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Inclusive Support Architectures in VET Across Five Countries: A Document-Based Mapping With An In-Depth Case Of Swiss Support Courses

René Wüthrich

Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training SFUVET, Switzerland

Abstract

Ensuring equitable participation in vocational education and training (VET) remains a persistent challenge across countries, yet “inclusion” is framed and operationalised in markedly different ways. This study provides a comparative, document-based mapping of inclusive support architectures in VET across Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and England. Based on a qualitative, category-guided analysis of 77 documents spanning legal and policy frameworks, programme and implementation documents, monitoring and evaluation reports, and research literature, the study reconstructs how inclusive support is institutionally designed across macro, meso and micro levels.

Findings show that inclusion is frequently articulated in broad, normative terms, while institutional implementation is organised through target-group logics, access conditions, responsibilities and portfolios of support instruments. Across countries, inclusive support becomes visible primarily through governance arrangements and legally or administratively anchored instruments rather than through uniform definitions of inclusion. Swiss support courses are examined as an in-depth case to illustrate documented organisational and didactic features of a clearly defined support format, without treating the Swiss case as a benchmark model or making causal claims about outcomes.

The paper contributes an “architecture perspective” on inclusion in VET by distinguishing normative inclusion aims from their institutional operationalisation. It also identifies research gaps, notably the limited availability of comparable evidence on participation, reach and outcomes of support measures, and outlines priorities for future research that triangulate document-based mappings with monitoring data and stakeholder perspectives.

Keywords: Comparative VET research; inclusion; support architectures; document analysis; support courses