

LEARNING DIARY

VET and VET Teacher Types

A Cross-National Comparison

Budapest University of Technology and Economics

4. semester

Noémi Pekker

5 CP

04. May 2026.

Introduction

The Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Program (BIP) entitled “*VET and VET Teacher Types. A Cross-National Comparison*” was organized by Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg. As a second-year student in the Vocational Teacher Training BSc program at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), I had the opportunity to represent my institution in this program.

I live in Budapest with my husband and my 13-year-old son. I obtained my qualification as an esthetician in 2009 in a two-year vocational training program built upon secondary school graduation. During this training, I received theoretical instruction at school, while practical training took place exclusively in an external setting, specifically in the salon of a master cosmetician.

In 2024, I enrolled in the Vocational Technical Instructor BSc program at BME with the aim of complementing my professional expertise with relevant pedagogical competencies and qualifications.

Although I had not previously participated in an Erasmus program, I regularly deliver professional lectures to students of cosmetology, pharmacy, and cosmetic chemistry from Greece, who visit Budapest by Erasmus mobility programs. Therefore, I was highly motivated to apply for a similar program, as it offered an opportunity to gain deeper insight into foreign VET systems, institutions, and teaching practices.

In this learning diary, I present the main components of the program, with particular focus on the location, the institutions we visited, and the educational practices and approaches observed during the study visits. I also address the role of vocational education and training (VET) in the labor market, which is widely recognized as a key factor in supporting employability and economic development (Cedefop, 2017; OECD, 2019), as well as the changing roles of VET teachers. In this context, I reflect on my own learning motivation, objectives, and observations.

Like all BIPs, this program consisted of both a virtual component (17–18 April) and a physical mobility period (20–25 April).

As stated on the official website of BME: “*BIP programmes are short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including the use of online cooperation. The programmes may include challenge-based learning where transnational and transdisciplinary teams work together to tackle challenges, for example those linked to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals or other societal challenges identified by regions, cities or companies.*” (BME, 2026)

In line with this description, the collaborative tasks throughout the program proved to be both challenging and highly beneficial.

In the previous academic year, during a course taught by Eszter Bükki, I delivered a presentation on European Union VET policy. As part of this work, I compared different VET systems, focusing on the German-Austrian, Spanish-Italian, and Swedish models. My analysis revealed significant differences in educational structures and training approaches: Germany and Austria are strongly practice-oriented due to their dual systems; Spain and Italy tend to rely more on traditional school-based training; while Sweden emphasizes social equality and flexible learning pathways in order to support the successful integration of learners from diverse backgrounds. (Pekker, 2025)

Although the presentations during the program suggested that EU Member States aim to align their systems with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and provide increasingly harmonized education (European Commission, 2020), my initial assumption was confirmed: notable differences between national systems still persist. In my view, these differences can primarily be explained by social and geopolitical factors.

During the week in Magdeburg, each day focused on a different vocational institution or organization connected to the VET system. These experiences will be discussed in detail in the following sections of this learning diary.

20. April 2026, AGSA (Auslandsgesellschaft Sachsen-Anhalt e.V.) & einewelt haus Magdeburg

Context

The first day of the Blended Intensive Program took place at the einewelt haus Magdeburg, hosted by AGSA (Auslandsgesellschaft Sachsen-Anhalt e.V.), an intercultural umbrella organization committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive society. The institution operates at the intersection of civil society, education, and public administration, with a strong focus on intercultural dialogue and global learning. (AGSA, 2026)

The program began with a series of introductory presentations delivered by professionals working in international cooperation, intercultural competence development, and educational projects. The agenda focused primarily on international aspects of vocational education and training (VET), including Erasmus+ projects, international exchange programs, youth mobility, and the integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into educational contexts. (AGSA presentation, 2026)

In addition to formal presentations, the day included a discussion session and an intercultural learning activity, which provided opportunities for informal learning and interaction among participants from different countries.

Reflection

What struck me most during this day was the strong emphasis on intercultural openness as a foundational competence, not only in general education but also within VET systems. Prior to this experience, I tended to associate vocational education primarily with labor market needs and practical skill development. However, this visit challenged that assumption by highlighting the broader social and cultural responsibilities of VET institutions.

