Masakuni Tagaki,
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# Center for
# Qualitative Psychology 2024:
# Mission completed

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# Content

About the Final Meeting
of the Center for Qualitative Psychology
in the Fall of 2024

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The international center CQP was founded in 1999 at the University of Tübingen, Germany with the intention of enhancing qualitative research methods in psychology (Kiegelmann, Held,. Huber & Ertel, 1999). The purpose of the center was international cooperation in research, development of methodology and academic teaching of qualitative methods. Within the 25 years of the CQP, regular workshop for networking were documented by publication of the series qualitative Psychology Nexus, published by the Ingeborg Huber Verlag and also available at the ZPID as open access publication (see PsychArchives; https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.10339). The Website of the AQUAD, a software for QDA also provides access to all of the proceedings (http://www.aquad.de/D_Literatur.html).

The first workshop took place in the small city of Blaubeuren at the guest house of the University of Tübingen, 19 international meetings followed with meeting places in Austria, Finland, Germany, Israel, Latvia and Spain. Over the 25 years of the existence of the CQP, according to its mission statement the main focus was on networking, enhancing qualitative empirical research methods in psychology and mutual support of researchers in the field of qualitative psychology in various career stages. In 1999, at the time of founding the CQP at the turn of the century, there was much pressure against qualitative research methods in psychology. Meanwhile, in 2025, qualitative approaches in psychology are getting more and more tolerated, even though not quite fully accepted. In addition, a quarter century ago, those doctoral students and upcoming early career researchers with an interest in pursuing studies based on qualitative psychological research methods or mixed methods approaches tended to be isolated. Sometimes, they even had problems finding advisors or

universities who would support their research and supervise their studies. At that time, the CQP served as a networking opportunity and helped to overcome isolation. Early career researchers were able to find supervisors, colleagues engaged in joint research and published together.

Now, 25 years later, there are more options for doctoral students and early career psychologists to connect and to find resources and funding opportunities for their studies. Publishing studies based on qualitative psychological research in peer reviewed journals is now possible. The pioneer journal in open access publishing "Forum qualitative Sozialforschung", FQS (https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs) regularly publishes psychological contributions, the American Psychological Association APA publishes the journal "Qualitative Psychology" (https://psycnet.apa.org/PsycARTICLES/journal/qua/mostdl), several handbooks are available, e.g. Mey and Mruck (2010 & 2020) and Tseliou, Demuth, Georgaca, & Gough (2023). It is possible to publish research reports based on qualitative or mixed methods in a growing number of scientific journals of psychology; book publications are possible as well. Furthermore, other disciplines with research fields overlapping psychology are open for qualitative research, such as education, cultural studies or sociology. Because of the growing acceptance of qualitative psychology, additional access to networking opportunity, now, the urgent need to overcome isolation and to find a network for cooperation in scientific qualitative research no longer exists. Besides in person workshops, online and social medial cooperation has become much more accessible.

The final workshop of the CQP was the 20th meeting of the center and took place in at the University of Education in Weingarten, Germany. The meeting could be held in connection with the anniversary celebration of the university's adult education department (https://www.ph-weingarten.de/de/transfer/transfereinrichtungen/weiterbildung-2/xx-workshop-cqp-10-jahre-aww). A group of researchers interested in educational studies and in networking within the Spanish speaking research community decided to continue meeting and to found a network for qualitative research in education. Collaborations and friendships, which had formed over the years will continue. Yet, in the fall of 2024, participants of the final workshop of the CQP decided to close the CQP and to de-register the NGO. The purpose of the center has been achieved.

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# Preface:
## Elaboration of the Contributions from the Japanese Perspective

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Despite the differences between the topics, the four contributions have several commonalities. The contributors show lifelong learning (LLL) in a broad sense: teachers in higher education, workers in agricultural fields, and vulnerable people who require more employment skills.

Arroyo, Iglesias, and Lozano clarified that the development of academics in higher education should be examined as their social mobility becomes more active in the EU and worldwide. They connotated that university teachers cannot adhere to each original affiliation, even though expected activating social mobility might provide them with hardships; they are required to adjust to new teaching skills, cultural diversities, language, and university administration or management, in addition to their genuine academic activities.

However, their suggestion is optimistic provided that ERASMUS+ works well. From the Japanese perspective, we did not put teaching skill improvement and farmer's skills in the LLL context. Undergraduate students who intend to be teachers in elementary or secondary education must complete the required courses and teaching practices at the relevant schools. Local education boards are involved in teachers' LLL but not in higher education. There is research on teachers' development in primary and secondary education. However, the study and training of teaching skills in higher education are separated from these two types of education, even though most universities are expected to have a regular teaching skill improvement program for academic members working for their affiliation. Graduate schools do not offer classes that prepare one to be university teachers. Although we are expected to have more students and teachers in higher education from other countries, the Government of Japan does not

have many programs to promote mutual exchange between students and staff.

Medina, Álvarez-Arregui, Medina, and Medina indicated that olive and olive oil farmers' daily working status and they were obtaining and transmitting skills with various methods. They elaborated on the farmers' interactions, which showed their community status. Farming consists of many phases and involves people with specific histories and cultures. The phenomena in the farming field should be LLL, in which learning objects, learners, and teachers, as well as knowledge updating and transfer from generation to generation, are systematically organized based on each venue.

Their study has more connotations, such as the history of old LLL in farming and society - as the contributors remarked, the cultivation of olives and olive oil is typical farming in the Mediterranean. I suppose that olives and olive oil have diverse meanings: political issues of trading and farming, and inherited food culture. In Japan, rice is a typical agricultural product, similar to bread or potatoes in Europe. During the Edo period (1603–1867), rice had the value of currencies. The Shogunate government provided each samurai with rice, based on their job positions and achievements. The samurai exchanged rice for money. In Japan, rice is the most important agricultural product and presents a trading issue. The shortage of rice farmers and the training of successors are social and political issues.

González and Álvarez highlight that a vulnerable group in the labor market needs holistic support, including empowering emotional vul-nerability as well as improving job skills. The authors' noteworthy remark is that the participant feels too late to receive job skills training and is frustrated and isolated. Mixed methods of qualitative interviews and quantitative research such as factor analysis have yielded inspiring conclusions. Vulnerability in the labor market is a critical issue, and the current contribution has implications for further studies in other areas.

Tagaki and Kiegelmann revealed the Japanese traits of disability awareness discourse by analyzing a disability essay. Promoting awareness of disability issues is rooted in a certain culture; however, it is invisible. They employed the KJ method developed in Japan and extended the Listening Guide developed in the USA and Germany. Kiegelmann's analysis of the German context explicated invisible Japanese cultural traits in this area. These findings contribute to the development of disability policies.

As a next step, there is a plan to develop a methodological discussion on mixed methods, such as different qualitative methods, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, and using different data resources (e.g., narrative, documents, and observed phenomena).

The proceedings of this workshop are contributed by three countries: Germany, Spain, and Japan. However, participants from many other countries attended the workshop. Instead of merely highlighting cultural differences or conducting comparative studies, reflections from culturally diverse backgrounds can raise awareness regarding the self-evident nature of one' own culture.

# Lifelong Learning, Academic Mobility and Internationalization: Contributions to the Professional Development of University Teachers

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## Abstract

In this chapter, we reflect on the concept of academic mobility in the professional development of university teaching staff as a factor that fosters social and institutional relationships promoting mobility for teaching or research purposes; improving their professional teaching development; teaching in a place other than their origin or affiliation; or acquiring or developing the necessary elements to carry out research or disseminate its results. The internationalization process of universities in the professional development of teaching and research staff allows the development of European mobility programs to generate professional relationships and advance in improving the quality of university professors. In conclusion, teacher training is a path that requires lifelong learning and, therefore, the ability to build and rebuild knowledge as fundamental pillars to face the challenges of the knowledge society that is changing, global and diverse.

## Resumen

En este capítulo reflexionamos sobre el concepto de movilidad académica en el desarrollo profesional docente universitario como un factor que fomenta las

relaciones sociales e institucionales que favorecen la movilidad por cuestiones docentes o investigadoras; mejorar su desarrollo profesional docente; realizar docencia en otro lugar distinto al de origen o afiliación; o adquirir o desarrollar los elementos necesarios para realizar una investigación o difundir los resultados de esta. El proceso internacionalización de las universidades en el desarrollo profesional docente e investigador permite el desarrollo de los programas de movilidad europeos para generar relaciones profesionales y avanzar en la mejora de la calidad del profesorado universitario. En conclusión, la formación del docente es un camino que requiere un aprendizaje a lo largo de la de vida y, por tanto, de la capacidad de construir y reconstruir el conocimiento como pilares fundamentales para afrontar los desafíos de la sociedad del conocimiento que es cambiante, global y diversa.

## 1. Introduction

From a pedagogical and transformational approach, the process of adaptation to the Bologna Plan and the internationalization of university institutions have provided an opportunity for growth for society in general and teachers in particular (Álvarez & Hevia, 2013). During this process several essential changes in education have become evident: greater investment, redefining teaching and student competencies, adapting them to the requirements of each stage and to the challenges of today's society (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Domínguez et al., 2021); controlling the commercialization of public education and the privatization of schools; properly managing the access of technological companies to education; new educational models based on constructivism, social justice and cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Ponce & Rico, 2022), etc. Also the need to emphasize a reform of the conception of teaching and learning for all educational levels, which is adapted to the students forming the classrooms (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Zabalza, 2006): moving from a traditional model, based on master classes and focused on the teacher to a more participatory model (Egido & López, 2016), in which diverse methodologies are included and the focus is on student learning (Domínguez et al., 2021); in which the hegemonic model of knowledge is discarded and egalitarian and shared teaching and learning models are incorporated, based on dialogue and joint reflection (Lozano et al., 2022); for which continuous training of teachers – who have already embraced the principle of *lifelong learning* – and the ability to construct and reconstruct knowledge are required as crucial pillars to meet the challenges of democra-

tization by which the current education system is confronted with (Zeichner, 2016). The aim of this paper is to reflect on the concept of academic mobility in the professional development of university teachers as a factor that fosters social and institutional relationships favoring mobility for teaching or research purposes; to improve the professional development of their teaching; to teach in another place, different from their place of origin or affiliation; or to acquire or develop the necessary elements to conduct research or disseminate the results of it. In all these processes we are witnessing, therefore, the internationalization of universities that need to open up to this European scenario with strategies that allow: their integration in European mobility programs to generate professional relationships and to advance in the improvement of the staff's teaching and research quality in university institutions.

## 2. Academic Mobility and Lifelong Learning

In this scenario, academic mobility and the concept of *Lifelong Learning* constitute a combination of two concepts with transformational potential. This association favors that ideas and projects are not limited to a specific center, but that allies are sought to solve common problems that are difficult to solve without help. This makes it possible to overcome the limitations of our educational system, with a partisan vision of understanding education, enriching it with the experiences of other countries with diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts, methodologies, curricula, etc. (Aguirre et al., 2018; Arroyo & Lozano, 2020). Moreover, this plurality of approaches and positions, allows us to experience other ways of acting, overcome monopolizing limitations typical of a privileged society, redefine education and adapt it to the existing diversity of the population. These contributions, in essence, promote the economic, social and cultural growth that every community pursues and that generates equal oppor-tunities for all its members.

Furthermore, from a situated perspective (Borko, 2004), academic mobility and the concept of *Lifelong learning* are configured as an opportunity for Teacher Professional Development understood as the growth and evolution of knowledge or individual thinking about the teachers' professional discourse and practice. This helps in the transformational reflection

of educational spaces, contents and processes such as curriculum design, methodology, programming, etc. through participation in projects that include people with different points of view and with whom an enriching dialogue is established to exchange opinions and educational practices; also through access to other resources not present in their institutions of origin; analysis and reflection on classroom practices carried out by teachers in other countries; and many other experiences that occur in contexts of academic mobility. For, as Blanco and Saunders (2019) point out, this constitutes a process of transformation of contexts and people, a teaching and learning process that encompasses all the people who participate in the experience. Therefore, for the participants this implies an act of reflection on their own teaching and research identity (prejudices, limitations, capacities, etc.) and its confrontation with the experience and the relationships established during the mobility. This implies that the identification, experience and evaluation of other classroom situations allow introspection on one's own teaching practices and a better adaptation to different educational realities as long as one faces these experiences with an open mind and is willing to be critical of one's own practices, opinions and ideas. What is interesting from the point of view of professional development of university faculty is the opportunity to train teachers to generate formative proposals that bring theory closer to professional practice (Korthagen, 2010, 2017), improving the quality of teaching and getting closer to the formative demands of university students (Arroyo-Salgueira et al., 2022; Gento et al., 2018). This is possible because the support of more experienced teachers improves the design and organization of the subjects taught by novice teachers and, in turn, the exchange of opinions and the possibility of (re)thinking the educational practice of experienced teachers (Pérez-Granados et al., 2021) turns reflective practice – with time, dedication and a little effort – into a habit that constitutes one of the main sources of teacher learning (Perrenoud, 2004).

## 3. Academic Mobility and Intercultural Competence

In this sense, the ERASMUS+ program has used the potentialities of networked learning and the principle of lifelong learning to place them into international contexts where members from different countries work

collaboratively to achieve a common goal (European Commission, 2020). At the university level, for example, promoting innovative educational practices with a constructivist didactic approach (Riklefs et al., 2018); favoring the formation of critical thinking (Cruz et al., 2019); or, among others, analyzing the epistemologies and the inclusive and formative potentialities of internationalization at home (Almeida et al., 2019). The dynamics of these activities – networked learning, professional learning communities (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006), collaborative research, learning from other qualified professionals (Bolívar, 2017) and/or reflective practice (Verástegui & González, 2019) – enable the exploration of new ideas and current classroom practices, in socio-culturally diverse contexts, in a situated-embodied manner and taking into account the learning and interaction opportunities offered by the whole community, thus learning in practice and from experience (Webster-Wright, 2009) consequently improving student learning (Vescio et al., 2008) through professional development activities (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Little & Horn, 2007) and continuous training (*Lifelong Learning*) of university faculty, essential for the improvement (and change) of teaching practice (Hadar & Brody, 2012).

