

FACILITATING THE ADULT LEARNING PROCESSES IN SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION: WHAT DO THE LATVIAN ADULT LEARNERS AND THEIR EDUCATORS THINK ABOUT?

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Abstract. *The paper aims at presenting the findings of the research on core competences of adult educators conducted in Latvia during the study "Identification and analysis of new challenges and solutions that have influence on engagement and reintegration of adults (18-24 years) in lifelong learning" funded by ESF project "Support to research in educational field" (sub-activity 1.2.2.3.2.), No 011/0011/IDP/1.2.2.3.2/11/IPIA/VIAA/001. The adult educators and adult learners from the field of second chance education (evening shift schools) were involved in an online survey (2011-2012) using the research tool developed in the project "Qualified to Teach" – QF2TEACH. The main research results are analysed in order to identify the core competences of educators as adult learning facilitators and to compare the adult learners and their educators' opinion concerning these competences within the domains: interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners, access and progression of learners, monitoring and assessment of learning processes.*

Keywords: *Adult educator, adult education, adult learner, adult learning, andragogy, learning processes, second chance education.*

Introduction

In Latvia, "adult education is seen [...] as a diverse process offering personal development and the capacity to cope in the labour market throughout life" (EAEA, 2011, p. 4). Furthermore, as it is mentioned in EAEA (2011) report, "the main goal of adult learning in Latvia is to provide individuals with the opportunity to obtain or complement existing learning based on needs and interests, irrespective of age, sex and previous education with an emphasis on up-skilling or re-skilling" (p. 5). However according to Deggs & Miller (2011), "the role of the adult educator can become more uncertain when attempting to address individual needs that are fundamentally representative of the complex issues within communities" (p. 25).

It should be specified that for the purpose of this paper the understanding of notion *adult* proposed by Jarvis (2012) will be provided: according to him, "the term *adult* refers to a social status rather than a biological age, since in some countries in the world adulthood is achieved at younger biological ages than in others. This point does demonstrate the significance of recognising that learning does not occur in social isolation and that the occurrence of different forms of learning may be the result of social and cultural pressures rather than biological differences alone" (p. 11). According to Booth and Schwartz's (2012) study, "prior to the 1970s, information about adults as learners was based on psychological perspectives about learning in general (...); however, with the

publications of several key texts, the most notable being Malcolm Knowles's *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (1973), theorists and practitioners began to focus on attempting to understand the unique learning processes and characteristics of adults as learners" (p. 43). In 1973, Knowles noted that "andragogical theory is based on at least four main assumptions that are different from those of pedagogy: (a) changes in self-concept, (b) the role of experience, (c) readiness to learn, and (d) orientation to learning" (pp. 45-47). More recently, Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2011) discussed new perspectives on andragogy emerged from research and theory in different disciplines taking into the consideration the "core andragogical principles" such as "the learner's need to know, self-directed learning, prior experiences of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and problem solving, and motivation to learn" (p. 181). Furthermore, Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2011) described eight elements of the andragogical process such as "preparing the learners, considering the physical and psychological climate setting, involving the learners in planning for their learning, involving the learners in diagnosing their own needs for learning, involving the learners in formulating their own learning objectives, involving the learners in designing learning plans, helping the learners carry out their learning plans, and involving the learners in evaluating their own learning outcomes" (p. 300).

In many recent studies (Deggs & Miller, 2011; Keogh, 2009; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2011; Nuissl & Egetenmeyer, 2010; Nuissl & Lattke, 2008; Research voor Beleid, 2008, 2010, etc) it is argued that the quality of adult educators has an influence on the quality of adult learning. It is important to think about the future of adult education and learning from the perspective of adult educators and adult learners. This idea was recently explored by Schmidt (2013). He indicated that "the future means being flexible, using technology wisely, partnering and working together, promoting and sharing the achievements and successes, focusing on professional sustainability" (Schmidt, 2013:79-80).

In Latvia, "the main challenge in the present day situation of adult education is how to increase the participation rate in adult learning", therefore the "enhancement of the second chance education opportunities, especially for socially at risk groups" is recognised as a priority in adult education policy (EAEA, 2011:5). The purpose of this paper is to present the key empirical findings of the research on core competences of adult educators from the field of second chance education conducted in Latvian evening shift schools in 2011-2012 using QF2TEACH (www.qf2teach.eu) first wave questionnaire. The main research results will be analysed in order to identify the core competences of adult educators and to compare the adult learners and their educators' opinion concerning these competences within the domains such as interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners, access and progression of learners, monitoring and assessment of learning processes.

Context and Sample of the Research

The QF2TEACH first wave questionnaire (Bernhardsson & Lattke, 2011:66-81) on the core competences of learning facilitators in adult and continuing education was used in the frame of the collaborative study "Identification and analysis of new challenges and solutions that have influence on engagement and reintegration of adults (18-24 years) in lifelong learning" funded by ESF project "Support to research in educational field" (sub-activity 1.2.2.3.2.), No 011/0011/1DP/1.2.2.3.2/11/IPIA/VIAA/001. The original questionnaire was translated into Latvian and Russian and created as a web-based survey tool (i.e. online questionnaire) using Google forms. The translated questionnaires were sent to 6 voluntary experts to provide feedback on it's adaptation to Latvian context. In October 2011 the email invitation of participating in the web-based survey was sent out to 507 potential respondents (155 adult educators and 352 adult learners) from the field of second chance education (20 evening shift schools). In February 2012 online survey yielded a total of 118 respondents (64 adult educators and 54 adult learners) for a response rate of 23 % (see Table 1).

Table 1

Latvian respondents' gender and age

Biometric traits		Respondents' groups				Total	
		Group 1: Adult educators		Group 2: Adult learners			
		Count N	% within Group 1	Count N	% within Group 2	Count N	% within Total
Gender	Female	61	95%	33	61%	94	80%
	Male	3	5%	21	39%	24	20%
	Total	64	100%	54	100%	118	100%
Age	Under 25	1	2%	43	84%	44	37%
	25-39	20	31%	8	10%	28	24%
	40-50	18	28%	-	-	18	15%
	Above 50	25	39%	-	-	25	21%
	Unknown	-	-	3	6%	3	2%
	Total	64	100%	54	100%	118	100%

Empirical Findings of the Research: Comparative Analysis

The obtained quantitative data were processed and analysed using SPSS 17.0 software. Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in respondents' view regarding the competences of educators as adult learning facilitators within the domains such as interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners, access and progression of learners, monitoring and assessment of learning processes between adult learners and their educators from the field of second chance education (evening shift schools) in Latvia. Firstly, within each domain the respondents were asked to indicate

how important are certain skills or behaviour currently. For each item a rating had to be given on a 6-point Likert scale from ‘irrelevant’ (score 1) up to ‘indispensable’ (score 6). Secondly, the respondents were asked for the future importance of the same skills or behaviour indicating if the respective item would be ‘less important’ (score 1), ‘equally important’ (score 2) or ