DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMPETENCES AND CONTINUING EDUCATION OF ADULTS IN FRANCE

BENDRŲJŲ KOMPETENCIJŲ LAVINIMAS IR SUAUGUSIŲJŲ TĘSTINIS MOKYMASIS PRANCŪZIJOJE

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Summary. The article provides overview of the main historical, legislative and institutional developments of key competences and continuing education for adults in France, as well as analyses the main training mechanisms and policy instruments used to facilitate adults’ access to the acquisition and development of key competences.

Key words: key competences, adult education, institutional development, qualifications, legislation of adult education, France

Santrauka. Straipsnyje yra pateikiama bendrųjų kompetencijų lavinimo ir suaugusiųjų tęstinio mokymosi Prancūzijoje istorinės raidos, teisinės bazės ir institucinės plėtros apžvalga bei analizuojami svarbiausi šios šalies suaugusiųjų švietimo ir bendrųjų kompetencijų lavinimo mechanizmai bei politikos instrumentai.

Raktiniai žodžiai: bendrosios kompetencijos, institucijų plėtra, kvalifikacijos, suaugusiųjų švietimo teisinė bazė, Prancūzija

INTRODUCTION

This research paper integrates within the framework of the project on the “implementation of a platform for the development of key competences of adults” funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. As an input contribution, it feeds into the comparative study of the current practices of policy measures and institutional frameworks for key competences development through adult education within the French, German and Lithuanian contexts, leading ultimately to the preparation of policy learning recommendations and guidelines. The adopted research methodology for the French contribution to the project is mainly based on recent scientific desk research and documentation, completed by a set of interviews conducted with experts and representatives of different stakeholders involved in continuing education and key competences development of adults. The outcome report consists of two main sections. The first section is an overview of the main historical, legislative and institutional developments of key competences and continuing education for adults in a French context. The second section deals with the description and analysis of the main
training mechanisms and policy instruments used to facilitate adults’ access to the acquisition and development of key competences.

OVERVIEW OF MAIN HISTORICAL, LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF KEY COMPETENCES AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMPETENCES

Although the debate concerning the notion of competences was launched in the 1970s between social partners (under the pressure of increased need for individualised human resources development and performance evaluation), the move towards the use of the concept of “competences” started effectively during the 1980s and intensified particularly since the 1990s. The major development of competence-based practice appeared at the beginning of the 1980s when the Ministry of Education introduced, through the process of designing its own awarded vocational qualifications, the certification referential standards (referential de certification) connected with each occupational profile in terms of three sets of descriptors of competences and knowledge: (a) capacities (capacités) as a way to qualify in general and transversal know-how, (b) competences (savoir-faire) meaning the individual’s acquired know-how in connection with the actions undertaken in the surrounding technical and social environment, (c) associated knowledge (savoir associés) corresponding the whole body of knowledge and information in the domain held by the individual and relevant related objects and environments (Maillard, 2013; Dif, 2010). The other major development followed in 1984 and was connected with the increased need to develop new competences through the involvement of the enterprises (Cannac & CEGOS, 1985). In 1993, the public authorities encouraged further the development of competence-based practices when the national employment agency called then ANPE (“Agence National Pour l’Emploi” transformed into “Pôle Emploi” since 2006) modified the labour market “Operational Repertory of Trades and Occupations” (ROME – Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des emplois) to be competence-based system. According to ROME, “the concept of competence is a set of knowledge, know-how and “know-how to be” (social competences) which are connected with the individual’s occupation or job in a given situation of activity. In its 1997 version, ROME distinguishes between three types of competences: technical core competences, specific competences (or capacities) and associated competences (ROME, 1997). In its last version, they are regrouped into two main categories: key and specific competences (ROME, 2015). This development contributed effectively to stimulating academic debates about the notions of competences and encouraged the enterprises to adopt an individualised competence approach in human resource management and development and abandon relying on the use of the previous non-labour market focussed notion of qualification.

The development of key competences in France for both young and adult people was mainly the result of two basic impulses: (a) the conceptual framework of the programme “DéSéCo” launched by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) towards the end of 1997 (and published on 04/09/2003), which identified and classified the key competences into three categories (acting autonomously, ability to use tools interactively and interacting in socially heterogeneous groups) where each one of them is composed of three capacities; (b) the EU reference framework defining (eight) key
competences for lifelong learning (EU recommendation 2006/962/EC). In this context, the National Agency for Fight Against Illiteracy (ANLCI – Agence Nationale de Lutte Contre l’Illétrisme), established in September 2003 a “national standards framework” defining four degrees of basic (core) competences: Structural benchmark competences (basics in writing, counting and communicating with others), functional competences for everyday life, competences facilitating actions in various situations and competences reinforcing the autonomy of action in the knowledge society (ANLCI, 2003).

Also under the influence of the OECD, the Laboratory CRI (Conseil, Recherche, Innovation) connected with the adult education provider GRETA (Groupement d’ETBblissements Publics d’enseignement) developed in 2005 a standards framework of nine practice-based key competences for vocational inclusion of adults, namely: motivation, ability of undertaking executive functions, capacity of developing cognitive functions, self-learning/knowledge, self-confidence (self-esteem), managing own emotions and stress, autonomy of thought and action, managing social relationships (living as a citizen) and communication (DIESE.NET-CRI, 2005).

