

Motivational Drivers and Curriculum Relevance Perceptions among EPAL Post-Secondary Apprentices: A Quantitative Study in Achaia, Greece

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Abstract

This study examines learners' perceptions of the EPAL Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year in Greece, focusing on their motivations for participation and the perceived relevance of the programme's curriculum to their interests and local labor-market needs. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed electronically to apprentices in the prefecture of Achaia. Convenience sampling was employed, resulting in a sample of 96 participants from four EPAL schools selected for their representativeness in terms of apprenticeship class offerings. The questionnaire included closed-ended items aligned with the research questions, and its reliability was supported through pilot test-retest procedures. The findings indicate that learners' motivations are predominantly credential-oriented, with the acquisition of the Level 5 Diploma emerging as the primary reason for participation. Additional ranking points for public-sector employment and financial incentives also constitute significant motivators, whereas employment-related and intrinsic learning motives appear less central. Regarding curriculum alignment, apprentices report high levels of correspondence between their personal interests and the programme's theoretical, practical, and subject-specific components. Practical training, in particular, shows the strongest alignment, and the curriculum is widely perceived as responsive to local labor-market needs. Overall, the results suggest that the Apprenticeship Year effectively supports learners' vocational goals and labor-market integration, while highlighting the importance of continued curriculum refinement, enhanced employer collaboration, and strengthened career guidance services.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Vocational Education, Learner Motivation, Work-Based Learning

1. Introduction

A persistent gap between education and the labor market continues to raise concerns about how young people transition into employment in knowledge-based societies (Hanushek et al., 2011). In the 21st century, individuals are expected to be adaptable, creative, and capable of critical thinking, collaboration, and intercultural communication. Apprenticeships have emerged as an effective policy tool for addressing these demands (Ryan, 2003).

Apprenticeship programmes offer learners real-world experience, opportunities for teamwork, entrepreneurial skills, and a deeper understanding of workplace requirements (Cedefop, 2015; Kuczera, 2017). They facilitate a smoother transition into professional life

(Galvani, 2017) and contribute to personal development and social maturity (Vickerstaff, 2007). Central to their success are teachers and workplace supervisors, who deliver instruction, mentor apprentices, and ensure the relevance and quality of learning experiences (Wilson & Pretorius, 2017; Vassiliou & Andor, 2013).

International evidence consistently highlights apprenticeships as a highly effective mechanism for supporting young people's entry into the labor market (Vosniakou, 2017). They respond to the widening gap between employer skill requirements and student competencies, at a time when youth unemployment is increasing and economic competitiveness is declining (Fragkoulis & Anagnou, 2018).

Within formal education systems, apprenticeships integrate institutional learning with structured, workplace-based training. Work-based learning encompasses pedagogical and assessment practices that bring together theoretical instruction and practical experience (Bruindiers et al., 2010). Through this synergy, apprenticeships promote skills acquisition, reduce youth unemployment, support innovation and entrepreneurship, and foster social inclusion.

The effectiveness of apprenticeship programmes depends largely on the pedagogical, professional, and supervisory competence of teachers and workplace mentors. High-quality supervision is considered a core quality-assurance requirement in vocational education (Wombleet et al., 1995). Nevertheless, research on the roles, qualifications, employment conditions, and professional development of educators involved in apprenticeships remains fragmented (European Commission, 2017; Greenan et al., 1998).

Historically, apprenticeships date back to medieval European guilds, which regulated professional training and labor competition (Ogilvie, 2004). Contemporary systems—most notably the German model—have institutionalised dual vocational structures supported by governments, employers, and labor unions (ILO, 2012; Vosniakou, 2017).

2. Apprenticeship Models Across Europe

Apprenticeship-type programmes are well-established across European countries. In several states—including the Czech Republic, Poland, and Spain—apprenticeships coexist with school-based vocational training schemes, where learners are required to spend a number of hours or days in real workplaces when school facilities cannot adequately support the development of specific skills (Farmakis, 2019).

Six countries (Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) operate dual apprenticeship systems that combine institutional learning with sustained workplace training. Furthermore, thirteen European countries have introduced apprenticeship pathways at tertiary level, demonstrating the expansion of apprenticeship as a recognized route for advanced professional education. In many cases, these systems are relatively recent or have undergone reform in order to increase flexibility and better align vocational education and training with the needs of modern production systems. Such reforms have taken place in countries including Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (European Commission, 2013; European Union, 2012).

