



Rediscovery and Restoring Forgotten Principles: Returning to the Past to Transform and Shape VET for the Future. Back to the Basics in VET

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ABSTRACT: The article explores the historical foundations and contemporary practices of Vocational Education and Training (VET), uncovering a cyclical relationship between past and present methodologies. It begins by analysing the traditional apprenticeship systems of medieval Europe and their counterparts in Asian contexts, demonstrating how these early models laid the groundwork for modern vocational education. The article then traces the historical origin of VET in response to shifting economic conditions and technological advancements, identifying key contemporary practices—such as competency-based education, work-based learning, and experiential learning—as rebranded versions of historical approaches. The analysis emphasizes that many of these so-called “innovations” are not entirely new but are instead adaptations of time-tested methods that have been revitalized to address current educational demands. This historical perspective underscores the importance of integrating traditional practices to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of modern VET systems. The discussion stresses the importance of learning from historical experiences to inform future developments in vocational education, suggesting that a deep understanding of VET's historical context can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers alike. The article also addresses the potential pitfalls of renaming and rebranding educational approaches, which can lead to misleading perceptions and adverse effects, hindering educators and policymakers from recognizing foundational principles that remain pertinent today. Additionally, the uncritical dismissal and rejection of past educational principles signifies a denial of the cultural and educational traditions that informed their development and shaped them. Acknowledging and recognizing these historical influences can enrich contemporary educational frameworks and promote a more nuanced understanding of the current educational landscape.

KEYWORDS: Asian context, Eastern-European context, rebranding VET, VET, Western context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Crucially, the article emphasizes that many contemporary approaches hailed as “innovations” are merely updated iterations of older models. For instance, competency-based and work-based learning, regarded as modern advancements in VET, have historical precedents in the master-apprentice systems of Asia and the guild-based apprenticeships of medieval Europe. The comparative study reveals that VET practices are cyclical, and their revitalization can be observed across both Asian and Western contexts. The document advocates for the continued use of these rebranded yet effective methods, emphasizing the necessity of balancing historical approaches with modern innovations to adequately prepare students for the future job market. The conclusion asserts that vocational education and training programs will become more responsive and successful by drawing on the strengths of both past and present practices. By continuously reassessing historical successes, VET systems can evolve to be more flexible and adaptable to emerging challenges. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the historical context of VET is essential for fostering a vocational education framework that not only honours its legacy but also addresses contemporary needs effectively.

VET has experienced substantial disruption in the past few decades due to technological advancements, changing labour markets, and evolving educational frameworks. Many vocational education and training programs today are repackaging old ideas and practices under a different name despite their claims of transformative new developments. The enduring impact of the medieval European guild-based apprenticeship system is evident in the renaissance of apprenticeships in countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany (*Remington, 2017*). Competency-based education, reminiscent of the conventional mastery-learning approach, is the current trend in VET systems. In this model, students were promoted according to their proficiency in particular skills rather than the duration of their class attendance. However, updating and rebranding vocational education and training can



obfuscate its origins, leading people to believe that new approaches are fresh when, in fact, they are founded on old practices despite these shared features.

This research explores concealed or renamed processes in vocational training and education by analysing their origins and relevance in modern systems. Our objective in exploring historical techniques is to demonstrate that critical approaches to vocational education, including competency-based assessments, community-oriented apprenticeships, and experiential learning, remain pertinent today, albeit under different names. This comparative analysis aims to demonstrate the extent to which conventional occupational training and education methods have evolved, remained unchanged, or been rebranded in both Western and Asian contexts. The study will examine the consequences of these modifications and demonstrate how the reintroduction or amalgamation of specific traditional methods could be advantageous in order to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of contemporary VET programs. This investigation aims to demonstrate that recent advancements in vocational education and training are merely reimagined versions of traditional approaches

2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The methodology employs a systematic review with a rigorous approach to analyze existing studies related to the article thematic. This includes a conceptual analysis aimed at clarifying established concepts within the field and a comparative methodology that is applied in two dimensions: a **cross-cultural comparison** that examines educational designs and approaches in Western and Eastern contexts, and a **cross-historical comparison** that analyzes these aspects across different temporal periods, specifically comparing contemporary practices with those of the past.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing a comparative analysis framework to examine the evolution of VET practices. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of the historical roots of vocational education and their implications for modern practices. The study draws on historical documents, academic literature, and case studies from various countries to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through a systematic review of existing literature on VET practices, with a specific focus on cross-cultural comparisons. The sources included: *historical documents, academic literature case studies, cross-cultural analysis.*

Data Analysis

The analysis involved a thematic approach, identifying key themes related to the historical context of VET practices and their *modern rebranded adaptations*. The following systemic aspects are explored:

1. **Historical Foundations:** The study examined the medieval guild system and its influence on contemporary apprenticeship models, emphasizing the importance of practical skills and theoretical knowledge.
2. **Competency-Based Education:** The emergence of CBE as a significant trend in modern VET was analyzed, drawing parallels to traditional apprenticeship models where proficiency determined advancement.
3. **Rebranding of Practices:** The implications of rebranding traditional practices are explored, focusing on how this can create a perception of innovation while obscuring historical roots.
4. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** The analysis highlighted the differences and similarities in VET practices across cultures, examining how historical practices are adapted to meet contemporary needs in various contexts. This included an exploration of how Asian countries are reviving experiential learning and how Western nations are re-emphasizing apprenticeship models.
5. **Integration of Historical Practices:** The necessity of integrating historical practices into modern curricula was emphasized, highlighting the potential for these practices to enhance the effectiveness of VET programs.