Regarding the latter, some teachers have stated that the ERASMUS+ program offers them the opportunity to learn about other teaching strategies, compare different educational systems and gain experience as teachers in different contexts; this translates into improving their attention to students in mobility programs and in adapting to curricular contents (Tuzun & Mede, 2016). In addition, research by Barbosa et al. (2017) identifies benefits for developments of professional teaching such as: the opportunity to observe, compare and evaluate teaching and learning methodologies, which have helped the participating university faculty to improve their strategies to capture the attention of their student body; it has provided them with more flexibility when organizing classes and adapting them to the student body; and, also, the possibility of transmitting an international awareness to the student body through the networks they have established. For Zwart et al. (2008), referring to peer learning resulting from direct observation of other teachers' classes, these experiences of professional development could promote among teachers greater self-confidence, greater skills with respect to the use of specific curricula and teaching materials and a greater sense of belonging; but, above all for visiting

teachers, the possibility of obtaining *feedback* on didactic proposals, observing the response of students in other teaching-learning situations, promoting educational innovation and confirming previous proposals or ideas for methodological change that may be promising for teaching in their home institutions. Thus, in addition to motivating reflection on the perspectives of their own professional experience in professionally inspiring work environments (Little et al., 2019), the exchange of teaching experiences and the possibility of participating in teaching in culturally diverse contexts and exchanging impressions with students provides the possibility of discovering different teaching strategies, comparing and contrasting the educational systems of different countries, acquiring experience in teaching other languages in different contexts, orienting mobile students and improving inter-institutional relations; which promotes international/intercultural understanding of university faculty to design courses of study in different educational programs, develop new concepts and content for these programs by providing knowledge about other countries, and address study problems comparatively (Tuzun & Mede, 2016).

Although, on the other hand, it is true that performing academic mobility does not automatically develop intercultural competence nor does it train a teacher to successfully work in intercultural education (Little et al., 2019). For, still, some needs are recognized for understanding and developing skills to work across cultural differences: knowledge and experience to respond to policy changes in different countries and institutions; and leadership and management skills aimed at internationalization, *networking* and relationship management to work with diverse stakeholders (Wong, 2014) and using research skills (Murray et al., 2014; Tran & Tran, 2020 – issues that, on the other hand, lead us to understand that the use of multicultural examples by university faculty in teaching-learning situations requires preliminary and early work on how internationalization principles are relevant to their subject, considerable broadening of the assumptions present in the subject design, and in-depth knowledge and reflection to teach the non-academically mobile student body (Pylväs & Nokelainen, 2021).

## 4. Conclusions

Thus, these indications lead us to recognize the need for further training of university teachers with activities and courses in planning and management, active methodologies, communicative and interpersonal competence, language competence, research, technologies, etc. necessary to facilitate academic mobility, language teaching and internationalization of the institution. After all, the development of international and intercultural know-ledge, skills and attitudes is influenced by the institutional priorities (Leask, 2015) of any institution seeking the internationalization of its educational community, but is dependent on mobility, in-depth knowledge of successful internationalization strategies of Higher Education institutions and training of university teachers for the paradigm shift in didactic strategies carried out in classrooms through the adoption of international perspectives, with a socially just pedagogy that does not limit the benefits of internationalization to the mobile student body, but is integrated into teaching (Wimpenny et al., 2020) to continue working towards a global citizenship that is more committed to the existing socio-cultural diversity. For example, by incorporating international cooperation into the demands of academic positions; presenting students with alternative perspectives through materials, readings, visiting faculty experiences, project work and experiences of other students; and/or addressing cultural differences in teaching-learning styles through effective and appropriate classroom communication to increase knowledge of other cultures and develop international perspectives. Although this is not enough if the Internationalization of the Curriculum is not developed in a systematic and coordinated way, mainly due to institutional obstacles or lack of understanding of this dynamic or lack of teaching competencies, resources and tools to adapt the teaching styles to an international environment with a culturally diverse teaching and learning environment (Renfors, 2019). This leads us to remark the need to continue training the university teacher with coherent knowledge and a comprehensive approach to incorporate an international and intercultural perspective in teaching practices (Weimer et al., 2019). After all, we cannot obviate that teacher education is a path that requires a lifetime.

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# Training and Professionalization: Lifelong Learning, Microcredentials to Agricultural Workers

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## Abstract

The research and innovation of a *Professionalization Program for Farmers in the Culture, Technology and Ecology of Olives and Olive Oil* requires a coherent and adequate foundation based on the principle of Lifelong Learning orienting professional training, while its design and development has been carried out from the micro-credentials approach.

The direct objective of this research has been: To discover coherent and relevant models, methods and actions to be applied in the founding and development of Programs and certification in order to train olive and oil professional to continuous by improving competencies, skills, know-ledge, practice and digital technology to ecological transformation of olive groves and products.

The methodology used has been a complementary synthesis of heuristic and didactic methods, with an outstanding application of the qualitative approach, concretized in the complementarity between the case study, relevant narratives, discussion groups and innovative practices, harmonized with didactic methods:

problem-based learning, team work, solution of practical cases that have been improved by projecting them in interdependence with those of research.

A content analysis of the responses of the experts and farmers consulted was carried out in order to identify the different meanings of the questions presented, including the following:

- Diagnosis of the expectations and needs for professionalization and improvement of agricultural practices.

- Concepts and knowledge to train olive farmers.

- Culture and transformations necessary for their professionalization.

- Basic elements of training: competencies, skills and contents...

- Necessary technology for the optimization of olive cultivation.

- Didactic and professionalizing methodology.

- Types of courses: modalities, timing and impact.

- The content analysis of the numerous answers to the dimensions of training presented shows:

- The simultaneous progress in the mastery of competences, skills, knowledge and practices that promote the professionalization of olive farmers, projected in a sustainable ecology and in an agricultural leadership.

- Strengthening training programs for olive professionals that promote a new culture and the use of more relevant technology, given the complexity and multidimensionality of the great challenges for the future of humanity in terms of food and health.

## Resumen

La investigación e innovación de un Programa de Profesionalización de Agricultores, en la Cultura, Tecnología y Ecología del Olivo y del aceite require de una coherente y adecuada fundamentación, que se ha basado en el Principio del Aprendizaje a lo Largo de la Vida, desde el que orientar la razón esencial de la Formación para apoyar su fundamentación a la vez que el diseño y desarrollo del mismo se ha realizado desde el enfoque de las microcredenciales.

El objetivo directriz de esta indagación ha sido: Descubrir modelos, méto-dos y acciones coherentes y pertinentes que puedan aplicarse en la creación y el desarrollo de programas y certificaciones con el fin de formar a los profesionales del olivar y del aceite de forma continua mediante la mejora de sus competencias, habilidades, conocimientos, prácticas y tecnologías digitales para la transformación ecológica de los olivares y sus productos.

La metodología aplicada ha sido una síntesis complementaria de métodos heurísticos y didácticos, con destacada aplicación del enfoque cualitativo, concretado en la complementariedad entre el studio de caso, narrativas relevantes, grupos de discusión y prácticas innovadoras, armonizadas con métodos didácticos: aprendizaje basado en problemas, trabajos en equipo, solución de casos práctdicos que se han mejorado al proyectdarse en interdependicia con los de investigación.

Se ha procedido al análisis de contenido de las respuestas de los expertos y agricultores consultados para identificar los diversos signifi-cados, ante las cuestiones presentadas, entre ellas:

-   Diagnóstico de las expectativas y necesidades de profesionalización y mejora de las practices agrarias.

-   Concepciones y conocimientos para capacitor a los agricultores del olivo.

-   Cultura y transformaciones necesarias para su profesionalización.

-   Elementos básicos de formación: competencias, habilidades y contenidos…

-   Tecnología necesaria para la optimización del cultivo de olivos.

-   Metodología didácticas y profesionalizadora.

-   Tipología de cursos: modalidades, temporalización e impactode.

-   El análisis de contenido de las numerosas respuestas a las dimensiones de formación presentadas evidencia:

-   El avance simultánea en el dominio de competencias, habilidades, conocimien-tos y practices que promuevan la profesionalización de los agricultores del olivo, proyectados en una ecología sostenible y en un liderazgo agrario.

-   Afianzar programas de formación de los profesionales del olivo que propicien una nueva cultura y el uso de tecnología más pertinente, ante la complejidad y multidimensionalidad de los grandes retos para el futuro de la humanidad en la alimentación y salud.

## 1. Introduction

The research presented here focuses on the development of a didactic-heuristic methodology, primarily qualitative, through which to evaluate the relevance and impact of the training quality of a program for the professional development of farmers, focusing on the care and cultivation of olive trees and olive oil.

The inquiring and innovative action has provided a special opportunity, involvement and appreciation of qualitative methodology and the use of this method within the framework of the CQP Congress, currently considered as a Center for Qualitative Research in Psychology and Education, involved in strengthening the principle of Lifelong Learning (LLL), promoting from this approach the center and its development, which has generated the University of Weingarten, since the foundation of the institute *Academy for Continuing Education*, which has brought about the congress.

In this context, we intend to provide the bases and achievements reached at the present time, related to the progress in the professional development of farmers, olive growers and generators of top quality oil in the region and districts of Bailén, Úbeda and Jaén - Andalusia - Spain, as well as delving into the current impact of the progress and significance of the olive and oil culture in Mediterranean Europe and in the region of Villa Leyva and its surroundings, an example of care and cultivation in Ibero-America and the tropical region (Medina, Medina and Medina, 2024).

The most outstanding contribution of the new program has been to train farmers, from the micro-credentials approach, by formulating a new Planning Model and designing program modalities and elaborating a course typology, which in coherence with the uniqueness of the hybrid teaching-learning environments and the university institution of Spain (UNED). The program developed is consistent with the vision of micro-credentials and adapted to the pilot study, diagnosis, which has been conducted prior to the design and implementation of the olive culture course where curri-culum development, action research and innovation are integrated.

In the academic context, this professionalization certificate will be consolidated with new qualifications and specializations, from the reco-

gnition of expert level to a future master's degree that will transform professionalization into a consolidated and fruitful preparation for research and awareness of a new option and vision of eco-sustainability, humanist technology and the consolidation of an inquiring and glocalised culture.

The line of continuous innovation that has been deployed is associated with an Erasmus Plus project, highly valued and applying the vision of the case study, given the necessary adaptation to the uniqueness and complexity of farms and environments in Spain, focusing in this case on Andalusia.

It is our aim to broaden the professional knowledge of farmers by applying life trajectories, auto and co-biographies, and innovative reports of the construction of singular lines of research in agrarian wisdom and in the style of being, learning, and knowing, in and from olive-growing organizations and olive crops.

Progress has been made in this agrarian knowledge in several dimensions: historical, challenge of the new landscapes, and prospective, according to which the Dacia of Southern Europe, with a special presence of olive trees in the regions of the Old Continent and North Africa, is working towards the impact of AOVE (Extra Virgin Olive Oil), with exceptional quality, as well as the generation of new agrarian communities that go beyond sustainable development.

The foundation of the program has focused on the transformation of beliefs, deepening knowledge, and advancing skills to underpin the professionalization of olive growers, consolidated from the transformation of the way of thinking, innovative practice from a new way of experiencing the practical conceptions of olive growing.

We have also advanced in the dialogue and understanding of new ways to advance in the encounter, professional understanding and a new sense of lifestyles and the generation of positive activities towards the recognition and improvement of landscapes and organizations. The meaning and basis of an innovative culture generating new conceptions and ways of transforming professional practices and applying the principle of Lifelong Learning has been discovered.

## 2. Conceptual Foundations

"Lifelong Learning " (LLL) is a guiding principle of adult education. It reflects the impact of education for all human beings throughout their existence and guarantees the training and permanent improvement of their life project, thus it is based on the numerous works, well-coordinated by UNESCO or by the plurality of Institutions committed to the fruitful line of each person to design and advance in the most valuable program of personal and professional self-affirmation, among other authors Belanger (1992) concludes and affirms, that the adult learning is the greatest guarantee for the future, to express that "that the Learning capacity of human being, that the unfolding of human potential, that creative Learning Throughout life, will be central to the task of shaping the new century and the new millennium".

The deepening of experiential and deep learning in the view of Rossiter (2006, 387) "requires understanding, openness and humility. The core to adult educations is "self-other relationship, the heart of life-long learning through which authentic and mutual respect is experiential and expressed. Whatever the aim of adult education, initiatives – economic independent social action, political change, personal growth – the effec-tiveness of those initiatives is rooted in mutually respectful relationships. "Special relation-ship, authenticity, empathy and relational asymmetry and power (395).

In the special orientation (Ruiz, 2006, p. 413), evidence political and pedagogical nature:

-   The popular union came about as the result a disruptive even, special popular organizations.

-   The popular union diverse political forces.

-   The principal element of education and training of popular groups is to link their learning to experiences or daily life.

Malvicini (2006, 443), "Popular education may seem like a strange bedfellow to lifelong learning, because the farmer has its roots in com-munity-based struggles against injustice, while the latter is an institutional expression of adult education."

"Lifelong Learning can be a place for 'positive subversion' focussing on productive ends even in dealing with unjust conditions" Kizito (2006, p. 459).

"Linking adult education traditions and experiential learning, in:

Humanist tradition: View of experience in relation to learning.

There is a concern about personal growth and development: Experience is seen as the source of knowledge and content in the curriculum.

Assessment Emphasis: The focus on the assessment is to ensure that everyone through increased levels of personal empowerment and freedom.

- Challenges:

    o    Academic challenges; new knowledge and social demands.

    o    Institutional constrains, labour intensive, curricula and admissions.

    o    Learner needs, preparedness for academic learning.

    o    The new way forward.

Lifelong Learning demands new lines of knowledge construction and personal, professional, and social impact, which ensure the permanent transformation and innovation of people and institutions, with special emphasis on the culture and technology of those involved in the didactic acts themselves, as well as of the organizations. It is of particular importance for the transformation of farms and olive groves and represents a relevant concept of lifelong learning and the updating of olive professionals, based on the demands of a new vision and generation of culture and technology, aware of the challenges of uncertainty and enormous geostrategic pressures in a complex and insecure world scenario.

We intend that the farmers participating in the UNED Professional Development Program, a course for raising awareness of the unique problems of farmers' life performance and their participation in today's organizations, is based on a curricular design, in response to the demands of the co-participants in the program (Pinto, 2022).

Ellinger (2006, p. 472) raises the urgency of teachers/trainers as pedagogical leaders and leaders, who participate and offer themselves to farmers and diverse workers as "inquirers and innovators of the complexity

of demands, which emerge from professional performance in the unique agricultural ecosystem. This contextualized learning and intense leadership must be understood as a call to autonomous and deep learning (Medina & Bohan, 2025), which engages each educator/trainer in a new scenario of complexity and full collaboration with the given human being, who is formed throughout his or her life, from a horizon and aspiration towards the optimal performance of the chosen activity and profession.

Lifelong Learning is a meta-learning, which demands from each farmer, who updates and perfects a sense of fullness and continuous and integral improvement, strengthening a culture of closeness and full collaboration between trainers, professionals, academics and organizations with the real demands of an open and super technological and uncertain world from which high tensions are generated and to which appropriate responses must be discovered through collaboration between farmers, trainers and experts from agricultural organizations and cooperatives.

## 3. Creative Vision of Professional Development

- Identification of farmers: Diagnosis of expectations, needs, and professional horizons.

- Selecting the bases for an Integral Formation, deepening in the permanent updating as professionals, young and experienced olives, and oil farmers.

- Role and assessment of the European Common Agricultural Policy: critical analysis of relevant policies and their impact on olive farms and landscapes.

- Analyze the complexity, bureaucratic dependency, and tax burdens on farmers on the European and world stage.

