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The multifaceted role of learning outcomes across the continuum of teacher education: An approach to empower VET teachers and trainers

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THE MULTIFACETED ROLE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES ACROSS THE CONTINUUM OF TEACHER EDUCATION

An approach to empower
VET teachers and trainers

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the learning outcomes approach has progressively become a cornerstone of European education, training and employment policy. All European countries now actively use learning outcomes, or competence statements, when defining, reviewing, and refining the content and profile of their education, training and skills development systems (Cedefop, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2017, 2021, 2022a). Defined as statements of what a learner knows, understands, and can do upon completion of a learning process (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2008), learning outcomes have supported the shift from input-based models of education to output-oriented, learner-centred approaches. Learning outcomes can operate as all-purpose mechanisms, adaptable to a variety of educational and policy needs. This shift is particularly relevant in vocational education and training (VET), where outcomes-based frameworks guide the design of qualifications, curricula, assessment, and validation processes. The transition to learning outcomes has become a key component of broader national initiatives aimed at reforming and modernising education and training systems, including their institutions and the associated teaching and learning methods.

Cedefop's ongoing project [The shift to learning outcomes; rhetoric or reality?](#) explores this transformative shift in the context of initial VET (IVET). Its first two publications focus on the influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools (Cedefop, 2024a) and on teaching practices in school-based programmes (Cedefop, 2025). Subsequent publications will address the effects of learning outcomes on work and practice-based IVET, as well as assessment. Findings to date suggest that VET teachers and trainers are increasingly expected to utilise learning outcomes, shaping teaching and learning in ways that respond to diverse learners' needs and labour market demands.

Cedefop's (2024a) research reveals that while national policies across European countries promote learning outcomes as a key element of VET, the extent to which they influence classroom teaching practices varies (see also Cedefop, 2015). It highlights that teachers in most countries show autonomy in choosing teaching methods aligned with learning outcomes, but some may face challenges due to unclear or restrictive learning outcome definitions, as well as lack of a clear understanding of the appropriate pedagogies and assessment methods that support them. Moreover, there is a noted need for better alignment between national policies, school-level practices, and teacher preparation to

ensure more effective implementation of learning outcomes in VET. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the context of teacher continuing professional development (CPD), which tends to be less structured and regulated than initial teacher education (ITE) (Cedefop, 2022b, 2024a), despite its importance being emphasised at the EU level. The disparity is even greater in the case of VET trainers, whose initial and ongoing training opportunities are generally more limited than those of VET teachers (Cedefop, 2022b, 2024a).

Beyond their explicit inclusion in teacher education curricula, learning outcomes influence the professional development of VET teachers and trainers through a range of indirect pathways. Often referred to as the ‘glue’ that connects diverse policy tools and initiatives in education and training (Cedefop, 2024b), learning outcomes serve multiple functions across different levels and domains. They inform curriculum and qualification design, underpin assessment strategies, and support the recognition of prior learning (Cedefop, 2024b, p. 9). In the context of teacher education, these purposes imply shaping national competence frameworks, teacher appraisal mechanisms, career progression pathways, and the recognition of in-service training.

Despite this multifunctionality, the role of learning outcomes in teacher professional development remains underexplored. Existing studies have concentrated on their application within ITE (González-Carriedo et al., 2024; Kabysheva, 2025), often neglecting how learning outcomes are employed across the broader continuum of teacher learning, including induction and CPD. This narrow focus reinforces the assumption that the mere inclusion of learning outcomes in policy frameworks or training curricula is sufficient to drive pedagogical change. However, such assumptions risk undermining the credibility of the approach, especially when the actual impact on teaching practices is limited or inconsistent. Crucially, many studies fail to examine how learning outcomes influence, or fail to influence, other key dimensions of teacher development in practice.

Against this background, this paper aims to investigate the multifaceted role of learning outcomes across the teacher education continuum, with a particular focus on VET teachers and trainers, and to introduce a conceptual framework to better understand this role. VET teachers are professionals who typically work in school-based settings, teaching general, theoretical, or practical vocational subjects, and are usually required to hold pedagogical and subject-specific qualifications. VET trainers operate mainly in work-based environments such as companies, focusing on hands-on, occupation-specific training, with more variable and often less formally regulated qualification requirements (Cedefop, 2022b, pp. 27-29). The paper extends the analysis beyond ITE to include teacher

induction and CPD, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of how learning outcomes support teacher professional development. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- a) How are learning outcomes embedded in the initial education, induction, and continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers across European countries?
- b) What functions do learning outcomes serve in the professional development of VET teachers and trainers?
- c) In what ways does the use of learning outcomes support the coherence of the teacher education continuum?

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1. Continuum of teacher education and the need for coherence

The concept of teacher education as a continuous, lifelong learning process has been emphasised in various EU policy documents throughout the years (European Commission, 2007, 2010, 2015). Both policy and research agree that, although ITE plays a vital role in shaping teacher quality, it is not the sole determinant of a teacher's preparedness for the profession (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; European Commission, 2015; Roberts-Hull et al., 2016). Just as the demands of 21st-century students have evolved, so have the professional expectations of teachers, necessitating the ongoing development of their skills and competences. This paper understands the continuum of teacher education in the following way:

‘This professional development of teachers is a lifelong process that starts at initial teacher education and ends at retirement. Generally, this lifelong process is divided in specific stages. The first stage concerns the preparation of teachers during initial teacher education, where those who want to become a teacher master the basic knowledge and skills. The second stage is the first independent steps as teachers, the first years of confrontation with the reality to be a teacher in school. This phase is generally called the induction phase. The third phase is the phase of the continuing professional development of those teachers that have overcome the initial challenges of becoming a teacher.’ (European Commission, 2010, p. 6)

Each phase within this continuum contributes to teacher quality and fosters ongoing growth, learning, and motivation. This continuum acknowledges that teacher learning does not stop after certification. Instead, it is a career-long process of reflection, growth, and adaptation to new knowledge, pedagogical strategies, technologies, and diverse student need. However, in practice, the concept of the continuum is often fragmented, with the different phases remaining isolated and lacking communication with each other (Stéger, 2014). This is particularly the case for teacher induction and CPD, which are conceptualised and implemented differently across countries. For example, induction might be perceived as an extension of ITE, as an autonomous stage of its own, or as an optional, loosely defined institutional policy measure. Similarly, CPD often lacks a coherent institutional framework and is not always linked to teacher appraisal (Symeonidis et al., 2024). The limited and uneven use of systematic needs analyses further contributes to mismatches between the CPD opportunities offered

and the actual professional development needs of teachers, leading to lower engagement and motivation (Symeonidis, 2021). As highlighted in the Cedefop (2022b) synthesis report, while most Member States have introduced some form of CPD requirement, both participation and the systematic assessment of teachers' needs vary considerably. For VET trainers only around 10 Member States reported conducting skills needs analyses, illustrating the diversity of practices across Europe.

Coherence refers to aligning the phases above, so they build on one another systematically and meaningfully. This is essential as coherence allows smooth transitions across phases. Teachers need a seamless progression from pre-service to in-service training, where concepts and practices introduced during ITE are reinforced and deepened during induction and CPD. Coherent systems promote data use and feedback loops between teacher education institutions, schools, and ministries. For example, insights from in-service performance can inform changes in pre-service training.

A potential lever for enhancing coherence across this continuum lies in the strategic use of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes provide a common language for articulating expectations and aligning policies and practices across all phases of teacher education, serving as multifunctional instruments akin to 'a Swiss army knife' in their adaptability (Cedefop, 2022a; European Commission, 2013, 2018a). However, the scope, precision, and application of learning outcomes vary widely across national systems (Cedefop, 2016). In addition, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning learning outcomes significantly shape their interpretation and practical application. For example, critics (Allais, 2014; Hussey & Smith, 2003, 2008; Souto-Otero, 2012) argue that certain formulations of learning outcomes (e.g. overly detailed and precise definitions) may inadvertently contribute to a simplification of the learning process, rather than fostering active and self-directed learning.

While some education systems establish learning outcomes at the central policy level, others define them at the level of ITE institutions or through professional associations. In some contexts, they are embedded in national standards and linked to quality assurance; in others, they serve more loosely as principles or guidelines (Caena, 2011; Cedefop, 2022b).

