Analysis of Gender Differences in Participation in Continuing Vocational Training: An Organizational Perspective

Iulia-Oana Ștefănescu
Kamer-Ainur Aivaz
"Ovidius" University of Constanta, Romania
oflorea81@gmail.com
kamer.aivaz@365.ovidiu-ovidius.ro

Abstract

This study examines gender disparities in continuing vocational training (CVT) from an organizational perspective. By analyzing data from different sized companies, the research identifies significant differences in access to CVT between men and women, highlighting systemic challenges and barriers. Quantitative analysis reveals a consistent inverse proportionality of participation rates, with women often being more involved in CVT programs, particularly in smaller organizations, where their participation rates are significantly higher than men's. These findings suggest that organizational policies, cultural factors, and structural barriers influence access to training opportunities. The research highlights the importance of developing inclusive strategies and flexible training programs that address the specific needs of both sexes. It also emphasizes the role of equitable resource allocation and policy adjustments in promoting balanced professional development and improving organizational performance. By providing actionable insights, this study contributes to the discourse on gender equality in vocational training and its implications for workforce development.

Key words: gender equality, continuing vocational training, organizational perspective, strategies
J.E.L. classification: J16, J21, J24

1. Introduction

Participation in continuing vocational training is a key aspect of an organization's human capital development, having a direct impact on the competitiveness and adaptability of individuals in a changing socio-economic environment (Kabeer N., 2021). In this context, gender differences can significantly influence access, motivation and opportunities to participate in such programs. Studies on the role of gender in continuing education emphasize the complexity of interactions between individual, social and institutional factors, highlighting existing challenges and inequalities (Kraft et al, 2020).

This paper aims to analyze in detail the gender gaps in participation in continuing education, focusing on identifying specific determinants, barriers and outcomes, quantifying these gaps, assessing the statistical significance and identifying the practical relevance of the findings. In addition, the study aims to highlight the extent to which public policies and institutional initiatives contribute to reducing these differences, thereby promoting equal opportunities.

By investigating the current context and emerging trends, this paper makes an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between gender and access to continuing vocational training, supporting the development of more inclusive and effective strategies.

2. Theoretical background

Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) is a fundamental component of lifelong learning, aiming to develop and update individuals' vocational competences to meet the demands of a changing economic and technological environment. It is a form of organized learning, taking place after the

completion of formal education, which contributes to maintaining and improving performance in the workplace, adapting to new technologies and organizational changes, and to career development.

CVT is defined as the set of structured educational activities aimed at improving professional knowledge, skills and attitudes (Goldin, 2021). In the literature, CVT is distinguished by three key characteristics: 1. Flexibility: programs are tailored to the specific needs of participants and the labor market; 2. Relevance: content is closely linked to the practical requirements of the workplace; 3. Continuity: it is an ongoing process necessary to respond to rapid changes in the professional environment (Tabassum, 2021).

Continuing vocational training (CVT) benefits from a rich theoretical grounding, being influenced by multiple disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology and pedagogy (Chuang, 2021). This theoretical framework provides diverse perspectives on how individuals learn, adapt and develop their competencies in the professional environment. In this section, we review the main theories underpinning CVT, emphasizing their implications for practice.

The human capital theory proposed by Gary Becker (1964) shows that continuing education and training are investments that bring economic benefits to both individuals and organizations. According to this theory, the skills and knowledge acquired through CVT increase productivity, contributing to increased personal income and organizational profitability. In the context of CVT, this theory justifies the allocation of resources to training programs, highlighting the link between employee skills and the competitive advantage of organizations. According to this theory employers invest in CVT to keep their workforce up-to-date and competitive, and public policies promote CVT to reduce structural unemployment and support job mobility (Levy, 2020).

David Kolb (1984), in experiential learning theory, argues that learning is most effective when individuals can use their previous experiences as a starting point to assimilate new knowledge and skills. In this model, learning is cyclical, involving four essential stages: concrete experience, observation and reflection, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. In CVT, this theory is central to the design of programs that capitalize on participants' work experiences, tailoring them to their specific needs. Case studies, simulations and practical projects are commonly used methods to facilitate experiential learning.

