International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsulfindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

Developing A Reflective Teacher Training Model For Character Education Implementation In Rural Vocational Schools In Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

Character education has become an increasingly important concern in vocational education, particularly in preparing students to face workplace challenges that require not only technical competence but also responsibility, collaboration, discipline, and ethical awareness. Nevertheless, many vocational teachers still experience difficulties integrating character values meaningfully into classroom learning. This challenge becomes more visible in rural and underserved schools where opportunities for sustained professional development remain limited. This study aimed to develop and evaluate a reflective teacher training model for strengthening character education implementation in vocational classrooms. The research employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design involving 30 teachers from three vocational schools in the Amfoang region of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, namely SMKN 1 Amfoang Tengah, SMKN 2 Amfoang Selatan, and SMKN 1 Amfoang Utara. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-training surveys, lesson plan assessments, and classroom observations, while qualitative data were obtained through reflective journals, focus group discussions, and classroom field notes. The findings showed significant improvements in teachers' reflective teaching practice, classroom character integration, collaborative learning facilitation, and vocational ethics instruction after

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participating in the training program. Qualitative findings further revealed changes in teachers' pedagogical awareness, classroom interaction patterns, and students' participation during learning activities. The study demonstrates that reflective and collaborative professional development can support meaningful pedagogical transformation in rural vocational education settings. The study contributes to the development of context-sensitive teacher professional development for vocational schools in geographically isolated areas.

Keywords: character education; vocational education; teacher training; reflective pedagogy; rural schools; professional development.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of society and the workplace has increased the importance of character education in vocational schools. Vocational education is no longer expected only to prepare technically competent graduates but also individuals who demonstrate integrity, responsibility, discipline, collaboration, communication skills, and ethical awareness in professional contexts. In the twenty-first century, employability is increasingly associated with both technical mastery and social competencies that enable graduates to adapt to industrial and societal changes.

The Indonesian government has also emphasized the importance of character formation in educational transformation. The policy on Pembelajaran Mendalam and Dimensi Profil Lulusan introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education highlights that learning should not only focus on cognitive achievement but also on the development of critical reasoning, collaboration, communication, independence, creativity, citizenship, and ethical awareness (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025). Similarly, the Roadmap Pengembangan SMK Pusat Keunggulan emphasizes the importance of strengthening vocational graduates' character, adaptability, and workplace readiness alongside technical competence (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Vokasi, 2021).

Despite these policy directions, the implementation of character education in vocational classrooms often remains superficial. Teachers frequently position character education as moral advice delivered separately from the learning process rather than integrating values into meaningful classroom interaction and vocational learning activities. As a result, character formation is often treated as an additional component rather than an embedded dimension of classroom pedagogy.

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This condition becomes more challenging in rural and geographically isolated schools. In the Amfoang region of East Nusa Tenggara, educational access and professional development opportunities remain uneven. Several schools are located in mountainous areas with difficult transportation routes that become harder to access during the rainy season. Internet connectivity remains unstable in some areas, limiting teachers' access to digital learning resources and continuous pedagogical support. These realities influence how teachers organize instruction and often encourage more directive teaching practices focused on completing learning targets efficiently.

The cultural context of Amfoang also shapes classroom interaction. Community life in this region strongly values kinship, communal relationships, and respect toward elders. These values contribute positively to solidarity among students but sometimes also influence students' confidence in expressing disagreement or critical opinions openly during classroom discussion. In vocational learning contexts, such conditions create unique challenges for teachers attempting to build collaborative and reflective classroom environments.

Professional development therefore becomes essential in supporting teachers' pedagogical transformation. Effective teacher training should not merely focus on theoretical understanding but also encourage reflection, collaboration, classroom experimentation, and continuous instructional improvement. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) explain that impactful professional development is sustained, collaborative, practice-based, and closely connected to teachers' classroom realities. Schön (1983) similarly emphasizes reflective practice as a process through which teachers critically examine their instructional experiences to improve pedagogical decision-making.

