

The influence of Religion in Vocational Education and Training

A survey among organizations active in VET

ADDITIONAL REPORT



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1. Introduction

A survey was conducted about the role of religion in (Vocational) Education. This was done as one of the case studies for the workgroup 'Religion as Driver of Change' for the Knowledge centre Religion and Development. A report was submitted to the knowledge centre in the required format.

Because this format does not present all the outcomes of the survey, this additional report was written to present the results more systematically. It is advised to read the other report first, because reference is made to analyses made in that report.

The survey was sent to partner organizations of Oikonomos, Red een Kind and Woord en Daad, but in this additional report, only the results of the partners of Woord en Daad are taken into account. Most partners indicated that their names could be mentioned in reports, but some preferred to remain anonymous. For this reason, no names are mentioned in this report.

The research was carried out to determine the role that the Christian identity of the organizations plays in the strategies, the planning, the implementation and the (perceived) quality, results and impact of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs.

2. Methodology

A questionnaire was developed (see appendix 1) and sent to all partners who are involved in VET. Partners who are not involved in VET but are involved in education programs were included in the research.

23 Questionnaires were sent out and 17 were returned, which represents 74%. In terms of research, this is a satisfactory response, although it is less than we expected. 3 Questionnaires were left out of the research for quality reasons.

The remaining 14 organizations come from Africa (4), Asia (7), Middle / South America (3).

Apart from the questionnaires, an interview has been held with representatives of 5 partner organisations. Outcomes of this interview have been included in the results.

3. Findings

This paragraph will present or summarize the answers given per section of the questionnaire. In any table, numbers refer to the number of organisation who gave a particular answer.

A. Strategies and Objectives

In the vision and mission statements, frequent reference is made to religious motivation: Word of God in action, compassion, command of God. In some cases, bringing the gospel is included in the mission statements. Cooperation with churches is mentioned in some vision statements.

Does the organisation have objectives for evangelism?

Yes, in separate department	5
Yes, in some or all departments	5
Yes, but not explicitly	1
No	3

Several organisations remark that there is no mix between religion and social service / development.

Objectives for VET

Most organisations refer to income generation, improved life conditions, reduced poverty and self reliance. Five organisations explicitly mention moral values, personality development or life skills as part of their objectives.

What is the ideal person and what are the top 5 values?

Integrity, honesty	11
Moral, good behaviour, responsible, exemplary	11
Generous, caring for others	10
Hard working	9
Self-confidence, dignity, self-respect, assertive	8
Professionalism, knowledge	6

Other points mentioned are: respectfulness toward others, thankfulness, humility, personal purity and holistic person.

Two main lines appear: moral values and dignity

B. Religious context within the organisations

Board membership: almost unanimously: Christians, evangelical Christians, born again Christians, respected Christians. Several organisations emphasize that board members come from different denominations. In some cases they represent their churches, in some case they are supposed not to. In a single case, all board members are from the same church community.

Staff: 5 have solely Christians as staff, 3 indicate to have preference for Christians under condition that quality and competence is equal and 4 accept staff of any religion, based on competence (and with acceptance of Christian values).

Influence of religion on policy formulation: several organisations indicate that Biblical values / ethical codes are underlying all policies. Some have worked out such a code explicitly. Others emphasize that policy is made by or based on the target group, irrespective of their religious views.

Influence of churches or other religious bodies

9 organisations indicate that they cooperate with local churches (7) or church councils (2). Only 1 organisation is linked to a single denomination, several emphasize diversity. 4 organisations have no relations with churches. Informal influence of churches is not reported by many organisations. Some mention influence through church attendance of staff.