Under the impulse of the European recommendations and those of the High Council for Education (HCE-Haut Conseil de l’Education) and as an implementation of the orientation and programming law on the future of the school (Act of 23 April 2005), the Ministry of National Education introduced (via the Decree of 11 July 2006) a common ground educational programme (within initial compulsory education) consisting of the following seven key competences: mastery of French language, practicing of at least one modern foreign language, basic competences in mathematics and in scientific and technological culture, mastering the usual ICT, acquiring humanistic culture, developing social and civic competences, autonomy and sense of initiative.

Also within the framework of the transposition of the recommendations of the European Parliament and Council of 18 December 2006, the Ministry of Labour and employment set out a framework programme for access to key competences for a sustainable integration into the labour market via the Circular of 3 January 2008 issued by its General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training called the “DGEFP” (now DIRECCTE – Regional Directorate for Enterprises, Competition, Consumptions, Labour and Employment). The focus was only on the following five key competences, considering that the other three can be dealt with transversally: communication in French, mathematical culture and basic competences in sciences and technology, digital culture, learning to learn and communication in a foreign language. Although this programme targets primarily vulnerable people (such as job-seekers, early school leavers without or with insufficient qualifications and beneficiaries of assisted vocational inclusion employment contracts), it is also open to all beneficiary employees of various adult education training instruments and related financing mechanisms, including innovative and experimental specific training programmes such as “planning management of jobs and competences” (GPEC – Gestion prévisionnelles des Emplois et des Compétences), “validation of acquired experience (VAE)”, alternating vocational training contracts, etc.

At the request of the ANLCI, the DGEFP (DIRECCTE) and several professional sectors, a practice-based referential standards framework for professionally situated key competences called the “Référentiel CCSP” (Référentiel des Compétences Clés en Situation Professionnelle) was established in March 2009. As it is constructed on the basis of observed work situations and not on pre-established definitions based on academic knowledge, the CCSP
adopts resolutely a professional approach in identifying and defining key competences. In fact, it is based on connecting the analysis and description of a work situation in its various dimensions (activities, criteria, professional capacities) with an analytical inventory of general and applied knowledge used in this work situation. The identified professionally situated key competences are organized within this framework according the first three (out of the four) degrees of the “national standards framework” established by the ANLCI in 2003. Additionally, by taking into consideration the recommendations of the EU framework in its inventory of key competences, the CCSP also adopts an interdisciplinary approach where the key linguistic competences (reading, writing, and speaking) are looked at as a broader package covering other dimensions and constituting in all the key competences. The CCSP targets various users, namely: (a) enterprises and local authorities as employers; (b) private and public funding organizations and institutions such as the sectoral and inter-professional OPCA (CVT accredited joint funding collectors), the State and local authorities and the national centre for local civil servants (CNFPT-Centre National de la Function Publique Territoriale); (c) training providers; (d) consultants and counselors in VET and vocational inclusion institutional operators such as: the employment poles, local missions and multi-year local plans for integration and employment (PLIE- Plans Locaux pluriannuels pour l’Insertion et l’Emploi); (e) different employees, their representatives and job seekers (including beneficiaries of various vocational inclusion programmes and contracts) (ANLCI, 2009).

More recently and as an implementation of the annex of the article 12 of National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 14 December 2013 and the Act of 5 March 2014 (Art. L6323-6 of Labour code), the “Observatories and Certifications Committee (SOC-Comité Observatoires et Certifications)” of the National Inter-professional Joint Committee on Employment and Training (COPANEF – COmité PARitaire interprofessionnel National pour l’Emploi et la Formation), finalised the preparation of a referential standards framework for the development of knowledge and professional competences called “S3CP (Socle Commun de Connaissances et de Compétences professionnelles)” on the 28 May 2014 (FPSPP, 2014). It was formally introduced through the implementation Decree n° 172 of 13 February 2015 and then completed by a set of corresponding referential assessment and validation criteria of acquired competences leading to obtaining certification-based qualifications (CNCP, 2015). Like the referential framework “CCSP”, the “S3CP” is characterised by its sufficiently wide scope which allows for undertaking, within each sector or branch of activity, the relevant adaptation and contextualisation to each learner’s occupational and professional career development needs. It is composed of seven fields for the development of knowledge and professional competences: communication in French; capacity of using basic calculation rules and mathematical reasoning; use of the usual techniques of information and the digital communication; ability to work under defined team-working rules; ability to work independently and achieve an individual goal; ability of learning to learn throughout life; mastering gestures and postures and compliance with the hygiene, safety and basic environmental rules (FPSPP, 2014). The S3CP’s targeted group of users includes professionally active people, job seekers, individuals on vocational inclusion schemes, training providers, social partners and regions (Decree 172, 13 February 2015).

Relevant information and guidance concerning the implementation of these framework programmes for the development of key competences to the end-users are provided through the following nationwide networks: (a) the regional “network for the guidance and follow-up
of the access to key competences and employment” (ROSACE – Réseau pour l’Orientation et le Suivi de l’Accès aux Compétences Clés et à l’Emploi) notably in cooperation with accredited counselors, the employment poles, the local missions and DIRECCTE (the Regional Directorate for Enterprises, Competition, Consumptions, Labour and Employment); (b) the network of regional centres for the organisation and coordination of information concerning VET (CARIF – Centres d’Animation et de Ressources de l’Information sur la Formation) or that of the regional observatory for employment and training (OREF – Observatoire Régional Emploi Formation); (c) Regional centres for resources information concerning Illiteracy (CRI – Centres ressources Illétrisme) which take in charge the fight against illiteracy (via the provision of relevant information and technical support and sharing educational resources and teaching tools and pedagogies) (DGEFP’s Instruction of 18/01/2010 and Circular of 03/01/2008).