Previous studies have explored teacher training and character education in various educational settings. However, many studies focus primarily on conceptual understanding and short-term workshops without examining measurable classroom transformation. Research involving vocational schools in rural educational contexts also remains limited despite the unique instructional challenges experienced by teachers in underserved regions.

This study addresses these gaps by developing and evaluating a reflective teacher training model for implementing character education in vocational classrooms in rural Eastern Indonesia. The training model integrates conceptual workshops, collaborative lesson design, classroom implementation, reflective coaching, and peer discussion within a measurable professional development framework. The study specifically investigates how the training influences teachers' pedagogical competencies, classroom practices, and understanding of character-oriented

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vocational learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative phase examined measurable changes in teachers' pedagogical competencies before and after the training intervention, while the qualitative phase explored teachers' reflective experiences and classroom transformation processes more deeply.

Research Sites and Participants

The study was conducted in three vocational schools located in the Amfoang region of East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, namely SMKN 1 Amfoang Tengah, SMKN 2 Amfoang Selatan, and SMKN 1 Amfoang Utara. The participants consisted of 30 teachers, with 10 teachers selected from each school. Participants represented vocational, adaptive, and normative subject groups. Teachers were selected purposively based on their active teaching responsibilities and willingness to participate throughout the program.

Training Procedure

The teacher training model was implemented over six weeks from August to September 2025 and consisted of four interconnected stages. The first stage was conducted during the first and second weeks of August 2025 through conceptual workshops discussing character education in vocational contexts, reflective pedagogy, collaborative learning, vocational ethics, and student-centered instruction. The second stage took place during the third week of August 2025 and focused on collaborative lesson design, where teachers redesigned lesson plans by integrating character values, reflective activities, collaborative tasks, contextual vocational problems, and student reflection components.

The third stage was carried out from late August until mid-September 2025 through classroom implementation. During this phase, teachers implemented the redesigned lessons in their respective classrooms while being observed by peers and facilitators. The final stage was conducted during the last week of September 2025 through reflective coaching and peer discussion sessions encouraging teachers to reflect critically on classroom experiences, instructional decisions, and implementation challenges encountered throughout the

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implementation process.

Instruments

Data were collected using several instruments. A Likert-scale questionnaire was administered before and after the intervention to measure teachers' understanding of character pedagogy, reflective teaching practice, classroom character integration, collaborative learning facilitation, and vocational ethics instruction. Teachers' lesson plans before and after training were assessed using a rubric evaluating character integration, collaborative learning, reflective activities, contextual vocational learning, and ethical discussion opportunities.

Classroom observations documented teacher-student interaction, reflective questioning, collaborative learning activities, student participation, and ethical problem-solving practices during classroom implementation. Reflective journals and focus group discussions were also used to explore teachers' experiences and pedagogical transformation processes more deeply.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests and effect size analysis to identify significant improvements after the intervention. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, interpretation, and triangulation processes.

RESULTS

Improvement in Teachers' Pedagogical Competencies

The findings demonstrated substantial improvements in teachers' pedagogical competencies after participation in the training program.

Table 1. Improvement in Teachers' Pedagogical Competencies

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gain (%)	Cohen's d
Character Pedagogy Understanding	2.81	4.42	57.3	1.24
Reflective Teaching Practice	2.93	4.37	49.1	1.11
Classroom Character Integration	2.74	4.48	63.5	1.37
Collaborative Learning Facilitation	3.02	4.51	49.3	1.15
Vocational Ethics Facilitation	2.88	4.29	48.9	1.06

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The largest improvement occurred in classroom character integration. Before the intervention, many teachers viewed character education primarily as moral reminders delivered outside classroom instruction. After the training, teachers increasingly integrated character values into collaborative learning activities, vocational problem-solving tasks, and reflective classroom discussions.

