

It is never too late.  
Televised classes and adult skill acquisition

Ilaria Malisan

May 2025

**Abstract**

In many countries, adults lack basic skills, yet scalable solutions for education beyond school age remain limited. Can informal, remote learning improve adult skill acquisition? This paper studies the impact of *Non è mai troppo tardi*, a televised education program for illiterate adults broadcast in Italy between 1960 and 1968. I exploit quasi-experimental variation in access to the program generated by the uneven roll-out of television signal across Sicilian municipalities, driven by geographic constraints and the staged construction of transmission infrastructure. Combining newly digitized municipal-level Census data from 1931 to 1971 with a continuous difference-in-differences framework, I find that increasing TV signal coverage from 0% to 100% raises literacy rates by 1 percentage point, explaining 18% of the overall improvement during the study period. Effects are concentrated among men, with no statistically significant impact for women, consistent with gender norms limiting access to communal TV spaces. These findings show that educational broadcasting can be an effective tool for supporting basic skill acquisition in adulthood, particularly where formal schooling is inaccessible or foregone.

**JEL Classification:** I25 J24 N34

**Keywords:** Education Policy, Adult Skill Acquisition, Remote learning