Historical Context of VET

A. Western Context

In medieval Europe, the guild served as the primary institution for vocational education. The proficiency was acquired through the master through apprenticeship within a systemized training framework, as these guilds-controlled trades (*Partarakis & Zabulis, 2023*). Apprenticeship training was comprehensive, encompassing practical assessments and social integration into a craft group.



The guilds also enforce quality and training, thereby integrating education with Practice. This combination of practical and theoretical methodologies is peculiarly suggestive of the approach taken by contemporary VET systems, known by various names, including: *dual training programs, apprenticeships, and work-related training*.

Nevertheless, guild-based apprenticeship models are all demonstrated to be efficient; however, they progressively declined in popularity during the Industrial Revolution. The guild system was undermined by the disappearance of localized, craft-based economies in favour of industrial manufacturing in order to accommodate the expanding economic demands (Ogilvie, 2014). Of course, the apprenticeship model was disregarded mainly, except for a few more specialized trades, as new educational paradigms that relied more on formal education are introduced. However, this approach is still alive and well in its contemporary reincarnation, particularly as demonstrated by the German Dual System. This "old" technique is still highly effective in today's economy.

A Renamed Practice: The Modern Revival of Apprenticeship

The Dual System of Germany is a contemporary example of a guild-based apprenticeship model that combines vocational education and Practice. The system allows learners to attend educational institutions for a specific period and labour for the remainder of the time, reminiscent of the medieval apprentice-master relationship (Remington, 2017). However, what was previously referred to as apprenticeship is now called dual or work-based learning. The subtle nature of the renaming of this learning method is that it obscures its origins, presenting the technique as a novel solution to the emergent job deficit of the twenty-first century. This renaming has led to differences in understanding of the relevance of historically successful methods. Though the language has changed, the basic idea—submerging students in real-world situations while obtaining theoretical knowledge—remains as important now as decades ago. Returning to the apprenticeship model—under its original name or using contemporary language—is proving to be a permanent fix as more nations try to solve labour skill shortages.

The Resurgence of Vocational Education and Training Apprenticeships

In recent years, numerous educational institutions and vocational programs have initiated the process of investigating and integrating traditional teaching methods into their curricula. Many of these resurrected approaches are driven by the increasing demand for personalized learning experiences, practical skill development, and more flexible educational models. It is possible to observe instances of how these concepts are being effectively modified and used to meet the needs of contemporary students by examining Western and Asian institutions.

Renowned for its innovative educational strategy, Finland has reinstated apprenticeship-based learning in its VET institutions. Throughout history, the apprenticeship approach was essential for acquiring a wide range of craft skills. The apprenticeship system was less regarded in Finland when vocational education transitioned to a more structured, classroom-based approach (Virtanen et al., 2018). However, in the past decade, Finnish VET institutions have reverted to a model that prioritizes practical, on-the-job training as an essential element of the curriculum. For example, Finland's "Reform of Vocational Education and Training" program involves students spending significant time in real-world workplaces, which resembles the traditional apprenticeship model. Students may develop practical ability and acquire real-world experience due to this reintroduction. Finnish VET initiatives have developed a hybrid approach that optimizes practical and theoretical learning outcomes by integrating these hands-on learning opportunities with contemporary technology.

B. Asian Context

The Master-Apprentice Model Renamed as Work-Based Learning

Education for Asian tradesmen both before and during the industrial revolution... The carpentry, pottery, metallurgy, and textile manufacture crafts of the pre-industrial age depend on the transfer and preservation of specific expertise. Common experiences for apprentices were absorption into the master's family and close supervision by their instructors. Learning was culturally as vital as it was technically as one's success in the business depended on acquiring the values, self-control, and work ethic regarded to be absolutely essential.

Japan's social system, which valued hierarchy and respect of authority, fit the master-apprentice relationship very perfectly. Being a "Shokunin" (craftsman or artisan) carried a tremendous degree of dignity and responsibility. Sometimes spending years—if not decades—in the process of developing their abilities, apprentices were obliged to dedicate themselves wholly to their trade before becoming fully autonomous as masters (Qiang & Li, 2013). Though it was a protracted and challenging process, it guaranteed great care and skill preservation of historic knowledge. Many Chinese guilds and companies also depended on the master-apprentice



concept concurrently. This system helped both employment possibilities and the survival of specialized crafts. Moreover, under the Chinese guild system, apprentices were supposed to follow rigid guidelines of behaviour. This strengthened the belief that vocational training was about more than simply acquiring skills; it also about transforming one into a contributing member of society.

Renowned or revived Practice

Rebranded under new labels such as work-based learning or on-the-job training in Asian VET systems, this hands-on, occupational-based learning method has been modernized. For example, although stressing "experiential learning" and "competency-based training" as fresh ideas, Japan's present vocational schools essentially reflect the traditional master-apprentice structure (*Megayanti et al., 2020*). This approach is increasingly characterized by dual-education models in nations like South Korea and China, which divide time between job and classroom training. Though presented as a creative response to contemporary labour problems, it essentially replaces the centuries-old master-apprentice system.

The rebranding of educational approaches introduces a risk of misinterpretation regarding their foundational principles and applicability. The renaming and rebranding of educational approaches can lead to misleading and negative effects, making it challenging for educators and policymakers to recognize the foundational principles that remain relevant today.

