

SKILL ME 4 JOB!

ANALYSIS OF TARGET GROUPS IN SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

PROJECT 2022-1-HR01-KA210-ADU-000082786



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Skill me for Job! – SOS4JOB

Analysis of target groups in soft skills training

Project 2022-1-HR01-KA210-ADU-000082786

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Introduction

Soft skills, integral to both personal and professional growth, transcend formal education and harness an individual's innate abilities to achieve superior outcomes across various domains. Often referred to as "people skills," these attributes are crucial in business settings and interpersonal interactions. They reflect how an individual executes tasks, collaborates with colleagues, fosters trust and reliability, leads teams effectively, and adapts swiftly to unforeseen circumstances. Daily workplace interactions invariably employ soft skills, often subconsciously, enhancing career advancement opportunities and overall business success. Conversely, a deficiency in soft skills can impede personal development and career progression. Key soft skills include communication, teamwork, creativity, problem-solving, adaptability, and empathy, among others.

In today's digitally driven business landscape, marked by rapid technological advancements and evolving job requirements, there is a heightened demand for a workforce that is not only technically proficient but also adept in soft skills. These include effective communication, reliability, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and ethical judgement. Employers increasingly value these skills, which can often be the deciding factor in hiring decisions.

Reflecting on the importance of soft skills within the Dutch context, preliminary research in our previous Erasmus+ project ASPIRE indicates a strong appreciation among Dutch employers for these competencies. A survey conducted in the Netherlands, involving various sectors, highlighted that a significant majority of employers recognize and assess soft skills during the hiring process, acknowledging their contribution to organisational productivity. The most valued employee traits reported include problem-solving abilities, advanced social skills, communication prowess, a quick learning capacity, and initiative.

As part of the Erasmus+ project "Skill me 4 Job!" - SOS4JOB (the acronym), our foundation, Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas, implemented comprehensive online soft skills training targeting distinct groups: Unemployed and employed individuals undergoing career transitions, teachers in adult education and adult students of Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas. The training was enrolled through the ESP Canvas platform. Then supported by additional learning material in the form of digital workbooks on the Ambitio learning platform Moodle. This covered the ten most crucial soft skills for today's labour market, presented via textual, video, and audio content along with practical exercises. It encompassed skills such as self-awareness, resilience, effective communication, cultural awareness, and digital literacy, with an additional focus on green skills to align with contemporary environmental challenges.



Analysis methodology

The objective of this analysis was to evaluate the effectiveness and applicability of the soft skills training as a component of Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas's educational offerings, and to assess the potential for integrating new participants into the program post-project. This necessitated a thorough examination of participant satisfaction, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the training, and measuring the skill enhancements achieved compared to their initial baseline. The analysis encompassed both quantitative and qualitative elements, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the development and/or enhancement of specific soft skills among participants.

Data was collected by incorporating surveys and face-to-face interviews, utilising Microsoft Excel for data analysis due to its robust functionalities in managing and visualising data. Participant selection was facilitated through the network of Exe-Leren and via email and social media, ensuring a diverse and representative sample of the target groups.

The **quantitative analysis** captured statistical data about the participants, including demographics like age and gender, their professional and employment status, and their feedback on various aspects of the training such as content, platform usability, and instructor effectiveness. This data provided a detailed snapshot of participant profiles and their overall satisfaction with the training components.

The **qualitative analysis** leveraged insights gathered through various evaluation questionnaires. These tools were designed to capture nuanced feedback on the participants' experiences before and after the training, assessing changes in their understanding and application of soft skills. The questionnaires focused on participants' views on the e-learning platforms, the quality of digital workbooks, instructor performance, and the relevance and impact of the content provided.

Participants in this study were employed and unemployed individuals undergoing career transitions, as well as educators and participants from Stichting Exe-leren programs. The methodologies used in the research included:

1. **Training application form:** Gathered essential demographic and background information to understand the participant mix and to facilitate their enrolment in this non-formal education program.
2. **Pre-training self-assessment questionnaire:** Comprised 40 soft skill-related items, requiring participants to rate their initial understanding on a 1 to 5 scale.
3. **Post-training self-assessment questionnaire:** Reassessed the same 40 items post-training to measure skill improvements and training impact.
4. **Professional and educational background questionnaire:** Collected additional data about the participants' educational and professional status and their initial reactions to the training.

5. **Training satisfaction evaluation:** Included evaluations of the Essential Skills Program and the digital workbooks, using a similar five-point scale and open questions to gauge overall satisfaction and effectiveness.

Through this methodology, the analysis was able to conclude how much each participant had developed or improved specific soft skills, offering insights into potential enhancements for the training program to better serve future participants. A total of 50 participants engaged in this analysis, with distribution across various demographic and professional categories, exceeding the initial projections set in the project application, and providing a robust data set for comprehensive evaluation.

Target groups

The soft skills training provided by Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas was tailored to address the needs of specifically defined target groups, each with their developmental objectives aimed at fostering comprehensive personal and professional growth.

The distinct target groups included:

a) **Unemployed and employed persons in career transition:** The training was pivotal for unemployed individuals, aimed at enhancing and upgrading soft skills to boost their competitiveness in the labour market, aiding in both the job search and employment phases. For those employed, the training served to strengthen their personal competencies and enrich their existing skill sets, preparing them for new challenges and roles within their careers.

b) **Participants (interns and volunteers) of Stichting Exe-leren:** Unlike Ambitio College, which provides direct training, our foundation supports educational initiatives by offering platforms like the open badge system to enhance learning recognition. Our participants, comprising volunteers, interns and some individuals who are currently employed, actively engage in supporting our activities. This diverse group includes not only individuals who are distant from the labour market but also those in stable employment or apprenticeships. The support provided aims to equip them with essential soft skills, enhancing their effectiveness and employability in various roles. Through these efforts, Stichting Exe-leren contributes to the broader educational landscape by facilitating training providers and educational institutes.

c) **Teachers in adult education:** This group includes trainers in adult learning connected through Stichting Exe-leren's network, but not directly involved with our operations. The training enhances their ability to integrate essential soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving into their teaching. This development not only advances their personal skills but also enriches their educational offerings, helping them better engage and support their learners. Through our network, these educators access resources that promote their professional growth.



The training for each of these groups was structured to address their unique needs, aligning with the broader objectives of Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas to facilitate skill development that supports both personal growth and professional preparedness in a rapidly evolving work environment.

Analysis of target groups

Dutch participants in training

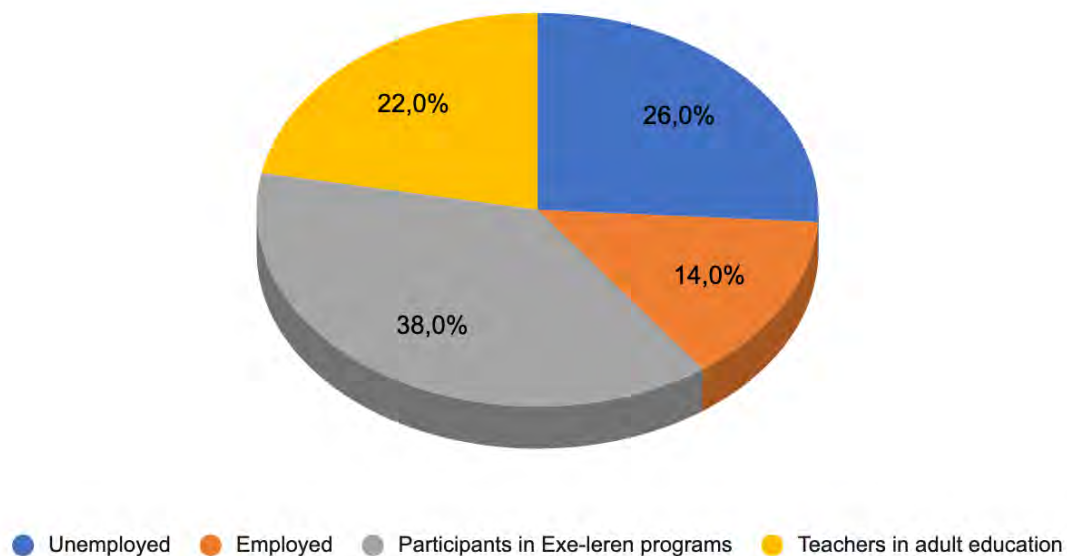


Figure 1. Share of target groups in training

A total of 50 participants (Figure 1.) participated in the soft skills training, i.e. 7 employed (14 %) and 13 (26 %) unemployed persons, 19 (38 %) participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs and 11 (23 %) teachers in adult education, which resulted in a larger number of training participants at the beginning of the training compared to the value defined in the project application itself.

Gender structure of participants

In the soft skills training facilitated by Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas, the composition of participants showed a balanced gender distribution. The breakdown was as follows:

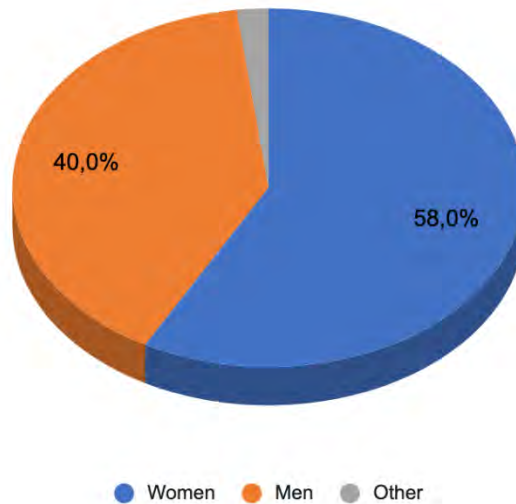


Figure 2. Share of genders in training

- Women: 29 participants, representing approximately 58% of the total.
- Men: 20 participants, accounting for about 40%.
- Other: 1 participant, making up 2% of the total.

This distribution (Figure 2.) indicates a notable diversity within the group, contrasting with other contexts where female participation might be higher. The near-equal representation of men and women in this training session underscores the universal relevance and importance of soft skills across different genders in today's workforce. This balance may also reflect the inclusive policies of the foundation and its commitment to providing opportunities equally to all individuals, irrespective of gender, enhancing their potential in both personal and professional domains.

