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**MOTIVAÇÕES E IMPACTOS DO PROCESSO DE RECONHECIMENTO, VALIDAÇÃO E CERTIFICAÇÃO DE COMPETÊNCIAS (RVCC) NA EDUCAÇÃO DE ADULTOS: EVIDÊNCIA EMPÍRICA DE UM CENTRO QUALIFICA**  
**MOTIVATIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE PROCESS OF RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF COMPETENCES (RVCC) IN ADULT EDUCATION: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM A QUALIFICA CENTRE**  
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## RESUMO

**Introdução:** O Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências (RVCC) constitui um instrumento central das políticas de educação e formação de adultos em Portugal, enquadrado na estratégia de aprendizagem ao longo da vida.

**Objetivo:** Analisar as perceções de adultos que frequentaram o processo de RVCC num Centro Qualifica do interior de Portugal, examinando a relação entre motivações, satisfação, impactos profissionais percebidos e variáveis sociodemográficas.

**Métodos:** Estudo quantitativo de natureza exploratória realizado com 56 adultos que frequentaram o Centro NERBA entre 2020 e 2023. A recolha de dados foi efetuada através de um questionário estruturado aplicado em formato digital. A análise estatística incluiu técnicas descritivas e inferenciais (teste t para amostras independentes, teste do qui-quadrado de Pearson, teste U de Mann–Whitney, correlação de Spearman e teste de Kruskal–Wallis), adotando-se um nível de significância de 5%.

**Resultados:** Observou-se um elevado grau de satisfação quanto ao cumprimento das expectativas. Não se verificaram diferenças estatisticamente significativas em função do género ou da escolaridade inicial. A idade apresentou associação positiva com a satisfação, e os participantes mais jovens demonstraram maior propensão a indicar a mudança de emprego como motivação inicial. Observou-se ainda uma associação entre a motivação orientada para a empregabilidade e a ocorrência de mudança profissional.

**Conclusão:** Os resultados reforçam o papel do RVCC como instrumento inclusivo de qualificação e valorização pessoal, evidenciando impactos positivos que transcendem as características sociodemográficas e sublinhando o potencial desta política para reforçar as oportunidades de aprendizagem ao longo da vida.

**Palavras-chave:** educação de adultos; reconhecimento de competências; RVCC; motivação; aprendizagem ao longo da vida

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) constitute a central instrument within Portuguese adult education policy, embedded in lifelong learning strategies.

**Objective:** This study analyses adults' perceptions of the RVCC process at a Qualifica Centre in inland Portugal, examining the relationships among motivations, satisfaction, perceived professional impacts, and sociodemographic variables.

**Methods:** A quantitative exploratory study was conducted with 56 adults who attended the RVCC process at the NERBA Qualifica Centre between 2020 and 2023. Data were collected through a structured digital questionnaire. Statistical analysis included descriptive and inferential techniques, namely independent-samples t-tests, Pearson's chi-square tests, Mann–Whitney U tests, Spearman's rank-order correlation and Kruskal–Wallis tests, adopting a significance level of 5%.

**Results:** High levels of satisfaction regarding expectation fulfilment were observed. No statistically significant differences were identified according to gender or initial educational level. Age showed a positive association with satisfaction, with younger participants more likely to report employment change as an initial motivation. An association was also observed between employment-oriented motivation and the occurrence of professional change.

**Conclusion:** The findings reinforce the inclusive role of the RVCC process in adult qualification and personal recognition, highlighting its potential to support lifelong learning and promote opportunities for professional development.

**Keywords:** adult education; recognition of prior learning; RVCC; motivation; lifelong learning

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** El Reconocimiento, Validación y Certificación de Competencias (RVCC) constituye un instrumento central de las políticas de educación y formación de adultos en Portugal, enmarcado en la estrategia de aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida.

**Objetivo:** Analizar las percepciones de adultos que participaron en el proceso de RVCC en un Centro Qualifica del interior de Portugal, examinando la relación entre motivaciones, satisfacción, impactos profesionales percibidos y variables sociodemográficas.

