

Understanding Italian Experiences on Learning Recognition

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Abstract

This paper aims at highlighting some existing experiences and practices in the Italian context regarding the recognition of learning through *work experiences* and *work-based learning* as a response to the global labor market requirements, the youth unemployment and the NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) phenomenon.

One of the most significant and recent practices of *learning through work* regards the validation of competences acquired during the civil service (in the Youth Guarantee¹ program) within the national system of competences certification.

A *work-based experience*, on the side of the education-training system, is the school-work alternation.

The complexity of the national system and legal framework evidences that the process is quite articulated as it involves many stakeholders and different qualifications. Reforms and innovations enhance practices intended to improve the high unemployment level and to increase inclusion and integration of disadvantaged groups.

Keywords: learning through work, work-based learning, nonformal and informal learning.

Introduction

In the transition from the traditional assumption of "jobs policies" to the more current concept of "requirements of the global labor market," rising from employment changes and the continuous innovation and internationalization of occupations, trades and industries, the process of learning recognition assumes a central role. The global market and the development of new technologies have imposed higher professional standards in the workplace. To answer to the increasing demand of required competences and qualifications, implementing specific actions (learning, assessment, and recognition) the risk of economic and social marginalization is able to be reduced.

The present economic and social situation in Italy has undoubtedly contributed to the focus on innovative competences. It has also encouraged the recognition of nonformal and informal learning opportunities for many workers and companies (perhaps in financial difficulty) to support professional, geographical and cross-sectoral mobility. The possibility to obtain formal recognition of skills, competences and qualifications acquired in different learning contexts, through working practices or experiences linked to civil and personal life (civil services, volunteering, etc.), support the development of and sustain individuals' occupations and professions.


The complexity of the Italian system, together with the national legal framework, evidences that the process

is quite articulated and complex. It involves many stakeholders (Ministries, Regions, labor market agencies, research institutes) working together to solve the economic issues of the times. Reforms and innovations of practices are intended to improve the high unemployment level and to increase inclusion and integration of disadvantaged groups (such as migrants, for instance). In this context, work-based experiences (such as the school-work alternation within the education system) and practices of learning through work (such as the validation of competences acquired during the civil service within the Youth Guarantee program) are examples of the innovative dynamics that are at the basis of the recent reforms.

Part I: The Italian Education System

An indication of the national context helps to understand the current reforms, as the Italian system of General Education (GE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) is quite complex, especially VET provisions whose competency is shared among the Ministry of Education² and local authorities (Regions and Autonomous Provinces). Such complexity requires a holistic approach to analyze and understand the way competent bodies interoperate, work over time and function within the context of a larger, evolving system. This becomes essentially a system made up of several interwoven and interconnected systems, representing the diversity of national and regional approaches. This diversity leads sometimes to difficulty in sharing models and common understandings, but it is also a source for pilot actions and innovations. The education cycles are based on the progression of education pathways in terms of age of students, type of pathways, courses/pathways propaedeutic to others, etc.

- I CYCLE (from 6 to 13 years of age): covers primary (5 years) and lower secondary education (3 years) pathways – compulsory education.
- II CYCLE (from 14 to 19 years of age): covers upper secondary education (5 years) and other VET pathways (from one to four years), including compulsory education (till 16 years of age) and right duty to education and training (till 18 years of age).
- III CYCLE: post-secondary education and training, academic pathways (higher education) and other VET pathways.

 **CONTINUOUS LEARNING:** activities to continually develop and improve skills and knowledge in order to perform effectively and adapt to changes in the workplace. Pathways usually Labor Market (LM) oriented.

The first cycle is mainly compulsory education and it represents the basis for the second cycle and it is under the MEUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research) competency. The second cycle is divided into two main pathways: those regulated nationally (under the MEUR competency) and regional ones (under the competency of Regions). The full integration between all systems involved is essential to enable the development of a dynamic system in which local requirements are taken on board and institutional and social actors may play distinctive and complementary roles, through predefined and shared procedures. Qualifications are still described with great differences among systems and methodological approaches (such as Learning Outcome and competence-based) have been implemented with a level of variation.

Analyzing descriptors, such as type and characteristics of the qualifications, EQF levels, competent bodies, that can be distinguished are delineated in Table 1.

