

Action Research in Educational Centres: A Proposal for the Prevention of Dropout in Vocational Education and Training

INVESTIGACIÓ-ACCIÓ ALS CENTRES EDUCATIUS: Una proposta per a la prevenció de l'abandonament a Formació Professional

Date of creation

2024

Description

During this project's action-research process, participating teachers engaged in multiple collaborative tasks:

1. Creation and active participation in a *working group* that analysed the actions undertaken in the school;
2. Participation in four *focus groups* to examine the school's situation and the teachers' perceptions in relation to the main dimensions of Self-Determination Theory;
3. Analysis of the results emerging from the action-research process and reflection on their own teaching practice;
4. Joint design of an *action plan* aimed at improving dropout prevention in VET;
5. Implementation and evaluation of this plan through the systematic collection of evidence.

Beneficiaries

-  **Learners at risk of early leaving from education and training**
-  **VET students (school-based learning)**

VET teachers

Countries

 **Spain**

Education level and sector

-  **Secondary education**
-  **Lower secondary vocational education and training (school-based)**

Type of policy/initiative

Level of implementation / Scope

 **Provider level**  **Local level**

Since 2024

Aims of policy/initiative

The aims of the project can be summarised as follows:

- To continue the collaboration with schools offering VET, thereby deepening action-research strategies and fostering the ongoing construction of tacit knowledge;
- To consolidate research strategies and instruments for studying dropout prevention and academic performance improvement among VET teachers;
- To work jointly with VET teachers to promote reflection on their own teaching practices in relation to dropout prevention at this educational stage;
- To design, implement, and evaluate - together with an educational centre - an action plan aimed at preventing dropout.

Features and types of activities implemented

The methodological structure of this project followed a cyclical process of **diagnosis, planning, action, observation, and reflection**, allowing for the continuous refinement of the strategies implemented. The main features and activities carried out are:

- **Analysis of the institutional context and identification of challenges** related to dropout and academic underachievement in VET through gathering data on student engagement, attendance, academic results, and existing support mechanisms, alongside a collective reflection on the main barriers perceived by teachers.
- **Formation of a driving group (“grup impulsor”)** composed of teachers from different VET specialties and the research team to coordinate the project, facilitated communication across departments, and acted as the main decision-making body in design and implementation.
- **Focus groups and reflective workshops** were organised to analyse the current teaching practices and the degree to which they supported students’ basic psychological needs. Discussions generated a shared understanding of how teaching styles, classroom climate, and assessment methods could influence motivation and persistence.
- **Collaborative design of an Action Plan** to prevent dropout and enhance student engagement and performance. This plan included concrete pedagogical strategies, classroom management adaptations, and institutional measures aimed at strengthening teacher-student relationships and fostering a supportive learning environment.
- **Implementation of improvement actions**, which included classroom-based innovations, mentoring activities, and coordination structures to ensure coherence between departments. Teachers implemented the proposed actions within their regular teaching practice while collecting evidence on student response and progress.
- **Monitoring and evidence collection** were systematically conducted through both quantitative and qualitative means drawing on student performance indicators, attendance records, and teacher observations, complemented by discussion groups, reflective journals, and evaluation meetings.

- **Reflective evaluation sessions** were held periodically to analyse the evidence collected, evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented measures, and identify new areas for improvement. These sessions reinforced teachers' professional learning, encouraged shared responsibility, and strengthened the institutional commitment to reducing dropout.
- **Internal dissemination and knowledge transfer** took place through meetings and documentation that shared progress within the school community. In addition, the project laid the groundwork for future **external dissemination**, including participation in seminars organised by the Institute for Educational Research and Innovation (IRIE) and the development of a **practical guide for VET teachers** on dropout prevention and pedagogical innovation.

Through these activities, the project succeeded in combining professional development with institutional transformation, consolidating a culture of collaboration and reflective practice within the school. It also established a sustainable model of intervention that can be transferred to other VET institutions facing similar challenges related to student disengagement and early leaving.

Target group

- **Teachers in Basic and Intermediate VET:** The project primarily targets VET teachers by analysing and enhancing their teaching styles and pedagogical approaches, through evidence-based strategies and practical tools.
- **VET institutions:** The results obtained support institutional development and can be replicated or adapted by other centres seeking to strengthen dropout prevention and academic success strategies.

