



Professional Development and Training Needs of Vocational Rehabilitation Practitioners in Kosovo: A Comprehensive National Survey

Original research article

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Abstract

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) practitioners in Kosovo operate within a developing post-conflict social support system, which requires strong professional accountability and evidence-based practice. Despite this need, formal certification systems and specialized training programs remain limited. This study provides the first comprehensive national assessment of the perceptions, practices, and professional development needs of VR practitioners in Kosovo, establishing baseline data to strengthen the national vocational rehabilitation framework. A cross-sectional online survey was conducted among practitioners from public and non-public VR service providers across Kosovo's seven regions between November 2023 and May 2024. The survey examined perceptions of research and training, current professional development activities, barriers to engagement, and preferences for training modalities. Out of 271 practitioners contacted, 142 completed the survey (52.4% response rate). The results showed that practitioners recognized the high utility of research ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.75$) and training ($M=4.30$, $SD=0.70$), but reported significant barriers including limited access to research guidance ($M=2.45$, $SD=1.15$) and lack of time for self-study ($M=2.60$, $SD=1.10$). Interactive training methods were strongly preferred, with in-person training ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.80$) and online live training ($M=3.95$, $SD=0.85$) rated higher than text-based materials ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.15$). Experience was positively correlated with training engagement ($r=.245$, $p<.05$). Regional disparities were also evident, with practitioners in Pristina reporting higher levels of engagement compared to other regions. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict training engagement, with

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demographic variables entered in the first step and perception variables in the second. The final model explained 32.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .321$, $F(6, 135) = 10.65$, $p < .001$). Years of experience ($\beta = .22$, $p = .011$) and perceived usefulness of training ($\beta = .28$, $p = .002$) were significant unique predictors. These findings reveal a motivated workforce that faces systemic barriers to professional development. The implementation of Knowledge Translation frameworks, technology-enabled training platforms, and structured mentorship programs is essential to enhance VR service quality within Kosovo's developing rehabilitation system and, ultimately, to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Keywords: *Vocational rehabilitation, professional development, Kosovo, training needs, knowledge translation, evidence-based practice, post-conflict rehabilitation*

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is critical in facilitating employment and social inclusion for persons with disabilities, particularly in post-conflict settings where systemic challenges are pronounced. Effective VR service delivery depends on well-trained practitioners equipped with up-to-date knowledge and competencies. Internationally, VR training is structured around formal education, certification, and continuous professional development, supported by frameworks such as the Council on Rehabilitation Education and the European Qualifications Framework (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2023). However, developing countries like Kosovo face significant obstacles in establishing sustainable professional development systems due to limited resources, faculty shortages, and infrastructural constraints (Disability and Development Partners, 2022; World Health Organization, 2023). These challenges contribute to regional disparities and inconsistencies in service quality. Emerging strategies, including Knowledge Translation frameworks (Graham et al., 2006) and technology-enhanced training modalities (Takahashi, Yamamoto, & Sato, 2021), offer promising avenues to bridge gaps between research and practice and to overcome geographic and systemic barriers. This study explores the professional development and training needs of VR practitioners in Kosovo, emphasizing the importance of tailored, accessible, and sustainable approaches to strengthen the national VR workforce and improve inclusive employment outcomes in this context.

Employment represents a fundamental pathway to social inclusion and economic independence for persons with disabilities, particularly in post-conflict societies like Kosovo (United Nations, 2006).

With approximately 5.1% of the population living with disabilities, Kosovo's vocational rehabilitation (VR) system plays a critical role in facilitating workforce participation and improving quality of life for individuals with disabilities (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2024). The significance of employment extends beyond economic benefits, contributing to identity formation, self-efficacy, and overall psychological well-being (Bradshaw, Armour, & Roseborough, 2007; Rogers, Lyass, Anthony, & Penk, 2006). Kosovo's VR system has undergone significant transformation since independence in 2008. The establishment of specialized legislation, including the Law on Vocational Ability, Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities (2013), created a framework for systematic VR services (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2009). Currently, services are delivered through regional centers, non-governmental organizations, and employment agencies with dedicated disability support units (Berisha & Pula, 2015). However, unlike established systems such as in the United States, where Certified Rehabilitation Counselors must complete master's degree programs and maintain continuing education requirements, Kosovo lacks formal certification requirements for VR practitioners. This absence of standardized qualifications creates challenges in ensuring consistent service quality and professional accountability (Disability Rights International, 2022). The European Union's influence on Kosovo's development has emphasized inclusive employment practices aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Kosovo signed in 2013 (European Commission, 2023). These international commitments necessitate a skilled workforce capable of delivering evidence-based VR services. Recent efforts

by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW) and international organizations have aimed to strengthen the VR sector. However, research on the expertise and professional development needs of VR practitioners in Kosovo remains limited (Shatri & Salko, 2016). Understanding practitioners' perceptions regarding their professional development is crucial for establishing effective capacity-building strategies and improving service delivery outcomes.