In the context of VET, coherence across the different phases of teacher education is further complicated by differentiated regulatory frameworks and fragmented policies which may result in contradictory expectations. Coherence requires that national standards, qualifications frameworks, and performance indicators align across the continuum. While ITE for VET teachers, especially those in school-based settings, is generally regulated across EU27+ countries, the

induction and particularly the CPD phases are marked by significant variation in structure, governance, and implementation (Cedefop, 2022b, pp. 35-37). CPD is a declared policy priority in nearly all EU countries, yet its actual provision often lacks coherence, strategic planning, and sustainable funding mechanisms. The delivery of CPD tends to rely heavily on short-term projects, EU-funded initiatives, or individual institutional efforts, rather than being embedded in comprehensive national strategies (Cedefop, 2022b, p. 36).

The fragmentation is even more pronounced in the case of in-company trainers, whose professional role is less formally defined and regulated than that of school-based teachers. In many countries, there are no national qualification standards or competence profiles for trainers, and participation in CPD is often voluntary or dependent on employer initiative (Cedefop, 2022b, pp. 41-44). Only a minority of EU+ countries have developed structured CPD opportunities or legal requirements for trainers, and even fewer conduct systematic needs analyses to inform provision. As a result, there is limited visibility into the actual learning needs of this professional group, and data on participation rates, outcomes, and satisfaction levels remain scarce and uneven across systems.

In addition, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for CPD – where they exist – rarely feed into national planning or quality assurance frameworks. Without robust systems for tracking the impact of CPD on teacher competence and student learning, policy makers face difficulties in designing evidence-based improvements (Cedefop, 2022b, pp. 36-37). This lack of strategic alignment undermines the very notion of a coherent teacher education continuum and risks creating inequities in access to meaningful learning opportunities across different types of VET professionals.

In light of these challenges, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the need for integrative mechanisms capable of bridging the gap between the various phases of teacher education and the responsibilities of different stakeholders. The use of learning outcomes emerges as a key strategy in this regard, serving as a shared reference framework that can enhance transparency, ensure greater consistency, and promote alignment across policy domains and stages of professional development. The following section delves deeper into the potential of learning outcomes as a transversal policy instrument, highlighting how they interconnect various teacher-related policies and practices across the continuum of teacher education.

2.2. Learning outcomes as a transversal policy tool across the teacher education continuum

As education systems transition toward competence-based approaches, learning outcomes have gained prominence as key instruments for guiding curriculum, assessment, qualification design and validation. This shift marks a paradigmatic departure from traditional, subject-centred pedagogies toward learner-centred models that prioritise individualised pathways, lifelong learning, and learner autonomy. Grounded in the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), learning outcomes focus on outcome-based achievements over input-driven processes, positioning teachers as central facilitators whose pedagogical expertise and methodological choices directly influence learning trajectories. Ure (2018) presents a multifaceted view of learning outcomes, framing them not just as neutral educational tools, but as simultaneously serving three interconnected roles:

- (a) **pedagogical tools** embedded in teaching practices: They guide curriculum design, assessment methods, and classroom instruction. They help educators align teaching with what students are expected to know and be able to do, thus shaping the actual learning experience;
- (b) **political and organisational instruments** shaping qualifications frameworks: Learning outcomes play a role in standardising and comparing qualifications across institutions and countries (e.g. through frameworks like the European Qualifications Framework - EQF);
- (c) **institutional agents** influencing how programmes are structured and presented: At the institutional level, learning outcomes affect how academic programmes are designed, promoted, and evaluated. They contribute to institutional strategy by helping institutions align their programmes with strategic goals, such as improving graduate employability, or interdisciplinary learning while they are used to design and revise programmes to meet these goals.

In essence, Ure argues that learning outcomes are not just educational tools but are also shaped by and contribute to broader political, organisational, and institutional dynamics.

While closely linked to the broader concept of competence, learning outcomes serve a distinct yet complementary role in teacher education. Learning outcomes are typically framed as specific, achievable statements of what learners are expected to accomplish, whereas competences denote the validated ability to integrate and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in practice (Cedefop, 2017; Weinert, 2001). This distinction is critical for understanding the dual function of

learning outcomes in teacher education: they structure curricula and assessments, while competence frameworks provide the scaffolding for career-long professional growth, appraisal, and progression. Recognising this interplay is essential for designing systems that support both short-term learning objectives and long-term professional development. Furthermore, existing conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2017, 2022a) significantly shape their interpretation and practical application.

Building on this foundation, the proposed conceptual framework examines **five interrelated dimensions** (see Figure 1) through which learning outcomes shape teacher education and professional development. These dimensions capture the role of learning outcomes as scaffolds for curriculum and assessment design, their capacity to foster professional growth, as well as professional identity and agency, their function in recognising teachers' prior learning, and their contribution to ensuring equity and transparency in teacher appraisal. Taken together, they illustrate how learning outcomes operate as a transversal policy tool that supports coherence and continuity across the teacher education continuum, from ITE through induction and into CPD.

Figure 1. **Five dimensions shaping the teacher education continuum**



Source: Authors

Dimension 1. Structuring teacher education curricula and assessment

The development of effective teacher education curricula and in-service training programmes is crucial for preparing teachers to meet the complex demands of the profession. Learning outcomes play a vital role in this process, serving as a blueprint for designing curricula that ensure coherence between intended educational goals, teaching methodologies, and evaluation strategies (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Cedefop, 2022). By structuring teacher education curricula around learning outcomes, educators can create a transparent learning environment where student teachers and teacher educators share a common understanding of the expected results and the progression toward them. Pouliou (2014), by examining the shift to a learning outcomes-based approach in English language

teacher education, found that while learning outcomes are intended to clarify objectives, enhance transparency, and align teaching, assessment, and learning, most teachers and stakeholders were unfamiliar with the framework. Although Cedefop latest research (2025), drawing from evidence from six of the 10 countries examined ⁽¹⁾, indicates an integration of learning outcomes in classroom practices – underscoring their influence on pedagogical approaches and learning practice – a discernible gap persists between classroom-level implementation and the broader institutional environment of VET schools. This disparity suggests that, while teachers frequently engage with learner-centred methodologies as part of their ITE, there remains a lack of coherent national guidance and sustained professional development to facilitate the effective and consistent implementation of learning outcomes across educational settings.

Learning outcomes can be embedded in ITE and CPD programmes in both explicit and implicit ways. Explicit embedding involves directly incorporating learning outcomes into programme design, enabling teachers to use them in planning, delivering, and assessing student learning. This approach prepares teachers to define intended outcomes, align teaching methods, and evaluate achievements. Implicit embedding, on the other hand, involves incorporating principles of the learning outcomes approach, such as learner-centredness, active learning, and integration of theory and practice, without explicitly labelling them.

The use of learning outcomes in teacher education has been shown to have a positive impact on the pedagogical and psychological preparation of student teachers. According to Darling-Hammond (2017), effective teacher education systems align activities and assessments with clearly defined outcomes and professional standards, thereby supporting learner-centred and practice-oriented pathways. In ITE, learning outcomes have been used to strengthen the preparation of student teachers, helping to define not only subject knowledge but also transversal competences such as communication, collaboration, and professional identity (Pesti et al., 2017). Similarly, in-service professional development has increasingly been organised through learning outcome-based frameworks, allowing teachers to engage in targeted skill development and document the acquisition of new competences over the course of their careers (Cedefop, 2022b).

The emphasis on learning outcomes also extends to the design of assessments. Instead of focusing on time spent in training or completion of prescribed inputs, assessment aligned to outcomes enables the evaluation of observable achievements, ranging from subject mastery to pedagogical application (Birtwistle et al., 2016). This shift encourages teacher educators and

⁽¹⁾ The six countries mentioned are Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia (Cedefop, 2025).

participants to move beyond a compliance-oriented model towards one where learning activities are explicitly linked to professional growth. However, the transition has often been hindered by insufficient staff development and by scepticism among academics who perceive the learning outcomes agenda as a bureaucratic imposition rather than a genuine pedagogical tool (Allais, 2014; Symeonidis, 2019). Cedefop (2008), in an early analysis of the shift towards learning outcomes, acknowledges that its influence on assessment practices has been limited.

