Network of Education Policy Centers

COORDINATION OF DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

ETF Evaluation Synthesis Report (Extension)

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PROJECTS FRAME

All of the three projects revolve around the concept of an on line professional environment for remote on-line co-working and peer to peer sharing. These types of ICT are considered as a preferential frame to gather and connect school staff and school based professional communities. Users generally perceive these tools as "practical", "easy", "fast", time saving and of "immediate value".

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Using of social platforms by VET teachers for sharing experience and teaching and learning materials project (Albania) resulted in the creation of The SHARE – VET Platform, composed of three vocational sectors (SHARE – Hostelry, SHARE – Economy and SHARE – Thermo-plumbing), with more than 150 teachers and instructors as members (almost the double of initial expectation of 80 teachers).

The platform development had its premises in an on line assessment on the use of social media conducted by the project managers in order to better tailor the output on participants' needs. The project managers reported that the analysis was a strategical component of the project to get the necessary data as the basis for further intervention.

From the Platform participants feedback results that they are becoming more familiar with the social platform procedures, they have benefited from the materials and experience shared with other teachers, and that they have improved the ability to prepare teaching and learning materials.

It was remarked that the sharing of documents and materials among teachers/instructors of the same sector is a good way to save time and to fill the gap created by the lack of textbooks and support material. Sharing teaching experiences (not only documents) is considered an important value.

In the frame of the ***Embedding the use of digital tools in vocational schools*** project, (Macedonia) the file sharing platform Vetnet.mk was created, registered and hosted and a six modules manual for trainees was developed. Twelve teachers from six schools attended the training workshop on different file sharing and on-line content management systems. The dissemination, conducted by a cascading process, reached 55 participants from the six schools who received certificates for their involvement in the project activities. In addition, 12 LTN received certificates for successfully completing their tasks.

The on-line platform Vetnet.mk hosts 21 different groups, created for an easier management of files and material. There are groups for each vocation participating as well as for general subjects. Users of the platform have shared more than 3000 files (teaching materials, links, presentations, preparations, curriculums). For each Vetnet group, there is a corresponding Facebook group.

Project managers reported that the teachers feel supported by other teachers and some of them believe that the new tools or methods will be of immediate value to them, their students and other teachers.

Networking for Agricultural Schools in Serbia project (Serbia) created a platform for placement of teachers' materials, outlined in cooperation with the 28 vocational agricultural schools participating in the activity. A training course was also organised, based on past recourses and adapted to the needs of the schools.

An input and output questionnaire for training participants was developed in order to assess participants attitudes prior to and after the training.

The first part of the training was held face-to-face (33 participants), while the second part was conducted on-line (32 participants). After the training completion, the schools shared their experience with the rest of the school staff (357 participants from 26 schools; information about two schools is missing). So far, 29 online lessons and 29 documents on teachers' preparation are available on the platform.

The results, of the analysis of the input and output questionnaire, show that after the training, teachers have significantly changed perceptions about their digital competences.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVTIES

The following table shows a compendium of follow-up activities per country/project.

COUNTRY/PROJECT	FOLLOW UP in PROCESS	POSSIBILE FOLLOW UP
Albania Using of social platforms by VET teachers for sharing experience and teaching and learning materials	• Two other sections will be added to the SHARE – VET Platform; • CCS consultants will continue to administrate the SHARE – VET Platform	• Other sections of the SHARE – VET platform will operate with the same concept and procedures and will be based on the experience of the current sessions; • there is consensus to expand the participation in the SHARE – VET to Albanian speaking teachers from Kosovo and Macedonia
Macedonia Embedding the use of digital tools in vocational schools	• Teachers will keep using the VETNET platform	
Serbia Networking for Agricultural Schools in Serbia	• Teachers will keep using the developed materials to improve the quality of their teaching	• starting of a "whole school approach" process to support this sort of initiatives; • additional online training for a larger number of teacher • e-resources to be uploaded to NARIS repository

COMMON TRENDS, LESSONS LEARNT AND CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with what emerged during the initial set of ETF projects (January – December 2017), the cascading model is considered a useful tool to expand the reach of the projects, but, once again, a certain lack of support/cooperation from the schools management was remarked. It appears that there is margin for a wider reflexion on the role and the perception of peer-to-peer learning and professional development off school staff in the Region.

All the projects envisaged a monitoring/surveying/feedback phase, in order to try to adapt the project features to the actual contexts, fostering the bottom up component of the initiatives.

Two projects out of three involve of social networks as a channel of knowledge sharing and networking, Facebook in particular. Its widespread availability and the fact that users are familiar with its features can facilitate an immediate and larger dissemination, also when it comes to professional scopes. Nonetheless, some of the participants in the Albanian project perceived it as a threat to their privacy. Indeed, beneficiaries engaged in the activities through their personal accounts. A possible solution, to keep the benefit of the some of the advantages the social medium while protecting participants' privacy, could involve the creation of ad hoc dedicated profiles (though with possible detriment of the inputs circulation, especially at the beginning).

One of the most common challenges pointed out refers to the motivation/level of participation of the users. The project managers reported that the level of engagement should be improved and align, as several teachers still have resistance in the sharing their proposals or in participating effectively in the activities, for various reasons (lack of support from the school, non-recognition of extra work-load, loss of privacy, fear of external/peer judgment).

One of the most sensitive issues raised by the participants in the Albanian project is the quality of the materials/outputs. The need of a quality check to obtain materials adequate to the required standards was clearly expressed, but, at the same time, teachers were against any sort platform moderation. This aspect could be maybe object of further investigation, in order to explore how horizontal professional communities on-line can assure the right balance between innovation and evaluation.

In the Macedonian case, a lack of proper technical infrastructure (obsolete hardware and poor internet connection) is still an obstacle to as smooth implementation of the activities.

It was generally remarked that, in order to grant sustainability to the projects, further support is needed. Considering the fast technology development and, most of all, the rapid changes in teaching methods, additional training and mentoring is perceived as a key factor, as well as policy level adjustments. The quality of the outputs should not rely only on the internal motivation of (some) teachers and school personnel.