**TVET Professional Development in the Pacific: A Toolkit Approach**

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**Abstract**

The TVET Online Toolkit (the Toolkit) was developed as part of the partnership for the open distance and flexible learning (ODFL) in the Pacific project funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT). Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and its regional centre (Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) hosted at the University of the South Pacific are implementing the project, aimed at improving access to equitable and quality training opportunities in the Commonwealth Pacific Island countries (PICs): Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The open access Toolkit was designed for continuous professional development (CPD) of practitioners for self-directed and life-long learning. The micro-learning resources it contains allow practitioners in a range of roles to engage in bite-sized learning about professional capabilities that interest them whenever and wherever it is convenient for them.

The resources on the Toolkit were designed through extensive consultations with key

stakeholders in the Pacific, including teachers/trainers, leaders, and employers. The

resources include mix of curated e-learning modules, case studies, research articles, and templates tailored to the regional labour market needs. The recourses were piloted at 5 TVET institutions in 5 PICs between 2022 and 2023.

A CPD framework was developed and piloted, that enabled analysis of the resources,

identification of gaps in the Toolkit, development of a capability mapping tool, and guidelines for future development of the Toolkit.

The mapping tool was developed and piloted, that provides a structured way for practitioners to engage with the resources, to help them to self-assess their capabilities, identify the capabilities they want to strengthen, find relevant resources on the Toolkit to help them strengthen the desired capabilities, and think about how they might demonstrate their capabilities to enable micro-credentialling.

A community of practice (COP) was established to encourage connections and collaboration, with the identification of in-country coordinators in the PICs to advocate for the Toolkit and to provide mentoring support to the practitioners, coordinated by PACFOLD. Practitioners can access and adapt resources online and offline for their CPD using informal learning approaches. A mid-term evaluation report points to the potential of reaching those who would otherwise not be reached through formal and non-formal learning approaches.

This practice paper summarises the context and purposes, innovative mechanisms and

technology, practical application and implications of the Toolkit in fostering the transformation of CPD within the Pacific’s TVET landscape.

**Introduction**

To ensure the quality and relevance of technical and vocational education and training

(TVET), continuous professional development (CPD) programmes are offered through formal, non-formal and informal approaches. While formal and non-formal CPD approaches are common, the use of informal approaches in community settings, workplaces, and civil society activities are less prevalent. Informal approaches are used to train teachers on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction1, leadership and management training2, and for the delivery of basic education3. However, literature on credentialing and the recognition and accreditation of credentials earned through informal approaches is relatively scares in the PICs.

TVET practitioners should continuously update their pedagogical, technical, and transversal

skills to stay current with trends, technologies, and best practices in their occupational fields.

Frameworks used for CPD include Kolb’s learning cycle, Gibbs’ reflective cycle, the 70:20:10

model, and the four-step process model, amongst others. Some of the models of CPD used

globally can be categorised as training, award-bearing, deficit, cascade, standards-based,

coaching/mentoring, community of practice, action research, and transformative4. Studies

indicate the need for effective TVET management and coordination, affordable and equitable

access to quality skills training across Commonwealth Pacific Island countries (PICs) to

address the ever-changing labour market needs5. However, there is a notable lack of

literature on CPD for competence-based training, assessment and foundational skills for selfdirected and life-long learning using informal learning approaches in the PICs.

The TVET Online Toolkit (the Toolkit) was developed as part of the partnership for the open

distance and flexible learning (ODFL) in the Pacific project funded by the New Zealand

Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT). Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and its

regional centre (Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD)

hosted at the University of the South Pacific are implementing the project, aimed at improving access to equitable and quality training opportunities in the PICs: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The open access Toolkit is designed for CPD, offering practitioners bite-sized self-directed

and life-long learning opportunities accessible anytime and anywhere at their convenience.

The aim was to improve the quality of instruction and result in increased access to high

quality learning and training opportunities for youth. The practitioners targeted include tertiary TVET providers and their industry partners, TVET practitioners, and state officers at TVET agencies and ministries responsible for TVET.

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1 A Case for Formal Education in the Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Pacific Islands Region

2 Leadership and Management Training in Pacific Island Countries | SpringerLink

3 https://www.cedol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/82-84-2007.pdf

4 Models of Continuing Professional Development: a framework for analysis

5 Skilling the Pacific: Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the Pacific | Asian Development Bank (adb.org)

**Practice Under Scrutiny: Professional Development of Practitioners Using Resources**

**on the Pacific TVET Online Toolkit**

Project activities commenced in 2021 with extensive consultations with TVET teachers,

trainers, leaders, and employers across the PICs to define the objects and refine the

requirements for CPD using self-directed learning approaches. Stakeholder involvement and

feedback was instrumental in shaping the design of the Toolkit and the development of

relevant micro-learning resources.

To identify the professional training gaps the Toolkit should address, virtual workshops were

conducted with six TVET stakeholder groups from PICs using the double diamond approach.

The consultations revealed that TVET implementation varies across the countries, particularly in the tourism, construction, and agriculture sectors. Challenges identified include inequitable access to education, vulnerability to natural disasters, geographical remoteness, limited resources, and tight budgets. As a result, there few CPD opportunities, insufficient learning resources, difficulties with competency-based learning and assessment, unclear TVET pathways, and prevalent stereotypes.

