

Canadian Attitudes toward Work-Related Adult Learning

Learning takes on many forms in adulthood, from non-formal learning—such as reading books and manuals, researching online, problem-solving, and asking friends and colleagues for help—to more formal learning activities such as degree courses and facilitated workshops. Since much of an adult's day revolves around work, it is likely that much of adult learning is job-related.

Fostering formal and non-formal work-related learning is increasingly important in growing Canada's economy. The rise of information technology and a shrinking workforce due to retiring baby-boomers are putting pressure on employers to upgrade workforce skills.²⁰

Investing in workplace training yields increased productivity, innovation and economic success.^{21,22} For the individual, workplace learning contributes to increased job satisfaction and performance, promotes social and personal development, and supports lifelong learning.²³

Formal work-related learning: Learning in the form of organized training programs, courses, workshops or seminars towards a degree, diploma, or certificate related to a job or career. Formal learning is structured and typically takes place in an educational or training institution.

Non-formal work-related learning: Learning while on the job (e.g., direct instruction, mentoring, coaching, or observation by a superior), job rotation, e-learning (e.g., online courses, tutorials or seminars), or self-guided learning (e.g., reading, researching, using manuals, asking a colleague for help, or problem-solving on one's own). Non-formal learning does not lead to certification.

Note: SCAL 2008 uses *non-formal* to refer to both non-formal and informal learning. However, the OECD makes a distinction between these two types of learning: the OECD defines *non-formal learning* as any organized and sustained educational activity, and can take place both within and outside educational institutions.

Overview: What we asked, what Canadians told us

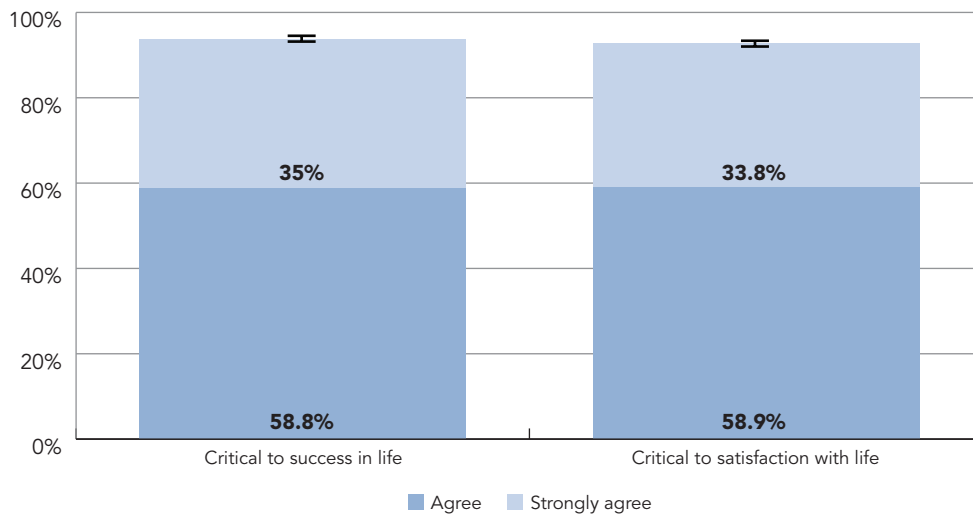
1. How important is adult learning?

- Is learning throughout adulthood critical to success in life?
- Is continuing to learn after leaving the school system critical to satisfaction with life?

The vast majority of Canadians agree or strongly agree that adult learning is critical to success in and satisfaction with life.

Figure 23

Proportion of Canadians who agree or strongly agree that adult learning is critical to success and satisfaction



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

2. How many Canadians take formal work-related training?

Among Canadians who have not retired, 51% report taking some type of formal work-related training within the past year. For most Canadians (75%), this training came after they had already finished formal schooling, but for one-quarter of Canadians this training was part of a continuous path from high school through college or university.

