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Challenges of developing professional practice in vocational education and training - The Kosovo case

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Abstract: Challenges in vocational education and training (VET) remain among the primary issues confronting Kosovo's education system. The most critical challenges are structural and institutional, particularly those related to implementing professional practice, enhancing youth employability, and aligning VET with labor market demands. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, conducted across five municipalities, nine schools, and forty partner companies. Participants included 125 students, nine school coordinators responsible for professional practice, and thirty-nine company mentors. Findings indicate that the absence of structured institutional cooperation, the predominance of theoretical content, and inadequate practical infrastructure significantly undermine VET quality. They further highlight the crucial role of trained instructors as a decisive factor for process effectiveness. A comparison with successful European models, particularly the German and Swiss systems, underscores gaps in Kosovo's context, emphasizing the need for institutionalized partnerships, infrastructure modernization, and curriculum reform. The study recommends developing a national strategy for professional practice, training and certifying instructors, and introducing fiscal incentives for businesses offering placements. These conclusions provide a foundation for sustainable policies and strategic interventions aimed at improving youth employability and fostering long-term economic growth.

Keywords: *Educational reform, Employability, Instructors, Professional practice, School- business cooperation, Vocational education and training (VET).*

1. Introduction

Professional practice represents a strategic component within the framework of Vocational Education and Training (VET), serving as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical experience in real work environments. In the context of a transitional economy such as Kosovo, where youth unemployment and the lack of practical skills aligned with labor market demands represent major challenges, professional practice plays a crucial role. It links the education system with the requirements of the private sector, enabling young people to acquire real-world experience and applicable skills for the labor market.

However, the efficient and effective implementation of professional practice in Kosovo faces a number of structural and institutional barriers that undermine its formative potential as a mode of learning. The lack of sustainable and formalized cooperation between vocational schools and businesses, insufficient clarity in the division of inter-institutional roles, non-standardized teaching infrastructure, as well as the shortage of qualified instructors and mentors, are among the main factors contributing to the fragmented application of professional practice.

Since the conclusion of the war, Kosovo has undertaken continuous efforts to develop an education system aligned with European standards, notably through reforms shaped by the Copenhagen Process

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on vocational education and training (VET), the Bologna Process on higher education (HE), and initiatives aimed at integrating dual-learning modalities into vocational education. Nonetheless, the absence of a coherent strategy for work-based learning has resulted in the practical component remaining underrepresented, without sufficient impact on improving graduate employability.

In light of this complex and challenging context, the study aims to provide a critical and empirically grounded analysis of the barriers limiting the effective implementation of professional practice in Kosovo. Specifically, the analysis focuses on three core elements:

1. The degree of collaboration between schools and the private sector, as a key factor in ensuring both the quality and coherence of the professional practice experience.
2. The predominance of theoretical content within the curriculum, coupled with insufficient practical resources, which negatively affects the development of students' technical skills.
3. The competence and quality of professional practice instructors, as a critical determinant of the effectiveness of the work-based learning process.

Based on this analytical framework, the study seeks not only to identify existing problems but also to propose solutions informed by successful European models such as the German, Austrian, and Swiss systems, adapted to Kosovo's socio-economic context. Furthermore, the research addresses challenges that are essential for increasing youth employability and for the economic development of the country, thereby accelerating the promotion of reforms within the VET sector.

2. Aim and Objectives

This study seeks to provide a critical and empirically grounded analysis of the challenges associated with implementing professional practice within Kosovo's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, with a particular focus on structural obstacles, cooperation with the private sector, and the shortage of human and technical resources.

The objective of the study is to examine the factors that hinder the effective development of professional practice in Kosovo's VET system and to identify potential mechanisms for their mitigation, with a view to adopting leading European practices.

Given the strategic importance of professional practice in preparing a well-qualified workforce, the study also seeks to propose sustainable improvement strategies, informed by comparisons with established European models such as the German, Swiss, and Austrian systems, and adapted to Kosovo's socio-economic realities to support the country's economic and social development

2.1. Objectives

1. Analysis of the structural and institutional barriers hindering the implementation of professional practice.
2. Assessment of the extent of collaboration between schools and businesses.
3. Examination of the impact of curriculum design and infrastructural resources on students' technical competencies.
4. Evaluation of the role of instructors and mentors in ensuring the quality of practical training.
5. Formulation of evidence-based improvement strategies informed by exemplary European practices.
6. Contribution to the reform of Kosovo's vocational education and training system through the provision of reliable data and actionable recommendations for education policymakers, VET providers, and economic partners.