Assessment standards, criteria, methods, and tools – whether explicitly or implicitly – reflect the key objectives of VET, as they convey signals about what learning is important, and what aspects of learning merit and require more time and effort (Siarova et al., 2017). Consequently, they have a direct influence on the behaviour of teachers, trainers, and learners, who tend to align their focus and efforts with the explicit and implicit de facto priorities established by tests and examinations. In addition, recent research done by Cedefop (2022c) acknowledges that if the alignment between the intended learning outcomes, the learning process, and the assessment criteria is too rigidly enforced, it can negatively affect teaching and learning. When teaching and assessment are overly tied to predefined outcomes in the curriculum and assessment specifications, they may limit flexibility and creativity in the learning process. Although assessment can serve as a powerful tool to enhance teaching and learning, its overly prescriptive use can undermine these processes.

Teacher education curricula that are structured around learning outcomes can significantly shape student teachers' learning experiences. Such approaches help future teachers develop a deeper understanding of how their coursework connects to professional standards, while also strengthening their pedagogical skills (Prøitz, 2010; Wiliam, 2013). Learning outcomes have also been promoted as instruments for establishing shared expectations and fostering collaboration across institutions, though critics note that this emphasis may privilege accountability over meaningful innovation (Allais, 2014). This balance is particularly important in teacher education, where curriculum structures must prepare teachers for diverse educational contexts and evolving professional demands.

Dimension 2. Shaping career progression pathways

Professional competence frameworks that are grounded in learning outcomes have become increasingly widespread as a means of guiding teachers' development throughout their careers, from ITE to induction and CPD. These frameworks provide a shared language and reference points for lifelong

professional learning, outlining the knowledge, skills, and competences expected of teachers at different career stages, and linking professional growth to appraisal, promotion, and recognition systems (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Symeonidis, 2021). By bridging teacher education, career development, and quality assurance mechanisms, competence frameworks play a crucial role in shaping education systems and career progression pathways (European Commission, 2018). They shift the focus from traditional input-based measures, such as hours of instruction or prescribed course content, towards an outcomes-based approach that prioritises the actual capabilities of teachers.

Still, the terminology related to learning outcomes, including concepts such as 'competence', 'output', and 'assessment criterion' needs to be carefully considered. Bjørnåvold and Villalba-García (2025) argue that a competence is not contingent upon formal certification but instead relates to the actual knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable an individual to carry out tasks or address challenges effectively. It is therefore associated with the individual's ability to apply knowledge and skills independently and autonomously in real-life situations and contexts. While qualifications and competences may vary in their scope and complexity, both can be articulated through learning outcomes.

The introduction of competence-based frameworks across Europe, particularly in the wake of the Bologna reforms, has transformed how professional development is understood and carried out. For instance, in Hungary, the adoption of outcome-based ITE at EQF level 7 has enhanced pedagogical and psychological preparation, while also aligning teacher appraisal with career progression (Pesti et al., 2017; Symeonidis, 2019). Similarly, in Estonia and Ireland, structured competence frameworks have established clear career stages, such as 'novice', 'senior', and 'master' teachers, with expectations tied to mentoring, leadership, or innovation roles (European Commission, 2018). These frameworks typically encompass a range of areas, including subject knowledge, pedagogical expertise, classroom management, collaboration, and innovation, and are increasingly used as benchmarks for career advancement and remuneration (OECD, 2019).

The value of competence frameworks lies not only in establishing minimum standards but also in creating pathways for teachers to deepen their professionalism and develop their expertise. Learning outcomes are central to this process, as they specify the developmental expectations at successive stages, ensuring that professional growth is both transparent and cumulative. By integrating these outcomes into national frameworks, teachers can transition from novice to expert roles with clear expectations for professional growth. However, experience suggests that when learning outcomes and standards are too closely

tied to summative appraisal or salary decisions, they can create accountability pressures that reduce CPD to mere 'box-ticking' exercises, rather than formative learning opportunities (Birtwistle et al., 2016; European Commission, 2018).

CPD programmes grounded in competence frameworks can promote greater consistency, transparency, and mobility in career progression. Effective CPD approaches engage teachers as both learners and practitioners, align with school and system priorities, and foster transformative practice rather than compliance (Gore et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2006). In Singapore, for example, competence-based frameworks are designed to cultivate teachers' capacity to foster 21st-century skills in students, linking individual teacher development with system-wide innovation (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Ultimately, competence frameworks and standards serve as career-long guides that provide structure to professional development, ensuring that the learning outcomes achieved during ITE are progressively expanded and deepened throughout a teacher's career. When used in a developmental context, these frameworks can enhance teacher motivation, professional identity, and equity in access to growth opportunities. However, if they are primarily used as accountability instruments, they risk undermining the formative potential of the learning outcomes approach and narrowing CPD to measurable compliance (Birtwistle et al., 2016). In addition, defining competences as precise, measurable learning outcomes can lead to overly complex or fragmented frameworks that are difficult to interpret or apply in practice. Over-specification risks reducing competences to checklists of discrete tasks, potentially overlooking holistic or contextual aspects of professional performance. Competence frameworks rooted in learning outcomes must balance the need for clear benchmarks with enough flexibility to accommodate diverse contexts, individual learner needs, and varying professional roles.

Dimension 3. Guiding teacher appraisal

Learning outcomes play an important role in guiding teacher appraisal and making teacher education and professional development more equitable and transparent. By articulating learning expectations in clear and accessible terms, they reduce ambiguity for teachers and learners alike, ensuring that standards for teaching, assessment, and appraisal are explicit and consistently applied (Cedefop, 2017; Kennedy et al., 2006). This clarity is particularly valuable in contexts where professional recognition and opportunities for development have traditionally depended on informal or opaque criteria – for example, decisions based on the preferences of school leaders, uneven institutional provision, or personal networks.

In teacher appraisal, learning outcomes provide reference points that support both formative and summative processes. Formative approaches emphasise feedback that helps teachers identify strengths and areas for growth, reinforcing their professional learning. Summative approaches, in turn, inform high-stakes decisions such as retention, promotion, or salary (European Commission, 2018). Research stresses that equity depends on maintaining a balance between these two functions: overly summative, outcome-driven systems may discourage teachers from openly acknowledging development needs, while formative, learning outcome-based evaluation contributes to trust and ongoing professional improvement (OECD, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Evidence from higher education in Norway and England shows how the learning outcomes approach can make curricula and assessment more transparent, supporting dialogue between teachers and students (Sweetman, 2017). At the same time, concerns were voiced that certain dimensions of teaching, such as creativity, professional judgement, or relational skills, are difficult to capture in outcome statements. This illustrates the double-edged nature of transparency: while outcomes clarify expectations, they may also risk narrowing the scope of what is valued in teacher development if applied rigidly.

At a systemic level, transparency through learning outcomes is closely tied to equity in access to professional development. Embedding outcomes in CPD frameworks makes it possible to align opportunities for teacher growth with clearly defined benchmarks, rather than leaving participation dependent on local discretion or individual initiative (Cedefop, 2022b). In this sense, learning outcomes not only create visibility and comparability but also help ensure that teachers across different institutions and regions are held to common standards and enjoy fairer access to recognition and progression opportunities.

Dimension 4. Supporting the recognition of prior learning

Learning outcomes underpin the EU architecture of transparency tools, which aim to make qualifications more comparable, ensure mobility, and strengthen the recognition of professional learning within and across borders (Cedefop, 2016; Halász, 2017). Rather than existing in isolation, these tools form an interconnected system that translates macro-level reforms into frameworks that can guide teacher education in practice. The term often used at a European and international level (adapted from OECD, 2022b; ETF, 2022) is ‘recognition of prior learning’ (RPL) which is a process used to identify, document, assess, and certify an individual’s knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning (including work, life, community or voluntary experiences). Its purpose is to provide credit or exemptions toward formal qualifications, reduce

duplication of learning, enhance lifelong learning and employability, and offer more flexible and personalised learning and training pathways. RPL plays a significant role in teacher education, particularly in broadening access to the profession, supporting career progression, and acknowledging diverse learning experiences.