**ADULT EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**

**Definition and main general objectives**

In France, adult education refers to all other aspects of learning undertaken (formally and informally) by individual learners outside the formal initial general and vocational educational system in its three basic components: compulsory schooling from 5 up to 16 years old (at primary and lower secondary levels), upper secondary cycle (16–18 years old) and higher education (18–24/30 years old). Although adult education can have several forms and dimensions, it is at present composed of two basic types: (a) a continuing adult education (usually referred as continuing vocational training or “formation professionnelle continue”) which is dominantly characterised by its professional character and provided basically for individuals who are already part of the workforce or are embarking into working life (including unemployed job seekers and early school leavers); (b) other types of adults education, such as socio-cultural promotion education, folk/popular education (education populaire), senior education diffused through public libraries, special colleges, free-time universities (universités du temps libre), literacy promotion education, etc. (European InfoNet, 2013; Eurydice, 2010).

The French adult education objectives are, in practice, more connected with the specific nature and targets of any of the undertaken related policy measures and actions within the system. However, the basic objectives of the dominant and most representative component of adult education “CVT (continuing vocational training)” since its introduction at beginning of the 1970s can be grouped into the following overarching basic objectives (ANI, 1970; 1971 Act n°71-575 and the 2004 Act n° 2004-391): (a) Promoting the development of competences (key and specific); (b) Facilitating access to different and higher levels of vocational qualifications; (c) Promoting professional inclusion, employability and adaptation to the requirements of change in technology, working techniques, conditions and transitions.

Additionally, the main objectives and actions of other types of adult education include basically the fight against illiteracy, facilitating access to self-learning, personnel development and socio-cultural promotion in general.

**Main historical, legislative and institutional developments**

Adult education is far older notion than that of competences in its most recent understanding as key competences. Historically, the founding text of the notion of adult education goes back to Condorcet’s “report and Decree project on the general organisation of public
instruction”, presented at the National Assembly on 20-21 April 1792. Then different forms of adult education courses were developed in the 19th century in conjunction with the industrialisation process (Laof, 2013). Between the Two World Wars, encouraging laws were passed especially in connection with the development of technical education. After the Second World War and until the 1970s, adult education was mainly concentrated on social promotion due to the encouraging subsidies from the local authorities and the State. The development of adult education took an important turning point at the beginning of the 1970’s, through the first National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI – Accord National Inter-professionnel) concluded on the 9th of July 1970 between social partners, with three important consequence: (a) introducing continuing vocational training within the framework of adult education and its compulsory financing by private enterprises with more than 10 employee (0.80 percent of the total gross wage bill), (b) creating the individual training leave for employee-self initiated and directed training (CIF-Congé Individuel de Formation), and (c) establishing for the first time the legitimacy of the role of social partners in continuing vocational training governance. This agreement was confirmed by law through the Act n°71-575 of the 16th July 1971 called Delors’s Act and put into practice starting from the 1st January 1972. Since then, the created continuing vocational training (CVT) system within adult education has undergone important extensions and enrichments concerning related legislations and institutions, instruments, functioning and active role of social partners and other involved stakeholders on the enterprise's level as well as on national, regional and sectoral levels. It has gone through the following main development stages (Eurydice, 2010, Lombardi, 2010; Terrot, 1997).

The 1970s stage was mainly dedicated to an effective implementation of the foundations of the current CVT system. This concerned basically: (a) the implementation of the compulsory contribution of the private companies with over 10 employees to accredited vocational training funds collectors and mangers (acting on branch/sectoral and regional levels), run by social partners, called “OPCA (Organismes Paritaires collecteurs Agréés)”; (b) the launch of the paid individual training leave “CIF (Congé Individuel de Formation)” for both employees and even job seekers; (c) The creation of the first Groupings of public schools (GGroupements d’ETAblishements publics d’enseignement) for formal CVT provision in 1974.

