



A PATHWAY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' CURRICULA  
IN ITALY AND IN SPAIN

of

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It is my pleasure to write a few words about the article *A Pathway in Vocational Education in the English Language to Enhance Students' Curricula in Italy and Spain*, written by the Ph.D. students Vincenza Tutino and Heidi Littunen and the colleague Concetta Maria Sigona from the University of Burgos.

The study follows the PCTO projects “The Job of Researcher in the Education Sciences” and “Job of Educator in the Education Sciences” promoted by Prof. Elisabetta Sagone and me in the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. It provided some classes of the Liceo Classico Europeo Convitto Cutelli with some basic notions and practical activities to understand the professions of the researcher and the educator in the areas of interest of the Department of Educational Sciences.

The project was an experimentation of the CLIL (research topic of Dr. Littunen) and Flipped Classroom (research topic of Dr. Tutino) methodologies applied to the professionalizing training of high school students as it was partially carried out in English involving actively some visiting professors and guests of the department as well as the students benefiting from the initiative.

Subsequently, during the international Erasmus Studio mobility for the two Ph.D. students at the University of Burgos, they, under the supervision of Prof. Sigona, conducted a seminar on PCTO projects from which the idea of writing a joint study was born. The paper addresses the issue of vocational training at school from a comparative perspective and could be a motivating experience of transferring good practices between two European Union countries.

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### Introduction

Today our world changes very quickly and education and training play an important role in the acquisition of skills and competences which are fundamental for managing future societal and economic changes including communication in English which is one of the key competences established by the EU<sup>1</sup>. In order to respond effectively to the new challenges and opportunities, there is the need for a new training model based on skills' development, aimed at improving basic skills but also at investing in more complex skills for the labor market. In Italy, Paths for Transversal Competences and Guidance, called PCTO, is an educational mode that allows the secondary school students, through the practical experience, to consolidate the knowledge acquired in school, to test their aptitudes in the field, enriching their education and orienting their study pathway towards future work. The PCTO guidelines in Italy encourage the development of learning outcomes connected to key competences and it considers the curricular, experimental and vocational dimensions<sup>2</sup>. These three dimensions have to be integrated into a unitary learning path that aims to develop transversal, technical and professional skills which are useful to the students for their studies and life choices and moreover applicable to different working fields. In particular, every school can plan a personalized path for the development of specific transversal skills identified as learning outcomes. The definition of pathways for the attainment of transversal skills and the development of the ability to orient oneself in personal life and in social and cultural reality is defined by the guidelines formulated by the MIUR under Article 1, paragraph 785, Law No. 145 of December 30, 2018, which partially modified so called, *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro*, as defined by Law 107/2015<sup>3</sup>. The pathways are framed in the broader context of the entire educational design, clarifying that they cannot be considered as an occasional experience of applying school knowledge in external contexts, but constitute a fundamental aspect of the students' curricula. PCTO enriches traditional teaching methods and it remodels teaching from transversal skills as described in the *Recommendation of the Council of the European Parliament* of May 22, 2018<sup>4</sup>.

Under the ministerial project *Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento* (PCTO), during the last three years of high school, the

<sup>1</sup> <<https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences>>.

<sup>2</sup> G. Alessandrini, *Nuovo manuale per l'esperto dei processi formativi*, Roma, Carocci editore, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> <<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2018/12/31/302/so/62/sg/pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> <<https://www.istruzioneelombardia.gov.it>>.

students can exploit different experiences in their own schools, institutions or private companies with the aim to get a better consciousness about their own work vocations and talents and, hence, a better address for their future choices once they have finished their school path. PCTO is therefore, a program that mixes vocational guidance activities and training for social, citizenship, business and cultural skills. The *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro (ASL)* project was an educational model introduced by the *Riforma Buona Scuola* in which the Italian Government adopted the reform of the national education and training system in July 2015<sup>5</sup>. This reform foresaw changes in several aspects of education and training provision management and of the curricula. The new law reinforced the school-work relationship and the use of digital skills. It allowed students in the third school year to carry out training courses at institutions or enterprises, with the main objective of guaranteeing them an experience that was as close as possible to a work experience and thus to orient them in the choice they had to make once they have finished their studies.

