

# Expectations Towards Vocational Training for Employment in Spain and its Impact on the Labour Market

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## Abstract

The necessity to adapt to the volatility of the labour market, coupled with the imperative to enhance the competencies associated with our professional roles, renders continuous training a fundamental requirement. In an era characterised by rapid technological advancements and shifting market demands, ongoing professional development is essential not only for individual adaptability but also for the overall efficacy and productivity of organisations. Cultivating a culture of lifelong learning is therefore critical in navigating the complexities of the contemporary work environment. This study aims to explore the expectations of both employed and unemployed individuals in Spain regarding this training system, as well as the tangible impact that training has had post-participation. A quantitative study was conducted using a questionnaire analysed through descriptive, correlational, and inferential statistics. The results, derived from responses by 390 (49% employed, 51% unemployed) trainings users, reveal high expectations among both employed and unemployed individuals concerning vocational training for employment. Moreover, the training positively influences the self-esteem of unemployed participants. However, this group does not report a significant impact on the relationship between training and their integration into the job market. In contrast, employed individuals experience a more pronounced impact regarding workplace improvements following the completion of training. These findings underscore the necessity of raising awareness about this training system and its implications, as well as the preparedness it imparts to its users. Efforts to enhance visibility will be essential for facilitating a quicker and more effective reintegration of unemployed individuals into the labour market.

## 1. Introduction

The necessity to adapt to the volatility of the labour market, alongside the need to effectively develop the functions associated with our roles, makes continuous training an evident requirement. Lifelong learning must be understood as an interaction between the environment and the individual, equipping the person with the tools to exploit their potential, enhance their technical and personal competencies, and the ability to reorient themselves towards their own needs or those of society (Bjursell, 2021; UNESCO, 2009; Zeiberte, 2021). This is all in service of adapting to what we now refer to as the Knowledge Society. We particularly emphasise this concept in relation

to economic and social development, as education, and thus training, will be a key part of progress (Ndibuza & Langa, 2020; Ndofirepi, 2017; Snellman, 2015).

Due to the importance of this concept, international organisations have begun to devote greater attention to it, incorporating certain guiding documents for training or the establishment of educational and employment policies (Cabral, 2019). Similarly, given the current social and economic characteristics, the access of adults to educational opportunities is gaining political significance (Maurer, 2022).

In Spain, "Professional Training for Employment" has been introduced as a means to enhance human capital by offering training aligned with the needs of both businesses and individuals seeking to improve employability. . This system is based on Organic Law 5/2002, of 19 June, on Qualifications and Vocational Training (LO 5/2002, 19 June), which was repealed by Organic Law 3/2022, of 31 March, establishing its aim to qualify and accredit its users so they can respond to the pressing social and market demands. It also ensures its provision free of charge and funded through public funds to promote lifelong training.

The following basic principles are established: a) Vocational training shall be directed towards personal development and the exercise of the right to work, as well as the free choice of profession or trade, while meeting the needs of the productive system and employment throughout life. b) Equal access for all citizens to the different modalities of vocational training. c) Participation and cooperation of social agents with public authorities in training and professional qualification policies. d) The alignment of training and qualifications with European Union criteria, in line with the objectives of the single market and the free movement of workers. e) The participation and cooperation of different public administrations according to their respective competencies. f) The promotion of economic development and adaptation to the various territorial needs of the productive system (BOE 147 of 20/06/2002, p. 2238).

The training offer is included in the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (INECUAL, 2022) according to the needs identified by the system that are eligible for recognition and accreditation. Thus, the catalogue must encompass the structure, content, and qualification of each of the offered modules. Additionally, it must provide information and guidance focused on employment matters.

Following regulatory changes, Law 30/2015 regulates the Vocational Training System for Employment, aiming to support workers in accessing, maintaining, and returning to employment, as well as in personal and professional development (p. 79780). This non-formal training system targets both unemployed individuals and those currently employed, seeking to enhance their skills for improved job performance. The development and implementation of relevant training actions will cover businesses and workers throughout Spain, thereby working collaboratively with the General Administration, Autonomous Communities, and business and trade union organisations, with the aim of "ensuring market unity and a strategic approach to training, respecting the existing competency framework" (Law 30/2015, of 9 September, which regulates the Vocational Training System for Employment in the Labour Sphere, p. 11).

Educating in competencies presents a significant challenge and still requires further research to validate the results obtained (Walden, 2020). Consequently, a debate is emerging in the European Union aimed at adapting economic and educational policies (González and Martínez, 2020). This involves shifting the focus from the accumulation of knowledge to the capacity to act, intervene, and decide in unanticipated situations (Perea, 2012). Thus, competency-based education promotes active, interdisciplinary, and practical learning, ensuring that knowledge, attitudes, and skills are transferable and effectively developed through practice (Shackleton and Messenge, 2021).

