Section 1
Genesis of TVET Research

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1.0 Introduction: Genesis of TVET Research

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1.0.1 The Research Field of TVET Research

An overview of the worldwide historical development of technical and vocational education and training research (TVET research) is difficult to write. The definition of the research field of TVET research has always been determined by national definitions and structures, which in turn are shaped by cultural traditions. A course of study that counts as vocational education in one country may be a part of higher education in another, and it may be entirely absent in a third country because the professional domains and hierarchies are organised differently. Suffice it to mention the example of technicians, whose education is not only structured differently, but also takes place in different parts of the educational system in England (college, university), Germany (higher secondary level or non-university tertiary level), France (higher secondary level, lycée d’enseignement général et/ou technologique) and the USA (community college).

An examination of the classification system ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) for educational programmes (see the following section), which is used by the UNESCO and the OECD for reporting on national education systems, makes this differentiation easily visible (OECD 1999a; 2004c, UNESCO 2007). In order to allow for an overview of national developments and to display worldwide trends the national fields of TVET in 176 states are listed and compared in the UNESCO statistics (ELLIS 2004). This task reveals the variety and systemic differentiation of TVET already by the classification between ISCED 2 and 3 (lower and higher secondary level), ISCED 4 (post secondary non-tertiary) and ISCED 5b (higher education). These educational tracks are highly different in their objectives and most likely are not present in any one country at once. Whilst ISCED 2 is focusing on literacy and basic vocational training and concerns above all children and youth, study programmes at the ISCED 5b level, which are mostly taken up by adults as continuing education, presuppose a very good secondary education and practical experience at a complex level. This intricate variety of national TVET systems entails consequences for TVET research, for it has to be oriented first towards the national situation and thus a determined research field with associated research questions. Whereas the structural differentiations between countries are perceived in most cases, those demarcations of the research field that are related to cultural contexts are more difficult for TVET research between single national systems. It is enough to mention the semantic differences of the term TVET in the various languages. In the German-speaking area berufliche Bildung is used as a comprehensive term and denotes everything that relates, regardless of the learning venue, to the imparting (including informal self-learning) of skills and knowledge directed towards the exercise of a professional activity that is mostly defined by a recognised occupation. In the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere, on the other hand, a more subtle differentiation takes place. This refers to the occupation, which may be classified, according to educational level (e. g. on-the-job training, secondary education, higher education) or social standing as occupation, vocation or profession. How difficult the definition of the research field can be already in one and the same language is shown by the different terminologies used by the UNESCO (technical and vocational education and training, TVET) and the EU (vocational education and training, VET). If these terms are translated back into other languages, problems of delimitation may be the consequence. This is, for instance, the case in France where there is a distinction between formation professionnelle and formation technique. Besides, this distinction of technical and vocational education also applies to the English-speaking countries.

In the globalised world of today the national TVET systems are directly influenced by transnational developments. This is why the demand for international research and for the exchange of national research findings is increasing. How did the UNESCO as the UN’s educational organisa-