Literature Review

International Standards in Vocational Rehabilitation Training

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) training internationally is grounded in formal education, certification, and continuous professional development to ensure practitioners possess the necessary competencies for effective service delivery. The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredits master's degree programs that train VR professionals in critical areas such as assessment, counseling, case management, and job development (Defur & Taymans, 1995). European countries have aligned their VR training programs with the European Qualifications Framework, promoting standardized competencies and cross-border workforce mobility (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2023). These frameworks emphasize the importance of structured educational pathways and ongoing skill enhancement to maintain professional accountability and service quality.

Challenges in Developing Countries

Developing countries face significant challenges in establishing and sustaining professional development systems for VR practitioners. Common obstacles include limited financial and human resources, scarcity of specialized faculty, and competing social priorities that hinder comprehensive training program implementation (Disability and Development Partners, 2022; World Health Organization, 2023). Despite these constraints, innovative solutions such as leveraging technology and fostering international partnerships have demonstrated potential in overcoming barriers to capacity building in resource-constrained settings (Khan et al., 2018). However, the

limited availability of formal certification and specialized training programs remains a persistent issue, contributing to inconsistencies in service quality and professional accountability (Disability Rights International, 2022).

Knowledge Translation in Rehabilitation

Knowledge Translation (KT) frameworks have emerged as effective strategies to bridge the gap between research evidence and clinical practice in rehabilitation services (Graham et al., 2006). KT approaches facilitate the synthesis, dissemination, and application of research findings in practical settings, enhancing evidence-based practice even in environments with limited direct access to research institutions (Graham et al., 2006). In post-conflict contexts like Kosovo, where access to up-to-date rehabilitation research is constrained, KT frameworks can play a critical role in translating international evidence into locally relevant interventions and training materials, thereby improving practitioner competence and service outcomes.

Technology-Enhanced Professional Development

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online training modalities, revealing their effectiveness and accessibility advantages compared to traditional face-to-face instruction (Takahashi, Yamamoto, & Sato, 2021). Well-designed online professional development programs offer flexibility and overcome geographic and infrastructural barriers, which are particularly relevant in Kosovo due to its dispersed population and limited transportation infrastructure in rural areas (Edutask Institute, 2025). Technology-enabled training platforms can provide interactive learning experiences that align with adult learning principles and practitioners' preferences, enhancing engagement and knowledge retention (Takahashi, Yamamoto, & Sato, 2021).

Regional Disparities and Systemic Barriers

Evidence from Kosovo highlights significant regional disparities in access to professional development opportunities, with practitioners in urban centers like Pristina benefiting from greater educational

resources, international partnerships, and professional networks compared to those in peripheral regions (Kelmendi & Hamby, 2022). Systemic barriers such as limited time availability, financial constraints, language barriers related to English-language materials, and lack of organizational support further impede practitioner engagement in professional development activities (Aliu & Bushi, 2019). Addressing these disparities and barriers is essential to ensure equitable service quality and to strengthen the national VR system.

Professional Development Needs and Preferences

Studies indicate that VR practitioners recognize the high utility of professional development, including both research engagement and training activities, but face difficulties in accessing mentorship and securing time for self-study (Fadyl & Mcpherson, 2009). Experience positively correlates with increased engagement and perceived usefulness of professional development, suggesting that motivation and capacity for learning grow with practice (Plotner, Strauser, & Trach, 2012). Moreover, practitioners express a strong preference for interactive and technology-enhanced training methods, such as live online sessions and in-person workshops, over passive text-based materials, reflecting contemporary adult learning theories and the need for engaging, flexible learning environments (Rogers, Lyass, Anthony, & Penk, 2006).