2.2. Hypotheses

H_1: If structured cooperation between vocational schools and businesses is absent, the quality and coherence of students' professional practice experience will be reduced.

This hypothesis suggests a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the level of cooperation and the effectiveness of professional practice. Structured collaboration entails the establishment of

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institutional relationships, sustainable agreements with clearly defined roles for schools and companies, trained mentors, communication platforms, and joint evaluation mechanisms.

H_2. If teaching in vocational schools is predominantly theoretical and opportunities for practical learning are lacking, students will not acquire the technical skills required by the labor market.

This hypothesis implies that the absence of practical components, combined with the predominance of theoretical approaches, widens the gap between acquired knowledge and the actual demands of the labor market. As a result, schools tend to produce graduates equipped with general knowledge but insufficiently prepared for specific technical applications in sectors such as technology, construction, mechanics, or technical services.

H_3. If the instructors and mentors responsible for professional practice are not adequately qualified and trained, students' preparation for employment will be insufficient.

This hypothesis assumes that students' skill development is shaped not only by curricular content or the practice setting but also by the professional, technical, and pedagogical competence of the instructor overseeing the process. An inadequately trained instructor lacks the capacity to effectively guide, motivate, assess, and structure the student's learning experience.

Each hypothesis is examined in the empirical analysis through the presentation of data and the corresponding discussion

2.3. Research Questions

1. What institutional and structural obstacles hinder the implementation of professional practice in Kosovo?
2. What are the main professional challenges in implementing professional practice in VET schools in Kosovo?
3. In what ways does the professional preparation of practice instructors influence the quality of students' practical learning?
4. To what extent does the absence of structured cooperation with the private sector affect the quality and effectiveness of students' professional practice? To what degree does the content of the vocational education curriculum align with the current demands of the labor market in Kosovo?
5. In what ways can Kosovo's system of professional practice be further developed to align with established international best practices?

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. It captures the perceptions of stakeholders through quantitative measures while also providing an in-depth analysis of the structural and institutional challenges associated with the implementation of professional practice in Kosovo's Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools.

The research draws on an extensive review of the literature, including more than thirty international and local scientific sources that examine dual system models, the challenges of VET in Kosovo, and comparative cases from the European Union (EU) and the Western Balkans.

Fieldwork was conducted in five municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, involving nine VET schools and forty cooperating companies across various sectors. The study sample included teachers and coordinators of professional practice, students from vocational schools, and mentors from partner companies where professional practice took place. In total, the sample comprised 125 students, nine school coordinators responsible for professional practice, and thirty-nine company mentors.

Alongside the quantitative component, reflected through percentages, a qualitative approach was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges encountered in practice, particularly in contexts where institutional systematization and regular statistical documentation are lacking. This approach enabled the collection of authentic experiences from stakeholders, including students, teachers, mentors, and institutional decision-makers.

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4. Theoretical Overview / Theoretical Framework

4.1. School–Business Cooperation in Kosovo

In Kosovo, one of the greatest challenges facing Vocational Education and Training (VET) remains its public perception and the lack of promotion of good practices. Gojani, et al. [1] observe that the media often focuses primarily on negative developments in the education sector while overlooking achievements and constructive practices. This is particularly significant for VET, as the development of practical skills and cooperation with the labor market require greater public visibility.

A review of the literature indicates that the absence of structured cooperation between schools and the private sector constitutes one of the major barriers to the effective implementation of professional practice in Kosovo. This is highlighted in the works of Beka and Stublla [2] and Zylfijaj and Shaqiri [3]. Even when cooperation exists, it is often informal and unstable, leaving professional practice dependent on individual initiatives [3]. Additionally, the lack of equipment and resources in schools hinders practical development. Qehaja [4] emphasizes the absence of a national framework to facilitate partnerships, while Mehmeti [5] links this to the instability of business mentors. According to ETF [6] and the World Bank [7] lack of incentives for enterprises has limited their contribution to professional training.

In this regard, the international report by GFA Consulting Group [8] stresses that improving the quality of vocational education in Kosovo requires structured mechanisms of cooperation with the private sector, including the engagement of business-based instructors and the implementation of work-based training as the most effective means of addressing the weaknesses of informal partnerships.

Based on the reviewed literature, the challenges in implementing professional practice in Kosovo are closely tied to the lack of institutionalized cooperation, inadequate infrastructure, and the inconsistent engagement of the private sector. These factors render this crucial component of vocational education fragmented and ineffective. Beka and Stublla [2] and Zylfijaj and Shaqiri [3] argue that the absence of structured cooperation between vocational schools and businesses remains one of the primary obstacles to the development of professional practice. Even when collaboration is present, Zylfijaj and Shaqiri [3] note that it is frequently informal and dependent on individual initiatives, lacking sustained institutional support. This diminishes the standardization of practical experience and its impact on students' labor market preparation.