The constructivist perspective on learning, advocated by authors such as Piaget (1926) and Vygotsky (1978), suggests that learning is an active process in which individuals construct meaning through interaction with the environment and collaboration with others. In CVT, this principle is used to develop collaborative programs based on problem solving and knowledge sharing among participants. According to this perspective, vocational training is most effective when active participation is encouraged through group activities and brainstorming. Mentoring and communities of practice are means through which learning becomes contextualized and relevant to professional needs.

In addition to human capital, CVT also builds on the concept of social capital, which emphasizes the role of networks of relationships in facilitating access to information and learning opportunities. Granovetter (1973) emphasizes the importance of 'weak ties' - looser but diversified relationships - in providing access to new information and useful resources. Within CVT, this theory suggests that training should also include aspects of networking to give participants the opportunity to expand their contacts and access to professional resources.

Self-determination theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), explores how motivation influences learning. It distinguishes between intrinsic motivation (driven by the personal desire to learn) and extrinsic motivation (driven by external rewards, such as promotions or salary increases). CVT programs that focus on personal and professional relevance tend to be more effective in cultivating strong intrinsic motivation. According to this perspective, it is possible to tailor training programs to match participants' individual and professional goals and to create an environment that supports autonomy, competence and positive interpersonal relationships.

Theoretical perspectives on change (Lewin, 1947; Kotter, 1996) highlight how CVT facilitates organizational transformations. By updating employees' skills, CVT supports the implementation of new strategies and technologies. In addition, it helps to reduce resistance to change by increasing confidence in adaptability.

Recent studies provide valuable insights into the factors influencing participation in CVT, particularly in the context of the social, economic and environmental changes of recent years. In a landscape marked by pandemics, urbanization and the transition towards sustainable development, they highlight the role of public policies, organizational strategies and educational initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a reassessment of public intervention measures and their impact on different social groups. The studies by Stan, Rus and Tasente (2020) and Nemirschi and Vancea (2020) explore young people's perceptions and industrial adaptations, highlighting the need for flexible policies that support inclusion and equal access to resources. These findings complement the analysis of unbalanced access to training, especially in small and medium-sized organizations.

At the same time, urbanization and sustainable rural development put pressure on HR strategies and organizational priorities. Stan (2022) investigates the impact of the pandemic crisis on employment, and Stan and Cortel (2022) examine the role of planning frameworks in local communities, concluding that well-structured policies can help reduce inequalities and increase equitable opportunities.

Sustainability perspectives play a central role in developing job skills and promoting gender equality. Grigorescu et al. (2023) introduce the concept of a green skills matrix for civil servants, while Munteanu, Ionescu-Feleagă and Ionescu (2024) address financial strategies for the circular economy. These studies suggest that integrating sustainable competences into training curricula can support diversity and inclusion while addressing the challenges of organizational change.

On the other hand, CVET is increasingly benefiting from innovative tools such as gamification. The study by Căpățînă et al. (2024) demonstrates the effectiveness of these tools in improving employee retention and performance, highlighting their potential for reducing gender differences in access to learning opportunities.

Economic and social factors also play a key role. Brașoveanu's (2023) analysis of the environmental impact of regional development and Bătrâncea et al.'s (2023) studies on the determinants of economic growth highlight the complex interdependencies between economic development, public policies and organizational initiatives.

Finally, perspectives on gender and religion provide a relevant cultural and sociological framework. Stan, Vancea, and Zaharia's (2023) study (Stan, Vancea, and Zaharia, 2023) addresses the link between women, religion, and conflict, complementing the understanding of the role of cultural values and norms in participation in vocational training. These can significantly influence organizational policies and human resource strategies.

In conclusion, the literature supports the idea that balanced participation in vocational training is conditioned by a combination of economic, social, cultural and organizational factors. These studies provide a solid framework for further analysis of gender differences and for the formulation of more inclusive and effective policies within organizations.

The theoretical framework of continuing vocational training is diverse and complex, bringing together complementary perspectives from multiple disciplines. Applying these theories in practice enables the design of effective and relevant programs that respond to individual needs as well as to organizational and economic requirements. CVT thus becomes an essential tool for personal, professional and societal development.

CVT plays an important role in bridging the gap between existing skills and those required by employers. Major benefits include increased competitiveness in the labor market, improved job satisfaction and increased adaptability to organizational change (Dwivedi et al, 2024). At the same time, CVT contributes to reducing structural unemployment and creating a more resilient workforce. While the benefits are numerous, CVT faces challenges such as high costs, unequal access to quality programs, limited time allocated by participants, and lack of clear supportive policies. There is also a growing need to tailor programs to meet the diversity of professional and individual needs.