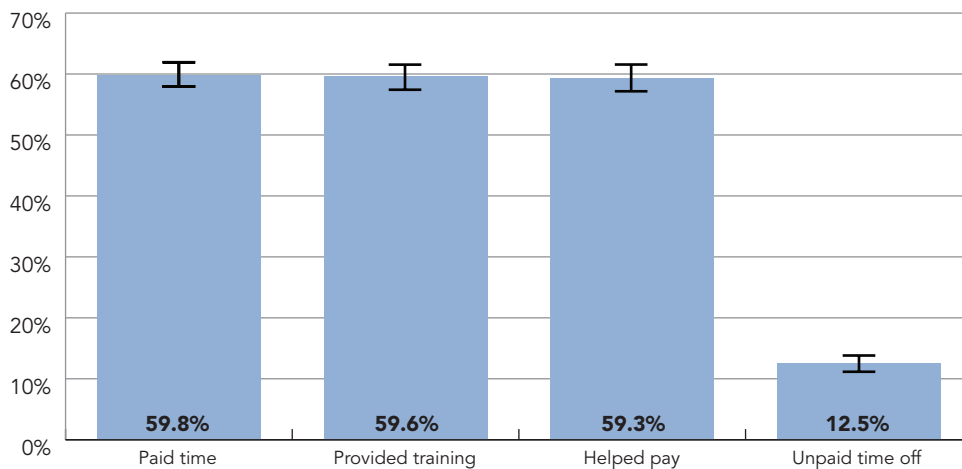
3. What forms of employer support do Canadians receive for their formal work-related training?

- Unpaid time off
- Paid time while on training
- Employer provided or arranged the training
- Employer helped pay for training costs (e.g., tuition or course materials)

Of those who received formal work-related training during the past year, 78% indicate that they received some form of employer support for that training. This typically involved employers either paying employees while they were receiving training, employers providing the training or arranging for it to be provided, or employers helping to pay for training costs.

Figure 24

Proportion of non-retired Canadians who received formal training during the past year, who report employer support for that training



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

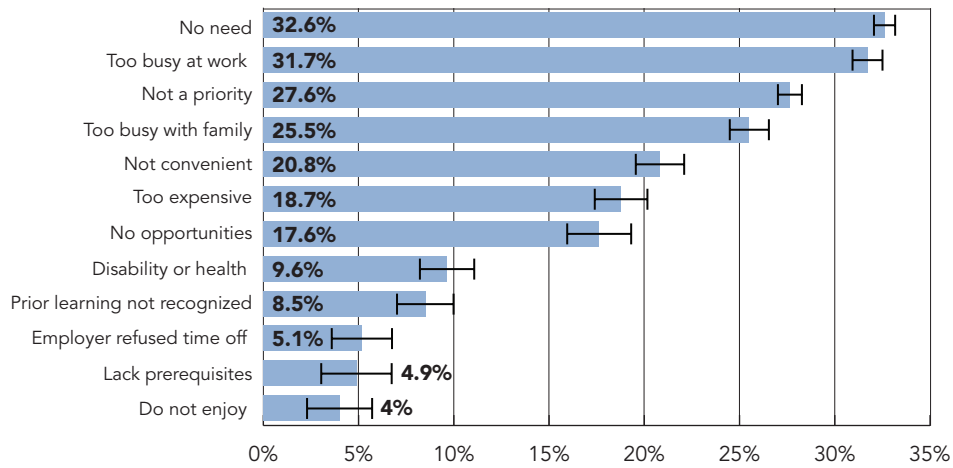
4. What factors prevent Canadians from taking formal work-related training?

Canadians who had not taken any formal work-related training within the last year cite many different reasons for abstaining from training. The most common reasons are that they:

- did not need further training;
- were too busy at work to take time off;
- did not see training as a priority; and
- had no time due to family responsibilities.

