

VET teachers' professional development

A study on the impact of formal and informal activities

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Introduction

Schools for Vocational Education and Training (VET) need to continuously innovate to adapt to changes in occupational practice and student characteristics.

Professional development of VET teachers is crucial to accommodate these changes (Kyndt et al., 2016). VET teachers undertake informal and formal activities, which might impact their development.

The purpose of this study is to improve understanding of the relationship between undertaken formal and informal activities and professional development of vocational teachers.

Research question

What is the impact of VET teachers' involvement in formal and informal activities on their professional development, and what factors do teachers indicate that explain this impact?

Theory

- Teacher professional development (TPD) is a continuous process in which teachers engage in formal and informal development activities. The impact of these activities on professional development is defined as change in teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and/or skills (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016).
- Formal activities can be described as organized settings for the purpose of learning and improving teaching, such as a team training on the latest digital tools.
- Informal activities are rather implicit and spontaneous activities, embedded in work activities, such as experimenting with an online teaching tool.
- Factors that explain the impact of informal and formal activities can be found in various characteristics and conditions for effective teacher professional development (Van den Bergh et al., 2014), such as collective participation, reflecting, or relevance for teaching practice.

Methodology

Longitudinal qualitative research design

- Period of two-and-a-half years (2018-2021)
- 24 experienced VET teachers were followed (Welfare and Business domains)
- Informal and formal activities, and short term self-perceived impact on TPD were described in six Learner Reports (LR)
- Long term self-perceived impact on TPD and the explanations of the perceived impact on TPD were explicit in two interviews (IV)
- Each teacher described 10 activities
- Resulted in 240 described professional development activities

2018-2019	LR1 Oct 2018	→	LR2 Feb 2019	→	LR3 May 2019	→	IV1 June 2019
2019-2021	LR4 Nov 2019	→	LR5 Feb 2020	→	LR6 Oct 2020	→	IV2 Feb 2021

Data example: teacher Welfare domain

Learner report		Interview	
Description of the activity	Short term perceived impact on TPD	Long term perceived impact on TPD	Explanation of the perceived impact on TPD
	Assessment by teacher (scale 1-5) 4 = large impact	Re-assessment by teacher (scale 1-5) 4 = large impact	
<i>'[...] is about a class situation [...] I felt like I was fire-fighting all over the place, because of that students were constantly crossing borders. [...] And it just really didn't work. That's the first time I thought "I just don't know what to do". And at one point I also said: "Guys, I'm just leaving. In this way I cannot achieve anything with you." And that actually felt very powerless.'</i>	<i>'I felt too responsible to finish it nicely or to make sure I give it [class] a positive spin. And that didn't work at that moment, so I had to accept the situation at that moment.'</i>	<i>'Well, actually the effect is very big on me, especially on a part of my health. [...]'</i> <i>'[...] also want to give the students a professional attitude in this way. A bit of personal responsibility [...] stricter and more consistent.'</i> <i>'[...] and then I also had consultations with colleagues about this, and they also indicated that it was going too far, it was also a busy and too large class. [...] So you just learn a lot from that when you discuss it with each other.'</i> <i>'And I do notice that I will take a different view on this for next school year, because I want to place that responsibility more on them [students] at the start of the lesson cycle. [...].'</i>	<i>'[...] confrontational and good to think about what to do when boundaries are really crossed.'</i> <i>'[...] Awareness of who I am as a person in front of the class. Who I am in terms of opinions, and why and where.'</i> <i>'[...] these are all norms and values that I have been given and I expect the same from my students. [...] provokes irritation in me [...].'</i> <i>'[...] discussed it with teachers and it was broadened, so we looked at what we were going to do with it as a team.'</i> <i>'What made the difference with this one situation and other situations is that for me this was the first time that there was unrest in every group.'</i> <i>'Looking back now, that was a long period for me, so maybe that also had an influence. I try to think about it for myself.'</i>

Analytical framework to be used on data

Theme	Operationalization	Reference
Informal / formal activity	Type of activity: • Informal activity • Formal activity	Kyndt (2016) Akiba (2012); Akiba & Liang (2016)
Perceived impact	Nature of the impact: • Change in knowledge • Change in views and beliefs (e.g. awareness, confirmed ideas, new ideas, intention for practice, positive emotions) • Change in skills (new practices)	Meirink (2007); Bakkenes (2010) Meirink (2007); Bakkenes (2010) Meirink (2007); Bakkenes (2010)
Explanatory factors of professional development	Factors • e.g. solving real problems, modeling, or active learning	Van den Bergh (2014)

Questions for discussion

- What is your view on the framework for analysis of the perceived impact?
- What is your view on the best way to analyze the factors that explain the perceived impact in relation to the described formal or informal development activity?

References

References can be requested from the researcher.

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