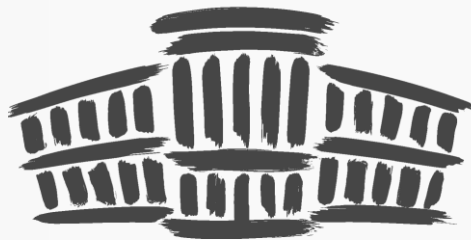


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13. NEMZETKÖZI MÓDSZERTANI KONFERENCIA

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COMPETENCES



13. Међународна методичка конференција

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CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR VET TEACHERS: OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES BASED ON A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The professional development of vocational teachers is critical to the effectiveness of education systems and to improving student outcomes. The purpose of this study is to explore the professional development practices of instructors at a technical school and the factors that influence them. The empirical research examined the views of 61 instructors using an online questionnaire. The focus of the research was on the instructors' knowledge of pedagogical methodology, their professional preparation and their needs for continuous professional development (CPD). The results show that, although teachers feel in an average position in terms of professional development, there is a strong demand for development opportunities, especially to keep up with rapidly changing industrial and technological trends. The research also shows that the CPD opportunities provided by the institution are not effective enough and suggestions are made to improve them.

Keywords: *teaching, training and continuous professional development (CPD)*

1. Introduction, VET teachers

At the heart of vocational education and training, as in other parts of the education system, are the teachers, who are the key actors for effective and quality training. VET teachers must have unique competences, including pedagogical, professional and industry-specific skills and knowledge. The combination of these will enable them to effectively communicate professional theory and practice to both students and adult learners. In addition, VET educators play an important role in overcoming barriers to learning and contribute to the development of skills that meet learners' labour market expectations (Bacsa-Bán, 2021). Among the skills to be developed, transversal skills such as independent learning, collaboration, critical thinking and digital competences are given particular attention. They will also support the transition from school to work of learners, including adults from diverse backgrounds who want to renew or upgrade their skills.

The nature and structure of vocational education and training programmes varies across countries, particularly in terms of the mix of work-based and school-based learning (Figure 1), and this has implications for the needs of teachers and the range of competences required. In some countries, VET is organised mainly as school-based education (e.g. Italy, Sweden), while in others, such as the Netherlands and Switzerland, a significant part of the programmes is based on extra-curricular elements. The ratio of time spent in school to time spent in the workplace can vary widely not only between countries, but also within countries and between different training programmes (OECD, 2022).

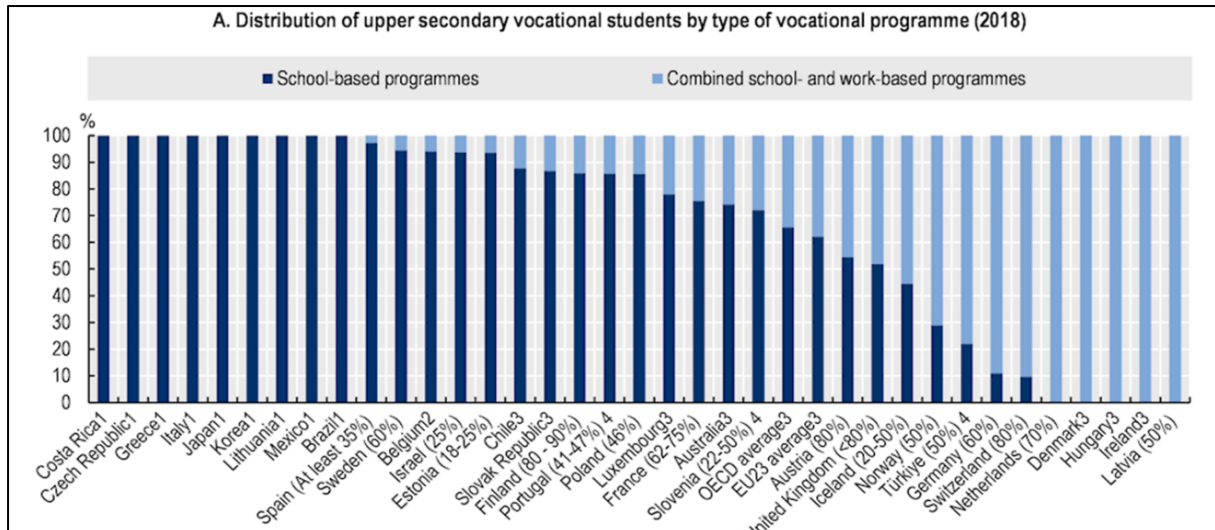


Figure 1.: Distribution of upper secondary vocational students by type of vocational programme (2018)
 Source: OECD (2021), Table B7.3. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes
<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

International research (TALIS, 2019; OECD, 2022) shows that VET teachers need a sophisticated mix of theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as pedagogical and subject-specific competences, to teach effectively. It is essential that they have the necessary experience of the profession and are able to work effectively with learners from a variety of backgrounds and with different needs. As vocational education and training often involves learners with poorer basic skills, teachers need to recognise and make up for these gaps. In addition, they need to place increasing emphasis on developing digital and socio-emotional skills, given the needs of the labour market.

VET teachers generally acquire the competences needed to qualify as vocational teachers through years of learning and practical experience. Although in most OECD countries the level of qualification required for VET teachers is lower than for general education teachers, the majority of VET teachers have a tertiary qualification (Figure 2). Many countries expect teachers to have at least an ISCED level 5 short-cycle tertiary qualification, ensuring that they have the necessary professional and pedagogical knowledge (OECD, 2021).

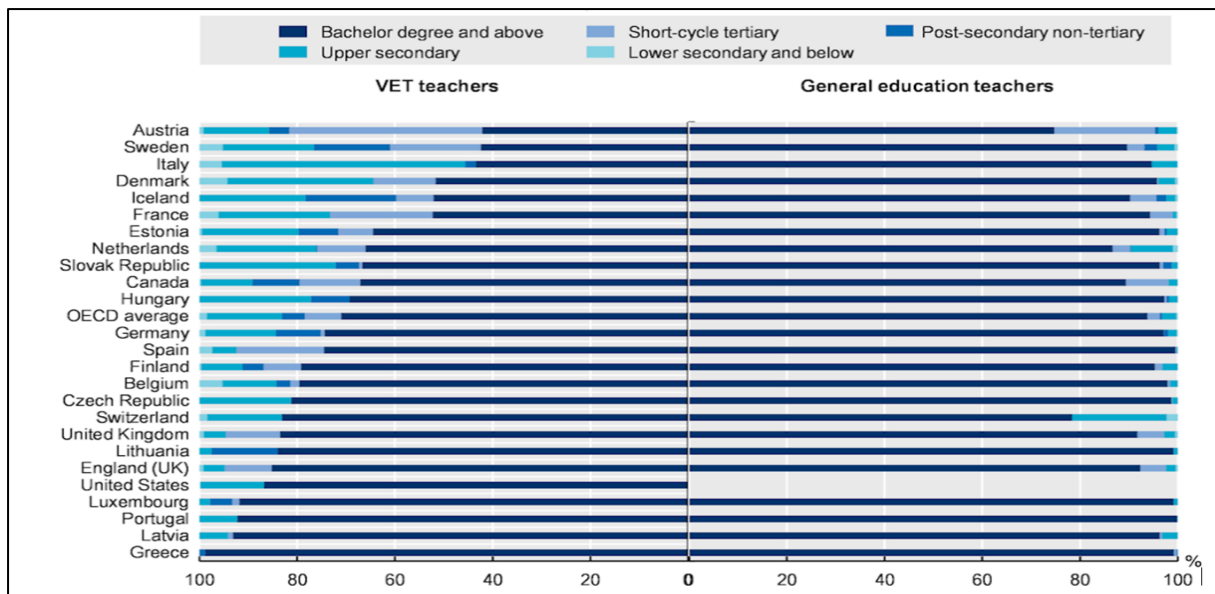


Figure 2.: Share of teachers by highest qualification attained
 Source: OECD (2022), Teachers and Leaders in Vocational Education and Training, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training (<https://doi.org/10.1787/59d4fbb1-en>)