Figure 25

Proportion of abstainers who report each reason for abstaining from training



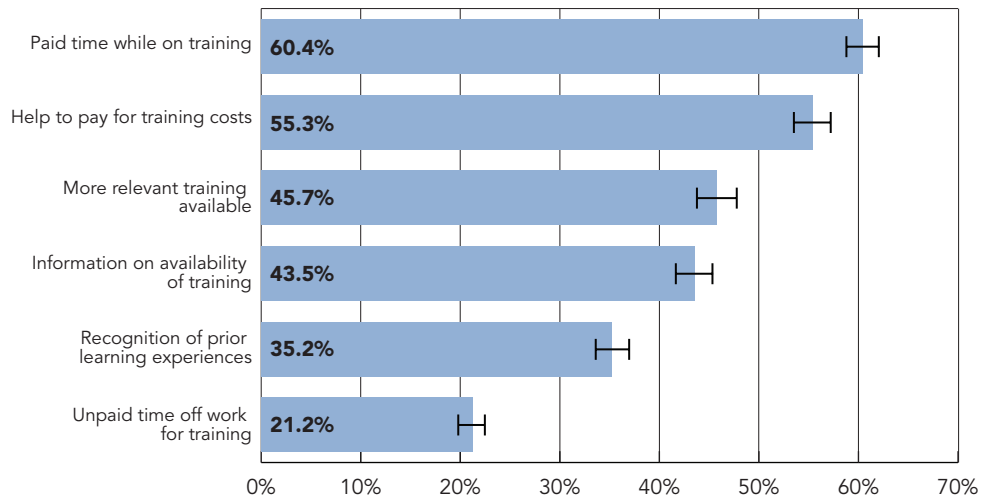
Source: Canadian Council on Learning, Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

5. What factors would foster greater participation in formal work-related training?

Financial considerations appear to be very important with respect to fostering greater participation in formal work-related training. Over half of those who had not taken any training in the past year indicated that they would be more likely to participate in formal work-related training if they could get paid time off for training, or assistance to pay for training costs.

Figure 26

Proportion of abstainers who would be more likely to participate in formal work-related training, given various forms of support



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

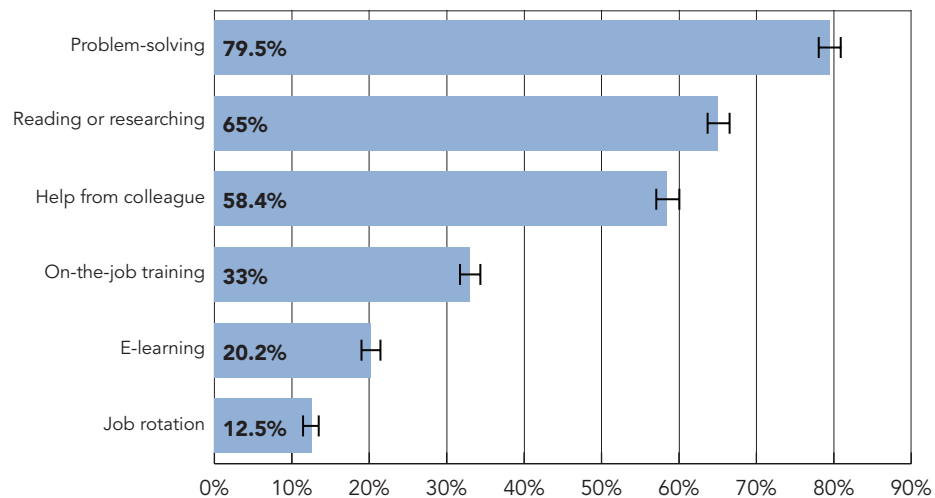
6. What forms of non-formal work-related learning do Canadians engage in?