Germany represents one of the most established apprenticeship traditions, where the labor market is closely integrated with vocational training. The dual system provides broad foundational training and develops the specialized skills required for specific

occupations. Apprentices generally train within companies for three to four days per week and attend vocational school for up to two days, under a formal training contract. Programmes typically last three years, and the suitability of enterprises and in-company trainers is monitored by competent authorities.

Denmark's dual apprenticeship system is regarded as highly effective in facilitating the transition from education to employment. Apprentices often secure employment even before completing their training, frequently outperforming university graduates without practical experience. The system's success is attributed to strong engagement from social partners, close cooperation between schools and industry, and rigorous certification procedures leading to nationally recognized qualifications.

In Austria, apprenticeship aims to equip young people with professional qualifications and prepare them for employment by integrating them into real work processes. Programmes last between 24 and 48 months, with approximately 80% of learning taking place in the workplace and 20% in school settings. Notably, 76% of apprenticeship graduates find employment within three months of completion.

In Finland, apprenticeship forms part of upper-secondary vocational education and supports the acquisition of qualifications in both initial and continuing vocational training. Programmes typically last one to three years.

France has a long tradition of apprenticeship, dating back to the 1920s, with its modern framework established in 1971. Apprenticeship aims to deliver officially recognised professional qualifications and typically lasts between 12 and 36 months depending on the occupation and qualification level (or up to 48 months for apprentices with disabilities). Approximately 61% of apprentices enter employment immediately after completing their programme, and more than half secure permanent positions (European Commission, 2013; European Union, 2012).

3. Apprenticeship in Greece

3.1. Legislative Framework

Apprenticeship has been recently integrated into the Greek vocational education system, formalizing the dual model that alternates learning between the workplace and an educational structure. Law 4386/2016 and subsequent regulations define apprenticeship as a system in which apprentices enter into a formal Apprenticeship Contract, receive remuneration, and are covered by social insurance.

Ministerial Decision FB7/108652/K3/2021 specifies that apprentices participate in structured learning activities both in the workplace and at school, and that employers are required to provide training aligned with the official curriculum. Apprenticeship programmes are designed to lead to certification of professional knowledge, competencies, and skills, ensuring alignment with national qualifications and labor-market demands.

3.2. Structure of the Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year (EPAL)

The Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year for graduates of Vocational Upper Secondary Schools (EPAL) operates for one academic year as a dual learning system. It includes:

- 28 hours per week of workplace-based training over a minimum of four days
- 7 hours per week of school-based laboratory instruction
- 70 hours of preparatory courses for certification examinations

Apprentices receive 75% of the statutory minimum wage and full labor and insurance rights. Employers must appoint a certified workplace trainer who has completed specialized pedagogical training adapted to the apprenticeship context.

Assessment takes place both continuously at the workplace—documented weekly in the learning log—and through a final examination, which may include written tests, practical demonstrations of skills, or project presentations.

Workplace learning programmes are developed based on approved occupational standards for each specialty. Ministerial Decision 26412/2017 establishes the Quality Framework for VET curricula, emphasizing adult-learning principles, active learning, critical thinking, experiential learning, and learner-centred approaches, recognizing that apprentices typically bring prior educational and professional experiences to the learning process.

3.3. Programme Implementation and Governance

Participation in the Apprenticeship Year is optional and open to EPAL graduates who are not simultaneously engaged in other education, training, or employment. Management of the programme is carried out by the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth, in cooperation with regional education directorates, EPAL schools, and School Laboratory Centres (EK).

Placement of apprentices in workplaces is organized by EPAL schools and Laboratory Centres in collaboration with the local Employment Promotion Centres (KPA) of OAED. Employers enter a formal agreement with apprentices and must comply with employment regulations.

The programme combines four days of workplace training with one day of specialized school-based instruction, thereby fulfilling both a professional role—facilitating graduates' labor-market integration—and a social role, supporting their transition to adulthood and active participation in economic and social life.

3.4. Regional Example: Achaia

Achaia hosts 13 EPAL schools (nine daytime, four evening). Participation has grown steadily, with:

- 240 apprentices
- 16 specialties
- 23 apprenticeship classes
- 160 cooperating employers
- 45 teachers involved

Completion rates exceed 92%, dropout remains below 8%, and certification success reaches 94–95%, demonstrating strong programme performance and labor-market relevance (Arachovitou, 2023).