**Métodos:** Se realizó un estudio cuantitativo de carácter exploratorio con 56 adultos que participaron en el proceso de RVCC entre 2020 y 2023 en el Centro Qualifica NERBA. La recogida de datos se realizó mediante un cuestionario estructurado en formato digital. El análisis estadístico incluyó técnicas descriptivas e inferenciales, como pruebas t para muestras independientes, chi-cuadrado de Pearson, U de Mann–Whitney, correlación de Spearman y prueba de Kruskal–Wallis, con un nivel de significación de 5%.

**Resultados:** Se observaron altos niveles de satisfacción con el cumplimiento de las expectativas. No se identificaron diferencias estadísticamente significativas según el género ni el nivel educativo inicial. La edad mostró una asociación positiva con la satisfacción, y los participantes más jóvenes presentaron una mayor tendencia a indicar el cambio de empleo como motivación inicial. Asimismo, se observó una asociación entre la motivación orientada a la empleabilidad y la ocurrencia de cambios profesionales.

**Conclusión:** Los resultados refuerzan el papel inclusivo del RVCC como instrumento de cualificación y reconocimiento personal, evidenciando su contribución al fortalecimiento de las políticas de aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida.

**Palabras clave:** educación de adultos; reconocimiento de aprendizajes previos; RVCC; motivación; aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida

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## INTRODUCTION

Adult education has become a central component of contemporary education policies, particularly within the framework of lifelong learning strategies promoted by international organisations such as the European Commission, OECD, and UNESCO. In this context, mechanisms that recognise knowledge and competences acquired outside formal education systems have become increasingly important.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) systems have emerged internationally as instruments for validating competences acquired through professional experience, informal learning, and everyday life contexts. By enabling adults to obtain formal certification based on previously acquired competences, these systems contribute to more flexible learning pathways and support the principles of lifelong learning (Cedefop, 2023). In Portugal, the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) process is one of the most significant public policy instruments for raising the educational and professional qualification levels of the adult population.

Since its implementation in the early 2000s, the RVCC process has played an important role in promoting adult qualifications and enabling the formal recognition of competences acquired through life and work experiences (Barros, 2025; Guimarães & Barros, 2025). The development of the Qualifica Programme and the expansion of Qualifica Centres have further strengthened this policy framework, aiming to address structural qualification gaps in the Portuguese workforce. Over recent decades, Portugal has made significant efforts to improve the qualifications of its population in order to overcome a long-standing historical deficit. Nevertheless, levels of educational attainment and the pace of improvement remain below those of more developed countries, limiting the conditions for national development in a global economy increasingly driven by knowledge and shaped by the demands of green and digital transitions. In the 2022/2023 academic year, 73,105 adults were enrolled in basic and secondary education programmes across Portuguese educational institutions offering these opportunities (Comissão Europeia, 2025). Despite the relevance of the RVCC process in Portuguese education policy, empirical research focusing on participants' perceptions, motivations, and perceived impacts remains relatively limited, particularly in specific territorial contexts such as low-density regions. Understanding the motivations that lead adults to engage in the RVCC process and the impacts they perceive after completing it is essential for assessing the effectiveness of this policy instrument and identifying factors that may enhance its outcomes.

In this context, the present study aims to analyse the perceptions of adults who participated in the RVCC process at a Qualifica Centre located in inland Portugal. Specifically, the study examines the relationships among motivations for participation, perceived professional impacts, satisfaction with the process, and participants' sociodemographic characteristics.

By examining participants' motivations, expectations, and perceived professional impacts, this study contributes to the empirical literature on adult qualification policies in low-density territorial contexts.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 Adult education and lifelong learning

In recent decades, adult education has taken on a central role in European and national public policies, being recognised as a strategic tool for economic development, social cohesion, and individual enhancement (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). Adult Education and Training (AET) comprises a diverse range of modalities geared towards academic and professional qualifications, as well as lifelong learning, framed within the National Qualifications System (SNQ) and operated mainly through Qualifica Centres (Decree-Law No. 396/2007; ANQEP, 2023; Cedefop, 2023). Although there are other modalities, the most relevant are Adult Education and Training (AET) courses, Certified Modular Training, Lifelong Learning Courses (Recurrent Education), Technological Specialisation Courses (CET), Vocational Training for Active People (employed and unemployed), and the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC). The programme currently emphasises digital training and skills development for the digital economy, as well as a greater focus on sustainability and gender equality (Nóbrega, 2024).

