

Implement competence based selection criteria

More and more, the role of the TVET teacher resembles the professional profile of the trainer in adult education. The new requirement of his or her changing role pushes him or her to have more adaptability and flexibility. However, the rigid frame of his or her status as a civil servant leaves him or her only very little room to move toward innovations. Innovative behaviour is not rewarded in a bureaucratic system (Troger and

Horner 2007, 119). This rigid approach is also evident from that fact that vocational trainers in VET institutions are often required to complete a pedagogical course. While such courses help prepare trainers for their work, more onerous requirements may discourage people in mid-career from becoming a vocational teacher or trainer (OECD 2009). To overcome these situations, VET teacher recruitment agencies in Europe are required to promote those candidates possessing deep knowledge of his/her subject with a creative bent of mind as VET teachers.

Unveil lifelong learning programmes

The VET teachers of today are required to learn and update themselves on a regular basis. Dalton and Smith (2004) point out that vocational teachers think they are too busy to update their skills and knowledge if in-service training is not part of their workload. The development and updating of work-related knowledge may be encouraged through incentives, particularly wage incentives. The reason behind this demand is that in the era of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG), VET professions are changing fast. As resultant, the VET teachers are destined to have updated knowledge and skills to teach and train VET workforce to meet this ever changing expectations. Therefore, VET teacher training institutions and other organisations are required to offer lifelong learning programmes for VET teachers of different disciplines. These programmes will help VET teachers learn the new tricks of the trade on regular basis and will ultimately help them to pass on this knowledge to future generations.

Empower teachers to use technologies for teaching

The nature of the twenty-first century learner has changed. This 'new learner' is a 'digital native'. Teachers are supposed to have knowledge, ways of thinking and acting, and capabilities to utilise technologies to fulfill the educational needs of these digital natives. Trapping the potential of these technologies for the betterment of the teaching–learning process is a challenge that must be met effectively and efficiently by teachers. Commenting on this issue, Geser and Olesch (2000, 315) observes, 'What we need is a renaissance of the teacher, a teacher who is fit for working in a networked learning environment and ready to be the guide on the side instead of the sage on stage'.

The worrisome fact is that although learners have grown up digitally and may be masters of technology, the schoolteachers who teach their future has been handicapped with a lack of sufficient knowledge about the use of technology. The majority of VET teachers are trapped in their educational practices by a lack of meaningful exposure to good information on the use of technology and of how to initiate new ways of sharing information that will help them to move forward. To fulfill the educational needs of a fast emerging society of digital native learners in VET professions, the existing pedagogical practices in VET teacher training programmes are needed to be replaced by e-pedagogical practices. Here the term e-pedagogy denotes the art and science of e-teaching.

Make standardised quality assessment frameworks

This research has revealed that European member states lack standardised quality assessment framework for VET institutions. Whereas, the national assessment

frameworks has been perceived as a helpful tool to ensure quality and consistency in teaching and training provisions. OECD (2009, 54) suggests:

> Countries can adopt alternative approaches aiming to ensure consistent national standards. These might include periodical inspections of VET institutions, inspection of examination bodies, random evaluation of student performance, self evaluation of providers and peer reviews.

Establishment of Standardised Quality Assessment Frameworks at national levels will encourage VET teachers to continuously up-date and up-grade them for helping learners to get standardised and nationally acceptable VET qualifications and skills.

Conclusion

Competent teachers are the key to make any education system a success. This is equally applicable in the case of VET teachers. VET teachers are destined to pass on theoretical as well as practical knowledge to make their wards fit and ready for the ever-changing world of work. Unfortunately, less than desired attention has been paid to VET teachers. Cedefop (2009b, 29) observes, 'While scattered research on VET teacher and trainer work practices is available for individual countries, empirical research does not appear to be available at international level'. The present paper attempted to break this deadlock, and we can hope that European and other societies will offer due recognition and make every effort for continuous professional development of VET teachers that in turn will help them to constantly produce qualified VET workforce for a better world and strong economy.

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Notes

1. ISCED 2 – lower-secondary education; ISCED 3 – upper-secondary education; ISCED 4 – post-secondary education; ISCED 5 –first stage of tertiary education.
2. Retrieved September, 20, 2009, from http://www.minedu.fi/vet2006/communique.html?lang=en.

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