Implications for Kosovo's Vocational Rehabilitation System

The literature underscores the importance of developing structured, sustainable professional development programs tailored to the specific needs and contexts of VR practitioners in Kosovo. Incorporating Knowledge Translation frameworks can enhance the applicability of international research, while technology-enabled training platforms can mitigate geographic and infrastructural challenges. Addressing systemic barriers and regional disparities through coordinated policy

efforts and sustainable funding models is critical to building a competent, accountable, and motivated VR workforce capable of advancing inclusive employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in a post-conflict society (Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon the literature, a conceptual framework was developed to guide this study. It posits that professional development engagement (the outcome variable) is influenced by a combination of: (1) Practitioner Characteristics (e.g., years of experience, education level, work setting); (2) Perceptions and Attitudes (e.g., perceived usefulness and enjoyment of research and training); and (3) Contextual Factors (e.g., systemic barriers, regional location). These factors are moderated by the availability of enabling structures such as KT frameworks and technology-enhanced platforms. This framework informed the selection of survey variables and the analysis plan, aiming to disentangle the relative contribution of individual and systemic factors to professional development outcomes.

Methods

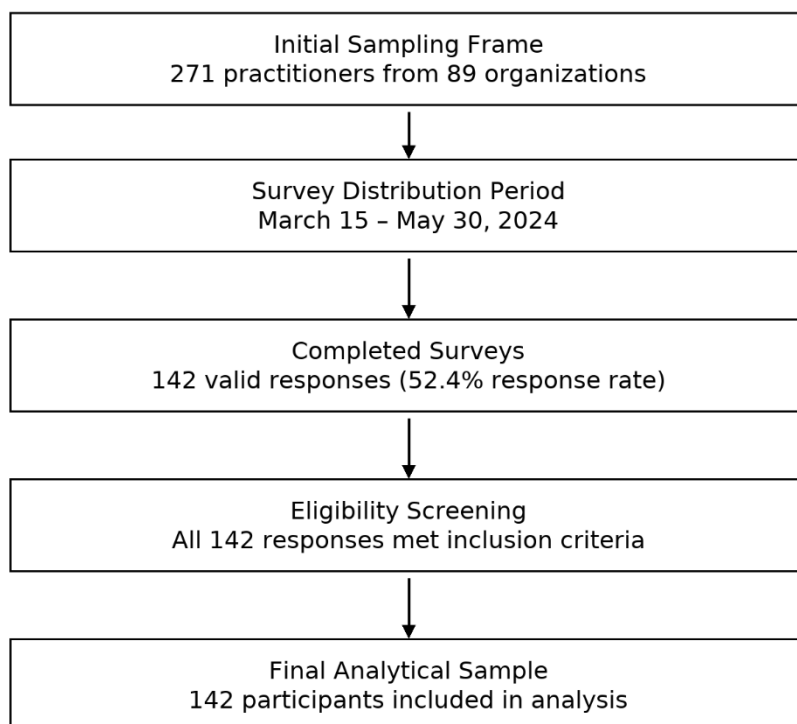
Study Design and Participants

This cross-sectional survey study targeted VR practitioners across Kosovo's seven regions (Pristina, Mitrovica, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Gjakova, and Ferizaj). Inclusion criteria were:

1. current employment in VR or disability
2. employment services,
3. minimum six months of experience, and direct client contact responsibilities.

Sampling and Recruitment

A comprehensive sampling frame identified 271 practitioners from 89 organizations across all regions. Figure 1 illustrates the participant recruitment flow. The survey was distributed electronically between March 15 and May 30, 2024, with reminder emails sent at two-week intervals.

Figure 1.*Participant Recruitment and Inclusion Process*

Note: Out of 271 practitioners contacted, 142 completed the survey (52.4% response rate)

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was adapted from a validated questionnaire (Capella-McDonnell, 2005), translated into Albanian and Serbian with cultural adaptation for the Kosovar context. A panel of three local VR experts reviewed the translated instrument for face and content validity. Minor adjustments were made to terminology to ensure cultural relevance. A pilot test with 15 VR practitioners (not included in the main study) confirmed the clarity and appropriateness of the items; internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's α) for the pilot scales were acceptable (Research Engagement $\alpha=0.71$, Training Engagement $\alpha=0.69$).

