

## VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' MOTIVES FOR IMPROVEMENT THEIR QUALIFICATION

Daiva Rimkuvienė<sup>1</sup>, & Sigitas Daukilas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assoc. Professor

<sup>2</sup>Professor

Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania)

### Abstract

Vocational education and training is widely valued by policy-makers in many countries. Vocational teachers are working in difficult conditions today. Changes continually take place in educational policy and in vocational school's physical and social environment. The teachers who want to be effective in such an environment should not only master their profession, but also seek new knowledge and strive for continuous improvement. Continuous professional development of teachers is essential when addressing the gaps in training that arise through time and change. Usually teachers improve their teaching skills on a voluntary basis, based on their own need to expand their professional development.

This article concerns the continuing professional development of vocational teachers. Data were collected from vocational teachers through quantitative study. 27 vocational schools in Lithuania were involved in the study. Results showed that the needs of teachers' professional development remain unchanged for many years. Such needs are dominated by didactic-pedagogical topics, although in the current situation, vocational education requires the development of communication and information technology competences. The motives for development are caused by technological advancement in the labor market and inner need for improvement.

**Keywords:** Vocational teachers, qualification, professional development.

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### 1. Introduction

Today's challenges and relevant vocational training problems suppose exclusive requirements for the educational system and vocational teachers. Vocational teachers' work is based on two main competences: teaching competence and competence related to a specific work-life vocational practice (Andersson & Köpsén, 2015). There are emphasized vocational teachers' personal qualities, motivation, an innovative approach to their activities and desire to keep improving in particular, taking good vocational training experience and creating special modern educational technologies for the subjects taught (Daukilas, Mičiulienė, Kovalčikienė & Kasperiūnienė, 2016). Vocational teachers have to be able to think broadly in various aspects and, evaluate and demonstrate practical experience, which relates to the subject matter of the object. Their professional development is a lifelong learning process, which is caused by both external (technological advancement in the labor market, teacher change in schools) and internal (inner need for improvement) factors.

The research questions for this study were:

How do the vocational teachers evaluate the impact of qualification improvement activities? What kind of activities are most preferred by vocational pedagogues? Do their attitudes depend on gender, age, school policy, etc? What are the essential motivations for the qualification improvement of the vocational teachers?

Nonparametric statistical hypothesis verification methods have been used to evaluate the statistical significance of the differences between the groups. Hypotheses are checked by  $\chi^2$ , Kruskal Wallis or Mann-Whitney U statistics. The data were processed with the statistical program SPSS.

### 2. Results

The study of the content of vocational teachers' activities was carried out on April - May 2016. Using probabilistic cluster sampling of the 10 regions (counties), 27 vocational schools have been randomly selected. The questionnaires, which are designed to identify professional development ways,

the peculiarities of the educational process, used the nominal and order (Likert) scales. In this research we focused on vocational teachers' motives for improvement their qualification.

A total of 339 teachers from vocational schools the survey, with some surveys incomplete. The sample included mostly women (72,1 %). There were 19,6 % of teachers of general subjects, 72 % of teachers of vocational subjects, 8,4 % of teachers of both general and vocational subjects. 40.7 % of the respondents were from cities (more than 50 thousand inhabitants), and others respondents were from district centers and countryside. Most respondents (38,3 %) were in the 50 - 59-year range. 21,4 % of respondents were in the 40 – 49 year age group, 17,5 % of respondents were in the 30 – 39 age group and the same percentage of respondents were older than 60 year. Only 5,3 % of respondents were in the 18-29 years age group.

The teachers were asked about the professional development they had participated in during the 12 months prior to the survey and to evaluate the impact of activities in 4 points scale (1 – no impact, 4 – large impact).

The majority of teachers participated in professional development activities (Table). The percentage of those not having participated in any professional development activity was estimated at 8,8%. The respondents attended at professional development activities 7,4 days on average (median – 6, maximum – 28). The most of teachers attended at courses/seminars, participated in the activity of methodical groups and observation visits to other schools, had informal dialogue with colleagues to improve the teaching.

