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Generative AI in Vocational Education: Chinese Teachers' Practices and the School-to-Work Connection

Dingning Liu

Sichuan Southwest Vocational College of Civil Aviation, China

Abstract

Recent years have witnessed the application and development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education. Existing studies have largely examined how university teachers perceive and use AI; however, vocational teachers' practices of adopting AI are ignored. In China, around 5.7 million students enter higher vocational education each year (Ministry of Education of China, 2025), making vocational teachers' use of generative AI an important area of study. This study thus investigates Chinese vocational teachers' use of generative AI in teaching, their evaluation and use of AI-generated materials, and AI's impacts on aligning classroom teaching with workplace demands. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 vocational teachers from diverse specialities, and thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. The findings show that most teachers use AI for routine tasks such as lesson planning and assessment, while some also use it to create simulated workplace interactions and improve students' work-related skills. At the same time, teachers do not simply adopt AI-generated content without further evaluation. They check it against professional standards and their own experience, consult people with industry knowledge, and modify the material according to their students and teaching contexts. The findings further show how generative AI affects the school-to-work connection. Teachers described using AI to bring recent workplace information and examples into the classroom more quickly. However, they continued to regard practical experience and direct interaction as important parts of vocational learning. This research contributes to the literature by showing how the distinctive pedagogical and occupational context of vocational education shapes teachers' engagement with generative AI.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Professional Development; Teaching Practices; Chinese Vocational Teachers; China