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Adult Learners and the SDGs: Perceptions of Skills Gained Through Non-Formal Education for the Labour Market

The education system, particularly VET and AE, is facing a tremendous challenge because of the rapidly changing demand for new skills and competencies in the job market due to technological advancement. Non-formal education and training are becoming increasingly important in European and global economies to address gaps in formal education and adapt to changing vocations and lifestyles.

This paper explores the role of non-formal adult education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Quality Education and Decent Work and Economic Growth.

It presents research findings from a study involving adult participants in various non-formal education programs, focusing on their perceptions of the skills acquired during training. According to the Cedefop European Skills and Jobs Survey (2023), around 85% of jobs in the EU require basic digital skills, 70% of jobs in the EU require at least a moderate level of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and 14% require advanced ICT skills. The aim was to assess whether these skills are relevant to the labour market and whether digital competencies were developed.

Using a mixed-method approach, the research gathered both quantitative data and qualitative insights from participants across several training initiatives. Findings indicate that most adults perceived the acquired skills—such as communication, teamwork, and especially basic digital literacy—as directly applicable to current job market demands. However, challenges remain, including limited recognition of non-formal learning outcomes and unequal access to digital tools.

The paper argues that non-formal adult education plays a vital role in building inclusive and adaptable skill sets, particularly in times of rapid technological change. To fully harness its potential, policies must better integrate adult learning into national development strategies, promote validation of non-formal learning, and expand access to digital education.

Keywords: adults, non-formal education, labour market, skills, training