Another example is project-based learning (PBL). PBL has gained some popularity in technical and vocational education in China. Historically, vocational education in China was highly pragmatic, with students primarily engaged in community-based initiatives that connected their knowledge to practical applications. This Practice diminished as the nation transitioned to a more centralized, theoretical education system. However, Chinese vocational colleges have recently reinstated project-based learning as a priority, recognizing that the workforce requires more excellent critical thinking and creativity (*Megayanti et al., 2020*). One example is the Zhejiang Technical Institute, which integrates PBL into practical training courses (*Chaiyong & Moonpa, 2024*). Students are required to engage in initiatives that are closely related to local businesses and enterprises. These initiatives provide students with practical experience and foster collaboration with business leaders, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This strategy revives the community involvement and practical significance that characterized previous occupational systems.

Lastly, Japan's vocational education initiatives for lifelong learning have been crucial. The necessity of continuous learning has been recently emphasized in Japan's vocational education system. This concept is deeply rooted in traditional apprenticeship systems, which allowed artisans to develop their skills throughout their lifetimes. Japan has initiated initiatives within its VET framework that prioritize perpetual learning, acknowledging the necessity of continuous skill development and the rapidity of technological advancements (*Huang, 2024*). For example, the Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Job Seekers (JEED) offers re-skilling programs specifically designed for senior workers and those who wish to enhance their skills during their careers (*Nilsook et al., 2021*). These programs integrate self-directed learning and lifetime professional development elements, fundamental concepts in historical apprenticeship models. Japan's VET system enables employees to consistently adapt to evolving industrial requirements, by reviving these concepts, enhancing their employability and career advancement.

Kaizen, often known as Continuous Improvement, renamed Problem-Based Learning.

Kaizen is a Japanese idea that continuously improves through constant yet minor improvements. This approach was applied in vocational settings to assist employees in enhancing their competencies through problem-solving as they practised workplace skills acquisition by systematically addressing issues faced at the workplace (*Carnerud et al., 2018*). Integral to the Japanese cultural way of doing business, *Kaizen* relies on repetition and self-analysis at a gradual pace to achieve mastery.

Similarly, conspired ideas are repackaged in several Asian VET systems nowadays, renamed or revived as problem-based learning (PBL). In contrast, PBL in vocational education is another concept that might be regarded as a more recent approach than *Kaizen*, as it targets trainees solving real-life problems to get knowledge and skills (*Carnerud et al., 2018*). This more recent concept is advertised as a breakthrough in education. This approach has long been used but has been renamed to fit modern educational trends. Government-led Training in Japan and South Korea also identified a post-war focus on the importance of vocational skills for the economic recovery of war-torn countries.



C. Russian and Eastern- European Context

The contemporary wide proclaimed and enforcement “Team-Based Organizational Approaches” in education are not new, but rather an adaptation of the “Collective Work models” used in the Russian and Eastern European communist educational systems.

In east -European pedagogical thought, it is common for authors, influenced by various political ideologies after the fall of Communist regime, to categorically reject certain old educational principles, ideas, and models. This rejection often persists until similar concepts reappear, typically introduced from Western literature, at which point they are accepted and promoted. **The uncritical and hasty rejection of concepts and models from previous historical periods represents a denial of our own cultural and regional heritage, as well as the educational genealogies and native traditions from which they emerged.**

Several educational concepts from Socialist educational systems (*period 1945-1991*) that were previously dismissed have resurfaced in contemporary education, rebranded and celebrated without critical reflection. These include:

1. *Soviet Project-Based Learning*: A key feature of Soviet pedagogy, particularly in the work of Makarenko, project-based learning emphasized hands-on, real-world tasks as central to student development. Today, this method is widely promoted in Western education as a novel and innovative approach, despite its deep roots in socialist educational practices.
2. *Socialist Polytechnic Education*: The holistic integration of general and vocational education was a cornerstone of socialist pedagogy. Students were taught practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge to prepare them for both life and work. In modern times, this model has been rebranded as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), with a renewed focus on cross-disciplinary learning, yet its origins in polytechnic education are rarely acknowledged.
3. *Collaborative (Collective) Learning*: Collective work and teamwork were central to socialist education, promoting social cohesion and shared responsibility. This approach is now seen in the widespread use of team-based learning and collaborative projects, often presented as progressive innovations in modern educational systems, despite their strong presence in earlier socialist frameworks.
4. *Modular Learning*: In socialist systems, modular learning aimed to integrate general education with specialized subjects, allowing for flexible pathways through education. This idea is now resurfacing under the guise of personalized learning pathways and modular course design, particularly in online and competency-based education, but without recognition of its historical roots.
5. *Experiential Learning*: Socialist education emphasized the importance of learning through experience and real-world application, particularly in vocational training. This approach has been revived in the form of work-based learning and internships, with modern education systems often portraying these as innovative approaches, even though they mirror earlier socialist practices.
6. *Holistic approach* to strengthening and consolidating scientific education, which underpins the STEM framework today, has clear parallels in earlier polytechnic education models long ago in Socialistic school systems. As *Tolubeva (1958)* stated, “*Polytechnics is not a distinct subject or science but must be integrated across all academic subjects, particularly in the natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology together as they exist naturally together.*”

Makarenko (1950) introduced the idea of labour activities starting at a young age, where work assignments are diverse, relevant, and stimulating. He viewed work as “the primary educational and developmental tool,” a concept that closely resembles the modern “project-based learning” model, often considered a new approach but already evident in Makarenko’s educational philosophy. *Borisenko (1959)* explored the integration of general polytechnic and professional education by suggesting a merging of general education and specialized subjects, akin to today’s modular learning systems. He also advocated for the early introduction of production-oriented training, which he argued could synergistically accelerate general education through its disruptive and dynamic influence. *Denisov (1957)* noted that while the term “polytechnic education” was absent from American literature, it was analogous to “industrial training.” His comparative analysis of American industrial training identified problems, particularly in how educational programs were structured. He proposed a model for individual industrial training that would not undermine general education. Polytechnicism, as an educational model, was not unique to socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc nations (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia). Its principles of integrating education with production work were adopted globally, with evidence of similar models in Western Europe and the United States during the same period. Examples from countries like America, Finland, China, Sweden, and Italy demonstrate the effectiveness of these approaches. *Zhivelov (1958)* reported that in Finland, schools were equipped with modern classrooms featuring a wide range



of technical resources, where students could observe and learn from older students, guiding them towards specific professions. Similarly, *Klepikov (1959)* highlighted how Chinese schools began profiling students at a young age, dividing them into three levels based on interest and proficiency in technical fields. This approach was economically advantageous for the state and demonstrated a complete integration of education with real-world tasks.