In conclusion, continuing vocational training is a central pillar of professional and economic development, integrating theoretical and applied perspectives to support the continuous adaptation of individuals and organizations to global dynamics. Studying and improving this process is essential for a knowledge and innovation-based economy.

3. Research methodology

The study uses a quantitative research design, based on paired-sample comparisons, to analyze the participation of men and women in the same organizations. This approach allows accurate measurement of gender differences and provides a sound basis for statistical interpretation of the results.

The data used in this study include paired observations on CVT participation rates for men and women, categorized by small, medium and large companies according to the number of employees. Information was collected from organizational sources using standardized methods for reporting CVT participation. Data were collected from the Eurostat database. Each dataset was structured in such a way as to allow analysis of gender differences within the same organization.

For data analysis, the following statistical methods were applied: a. Paired Samples t-Test to assess the average differences between male and female participation in each company category; b. Effect sizes (Cohen's d and Hedges' correction) to quantify the magnitude of the gender differences and interpret them in terms of their practical relevance; c. Confidence intervals (95%) to establish the limits within which these differences can be generalized with a high degree of certainty; d. Assessment of statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) to validate the results obtained.

The analyzed population consists of employees participating in the CVT, distributed in three categories: small companies (10-49 employees), medium-sized companies (50-249 employees) and large companies (more than 250 employees). The data reflect individual participation in training programs, segregated by gender, for each organization analyzed.

4. Findings

Table 1 presents the correlations between male (M) and female (F) participation in continuing vocational training (CVT) for various categories of companies categorized by company size. The perfectly negative correlation (-1.000) between the two groups, with an extremely high level of significance ($p < .001$ for one-tailed and two-tailed tests), indicates an absolute inverse proportional absolute relationship. In other words, an increase in participation of one gender is directly associated with a decrease in participation of the other, regardless of company size.

The very low p-value indicates that this relationship is not random but reflects a systematic pattern. It suggests a strict segmentation of access to continuing education and training by gender, either through organizational policies, cultural factors or internal practices.

From a business management perspective, this result highlights a significant imbalance between men and women in terms of access to CVT programs. In small, medium and large companies, the phenomenon is consistent, indicating a systemic problem rather than one specific to a particular type of organization. This situation may have several causes: gender stereotypes, which may lead to men's inclination towards technical programs, family responsibilities which affect women more, or even a lack of flexibility in the organization of training to meet the needs of both groups.

Table no. 1 Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Total_B	37.4082	110	14.68045	1.39973
	Total_F	62.5918	110	14.68045	1.39973
Pair 2	Companies 10-49 empl. M	24.7627	110	14.25831	1.35948
	Companies 10-49 empl. F	75.2373	110	14.25831	1.35948
Pair 3	Companies 50-249 empl. M	34.0682	110	15.62077	1.48938
	Companies 50-249 empl. F	65.9318	110	15.62077	1.48938
Pair 4	Companies over 250 empl B	49.6964	110	15.15344	1.44482
	Companies over 250 empl F	50.3036	110	15.15344	1.44482

Source: authors' own processing by SPSS

These data, presented in Table 2, suggest that managers need to investigate the barriers that lead to this imbalance and adjust policies to promote equitable access to training. Training programs should be rethought to include both men and women in a balanced way. It is also essential to develop flexible strategies to enable both genders to access vocational training, considering their different needs and constraints.

Another important issue is the impact of this imbalance on organizational performance. Limited access to training for one gender can affect the diversity of skills and team effectiveness. Therefore, balancing access to CVT not only responds to equal opportunities requirements, but also contributes to the development of better trained and more diverse human capital.

In conclusion, the perfectly negative correlation between male and female participation in CVT highlights a systemic problem that requires strategic interventions at the organizational level. Managers need to focus their efforts on removing barriers that limit access to training and on creating an inclusive environment capable of supporting balanced skills development for both genders.

The results presented in Table 2, Paired Samples Test, analyze the average differences between male (M) and female (F) participation in continuing vocational training (CVT) by company size categories. Interpretation of the results reveals significant insights into how access to CVT is influenced by gender and organization size.