In many OECD countries, the shortage of professional teachers is a critical problem, for example in the US and Germany they can only meet part of the demand (OECD, 2021). One of the main reasons for the shortage of VET teachers is the limited attractiveness of the profession, exacerbated by unfavourable employment conditions, lower wages and a lack of career support and financial incentives (OECD, 2021). In contrast to teaching, industrial sectors often offer more favourable working conditions and can therefore attract teachers by competing for labour. To overcome this shortage, many countries use flexible working arrangements and part-time employment, especially for professionals with an industrial background. This model, which is common in Western Europe but less known in Hungary (TALIS, 2018), simultaneously alleviates teacher shortages, reduces training costs and refreshes the industrial knowledge base of education. Such part-time teachers not only facilitate the transition into teaching, but also support them in obtaining their own vocational qualifications. According to the 2018 TALIS survey, flexible scheduling is one of the most common motivators for choosing a career as a vocational teacher (68%) and is more attractive to them than to general knowledge teachers (60%) (OECD, 2021). The level and form of qualification requirements for vocational teachers vary across countries and fields of education, so a priority is to ensure that there are multiple, flexible routes into vocational education, particularly for experienced industry professionals (OECD, 2021).

2. Professional development for VET teachers

Teachers' professional preparation, their knowledge of pedagogical methodology and their commitment to continuous professional development all contribute to their ability to effectively teach and support students throughout the educational process. Education policies also increasingly recognise the importance of teacher quality and support and encourage teachers' continuous professional development accordingly. Teacher education, training and support have become a priority area for national and international education policies (Teachers matter, 2005; Horváth, L. et al., 2016; Fazekas and Horváth, 2019; TALIS, 2019; ELTE PPK, 2021; OECD, 2022; Rapos et al 2022). This is because the quality of teachers has a direct impact on the learning outcomes and development of students, and thus plays a key role in the efficiency and effectiveness of education systems.

Due to the high degree of heterogeneity in vocational education and training, the factors influencing the continuous professional development of VET teachers may vary between countries' education systems and even between institutions. The empirical research among VET teachers described in this paper is one of the few domestic studies that investigates the professional development of VET teachers (Bükki and Fehérvári, 2021; Rapos et al, 2023). This quantitative analysis focuses on the circumstances and conditions of VET teachers' professional development, explores VET teachers' pedagogical methodologies and views, and provides information on their professional status, preparation, problem-solving methods and professional work. The aim of this research is to explore the professional development and learning practices and related views of VET teachers in a school-based VET institution and to identify VET-specific factors that influence them.

Our research background, on the basis of which we developed the hypotheses of the study, was as follows. Studies on the national vocational education and training system and the findings of the Continuous Professional Development of Teachers (CPD):

1. The effectiveness of teacher in-service training:

The continuing training opportunities offered by VET institutions often do not meet the needs of teachers. Teachers often do not see the programmes offered as relevant, which reduces their willingness to participate.

2. Methodological innovations:

The majority of VET teachers do not make use of new methodological approaches and rely on traditional teaching methods. This is often due to the shortcomings of the FSC.

3. Teacher satisfaction and loyalty:

Teacher satisfaction is closely linked to the potential of the FSC. Teachers who participate in professional development programmes tend to show higher levels of satisfaction with their work and their institution.

4. Institutional support:

Support from institutional leadership plays a key role in the effectiveness of the CPD. VET institutions where management actively encourages teachers to undertake further training tend to be more successful in achieving their educational goals.

5. VET reforms:

The reforms have increased the need for professional development among teachers.

6. Cooperation opportunities:

Cooperation between VET institutions and the strengthening of links with labour market actors are important factors for the continuous professional development of teachers

3. Institutional survey among teachers at Bánki Donát Technical School University of Dunaújváros

Based on our theoretical background, we conducted an online survey in spring 2024, using a Google questionnaire, among teachers at a vocational training institution to pilot research on continuous professional development of vocational teachers to inform our future large-scale study. We aimed to survey the entire teaching staff (61), but were able to obtain responses from 41, giving our sample a 67.2% participation rate for the institution's core population.

3.1. The aim of the study

This quantitative analysis focuses on the conditions and circumstances of VET teachers' professional development, explores their pedagogical methodology and views, and provides information on their professional situation, their preparation, their problem-solving methods and their professional work. The aim of this research is to explore the professional development and learning practices and related views of VET teachers in a school-based VET institution and to identify VET-specific factors that influence them.

3.2. Hypothesis

In our hypotheses, we argued that teachers are in an average position in terms of continuous professional development (CPD), but they need CPD in order to keep up with industry trends and technological developments as well as pedagogical and methodological trends. We believed that the professionalism, loyalty and satisfaction of the teachers directly determine the educational success of the students and the effectiveness and perception of the institution. We also assumed that the opportunities provided by the vocational training institution are not effective in terms of the instructors' FSZF. Along this line, we aimed to formulate recommendations to promote CPD.

3.3. The study and its results

VET teachers play a critical role in adapting to industry and technological trends, providing students with the practical and theoretical skills they need to succeed in the labour market. Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers is therefore essential to keep pace with pedagogical and technological innovations and to meet changing industry expectations. The aim of this empirical study is to assess the needs of VET teachers for CPD, the existing training opportunities and the effectiveness of institutional support. Data collected through an online questionnaire was collected from 41 teachers and analysed in detail to identify key factors for professional development, barriers and expectations among teachers.

3.3.1. Background information

The gender distribution of respondents to the survey is almost equal: 51.2% women and 48.8% men. This balanced proportion allows us to assess the experiences of vocational teachers without gender bias, in addition to the fact that women are the majority of teachers of general subjects at the institution and, due to the technical nature of the institution, the majority of teachers of vocational subjects are men. The age distribution of the responding teachers (Fig. 3) is skewed towards the older age group, with more than half of them over 50. This indicates an ageing of VET teachers, which may have implications for the supply of new teachers and the long-term renewal of education.

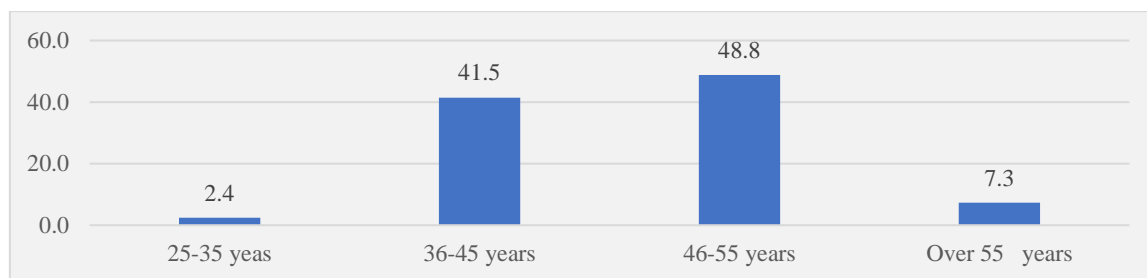


Figure 3.: Age group distribution

Looking at the years spent in vocational education and training, the chart (Fig. 4) shows that the majority of teachers have spent more than 20 years in vocational education and training. This implies a high level of professional experience, but also highlights the challenge of attracting new professionals. Adding to this the number of years spent in the institution, we find that (Fig 5) more than half of the teachers have been working for less than 5 years, which may be due to the change of the institution's management and the high turnover of teachers in VET, and the importance of the CPD in monitoring the professional development of teachers and supporting them according to their needs and requirements.