EFA courses are aimed at adults aged 18 and over who wish to complete their basic or secondary education or even obtain dual academic and professional certification. Based on the National Qualifications Catalogue, the most relevant characteristics of EFA courses are their modular structure, flexible pathways, and integrated technological training, which can confer qualification levels 1 to 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (which establishes the correspondence with the European Qualifications Framework [EQF]) (ANQEP, 2023; European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2021).

Certified Modular Training Courses are based on Short Training Units (commonly known as UFCD), lasting 25 or 50 hours, which allow skills to be accumulated progressively and can be integrated into diverse training pathways (such as EFA courses, among others). They are also often used for professional retraining or to complement existing skills in a specific area (Cedefop, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Lifelong Learning Courses are also aimed at adults who wish to complete basic or secondary education and operate on an alternative school basis (usually after work), with a modular structure, and are mainly attended by working adults who wish to increase their level of education. However, they have been losing ground to EFA courses (ANQEP, 2023).

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CETs are level 5 QNQ courses aimed at adults who have completed secondary education and fall within the scope of post-secondary non-higher education. They have a strong practical specialisation component and are geared towards integration into the labour market.

In turn, the RVCC can take two forms: academic and professional. The academic RVCC allows students to obtain an academic certificate for each level of education (1st Cycle of Basic Education [CEB], 2nd CBE, 3rd CBE and Secondary Education). It is based on skills acquired throughout life, in formal, non-formal, and even informal contexts (Andersson & Fejes, 2021; Cedefop, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). The professional RVCC allows adults to obtain professional certification (levels 2, 4, or 5 of the QNQ) by demonstrating the skills listed in the CNQ (Cedefop, 2023).

Currently, there are other active programmes and measures, such as the Qualifica Programme, digital retraining measures, programmes funded by the Recovery and Resilience Programme (PRR), and the Training Cheque, among others (ANQEP, 2023; European Commission, 2023).

### 1.2 Policies for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) systems are emerging internationally in response to the need to value skills acquired outside formal education systems, particularly in non-formal and informal contexts (Cedefop, 2023). These systems aim to recognise adults' experiential knowledge, promoting greater flexibility in qualification pathways and reinforcing the principles of lifelong learning.

At the European level, the validation of skills has become a cornerstone of education and employment policies, understood as a tool for promoting employability, mobility and social inclusion (Cedefop, 2023). In this context, systems for the recognition of prior learning seek to value skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, contributing to the reduction of educational inequalities accumulated throughout life.

In Portugal, the RVCC process was developed in the early 2000s as a public policy for adult qualification aimed at raising the educational levels of the working population (Barros, 2025). RVCC represents both a qualification policy and an instrument of social justice, as it allows knowledge acquired through professional and personal experience to be formally recognised as skills.

From a conceptual point of view, the validation of competences reflects a paradigm shift in the way experiential knowledge is recognised, shifting the focus from an exclusively school-based logic to a broader perspective of lifelong learning (Andersson & Fejes, 2021). However, the literature also highlights tensions inherent in these processes, namely between the emancipatory valorisation of the subject and the instrumentalisation of qualifications in the service of economic agendas (Guimarães & Barros, 2025).

Recent research shows that, in second-chance education systems, the adult learner's path creates tension between training geared towards employability and training geared towards personal emancipation, influencing educational practices and participants' expectations (Vanderavero et al., 2026). Thus, RVCC can be interpreted simultaneously as a mechanism for inclusion and as an instrument for governing the educational and professional trajectories of adults, reflecting the intersection between educational policies and employment policies (Andersson & Fejes, 2021; Cedefop, 2023; Guimarães & Barros, 2025).

### 1.3 Motivation and impacts on adult education

Adult learners often face specific challenges related to work responsibilities, family commitments and time constraints, which require flexible and supportive learning environments adapted to their particular needs (Scruton et al., 2025).

Motivation is a key factor in participation in a particular activity with a defined goal. From a theoretical point of view, motivation in adult education has been broadly framed by Self-Determination Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic motivations, associated with interest, personal satisfaction and individual development, and extrinsic motivations, oriented towards external rewards or instrumental goals (Bierema et al., 2025; Bílá & Kalenda, 2025; Van Nieuwenhove & De Wever, 2025). This distinction is particularly relevant in adult qualification contexts, where personal fulfilment and professional goals coexist. Recent bibliometric evidence indicates a growing body of research examining learner engagement and motivation in adult learning environments, highlighting the increasing prominence of learner-centred approaches that emphasise intrinsic motivation and active participation (Por et al., 2025).