Even the often-cited phrase "learning to learn," popularized by Jacques Delors in 1996, *was not a novel concept*. It echoes earlier statements by the first secretary of the Bulgarian socialist party- *Todor Zhivkov*, who said, "*The polytechnic school educates and prepares individuals, providing them with the key to vast knowledge and teaching them how to learn*" (*Zhivkov, 1979: 64*)!

These models, which were prevalent during the communist era, have been rebranded and celebrated in modern educational discourse without proper acknowledgment of their historical roots. Even being rejected they are resurfaced in today's educational practices, such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, and modular learning and are still alive. These concepts, once dismissed after the fall of communist regimes, are now being *embraced as new ideas*, reflecting a lack of critical reflection on the region's educational heritage. *The uncritical rejection of past educational principles represents a denial of the cultural and educational traditions that shaped them. Recognition and acknowledgment can enrich current educational frameworks and foster a more comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape in Russia and Eastern Europe.*

Forgotten yet Effective Practices

1. Models of apprenticeship without official structure

Often in medieval Europe, apprenticeship took place inside trade guilds. Living with their masters, young apprentices would pick up the skill and the related morals, ethics, and societal standards. This concept was comprehensive because it focused on the apprentice's whole growth. However, the conventional guild system disappeared as industrialization developed and vocational education moved toward more official learning environments. Many apprenticeships nowadays are far more regimented and devoid of the personal mentoring and communal connection that defined guilds.

Like the Western guild system, several Asian nations maintained unofficial apprenticeship programs whereby young people learnt trades within households or communities without official schooling. Skills were passed down over generations in rural regions of nations like India and Nepal (*Jing et al., 2022*). These unofficial approaches dropped dramatically when official vocational training courses were launched, therefore losing the skills and cultural practices connected with them.

2. The Socratic Approach

Socratic Questioning for Vocational Education Deep roots in educational theory but limited applicability in vocational education, the Socratic approach, marked by asking and answering questions to foster critical thinking, has excellent resonance. In conventional classrooms, it was not unusual for teachers to include their pupils in conversation and inquiry, developing a closer knowledge of the topic (*Qiang & Li, 2013*). However, the adoption of this approach has dropped as VET has turned more and more toward technical knowledge and rigorous tests. Many Western VET schools have focused on rote learning and skill development, ignoring the complex debates and critical thinking the Socratic approach promotes.

In many Asian nations, rote memorization—where pupils were required to memorize enormous volumes of material without encouraging critical inquiry—was the mainstay of conventional education. Although this strategy was used in educational institutions and vocational training, it has eclipsed more interesting, dialogue-based techniques like the Socratic Method. The total rejection of such critical inquiry activities has happened as education reforms aim to modernize teaching approaches, creating a void in teaching strategies supporting analytical and autonomous thinking.

3. Circles of Learning and Cooperative Education

Many vocational schools have used learning circles, small groups of students sharing information, experience, and skills worldwide, such as in Europe. These unofficial systems supported peer learning, community, and group problem-solving. However, the present educational emphasis on standardized testing and personal success has caused such cooperative approaches to fade. Research demonstrating their efficacy in skill retention and development shows that the advantages of learning circles have been lost as VET institutions turned toward competitive learning settings (*Qiang & Li, 2013*). Traditional Contextual Cooperative Learning In rural regions, cooperative learning techniques—where community members would gather to impart information and teach skills—were quite prevalent in traditional Asian schooling. Farmers in agricultural communities, for instance, would cooperate to pick up fresh



skills and methods. These cooperative approaches have mostly disappeared with the advent of official educational institutions and a more competitive attitude to learning, replaced by individualized models that underline not teamwork.

4. Simulations and Dramatic Role-Playing Games

Dramatic role-playing was once a component of specific vocational training courses meant to teach practical problem-solving and interpersonal skills in Western countries. Simulated real-world events let participants develop soft skills, including cooperation, communication, and negotiating (Qiang & Li, 2013). Nevertheless, as technical skills and standardized testing become more and more critical in vocational education, these approaches have been underlined less and a gap in the development of vital soft skills results.

Similar techniques existed in traditional Asian training environments, where apprentices would learn by playing out scenarios in a controlled atmosphere, usually mirroring real-life events they would experience in their crafts. These exciting learning opportunities have mainly vanished from modern VET courses as stricter, institutionalized training approaches have become the norm.

Thus, the teaching and learning methods show that the previous effective practices in Western and Asian VET systems have been reduced or eliminated. As vocational education changes, there is an increasing need to acknowledge and, in some cases, reintroduce these lost strategies to build better and more effective learning processes in students. To come up with such approaches, a rethink of the value of these approaches might cause a shift to the development of a balanced VET curriculum that entails the preparation of the learners for current employment opportunities.