Policymakers and other stakeholders: By generating empirical evidence and validated resources, the project aims to inform educational policy and teacher-training programmes in VET, thereby contributing to improved retention lowering early leaving rates.

Resources

The project PONT75 is founded by IRIE (Institut de Recerca I Innovació Educativa-University of Balearic Islands) and Government of the Balearic Islands.

Evaluation of the measure

By 2026, the project's implementation has been completed and is in the process of evaluating the data collected. Participants' feedback has been highly positive. Teachers emphasised that the project has fostered coordination, collaboration, and shared reflection. It has also enabled them to design and commit to an action plan for improvement, which is currently being implemented and evaluated, reinforcing a culture of professional learning and continuous improvement within the school.

Evidence of effectiveness of the measure

Evidence gathered throughout project implementation demonstrates a positive and measurable impact on both teaching practices and institutional culture at IES Algarb.

The **teachers' self-reported reflections** and feedback reveal a significant evolution in the understanding of dropout as a multidimensional phenomenon. Teachers reported

increased awareness of how their teaching styles, classroom management strategies, and relational approaches influence students' motivation and persistence. The iterative reflection-action-evaluation cycle contributed to consolidating a culture of evidence-informed practice within the centre.

The **implementation of the Action Plan** led to concrete pedagogical and organisational changes. Teachers introduced new motivational strategies, adapted assessment practices, and reinforced relational support for students. The resulting improvements were observed in both the internal evaluation sessions and the documentation generated by the teaching teams. Teachers highlighted enhanced communication and coordination among colleagues, a greater sense of shared responsibility, and stronger connections with students.

Moreover, the project generated **institutional learning outcomes** beyond the individual participants. The experience fostered the creation of professional learning communities and mechanisms for sustained collaboration that are now integrated into the school's regular functioning. The school leadership recognised the initiative as a catalyst for transforming professional dialogue and promoting long-term strategies to prevent dropout.

Finally, the evidence obtained provides a solid foundation for **transfer and scalability**. The processes, tools, and materials developed have shown to be adaptable to other vocational education contexts. The project's effectiveness has also been acknowledged through its inclusion in dissemination initiatives, such as the forthcoming publication of a practical guide for VET teachers and the presentation of results at academic and institutional events organised by the Institute for Educational Research and Innovation (IRIE).

Success factors

The project's implementation at IES Algarb has yielded solid, evidence-based results on preventing dropout in VET and on improving students' academic performance and engagement. The initiative has combined theoretical rigour with practical innovation, generating new knowledge and fostering professional learning within the institution.

The project's design has made it possible to **integrate research, reflection, and educational practice** through a structured, cyclical process involving diagnosis, planning, action, and evaluation, allowing participating teachers to become both researchers and agents of change. The continuous process of evidence collection and analysis has supported a data-informed reflection on teaching practices, resulting in a stronger alignment between pedagogical intentions and classroom realities.

Several key factors explain the project's success and its impact on the participating centre and community:

- **Relevance and contextualisation:** The project addressed a pressing challenge in VET, that is the high dropout and underachievement rates, through interventions tailored to these specific needs. The close alignment between the research objectives and the centre's improvement priorities ensured strong teacher engagement and institutional ownership.
- **Teacher empowerment and collaboration:** The creation of a driving group and the development of collaborative spaces fostered a sense of shared purpose among teachers. The participatory nature of the action-research process enhanced professional dialogue, strengthened mutual trust, and promoted a collective responsibility for student success.
- **Evidence-based innovation:** The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provided robust evidence for decision-making and enabled the iterative refinement of the action plan. This evidence-based approach enhanced the project's credibility and facilitated the institutionalisation of successful pedagogical practices.
- **Institutional learning and sustainability:** Beyond individual practice, the project generated institutional learning processes that have become embedded in the school's organisational culture and annual work plan, thus contributing to the

sustainability of the project's results.

- **Transfer and dissemination potential:** The project has produced materials, procedures, and tools that are adaptable to other VET contexts. Its results will be disseminated through professional events and through the forthcoming publication of a practical guide for VET teachers, supporting wider transfer and replication.

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