However, there are different motivational profiles among adults, which may combine aspects of intrinsic motivation (such as interest and personal growth) with aspects inherent to extrinsic motivation (which are usually more objective, instrumental, and professional), which may vary depending on factors such as age, gender and the learning contexts themselves (Bierema et al., 2025; Bílá, & Kalenda, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Yaban & Gaschler, 2025).

Engagement, persistence, satisfaction, and the transfer of learning to new contexts are directly related to extrinsic motivation, but even more so to intrinsic motivation (Bílá & Kalenda, 2025; Heuer et al., 2025). The literature suggests that although extrinsic motivation may drive the initial decision to participate, intrinsic motivation tends to be more strongly associated with persistence, sustained engagement, and the internalisation of learning (Bílá & Kalenda, 2025; Heuer et al., 2025; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Radovan's work (2024) also highlights that adult education plays a decisive role in promoting sustainable development in multiple dimensions. In economic terms, participation in training is associated with employment characteristics, such as contract type and

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organisation size, reinforcing the importance of continuous learning for workforce adaptability and sustainable growth. On a social level, inequalities in access to education, influenced by professional status and flexible working hours, highlight the need for policies that guarantee equal opportunities for qualification and retraining, promoting greater social cohesion (Vanderavero et al., 2026).

In this context, motivation plays an important role in shaping participation in training processes and in influencing how adults perceive the professional and personal impacts of these experiences. Adults whose participation is primarily driven by professional motivations tend to emphasise outcomes related to employability, career progression, or employment change, whereas motivations of a more personal nature are more frequently associated with gains in self-esteem, social recognition, and individual fulfilment (Bílá & Kalenda, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). This distinction is particularly relevant in the analysis of qualification processes such as RVCC.

Consequently, analysing motivation in adult education contributes to understanding both the factors that influence participation decisions and the perceived impacts following the completion of training processes, constituting an important explanatory variable in empirical research in this field.

#### 1.4 Sociodemographic variables and participation in adult education

Participation in adult education is not uniform and is influenced by a set of socio-demographic variables that condition both access, motivations, and the outcomes of training courses. The literature shows that factors such as age, gender, and initial level of education play a significant role in the likelihood of involvement in lifelong learning activities (Boeren, 2020; Desjardins & Ioannidou, 2020; OECD, 2021).

Age is a particularly relevant variable in the analysis of participation in adult education. Recent studies indicate that younger adults tend to participate in more instrumentally oriented training, often associated with employability and career progression, while older adults show motivations more focused on personal development and individual fulfilment (Bílá & Kalenda, 2025; OECD, 2023).

In addition, the likelihood of participation tends to decrease with age, especially in contexts where the economic returns of qualifications are perceived to be lower (Desjardins & Ioannidou, 2020).

Gender has also been identified as a relevant factor in the analysis of participation in adult education, although patterns vary across national contexts and types of training. In several European countries, women have higher participation rates than men in certain types of training, particularly in retraining and basic education (OECD, 2021). However, inequalities persist in reconciling work, family responsibilities, and training opportunities (European Commission, 2023).

Initial educational attainment is one of the most consistent determinants of participation in adult education. Individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to continue investing in training, a phenomenon often referred to as the cumulative effect of education (Desjardins & Ioannidou, 2020).

Paradoxically, those who would benefit most from qualification opportunities, namely adults with low levels of education, tend to participate less, which reinforces the need for public policies targeted at vulnerable groups (OECD, 2023).

The analysis of these variables is particularly relevant in studies on adult qualification processes, as it allows us to understand how individual characteristics influence motivations, expectations, and perceived impacts. In this regard, the consideration of sociodemographic variables is relevant for interpreting empirical results on the RVCC process.

#### 1.5 Expectations and satisfaction in training processes

Expectations play a central role in the educational experience of adults, influencing both the decision to participate and the subsequent evaluation of the training course. In adult education and training contexts, expectations tend to be associated with specific goals, often related to professional advancement, personal fulfilment, or social recognition (Bílá & Kalenda, 2025; OECD, 2021).