On the other hand, highlight the importance of school infrastructure, stressing that the lack of equipment and didactic resources significantly hinders the development of high-quality professional practice. This not only compromises practical teaching but also weakens students' preparedness for the labor market.

Qehaja [4] identifies the absence of a national mechanism for coordinating professional practice as a key factor contributing to fragmentation and lack of formalization in school–business cooperation. Similarly, Mehmeti [5] underscores the instability of business mentors as an obstacle to the effective transfer of professional experience during practice.

According to the ETF [6] and the World Bank [7] one of the main reasons why the private sector does not actively engage in providing professional practice is the absence of concrete incentives—whether fiscal or institutional—that would encourage businesses to participate in student training.

Kosovo's Law No. 04/L-138 on Vocational Education and Training stipulates that VET institutions—whether public, private, or public–private partnerships—must provide programs that develop the competencies and skills of young people in line with labor market demands and ensure adequate career opportunities. Furthermore, the law promotes the creation of both general and professional culture aligned with lifelong learning principles and technological and economic advancements. It also requires the integration of professional standards into curricula in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework [9].

Although VET is regulated by Assembly of Republic of Kosovo [9] recommends reforms through the adoption of a new law that would give higher priority to VET-related issues, particularly the development of dual education in Kosovo.

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4.2. European Best Practice Models

The dual systems of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland are founded on close, institutionalized cooperation with businesses Euler [10] and Deissinger [11]. Wolter and Ryan [12] emphasize that companies not only provide practical training but also play an active role in curriculum design.

Based on the reviewed literature, the challenges of integrating professional practice into education systems—particularly in countries seeking to adopt or enhance dual models such as those in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland—are closely linked to institutional structures, collaboration with the private sector, and the broader economic context

In the German and Swiss dual models, close cooperation between vocational schools and businesses is a key factor in the successful integration of professional practice. As emphasized by Euler [10] and Deissinger [11] this cooperation is formalized, institutionalized, and fully embedded within the education system. Companies not only provide training placements but also play an active role in curriculum design, thereby ensuring that teaching content remains closely aligned with labor market needs [12].

According to Cambridge Assessment [13] vocational education and training (VET) encompasses educational reforms and initiatives aimed at enhancing young people's skills for the labor market. International models highlight the importance of cooperation between schools and employers in providing practical skills and employment opportunities. An illustrative example is the Skills for Work programs in Scotland, where schools and businesses collaborate to prepare students for the labor market. Such initiatives contribute both to improving employment prospects and to advancing educational reforms that address the real needs of the economy.

According to Busemeyer and Trampusch [14] the model of "collective skill formation" involves a balanced division of responsibilities between the state and the private sector, requiring strong coordination and a clear policy framework for effective implementation. However, Pilz [15] cautions that transferring the dual model to other contexts—particularly in countries with weak economic structures or limited institutional cooperation—faces considerable obstacles.

Bohlinger [16] adds another dimension by analyzing the school-to-work transition in Eastern European countries, including the Balkan region, where significant challenges arise from mismatched qualifications, the limited availability of high-quality practical training, and the inconsistent engagement of the private sector.

4.3. Critical Dimensions of Education in Kosovo: Infrastructure, Curriculum, and Human Capacities

ETF [6] emphasize the lack of laboratories and modern technical equipment in schools. Furthermore, the ETF report highlights that curricula often fail to reflect the needs of the local labor market, while the GIZ [17] stresses that Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions attempt to improve youth employability by updating curricula and developing skills standards. Nevertheless, challenges remain in linking theory with practice due to the absence of sustainable cooperation with businesses and the shortage of qualified trainers and mentors.

Similarly, the OECD [18] finds that VET, professional practice, and cooperation with businesses are closely linked to skills development and increased employability. Moreover, the report emphasizes the importance of integrating professional practice and establishing close cooperation with the private sector to ensure that VET programs meet labor market requirements. At the same time, it highlights the need for reforms in education policies and for instructor training to improve the quality of vocational education and increase youth employability.

Simultaneously, the catalogue of training programs does not reflect the professional development needs of teachers in VET, nor their cooperation with enterprises [19]. Teachers' professional development should be closely aligned with their specific needs; therefore, school-based professional development is considered one of the most sustainable approaches to fostering teacher growth [20].

