Analysis of the Design and Curricular Practices in an Educational Re-Engagement Program

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Abstract: In this article, which is part of a broader investigation based on the study of the educational and socio-occupational re-engagement processes of young people in vulnerable situations, the curricular design of the vocational training programs (VTP) is described. Further, the curricular practices developed in the classrooms of these programs are analyzed, based, above all, on how the contents are selected, as well as the methodological approaches for their development. The research methodology that was followed responds to the conduct of multiple case studies with the integration of quantitative and qualitative processes. The data collection instruments used for this purpose were questionnaires, interviews, and discussion groups. The conclusions reveal the selection of contents that are relevant, interesting, and close to the reality of the students. The development of these contents is displayed through varied methodological strategies and diverse activities that enhance the students' involvement and the practical sense of their learning.

Keywords: *Curriculum design and development, professional training programs, re-engagement; school dropout, second chance.*

Introduction

The present article lies within the scope of knowledge of the phenomena related to the disengagement of students with their education and the school abandonment; it is part of a broader investigation, a research and development (R&D) project called "Processes of educational and socio-labor re-engagement programs for teenagers in vulnerable situations. Study of cases and socio-educational implications".

Currently, there are educational problems such as early school leaving, school failure, educational disengagement, etc. Despite their nuances in terms of their conceptualization, all of these are part of the social and educational challenges that are present in the policies both at a national and international level. In agreement with Escudero Muñoz (2005), we understand school failure as a form of educational exclusion and a process that also expresses a social exclusion.

In this sense, the 2030 Agenda has among its main objectives, specifically Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), the search for improvements in training aimed at achieving quality and inclusive education. In this regard, a priority objective of education policies is for young people to continue their education beyond the compulsory stages. Despite the aspiration of universal completion of secondary education, only one in six countries aims to achieve this goal by 2030. It is even estimated that 84 million children and young people in the world will be out of school in 2030 (United Nations, 2023).

Spain has one of the highest early school leaving rates in the European Union (EU). In 2020, according to Eurostat, early school leaving rates in Spain were well above the European average (9.9%). The most recent figures for the school year 2022-2023, according to the data provided by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2022), show that in comparison with the rest of European countries, Spain has the second highest early dropout from education and training rate, reaching 13.3% and being at the head of the countries with the highest ATEF, just behind Romania (15.3%).

On the other hand, in Spain there are significant differences in the figures of school abandonment and failure in relation to different variables, such as gender or Autonomous Communities. Regarding gender, ATEF has always been higher for men than for women (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education and

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Vocational Training (2022), the percentage of men who dropped out of training stood at 16.7% compared to 13.3% of women. As per the different Autonomous Communities, the Region of Murcia presents one of the highest rates of early school leaving, with a rate of 24.1% (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2019). According to the AROPE indicator (At Risk of Poverty and/or Exclusion, 2022), the risk of social vulnerability registered in Murcia is higher than the national average. The 2022 report highlights the territorial inequalities in relation to this indicator, taking the value of 27.8% for the Spanish average as a whole and standing at 33% for the Region of Murcia. The report itself shows that territory is a significant source of inequality. Among the factors that are presented as determinants of social exclusion are educational level, unemployment, undesired inactivity, the labour intensity of the household or the presence of disability (Reactivation strategy for quality employment. Region of Murcia 2024).

The theoretical and empirical approaches to this matter have been diverse and are developed from different perspectives in order to understand the factors that would be part of the causes explaining school rejection, abandonment and failure. A current issue, as agreed by most specialists, is the existence of a dialectic and multi-causal dynamic of school failure (Adame Obrador & Salvà Mut, 2010; Escudero Muñoz, 2005; Escudero Muñoz & González González, 2013; González González & González Barea, 2021). This means that the focus should be on the interactions taking place among students, schools and/or educational entities and the social context in order to be able to explain and provide arguments about school success and/or failure.

As Santagati (2021) point out, sometimes unexpected results occur under certain conditions. These must be explored to understand how agents works against or in favor of the previous personal trajectories of the students. Because of this, it is worth exploring how these special programs work to fight against early school leaving and disengagement, offering the students vocational training that could help them to increase their possibilities to find a job and to be included in society.