Table 1: The Italian Education System

System	Description	Characteristics of the Qualification	Qualification Type	EQF Level	Competent Body
GE Education	Lyceum , providing at national level General Education (GE).	Qualifications recognized at national level, which allows students to enter university. Five-year upper secondary schools. School-work alternation during the final 3 years.	Diploma	EQF 4	<i>Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca</i> (MIUR) Ministry of Education, University and Research competency (MEUR).
(T)VET (Technical) Vocational Education and Training	Technical Institutes and Vocational Institutes , providing at national level technical and vocational pathways.				
ITS - Higher Technical Institutes	Courses organized by Higher Technical Institutes (ITS). They last 4 semesters for a total of 1800/2000 hours. Special subjects courses may take up to 6 semesters.				

Continued on next page.

Table 1: The Italian Education System (continued)

System	Description	Characteristics of the Qualification	Qualification Type	EQF Level	Competent Body
VT Vocational Training	These provisions are addressed to students who have completed the first cycle of education. The training provision is designed by Regions and implemented by accredited training providers. In some regions also vocational institutes (MIUR) can provide these pathways within a system of subsidiary, integrative and complementary training. Pathways are from one to four years long.	Qualifications issued at different level (EQF 3 and 4) are recognized mainly in regional/sector sub-systems. In some cases, following State-Regions agreements, qualifications are nationally recognized. These pathways do not allow access to university. Competence-based approach has been implemented.	Three-year VET courses A first qualification level called: <i>Professional operator certificate.</i>	EQF 3	Local authorities (19 Regions and 2 Autonomous Provinces: Trento and Bolzano).
			Four-year VET courses A second qualification level called: <i>Professional technician diploma.</i>	EQF 4	
IFTS – Higher Technical Education and Training	Post-diploma VET courses which last 2 semesters, for a maximum of 800/1000 hours.	Qualifications are awarded by Regions, but nationally recognized upon common standards. The design of these paths were Learning Outcome oriented.	Higher technical specialization certificate.	EQF 4	

The homogenization in terms of skills and competence descriptions and mutual recognition in national and regional systems is foreseen in order to overcome diversity and benefit from different best practices. Many regions for instance, have developed strong networks and outreach services (information centres, Informalavoro, employment centres) and have extensive experiences in terms of guidance in study or work context and a good understanding of labor market trends and needs.

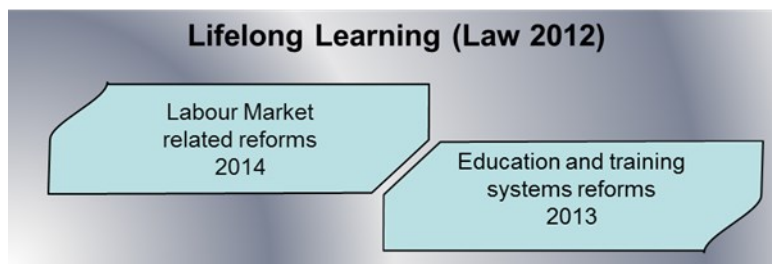
Part II: The Legal Framework

As a result of the economic crisis that began in 2008 and the subsequent period of profound crisis of the Italian labor market, the years 2010-2015 may be considered the period in which the main legislative

innovations were issued. Following the numerous solicitations coming from EU, national stakeholders, and the economic and social situation, Italy has been involved in a profound process of reform regarding both the education and training systems and the competences certification system, all connected to the development of the National Qualifications Framework.

The first response to the economic and social crises occurred in 2012 with the law³ establishing the right to lifelong learning and gradually implementing different steps of a national lifelong learning strategy, based on the development of mechanisms of transparency, accumulation, validation and transfer of skills and competences acquired by the individual.

The subsequent interventions were divided into two interconnected directions:



A. Labor market-related reforms

The implementing measures related to the LM are quite compound and two main domains are relevant in this paper:

- Services for employment and active policies.
- Processes connected to the valorization of qualifications, certification frameworks, validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Referring to services for employment and active policies to support labor market, these have been developed mainly through the Jobs Act Reform of 2014, which involved a series of innovations intended to create stable employment. The Jobs Act is made up of two main legislative acts,⁴ followed by several implementing decrees: The Legislative Decree (no. 150)⁵ issued in 2015 intended to reorganize the legislation frame regarding services for employment and active policies; and, the Legislative Decree (no. 81)⁶ concerning the development of an organic discipline of employment contracts and review of the related regulations. This introduced new features for the *apprenticeship* contract, now considered as a “permanent contract” aimed at training and employment.