4. Method

4.1. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate learners' perceptions of the EPAL Apprenticeship Program, focusing on their motivations for participation and the relevance of the program's curricular content to their interests and the needs of the local labor market. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the learners' perceptions regarding their reasons for participating in the Apprenticeship Program?
2. What are the learners' perceptions regarding the alignment between the apprenticeship curriculum, their personal interests, and labor-market needs?

4.2. Research Methodology

A quantitative research design was adopted, implemented through a structured questionnaire. Quantitative survey methodology is widely used for capturing perceptions, trends, and attitudes in educational research (Cohen et al., 2018). The design allowed for systematic data collection across a relatively large group of learners and facilitated statistical comparison of their responses. Convenience sampling was selected due to the accessibility of the target population, a choice that is common and acceptable in educational field studies when researcher access is naturally constrained (Creswell, 2014).

4.3. Research Sample

The sample was selected using convenience sampling (Creswell, 2014). From the six (6) EPAL schools in the Prefecture of Achaia participating in the Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year, four (4) were chosen as the most representative, as they offered the largest number of apprenticeship classes in the current (7th) implementation phase.

A total of 96 learners participated in the study. Of these, 60.4% were male and 39.6% were female. The majority (66.7%) belonged to the age group 18–22 years old. Learners represented eleven (11) different specializations out of the sixteen (16) available in Achaia, ensuring substantial vocational diversity within the sample.

4.4. Research Data Collection Tool

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, developed via Google Forms to facilitate distribution, accessibility, and automated data management. The questionnaire included closed-ended items directly aligned with the research objectives and questions.

To enhance reliability, a pilot test was conducted before final distribution. Each participant in the pilot study completed the questionnaire twice within a one-week interval. Consistent with recommendations for stability testing in educational research (Robson & McCartan, 2016), the correlation of responses across the two administrations was examined to assess test-retest reliability.

4.5. Data Collection Process

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to learners enrolled in the apprenticeship classes of the selected EPAL schools. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and conducted within a predefined time frame to ensure consistency in administration. Responses were automatically recorded, exported, and subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques.

4.6. Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged.

- The use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific region studied (Cohen et al., 2018).
- The sample is limited to apprenticeship learners from a single prefecture (Achaia), which may not fully capture the diversity of apprenticeship experiences across Greece.

Nevertheless, such limitations are typical in localized educational research, where contextual insights can still offer valuable contributions to understanding broader institutional practices (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

4.7. Reliability and Validity

Reliability was supported through the pilot testing process, which examined the temporal stability of responses, a widely recommended procedure in quantitative educational research (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Validity was strengthened by ensuring that questionnaire items were explicitly aligned with the research questions and constructed according to established principles for content and construct validity (Creswell, 2014). The use of closed-ended questions also promoted consistency and clarity in participant responses, enhancing internal validity.

5. Results

5.1. Motives for participation in the EPAL Apprenticeship Program

The prioritization of motives for participation in the EPAL Apprenticeship Program reveals a rich and multilayered motivational structure that reflects both the socio-economic environment of vocational education in Greece and broader theoretical perspectives on learner motivation. The ranking data illustrate how learners navigate between credential-related ambitions, labor market expectations, and personal development goals, forming a complex motivational profile that is both pragmatic and aspirational.

Table 1. Ranking of Motives for Participation in the EPAL Apprenticeship Program

Motive for Participation	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Total
Acquisition of Level 5 Diploma	43 (44.8%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3 (3.1%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	26 (27.1%)	96 (100%)
Financial incentives	12 (12.5%)	33 (34.4%)	8 (8.3%)	7 (7.3%)	6 (6.3%)	22 (22.9%)	8 (8.3%)	96 (100%)
Entry into the labor market	5 (5.2%)	13 (13.5%)	26 (27.1%)	13 (13.5%)	19 (19.8%)	14 (14.6%)	6 (6.3%)	96 (100%)
Acquisition of professional experience	1 (1.0%)	7 (7.3%)	19 (19.8%)	39 (40.6%)	7 (7.3%)	16 (16.7%)	7 (7.3%)	96 (100%)
Acquisition of knowledge and skills	3 (3.1%)	6 (6.3%)	19 (19.8%)	22 (22.9%)	36 (37.5%)	6 (6.3%)	4 (4.2%)	96 (100%)