Several European transparency tools operationalise this recognition function by explicitly translating learning outcomes into portable and comparable formats. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) expresses learning outcomes as credits, allowing modules in pedagogy, subject knowledge, or professional practice to be recognised between higher education institutions and across countries. Europass complements this at the individual level, providing teachers with a portfolio to document learning outcomes achieved in both formal and informal settings – an essential mechanism for making CPD or workplace-based learning visible and portable. Likewise, European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO) classifies competences in outcome-based terms, linking teacher roles to broader labour market and education standards, while European quality assurance in vocational education and training (EQAVET) embeds learning outcomes into quality assurance processes, ensuring that the evaluation of VET teacher and trainer preparation focuses on demonstrated competences rather than solely on input measures.

Moreover, the growing focus on validating non-formal and informal learning reflects the influence of the learning outcomes approach, which emphasises the recognition of teachers' competences regardless of how or where they were acquired. This validation supports more flexible, lifelong learning pathways and helps bridge formal education and workplace learning (Bjørnåvold & Villalba-García, 2025). The rapid expansion of qualifications frameworks over the past decade, as well as microcredentials (Cedefop, 2023a), illustrates this shift, aiming to increase transparency for learners and improve coordination among education providers. Increasingly, these frameworks are also being linked to quality assurance systems, using learning outcomes as reference points for aligning and evaluating qualifications. Microcredentials⁽²⁾ have the potential to validate targeted teacher competences (e.g. digital pedagogy, inclusive education, assessment design) and allow for stackable learning, enabling teachers to accumulate microcredentials toward a larger qualification or professional development goal. For teacher education, this means that ITE and CPD programmes can be aligned

⁽²⁾ According to the Council of the European Union (2022), microcredentials are defined as 'the record of learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning'.

not only within countries but also across borders, making pathways of progression clearer and more transparent (European Commission, 2018).

However, the recognition function of these tools depends on how learning outcomes are interpreted and enacted in practice. If teachers perceive them as rigid checklists or bureaucratic requirements, they are unlikely to use them to document or value their own learning. By contrast, when embedded in lesson planning, assessment, and professional development, they can provide credible evidence of competences acquired across diverse contexts (Ure, 2019). Yet, as Cedefop (2024b) notes, teacher educators often struggle to connect the learning outcomes approach to the theories and practices used in VET, while Halász (2017) highlights that many are not prepared to train future teachers in its use. Olson et al. (2018) also show that although outcomes-based frameworks reflect a market logic of employability, their enactment is shaped by local professional and community logics – shared values, priorities, and routines that often reinterpret central policies to fit local contexts. These findings underline that transparency tools can effectively support the recognition of teachers' prior and ongoing learning when they are meaningfully embedded in local professional cultures and supported by the capacity to use them effectively.

Dimension 5. Strengthening professional identity and agency

Learning outcomes make explicit the expectations placed on teachers, offering a framework for understanding their professional responsibilities and positioning themselves within broader educational ecosystems (Caena, 2011; European Commission, 2013). Research by Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO and UIL (2018) highlights that shifting to a learning outcomes-based approach transforms the teacher–learner dynamic, fostering more balanced, interactive relationships and promoting learner engagement. This learner-centred orientation reshapes expectations of the teacher's role, highlighting their role as an agent, a facilitator and enabler of learning, rather than a mere transmitter of knowledge.

By defining clear goals, learning outcomes support teachers in reflecting on their practice, orienting their teaching, and selecting effective pedagogical strategies. They also help learners see not only what they must know and do, but who they are becoming as professionals and how they can actively shape that journey. In this way, learning outcomes contribute to reinforcing teachers' professional identity as pedagogical designers and facilitators of learning, providing reference points for validating their contribution to educational improvement.

Research consistently highlights that teacher quality and professional identity are among the most critical school-related factors influencing student achievement

(Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Hattie, 2009, OECD, 2022). Effective teachers possess not only strong content knowledge but also the ability to differentiate instruction, create inclusive learning environments, and engage in reflective practice. The learning outcomes approach can therefore enhance teachers' sense of agency by making the learning process more transparent and measurable. When teachers see a clear connection between intended outcomes, their instructional choices, and student progress, they are more likely to feel empowered as active shapers of educational quality, rather than mere implementers (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Hattie, 2009; OECD, 2022a).

'Agency' refers to the capacity of professionals to make informed decisions, take initiative, and adapt their practice in response to evolving contexts (Beijaard & Verloop, 2004, Priestley et al., 2015). Sachs (2005) emphasises that teacher professional identity is shaped by tensions between autonomy-driven professionalism and externally imposed accountability. Learning outcomes can be part of the managerial and accountability discourse when introduced as measurable standards, yet they can also support a collaborative and reflective discourse by offering teachers a shared framework for dialogue, self-assessment, and professional growth. When supported by meaningful professional learning, they can enhance teachers' agency; when imposed top-down without support, they risk undermining it.

Coburn (2001, 2004) further shows that teacher learning is both individual and social. Teachers construct new knowledge and instructional strategies through critical self-reflection and experimentation, but they also build shared professional cultures through dialogue, collaboration, and joint problem-solving. Learning outcomes can support both dimensions: they provide clear benchmarks for individual self-assessment and progress, and they offer a shared language that makes professional collaboration more focused and productive. By linking individual reflection with collective meaning-making, learning outcomes can strengthen teachers' professional identity while fostering a sense of agency grounded in shared purpose and trust.

At the European level, learning outcomes have also been promoted as a means of empowering rather than controlling the teaching profession. Council conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2007, 2009, 2014) and European Commission communications (European Commission, 2012, 2013) have called on Member States to develop teacher competence frameworks rooted in learning outcomes, emphasising agency, trust and shared responsibility. When co-designed with the profession, such frameworks can strengthen teachers' ownership of their standards, aligning professional development with growth and autonomy rather than bureaucratic regulation (OECD, 2005; Sachs, 2015).

Chapter 3.

Methods

This paper gathers evidence on the multiple uses of the learning outcomes approach across the teacher education continuum, with a particular focus on VET teachers and trainers. A multi-method approach was thus adopted. First, it draws on a literature review based on resources collected through Cedefop's internal database on learning outcomes, focusing on studies published since 2009. Although the concept of learning outcomes was initially introduced by a few countries in the 1980s and 1990s, its widespread prominence across most European countries has emerged primarily over the past two decades. European policy initiatives, such as the EQF (launched in 2008) and the Bologna process (initiated in 1999), have been instrumental in driving this development, serving as key mechanisms for articulating the objectives underpinning the transition toward a learning outcomes-based approach.

Building on this literature review, the paper develops a conceptual framework that identifies five interconnected dimensions through which learning outcomes influence teacher education across the different phases of the continuum. These dimensions illustrate how learning outcomes structure curriculum design and assessment, guide not only career progression through competence frameworks but also teacher appraisal and can finally underpin the recognition of prior learning as well as support the development of teacher professional identity and agency. Taken together, they position learning outcomes as a transversal policy instrument that fosters coherence and continuity across the teacher education continuum – from ITE through induction to CPD.

The specific conceptual framework is then deductively applied in analysing 10 country case studies gathered in the context of Cedefop's project [The shift to learning outcomes: Rhetoric or reality?](#), including: Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. In each country, national experts conducted desk research in the national languages and semi-structured interviews with organisations that offer initial and/or continuing training for VET teachers and trainers. The interviews targeted management/administration, as well as individual teacher educators. On average, five people per country were interviewed. Visits to VET providers were also organised in each of the 10 countries, including observation of at least two lessons, a focus group with teachers and follow-up interviews with learners and teachers.

Analysis of the case study reports illustrates, through concrete examples from practice, the multiple roles that learning outcomes can play across the continuum of teacher education. To complement these data, the paper also draws from

Cedefop's research work in implementing European strategic objectives and policy priorities concerning the role and [professional development of VET teachers and trainers](#).

Overall, the intention of this working paper is to adopt an exploratory approach to conceptualising the role of learning outcomes in the teacher education continuum, aiming to illuminate key dimensions and raise questions for further investigation, rather than to propose prescriptive solutions. In this context, the paper is framed as an exploratory contribution to ongoing discussions and debate on the usefulness of learning outcomes in teacher education, offering insights to inform ongoing policy discussions while recognising the need for further evidence.