Figure 1. presents a roadmap that summarizes the amalgamation of Western and Asian VET practices, highlighting key trends that inform the evolution of modern VET systems. The figure underscores the convergence of historical approaches from both regions into new tendencies that address current educational, and workforce demands.

- ✓ *Western VET:* Rooted in guild-based apprenticeship systems of medieval Europe, focusing on hands-on training through structured apprenticeships.
- ✓ *Asian VET:* Influenced by the master-apprentice system, especially in countries like Japan and China, emphasizing hierarchical learning, discipline, and skill development through practical engagement.
- ✓ *Shared Methodologies:* Both Western and Asian traditions prioritize experiential learning, work-based training, and the integration of theory and practice, laying the foundation for modern approaches like competency-based education and dual education systems.
- ✓ *Modern Rebranding of Historical Approaches:* In both regions, traditional models are re-emerging under contemporary names. For example, experiential learning in Japan mirrors historical project-based model *Kaizen*, while Germany's dual system retains its apprenticeship roots. This reflects a global trend where older methods are adapted and renamed to fit current educational paradigms.
- ✓ *Emerging Trends:* Technological Integration: Both regions are incorporating technology into VET, bridging traditional methods with digital tools for skill development.
- ✓ *Globalization of VET Models:* Western and Asian VET systems are increasingly converging, sharing best practices in work-based learning and competency-based frameworks to create global standards for workforce training.
- ✓ *"Educational amalgamation":* The figure illustrates how this *blending* of Eastern and Western VET models is creating a unified, dynamic framework for the future of vocational education.

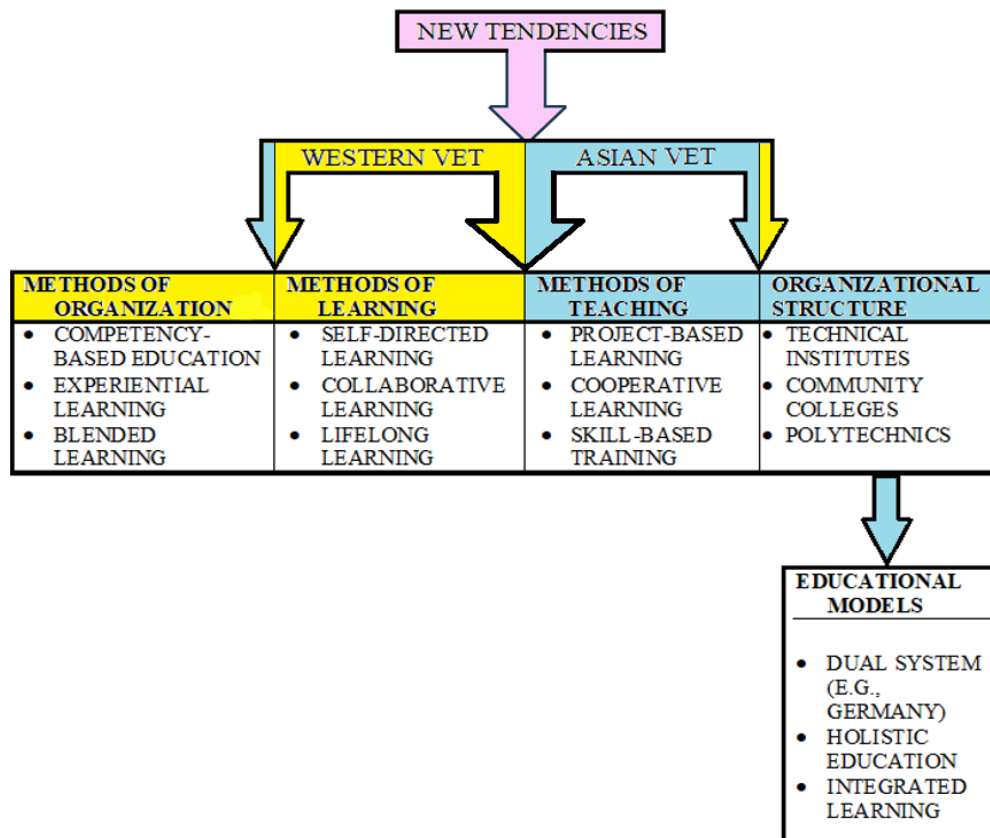


Figure 1. Comparative Analysis: Roadmap of Old Practices in Western vs. Asian Contexts and New Tendencies in VET [author’s research]

New Trends in Vocational Education and Training

Instructional Strategies Competency-Based Education (CBE) in the Western Context underscores the importance of achieving specific skills and objectives, a trend that emerged from traditional apprenticeship programs that required students to demonstrate proficiency prior to advancement. The validation and assessment of skills are altered by the predominant use of competency-based models in Western VET. Experiential learning is a direct descendent of first-hand experience, which has long been the basis for occupational practices across history in teaching new skills (Kolb, 2014). Early in their vocational education, when this was the primary way skills were transferred, students actively participated in activities to acquire knowledge (Qiang & Li, 2013). This approach ensured that students acquired theoretical knowledge and had chances to apply it. Experiential learning is one way this method finds itself in modern classrooms. Students enhance their knowledge, memory, and understanding by actively engaging in the practical implementations of their study. Apart from providing knowledge, this method enables students to acquire the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities required in modern VET programs.