- Evaluate the rules and regulations imposed on agricultural activity, especially in the olive sector, in the European Union.

- To study the contradictions generated by the new ecological designs that are been proposed.

- Involve farmers in the objectives, methods, practices, and training actions to be developed through the program.

- To make it easier for participants to understand and apply lifelong learning in their professional project, in their own progress as olive farmers and olive oil professionals.

## Background Framework

The professional updating program for olive farmers and olive oil professionals must be based on formative theory, which encourages actors and program participants to:

- Consolidating the vision, mission and awareness of the significance of the transformation of feelings, knowledge and skills in the professionalization of the olive grower.

- Integral transformation of the way of thinking, acting, living and sharing olive conceptions and practices.

- Training for openness, *dialogue, professional understanding* and a sense of living in balance and lifestyle, generating positive attitudes and special recognition of an irreplaceable ancestral art-craft.

- Commitment to *discovering traditional conceptions and cultures*, through the use and care of plants, disease prevention and a spatial use/transformation of what is known, adapting the most relevant, innovative and optimising technology: ecological – sustainable and cost-effective – professionalizing.

- Applying the Lifelong Learning Principle.

Figure 1: *Concept map: design of the training program*
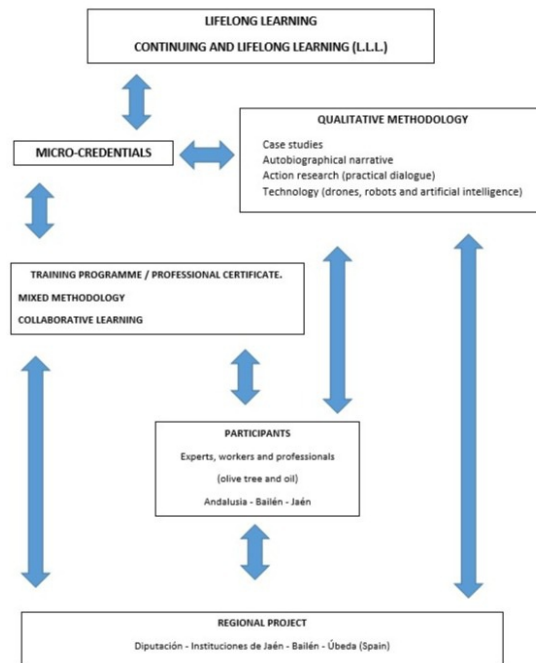


## The Meaning of Micro-credentials: Contributions and Controversies

- Micro-credentials understood and applied on an innovative basis.

- Training synthesis that integrates competences, skills, knowledge, relevant contents, and practical cases in the workplace.

- They are considered as precise, short, efficient, and evaluable training responses to respond to the complex and changing situations of the plurality of new jobs.

- Training frameworks that enable participants to learn in proximity, exponentially and with direct responses to the new professional demands of each individual job.

- New visions that are precise and generate imaginative training approaches, which provide the appropriate solutions to each micro-

context and to the challenges of the society of uncertainty and complexity, providing creative solutions for each learner and team.

-   The European Commission (2020) defines the "Micro credentials" as: proof of the leaving outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience, OECD, 2021.

(Pawilen, Laborg & Fausto, 2022; Walsh, 2021; Ralston, 2020; McGreal & Olcott, 2022; MacGreal, Mackintosh & Lane, 2023; Dormido, 2024)

## Micro-credentials: Guiding concept for training programs

The design of a training program and its implementation from the approach and basis in the Micro-credentials implies for the trainers and generators of new professionalization processes a process of decision making and adaptation of the following components of the curriculum:

-   Competence

-   Training objectives

-   Content

-   Methodologies

-   Activities / Tasks

-   Didactic interaction.

-   Use of digital media

-   Updating of classic resources

-   Tutoring

-   Harmonization of spaces and times

-   Impact on the professionalization scenario and laboratories.

-   Evaluation: Formative, Criterion-oriented, Integral and Self-Co-Hetero evaluation. Extended in their meaning, projection, and trans-formation, by means of:

Research:

-   Curricular design and development

- Performance of the teaching-learning process.

- Coherence between what was planned, what was programmed and what was conducted, as well as its impact on the results achieved in terms of their level of professional development.

Innovation: (Medina & Medina, 2023; Medina & de la Herrán, 2023; Medina & Bohon, 2025).

- Micro-credentials have an impact on the generation of conception, vision, practices, and transformation of the integral and permanent training of the farmers involved and their organizations in the program.

The Significance of Micro-credentials for Optimizing the Professional Development of Farmers

The design of training programs from the micro-credentials approach represents a relevant option for farmers, especially in the olive sector, which will mark their future professional development by combining the following aspects:

- The precision and rigor of the activities and the integral meaning of the combination of practical knowledge based on the performance of actions and actions in farms with the enrichment that the synthesis and rigor of the theory and training blocks provides.

- Clarity, which must be reflected in the discourse of the trainer and collaborators in the program: clear, structured, and motivating, with the above characteristics extended by the recognition and uniqueness of experiential learning, characteristic of the farming profession.

Thus the works of different authors (Pinto, 2022; McGreal, Mackintosh & Lane, 2023; Dormido, 2024) underline some of the unique features provided by a program, entered into micro-credentials and agree on the impact on professional development, awareness of lifelong learning and updating and attention to the demands of new jobs and the impact of digitization.

The program that we are presenting and are already developing with experts in olive and olive oil culture and technology as well as the participants themselves in the training process is achieving an outstanding synergy, commitment and collaboration between teachers and students, with the

declared involvement of university doctors, professional experts from oil cooperatives and creative farmers.

Figure 2: *Curriculum design and development (Adaptation of Pavilen & Lubeng, 2022, p. 515)*
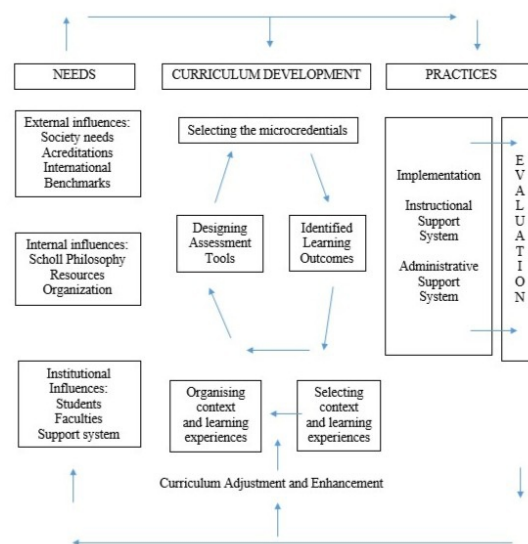


## 4. Didactic Methods for the Development of Micro-Credentials (Competence Training)

Developing competences and mastering new skills requires creative teaching methods:

• Case studies (Didactic and heuristic; Medina & Medina, 2023).

• Generation and Problem-Based Learning (Sender & Huber, 2016).

• Mutual Learning (Huber, 2016).

• Fractal teaching in epochs (Huber, 2016).

The methods applied to optimize the professional development of farmers have focused on the study and analysis of agricultural ecosystems, with particular attention to the identification of problems and collaborative learning to solve them in a cooperative way and based on interdisciplinary knowledge and decision-making with a strong socio-community projection, making each participant the main actor in their own personal and professional eco-sustainable progress.

## Research design

The research carried out has selected the core aspects, which are synthesised in: problem-based research, purpose of professionalization, general and specific objective, methodology, instrument design, data analysis, synthesis of the informants' answers to the formative questions. In this context, the aim is to demonstrate:

- Relevance, coherence and appropriateness of the qualitative research methodology to the knowledge and design of comprehensive training programmes and processes for farmers (with special emphasis on olive growers).

- To justify the incidence of the methodological approach developed through case studies, which are complemented with professional narratives and research-action methodology, as well as to study in depth practical experiences.

- Context and training institutions:

   o Socio-geographical olive-growing environments, located in Andalusia (Jaén, Bailén, Úbeda... - Spain).

   o Micro-farms, fields in innovation, oil cooperatives, plurality of institutions …

The purpose is to generate a program for the innovation and professionalization of olive farmers. Then, it is necessary to provide provide people and agri-food institutions, university institutions, olive organisations and innovative Lifelong Learning centers.

Educational leaders, with new models, training visions and methods that place the emphasis on case studies, which promote the professio-

nalization, well-being and civic awareness of the real protagonists of the tasks and practices that transform the olive tree

To generate a humanistic culture through the ethical use of technology, the promotion of sustainable ecosystems and environments, which promote healthy systems with the intention of improving the nutrition and general health of the population.

## Core questions

Do higher education institutions, intermediary institutions and agricultural organisations contribute to the professionalization of olive farmers with the conceptual frameworks, the appropriate lines of innovation and research, in order to make progress in continuing education, full technical and human development and adequate civic awareness?

How can we promote integral well-being from a balanced social and regional climate designed for people committed to eco-sustainability, oil quality, new social environments and the profound collaborative and transformative responsibility of farmers in general and cooperative members in particular?

## Objectives

### General objective

To discover coherent and relevant models, methods and actions to be applied in the founding and development of programmes and certifications in order to train olive and oil professionals to continuously improve their skills, knowledge, practices and digital technology aimed at the ecological transformation of olive groves and their valuable products (olives and oil).

### Specific objectives

- Justify the most appropriate qualitative methods to promote the ongoing training of olive farmers.

- To design innovative programmes that promote the professional development of olive farmers.

- To strengthen new visions that consolidate the meaning and value of the culture, technology and ecology.

-   Promote the cultural and technological development of olive-oil organisations, with emphasis on cooperatives.

-   To promote innovative and transformative cultures of farmers.

Figure 3: *Qualitative methodology: case studies, narratives and experience analysis / enquiry*
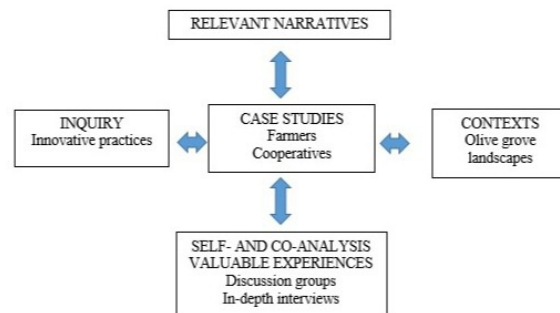


Own elaboration (Gürtler and Huber, 2023; Yin, 2014; Medina, 2015).

Sense and justification of the method / qualitative approach preferably.

The nature of the training program and the prominent place of the practical training of olive farmers, requires the application of the preferred method: case studies, where the uniqueness of the farms and olive grove sites, which in turn require the protagonist of the participants, both in their personal involvement, reflected in the narratives, and in the ecological and technological adaptation, required from the analysis of the contexts and the co-study of the professional experiences lived and reflected in the methods "Focus Groups".

## 5. Diagnosis and Needs of the Training Program

The design and implementation of the training program to improve the professionalisation of olive farmers, as well as its development, has required collaboration between the university, the olive organisations and cooperati-

ves and the participants themselves. This approach has been based on: Identification of expectations, needs, problems and desires of olive farmers in specific contexts and settings/landscapes.

- To train farmers in relevant aspects for the optimal development of the olive growing profession.

- Collect the most salient and unknown data up to the start of the programme's implementation.

- Dialogue with people and olive agents, who represent the values, frameworks and elements for being and feeling olive grower/s.

- Detect the most important training aspects of innovative training (culture, technology and ecology of the olive tree and olive oil).

- Protocol and questionnaire, used in the interview, focus groups and dialogue with professional experts.

- Field notebook, relevant annotations obtained from the observation of: farms, cooperatives, olive oil mills, sites...

- Data amplification in dialogical "ethnographic situations", applied to a variety of key informants.

- Selective visits to oil farms and cooperatives in order to deepen the prototypical features, training expectations, new challenges, knowledge and demands of the farmers.

- Analysis of the experiences of experts and technicians with extensive knowledge in the development of olive culture and technology.

- Observation of performances of teachers from schools and vocational training centres, specialised in the cultivation and care of olive trees and olive oil.

- Dialogues with students of vocational training, with emphasis on family ecosystems dedicated to olive growing.

Selection and identification of key informants:

Institutions and key informants:

- Agricultural cooperatives, farmers, university institutions, vocational schools for farmers, specialised secondary schools.

- Specialists in olive culture and technology (application of the criterion of mastery/excellence of each informant and DIADAS).

- Special attention to: expert in knowledge, know-how and olive tree farms, olive oil mills, cooperatives. Training professionals: university leader's students, secondary school teachers, vocational training institutions, expert criteria (at least six years of research); technicians of agricultural cooperatives, olive oil mills...

## Data analysis and triangulation

The design of the instruments and their rationale has been completed:

- Interview technique, focus groups and questionnaire responses and protocols of professional experiences.

- Analysis of the texts and dialogues collected in the narratives, discussion groups, situations of professional experiences, case studies, etc.

- Content analysis of sentences, expressions, biographies, life stories...

- Deepening and identification of codes, meta-codes, relevant features, para-verbal, gestural, expressive marks...

The following programmes have been used to analyse the texts and the diversity of the dialogues collected, in particular Huber's updated AQUAD (Gürtler & Huber, 2023) and in some respects semantic networks have been generated using the ninth version of Atlas.ti.

## Synthesis of key informant responses

We present the main selection of qualitative information expressed by the participants in the process of diagnosis and detection of training needs, extracted from the questionnaire, interviews and discussion groups, collecting the most relevant terms and phrases and coinciding issues.

What do olive-oil farmers need to learn in order to improve their human development, organisations and farms?

"*Learning to manage the farm in an integral way in its management and profitability, acquiring the knowledge to make the right decisions to develop sustainable agriculture*" (E. 3 – 5 – 11 -15).

"*To achieve professional recognition, to be listened to in their traditional knowledge and to support them with new technologies*" (S. 7 – 9 – 14 – 19 – 21).

What conception and knowledge should be worked on in a training programme?

*"Training in quality, digitalisation and critical understanding of European standards" (S. 11 – 12 – 15 – 17 - 22)*

"*Training in technical management, entrepreneurship, specific analytics and new agricultural challenges*" (E. 19 – 20 – 21 - 23).

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*"Training in technical management, entrepreneurship, specific analytics and new agricultural challenges* (E. 19 – 21 - 23).

