

STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF RURAL EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE ON TEACHERS' SATISFACTION IN THE PRACTICAL TRAINING OF THE STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN ARGES AND VALCEA COUNTIES OF ROMANIA

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Abstract

The quality of educational infrastructure and material resources influences teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of practical training for students in vocational and technical education, especially in rural areas, where resources are often limited. The study analyzes the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, educational infrastructure and continuing training and examines the extent to which these variables are associated with the adequacy of students' training to the demand of the labor market. The research used a quantitative methodology, applying a structured questionnaire to a sample of 272 teachers from two counties in Romania - Argeș and Vâlcea. Data analysis was performed using Pearson correlation and t-test for independent samples, investigating three objectives: assessing the relationship between the curriculum and the perception of graduates' employability, analyzing the impact of infrastructure on teachers' satisfaction and examining the effect of continuing training on the perception of the quality of education. The results indicate a weak correlation between perceptions of the curriculum and estimates of graduate employability, suggesting that teachers' perceptions are not a clear predictor of students' professional integration. In contrast, the analysis highlights a strong association between the quality of infrastructure and teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training, suggesting that the endowment of educational institution plays a major role in the evaluation of the training process, with significant implications in rural areas. The independent samples t-test does not indicate a significant difference between teachers who participated in in-service training and those who did not, raising questions about the real impact of these programs on perceptions of the quality of education.

Key words: vocational and technical education, educational infrastructure, teacher satisfaction, continuing education, graduate employability

INTRODUCTION

The low number of qualified school leavers in various fields does not reflect the real needs of the economy, and the qualitative aspect regards the low degree of satisfaction from the part of employers concerning the competences of the graduates of the professional education. This is a reason that technical and vocational education to be a priority for any Government strategy for assuring the labour market with a high skilled young generation of qualified specialists [11]

Education is among the EU priorities because it provides knowledge and practical competences and skills as required by labor market according to the principles of equity and inclusion. However, the structure of the

educational system varies from an European country to another taking into account its specific needs [3].

In Romania, Law no.1/2011 [4] and completed with OM No.5733/2022 [7] establishes the legal framework for the development of technological and professional education.

According to these legal documents in Romania, the high school technological and vocational education assures qualifications and skills according the labor market according to the National Register of Qualifications. At the regional, county and local level, there are set up strategies for planning the offer of the future students in the high schools profiled in this field of education [4, 8].

Besides the Government strategy in the field of education, locally the School Inspectorates of the counties assure the offer for admittance and enrollment in the technical and vocational education. An example is given by the two inspectorates of Valcea and Arges counties of Romania where this research is running [9, 10].

In the Republic of Moldova, important studies on technical and vocation education were made by [5, 6].

Among the main important aspects regarding vocational and technical education (VET), we could mention the way in which teachers perceive the curriculum and how educational infrastructure influences the quality of the educational process and the preparation of students for the labor market.

Specialized studies emphasize that a well-structured curriculum adapted to the current demands of the labor market facilitates the transition of graduates to jobs appropriate to their qualifications [8].

In rural technical and vocational education institutions, educational infrastructure is not only a logistical support, but also a determining factor in the efficiency of the practical training process. Schools in rural areas frequently face problems related to the condition of workshops and laboratories, the lack of adequate equipment and limited access to modern technology. These deficiencies can significantly influence teachers' motivation and their ability to provide students with relevant practical training. Studies show that, in the absence of adequate equipment, teachers in rural areas are forced to resort to alternative training methods, which can reduce the quality of practical training and affect the transition of graduates to the labor market.

The quality of educational infrastructure plays a decisive role in the efficiency of practical training of students in TVET. Properly equipped training spaces and modern equipment not only enhance the learning experience, but also contribute to the development of practical skills needed in various technical fields [6].

Continuous teacher training is a key variable for updating knowledge and adapting to new

educational and technological trends. Participation in professional development programs allows teachers to improve their pedagogical skills and implement innovative teaching methods, having a positive impact on student performance, as demonstrated in recent research [2].