The literature has often framed learning satisfaction in the light of Expectancy Confirmation Theory, according to which satisfaction results from a comparison between initial expectations and perceptions of the actual performance of the educational process. When expectations are confirmed or exceeded, satisfaction tends to be higher, and the learning experience is more positively assessed.

In adult education, satisfaction is not limited to the academic dimension but also encompasses perceptions of practical usefulness, professional relevance, and recognition of the skills acquired (European Commission, 2023). Recent research suggests that learning environments that value learners' prior experience and promote flexible pathways tend to generate higher levels of satisfaction (Cedefop, 2023).

Satisfaction can also act as a mediator between motivation and perceived impact. Adults whose participation is guided by clearly defined intrinsic and extrinsic motivations tend to give more positive evaluations when the results obtained match their initial expectations (Bílá & Kalenda, 2025). In this sense, analysing the alignment between expectations and perceived professional changes is particularly relevant in processes such as RVCC, where formal recognition of skills is one of the main objectives stated by participants.

Thus, understanding the degree of satisfaction and fulfilment of expectations in adult qualification processes allows an assessment of the programme's perceived quality and an interpretation of the personal and professional impacts reported after its completion.

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### 1.6 Research Questions

Problem question: How do adult participants perceive the RVCC process, and how do these perceptions, including motivations and professional impacts, relate to their sociodemographic characteristics?

RQ<sub>1</sub> - What are the perceived impacts of the RVCC process on the personal and professional development of adults?

RQ<sub>2</sub> - Do perceptions and motivations associated with the RVCC process vary according to sociodemographic characteristics?

RQ<sub>3</sub> - Is there an alignment between initial expectations and perceived professional changes after the process?

## 2. METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative methodological approach to analyse the impact of the RVCC process on adults who attended the Qualifica Centre of the Bragança District Business Association (NERBA).

### 2.1 Sample

The study population includes adults who attended the NERBA Qualification Centre between January 2020 and December 2023 (N = 118), with 56 valid responses collected (n = 56). The response rate was 47.5%, which is considered adequate for exploratory questionnaire studies.

### 2.2 Data collection instruments

Data collection took place in May 2024 via electronic (email) and telephone contact with participants to maximise the response rate. Data were collected using a structured, digital questionnaire.

The questionnaire included eight items organised into three sections: (i) sociodemographic characterisation of the participants, (ii) motivations for participation in the RVCC process, and (iii) perceived personal and professional impacts resulting from participation in the process. The instrument was adapted from a previously developed questionnaire (Simões, 2023) and adjusted to the objectives of the present study.

The first section included questions related to participants' sociodemographic characteristics, namely gender, age, and educational level at the time of entry into the NERBA Qualifica Centre. In addition, the questionnaire included a set of closed-ended questions designed to address the research questions and the study's specific objectives (Table 1).

Table 1- Sociodemographic variables

Variable	Type of variable	Response options
Age	Continuous	Numerical value
Sex	Categorical	Female; Male; Prefer not to say
Initial education level at entry to the NERBA Qualifica Centre	Categorical	1st CBE; 2nd CBE; 3rd CBE; Secondary education

Five variables were analysed, with different types of response:

1. Multiple-choice question on the reasons for undertaking the RVCC process, with four response options: personal fulfilment, career progression, interest in learning more, and changing employment.
2. Five-point Likert scale question to assess the degree of agreement with the statement regarding the fulfilment of expectations regarding the RVCC process (1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neither agree nor disagree; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly agree).
3. Dichotomous response questions (yes/no) regarding the identification of advantages in the RVCC process, the perception of changes in professional level, and the possible choice of another route to complete primary or secondary education if the RVCC process had not been developed.

The questionnaire also included two initial questions of an ethical nature, also with dichotomous answers (yes/no), intended to ensure the informed consent of the participants: (i) agreement to participate in the study and (ii) authorisation for the anonymous and confidential treatment of responses for analysis and scientific publication.