## Training programs for olive farmers and olive oil professionals

Practices to be developed

*"Management techniques, care, fertilisation, irrigation, pests and diseases" (S. 5 – 7 – 9 – 12 - 16)*

*"Analysis of the quality of olive trees, olive oils and olive grove sites"* (S. 3 – 4 – 9 – 15 - 23)

Transformational question

*We underline that experts and trainers (1, 13, 13, 13, 16 and 18) express that the level of interest is low….*

*In any case, the majority of farmers and agricultural technicians show a high level of interest" (3, 4, 7, 21, 25, 27 and 29).*

Needs

*"Adequate and free counselling" (E. 15, 16, 17, 18, 21)*

*"Reduce bureaucratic work, unnecessary for the development of agricultural activity" (almost all the people interviewed).*

*"Fair and compensatory prices for olive products, especially olive oil" (unanimity).*

Culture

*Proposal. Highlight the most relevant values of the farmers you know, rank them in order of importance: Honesty, effort, dedication, continuity, constancy, tenacity, commitment, wisdom, resilience, recognition, autonomy, etc.*

*"Take decisions at the foot of the olive trees and not in offices" (S. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29).*

## Competencies, Skills and Contents

Competencies:

*"Training in the selection and profitability of agricultural machinery". (E. 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19).*

*"Digital/technological training, optimisation of the technical means used" (S. 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 23, 24, 26, 28 and 29).*

*"Knowledge of scientific agricultural techniques: cultivation, pruning, fertilisation, water stress control, hydration of olive trees" (E. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14. 15. 23).*

Skills:

> *"Application of advanced techniques for the improvement of olive cultivation and the generation of olive oil - AOVE" (E. 1, 5, 6, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23).*

> *"Appropriate search for information, handling and experimentation with ICT" (S. 13, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30).*

> *"Learning collaborative styles and developing a climate of understanding among cooperative members" (E. 1, 3, 7, 9, 15, 16, 21, 23).*

Contents:

> *"Models, techniques and treatment of soil care, identifying the nutritional status of trees and identification of pests and diseases (E. 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 17, 19, 21).*

> *"Application of ICT to the improvement of olive tree farms, its impact on the environment and appropriate phytosanitary and fertiliser treatment" (S. 1, 4, 7, 11, 13, 15, 21, 23, 27).*

> *"Study of the control of the production process, marketing, innovative techniques and product selection for the improvement of agricultural holdings" (S. 2, 4, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 22, 24, 26, 28).*

## Technological resources and tasks

Technological resources:

- *Drones* (S. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 19, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29)

- *Robots* (S. 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 13, 15, 17).

- *Satellite* (E. 4, 5, 6, 11, 16, 18, 20, 21).

- *Artificial Intelligence* (E. 1, 7, 9, 12, 15, 16, 19, 21)

- *Other*: Big Data, mini-videos, mobiles, apps (innovative working machines, latest generation self-driving tractors).

Applied tasks and improvement of the care and cultivation of olive trees – Integral Training

- "*Improvement of techniques in olive cultivation*" (S. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27)

- "*Use of sensors on drones and satellites to detect nutritional, hydric, biotic and abiotic conditions of the olive tree*" (E. 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17).

- "*Experimenting and contributing techniques and ideas to improve the quality of the oil and knowledge of the optimum time for harvesting and care of the state of maturity of the olive, as well as the profitability of the oil*" (majority of interviewees).

- "*Critical analysis of European legislation*" (a large number of key informants)

## Teaching methodology

The following global responses are proposed:

- *Management and treatment of ground cover* (E. 3, 5, 7, 11, 16, 17)

- *PBL and design of innovative projects* (E. 11, 13, 17, 21, 22)

- *Based on questions from olive growers, technicians and training experts* (S. 3, 7, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21).

- *Specific vocational training courses for farmers and experts* (E. 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, 22, 25 and 29).

Methods for training olive farmers and oil producers:

- *Use, handling and interpretation of the data obtained* (E. 7, 9, 17, 19, 27).

- *Practical work days in the field, on the farm, applying the use of ICT* (S. 3, 4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 20, 25, 27, 29).

Methods to encourage self-training and co-training of olive farmers and technicians:

- *Training by getting involved in innovative tasks, which are carried out on farms* (S. 3, 7, 9, 22, 25, 27, 29).

- *Learning by doing and special collaboration between farmers and trainers* (most of the respondents have proposed this self-training path).

Personal training experiences that have supported your professional development:

- *Use and creative use of apps, which have helped us to improve the activities of water stress, sanitary situation and olive pests* (most of the interviewees).

- *Spectral analysis of cultivated areas to improve agricultural decisions and yields* (E. 3, 7, 9, 13, 17, 19).

- *Narratives of life experiences as an olive grower, by deepening the care of the olive tree (pruning, tillage, pest treatment, hydrological balance)* (S. 3, 5, 7, 9, 15, 17, 24, 27, 29).

Aspects to consider in farmer training programmes:

- *Previous experiences, and knowledge, culture and technology, lived and shared with and among farmers* (S. 1, 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 22, 25)

- *Specific courses and workshops in collaboration with vocational training centres* (E. 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19).

- *Comprehensive courses and use of advanced technologies - robotics, drones, AI, sensors, apps, mobiles, mini-videos* (majority of respondents)

## Timing of training

- *Recycling courses are demanded in response to local, regional, auto-nomous, national and inter-institutional (Mediterranean ecosystem) demands.*

- *At least one course is demanded every two years through micro-credentials (3 to 5 credits - 75 to 125 hours* (E. 2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19).

- *They are requested between one and two months a year, but avoiding peak times on farms and adjusted to the schedule of activities and needs of farmers and technicians* (majority of interviewees).

- *Collaborate from a more innovative culture* (E. 1, 3, 7, 9, 13, 17, 18, 21).

- *Intense counselling, motivation, permanent attention and institutional support are required* (S. 4, 6, 9, 11, 13, 17, 23, 24, 26).

Figure 4: *Graphical synthesis of the qualitative analysis.*
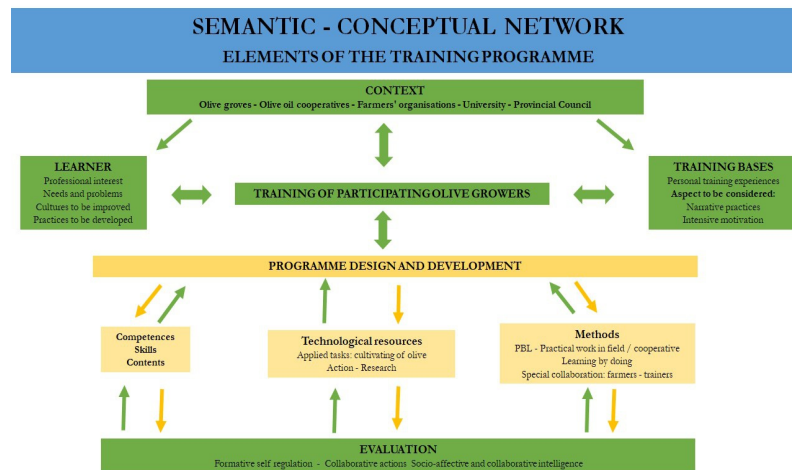


## Inter-program dialogue. Lifelong Learning Courses

The principle of "Life Long Learning" (LLL), is evidenced by the following characteristics that confirm this research:

- Duration short, underline that training should be short " semestral " with an optimal duration of between 2 weeks and 2 months.

- Specific, skills or competencies have to be identified and trained through a series of lessons or modules.

- Among the skills: care and treatment techniques for olive trees and oil, application of drones, handling of automatic machines, oil care…

- Demonstrating mastery: Through assessment, which has been especially valued by experts and farmers.

- Micro-credential oriented curriculum design must provide (Luke & Young, 2020), a focus on professional learning by doing, flexible time and computational learning

The training vision that we assume in this new programme of performance, culture and technology adapted to the olive farmer: integrated, ethical and transformative.

## Decision-making for designing farmer training programs

The professional development:

- To elaborate permanently updated training programs.

- Redefine the competences, skills, knowledge and practices, methods and digital resources.

- To advance in the complementarity between models, methods and practices.

- Consolidate the new agricultural culture and technology by incorporating

- Incorporate intelligent questions, complementarity between self-observations, innovative work in dyads and ethical use of digital technology.

- To involve the farmers and technicians participating in the program in the formulation of new ideas and collaborative decision making.

- To take on board and promote numerous contributions from the key informants of this program and research, aware that the training of olive farmers is: complex, multidimensional, transformative, collaborative and of great impact for people, organisations.

## 6. Reflections on the Controversies

Lifelong learning is consolidated as an essential principle to guide the design and development of training programs, with a singular impact on those aimed at updating farmers, especially at a time of complexity and uncertainty that characterizes today's world, in which olive professionals require an outstanding and consolidated training, taking into account their initiative, leadership and integral improvement of organizations.

The training model that guides the program is Lifelong Learning as it contributes to an Integral Education and to a profound advance in the

*Culture, Technology and Ecology* of the *Olive Tree and Olive Oil*. Our research confirms the vision of Belanger (1998) that this training is the best guarantee for the professional future of adults.

In this line, the approach of Rossiter (2006) states that training is the main basis for the initiative, economic independence and greater socialization of people with high age and labor challenges, we agree with this vision, which hopes to optimize the integral training of each human being to attend with rigor and quality to the permanent challenges of the new and digital jobs. In line with Ruiz (2006), we believe that continuous training is the best guarantee to advance as personnel in the social and experiential domain and sense, insisting on the commitment of the agricultural institutions to support their members and, in particular, the responsibility of the universities.

The ongoing program and its diagnosis have shown that we have to attend to the academic, institutional and learning challenges, so in this line we agree with Kizito (2006) in its relevance and special attention, and especially with the urgency of adapting the training programs such as the one we are working on, to the real knowledge of challenges and objectives between the Higher Education institutions and the olive cooperative organisations, deepening in the permanent opening of new programmes to professionalize the olive and oil workers.

The training for an authentic professional leadership has been addressed in a singular way in some of the training blocks / modules, as well as in an objective that guides the Program in its globalist, in line with the vision of Ellinger (2006) when proposing the urgency of promoting professional leadership that advances in the transformation and improvement of the tasks of adults, when proposing a special preparation of olive and oil professionals.

This reflection is completed in the rationale of the Program with a design focused on the micro-credentials modality in coherence with the vision of Pawile et al. (2022). The program has been presented as a training framework, which exposes with precision, efficiency, brevity and evaluable in terms of the main answers to assume a framework of presentation and professionalization of the training with special attention and adaptation to each person, who learns.

The program has detected the most relevant professional demands and has particularly encouraged the participants to design their own case study, by attending to the unique answers and innovative tasks to be provided from the self-analysis of their professional practices and the search for new challenges.

We have intensified the decision-making processes by attending to each learner from their own reality and professional performance, over-coming some of the formative limitations of micro-credentials, and reposi-tioning each person as a co-protagonist of their training, thus addressing the limitations of a strict training design from the micro-credentials approach (McGreal & Olcott, 2022).

We understand that the uniqueness of experiential learning in and from olive growing needs to be enriched with a broader theoretical vision in line with the challenges of the digital and complex society, as pointed out by McGreal et al. (20023), who underline that training programmes focused on micro-credentials should boost professional development and improve employability.

## 7. Conclusions

The results of the responses of the experts and farmers consulted show a wide acceptance of the training program designed, as well as its relevance to the micro-credentials modality: precise, clear, professionalizing and generating a new digital and creative culture and technology for moder-nization and awareness of the transforming role of olive farmers in the third decade of the 21st century.

-   It underlines the value of qualitative methods, particularly the case study, the narratives and listening to the ancestral knowledge of olive growers, as well as the value of dialogue, discussion and meeting between farmers to optimize the care and cultivation of olive trees.

-   The second objective shows the significance and value of the design of an innovative program to professionalize the farmers, which has been accepted and widely valued by the experts with results, with the

farmers agreeing with them, affirming by a large majority its oppor-
tunity, as well as the requirement of clarity, brevity, precision and
impact on the improvement of the concepts, practices and agrarian
culture, with emphasis on the care and ecology of the olive tree.

- It has been highlighted by all the experts and farmers consulted the
  need and opportunity to strengthen the training of the participants in
  culture, technology and ecology of the olive tree, giving back to its
  nutritional and ecological value the meaning and transformation of the
  landscapes and of the essential liquid "Virgin Olive Oil" that has to
  permeate the Mediterranean ecosystem and its projection in Europe
  and the rest of the world.

- It confirms the impact and future possibilities of a program of
  professional development of farmers and professionals to consolidate
  a deep, efficient and transforming culture, technology and ecology,
  with special emphasis on the construction and settlement of oil
  organizations and cooperatives, open to an inquiring vision and
  maximum social co-responsibility between experts, farmers and
  affected communities, united for the best consolidation of the
  authentic and innovative workers of the olive tree, oil and crucial
  Mediterranean forest in the current balance for sustainable ecosystem.

- It has been achieved, as expressed by the key informants who
  participated in the consultations, the innovation and transformation of
  the olive culture with emphasis on a rigorous dialogue between people,
  cooperatives and the surrounding olive ecosystem that guarantee a
  horizon that generates styles of being, knowing and co-operating to
  consolidate new areas and overcome the challenges of the society of
  complexity and globalized uncertainty, with great impact on the
  generation of a new reality. Thus it is expected, in the life and
  agricultural practices, to establish a new balance of its protagonists and
  the creative advance to configure new visions and ways of building the
  ecosystems and olive grove landscapes that strengthen the culture, new
  values and commitments of farmers with their communities, colleagues
  and future generation of young people, necessary for the continuity of
  life in the farms, assuming and advancing in a com-prehensive and
  permanent training.

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# Skills and Employability:
## A View from the Perspective of Vulnerable Groups

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## Abstract

Precarious employment and unemployment are structural problems in our society that are linked to increased vulnerability. Poverty and social ex-clusion rates inEurope are high and consistent, placing Spain fourth among European Union countries with the highest number of people living in poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2022). In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the fight against unemployment is key to promoting inclusion. It is essential to foster a universal citizenship capable of facing instability and constant changes (UNESCO, 2021) through lifelong learning as a way to address these inequalities and improve employability. However, participation levels remain low, so it is necessary to listen to people's opinions and delve into the challenges they face in their job search process. Method: The objectives have been approached through an empirical study that incorporates a mixed methodology, including a questionnaire with open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews, and life stories. The sample consisted of 525 unemployed individuals considered vulnerable groups by the European Social Fund, including long-term unemployed, immigrants, people with recognized disabilities, and victims of gender-based violence, among others. Results: People value training in skills development as an opportunity to get closer to the job market and for its personal and social impact. However, deficiencies and difficulties in the job search process have been identified, revealing the need to offer training and guidance programs that are aware of emotional aspects, with more holistic approaches that combine technical, transversal, and systemic competencies, emphasizing basic issues of emotional well-being.