Zylfijaj and Shaqiri [3] identify significant discrepancies between the skills demanded and those provided. Gojani and Gojani [21] further note that in over 95% of cases, teaching and assessment

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practices rely exclusively on content presented in textbooks. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic planning with clear expectations and objectives regarding student assessment. As a result, evaluation remains focused on specific content rather than on assessing the outcomes and skills that students are expected to develop.

CEDEFOP [22] emphasizes the absence of an assessment system for the outcomes of professional practice. Similarly, Grollmann and Rauner [23] underline the importance of qualified instructors for the success of VET, while Sweet [24] and UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training [25] propose effective workplace learning practices. According to CEDEFOP and Grollmann and Rauner [23] the quality of practical instructors directly affects the competencies students develop during their training. In countries with strong dual education traditions, such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, professional practice instructors are required to undergo regular training and certification in order to maintain responsibility for mentoring students.

To promote effective and functional VET practices, the legal framework constitutes an essential foundation for the development of all processes. These are regulated by the following laws of the Republic of Kosovo: Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education (link) https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2770, Law No. 04/L-138 on Vocational Education and Training (link) https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=8676, and Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government (link) https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2530.

The European Commission [26] underscores the need for profound reforms in VET, recommending the drafting and adoption of a new law that would recognize this field as a strategic priority. In particular, the report highlights the importance of strengthening the dual education model, which seeks to combine theoretical preparation in educational institutions with practical experience in the workplace. Such an approach is seen as a key mechanism for reducing the gap between the education system and the actual demands of the labor market, equipping young people with concrete skills required by the private sector and enhancing their employment opportunities.

According to the OECD [27] VET plays a key role in developing the skills necessary for todays` and tomorrow's labor markets. The report stresses the importance of adapting VET systems to meet changing market needs and providing training opportunities for both youth and adults. Moreover, it discusses the need for educational reforms that incorporate digital technologies and innovative teaching approaches to improve both the quality and accessibility of VET.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is also frequently promoted as a potential solution to youth unemployment, as it facilitates the school-to-work transition by providing skills more relevant to the labor market [28].

The European Commission's recommendation implies not only the need for legal improvements but also the necessity of closer coordination between state institutions, businesses, and vocational schools to ensure that reforms are both sustainable and effective in the long term.

4.4. Gaps in the Existing Literature

Research on professional practice in Kosovo has been limited both theoretically and empirically. While international literature has assessed the impact of professional practice on skills development and the school-to-work transition, the Kosovo context remains underrepresented in structured, evidence-based studies. The absence of a comprehensive approach that integrates the perspectives of students, educational institutions, and the private sector has created significant gaps in understanding the real dimensions of the challenges and opportunities that this process entails.

- There is a lack of studies measuring the long-term impact of professional practice on employment in Kosovo.
- The perspective of students has been underrepresented in research and is addressed here for the first time.
- There is no data on the costs and benefits for businesses providing professional practice, and gender analysis is noticeably absent.

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These gaps limit the possibility of developing a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the issue.

5. Educational Structures: Kosovo and International Practices

Cooperation between vocational schools and the private sector is a fundamental component in the structure of Vocational Education and Training (VET). *To improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational education and training, the World Bank [7] recommends sustainable educational reforms that integrate practical skills and strengthen cooperation with the private sector, particularly with enterprises.* The Osnabrück Declaration of the European Commission [29] highlights that VET must be reinforced through the engagement of mentors and trainers in schools and companies, who act as bridges between students and the labor market. The document underscores the importance of personalized guidance and support for students, as well as the need for teachers, counselors, and trainers to benefit from continuous professional development. It also stresses that close cooperation between VET institutions and industry is essential for providing real work experiences and preparing new generations for the digital and green labor markets.

International literature and best practices—particularly in countries with well-developed dual education systems such as Germany and Switzerland—emphasize the necessity of such cooperation as a prerequisite for high-quality, sustainable professional practice aligned with labor market needs [10, 12]. In Germany, businesses are directly involved in curriculum development [10] whereas in Kosovo they remain largely peripheral [2]. Germany also has clear structures for monitoring and cooperation [11] while in Kosovo these processes rely on temporary initiatives [3].

In Kosovo, the absence of a formalized school–business cooperation framework has been identified as one of the main obstacles to the effective implementation of professional practice [2, 3]. Without such cooperation, institutional responsibilities remain unclear, communication is informal, and interns are often treated inconsistently, without a standardized approach to training or evaluation.

