

Competence development of young people and young adults across the learning continuum

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PIAAC data shows that key competences – a pre-requisite for participation in political, social and professional life – are developed, in particular, during youth and young adulthood. The development of these competences takes place in a variety of settings, contexts and learning activities as well as in a continuum between formal, non-formal and informal educational and learning experiences. Based on Austrian PIAAC data, the participation of 16 to 29 year old young adults (N=1,378) in educational and learning activities, in particular during the 12 months before the survey was explored, including in relation to individual socio-economic factors. Furthermore, the relationships between these educational and learning experiences as well as opportunities (such as the application of key competences at work or outside work/in everyday life) on the one hand and levels of key competences on the other hand was analysed.

The results suggest, that not only formal but also non-formal education is “socially inherited”: a higher educational achievement is linked to a higher degree of engagement in non-formal and informal learning. This again is interrelated with levels of key competences. In this sense, a “Matthew effect” can be assumed: a higher educational achievement increases the access to further opportunities for developing key competences and all related advantages. It is remarkable that key competences are applied much more frequently outside work/in everyday life than at work. Furthermore, the application of key competences outside work/in everyday life shows relatively strong links with all three key competences – but only a weak link with the educational achievement. While the causality respectively the direction of effects cannot be verified distinctly, the results suggest that an increased application of key competences leads to the development of these competences. Subsequently, it should be explored how the existing potential for competence development can be used more effectively, in particular through targeted support of competence development within the full learning continuum, especially in non-formal and informal learning contexts and at the workplace, but as well through adequate developments in the formal education system.

Keywords: Key competences, competence development, young people, learning continuum, formal education, non-formal learning, informal learning