Resumen

La precariedad laboral y el desempleo son problemas estructurales de nuestra sociedad que están ligados a una mayor vulnerabilidad. Las tasas de pobreza y exclusión social en Europa son elevadas y constantes, situando a España como el cuarto país de la Unión Europea con mayor número de personas ensituación de pobreza o exclusión social (Eurostat, 2022). En línea con los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, la lucha contra el des-empleo es clave para promover la inclusión. Es esencial fomentar una ciudadanía universal capaz de afrontar la inestabilidad y los cambios constantes (UNESCO, 2021) a través del aprendizaje permanente como forma de hacer frente a estas desigualdades y mejorar la empleabilidad. Sin embargo, los niveles de participación siguen siendo bajos, por lo que es necesario escuchar la opinión de las personas y profundizar en los retos a los que se enfrentan en su proceso de búsqueda de empleo. Método: Los objetivos se han abordado a través de un estudio empírico que incorpora una metodología mixta, incluyendo un cuestionario con preguntas abiertas, entrevistas semiestructuradas e historias de vida. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 525 desempleados considerados colectivos vulnerables por el Fondo Social Europeo, incluyendo parados de larga duración, Resultados: Las personas valoran la formación en el desarrollo de competencias como una oportunidad para acercarse al mercado laboral y por su impacto per-sonal y social. Sin embargo, se han identificado deficiencias y dificul-tades en el proceso de búsqueda de empleo, lo que revela la necesidad de ofrecer programas de formación y orientación que sean conscientes de los aspectos emocionales, con enfoques más holísticos que combinen competencias técnicas, transversales y sistémicas, haciendo hincapié en cuestiones básicas de bienestar emocional.

## 1. Relevance of the Article for Qualitative Psychology/ Qualitative Research in Social Sciences

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding employability in vulnerable contexts by analyzing how professional and personal compe-tencies are valued and developed by unemployed individuals in situations of social fragility. Through this approach, this paper provides insights into the specific needs of this group, highlighting key aspects such as training and emotional development – elements that are essential in social sciences for addressing employment-related challenges.

The analysis focuses on transversal and systemic competencies, those that go beyond technical skills, such as resilience, creativity, and social abilities. These

competencies are crucial for understanding human behavior in changing and adverse contexts, positioning them as central to qualitative psychology.

From a practical standpoint, the results allow for the design of more effective strategies for job orientation and training programs, integrating emotional components and transversal skills. This is essential for developing public policies based on empirical evidence that address the real needs of the labor market and of people in vulnerable situations.

In terms of methodology, the combination of quantitative and quali-tative analysis provides a robust approach that strengthens research in social sciences. This model is replicable and offers an effective pathway for future studies examining the impact of competencies on employability.

Finally, by comparing local results with international approaches to competen-cies, this study helps to contextualize the situation of Asturias in relation to the rest of Spain, as well as Spain in relation to other countries. This not only enriches the analysis but also fosters a global dialogue on current challenges in employability in vulnerable contexts.

## 2. Introduction

Modern society is characterized by its complexity, interdependence, and reliance on information. In this context, macro-trends such as glocalization and scien-tific-technological development are emerging. This dynamic fosters new economic, political, and social models, requiring individuals to constantly adapt their skills to prevent polarization, exclusion, and insur-mountable literacy gaps (Alvarez-Arregui, 2023).

The Skills Strategy for Europe emphasizes that the speed of change necessi-tates increasing adaptability among citizens to harness the numerous opportunities and challenges before us. Adapting to emerging demands involves acquiring a set of competencies that must be regularly updated, underscoring the importance of lifelong learning (OECD, 2019). Therefore, educating the population is a challenge not only for educational systems but also for individuals throughout their lives, encompassing all aspects of life.

The Council of the European Union (2021) reiterates the importance of acquiring key competencies as a prerequisite for achieving full personal, social, and professional development. This political initiative seeks to align with the demands of a glocalized world – simultaneously addressing global and local challenges – linking economic development with systemic know-ledge management that

positively impacts individuals and the environment. Consequently, in an intercon-nected information society undergoing constant transformation due to globalization, technological advancement, international competition, market evolution, and transnational environ-mental and political challenges, education takes on greater significance, and competencies become increasingly vital (Álvarez-Arregui, E. & Arreguit, X., 2019).

This ecosystemic approach integrates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, acknowledging that success in work and society depends on their interplay. Basic competencies, such as reading comprehension and mathe-matical and digital skills, are essential for adapting to labor and social changes. Cross-cutting cognitive and metacognitive skills – such as critical thinking, complex problem-solving, creativity, learning to learn, and self-regulation – are necessary not only to address future challenges but also to improve the future itself. Social and emotional competencies, including awareness, responsibility, empathy, self-sufficiency, and collaboration, con-tribute to building kinder, more tolerant societies.

However, this lifelong development of competency requires significant social transformation. This scenario puts welfare state policies under pressure, demanding a shift toward cross-cutting, participatory, and inclu-sive policies. The inclusion agenda becomes a cornerstone of the welfare state, as its weakening is linked to growing inequality. As exclusion becomes entrenched, it limits citizens' capacity to participate, integrate, and access  personal, social, and professional pathways (European Union Council, 2018). Consequently, strategies to improve employability are increasingly seen as a top socio-economic and political priority to mitigate and reverse social exclusion.

Developing socio-educational initiatives to improve adult learning provides this population segment with opportunities to update and refine their skills in line with the changing demands of the labor market. This is no easy task: PIAAC data shows that only 41% of adults in the OECD member countries participate in formal or informal adult learning. More-over, less qualified adults, the long-term unemployed, individuals at high risk of job automation, and those in atypical employment (e.g., self-employed, temporary, or part-time workers) are less likely to participate (OECD, 2021).

In practice, few countries have implemented effective lifelong learning policies. Most of them focus on adults with high competency levels. Among the participants of the PIAAC survey, 48% of adults neither participate in nor wish to engage in adult learning programs, highlighting the need for effective strategies to motivate and attract this segment to take advantage of education and training programs. Additionally, lack of motivation in-creases as skill levels decrease, compounded by limited learning readiness, a lack of understan-ding of training opportunities, and personal perceptions of insurmountable barriers to participation (OECD, 2023).

In Spain's labor market, imbalances between employers' needs and job seekers are evident. Despite nearly three million unemployed people, many organizations struggle to find suitable candidates. According to the Adecco Report (2021) on skills shortages in Spain, almost one in ten job vacancies remains unfilled. Another report on the future of employment (2023) high-lights significant gaps in professional and personal attitudes. Companies highly value adaptability, resilience, commitment, and the ability to work in uncertain environments. However, 72% of companies struggle to find can-didates with the necessary adaptability and resilience, 52% cannot find adequate communication skills (considered crucial by 91%), and 56% lack candidates with teamwork abilities (viewed as vital by all respondents).

International organizations emphasize the importance of competencies for productivity, innovation, and labor market access, which positively impacts social cohesion and justice by reducing structural inequality (OECD, 2015). In this changing environment, career paths are no longer linear but involve entering and exiting the labor market, with soft skills playing a pivotal role (Perrenoud, 2008). These skills enhance adaptability across various contexts. However, rigid educational and training models remain an obstacle (Álvarez-Arregui,2023).

From this perspective, career paths are linked to lifelong learning aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of "leaving no one behind," as advocated by the ILO (2020). This underscores the need to strengthen education and training as a defense against emerging vulnerabilities.

Based on these arguments, this research sets out to address three objectives:

1. Identify if unemployed individuals value competencies and which competen-cies they consider most important for improving their employability in vulnerable situations.

2. Determine at what stage of their lives they have perceived the importance of these competencies and identify the most appropriate stages for receiving such training.

3. Understand the process of job searching, identifying difficulties and barriers unemployed individuals have to face.

## 3. Description of the Study

To address these objectives, a research study was conducted; its key aspects are summarized below.

The participants were unemployed individuals who, due to their characteristics, are classified as priority groups by the European Social Fund because of their vulnerability. These criteria are included:

Long-term unemployment

Unemployment combined with another vulnerability factor, such as:

Being an immigrant

Having a recognized disability of at least 33%

Living in a household where all members are unemployed

Being a woman who is a victim of gender-based violence

Belonging to an ethnic minority, etc.

The sample included 525 unemployed individuals, based on data provided by the Action Against Hunger Foundation, which implements employment support and guidance projects funded by the European Social Fund. The final participant pool consisted of 407 unemployed individuals, distributed across six different support programs carried out by the Foundation in Asturias. Proportional stratified random sampling ensured a balanced number of unemployed individuals representing the various groups mentioned and the entire Asturian region. To complement our research, we conducted 37 interviews and 10 life histories to gain deeper insights into the responses.

Table 1. *Technical sheet of the research*

| Instruments | Questionnaire for unemployed persons. Semi-structured interviews and life histories. |
|---|---|
| Population | 64,798 unemployed people. |
| Sample | 525 unemployed people participating in projects of the Action Against Hunger Foundation in the years 2020 and 2021. |
| Final parti-cipants | 407 unemployed people (questionnaire - quantitative). 37 unemployed persons (interviews - qualitative)      10 unemployed persons (life histories- qualitative) |
| Sampling procedure | Stratified sampling |

| Sampling errors | 2,05 % at 95% confidence |
|---|---|
| Confidence | 95%; Z=1.96; p=q=0.5 |
| Data processing | Quantitative database - SPSS.25<br>Qualitative database - Aquad 8 |

Source: own elaboration

Based on a review of various instruments and the corresponding litera-ture, we opted to develop an ad hoc questionnaire. Following Rodríguez-Mantilla and Fernández-Díaz (2015), the measurement scale was designed using a system of dimensions, subdimensions, and indicators, drawing from the contributions of prominent and relevant authors such as Kupermincetal (2001) and Jennings and Greenberg (2009), among others. Their theories were adapted to the labor and educational context of our country and, of course, to the specific area of focus.

The validation of the questionnaires was conducted through an expert panel. Two rounds of reviews were carried out by five researchers, who provided feedback to refine the formulation of each item and to determine their inclusion or exclusion in the final questionnaire. Based on these inputs, the proportional stratified sampling method was deemed appropriate.

The sampling error was calculated using the formula for finite popu-lations. For reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied, which measures the internal consistency of the questionnaire, or the inter-item correlation. Using the STATA and SPSS programs, we obtained a high Cronbach's alpha value of $\alpha=0.96$, indicating strong reliability of the tool as a whole.

The procedure followed for the instrument and data collection involved the following steps: contacting respondents; sending and receiving questionnaires; content review; database creation; basic descriptive analysis (mean, median, standard deviation, mode, frequency, and percentage); contingency tables; Pearson's Chi-squared test; simple and multiple logistic regression analysis; and simple linear regression. Factor analysis was employed to reduce the data and group variables into homogeneous clusters, with factors extracted using the principal components method. Finally, linear regression allowed us to relate factorial scores (as continuous variables) to classification variables.

The management of qualitative data followed these steps: classification of comments into their respective dimensions, establishment of coding systems, identification of meaning segments based on references, develop-ment of catalogs to group codes and establish frequencies, and selection of segments that faithfully illustrate the arguments made (using the AQUAD 8 software). This process reduced

the data and organized the information systematically by identifying key ideas, creating identifiable meaning segments, developing catalogs, and linking or cross-referencing codes when necessary. Individual identification and the information for each meaning segment were facilitated by establishing specific abbreviations, making it easy to specify the participants' contributions.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The quantitative results regarding the assessment of competencies reveal an average score of 5.2. Competencies such as "commitment" (5.6), "organi-zation" (5.6), and "problem-solving" (5.6) are highly valued. These compe-tencies reflect a proactive attitude towards challenges in the workplace, making them particularly appreciated. This indicates a holistic view of competency development, where transferable skills are recognized. However, lower scores were observed in creativity (4.5) and self-confidence (4.9), which are associated with more specialized roles, in contrast to the initial competencies that are more transferable to various jobs. This difference in valuation among competencies suggests a perspective where, although the role of competency development is valued, not only technical competencies but also transversal ones, especially those more transferable to job requirements, are emphasized, and perhaps also to lower-level jobs.

Table 2. *Average Scores*

| Which skills are valued by companies and most in demand in the labor market? | Mean (SD) |
| --- | --- |
| Y. Communication | 5.10 (3.0) |
| Z. Initiative | 5.00 (3.1) |
| AA. Social skills | 5.10 (3.0) |
| AB. Commitment | 5.60 (3.2) |
| CA. Creativity | 4.50 (2.9) |
| AD. Flexibility | 5.50 (3.2) |
| AE. Problem solving | 5.60 (3.2) |
| AF. Time management | 5.40 (3.2) |
| AG. Self-management | 5.20 (3.2) |
| AH. Self-confidence | 4.90 (3.0) |
| AI. Organization | 5.60 (3.2) |

Source: own elaboration

The average response values were compared with variables such as gender, age, nationality, duration of unemployment, work experience, and highest educational level (with high school and vocational training grouped in one category). Significant values were identified with a margin of error of 5% if the p-value (from the Kruskal-Wallis test) is ≤ 0.05, and with a margin of error of 10% if the p-value is ≤ 0.1. Lower p-values suggest significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis (no association with demographic variables) in the population. The p-values from the Kruskal-Wallis test are presented in the attached table (p-values ≤ 0.1 are in bold, and p-values ≤ 0.05 are in bold and underlined).

Table 3. *P-values from the Kruskal-Wallis Test*

| COMPETEN-CIES | Gender Studies | Age | Nationality | Time (unempl.) | Experience | Studies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Y. Communication | **0.074** | 0.137 | 0.531 | 0.157 | 0.148 | 0.158 |
| Z. Initiative | 0.472 | <u>**0.008**</u> | **0.027** | 0.279 | **0.064** | 0.224 |
| AA. Social Skills | **0.017** | **0.040** | **0.015** | **0.049** | **0.057** | **0.088** |
| AB. Commitment | 0.426 | <u>**0.005**</u> | **0.036** | **0.088** | 0.393 | 0.182 |
| CA. Creativity | 0.567 | **0.033** | <u>**0.001**</u> | **0.025** | 0.129 | 0.112 |
| AD. Flexibility | 0.129 | <u>**0.000**</u> | 0.123 | **0.017** | 0.218 | 0.179 |
| AE. Problem solving | 0.480 | **0.026** | **0.054** | **0.076** | 0.347 | 0.215 |
| AF. Time management | 0.352 | <u>**0.007**</u> | **0.014** | **0.082** | 0.262 | 0.260 |
| AG. Self-management | **0.076** | **0.012** | **0.083** | **0.034** | 0.126 | 0.121 |
| AH. Self-confidence | 0.260 | **0.079** | <u>**0.009**</u> | **0.073** | 0.438 | 0.182 |
| AI. Organization | **0.031** | 0.133 | <u>**0.006**</u> | **0.038** | 0.373 | 0.073 |

Source: own elaboration

- **Age:** Participants under 30 scored higher than other age groups, suggesting that younger individuals are more likely to have internalized the value of competencies and their role in the labor market, unlike older groups.
- **Nationality:** Spanish participants scored lower, reflecting a limited understanding of competencies and their utility in the labor market, a concept more widely recognized in other countries.
- **Duration of Unemployment:** Higher scores were observed among individuals unemployed for less than a year, supporting the hypothesis that the longer someone remains unemployed, the less aware they are of their needs.
- **Gender:** Women scored higher in "social skills" (5.3 vs 4.6), "organi-zation" (5.8 vs 5.1), and "communication" (5.3 vs 4.6). In other areas, women also scored higher, but the differences were not statistically significant.