In Spain, vocational training refers to an educational model applied to a specific type of student attending the vocational school to equip them with both practical skills and theoretical knowledge, relevant to their future employment<sup>6</sup>. Dual vocational training, FP Dual (Formación Profesional Dual) is an education and training system that combines classroom learning with on-the-job training<sup>7</sup>. It is designed to provide students in vocational schools with a strong foundation in both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, preparing them for specific careers. Students in dual vocational training programs attend vocational schools or high schools where they receive theoretical education related to their chosen field<sup>8</sup>. This classroom instruction covers the essential knowledge and skills required for their specific profession. In addition to classroom learning, students spend a significant portion of their time gaining practical experience in a real workplace. They are placed in companies or organizations related to their field of study, where they can apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-world situations. The key aspect of FP Dual is the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical

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<sup>5</sup> <<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg>>.

<sup>6</sup> P. Pineda-Herrero, A. Ciraso-Calí, L. Arnau-Sabatés, *La FP dual desde la perspectiva del profesorado: elementos que condicionan su implementación en los centros*, in «Educación», XX1, 22 (2019), pp. 15-43.

<sup>7</sup> D. Beckett, P. Hager, *Life, work and learning: Practice in postmodernity*, Routledge International Studies in Philosophy of Education, London, Routledge, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> S. Bentolila, A. Cabrales, M. Jansen, *El impacto de la FP dual sobre la inserción laboral de los jóvenes: evidencia para la comunidad de Madrid*: <[https://www.fedea.net/nsaw/descargas/NSAW05es\\_fp\\_dual\\_madrid.pdf](https://www.fedea.net/nsaw/descargas/NSAW05es_fp_dual_madrid.pdf)>.

experience. This allows students to immediately apply what they learn in the classroom to their work environment and vice versa. Students typically work under the guidance and supervision of experienced professionals in their chosen field. These mentors provide valuable insights, coaching, and feedback to help students develop their skills. In many cases, students receive a stipend from the employer during their on-the-job training and this helps them cover their living expenses and provides an incentive to participate in the program. Upon successful completion of the program, students receive a vocational qualification or certificate that is recognized by employers in their industry. Therefore, FP Dual is considered as a valuable approach to education and training as it bridges the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills and it helps students make a smoother transition into the workforce, increasing their employability. This approach is particularly common in a wide range of sectors, such as automotive, hotel, electrical, construction and it has become increasingly popular in Spain. However, it must be borne in mind that the implementation of FP Dual varies according to the autonomous communities and educational institutions, partner companies and training programs. The rules governing vocational training in Spain are mainly based on the *Organic Law on Education (LOE)* and *Royal Decree 1529/2012*, which establishes the legal regime of FP Dual. As mentioned above these regulations establish the requirements and procedures for the implementation of dual training:

- companies and educational centers must sign collaboration agreements to establish the terms and conditions of FP Dual which must be approved by the corresponding education authorities;
- FP Dual has a specific duration, which can vary according to the training cycle and the agreement reached between the educational center and the company and it combines periods of training in the educational centers and periods of work in the company;
- FP Dual tutors in companies are responsible for guiding and supervising the student's learning process;
- Upon successful completion of dual education, students are awarded a vocational training qualification.

However, these regulations may vary according to the autonomous community in Spain, as some regions may have additional or specific regulations.

Vocational guidance in high schools in Italy and Spain shares some common aspects, but there are also notable differences due to variations in education systems, cultural contexts, and economic conditions. Some aspects are common, for example in career exploration both Italy and Spain offer voca-

tional guidance to help students explore potential career paths. This includes information on different professions, industries, and educational pathways. Also, individual counseling in high schools in both countries often provide one-on-one counseling sessions with students to assess their interests, skills, and goals. This helps students make informed decisions about their future careers.

Various assessment tools, such as aptitude tests and career interest inventories, are used in both countries to help students identify their strengths and preferences. Internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities are encouraged in both Italy and Spain to give students practical experience in their chosen fields. Both countries typically offer a range of educational pathways, including vocational education and training (VET) programs, technical and professional courses, and traditional academic tracks. Italy and Spain have different education systems. In Italy, high school education is divided into three main types: Liceo (academic), Istituto Tecnico (technical), and Istituto Professionale (vocational). In Spain, the system is more centralized, with two main tracks: Bachillerato (academic) and Formación Profesional (vocational). Also, the curriculum in vocational high schools in Italy tends to be more focused on general education, while vocational high schools in Spain place a stronger emphasis on specialized vocational training. In Italy, high school typically lasts for five years, while in Spain, it is typically four years for both academic and vocational tracks.