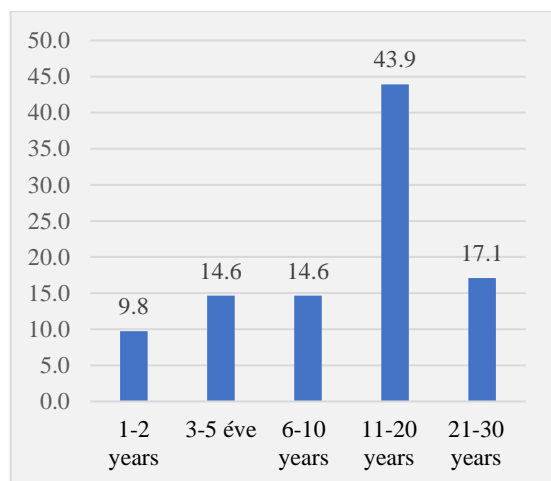


Figure 4.: Time spent in vocational training

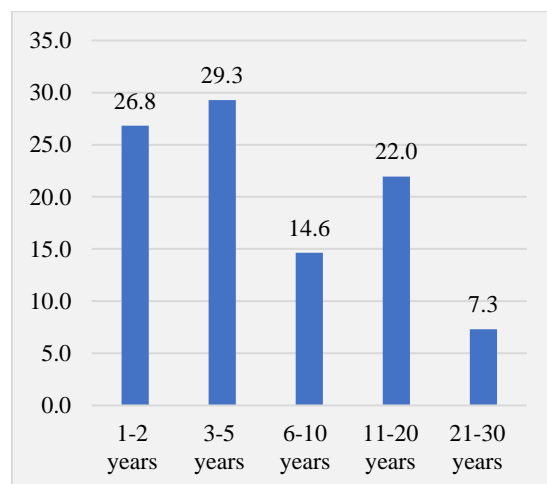


Figure 5.: Education at Bánki Donát Technical School

The distribution of the interviewed teachers according to their education/qualification/educational qualification can be summarized as follows: 61% of them have a professional degree, most of them have a university/MA/MSc degree (Fig 6), only a few of them (4.88%) have no educational qualification (Fig 7), 48.76% are general knowledge teachers, most of them are vocational teachers (practical teachers, vocational teachers, engineering teachers) (Fig 8).

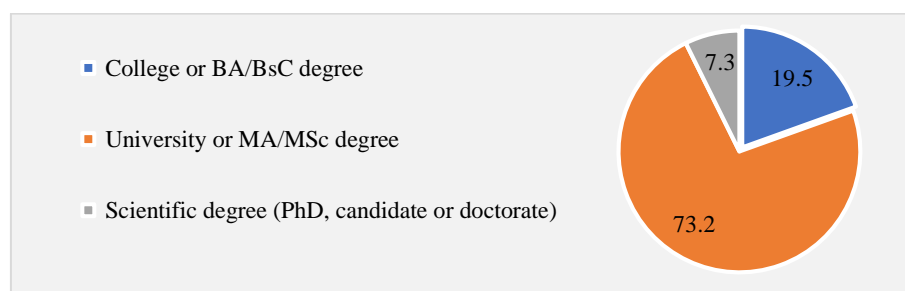


Figure 6.: Distribution of respondents by educational level

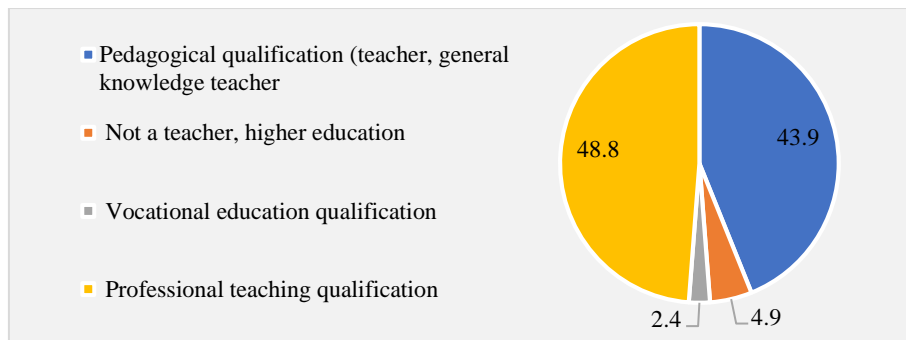


Figure 7. Pedagogical qualifications of the respondents

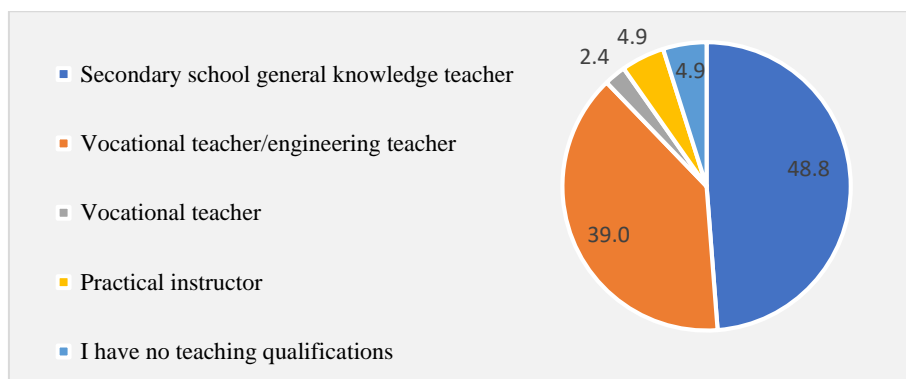


Figure 8.: Distribution of respondents by teaching qualifications

Most of the respondents teach at a vocational secondary school (Fig 9.), and in terms of institutional responsibilities, almost 50% of them also have other responsibilities at the institution, e.g. class teacher, mentor, exam chairperson, etc. (Fig 10.)

