

THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS BULLETIN

Do education & training amount to skills gains?

Those with the lowest levels of education are least likely to access education and training

It is a commonly held notion that education matters. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better health and social outcomes than those with lower levels. It stands to reason, then, that those with lower levels of education would benefit most from participating in additional education and training, and would have more of an incentive to participate in training programs. However, results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) reveal that those with the lowest levels of educational attainment are less likely to participate in some form of formal or informal education and training. The question that remains, is why.

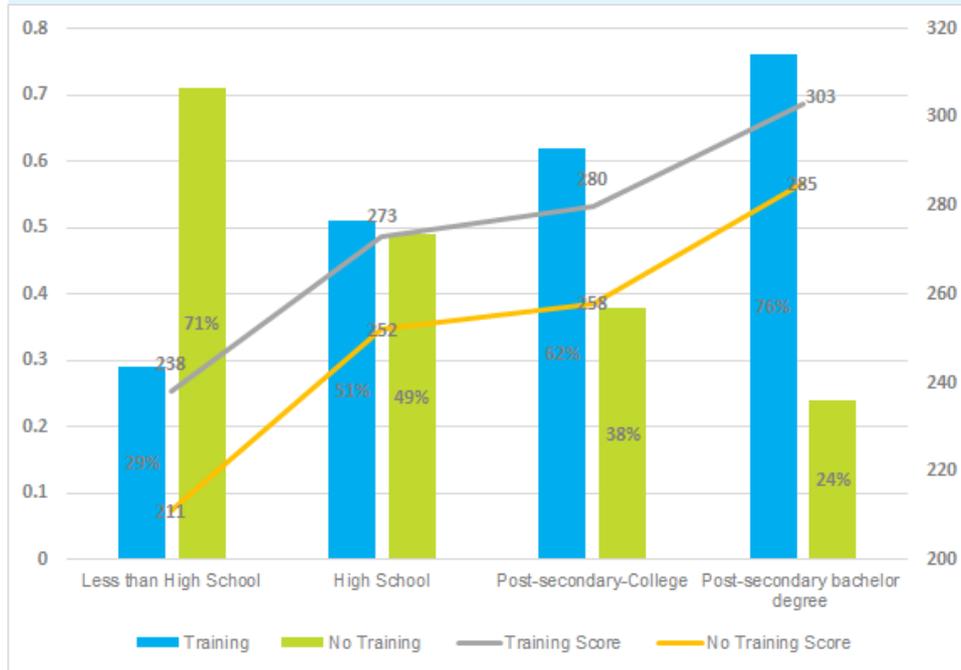
Analyzing the Results

As part of the background questionnaire, PIAAC respondents were asked if they had participated in education or training (formal or informal) within the last 12 months. Figure 1 depicts the response to this question among the Ontario respondents aged 25-54 (working age) with various levels of educational attainment. Among those with

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less than a high school diploma, about 29% participated in education or training, as compared to 76% of those with a post-secondary bachelor degree.¹ These results not only suggest that those with lower skill levels are less likely to participate in education or training, but that the percentage of people that participated in education or training increases as educational attainment increases - meaning that the likelihood of participating in training activities increases as one's education level increases.

Figure 1: PIAAC Results: Participation in Formal and Informal Adult Education/Training and Average Literacy Proficiency Scores by Educational Attainment (Ontario Population aged 25-54)