The 1980s were marked by the diversification of CVT related responsibilities and contents mainly through: (a) the launch of the decentralisation process via transferring to regions the CVT financing and the responsibility of managing and implementing continuing vocational training (including apprenticeship) in order to allow for taking into account local territorial requirements and realities (Decentralaisation Laws of March 1982 and 6 January 1986); (b) Extending CIF financing at 0.10 percent of the gross wage bill to enterprises with less than 10 employees, enlarging social partners’ negotiating competences concerning CVT to take place at the levels of the enterprises’ committees and the professional sectors, including the reinforcement of CVT providers transparency (Rigout’s Act n°84-180 of 24 February 1984, reforming 1971 Act); (c) tax exemption on companies’ contributions to CVT development (Act n° 88-1149 of 13 December 1988 for 1989 financing budget); (d)-Promoting access of employees and skilled workers to higher education programmes at EQF levels 5 and 6 by introducing (via the Decree n° 85-906 of 23 August 1995) the regime of the Validation of Acquired Personal and Professional (informal and non-formal) learning (VAPP – Validation des Acquis Personnels et Professionnels).
During the 1990s, important efforts were put forward with the aim of improving CVT performance in terms of promoting accessibility to employment and labour market basically through: (a) the introduction of the training providers’ right for quality control and accreditation via the Professional Office for Quality Accreditation of Training Providers (OPQF – Office Professionnel de Qualification des Organismes de Formation), which was effectively created in 1994 to deliver quality assurance certification (Act n°90-579 of 4 July 1990 on training financing, quality and control of CVT); (b) Formal introduction of Competence Audit regime (BC – Bilan de Comptences) which allows its individual beneficiaries to have their professional and personal competences to be assessed for mobility, guidance and/or redefinition of clear career/learning projects through the Act of the 31st December 1991, following the Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of the 3rd July 1991; (c) Facilitating access of professionally experienced individuals to formal certification-based qualifications via the implementation of the regime of the Validation of Acquired Professional learning (VAP – validations des Acquis Professionnels) introduced through the Act n° 92-678 of 20th July 1992.

The 2000s were characterized by a profound overhaul of the CVT system mainly through the following important developments such as: (a) the extension of the 1992 regime for the validation of prior work-based learning (VAP) to include all types of prior experiential learning with access to all types of vocational certifications under the new acronym VAE (Validation des Acquis de l’Experience) introduced through the “Social Modernisation Act n° 202-73 of 17 January 2002; (b) the creation of both the National Repertory of Vocational Qualifications (RNCP – Repertoire National des Certifications professionnelles) and its managing National Commission for Vocational Qualifications (CNCP – Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle) through the same “Social Modernization” Act of 17/01/2002; (c) The creation of three CVT important instruments through the Act n° 2004-391 of 4/5/2004 on “Long-life Vocational Training and Social Dialogue”, following the National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 20/9/2003 on “the Organisation of Labour Market”), namely: (a) the Individual Right to Training (DIF-Droit Individuel à la Formation), (b) the Professionalisation Contract (CP- Contract de Professionalisation) replacing the three previous vocational contracts (vocational qualification contract, vocational guidance contract and vocational adaptation contract), and (c) the Professionalisation Training Periods (PP- Périodes de Professionalisation); (d) Extending, with some adaptations, the CVT instruments to the public sector (civil servants) through the Act n° 2007-148 of 2/2/2007 concerning the “modernisation of the public sector services”; (e) Renovating the CVT system and extending the role of the related accredited joint funds collectors and managers (OPCA – Organismes Paritaires Collecteurs Agrées) through the Act n° 2009-1437 of 24 November 2009 on “guidance and long-life training”, following the Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 5 October 2009 on the “development of long-life training and career security”.

Finally, the first half of the 2010s was marked, especially towards its end, by undertaking a major reform of continuing vocational training introduced through the Act n° 2014-2018 of 5 March 2014 on “vocational training, employment and democracy” following the Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 14 December 2013 on “vocational training”. This consists basically of the following: (a) Creation of the “Personal Training Account” regime which substitutes the “Individual Right for Training (DIF- Droit Individual à la Formation)” starting from the 1st January 2015, (b) Reinforcing further the role of regions as key players in lifelong learning and career guidance; (c) Redefining and extending the role of the accredited
joint-funds collectors and managers (OPCA) in connection with the provision of information on access to training and career guidance, including the responsibility of securing the quality of their funded training in cooperation with regional authorities and job-centres; (d) Revising the previous employers’ mandatory contribution to CVT funding to a unique contribution (as a percentage of the total wage bill) of 1 percent for companies with at least 10 employees and 0.55 percent for those with less; (e) Entitlement of all employees to a “career interview” at least every two years for career assessment, guidance and development; (f) Revising and reinforcing the guidance and governance mechanism of CVT provision through the creation of the following bodies: (a) the national and regional councils for employment, training and vocational guidance (CNEFOP and CREFOP), (b) the national and regional inter-professional committees for employment and training (COPANEF and COPAREF), (c) Guidance operators of the council for professional development (CEP).

**MAIN TRAINING MECHANISMS AND POLICY INSTRUMENTS FACILITATING ADULTS’ ACCESS TO THE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF KEY COMPETENCES**

The current policy measures and actions undertaken to achieve the objectives of adult education in its basic CVT component and to facilitate access to the acquisition and development of key competences, can be grouped into three main categories: employer-directed training (ED-CVT), employee self-directed training (SD-CVT) and employee-employer directed training (EED-CVT).

**Employer-Directed training (ED-CVT)**
Employer-initiated and Directed CVT (ED-CVT) constitutes the dominantly used instrument within the French continuing vocational training system. It is generally carried out within the framework of the vocational training plan of the organisation (private or public). It includes all kinds of short term and medium term vocational training decided and implemented by the organisation in favour of its employees. It is the result of a concerted action within the enterprise between the management and the employees’ representatives, aiming basically at: (a) the development of the employees’ competences and qualifications; (b) ensuring the employees’ adaptation to their ongoing job requirements, and (c) the promotion of the employees’ job retention, functional and promotional mobility. For the enterprise, the training plan is usually financed through the firm’s overall mandatory contribution (representing now an overall minimum contribution of 1% of its total wage bill for companies with at least 10 employees and 0.55 percent for those with less) to accredited vocational training funds collectors and managers (acting on sectoral and regional levels) called “OPCA (Organismes Paritaires collecteurs Agréés)” (Act of 4 May 2004; Act of 5 March 2014).