Chapter 4.

Findings

This section draws from 10 country case studies and supporting Cedefop material to describe the level of embeddedness of learning outcomes in ITE and CPD, while also investigating their role in teacher career progression, teacher appraisal, the recognition of prior learning, and strengthening teacher professional identity and agency.

4.1. Structuring teacher education curricula and assessment

The way and extent to which VET teachers and trainers are introduced to learning outcomes throughout their professional development varies considerably across Europe. Evidence from Cedefop's case studies shows considerable divergence among the Member States investigated. Table 1 provides an overview of the extent to which learning outcomes are systemically embedded in teacher education in the 10 countries under study.

Table 1. **Countries in which the learning outcomes approach is systemically embedded in teacher education**

Country	Learning outcomes systemically embedded in teacher education	Evidence/Justification
Bulgaria	No	Learning outcomes are not yet systematically embedded in ITE or CPD. While the VET curriculum is modularised, teacher preparation and mentoring remain largely input-based, and participation in structured CPD is limited.
Ireland	Yes (but uneven CPD)	Outcome-based professional standards defined by the Teaching Council structure the continuum of teacher education. Learning outcomes guide assessment and professional development, though CPD opportunities are unevenly supported across sectors.

Country	Learning outcomes systemically embedded in teacher education	Evidence/Justification
France	Yes (varies by cohort)	Learning outcomes and competence-based pedagogy are systematically integrated in ITE through INSPE programmes. Earlier cohorts have been introduced to the approach through seminars or CPD. Induction and CPD frameworks refer to national competence standards, with implementation adapted locally.
Lithuania	Yes	Modular ITE and CPD programmes are explicitly built around learning outcomes. Teachers are expected to complete approximately 40 hours of CPD annually, focusing on competence development and outcomes-based assessment.
Malta	No (partial, inconsistent)	Learning outcomes are used in VET curricula at MCAST, but pre-service teacher education is not mandatory before employment, and CPD engagement with the learning outcomes approach remains inconsistent across institutions.
The Netherlands	Yes	Competence-based qualification files form the foundation of VET and teacher preparation. Learning outcomes are embedded throughout ITE and induction, while CPD follows outcome-based principles within an autonomy-oriented system.
Poland	No (partial, inconsistent)	Learning outcomes are not systematically addressed in ITE and CPD programmes. Pedagogical programmes for VET teachers do not include training on outcomes-based pedagogy, and CPD is mainly project-based or subject-oriented.
Portugal	No (limited implementation)	Learning outcomes are referenced in policy and curricula but are not yet systematically embedded in ITE or CPD. Teachers often apply them empirically, and there is demand for more structured professional learning in this area.
Slovenia	No	Learning outcomes are recognised as useful for linking vocational programmes with labour market needs, yet ITE and CPD frameworks have not systematically incorporated them. Reform discussions are ongoing.

Country	Learning outcomes systemically embedded in teacher education	Evidence/Justification
Finland	Yes	Learning outcomes and competence-based pedagogy are integral to the preparation of VET teachers, delivered through universities of applied sciences and universities. Competence demonstrations of learners in VET are co-assessed by schools and workplaces, while CPD regularly updates teachers' assessment and outcomes-based practices.

Source: Authors based on case studies from Cedefop's project [The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality](#).

Table 1 illustrates this divergence in the systemic embedding of learning outcomes in teacher education. France, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Finland demonstrate structural integration of learning outcomes into ITE programmes and, to varying degrees, CPD. By contrast, Bulgaria, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia lack a coherent national approach, leaving teachers and trainers to engage with learning outcomes empirically or inconsistently. The divergence is not absolute and varies in specific contexts: in schools examined in France and Ireland, the extent of exposure depends on when teachers entered the system, with newer cohorts benefiting from systematic training while older teachers rely on ad hoc provision. Malta shows partial embedding at institutional level but no uniform national strategy, while in the Netherlands learning outcomes are considered so integral to the country's education framework that, even without explicit modules, they permeate all aspects of ITE and CPD. These variations highlight the importance of considering not only whether outcomes are embedded, but also how consistently they feature across the teacher education continuum.

Furthermore, in the Bulgarian schools examined, the learning outcomes approach is not part of a teacher's professional development. Becoming a VET teacher requires a subject-relevant degree and a general teaching qualification, without any specialised preparation in designing or assessing learning outcomes. In this sense, there is room for improvement in developing a national approach for VET teachers in Bulgaria on the uses of learning outcomes. In Poland, although the policy framework and core VET curricula are grounded in learning outcomes, teachers reported limited opportunities to engage with pedagogies appropriate for outcomes-based curricula during their initial education and restricted access to structured CPD. Portugal presents a comparable picture, since there is no national strategy for embedding learning outcomes in teacher education, and teachers tend to apply them empirically as they see fit. Similarly, in the Slovenian case study, even if Cedefop (2023b) research shows that the learning outcomes approach in

VET is seen as a useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to real life and labour market needs, the schools examined did not point to available information suggesting systemic embedding of learning outcomes in teacher education. Finally, Malta has incorporated learning outcomes into its VET curricula, but these are not tied to any particular pedagogical approaches in teacher practice. The case study conducted at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) revealed that ITE is not a prerequisite for employment, which results in uneven understanding and use of learning outcomes among teaching staff. In short, while teachers in Malta are introduced to learning outcomes, further efforts are needed to promote a more consistent and structured application across the teacher education continuum.

By contrast, France, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Finland all have teacher education systems which make a greater systemic use of the learning outcomes approach. Lithuania is a good example of this, following the country's introduction of modular programmes which provided extensive training to VET staff on learning outcomes. The Finnish case study illustrates well-developed practices for addressing learning outcomes in teacher education, meaning that all new teachers are familiar with the approach from the first day of their professional career. Implementation depends heavily on peer learning and the use of ministerial teaching programmes, which ensure compliance but not necessarily ownership or pedagogical innovation. However, it should be noted that while France, Ireland, and the Netherlands make use of the learning outcomes approach in their teacher education, its application may vary and sometimes depends on when a teacher undergoes training or whether support in learning outcomes is requested by the teachers themselves. For example, in Ireland, there is a feeling among teachers that there is now a lack of centralised help compared with previous years. On the contrary, in France, new teachers are in a position, based on their training, to draw links between competence-based learning and assessment, whereas teachers who entered the system in previous years were only introduced to these concepts in an ad hoc fashion; for example, through irregularly offered seminars. Finally, in the Netherlands, all teachers are well versed in the concept and use of learning outcomes, although there is no specific training provided on the learning outcomes approach per se.

Just as the extent to which learning outcomes feature in a country's ITE, so the presence of the learning outcomes approach across a teacher's professional development varies from country to country. Specifically, a complex picture emerges where even countries with a developed approach to learning outcomes in their teacher education systems may not provide learning outcomes-based CPD. As noted earlier, Bulgaria does not currently have a developed approach to

teacher education which includes learning outcomes. More specifically, the country provides no professional training for mentors and there is a lack of CPD. For instance, observations from a Bulgarian VET school suggest that VET teachers are preoccupied with bureaucratic tasks which take away the time they could be investing in CPD and integrating learning outcomes into their professional activities. In Poland, CPD provision is also limited and tends to focus on administrative or subject-specific updates rather than the application of learning outcomes in teaching practice. A similar picture emerges in the Maltese, Portuguese, and Slovenian case studies, where there is no requirement to undergo CPD related to learning outcomes. However, it should be noted that teachers in Portugal have expressed a desire to be trained in learning outcomes both as part of their ITE and future professional development. This indicates an awareness among teachers of the need to be provided with training to align their professional competences with developments in European VET and general education, including those related to learning outcomes. Furthermore, in both France and Ireland, countries with embedded learning outcomes modules, CPD is generally a matter for the teacher to request and is not provided systematically.

On the other hand, Finland provides VET teachers and trainers with frequent opportunities to enrich their skills in competence-based assessment. These opportunities take the form of both on-the-job and online training. Furthermore, in Lithuania, extensive training in learning outcomes is provided as part of a teacher's initial training and there is the expectation that teachers will allocate approximately 40 hours a year for their CPD. Finally, the Netherlands provides its VET teachers with frequent training opportunities, including webinars and e-learning. Although CPD in the Netherlands do not specifically refer to learning outcomes, it is taken for granted that they will appear in all training provisions, since they form the foundation of the Dutch VET system.