Age structure of participants

The age structure of participants in the Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas soft skills training was diverse, encompassing a range from young adults to seniors, illustrating the broad relevance and necessity of soft skills across various life stages.

The distribution across the age groups among the 50 Dutch participants was as follows:

- 15-20 years: 11 participants
- 20-30 years: 21 participants
- 30-40 years: 3 participants
- 40-50 years: 6 participants
- 50-60 years: 6 participants
- Older than 60 years: 3 participants

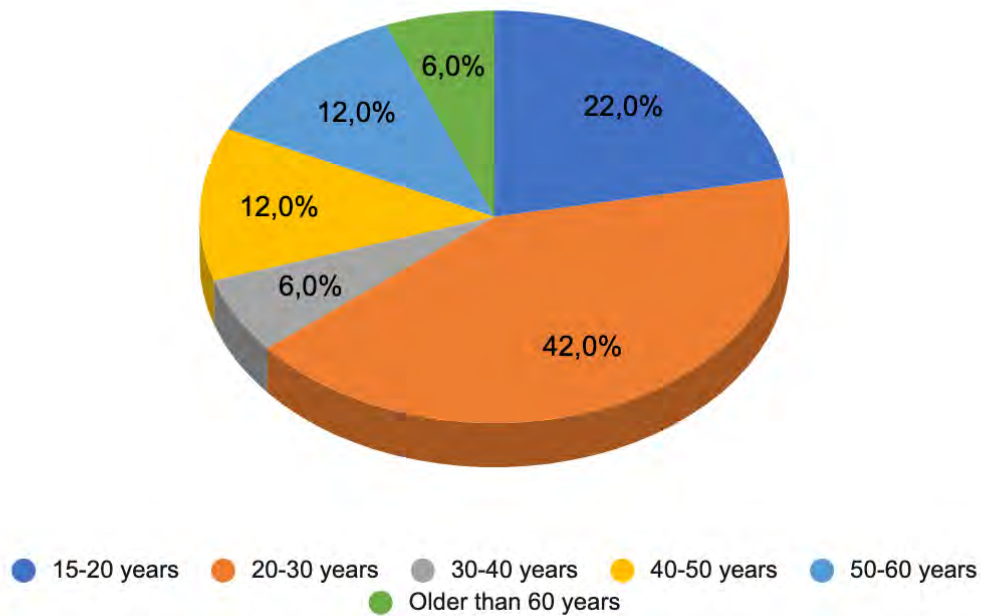


Figure 3. Share of age participants in training

This data (Figure 3.) indicates that the largest group of participants was within the 20 to 30 years age range, representing about 42% of the total. The 15-20 years age group also had a notable presence, making up about 22% of the participants. Meanwhile, the age groups spanning 40 to 60 years and older than 60 years collectively made up a substantial portion of the participants, showing that middle-aged and senior individuals are actively seeking to enhance their soft skills.

This inclusive age range underscores Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas's commitment to fostering lifelong learning and skill development, emphasising the importance of soft skills in enhancing employability and effectiveness in both personal and professional realms across all ages.

Geographical structure of participants

The Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas soft skills training attracted participants from various provinces across the Netherlands, indicating the program's broad appeal and its reach beyond the immediate locality of the foundation's base in Noord-Brabant. Here is a breakdown of the participants by province:

- Noord-Brabant (N-Brabant): 36 participants
- Noord-Holland (N-Holland): 4 participants
- Gelderland: 4 participants
- Utrecht: 3 participants
- Zuid-Holland (Z-Holland): 1 participant
- Limburg: 1 participant
- Friesland: 1 participant

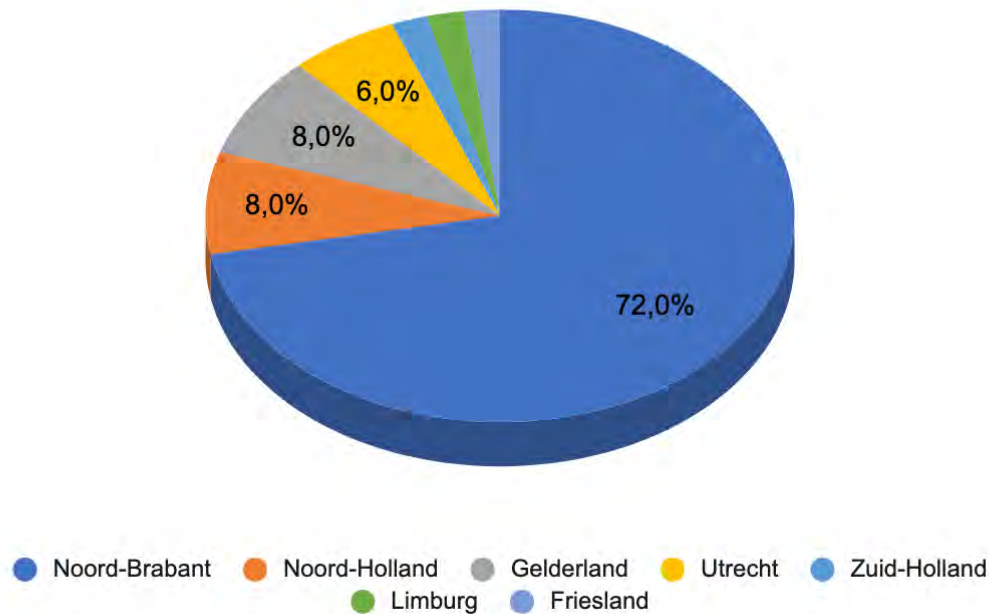


Figure 4. Share of participants in training by province

From this distribution (Figure 4.) it is evident that the largest share of participants, 72%, are from Noord-Brabant, where the foundation is headquartered. This significant concentration likely reflects the foundation's robust local network and outreach efforts, facilitating easier access and higher engagement within this province.

The participation from other regions such as Noord-Holland, Gelderland, and Utrecht, although smaller, showcases the program's capability to attract individuals from across the country, reinforcing its relevance and accessibility. The presence of participants from Zuid-Holland, Limburg, and Friesland, albeit minimal, further underscores the geographic diversity of the program's reach.

This pattern of participation from all defined regions, with a strong local concentration and broader national outreach, illustrates that the training is recognized across diverse demographic landscapes as essential for personal and professional development. The geographical analysis not only reflects the current state of engagement but also provides insight into potential areas for expanding the foundation's activities and enhancing its impact throughout the Netherlands.

Educational structure of participants

The educational background of the participants in the Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas soft skills training reflects a varied demographic. The distribution is as follows:

- Higher Education: 18 participants (36%)
- Secondary Vocational Education: 18 participants (36%)
- Pre-vocational Education: 14 participants (28%)

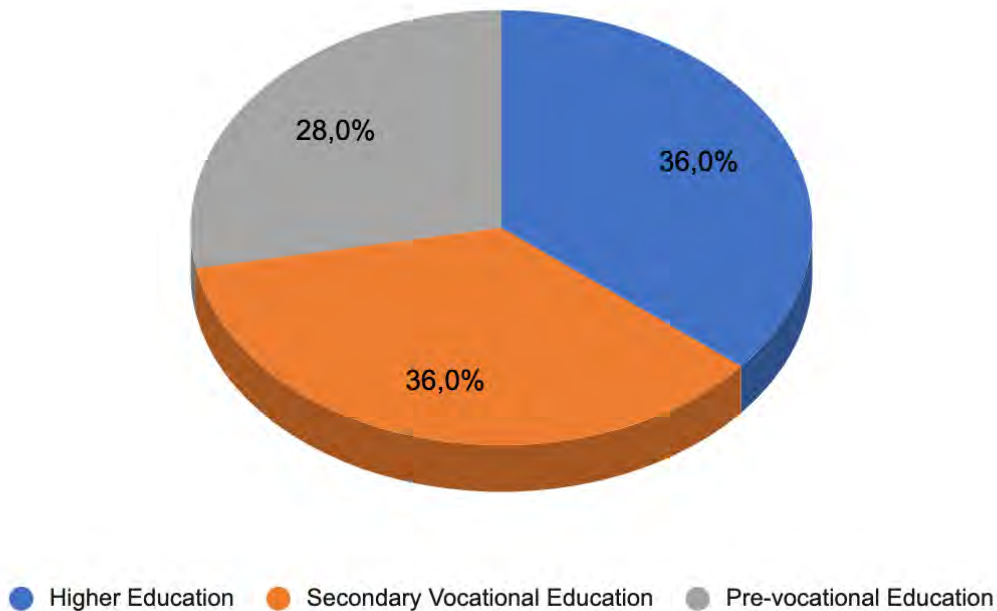


Figure 5. Share of participants according to professional qualification

This distribution (Figure 5.) indicates a balanced participation across different educational levels. A significant portion of the participants have completed higher education, suggesting that individuals with advanced academic qualifications are seeking to enhance their professional skills through soft skills training. Similarly, those with secondary vocational and pre-vocational education backgrounds are well-represented, highlighting the training's appeal to those in practical and preparatory educational pathways. This broad educational diversity illustrates the training's relevance and importance across various educational and professional stages.

Introduction to intersectional analysis

This section provides an intersectional analysis of the Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas soft skills training program. By examining the interplay of age, education, geographical location, and gender among the participants, we gain valuable insights into how these demographic factors influence engagement with the training. This analysis helps identify specific needs across different groups, guiding targeted enhancements to the program. Understanding these dynamics allows us to better tailor our training initiatives, ensuring they are inclusive and effective across our diverse participant base.

Intersectional analysis

Age and education:

Young Adults (15-20 years) in Noord-Brabant: Predominantly enrolled in secondary vocational or pre-vocational education, indicating robust engagement at the onset of their career paths.

Participants Aged 20-30: Span all educational levels, with many in pre-vocational settings, emphasising the program's role in facilitating transitions to higher education or the workforce.

Geographical and educational synergy:

Local Engagement in Noord-Brabant: Strong participation across all educational categories suggests effective local outreach.

Geographical Dispersion of Higher Education Participants: Indicates recognition of the program's value across various regions, enhancing the academic profiles with soft skills training.