**Employee- Self directed training (SD-CVT)**
Considered as the employee’s choice and preference guided form of training, self-directed continuing vocational training (SD-CVT) is usually carried out via the the group of formally institutionalised main vocational training regimes for key competence development of adults.

**Individual Training Leave (CIF – Congé Individuel d’Formation)**
Officially introduced in 1971, “CIF” regime (Congé Individuel de formation) was designed to allow any worker in the private sector to take (over his/her working life) a paid leave (under minimum requirements adapted to the nature of work contract) to undertake self initiated
and directed training programmes independent of the organisation’s training scheme with the guarantee of maintaining the work contracts during the period of training. It was created to promote free choice and equal access to training by introducing three interdependent guarantees (MTEFP, 2014a; Dif, 2008; Gahéry, 1996; Guilloux, 1996):

**Free-choice guarantee.** It guarantees that the employee is free to choose any type of training programme outside the organisation’s usual training scheme. The undertaken training can be vocational with a variety of ultimate aims such as acquisition of key competences and higher qualifications for promotions and professional advancements/transitions, enhancing employability, job conversion and mobility, as well as for adaptation to changes in technology and labour market structures. The training programme can also be non-vocational with the aim of allowing the trainee to acquire general qualifications and/or to get more involved in the social and cultural life. The CIF duration is one year maximum, if the training is undertaken on a full-time basis, and 1200 hours in the case of part-time training. This duration limit can be exceeded via collective bargaining agreement (within the sector or the enterprise).

**Equal chance guarantee for access to training.** Accordingly, all workers with different types of work contracts can benefit from it. Initially, “CIF” was designed and implemented exclusively in favour of workers recruited according to non-limited duration work contract. It took twenty years for this regime (after its introduction) to adapt to the situation of precarious employment. In December 1991, it was formally extended to include employees on fixed duration contracts and temporary workers. In the case of a full/part-time open-ended contract, the candidate to CIF has to justify accumulating (continuously or discontinuously) a prior working experience of two (full-time or equivalent) years of which 12 months within the last company. For a fixed-term contract, the candidate has also to justify 2 years of prior experience accumulated over 5 years of which 4 months at least during the last year. As for employees working through temporary employment agencies, they need to justify only accumulating (continuously/discontinuously) a working experience of 560 hours of which 360 hours through the last temporary employment agency.

**Autonomous funding and management guarantee.** Since 1984, “CIF” has been financed through a special fund held and managed by an independent parity organism called OPCA (FONGECIF/OPACIF). This fund is fed by a mandatory contribution (specific to this regime) from the employers representing 0.20 proc. of the total amount of wages paid to their employees. During the training leave, the beneficiary employee receives his/her full salary as long as the letter is lower than the double of SMIC (the minimum guaranteed wage), otherwise the received salary will be within the range of 80 percent to 90 percent of the original salary. The other costs such as training cost, transport and accommodation can also be taken in charge partially or fully by the OPCA (FONGECIF/OPACIF). Although in some cases, the State/local authorities can take in charge part of the training costs, their contribution remains however variable over time and generally limited to financing special cases of vocational training leave such as long term training leaves and the training leaves within small companies.

**Professional Training Leave (CFP- Congé de Formation Professionnelle)**
The CFP is equivalent to CIF scheme (used by the employees of the private sector). It is accessible by any employee within the public sector after accumulating three years of full-time working experience (or equivalent). Its maximum duration is 12 months (and three years maximum accumulated leaves over the whole career of the beneficiary). During the training leave the employer takes in charge the payment of 85 percent of the salary, including
all training related costs. After the completion of training leave, the beneficiary has to work for the same institution for duration equal to three times the training leave period. In this sense, the CFP is more or less similar to Payback Clause training leave instrument (MDFP, 2012).

**Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE- Valdication des Acquis de l’Expeience)**

The Validation of prior experiential informal and non-formal learning is not a new notion to the French adult education system. Its development has been a gradual process in scope and contents under different acronyms: Validation for obtaining the grade of “Engineer” in 1934 (Act of the 10th July 1934), VAPP (“Validations des Acquis Personnels et Professionnels) in 1985 with the aim of facilitating access to formal higher education, VAP (“Validation des Acquis Professionnels”) in 1992 to cover all levels of professional qualifications and finally the VAE (Validation of Acquired Experience – “Validation des Acquis de l’expérience) introduced through the “Social Modernisation Act” (17 January 2002) to include, in addition to prior work-based learning, learning and key competences acquired through social and cultural activities. As “formative and “summative” instrument, the VAE establishes the individual’s right who has already accumulated (continuously and/or discontinuously) over three years (on full-time basis or equivalent) of any remunerated and non-remunerated working experience, in at least one activity related to the contents of the targeted type of qualification/certification to apply for an exemption in the required exam-units or modules. The required prior experience does not include the periods of initial and continuing vocational education and training, traineeships/internships and any training periods connected with obtaining a qualification or a title. Thus the VAE allow its beneficiary (meeting this requirement) to get his/her prior experiential informal and non-formal learning assessed and validated (within a validation and certification awarding institution) through a process leading to obtaining a vocational certification (qualification) or a title (at any level) referenced and registered within the NQF Repertory (RNCP-Répertoire Nationale des Certifications Professionnelles). The qualifications obtained through the VAE are the same as those obtained through the formal track (IVET system). The procedure which guarantees a real access to VAE regime, in its last generalised version, is functioning through a succession of basic stages (Dif, Heraud and Nkeng, 2009; MTEFP, 2014b):