C. Religious context around the organisations

As is worked out in the report for the workgroup 'Religion as driver of change', the religious contexts can be divided into 3 categories:

1. "Minority situation" 6 organisations
Christianity is a small minority among a diffuse religious situation or among a majority religion
2. "Diffuse situation" 3 organisations
Christianity is one of several major religions
3. "Majority situation" 4 organisations
Christianity is the majority religion

It turned out that many differences in how religion is expressed and how open the organisation is toward others, are dependent on the religious context. (e.g. the value 'respect for others' was only mentioned by organisations from a minority situation).

Most organisations do not experience their values and norms to be deviant from society around them. Especially organisations in a minority situation emphasize the commonness of their values with the rest of society, while organisations in a majority situation relatively more often emphasize their being different from mainstream Christianity.

Religious conflicts are not common, only at a very small, personal scale. In one case (diffuse situation), upcoming Islamic fundamentalism was reported.

Remarkable detail is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. Some organisations place it in the category 'same Christians', others in the category 'Christians with different convictions' and still others in 'different religion'.

Changes in context

8 organisations report directly or indirectly rising standards of living, but several mention the parallel rising of inequality. Some report this to have a negative impact on norms and values in society, sometimes going along with rising secularism. One organisation mentions increasing room for religion in government.

D. Religion in VET / Education

Factors that led to involvement in VET: All organisations make reference to the need they saw. 2 specifically mention the need for Christian / sincere workers and 1 organisation mentions man's being created in the image of God.

5 organisations mention that religion did not play any role in the decision to be involved in VET, 7 mention religion as a motivation (love, concern, Biblical mandate) and 2 organisations mention that evangelism was the main motivation (or primary focus) for involvement in VET. In both cases, this is not included in the objectives.

Why are you, as a Christian organisation, involved in VET?

Added value because of moral / ethical teaching	6
Added value because human dignity is central	2
Christian motivation as driving force	4
Christian tradition has history of involvement in education	1

Does your religious identity make it harder or easier?

9 organisations find it easier, because of joy and good motivation (3) or because of being appreciated or respected (4), 3 organisations find it harder, because more is involved than just technical skills. 4 organisations see no difference; some indicate that they do not like to compare themselves with those of other religious convictions.

Does religion play a role in admission of students / trainees?

Without exception: no. In some cases, there is discrimination based on socio-economic criteria only.

Expression of religious identity in VET

Almost all organisations mention that lessons on ethics and / or life skills are being given, some as part of the curriculum, some outside the (state-) curriculum. Most organisations also include Christian or Biblical education, but not all. Especially in minority situations, moral teaching is often not explicitly Christian. An example of practical ethics is an organisation that

has a 'help your neighbour' program in the school, where students are encouraged to contribute for more needy fellow students.

Most organisations do offer morning prayers, devotions and / or other religious activities. In several cases, this is voluntary as students have different religious convictions (notably in minority situations). In diffuse situations, some organisations make explicitly clear to parents that the school has a Christian identity including Christian teachings.

About lifestyle: most organisations (10) mention that teachers function as a role model. How this exactly happens is less clear. Few organisations have specific seminars for teachers to encourage their exemplary behaviour. One organisation has a Human Development Class, which is later referred to as the most influential element of the training.

Most organisations do have gender specific objectives or encourage girls to attend school or to participate in non-traditional trainings. In most organisations where prayers are held, both males and females can lead such prayers or devotions. For some: only teachers, for others: also the pupils. Only one organisation reported to have separate ethical teachings for girls and boys, regarding life skills / sexuality.

E. Effects of Religion

Religion does

Improve the quality of VET	11
Help to reach objectives	12
Give better chances for wage employment	12
Give better chances for self employment	11

This shows that organisations are very confident that the influence of their religious identity on the results and impact of their VET programs is very positive. 9 organisations explicitly mention the influence of ethical / moral teaching and 4 organisations mention the self-respect and dignity that comes through the Christian faith.

Several organisations make mention of the testimonies of outsiders: students are preferred by employers, etc. This is an indication that the effects are not only perceived by the organisations but also by other stakeholders.