Table no. 2 Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
		Mean	STD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Total_M - Total_F	-25.18	29.36	2.79	-30.73	-19.63	-8.99	109	<.001	<.001
Pair 2	10-49emplM 10-49empl F	-50.47	28.51	2.71	-55.86	-45.08	-18.56	109	<.001	<.001
Pair 3	50-249emplM 50-249emplF	-31.86	31.24	2.97	-37.76	-25.95	-10.69	109	<.001	<.001
Pair 4	over250emplM over250emplF	-.6072	30.30	2.88	-6.33	5.11	-.210	109	.417	.834

Source: authors' own processing by SPSS

For the whole population analyzed (Total_M - Total_F), the mean difference is -25.18, indicating that women participate significantly more than men in CVT, with a statistically significant difference (p<.001). The 95% confidence interval (-30.73 to -19.64) shows that this difference is robust and consistent, and the negative t-score (-8.996) confirms this trend. This result suggests that women have a much more pronounced presence in continuing professional development programs, which may reflect either a greater openness to professional development or a priority given to it by organizations.

For small companies (10-49 employees), the average difference between male and female participation is higher (-50.47), indicating an even more pronounced bias in favor of women. The t-value of -18.564, with an extremely high statistical significance (p < .001), confirms this imbalance. The confidence interval (-55.86 to -45.09) shows that the mean difference is consistent and significant. This result may reflect a greater focus on women's training in small companies, which may be related to their specific roles in the organizations or a compensation strategy for possible career barriers.

For medium sized companies (50-249 employees), the mean difference is -31.86, with a confidence interval of -37.77 to -25.96 and high significance (p < .001). This difference, although smaller than for small companies, is still substantial, indicating a continuation of the trend of higher female participation in training. This result may signal that as the size of the organization increases, women continue to benefit from greater involvement in CVT, possibly because of more structured and inclusive policies.

For large companies (more than 250 employees), the average difference between men and women is almost non-existent (-0.607) and statistically insignificant (p = .417 for one-tailed test and p = .834 for two-tailed test). The confidence interval (-6.33 to 5.12) includes the value zero, indicating that there is no real difference between men's and women's participation in CVT in this type of organizations. This result can be explained by more well-defined equal opportunity processes in larger companies, which have more consistent resources to provide equal access to both genders.

From a business management perspective, these results highlight a clear need to adjust training strategies to ensure gender equity. In small and medium sized companies, managers could continue to encourage women's involvement but must be careful not to neglect the development of men's skills. In large companies, where participation is more balanced, it is important to maintain this neutrality through transparent and fair policies. Overall, the evidence suggests that tailored approaches that consider the specificities of each company size are essential to maximize the impact of training programs.

Table 3 presents the effect sizes for the pairwise differences between male (M) and female (F) participation in continuing vocational training (CVT), using Cohen's d and Hedges' correction indicators to quantify the magnitude of the differences between the two groups by company size.

Table no. 3 Paired Samples Effect Sizes

			Standardizer[a]	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Total_M - Total_F	Cohen's d	29.36090	-.858	-1.075	-.638
		Hedges' correction	29.56487	-.852	-1.068	-.633
Pair 2	Comp 10-49 empl M Comp 10-49 empl F	Cohen's d	28.51662	-1.770	-2.068	-1.468
		Hedges' correction	28.71473	-1.758	-2.054	-1.458
Pair 3	Comp 50-249 empl M Comp 50-249 empl F	Cohen's d	31.24155	-1.020	-1.249	-.788
		Hedges' correction	31.45859	-1.013	-1.240	-.782
Pair 4	Comp over 250 empl M Comp over 250 empl F	Cohen's d	30.30688	-.020	-.207	.167
		Hedges' correction	30.51743	-.020	-.205	.166

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.
Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

Source: authors' own processing by SPSS

Cohen's d and Hedges' correction measure the effect size, i.e. the size of the standardized difference between the two groups. Negative values indicate that women (F) participate more than men (B), and the confidence intervals (95%) provide the limits within which these effects lie with a high degree of certainty.