International studies corroborated that this vocational training has a positive impact on the (re)integration of its users into the labour market, regardless of their idiosyncrasies (Choi et al., 2019; Chuan and Ibsen, 2022; James et al., 2020). However, these same authors also discuss the obsolescence of the knowledge acquired over time. While the fundamental objective of training is met, it is necessary to assess its impact over time.

The focus is not solely on professional impact in job seeking, but also on the enhancement of skills and competencies, as well as personal development (Landberg and Noack, 2022). Therefore, Professional Training for Employment (FPE) can be a key pillar in the planning and/or updating of users' life projects (Olmos and Mas, 2018).

Despite the positive intentions and outcomes, Vocational Training for adults does not always meet the expectations and aspirations of its users (Cooper et al., 2017; Maurer, 2019). This study seeks to evaluate the impact of Professional Training for Employment on users, as well as their expectations. To achieve this, the sample is divided based on the participants' employment status at the time of the study: employed or unemployed.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Study Design and Data Analysis

The study design is non-experimental (ex post facto) and was conducted using a descriptive survey research method (Guevara et al., 2020).

For data analysis, descriptive, correlational and inferential statistics were used through SPSS v.27 software. For the descriptive statistics, means ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) were used. For correlational statistics, the Spearman test were employed. For the inferential statistics, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was first applied to check that the sample was normally distributed, followed by the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test (H) for more than two independent samples and the Mann-Whitney U-test (U) for two independent samples, respectively. In addition to the non-parametric inferential analysis, the effect sizes were calculated using the squared correlation coefficient (ER2) (Pizarro y Martínez, 2020).

## 2.2. Participants and Procedure

This study involved a simple random sampling of individuals who are currently vocational training seekers or former students of such programmes. To calculate the sample size, the formula for infinite populations ( $> 10,000$  subjects) was employed:  $n = z^2 P*Q/E^2$ . Consequently, the final sample comprised 390 subjects, with 38.2% identifying as male and 61.8% as female. The age distribution was as follows: 18-25 years (10.8%), 26-35 years (39.2%), 36-45 years (24.5%), and over 45 years (25.5%). Regarding residential location, 69.6% of respondents resided in Seville, 13.7% in Cádiz, 1% in both Cádiz and Jaén, 5% in Granada, 2.9% in Málaga, and 9.8% lived outside Andalucía, with respondents distributed across Barcelona, Alicante, Asturias, Burgos, and Girona. In terms of employment status, 49% of respondents were employed, while 51% were unemployed.

The questionnaires were completed online using Microsoft Forms. The questionnaire can be answered during the months of January-April 2023, and the link to the questionnaire will always remain open. We contacted different training companies that could put us in contact with users interested in participating in the study. In this way, we ensured data protection and voluntary participation in the research. The questionnaire was previously validated by a panel of experts and passed the statistical tests of Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis.

## 2.3. Instruments

A questionnaire entitled "Expectations and Impact of Vocational Training on Employment" was specifically created for this study. Considering the need for validation of the instrument, a group of 8 professionals from the field of education and research validated the instrument's content through a Delphi panel.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a score of  $\alpha=0.855$  for the impact of training on employed individuals,  $\alpha=0.889$  for the impact of training on unemployed individuals,  $\alpha=0.864$  for the expectations of training among employed individuals, and  $\alpha=0.868$  for the expectations of training among unemployed individuals.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the Principal Component method was used to evaluate construct validity, after previously checking sampling adequacy with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Además, se ha realizado el juste de bondad mediante la prueba de Proxcall (Table 1 y Table 2)

**Table 1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)**

Dimension		KMO	% Variance	factors	Bartlett's Test	Saturation Coefficients
					$\chi^2$	DF
Impact of Training on Employed Individuals		0.802	71.811.%	2	146.275	21
Impact of Training on Unemployed Individuals		0.867	62.638%	1	143.671	21
Expectations of Training for Employed Individuals		0.873	63.401%	1	142.490	15

Expectations of Training for Unemployed Individuals	0.662	63.209%	1	201.655	15
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Source: Author's own elaboration