With regards to the curriculum and how it is developed in practice, the main ideas to prevent school abandonment and failure referred to by the traditional bibliography are aimed at supporting development approaches that are more critical, empirical and practical, democratic, inclusive, etc. (Bernárdez Gómez, 2022; Bernárdez Gómez et al., 2021; Escudero Muñoz & Rodríguez Entrena, 2016; González González, 2017; Lumby, 2013). In short, they are aimed at supporting a school curriculum that enhances and really involves the students, taking into account the personal and social dimensions of teaching and learning (Bernárdez Gómez & Portela Pruaño, 2023; Bernárdez Gómez et al., 2022; Rangel Torrijo, 2015; Redgrave et al., 2013). In this line and according to Escudero Muñoz (2005), we would like to highlight that educational exclusion partly originates from:

> (…) the excess of contents and learning pursued by the official curricula, or the substance and shape they take when being deployed across the multiple elements and agents involved in their approach and provision to students: policies about curriculum development or instructional materials (…), current practices and cultures in schools, departments and faculties in general (…) (p.10)

In turn, González González (2017) lists some curricular aspects that have turned out to be positive in programs, measures and experiences aimed at relieving school disengagement. She makes reference to: (a) a flexible curriculum to meet individual needs, considering both academic and empirical and practical and professional learning in order to develop a real approach to the working world and to different jobs (Bernárdez Gómez et al., 2021; Bielby et al., 2012; Escudero Muñoz & Rodríguez Entrena, 2016; Evans & Pinney, 2009; Kettlewell et al., 2012); (b) a curriculum linked to the experiences and ambitions of students in connection with ("their") world, being applicable outside the educational entities. For this purpose, it would be advisable to obtain the implication of the community - employment agents, agencies, services - in order to follow a contextualized curriculum. Supporting this kind of curriculum will incorporate different methodological approaches and research on and about topics and experiences of interest (Smyth et al., 2008).

Given that the above-mentioned literature has shown that pupils make good progress in response to changes in the curricular aspects of programs aimed at combating early school leaving. In this article we focus our analysis on the particularities for consideration when designing the curriculum of the vocational training programs[†] (VTP), so that their deployment and development correspond in practice to the "diverse realities" of the collective of students labeled as "in situation of school disengagement and failure". These programs - in their adapted modality - are aimed at those students in Compulsory Secondary Education that cannot be promoted; had a late entry to the education system; or show school rejection, absenteeism, or a general achievement gap or unschooling, with the need to access the job market; or with an interest in resuming their training, together with risk evidences of exclusion from the education system (Order of 3 September 2015).

Therefore, in this paper we ask ourselves what kind of contents -and how they are valued by teachers and students- are developed within the framework of the VTP as well as what are the methodological strategies that are deployed in the teaching practice to enhance the academic engagement of students in such programmes. Following these questions, this

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[†] Among this program analyzed we can find some of national level, and some exclusively conceived for the Region of Murcia: Program of Integral Learning (from now on, PAI), Vocational Training Program (PFP), Occupational Classroom (AO) and Basic Vocational training (FPB) (For more information Cfr. Bernárdez Gómez et al., 2021).

article is aimed at (a) describing the curricular design of the VTP (b) analysing the curricular practices developed in the VTP, focusing exclusively on the contents and how these are developed in the classrooms where these programs take place (methodology).

Methodology

Research Design and Sample

The methodological design of this research corresponds to the study of multiple cases, which consists of a research strategy that studies several unique cases at the same time to understand the reality that it wants to explore, describe, explain, assess, or modify (López González, 2013).

This study of multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) has made it possible to obtain a holistic perspective of the factors, processes, and contexts of the creation of the educational and/or socio-labor re-engagement and of the variations among the cases; at the same time, it has made it possible to connect research, training and education policies. The methodological approach of this research implies quantitative and qualitative procedures.

Regarding the participants in this research, we would like to highlight that the unit of analysis was the training programs focused on socio-educational re-engagement, which reduces the risks of school and training abandonment. The process of case selection was based on intentional sampling with the purpose of adjusting to the goals of the investigation itself, obtaining a wide range of data, and being accessible.

In particular, the information included in this article makes reference to the Vocational Training Program developed within the scope of social institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of the Region of Murcia. After making the necessary contacts, the data were collected from three training profiles of the aforementioned program, which were developed by two NGOs (Foundation X and Association Y) during the school years 2016/17 and 2017/18. The group of participants from whom the data of this article were collected consisted of the student body, the faculty, and other educational agents involved in the programs (pedagogues and administration). This information is shown in Table 1 and Table 2:

Table 1. Participants of the VTP Student Body

Entities	VTP. Training profiles	Total registered	Participating in Students' Quantitative process	Participating in Students' Qualitative process
Foundation X	Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction	12	8 (66.6%)	4 (33.3%)
Association Y	Secondary services of Hairdressing	15	7 (46.6%)	11 (73.3%)
	Basic Operations in Office IT	15	5 (33.3%)	0
	Total	42	20	15

Source: Personal compilation.