- On-the-job training including direct instruction, mentoring, coaching, or observation by a superior
- Independent learning by reading, researching or using manuals
- Asking a colleague for help
- Learning by independent problem-solving
- E-learning, such as online courses, tutorials or seminars
- Job rotation

Overall, 88% of non-retired Canadians report engaging in some type of non-formal work-related training within the past four weeks. Independent forms of learning—such as problem-solving, reading books or researching online—were the most popular forms of non-formal learning. More structured forms of non-formal learning—such as on-the-job training, e-learning and job rotations—were less popular.

Figure 27

Proportion of non-retired Canadians reporting non-formal work-related training within the past four weeks



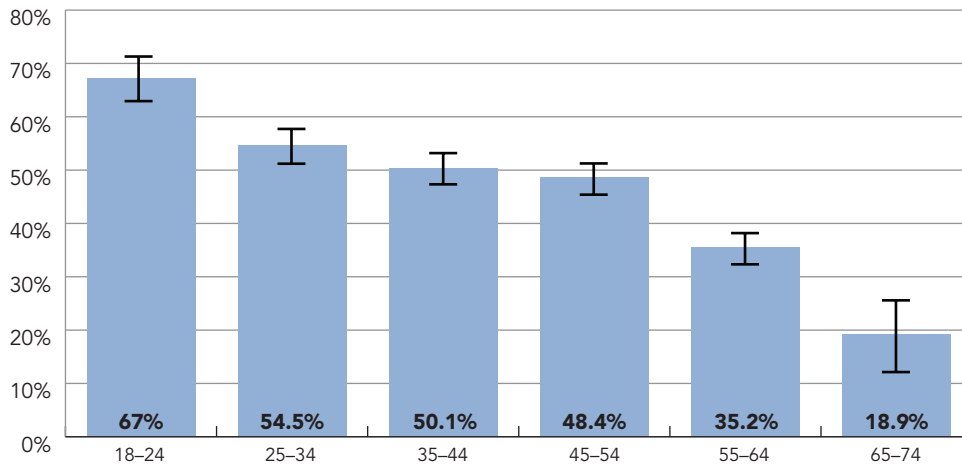
Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

Older workers

SCAL 2008 results reveal that older workers are less likely to participate in formal work-related training than those in younger age groups.

Figure 28

Proportion of non-retired Canadians who report participation in formal work-related training within the past year, by age



Source: Canadian Council on Learning, Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

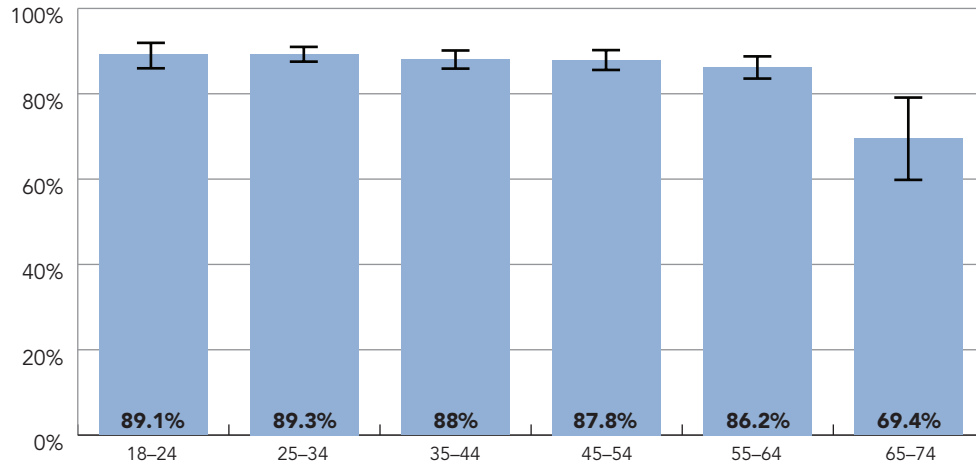
These results are consistent with the OECD's finding that participation in formal work-related learning continues until about age 50, after which it tends to drop off.²⁴ Older workers might not perceive workplace learning to have a high rate of return, and age might thus act as a disincentive. Likewise, employers may be less inclined to invest in workplace training for older adults, given expectations that they will soon retire. However, research also shows that older adults are more likely to face difficulties as new information technologies are implemented.²⁵