**Table 2 Goodness of Fit. PROSCALL Test**

Dimension	Stress	Stress I	Stress II	S-Stress	D.A.F	Tucker
Impact of Training on Employed Individuals	0.03021	0.17282	0.50170	0.08354	0.96979	0.98478
Impact of Training on Unemployed Individuals	0.3495	0.18695	0.43004	0.07620	0.96505	0.98237
Expectations of Training for Employed Individuals	0.02499	0.15810	0.29615	0.06348	0.97501	0.98742
Expectations of Training for Unemployed Individuals	0.02911	0.17062	0.49765	0.08336	0.97089	0.98534

Source: Author's own elaboration

Furthermore, the instrument was subjected to expert evaluation, demonstrating that it was appropriate for the expected results of the study. The instrument was disseminated in three major dimensions. The first dimension consists of multiple-choice or binary questions pertaining to sociodemographic data, while the second and third dimensions present participants with statements to which they respond according to a Likert scale rated from 1 to 4, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree," 2 "Disagree," 3 "Agree," and 4 "Strongly Agree."

The first block references sociodemographic issues such as age, province of residence, and employment status. The second block, "Impact," comprises 14 items providing statements related to the acquisition of skills or personal changes resulting from the training. The third block, "Expectations," contains 12 items that refer to the anticipated outcomes following the completion of the training. Both the second and third dimensions are divided into items for employed and unemployed individuals, as their approach to training may differ.

### 3. Results

We start from the premise that this is a non-normally distributed population, as evidenced by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which yielded a significance level of less than 0.05.

#### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 3, the scores regarding expectations are notably higher (not falling below 3) than those related to the impact of the training. However, many items exhibit high deviations, indicating a lack of consensus in opinions. Consequently, it becomes even more pertinent to investigate statistical differences based on certain sociodemographic characteristics. The highest mean score (3.69) was recorded for the item "I expect that training will open doors for me in the job market," which is the primary objective of the training subsystem under investigation.

**Table 3 Descriptive Statistics**

Impact Items	Mean	SD	Expectation Items	Mean	SD
The training I received has helped me to be promoted in my company.	2.61	1.017	I hope that the training will help me expand my already acquired professional competencies.	3.58	0.710
The training has increased my sense of belonging to the organisation.	2.66	0.914	I trust that receive will enhance my sense of belonging to the organisation.	3.02	0.838
The training received has expanded my already acquired professional competencies.	3.34	0.713	I trust that the methodology will promote the development of my professional competencies.	3.44	0.681
After the training, I feel eager to continue learning.	3.41	0.693	I hope that the training will equip me to face new challenges in my job.	3.54	0.585
The content delivered during the training has addressed my training needs.	3.16	0.713	I hope that the training will help me gain new job perspectives.	3.54	0.683
The training received has helped me to face new challenges in my job.	3.20	0.823	I hope that the training will assist me in advancing my position.	3.55	0.653
Completing the training has made me more self-confident.	3.23	0.803	I trust that the content developed during the training meets my professional needs.	3.45	0.610

Impact Items	Mean	SD	Expectation Items	Mean	SD
The training I received has helped me find new employment.	2.24	1.076	I hope that the upcoming training will provide me with the personal security to face the job market.	3.63	0.488
The training received has provided me with new tools that increase my options for accessing the job market.	3.21	0.704	I trust that the methodology will promote the development of my professional competencies.	3.55	0.503
After the training received, I felt better prepared for the job market.	3.08	0.749	I trust that by completing the course, I can address my training deficiencies.	3.49	0.644
After the training, I feel eager to continue learning.	3.26	0.795	I hope that the training will help me gain new job perspectives.	3.365	4.0483
The content delivered during the training has addressed my training needs.	3.13	0.665	I hope that the training will open doors for me in the job market.	3.69	0.469
The training received has met my expectations.	3.13	0.665	Completing the training has made me more self-confident.	3.16	0.855

Source: Author’s own. Mean = scale 1 to 4); SD = Standard Deviation

### 3.2. Inferential Analysis

We proceed to conduct the Mann-Whitney U test to ascertain the existence of significant differences based on gender; however, we cannot confirm that such differences exist, as the significance of U is consistently greater than  $p = 0.05$ . When conducting the test based on age, the Kruskal-Wallis H test is employed, revealing significant differences only in the item “The training I received has helped me to be promoted within the company” ( $p = 0.05$ ), with individuals over 45 years old scoring higher on this item ( $C = 0.392$ ;  $p = 0.008$ ). The effect size is calculated as  $ER2=0.049$  (Small Effect).

### 3.3. Correlations

We now aim to investigate whether significant relationships exist between the items themselves. The Pearson correlation coefficient is calculated, yielding the following significant results (Table 4 for employed individuals, Table 5 for unemployed individuals).