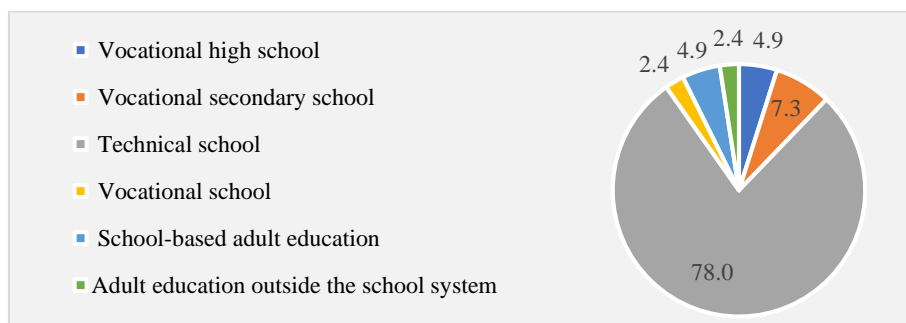


Figure 9.: Distribution of respondents' educational activities by training form

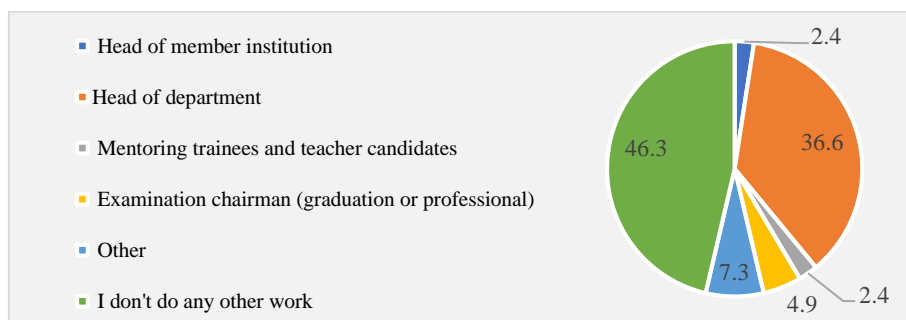


Figure 10.: Distribution of respondents according to their other pedagogical activities at the institution

In terms of employment, most of them are permanent employees, which provides them with a high degree of security and stability, while around 1/5 of them have a fixed-term or hourly contract (Fig 11). Accordingly, they are mostly employed full-time by the institution.

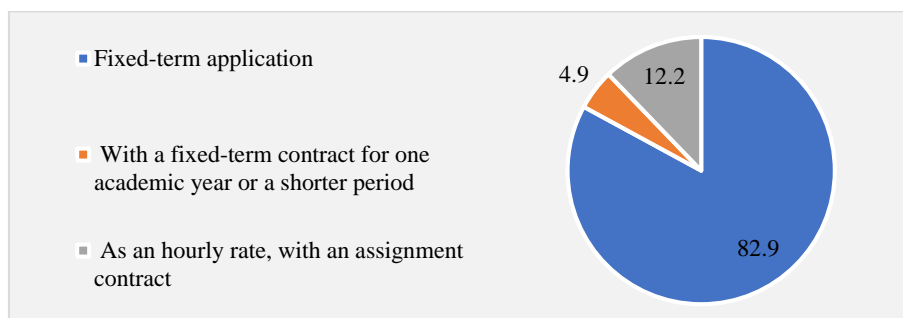


Figure 11.: *Distribution of respondents by legal status and employment status*

Finally, as regards the basic data, the question of how much they feel at home in the institution, i.e. how much they consider themselves part of the teaching staff, is worth highlighting: only 12.2% of them do not feel part of the teaching staff (Fig. 12), i.e. the professional cohesion of the institution can be considered significant.

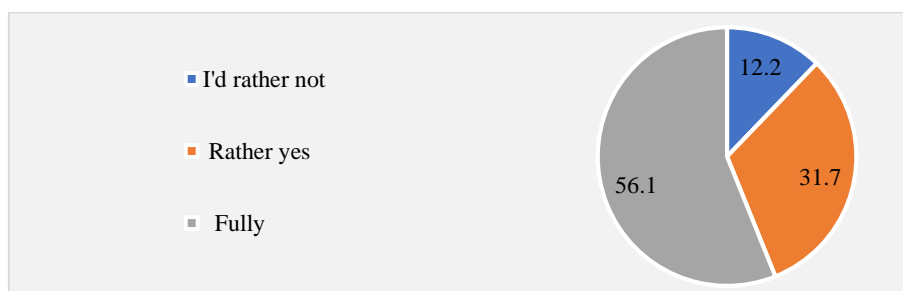


Figure 12.: *Respondents' relationship with the school teaching staff*

3.3.2. Research results in terms of continuous professional development (CPD)

Typically, the first stage of a teacher's continuing professional development (CPD) is formal teacher training. However, in the case of professional teachers, legislation allows for their employment without a teacher qualification, and as they were also present in large numbers in our study, we found this area to be particularly important. In the questionnaire survey, we used a four-point scale to ask the teachers about the weight they thought this training had played in the development of their current teaching competences. According to respondents, their initial teacher training played a major role in the development of their subject and methodological competences (Fig. 13). The majority also felt that the training had a significant impact in the areas of student assessment, ongoing professional self-reflection, competences related to standards/curricula and teaching interdisciplinary skills. However, it played little or no role in supporting learning, working with parents, and in particular in the development of individualised development and ICT skills.

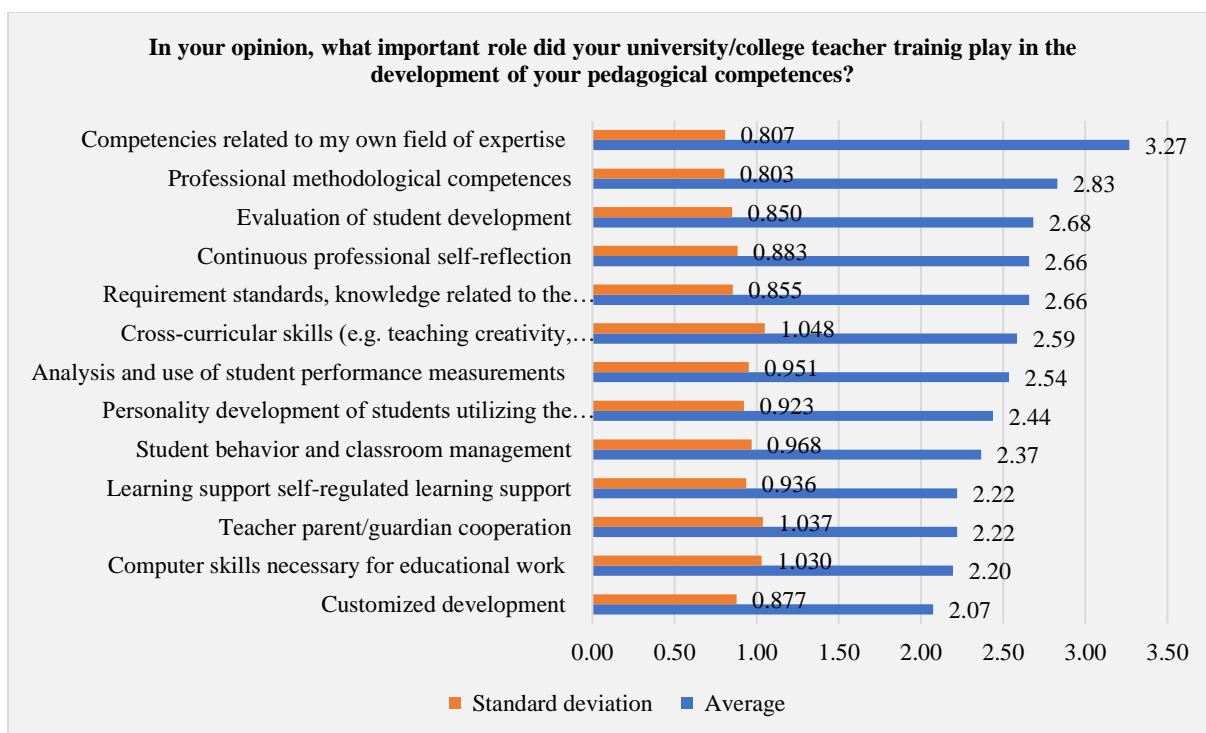


Figure 13.: *The role of teacher training in the development of the respondents' pedagogical competencies*

Teachers were also asked about the extent to which they felt they needed to improve in each of the teacher competence areas. The majority of teachers surveyed felt a greater or greater need for professional development in almost all teacher competences, except for teacher-parent cooperation and school management and administration (Fig. 14). The greatest need for development was reported in the areas of subject and (subject) methodological competences and ICT competences.