Gender, age, and location:

Balanced gender distribution: Suggests the program's broad appeal is not confined by gender.

Older and Middle-aged Adults: Participants primarily with higher education from various provinces highlight an enduring interest in personal and professional development through soft skills training.

Young status holders in Noord-Brabant: Predominantly in pre-vocational education, highlighting targeted support for immigrants integrating into the local society and preparing for vocational training.

Young status holders in the Netherlands face multiple challenges when integrating into society, as highlighted in the CBS Report on Integration and Society 2022¹. Key barriers include navigating a complex bureaucratic asylum process and constraints imposed by strict government policies, often leading to prolonged uncertainty about their future. Additionally, cultural differences and language barriers contribute to social isolation. While waiting for a definitive decision on their status, opportunities for meaningful daily activities and integration are limited, negatively impacting their long-term chances for successful assimilation. Dependence on emergency shelters and lack of personal autonomy can also lead to demotivation and psychological stress, further hindering their ability to integrate effectively.

Duration and method of training

The soft skills training facilitated by Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas was structured into two groups, utilising distinct methods tailored to the learning preferences and requirements of the participants.

The first group, comprising 19 participants from Stichting Exe-leren's participants (volunteers and interns), participated in the Essential Skills Program (ESP). This online training was delivered on a digital platform from December 6, 2023, and lasted until February 25, 2024. We prolonged until 15th April. The course was conducted in English (hosted on the Canvas platform) and supplemented by digital workbooks specifically customised for the Dutch context, hosted on the Moodle platform. These materials were designed to enhance participants' learning experiences by providing additional, targeted educational content.

The second group included 31 participants, made up of 13 unemployed individuals, 7 employed persons, and 11 teachers in adult education. This group accessed tailored digital workbooks, designed to meet their specific needs, on the Moodle platform in Dutch. This

¹ <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/publication/2022/46/report-on-integration-and-society-2022>

second group lasted from January 3 till February 25, 2024, but prolonged until 15th April. The workbooks aimed to reinforce the training content and offer a practical approach to learning.

Both sessions began with an introductory online lecture to acquaint participants with the concept of soft skills, emphasising their importance for both personal and professional development. This introduction was critical in setting expectations for the training, outlining the progression through the content, and detailing the activities planned on both platforms.

The training covered a broad spectrum of soft skills, including self-awareness, empathy, resilience, effective communication, problem-solving, cultural awareness, digital literacy, innovation, collaboration, and adaptability. Moreover, components relating to green skills were incorporated into the curriculum, reflecting the foundation's commitment to promoting sustainability and environmental consciousness. This integration ensured that participants not only developed essential soft skills but also gained valuable insights into environmentally responsible practices applicable in various professional and personal settings.

Target group 1: Employed and unemployed persons in a career change

In today's diverse job market, both employed and unemployed individuals transitioning in their careers face numerous challenges that transcend traditional technical skills and qualifications. For this target group within Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas, the enhancement of soft skills is increasingly recognized as essential, not only improving employability for the unemployed but also enriching the professional capabilities of those already employed.

For those in employment, mastering soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution is crucial. These skills enable employees to work efficiently with others, share credit for collective successes, and navigate the complexities of workplace dynamics. Additionally, the ability to analyse situations, identify problems, and develop tailored solutions is invaluable. Critical thinking helps in evaluating information accurately and making informed decisions, while strong organisational skills ensure that multiple tasks and deadlines are managed effectively. A robust work ethic and developed leadership abilities further enable employed individuals to motivate their teams, delegate tasks appropriately, and foster a cooperative work environment, all of which are conducive to career advancement and enhanced job satisfaction.

Relation to soft skills training

For both employed and unemployed individuals facing career transitions, Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas recognizes the importance of soft skills training as crucial for enhancing employability and professional development. Employed individuals benefit from mastering skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution, which are essential for efficient collaboration and career advancement. These skills enable them to manage workplace dynamics effectively, think critically, and handle multiple responsibilities efficiently.



For unemployed individuals, strong soft skills such as crafting effective resumes and performing well in interviews significantly improve their chances of securing employment. These skills are vital for making a positive first impression and demonstrating readiness to succeed in professional settings. The training aims to equip all participants with the necessary tools to effectively navigate the job market and succeed in their career paths.

Target group 2: Participants of Stichting Exe-leren

The participants (supporters and volunteers) of Stichting Exe-leren are a diverse and dynamic group, engaged in enhancing the reach and effectiveness of our educational initiatives. This group includes volunteers, apprentices, and employed individuals who dedicate their time and skills to support various programs and projects facilitated by our foundation. Their backgrounds range from those just entering the labour market to those well-established in their careers, making this group uniquely versatile and multifaceted.

Relation to soft skills training

Soft skills are integral to the effectiveness and adaptability of our supporters and volunteers. These skills enable them to communicate effectively, collaborate with teams, manage projects, and resolve conflicts, all of which are crucial for the successful execution of our educational initiatives. Training in soft skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, and teamwork enhances their ability to work efficiently and adapt to various roles within the foundation. Additionally, soft skills like leadership and empathy empower our volunteers and supporters to take initiative, lead projects, and engage empathetically with learners and other stakeholders.

By investing in the development of these soft skills, Stichting Exe-leren ensures that our supporters and volunteers are not only more effective in their roles but also have the opportunity for personal and professional growth. This training also increases their employability and effectiveness in other professional environments, contributing to a broader impact beyond our immediate organisational activities. Through enhancing these essential skills, our supporters and volunteers become more adept at navigating the complexities of educational support and driving the success of our initiatives.

Target group 3: Teachers and trainers in adult education

The teachers and trainers in adult education connected with Stichting Exe-leren form an essential part of our educational network. While they are not directly involved in day-to-day operations, their roles are critical in disseminating the knowledge and practices that underpin our educational philosophy. This group includes seasoned educators and facilitators who specialise in adult learning, equipped to address the diverse needs and backgrounds of adult learners.

Relation to soft skills training

Soft skills are crucial for teachers and trainers in adult education, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers, and innovate in their teaching methods. The

training provided by Stichting Exe-leren focuses on developing these key competencies, such as effective communication, teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving. These skills are not only vital for personal development but also significantly enrich the educational experiences they offer, enabling them to engage more deeply and supportively with their learners.

By incorporating these soft skills into their professional skill set, teachers and trainers can create more interactive and inclusive learning environments. This approach not only improves the learning experience but also prepares their students better for the professional world, reflecting the dual benefit of our training programs. Additionally, our network provides access to various resources that support the continuous professional growth of these educators, ensuring they remain at the forefront of educational innovation and best practices.

Structured to meet the specific needs of this group, our training aligns with the broader objectives of Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas. This alignment ensures that our efforts in soft skills development support both the personal growth of educators and their professional preparedness, crucial in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Satisfaction with the introductory online lecture

At the beginning of the training, we organised an online lecture in real time for all participants of which few attended. Upon organised online introductory lecture, all participants received also via e-mail the recorded online lecture to be able to listen prior to self-learning on e-learning platforms. Feedback from the session indicates general positivity about the introductory lecture, although with some noted reservations. About 75% of participants fully recognized the trainer's expertise in soft skills, a figure slightly below previous metrics. Similarly, 70% agreed that the lecture effectively integrated practical examples, reflecting a moderate but slightly less robust enthusiasm. The explanation of soft skills resonated well, with approximately 75% complete agreement on its clarity. However, overall satisfaction was somewhat lower, with 70% of participants completely satisfied, suggesting room for enhancing certain aspects of the training to boost overall effectiveness and satisfaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the online lecture aimed at introducing participants to soft skills demonstrated a generally positive reception. The recorded session provided flexibility, allowing participants to engage at their convenience, which was well-received. We believe that the introductory lecture was really helpful for the participants. However, the somewhat lower levels of complete satisfaction and recognition of the trainer's expertise compared to previous sessions suggest the need for adjustments. Enhancing the practical application of content and addressing the noted reservations could further increase effectiveness and participant satisfaction in future sessions. This feedback is crucial as it provides a clear direction for refining the training approach to better meet the participants' needs and expectations.



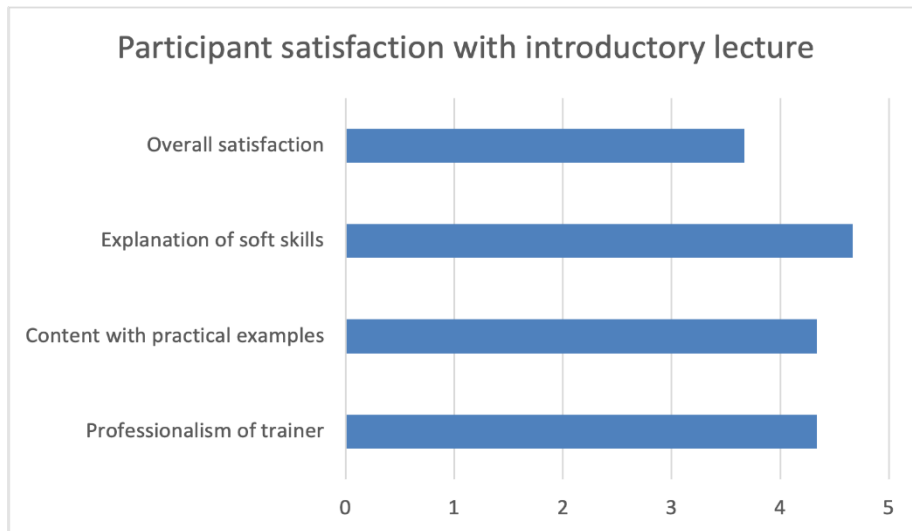


Figure 6. Participant satisfaction with the introductory online lecture

Essential Skills Program (ESP) satisfaction evaluation questionnaire

The Essential Skills Program (ESP) on the Canvas platform, while initially attracting 25 participants, experienced a lower-than-expected completion rate, with active participation of around 20%. Detailed feedback from participants points to several factors impacting their engagement and progress within the program. Four out of twenty-five participants participated in ESP of which two have finished all modules and two of them have read only one module. The reason why they did not participate is diverse. After having conversation with a large group of participants via telephone or face to face we noted several following reasons of what their reasons were:

Time availability: The most significant challenge cited by participants was time availability. The course's demands did not align well with the schedules of participants, indicating a need for more flexible or self-paced training options that allow for varying schedules and commitments.