Table 4 demonstrates numerous correlations of medium (0.4-0.6) and even high (0.6-0.8) intensity among the items directed at employed individuals. This clearly indicates the positive impact of training on both job security and a sense of belonging to the organisation. Furthermore, we observe that this promotion and well-being are reflected in the high scores generated by the participants' expectations regarding training. The strongest correlations among the responses from employed participants were found between the items "The training I received has helped me to be promoted within my company" and "After the training, I feel eager to continue learning" ( $r = 0.527$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "The training I received has helped me to be promoted within my company" and "I hope that training will help me gain new job perspectives" ( $r = 0.650$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "The training I received has helped me to be promoted within my company" and "I expect the training to assist me in advancing my position" ( $r = 0.537$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "After the training, I feel eager to continue learning" and "The training I received has helped me to face new challenges in my job" ( $r = 0.584$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "After the training, I feel eager to continue learning" and "Completing the training has made me more self-confident" ( $r = 0.581$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "The training has increased my sense of belonging to the organisation" and "Completing the training has made me more self-confident" ( $r = 0.710$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

In the case of Table 5, which pertains to the correlations among items related to unemployed individuals, we highlight those items with the most substantial correlations: "After the training received, I felt better prepared for the job market" and "After the training, I feel eager to continue learning" ( $r = 0.736$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "After the training received, I felt better prepared for the job market" and "I hope that training will open doors for me in the job market" ( $r = 0.702$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); "After the training, I feel eager to continue learning" and "The training I received has provided me with new tools that increase my options for accessing the job market" ( $r = 0.672$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). These results highlight the benefits of training for users, not only in preparing them for the job market but also in enhancing their self-esteem and personal confidence.

**Table 4** Correlations among items for employed individuals

		The training I received has helped me to be promoted in my company	The training has increased my sense of belonging to the organisation	The training received has expanded my already acquired professional competencies	After the training, I feel eager to continue learning	The content delivered during the training has addressed my training needs	The training received has helped me to face new challenges in my job	Completing the training has made me more self-confident	I hope that the training will help me to expand my already acquired professional competencies	I trust that the training I receive will enhance my sense of belonging to the organisation	I trust that the methodology will promote the development of my professional competencies	I trust that the methodology will promote the development of my professional competencies	I hope that the training will equip me to face new challenges in my job	I hope that the training will assist me in advancing my position.
The training I received has helped me to be promoted in my company.	r		.506	.378	.527		.458	.366	.440	.551	.436	.510	.650	.537
	Sig		.000	.011	.000		.002	.014	.003	.000	.003	.001	.000	.000
The training has increased my sense of belonging to the organisation.	r	.506		.325	.446	.549	.559	.710		.461	.334	.492	.318	.399
	Sig	.000		.031	.002	.000	.000	.000		.002	.028	.001	.037	.009
The training received has expanded my already acquired professional competencies.	r	.378	.325		.417		.314				.317	.398		
	Sig	.011	.031		.005		.038				.039	.010		

After the training, I feel eager to continue learning.	r	.527	.446	.417		.477	.584	.581		.543	.386	.409	.454	.452
	Sig	.000	.002	.005		.001	.000	.000		.000	.011	.008	.002	.003
The content delivered during the training has addressed my training needs.	r		.549		.477		.616	.747						
	Sig		.000		.001		.000	.000						
The training received has helped me to face new challenges in my job.	r	.458	.559	.314	.584	.616		.702						
	Sig	.002	.000	.038	.000	.000		.000						

Source: Author's own.

**Table 5** *Correlations among items for unemployed individuals*

		The training I received has helped me to find new employment	The training received has provided me with new work tools that increase my options for accessing the labour market	After the training, I felt better prepared for the labour market	After the training, I feel eager to continue learning	The content delivered during the training has addressed my training needs	The training received has met my expectations	Completing the training has made me more self-confident	I trust that the content developed during the training meets my job-related needs	I hope that the training I will receive will provide me with personal security to face the labour market	I trust that the methodology will promote the development of my professional competencies	I trust that by completing the course, I can address my training deficiencies	I hope that the training will help me to obtain new job perspectives	I hope that the training will open doors for me in the labour market.
The training I received has helped me to find new employment.	r Sig	1 .000	.646 .000	.512 .001	.525 .001	.409 .011	.409 .011	.399 .013	.446 .006	.420 .010	.380 .020	.400 .014	.358 .030	.390 .017
The training received has provided me with new work tools that increase my options for accessing the labour market	r Sig	.646 .000	1	.634 .000	.672 .000	.517 .001	.575 .000	.482 .002	.407 .012	.411 .012	.411 .012	.327 .048	.557 .000	.621 .000
After the training, I felt better prepared for the labour market	r Sig	.512 .001	.634 .000	1	.736 .000	.521 .001	.576 .000	.613 .000	.642 .000	.604 .000	.624 .000	.353 .032	.605 .000	.702 .000
After the training, I feel eager to continue learning	r Sig	.525 .001	.672 .000	.736 .000	1	.444 .005	.547 .000	.574 .000	.537 .001	.351 .033	.369 .024		.617 .000	.669 .000