The instrument contained five sections:

- Demographic and Professional Characteristics (8 items)
- Perceptions of Research and Training (6 items) - assessed difficulty, usefulness, and enjoyment on 5-point scales
- Current Research and Training Activities (9 items) - rated on 5-point Likert scales
- Training Modality Preferences (4 items) - preferences for different delivery methods
- Barriers and Facilitators (7 items) - obstacles to professional development

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. Descriptive statistics characterized the sample and key variables. Composite scores were created for research activities ($\alpha=0.74$) and training activities ($\alpha=0.72$). The assumptions for parametric tests (normality, homogeneity of variance) were checked and met for the key dependent variables. One-way ANOVA examined differences across groups, while Pearson correlations assessed variable relationships. To further explore predictors of professional development engagement, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed. Demographic variables (years of experience, education level, work setting) were entered in Block 1, and perception variables (perceived usefulness of training and research) were entered in Block 2, with the Training Engagement Scale score as the dependent variable. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the University of Pristina Research Ethics Committee (Ref: UP-2023-089). Participants

provided electronic informed consent, and data anonymization was maintained throughout. All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic and professional characteristics of the 142 participants. The sample was predominantly female (59.2%) with a mean age of 38.4 years (SD=9.2). Most participants held bachelor's degrees (54.9%), with the majority working in NGO settings (47.2%).

Table 1.

Participant Demographics and Professional Characteristics (N=142)

Characteristic	n	%	M	SD
Gender				
– Female	84	59.2		
– Male	58	40.8		
Age (years)				
			38.4	9.2
– 25-34	45	31.7		
– 35-44	52	36.6		
– 45-54	32	22.5		
– 55+	13	9.2		
Education Level				
– High School	12	8.5		
– Vocational Certificate	28	19.7		
– Bachelor's Degree	78	54.9		
– Master's Degree	22	15.5		
– Doctoral Degree	2	1.4		
Years of Experience				
			7.8	8.1
– 1-3 years	38	26.8		
– 4-7 years	41	28.9		
– 8-15 years	42	29.6		
– 16+ years	21	14.8		
Primary Work Setting				
– Government Agency	34	23.9		
– NGO/Non-profit	67	47.2		
– Private Organization	25	17.6		
– Educational Institution	16	11.3		

Perceptions of Research and Training

Table 2 summarizes practitioners' perceptions regarding research and training activities. Both research and training were

viewed as highly useful (M>4.0), with training perceived as significantly easier and more enjoyable than research activities.

Table 2.

Perceptions of Research and Training Activities

Perception Dimension	Research M (SD)	Training M (SD)	t-value	p-value
Difficulty (1=very difficult, 5=very easy)	2.84 (0.92)	3.21 (0.88)	-4.12	<0.001
Usefulness (1=not useful, 5=very useful)	4.18 (0.76)	4.35 (0.69)	-2.31	0.022
Enjoyment (1=not enjoyable, 5=very enjoyable)	3.52 (0.81)	3.78 (0.74)	-3.18	0.002

Note: Higher scores indicate greater ease, usefulness, and enjoyment

Experience-Based Differences

Table 3 presents differences in perceptions based on years of professional experience. More experienced practitioners

perceived both research and training as less difficult and more useful, suggesting expertise development through practice experience.

Table 3.
Perceptions by Years of Experience

Experience Group	Research Difficulty M (SD)	Training Difficulty M (SD)	Research Usefulness M (SD)	Training Usefulness M (SD)
1-3 years	2.45 (0.89)	2.89 (0.85)	3.97 (0.82)	4.21 (0.73)
4-7 years	2.78 (0.91)	3.15 (0.88)	4.12 (0.74)	4.29 (0.68)
8-15 years	3.02 (0.88)	3.38 (0.82)	4.28 (0.69)	4.45 (0.64)
16+ years	3.19 (0.95)	3.52 (0.91)	4.33 (0.73)	4.48 (0.71)
F-statistic	6.24**	4.18*	2.87*	1.95

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 presents current situations related to research and training engagement. Practitioners reported moderate research engagement (M=3.12) and higher training

engagement (M=3.45). The greatest challenges were securing time for professional development and accessing research mentorship.

Table 4.
Current Research and Training Situations

Situation Statement	M	SD	α
Research Engagement Scale	3.12	0.68	0.74
Have access to research mentorship	2.89	1.15	
Possess basic research knowledge	3.08	0.94	
Interested in research activities	3.24	0.91	
Feel the need for research involvement	3.27	0.87	
Training Engagement Scale	3.45	0.61	
Easy access to training materials	3.18	1.02	
Can secure time for professional development	2.95	1.08	
Integrate learning into practice	3.67	0.89	
Have peer learning opportunities	3.52	0.91	
Feel the need for additional training	4.12	0.78	

Note: 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree

Training Method Preferences

Table 5 shows significant differences in training modality preferences (F=11.73,

$p < 0.01$). Interactive methods were strongly preferred over passive formats, with online live training receiving the highest rating.