Reflective teaching practice also improved significantly. Teachers became more aware of classroom interaction patterns, emotional support, student participation, and the importance of reflective dialogue during learning activities. The effect size analysis indicated large practical effects across all competency dimensions, suggesting that the intervention produced meaningful pedagogical transformation rather than temporary perceptual change.

Lesson Plan Transformation

Lesson plan analysis demonstrated meaningful pedagogical transformation after the intervention.

Table 2. Lesson Plan Assessment Results

Component	Before Training	After Training
Character Integration	2.4	4.5
Reflective Activities	2.1	4.3
Collaborative Learning	2.8	4.6
Contextual Vocational Learning	3.0	4.7
Student Reflection Activities	1.9	4.4

Before the training, lesson plans were generally dominated by technical competency targets and procedural instruction. Character values were commonly written symbolically in planning documents without clear strategies for classroom implementation. After the intervention, teachers increasingly designed learning activities encouraging collaboration, ethical discussion, contextual problem-solving, and student reflection.

Classroom Observation Findings

Observation results revealed significant changes in classroom interaction patterns.

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Table 3. Classroom Observation Results

Observation Indicator	Before	After
Reflective Questioning	34%	84%
Collaborative Discussion	41%	89%
Ethical Problem Solving	29%	81%
Student Participation	46%	91%
Student Reflection Activities	18%	79%

Before the intervention, learning activities in the three schools were still largely dominated by teacher-centered instruction. Most teachers focused on completing competency targets and ensuring that practical activities ran according to procedure. In many classrooms, students tended to wait for instructions rather than actively participating in discussion or expressing their own ideas. Reflective conversation and collaborative inquiry were still relatively limited because classroom interaction was often directed toward finishing tasks efficiently, especially during practical sessions in vocational subjects that demanded technical precision and time management.

After the intervention, noticeable changes began to appear in classroom interaction. Teachers gradually created more space for students to speak, collaborate, and reflect during learning activities. Classroom discussions became more open and participatory, while students appeared more confident in expressing opinions and working together during vocational tasks. Teachers also became more intentional in connecting technical activities with values such as responsibility, cooperation, discipline, and fairness.

At SMKN 2 Amfoang Selatan, where the vocational concentrations include Wood and Rattan Craft, Building Modeling and Information Design, and Motorcycle Engineering, students in a practical workshop session discussed workplace safety responsibilities before starting group tasks. Instead of immediately giving instructions, the teacher guided students through reflective questions about accountability, teamwork, and professional ethics. In the Wood and Rattan Craft class, for example, students were encouraged to divide responsibilities fairly during production activities and to reflect on the importance of precision, patience, and mutual trust when completing craft products together. The atmosphere in the classroom felt more relaxed, yet students remained focused and engaged in the discussion.

At SMKN 1 Amfoang Tengah, which offers Hospitality, Agribusiness of Ruminant Livestock,

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and Agricultural Product Processing Agribusiness programs, teachers encouraged students to reflect on how communication and cooperation influenced the quality of their practical work. During hospitality practice sessions, students discussed how respectful communication and empathy shape professional service in the tourism and hospitality industry. In agricultural product processing activities, teachers asked students not only to focus on production outcomes but also to evaluate teamwork, discipline, and cleanliness during processing practices. Several students who were previously quiet began participating more actively in group conversations and peer discussions.

Meanwhile, at SMKN 1 Amfoang Utara, where the main vocational concentration is Agribusiness of Ruminant Livestock, reflective discussion became more visible during livestock management and animal care practices. Teachers encouraged students to discuss responsibility, consistency, and cooperation while carrying out feeding schedules, livestock hygiene, and group-based practical assignments. During classroom presentations and practical sessions, students began responding to their peers more respectfully and providing constructive feedback to one another. In several observations, students connected values such as honesty, discipline, and mutual support with their future responsibilities as livestock practitioners and members of the community. Small changes in classroom interaction gradually created a warmer and more collaborative learning atmosphere across the three schools.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings showed meaningful changes in how teachers understood and practiced character education in their classrooms. Before the intervention, many teachers still viewed character education as something separate from the learning process. Character education was often associated with reminding students to behave politely, obey rules, or maintain discipline in class. After participating in the training and reflective discussions, teachers gradually began to see that character formation actually grows through everyday classroom interaction, teamwork, communication, and the way students solve problems together during learning activities.