Likewise, the lately popularized blended learning paradigm reflects the initial flexibility historically oriented vocational training provides by allowing teachers to mix online and traditional in-person instruction approaches; blended learning generates a hybrid educational paradigm. This arrangement is comparable to traditional vocational colleges, where flexibility in several classroom environments and student schedules was crucial (Megayanti et al., 2020). Traditionally, students have had to fit their mentors' schedules to complete their apprenticeships and receive an education. Modern blended learning models provide students more agency for their own learning and time management, consistent with the various schedules and particular demands observed in previous forms of vocational training (Graham, 2013). Customizing courses to fit every student's particular requirement will enable tutors to assist them in becoming masters of the theory and Practice required for their intended professions.



Project-based learning has become well-known throughout Asia as a return to more conventional approaches to education that pushed students to participate actively in their local communities. An expansion of more traditional methods, project-based learning has long inspired students to apply their academic knowledge utilizing community service (*Megayanti et al., 2020*). Its emphasis is on practical initiatives as a form of skill development. These initiatives made students feel more responsible for their actions by tying their education to practical issues in their local communities and the globe. Modern project-based learning approaches, like in the past, inspire students to be proactive, innovative, and problem-solvers by having them work on projects simulating real-world responsibilities.

Modern Western VET systems highly encourage self-directed learning, reminiscent of traditional apprenticeship models in which students actively sought material and teaching, but these all mentioned are already known concepts and policies- see *Table 1*. Historically, apprentices eagerly sought opportunities to develop their talents away from supervision by their direct supervisor and took great satisfaction in their education. When students participate in self-directed learning—which lets them follow their hobbies and simultaneously prepare for the future workforce—they still feel this independence (*Keller & Raemy, 2023*). Encouraging students to own their educational routes promotes intrinsic drive and independence—qualities vital for job adoption and lifelong learning.

Table 1. Historical figures and movements that laid the groundwork for modern vocational practices.

[author's research]

OLD PRACTICE	FOUNDER/ HISTORICAL INFLUENCE	DESCRIPTION OF INFLUENCE
APPRENTICESHIPS	MEDIEVAL GUILDS / TRADITIONAL TRADE MASTERS	Apprenticeships date back to medieval Europe, where guilds regulated training in skilled trades under the supervision of a master craftsman.
PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL)	<i>John Dewey (1859–1952)</i>	Dewey advocated for "learning by doing," where students engage in real-world projects as a method of education, shaping project-based approaches in vocational and general education.
LEARNING DOING	BY <i>John Dewey / Maria Montessori (1870–1952)</i>	Both Dewey and Montessori promoted the idea that education should be active, with students learning through experience rather than passive memorization.
COMPETENCY- BASED EDUCATION	<i>Ralph W. Tyler (1902–1994)</i>	Tyler's principles of mastery and behavioural objectives in education laid the groundwork for competency-based education, where students must demonstrate proficiency in a skill before moving on.
VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	<i>Charles Prosser (1871–1952)</i>	Prosser, considered the father of vocational education in the U.S., developed theories to systematize and integrate vocational training into public education, especially through the Smith-Hughes Act (1917).
SHOP CLASS / MANUAL TRAINING	<i>Calvin M. Woodward (1837–1914)</i>	Woodward was a pioneer of manual training schools, advocating for "shop class" as a way to integrate manual labour with mental training in education, starting in the late 19th century.
CORRESPONDENCE COURSES	<i>Isaac Pitman (1813–1897)</i>	Pitman introduced the first shorthand correspondence course in 1840, marking the beginning of structured distance learning, which later evolved into modern online learning.
LIFE TRAINING	SKILLS <i>Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)</i>	Washington promoted vocational and life skills education as part of his work at the Tuskegee Institute, focusing on practical skills for African Americans in the post-slavery era.



JOB SHADOWING	<i>Early Industrialists (19th Century)</i>	Many industries in the 19th century used informal job shadowing as a way for young workers to learn from experienced professionals in factory or trade settings.
COOPERATIVE EDUCATION	<i>Herman Schneider (1872–1939)</i>	Schneider developed the cooperative education model at the University of Cincinnati in the early 1900s, which combined classroom study with hands-on industry work experiences.

Many Western vocational education and training programs include collaborative learning, which originated in the more conventional apprenticeship model when students worked together to finish tasks. Working together and learning from their masters and peers was standard Practice for apprentices. Students today participate in a comparable degree of involvement and collaboration through collaborative learning—where they work together to confront issues, think critically, and share ideas (*Wagino et al., 2023*). Strong “soft skills”, including the capacity to collaborate well with people and communicate effectively, are now highly recognized by companies. This approach helps these skills to grow and guarantees that students are ready to manage the complexity of modern companies, which depend more on cross-functional cooperation. Besides, with pupils splitting up chores and working together, ancient educational environments sometimes employed group projects as a form of skill learning. *Shi et al. (2021)*, support cooperative learning models by emphasizing group projects, student-teacher contact, and project-based learning. Like in traditional apprenticeship programs, cooperative learning fosters a mutually advantageous environment whereby colleagues support one another in success. Substantial interpersonal, bargaining, and communication skills—all of which modern companies’ value—and cooperative learning in a motivating classroom environment may help to develop.

Lastly, lifelong learning—which reflects the long-standing patterns of continuous skill development in more traditional occupational settings—is one of the foundations of modern educational philosophy. Skilled artists and artisans of yesterday committed themselves to lifetime learning if they were to remain competitive and relevant. The present drive for lifelong learning, which emphasizes the importance of workers being able to adapt to a dynamic and always-changing work environment, obviously reflects this concept (*Mustafa & Lleshi, 2024*). CPD is no longer a luxury as industries evolve and new skills are needed; it is instead a need. Modern VET colleges guarantee that students are not only equipped for the workforce upon graduation but also for progress in their present roles and beyond by including lifelong learning.