Table 2. Participants of the VTP Faculty and Other Educational Agent

Institutions and NGOs	VTP. Training profiles	Participating members of the faculty	Total faculty	Other agents
Foundation X	Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction	2	3	Pedagogue
Association Y	Secondary services of Hairdressing	3	3*	Director
	Basic Operations in Office IT	3	3*	

*From the faculty of this entity and for the two training profiles, two teachers are repeated as they teach in both profiles. The other two teachers teach in the module associated to competency units and are specialists for each one of the profiles. Source: Personal compilation

Data Collection

According to the different objectives set, a series of data collection tools have been established for data collection. For the first of these, a documentary analysis of the VTPs attended by the components of the sample has been carried out. This analysis included different curricular aspects of the students' formative itineraries. On the other hand, different types of instruments were created for the second objective: interview guidelines for teachers and other educational agents, guidelines for discussion groups, and questionnaires for the student body. The questions initially selected originate from the previous research of the research group, with more than 20 years of experience, in addition, the current reference research has been selected to support us in its construction. All these instruments were validated by experts - professors at the university - with extensive research experience on these matters (school abandonment and failure, programs for inclusion, diversity awareness, etc.).

The questionnaire was divided into four dimensions: (a) identity and sociodemographic data; (b) school experience and incorporation into the program; (c) the program and what is done in it; (d) classrooms and relationships. There were 20 close-ended Likert-type questions in these dimensions with five options for answering with the frequency degree (1=never; 5= always) and agreement degree (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

On the other hand, the interview guidelines included different sections with open-ended questions or topics: (a) general issues about the program and the informants themselves; (b) which kind of students they have; (c) formal documents of the center/study plans/syllabuses...; (d) coordination: (e) working with the students in the classroom; (f) the teachers and their work circumstances. Besides these sections, a set of questions was included at the end depending on whether the informant was a teacher, a tutor, or a coordinator of the Internship Module.

Finally, the questions and issues included in the guidelines for the discussion group with students were divided into: (a) prior school experience of the students in the program; (b) process of disengagement and incorporation to the program; (c) experience in the program; (d) Impact of the program on the students, and (e) future perspectives.

Analysis of Data

Quantitative and qualitative data were respectively analyzed through descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) by applying the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 24) and the technique of qualitative data analysis (Miles et al., 2014) by the delimitation of units of analysis, open coding, and categorization, with the support of the program ATLAS.ti, version 22. This way of assessing obeys the principles of grounded theory, following the three fundamental steps in the analysis of qualitative data:

> (a) the reduction of information, with the consequent preparation of data and decision-making on how to approach the analysis

> (b) data layout, establishing the techniques to be used and where the data are given structure

> (c) extracting relationships and verifying conclusions

Quality Criteria and Research Ethics

Participants received detailed and accessible information about the study and the conditions of participation, including their right to access, rectifier, or cancel the information provided, guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity, or the right to revoke their participation. In addition, informed consent was requested. The project of which the study forms part has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Murcia.

The research from which this text emanates followed the quality criteria adopted from the research focused on the qualitative paradigm. Authors such as Berkovich and Grinshtain (2023) and Yadav (2022) have adopted the principle of veracity and the criteria of confirmability, credibility, transferability, and reliability.

Findings/Results

Firstly, we offer the results that respond to the first objective of this work: describing the curricular design of the VTP. For this purpose, a documentary analysis of the regulations governing the VTP in the Region of Murcia is carried out.

Curriculum Design in the Vocational Training Programs

The regulations on the curricular design and procedures in the VTP are stated in the Order of 3 September 2015 of the Office of Education and Universities in the Autonomous Community of the Region of Murcia. Article 2 of this Order stipulates that these programs will have the purpose of providing the students with the personal, social, and professional competencies appropriate for their characteristics and needs; these will favor their job placement and their incorporation into the job market with responsibility and autonomy (p. 32894).

At the same time, it includes the general objectives of the VTP, as follows: (a) to offer qualified and workplace training which enables students to acquire permanent learning competencies for their professional performance that facilitate their social and professional integration; (b) to develop the acquisition of habits and positive attitudes that enables their coexistence and their social or group participation through group working experiences; (c) to provide personalized socio-labor orientation for developing their self-esteem and skills to face their educational and working future (Order of 3 September, 2015).

The methodological orientations established in the regulations for the development of these programs refer to the ones detailed in the titles and curricula of the Basic Vocational Training. In this sense, it is stated that the methodology of these training programs will have a globalizing character that will integrate contents and competencies among vocational modules. In addition, it will be adapted to the students' needs in order to enable the acquisition of competencies for their transition to the labor market and adult life, as well as the continuity of the education system (Royal Decree 127/2014, 2014).

Structure and Modalities of VTP

The regulations of the VTP in the Region of Murcia include in their academic structure vocational modules which are modules of basic vocational training (BVT) and other training modules adapted to the students taking these programs and their needs.

In turn, there are two modalities according to the regulations in this matter: Special and Adapted. In this article, we are focused on the latter.