4.2. Shaping career progression pathways

Learning outcomes are often integrated into competence frameworks and professional standards to enhance and structure the professional growth of teachers and trainers. These frameworks can be implemented at national, regional, or local levels and may be consistently applied across the continuum of teacher education or tailored to specific phases of it. Findings reveal considerable variation in the approaches adopted by the EU countries examined, reflecting diverse governance traditions and degrees of standardisation.

Learning outcomes can provide a common language for teacher professional development when utilised consistently at national level. This is evident in

countries such as France, Ireland, and Lithuania, where competence frameworks grounded in learning outcomes are institutionalised as reference points throughout teachers' careers. In France, the *référentiel de compétences professionnelles* [professional competence framework] applies to all teachers, shaping their training, appraisal, and professional development, though career advancement still follows traditional seniority- and exam-based rules. In Ireland, the Teaching Council has established a comprehensive continuum of teacher education that explicitly embeds learning outcomes at each stage: outcome-based standards are defined for ITE (*Céim*)⁽³⁾, requiring providers to align curricula and assessments with professional competences; during induction (*Droichead*) learning outcomes are used as developmental benchmarks, guiding mentoring and evaluation of newly qualified teachers; and CPD (*Cosán*) is framed as a lifelong, flexible process, encouraging diverse learning activities while anchoring them to outcome-based professional standards. While pay progression is not directly tied to these standards, they influence recognition, appraisal, and eligibility for leadership roles. Similarly, Lithuania has implemented a system that combines modular VET curricula with legally defined competence profiles and mandatory CPD, connecting career advancement explicitly to the demonstration of outcome-based competences.

In other countries, learning outcomes play only a limited role in shaping career structures, which tend to rely on credit accumulation or civil service rules rather than clearly articulated competence frameworks. For instance, in Bulgaria, teachers progress through stages such as teacher, senior teacher, and head teacher, but advancement depends mainly on CPD credits, with no systematic use of outcome-based competence profiles. Slovenia also links career progression to professional titles such as mentor, advisor, or councillor, yet these are awarded based on accumulated activities rather than demonstrated learning outcomes. In Portugal, a statutory teacher career statute defines roles and responsibilities, and some CPD initiatives incorporate learning outcomes, but progression largely follows civil service rules tied to seniority and examinations rather than outcome-based standards. In Malta, learning outcomes are embedded in the NQF and CPD has been strengthened through agreements with teacher unions, yet a unified competence framework to structure progression across the career is absent. In Poland too, progression follows statutory stages of professional titles, but

⁽³⁾ *Céim* (Irish for 'step') is the national framework for ITE in Ireland, setting accreditation standards for teacher education programmes. *Droichead* ('bridge') is the induction framework for newly qualified teachers, combining mentoring and reflective learning. *Cosán* ('path') is the national framework for teachers' CPD, supporting ongoing professional learning.

advancement is tied primarily to seniority and procedural requirements rather than outcome-based competence profiles.

The Netherlands and Finland exemplify autonomy-driven approaches. In Finland, teacher education institutions embed competences and learning outcomes in curricula and professional development, but career advancement is not tied to national frameworks, relying instead on institutional practices and collective agreements. In the Netherlands, the Wet BIO ⁽⁴⁾ defines competence requirements that guide ITE and professional dossiers, and competence-based qualification files underpin teaching practice. However, career progression is determined primarily by locally negotiated salary scales rather than national, learning outcome - based career stages. These cases show that learning outcomes can be deeply integrated into teaching and learning without being systematically connected to formal progression structures.

The picture differs again for in-company trainers and work-based learning contexts. In several countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Malta, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia), trainers lack a formal competence framework articulated in learning outcomes, and their professional development depends largely on employer discretion or short-term EU-funded projects. This results in fragmented provision and weak links between professional growth and career recognition. By contrast, in the Netherlands and Finland, trainers' roles are indirectly structured through learning outcome - based qualification files or pedagogical training offered by universities of applied sciences, which provides some coherence with teacher standards. In France and Lithuania, trainer competences are increasingly defined in learning outcome terms, and the qualifications relevant to trainer roles are often referenced to NQFs, enhancing their visibility and recognition within VET systems.

Taken together, these cases highlight significant variation in how learning outcomes inform professional growth and career progression. In some countries, notably Lithuania, competence frameworks grounded in learning outcomes anchor progression across ITE, induction, and CPD, while in others, such as Bulgaria, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia, advancement relies on credits or titles without systematic reference to competences. France and Ireland occupy a middle ground, where frameworks shape professional practice but have only partial influence on career structures. The Netherlands and Finland demonstrate that strong outcome-based approaches to curriculum and practice can exist without formal progression ladders, relying instead on institutional autonomy. For trainers, however, the absence of formal competence frameworks in many systems leaves their career development fragmented and dependent on local arrangements.

⁽⁴⁾ Short for *Wet op de beroepen in het onderwijs* refers to the Dutch act on professions in education.

Overall, the evidence shows that learning outcomes have considerable potential to structure teacher careers, but their impact depends on how systematically they are embedded in national competence frameworks and linked to appraisal, recognition, and progression mechanisms.

4.3. Guiding teacher appraisal

Learning outcomes play a pivotal role in guiding teacher appraisal and fostering equity and transparency by clarifying expectations, reducing arbitrariness, and supporting fairer assessment. While the case studies do not explicitly describe formal teacher appraisal systems, they provide rich evidence of how learning outcomes structure the assessment environments within which teachers operate. When used effectively, learning outcomes allow teachers, trainers, and learners to understand the standards against which performance will be judged, building trust and ensuring that opportunities for recognition and progression are not dependent on opaque or informal practices.

The case studies illustrate these dynamics in varied ways. In Ireland, learners in further education and training highlighted that outcome-linked assessment briefs offered clarity: ‘we know exactly what we’re being judged on’. This transparency was also valued by teachers, who regarded outcome-based rubrics as enhancing fairness and predictability, particularly for diverse student cohorts. Malta provides a similar picture, where the integration of learning outcomes into assessment and internal quality assurance has strengthened transparency around evaluation practices, providing clearer benchmarks and reducing reliance on ad hoc or discretionary judgements.

Other countries show how transparency can be compromised when outcome-based principles are not consistently applied. In Poland, despite the existence of external examinations grounded in learning outcomes, inconsistent marking practices weakened perceptions of fairness among both teachers and learners. In Bulgaria, work-based learning curricula and mentors’ diaries formally map tasks to learning outcomes, yet these tools are often not used actively as feedback mechanisms. As a result, opportunities for using learning outcomes to support reflective dialogue or structured guidance for teachers and trainers remain limited. By contrast, Finland demonstrates a more integrated model: personalised competence development plans tied to learning outcomes provide a shared reference point for teachers and trainers, supporting more consistent expectations and structured feedback for both learners and teaching staff.

From a teacher education perspective, these findings suggest that equity and transparency in teacher appraisal are not automatic by-products of adopting the

learning outcomes approach. Rather, they require deliberate investment in preparing teachers and trainers to use learning outcomes as tools for formative feedback and fair evaluation. During teacher induction, this may involve mentoring that emphasises clear communication of expectations and constructive feedback linked to outcomes. In CPD, teachers and trainers can be supported to use learning outcomes more effectively as reference points for self-evaluation and peer or managerial appraisal, enabling feedback that is both developmental and aligned with progression decisions.

In sum, when systematically embedded, learning outcomes contribute to more transparent and equitable teacher education and in-service training systems by making standards explicit and reducing reliance on subjective or opaque criteria. Yet, the case studies also show that without consistent implementation and adequate preparation of staff, outcomes risk being applied unevenly, thereby undermining rather than strengthening trust in appraisal processes.

4.4. Supporting the recognition of prior learning

Evidence from the literature and the case studies show that learning outcomes - based transparency tools (EQAVET, EQF/NQFs, ESCO, Europass) as well as microcredentials play a systemic role in supporting the recognition of teachers' and trainers' prior learning achievements. By defining qualifications and competences in outcome terms, these instruments make learning achievements visible, comparable, and portable, linking recognition with mobility and quality assurance across the teacher education continuum (ITE, induction, and CPD).