Asian Context

Many Asian countries have traditional education based chiefly on rote memory, which has garnered criticism for its poor teaching strategies and emphasis on memorization above critical thinking. Though more conventional types of education are still somewhat common, modern pedagogical tendencies in Asia are toward more participatory and group projects (*Qiang & Li, 2013*). This change comes from growing knowledge of the flaws in memorizing and the urgent need for students to develop the analytical and problem-solving skills required for success in today's fast-paced companies. Integrated learning—which mixes courses from several disciplines—is being embraced by more and more Asian institutions. This method recognizes the link between theoretical knowledge and practical competency, therefore fostering a more complete perspective on VET.

Like medieval apprenticeships, competency frameworks for curriculum design and other modern Western curriculum models stress skill-specific training. Students may methodically raise their skills and meet industry standards with these systems. The adaptability and personalizing of modular curricula remind students of more traditional craft-based pedagogies, in which students work at their own pace to reach mastery rather than according to set plans (*Bates, 2022*). As previous guilds and trade networks were known, classroom education had to be connected to practical industry experience. Vocational education and training programs continuously strive to enhance these relationships to provide students real-world experience following what employers seek.

The focus on vocational training is a legacy from the days of conventional trade schools, even in contemporary Asian educational institutions. Like medieval guilds were, institutes like these are essential in preparing students for professions by imparting specific skills and motivating them to keep learning throughout their lifetime. Community colleges offer customized training for their areas' specific needs, making education more relevant and accessible to local employment markets (*Pilz, & Regel, 2021*). Likewise, Asian polytechnics let students develop well-rounded professionals by combining classroom instruction with practical experience. In the early days of vocational education, they were extensively focused on practical training, which is demonstrated.



VET have evolved historically in Western and Asian settings, mirroring a mix of conventional approaches and innovative concepts. This gives students the skills they need to keep learning and develop in their professions, and it helps them get equipped for today's workforce (Kanwar et al., 2018). While still depending on traditional methods, vocational education systems can enable modern students to learn more successfully by including new demands in their courses.

Instructional Models

Two widely recognized educational systems were developed in Western countries. Drawing inspiration from the German model, the dual system reintroduces techniques from previous apprenticeship models to incorporate study and labour. This approach offers students practical expertise as they investigate abstract concepts (Pilz & Regel, 2021). This aligns with the conventional wisdom regarding education, as holistic education emphasizes the importance of individual development through technological literacy. The objective of this methodology is to cultivate adaptable individuals who can flourish in a diverse array of environments.

Practical activities are becoming an integral feature of vocational education programs in a growing number of Asian nations, and although some have fully embraced experiential learning, many more are only beginning to do so. This method is built on the time-tested principle of community-based training, whereby participants gained valuable skills via hands-on experience in the workplace (Pilz & Regel, 2021). Fieldwork and practical apprenticeships, for instance, have a long history of putting students in scenarios where they may apply what they've learned in the classroom to actual challenges. By strengthening ties between local businesses and educational institutions, this plan expands on earlier efforts to include and empower locals.

The current push for experiential learning is also indicative of a larger movement toward flexible and evolving pedagogical approaches that may better serve the evolving demands of both students and employers. Programs that integrate classroom instruction with real-world experience help students develop the analytical, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills necessary for success in today's jobs. The needs of contemporary jobs can be better met by students when their education combines classroom theory with real-world experience as Qiang and Li, (2013) found. Together, these tactics strengthen their adaptability to a wide range of job responsibilities, making them more resilient to the ever-shifting nature of the modern workplace. Additionally, these programs aid in increasing job preparedness and employment outcomes by giving students practical experience, thereby bridging the gap between school and the workforce.

This comparison emphasizes that contemporary VET methods frequently resemble older systems that have been abandoned or given new names in Asian and Western contexts, summarized in **Table 2**. The emphasis is on the genuine development of skills and community involvement in cooperative learning, project-based learning, competency-based education, and a return to the fundamental principles of traditional vocational training (Kamdi, 2015). Legislators and educators must recognize and integrate these "forgotten" concepts into vocational and technical (VET) programs to establish a more comprehensive and applicable learning environment for contemporary students. This underscores the necessity of perpetually contemplating ones past experiences to guide contemporary developments in vocational education and the cyclical nature of educational systems.

Table 2. Comparing new rebranded practices in (VET) with their corresponding old practices
[author's research]

OLD PRACTICE	REBRANDED NEW TERM	DESCRIPTION
APPRENTICESHIPS	<i>Work-Based Learning / Internships</i>	Traditional hands-on training under a mentor, now rebranded as work-based learning or internships in modern industries.
PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL)	<i>Problem-Based / Inquiry-Based Learning</i>	Completing real-world projects, historically central to vocational education, now reframed in STEM and other subjects.
LEARNING BY DOING (Dewey's School model)	<i>Experiential Learning</i>	Hands-on, practical education once advocated by Dewey, rebranded as experiential learning across a wider range of disciplines.
COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION (Bloom And Kolb's Model)	<i>Mastery-Based Learning</i>	Students progress upon demonstrating skill proficiency, now called mastery-based learning, especially in personalized learning contexts.



VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	<i>Career and Technical Education (CTE)</i>	Vocational schools with a focus on trades, rebranded as CTE to emphasize pathways into high-demand careers like healthcare and technology.
SHOP CLASS / MANUAL TRAINING	<i>Makerspaces / Fab Labs/ Workshops etc.</i>	Traditional shop classes where students learn carpentry and metalwork, now rebranded as makerspaces or Fab Labs focusing on modern tools like 3D printing.
GUILD SYSTEMS	<i>Dual Education Systems</i>	Allocates time between classroom instruction and practical training, reflecting historical guild practices.
ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL EDUCATION	<i>Personalized Learning</i>	Customizes educational experiences to meet individual learner needs, contrasting with traditional uniform educational approaches.
CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION	<i>Blended Learning (Online Learning / Distance Education)</i>	Remote education delivered by mail, now transformed into online or digital distance learning enabled by the internet.