**Information and guidance.** Any individual interested in VAE has a direct access to many sources of information provision, guidance and even supervision on national and regional levels. In addition to documentation standpoints, repertories and websites connected with national government ministries and sector bodies, each academy, local authority and university on regional level is equipped, at least, with one VAE information and guidance provision department/centre and related website

**Feasibility of the candidature.** This stage consists of preparing and submitting an access feasibility administrative application to the selected institution for the targeted certification. It is a three step process: pre-admissibility application preparation, pre-admissibility reviewing and justified feasibility decision.

**Candidate’s portfolio preparation and accompaniment.** This stage allows effectively the pre-admitted candidate to explicit and analyse his or her prior experiences in a more formalised and structured way by preparing the VAE folder of the “portfolio of acquired experiences and competences”. Starting from this stage, a coaching tutor is appointed by the validation institution.
Assessment, interviewing and validation. The assessment and validation process takes place at an accredited institution for this purpose, which is usually the certification delivery institution. The assessment and validation are taken in charge by a jury which must be appointed and chaired in accordance with VAE related general regulations and with those specific to each type of qualification. The jury’s role in this stage can be divided into three key steps: (a) analysis and assessment of all the information contained in the application file to identify the applicant’s prior experiential knowledge and competences which comply with the requirements of the candidate’s targeted certification; (b) interview: this allows for obtaining complementary information and clarifications from the candidate concerning his or her submitted portfolio of acquired experiences and competences; (c) deliberation and final decision making: the VAE jury then proceeds to deliberation and takes one of the following final decisions: a full validation (and awarding of related certification), a partial validation (some exemption units) or refusing to award the targeted qualification/certification. In this last case the validation process for the targeted certification stops, and the candidate might be re-directed to other educational or guidance instruments such as “bilan de compétences”.

The obtained VAE financing is dependent on the trainee’s employment status in the labour market:

For employed individuals, there are three open possibilities:

- Within the framework of employer-directed training (usually through the training plan) via undertaking for instance a “Professional Training Leave (CFP)” for the employees of the public sector;
- Within the framework of “DIF” (Individual Right for Training) scheme, replaced since January 2015 by “CPF” (Personal Training Account);
- Within the framework of the employee self-directed CVT for the private sector employees, usually through an “Individual Training Leave (CIF)” or a VAE leave scheme (Congé VAE), which are financed through a funding collector and manager called OPCA (OPACIF/FONGECIF).

Concerning unemployed/job-seekers there are two possibilities:

- Employment pole (pole emploi) which manages unemployment insurance funds
- Regional authority (Regional council)

As for self-employed individuals, VAE is financed by a Training Insurance Fund collector and manager called FAF (Fonds d’Assurance Formation des non-salariés).

Competence Audit (BC- Bilan de Compétences)

After a period of experimentation during the second half of the 1980s, the non-formal competence audit regime (“Bilan de Compétences: BC”), was formally generalised to all remunerated and non-non remunerated individuals (including job-seekers) at beginning of the 90s. BC established the individual’s right to have a voluntary access to personnel and professional assessment and guidance with aim of coping with work/learning transitions and defining a clear professional or training project for future developments. As a “formative” and “guidance” instrument, the competence audit does not lead to any formal recognition or certification but it might lead to undertaking a “VAE”. To have access to the “BC”, the candidate has to justify a prior salaried regular activity of 5 years, of which one year within the last organisation. The individuals employed according to a fixed-term work contract, have to justify only 2 years of work experience within this period of 5 years (of which 4 months on the basis of
fixed duration work contract). As for temporary employees, they need to justify 5 years within the profession of temporary work (of which 1600 hours within the last organisation). The effective organisation of access to BC and its funding is dependent on the trainee’s employment status in the labour market (Dif, 2008; MTEFP, 2010):

For employed individuals, there are three open possibilities:

- Within the framework of employee-self directed learning by taking a “Leave for Competence Audit (Congé de Bilan de compétences: CBC). It is financed through a parity fund collector called OPCA (FONGECIF/OPACIF) for beneficiaries on open-ended or fixed term work contracts and by FAF-TT for employees recruited through temporary employment agencies.
- Within the framework of DIF instrument (financed by the employer) which has been replaced, since January 2015, by the personal training account (CPF- Compte Personnel de Formation);
- Within the employer-directed training scheme/plan.

As for the unemployed individuals, the BC is accessed through employment centres of “pôle emploi” and financed partially or fully by the State or local authorities.

The competence audit takes place within one of more than 921 institutions accredited as “BC-Centres” (including “Centres Interinstitutionnel de Bilans de Compétences: CIBC”). The assessment process is formally established by the 1992 implementing Degree. It goes through a succession of three individualised stages (Dif, 2001; Dif, 2008; MTEFP, 2010):

- **Preliminary information and guidance stage** which allows the CIBC to: (a) collect and analyse the necessary information about the candidate’s needs and commitment in the process, (b) Inform rigorously the beneficiary about the BC process, its stages and the assessment methods and techniques used.
- **Assessment stage**, which allows the beneficiary to: (a) analyse his or her motivations, personal and professional interests, (b) identify his or her personal and professional competencies (including general knowledge), (c) construct his or her project for professional development.
- **Concluding guidance stage**, which allows the beneficiary through an interview to: (a) have access to detailed results of the assessment stage, (b) identify the favourable and non-favourable factors for the construction of a professional or a training project, and plan the principal steps of its implementation.