These findings point to an important gap within current work-related training patterns. With fewer young workers available to replace retiring workers, it is important to retain older workers in the labour force as long as possible. Older workers who remain in the workforce may require at least as much training as younger workers in order to maintain their skills (including literacy skills, which have been shown to decline with age) and to adapt to the implementation of new technologies.

SCAL 2008 results suggest that non-formal work-related training may be at least partially filling the age gap in work-related training. Participation in non-formal work-related training remains relatively constant across age groups, with only a small drop-off among the very oldest group of workers (in contrast to a larger drop-off among older workers pertaining to formal work-related training).

Figure 29

Proportion of non-retired Canadians reporting participation in non-formal work-related training within the past four weeks, by age



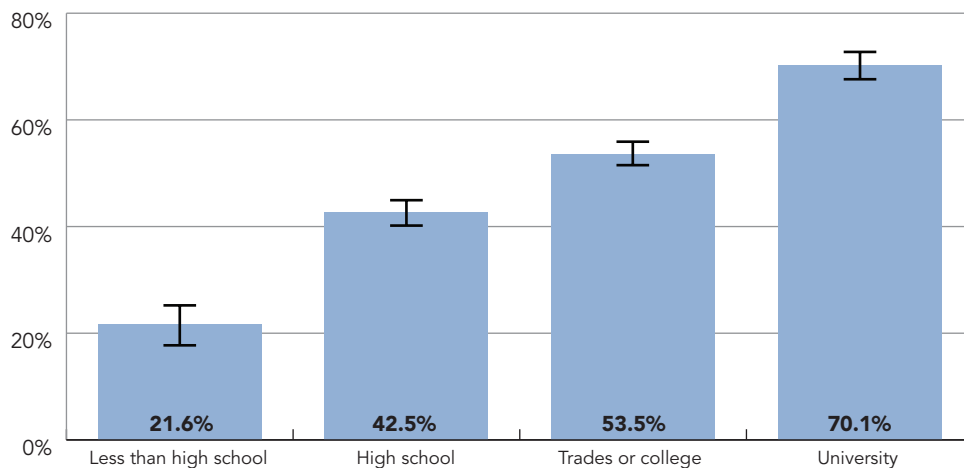
Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

Workers with less education

Among non-retired Canadians, those who already have higher levels of education are more likely to participate in formal work-related training. In fact, workers holding a bachelor's degree or higher are more than three times as likely to participate in formal work-related training than workers who ended their formal education without a high-school diploma.

Figure 30

Proportion of Canadians who participated in formal work-related learning within the past year, by highest level of education attained