Content complexity: The second major concern was the density of the course's text and the complexity of its language. Participants found the material challenging to read, emphasizing the need for more straightforward explanations and the incorporation of visual elements to break up text-heavy content and facilitate easier understanding.

Communication issues: Although Stichting Exe-leren have done a lot of effort to explain and provide support in accessing to Canvas platform, participants reported that messages related to the course were often missed or not recognized as part of the project in their mailbox, highlighting the necessity for a clearer and more direct communication strategy that effectively captures attention and conveys essential information.

Technical issues: Lastly, technical challenges were noted, including difficulties in logging in and navigating the course, especially on mobile devices.

Feedback implementation recommendations

1. Adapt the course format to accommodate the limited time availability of participants, possibly through shorter modules or a more self-directed learning approach.
2. Simplify the course content by reducing text density, using simpler language, and incorporating more visual aids and interactive elements to enhance understanding and retention.
3. Improve the communication plan to ensure important information about the course is effectively delivered and received, making use of multiple channels and clear, direct messaging. Provide clear instructions on the technical resources available.

Therefore, Stichting Exe-leren will communicate with associated project partner from ESP USA to be familiarised with this feedback to be able to provide better user experience in the future.

Evaluation questionnaire on the satisfaction of the Moodle platform

In our analysis participation in Moodle platform has shown better engagement in comparison to Canvas platform and therefore we can conclude that soft skills modules in Moodle were more accepted.

It's evident that the responses indicate a general satisfaction, although the nuances of the feedback reveal areas for potential improvement. With only 28% of participants responding, the data predominantly represents the views of those who were more engaged or committed to completing the training. The analysis has shown that twelve participants have finished all modules, while 22 people have read only one module, five persons - two modules and one person - three modules and one person – six modules.

The respondents, who include a range of unemployed/employed individuals, teachers/trainers, and participants from Stichting Exe-leren programs, largely expressed satisfaction with the usability, design, and content quality of the workbooks. Many have acquired or improved their soft skills through this training, which we believe will enhance their job prospects and the application of these skills in daily activities and life challenges. While the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, there were some neutral responses regarding the video materials and certain tasks. This feedback is valuable as it highlights opportunities for us to further refine these elements to meet everyone's expectations.

Additionally, face-to-face interviews with participants who completed only one module shed light on several challenges. These participants valued the training but were hindered by time constraints, often related to preparing for exams. They expressed appreciation for the training being available in Dutch, which facilitated their learning process, yet some faced technical issues with the platform, particularly with navigation and browser functionality.

This feedback underscores the need for improvements in specific areas such as enhancing video content and interface navigation to better support user engagement and learning outcomes. These insights are invaluable for refining the e-learning experience to cater to a broader audience and encourage higher completion rates.

General conclusion

The general overall conclusion drawn from both the closed and open-ended questions suggest several key points:

Positive Reception: Overall, there is a positive reception to the online soft skills training program, with many participants expressing satisfaction with various aspects such as platform usability, visual design, and content quality. Their feedback justifies that training was useful and they will better navigate these skills in work and life environments.

Areas for Improvement: There are clear areas for improvement identified by participants. These include the need for more practical application of concepts, clearer feedback on quizzes, improvements to interface design and navigation, simplification of content, and increased accessibility across devices.

Tailored Approach: The feedback also indicates that the training program could benefit from a more tailored approach, with adjustments made to better meet the needs and preferences of different target groups, such as unemployed/employed individuals, teachers/trainers in adult education, and participants of specific programs like Stichting Exe-leren.

Continuous Iteration: Incorporating the feedback provided by participants and continually iterating on the training program after the project implementation based on their suggestions will be crucial for enhancing its effectiveness and ensuring learner engagement and satisfaction in the future. Stichting Exe-leren/ComPas will work on adjusting and improving the training as a tailored approach to be able to support in upskilling in soft skills for future adult participants.

Overall, while there are areas for improvement, the feedback underscores the value of the online soft skills training program and the importance of ongoing refinement to meet the evolving needs of learners.



Likert scale responses

A general conclusion based on the analysis of the Likert scale responses suggests that overall, participants exhibit a positive perception of the e-learning platform and digital workbooks for soft skills training. Most responses indicate agreement or complete agreement with statements related to platform usability, design, content organisation, and overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

However, there are some areas where improvements could be considered. For instance, there are a few instances of disagreement or neutrality regarding language clarity and platform navigation, particularly among specific target groups. These findings suggest that providing clearer language explanations and refining navigation features could enhance the overall user experience for some participants.

In summary, while there is a generally positive reception of the e-learning platform and digital workbooks, addressing the identified areas for improvement could further enhance user satisfaction and engagement across all target group.