**Employee-employer directed training (EED-CVT)**

The EED-CVT is usually carried out through the following formally institutionalised main vocational training instruments for key competence development of adults:

**Personal Training Account (CPF – Compte Personnel de Formation)**

Introduced within the framework of the recent reform of vocational training system via the Act of 5 March 2014, following the National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 14 December 2013, the CPF (personal training account), replacing effectively since January 2015 the previous “individual right for training DIF” (“Droit Individual à la Formation”) which was created ten years ago via the Act n° 2004-391 of 4/5/2004. The DIF was created to allow any employee (within the private and public sector), under certain conditions, to have access to training through the use of training credits in terms of acquired 20 hours per year cumulative
within the limit of 120 hours maximum over 6 years. However, the performance of DIF during the last 10 years of its implementation was relatively low, as its usage rate was about 4.9 percent representing only 66,000 beneficiaries in 2012 with an average duration of training of 22.5 hours (Galtier, 2015; Gérard, 2015; MTEFP, 2014c). Thus, the CFP was introduced to take over and cope with some of DIF’s observed problems of accessibility and performance as it has the following basic characteristic: (a) It is personally attached to the individual through his/her working life starting from the age of 16 up the retirement (including apprentices, beneficiaries of professionalisation periods/contracts, unemployed job-seekers and young school leavers without qualifications; (b) It is credited for any individual who is working on a full-time basis by 24 training hours per year over 5 years up-to 120 hours, then by 12 hours per year for further two years and half up to a total of 150 training hours maximum (without taking into consideration specific cases of extensions). As for those working on a part-time basis, these credits are calculated in proportion to the hours worked; (c) The accumulated credit hours already acquired through DIF, can be used within the framework of CPF over a period of 6 years until 2020. (d) Accessible types of training are basically for the development of competences, skills and access to further qualifications (including accompaniment through the VAE process); (e) The funding of the accumulated credit hours is taken in charge by the employers or the OPCA/OPACIF (for the employees), the regional authorities or the employment centers (for job-seekers) according to their specific listing of eligible types of training. As the CPF’s use is, at present, limited the private sector, the DIF continues to be used within the public sector.

**Alternating vocational training**

Alternating training (“formation en alternance”) is a “dual system” based on alternating periods of work and training within a private or a public organisation and a CVT provider. It composed at present of two instruments: the “Professionalisation Contract (CP- Contrat de is professionalisation) and the “Professionalisation Period”, both created through the Act n° 2004-391 of 4/5/2004 on “Long-life Vocational Training and Social Dialogue”, following the National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 20/9/2003 on “the Organisation of Labour Market”:

The “Professionalisation Contract (Contrat de professionalisation: CP)” is a dual system based on alternation between on-the-job training (from 75 percent to 85 percent of the duration of the contract) and in-house training (15 percent to 25 percent of the contractual time) within a training provider such as CFA. Following the National Inter-professional Agreement of the 5th December 2003, the CP was introduced through the 2004 Act (of the 4th of May) on “lifelong vocational training and social dialogue” as a substitute to the previous three vocational inclusion contracts (vocational qualification contract, vocational guidance contract and the vocational adaptation contract). It targets the professional integration or reintegration within the labour market of both young and old people, including those (mainly job-seekers) who are already living on the minimum social allowances (such as ‘ASS’ and ‘RSA’) provided by the public authorities. Its duration goes from 6 to 12 months, with a possible extension to 24 months, via sectoral agreement, according to the specific case of the beneficiary and/or the nature of the undertaken training. During this period, the beneficiary is coached by a tutor and receives a salary from the employer representing a percentage of the minimum guaranteed wage which goes up from 55 percent up to 85 percent (and even beyond)
depending on the age and the qualification level and sectoral bargaining agreements. The funding of training actions is provided by an accredited funding collector and manager called OPCA obtained initially through the mandatory contribution of the enterprises (1 percent of the gross wage bill of companies with at least 10 employees and 0.55 percent for those with less). At the end of the professionalisation contract, the successful beneficiary is awarded a "Vocational Qualification Certificate (CQP: Certificat de Qualification professionnelle)", a title or a qualification referenced by a collective agreement and registered within the NQF Repertory (RNCP) (MTEFP, 2014d; Dif, 2012).