The active involvement of teachers in the design and updating of the curriculum ensures a better correlation between the educational content and the real needs of the labor market. This collaboration leads to the development of study programs that meet the requirements of employers and facilitate the professional insertion of graduates [1].

Investigating teachers' perceptions of curriculum, infrastructure and continuing training offers valuable insights for improving the quality of TVET education and adapting it to labor market dynamics.

In this context, this paper studied teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, educational infrastructure and continuing training in order to assess in what measure these variables are associated with a corresponding students' destined to meet the demand of the labor market. The study case was made in Arges and Valcea counties, Romania

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Through this research, we aim to investigate the perceptions of teachers in vocational and technical education (VET) in Argeş [10] and Vâlcea [9] counties, Romania, focusing on the relationship between curriculum, infrastructure, continuous training and adequacy to labor market requirements. To achieve the proposed objectives, a quantitative methodology was adopted, using structured questionnaires as the main data collection instrument.

The group included 272 teachers of which: from Argeş (n=192, 70.6%) and Vâlcea (n=80, 29.4%) counties. Most of the participants came from educational institutions such as Costeşti Technological High School (n=30, 11%), Bistriţa Special Vocational School (n=25, 9.2%), Mărcăneni Technological High School No. 1 (n=23,

8.5%), Maria Teiuleanu Economic College and Călimănești Technological High School of Tourism (each with $n=21$, 7.7%). Regarding the teaching degree, 214 teachers (78.7%) hold the teaching degree I, 23 (8.5%) the degree II, 22 (8.1%) the permanent one, 8 (2.9%) are beginners, and 3 (1.1%) are substitutes.

Research objectives:

1. Assessing the correlation between teachers' perception of the TVET curriculum and the degree of adequacy to labor market requirements.
2. Analysis of the relationship between the quality of infrastructure and material resources and teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training.
3. Determining the impact of continuous training of teachers on their perception of the efficiency of the educational act in TVET.

Assumptions :

1. H1: There is a significant positive correlation between teachers' perception of the adequacy of the TVET curriculum and the assessment of graduates' chances of finding a job in the field studied. (Tested by Pearson correlation between variables related to the curriculum and perception of employment opportunities)
2. H2: Teachers who have participated in continuing education programs in the last two years will have a significantly more positive perception of the effectiveness of the educational act compared to those who have not participated. (Tested by t-test for the difference between the means between two groups: participants vs. non-participants in continuing education and their perception of the quality of education in TVET)

The questionnaire included both questions with answers on a Likert scale from 1 to 4 (from "not at all" to "to a great extent") and multiple-choice questions, allowing for a detailed analysis of teachers' perceptions and experiences.

Data collection was carried out between 01.07.2024-01.09.2024, by distributing questionnaires in physical and electronic format. For physical distribution, the questionnaires were sent to the selected educational units, and teachers were asked to

complete them and return them in sealed envelopes, ensuring the confidentiality of the responses. The electronic version was distributed by e-mail, using secure online platforms. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and ensuring the confidentiality of the data provided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first objective aimed at evaluating the correlation between teachers' perception of the vocational and technical education curriculum and its degree of adequacy to the labor market requirements. To verify the relationship between teachers' perception of the vocational and technical education curriculum and its degree of adequacy to the labor market requirements, we used Pearson correlation analysis. This allows quantifying the relationship between two variables measured on an ordinal scale, converted into numerical variables in order to be analyzed statistically. The data used in the analysis were obtained through two specific items of the questionnaire. The first item assessed teachers' perceptions of the extent to which the curriculum covered general technical knowledge, specific technical skills, general and socio-emotional skills. The second item concerned teachers' estimates of students' chances of obtaining a job in the field studied. Both variables were measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where higher scores indicated a more favorable perception.

Before applying the Pearson correlation test, we evaluated its statistical premises. We analyzed the data distribution to assess whether there is a linear relationship between the variables, as the Pearson correlation test is appropriate for variables that meet this condition. We also excluded the existence of extreme values that could have influenced the result.

Table 1 presents the correlation results.