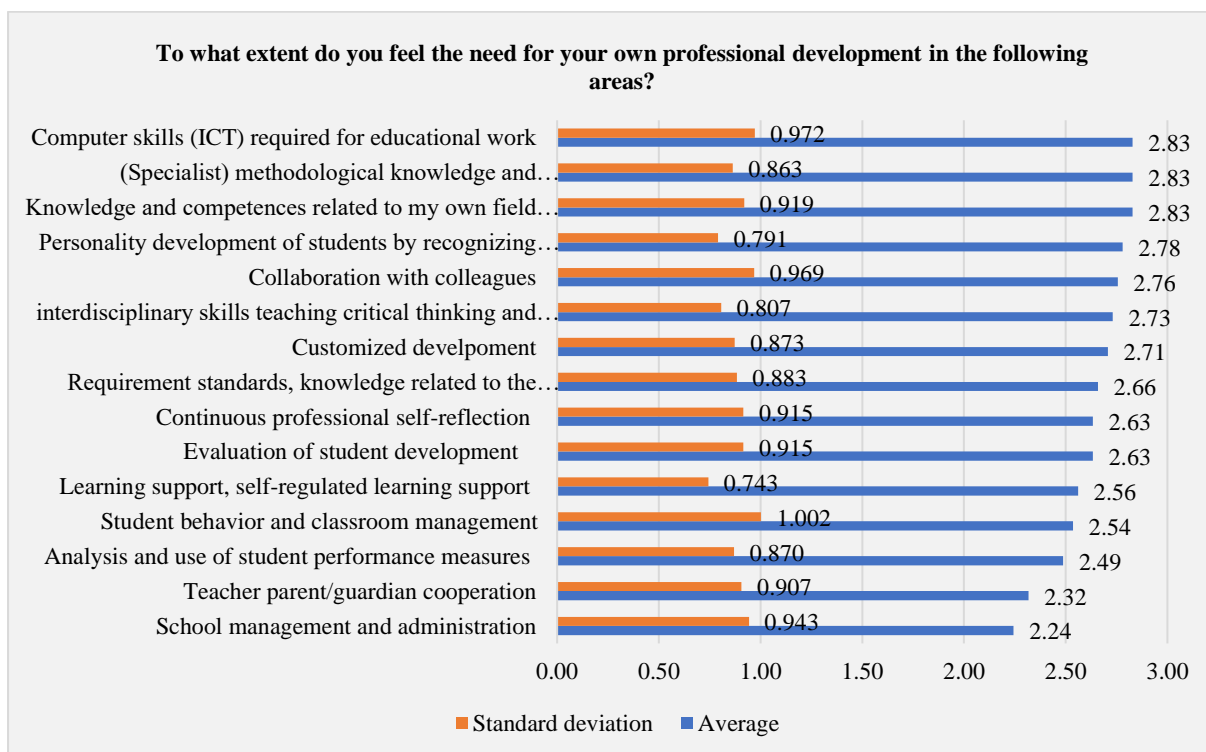


Figure 14.: *Respondents' need for CPD*

By looking at the ways in which continuous professional development is manifested, we were able to find out which activities are preferred by teachers. Instructors identified reading the literature on the subject, assessing student progress, self-reflection and exchange-type tutor collaboration as their typical CPD activities (Fig 15). They were less likely to describe themselves as engaging in experiential observation and deeper collaborative and pedagogically oriented non-formal activities. The latter might be explained by the young faculty data observed among the seven variables, as most of the colleagues had been working in the institution for less than 5 years, but this was not confirmed by the very low correlation value.

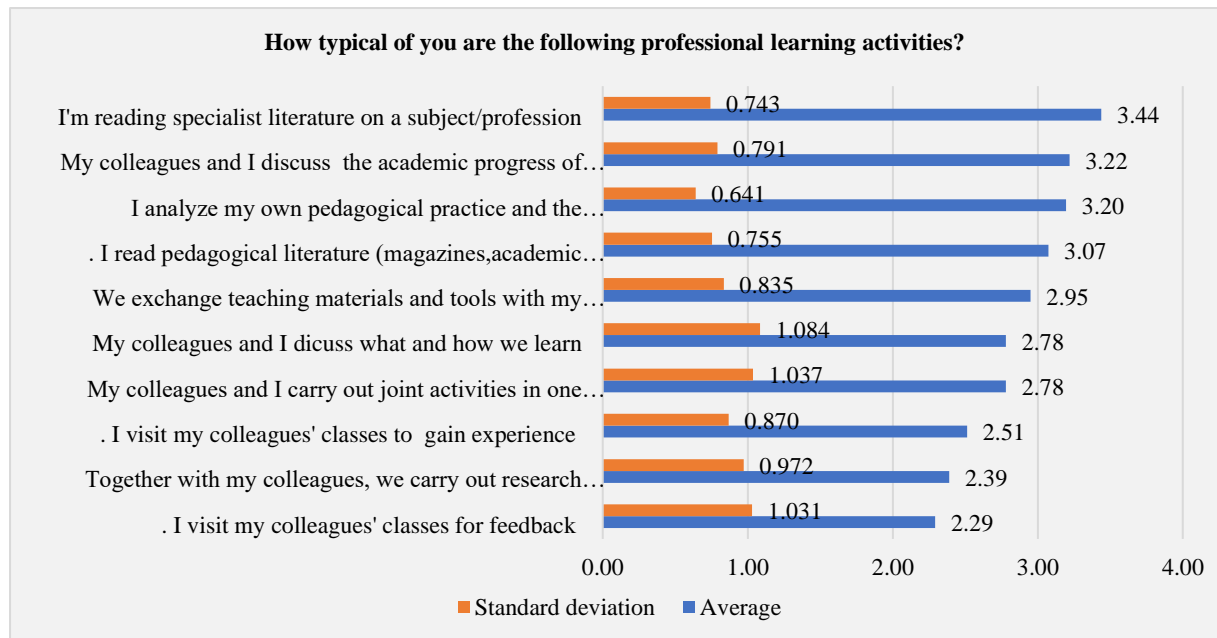


Figure 15.: Respondents' most typical CPD activities

In addition to their participation in professional learning and collaboration activities, the survey also asked teachers how they assess the impact of these activities on their own professional development. Lecturers felt that reading literature relevant to the subject, professional development, reflection and exchange-type tutor collaboration had the greatest impact (Fig 16). And joint activities with colleagues also came last in terms of impact.