In parallel, the process connected to the valorization of qualifications, which had started in 2012 with the First Italian Referencing Report to the EQF, had further developed in the years 2013-2016. In 2013, a step forward concerned the Legislative Decree (no. 13/2013),⁷ which defined the *general rules and essential performance levels for the identification and validation of nonformal and informal learning and the minimum standards of the national system of competence certification*. This act represents the basis for the implementation of the national system of competences certification and it aims at enhancing recognition and transparency of qualifications. It has reached important results in the past two years and has become an effective legal framework for:

- The implementation of the national repertory of qualifications as a unique reference for the certification of competences.
- The definition of a framework of minimum standards which guarantees the quality of competences certification services.

In 2015 competent Ministries, Regions and Autonomous Provinces (Inter-ministerial Decree of 30 June 2015)⁸ agreed on an *Operative Framework for the national recognition of the regional qualifications and competences, within the national repertory of qualifications*. The decree also provides the infrastructure and operational basis for the overall set up of the system for the certification of competences. An online tool: the *Atlas of Labour and the Repertory of Qualifications*⁹ is available since 2016. At the end of 2016, national guidelines for validation and certification of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL) were also defined. Further, a proposal for referencing those qualifications not included in the First Italian Referencing Report, together with the definition of the Italian NQF (correlated to EQF and to Regional repertories) was forwarded in 2016 by the Technical Group¹⁰ to the responsible Ministries and shortly will be formalized.

All regions are implementing the above-mentioned provisions and all these actions are in line with the requirements of the worldwide innovations and challenges to encourage the development of visible and demonstrable qualifications, skills and competences.

⇒ Meanwhile concrete applications for specific target groups have been developed. In particular, actions supporting the national program of civil service volunteers, in connection with the Youth Guarantee program (2015/2016) constituted the basis for pilot experiences to validate and make transparent skills and competences.

B. Education and training system reform (the “Good School”)

Similar objectives were addressed to reform the education and training system in Italy. In 2015 a recent Law (no. 107/2015)¹¹ reforming the education and training system under the competency of the MEUR, the so called “Good School,” is intended to increase skills and competences necessary in a prospective of better inclusion in the future labor market. The main innovations are oriented to:

- Provide an offer in the education and training systems more adequate to students' needs (personalization of learning pathways where possible) and to guide them to the future labor market needs.
- Introduce a plan to digitalize schools, involving the entire education system, allocating EUR 30 million to schools in 2015, to enhance competences and tools related to digital innovation.¹²
- Increase specific skills connected to the key competences of the EU 2006 Recommendation.
- Improve contents and methodologies.
- Increment school-work alternation approaches.

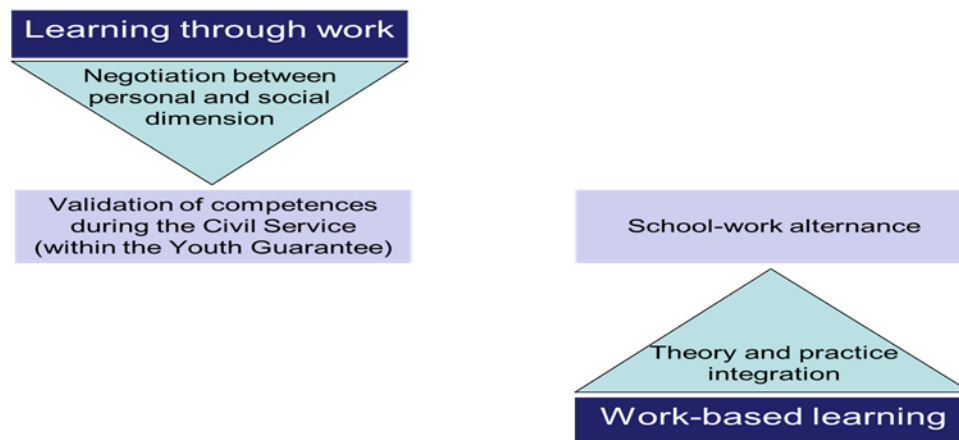
⇒ The school-work alternation approach (the Italian dual system), now mandatory in all upper secondary cycle of the education and training system, has the purpose to innovate methods and practices.