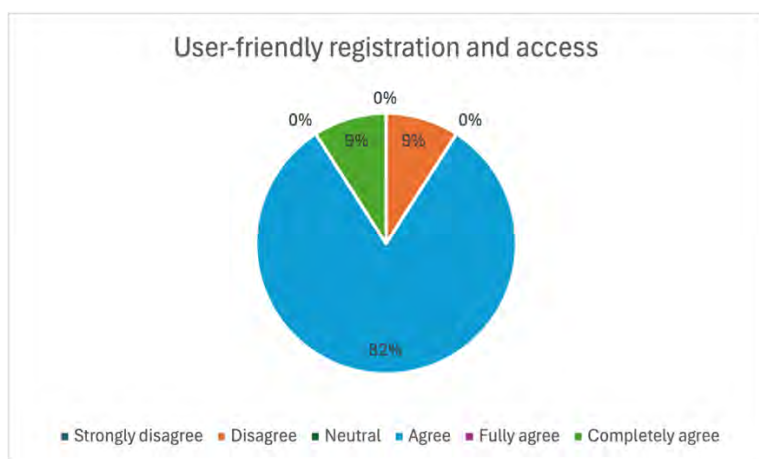


Figure 7. User-friendly registration and access

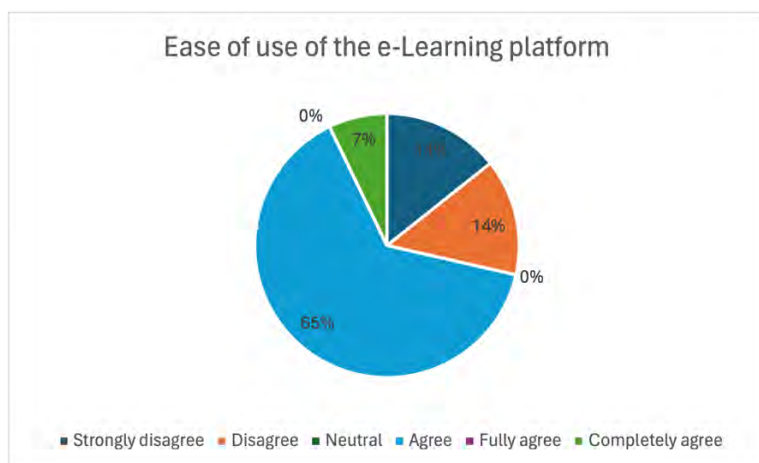


Figure 8. Ease of use of the e-Learning platform

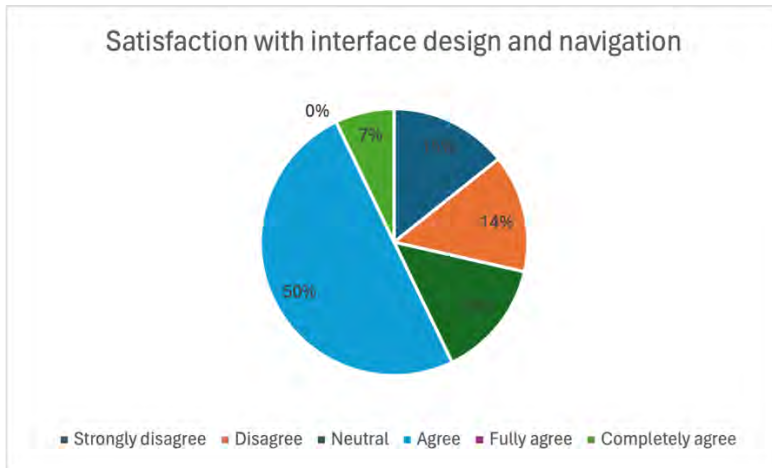


Figure 9. Satisfaction with interface design and navigation

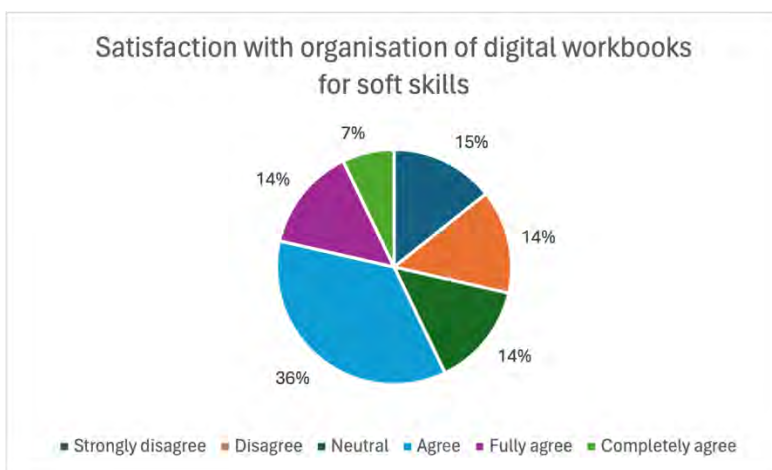


Figure 10. Satisfaction with organisation of digital workbooks for soft skills

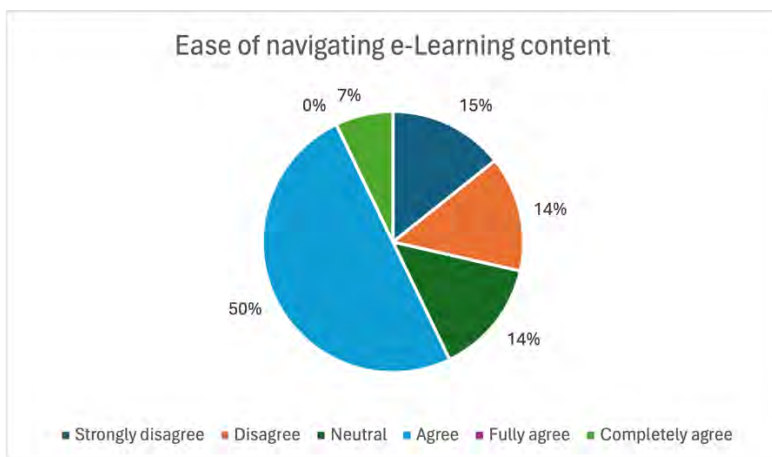


Figure 11. Ease of navigating e-Learning content

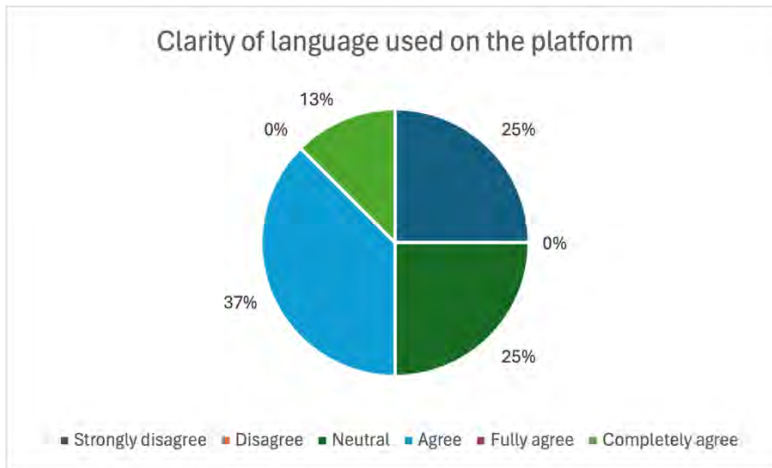


Figure 12. Clarity of language used on the platform

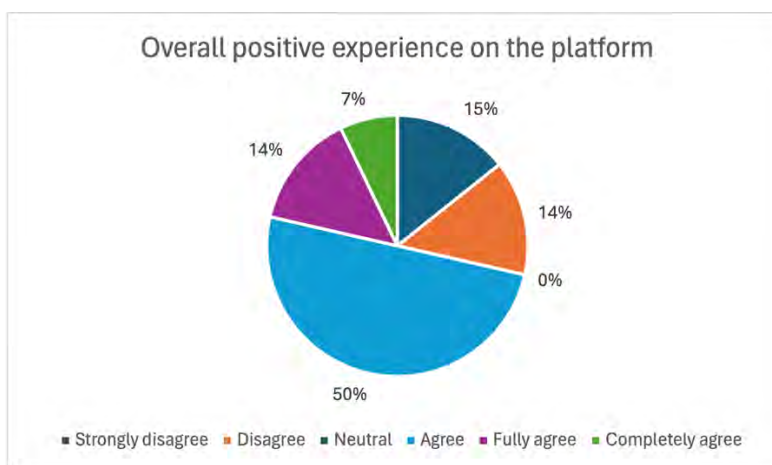


Figure 13. Overall positive experience on the platform

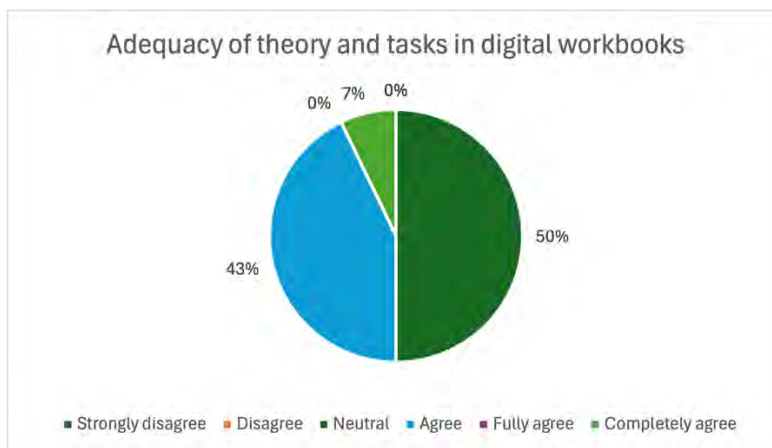


Figure 14. Adequacy of theory and tasks in digital workbooks

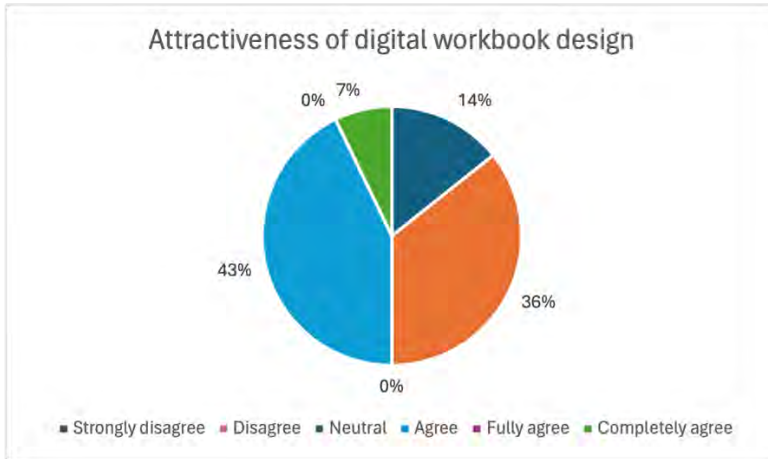


Figure 15. Attractiveness of digital workbook design

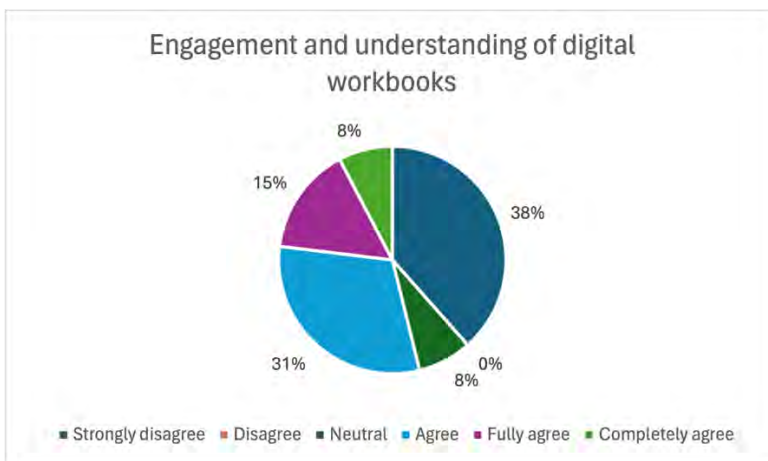


Figure 16. Engagement and understanding of digital workbooks

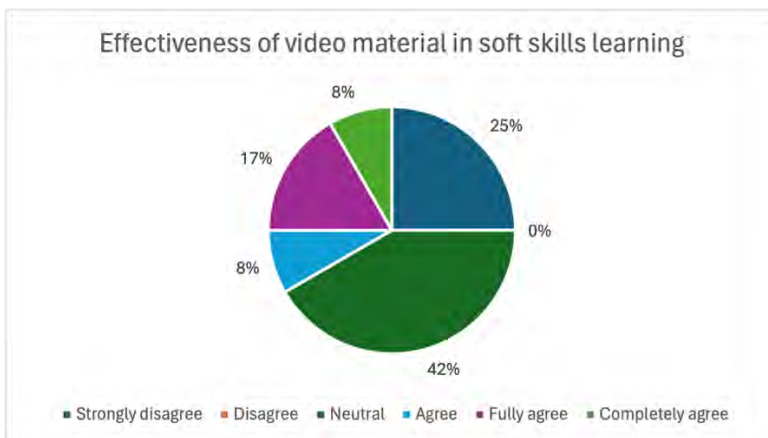


Figure 17. Effectiveness of video material in soft skills learning

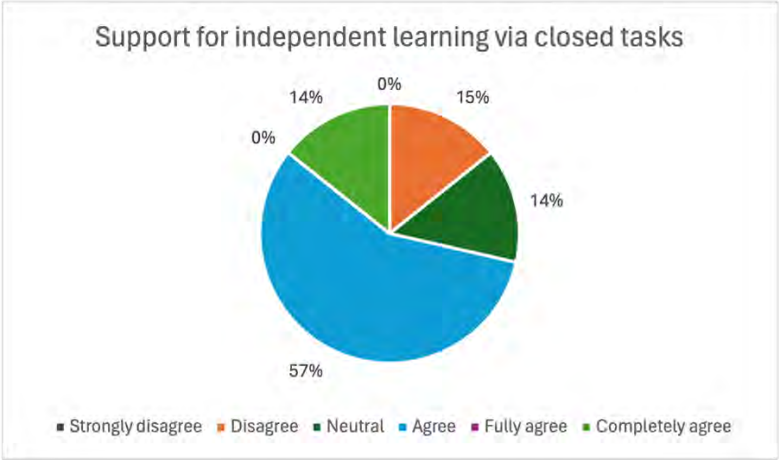


Figure 18. Support for independent learning via closed tasks

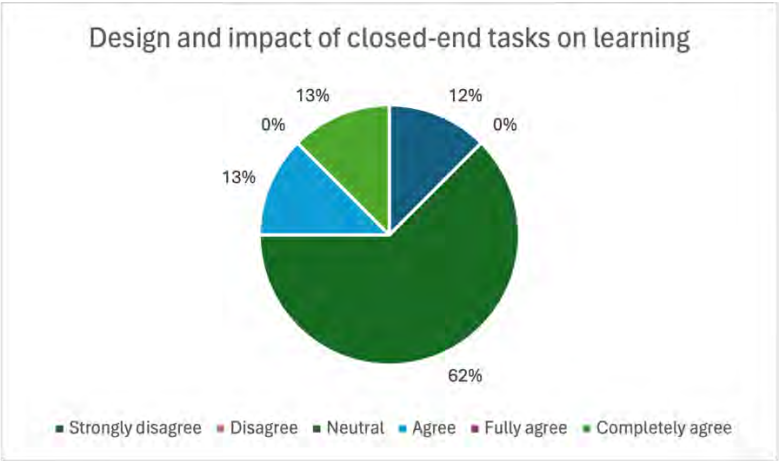


Figure 19. Design and impact of closed-end tasks on learning

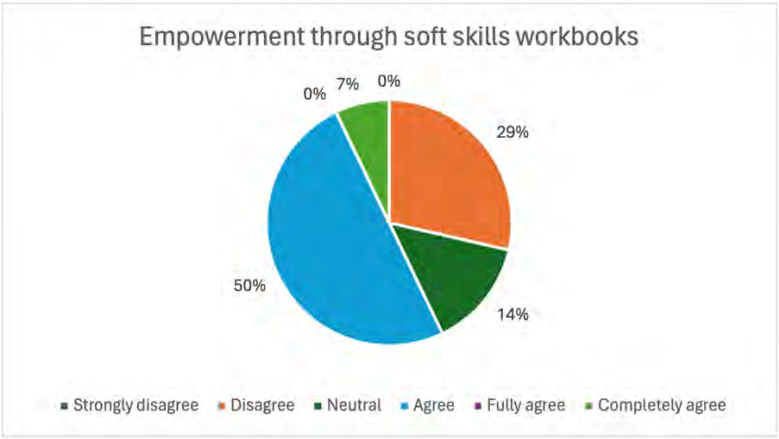


Figure 20. Empowerment through soft skills workbooks

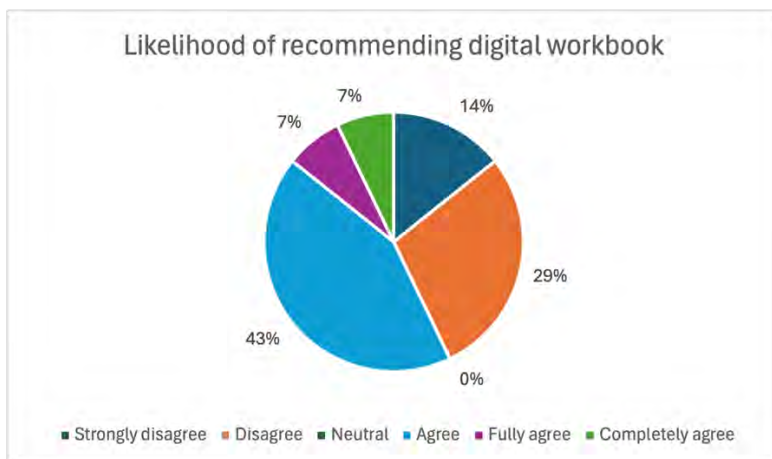


Figure 21. Likelihood of recommending digital workbook

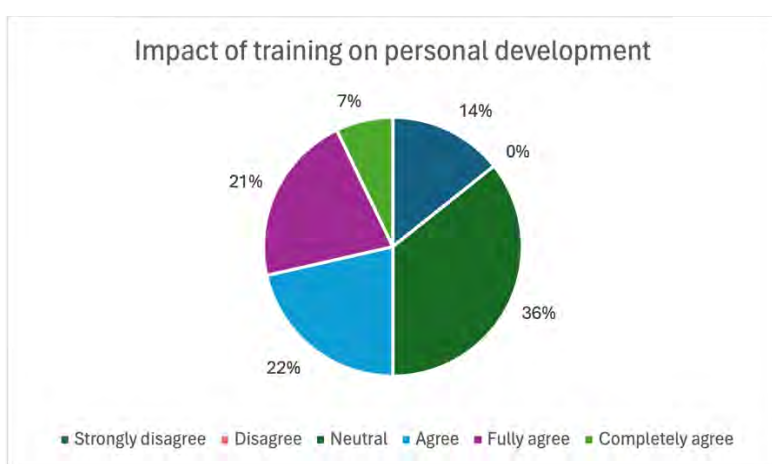


Figure 22. Impact of training on personal development

Conclusion

The survey results from the pie chart indicate a generally positive response towards our services. For 'User-friendly registration and access,' nearly 90% of participants expressed agreement, demonstrating the effectiveness of our registration process. In the case of the 'Ease of use of the e-Learning platform,' about 60% of respondents agreed on its usability, highlighting a strong foundation. However, the presence of some strong disagreements suggests areas for improvement. Overall, these results suggest our platforms are well-received and provide clear directions for further enhancements to boost user satisfaction.

In the following table from each question, the outcome is described including a conclusion.

Question	Description of Outcome	Conclusion
User-friendly registration and access	90% agree (80% agree and 10% completely agree), with 10% disagree.	Majority find the registration and access user-friendly.
Ease of use of the e-Learning platform	70% positive responses (50% agree and 20% completely agree), with 20% strongly disagree and 10% disagree.	Most users consider the platform easy to use.

Question	Description of Outcome	Conclusion
Satisfaction with interface design and navigation	50% positive responses (30% agree and 20% completely agree), with 40% expressing dissatisfaction (20% disagree and 20% strongly disagree), and 10% neutral.	Mixed feelings about the interface and navigation.
Satisfaction with organisation of digital workbooks for soft skills	40% positive responses (30% agree and 10% completely agree), with 40% expressing dissatisfaction (20% disagree and 20% strongly disagree), and 20% neutral.	Opinions are divided regarding the organisation of workbooks.
Ease of navigating e-Learning content	40% positive responses (30% agree and 10% completely agree), with 40% expressing dissatisfaction (20% disagree and 20% strongly disagree), and 20% neutral.	Opinions vary on the ease of navigating content.
Clarity of language used on the platform	50% positive responses (40% agree and 10% completely agree), 20% strongly disagree, and 30% neutral.	Language clarity is acceptable but could be improved.
Overall positive experience on the platform	60% positive responses (50% agree and 10% completely agree), with 40% expressing dissatisfaction (20% disagree and 20% strongly disagree).	Majority have a positive experience, though not without detractors.