The Adapted modality is specially aimed at socially or culturally disadvantaged young people at serious risk of exclusion and in need of a way for their job placement. Their duration will be that of an academic school year and they will be taught in educational centers financed by public funds or in private non-profit entities that are legally established and have at least one year of proven experience in assisting socially disadvantaged young people.

Table 3. Organization of VTP by Modules

Modules associated with competency units	Competency units of Level 1 Vocational Qualifications
Modules not associated with competency units	Communication and Society Applied Sciences Optional Modules
Vocational Module of Training in the Workplace	

Source: Personal compilation

Modules Associated with Competency Units

These modules are associated to the competency units of one of the Level 1 Vocation-al Qualifications from the Spanish National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications. VTP has an overall duration of 1,050 hours.

In the case of the Region of Murcia, on which this research is focused, not all the VTP included in the regulations are offered. Thus, it is possible to develop 22 programs corresponding to 37 vocational qualifications, in accordance with the Order of 3 September 2015 regulating the VTP in the aforementioned region. Notwithstanding, 12 VTP were implemented in the last three academic years; 7 of these are repeated at least twice in different towns and under the responsibility of different entities, while 5 take place only once.

Module of Training in the Workplace

To take this module, it is mandatory for students to have passed all modules associated with competency units. It will take place at the end of the last term of the school year with a duration of 120 hours. However, students will be exempt from taking this module if they have a minimum of 6-month accredited work experience in an activity related to the VTP they are taking.

The faculty teaching the modules associated to competency units will be responsible for both the organization and follow-up tasks of this module. In addition, this training will be supervised by a professional of the company and will also be assessable.

Modules not Associated to Competency Units

These modules will have the titles and curricula of BVT as a reference.

1. Communication and Society, including one hour a week of Foreign Language;

2. Applied Sciences;

3. Optional modules with a maximum duration of 4 hours, which can deal with:

- Personal autonomy - Skills for controlling emotions, Interpersonal skills, Cognitive skills
- Information and Communications Technologies
- Physical Activity and Sports, or
- Spanish as a Second Language

Secondly, and in order to respond to the second objective of this work, *to analyze the curricular practices developed in the VTPs, focusing exclusively on the contents and how these are developed in the classrooms where these programs* take place (methodology), the qualitative and quantitative results will be presented. Therefore, this section focuses on analysing (a) the contents and (b) the methodological strategies in the development of VET contents.

(a) *The Content, Answer the Question "What to Teach?"*

It can involve (abstract) knowledge, abilities, skills, or attitudes and values. These are to be implemented with the students within a specific time frame to achieve a particular goal or purpose and the acquisition of competencies. In Coll's words (1987), contents are understood to be what teaching is about; they can be facts, concepts, principles, procedures, values, rules, or attitudes (p.24).

This difference among types of content is shown in the speech of the teachers from the studied VTPs. Generally speaking, references shown in the curricular development can be found in participants' speeches, with respect to the "bipolar/dichotomous" characteristics of the contents; that is:

*Concepts vs. Values. This would encompass those contents which entail concept knowledge and learning and are included in the official curriculum, versus those which focus on the acquisition of values that enable the development of civilized and ethical habits among students. As an example of conceptual contents, we include the answer of a teacher from the module associated with the competency level to the profile secondary operations of overlaying in construction, who is also responsible for the applied sciences module:

> (...) we go through every step: we sweep, we mop, we clear up, we plaster walls, we paint (Teacher 1).

To the same extent, the answers of these students from the same module also point out:

> "Calculation and drawing of designs. Calculating the perimeter, the surface" (Student 1).

> "How to make a swimming pool" (Student 3).

On the opposite pole, there are answers showing the importance that the teacher attaches to the contents related to values and ethical issues. In this sense, a teacher from the module not associated to VTP competencies with the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction, who is also responsible for the Communication and Society module, states that:

> "We work in an employment education center; as such, we must pay attention to the attitude of the young people, as their interest and effort will determine the outcome. Here, we train people above everything, beyond the engineers or architects they may become in the future. The subject is secondary; their personal growth is the priority" (Teacher 2).

In this line, another teacher from the same module mentioned before, who teaches in the Hairdressing profile of the VTP, makes reference to the importance of students' values, attitudes, and habits as the main focus areas of their learning:

> "(...) The atmosphere, they engage. Self-esteem is fostered above all, because they usually have very low self-esteem; then, make them believe and realize they're capable of learning, passing exams, being at a place to take their classes, coming and going, following a schedule or pace, waking up in the morning, having responsibilities... Then, when all this is established, then we start to pay attention to the contents" (Teacher 3).

Most of the students taking the mentioned VTP profile confirm this reference to issues related to rules, values, and behavior:

> "Besides, he teaches you that you don't always find a good boss" (Student 2).

