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ESTUDIOS

≡ Diagnostic analysis of research into **initial vocational education and training** in Spain (2005-2017)

**Resumen ejecutivo**

# Diagnostic analysis of research into initial vocational education and training in Spain (2005–2017)

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## **Acknowledgements:**

We would like to thank the entire research community for its contribution in providing the information and data employed in this study.

The Estudios collection published by Fundación Bankia por la Formación Dual contains benchmark studies and research intended to further analysis, implementation and knowledge of conventional and dual vocational education and training (VET).

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© First edition, February 2019

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Fundación Bankia por la Formación Dual, 2019  
Paseo Castellana, 189  
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Digital ISBN: 978-84-09-08691-7

## Executive summary

The growing interest in Spain in vocational education and training (VET) and its impact on social structures (education, employment, etc.) have led us to ask how VET is regarded by the scientific community or, to put it another way, how researchers have addressed VET in recent years.

To that end, we have analysed the development of research output (published in Spain) on **initial vocational education and training** (IVET) under the Spanish system, examining the period between 2005 (prior to the financial crisis) and 2017 (the start of recovery).

Far from focusing solely on quantitative analysis, we have examined the content and quality of the research carried out and have created a database of research lines and groups on the topic. We therefore analysed the scientific papers produced (*documentary analysis*) using quantitative (*bibliometric analysis*) and qualitative (*content analysis*) techniques in order to reveal the extent of scientific output in this field of knowledge and assess its development over time.

Of all the research found, only **54 doctoral theses (DTs), 174 papers in scientific journals (PSJs) and 32 research and innovation project reports (RIPRs)** met the quality criteria set for inclusion in our analysis. Document search was conducted in national and international repositories and search engines specialising in the subject under study.

Defining the context within which this output was produced enabled us to draw up a **map** of IVET research in Spain and establish five broad **areas**: *IVET Structure*, *Educational Environment*, *Workplace Environment*, *Training Enterprises* (no research is available on this latter area) and *Dual Vocational Education and Training* (Dual VET). Each of these areas is divided into various **categories** generated using the trial-and-error method. Thus, DTs comprise 11 categories, PSJs comprise 13 and RIPRs comprise 8.

As regards the first of these, we found that the historical background and socioeconomic context that contribute to configuration of the IVET system are the preferred subjects of the research papers. This is less the case with the doctoral theses, and even less so with the reports. In fact, none of the latter conduct a historical analysis. The primary focus of interest among them is the context in which VET takes place and its contribution to corporate innovation.

The next most popular areas of interest in the theses and papers are the teaching and learning processes that occur in the educational environment, followed by examination of how the teaching centres in which these processes take place are managed. This is not the case with the reports, which barely address issues related to teaching centres, with the exception of those relating to development of Dual VET.

The workplace environment receives a similar amount of attention as the educational environment in both the theses and the papers, and receives considerably more in the reports. In these first two environments, issues relating to academic and professional orientation, followed by those referring to graduates' integration into society and employment, are preferred. Diagnosis and development of skills receives a certain degree of attention in all three document types, while vocational qualifications attract less interest.

Meanwhile, there is practically no research into Dual VET in the theses examined and only one in ten articles address the topic. However, over half the reports focus on this new form of training in Spain.

Looking at the breakdown of this output over time reveals that production was fairly irregular and that there were peaks in the early and latter years (when most of the research was produced) of the period under study. This is most evident in the case of the theses — four out of ten were submitted in 2015 or 2016, probably due to the entry into force of Royal Decree 99/2011.

Analysis of scientific production by universities, journals and institutions likewise reveals a fairly fragmented and irregular distribution. Thus, the theses were defended in a third of Spain's public and private universities and in 30% of those only one thesis was submitted. Meanwhile, most of the journals only published one (61%) or two (15%) papers on the topic over the thirteen-year period reviewed. Just 3% published eight papers and none of them did so regularly over the period analysed, as most of the articles appeared in monographs. Likewise, a wide variety of bodies and/or institutions funded production of the reports with one-off grants, a situation that has not favoured development of well-established lines of research.

This heterogeneity is not mirrored in the methodologies used. Research that adopts both qualitative and quantitative paradigms predominates. When researchers do clearly opt for one of the above models, the former is the most popular, above all in the theses and papers.

Most of the research is descriptive. Very few use quasi-experimental designs and they almost always employ equivalent control groups. There are even fewer correlational, regression analysis and longitudinal studies.

In line with these methodologies, questionnaires predominate, above all in the theses and papers. In the case of the reports, and in a small percentage of papers, surveys are preferred. In a significant number of the former there is no evidence that they have been properly validated.

Meanwhile, most of the sampling is non-probabilistic and opportunity-based. The samples are almost always circumscribed to teaching centres within a town, city, region or autonomous community and they rarely cover the entire country.



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