Adequacy of theory and tasks in digital workbooks	30% positive responses (20% agree and 10% completely agree), with 70% neutral.	Adequacy of materials is generally accepted but not strongly.
Attractiveness of digital workbook design	50% positive responses (40% agree and 10% completely agree), with 50% expressing dissatisfaction (30% disagree and 20% strongly disagree).	Opinions are split on the attractiveness of workbook design.
Engagement and understanding of digital workbooks	40% positive responses (30% agree and 10% completely agree), with 50% strongly disagree and 10% neutral.	Engagement and understanding need significant improvement.
Effectiveness of video material in soft skills learning	20% positive responses (10% agree and 10% completely agree), 30% strongly disagree, and 50% neutral.	Effectiveness of video material is largely questioned.
Support for independent learning via closed tasks	80% positive responses (70% agree and 10% completely agree), with 10% disagree and 10% neutral.	Strong support for independent learning through closed tasks.



Question	Description of Outcome	Conclusion
Design and impact of closed-end tasks on learning	30% positive responses (20% agree and 10% completely agree), with 70% neutral.	Impact of closed-end tasks on learning is largely uncertain.
Empowerment through soft skills workbooks	40% positive responses (30% agree and 10% completely agree), with 40% disagree and 20% neutral.	Empowerment through workbooks is moderately perceived.
Likelihood of recommending digital workbook	50% positive responses (40% agree and 10% completely agree), with 50% expressing reluctance (30% disagree and 20% strongly disagree).	Recommendations are likely but there are significant reservations.
Impact of training on personal development	30% positive responses (20% agree and 10% completely agree), with 20% strongly disagree and 50% neutral.	The impact on personal development is unclear, with many undecided.

Table 1 Outcome Likert scale questions including conclusion.



Open-ended questions

Based on the responses to the open-ended questions, several common themes and areas for improvement emerge:

Desire for practical application: Many participants expressed a desire for more practical examples and real-world applications of the soft skills covered in the training. This suggests that incorporating more case studies or scenarios could enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the training.

Feedback and clarity: Several participants mentioned a need for clearer explanations and feedback, particularly in relation to quiz questions and incorrect answers. Providing more detailed explanations for correct and incorrect responses could improve understanding and learning outcomes.

Interface and design: Some respondents highlighted issues with the interface and design of the digital workbooks, including concerns about cluttered layouts and difficulties with navigation. Improving the interface design to make it more intuitive and user-friendly could enhance the overall learning experience.

Content length and complexity: There were comments regarding the length and complexity of the content, with suggestions for reducing text and simplifying language to make it more accessible. Adjusting the content to be more concise and using language that is easier to understand could improve engagement and comprehension.

Accessibility: A few participants mentioned the importance of mobile accessibility and the need for a mobile app version of the training platform. Although the training was available on mobiles, there is a need to provide better/easier accessibility which could increase convenience and flexibility for learners.

In summary, the feedback from open-ended questions highlights opportunities to enhance the soft skills training program by incorporating more practical examples, providing clearer feedback, improving interface design, simplifying content, and ensuring better accessibility across different devices. Addressing these areas could lead to a more effective and engaging learning experience for participants.