Motive for Participation	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Total
Obtaining an extended license to practice the profession	3 (3.1%)	22 (22.9%)	10 (10.4%)	8 (8.3%)	18 (18.8%)	28 (29.2%)	7 (7.3%)	96 (100%)
Additional ranking points for public sector employment	29 (30.2%)	6 (6.3%)	8 (8.3%)	4 (4.2%)	6 (6.3%)	5 (5.2%)	38 (39.6%)	96 (100%)

5.1.1. Dominance of Credential-Oriented Motives

There is an overwhelming emphasis placed on securing the Level 5 Diploma, which nearly half of the participants (44.8%) identified as their primary motive. This suggests that learners primarily perceive apprenticeship not as an isolated educational experience but as a pathway to formal recognition and upward mobility within the vocational education framework. In the context of the Greek education system—where formal qualifications carry significant weight for professional licensing and structured career advancement—the diploma serves as a clear symbol of educational progression. The diploma functions as a tangible, institutionally validated outcome that enhances employability, social standing, and eligibility for regulated professions. The strong focus on certification supports the argument that vocational learners actively seek credentials that can differentiate them in a competitive labor market, particularly in sectors where regulated qualifications are prerequisites.

5.1.2. Public Sector Aspirations and the Appeal of Institutional Security

The second major finding relates to the substantial percentage (30.2%) of learners who view additional ranking points for public sector employment as their top priority. This highlights the enduring attractiveness of the public sector as a provider of job security, stable income, and predictable career progression. In economies characterized by labor market volatility, such institutional stability can be particularly appealing.

However, the simultaneous observation that 39.6% of participants ranked this motive last suggests a bifurcation in career aspirations. Some learners pursue the program strategically to gain advantage in public-sector recruitment, while others appear to reject public-sector pathways in favor of private-sector employment or entrepreneurial ambitions. This polarization reflects a broader divergence in how vocational learners conceptualize their professional futures.

5.1.3. Financial Incentives as Conditional Motivators

Financial incentives emerge prominently as the second priority for more than one-third of respondents (34.4%). This indicates that although financial support is not typically the decisive motivator prompting learners to initially enroll, it plays a significant reinforcing role, enabling participation and persistence. Apprenticeship programs often attract learners from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, for whom financial compensation can mitigate opportunity costs associated with training.

This pattern resonates with the notion of instrumental motivation, where learners balance educational benefits against material considerations. The prominence of financial incentives

as mid-level motives suggests that while monetary support is appreciated, it is not perceived as the core value of the apprenticeship experience.

5.1.4. Employment-Oriented Motives: Practical and Expected, Yet Not Primary

Motives related to entry into the labor market and the acquisition of professional experience demonstrate consistent importance, though not typically in the highest-ranked positions. For instance, “entry into the labor market” appears strongly as a third priority (27.1%), while “acquiring professional experience” is most often ranked fourth (40.6%).

These tendencies suggest that learners do view the apprenticeship as an effective bridge to employment, but they weigh employment-related benefits after institutional rewards such as the diploma or ranking points. This indicates a nuanced perspective: learners expect the apprenticeship to enhance employability, yet they acknowledge that formal credentials and institutional recognition may carry more immediate or strategic value.

From a theoretical perspective, these motives reflect integrated regulation, a form of motivation wherein learners internalize the value of work-based experience as part of their broader career trajectory.

5.1.5. Knowledge and Skills Acquisition: Important but Not Central

Although intrinsic motives related to learning—such as acquiring new knowledge and developing skills—are rarely prioritized in the top ranks, they are consistently present across the middle of the distribution. A large proportion (37.5%) identified this as their fifth priority. This suggests that learners recognize the educational value of the program but do not view skill development as the primary purpose of their participation.

This finding is consistent with observations from vocational education research, which often reports that learners prioritize employability and certification over purely pedagogical motivations. It also raises questions about how effectively the program communicates its learning-based benefits relative to its credential-related outcomes.

5.1.6. Professional Licensing as a Regulatory Incentive

The motive “obtaining an extended license to practice the profession” also follows a characteristic distribution, frequently appearing in the middle ranks. This pattern highlights the regulatory environment surrounding vocational professions in Greece, where additional licensing can significantly influence employment opportunities. Learners appear to recognize this advantage, though they position it below more immediately compelling motives such as the diploma or ranking points.