Connection to Theory

The activities of AGSA can be interpreted through the framework of global citizenship education and intercultural learning (UNESCO, 2017; Byram, 1997). The integration of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into educational practice reflects a competence-based approach that focuses on developing learners' social responsibility and global awareness. Furthermore, this aligns with experiential learning theory, where knowledge is constructed through active participation and reflection (Kolb, 1984).

International Comparison

Compared to the Hungarian VET system, where the primary focus is often placed on occupational competencies and labor market integration, the German approach presented here appears to place stronger emphasis on intercultural and civic dimensions of education.

Application (Transfer)

Personal (Life Competencies)

This experience contributed significantly to the development of my intercultural competence and reflective thinking. I became more aware of my own assumptions and the importance of openness when encountering different perspectives. It also strengthened my ability to critically evaluate educational practices in an international context.

Professional (Teacher Competencies)

From a professional perspective, I see clear implications for my future role as a VET teacher. Firstly, I recognize the importance of integrating intercultural elements into teaching, even in practice-oriented fields such as cosmetology. Secondly, I consider it essential to support learners in developing not only technical skills but also social and communicative competencies.

Additionally, the concept of connecting global issues (such as sustainability and diversity) with local educational practices is something I would like to incorporate into my own teaching. This intention is also reflected in the focus of my bachelor's thesis, entitled "*The Pedagogical and Psychological Integration of Sustainability into Vocational Education in the Beauty Industry.*" In my view, this integration could be effectively realized through project-based learning approaches or structured discussions that connect professional content with broader societal and environmental challenges.

Conclusion of the Day

Overall, the first day provided a strong conceptual and value-based foundation for the entire program. It broadened my understanding of VET by positioning it within a global and intercultural framework, and it encouraged me to reflect on my own role and responsibilities as a future educator in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. (United Nations, 2015)

Most importantly, it highlighted that vocational education is not only about preparing students for the labor market, but also about preparing them to participate actively and responsibly in a diverse and interconnected world.

21 April 2026 – BBZ der Handwerkskammer Magdeburg

Context

On the second day of the program, we visited the Berufsbildungszentrum (BBZ) der Handwerkskammer (HWK) Magdeburg, an inter-company vocational training center within the German dual system. The institution plays a complementary role in vocational education by providing überbetriebliche Lehrlingsunterweisung (inter-company training), which supports and extends company-based training. (HWK presentation, 2026)

The presentations focused on the structure of the German dual system, the legal framework (BBiG), and the cooperation between different learning venues: vocational school, company, and inter-company training center. A key idea was that training regulations define the required competencies, but companies often cannot cover all aspects due to specialization, which makes institutions like BBZ essential for ensuring quality and standardization. (HWK presentation, 2026)

Particularly relevant for my professional background was that BBZ also offers training in cosmetics and hairdressing, among other trades.

Reflection

This visit had a strong impact on how I think about the concept of quality assurance in vocational education. What stood out to me was the systemic approach: instead of expecting a single institution (e.g. the company) to provide complete training, the system distributes responsibility across multiple actors. (HWK presentation, 2026)

From my perspective as a future VET teacher – and also as someone working in a practice-based profession – I found this model both reassuring and challenging. Reassuring, because it acknowledges real-world limitations of workplaces. Challenging, because it requires a high level of coordination and shared responsibility.

I also reflected on my own field (cosmetology). In Hungary, practical training often depends heavily on the given workplace, which can lead to uneven learning experiences. At the same time, it is important to note that beauty industry vocational training has a more prominent and differentiated role in Hungary compared to Germany. (HWK, personal communication)

In the Hungarian system, cosmetology training follows a more specialized structure. For example, manicure and artificial nail techniques, as well as foot care, are offered as separate qualifications, whereas these areas are integrated into a broader training profile in Germany. Conversely, Hungarian cosmetology training places a stronger emphasis on advanced skincare knowledge and treatments, resulting in a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of skin physiology and care.