The development of students' technical skills cannot be achieved through theoretical content alone. Vocational training requires the integration of knowledge with hands-on experience, using tools, technological equipment, and real workplace problem-solving. CEDEFOP [30] emphasizes that vocational education holds value only when it prepares students to act in specific work contexts, beyond the theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom. Yet, in Kosovo many VET schools continue to operate with a strong theoretical emphasis and a lack of tools and equipment. Note that most schools lack functional laboratories, simulators, and technical materials. This prevents students from gradually practicing and refining their skills before entering the labor market.

In modern vocational education systems, instructors—both practical teachers and company mentors—play a decisive role in students' professional development. According to the OECD [31] in Germany and Austria, 60% of vocational training takes place within companies or practical laboratories. In Switzerland, every vocational school has certified laboratories and partnerships with industry that provide equipment and real-time training. The OECD [31] further highlights that a key factor behind the success of VET in these countries is continuous investment in technology and its integration into every curriculum module.

This component is systematically absent in Kosovo's VET system, creating a pronounced disconnection between what is taught in schools and what is required in the workplace. Despite the importance of their role, instructors in Kosovo are often not provided with specialized training, either in the technical aspects of their field or in pedagogical leadership methods. This shortcoming negatively affects the implementation of professional practice and diminishes students' vocational preparedness for the labor market.

By contrast, in Germany companies cannot accept interns unless they have licensed instructors. Similarly, in Austria mentors are required to undergo annual training to maintain their status as practice supervisors. Such quality assurance measures are among the key factors behind the success of the dual system [10].

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The absence of a coherent public policy for the training of mentors and instructors in Kosovo has also been emphasized by GIZ [17]; ETF [6] and Beka and Stublla [2]. This remains one of the most significant gaps in the institutional framework of professional practice.

6. Research Findings

The data collected in this study strongly support the above hypotheses:

- Only 68.4% of mentors reported some form of cooperation with schools, and the majority described it as partial or informal.
- Over 60% of practice coordinators reported the absence of standard contracts and a lack of structured communication with companies.
- Almost 45% of students indicated that they did not have an assigned mentor at their practice site.
- Approximately 55% of mentors stated that they had not received specific training for supervising interns.
- A significant proportion of students highlighted a lack of clarity in practical tasks and a mismatch between the practice and the curriculum content.

These findings demonstrate that when well-structured cooperation is absent, students do not gain a consistent or effective experience that contributes meaningfully to their professional development.

The absence of structured cooperation between schools and businesses has multiple consequences:

- Lack of coherence and clear direction, leading to process fragmentation.
- Students face unstructured experiences in which practical training is not outcome-oriented and depends heavily on the goodwill of individual company staff.
- Inconsistent evaluation standards, as schools cannot ensure fair and equal assessment for all students.
- Low student motivation: without a clear mentoring structure and defined objectives, interns lose their sense of purpose and engagement.
- Insufficient preparation for the labor market: the absence of practice with real content makes the transition from school to work difficult and ineffective.

Consistent with these findings, the literature emphasizes that Kosovo lacks a standardized and sustainable institutional approach to professional practice. The challenges include:

- Unstructured and informal cooperation with the private sector;
- Substantial lack of equipment and adequate school infrastructure;
- Unstable mentors without sufficient professional training;
- Absence of strategies and incentives for business involvement in training.

This situation highlights the urgent need to establish formalized partnerships, strengthen educational infrastructure, and design policies that promote structured, long-term participation of the private sector.

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Figure 1.
Key Challenges Faced by Coordinators in Implementing Professional Practice.

The graph illustrates the percentage of vocational school coordinators in Kosovo who identified key challenges in implementing professional practice within companies. As shown, 85% reported a lack of willingness from businesses to cooperate, while 70% emphasized the absence of continuous communication. In addition, 60% highlighted the lack of formalized contracts, indicating a low level of institutionalized cooperation. On the other hand, only 55.6% had attended any training on collaboration with the private sector, and just 44.4% felt they received adequate institutional support. These findings underscore the urgent need for strategic interventions and stronger backing from educational authorities.

6.1. Statistical Evidence from This Study

The findings from this empirical study strongly support the above hypothesis:

- Only 31.6% of mentors reported that students were adequately prepared for practice, indicating significant technical gaps resulting from the lack of practical application and organization within schools.
- Fifty-five percent of mentors stated that students did not possess basic practical skills when they began their practice in companies.
- Approximately 45% of students felt that the theoretical content they received at school was not reflected in their practical experience.
- As many as 74.6% of students reported acquiring technical skills only during their practice in companies, suggesting that schools are not fulfilling their formative practical function.