Target group	Question	Suggested response
Unemployed/employed	What do you consider the greatest quality of the online soft skills training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Flexibility to complete the training in own time- Practical approach with real-life scenarios

Target group	Question	Suggested response
Participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs	What do you consider the greatest quality of the online soft skills training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective communication workbooks - Practical approach with real-life scenarios
Teachers/trainers in adult education	What do you consider the greatest quality of the online soft skills training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good information and quizzes
Unemployed/employed	What did you like most about the digital workbooks of the soft skills and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visual appeal - Practical approach - Good information and quizzes
Participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs	What did you like most about the digital workbooks of the soft skills and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goal achievement - Effective communication workbooks
Teachers/trainers in adult education	What did you like most about the digital workbooks of the soft skills and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of daily situations - Videos and questions
Unemployed/employed	What is still missing from the soft skills training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practical application - More explanations on incorrect answers - Better interface
Participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs	What is still missing from the soft skills training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interface and design improvements - Less text, clearer language

Target group	Question	Suggested response
Teachers/trainers in adult education	What is still missing from the soft skills training?	- More practical examples and scenarios - Clearer navigation
Unemployed/employed	What change would you suggest improving the overall quality of the online soft skills training?	- Simplify language - More visual aids - Mobile app version
Participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs	What change would you suggest improving the overall quality of the online soft skills training?	- Clearer presentation - Simplify language - More visual aids
Teachers/trainers in adult education	What change would you suggest improving the overall quality of the online soft skills training?	- Simplify language - More practical examples - Clearer navigation

Table 2. Responses to open-ended questions

Unemployed/Employed:

- Greatest quality: Emphasise practicality and flexibility, such as completing training in their own time and recognition of daily situations.
- Liked most: Appreciate practical approach, effective communication workbooks, and clear information.
- Missing: Desire more practical application, clearer explanations on incorrect answers, and improvements in interface and design.
- Suggestions for improvement: Simplify language, enhance visual aids, and provide clearer navigation.

Participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs:

- Greatest quality: Value flexibility and effective communication workbooks.
- Liked most: Appreciate practical approach, recognition of daily situations, and good information and quizzes.
- Missing: Like the unemployed/employed group, desire more practical application and clearer explanations.
- Suggestions for improvement: More visual aids, simplify language, and provide a mobile app version.

Teachers/Trainers in adult education:

- Greatest quality: Emphasise good information and quizzes.
- Liked most: Appreciate the practical approach and availability of videos and questions.
- Missing: Desire clearer presentation and explanations.
- Suggestions for improvement: Improve interface and design, simplify language, and provide more practical examples.

There are some commonalities across the groups, such as the desire for practical application, clearer explanations, and improvements in interface and design. However, there are also distinct preferences, such as the emphasis on flexibility and effective communication workbooks among participants of Stichting Exe-leren programs. These differences highlight the importance of tailoring improvements to meet the specific needs and preferences of each target group.

Understanding of soft skill terms

Self-assessment questionnaire before and after the training - At the start of the training 33 of the 50 participants filled in the pre assessment for their understanding of the soft skills terms. From the participants that followed the training (either on Canvas LMS or Moodle LMS and at least finished one module) there were 14 participants that filled in the post assessment. Reasons for not filling in the form were diverse mostly due to lack of time and interest. We therefore will highlight the most notable differences between pre- and post-training assessments.

From the respondents, we focus on the key skills of each target group based on their relevance and significant improvement.

The following 40 terms were asked before and after the training.

#	Term	#	Term
1	Cultural responsibility	21	Power distance
2	Soft skills	22	Strategies in solving problems
3	Self-confidence	23	Fixed mindset
4	Divergent thinking	24	Conflict resolution



#	Term	#	Term
5	Lateral thinking	25	Green policies
6	Innovation	26	Mindfulness
7	Self-awareness	27	Non-verbal communication
8	Assertive communication	28	Noise in communication
9	Cognitive agility	29	Culture
10	Problem situation	30	Emotional regulation
11	Digital literacy	31	Self-compassion
12	Cultural identity	32	Time tracking tools
13	Social anxiety	33	Active listening
14	Sympathy	34	Growth mindset
15	Self-esteem	35	Phishing
16	Empathy	36	Resilience
17	Creativity	37	Adaptability
18	Verbal communication	38	Malware

#	Term	#	Term
19	Idea about ourselves	39	You-message
20	Common humanity	40	I-message

Table 3. 40 terms asked before and after the training.

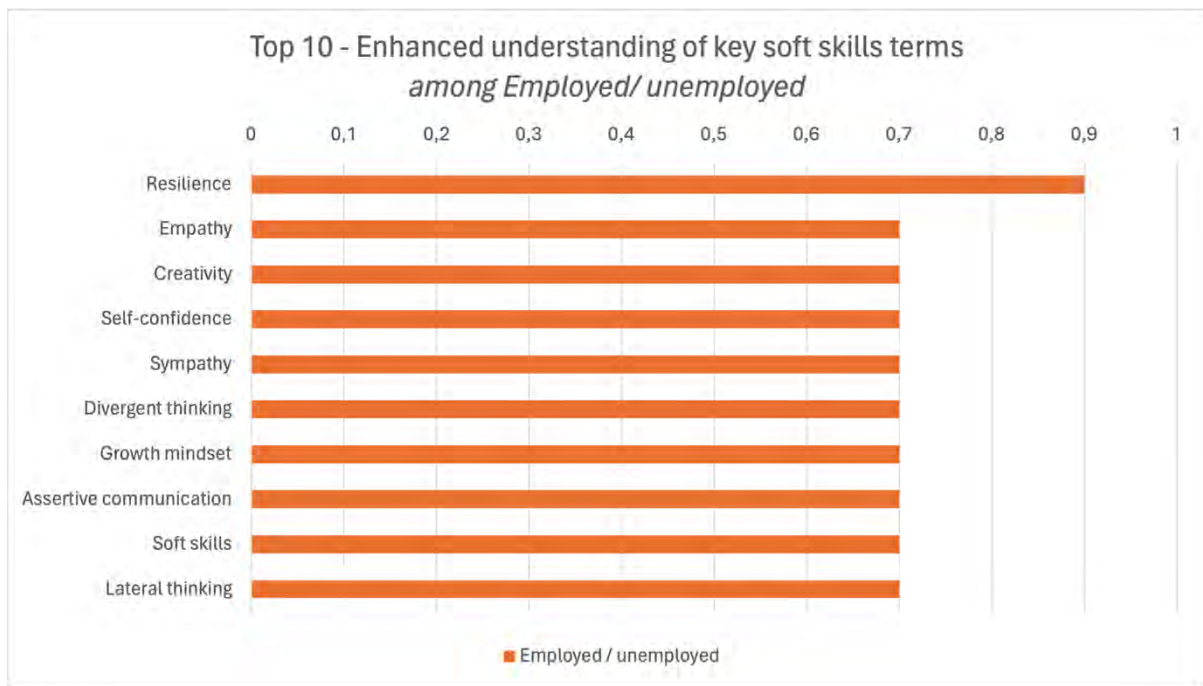


Figure 23. Enhanced understanding of key soft skills terms among Employed/ unemployed

Explanation of bar graph:

1. Employed/Unemployed:

- The terms here include a mix of personal attributes and mindset-related terms like "Resilience", "Empathy", and "Creativity".
- "Resilience" stands out as the term with the longest bar, highlighting its importance or significant post-intervention understanding for this group.

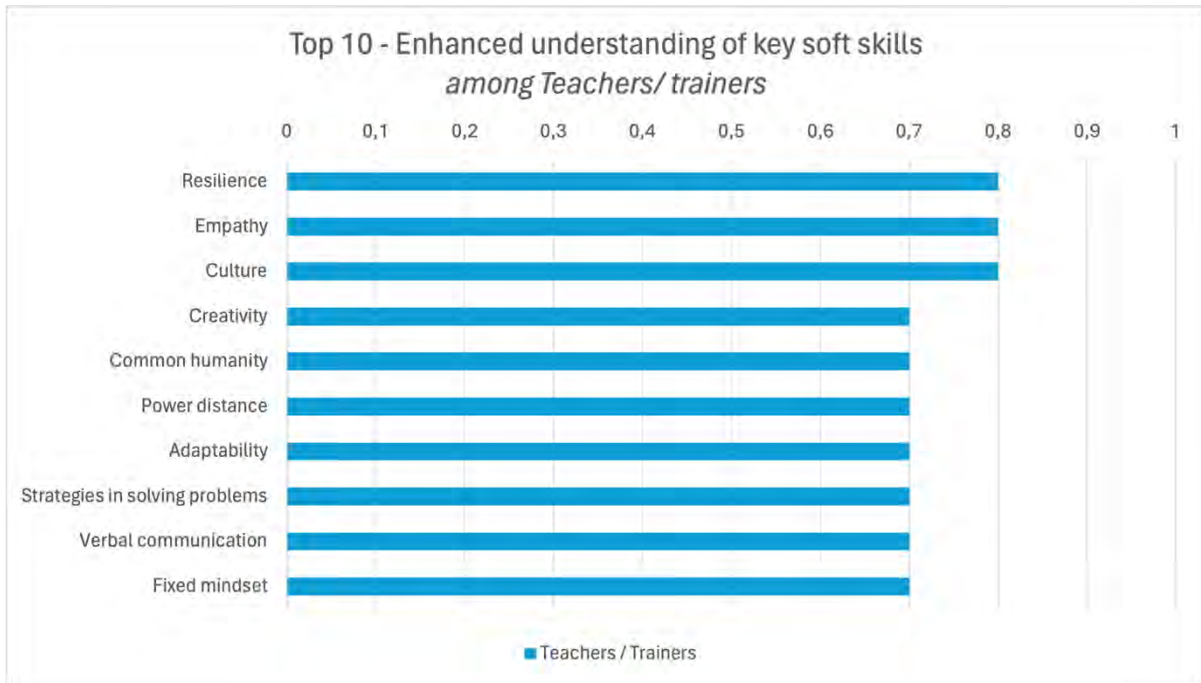


Figure 24. Enhanced understanding of key soft skills among Teachers/trainers

Explanation of bar graph

2. Teachers/Trainers:

- This graph leans towards terms associated with cultural and personal attributes, such as "Resilience", "Empathy", "Culture", and "Creativity".
- The terms "Resilience" and "Empathy" show particularly long bars, indicating strong understanding or improvement.