Connection to Theory

The BBZ model can be interpreted through the integration of different learning environments, where theoretical knowledge and practical experience are closely connected. This reflects a key principle of vocational pedagogy, which emphasizes the

importance of combining school-based and work-based learning (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, 2020).

This approach can also be linked to experiential learning theory, as learners acquire knowledge through the interaction between theory and practice (Kolb, 1984). Additionally, the dual system is widely recognized as an effective model for aligning education with labor market needs (Cedefop, 2017).

International Comparison

Compared to Hungary, the German system appears more systematically regulated and standardized. While Hungary also operates within a dual framework, the role of inter-company training centers is less pronounced. (HWK personal communication, 2026)

In my experience, Hungarian vocational training can be more dependent on the quality and capacity of individual training sites. In contrast, the BBZ ensures a more consistent learning experience by filling gaps and reducing inequalities between training companies.

Application (Transfer)

Personal Competencies

This experience strengthened my systemic thinking and helped me better understand education as a network of interconnected actors rather than isolated institutions.

Professional Competencies

As a future VET teacher, I see the importance of:

- creating structured learning situations independent of immediate production pressure
- consciously linking theory and practice
- supporting learners who may receive uneven training experiences

In my own field, I would consider integrating more simulation-based or guided practice elements to ensure that all students reach a comparable level of competence.

Conclusion of the Day

The visit highlighted that high-quality vocational education is not accidental but the result of intentional system design. It reinforced the idea that the role of a VET teacher is not only to transmit knowledge but also to mediate between different learning environments and support the learner's development across them.

22 April 2026 – Caritas Magdeburg

Context

On the third day, we visited Caritas Magdeburg, focusing on the integration of refugees and migrants into society and the labor market. The institution provides multilingual counseling, legal and social support, and targeted programs for labor market integration, especially for vulnerable groups such as migrant women.

Their services include assistance with residence and asylum procedures, job orientation, language learning, and recognition of qualifications. A particularly important program is ASAMi, which supports migrant women in entering or re-entering the labor market by addressing both personal and structural barriers.

Lecture of Amidou Traore

During the visit to Caritas Magdeburg, we attended a presentation delivered by Amidou Traore, originally from Ivory Coast, who shared his personal migration and integration trajectory. His narrative provided a powerful first-hand perspective on the challenges and processes of integration within the German context.

Mr. Traore left his home country in December 1994 due to the political situation. Upon arrival in Germany, he initially experienced significant difficulties, including social exclusion and a strong sense of alienation. He described feeling like a "stranger" and facing instances of discrimination. At the same time, he began to construct new social roles and identities, for example as a football player, later as a husband, father, and employee. These evolving roles played an important part in his integration process.

He first arrived in Halberstadt, where he applied for asylum. The initial period was characterized by multiple adaptation challenges, including unfamiliar environmental conditions (such as the cold climate), cultural differences (e.g. food habits), and language barriers. His asylum application was initially rejected; however, through legal appeal, as well as his increasing social integration - supported by his involvement in football and the establishment of a family - he was eventually granted residence status.

A significant turning point in his life was the opportunity to work at Caritas. Due to his multilingual competencies (French, English, and German), he was offered a position supporting refugees. He emphasized that this role not only provided employment but also contributed to a sense of belonging and social acceptance. He described this work as a major source of personal strength and motivation.

Subsequently, he pursued studies in social pedagogy and spent approximately 13 years working in Halberstadt before relocating to Magdeburg. At present, he leads a team of six professionals, providing social counseling services within Caritas, which operates as a Catholic Church-based social institution.

A key concept highlighted during the presentation was the role of the *IQ Network (Integration through Qualification)*, which supports the recognition of foreign qualifications and facilitates labor market integration. Mr. Traore strongly emphasized that *language competence is a fundamental prerequisite for successful integration* - a minimum language level (approximately A2) is typically required.

He also outlined structural challenges within the asylum system. For example, asylum seekers are not permitted to work during the first three months, and afterwards must apply for a work permit. This creates a paradoxical situation: employment often requires a permit, while obtaining a permit is difficult without employment. Additional requirements include language proficiency and a clean criminal record.