Table 5.
Training Method Preferences

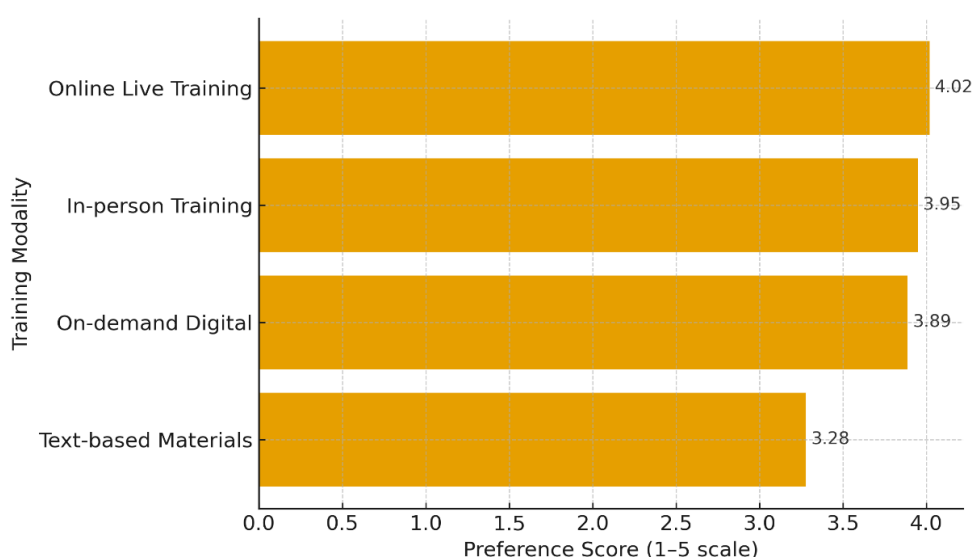
Training Method	M	SD	F-statistic	Post-hoc Comparisons
Online Live Training	4.02	0.84	11.73**	Online > Text**
On-demand Digital Content	3.89	0.91		On-demand > Text**
In-person Training	3.95	0.79		In-person > Text**
Text-based Materials	3.28	1.12		

**p < 0.01

Figure 2 illustrates the preference distribution across training modalities,

clearly showing the preference hierarchy for interactive learning approaches.

Figure 2.
Training Modality Preferences (N=142)



Barriers to Professional Development

Table 6 identifies primary barriers to professional development. Time constraints

emerged as the most significant barrier, followed by financial limitations and lack of available training opportunities.

Table 6.
Barriers to Professional Development

Barrier	M	SD	% Rating as Major Barrier
Limited time due to workload	3.89	0.94	67.6%
Lack of financial resources	3.76	1.02	62.0%
Limited training opportunities	3.68	0.98	58.5%
Language barriers (English materials)	3.45	1.15	52.1%
Lack of organizational support	3.32	1.08	45.8%
Geographic isolation	3.18	1.21	41.5%
Technology access limitations	2.95	1.18	35.2%

Regional Differences

Table 7 presents significant regional differences in training engagement across Kosovo’s regions (F=3.24, p<0.01).

Practitioners in Pristina reported higher levels of both training and research engagement compared to other regions.

Table 7.
Barriers to Professional Development

Region	n	Training Engagement M (SD)	Research Engagement M (SD)
Pristina	42	3.68 (0.58)	3.35 (0.71)
Prizren	23	3.52 (0.61)	3.18 (0.69)
Mitrovica	19	3.31 (0.64)	2.95 (0.73)
Peja	18	3.39 (0.59)	3.02 (0.66)
Gjilan	16	3.25 (0.67)	2.89 (0.75)
Gjakova	14	3.18 (0.72)	2.84 (0.78)
Ferizaj	10	3.12 (0.69)	2.76 (0.71)
F-statistic		3.24**	2.87*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Correlational Analysis

Table 8 presents correlations between key study variables. Significant positive correlations emerged between experience,

education, and engagement variables, indicating that professional development motivation increases with experience and educational attainment.