The professionalisation period is the second type of the dual CVT based on an alternation between on-the-job training and in-house training introduced via the Act n° 2004-391 of 4/5/2004 on "Long-life Vocational Training and Social Dialogue", following the National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 20/9/2003 on “the Organisation of Labour Market”). It concerns primarily permanent employees possessing insufficient or non-adapted qualifications/competences to technological and organizational changes, having 45 years old and more with at least 20 years of professional activity of which one year minimum within an enterprises. It is also extended to other categories of individuals such as workers usually employed on a fixed-term work contract by an employer/or a group of employers involved in promoting vocational inclusion through economic activity, as well as the beneficiaries of the limited duration “unique vocation inclusion contract” CUI (Contrat Unique d’Insertion). The minimum training duration is fixed (through the Decree n° 2014-96 of 22 August 2014) at 70 hours distributed over 12 calendar months maximum, during which the trainee maintains his or her salary if the training is undertaken during the working hours. But, if the training takes place outside working hours, the trainee benefits of 50 percent of the usually received net salary. Its basic aims consist of allowing its beneficiaries: (a)- to develop their knowledge and competences; (b) access to a vocational qualification validated and registered within the NQF repertory (RNCP-Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles) by the “National Commission for Vocational Qualifications (CNCP-Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle). A tutor may be appointed to inform and guide the beneficiary trainee. As for the costs of undertaken actions of training, coaching and assessments actions during the professionalisation period are financed by an accredited joint funds collector and manager called "OPCA" on the basis of a flat rate not exceeding the real cost of €12 per training hour (M.T.E.F.D., 2015b)

All type of vocational qualifications and titles accessible via these CVT instruments (including the VAE) are the same as those awardable within the whole French Education and Training system. They are all referenced and registered (according to the-five-level-classification grid of 1969) within the NQF Repertory (RNCP- Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles) held, updated and managed by the National Commission for Vocational Qualifications (CNCP-Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle). 15 percent of CVT provision market is focussed on obtaining a certification. The obtained certifications are classified into three basic categories according to their delivering bodies (Dif, 2010; Eurydice, 2010):

National vocational certifications and titles awarded under the name of the State (by different ministries) and created on the basis of the decision undertaken by the advisory bodies (such as the professional consultative commissions). They are automatically incorporated in the NQF repertory (RNCP).
Vocational Qualification Certificates (CQF-Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle): They are sectoral or inter-sectoral certifications created and developed by the sectors under the responsibility of social partners. Their registration (for 5 years) within the NQF repertory (RNCP) is requested by the concerned sector bodies and approved by the National Commission for Vocational Qualifications (CNCP).

Certificates and titles delivered by the Chambers, public or private institutions under their own names: They are registered within NQF repertory (“RNCP”) at request and after the approval of the “CNCP”.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above analysis, it can be concluded that the effective introduction and use of the notion of “competences” in France has gone through the following practice-based development stages starting from the early 1980s:

The first pioneering use was connected with the process of designing the vocational qualification standards within the Ministry of National Education based on three sets of descriptors of competences and knowledge: capacities as general and transversal now-how, know-how competences and associated knowledge. As these descriptors are directly connected with related occupational standards, they are derived from their relevant job/activity analysis and serve as a basis for both curricular development and assessment within the whole educational and training system, including the validation of prior experiential informal and non-formal learning.

The second main use of the notion of “competences” was mainly connected with the creation in 1993 of the labour market Operational Repertory of Trades and Occupations “ROME” which distinguished, in its 1997 version, between three interrelated types of competences: technical core competences, specific competences and associated competences. In ROME’s most recent version, these competences were regrouped into key and specific competences.

Mainly under the influence of the outcomes of the framework programme “DéSéCo” launched in 1997 by the OECD, the National Agency for Fight Against Illiteracy “ANLCI” established, in 2003, a “national standards framework” defining four degrees of key competences: structural benchmark competences (basics in writing, counting and communication with the others), functional daily life competences, competences facilitating action in various situations, and competences reinforcing the individual’s autonomy in the knowledge society.

Within the framework of transposing some of the recommendations of the European Parliament and Council of 18 December 2006, the ministry of labour and employment set out and implemented in 2008 a “framework programme” for promoting sustainable integration within the labour market of mainly vulnerable people (such as job-seekers, early school leavers without or with insufficient qualifications and beneficiaries of assisted vocational inclusion contracts) to have access to the following five key competences: communication in French, mathematical culture and basic competences in sciences and technology, digital culture, learning to learn, and communication in a foreign language.

In order to meet the needs of professional sectors and other users, a “referential standards framework for professionally situated competences” called CCSP (référentiel des Compétences Clés en Situation Professionnelle) was established in 2009 on the basis of connecting the analysis and description of observed work situations (not pre-established definitions based
on academic knowledge) in its various dimensions (criteria, activities, professional capacities) with an analytical inventory of general and applied knowledge used in these work situations. As a result, the identified professionally situated key competences are classified within this referential framework according to the first three classification degrees of key competences of the previous “ANLCI’s National Standards Framework” of 2003.

More recently, the aim of meeting the needs of professional sectors and other end-users is further reinforced via the finalisation on the 28 May 2014 by the social partners of the referential standards framework for access to a set of “common-base knowledge and professional competences (S3CP- Socle Commun de Connaissances et de Compétences professionnelles)” and related certifications. This new referential standards framework includes seven fields for the development of knowledge and professional competences: communication in French; use of basic calculation rules and mathematical reasoning; capacity of using usual techniques of information and the digital communication; ability to work under defined team-working rules; ability to work independently and achieve individual goal; ability of learning to learn throughout life; mastering gestures and postures and compliance with the hygiene, safety and basic environmental rules (FPSPP, 2014). It was formally introduced via the implementation Decree n° 172 of 13 February 2015 and completed by a set corresponding referential assessment and validation criteria of acquired competences allowing for access to the certification (CNCP, 2015).

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