An iterative design process for the Toolkit started in 2021, focusing on accessibility anytime,

anywhere, with downloadable and printable content. It supports practical use of microlearning resources in workplaces and features a user-friendly interface for easy access and navigation. The curated content is culturally relevant and aligned with training context and practices across the PICs, offering a range of resources such as e-learning modules, case studies, and templates to enhance the professional skills of TVET practitioners.

The Toolkit is designed with 'how-to' micro-learning modules that TVET practitioners can

freely download and use offline without needing to sign in. It includes resources on

competency-based learning and assessment and developing competency-based learning

resources. It also includes resources on how to teach online, engaging with communities of

practice, collaborating with industry, and promoting TVET as a viable pathway. Additionally,

TVET leaders can find resources on enhancing new staff capabilities and providing CPD.

Employers can find resources on competence assessment, building relationships with

providers, and evaluating competence in the workplace.

With support from COL, seven partner institutions from Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati,

Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga conducted unstructured CPD pilot activities. These

activities follow a four-phase process:

1. Design Phase: Institutions hold workshops to set CPD goals and develop detailed

implementation plans.

2. Activity Phase: Teams carry out CPD activities with guidance from institutional

mentors.

3. Reflective Practice Phase: Teams use learning logs or e-portfolios to reflect on their

learning and assess progress against CPD goals.

4. Application Phase: Individuals and teams apply the acquired knowledge and skills in their jobs.

During the pilot, several challenges were identified: intermittent internet connectivity in parts

of the Pacific, high internet costs, insufficient digital devices, language barriers (as English is a second language), difficulties in measuring and tracking progress, and low ICT literacy

among some practitioners. Common misconceptions included the belief that the Toolkit is a

course requiring a facilitator and certificates, that it provides subject-specific content, and that ministries or institutions should support or incentivize its use.

To address the challenges from the pilot phase, a CPD framework was developed in 2023 to

analyze the Toolkit's resources and identify gaps. This led to the development of a

professional development framework, a capability mapping tool, guidelines for future Toolkit

updates and a sustainability plan. Additionally, in-country coordinators were trained to

advocate for the Toolkit, provide mentoring and support, and monitor self-learning using the

micro-learning resources on the Toolkit.

The professional development framework outlines key capabilities across four domains: core, design, delivery, and leadership.



Based on the capabilities, a mapping tool was developed to help practitioners self-assess

their capabilities, identify areas for improvement, access relevant resources on the Toolkit to

help them strengthen the desired capabilities at their own time and place, and consider how

to demonstrate their skills for micro-credentialing.

A community of practice (COP) was established to encourage connections and collaboration, with the identification of in-country coordinators in the PICs to advocate for the Toolkit and to provide mentoring support to the practitioners, coordinated by PACFOLD, as part of the sustainability plan.

**Discussion and conclusion**

In this practice, stakeholders are involved in the design, development, implementation,

monitoring and evaluation (David Johnson and Roger Johnson’s Cooperative Learning theory and Kenneth Bruffee’s Collaborative Learning theory). TVET practitioners use a mapping tool

to self-identify prior professional capabilities and their knowledge or skill gaps (Habermas &

Honneth critical social theory). They then use self-directed learning approaches and

technologies at their own time, pace and places (Knowles theory of andragogy) by

constructing knowledge and skills (Piaget and Vygotsky constructivist theory), through

experiences (Klob’s experiential learning theory) with the micro-learning resources on the

Toolkit as they observe and model practices by experienced trainers at their respective

institutions and mentors in their community of practice (Bandura’s social learning theory). The practitioners also reflect on their experiences through e-portfolios and communities of practice (Schon’s reflective practice theory) leading to transformative changes (Mezirow’s

transformative learning theory) for social justice, empowerment and lifelong learning.

Challenges are being addressed through the deployment of COL’s AptusPi devices for offline micro-learning, upgrades to the Toolkit for improved interactivity and offline use, enhanced mentor support, and AI integration to aid self-directed, lifelong learning.

Professional skills gaps and skills mismatch amongst TVET practitioners were noted while

piloting use of the micro-learning resources on the Toolkit. TVET practitioners need to

develop a culture for self-initiated learning through structured or unstructured CPD

programmes. Use of structured CPD characterised by planned learning outcomes typical in

formal or non-formal learning settings should be encouraged, that is evidenced by enrolment

and attendance records, completion records, and assessment records. Unstructured CPD

characterised by unplanned learning outcomes typical of informal learning settings should

also be encouraged, that is evidenced on their respective e-portfolios using artefacts and

reflections on mentorship and on-the-job training records, performance reviews or appraisals, and satisfaction or feedback survey reports.

In general, the desired outcome in the TVET sector in the PIC, is for practitioners to develop

and demonstrate work-oriented capabilities and receive credentials for these skills. Open

learning approaches will provide equitable access to quality professional development.

Credentialing of professional skills benefits individuals, employers, and the community. Plans are underway to develop a framework for credentialing micro-learning and developing

credentials within PACFOLD’s learning management system, in alignment with the Toolkit’s

micro-learning resources. National and regional qualification bodies should appreciate the

Toolkit’s relevance for CPD and recognise and accredit credentials earned through

unstructured and informal learning methods. Plans are in place o validate the sustainability plan with stakeholders as the practice is scaled in more PICs.

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