Table 8.
Correlations Between Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Years of Experience	-					
2. Education Level	.18*	-				
3. Research Engagement	.23**	.31**	-			
4. Training Engagement	.28**	.24**	.45**	-		
5. Research Usefulness	.21*	.19*	.38**	.33**	-	
6. Training Usefulness	.16	.22**	.29**	.41**	.52**	-

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

As detailed in the methods, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to predict Training Engagement. In Block 1, demographic variables (years of experience, education level, work setting [dummy coded]) explained 11.2% of the variance ($R^2 = .112$, $F(4, 137) = 4.32$, $p = .002$), with years of experience being the only significant predictor ($\beta = .25$, $p = .005$). Adding the perception variables (Perceived Usefulness of Training and Research) in

Block 2 led to a significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .209$, $p < .001$). The final model (Table 9) explained 32.1% of the variance in Training Engagement ($R^2 = .321$, $F(6, 135) = 10.65$, $p < .001$). In this model, years of experience ($\beta = .22$, $p = .011$) and perceived usefulness of training ($\beta = .28$, $p = .002$) were significant unique predictors. Perceived usefulness of research approached significance ($\beta = .17$, $p = .051$).

Table 9.*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Training Engagement*

Step	Predictor	B	SE B	β	p-value	ΔR^2	R ²
1	(Constant)	2.45	0.31		<.001	.112	.112
	Years Exp.	0.02	0.01	.25	.005		
	Education	0.05	0.06	.07	.433		
	Work Set. 1	-0.08	0.13	-.06	.516		
	Work Set. 2	0.11	0.12	.09	.352		
2	(Constant)	0.89	0.43		.041	.209	.321
	Years Exp.	0.02	0.01	.22	.011		
	Education	0.03	0.05	.05	.540		
	Work Set. 1	-0.07	0.11	-.05	.541		
	Work Set. 2	0.09	0.11	.08	.390		
	Usefulness (Training)	0.25	0.08	.28	.002		
	Usefulness (Research)	0.14	0.07	.17	.051		

Note: Work Set. 1 = Government Agency vs. Others; Work Set. 2 = NGO vs. Others. The reference category for work setting is Private/Educational combined.

Discussion

Professional Development Patterns and the Experience-Learning Nexus

The findings of this national survey reveal that VR practitioners in Kosovo perceive professional development as highly valuable yet encounter pronounced systemic barriers—a pattern echoing challenges noted in other developing and post-conflict rehabilitation contexts (Aliu & Bushi, 2019). The positive correlation between years of experience and both training engagement ($r=.28$, $p<.01$) and perceived usefulness of research ($r=.21$, $p<.05$) suggests a critical experience-learning nexus. As practitioners accumulate practical, on-the-ground experience, they appear to develop a more nuanced awareness of their knowledge gaps and a stronger intrinsic motivation to address them. The regression analysis further substantiates this, identifying years of experience as a robust predictor of training engagement even after controlling for other factors.

This aligns with adult learning theory (Plotner, Strauser, & Trach, 2012) and the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition, which posit that learning needs and self-directed learning capacities evolve with professional maturity. In Kosovo's context—where formal, standardized certification pathways are absent—this on-the-job, experience-driven learning becomes the de facto primary mechanism for professional growth. Consequently, professional development

initiatives should be career-stage-specific, targeting foundational skills for novices and advanced, specialized competencies for seasoned practitioners.

The Value-Barrier Discrepancy: A Call for Systemic Support

A central and compelling finding is the stark value-barrier discrepancy. Practitioners rated the utility of both research ($M=4.18$) and training ($M=4.35$) very highly, indicating strong recognition of their importance for evidence-based practice. However, this stands in sharp contrast to the reported access to enabling resources: limited access to research mentorship ($M=2.89$), difficulty securing time for professional development ($M=2.95$), and significant financial constraints (rated a major barrier by 62.0% of respondents). Critically, the regression analysis revealed that the perceived usefulness of training was the strongest unique predictor of actual training engagement ($\beta = .28$), even more so than years of experience. This discrepancy underscores that practitioner motivation is not the limiting factor. Instead, the bottleneck lies in structural and systemic shortcomings—a lack of institutional support, inadequate funding models, and an absence of protected time for learning (Ministry of Finance, 2023). This finding shifts the onus from individual practitioners to organizational leaders and policymakers, highlighting the need for system-level interventions that create conducive

environments for continuous learning while leveraging and nurturing the existing high valuation of professional development.