Part III: Learning Recognition in Italy

Beyond the boundaries of the formal learning, the attention today is placed on nonformal and informal learning, community learning, workplace learning (Eraut, 2004), work-based learning (Raelin, 1997), learning through work experience (Guile & Griffiths, 2001), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Myers, 2009), and tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000).

Learning validation practices are aimed at identifying, accrediting, and certifying learning acquired in nonformal and informal contexts. These procedures have increased in recent years in all educational sectors: Higher Education (HE), General Education (GE), and Vocational Training (VT). Since the mid-1990s, formal and informal practices have tried to acquire equal dignity over the formal education and training systems. In Italy, many models and pilot actions on recognition of learning (on a regional basis) have been developed. One of the most significant and recent practice of *learning through work* regards the *validation of competences acquired during the civil service* (within the Youth Guarantee program).

An alternative experience, on the side of the education system under the MEUR competency, is the *school-work alternation*. Using *work-based learning* and increasing the employability of young people is a step forward to be closer to the needs of enterprises. Experiences within companies and organizations provide students with the professional skills they need to perform an assigned task, regardless of the title of their formal learning pathway. This innovation is not only to develop innovative educational pathways, but also to adapt individual skills to the needs and specificities of the global labor market.



1. Practices on validation within the national system of competences certification

Until 2013, at national level in Italy, there was great understanding and sharing of principles regarding the recognition of nonformal and informal learning, with few specific rules (only the *Libretto Formativo del cittadino*)¹³ and no national system. While at regional level many experiences, practices and pilot projects have occurred. Within many regions, approaches of validation and certification have been in place (e.g., Basilicata, Campania, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Marche Puglia and the autonomous province of Trento). In other regions, strategies that generated concrete services were formalized (e.g., Emilia Romagna, Lombardia, Piemonte, Sardegna, Toscana, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto). Many practices were developed during the last 3 years at local levels in different fields, in response to the growing needs of people and enterprises and following the innovative European programs (such as Leonardo and Erasmus+).¹⁴

One common difficulty experienced was the insufficient regulations regarding the legal value of the certification system and the characteristics of the operating framework outside the formal context. In the past, legislation was more focused on the classification of employment contracts (job policy) rather than identify innovative way to respond to the labor market requirements. The latest evolution of the labor market (followed by appropriate regulations and legislations) now investigates more on qualifications in terms of content and descriptors, such as knowledge, skills and competences together with working processes. In this sense, identifying the connections with the education and training system and the institutions governing the employment transitions at national and international level is easier.

A step forward in this process occurred in 2013, when the national system of competences certification obtained a strong legislative impulse. Indeed, the main innovation of the process was developing a national system of competences certification. This included not only titles and qualifications of the formal system of education and training, but also procedures, reference paths and standards for the identification, validation and recognition of learning acquired by the individual in all contexts and, in particular, those achieved in nonformal and informal contexts. This national system of competences represents the main step toward the establishment of a common methodological framework¹⁵ for gathering all regional qualifications repertories in a homogeneous national system. The aim is to integrate the various regional repertories, creating a national

repertory and assigning specific roles to competent institutions.

In this context, the certification of skills and competences acquired in any context becomes a public act, ensuring transparency and recognition of learning, and leading to the release of a certificate, which represents the formal document validating learning. Such validation, recorded in an electronic dossier, guarantees the adequate institutional recognition of both education-training systems and the labor market, in terms of employability and empowerment. The national recognition is assured within the national system of competences certification.

A particularly interesting example at national level is the pilot action which has been developed in some regions (since 2015 and it is now at its third phase) concerning the validation of competences acquired during the civil service within the Youth Guarantee. This example may be considered one of the first experiences at a national level in which the Youth Guarantee (supporting young unemployed people) and concrete regional services for citizens were simultaneously activated. In most of the participating regions, the method used provided guidance events and outreach services, such as individual interviews and seminars that were addressed to young people and their mentors. The main aim was to elaborate a personal *dossier*, related to a professional profile, to be validated within the regional repertory of qualifications.