Based on his professional and personal experience, Mr. Traore formulated his own definition of integration. According to him, successful integration requires resilience, openness, and proactive engagement. He stressed the importance of building supportive social networks, learning the language, asking for help when needed, maintaining a strong work ethic, and respecting legal frameworks.

Finally, he addressed the recognition of foreign qualifications, emphasizing that individuals should actively seek the appropriate institutions responsible for the recognition process. This may result in full or partial recognition of qualifications. While the process is generally more accessible within Germany, it can also be initiated from abroad via online platforms. (Traore, 2026)

Reflection

This day was emotionally and professionally one of the most impactful for me. It shifted my perspective from a purely educational viewpoint to a more holistic understanding of learners' life situations.

What became very clear is that participation in VET is not only a pedagogical issue but also a social and structural question. Factors such as housing, legal status, language barriers, and family responsibilities significantly influence learning opportunities.

I found myself reflecting on how often teachers might interpret lack of performance as lack of motivation, while in reality, learners may be dealing with complex life challenges.

Connection to Theory

From a theoretical perspective, the work of Caritas can be interpreted through the framework of inclusive education, which emphasizes equal access to learning opportunities regardless of social background (UNESCO, 2017). The observed practices also reflect the importance of addressing socio-economic factors influencing learning, as highlighted in international research on educational inequality (OECD, 2019). Furthermore, the emphasis on individual support aligns with holistic education approaches, where learners are understood within their broader life context.

International Comparison

While the German context presented during the Caritas visit places strong emphasis on the integration of refugees and migrants, the Hungarian context highlights somewhat different, yet equally complex challenges related to social inclusion.

In Hungary, public and educational discourse on integration is less centered on migration, partly due to differing policy approaches and migration patterns. Instead, one of the most significant and longstanding challenges concerns the integration of the Roma population, which is estimated to constitute approximately 6–10% of the total population.

From an educational perspective, the inclusion of Roma learners raises critical questions regarding equal access to quality education, early school leaving, socio-economic disadvantages, and the reproduction of educational inequalities. These challenges are not solely pedagogical but are deeply embedded in broader social and structural conditions.

In this sense, although the target groups differ, there are important parallels between the German and Hungarian contexts. Both require a *holistic and inclusive approach* that goes beyond formal education and addresses learners' social realities. However, the specific strategies and priorities reflect national contexts, historical developments, and policy frameworks.

For me as a future VET teacher, this comparison highlighted that inclusion must always be interpreted contextually. While in Germany the focus may be on supporting migrants'

integration into education and the labor market, in Hungary similar pedagogical principles need to be applied to the inclusion and support of disadvantaged groups, particularly Roma learners.

These challenges are also reflected in international research on disadvantaged groups and educational inequality (OECD, 2019).

Application (Transfer)

Personal Competencies

This experience deepened my empathy and social awareness. It also made me more reflective about my own assumptions regarding learners.

Professional Competencies

As a future VET teacher, I consider it essential to:

- adopt a holistic view of learners
- recognize hidden barriers to learning
- cooperate with support services when necessary

Even in cosmetology education, I may encounter learners with complex backgrounds, and this requires sensitivity, flexibility, and differentiated teaching strategies.

Conclusion of the Day

This visit emphasized that vocational education is deeply embedded in social realities. It reinforced the idea that effective teaching requires not only pedagogical competence but also social responsibility and awareness.

23 April 2026 – Vocational Schools “Otto von Guericke” Magdeburg

Context

On the fourth day, we visited the Vocational Schools “Otto von Guericke” Magdeburg (BBS OVGU), one of the largest technical vocational schools in the region, with approximately 3,100 students and 105 teachers.

The school offers a wide range of programs within the dual system, including civil engineering, metal technology, electrical engineering, and IT. The structure allows for different educational pathways, combining school-based and company-based learning. (BBS OVGU presentation, 2026)

We also had the opportunity to observe the infrastructure, including well-equipped laboratories and modern classrooms.

Reflection

What impressed me most was the scale and organization of the institution. The idea of having multiple vocational pathways “under one roof” creates a complex but structured learning environment.

