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Status and Development of VET in Latin-America and Subsahara-Africa

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Abstract

The findings of this research brief are based on two fieldwork trips that were undertaken in the context of the funding initiative “Internationalisation of VET” of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In 2017 and 2018, we explored the status and development of VET in five Latin-American countries (Costa-Rica, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil) and five countries in Subsahara-Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Kenia, Botswana and Namibia). The findings of this paper are based on a large number of expert interviews, on-sight visits in training institutions and document analysis and provide insights into five central dimensions of VET (social partner cooperation in VET, learning in the process of work, acceptance of national standards, qualified teachers and trainers, and institutionalized VET research and consultancy) in the respective countries.

Keywords

VET; Subsahara-Africa; Latin-America; fieldwork-based research

1 Introduction

A team of researchers from Osnabrück University, the University of Bremen and their cooperation partner, the Institute for Innovation and Technology Berlin, is currently commissioned with research that accompanies the funding initiative “Internationalisation of VET” of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The programme aims at the internationalization of German VET providers and simultaneously intends to support VET reforms in selected cooperation countries, and funds cooperation projects in the area of VET between German and international partners to achieve these ends. Besides evaluating the funding programme at large, and contributing to international VET research, the team of the concomitant research is also tasked with providing feedback to the ministry that can be used as an input for the formulation of future funding programmes for the “Internationalisation of VET”.

In 2017 and 2018, the task of the concomitant research was to explore the status and development of VET in five Latin-American countries (Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil) and five countries in Subsahara-Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Botswana and Namibia), as both regions are of strategic interest for the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Hence, the research team undertook two fieldwork trips to these regions and conducted a large number of expert interviews, on-sight visits in training institutions and document analysis. Below, we present our fieldwork in more detail. Subsequently, in a stylized fashion, we summarize the main findings on the current status and development of VET in those countries we visited, and thus provide insights into cases, which are not frequently studied in the contemporary mainstream of VET research.



1.2 “Setting the scene” – Context, approach and methods used in our fieldwork in Latin-America and Sub Sahara-Africa

In the last decade, and not least due to increased youth unemployment in wake of the global economic crisis of 2008 and its aftermath, dual training models have gained prominence in debates among VET practitioners, scholars and politicians alike. Germany’s model of dual apprenticeship has featured prominently in this discourse, which in turn intensified the cooperation between Germany and other national governments in the field of VET. This led to a strategic reorientation of international VET cooperation on part of the German government and culminated in its strategy of “VET cooperation from a single source” (Berufsbildungszusammenarbeit aus einer Hand”) (Deutscher Bundestag 2013). In this strategy, the German government has identified five core principles of its vocational training system, which are intended to feature centrally in VET cooperation with international partner governments:

1. Cooperation between social partners, business organisations and the state
2. Learning in the process of work
3. Acceptance of national standards
4. Qualified teachers and trainers
5. Institutionalised VET research and consultancy

As the team of the concomitant research was given the task to explore the status and development of VET in selected countries in Latin-America and Sub Sahara-Africa in order to shed light on the potential for future cooperation with German partners in the area of VET, the abovementioned five “core principles” served as analytical guiding posts for our research. Moreover, these principles are also closely related to building blocks of VET systems as identified by recent skill formation typologies (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012, Pilz 2017).

In late 2017, we undertook a first study visit covering five countries in Latin-America: Costa-Rica, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil. Subsequently, in the beginning of 2018, we visited Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Botswana and Namibia as five exemplary cases of VET development and its future perspectives in Sub Sahara-Africa. In the latter cases, we conducted 33 expert interviews, visited 6 training facilities and attended three group-discussions/workshops at three local German Chambers of Commerce. In the Latin-American countries, we conducted 33 expert interviews, visited 4 training facilities and attended three group-discussions/workshops at three local German Chambers of Commerce. We selected our interviewees in order to represent a broad range of VET – and international VET-cooperation – stakeholders and to gain insights into their different perspectives on the status quo of VET in the respective country. Among our interviewees were representatives of individual firms, training providers, German embassies, the local German Chambers of Commerce, government ministries responsible for VET, national training authorities, vocational schools, employers’ associations and VET researchers.