In Spain, students who complete vocational education programs can earn professional qualifications recognized by the government, while in Italy, they receive a diploma that may require additional certification for specific professions. Some regions in Spain, for example Catalonia, may have different practices compared to Andalusia. Economic conditions and labor markets in Italy and Spain can influence the types of vocational programs and career opportunities available to students. These factors can change over time and affect the relevance of certain vocational guidance services. Additionally, in Italy, the primary language of instruction is Italian, while in Spain it's Spanish, but there are also regional languages like Catalan, Basque, and Galician. It's important to note that both Italy and Spain continually adapt their educational and vocational guidance systems to meet the evolving needs of their students and labor markets.

### *PCTO in Italian High Schools Today*

The 2019 Budget Law changed the name from *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro (ASL)* to *Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento (PCTO)*, as well as the duration and requirements. Further, the same PCTO

guidelines suggested that learners develop competences related to guidance, which are also connected to entrepreneurship competences. During the PCTO the students have the opportunity to learn from their own errors and failures and they learn how to be the main actor of their own lives. PCTO offers them the practical possibility to solve problems without seeking for help at the first difficulty, they learn by doing and they have the opportunity to develop their own passions<sup>9</sup>.

With the introduction of the new PCTO, in 2019, the training paths followed by students took on a broader and deeper meaning, based on two main dimensions: the vocational guidance and the soft skills dimensions. The experiences gained by students serve to give them greater awareness of their vocations for the fulfillment of their personal and social projects and desires.

*PCTO, Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento*, clarifies how professional institutes (*Istituti Professionali*) in Italy are characterized by a solid base of general and technical-professional education. These schools allow students to develop knowledge and skills necessary to meet the training needs of the productive sector of reference, for a rapid entry into the world of work, and access to university. All this is possible through laboratory activities, internships, apprenticeships thanks to the PCTO project. The Italian gymnasiums (*Licei*) are characterized by more theoretical studies. These institutes aim to provide students the cultural and methodological tools for a deeper understanding of reality and how to gain knowledge and skills<sup>10</sup>.

The vocational education and training paths are managed by the regions and have a duration of three or four years. The purpose of these institutes is to provide useful skills and technical knowledge and to introduce students into the world of work, thanks to the relationship between the region and the local industries. At this decision-making stage, the students can continue their studies by enrolling in a Bachelor's degree programs at a university. The PCTO project allows the student to have an ongoing guidance, allowing them to develop an attitude of greater awareness of their vocations. This experience contributes to have a clearer idea of the social-economic context in which the students grow up, allowing them to understand where they can place themselves in society. PCTO system also foresees the creation of two figures: the school tutor and the external tutor in charge of developing the personalized training course and assisting and guiding the students in managing relations with the context where the learning experience takes place.

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<sup>9</sup> <[https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5588\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5588_en.pdf)>.

<sup>10</sup> M. Di Stefano, G. Prisco, *Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento (PCTO): esperienze a confronto*, in «Education Sciences & Society», 10, 2 (2016), pp. 219-235.

Documents related to the PCTO projects will be checked by the PCTO tutor, who is responsible for controlling that everything is done according to the standards of procedures. The data from the work experience will then be available to the student's class committee, which will be held in the final graduation exam. Furthermore, this data is also useful for the preparation of the student's curriculum, in which the activities carried out during the PCTO project are reported. Final documents of the PCTO project report on skill levels learned during the experience and verification of achievements. This assumes a formative value, indicating one's vocations and interests, but also promotes self-orientation, since by entering the world of work, one can better evaluate the economic and professional expectations for one's future<sup>11</sup>.

The definition of pathways for the attainment of transversal skills and the development of the ability to orient oneself in personal life and in social and cultural reality is defined by the guidelines formulated by the MIUR under Article 1, paragraph 785, Law No. 145 of December 30, 2018, which partially modified so called, *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro*, as defined by Law 107/2015<sup>12</sup>.