5.1.7. A Hybrid Motivational Profile

Taken together, the findings point to a hybrid motivational structure. Learners are neither exclusively extrinsically motivated nor wholly intrinsically driven. Instead, they balance:

- Credential-driven motivations (diploma, ranking points)
- Economic considerations (financial incentives)
- Career-oriented motivations (labor market entry, licensing)
- Learning-based motivations (skills and knowledge)

This blend reflects a pragmatic approach to vocational education, where personal development is acknowledged, but strategically subordinate to institutional and labor-market benefits.

5.2. Alignment of the apprenticeship curriculum, trainees' interests, and labor-market needs

5.2.1. Alignment of training subjects with trainees' interests

The results provide a clear picture of how learners perceive the alignment between the subjects taught in the apprenticeship program and their personal interests. The distribution is markedly skewed toward the higher end of the scale, indicating strong relevance and resonance of the curriculum with learners' preferences.

Table 2. Alignment of training subjects with trainees' interests

Degree of Alignment	Frequency	Percentage %
Not at all	2	2.1%
Very little	2	2.1%
Quite	15	15.6%
Much	20	20.8%
Very much	57	59.4%
Total	96	100%

The most notable finding is that 59.4% of participants report that the training subjects correspond "very much" to their interests. When combined with those who responded "much" (20.8%), the cumulative percentage reaches 80.2%, meaning that four out of five learners experience a high degree of personal relevance in the educational content. This level of alignment suggests that the program succeeds in tailoring its curriculum to learners' vocational aspirations and preferences.

A smaller but meaningful proportion (15.6%) rated the alignment as "quite". While this is a moderate level, it still indicates positive association and does not reflect dissatisfaction. In contrast, only 4.2% of respondents (those selecting "not at all" or "very little") perceive minimal alignment between their interests and the subjects taught.

This strong predominance of positive responses indicates that the apprenticeship curriculum is perceived as highly relevant and meaningful, serving as an important motivational factor for learner engagement, persistence, and satisfaction. These outcomes are consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the importance of interest-driven learning, where relevance of content significantly enhances intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and vocational identity formation.

The high alignment also serves as indirect validation of the apprenticeship model's responsiveness to labor market needs. Since learners in vocational pathways often choose fields based on clear occupational intentions, the strong correspondence between subject matter and interests suggests that the program provides training that aligns well with professional expectations and individual career goals.

5.2.2. Alignment of theoretical instruction with trainees' interests

The findings illustrate a strong positive relationship between the theoretical component of the apprenticeship program and the interests of the learners. As with the practical training subjects, the theoretical curriculum appears to resonate highly with participants, demonstrating a high degree of perceived relevance.

Table 3. Alignment of theoretical instruction with trainees' interests

Degree of Alignment	Frequency	Percentage %
Not at all	3	3.2%
Very little	2	2.1%
Quite	17	17.9%
Much	25	26.3%
Very much	48	50.5%
Total	95	100%

The most prominent data point is that 50.5% of respondents report that the theoretical instruction corresponds “*very much*” to their interests. This represents more than half of the sample and signals that the theoretical framework of the program effectively supports learners’ vocational pathways. When combined with those reporting “*much*” (26.3%), a total of 76.8% perceive a high level of alignment.

In addition, 17.9% rated the alignment as “*quite*”. Although this reflects a moderate level of correspondence, it still indicates generally positive perceptions of the theoretical content. In total, 94.7% of learners rate the alignment at moderate to very high levels, revealing that only a small minority experience low relevance in the theoretical component.

The lower categories—“*not at all*” (3.2%) and “*very little*” (2.1%)—represent just 5.3% of respondents. This extremely small proportion suggests that dissatisfaction with theoretical instruction is rare. Theoretical misalignment likely occurs either due to mismatches between expectations and subject matter or because a small subset of learners may be more practically oriented and therefore less engaged with theoretical components.

These trends demonstrate that the theoretical elements of the apprenticeship curriculum are successfully integrated into the broader learning experience and are generally perceived as meaningful, relevant, and well-aligned with vocational interests. This is important because theoretical instruction forms the backbone of conceptual, regulatory, and professional knowledge that underpins workplace learning.