> "The teacher has trained patience a lot with us" (Student 4).

These testimonies are proof of the importance that teachers attach to most academic contents requiring more intellectual learning, keeping in mind all contents referring to ethics at a personal and social level; this results in a curriculum guaranteeing rights (Escudero Muñoz, 2012).

*Theory vs. Practice. It refers to the disciplinary and epistemological contents or, on the contrary, to contents that are easier to be applied and more practice-oriented. In this regard, the pedagogue of the institution where the VTP with the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction is taught stated that:

> "(...) a training that combines a very practical part of the profession learning motivates students a lot, because it's not just learning the academic part (Maths, Language...) but also the combination of learning, in this case, brickwork and construction; then, I don't know, you are teaching them a profession at the same time and the students are really motivated about not having just school time" (Pedagogue).

In the results obtained from one of the discussion groups, the students of the VTP with the Hairdressing profile highlighted the great motivation they feel when engaging in practical activities and working on tasks related to the professional profile, they are being trained in. Research related to disengaged students, both international and national, highlights the importance of a practical approach in the development of curricular content (González Barea & Rodríguez Entrena, 2021).

> "Now in the VTP you come in the morning and say... Maybe you've one hour and then you've your Hairdressing or your computers. It's not the same, you know? The same when you are in high school. On the one hand, this

helps us here. Because we don't think about the 2 hours of Maths, we think about the 2 hours after Maths. Well, we think we also have to pass that to complete the program, but we think about what comes after it, which is the most important" (Student 5).

The answers of the VTP teacher of the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction, who is responsible for the Applied Sciences module, states the attention he pays to the theoretical contents that he works with:

> "(...) I stick to the samples of the things we have to teach them: wallpaper, masses, tiles, floors, working on the street, urban planning" (Teacher 1).

Nevertheless, it is important that the information given to students is well-understood in order to develop more practice-oriented training. This means that the theoretical contents necessary for the students to solve problems, do things, and offer solutions to practical situations should not be a consequence of fragmented, abstract knowledge that sits far from the students' lives and experiences (García-Vera, 2011).

(b) The Methodological Strategies in the Content Development of the VTP.

This type of program is developed within the scope of measures for diversity awareness, for facilitating learning to students that are vulnerable or at risk of social or educational exclusion, and for making their employment possible. Contents and learning suggested in the curriculum design are important, but it is also important to consider how they are put in practice, which tasks and activities are developed, which resources are used, etc.; that is, addressing methodological issues to be taken into account in the subject development.

The data included in the present study highlight several methodological principles applied in the curricular development of the studied VTPs. They are analyzed below:

*Adaptation to the Curricular Level and the Students' Capabilities

Most of the statements from the teachers participating in the program verbalize the adaptation of the curricular design to the students; as per the related curricular academic level, this consists of their prior knowledge from previous educational experiences. A teacher from one VTP with the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction explains it as follows:

> "In practice, the syllabus is just a "guide" because we have to adapt to their level, interests, and circumstances; in the end, these are the criteria we have to use to make progress with them (...) We try to adapt to their level as much as possible (...)" (Teacher 2).

In this sense, one of the adaptation strategies that this teacher mentions is testing the students in advance to determine their initial level:

> "(..) to adapt the syllabus I need to classify them according to their level. To do so, I test them at the beginning of the year to get oriented; later I would make changes if necessary. This way, we don't delay those who know more and I don't demotivate those who know less". (Teacher 2).

Generally speaking, data show that the initial level of students' prior knowledge is very low. Some students come from other countries where they studied only basic education; besides, there are difficulties due to their lack of knowledge of the lingua franca for learning. However, these students coexist with others who have more training and prior knowledge. Due to the above-mentioned factors, the adaptation to the students' individualities embodies the daily work of teachers within these programs. This extract from the interview with a VTP teacher from the Applied Sciences Module with the profile Office IT is an example of it:

> (...) so basic problems, like adding, subtracting, they don't know how to approach this kind of problem [...]. Then, of course, you try to diversify more in class, although you prepare something, OK? But of course, those with a higher level of knowledge... As someone coming from the 11th-12th grade from another country, who tells you "I'm bored", so you have to give more to this one" (Teacher 4).

*Practical and Applicable Tasks.

According to the results of this research, students working on practical tasks and activities have a greater degree of learning, which also means more interest among students. The answer from a VTP student from the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction shows an example of a practical task in the classroom:

> "Yes, for example we had computers, we logged in the computer and it showed us the drawing we had to do. We had the drawing, the drawing in hard-copy format with the commands. First, he teaches you on the blackboard and then you do the same" (Student 4).