The dossier is a collection of documents, which allow for the identification and subsequent validation of the selected competences, leading to prior learning validation, starting from the activities carried out during the civil service. Through the presentation and subsequent analysis of the dossier, the validation process starts and a committee of experts is nominated by the competent region. In the identification phase the experiences of the applicant are made transparent and the evidences produced by the participant and the learning outcomes resulting from the assessment carried out during the civil service are evaluated. In the assessment phase, competences are checked/tested. In case of nonformal and informal learning, practical tests can be used. At the end of the process, the entitled body (usually the competent region) issues the certificate of competence validation, which is linked to the regional repertory and recognized at national level in line with the implementation of the national system of competences certification.

These pilot experiences were carried out in eleven regions (Abruzzo, Basilicata, Campania, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Molise, Piemonte, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia and Umbria). Through the pilots, skills and competences related to occupational profiles identified by participants according to the activities undertaken during the civil service, and that were included in the regional Qualifications repertories, were validated. In order to enable the validation of cross-sector/soft/key skills, not present in regional repertories, some regions (for example in Liguria) decided to include a specific learning section, in which the *eight key competences*¹⁶ are presented to the volunteers as an alternative to occupational skills. These processes represent the minimum standards to ensure the validation of competences, namely, the confirmation of the achievement of measured learning outcomes in relation to the appropriate standard. In this sense, *learning through work* overtakes the dimension connected to a single occupation or working context. It represents a series of negotiations between the personal and social aspect, made up of theoretical and practical learning progresses. Working experiences acquire significance and authenticity as part of the individual work and life. The working context turns out to be a “didactic mediator” supporting individual lifelong learning.

The system has the potential to create a new model to regulate the labor market, especially for young unemployed people or disadvantaged groups (such as migrants, for instance). Competences acquired and validated may be directly connected to a full recognition in the labor market (perhaps in the individual employment contract) or to the acquisition of a full qualification within the education and training system. In this

direction, the validation of nonformal and informal learning may act as a bridge between the weaknesses of the education and training systems and the rapid innovation and changes of working processes. However, idiosyncrasies can be found as learning through work is still considered, by rules, nonformal learning, deserving a higher level of value. Thus, the expectations regarding initiatives designed to promote the recognition of prior learning and work-based learning are still very high.

Unfortunately, acquiring a professional or academic qualification, a title or certificate, or a full qualification through recognition of nonformal and informal learning is still not possible, as it occurs in France. But we are moving, from different regional experiences only anchored to the regional qualifications systems, to greater national uniformity through the system of competences certification and the NQF. The experiences of the civil service within the Youth Guarantee have shown how to combine successfully different purposes: involving territories, and using a nationally shared methodology. Besides, the traditional weaknesses of the education and training systems, connected to the rapid innovation and changes of occupations, skills demand and the labor market requirements, have also been addressed with innovative practices in the last reform (the so called “Good School” reform).

2. Practices on work-based experiences within the education and training system (the “Good School”)

The educational and training system under the competency of MEUR is evolving, becoming more operative by opting for a structural policy, more in favour of the development of new (even personal) skills, in order to address unemployment (especially of young people) and the skills mismatch which is very high in Italy.¹⁷ This ambitious goal is intended to be achieved through different improvements. One of these is represented by the school-work alternation, which introduces a learning method, tailored on the needs of the world outside school. This involves different stakeholders, such as internal teachers (in schools) and external tutors (in enterprises), to work together, promoting intersectoral communication and setting the basis for exchange experiences and mutual growth.

School-work alternation is one of the most significant innovations of Law no. 107/2015 (the so called “*Good School*”). In line with the principle of a more interconnected education system, a period of learning in an organization/enterprise becomes mandatory for all students (16-19 year-old) in the last three years of the secondary education and training cycle under the MEUR competency. It requires 400 hours in technical and vocational institutes and 200 hours in general high schools (lyceum) which may be carried out also abroad.

This practice was quite widespread in technical and vocational institutes, but the extension to lyceum represents a deep innovation in the new education format compared to traditional school activities. With this practice, finally, the work-based learning enters in all schools, even in those pathways traditionally considered unsuitable with learning through working experiences (such as Lyceum). It is also a European unicum. Even in Germany, with the dual system, work-school experiences concern only technical and professional institutes.