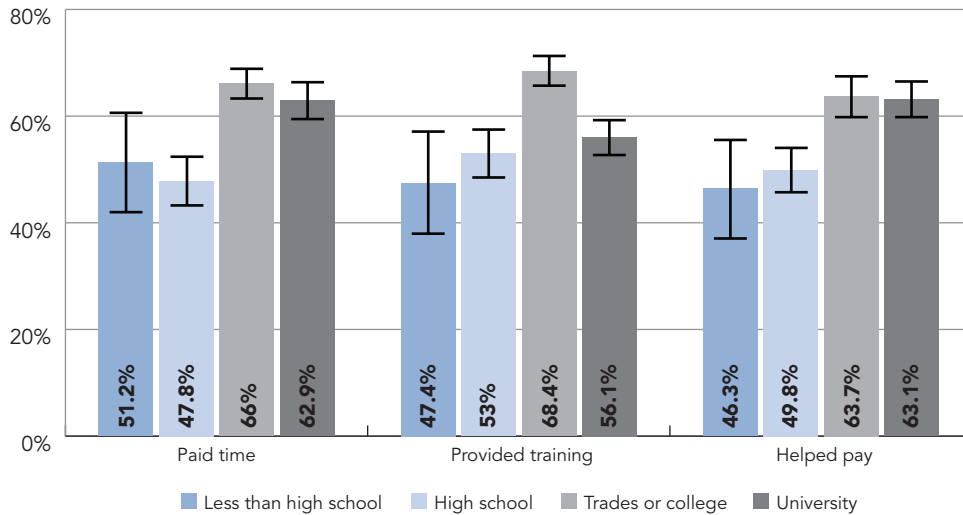


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

Canadians with more education are also more likely to have employers who support their formal work-related training, either by providing paid leave time for training, providing or arranging for the training, or by paying for some or all of the costs of training.

Figure 31

Proportion of Canadians who received formal training within the past year, who report employer support for that training, by highest level of education attained



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

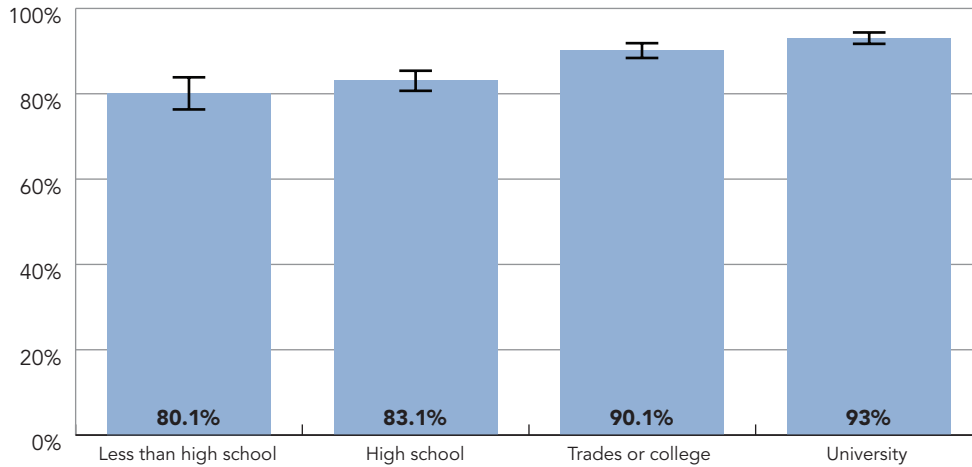
These findings are similar to other research indicating that Canadians without a high-school diploma or post-secondary credentials often work in low-paid, low-skilled jobs, and that employers tend to invest in workers who are already qualified and who work in higher-level positions.²⁶ This suggests that persons working in certain low-skilled occupations—those who are the most likely to benefit from workplace training—are less likely to develop the skills demanded by the new economy.

Research shows that when less educated workers have the opportunity to participate in training, they are more likely than their more highly educated counterparts to realize economic gains as a result of their training. According to a recent study, 53% of respondents with a high-school diploma or less reported that their training helped increase their income, compared to 44% of university graduates.²⁷

Non-formal training may be one avenue for closing the training gap between highly educated and less educated Canadians. As with formal work-related training, participation in non-formal work-related training depends on previously achieved levels of education. Highly educated workers are more likely to participate in non-formal training. However, the training gap between highly educated and less educated Canadians is much smaller for non-formal than for formal training.

Figure 32

Proportion of non-retired Canadians reporting participation in non-formal work-related training in the past four weeks, by highest level of education



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2008

Conclusion

About half of non-retired Canadians report participation in some type of formal work-related training in the past year. Among Canadians who do not participate in such training, financial considerations are important with respect to fostering higher levels of participation. The majority of non-retired Canadians report participation in non-formal work-related learning. While older Canadians and those with less education are less likely than their counterparts to receive formal work-related training, their levels of participation in non-formal learning are very high.