DISCUSSION

In summary, the document emphasizes that many modern VET practices are not entirely new but rather evolved versions of historical methods, particularly the apprenticeship model, which continue to play a vital role in vocational education today:

- [1] *Key Historical Practices Influencing Modern VET:* The medieval guild system is highlighted as a foundational model for vocational education, where apprentices learned trades through a structured framework under the guidance of a master. This system emphasized a combination of practical skills and theoretical knowledge, which is mirrored in today's dual training programs and apprenticeships. The resurgence of these models in countries like Germany and the UK illustrates the enduring relevance of these historical practices in addressing current labour market needs.
- [2] *Competency-Based Education vs. Traditional Learning Methods:* Competency-based education (CBE) has emerged as a significant trend in modern VET, focusing on the mastery of specific skills rather than the duration of instruction. This approach is reminiscent of traditional apprenticeship models, where advancement was contingent upon demonstrated proficiency. CBE allows for personalized learning experiences and aligns closely with the practical, hands-on training that characterized historical vocational education. The shift towards CBE reflects a broader movement to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of VET programs to meet contemporary job market demands.
- [3] *Implications of Rebranding Old Practices (Table 3.):* The rebranding of traditional practices in vocational education can lead to a perception of innovation, even when the underlying principles remain unchanged. This can obscure the historical roots of current educational methods, potentially leading to misunderstandings about their efficacy and relevance when unattached from their historical context. While modern adaptations may offer flexibility and responsiveness to current educational needs, it is crucial to recognize and integrate the foundational elements of past practices to enhance the effectiveness of VET programs. This understanding can help educators and policymakers design curricula that leverage historical insights while addressing contemporary challenges.

Table 3. Conceptual aspects of “Rebranding Old Practices”: summary

[author’s research]

CONCLUSION	DESCRIPTION
PERCEPTION OF INNOVATION	Rebranding traditional practices can create a misleading impression of innovation in VET methods, suggesting that they are entirely new when they are often adaptations of established systems.
OBSCURED HISTORICAL ROOTS	Egoistically- driven, self-interested scientists and researchers are presenting often present established concepts in a new form claiming them as entirely original new ideas, which they are not.



POTENTIAL FOR MISUNDERSTANDING	The renaming and rebranding of educational approaches can obscure their historical origins, making it difficult for educators and policymakers to identify the foundational principles that remain relevant today. This lack of clarity may lead to misconceptions about the effectiveness and applicability of current educational methods, as the original historical context can offer critical insights into their strengths and limitations in practice.
NEED FOR INTEGRATION	There is a critical need to integrate historical practices into modern VET curricula to enhance their effectiveness and ensure that they address contemporary labour market demands, but often .
FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS	While rebranding can offer flexibility and responsiveness to current educational needs, it is essential that these adaptations do not compromise the core principles that have historically proven effective.
CYCLICAL NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES	The cyclical nature of educational practices suggests that revisiting and revitalizing traditional methods can provide effective solutions to current challenges faced in vocational education and training.
IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT	A thorough understanding of the historical context of VET practices can inform the development of future educational strategies, ensuring they are grounded in proven methodologies while also addressing modern challenges.
ENCOURAGEMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING	By acknowledging the historical roots of current practices, educators can better promote lifelong learning and adaptability among students, thereby preparing them for the evolving demands of the job market.

CONCLUSION

The analysis emphasizes that many of these so-called “*innovations*” are not entirely new but rather *adaptations of time-tested methods* that have been revitalized to address current educational needs. It also explores the implications of this historical perspective for modern VET systems, advocating for the integration of traditional practices to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of vocational training. By drawing connections between the past and present, the narrative underscores the importance of learning from historical experiences to inform future developments in vocational education, ultimately aiming to better prepare students for the evolving workforce. In conclusion, the article posits that a comprehensive understanding of VET's historical context can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers, fostering a more effective and responsive vocational education framework that honours its rich legacy while embracing contemporary challenges. A crucial insight is highlighted in the document's examination of VET: Many of the approaches being hailed as new fads in vocational education and training are just updated versions of older models or revitalized ways of doing things. Competency-based and work-based learning, now hailed as “*innovations*” in VET, may trace their roots back to older systems, such as the Asian master-apprentice systems and the medieval European guild-based apprenticeship. This comparative study has shown that VET practices are cyclical in Asian and Western nations. Some Asian nations, like Japan and China, are bringing back project experiential-based learning, while others, like Germany and Finland, are reverting to standard apprenticeship systems before industrialization. Developing practical skills and integrating real-world experience with classroom instruction are two areas where these techniques continue to be highly beneficial. As a result, learning from and with history is emphasized toward the end of this discourse. Even though these techniques have been renamed and rewritten many times, they are still relevant today. Conversely, when applied now, none of these approaches will try to fix problems like technology and job possibilities. This approach ensures that vocational education and training programs can adequately prepare their students for future job markets by combining historically appropriate approaches with more modern innovations. These techniques, which have been renamed or are now in the “*forgotten*” category, must be used. Implementing practical approaches and creating creative answers to emerging difficulties are necessary to grow VET programs. This continuous evaluation of previous achievements will pave the way for future vocational education systems to be more flexible, efficient, and successful.



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