Upon our return, we triangulated the gathered evidence with further primary and secondary sources to substantiate and verify our findings. Short versions of country reports have already been published (DLR 2018) and longer reports on each country as well as a cross-case comparison are forthcoming in an edited volume in 2019 (Baumann et al. forthcoming).

Due to space constraints, we will now present the central findings for the ten cases in two tables listing important aspects of each country’s VET system regarding the abovementioned five core principles. Subsequently, we highlight selected findings in a cross-case comparison.

2 Findings for VET in Latin-American countries

Table 1 Selected findings in light of “five core principles” for Latin-America

	Costa-Rica	Colombia	Peru	Chile	Brazil
Cooperation between social partners, business organisations and the state	Social dialogue between employers, unions and the government at the national level (consultative), but conflictive No institutionalized tripartite governance of VET	Sectoral associations involved in curriculum development Firms co-finance training via a levy Unions are weak and have little power in VET politics	Social partners not included in VET politics at the national level	In 2016 creation of the Consejo Asesor de Formación Técnico-Profesional at national level Stakeholders have little experience in cooperation, but realistic potential for improvement	Existence of two well-regulated systems: Public system and private S-system (SENAI) Strong employer involvement in S-system (SENAI)
Learning in the process of work	Learners in companies usually have the status of interns Revised regulations needed for on-the-job-training and apprentices	Two separate systems (technico/traditional system) Practical component stronger in the technico programmes	New laws of 2016/2017 have established rules for a dual training model	Mismatch between training system and labour market needs Firms are mostly not involved in training	Law mandates employers to give apprentices employee status Regulation of on-the-job training component needs to be systematized
Acceptance of national standards	Over 500 different VET programmes Little cross-programme standardization confusing for companies and learners alike	Standardisation is relatively high Certificates are accepted on the labour market Certificates not accepted in institutions of tertiary education	Due to the size of the informal sector, regulations for the recognition of prior learning are needed No cooperation between employers and the state in devising curricula	Curricula are outdated and have little connection to labour market needs High reform pressure due to the creation of new VET-providing institutions	A variety of flexible and codified standards for theoretical and practical training exists Regulation of practical training could be strengthened
Qualified teachers and trainers	No common and binding profile for VET teachers No specific training for firms' training personnel	No specific training for VET teachers in general education Training of practical instructors with SENA	No specific training for VET teachers in general education	Teaching personnel needs re-training for teaching practical subjects, outdated knowledge of industry standards/needs	Training personnel a current priority in VET policy No specialized public programmes for VET teachers
Institutionalised VET research and consultancy	No institutionalised VET research	Little VET research at universities and research institutes VET research by SENA	No institutionalised VET research	No institutionalised VET research apart from individual scholars	INEP as a national institute for VET research Additional research at many universities and SENAI
Source	Baumann/Láscarez Smith (2018)	Peters/Gessler (2018)	Angles/Gessler (2018)	Gessler et al. (2018)	Bauer (2018)

3 Findings for VET in Sub Sahara-African countries

Table 2 Selected findings in light of “five core principles” for Sub Sahara-Africa