### 2.3 Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29), combining descriptive and inferential statistics.

In the first phase, a descriptive analysis of the sociodemographic variables was performed, using absolute and relative frequencies for categorical variables (gender and initial education upon entry into NERBA) and measures of central tendency and dispersion for the continuous variable. The normality of the age variable distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Since there were no significant deviations from normality ( $p > .05$ ), it was considered appropriate to use parametric tests in the analyses involving this variable. Thus, to compare the mean age between groups defined by dichotomous variables (e.g., presence/absence of a certain reason), Student's t-test for independent samples was applied, assuming homogeneity of variances when verified.

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Given the ordinal nature of the variable fulfilment of expectations (five-point Likert scale), non-parametric tests were used in the corresponding analyses: the Mann-Whitney U test for comparison between two independent groups (gender), Spearman's correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) to assess the association between age and the variable, and the Kruskal-Wallis test to assess the fulfilment of expectations regarding the process.

The associations between categorical variables were analysed using Pearson's chi-square test. For the multiple-choice question on the reasons for undertaking the RVCC process, each option was coded as an independent dichotomous variable (0 = not selected; 1 = selected), allowing for individual analysis of each reason. The level of statistical significance adopted was 5% ( $p < .05$ ) for all inferential analyses. The inferential statistical procedures applied, depending on the type of variables analysed, are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Summary of inferential statistical tests performed**

Analysed relationship	Type of variables	Statistical test applied
Age × RVCC motivations	Continuous × Dichotomous	Independent samples t-test
Sex × RVCC motivations	Categorical × Categorical	Pearson's Chi-square test
Education level × RVCC motivations	Categorical × Categorical	Pearson's Chi-square test
Sex × Expectation fulfilment	Categorical × Ordinal	Mann-Whitney U test
Age × Expectation fulfilment	Continuous × Ordinal	Spearman's rank-order correlation ( $\rho$ )
Education level × Expectation fulfilment	Categorical × Ordinal	Kruskal-Wallis test
Expectation of employment change × Actual employment change	Categorical × Categorical	Pearson's Chi-square test

### 3. RESULTS

In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, the sample consists of 56 participants: 34 female (60.7%) and 22 male (39.3%). Their ages range from 27 to 62, with a mean age of 46 years.. Regarding initial education, participants ranged from the 2nd Cycle of basic Education to secondary Education. The majority had completed the 3rd CEB (58.2%), followed by secondary education (29.1%) and the 2nd CEB (12.7%).

Prior to performing inferential analyses involving the age variable, the assumption of normality was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk test. No statistically significant deviations from normality were observed ( $W = .967$ ;  $p = .123$ ), so it was considered appropriate to use parametric tests in the analyses that included this variable.

Regarding the reasons for undertaking the RVCC process, analysis using Pearson's chi-square test did not reveal any statistically significant associations between the categorical variables of gender and initial education level and the different reasons reported (Table 3).

However, analysis of the age variable using an independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in the change of employment reason, with participants who indicated this reason having a lower average age than those who did not. Cohen's d coefficient ( $d = 0.31$ ) was also calculated, indicating a small effect size for the group difference (Table 3).

No statistically significant differences were observed in terms of age for the reasons of personal development, career progression, or interest in learning more.

**Table 3 – Inferential analysis of associations between sociodemographic variables and motivations for participation in the RVCC process.**

Motivation for RVCC	Age (t-test) p-value	Sex ( $\chi^2$ ) p-value	Education level ( $\chi^2$ ) p-value
Change of employment	.019*	.242	.293
Personal development	.061	.166	.895
Interest in learning	.078	.430	.907
Career progression	.108	.565	.392

Note.  $p < .05$ .

**Table 4 – Independent samples t-test results for age according to motivation change of employment**

Change of employment	N	Mean	SD	Cohen's d
Yes	33	45.25	9.22	.31
No	23	48.09	9.39	

Note.  $d$  = Cohen's effect size; SD = Standard Deviation.

Regarding the motivation change of employment, 33 participants (58.9%) identified this factor as one of the reasons for undertaking the RVCC process. Although a higher proportion of professional changes was observed among participants who reported employment change as a motivation, the association between this expectation and the actual occurrence of professional change was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = .010$ ;  $p = .921$ ) (Table 5).