The legislation currently in force establishes in 210 hours the minimum three-year duration of PCTO in professional institutes, 150 hours in technical institutes and 90 hours in high schools, but it does not abolish its compulsoriness, nor its being a condition for admission to state high school diploma exams, as established by Legislative Decree No. 62 of April 13, 2017. Instead, the pathways are framed in the broader context of the entire educational design, clarifying that they cannot be considered as an occasional experience of applying school knowledge in external contexts, but constitute a fundamental aspect of the students' curriculum. PCTO enriches traditional teaching methods and it remodels teaching from transversal skills as described in the *Recommendation of the Council of the European Parliament* of May 22, 2018<sup>13</sup>.

Under the ministerial project *Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento* (PCTO), as mentioned above, students during the last three years of high school can exploit different experiences in institutions or private companies with the aim to get a better consciousness about their own work vocations and talents and, hence, a better address for their future choices once they have finished their school career. PCTO is a program that mixes vocational guidance activities and training for skills, such as social, citizen-

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<sup>11</sup> *Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento*, MIUR, 2018; *Io scelgo io studio*, MIUR, 2021: <<https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/io-scelgo-io-studio>>.

<sup>12</sup> <<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2018/12/31/302/so/62/sg/pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> <[www.istruzioneemilombardia.gov.it](http://www.istruzioneemilombardia.gov.it)>.

ship, business and cultural skills. With the introduction of the new PCTO, the training paths followed by students take on a broader and deeper meaning, based on two main dimensions: the orientation and the soft skills dimensions. The experiences gained by students are useful to give them greater awareness of their vocations for the fulfillment of their personal and social project. All activities conducted in the PCTO must be aimed at the acquisition of skills typical of the chosen course of study and transversal skills, both personal and social. They should teach how to learn in the most appropriate and efficient way. Citizenship, entrepreneurial competence and cultural awareness are important parts of PCTO<sup>14</sup>.

Starting from the 2018/2019 school year, PCTO is implemented at secondary school level over the final three years of the course. This decision perfectly matches with the European emphasis on competence-based teaching and changes the traditional orientation culture and the traditional information-based approach in favor of a training based on experiential and autonomous learning, even in a non-formal context. The PCTO, differently from the previous so-called *Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro*, promotes the development of transversal skills and it places students in the condition of self-orientation through the being key players of the learning subject in extracurricular and professional contexts. The PCTO therefore is configured as an integral part of the formal curriculum to be performed not necessarily in tandem with the school time, especially when the PCTO is located outside the school environments, but with a binding minimum number of hours for each educational institution, ranging from a minimum of 90 hours for high schools, 150 hours for technical institutes and 210 hours for professional institutes<sup>15</sup>.

The preparation, implementation and continuous improvement of a process of development of transversal skills and orientation actions should be always validated by a quality assurance system through documentation, monitoring, evaluation and archiving of the entire process carried out. In addition, the dissemination of good practices is an essential part of PCTO.

### *The University of Catania approach regarding PCTOs*

The University of Catania firmly believes that PCTO modules can play the role of a bridge between higher education and the work world in which

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<sup>14</sup> F. Frabboni, *PCTO competenze e licei: una rivoluzione possibile*, in «Formazione & Insegnamento», 6, 2 (2018), pp. 73-87.

<sup>15</sup> P. Gallo, *PCTO nei licei: una nuova sfida per la scuola italiana*, in «Scuola Democratica», 4, 1 (2020), pp. 139-148.



university departments have an important role as students' trainers in order to let them acquire new professional skills. At the same time university departments have a relevant position as facilitators of the acquisition process in order to increase students' awareness of their vocations and talents. When the PCTO projects are held in English, the students have the great opportunity to enhance their English skills while they are learning by doing.

By participating to the PCTO initiative with the local high schools, the University of Catania is sharing the following objectives:

- to implement, from a cultural and educational perspective, flexible learning modes that link classroom training with practical experiences;
- to enrich the school education with training paths aiming at the acquisition of additional and specific skills useful for the labor market;
- to foster the student guidance to enhance their personal vocations, interests and individual learning styles;
- to link the educational and training institutions with the world of work and with the society;
- to provide an educational offer in line with the cultural, social and economic development of the territory.