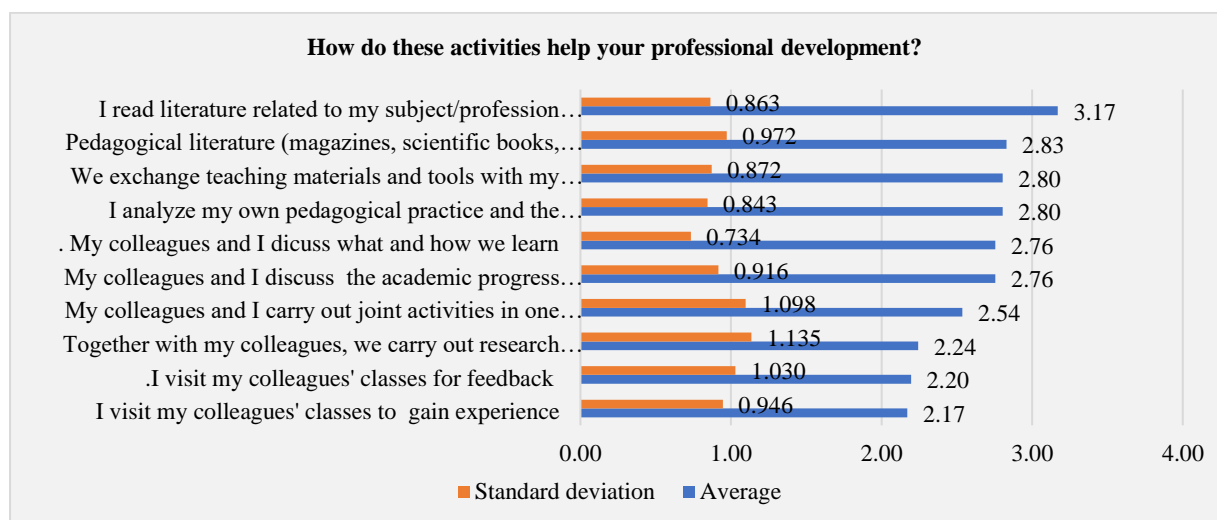


Figure 16.: CPD activities to support respondent development

When asked about barriers to professional learning, most respondents identified lack of time and energy due to workload as a barrier to professional learning (Fig 17), followed by those who found it difficult to afford learning opportunities that interested them and limited availability of teacher training. Lack of time and energy due to family commitments also emerged as a barrier of similar magnitude. The three least agreed with were that lack of language skills, or lack of financial and/or moral recognition, or lack of support from school management would make their learning more difficult.

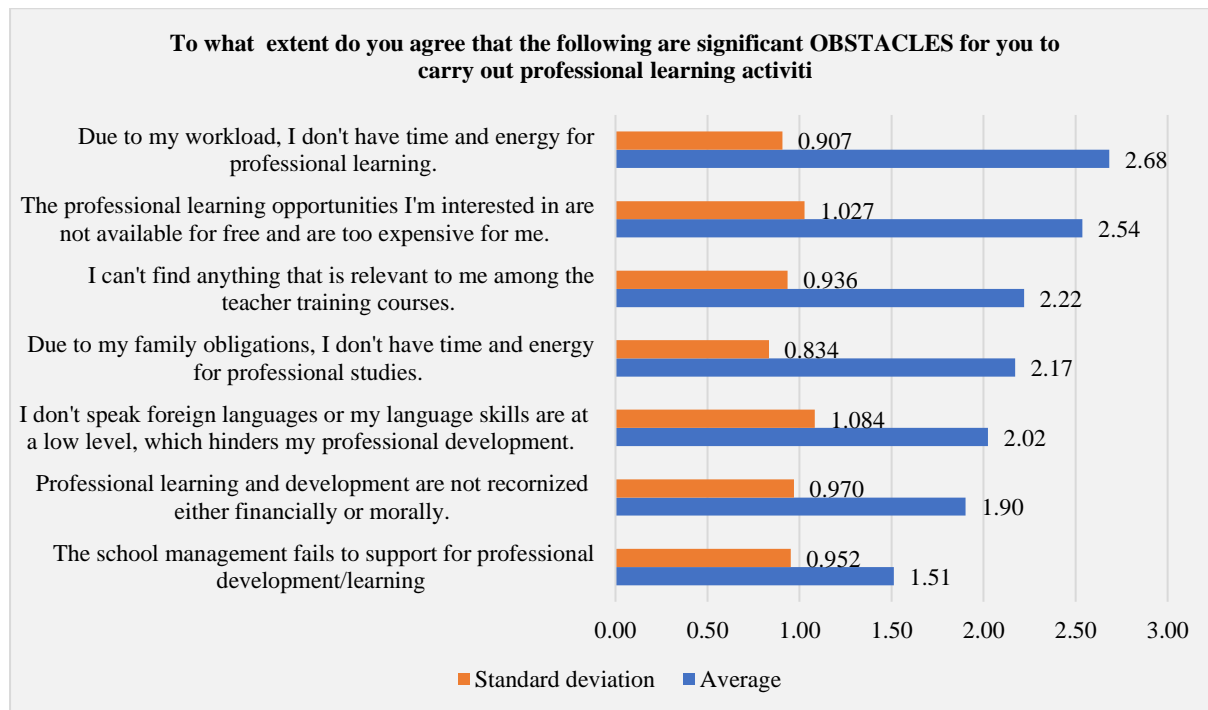


Figure 17.: *Barriers to professional learning activities*

The teachers were also specifically asked about barriers to teacher cooperation. The highest proportion of respondents rated the different nature of the work, timetables or problems of the teaching profiles as a barrier to cooperation (Fig. 18). The number of respondents who felt that the formal working group, which does not support professional development, or the low number of teachers teaching the same subject or the high turnover of teachers were lower.

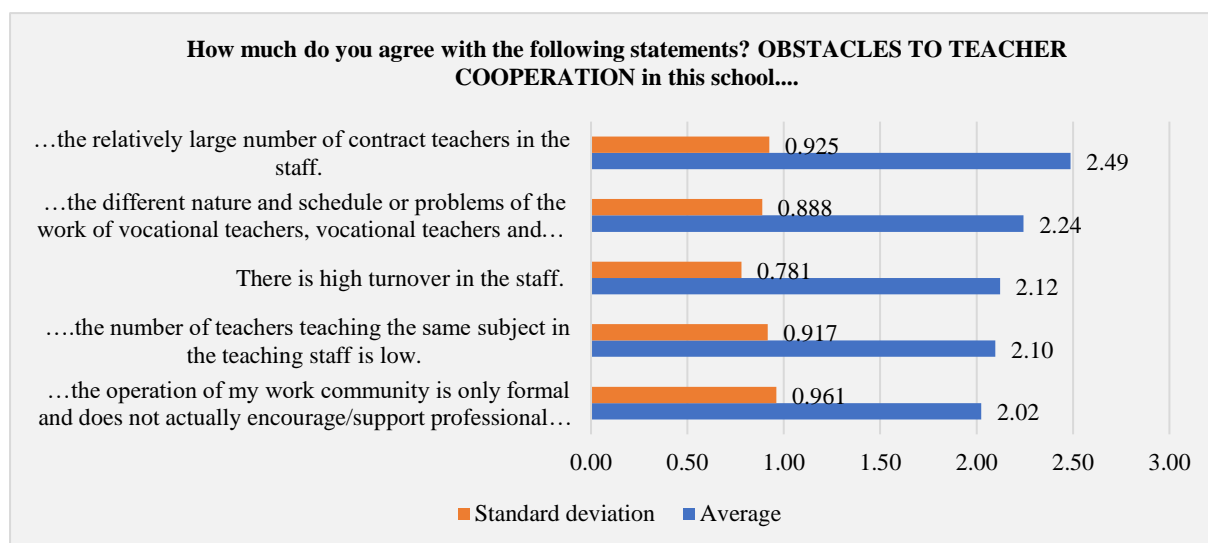


Figure 18.: *Obstacles to teacher collaboration in the institution according to respondents*

We also researched the specific forms of implementation of the CPD in the institution, which showed that the most frequent participants were mainly in training courses for the whole teaching staff (we know that there was a project to transform the organisational culture in the institution), as well as attending teacher training programmes, conferences and seminars, thanks to their fortunate position as the host institution is a higher education institution, so these were the most easily accessible activities for the teachers of the VET institution (Fig 19.).