This model goes beyond the division between knowledge-based learning and practical experiences. The integration of theory and practice and of knowledge and experience is functional to specific tasks or occupations. Work-based learning experiences are intended to support the transition from education-training system to labor market. This is a cultural change, which goes beyond European practices, combining them with the specificities of the economic, socio-cultural context of Italy. In fact, despite their different roles, schools and enterprises are obliged to interact with greater education and social co-responsibility to enhance students’ objectives toward sustainable and inclusive personal and professional growth.

The pathway offers students the opportunity to enter in working contexts, appropriate to stimulate their own creativity. The understanding of activities and processes within an organization is considered important to develop their own initiatives and entrepreneurial competency, which means understanding how to translate ideas into action. It is connected to several key competences (within national and European classifications)¹⁸ such as creativity, innovation and risk management, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects to achieve goals. Competences helping individuals to become aware of the context in which they work and to be able to identify future opportunities. All subjects involved become educational partners offering students high-qualifying learning opportunities.

In this context, defining and distinguishing school-work alternation from internship and apprenticeship is important. The school-work alternation is made up of: informative modules which can be carried out in class or in an organization/enterprise, and practical modules within the workplace. When compared to internship, school-work alternation is a more structured and systematic learning pathway; it is mandatory, with a strong organizational commitment related to long period (three years) learning experiences. In this sense, school-work alternation has become an integral part of the didactic methodology of the secondary education and training cycle under MEUR, while internship is usually a tool to help young people to enter the labor market through training and work. School-work alternation also differs from apprenticeship as it is not a working relationship. Apprenticeship is, in fact, an employment relationship including a training plan in the contract. Differently to apprenticeship, students are never workers; they are intended to learn competences consistent with the chosen course of study or to key competences.

Data¹⁹ (at regional level) from the first school year (2015/2016) are quite encouraging:

- 87.4 percent of the total schools have developed school-work alternation pathways in the year 2015/2016, compared to 42 percent of the previous year (2014/2015). The highest number of participating schools are in the following regions: Molise (97.8 percent), Umbria (94.9 percent), Emilia Romagna (93.5 percent), Piemonte and Friuli Venezia Giulia (93.4 percent).
- 90.6 percent of students of the third year (starting class being compulsory) participated in school-work alternance pathways. The regions where more students participated in school-work alternance pathways are: Lombardia (105,564), Campania (66,411), Lazio (64,265), Veneto (55,245) and Sicilia (53,554).

By fulfilling the obligation to develop school-work alternance pathways, the most significant increase in the number of students regards Southern Regions: Puglia (+478 percent), Campania (+406 percent), Calabria (+270 percent), and Sicilia (+258 percent) of the total classes (3rd, 4th and 5th year).

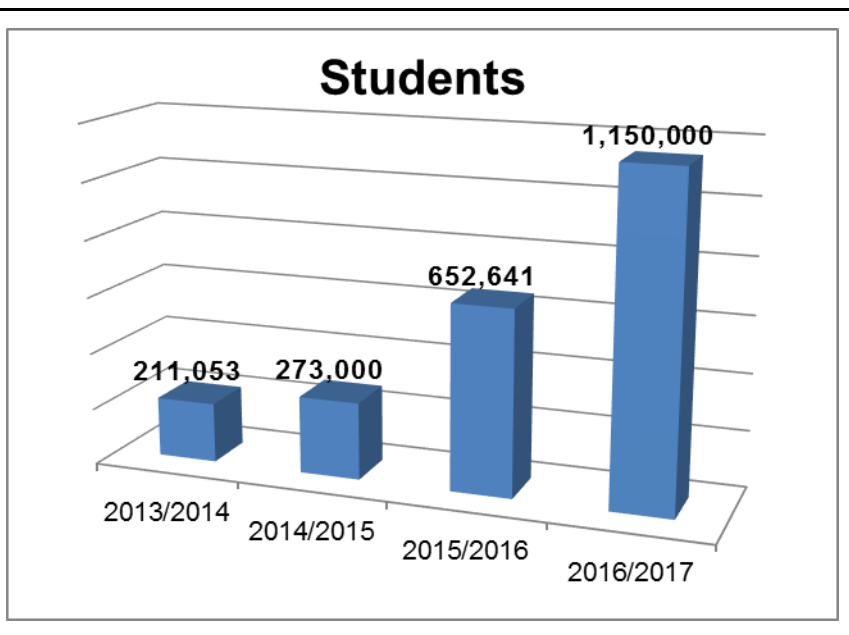
In the school year 2014/2015, prior to compulsory alternance, students involved were 273,000 and schools 54 percent.