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**Table 5** - Association between expectation of employment change and actual employment change

Variable	Value	$\chi^2$ p-value
Change of employment	.010	.921

Participants reported very high levels of satisfaction with the RVCC process. Most respondents strongly agreed that the process met their expectations (89.09%), while 7.27% agreed and 3.64% neither agreed nor disagreed. No participants reported disagreement with the statement. The very high levels of satisfaction observed in this study also require cautious interpretation. While they may indicate a positive and meaningful experience, they may simultaneously reflect response bias or social desirability effects, particularly in contexts where participants perceive the process as beneficial or legitimising. In addition, the absence of negative responses raises the possibility of a ceiling effect, limiting the variability of the data and constraining deeper analytical differentiation. Previous research in adult education has suggested that high satisfaction levels do not necessarily correspond to long-term structural impacts, particularly in terms of employment outcomes or social mobility. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of perceived value rather than definitive evidence of sustained impact.

No statistically significant differences in satisfaction were observed by gender, as indicated by the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 6). Regarding the association between satisfaction and age, Spearman’s correlation coefficient revealed a positive association, indicating that older age is (moderately) associated with greater agreement with expectations for the RVCC process (Table 6). In turn, the Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal statistically significant differences in satisfaction across participants’ initial levels of education.

**Table 6** - Association between expectation fulfilment in the RVCC process and sociodemographic variables

	Statistical test	Result	p-value
Sex	Mann-Whitney U test	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	.973
Age	Spearman’s rank-order correlation	Positive ( $p = 0.415$ )	.001*
Education level	Kruskal–Wallis test	$H = .732$	.692

\* $p < 0.01$

All participants identified the RVCC process as advantageous, and the majority (85.5%) would not have chosen another route to complete their compulsory education if they had not started the RVCC process (Table 7).

**Table 7** – Responses to dichotomous questions

Dichotomous questions	Yes	No
Do you identify advantages in the RVCC process?	100%	.0%
At the professional level, do you identify changes resulting from the RVCC process?	61.8%	38.2%
If you had not undertaken the RVCC process, would you have chosen another pathway to complete basic or secondary education?	85.5%	14.5%

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm the centrality of motivational factors in adult education and training pathways, corroborating previous evidence that identifies motivation as a structuring variable in decisions about participation, persistence, and the evaluation of educational impact (Nóbrega, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The high satisfaction reported by participants suggests that the RVCC process was perceived as relevant and in line with initial expectations, reinforcing the importance of perceived usefulness and recognition in adult involvement in qualification contexts.

The strong agreement with the fulfilment of expectations indicates that RVCC can function as a formal certification mechanism while also constituting an experience of symbolic validation and identity recognition. This result is consistent with approaches that emphasise the emancipatory dimension of skills recognition processes (Andersson & Fejes, 2021; Guimarães & Barros, 2025), even though these coexist with instrumental objectives geared towards the labour market.

The absence of statistically significant gender differences suggests that the perceived impact of the process is cross-cutting, indicating a relatively equitable learning experience. This result aligns with research indicating the capacity of adult education systems to serve as instruments for mitigating structural inequalities and promoting qualification opportunities for traditionally underrepresented groups (Kalenda et al., 2024). Similarly, the lack of variations based on initial schooling reinforces the inclusive potential of RVCC as a recognition mechanism accessible to different educational profiles. However, the absence of statistically significant differences across key sociodemographic variables should not be interpreted uncritically as evidence of full equity in the RVCC process. Alternative interpretations must be considered. On the one hand, the lack of variation may reflect a genuinely inclusive design. On the other hand, it may also result from methodological constraints, including the relatively small sample size, which may limit statistical power to detect subtle differences. Furthermore, it is possible that the standardised structure of the

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RVCC process produces relatively homogeneous perceptions across participants, potentially masking differentiated experiences that would require qualitative approaches to be fully captured. From this perspective, the apparent uniformity of results may conceal underlying heterogeneity in how different groups experience recognition processes.

In contrast, age proved to be a differentiating variable in terms of motivations. Younger participants showed greater focus on professional goals, namely changing employment, while older participants tended to value personal development. This pattern is consistent with the literature on lifelong learning, which associates different life-cycle stages with distinct training priorities (Heuer et al., 2025; Kalenda et al., 2024). Yamashita et al. (2022) seem to reinforce this view, noting that no strong, consistent gender patterns emerge on their own; instead, what truly matters is the intersection of age, educational attainment, and literacy skills.

