

Perceptions of and participation in adult learning and CVET activities

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Key Findings

- *Perception goes with participation* - If adult learning and continued vocational education and training (CVET) activities are considered important, the likelihood of engaging in different types of adult learning and CVET activities increases.
- *General affectedness* - This relationship has been found for participation in all kinds of adult learning and CVET activities included in this study: formal, non-formal work-related, non-formal non-work-related, and informal.
- *Age and status gap* - Adults who are younger, higher educated and white-collar employed are more likely to participate in all four types of adult learning and CVET activities.
- *Gender gap* - Women are more likely to participate in adult learning and CVET activities compared to men.

Why is this important?

As European populations are ageing, the expected labor force shortage and the sustainability of pension systems are widely discussed. Consequently, prolonging working lives equally and inclusively has become a common goal of EU member states (European Commission, 2021). Access to learning or training activities is key to prolonging working lives, as workers need to be able to update their skills and acquire new skills. Also, with regards to the green and digital transition, skills are a key factor, which is highlighted by the “European year of skills” 2023 (European Commission, 2023). The access to learning and training activities should be equal to attain the goal of prolonging working lives equally and inclusively. However, previous research has found that participation in learning activities varies by different socioeconomic factors, revealing inequalities in participation. Improving perceptions about adult learning and CVET, especially among groups with lower participation rates, could be a way to increase participation and mitigate inequalities.

Who participates?

Results show a highly significant positive relationship between the perceived importance of adult learning and CVET as well as participation in it. More specifically, a more positive view on adult learning and CVET is associated with increased engagement in formal, non-formal work-related, non-formal non-work-related, and informal learning and CVET. This relationship remains, even when controlling for known impact factors, such as age, education, occupation, gender or country of residence. Hence, perceptions on adult learning and CVET should be considered when trying to increase participation rates.

In line with previous research, findings confirm the role of demographic and socioeconomic factors for engagement in adult learning and CVET activities. Younger and higher educated adults as well as white-collar employees are found to be more likely to engage in formal, non-formal work-related, non-formal non-work-related, and informal learning and CVET. Results showed a higher likelihood of participation for women in all types of activities, though the results for non-formal non-work-related learning were only significant in one of the models.

Recommendations

- Image management or awareness campaigns can emphasize various benefits of adult learning and CVET and hence improve perceptions. Improved perceptions, in turn, contribute to increased participation rates.
- These campaigns should be targeted at groups that are known to engage less in adult learning and CVET. Thereby, inequalities in participation could be mitigated.
- In times of extended working lives, adult learning and CVET are increasingly important for older workers. Image management campaigns should target older workers, especially those who are less likely to participate. This could mitigate inequalities in participation and thereby contribute to reduced inequalities in late working lives.
- In general, more efforts should be made to make adult learning and CVET more accessible for all and to create solutions to overcome barriers in participation.

About the research

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We are thankful to the [European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training \(Cedefop\)](#) for access to the Cedefop European opinion survey on adult learning and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) key to this study. The opinion survey on adult learning and is Cedefop copyright and are reproduced with the permission of Cedefop.

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