In the school year 2015/2016 students participating were 652,641 - an increase of 139 percent. Schools passed from 54 percent to 96 percent.

Pathways ranged from 11,585 to 29,437 (+154 percent).

Also, host organizations increased (+ 41 percent) and they are mostly enterprises (36.1 percent). Other pathways were developed in school or in simulated context, for example in libraries (12.4 percent), in public administrations (8.5 percent), nonprofit organizations (7.6 percent) and the remaining percentage (35.4 percent) in professional firms, associations/orders and trade unions.

MEUR objective is to involve 1,150,000 during the second mandatory year (2016/2017) and to involve 1.5 million regularly since 2017 onward.



The subdivision of students involved per institution type is the following:

Five-year upper secondary schools (**Lyceum**) students: 227,308; they were 12,371 in 2014/2015 (+1.737 percent).

Five-year **technical schools** students: 140,699; they were 31,592 in 2014/2015 (+345 percent).

Five-year **vocational schools** students: 87,055; they were 45,789 in 2014/2015 (+90 percent).

Data regarding the participation of schools and students are remarkable. School-work alternation experiences are a powerful tool to motivate and stimulate young people to confront with the labor market, while they are still in their studying pathways. If this practice finds the appropriate position in the system, it will improve transition from the education system to the labor market. Considering the high level of young unemployed in Italy (around 40 percent), it should not be undervalued, but there are still some critical issues.

For both students and teachers (especially in lyceum) school-work alternation is still considered a further engagement added to the traditional duties. In this sense, changing how "school" is understood and the model to achieve skills demands by reducing skills mismatch, and at the same time, achieving the well-known high quality learning outcomes is important. Furthermore, to investigate whether all school personnel is prepared for this change is necessary. This is why surveys on students' learning (made by Invalsi)²⁰ and the assessments of the quality of the services play an important role in modernizing the model. School-work alternation is a shared path between the system of education-training and enterprises, and it is fundamental to identify common and shared goals for the development of motivated and encouraged young people. This is not always a converging match; there are different expectations (labor market versus education and the other way round), and dialogue needs to be encouraged and supported. Defining a shared future collaboration between schools and enterprises is necessary and at the same time develop mechanisms focused on guidance and support toward the validation of competences.

Conclusions

The development of competences validation practices, acquired in working contexts, and the possibility for

students to experience work-based learning, are important practices supporting the economic and social challenge and is connected to the high national unemployment rate. Considering data²¹ on unemployment (Italy is the third highest among European countries in the period 2007-2016 among young people and adults 20-64 years of age), and the confirmation of the NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) phenomenon (NEET rate in Italy is the highest at EU level, in 2016), practices that improve the transition to the labor market need to be monitored and implemented. In addition, several studies (e.g., Castellano, Kastorinis, Lancellotti, Marracino, & Villani, 2014) demonstrated a substantial gap between the skills of young Italians and the skills needs of Italian enterprises, which denies both a lack of specific required skills and practical experience.

In Italy, a further expansion of the interrelations between education-training systems and the labor market needs to be ensured, which currently remain too weak. In addition, recognition of prior learning and learning acquired in all contexts (such as nonformal and informal learning) still need to be enhanced. Nonformal and informal learning combined with the formal learning context par excellence (school) may superficially appear as an oxymoron. In reality, all changes in the last decade in Italy (and in many other European countries) have affected both theories and strategies of lifelong learning and the labor market. The theoretical and methodological paths through which work-based experiences during the “study” path as well as practices of recognition and validation of learning acquired in training-working activities (such as the civil service), represent innovative actions for the entire national system, intended to implement a comprehensive process of rethinking and improving the transition from study to work.