The PCTO modules implemented by the University of Catania intend to overcome the idea of disjunction between the formative and operational moment of students' education. In addition, they intend to reach the more incisive goal to increase students' motivation and to guide them to discover and to deepen their personal vocations, interests and individual learning styles. The final goal is to enrich their schooling with the acquisition of skills gained in the field. Such conditions offer new stimuli for learning and it is an added value for the students' education. Finally, it has undeniable advantages compared to a theory-based education.

The University of Catania has created a platform for the PCTO initiative management available in UniCT web page<sup>16</sup>. Although an office of the University central administration takes care of the platform updating and monitoring, the portal allows a telematic dialogue between the departments which are the providers/facilitators of training interventions and the high schools as final beneficiaries. This way, the two main actors of the PCTO initiative are linked directly, without any involvement of other mediators.

High schools can register on the University portal by signing a specific collaboration agreement, called Convention, with the University of Catania. After that, the schools receive a username and a password to apply for PCTO

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<sup>16</sup> <<http://151.97.23.135/alternanza/amministrazione/index.php>>.

projects proposed by the departments. Every department can upload PCTO proposals on the portal, through authorized access, and they are responsible for the projects proposed.

In the portal the navigation menu consists of three sections: *Projects*, *Interests*, *Conventions*.

By accessing the *Projects* section, each department can submit new training proposals and can consult and check the list of the projects that are still in progress and the ones already implemented.

By accessing the *Interest* section, each school that has signed the Convention can have a prospect of the projects available. They can choose the PCTO projects of their interest and propose the participation of their students by expressing their preference by signing a tick in a box. After this step, the departments are able to see the schools that have expressed interest in one of their projects and authorize them to take part of the proposed initiative. If there are more than one school interested in the same project, the department needs to proceed with the evaluation of the requests and select the participating institution according to the relevance of their educational objectives. There is also a possibility to create a mixed class in which students from more than one school converge or eventually propose new PCTO cycles to allow more schools to benefit from the educational proposal.

By accessing the *Conventions* section, it is possible for schools to download an updated agreement prototype and join the University portal, specifying the number of possible students who could be involved. It is also possible, for both schools and departments, to check the Conventions status and the number of remaining places still available.

By accessing one more time the *Projects* section, at the conclusion of each PCTO project, the department promoting the initiative, has to fill in the names and tax ID codes (*codice fiscale*) of the students who have successfully completed the course in order to recognize the training/guidance hours successfully performed.

This way, the University of Catania has made it possible to carry out in a simple, fast and effective way the matching between the training proposals of the University and the applications from the high schools, allowing the students to benefit from high quality academic training projects and to fulfill the quality assurance system requirements established by the PCTO regulations<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> <<http://www.cof.unict.it/content/alternanza-scuola-lavoro>>.

*Two PCTO projects offered by the Department of Educational Sciences of the University of Catania*

The Department of Educational Sciences of the University of Catania created and performed two PCTO projects in the academic year 2021/2022 and 2022/23 in a European Classical High School in Catania, *Convitto Cutelli*. The projects were innovative from many different perspectives. The lectures were conducted using CLIL methodology. Content and Language Integrated Learning, CLIL, is an approach in which a foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both language and the subject have a joint role<sup>18</sup>. The language used was English, foreign visiting professors were involved and the projects were student-centered mainly using collaborative tasks. CLIL motivates students by making English language learning more engaging and relevant. When students see the practical application of language skills in real-life contexts, it enhances their motivation to learn. Also, flipped classroom approach was used during the modules. Students were introduced to new content outside of class, often through videos or other online materials, and class time was then used for activities, discussions, and deeper understanding of the material through application. The flipped classroom method enhanced motivation by giving students more control over their learning pace and allowing for active engagement during class time and encouraged active engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration. Students found the interactive and collaborative nature of in-class activities more motivating than traditional teacher-centered classes.

Both CLIL and the flipped classroom model emphasized real-world application enhancing students' understanding of the practical relevance of their education. By integrating CLIL and the flipped classroom model into a PCTO project, a dynamic and engaging learning environment was created and language development, content understanding, and overall student motivation promoted.

Eventually, the PCTO projects matched with the UN Sustainable Development goals 2030 and European Erasmus+ goals regarding students' education. Working in a different language environment exposes students to various cultural aspects related to language, which enrich their understanding of the language and improve their cultural competency. Engaging with classmates and tutors in the L2 during PCTO experiences help students expand their network, providing opportunities for language exchange and further language practice.