The strong alignment with learner interests is consistent with educational theory emphasizing the role of curricular relevance and learner-centered instruction in promoting motivation, satisfaction, and learning persistence. High alignment also serves as an indicator of the curriculum’s responsiveness to contemporary labor market demands, ensuring that theoretical knowledge remains applicable, coherent, and directly related to workplace realities.

5.2.3. Alignment of practical training with trainees' interests

The data reveal an overwhelmingly positive perception of the alignment between the practical training component and learners’ individual interests.

Table 4. Alignment of practical training with trainees' Interests

Degree of Alignment	Frequency	Percentage %
Not at all	1	1.0%
Very little	6	6.3%
Quite	9	9.4%

Degree of Alignment	Frequency	Percentage %
Much	24	25.0%
Very much	56	58.3%
Total	96	100%

The data reveal an overwhelmingly positive perception of the alignment between the practical training component and learners' individual interests. Practical training appears to resonate even more strongly than theoretical instruction, with 58.3% of participants rating the alignment as "*very much*", the highest level on the scale. Combined with those who selected "*much*" (25.0%), 83.3% of learners perceive a strong correspondence between practical activities and their vocational interests.

This high degree of relevance is characteristic of effective apprenticeship models, where practical training is expected to be closely connected to learners' chosen specialties. The fact that more than four out of five learners report high alignment underscores the success of the program in offering practical experiences that are meaningful, engaging, and closely tied to occupational goals.

A moderate proportion (9.4%) selected "*quite*", indicating that for some learners, practical tasks meet their interests reasonably well, though perhaps not fully. Meanwhile, "*very little*" (6.3%) and "*not at all*" (1.0%) jointly account for 7.3%, a relatively small share of participants. These responses may reflect cases where learners perform tasks unrelated to their preferred specialization, or where workplace conditions limit the relevance or variety of practical activities.

Compared to similar tables on theoretical and subject-specific alignment, the practical component shows the highest level of interest alignment among the three instructional dimensions. This is consistent with the nature of apprenticeship learning: practical training often offers immediate, hands-on, contextualized experiences that learners find intrinsically motivating and professionally valuable.

The findings reflect core principles of experiential learning theory, highlighting how direct engagement in real tasks enhances motivation, deepens understanding, and fosters strong vocational identity development.

5.2.4. Alignment of training content with local market needs

The data indicate that learners perceive a strong alignment between the training curriculum and the needs of the local labor market.

Table 5. Alignment of training content with local market needs

Extent of Consideration	Frequency	Percentage %
Not at all	1	1.0%
Very little	4	4.2%
Quite	19	19.8%
Much	31	32.3%
Very much	41	42.7%
Total	96	100%

The data indicate that learners perceive a strong alignment between the training curriculum and the needs of the local labor market. A combined 75% of respondents believe that labor market needs are taken into account “*much*” (32.3%) or “*very much*” (42.7%) during the design of training subjects. This suggests that, from the learners’ perspective, curriculum design is responsive to local employment conditions and industry demands.

Additionally, 19.8% of learners responded “*quite*”, indicating a moderate perception of alignment. This medium-level group acknowledges the consideration of market needs but perhaps views it as less systematic or less consistently implemented.

At the lower end, only 5.2% of respondents (1.0% “*not at all*” and 4.2% “*very little*”) believe that labor market needs are minimally or not at all incorporated into curriculum planning. This very small percentage may reflect learners in specializations where the link between training content and local employment is less visible or less direct, or cases where individual learning placements do not reflect broader market trends.

Overall, the distribution of responses demonstrates that learners generally perceive a high degree of responsiveness in how training subjects are designed relative to local labor market conditions. This is a critical indicator of program relevance, especially in vocational and apprenticeship systems where employability and workplace integration are central goals.

6. Discussion

6.1. Motives for participation in the EPAL Apprenticeship Program

The findings indicate that external, institutional motives dominate, with the acquisition of the Level 5 Diploma as the primary driver, functioning as a strong indicator of professional recognition and mobility. Additional ranking points for public-sector employment also play a significant role, reflecting learners’ socioeconomic priorities, although responses are polarized between those who find this crucial and those who find it irrelevant. Financial incentives act as secondary yet important motivators, helping to reduce participation barriers. Employment-oriented motives (entering the labor market, gaining experience) hold a mid-level position, while intrinsic motives (knowledge, skills) are present but not predominant. Overall, a mixed motivational profile emerges, with learners using the program both as an educational pathway and as a strategic professional choice.