The Pearson correlation coefficient calculated between the two variables is $r = 0.16$, which shows a weak positive association. The positive direction of the coefficient suggests that as teachers perceive the curriculum to

have a higher degree of coverage of general technical knowledge, specific skills and socio-emotional competences, their estimates of graduates' employment opportunities tend to be more optimistic.

Table 1. Correlation between teachers' perception of the TVET curriculum and the degree of adequacy to labor market requirements

Item	To what extent does the TVET curriculum cover general technical knowledge, specific technical, general and socio-emotional skills?	What chances do you think your students will have, after graduating, of finding a job in their field of study?	P-value
To what extent does the TVET curriculum cover general technical knowledge, specific technical, general and socio-emotional skills ?	1.0	0.16	0.374
What chances do you think your students will have, after graduating, of finding a job in their field of study?	0.16	1.0	0.374

Source: Own results.

p -value = 0.374 provides additional information on the robustness of this relationship. A p -value greater than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05 indicates that this association could be influenced by random variation in the sample, which raises questions about the extent to which this relationship can be generalized to the entire population of vocational and technical education teachers.

On the one hand, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum are influenced by factors such as

their teaching experience, access to pedagogical resources and familiarity with current employer requirements.

On the other hand, the assessment of graduates' employability is likely to reflect both the knowledge and skills acquired during their studies, as well as local socio-economic conditions, job availability and the degree of collaboration between educational institutions and the private sector.

A low correlation coefficient does not imply the absence of a relationship between the two variables, but rather suggests that the link between curriculum perception and employment opportunity estimates could be influenced by other factors not measured in this study. Aspects such as the structure of internship programs, the involvement of economic agents in vocational training, or the individual characteristics of graduates probably have an impact on the analyzed relationship, requiring further investigation.

Next, we asked teachers about the extent to which they believe that the vocational and technical education curriculum covers different types of competencies needed to prepare students. These competencies were structured into four distinct categories: general technical knowledge, specific technical and practical skills, general skills, and socio-emotional skills.

For each category, respondents were able to rate the degree of curriculum coverage using an ordinal scale ranging from "a little" to "a lot." The results are presented in Figure 1.

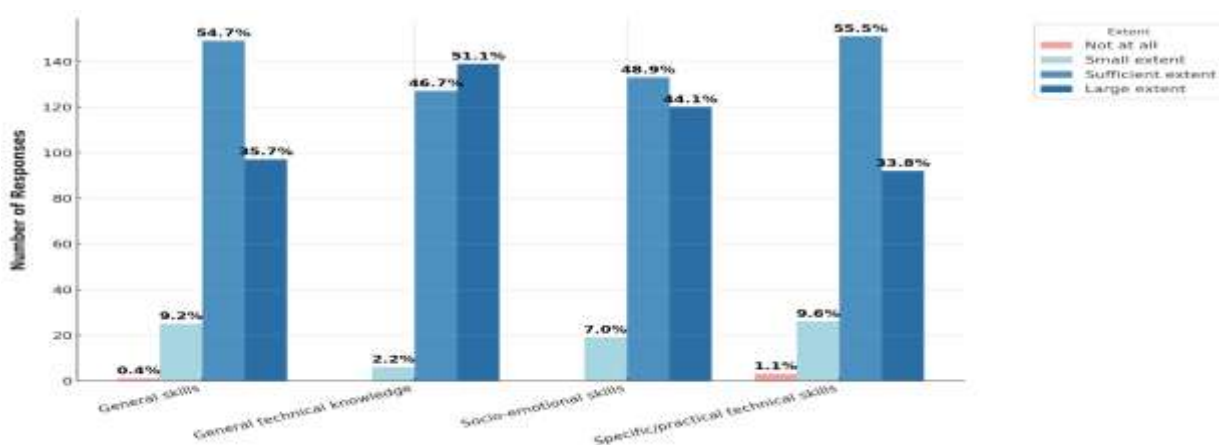


Fig. 1. Teachers' assessment of the extent to which the curriculum covers different aspects

Source: Own results.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of teachers' perceptions of the extent to which the vocational and technical education curriculum covers four types of competences: general, general technical, socio-emotional and specific technical or practical. The data indicate a variation in responses, suggesting that perceptions of the curriculum are not uniform and may be influenced by several educational and professional factors.