The content delivered during the training has addressed my training needs	r	.409	.517	.521	.444	1	.755	.628	.457	.499	.547	.392	.494	.488
	Sig	.011	.001	.001	.005		.000	.000	.004	.002	.000	.016	.002	.002
The training received has met my expectations	r	.409	.575	.576	.547	.755	1	.628	.457	.499	.384	.614	.494	.577
	Sig	.011	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.004	.002	.019	.000	.002	.000
Completing the training has made me more self-confident.	r	.399	.482	.613	.574	.628	.628	1	.490	.543	.460	.331	.474	.469
	Sig	.013	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000		.002	.001	.004	.045	.003	.003

Source: Author's own

## 4. Conclusions and discussion

Regarding the impact of training on employed individuals, a central finding is the enhancement of self-esteem among users, as highlighted in the research by Hlad et al. (2021). Following their initial training experiences, participants express a desire to engage in further activities, indicating the personal benefits associated with such training. However, the overall effectiveness of training in terms of career advancement or fostering a sense of belonging appears to fall short for many users, with the exception of individuals over 45 years old, who report a more substantial impact on their job roles.

Conversely, while the training may not significantly influence professional development, it contributes to increased self-confidence among users (CEDEFOP, 2011). This suggests that training can be instrumental in enhancing participants' self-esteem. This could be why the users' desire to continue participating in training. As they have higher self-esteem and feel more and more prepared for the labour market, they might feel that their chances of entering the labour market are close.

An analysis of the relationship between item scores and user characteristics reveals no significant correlation between participants' gender and their scores. However, there is a positive association between job improvement and training for individuals over 45 years who have participated in employment training. Notably, high means were recorded across all items related to expectations, particularly regarding promotion in the workplace, which received the highest score among active workers.

In the context of unemployed individuals, they generally perceive that the training received has not significantly impacted their professional development or assisted them in securing new employment, as evidenced by low scores on these items. This stands in contrast to the findings of Andersson and Muhrman (2022), which suggested that such training often leads to employment opportunities. As noted by Löfgren et al. (2020) and Landberget Noack (2022), these training programmes serve as an initial step, requiring participants to also cultivate practical experience, attitudes, and interpersonal skills.

Nonetheless, there is a notable sense of hope and enthusiasm for ongoing participation in training activities, as indicated by high scores on the item regarding the desire to continue training. This aligns with the assertions of Mara et al. (2022) and Beka and Stublla (2022), who contend that training can serve as an effective tool for enhancing personal self-esteem. The successful completion of courses ultimately motivates participants and empowers them to pursue their professional aspirations.

Regarding the expectations of unemployed individuals concerning training, it is evident that they place significant trust in employment training as a pathway to new job opportunities. The desire for improved employment prospects is the most highly valued expectation among unemployed respondents, aligning with legislative goals for such training and underscoring the primary objectives for training managers. This perspective resonates with James (2020), who posited that training programmes should facilitate integration into the labour market. While these training initiatives are complementary and beneficial, their effectiveness in achieving full integration into the labour market remains incomplete (Achatz et al., 2022; Cooper et al., 201; Maurer, 2019). The evolving nature of the labour market necessitates a focused approach to training that leverages the positive expectations surrounding such programmes as a driving force to encourage participation.

In light of the above, the article shows the need to work on this training system in order to achieve greater compliance with the proposed legal objectives. Although there is a positive impact on a personal level, it is still not enough in terms of professional impact. In this sense, we consider that the joint work of the different agents involved in training: teachers, training companies, internship companies and labour representatives, among others, would be key to improving the training system. Working together and discussing real needs in the labour market could lead to training plans/training offers that are better adapted both to the needs of the environment and to the professional skills demanded. Furthermore, increasing the visibility of the system and its benefits is key for the subsequent insertion of its users.

## Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

## Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Susana Vidigal-Alfaya; Miguel-Ángel Ballesteros Mosocosio; **data collection:** Susana Vidigal-Alfaya; **and interpretation of results:** Susana Vidigal-Alfaya; **draft manuscript preparation:** : Susana Vidigal-Alfaya; Miguel-Ángel Ballesteros Mosocosio*

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