6.2. Alignment of training subjects with trainees’ interests

Learners perceive the training subjects as strongly aligned with their personal interests, suggesting that the apprenticeship curriculum is meaningful and relevant to their vocational aspirations. This alignment appears to enhance learners’ engagement and motivation, as content that resonates with individual interests is more likely to sustain attention and commitment. More moderate perceptions may reflect variations in expectations or differences across training specialties, while the limited negative views point to specific areas where curriculum refinement may be needed. Overall, the findings indicate that the program effectively addresses learners’ interests, supporting satisfaction and persistence within the apprenticeship pathway.

6.3. Alignment of theoretical instruction with trainees' interests

Most learners consider the theoretical instruction highly aligned with their interests, with more than half selecting “very much.” The theoretical component is perceived as meaningful and relevant to their profession, avoiding the common disconnect from practical training. Low dissatisfaction rates show that the program meets the needs of diverse learner profiles. The relevance of theoretical content enhances motivation, vocational identity, and deeper learning, highlighting the importance of continuous updates to maintain its connection to real professional contexts.

6.4. Alignment of practical training with trainees' interests

The practical component shows even higher alignment with learners' interests, with more than 83% reporting strong or very strong correspondence. Practical training acts as a key motivational element, offering direct experience, application of knowledge, and professional confidence. Small groups of learners expressing moderate or low alignment point to the need for improved placement matching and stronger collaboration with employers. Overall, practical training is a major strength of the program.

6.5. Alignment of training content with local market needs

Learners perceive the curriculum as highly aligned with local labor market needs, indicating effective cooperation with employers and informed curriculum planning. Moderate responses suggest occasional content gaps or differences across specialties, while the small proportion of negative views can guide targeted improvements. Overall, the program is seen as well connected to labor market demands, an essential factor for enhancing graduates' employability.

7. Conclusions

The study demonstrates that the EPAL Apprenticeship Program functions as a multifaceted mechanism supporting both professional advancement and educational development. Learner motivation is dominated by credential-oriented and institutional incentives, reflecting the significance of formal qualifications and public-sector opportunities within the Greek labor market. While financial and employment-related motives contribute meaningfully, intrinsic learning motives are less prominent, suggesting that participants view the apprenticeship primarily as a strategic step toward formal recognition and career progression.

Both the theoretical and practical components of the program exhibit strong alignment with learners' interests, reinforcing its pedagogical effectiveness. Practical training emerges as the most influential factor in sustaining engagement, validating the central role of experiential learning in vocational pathways. Moreover, learners perceive the curriculum as well aligned with local labor-market needs, underscoring the program's relevance and its potential to enhance employability and smooth transitions into the workforce.

8. Recommendations

Drawing on the results of this study, the following recommendations can be outlined to improve learner engagement, curriculum relevance, and overall program effectiveness of the EPAL Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year:

1. *Strengthen the Role and Recognition of the Level 5 Diploma.* Policymakers should ensure that the diploma maintains high labor-market value, with clear pathways to regulated professions and employment opportunities.

2. *Enhance Career Guidance Services.* The polarization regarding public-sector ranking points suggests the need for individualized career counseling that supports both public- and private-sector trajectories.
3. *Increase Visibility of Learning and Skill Development Benefits.* Since intrinsic motives rank lower, communication strategies and instructional design should emphasize the program's educational and competence-building strengths.
4. *Maintain and Expand Financial Support Mechanisms.* Given the role of financial incentives in enabling participation, economic support should remain stable and potentially be expanded for learners facing socioeconomic barriers.
5. *Strengthen Employer Partnerships and Placement Quality.* Ensuring high-quality practical placements and improving employer engagement will enhance training relevance and learner satisfaction.
6. *Continuously Update Curriculum Based on Labor-Market Intelligence.* Systematic monitoring of regional labor-market trends is essential for sustaining curriculum relevance and supporting long-term program credibility.

Adopting these recommendations will support the sustained relevance, quality and accessibility of the EPAL Post-Secondary Apprenticeship Year, ultimately enhancing learner outcomes, employability and alignment with evolving educational and occupational needs and standards.

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