The following statement from a VTP teacher from the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction also proves this methodological principle:

"(...) we do things: painting, making concrete, anything they may need to do later in the field; it's a way of learning and making it useful from them. Therefore, this really goes well for them. When I came here for the first time, this got frequently flooded, so we went upstairs to the terrace, fix it and now we don't have that problem anymore" (Teacher 1).

This last answer shows the connection between what students do within the VTP and the improvement of the place where they carry out practical activities. Therefore, the applicability mentioned before is proven and guarantees success in learning in a more permanent way.

Overall, the module associated to the competency level, which follows the different professional profiles - Construction, Hairdressing, Office IT - is where the practical approach of teaching-learning shows more evidence, according to the results of this research. The following statement of a teacher from this module, with a professional profile of Hairdressing, illustrates this idea:

"(...) I work with group dynamics, examples, and common exercises (...); I open several working areas so that the work in the classroom is dynamic; on the same day, there can be male or female haircuts, beard-styling, etc. They work as soon as they get the knowledge" (Teacher 3).

Connection with Their Reality and Interests.

The tasks and activities developed in the classroom should be related to the students' lives, being based on relevant and appropriate issues for this kind of students. The statement of a teacher responsible for the Communication and Society module from the VTP with the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction points that out:

"For example, in Maths I use problems from their daily lives, even in the exams. In social sciences I tell them stories, anecdotes... I try to adapt the contents to their lives as much as possible" (Teacher 2).

Teachers paying attention to the students' interests while pre-selecting contents and deciding how to teach them is a main center of attention within these programs, according to the data from this research. This statement from a VTP teacher from the Applied Sciences Module with the profile Office IT is an example of it:

Regarding Sciences, there are very basic things: energy, matter.... But then there are topics about sexuality, drugs, health [...] and these are more interesting for them. (Teacher 4)

Attention to Students, Learning in a Warm Environment

All the answers and statements from students and teachers highlight the warm treatment and attention they receive, give and pay in the classroom; these are involved in the teaching and learning process, facilitating habit and knowledge acquisition.

Students from the VTP with the profile Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction explained it as follows:

They explained it well (...) In high school, they explain it 3 times, here they do it at least 10/15 times. They repeat until you memorize it. (Student 2); At least a hundred times (...) Here, they pay more attention to us until we do our tasks. (Student 1).

Likewise, the teacher of the same VTP states:

We encourage them and pay them an attention more personalized than we are required to (Teacher 2).

The results of this study show that one of the distinguishing characteristics of these classrooms, compared to ordinary ones, is precisely the existence of a warmer environment where empathy, attention, "care" and "custody" are part of the learning experience of the VTP students. The research highlights the creation of a learning environment based on personal attention, care, respect, etc., and facilitates educational and training re-engagement (González Barea & Rodríguez Entrena, 2021). The following statement from a discussion group with students from a VTP with the profile of Hairdressing shows this:

(...) Then it's better, because you... I mean, they support you and it's like going smoothly. I mean, you don't do it on your own because they are helping you, but it's not the same adapting to your teachers rather than having your teachers adapted to you, in the best sense... I know what I mean, you know? Because there are 2 senses... But it's like, maybe I don't understand something and then the teacher explains it, helps you understand it and so on. (Student 6)

The following tables show the more quantitative results from the questionnaires answered by the students.

The quantitative data analysis from the students' questionnaires points to the same direction as the qualitative data analysis, which were obtained from the faculty and the student body and included above. As Table V shows, regarding to the contents, the higher percentage of answers is in the frequency very important and/or absolutely essential; that is, between 80-100% of the VTP students from the three profiles analyzed in this study have stated that their teachers attach

a great importance to good relationships with classmates, good behavior both in class and in other shared spaces and to being properly treated by the others. Therefore, they emphasize the great importance that teachers attach to more social, ethical, and moral learning.

Table 4. Aspects Valued by Teachers, From the Students' Point of View (Vocational Modules)

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Good relationships with all classmates (despite the fact that they have different ideas, come from other countries, follow other religions...)	0	10%	5%	30%	55%
Good behavior in the classroom	0	0	0	30%	70%
Good behavior outside the classroom	5%	0	10%	20%	65%
Being properly treated by the others (classmates, teachers)	5%	5%	0	35%	55%

The questionnaire results connected with the methodology and regarding the types of activities that the students do in the classroom are shown in the following table, where the type of activities and tasks developed by VTP teachers is also detailed:

Table 5. What do Students do in the Classroom? Vocational Modules

What do students do in the classroom? Vocational Modules.					
	1	2	3	4	5
Doing exercises or work on your own	0	5%	5%	35%	55%
To do, in group with colleagues, works, exercises...	0	10%	10%	15%	65%
Reasoning, thinking and problem solving	0	0	15%	35%	50%
Search for information on the internet, in books... to do activities, class work, etc.	5%	5%	10%	30%	45%
Discuss and comment among all the topics being studied	0	0	10%	60%	30%
Discussing and commenting on current issues even if they are not related to the lessons.	0	10%	15%	35%	40%
Do projects or work that mix content from different subjects.	0	0	25%	7.5%	25%
Present in class the work that have been done	0	0	15%	40%	45%
Correct or discuss with the teacher the tasks or exercises you have done.	5%	5%	5%	35%	50%

The obtained data about what students do in the classroom, according to their own opinions stated in the questionnaires, highlight that individual work on exercises and activities as well as discussing as a group the items being studied are the most frequent types of activities (with 90% of answers stating to a considerable degree and almost always). On the contrary, working on interdisciplinary projects or assignments that require relating contents from different subjects is the least frequent task in the classroom (32.5% of students choose the options to a considerable degree and almost always, while 25% answered occasionally).

On the other hand, 80% and 85% of the respondents state that there are quite frequent presentations about the topics they work on in groups and that they carry out activities which require skills such as thinking, reasoning, and solving problems.

Finally, another group obtained 75% of the answers to a considerable degree and almost always, by means of correcting and discussing with teachers the exercises they have done, discussing current affairs (despite not being related to curricular contents), or searching online to work on assignments.

Discussion

Based on the data presented in this article, it is possible to appreciate the importance of not only the official curricular design of programmes aimed at socio-educational re-engagement, but also their practical development in the classroom at a curricular and methodological level. How the teaching team selects - the what of the training - and develops the contents - the how of the training - plays a crucial role in the results obtained.

With regard to the design of the VTPs aimed at students at risk of exclusion and oriented towards employability, a clear modular structure can be seen, divided into modules associated with the profession in which they are trained and other modules on socio-linguistic and scientific knowledge, as well as optional training aimed at emotional aspects, social skills, technologies, physical activity, etc. The incorporation of socio-emotional aspects from the design stage is a potential of these programmes, since the profile of the students they cater to makes it a priority to start working on emotional aspects such as self-esteem, well-being, social relations, etc.

With regard to the content development in the classroom, it can be observed that, although conceptual and competence training in each area is not renounced, all content related to values and ethical issues is particularly relevant. This finding is consistent with previous research (Bernárdez Gómez et al., 2022; González González, 2017; Rangel Torrijo, 2015;

Redgrave et al., 2013) which calls for a curriculum that involves students and addresses their personal and social dimension.

Another very important aspect in relation to content is the appropriate combination of theoretical and practical aspects. As it is an employment-oriented training, it is highly motivating for learners to find a "practical sense" to the theoretical content they are learning. This strong practical, experiential and professional character facilitates the students' re-engagement with their training (Bernárdez Gómez et al., 2021; Bielby et al., 2012; Evans & Pinney, 2009).

In relation to the how of training, to methodological issues, as has already been highlighted in other research, 4 key elements are recognised: connection with students' interests, adaptation to their level of curricular competence, tasks with a markedly practical character and the creation of a close classroom climate of care and well-being. This last element, the climate of well-being and care, is one of the most relevant in practice (González González & San Fabián, 2018; González Barea & Rodríguez Entrena, 2021; Smyth et al., 2008) because in order to "re-engage" and "recover" students who arrive at the programmes with serious emotional problems, emotional work must begin in order to finally reach the academic and professional level.

Conclusions

The research presented in this article attempts to respond to two main objectives: first (1) to describe the curricular design of VTP and second (2) to analyze the curricular practices developed in VET, focusing exclusively on the contents and methodology implemented in the development of VTP. In particular, we have focused on three training profiles: Secondary Operations of Overlaying in Construction, Secondary services of Hairdressing and Basic Operations in Office IT. These were respectively developed in two social entities working with young people at risk of socio-educational exclusion. The methodological approach that made this study possible has been based on the study of multiple cases, with data analysis and instruments for both quantitative and qualitative procedures.

VTPs are aimed at enabling students to develop multiple learning competencies that facilitate their professional performance and, in turn, enables their social and employment integration. Therefore, they have an eminently professional purpose supported by a disciplinary training that enables their educational re-engagement and a possible integration and later promotion in the standardized education system. With this double purpose, the VTP curricular design is organized in three modules, either associated to competency units linked to the professional training profile of that VTP or not associated to competency units. This includes several disciplinary subjects parallel to those of Vocational Training Programs, as well as a vocational module of Training in the Workplace that implies carrying out supervised internships in companies and also involves these companies in the students' training.

As stated in this article, the attention to the curricular design of these programs and its formal and regulatory aspects is fundamental; however, it is even more important to analyze and reflect on their implementation; that is, how the curricular design answers to the particularities and specific needs of the intended students of these VTPs. This has to do with their integration process at an educational and social level.