Training Modality Preferences: A Blueprint for Accessible Design

The strong preference for interactive training modalities—especially online live training (M=4.02) and in-person workshops (M=3.95) over passive text-based materials (M=3.28)—provides a clear blueprint for designing effective professional development programs. This preference aligns robustly with contemporary principles of adult and experiential learning (Rogers, Lyass, Anthony, & Penk, 2006). More importantly, it offers a pragmatic solution to Kosovo's geographical and infrastructural challenges. The high rating for online live training is particularly significant. It demonstrates practitioner readiness for technology-enhanced learning, which can circumvent transportation barriers in rural areas and reduce costs associated with travel and venue hire (Edutask Institute, 2025). This preference, validated by the successful pivot to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Takahashi, Yamamoto, & Sato, 2021), indicates that blended or fully virtual formats are not just acceptable but are preferred and practical avenues for scaling up access equitably.

Regional Disparities: Equity as a Prerequisite for Quality

The significant regional disparities in training engagement (e.g., Pristina M=3.68 vs. Ferizaj M=3.12; F=3.24, $p < .01$) mirror broader patterns of resource concentration in Kosovo (Kelmendi & Hamby, 2022). Practitioners in the capital benefit from proximity to universities, international NGOs, and professional networks—advantages largely unavailable in peripheral regions. This inequity in access to professional development directly threatens equity in service quality. Clients in rural areas may receive services from practitioners with fewer opportunities to update their skills, potentially perpetuating a two-tier rehabilitation system. Addressing these disparities is therefore not merely an issue of fairness but a fundamental requirement for ensuring a minimum national standard of VR service quality. Future initiatives must be deliberately designed with a pro-equity lens,

prioritizing resource allocation and mobile training units for underserved regions. The preference for online live training offers a direct technological solution to mitigate these geographic disparities if coupled with efforts to ensure reliable internet access and digital literacy.

The Knowledge Translation Imperative for a Research-Limited Context

The moderate levels of self-reported research engagement (M=3.12) coupled with high perceived research usefulness (M=4.18) reveal a fertile ground for Knowledge Translation (KT) strategies. The regression analysis showed that perceived usefulness of research was a borderline significant predictor of training engagement ($\beta = .17$, $p = .051$), suggesting a link between valuing evidence and engaging in professional development. In a context where direct access to academic journals and research institutions is limited, and English-language proficiency presents a barrier, practitioners cannot be expected to bridge the research-practice gap alone. Structured KT frameworks (Graham et al., 2006) are essential. These frameworks can involve local universities or specialist NGOs in synthesizing, translating, and contextualizing international evidence into practice briefs, toolkits, and training modules in Albanian and Serbian. By acting as “research intermediaries,” KT initiatives can leverage practitioners' existing motivation while overcoming the practical barriers of language, access, and time (Graham et al., 2006). This approach moves beyond simply encouraging research consumption to actively curating and delivering applicable knowledge to the frontline workforce.

Research Implications

The findings of this study carry significant implications for theory, future research, professional practice, and policy development within Kosovo's VR sector and similar contexts internationally.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of professional development in post-conflict and resource-constrained settings. It empirically validates and extends models of adult learning (Plotner, Strauser, & Trach, 2012) by

demonstrating how the “experience-learning nexus” operates in the absence of formal educational structures. The identified value-barrier discrepancy offers a new conceptual lens for analyzing workforce development challenges, shifting focus from individual competency deficits to systemic enablers and inhibitors. Furthermore, the strong documented preference for interactive, technology-mediated learning in a developing context enriches theories of digital adoption in professional education, suggesting that perceived utility and accessibility can drive technology acceptance even in environments with infrastructural challenges (Edutask Institute, 2025). The regression model highlights the primacy of perceived usefulness as a predictor, supporting and extending key constructs from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to the domain of professional development motivation.

Implications for Future Research

This study provides a foundational dataset and methodological approach that can guide subsequent inquiry. Future researchers should:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in practitioner competencies and client outcomes following the implementation of professional development programs informed by these findings.
- Employ mixed-methods designs to complement the quantitative survey data with in-depth qualitative interviews, exploring the lived experiences behind the barriers and preferences quantified here.
- Develop and test intervention models based on the key preferences identified—such as comparing the efficacy and cost-benefit of online live training versus in-person workshops in the Kosovar context.
- Expand the comparative scope by replicating this survey in other Western Balkan countries to identify regional patterns and facilitate cross-border learning and resource sharing (OECD, 2025).
- Investigate the client perspective to directly link practitioner training engagement with employment and psychosocial outcomes for persons with

disabilities, thereby closing the evidence loop on service impact.