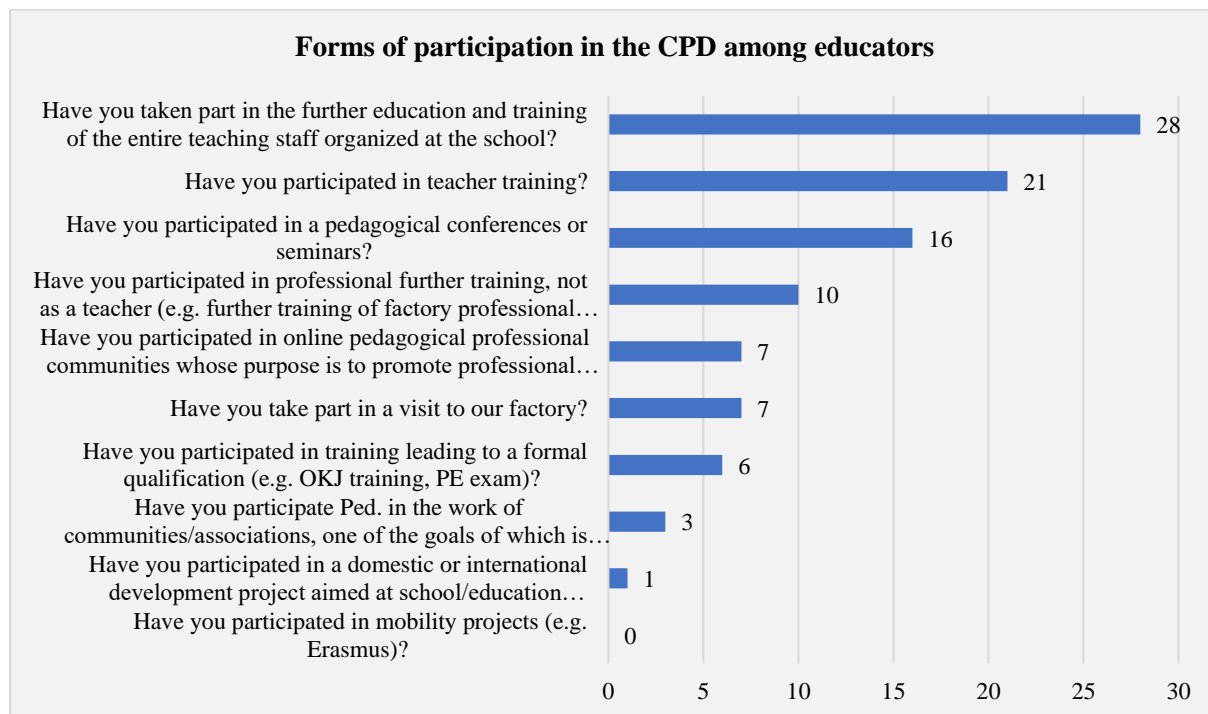


Figure 19.: Forms of CPD participation among surveyed educators

As for the topics of the CPD, it is clear that the subject and methodological topics were the most prominent, while all other elements received a very low number of mentions (Fig. 20)

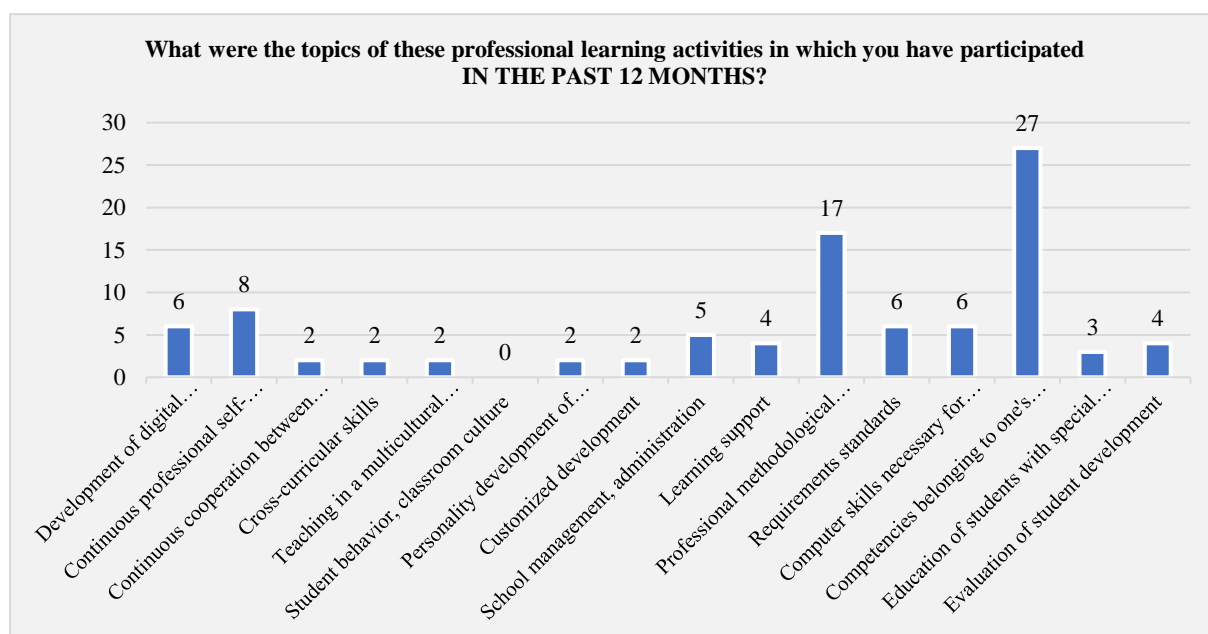


Figure 20.: Distribution of respondents by topic of CPD activities undertaken in the last 12 months

Compared to the latter, i.e. in terms of need and realisation, the CPD almost exclusively catches up in the subject area, while it comes close in terms of methodological knowledge, but in all other areas the need and its realisation are significantly lagging behind (Fig, 21). This is one of the most important results of our study, which is worth further investigation from the perspective of the institution and its instructors.