At the same time, I noticed that the system requires a high level of learner autonomy and responsibility. This raised an important question for me: how do we support students who struggle with self-regulation in such systems?

I also reflected on the physical learning environment. The well-equipped laboratories and digital tools clearly support skill development, but I believe that the pedagogical approach remains the key factor.

Connection to Theory

This can be interpreted through situated learning theory, which emphasizes learning in authentic environments (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, differentiated educational pathways are considered essential in supporting diverse learner needs (OECD, 2019).

International Comparison

Compared to Hungary, the German system seems to offer more flexible and clearly structured pathways. While similar programs exist, the integration and scale of the system appear more developed.

Application (Transfer)

Personal Competencies

The visit enhanced my ability to analyze educational systems critically.

Professional Competencies

I see the importance of:

- creating authentic learning environments
- supporting learner autonomy
- balancing structure and flexibility

Conclusion of the Day

This visit reinforced the idea that effective vocational education requires both infrastructure and pedagogy. The environment can support learning, but it is the teacher who ultimately shapes the learning experience.

24 April 2026 – Europäisches Bildungswerk für Beruf und Gesellschaft (EBG)

Context

Finally, we visited the Europäisches Bildungswerk für Beruf und Gesellschaft (EBG), a large educational provider offering vocational training in fields such as healthcare, social pedagogy, and technical professions. (EBG presentation, 2026)

A key focus was the structure of nursing education, which combines theoretical instruction (2,100 hours) and extensive practical training (2,500 hours) across different care settings. (EBG presentation, 2026)

The institution also provides strong support for international students, including language courses and administrative assistance.

Reflection

This day highlighted the importance of integration between theory and practice. The structured coordination between school and practice settings ensures that learning is coherent and progressive.

I was particularly impressed by the level of support provided to international students. It reflects a conscious effort to reduce barriers and promote inclusion.

Connection to Theory

This approach reflects the principles of constructive alignment, where learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment are closely connected (Biggs, 1996). It also aligns with competence-based education models widely used in European VET systems (European Commission, 2020).

International Comparison

Compared to Hungary, the level of coordination between theory and practice appears more formalized and systematically monitored.

Application (Transfer)

Personal Competencies

This experience strengthened my appreciation for structured learning design.

Professional Competencies

I would aim to:

- better integrate theory and practice
- provide structured guidance during practical training
- support learners with diverse backgrounds

Conclusion of the Day

The final visit summarized many key themes of the program: integration, structure, and inclusivity. It reinforced my understanding that vocational education must be both professionally relevant and pedagogically well-designed.

This also highlights the importance of reflective practice in teaching, where educators continuously evaluate and adapt their methods (Schön, 1983).

References

Auslandsgesellschaft Sachsen-Anhalt e.V. (2026). <https://www.agsa.de>

Auslandsgesellschaft Sachsen-Anhalt e.V. (2026). Presentation [PowerPoint slides].

Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32(3), 347–364.

Budapest University of Technology and Economics. (2026). Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP). <https://nki.bme.hu/ERASMUS%20BIP%20for%20Students>

Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. *Multilingual Matters*.

Cedefop. (2017). The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu>

Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training. (2020). Young people study in the company and at school. <https://www.bibb.de/en/77203.php>

Europäisches Bildungswerk für Beruf und Gesellschaft. (2026). Presentation [PowerPoint slides]. Unpublished internal document.

European Commission. (2020). The European Qualifications Framework: Supporting learning, work and cross-border mobility. <https://ec.europa.eu>

Handwerkskammer Magdeburg. (2026). Berufsbildungszentrum presentation [PowerPoint slides]. Unpublished internal document.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

OECD. (2019). *Education at a glance 2019: OECD indicators*. <https://www.oecd.org>

Pekker, N. (2025). European Union vocational education and training policy (Unpublished course assignment). Budapest University of Technology and Economics.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>

United Nations. (2015). *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Declaration of AI Use

AI-based tools (ChatGPT, OpenAI) were used for language support and stylistic editing.
All substantive content and reflections are the author's own work.