Two lines of argument about the influence of religion on the results of VET appear:

1. The ethical and moral (Christian) teaching, explicitly and by example, in theory and practical, leads to ethical and moral people, who are therefore more respected, more demanded and have better changes on the labour market.
2. The attention for character formation, based on the teaching of man being created in the image of God, leads to self-respect, dignity and a self-reliant and entrepreneurial spirit and helps people to cope with reality with confidence and trust. This makes them better equipped for wage, but especially for self-employment.

Most organisations are positive about the influence of their religion in the development of wider society. The reasoning is mainly the effect that individuals will likely have on society; 'just people constitute just institutions'.

F. Changes

Half of the organisations report that no changes have been made in strategies, plan or the role of religion in VET. For some organisations the reason is the newness of the program. Changes that are reported are improvement of quality, a shift to more market based planning and more attention for gender. No changes about the role of ethics / moral teaching / attitude formation / behaviour change or teaching about dignity and self respect are mentioned. Also the changes in the context did not lead to changes in the program in many cases.

G. Conclusions

Partner relations

Most mentioned aspects are trust, openness, reciprocity, free exchange of ideas and common goals. In one case the spiritual aspect was mentioned. In all but one case organisations find that sufficient attention is given to the most important aspect.

The remaining questions in this section were meant as a double check for other sections. The ranking statements received the following points, in descending order of popularity:

Because of the Christian identity, students are:

1. better citizens	64
2. Like to work hard	64
3. more determined to achieve purposes	63
4. more aware of responsibilities	60
5. more creative	60
6. better employees	59
7. better christians	50
8. better entrepreneurs	50
9. more aware of rights	48
10. different worldview	47
11. learned to accept future destiny, whatever it may be	38
12. think on shorter time scale	32
13. more individualistic	26

These numbers have no exact meaning and these results are only indicative. What is striking however, are the low scores of the bottom 3 statements.

Statement 11 could indicate fatalism, so a high level of disagreement is in accordance with the argument about entrepreneurial attitude. The same applies to statement 12.

4. Analysis and conclusions

Paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 from the main report show the analyses and conclusions from these findings. Numbers of organisations mentioned may differ from this additional report, because partner organisations of Red een Kind and Oikonomos are included in the main report. However, the lines of argument used, the analyses and conclusions do not differ significantly.

Recommendations for policy makers are formulated in paragraph 4 of the main report.

Recommendations for partner organisations:

1. All organisations are confident about the positive impacts of the Christian identity on the results of their VET or education programs (the two lines of argument: better morals / behaviour / discipline and more sense of dignity and self respect). Therefore:
 - a. Work out explicitly in project proposals:
 - i. In what way the religious identity of the organisation underlies the programs and is expressed in the programs.
 - ii. What are the expected impacts of this religious identity on the results of the programs.
 - iii. How these expected positive influences will be verified through evaluations and research.
 - b. Integrate character formation and behaviour change in the project strategies.
 - c. Plan for evaluations and researches that include the elements of behaviour change and character formation, but also the impact of the religious identity. It will be important to do this in an objective way and to include the perspectives of

those of other stakeholders (do they also believe that the Christian identity influences the results of the program positively?)

2. Never work with hidden objectives in projects or programs. If character formation (based on Christian ethical values) is part of the objective, this should be worked out, including how this is necessary or helpful to reach the development objective.
It is not advisable to execute VET programs with the (hidden) objective to convert people.
3. Always make clear to all stakeholders how religion is expressed in the program, and to what extent students / trainees are obliged or expected to participate in religious activities. This is less important in majority situations, but more in diffuse or minority situations. It may be necessary to have parents sign for agreement, as is practised by one organisation. This will help to avoid accusations of manipulation or pressurizing of students.
4. Continuous monitoring of changes in the context is needed: socio-economic changes, but also the moral implications of such changes. Just as the general program strategy should reflect changes in the context, the element of ethics should reflect the changes in moral values in society.