**The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.97, and the Bartlett test of sphericity yielded a p-value < 0.001.**

Table 4. *Saturation, Specificity, and KMO for the Factor*

| Variable | Saturation (Factor) | Specifity | KMO |
|---|---|---|---|
| Y. Communication | 0.91 | 0.17 | 0.98 |
| Z. Initiative | 0.93 | 0.13 | 0.97 |
| AA. Social Skills | 0.95 | 0.11 | 0.98 |
| AB. Commitment | 0.97 | 0.06 | 0.97 |
| CA. Creativity | 0.91 | 0.18 | 0.95 |
| AD. Flexibility | 0.94 | 0.12 | 0.96 |
| AE. Problem solving | 0.98 | 0.05 | 0.96 |
| AF. Time management | 0.97 | 0.06 | 0.98 |
| AG. Self-management | 0.96 | 0.08 | 0.96 |
| AH. Self-confidence | 0.95 | 0.11 | 0.96 |
| AI. Organization | 0.97 | 0.06 | 0.96 |

Source: own elaboration

In the exploratory factor analysis for the questions in block 1, using the principal component extraction method, we found that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.97, and the p-value for Bartlett's test of sphericity is < 0.001. Since there was only one factor, it was analyzed using the average score of the related question block. This factor explained 90% of the variance, and no rotation was performed. Low uniqueness or specificity values indicate that a large proportion of the variance in these variables is explained by the factor. The average score for all questions was 5.2 (standard error 0.2), with higher scores among participants under 30 and nonSpanish participants.

Table 5 shows that individuals under 30 and those of foreign nationality scored higher (6.1 in both cases). Participants unemployed for less than a year also scored higher than those unemployed for a longer time. Women scored above average, with a 0.5 point advantage over men. This correlates with issues related to participation in continuous training, where older individuals and those with less education participate less and are precisely those who value the importance of competency development the least.

In addition, a total of 95 responses were collected in the open-ended question about other competencies of interest. The most frequently mentioned were teamwork(22) and responsibility(20), followed by others such as commitment (3), aligning with the previously discussed results.

In order to gain a deeper insight into the responses, and to understand how the unemployment situation is experienced, and what aspects influence employability positively and negatively, we decided to conduct semistructured interviews. A content analysis was carried out to establish the relative and total frequencies of individual codes, categories and catalogues. This analysis generated 42 categories, grouped into three catalogues: *Weaknesses*, *Threats* and *Opportunities*. Relevant examples from each catalogue are provided below.

Table 5: *Average Response Scores and P-values*

|  | Mean (standard error) | p value |
| --- | --- | --- |
| All | 5.2 (0.1) |  |
| **Gender** |  |  |
| Female | 5.4 (0.2) | 0.153 |
| Male | 4.9 (0.3) |  |
| **Age** |  |  |
| Under 30 years old | 6.1 (0.4) | **0.017** |
| Between 31 /44 years old | 4.9 (0.2) |  |
| Older than 45 years old | 5.1 (0.2) |  |
| **Nationality** |  |  |
| Spanish | 5.1 (0.2) | **0.022** |
| Non-Spanish | 6.1 (0.4) |  |
| **Time unemployed** |  |  |
| less than 1 year | 5.5 (0.2) | **0.041** |
| > 1 year and others | 5.0 (0.2) |  |
| **Experience** |  |  |
| < 1 year | 5.8 (0.4) |  |
| Between 1 year < 5 | 5.3 (0.4) | 0.091 |
| Between 5 years and 10 years | 5.0 (0.4) |  |
| More than 10 years | 5.1 (0.2) |  |
| **Studies** |  |  |
| University | 5.5 (0.2) | 0.126 |
| Baccalaureate and FP | 4.9 (0.2) |  |
| E.S.O. and Primary School | 5.4 (0.3) |  |

Source: own elaboration

Catalog 1: *Weaknesses*

Foreign unemployed individuals face difficulties in having their academic qualifications recognized, which affects their ability to practice their pro-fessions in our country. Technological skills and access to resources are also lacking, limiting their chances of integration. Furthermore, a poor under-standing of the labor market and low available training or employment opportunities impact the process of job searching. Examples:

*"I managed to get my high school diploma recognized, but the process is so long that you give up on your profession"* (H8.M-D.L.2.EX.N.SE).

*"I didn't finish secondary school. I've never worked and don't know what to do"* (H6. H.D.C.1.E.N.O).

*"I don't even have a phone, so I have to leave the shelter's number"* (H10. M.D.L.3.S.S).

Catalog 2: *Threats*

The demands of the labor market, along with poor alignment with offered working conditions, are seen as threats. Prejudices against certain groups further complicate integration. Support resources in the region are often uniform and punitive, failing to address individual needs. Lack of results in the job search process leads to demotivation, affecting self-esteem and sometimes mental health. Examples:

*"They call you for two days of work, but you can't risk it because they'll cut your social benefits"* (H25. M.D.L.3.E.S. P-BAE-D-SL).

*"I feel like I'm useless"* (H9. H.D.L.2. E.S.U.).

*"I was depressed, and being unemployed doesn't help because you worry about everything"* (H25. M.D.L.3.E.S. P-BAE-D-D-P).

*"You feel like you're worthless; people think you're lazy, and you start believing it too"* (H25. M.D.L.3.E.S. P-BAE-D-RS).

Catalog 3: *Opportunities*

Participation in career guidance programs helps to establish routines and foster social relationships – skills that are significantly weakened during prolonged unemployment. Projects that include group activities for skills development and interactions with companies are especially valued. Training is identified as an opportunity, particularly when it includes non-work-related internships. Examples:

*"Attending these projects forced me to have a schedule."* (H1. M.D.L.3.E.S.U)

*"I didn't value myself before; now, at 60, I've rediscovered who I am."* (E7.H.D.L.4.E.S.S-BAE-ODc)

*"Training, especially professional certificates, is a good option. I discovered them too late."* (E10. M.O.4.E.S.U-BAE-O-F)

*"Employment plans will allow me to collect the subsidy for people over 52, which counts toward retirement."* (E10. M.O.4.E.S.U-BAE-O-Re)

## 5. Results and Discussion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that unemployed individuals in vulnerable situations recognize the value of competencies as enhancers of their employability. In general terms, all scored below the average, but not drastically so.

Socio-demographic analysis revealed that the concept has resonated more with younger people, specifically those under 30, and foreign nationals. This can be attributed to the greater tradition of competency development in their countries of origin compared to Spain, which explains their higher scores. Among individuals with university degrees, competency evaluations were higher. Women also scored higher than men. This aligns with the observation from the World Economic Forum (2020) that lower educational levels correlate with a lesser appreciation of competencies, likely tied to a lack of knowledge about labor market requirements.

This is supported by interview responses, which showed that individuals with lower educational attainment are often those who have been unemployed the longest.

Regarding the most valued competencies, it is noteworthy that those directly related to technical and specialized skills scored higher compared to those focused on social and personal development. These results reflect a traditional view of the labor market, where professional competencies are tied to mastering a set of technical and personal skills, but always linked to the "know-how," "know-what," and "know-when" of a particular occupa-tional sector.

This perspective contrasts with findings from the CaixaBank Dualiza Report (2022), which emphasized that the primary demand from companies is for greater versatility and flexibility to adapt to change, as specialization can often be developed on the job. Similarly, there is a growing demand for globally oriented workers, as highlighted in the EpyCEReport (2020), which underscored the importance of commitment and problem-solving competencies.

In contrast, our research found that competencies associated with initiative, learning ability, and creativity – identified as crucial for effective job performance – were not significantly valued. On the other hand, respondents in this study highlighted training as an opportunity to access the labor market, particularly through professional certificates and non-work-related internships. Other skill gaps identified include organization, planning, and time-management, which have a direct impact on job searching and are also valued above average in the labor market. The lack of digital skills and technological resources is cited as a barrier, aligning with the European Skills Agenda, where digital competency is prioritized.

The survey and interview respondents emphasized several critical points for vulnerable individuals. Notably, their lack of knowledge about the labor market and in-demand profiles hampers their development and widens socio-professional gaps in acquiring basic digital competencies and accessing resources. For those who eventually gain access to training programs, it often happens too late, leaving them feeling that they have lost valuable time, further limiting their integration prospects.

Finally, the comments suggest that emotional aspects should be more prominently addressed by teams supporting these individuals' integration and training. A more holistic approach should combine technical, trans-versal, and systemic competencies while emphasizing basic well-being. This could help tackle isolation and frustration, fostering greater resilience and adaptability.

## 6. Methodological Consequences for Qualitative Social Research

This study highlights significant methodological consequences for qualitative social research by combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. The integration of both approaches enriches the analysis by providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The methodology employed, which combines techniques such as surveys and interviews, captures both the structural and subjective dimensions of employability in vulnerable contexts.

The use of factor analysis and linear regression as methodological tools facilitates the reduction of complex data and the identification of patterns, providing robust results that are also replicable in future studies. On the other hand, qualitative content analysis offers a rich and detailed perspective on individual experiences, enriching the understanding of professional competencies from the voices of the

participants themselves. These metho-dologies also emphasize the importance of considering emotional and social factors, crucial aspects in qualitative psychology for addressing labor challenges in vulnerable contexts. Additionally, the management of quali-tative data through coding and segmentation systems allows for precise and systematic organization of the information, which is essential for identifying and delving into underlying meanings. In summary, the methodological consequences derived from this study underscore the need for mixedmethod approaches in qualitative social research, where the objectivity of quantitative analysis is combined with the depth of qualitative analysis, offering a  more comprehensive perspective on the social phenomena studied.

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# A Qualitative Analysis of a Japanese Essay on Disability Awareness from Japanese and German Perspectives: The KJ Method and the Extended Listening Guide Joint Approaches

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## Abstract

This study examines how people could interpret disability awareness essays and derive methodological implications. Japan has diverse disability aware-ness programs, and many disability policies have been implemented. The target data were obtained from an essay on an infant with a severe dis-ability requiring chronic medical support who died shortly thereafter. The writer was Ms. Shimada (2023), the baby's mother, and her essay was rewarded in a government contest in Japan. The KJ method (a Japanese approach to analyse qualitative data by intuitive thinking processes fol-lowing Charles Pierce's notions of abduction as contrasted to deductive and inductive processes) and the extended Listening Guide (eLG) were employed to qualitatively analyse the essay. Using the KJ method, the study found that Shimada (2023) mourned her baby. This mother had to struggle with accepting that her daughter needed a *critical-condition-and-disability certificate* to receive social welfare services. However, Shimada was proud of her daughter's short life and wanted to use her experience to support other children with similar conditions. The authors of the current study argue that writing essays has social meaning, and the mother's referral to the disability certificate and other government subsidiaries was thus intended to show the severity of her child's disability as a socially recognized status. Shimada (2023) considered that the essay would be accepted for the essay contest. Employing the KJ method and the eLG enabled researchers to recognize their own obvious values based on the cultural context. Published disability essays are open to various interpretations, and using these two methods contributes to a deeper elaboration of the texts.

## 1. Background

This paper presents methodological questions for researching the social and cultural meanings of disability awareness programs in Japan. Two approaches to qualitative data analysis were applied to the thematic field of disability awareness in Japan: the KJ Method and the extended Listening Guide. Social embeddedness, national perspectives, knowledge of current discourses, and language abilities regarding the authors' research data are discussed as context factors relevant to data analysis. Further research is needed to evaluate the compatibility of the two methods and the role of the language and context sensitivity of researchers in qualitative psychology.

The Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan (2024) estimated that approximately 11.5 million Japanese people (nearly 9.2% of the total population) had physical or intellectual disabilities or mental disorders by 2020. The general attitude toward people with disabilities (hereafter, PWDs) is negative in Japan, although it changed dramatically after World War 2 (Tagaki & Borowska-Beszta, 2023). According to a survey on general social attitudes toward PWDs conducted in 2022, 61.9% of the respondents reported that they helped PWDs, and 88.5% confirmed that prejudice or discrimination against PWDs existed (the Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan, 2023).

The government of Japan supposed that promoting general awareness of PWDs is a component of promoting disability policies, and its significance is increasing because the government has enacted numerous legislation since the 2000s. Despite the essentials of disability awareness programs, in Japan, there are insufficient studies on general responses to disability awareness programs, such as essays, drawings, and speech. The current study does not discuss the effectiveness of these programs as static products but interprets them as textual openings for diverse interpretations.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 The Target Data

To illustrate the two approaches, the KJ and extended Listening Guide (hereafter eLG) method, a published text was used as a data example. The target data were derived from an essay that was honorably awarded in a disability awareness contest hosted by the Cabinet Office of Japan in 2023. Makiko Shimada (2023), the writer of this essay, remembered her late daughter, focusing on her experiences as a mother from the birth to the death of her child. According to the Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan (2024), each prefecture and ordinance-designated city government sent out a call for essays in four categories – elementary, junior high, high school, and adult – from July to September 2023. One thousand six hundred thirty-six submissions were received, comprising 172, 837, 512, and 115 essays, respectively, in the aforementioned categories. Local governments recommended 132 essays (32, 46, 26, and 26) to the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office selected one, three, and five essays in each category in the order of best, excellent, and honorable, respectively.

The authors selected Makiko Shimada's essay because the writer described her experiences in her subjective voice. This perspective suits the extended Listening Guide (eLG) research method. The essay was written in Japanese. However, the authors used English translation as the working language. To easily control the quality of the translation, a working version of the data was created with the original Japanese presented with a line-by-line English translation. The first author, a native Japanese speaker, translated the original essay into English using DeepL (version 24), developed by DeepL SE (Germany), an AI translation program for Windows, and manually checked the connotations in detail. In addition, he added furigana to the original data to make reading it easier for Kiegelmann, the second author, who only has rudimentary knowledge of Japanese. Specifically, in the English translation of the essay, the authors added subjects such as "I" and "we" to represent the meaning, while such pronouns are often omitted in Japanese. In the eLG, first-person pronouns are a core analytical target.

Both authors agreed on a single research question to analyze the essay. This identical research question supported the analysis regarding the representation of social relationships within the data and the discussion of the comparability and differences between the KJ and eLG, the two approaches to qualitative social research applied for this paper. The first author suggested some Japanese-published essays from his field of expertise in disability studies, and both authors agreed to work with the target essay written by Makiko Shimada. We formulated the following research question:

> "How does the mother represent her relationship with the child within the framework of this disability awareness contest?"

Subsequently, each author analyzed the data.