One teacher from SMKN 2 Amfoang Selatan shared:

“Previously I thought character education only meant reminding students to behave properly. Now I understand that character is formed through how students interact, collaborate, and solve problems during learning.”

This shift became increasingly visible during vocational practice sessions. In the Wood and

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Rattan Craft program at SMKN 2 Amfoang Selatan, teachers noticed that students became more aware of responsibility while working together to complete production tasks. Students started discussing how to divide work fairly, help friends who experienced difficulties, and finish assignments together without depending entirely on teacher instructions. In Motorcycle Engineering classes, students also became more active in discussing workplace safety and teamwork during practical sessions. The learning atmosphere gradually felt more open and cooperative compared to before the intervention.

Teachers also showed stronger reflective awareness regarding their own teaching practices. Several participants admitted that reflective coaching sessions helped them realize how classroom interaction had previously been dominated by teacher explanation. Some teachers acknowledged that they rarely gave students enough space to express opinions or reflect on their experiences during learning activities.

One teacher from the Hospitality program at SMKN 1 Amfoang Tengah explained:

"Through reflective discussions, I realized I often dominated classroom conversations. Students rarely had opportunities to express their opinions."

Teachers in the Hospitality program further observed that students became more confident when classroom activities involved role-play, group discussion, and service simulations. Students who were usually quiet slowly began participating in conversations and interacting more respectfully with their peers. Meanwhile, in the Agricultural Product Processing Agribusiness program, teachers noticed that students became more disciplined and cooperative during practical activities when they were encouraged to reflect together after completing production tasks.

Collaborative learning activities also contributed to stronger classroom participation and responsibility. Teachers observed that students became more willing to cooperate, more confident expressing ideas, and more responsible during practical learning activities.

Another participant from SMKN 1 Amfoang Utara reflected:

"Students became more engaged because they felt responsible not only for themselves but also for their team."

In the Agribusiness of Ruminant Livestock program at SMKN 1 Amfoang Utara, teachers observed small but meaningful changes during livestock care practices. Students became more consistent in carrying out feeding schedules, cleaning livestock areas, and reminding one another about shared responsibilities. During group activities, students also appeared more willing to support friends who experienced difficulties completing practical tasks.

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Teachers further emphasized that vocational learning naturally created opportunities for character formation. Values such as responsibility, teamwork, discipline, communication, honesty, and mutual respect emerged more naturally when integrated into practical learning activities and workplace simulation contexts. Across the three schools, teachers gradually noticed warmer classroom interaction, stronger cooperation among students, and a learning atmosphere that felt more reflective and supportive than before the intervention.

Table 1. super system in six major ways

1. From Analog-to- Digital
The predominant medium for capturing and disseminating information has shifted from analog - to - digital. Since MP3s and DVDs seem to be the favored methods for transferring entertainment, it is becoming increasingly difficult to access tracks recorded on record or films stored on VHS cassettes. Print media are rapidly losing momentum to electronic, online media dissemination forms, and a few have gone bankrupt.
2. From Tethered to Mobile
Actions that have traditionally linked an individual to a certain location. Cell devices enable us to communicate with coworkers, friends, and relatives without even being bound to a block by a telephone cord. Wi-Fi technologies enable everyone to access the Internet, social media, and instant messaging without even being attached to a network connection.
3. From Isolated to Connected
Although IP and many other standards used to enable machines to create simple connections to each other, online services and interfaces now allow for even more complex sorts of information exchange. Whereas faxes and postcards formerly linked individuals autonomously, social networking sites (such as Facebook), telecommunication services (such as Skype), messaging, and cell devices increasingly link users in real time.
4. From Standard to Personal
Practically, in every aspect of life, technology allows “mass customization” of products and services. If cellphones ring in a public place, each sounds a distinctive ring tone chosen by the user. Users can personalize the color scheme and features on automobiles people want to buy using user interfaces. For instance: Amazon.com, a retailer having possibly millions of users, provides personalized customized suggestions to its consumers.
5. From Consumers to Creators
The equipment and perhaps other resources required to create and transmit diverse cultural