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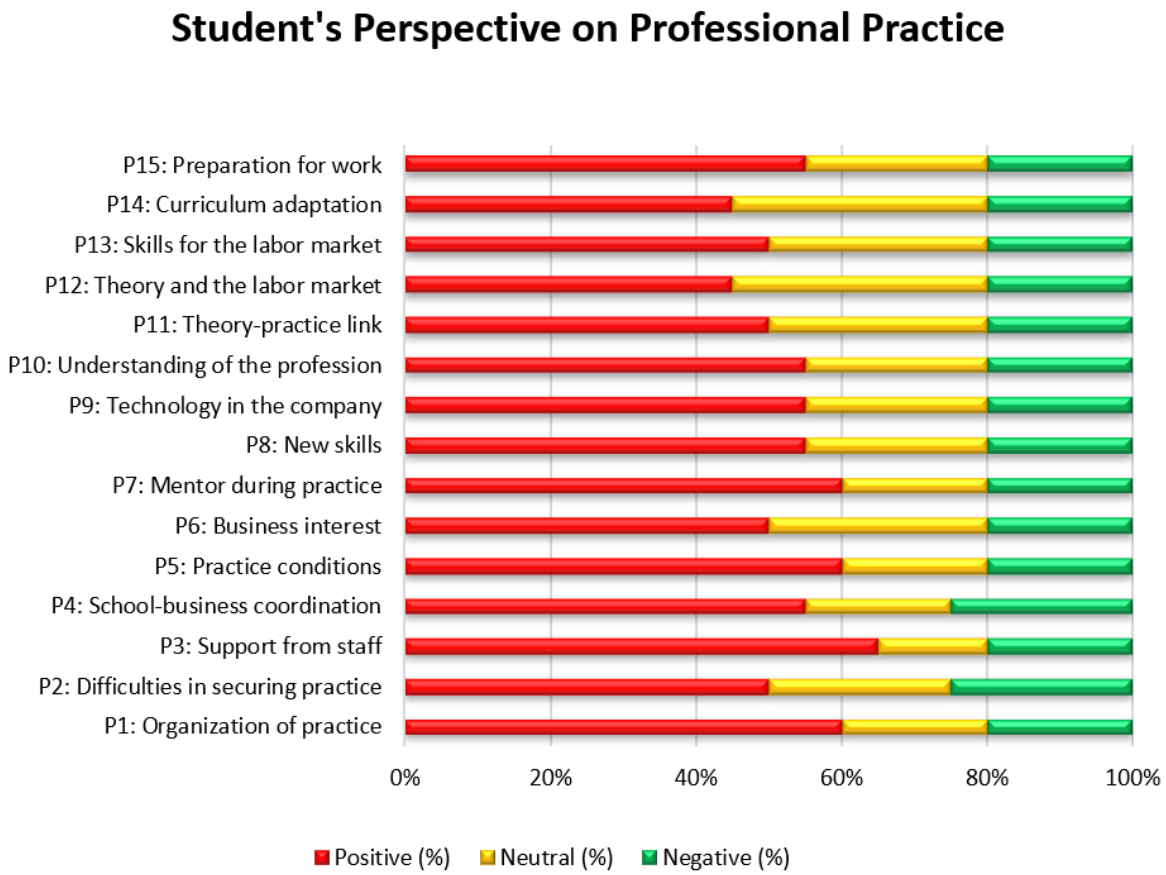


Figure 2.
Analysis of Survey Results with Students on Professional Practice in VET Schools in Kosovo.

The graph illustrates the percentage of positive, neutral, and negative responses for each of the fifteen survey questions related to the organization, supervision, and alignment of professional practice in Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools in Kosovo. The results show that most students reported positive perceptions in several key areas, such as the organization of practice (80.2%), staff support (75.4%), and the acquisition of new skills (74.6%). However, in areas such as curriculum alignment with labor market demands (54.8%) and assistance with post-school employment (60.3%), the indicators were considerably lower, reflecting a need for improvement. A notable percentage of neutral responses further suggests uncertainty or inconsistencies in students' experiences across schools.

These findings are consistent with the reports of Zylfijaj and Shaqiri [3] and ETF [6] which highlight the persistent mismatch between theoretical content and industry realities.

6.2. Consequences of the Dominance of Theoretical Learning in Vocational Education in Kosovo

The dominance of theoretical content without adequate practical tools results in:

- Students graduating with significant gaps in technical skills.
- A lack of practical competencies necessary for immediate employment.
- Teachers being unprepared to apply modern, practice-oriented teaching methods.
- Companies hesitating to engage interns due to their insufficient technical preparation.