The observed association between employability-oriented motivation and the actual occurrence of professional change suggests that RVCC may contribute to labour mobility. This interpretation is consistent with previous research highlighting the role of adult education in supporting employability and professional transitions in changing labour markets (OECD, 2023; Cedefop, 2023). However, this effect is likely conditioned by external contextual factors, such as regional employment opportunities or sectoral dynamics. This evidence reinforces the instrumental dimension of the process, framing it as a potential mechanism for adapting to the demands of a changing labour market. Lifelong learning thus emerges not as a homogeneous phenomenon, but as a process shaped by individual trajectories, diverse motivations, and specific territorial contexts. Moreover, the lack of a statistically significant association between expectations of employment change and actual professional change suggests that the relationship between RVCC participation and labour market outcomes may be more complex than initially assumed. This finding raises important questions regarding the extent to which RVCC effectively translates into tangible professional mobility, particularly in low-density regions where labour market opportunities may be structurally limited. It also reinforces the need to distinguish between perceived impact and measurable outcomes, highlighting a potential gap between individual expectations and structural conditions.

Overall, the data obtained reinforce the relevance of the RVCC as a structuring component of adult education policies in low-population-density contexts, highlighting positive impacts that transcend sociodemographic variables and underline the need for flexible, individualised strategies sensitive to different life-cycle stages. Despite these contributions, the results should be interpreted with some limitations in mind, namely the study's exploratory nature and the relatively small sample size from a single Qualifica Centre, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other territorial contexts.

From a broader policy perspective, these findings contribute to ongoing debates regarding the role of RVCC within adult education systems. While the process appears to support individual recognition and perceived empowerment, it may also function as an instrument aligned with policy objectives focused on qualification targets and labour market adjustment. This dual role reflects a structural tension identified in the literature between emancipatory and instrumental logics in adult education. In this sense, RVCC should not be analysed solely in terms of individual outcomes, but also in relation to its function within wider governance frameworks that shape access to education, certification practices, and employability strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, and educational background can provide important insights for shaping public policies aimed at encouraging the continuation of studies, particularly in countries such as Portugal, where increasing educational attainment remains a key societal challenge.

The results of this study corroborate international evidence highlighting the centrality of motivation, practical relevance, and recognition of skills in adult education. The high level of satisfaction observed and the association between certain motivations and professional impacts suggest that the RVCC process is perceived as a formal certification mechanism and a meaningful experience of personal fulfilment and potential labour mobility.

The analysis also shows that, although positive perceptions are common across gender and educational levels, age introduces nuances in motivations, reflecting different rationales at different life stages. These results reinforce the need for flexible approaches that are sensitive to individual trajectories, capable of accommodating both instrumental goals oriented towards employability and dimensions of personal development.

In the context of lifelong learning policies, RVCC emerges as an instrument with dual potential: promoting educational inclusion and supporting labour-market adaptation, particularly in less densely populated areas. Consolidating this potential requires strategies that ensure personalised pathways, coordinate with the local economic fabric, and align participants' expectations with actual results.

Maximising the impact of RVCC involves recognising the heterogeneity of adult profiles and structuring policies that integrate flexibility, recognition, and guidance towards concrete objectives, thereby reinforcing its role as a structuring axis of public policies for lifelong learning.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of the RVCC process across different regional contexts and qualification pathways. While the findings highlight the potential of RVCC as an inclusive and flexible mechanism within lifelong learning policies, they also suggest the need for a more critical understanding of its outcomes. The distinction between perceived benefits and structural

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impacts remains particularly relevant, especially in contexts characterised by limited labour market dynamism. Future policy development should therefore expand access to RVCC and strengthen the articulation between certification processes and concrete opportunities for professional progression. Further research is needed to explore these dynamics through longitudinal and mixed-method approaches, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of adult qualification policies.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization, A.F.; data curation, A.F.; formal analysis, A.F.; investigation, S.C. and B.T.; methodology, A.F.; project administration, S.C.; resources, S.C. and B.T.; software, A.F.; supervision, S.C.; validation, S.C.; visualization, S.C.; writing – original draft, A.F.; writing – review & editing, S.C.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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