
Scrutinising current VET approaches in international cooperation


Markus Maurer

Professor of Vocational Education and Training, Zurich University of Teacher Education

11 June 2025 / online

Presentation in the Online Debate «Rethinking Priorities: The Future of Dual VET in International Cooperation»

Why supporting VET in international cooperation?

Because it's a priority of <i>partner countries</i> ?	increasingly
Because it's in line with <i>foreign policy objectives</i> of donor countries?	definitely the case for Switzerland (see e.g. Maurer, 2019), probably for other “dual VET core countries”, too
Because there is a plausible <i>theory of change</i> ?	 <pre>graph LR; A[VET] --> B[skills]; B --> C[employment & income]</pre>
Because there is <i>evidence</i> that VET leads to impact?	<p>“We don’t know enough!”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– evidence often from projects implemented under “lab conditions”– not in view of overall development of education / VET systems (see e.g. Allais, 2023)

Challenge 1: (Dual) VET in core countries quite unique (e.g. Austria, Germany, Switzerland)

Key elements

difficult to transfer

- very high share of company-based training
- access to an upper secondary qualification via employment at a company

Timing matters!

timing in partner countries very different

- In the 20th century, (dual) VET expanded earlier than academic upper-secondary education.
 - VET diplomas becoming standard qualifications of middle classes
 - strong ties with labour market (e.g. recruitment practices)

Challenge 2: Theory of Change is tricky!

(Formal) VET can lead to sustained social impact BUT ...

... when doing VET, ...

- ... it needs to be occupation-specific and support the development of practical skills
- ... beneficiaries have to be planning to work in these occupations
- ... occupations have to require some formal training (not only on-the-job training).

When doing *dual / dualised* VET, ...

- ... it needs to be aligned with economic (i.e. mainly short-term) interests of companies / workshops
 - companies need to profit ... (see e.g. Gehret et al., 2019; Muehleemann & Wolter, 2020)
 - ... during the training programme
 - AND / OR
 - ... after the training programme (mainly through retention of former apprentices)

Comparing VET approaches in international cooperation

Changing focus in international support to education

1960s – 1980s

- VET the key element of international support to education

1990s

- shift towards primary education

Post-2007

- global financial crisis (→ high youth unemployment)
leading to renewed interest in VET


Traditional approaches (pre-1990)

Type	Aims / characteristics	Challenges
Sector-specific training programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- addressing skill needs of key economic sectors (e.g. manufacturing)- mostly short programmes, at different skill levels- mainly under sector-specific ministries (e.g. Ministry of Textiles) <div>Some key providers have survived until today!</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- fragmentation of VET provision
“Diversified secondary education”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- broad upper secondary education with general education and vocational options	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- comparatively low rate of return (Psacharopoulos & Loxley, 1985)

Current key approaches (since 2007)

Type	Aims / characteristics	Challenges
Poverty-oriented non-formal VET (“donor priority”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mostly short courses (also recognition of prior learning RPL) - focus on access to employment and income for socially/economically disadvantaged people (including learners with uncompleted basic education) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unclear long-term benefits of training / qualifications in sectors where informal training dominates - lack of sustainable financing mechanisms → “poor training for poor people” (see e.g. Maurer, Haolader & Shimu, 2023)
Formal upper-secondary VET (“government priority”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus often on permeability → access to higher education a key promise - strategy to undermine “excessive” growth of academic upper-secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited incentives for learners to develop practical skills (see e.g. Maurer, Haolader & Shimu, 2023; Maurer & Spasovski, 2024a; Maurer & Spasovski, 2024b) <div>challenge for dual VET</div>

Proposed alternative approach

Type	Aims / characteristics	Challenges
<p>Sector-specific vocational programmes at post-secondary and tertiary levels (technician level and above)</p> <p>→ blurring of boundaries between VET & higher education</p>	 <pre> graph TD A[higher skills at mid-levels] --> B["better companies"] B --> C[broader access to employment & income] </pre> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus on critical skill needs of sectors with high employment potential - public and private providers (including universities, depending on context) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social inequalities <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 10px;"> <p>What would be needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - funding mechanisms that address social inequalities (see e.g. Maurer, Shimu & Veung, 2025) - priority focus on critical economic sectors → timing is key - increased VET / industry cooperation → “dualisation” </div>

plus support to solid basic education (mainly up to lower secondary education)

Thank you!

Literature

- Allais, S. (2023). Structural Similarities of Formal Vocational Education Systems in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. In W. O. Lee, P. Brown, A. L. Goodwin, & A. Green (Eds.), *International Handbook on Education Development in the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 923–943). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Gehret, A., Aepli, M., Kuhn, A., & Schweri, J. (2019). *Lohnt sich die Lehrlingsausbildung für die Betriebe? Resultate der vierten Kosten-Nutzen-Erhebung*. Zollikofen: Eidgenössisches Hochschulinstitut für Berufsbildung.
- King, K. (Ed.) (2013). *2012: The Year of Global Reports on TVET, Skills & Jobs. Consensus or Diversity?* Geneva: Norrag.
- King, K., & Palmer, R. (2007). *Skills Development and Poverty Reduction: The State of the Art*. Torino: European Training Foundation.
- Lauglo, J. (1992). Vocational Training and the Bankers' Faith in the Private Sector. *Comparative Education Review*, 36(2), 227–236.
- Maurer, M. (2019). Integrating Work-based Learning into Formal VET: Towards a Global Diffusion of the Dual model? In S. McGrath, J. Papier, M. Mulder, & R. Suart (Eds.), *Handbook of Vocational Education and Training: Developments in the Changing World of Work* (pp. 551–567). Heidelberg: Springer.
- Maurer, M., Haolader, F. A., & Shimu, S. S. (2023). VET for all: Assessing the case of Bangladesh. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 101.
- Maurer, M., Shimu, S. S., & Veung, N. (2025). The emergence of training programmes for the garment industry: Analysing the cases of Bangladesh, Cambodia and Sri Lanka from a historical-institutionalist perspective. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 29(1), 56–73.
- Maurer, M., & Spasovski, O. (2024a). *A Review of Vocational Education and Training in North Macedonia. Final report submitted to Helvetas North Macedonia*. Zurich/Skopje: Zurich University of Teacher Education/Ss. Cyril and Methodius University.
- Maurer, M., & Spasovski, O. (2024b). VET policy transfer in the context of academic drift: The case of North Macedonia (Draft article). In A. Barabasch, S. Böhlinger, & S. Wolf (Eds.), *Policy Transfer in Education*. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Muehlemann, S., & Wolter, S. C. (2020). Chapter 40 - The economics of vocational training. In S. Bradley & C. Green (Eds.), *The Economics of Education* (2 ed., pp. 543–554). London: Academic Press.
- Psacharopoulos, G., & Loxley, W. (1985). *Diversified Secondary Education and Development: Evidence from Colombia and Tanzania*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- SDC. (2017). *Impact areas of vocational skills development (VSD): A project typology tool*. Berne: SDC.
- World Bank. (1991). *Vocational and Technical Education and Training: A World Bank Policy Paper*. Washington DC: World Bank.