6.3. Statistical and Empirical Evidence from the Study

The data collected in this study provide strong support for the hypothesis:

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- Only 44.7% of company mentors reported having attended any training for their role as internship supervisors (mentor data, 2024/25).
- More than 55% of mentors led internships without any didactic support or institutional guidance.
- Internship coordinators reported that the lack of professional capacity among mentors is one of the most serious challenges in developing professional practice.
- Student interviews indicated that instructors often failed to provide concrete guidance, did not monitor progress, and were not actively engaged in tracking the competencies acquired.
- Data from 74.6% of students who rated the internship as an experience that taught them something new were primarily linked to active and dedicated mentors, suggesting that the supervisor's role is a critical differentiator.

6.4. Consequences of the Lack of Instructor Qualification

The lack of professional and pedagogical training among instructors leads to several consequences:

- Internships are reduced to passive activities, where students merely *observe* without meaningful engagement.
- No objective mechanisms are in place to evaluate student progress.
- Students fail to acquire transferable competencies applicable in other work environments.
- Companies perceive internships not as an investment in the future but as a burden.

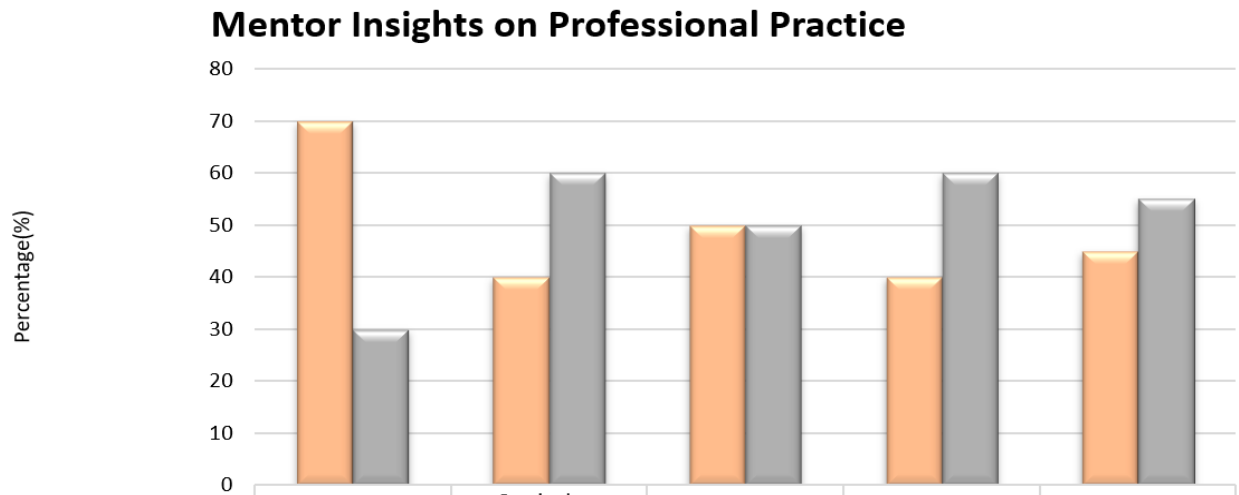


Figure 3.
Analysis of Mentors' Perceptions on the Implementation of Professional Practice.

The graph presents mentors' evaluations of the key factors influencing the quality of professional internships in Kosovo. More than two-thirds of mentors (68.4%) fully agreed that cooperation between schools and businesses exists, whereas the alignment of the curriculum with labor market needs was rated significantly lower, with only 31.6% expressing a positive view. Furthermore, 55% of mentors reported that they had not received any training for their role, and 60% assessed students' preparation as insufficient. These findings highlight the urgent need to improve mentor training, reform the curriculum, and strengthen structured collaboration with the private sector.

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7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The activity carried out through this research has provided an in-depth and multidimensional analysis of the challenges faced by vocational schools in Kosovo in the implementation of professional practice, with particular emphasis on the school–business partnership, the theoretical dominance of the curriculum, and the lack of qualified instructors. In accordance with the research aim and the stated objectives, both the theoretical analyses and the empirical data have confirmed the validity of the three main hypotheses of this study:

- Hypothesis H1 was confirmed through data showing that the lack of structured cooperation between schools and businesses significantly undermines the quality, coherence, and sustainability of students' practical experience.
- Hypothesis H2 was supported by empirical results showing that the dominance of theoretical content and the lack of practical infrastructure in schools result in insufficient technical preparation of students.
- Hypothesis H3 was confirmed through the analysis of the role of unqualified instructors in practical experience.