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artifacts such as literature, films, and songs were formerly an exclusive domain of the affluent. An economic hurdle to generating and disseminating cultural identities has nearly vanished. Everyone can produce a book and compete with publishers, thanks to computer programs and print-on-demand publication solutions. Anybody can become a journalist and a challenge to media, thanks to free blogging applications and digital cameras frequently accessible in cellphones. With the availability of low-cost video recording devices hosting services such as YouTube, anybody can release films and compete with major studios.
6. From Closed to Open
The fundamentals of rapid knowledge dissemination, which have almost eliminated each unit operating costs, have permitted extensive, free distribution on a level which has never been seen before. The realm of free software offers consumers entirely free and available alternatives to the Windows version, Microsoft Word, Photoshop, SPSS, and other costly software applications.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that reflective and collaborative teacher training can strengthen teachers' capacity to implement character-oriented learning in vocational classrooms. The improvements identified across various competency dimensions suggest that meaningful pedagogical transformation does not happen instantly through one-time workshops or theoretical explanation alone. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their own practices, try new approaches in real classroom situations, and discuss their experiences openly with colleagues who face similar challenges.

One important finding in this study concerns the shift in teachers' understanding of character education itself. Before the intervention, many teachers still viewed character education as something separate from classroom learning and closely connected it with discipline, rules, or moral advice delivered verbally to students. After participating in reflective discussions and classroom implementation activities, teachers gradually began to understand that character formation develops naturally through classroom interaction, collaboration, communication, and the way students participate in learning activities together.

This finding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist perspective emphasizing that learning and character formation develop through social interaction and collaborative participation. In vocational education, practical learning activities create authentic situations

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where students learn not only technical competencies but also responsibility, teamwork, communication, and ethical awareness. During observations in the Wood and Rattan Craft program at SMKN 2 Amfoang Selatan, for example, students became more aware of fairness and shared responsibility while completing production tasks together. In Motorcycle Engineering classes, students began discussing workplace safety and task division more actively during practical sessions. These interactions showed that character values emerged more meaningfully when connected directly to vocational practice.

Reflective coaching also contributed significantly to teachers' pedagogical awareness. Teachers became more attentive to classroom atmosphere, student participation, emotional support, and communication patterns during learning activities. Several teachers admitted that before the intervention they focused almost entirely on completing competency targets and ensuring that practical activities finished on time. They rarely reflected on how students interacted, communicated, or worked together during group activities.

In the Hospitality program at SMKN 1 Amfoang Tengah, teachers gradually realized that successful vocational learning is not determined only by technical competence but also by empathy, respectful communication, and the ability to work with others. Students who were previously quiet during classroom activities slowly became more confident when teachers provided opportunities for discussion and reflection. Similar changes were also observed in the Agricultural Product Processing Agribusiness program, where students became more disciplined and cooperative during practical activities when reflective discussion was integrated into the learning process.

The collaborative dimension of the training also strengthened professional learning among teachers. Peer discussions gave teachers opportunities to share experiences, discuss classroom difficulties, and develop contextual solutions together. This became particularly important because teachers in remote areas such as Amfoang rarely experience sustained pedagogical discussion outside administrative meetings. Korthagen (2001) explains that meaningful teacher learning develops when reflection is closely connected to authentic classroom experience. This situation was clearly visible during the training process, where teachers often felt more comfortable discussing practical classroom challenges with colleagues who understood their local realities.