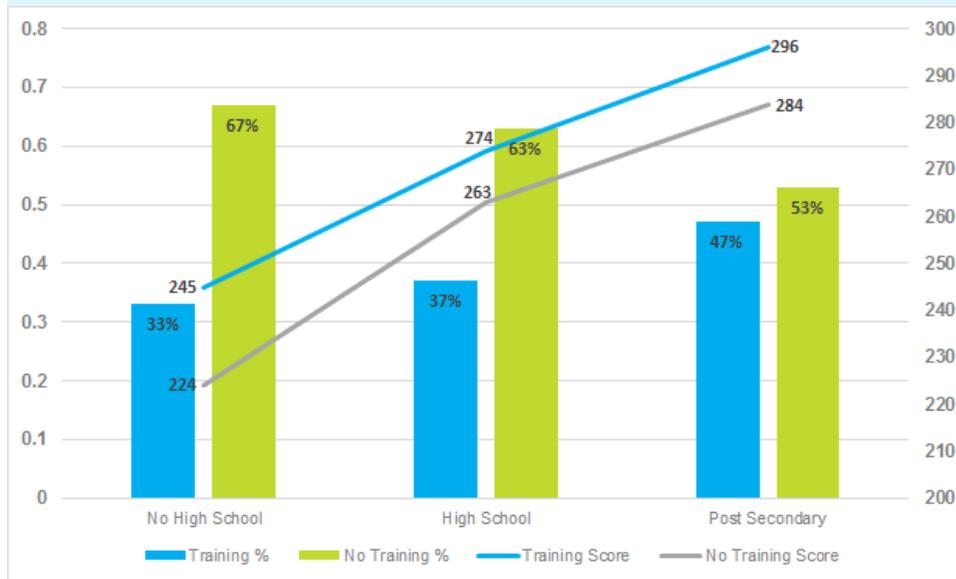


The results also show that adults who have participated in some form of training have higher literacy proficiency scores compared to those with similar levels of educational attainment that have not participated in education or training. For instance, the average literacy score among those adults with less than high school diploma who have not participated in education or training is 211, (standard error 6.5) compared to an average score of 238 (standard error 7.8) among those with less than a high school diploma, but who have participated in education or training.²

It should be noted that PIAAC data alone cannot establish a causal link between education levels and participation in education and training. Further analysis into this issue is warranted here.

The PIAAC survey also asked respondents if they had participated in ‘on-the-job training’ in the past 12 months. The results (as shown in Figure 2) show that among the employed population in Ontario, those with less than a high school diploma are less likely to have participated in on-the-job training than those with high school diplomas and post-secondary degrees.³ This is disconcerting considering that there appears to be benefits to participation and training: for instance, no matter what level of educational attainment, those who participated in on-the-job training had higher literacy scores on average than those that did not. It is unclear whether the lack of participation in job training is a reflection of low proficiency scores or vice versa. Additional study on this issue is needed.

Figure 2: Participation in On-the-Job Training and Average Literacy Proficiency Scores by Educational Attainment (Ontario Employed Population)