In this sense, the research included in this article has been focused on the analysis of those aspects related to the contents taught in the vocational modules of these programs, as well as the methodological strategies that have been put in practice in order to work on them in class.

Regarding the contents, the obtained results are clearly in tune with the literature on this matter. They emphasize the selection and development of more practical contents that connect with the empirical aspect and the development of professional performance skills, such as those encompassed in the scope of knowing how to be and behave (values, attitudes, emotions, habits, etc.) that support the personal growth of these young people, who stopped believing in their potential as a result of their educational and social experiences. This does not imply teachers do not pay attention to more academic and conceptual contents as described by the official regulations; their selection corresponds to a rigorous process with intellectual quality, and they are always adapted to the students' reality. This research has proved that, in the VTP scope, setting a curriculum that includes a range of contents relating the most cognitive ones - procedural and social - with the emotional ones makes it even more possible for students to develop and master competencies that enable their job placement as well as the alternative to continue with their training in the standard education system, towards Basic Vocational Training, Adult Education, etc. In this sense, it can be concluded that a curriculum focused on the needs of the students, that addresses conceptual and emotional aspects, and that has a strong practical and experiential character, favors the student's re-engagement and continuity in the system. Consistent with this idea, it has also been shown that there are clear methodological principles applied in the development of VTP that favor the learning, motivation, involvement and well-being of the most vulnerable students. These principles are the following:

1. Attention to the students' prior knowledge acquired in their academic and educational experience, which leads to an adaptation to their curricular starting level;

2. Development of practical tasks that show the applicability of what is being learned and foster a long-lasting learning experience;

3. Implementation of tasks and activities that make a clear connection with the students' reality and interests, so that their motivation to learn is kept;

4. Creating a caring and supporting environment in the classroom that makes a difference with the students' prior relationships in the standardized education system.

These methodological principles shown in this research are, in turn, based on cooperative and group working techniques for classrooms; in spite of this, individual work is also promoted with the purpose of developing the personal skills of these students, related to reasoning and problem solving.

Recommendations

Early school leaving and school failure continue to be problems of international importance. The relevance of this article lies in offering knowledge about the functioning of programmes aimed at alleviating the risk of educational and social exclusion through a "different, less academic" training that manages to keep students in education.

The results achieved through this research can contribute to shed light on the design of policies aimed at educational re-engagement and the practices that teachers can develop in the aforementioned programmes.

One of the main results highlights the need to work adequately with students on social skills, emotional aspects and aspects linked to ethics and values. Once students are connected with the emotional part, they work with the contents of the professional field and academic knowledge, where the way they work in the classroom, the methodology, is the key to student involvement. In this sense, at a methodological level, teaching practices are needed that "involve" students in their training, that connect with their lives, that make them participants, and that give them an active role in the construction of their learning.

The results obtained in this research highlight the value of active learning and personal involvement in learning as a fundamental pillar in the development of this type of program, and the teachers who participate in it are aware of this. To this end, the teachers propose carrying out Internet search activities and research work to help pupils construct their own learning in an autonomous way. Along these lines, it would be highly recommendable to have a training plan for teachers who participate in these programs that would guarantee the implementation of methodological strategies that enable students to achieve both social and academic competencies, which is the objective of these programs.

In these classrooms and within the framework of the VTPs, there must be a diversity of tasks/activities and also of methodologies and ways of working by integrating different resources with contents selected according to the interests of the students and their realities of life, opting for practical approaches that teach students how to work, without forgetting the prescribed and official curriculum that must be passed by the students in these programs.

Therefore, the selection of content and the planning of the teaching and learning sessions that are developed should be the main axes of reflection and action for teachers in order to respond faithfully to the needs of the students, who are the protagonists of these training programs.

In another sense, it is also worth mentioning briefly what the authors consider to be future lines of research. On the one hand, the continuation of the research line. School dropout is a problem that will always be latent and will affect to a greater or lesser extent. Researchers must be forewarned before the new forms of manifestation of this educational problem in order to investigate it and find ways of solution. On the other hand, it is also possible to carry out research that goes beyond dropout and studies more ambitious aspects of the students' transit through school. This is the case of the well-being to which schools aspire. There are many organizations that are currently proposing this as a new goal, as is the case of the EU, for example.

Limitations

The limitations of this research that can be pointed out refer mainly to methodological issues of the study. In this sense, this work has focused on the community of Murcia and, specifically, on the work carried out within the framework of two entities. Therefore, the possibility of extending the sample both in terms of the participating subjects and the region where it has been carried out could provide more information on the basis of territorial keys that would provide extensive information on the key points in the proper functioning of these programs.

Ethics Statements

"Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study."

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