Implications for Professional Practice and Practitioners

For VR practitioners and their managers in Kosovo, this study offers an evidence-based mandate for change:

- Practitioners can use these findings to advocate within their organizations for dedicated time and resources for professional development, legitimizing their requests with national data.
- Managers and organizational leaders should prioritize funding for interactive and online training formats, establish peer learning groups to foster collaborative knowledge-sharing, and actively seek out or develop translated, context-adapted practice resources to overcome language barriers.
- The entire sector can move towards establishing communities of practice, both nationally and online, to create sustainable, peer-supported learning networks that reduce dependency on sporadic, externally funded workshops.

Implications for Policy and System Development

For policymakers in the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and other stakeholders, the findings point to several actionable priorities:

- **Integrate Professional Development into Standards:** Develop and legislate mandatory minimum continuing education requirements for VR practitioners, linked to the European Qualifications Framework (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2023).
- **Invest in Digital Infrastructure:** Allocate funds for developing a national online training portal for VR professionals, hosting both live and on-demand courses in local languages (Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).
- **Adopt an Equity-Based Funding Model:** Design grant schemes and state subsidies that actively favor applications from organizations in underserved regions (Mitrovica, Gjilan, Ferizaj, etc.) to counterbalance geographic disparities.

- **Foster Academic-Practice Partnerships:** Formalize collaborations between the MLSW, universities, and service providers to institutionalize Knowledge Translation pipelines, ensuring that international research is systematically adapted for local use (Graham et al., 2006).
- **Secure Sustainable Financing:** Advocate for the inclusion of line items for continuous workforce development in the national budget and social service contracts, moving beyond donor-dependent project funding to sustainable state investment (Ministry of Finance, 2023).

Solving Practical Problems Identified by Experts

The findings offer direct guidance for stakeholders in Kosovo's VR ecosystem:

- **For training providers:** Prioritize interactive, live-online, and blended formats over passive materials.
- **For NGOs and public agencies:** Allocate protected time and budgets for continuous professional development.
- **For international partners:** Support the development of a digital training repository in local languages.
- **For professional associations:** Advocate for certification and continuing education requirements aligned with the European Qualifications Framework.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences about relationships between variables. The response rate of 52.4%, while acceptable, may introduce selection bias if non-respondents differ systematically from respondents. The adaptation of the survey instrument from the Japanese context, while carefully conducted, may not capture all relevant aspects of professional development in Kosovo. Cultural and contextual differences may influence the applicability of certain findings. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, as practitioners may overestimate their engagement with professional development activities or underreport barriers due to social desirability

concerns. Furthermore, the regression model, while informative, explained a moderate portion of the variance in training engagement (32.1%), indicating that other unmeasured factors (e.g., organizational culture, personal resilience, specific job demands) also play important roles.

Conclusions

This study provides the first comprehensive assessment of the professional development needs of vocational rehabilitation (VR) practitioners in Kosovo, revealing a workforce that highly values continuous learning yet encounters significant systemic barriers. Key conclusions include the identification of strong practitioner motivation for both training and research engagement, with perceived usefulness of training emerging as a primary driver of participation. The findings highlight experience-based learning patterns, underscoring the importance of career-stage-specific professional development approaches. Preferences for interactive and technology-enabled training methods suggest promising avenues to overcome geographic and infrastructural challenges, particularly through online live sessions and blended formats. Systemic barriers such as limited time, financial constraints, and restricted access to mentorship and training opportunities necessitate coordinated responses from government, NGOs, and international partners. Notably, regional disparities in training engagement point to the urgent need for equity-focused interventions to ensure consistent service quality across Kosovo. The integration of Knowledge Translation frameworks and investment in digital infrastructure are critical to bridging research-practice gaps and enhancing practitioner competence. Ultimately, investing in structured, sustainable professional development tailored to Kosovo's VR context is essential for building a knowledgeable, accountable, and motivated workforce. Such investment will contribute directly to improving employment outcomes and social inclusion for persons with disabilities, reinforcing the foundation of a rights-based, inclusive society. Future research should focus on evaluating specific professional development interventions and

exploring their impact on client outcomes through longitudinal and mixed-methods studies.

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