## 2.2 The KJ Method for Data Analysis 1

The authors established a research question based on the aims mentioned above in the current paper. They then examined how the writer represents her relationship with the child within the framework of the disability awareness contest. They analyzed the essays using the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967). Kawakita (1967) adapted this method from Peirce's notion of abduction, relying on intuitive, nonlogical thinking processes (Scupin, 1997). The KJ method was initially developed to interpret ethnographic data in Nepal and has become a popular qualitative analytical method in numerous fields, including developmental psychology (e.g., Tagaki, 2023). The KJ method and grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) commonly assign codes to segmented text data and then develop semantic connections between the categories of the obtained codes. However, while grounded theory aims to develop a logical integration of categories into a theory, the goal of the KJ method is to create new connections between ideas or concepts that might be contradictory or illogical categories, as people do not always interpret their experiences logically to deal with their changing lives, and conduct qualitative research on these meanings.

The first author followed the standard procedure for the KJ method. First, the first author developed codes in the form of several phrases or one or two sentences from the essay in English, resulting in approximately 50 codes. Second, the author provisionally grouped the 50 codes into 10 groups, assigned a new code name to the grouped codes (subcategories), and repeated the same procedure. Thus, the author obtained three main categories, several unclassified subcategories, and initial codes. The author used Atlas.ti Windows (Version 9.0) or computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) developed by Scientific Software Development GmbH (Germany). Finally, the author analyzed the existing relation-ships in the entire participant group and combined the categories presented to form six main categories. They are "missing my baby", "surviving despite critical status", "refusing a disability certificate", and "gratitude for my baby and the surrounding people".

## 2.3 The extended Listening Guide for Data analysis 2

The eLG is rooted in relational psychology, which was developed by Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (Gilligan, 1982; Brown et al., 1988; Kiegelmann, 2021). Within this theoretical framework, social relationships and identity development within the context of close relationships are considered to be important aspects of human psychology. This approach questions the limited focus of psychological analysis on cognition as the most relevant construct. Instead, initially, in the context of research on moral development, Gilligan (1982) added a dimension for social relationships ("care") to the predominately cognitive dimension ("justice"), as exemplified in the work of Kohlberg (1971). Embedded in feminist psychology, Gilligan pointed to a need to consider socio-emotional development and complex negotiation of the needs of others and individuals' authenticity (Gilligan, 1982). Based on this research, Gilligan and her colleagues developed an approach of relational psychology. In this approach, socially embedded systems of discrimination and their long histories are

criticized and deconstructed, such as Western notions of the body-mind split and its history, tracing back to Greek philosophy (Gilligan, 1991). The relational psychology approach criticizes the disconnections between Western philosophy and Western social expectations as destructive and oppressive. Social pressure, such as disconnection from authentic needs and feelings, disconnection from others, and disconnec-tion from the self, are dismantled as oppressive (Gilligan & Kiegelmann, 2009). To understand how people experience and shape their social relationships, members of a research group that developed the relational psychology approach created a method for qualitative empirical research (e.g. Brown et al., 1988; Kiegelmann, 2000). Gilligan's research group developed a new research methodology rooted in relational psychology, including crafting variations and nuances depending on the research field. For example, different names have been used to describe this method, such as voice-centered reading, relational listening for contrapuntal voices, and listening guides (Doucet & Mauthner, forthcoming).

In this paper, the second author, Kiegelmann applied the eLG, which is an extended version of the Listening Guide method within the approach of relational psychology. This method stresses a systematic analysis of various social contexts relevant to research relationships in psychological studies (Kiegelmann, 2021, 2024; Müller et al., 2023; Kiegelmann & Beaubeouf-Lafontant, forthcoming). The early version of the Listening Guide method is based on three separate steps of analysis: (1) listening for the plot and the readers' response, (2) listening for the self, or I, and (3) listening for contrapuntal voices (e.g. Gilligan, 2015). As it is more diffe-rentiated, the eLG suggests seven steps of analysis, including intensified social context analysis within general analysis (Kiegelmann, 2024; Kiegelmann & Beauboeuf-Lafontant, forthcoming). Focusing on social embeddedness, Kiegelmann contributed to this study by illustrating how the social embeddedness of a researcher might be relevant to the process of data analysis. Makiko Shimada wrote her essay and was awarded a prize in Japan. The text is deeply embedded within current Japanese discourse and policies regarding the social inclusion of PWDs. Because the listening guide is rooted in relational psychology and was developed in the United States using U.S. English, the question was raised if relational psychology could be meaningful within the context of Japanese data. Applying the eLG to essays as research data provides the opportunity to illuminate potential for enhancement of relational psychology and the Listening Guide based research methodology. Kiegelmann is the second author, and a Western psychologist from Germany who was trained in the USA. We were curious whether it would be possible to apply the eLG in a culturally appreciative and Japanese-sensitive manner or if the method would need further adaptation to be meaningful beyond application with Western versions of English, such as US English and British English, as well as beyond the work with other Western language data, such as German. Taken together the two methods of analysis appear to be compatible for the chosen data set. From the presented analysis of the essay, readers of this paper will gain insight into how the same dataset was analyzed by our author team, that is, the first author, a Japanese qualitative psychologist, applying the KJ method and Kiegelmann, a German qualitative psychologist, applying the eLG method.

Before documenting the analysis process of the selected data, the procedure for the eLG is briefly summarized.

The extended Listening Guide calls for the following six steps of analysis (Kiegelmann, 2024):

0. General background information: Information regarding the socio-political situation relevant to the study, which, here, was the Japanese disability awareness contest in which the essay was written.

1. Plot: A content analysis of the main topics touched on in the data.

2. Readers' response: A reflection by the analyzing researchers on their associations and reactions when engaging with the data.

3. Social context (a) at the time of data collection and (b) at the time of data analysis: A systematic search for evidence related to (a) social discourses within the language used in the data and (b) evidence of traces that are connected to social relevance at the time of the data analysis (e.g., in this project, current laws and discourse regarding disabilities that are part of the everyday experiences of the researchers).

4. Self: A systematic analysis of the language used for self-representation in the data. Creation of a self-poem based on statements of self-representation (such as personal pronouns in languages such as English and more differentiated expressions of the self in Japanese).

5. Multiple voices: A systematic analysis of different sets of meaning or "Voices" that can be identified in the data; these voices may contradict each other or represent differentiating nuances, structured similar to contrapuntal structures in Western classical music.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The KJ Method

The authors examined how Shimada (2023), the writer of the essay, represented her relationship with the child within the framework of the disability awareness contest. The writer mourned her baby, who died shortly after birth. She had to struggle with accepting that her daughter needed a critical-condition-and-disability certificate to receive social welfare services, intensive medical treatment. However, the writer was proud of her daughter's short life and wanted to use her experience to support other children with similar conditions. The following are main categories using the KJ method.

Missing My Baby

The core category was "missing my baby," which consists of "away from me" and "heart-breaking." The writer was devastatingly shocked to find that her infant had a severe disability, finding herself only "half-convinced that it was my child." The baby was hooked up to many tubes, which made the writer nervous. The writer

misses her baby, who passed away because of an incurable disease; she was unable to be with the baby before her death. The baby stayed "at home for [only] about three weeks"; however, "her remaining time was spent in the hospital." As the mother stated, the parents' visits with the baby were limited to "15-minute visits" because of COVID-19. In Japan, medical and disability facilities limited visitors to avoid infections. Her daughter "took to the sky," and the writer stated, "[I] can't believe Karin's departure," as she mourned losing "my precious, precious child."

Surviving despite Critical Status

Her daughter survived longer than the medical staff expected because of issues such as "fetal pleural effusion" and an "ungrown lung." She had to undergo diverse medical treatments such as a "tracheotomy at three months of age." The writer realized that her child was "a child requiring chronic me-dical care," which was a widely known term in the family and among professionals. She was very nervous about the medical treatment. She recounted that the treatment and support were "something I [the writer] had never experienced before" and that she "cried and refused."

Nevertheless, the writer's daughter "favorably undertook "a hard rehabilitation program'" and "gradually became able to sit up" and grew "more active."

Refusing a Disability Certificate

The writer claimed that her daughter held a Level 1 disability certificate, an incurable disease certificate, and a special allowance for supporting children with severe disabilities. However, the writer was reluctant to use the disability services. She stated, "Honestly, I couldn't accept the reality that my child had to get a disability certificate," and accepting it, which was required to use the disability services, was "painful" for her. She even recounted that "returning it [the certificate] [to the municipal government issuing it] is a goal [for a while]."

Gratitude for my Baby and the Surrounding People

The writer appreciated "trustworthy people" around her who "loved and cherished" her baby or "treasured" and cared for her. Though she supposed that others would not welcome her baby, nurses in the hospital and others accepted her as a "human being," not "disabled Karin [her daughter's name]." She added that their "kindness" helped her accept the baby's disability. She was moved at Karin's funeral, as many people attended. She was even "grateful for" the disability services and medical support, which she had previously "stubbornly" refused. The writer noted that the disability-related experience was a social experience connected to a broader context than her own. She said, "[I] have experienced how important it is to care for those around [us]," adding that "she was not for my growth."

## 3.2. The eLG

Kiegelmann, the second author, analyzed the essay within the framework of relational psychology proposed by Gilligan and her colleagues (e.g. Brown &

Gilligan, 1992), using the differentiated version of the eLG in this case (Kiegelmann, 2000, 2021, 2024). The sequence of analyzing and reanalyzing the given data supports a discussion on whether it is possible, meaningful, and sensitive to the Japanese language to transfer the eLG for use with English translations of Japanese data.

As previously stated, a core feature of the eLG is to analyze a dataset, such as interviews, several times, each time focusing on a different aspect of the analysis (Gilligan, 2015; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Müller et al., 2023; Kiegelmann, 2024; Springmann et al., 2005). To illustrate the analytical process, the following section documents the observations from each of the six analysis steps. The analysis is then rounded up by connecting each observation and analyzing the relationships of the findings of each step. Finally, the results are presented.

The two authors agreed on the research question for the exemplary analysis applying the eLG to the essay: "How does the mother represent her relationship with the child within the framework of this disability awareness essay contest?"

To document the research activity process, Kiegelmann took notes during each analysis step using her eLG worksheet (Kiegelmann, 2024; Table 1). Because of limited space and the need for readability, Table 1 contains only a summary column.

Table 1: *The suggested eLG worksheet with sample notes*

| Listenings | Purpose and rationale for each listening | Summary for each step of analysis of Shimada's essay |
|---|---|---|
| 0. General background information | Information regarding the date and setting at the time of data collection, and relevant information about the socio-political situation at that time | The data are from an awareness contest on disability in Japan. The text is a crafted essay by Schimada (2023), in which she was aware of the social expectations of the contest. The first author of this paper has served on committees of disability awareness contests; thus, from his experiences as jury member, he adds inside knowledge, though he was not involved in evaluating this specific essay. |
| 1. Plot | Summary of the overtly mentioned content of the interview (similar to content analysis, e.g. Mayring, 2015) | A mother provides a story about her experience of losing a baby daughter, who died in a hospital at the age of 1.5 years. The baby produced a sound only once, right after her birth, but was immediately hooked up to tubes and placed in intensive care. The mother writes about her limited visitation rights at the hospital (15 min. per day) and her relationship with the medical staff. |

| 2. Reader's response | A place to reflect on the researcher's reaction to the data, personal sore spots, excitement, threatened values, etc..(This step is similar to the construct of "countertransference" in psychoanalysis or autoethnography, e.g., Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017) | As a psychologist and mother from Germany, reading the essay was frustrating to me because of what I perceived as a lack of agency in the mother. I understand that medical staff have a very high level of power. I am left sad with empathy for the mother and humbled because of my lack of understanding of everyday social relationships in Japanese hospitals. The mother writes that she was against a disability certificate for the baby, which bothers me: Why does the mother not want to have a written statement that her severely sick child has special needs? In my social experiences, I am reminded of discourses about too much bureaucracy involved in obtaining disability status in Germany. However, I am not aware of any reason to pretend that a child this ill has no special needs. I wonder if it is ethically ok to pretend that I understand anything from (this translation of) the essay. |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Social contexts (see Kiegelmann, 2021)<br><br>a) Listening for social context (with a focus on the interview relationship) | a) Trace what discourses from the social context are documented in the data regarding the situation in which the interview took place. This includes, for example, information about SES and language use that documents social discourse. | 3a) Schimada expresses statements that appear to represent a discourse with values of humbleness, appreciation of medical staff, and respect for persons with disability. When reading, I sense that the mother tries to express what is socially expected. One hypothesis at this point of analysis is that fitting social expectations and contest criteria might be more important for the author than narrating her life as a mother whose baby died. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| b) Reading for social context (with a focus on the process of analysis, see Kiegelmann, 2021) | b) Trace context factors within the analysis process at the time of data analysis, i.e., how the researchers were socially embedded or surrounded by geopolitical challenges | 3b) The two authors collaborated via video communication tools when conducting the analysis. Such tools became available during the 2020 COVID pandemic. The authors' memories of social distancing and visiting restrictions in hospitals worldwide was fresh when conducting the analysis. From my German perspective, the restrictions on visiting times (slots of 15 min. per day) appeared very strict and appear to have enhanced existing unequal power relationships between professional caregivers and mothers. Being able to collaborate with Masakuni Tagagki on this analysis helped me to understand more about the background of disability policies in Japan, including new developments in 2024, i.e. at the time when we discussed the essay. |
| 4. Self | Pay attention to the exact wording regarding how the self is named. Analyze the meaning of this wording for relationships that are mentioned. Create a "self-poem" by writing the self-statements line by line. (For more on the concept of "listening for self" see Koelsch, 2015 or Gilligan, 2015). | Even though, in the original Japanese language version of the essay, only a few personal pronouns for the self were used in the data, I was able to trace a process of development in terms of how the author of the essay represented her voice regarding the self. For more details about this observation of development, see one example of a "self-poem" from an excerpt of the essay below. |
| 5. Multiple voices | Similar to a "voice of care" in addition to a "voice of justice." Inductively trace layers in meaning, including resonances of "inner voices" that the speaker attempts to suppress. | *the doctor told me*: passive and lack of agency and lack of understanding<br><br>*I was a terrible parent*: resistance against care givers, government certificate program; hidden resentment or sadness because carer had closer relationship with the child—turns into a voice of I want to be a person who can take care of those around me<br><br>*she was trying her best*: the child is described within an active voice and with agency |

Attempting to apply the eLG in the context of Japan and the Japanese language appears to be a challenge because the fourth step of the eLG explicitly involves analyzing not only the content of the data but also how language is used to convey meaning. Specifically, describing the self of a research participant in the context of narrating lived experiences within social relationships is at the core of this analytical step (Koelsch, 2015). As mentioned above, both authors of this paper used an English translation for the analysis but also referred to the original Japanese text. While translation issues are seen as relevant in relational psychology (Springmann et al., 2025), in this paper, we focus on the question of self-representation in the essay using Japanese data. From a methodological perspective, we discuss approaches to analysis using the KJ and eLG methods.

The challenge of translation of self-representation in Japanese within the task of isolating self-statements which can be represented in a self-poem is illustrated in an excerpt of the essay in Table 2.