For general competences, the largest proportion of teachers consider that they are covered to a large extent (35.7%) or sufficient (54.7%). Only a small percentage of respondents consider that these competences are covered to a small extent (9.2%), and an insignificant percentage considers that they are not included in the curriculum at all (0.4%). This type of competence, which includes skills such as writing a report or approaching a problem, is considered to be present in the curriculum, but the perception of the extent to which they are covered varies. A possible explanation may be related to the differences between the training areas and the way in which these skills are integrated into the subjects taught.

Regarding general technical knowledge, 51.1% of teachers consider it to be covered to a large extent and 46.7% to a sufficient extent. A small proportion of 2.2% state that it is covered to a small extent, which suggests that most teachers consider that the curriculum provides students with a solid theoretical basis in the technical field. The high degree of agreement can be explained by the structure of the educational programs, which emphasize theoretical knowledge as a foundation for practical training.

Socio-emotional skills are considered by 44.1% of teachers to be covered to a large extent, and by 48.9% to be covered to a sufficient extent. The percentage of those who consider that these skills are covered to a small extent is 7%, which indicates a generally positive perception of the integration of these skills into the curriculum. Teamwork, perseverance and conflict management are elements that can be developed both through explicit curriculum and through pedagogical methods that

promote interaction and collaboration. However, different perceptions may be influenced by the distinct approaches that teachers have within the educational process.

For specific technical and practical skills, 33.8% of teachers consider them to be covered to a large extent, and 55.5% to a sufficient extent. In contrast, 9.6% of respondents believe that these skills are integrated to a small extent, and 1.1% state that they are not included at all. This distribution indicates a greater variation in perceptions compared to the other categories of skills, which may reflect differences between vocational training areas or unequal access to adequate resources and infrastructure for carrying out practical activities. Teaching practical skills requires the existence of up-to-date equipment and technologies, and discrepancies between educational institutions may influence teachers' perceptions of how these skills are taught.

The second objective aimed to analyze the relationship between the quality of infrastructure and material resources and teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training.

The results are presented in Table 2.

In the study, the variable related to the quality of infrastructure and material resources was defined based on item 12 of the questionnaire, which included three dimensions: the condition of the workshops, the equipment used in the educational process and the availability of materials necessary for carrying out practical activities.

Table 2. Correlation between the quality of infrastructure and material resources and teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training.

Item	Quality of infrastructure and material resources	Teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training	P-value
Quality of infrastructure and material resources	1.0	0.722	0.00015
Teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training	0.722	1.0	0.00015

Source: Own results.

The responses were coded using an ordinal system, where “Very good” received a score of 3, “Good” a score of 2, and “Poor” a score of 1. This approach allowed the aggregation of an average score for each respondent, reflecting the general perception of the resources existing in the educational unit.

The variable corresponding to teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training was constructed based on item 13, which evaluated four aspects: coverage of general technical knowledge, development of specific technical skills, training of general skills necessary for professional activity, and stimulation of socio-emotional skills.

To test the relationship between the two variables, Pearson correlation was used, justified by treating the scores as continuous variables. The coefficient obtained was 0.18, indicating a weak positive association between the perception of infrastructure and material resources and satisfaction with practical training. The p-value for this coefficient was 0.352, suggesting a high probability that the observed relationship is the result of random fluctuations in the analyzed sample.

The Pearson correlation coefficient calculated between the quality of infrastructure and teachers' satisfaction is 0.722, which suggests a strong positive relationship between the two variables. As teachers evaluate the infrastructure and material resources more favorably, their satisfaction with students' practical activities also increases. This association can be explained by the fact that access to modern equipment and adequate materials facilitates more efficient practical training, reducing the difficulties that teachers may encounter in organizing teaching activities. The p value = 0.00015 indicates the probability that this relationship occurred by chance in the analyzed sample. In a statistical context, such a small p value suggests that the observed association between the two variables is consistent and can be interpreted as a stable trend among the teachers included in the study. The third objective refers to determining the impact of continuous teacher training on their perception of the efficiency of the educational act in TVET. To begin

with, we were interested in the share of teachers who benefited from continuing education programs in the last 2 years. The results are presented in Figure 2.