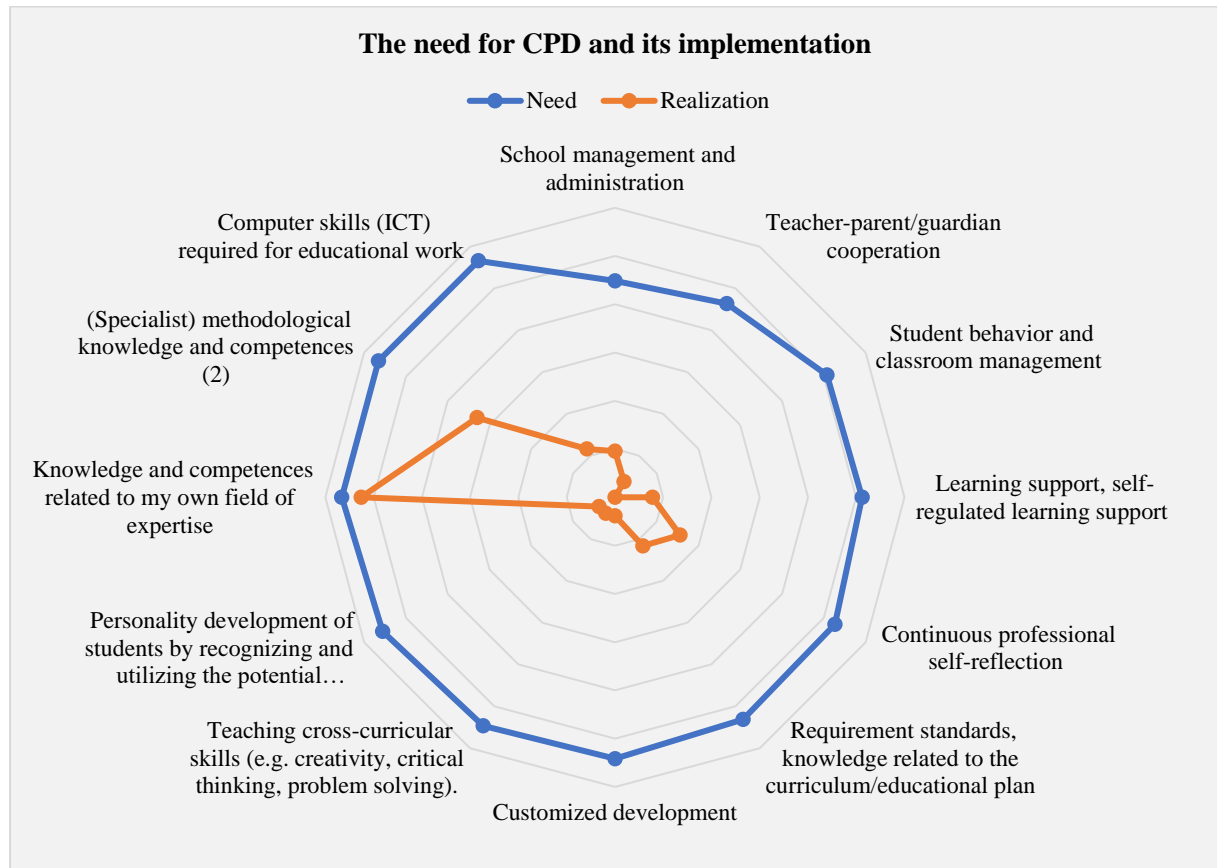


Figure 21.: *The need for CPD among the surveyed teachers and its implementation*

4. Summary and suggestions

The results of the empirical study clearly showed that continuous professional development is key for teachers. Keeping abreast of industry and technological trends and learning modern pedagogical methods are essential requirements for VET practitioners, but existing institutional facilities and support do not always meet the needs of teachers. Expanding the possibilities of the CPD, introducing flexible and practice-oriented training and increasing institutional support can play a significant role in increasing teacher satisfaction and professional loyalty. Based on the results, it is recommended that the institution should focus on improving its CPD programmes and developing more targeted training programmes to enable VET teachers to meet the changing labour market and educational challenges. Based on the main findings and context, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The focus of teacher education is primarily on the development of professional and methodological knowledge, while interest in educational topics is minimal. Teachers are mostly not well versed in educational issues and do not show any interest in acquiring such knowledge. In terms of professional learning activities, respondents perceive and value a narrow range of activities, indicating that their development needs are rather limited to direct teaching practice. In addition, learning from colleagues is overshadowed, suggesting a lower role for collaborative forms of learning in VET.

Teachers are aware of individual barriers to continuous professional development and recognise institutional constraints that may hinder their development opportunities. The role of school management and faculty support is well identified and seen as an important factor. Responses also show

that teachers mostly identify with their expectations, indicating that they see a match between institutional goals and their own professional guidelines.

The relationships hypothesised in the study, such as the effects of age, years in the profession, teacher education and institutional position on the needs for CPD, the development of teaching competences, participation and preferences in CPD, and perceptions of barriers to schooling, could not be clearly demonstrated. This suggests that the variance in responses and the role of individual factors is greater than the correlations hypothesised on the basis of the grouping principles.

Based on the quantitative study, a number of correlations can be identified between the continuous professional development (CPD) needs of teachers and their various characteristics, including demographics (e.g. age, education) and professional background.

Age and CPD needs: Older teachers, with decades of professional experience, tend to show less interest in new methodological and digital tools. In contrast, younger teachers actively seek training to develop modern technological and pedagogical skills, as they feel a greater need to keep up with technological developments.

Impact of qualifications and qualifications on CPD: Teachers with higher qualifications (e.g. those with a professional qualification) tend to be more aware of the importance of professional development, particularly in the area of improving pedagogical and methodological skills. This may suggest that teachers with higher qualifications place a higher value on CPD in the continuous development of their teaching practice.

The role of tenure and institutional loyalty in the CPD: Loyalty is higher for teachers with tenure, which also reinforces their commitment to continuous professional development. Instructors who work in a stable working environment are more likely to participate in continuing education as they plan for the longer term at the institution. However, for older and tenured teachers, this higher loyalty does not always translate into higher participation in the CPD, especially if the training offered by the institution does not meet relevant professional needs.

Needs for pedagogical and methodological trainings: The data shows that those working in vocational training who teach more practical classes show a greater interest in methodological innovations in order to keep up with practice-oriented teaching methods. In contrast, theoretical instructors prefer training in pedagogical methodology, especially in order to improve the effective transfer of theoretical knowledge.

Language skills and global professional development: Teachers who have a language qualification are generally more open to learning international trends and new teaching methods. The existence of language competences can strengthen the willingness to professional development, as it enables them to access foreign literature, studies and international training materials.

The impact of institutional culture and community learning: Satisfaction with the institutional culture and the feeling of being part of the faculty also influence commitment to the FSZF. Faculty who feel more strongly part of the faculty are more likely to participate in forms of community learning, such as mentoring programs or training based on the exchange of professional experience.

Based on the investigation, it becomes clear that the professional and demographic characteristics of the instructors are closely related to the needs and participation in continuous professional development. Institutional support, relevant and practical training opportunities, and the attraction and retention of younger instructors are key factors in the successful development of vocational training. The proposed development opportunities and intervention points are aimed at supporting the continuous professional development of the instructors and improving the overall effectiveness of the institution.

In order to promote continuous professional development (CPD), it is extremely important that instructors keep up-to-date with industrial and technological trends. To this end, it is recommended to strengthen industry collaborations and build a system of technological training, so that instructors have the opportunity to learn about the latest developments and industrial innovations. In order to follow pedagogical and methodological trends, it is also essential to introduce innovative methodological training, as well as to establish mentoring programs and to regularly share best practices among faculty members. This provides an opportunity for instructors to continuously improve their teaching methods and adapt to new pedagogical expectations.

In order to increase the professional preparation and loyalty of the instructors, we recommend the introduction of personalized continuing education programs aimed at strengthening the competencies of the instructors. In addition, it is also necessary to develop a motivational system that increases the loyalty of lecturers and supports their long-term institutional commitment. In order to increase the

effectiveness of the FSZF opportunities, a comprehensive reform is needed, which provides training programs based on the individual needs of teachers and the challenges of work schedules.

In order to increase institutional effectiveness and teacher satisfaction, regularizing teacher satisfaction surveys is essential. The introduction of targeted development proposals based on the data from these improves the success of teachers and students, thus increasing the institution's competitiveness and internal cohesion.

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