

Investment patterns in vocational Adult Education and Training in international comparison. Differences of results by distinguishing and combining FED and NFE

Elisabeth Reichart & Katrin Kaufmann

The distinction between formal (FED) and non-formal education (NFE) and informal learning is common in research and a core element of European statistics on Adult Education. However, operationalisations of these concepts vary with unclear consequences for the comparability of results between datasets and countries (Behringer, Schönfeld 2014). Even within the Adult Education Survey (AES), where the assessment is based on the European classification of learning activities (CLA, European Commission 2006), the concrete categorisation of learning activities as FED or NFE is country-specific. According to the CLA, FED activities are defined as leading to credit-based qualifications that are mapped to the national qualification framework; however, countries differ with respect to the extent of formalisation of learning activities. Consequently, a similar activity might be categorised as FED in one country and as NFE in another. This is also reflected by a shorter mean duration of FED activities in some countries where participation rates in FED are comparably high (Hefler, Markowitsch 2013). Therefore, it is recommended to combine FED and NFE in comparative research (Behringer, Schönfeld 2014).

In order to explore, whether and in what way the results differ, the aim of this contribution is to systematically contrast analyses of NFE activities only, FED activities only, and FED and NFE activities combined. Our substantive research interest is directed towards investment structures in vocational Adult Education and Training (AET) for employed persons. Overall, employers are the primary sources supporting AET. In Europe, at least 50% of employed participants in AET are sponsored fully or partly by employers (Brunello et al. 2007). Furthermore, it has been shown that, besides employer and self-financed activities, a remarkable share of training is co-financed by employer and employee, and that determinants of participation differ between these three segments (Kaufmann/Widany 2013), and also in international comparison (Kaufmann 2013). The AES 2011/12 allows to distinguish even another segment of co-financing AET, combining investments of employers, employees and public actors (Kaufmann, Reichart 2014).

Theoretically, we draw on the Varieties-of-Capitalism approach that, in an extended version, distinguishes four types of welfare production regimes with differential labour market characteristics and skill formation systems: liberal market economies (LME), coordinated market economies (CME), Mediterranean countries, and dependent market economies (DME) (Hall, Soskice 2001; Estevez-Abé et al. 2001; Bohle, Greskovits 2007; Nölke, Vliegenthart 2009). Recent analyses, in which 11 countries or country groups were compared in terms of investment and participation patterns in NFE, overall support the theoretical assumptions. However, there were also some unexpected results (e.g. for the UK) that point to effects of country-specific classification of FED and NFE (Kaufmann, Reichart 2014).

Drawing on these results, this contribution focuses on differences in patterns of investments in vocational AET and corresponding participation rates in selected countries or country groups that represent different welfare production regimes: Nordic Countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland) and Austria/Germany as representative for CME, Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) for DME, France and Spain as Mediterranean countries, and the UK as a representative for LME. The analyses are based on data of the AES 2011/12 and the sample is restricted to employed persons and the above mentioned countries. We will conduct analyses for NFE activities only, FED activities only, and FED and NFE activities combined and discuss whether differences in results are likely to be attributed to country-specific definitions and understandings of FED and NFE. We will further explore the analytical potential of using an activity-based data set to discern activity characteristics (e.g. patterns of duration, reasons, and participants) with descriptive and multivariate methods. Finally, we will discuss the implications of using either set of activities and draw conclusions for further research.

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Authors(s) of proposal including affiliations and email addresses:

Dr. Elisabeth Reichart, German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning, Bonn; reichart@die-bonn.de

Ass. Prof. Dr. Katrin Kaufmann, Freie Universität Berlin, Department of Education and Psychology, Educational Research on Further Education; katrin.kaufmann@fu-berlin.de

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