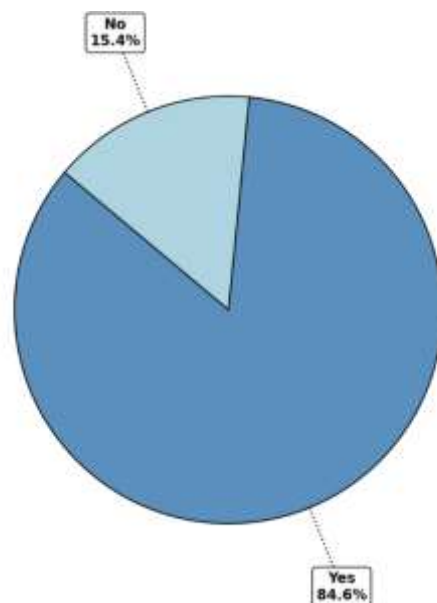


Fig. 2. Share of teachers who have benefited from continuous professional training programs in the last 2 years

Source: Own results.

The data in Figure 2 reflect the participation of teachers in in-service training activities organized by public or private providers in the last two years. The proportion of teachers who declared that they participated in such programs is 84.6% (n=230), while 15.4% (n=42) stated that they were not involved in any in-service training activities during this period.

This distribution suggests that continuing education is a common practice among teachers in vocational and technical education. A high participation rate can be explained by the requirements of the educational system, which requires periodic updating of professional skills. Also, engagement in advanced training programs is influenced by the opportunities available at local or national level, the accessibility of courses and the specific requirements imposed for the evolution of the teaching career.

To achieve our third objective and test the second hypothesis, we used the independent samples t-test. The hypothesis assumes that teachers who have participated in in-service training programs in the last two years will

have a significantly more positive perception of the effectiveness of the educational act compared to those who have not participated. We tested the hypothesis by t-test for the

difference between the means between two groups: participants vs. non-participants in in-service training and their perception of the quality of education in TVET.

Table 3. T-test for the difference between means between two groups: participants vs. non-participants in continuing education and their perception of the quality of education in TVET

Test	Test statistics	df	p	The difference between the environments	95% Confidence Interval (Lower)	95% Confidence Interval (Upper)
Levene	0.245	-	0.622	-	-	-
T-Test (Assumed Equality)	-1.129	58	0.263	-0.133	-0.292	0.025
T-Test (Unassumed Equality)	-1.129	29.0	0.263	-0.133	-0.297	0.03

Source: Own results.

Before applying the t-test, we checked the homogeneity of variances using the Levene test. The value of the Levene statistic is 0.245, and the associated p-value is 0.622, which indicates that the variances of the two groups are homogeneous. Thus, the standard t-test can be used, with the assumption of equality of variances.

The result of the independent samples t-test indicates a t-statistic value of -1.129 for the variant with the assumed equality of variances and the same value for the variant in which the equality of variances is not assumed. The degrees of freedom (df) are 58 in the first variant and 29.0 in the second. The p-value obtained in both cases is 0.263, which indicates the probability that the observed difference between the means is generated by random fluctuations in the sample.

The difference between the means is -0.133, which shows that the perception of the quality of education among those who participated in continuing education is, on average, slightly lower than among those who did not participate. The 95% confidence interval for this difference is between -0.292 and 0.025 in the version with the equality of variances assumed and between -0.297 and 0.03 in the version without this assumption. The fact that this interval includes the value 0 indicates that the difference between the two groups is not sufficiently clearly defined to be considered significant.

The interpretation of these results must be made in the context of the dynamics of continuous training and the way in which teachers perceive the effectiveness of the educational act. A possible explanation for the

lack of a significant difference may be that training programs are not always designed to provide a real added value in terms of teaching quality.