The comparative analysis with models from European countries such as Germany and Switzerland has further strengthened the scientific argument of this study, demonstrating that success in professional practice depends on institutionalized cooperation, strengthened capacities and empowerment of instructors, and the integration of practical content into the official curriculum.

8. Main Conclusions

The study has identified several fundamental conclusions that reflect the current state of professional practice in Kosovo:

8.1. Lack of Structured Cooperation between Schools and Businesses

- The empirical results show that the interaction between educational institutions and the private sector remains fragmented, informal, and unsustainable.
- Many enterprises accept interns through individual arrangements, bypassing institutional mechanisms. This generates uncertainty, produces unequal standards, and makes the practical experience inconsistent.
- The evaluation process often remains subjective and disconnected from the coherence of the official curriculum.

8.2. The Dominance of Theoretical Content in the Curriculum

- The vocational education system in Kosovo remains primarily focused on theoretical instruction, while the absence of functional laboratories and practical equipment is particularly evident.
- This creates a considerable gap between the knowledge acquired in school and the competencies required by the labor market.
- Many students graduate without mastering basic technical skills, which further fuels employers' hesitation to integrate them into the workforce.

8.3. The Role of Instructors and Mentors

- A significant portion of mentors have not undergone training programs for managing professional practice.
- The lack of pedagogical preparation and technical expertise often reduces training to a passive activity, with students limited to observation only.
- Consequently, students do not acquire transferable skills, while businesses perceive the process as a burden rather than an investment in human capital.

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- Without proper support and development, mentors remain unmotivated to foster students' practical competencies.

8.4. Comparison with European Models

- Dual education systems in countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland demonstrate that the effectiveness of professional practice is closely linked to institutionalized partnerships and systematic mentor certification.
- In Kosovo, the absence of these mechanisms limits alignment with European standards and hinders the development of a sustainable, standardized training system.
- Compared to these models, Kosovo remains in the initial phase of implementing dual learning within vocational education.

8.5. Underrepresented Aspects in Literature and Scientific Research

- The study identified a lack of analyses addressing the gender dimension.
- There is no assessment of the long-term impact of professional practice on employment.
- No comprehensive evaluation exists regarding costs and benefits for businesses.
- These gaps limit a complete understanding of the phenomenon and complicate the drafting of evidence-based public policies aligned with European best practices.

9. Recommendations

To ensure high standards in the management of professional practice and maximize its impact on employability, the following institutional and practical measures are recommended:

9.1. Institutionalization of Structured School–Business Collaboration

- Develop a national strategy with standard agreements, joint objectives, and monitoring mechanisms.
- Ensure equality for students, standardize practical experience, and establish sustainable partnerships between education and business.

9.2. Certification and Professional Development of Instructors and Mentors

- Develop mandatory training and certification programs in cooperation with MASHTI, chambers of commerce, and the business community.
- Provide continuous professional development supported by progressive career advancement systems.
- Encourage outstanding mentors through recognition, rewards, and professional engagement opportunities.

9.3. Modernization of Practical Infrastructure

- Invest in workshops, laboratories, equipment, and environments that reflect labor market realities.
- Enable students to acquire sustainable competencies prior to company-based practice.

9.4. Integration of Practical Training into the Curriculum

- Ensure that curricula include practical components as a necessity.
- Pair theoretical modules with practical applications in laboratories or companies, following the German-speaking model.

9.5. Creation of a National Digital Platform

- Establish an online system for sharing best practices between schools and businesses.

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- Enable student progress tracking, mentor reporting, and transparent communication.
- Use the platform as a basis for standardized monitoring and evaluation.

9.6. Incentivizing Businesses to Participate in Professional Practice

- Provide fiscal and institutional incentives (e.g., tax breaks, state benefits) for companies engaging in training.
- Promote professional practice as a strategic investment in the workforce rather than a burden.

9.7. Addressing the Gender Dimension and Social Equity

- Actively promote girls' participation in VET, addressing structural and cultural barriers.
- Expand opportunities for all social groups, contributing to gender equality.

9.8. Cost–Benefit Analysis for Businesses

- Conduct specialized studies measuring the financial and economic impacts of internships on businesses.
- Use findings to design balanced, evidence-based policies for both public and private sectors.

In summary- the lack of qualified instructors poses a direct risk to the quality and effectiveness of vocational training in Kosovo. Mandatory training, certification, and continuous professional development of instructors and mentors are fundamental prerequisites for any successful reform. These measures will ensure high standards, provide students with sustainable learning experiences, and align VET with labor market demands.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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