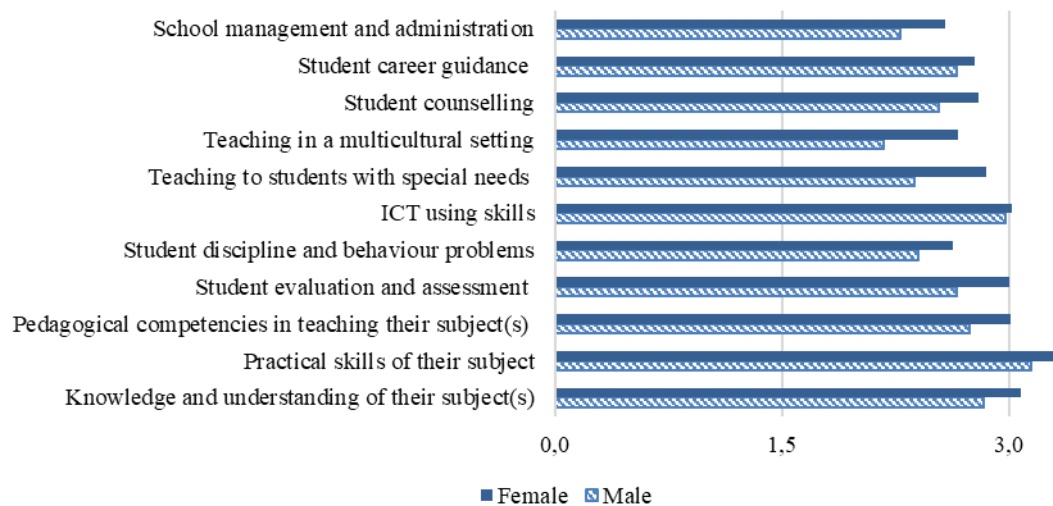
Table 1. Participation of teachers in activities and its impact on their professional development.

Type of professional development	Teachers indicating they participated in activity in previous 12 months, %	Impact		
		Mode	Mean	Std. Deviation
Courses/seminars (education-related topics)	90,86	3	3,01	,624
Informal dialogue with colleagues to improve the teaching	87,02	3	3,17	,758
Courses/seminars (subject related/technological topics)	84,37	3	3,18	,701
Participation in the activity of methodical group	79,35	3	2,97	,777
Observation visits to other schools	76,99	3	3,20	,741
Reading professional literature	73,75	4	3,38	,723
Observation of colleagues' work	71,68	3	2,92	,829
Project activities	59,29	4	3,24	,874
Individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest	49,26	3	2,63	,922
Internship	33,04	4	3,18	1,100
Participation in a network of schools	27,43	3	2,69	1,094
Mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching, as part of a formal school arrangement	21,24	3	2,59	1,159
Participation in pedagogical ideas fair	17,11	3	2,49	1,098
Qualification programme (master studies)	10,91	1	2,39	1,293
Workshops/camp	4,42	1	1,75	1,090

The majority of teachers reported that the *Reading professional literature* had the largest impact. Surveys responses indicated, that *Project activities*, *Observation visits to other schools*, *Courses/seminars* (subject related/technological topics), *Internship*, and *Informal dialogue* with colleagues had medium or large impact. Comparing by gender, there were statistically significant differences in assessment of following activities: *Project activities*, *Observation of colleagues' work*, and *Informal dialogue with colleagues* (*Female* ranked more positive than *Male*). Comparing by place of residence, there was statistically significant difference in assessment of *Workshops/camp*. Kruskal-Wallis test showed that teachers of vocational subjects ranked more positive such activities as *Courses/seminars* (subject related/technological topics) ( $p = 0,012$ ), *Internship* ( $p = 0,026$ ), and teachers of general subjects ranked more positive *Informal dialogue with colleagues to improve the teaching* ( $p = 0,039$ ). There were not statistically significant differences by age.

The respondents indicated, that the most important need is the improving the knowledge and practical (technological) skills of their subject, and practicing of ICT skills. There were found statistically significant differences by age in ranking of *Student evaluation and assessment* ( $p = 0,001$ ), *Teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting* ( $p = 0,004$ ), and *School management and administration* ( $p = 0,000$ ), *Instructional practices* ( $p = 0,015$ ); by subjects taught by teachers – *Teaching to students with special needs* ( $p = 0,010$ ). There were no statistical statistically differences comparing by place of residence. Comparing qualification improvement needs by gender (Figure), there were found not statistically significant differences in assessment of *Student discipline and behavior problems* ( $p = 0,115$ ), *ICT using skills* ( $p = 0,430$ ), *Student career guidance* ( $p = 0,280$ ) and *School management and administration* ( $p = 0,063$ ).

Figure 1. Qualification improvement needs (average rank).



The results show that the participants highlighted personal desire for the acquisition of new knowledge and technical skills as the strongest motive for improvement of their qualification. They pointed out that “*We need to learn all our life in our professional life*”.

### 3. Conclusions

Vocational teachers’ training is inert, more based on traditional experiences and local needs. Highly relevant group and individual qualification upgrading strategies are: more traditional methods of qualification upgrading methods are used, such as courses and seminars on pedagogical and technological topics, consultation with colleagues. However, individual ways are appreciated, such as reading professional literature. The topics and needs of teachers’ professional development are unchanged for many years: didactic-pedagogical topics, although teachers miss technological-business training; teachers give priority to didactic-business training. The geographical location and size of the school affects the qualifications of teachers. In schools in small rural areas, priority is given to general, often informal learning in methodological groups, non-governmental organizations, social activities and programs. Teachers of district schools are more likely upgrading their qualification in project activities.

The research of motives for the development of vocational teachers reveals that qualification improvement is a continual process in this profession which is caused by both external (technological advancement in the labor market) and internal (inner need for improvement) factors.

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