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<sup>18</sup> D. Coyle, *Content and language integrated learning: Motivating learners and teachers*, in «Scottish languages review», 13, 5 (2006), pp. 1-18.

The training path, characterized by a high degree of interdisciplinarity, prepares high school students to become familiar with the job of a university researcher and the job of an educator providing them basic knowledge and information regarding these two different careers. During the courses, training activities, bibliographical elements and useful digital tools were presented in order to make the students able to create their own theoretical and applied research paths.

The first PCTO project entitled “*The job of a researcher in social sciences*” is a 35-hour training path for 30 participants. It aims to provide high school students with basic notions and practical activities to better understand the profession of a researcher in the field of social sciences. The training activity is carried out by foreign professors and local PhD students. The choice of involving these two categories of professionals was motivated by the intention to have a multicultural and multilingual approach and to offer the PhD students a possibility to improve their communication and teaching skills in English the lectures are held individually and in pairs on a chosen topic and speakers organize their talks by providing brief lectures but mainly proposing practical activities such as exercises, games and simulations. The participants have therefore the opportunity to benefit from different teaching methods and ways to transmit knowledge.

The second PCTO project entitled “*The job of an educator in social sciences*” is a 23-hour training path, for 25 participants. It has a goal to provide high school students with basics and practical activities to better understand the profession of an educator. The training activity is carried out by foreign professors and local PhD students who, in the light of their previous experiences, present their work to the students with a multicultural and multilingual approach. Also, in the second PCTO project, the lecturers cover specific topics related to the profession of an educator and organize their talks by providing brief presentations and mainly basing their contributions on practical activities using English as a vehicular language.

As required in the 2019 Budget Law, both projects have the professionalizing purpose but they also have the added value of guidance to the study courses offered by the Department of Educational Sciences of the University of Catania. During the opening ceremony, the Delegate of the Director of the Department for vocational guidance presents the department didactic offer. In the closing ceremony, the Delegate of the Director of the Department for Internationalization gives a presentation of the international exchange opportunities provided by the department for its future students.

At the conclusion of both PCTO projects, there are two types of evaluations: students’ self-evaluation through a questionnaire and tutors’ evaluation

on a group-work done by the students. The students have to choose one of the topics of the lectures and prepare a digital product (e.g., power point, report, theoretical in-depth research) to be presented to the evaluation committee made up of the university lecturers and the school tutor involved. *PCTO* projects are evaluated based on the competences developed by students during their participation in the project, which are assessed through a combination of self-evaluation and evaluation by their tutors. Students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and to identify the competences they have acquired, which can then be included in their personal portfolios and used as evidence of their learning outcomes.

The committee evaluates the final works taking into consideration the digital product, the ability to work in a team, English language and communication. The score awarded goes from minimum of 6 points to maximum of 10. As the projects are student-centered, an award to the best presentation is voted by the participants.

#### *The presentation of UNICT modules and their adaptability in Spanish high school system*

During the visit of the PhD students, Vincenza Tutino and Heidi Litunen, from the Department of Education of the University of Catania, two presentation and dissemination activities were organized in the Master's class for future secondary school English language teachers. Before introducing the topic, a survey was conducted to explore students' knowledge regarding vocational guidance. After the collection and discussion of students' feedback, the UNICT modules were presented in order to explore the adaptability of the Italian *PCTO* experience to the Spanish high school system. Students were required to create and present their own *PCTO* project to be usable in all types of Spanish high schools and not only in vocational schools. After carrying out the group work, students were assigned to prepare a more detailed project according to the following task: Create and structure a *PCTO* project for all types of high schools in Spain and highlight the most important elements for the successful development of your experimental module.

The students showed a great interest in the topics proposed during the seminars and they fulfilled the written task given with enthusiasm and successfully.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *PCTO* projects represent an innovative and effective approach to high school education in Italy which emphasizes the importance of practical and hands-on learning experiences as a way to develop students' transversal competences, English language skills, and promote their educational and professional orientation in all kinds of high schools. These projects not only provide students with valuable skills and knowledge but also foster important connections between schools and their local communities, contributing to the social and economic development of the region<sup>19</sup>.

