

# VET teachers' professional development

## A study on the impact of formal and informal activities

Open Universiteit



### 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<br>Oct<br>2018 | → | LR2<br>Feb<br>2019 | → | LR3<br>May<br>2019 | → | IV1<br>June<br>2019 |
| 2019-2021 | LR4<br>Nov<br>2019 | → | LR5<br>Feb<br>2020 | → | LR6<br>Oct<br>2020 | → | IV2<br>Feb<br>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)<br>4 = large impact  | Re-assessment by teacher (scale 1-5)<br>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>'[...] confrontational and good to think about what to do when boundaries are really crossed.'</i>   |
|   | <i>'It is more an awareness that it does not always have to be good, sometimes it is just allowed a little less or there is also their own responsibility [of the students] in it.'</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>'[...] 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>'I have really learned that maybe I should be stricter [...] So I set my own limits more in that.'</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>'[...] 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>'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>'[...] 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   | Kyndt (2016)                       |
|   | • Formal activity   | Akiba (2012); Akiba & Liang (2016) |
| Perceived impact                                | Nature of the impact:   |                                    |
|   | • Change in knowledge   | Meirink (2007); Bakkenes (2010)    |
|   | • Change in views and beliefs (e.g. awareness, confirmed ideas, new ideas, intention for practice, positive emotions) | Meirink (2007); Bakkenes (2010)    |
|   | • Change in skills (new practices)  | Meirink (2007); Bakkenes (2010)    |
| Explanatory factors of professional development | Factors   | Van den Bergh (2014)               |
|   | • e.g. solving real problems, modeling, or active learning  |                                    |

### 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.

### Contact researcher

Marjanne Hagedoorn  
marjanne.hagedoorn@ou.nl