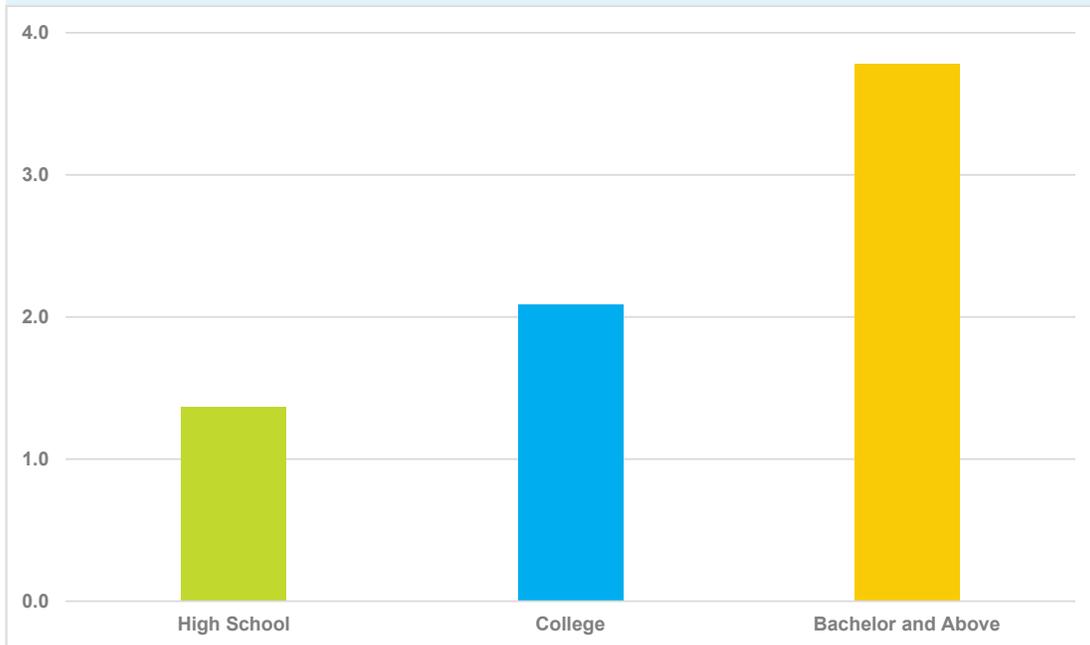


Further analysis of these results reveals that those with a bachelor degree or higher are almost four times more likely to have reported participating in formal or informal adult education and training than those with less than high school, even when controlling for factors such as age, immigration status, parents' education and employment status. Though these results are limited in many respects and more careful study is needed to determine the exact nature of the relationship, they do provide additional evidence of the association between educational attainment and participation in training. These results suggest that those with the least skills receive the least training.

Conclusion

The PIAAC data highlights the association between educational attainment and participation in further education or training. It appears that those in greatest need for further education and training are the least likely to participate in formal and informal education and training programs. Some critical questions arise from these results. Namely; is the lack of participation in education and training caused by motivational issues among those with lower levels of education? Does it reflect the lack of accessibility to public adult education and training programs which are congruent with the goals and aspirations of lower skilled adults? Is it related

Figure 3: Likelihood of Participation in Formal and Informal Adult Education and Training in Canada - PIAAC 2012



Increased likelihood (odds ratios) of adults with high school, college and university education reporting participation in adult education or training compared to those with less than a high school degree.

Note: Results were derived using a binary logistic regression model with Age, Immigration Status, Mothers Education, and Employment Status used as control variables. Those that were in school full time (3247 individuals in Canadian Public Use Microdata file) were removed from the analysis. All Odds ratios are statistically significant at .000 and no collinearity was detected between control variables.

to the well-documented fact that workers in low-skill occupations do not receive as much training as those in high skill occupations? (Desjardins, 2011). Or is it part of a larger systematic problem in Canada's 'second chance' systems, as discussed in Halliwell's (2013) recent and comprehensive study *No Shortage of Opportunity - Policy Ideas to Strengthen Canada's Labour Market in the Coming Decade*. Indeed it is possible that all of these factors are contributing to the lack of participation in education and training among those with lower levels of education.

Essential Skills Ontario believes that these are critical research questions that need to be fully explored if we are to solve the problem of Canada's skill divide. We are currently examining this issue through three applied research projects (Elevate Canada, Career Ladders and Strengthening Rural Canada) which seek to provide a better understanding of the challenges faced by low-skilled, low income individuals. The results of this research, as well as the PIAAC results, should be used to develop more effective policy and programming to address the challenges faced by the individuals that are most in need of such interventions.

Endnotes

¹ All percentage differences between those at each level of educational attainment that reported and did not report participation in education and training are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

² All score point differences between those that participated and did not participate in education are statistically significant at each level of educational attainment at the 0.05 level.

³ All score point and percentage differences between those that took part in on the job training and those that did not at each level of educational attainment are statistically significant at 0.05.

Bibliography

Desjardins, R. (2011). *Literacy for Life: Further Results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey: Second International ALL Report*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada

Halliwell, C. (2013). *No Shortage of Opportunity - Policy Ideas to Strengthen Canada's Labour Market in the Coming Decade*. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

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