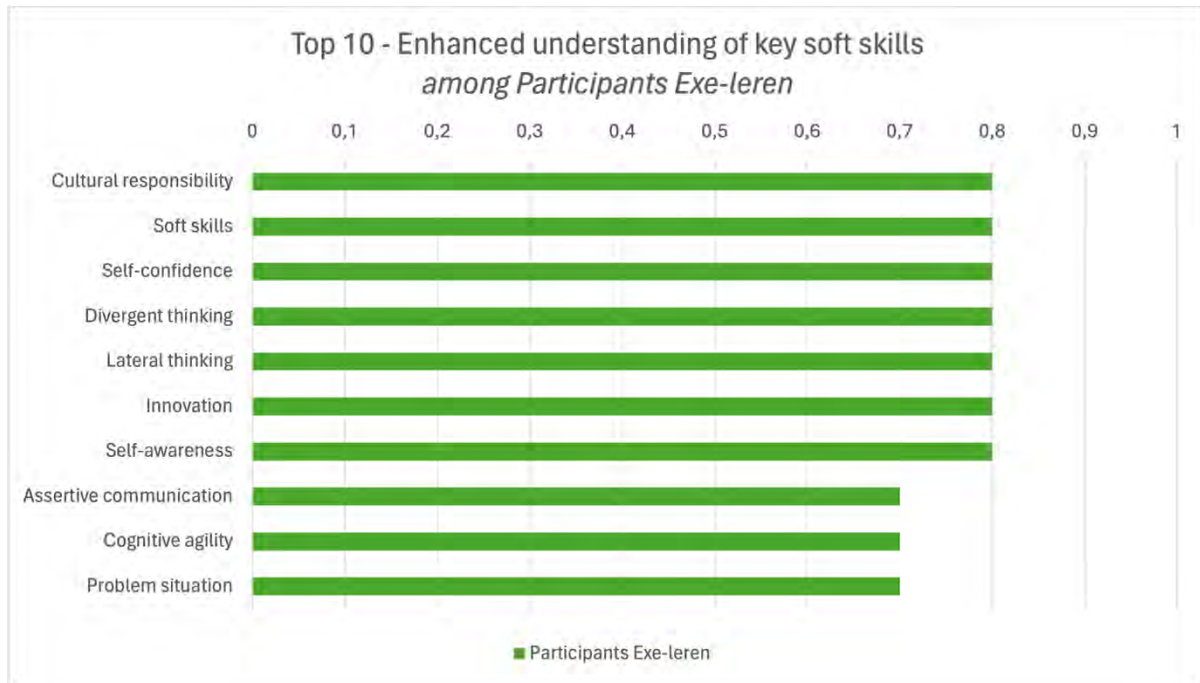


Figure 25. Enhanced understanding of key soft skills among Exe-leren participants

Explanation of bar graph

3. Participants of Exe-leren:

- The terms listed are predominantly related to communication and thinking strategies, such as "Cultural Responsibility" and "Assertive Communication".
- The longer bars for terms like "Soft Skills" and "Cognitive Agility" suggest these areas saw significant improvement or were well understood in the post-assessment.

Conclusion

The graphs suggest that the interventions or learning sessions tailored for each group were effective, with noticeable post-understanding in key areas relevant to their contexts. Participants of Exe-leren may have focused on enhancing communication skills and problem-solving, teachers/trainers on cultural and interpersonal skills, and the employed/unemployed on mental resilience and innovative thinking.

Overall, the results highlight the importance of customising training and educational content to the specific needs and existing knowledge levels of different target groups to maximise understanding and applicability of soft skills in various contexts.

Additionally, the improvement of even a single skill among participants is a positive outcome, enhancing their personal and professional growth.

Mapping assessment terms to training objectives: ensuring relevance and alignment

The following table links 40 terms assessed in the pre- and post-assessment with the 10 soft skills targeted in the training. This alignment highlights the relevance of the training content to the assessed competencies, ensuring a comprehensive development approach.

Soft Skill	Associated terms
Self-awareness	Self-awareness, Idea about ourselves, Self-esteem, Self-confidence, Self-compassion, Mindfulness, Emotional regulation
Empathy	Empathy, Sympathy, Active listening, Conflict resolution, Cultural identity
Effective communication	Verbal communication, Non-verbal communication, Assertive communication, You-message, I-message
Productive collaboration	Collaboration, Cultural responsibility, Power distance
Problem-solving	Problem situation, Strategies in solving problems, Divergent thinking, Lateral thinking
Resilience	Resilience, Growth mindset, Fixed mindset
Adaptability	Adaptability, Cognitive agility, Time tracking tools
Digital literacy	Digital literacy, Phishing, Malware
Innovation	Creativity, Innovation, Divergent thinking, Lateral thinking, Green policies
Cultural responsiveness	Culture, Cultural identity, Cultural responsibility, Power distance, Common humanity

Table 4. Mapping terms with 10 soft skills training



Recommendations for improving the training

From Stichting Exe-Leren/ComPas according to the feedback of our participants there are quite a few recommendations for improving the soft skills training to engage more participants and keep the participants interested and able to finish the training modules.

Most of the reactions were concerning the heavy load of the learning materials especially regarding the workbooks that were developed for this purpose. The main concern is the amount of text and the vocabulary that was quite a challenge for our participants. Although 50 participants filled in the application form and expressed interest in soft skill training, later in the process some of them didn't continue with the training, due to the known factors (time constraint, lack of interest). The fact that participation was voluntary, and they saw no relation to their current situation or future career caused many of our participants to drop out before the end of most modules they started, even though Stichting Exe-leren have done a lot of effort to motivate them. This even though a certificate and a digital badge was offered as a recognition of their educational effort.

Another important issue that leads to an important recommendation is that most participants do not have access to a desktop or laptop computer. They are members of a target group that is vulnerable regarding their participation in society and the purpose of our training is to engage them in learning material to build up their confidence and bridge the gap to the labour market. In this way we can conclude that it is very inconvenient that our learning materials were not easy for all participants to use on a mobile phone as the navigation is challenging. The young participants were not to be motivated as it took too long, and the participation was voluntary. Which caused a lot of the younger participants to give up before even really having gotten started. This even after explanation and guidance by Stichting Exe-leren.

We also learned that participants might lack digital skills, which hinders their ability to navigate effectively through the process. In terms of communication, our findings indicate that participants who showed initial interest in our training modules sometimes failed to respond to emails. It appears that some emails were mistakenly directed to spam folders or overlooked. Upon follow-up, we discovered that non-responses were occasionally due to unclear indications that the emails were related to the training participants were enrolled in. This insight has underscored the need to enhance digital literacy as part of our training to improve overall engagement and effectiveness.

Overall, we find that at the start many of the participants found the training subjects interesting and motivating. However, when starting the training they faced time constraints. Others were not motivated to read all text in relation with, for then unclear practical usage. This despite the offering of a digital certificate and a digital badge. For example, a large part of our participants followed a training for migrants. Those were also the challenging parts as they have to combine it with the soft skill training. In contact with them we encountered many enthusiastic participants, with Dutch language level A2 or B1. Despite this, they faced challenges in understanding the amount of text and the time was for them in the end not convenient as the exams were on their agenda. As we will start upon completion of the



project to improve Dutch versions of the workbooks and adjusting them better, later on we will offer again this training to all interested participants including those who had not finish them in project phase to be able to give them improved user experience and support their efforts in educational sense to be able to acquire soft skills for work and life challenges in the future.

We learned that approaching our participants by phone or in person would sometimes result in them having another go at our initiative, but the result would in most cases still be unsatisfactory. In general, we can assume that the loose engagement Stichting Exe-Leren/ComPas has with the participants was insufficient to tempt people into finishing the training. Most young people feel overloaded as it is, let alone that a flawed skills training with unclear benefits fits into their schedule.

Following from this feedback we can summarise the following recommendations:

- To keep participants interested the right balance between textual input, visual material and short film clips should be found. We expect this will result in keeping participants' attention longer and thus more participants finishing the modules.
- A very important recommendation regarding the responsiveness of online material to the browsers on mobile phones. As we pointed out a lot of our participants belonging to the target groups do not have access to a desktop or laptop computer and will as a result fall back on their mobile phones.
- We also discovered the importance of effective and recognisable communication with the participants. Too much text, different sender identities and unexpected operations will distract our participants from the objective. Therefore, effective communication and logical and straightforward operation of offered material will lead to more successful participation.
- Finally, despite our efforts to keep participants motivated through educational incentives such as learning new skills and providing digital certificates and badges for their CVs, some found these rewards insufficient for pursuing career advancement. This perception impacted their engagement and motivation to continue with the training material.

Conclusion

The Erasmus+ project "Skill me 4 Job!" project has provided Stichting Exe-Leren/ComPas valuable insights into the importance and impact of soft skills training within the Dutch context. This analysis has effectively showcased how the strategic implementation of soft skills training can cater to diverse demographics, fostering essential personal and professional growth across various segments of society.

From an organisational perspective, project has involved substantial efforts aimed at enhancing the soft skills of our target groups, focusing on both private and professional life improvements. Throughout the project, Stichting Exe-Leren/ComPas has dedicated significant resources and strategic planning to effect meaningful changes in soft skills development. This commitment reflects our overarching goal to not only equip individuals with necessary competencies but also to empower them to excel in diverse societal roles, thereby bridging skill gaps and fostering comprehensive growth within the community. This focused approach has been pivotal in driving the initiative's success and aligning it closely with the needs of our participants.

Key outcomes from the initiative highlight a substantial positive reception among participants, indicating a robust appreciation for the practical applications and integration of soft skills in both personal and professional domains. However, the analysis also underscores the necessity for continuous adaptation and improvement to meet evolving educational and market demands effectively.

To further enhance the effectiveness of the training programs, it is recommended to streamline content delivery to be more accessible and engaging, especially on mobile platforms which are increasingly becoming the primary means of accessing educational content. Additionally, enhancing direct communication and providing clear, tangible benefits to participants will be crucial in improving engagement and completion rates in future offerings of these digital training materials.

Moving forward, Stichting Exe-Leren/ComPas should consider these insights as opportunities for refinement. By focusing on a more tailored, flexible approach that accommodates the unique needs and preferences of its diverse audience, the foundation can strengthen its position as a pivotal force in bridging the gap between current competencies and the future demands of the labour market.

In conclusion, while the "Skill me 4 Job!" the project has laid a solid foundation for soft skills training, its sustainability and expansion will depend on its ability to evolve and adapt to the continuous changes in educational requirements and job market landscapes. By doing so, Stichting Exe-Leren/ComPas will continue to adjust soft skills training to the needs of future target groups and to enhance its significant contribution to lifelong learning and professional development in the Netherlands and beyond.



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