Some countries display a deep and systemic use of such tools, where NQFs are firmly integrated into curricula, assessment, and staff development and thereby embed the recognition function directly into everyday practice. In Finland, for example, competence demonstrations assessed jointly by teachers and workplace trainers make the Finnish NQF descriptors an integral part of classroom teaching, validating learning gained in both school-based and work-based contexts. In the Netherlands, qualification files tied to the NLQF ensure that both school-based and company-based routes lead to the same outcome-defined qualification, creating a shared professional language for teachers, trainers, and mentors, thus supporting the recognition of prior work-based learning. In Ireland, the NFQ and QQI award standards require teacher education programmes to be structured around learning outcomes, fostering comparability and recognition across providers. Similarly, Malta mandates that all qualifications listed in the MQF be expressed in learning outcomes, which has driven universities and training providers to align curricula, assessments, and staff development accordingly.

Other countries apply these tools more selectively, meaning that while recognition of learning is supported in certain areas, it is not applied across teacher education as a whole. In Portugal, for instance, the National catalogue of qualifications specifies outcomes and assessment criteria for each qualification and EQAVET strengthens quality assurance. However, the extent to which this impacts teacher education depends heavily on how individual providers implement them. For instance, in Poland, the PQF underpins outcome-based curricula and external examinations, which give teachers clear benchmarks and facilitate the validation of competences, but the heavy emphasis placed on examinations can risk narrowing professional development to exam preparation rather than fostering broader formative growth.

By contrast, in Bulgaria and Slovenia, the case studies show that European and national transparency tools exist but are only loosely connected to teacher education. In these contexts, initial teacher education and CPD are rarely structured around learning outcomes, and teachers and trainers receive limited guidance on how policy-level frameworks should be interpreted as professional standards. The weak alignment limits opportunities to validate prior learning and contributes to a persistent gap between policy ambitions and classroom realities.

Overall, findings suggest that when transparency tools are embedded into the daily work of curriculum design, assessment, and staff training, they can effectively support the recognition of teachers' and trainers' competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal pathways. Linking learning outcomes to microcredentials could further strengthen this function, allowing teachers to document targeted competences (such as competences related to digital pedagogy or inclusive education) and progressively stack them toward larger qualifications. This approach would make teacher education more outcomes-driven, personalised, and responsive to changing educational demands, while ensuring that professional development remains transparent, evidence-based, and recognised across institutional and national boundaries.

4.5. Strengthening professional identity and agency

Learning outcomes influence teacher professional identity and agency by making explicit what is expected of teachers at different career stages and the degree of autonomy they exercise in the classroom. Autonomy and agency are key aspects of the learning outcomes discussion, since one of the concerns raised about the application of learning outcomes is that they can be seen as overly specific, resulting in a feeling that teaching is overly prescriptive and that teachers do not have freedom in what and how they teach (see Cedefop, 2022a, p. 71). Of course,

context is important in this respect. For example, in some countries where the application of learning outcomes is prescribed at institutional level, a teacher's involvement may be more limited than in contexts where teachers are empowered to apply learning outcomes.

The extent to which teachers feel autonomy in relation to learning outcomes and their applications is felt differently across the Member States studied. For instance, in Bulgaria, there is a general feeling among teachers that they do not have any autonomy in designing learning outcomes approaches for the VET subjects they teach – a feeling largely due to the lack of a national approach to learning outcomes. Teachers interviewed in Malta also refer to a lack of autonomy, linked to MCAST's prescribed template regarding module structure and number of learning outcomes. Moreover, in the case of secondary schools, teachers cite a distinct lack of autonomy in relation to the curriculum, which is set externally, although there is a good degree of autonomy in the methods they use to teach VET subjects and in designing assessment tasks.

Conversely, in Finland, teachers express a high level of satisfaction with learning outcomes-based curricula, for which they enjoy full freedom in how they design and conduct their work, provided that generally agreed conditions are adhered to. Such conditions are set out by educational teams in which teachers also serve. A similar picture emerges in France, Lithuania, the Netherlands Portugal and Slovenia. In Lithuania in particular, teachers are given full freedom to decide how they incorporate pre-defined VET learning outcomes into their teaching and how they apply the approach in class. However, it must be noted that they have very little influence over the subject material and what is taught. More specifically, although VET teachers may incorporate additional learning outcomes into their teaching, this is somewhat restricted by the country's centralised system and even this freedom appears to be used reservedly in the case of the teachers interviewed, since the extent to which this freedom can be applied is unclear. This is also the case in assessment, for which the teachers interviewed raised concerns.

Finally, in Ireland, the situation regarding teacher autonomy is particularly nuanced, as some of the teachers interviewed are employed as fully qualified tutors, whereas others are engaged as tutors from industry sectors. Indeed, it was found that even some fully qualified teachers may not have received specific teacher education as possessing a degree and relevant experience used to be the sole prerequisites for teachers in Ireland. Moreover, teachers in Ireland enjoy a great deal of autonomy in the shaping of teaching and learning; although this autonomy can have a direct impact in the application of learning outcomes, to which several teachers may not have been exposed.

The case studies highlight that where learning outcomes are systematically embedded, teachers perceive themselves as part of a professional community, with shared standards guiding their development. In France and Ireland, outcome-based standards are used not only as reference points for teacher education but also as tools to guide reflection and dialogue about what it means to be a teacher. In these contexts, learning outcomes act as anchors for professional identity, signalling that teachers are pedagogical designers rather than mere transmitters of knowledge. Similarly, in Lithuania, and to a more limited extent in Poland, modular curricula defined in learning outcomes support teachers in connecting classroom practice to recognised professional standards, strengthening their sense of professional agency.

Professional agency is most evident in systems that pair outcome clarity with instructional autonomy. In Finland, for instance, while career progression is not formally linked to competence frameworks, teachers have wide latitude to design curricula and assessments to achieve agreed outcomes, reinforcing their professional discretion. The Netherlands shows a similar pattern: competence requirements and outcome-based qualification files provide a shared professional language, but teachers enact agency primarily through institutional autonomy rather than centrally imposed frameworks. Taken together, the evidence suggests that learning outcomes enhance professional identity when they make expectations explicit and collectively recognised, and they strengthen agency when teachers are given discretion in how outcomes are achieved. Where these conditions are met, teachers are more likely to view themselves as autonomous professionals with the capacity to shape their careers and influence educational quality. Where they are absent, identity and agency remain fragile, often reduced to compliance with procedural or administrative demands.

Chapter 5.

Concluding remarks

This paper set out to explore the multifaceted role of learning outcomes across the teacher education continuum for VET teachers and trainers, spanning ITE, induction, and CPD. Rather than prescribing uniform solutions, the intention was to inform dialogue among policymakers, practitioner communities, and social partners on how learning outcomes can be used to build more coherent teacher education systems.