In some cases, teachers may perceive these programs as administrative requirements rather than genuine opportunities for professional development.

This result can be analyzed through the lens of the theory of cultural capital formulated by Pierre Bourdieu, according to which the accumulation of formal skills and certifications does not always translate into a perceptible change in the way a profession is practiced [12].

In this case, even if teachers participate in continuous training, their perception of the quality of education may not change significantly, either because of the content of these programs or because of other contextual factors that influence the educational act, such as the available material resources or the level of student involvement.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the possibility that the perception of the quality of education is influenced by subjective factors, independent of participation in continuous training.

The accumulated professional experience, the teaching conditions in each school unit and the socio-economic context of the students can contribute to the way in which teachers evaluate the quality of the educational act.

If these variables are not taken into account in the research design, the real effect of continuous training on teachers' perceptions may be diluted or masked by other factors.

CONCLUSIONS

The first objective aimed to evaluate the correlation between teachers' perception of the curriculum and its degree of adequacy to the labor market requirements.

Hypothesis H1 assumed that the perception of the curriculum correlates positively with the assessment of graduates' chances of finding a job in the fields studied. Testing this hypothesis by Pearson correlation indicated a coefficient of 0.16, which suggests a positive association of low intensity between the two variables. The direction of the correlation suggests that, as teachers perceive the curriculum as having a higher degree of coverage of technical and socio-emotional skills, the general tendency is to estimate higher employment chances for graduates. However, the p value = 0.374 shows that this relationship is not statistically significant, which suggests that teachers' perceptions of the curriculum are not a strong enough predictor of graduates' professional success.

The second objective was to analyze the relationship between the quality of infrastructure and material resources and teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training. The results of the Pearson correlation indicated a coefficient of 0.722, which suggests a strong positive relationship between these variables. The p value = 0.00015 shows that this association is statistically significant, which shows us that teachers who perceive the infrastructure and material resources as being of quality are more satisfied with students' practical training.

The third objective was to determine the impact of in-service training of teachers on their perception of the effectiveness of the educational act.

Hypothesis H2 assumed that teachers who participated in in-service training in the last two years will have a significantly more positive perception of the quality of education compared to those who did not participate. The t -test for independent samples did not indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups, the p value = 0.263 showing that the perception of the quality of

education is not clearly influenced by participation in in-service training.

The results suggest that teachers' perceptions of curriculum, infrastructure and in-service training are shaped by multiple contextual variables. While educational infrastructure has a clear influence on teachers' satisfaction with students' practical training, the relationship between curriculum and graduate employability, as well as the impact of in-service training on teachers' perceptions of educational quality, are less clearly defined. These aspects can be analyzed in more detail by future studies that include additional factors, such as employers' perspectives, students' performance in practical activities and the actual impact of in-service training on teaching skills.

The results of the study suggest that rural teachers' perception of the educational infrastructure is significantly more negative compared to that of urban teachers. The lack of investment in the modernization of workshops and the provision of equipment relevant to the labor market leads to a decrease in teachers' satisfaction with the practical training process. In addition, rural teachers face additional difficulties, such as the lack of continuous training opportunities in the vicinity of their localities, which may limit access to advanced training programs adapted to the current demands of the labor market.

Another aspect that differentiates rural and urban vocational education institutions is their limited access to partnerships with relevant economic agents. In many rural areas, the lack of industrial or manufacturing companies reduces internship opportunities for students, which affects both practical learning and the integration of graduates into the labor market. Unlike urban institutions, where collaborations with employers are more frequent and better structured, rural schools need to make additional efforts to ensure relevant internships for students.

In order to reduce the gaps between urban and rural areas in terms of educational infrastructure, investments are needed to equip workshops and laboratories in rural vocational and technical education units. It is

also important to develop continuous training programs accessible to teachers in rural areas, either through online learning solutions or through regional training centers. Last but not least, closer collaboration between authorities, educational units and the private sector can facilitate the development of internship programs adapted to the economic specificities of each rural region.

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