*PCTO* collaboration between the University of Catania and *Convitto Cutelli* European High School supported and enhanced the educational offer of high schools and it created opportunities for a more engaging orientation, offering the students the chance to measure themselves with the specific disciplinary content and methodologies typical of the university world. During the lectures the students had occasions to work in pairs and in groups. This gave them the chance to improve their transversal skills which are the skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings. These skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes in the modern world. The participants improved their critical and innovative thinking, inter-personal skills and also their global citizenship learning from their mates and tutors.

As mentioned before, the projects were successful because they were innovative: the lectures were conducted using CLIL methodology, the language used was English, foreign visiting professors were involved and the projects were student-centered mainly using collaborative tasks.

Tolerance, openness, respect for diversity and intercultural understanding were key factors during the both *PCTO* projects.

Vocational guidance in Spain plays a crucial role in helping vocational school students to make informed career choices and navigate their professional paths.

While both countries share certain similarities in their approaches, they also exhibit distinct characteristics and challenges. Vocational guidance system in Italy is deeply rooted in its educational institutions, providing students with ample resources and opportunities to explore employment options from an early age. The integration of vocational guidance into the curriculum promotes occupation readiness and aligns education with industry demands.

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<sup>19</sup> W. Bliem, A. Petanovitsch, K. Schmid, *Success factors for the Dual VET System*, Wien 2015.

Spain, on the other hand, has made significant strides in recent years to strengthen its vocational guidance services, particularly through the expansion of career counseling programs and partnerships with employers. The country's emphasis on apprenticeships and vocational training programs has helped bridge the gap between education and employment, addressing high youth unemployment rates. However, Spain must continue to invest in these initiatives and address regional disparities in access to vocational guidance services.

In both countries, there is room for improvement. Strengthening collaboration between educational institutions, government agencies, and employers can enhance the effectiveness of vocational guidance. The Italian PCTO program can be a valuable opportunity for students to improve their second language (L2) skills through practical immersion, workplace communication, documentation, cultural exposure, and possibly formal language instruction. It offers a holistic approach to language learning by integrating language skills into real-world experiences and contexts.

The experiment performed between the University of Catania and the University of Burgos demonstrated that the Italian PCTO module could be an added value for the Spanish high school system. Further studies of a PCTO pilot project could be led in a Spanish *Bachillerato* in order to collect the feedback of the attending students who are the final beneficiaries of the best practice exchange.

#### ABSTRACT

This comparative study analyzes the vocational training regulations and practices in Italy and in Spain and it searches for the opportunities to look for a better coherence to vocational training in both countries through a fruitful exchange of good practices.

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the Italian and Spanish legislation in use for the PCTO in Italy and FP Dual in Spain, in order to draw useful modules for the continuous improvement of programs regarding the vocational guidance in high schools. This comparative analysis contributes to the understanding of how educational policies can promote a more effective transition of students from school to the world of work, fostering the development of practical skills and improving the employability of young people in both countries. The two PCTO projects described show how using CLIL methodology, helps students to use and to improve their English language communication (L2) with classmates, tutors and supervisors. Additionally, the use of the Flipped Classroom approach significantly enhances students practical learning skills.

Questo studio comparativo analizza le normative e le prassi in materia di formazione professionale in Italia e in Spagna e analizza le opportunità per una maggiore coe-

renza della formazione professionale in entrambi i Paesi attraverso un proficuo scambio di buone pratiche.

L'obiettivo di questo lavoro è quello di fornire una panoramica completa della legislazione italiana e spagnola in uso rispettivamente per il PCTO in Italia e per la FP Dual in Spagna, al fine di tracciare elementi utili per il miglioramento continuo dei programmi di orientamento professionale nelle scuole superiori. Questa analisi comparativa contribuisce alla comprensione di come le politiche educative possano promuovere una transizione più efficace degli studenti dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro, favorendo lo sviluppo di competenze pratiche e migliorando l'occupabilità dei giovani in entrambi i paesi. I due progetti PCTO descritti mostrano come l'utilizzo della metodologia CLIL aiuti gli studenti a utilizzare e migliorare la loro conoscenza della lingua inglese (L2) nella comunicazione con compagni, tutor e supervisori. Inoltre, l'uso dell'approccio Flipped Classroom migliora significativamente le capacità di apprendimento pratico degli studenti.