Pair 1: Total_M - Total_F

The overall difference between men and women at the total level has a Cohen's d value of -0.858, with a confidence interval between -1.075 and -0.638. This indicates a moderate to large effect in favor of women, according to the standard Cohen's interpretation (0.2 = small, 0.5 = moderate, 0.8 = large). The result is confirmed by the Hedges' correction (-0.852), which slightly adjusts the effect size for small to medium-sized samples. This result reflects the fact that women, on average, have a higher participation in CVT than men, which may suggest a greater openness or involvement of women in professional development.

Pair 2: Companies with 10-49 employees

For small companies (10-49 employees), the difference is the largest, with Cohen's d of -1.770 and a confidence interval between -2.068 and -1.468, indicating a very large effect in favor of women. Hedges' correction (-1.758) confirms this result. The significant difference shows that women in small companies participate much more frequently than men in CVT. This can be explained by the fact that these companies, which often operate with limited resources, prioritize the development of employees who can have a greater impact on overall performance, and women may be perceived as more receptive to these initiatives.

Pair 3: Companies with 50-249 employees

In medium-sized companies, the difference is smaller than in small companies, but still significant, with Cohen's d of -1.020 and a confidence interval between -1.249 and -0.788. This indicates a large effect in favor of women, suggesting that they continue to be more involved than men in CVT. Hedges' correction (-1.013) supports this conclusion. Medium-sized companies, which are often in transition to more formalized structures, may favor women for skill development, given their importance in various organizational roles.

Pair 4: Companies with more than 250 employees

In large companies, the difference between men and women is almost non-existent, with Cohen's d of -0.020 and a confidence interval including zero (-0.207 to 0.167). Hedges' correction produces the same result (-0.020). This indicates that there is no significant effect in terms of gender differences in CVT participation. In large companies, policies and processes are better defined and standardized, which ensures equitable access to continuing training programs for both genders.

In summary, the research results are presented in Table 4.

Table no. 4 Summary of research results

Analyzed aspect	Small companies (10-49 employees)	Medium companies (50-249 employees)	Big companies (over 250 employees)	Implications and Recommendations
Participation Female vs. Male	Greater participation of women (Cohen's d = -1.770)	Greater participation of women (Cohen's d = -1.020).	Gender-balanced participation (Cohen's d = 0).	Inclusive policies needed in small and medium-sized companies to reduce imbalance
Effect size	Very large effect in favor of women	Large effect in favor of women	Non-significant effect	In large companies, neutrality should be maintained through standardized processes.
Possible causes of the imbalances	Limited resources, different perceptions of professional roles	Transitional strategies in favor of women	Equality promoted through clearly defined resources and policies	Creating gender-inclusive programs adapted to organizational specifics
Effect on performance	Significant imbalance; may affect skill diversity	Moderate imbalance; similar risks	Diversity ensured due to balanced participation	Managers should monitor effects on teams and correct discrepancies
Specific recommendations	Investigations to remove barriers to male access	Tailored programs that include both genders equitably	Maintaining balance through transparent and flexible policies	Adopting a strategic perspective to integrate diversity into all organizations

Source: authors' own processing by SPSS

5. Conclusions

The study highlights the need for strategic interventions to ensure gender-balanced access to continuing vocational training (CVT). Training programs should be tailored to the specific needs of the organization, promoting equal participation for both women and men. Large companies can serve as a model of good practice by implementing standardized and transparent policies that encourage gender balance.

The analysis shows significant differences between men and women in terms of participation in CVT, especially in small and medium-sized companies. In these organizations, women participate much more frequently than men, which may indicate either a greater openness of women to vocational training or a priority given to them by employers. In contrast, these differences almost completely disappear in large companies, where well-defined organizational policies ensure equitable access for both genders.

Possible causes of these imbalances include gender stereotypes, family responsibilities and organizational policies that are not sufficiently inclusive in small and medium-sized companies. Managers in these organizations should investigate the causes of the differences and implement measures to guarantee equal access to vocational training for men and women.

Imbalances in CVT participation can have important organizational implications, influencing the diversity of skills and the effectiveness of teams. Therefore, it is essential to adopt more inclusive and personalized human resources policies that consider the needs and characteristics of each type of organization.

The research results, obtained based on Eurostat data, were validated by rigorous statistical methods, such as paired samples test, effect size measurements and statistical significance analysis. These methods confirm the robustness of the conclusions and highlight the importance of adjustments in human resources policies to promote gender equality in vocational training.

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