	Nigeria	Ghana	Kenia	Botswana	Namibia
Cooperation between social partners, business organisations and the state	Very fragmented system due to the weakness of the central state Private initiatives with social partner involvement, mostly at the regional level	COTVET and <i>Sector Skills councils</i> as potentially important actors to increase cooperation Main challenge are industry involvement and acceptance	In theory, cross-class cooperation at national level In practise, union involvement very limited Interests of informal sector not represented	Little cooperation between government and further actors apart from pilot projects Potentially bigger future role for cross-class <i>Sector Skills Committees</i>	Two parallel systems: public partner involvement (NTA) and private, industry-driven system Strong role of private consultants in curriculum development
Learning in the process of work	Rather strong willingness of firms to invest in training No statutory regulations for learning at work	Parallel systems of private and public VET provision Infrastructure for practical training in the public system is outdated	VET is not geared towards labour market needs Despite industry involvement at governance level, limited willingness of firms to train	VET is mostly school-based Infrastructure for practical training is outdated	Dual training models have been strengthened since 2017, employers contribute to training via a levy Yet, in reality very limited capacities for practical training
Acceptance of national standards	New NQF since 2018 Mismatch between training system and labour market needs	Standards are generally accepted Yet, standards and provisions for practical learning in VET are of low quality	Since 2010 reform towards CBET Slow development due to a limited number of experts in CBET implementation	Since 2013 new NQF Industry and practitioner input in curriculum development is very limited, making VET content mismatching to labour market needs	Standards are generally accepted Yet, standards and provisions for learning in VET are of low quality
Qualified teachers and trainers	No systematic education of training personnel for practical skills development No specific regulations for trainers	Teacher and development are central challenges for Ghana's VET system VET teachers have low reputation compared to university lecturers	Increased training needs for VET personnel in wake of CBET reforms No systematic education of training personnel for practical skills development	VET teachers have comparatively low salaries, making it hard to attract skilled practitioners as instructors No specific training for VET teachers in general education	Limited number of teachers allowed to train VET above level 5 of NQF Most instructors for higher training are recruited from abroad
Institutionalised VET research and consultancy	Very limited VET research, despite country size	Very limited VET research capacities	Very limited VET research capacities	No institutionalised VET research	No institutionalized VET research, but initiatives to create a faculty for VET at NUST
Source	Krichewsky-Wegener/Vossiek (2018)	Frommberger/Krichewsky-Wegener (2018)	Baumann (2018)	Vossiek (2018)	Gessler et al. (2018)

4 Conclusion by way of comparative discussion

Our fieldwork-based research on the training systems of ten Countries in Latin America and Sub-Sahara Africa has yielded some important insights on the current status and development of VET in countries, which are usually not studied in the contemporary mainstream of VET research. In general, we found that there are considerable differences between the two regions, but that the variation within regions is also quite large. However, we also have some preliminary evidence on broad similarities for selected aspects of the countries' VET systems.

In terms of differences, while most of the studied African countries have, or are close to establishing, a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), in the visited Latin American countries only Costa Rica had a NQF and Colombia was close to establishing one at the time of our visit. Moreover, our findings point to a large variety in terms of firm involvement in VET: While firm involvement is not as strong as in typical cases of collective skill formation, the cases of Brazil, Namibia and some regional initiatives in Nigeria show that firm involvement can be stronger than usually expected, but at the same time social dialogue between employers, governments and unions is rather weak at the national level in all cases. Finally, while Namibia and Peru have recently established new laws for dual training models, the regulation of practical training is often stifled by lack of industry involvement or the inadequacy of training facilities. One notable exception is training by SENATI in Peru, which is considered to have a very high standard of practical training.

What has emerged as a cross-cutting topic from our research was the low societal status that VET has in all cases when compared to higher education. One central question for future research could therefore consist in the identification of VET programs that are held in high esteem in the countries under study and to identify factors, which make them attractive to learners, parents and companies. Finally, in terms of VET research and apart from INEP in Brazil and SENA in Colombia, we were often confronted with rather scarcely populated research landscapes, in which only a few individual researchers or government departments conduct analyses of their VET system and labor markets. In this context, building up research capacities and systematic international knowledge exchange between researchers will have to be a priority for broadening and deepening our knowledge on the status and development of VET in these cases, which are unduly neglected by international VET research.

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Biographical notes

Dr Janis Vossiek is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Osnabrück. His main fields of research are comparative political economy and policy analysis. His work currently focuses on the international comparison of vocational training systems and training reforms.