Another important contribution of this study relates to vocational character formation. The findings suggest that vocational classrooms provide strong opportunities for integrating character education because vocational learning naturally involves responsibility, cooperation,

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workplace ethics, discipline, and problem-solving. Character education therefore became more meaningful when connected directly to practical learning activities rather than delivered only through verbal instruction.

At SMKN 1 Amfoang Utara, for instance, students in the Agribusiness of Ruminant Livestock program demonstrated stronger responsibility during livestock care activities when they worked together managing feeding schedules, cleaning livestock areas, and monitoring practical assignments. Teachers observed that students became more willing to remind one another about responsibilities without depending entirely on teacher supervision. Small changes like these gradually created a stronger sense of cooperation and accountability among students.

The geographical realities of Amfoang also influenced the implementation process. Limited transportation access, unstable internet connectivity, and restricted professional development opportunities shaped teachers' instructional habits over time. In some cases, teachers had become accustomed to directive teaching approaches because they were considered more efficient for maintaining classroom order and completing learning targets under limited conditions. Reflective and collaborative pedagogy therefore initially felt unfamiliar for some participants. However, as teachers became more comfortable with reflective discussion and collaborative activities, they gradually began to see that student participation and classroom interaction could improve without reducing instructional discipline.

The findings also reinforce Fullan's (2020) argument that deep learning requires meaningful engagement, collaboration, reflection, and authentic participation. Character formation in vocational education cannot develop effectively through isolated moral instruction alone. It develops gradually through repeated interaction, classroom culture, teacher modeling, and authentic learning experiences that allow students to practice responsibility and cooperation directly.

Despite these positive findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study involved a relatively small participant group and focused only on one regional context. The implementation period was also relatively short, limiting opportunities to examine long-term sustainability and student character development over time. Future studies are therefore recommended to involve broader participant groups, longer implementation periods, and more diverse vocational education contexts.

Theoretically, this study contributes to reflective professional development literature by proposing a measurable and context-sensitive teacher training model specifically adapted for rural vocational schools. The study also strengthens discussions on vocational character education by

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showing that reflective pedagogy and collaborative learning can support meaningful classroom transformation even in geographically isolated educational settings where access, infrastructure, and professional learning opportunities remain limited.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the reflective teacher training model helped strengthen vocational teachers' capacity to integrate character education more meaningfully into classroom learning. After participating in the program, teachers showed visible improvements in reflective teaching practices, classroom character integration, collaborative learning facilitation, and vocational ethics instruction. More importantly, the changes were not limited to lesson planning or instructional technique alone. Teachers gradually became more aware of how classroom interaction, communication, and everyday learning experiences contribute to students' character formation.

The training process encouraged teachers to rethink not only how they teach, but also how they build relationships with students during learning activities. In the vocational classrooms observed throughout this study, character education became more authentic when connected directly to practical experiences such as teamwork, responsibility, workplace discipline, communication, and collaborative problem-solving. Small changes in classroom interaction, such as giving students more opportunities to speak, reflect, and support one another during practical activities, gradually created a warmer and more participatory learning atmosphere across the three schools.

The findings also show that reflective and collaborative professional development is particularly important for vocational schools located in rural and geographically challenging areas such as Amfoang. Despite limitations related to access, infrastructure, and professional learning opportunities, teachers demonstrated strong commitment to improving their classroom practices when they were given supportive spaces for reflection, collaboration, and contextual learning.

This study therefore highlights that meaningful pedagogical transformation does not always begin with large-scale reforms or sophisticated technology. In many cases, transformation begins from simple but consistent changes in how teachers listen to students, facilitate interaction, encourage collaboration, and connect learning with real vocational experiences. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term influence of reflective teacher training on student character development, school culture transformation, and sustainable vocational learning practices in broader educational contexts

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