In this sense, guidance and accompanying actions for the recognition and validation of learning, as well as the critical examination of the methodological approaches and operational tools used, are fundamental. It emerges the strong learning value for the development of functional methods and tools for competence certification, but in a placement perspective.

Today, guidance should accompany people throughout the entire life, as the transition phases have multiplied. This implies the development of new methodologies and a new vision of lifelong guidance, with new tools and processes, which provides guidance services accessible to everyone, without any distinction between the various types of guidance (scholastic, academic, professional and personal). Living and working in the knowledge society requires active citizens who want to manage their own personal and professional careers independently.

Notes

¹ According to the European Commission (n.d.), “The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, [and] traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education” (para. 1).

² MEUR - Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR – Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca).

³ Law no. 92/2012 (so called Fornero Law): reformed the labor market and; established the right to lifelong learning; relaunched policies for learning through permanent territorial networks; developed services for the identification and valorization of formal, nonformal and informal learning (even considering a unified ICT [information and communications technology] tool); defined essential performance levels (livelli essenziali delle prestazioni - LEP) and national standards for the validation of nonformal and informal learning and the certification of skills and competences; and advanced the development of the NQF (Repertorio nazionale delle Qualificazioni).

4 The Jobs Act is the legislative initiative on employment, promoted in 2014 and 2015, that includes the following measures: 1) Decree no. 34/2014 converted with changes in the Law no. 78/2014 regarding urgent measures to increase employment and for the simplification of obligations imposed on enterprises on labor costs; 2) Law no. 183/2014 delegating the government on the reform of social welfare, employment services and active policies, and concerning the reorganization of other services: employment contracts, inspective activities, life and work care, protection and conciliation.

5 Legislative Decree 14th September 2015, no. 150 on the reorganization of the legislation on employment services and active policies.

6 Decree no. 81/2015 on the reorganization of the employment contracts and the new discipline of tasks and duties.

7 Legislative Decree no. 13/2013, regarding the “Definition of the general rules and essential performance levels for the identification and validation of nonformal and informal learning and the minimum standards of the national system of competence certification, following art. 4, subparagraphs 58 e 68, of the law no. 92/2012.”

8 Interministerial Decree 30th June 2015 regarding the “Definition of an operative framework for the national recognition of the regional qualifications and competences, within the national Repertory of qualifications following Art. 8 of the Legislative Decree no. 13/2013.”

9 The website is http://nrpitalia.isfol.it/sito_standard/sito_demo/index.php.

10 A Technical Group constituted by the Ministry of Labour and the Regions, supported by ISFOL (now INAPP) and Tecnostruttura (<http://www.tecnostruttura.it/>).

11 Law no. 107/2015 on the “Reform of the national education and training system” – the “Good School.”

12 See http://www.istruzione.it/scuola_digitale/index.html.

13 The Libretto Formativo del cittadino (Citizen's Training Booklet) is a tool designed to collect, synthesize and inform on the different learning experiences of workers as well as the competences acquired, in any contexts: at school, in training paths, at work and in daily life. The Booklet aims at improving the readability and use of skills and competences. Issued by a ministerial decree in 2005, since 2006 it has been adopted (on an experimental basis) in several regions with different approaches and for different beneficiaries: workers, unemployed people, apprentices, migrant workers, armed forces personnel during their leave periods, volunteers (see <http://librettocompetenze.isfol.com>).

14 Those practices are surveyed by INAPP-ISFOL. At the following website, useful information: <http://librettocompetenze.isfol.com>.

15 This framework, The Atlas of Work and Qualifications (Atlante del Lavoro e delle Qualificazioni), is found at <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/>.

16 The national development of key competences, generated from the European set of key competences (Recommendation 2006/962/EC on key competences for lifelong learning), and it is based on the Ministerial Decree no. 139/2007. This rule states that “knowledge and skills required to achieve compulsory education are referred to four cultural axes, which form the basis to develop learning pathways oriented to the acquisition of eight key citizenship competences.”

17 OCSE findings: PIAAC and Survey of Adult Skills.

18 See Bonacci and Santanicchia, 2016.

19 Source: Ministry of Education, University and research (<http://www.istruzione.it/alternanza/primoanno.shtml>).

20 INVALSI (Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione) website: <http://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/index.php>.

21 Source of data: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics).

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