Table 2: *Translation from Japanese into English using DeepL*

| | |
|---|---|
| 産まれてすぐの Karin を見た時、産声を聞いた時、Karin のことが愛おしくて大事でたまりませんでした。 | When I saw Karin right after she was born, and when I heard her voice, I couldn't stop to love her and to care for her. |

The self-representations within this brief statement highlight that in English, Tagaki adds first-person pronouns to convey the expressed meaning from the Japanese original:

Table 3: *How to add the first person pronouns to the translation*

| Original | Translation | Word by Word Translation |
|---|---|---|
| を見た | I saw | Particle / seeing / past tense ending |
| を聞いた | I heard | Particle / hearing / past tense ending |
| でたまりませんでした | I couldn't help | helping / negation morpheme / past tense ending |

Due to the added translation, it is possible that simply coding first person singular pronouns for the Listening for self-step of analysis within the eLG proves challenging for the Japanese language: The fourth step of the eLG calls for analyzing self-representations by coding personal pronouns in the transcript or data text to gather information regarding how people represent themselves through the choice of words. Yet, when personal pronouns are not needed, and the first-person singular is rarely used to convey self-representation, creating an "I-poem" becomes challenging (for details about I-poems, see Kölsch, 2015; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017). However, to try to understand how the LG could be modified for meaningful use with Japanese, Kiegelmann suggests to modify the "Listening for self" step of analysis away from coding only pronouns and, instead, including more words that might represent information about the speaker in Japanese. The following translated excerpt from the data illustrates this procedure:

> "When (I) saw Karin right after (she) was born and heard her birth cry, (I) couldn't help but love and cherish her. From the moment (she) was born, (she) was a baby who looked just like her daddy in everyone's eyes. But then came the days of relentless, harsh advice from my doctor: (I) could not hold Karin in my arms even if (I) wanted to because (she) was in the NICU, hooked up to so many tubes and doing her best. (I) was afraid to touch her, and due to the new coronavirus disease, (I) only had 15 minutes of visitation time a day. (I) wondered if this baby was my own. (I) was trapped mentally, even though (she) was supposed to be my precious child. (I) could not feel that it was my child. (I) was half-convinced that it was my child, and (I) spent my days going to the 15-minute visits with a family member who drove me to and from the hospital. If (I) had not been driven to and from the visit by my family, (I) might not have gone to the visit. No, (I) might not have been able to go. I could not trust anyone, not my doctor, nurses, or government welfare office, and (I) could not listen to anyone honestly. I was a terrible parent."

In the fourth step of the eLG, Kiegelmann coded statements that seemed (in the English translation) to convey information about the self of the author of the essay. Following this, Kiegelmann listed these "self-statements" line by line (see below) for the purpose of creating a "self-poem". Finally, she searched for shifts in voice in the poem. This procedure of grouping lists of self-statements into chunks involves creating a self-poem using the Listening Guide methodology (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Kiegelmann, 2000). The shifts in voice, which Kiegelmann interpreted, indicated a shift in meaning conveyed by the writer of the essay. Specifically, three shifts can be seen in this self-poem: 1) from a voice of clarity and certainty to a voice of ambivalence, 2) a shift toward a voice of social embeddedness, and 3) another a shift toward a voice of clarity.

The self-poem resulted from the above excerpt from Shimada's (2023) essay, including indications of shifts printed in italics.

(I) saw

(1) heard

(I) couldn't help but

*---Shift from clarity to ambivalence---*

(I) couldn't hold Karin in my arms

(I) wanted to

(I) was afraid to touch her

(I) only had 15 minutes

(I) wondered if this baby was really my own.

(I) was

(I) couldn't really feel that it was my child.

(I) was half-convinced that it was my child,

(I) spent my days

member who drove me


*--Shift toward social embeddedness---*

(I) had not been driven

(I) might not have gone

(I) might not have

(I) couldn't trust

not my doctor,

(I) couldn't listen


*-----Shift toward clarity---*

I was a terrible parent


Results from the example analysis applying the fourth step

With this version of conducting the fourth step of the eLG, that is, listening for self, Kiegelmann indicates that Shimada covered the following meaning in the above quote: Her initial clear love and intense relationship with the newborn child was shattered by the circumstances of her child's medical condition and by the treatment setting. In addition, the mother expressed stress because of her experience of passively being left to be submissive to what the medical staff decided for the medical treatment for the baby. Kiegelmann heard in the essay that Shimada described her separation from her child (e.g., only 15 minutes per day of visitation rights and decisions made and treatment provided without the involvement of the

mother) by using words for ambivalence and disconnection of the mother-child relationship.

Kiegelmann understood that this passage was followed by a narration of the mother's disconnection from the medical staff. Finally, Kiegelmann understood the essay passage as culminating in self-blame and the mother judging herself as a terrible parent.

However, the mother's self-blame may not be meant to be taken literally. The first author has the language and cultural knowledge to understand such self-blame as what Kiegelmann would interpret as a "harmless" form of expressing humbleness – with no connotation of frustration regarding a lack of parenting skills. This example of transferring the eLG toward data in the Japanese language illustrates that assumptions, cultural knowledge, and language proficiency are crucial aspects of the procedure of coding evidence of "how" meaning is conveyed in transcribed or written data. Collaboration of researchers with connections to various social context enriches research. As the exemplary analysis illustrates, the social context of the researchers who engage in data analysis matters. Further research is needed to theoretically reflect on the distinction between listening for I (analyzing personal pronouns) and listening for self-representation (analyzing the language used for self-representation to understand how meaning is communicated) within the listening guide methodology. The discussion of only one of the several steps of analysis of the eLG shows the potential of further development of relational psychology for applications with data in different languages. For more details on the results of all steps of analysis with the eLG see Table 1.

For the purpose of methodological discussion, the elaboration of the question of how to analyze self-representation in the eLG with Japanese data, this paper focusses on a discussion of the "Listening for self-representation" step. The analytical step of Listening for multiple voices or for so called counterpuntual voices in this essay resulted in identifying three distinct categories or voices which were represented in an interwoven form within the essay:

**"The doctor told me" - voice.** Shimada (2023) expressed throughout the essay her relationship with medical staff und physician in a way that she had little or no opportunity to make decisions or even understand the medical condition and treatment indications for her child.

**"I was a terrible parent" - voice.** There are statements within the text in which Shimada (2023) expresses some resistance against the professional care givers, against the visitation restrictions and the governmental certificate program. Sadness of a mother about having less bonding with her own child than the nurses shines through, when she titles herself as a "terrible parent". Also, her decision to be a care taker of others appears within the context of disconnection with her child.

**"she was trying her best" - voice.** In contrast to the mother's struggle with the limited opportunity to bond with her child, Shimada (2023) represents her daughter at times in the text as an active person who was working hard and was causing benefits to others.

The results of all steps of analysis with the eLG take together present the answer to the research question as follows:

The mother represents her relationship with her child as strained by separation and a lack of mother-child bonding. Visitation restrictions and watching others to be able to bond with the baby and to have power over the child's treatment appear represented as a hardship. The mother writes within the context of the contest that accepting the hardship and focusing on the child's strength in helpful for coping and for the mother to become able to care for others.

## 4. Discussion

The content of this essay focuses on the shock of a daughter's unexpected and severe disability, the mother/writer's shock, her daughter's development, the love and care of those around the family, and the mother's untimely grief at her daughter's death. The essay focuses on the use of the upheaval of the experience of having a disabled child. Writing an essay might provide relief from Shimada's loss of her daughter and promote bereavement. This disability awareness essay aims to inform general readers regarding chronic medical care (see the Act on Providing Support for Children Requiring Chronic Medical Care and the Family (The Government of Japan, 2021).

However, writing essays has a social meaning. This essay was awarded partly because the relevant legislation had only recently been enacted. This process is similar to the experiences of mothers with children with disabilities. Based on the performative aspect of the essay, the writer may have intended to highlight her daughter's place in the family of children with disabilities as well as the political issues related to children with disabilities. By referring to the Level 1 certificate of disability, certificate of inability, and unique child support allowance, Shimada wanted to show that the severity of her child's disability was not just a medical or personal condition but that it had social validity. The authors argue that the writer implicitly considered the contest view. The contest is part of Disability Week (December 3-9, every year), which is noted in the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities in Japan.

The first author of this paper, who works for a university in Japan, did not contemplate Shimada's separation of the receipt of medical support from the receipt of a disability certificate, because it is often the case that the two do not necessarily go hand in hand in Japan. The first author would argue that there may be more stigma attached to having a disability certificate than to receiving medical support despite that having a disability certificate offers many advantages, such as receiving social welfare services. Shimada's statement that "the aim is to return the certificate" represents a strategic decision to assume the social category of "disabled" for a period of time for the practical benefits. However, disability certificates seem to rarely be returned, except when the concerned person dies.

"Children requiring chronic medical care" was the target that Shimada wanted to contribute to sharing her experiences after her child's death. The number of children who require chronic medical care and live at home was estimated to be 2,000 in 2021 (The Ministry of Health and Labour, 2024). This is a preferable statement, but it is often observed in a community consisting of people with similar difficulties (e.g., Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). Notably, she stated that her daughter was not born for the mother's growth. PWDs want people without disabilities to know about them, but they do not wish to act as education material.

Shimada's gratitude for being able to use the disability services results from Japanese norms that expect PWDs and their family members to be modest and humble. This implies that the mother's and her daughter's achievements were due to their environment, including social services, even though the daughter was eligible for the services once she was issued a disability certificate. Shimada did not criticize any individuals or the social systems in the essay. Additionally, the authors of this paper observed that the mother's husband's (the daughter's father's) role was missing from the essay, which is common regarding the rearing of children with disabilities. Within Shimada's essay, traces of male dominance by medical staff became visible, which shows that medical discourse is vital in relation to these children and is embedded in social and cultural aspects.

The eLG made a suggestion to elaborate the analysis by the KJ method, applying the eLG worksheet (Kiegelmann, 2024). The KJ method requires researchers to be cautious regarding the data context and their own values. In the current paper, the authors have different social and cultural backgrounds and thus naturally required discussion to bridge the mutual cultural differences. The eLG explicitly calls for such reflections of the social embeddedness of researchers. The first author initially considered that PWDs and their family members often refuse disability certificates even though they receive medical care because being a patient is different from becoming a PWD. He did not realize the dominance of medical professionals. After a discussion, the first author noted that it was a product of the culture. If both researchers had the same background, the discussion may not have arisen. However, the eLG worksheet helped the authors elaborate on data processing and recognize their own backgrounds. Therefore, translational collaboration proved meaningful. Applying two different and culturally embedded research methodologies to the same essay supported a more in depth understanding of the social embeddedness of the act of data analysis.

The eLG is meant to extend the Listening Guide by supporting attention to social context. Especially for deliberate reflection on language assumptions, Kiegelmann included explicit reflections on the social context of the research participants and the researchers themselves (Kiegelmann, 2021). While more research is needed about the question whether and how to modify the fourth step of analysis in the eLG (listening for the self) when using English translations of Japanese data, the current study stressed the importance of attending to the researchers' social background and investing the effort to include their own contexts in the analysis. Within the transnational collaboration, the two authors engaged in

in-depth discussions regarding local legal regulations, social attitues, and surprises were forced to notice what they presumed to be common knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

The different versions of the analysis of an identical dataset in this study clearly illustrate the relevance of the social location of researchers who engage in research analysis. Their awareness, knowledge, and stance on socio-political questions, such as disability policies and the experiences of parents of children with disabilities, can be key factors in guiding research results. The approach to qualitative research both authors promote is to make social embeddedness and implicit assumptions explicit. This study illustrates that qualitative psychological research benefits from the open communication of analysis processes as quality standards (see Maxwell, 2013; Maxwell & Kiegelmann, 2023). The eLG method provides a systematic tool for documenting the social embeddedness of the research process, especially the research steps "readers' response" and "listening for social context." Further research is needed to determine whether the eLG is sensitive enough to overcome its rootedness in the US English language and in references to Western philosophy, even though they are critically reflected.

The mixed method in the current study contributes to deepening the text analysis. Published disability essays are open to various interpretations, as is the case with every text. For PWDs, interpreting other texts should provide an opportunity to experience solidarity with other PWDs or role models. People without disabilities can read texts reflectively. However, if a writer considers the possible audience or readers, analyzing the written text leads to explicit, obvious, and invisible familiarity with PWDs and their families. The KJ method works well for readers to obtain an outline of the content and meanings of texts. The eLG is suitable for attending to implicit meanings and to processes of reception such as readers' systematic responses to texts. In a further study, the two researchers could separately analyze the same data with the eLG, and the analysis process made their assumptions more explicit and visible.

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He has more than 400 publications in books and journals related to Leadership, Climate and Culture, Inclusion, Training, Innovation, Technology and Organization and Management of Educational, Social and Labor Institutions. In the last two decades he has carried out teaching and research stays and collaborations in Spanish universities (Seville, Huelva, León, Balearic Islands, Jaén, Madrid, Basque Country, Zaragoza, Barcelona, Santander, Granada, Vigo, Cáceres,...) and in institutions in other countries (Seville, Huelva, León, Balearic Islands, Jaén, Madrid, Basque Country, Zaragoza, Barcelona, Santander, Granada, Vigo, Cáceres,...). ) and in institutions in other countries (Albania, Uruguay, Chile, Latvia, Portugal, USA, UK, Ireland, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Switzerland, France, Romania, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Australia, Tunisia, Equatorial Guinea...) as well as working with companies and associations of the Productive and Social Economy (FUNDAE, FADE, ASATA, Clúster-TIC, Foundation against Hunger - FCH or Innobridge, in Switzerland). He is a member of the Spanish Society of Pedagogy; the Group "Universities and Inclusive Education"; the Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (SEPIE); the European Network of Inclusive Education and Disability incluDed; the Transdisciplinary

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The presence in Europe, has been very intense in the ECER with the collaboration of Drs. Huber and Day, among other colleagues, in the network, 11th and in the EARLI, as well as in ISATT, together with Drs. Ribeiro and Day, which have meant the forefront of research, innovation and professionalization of teaching. He has coordinated several collections of books, such as General and Special Didactics, in Pearson Education, Universitas, 2002 and following, in UNED, as the series of the 5 works of Didactics, from 2014 to 2023, UNED, REDIPE, the series in the publishing house CERASA and Octaedro a new Didactics to form, 2023, the most recent, 2025, Didactic Innovation and Curriculum Development for the improvement of Teaching-Learning, unique for Central Africa and America. It also highlights more than two hundred articles in various journals and formats, which synthesize the past and open new doors to dialogue with different cultures in the future.

He has given more than five hundred, national and international conferences, close to a thousand, subjects taught in the last decade, an average of 6 per semester, coordinating teams and interacting with thousands of students in addition to deploying a broad advice to UNED Centers, along with participation in more than 100 presidencies of commitees of exams-tests-UNED and assistance to courts of doctoral theses, about 12 per year, exceeding three hundred among other management tasks and participation in international congresses and conferences within and outside of Spain.

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## Subject Index