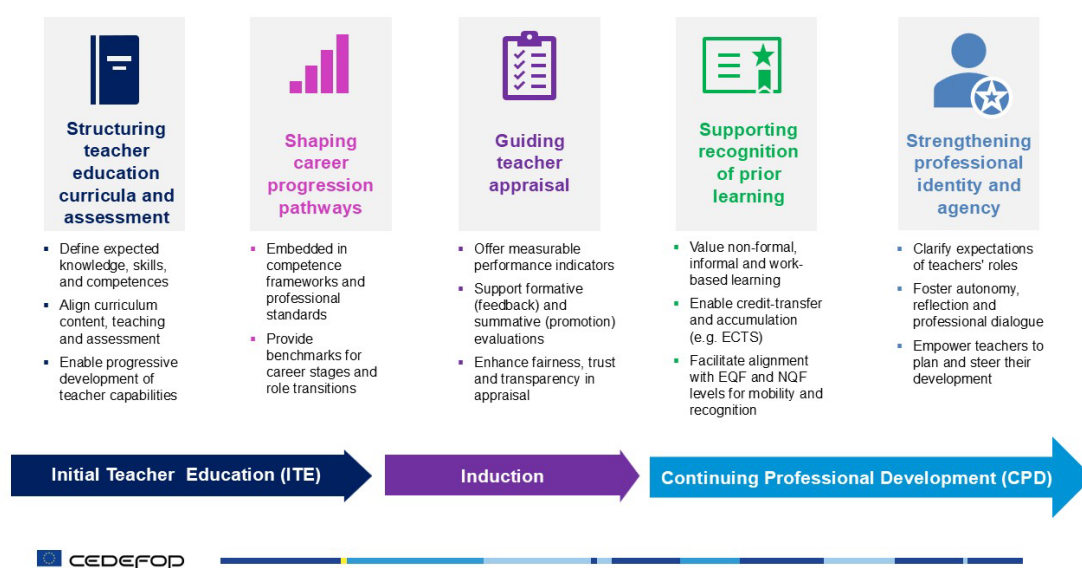
The first research question examined how learning outcomes are integrated into the various phases of ITE, induction, and CPD. The case studies revealed considerable variation in the extent to which learning outcomes are embedded across Europe. More established learning outcome-based frameworks can be found in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands, and Lithuania, where they are integrated into qualification files, national frameworks, and CPD requirements. By contrast, in countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia, learning outcomes are only loosely connected to teacher education structures, and career progression depends mainly on credits or seniority, rather than demonstrated competences. Ireland and France are located somewhere in the middle, with strong outcome-based frameworks for ITE, but less coherent approaches to CPD. Such differences reflect broader governance traditions, but they also point to a common challenge: building coherent pathways that connect ITE, induction, and CPD.

The fragmentation mirrors the literature's concerns about the lack of coherence across the teacher education continuum (European Commission, 2010; Stéger, 2014; Symeonidis et al., 2024). It also reflects wider governance patterns: where CPD remains project-based or locally driven (Cedefop, 2022b), learning outcomes are seldom used to create progressive learning pathways that connect the different stages of teacher development. However, learning outcomes can serve as a common reference framework, aligning expectations related to teachers' competences from ITE through induction to CPD, and linking them to assessment and feedback mechanisms.

Regarding the second research question on the functions that learning outcomes can serve in the professional development of VET teachers and trainers, the findings confirm the multifunctional character of learning outcomes that was proposed through the conceptual framework and the literature (Cedefop, 2022a, 2024b; Ure, 2019). Across the case studies, learning outcomes were shown to

perform five interrelated functions: they structure curricula and assessments, support career progression, guide teacher appraisal, underpin recognition of prior learning and strengthen teachers' professional identity and agency. Figure 2 illustrates these functions that are cutting across the different phases of the teacher education continuum.

Figure 2. Multifaceted role of learning outcomes across the continuum of teacher education



Source: Authors

However, these functions rarely emerge together in a coherent way; rather, they often appear fragmented. In some countries, learning outcomes help structure ITE curricula, but are not linked to career progression or appraisal; in others, they support assessment and quality assurance, but are not recognised as tools for professional learning. This selective enactment echoes Ure's (2018) point that learning outcomes are not neutral instruments; rather, they are socially constructed and influenced by different and sometimes conflicting logics - such as those of management, professions, and communities. Olson et al. (2018) similarly show that although outcomes-based frameworks reflect a market approach to employability, their implementation is reshaped by local professional cultures. Findings clearly illustrate this: in Finland and the Netherlands, learning outcomes are internalised as part of everyday pedagogical work, while in Bulgaria or Slovenia they remain external policy artefacts with little value for teachers' professional practice.

suggests that their potential depends less on their presence; rather, on how they are designed, perceived and enacted. Where learning outcomes are co-designed with teachers, embedded in mentoring and appraisal, and coupled with autonomy in how to achieve them, they can enhance teachers' sense of professional identity and agency. This supports Sachs's (2005, 2015) view that teacher professionalism is shaped by the ongoing tension between autonomy-oriented and accountability-oriented approaches. Finland and the Netherlands illustrate systems where clear outcome expectations are combined with considerable teacher discretion, allowing learning outcomes to inform practice while leaving room for professional judgement. In more centralised or exam-oriented systems such as Poland or Bulgaria, learning outcomes tend to be applied in a more prescriptive manner, which can limit flexibility in practice and reduce opportunities for professional dialogue.

Recognition mechanisms offer another illustration of this conditionality. Transparency tools such as EQAVET, EQF/NQFs, Europass and microcredentials can help to validate competences gained through both formal, non-formal and informal learning, making teachers' achievements visible and portable. However, their value depends on whether teachers and institutions are equipped to use them meaningfully. When seen as checklists disconnected from daily practice, they fail to support recognition or mobility, reinforcing the policy–practice gap noted in the literature (Halász, 2017; Ure, 2019).

Overall, the findings suggest that learning outcomes can act as connective tissue across the teacher education continuum — but only when they are part of a broader local and/or national culture which focuses on the professional development of teachers. They can empower teachers by offering clarity, recognition, and ownership over their learning; or they can constrain them if used primarily for external accountability. Achieving the former requires balancing regulatory frameworks with teacher autonomy, and ensuring that learning outcomes are continuously co-developed, reviewed, and aligned with professional practice (Cedefop, 2022a).

The limitations of this paper should also be acknowledged. The evidence is drawn from a limited set of case studies, which cannot fully capture the diversity of contexts, governance traditions, and teacher education systems across the EU. The qualitative nature of the data relies on available documentation and stakeholder perspectives, which may offer incomplete or biased pictures of actual practice. In addition, because this research represents a snapshot in time, it may not reflect ongoing reforms or future developments in the integration of learning outcomes. Another limitation concerns the extent to which the CPD of VET trainers is addressed and analysed. While VET trainers are included in the discussion and

comparisons are drawn with VET teachers, the analysis provides less detail on trainers, reflecting the teacher-oriented focus of most case studies ⁽⁵⁾. Similarly, evidence on induction phase was relatively limited, partly due the fact that in some countries this phase is considered an extension of ITE or is non-mandatory, resulting in scarce and uneven documentation. These limitations underline the need for further empirical work, particularly comparative studies that trace how learning outcomes are interpreted and used across different institutional and cultural settings.

Future research should therefore examine how learning outcomes interact with pedagogical approaches, teacher preparation curricula, and emerging instruments like microcredentials, as well as how they shape teachers' and trainers' perceptions of their professional roles. Further studies focusing specifically on the CPD of in-company VET trainers could shed light on how learning outcomes shape professional development and practice in work-based learning contexts. Finally, comparative studies could reveal how different governance traditions mediate the balance between autonomy and accountability, and how systems can move from fragmented initiatives toward coherent frameworks that support teachers' growth across their entire careers.

⁽⁵⁾ Still, in Cedefop's (forthcoming) research, two companies involved in work-based learning in IVET were selected in each of 10 countries (Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland). Site visits enabled interviews with company directors, human resources (HR personnel, in-company trainers, and learners), as well as opportunities to observe training in situ. Nevertheless, the topic of trainers, CPD was not explored in detail.

List of abbreviations

CPD	continuing professional development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
EU	European Union
FiNQF	Finnish national qualifications framework
INSPE	Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Education
ITE	initial teacher education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
NFQ	national framework of qualifications
NLQF	Netherlands qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
PQF	Polish qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VET	vocational education and training

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THE MULTIFACETED ROLE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES ACROSS THE CONTINUUM OF TEACHER EDUCATION

An approach to empower VET teachers and trainers

This working paper explores the multifaceted role of learning outcomes across the continuum of teacher education, spanning initial teacher education, induction, and continuing professional development. Drawing on a literature review and data from 10 case studies conducted as part of Cedefop's project 'The shift to learning outcomes: Rhetoric or reality?', it examines how learning outcomes shape teachers' lifelong learning through five interrelated functions: structuring curricula and assessment, shaping career progression pathways, guiding teacher appraisal, supporting the recognition of prior learning, and strengthening professional identity and agency.

Findings reveal considerable variation in how systematically learning outcomes are embedded in teacher education across countries. While they confirm the transversal potential of learning outcomes as a policy tool, their influence depends on how they are designed, interpreted and enacted in ways that empower rather than constrain teachers. The study argues that their contribution to coherence relies on local professional cultures and sustained capacity-building.

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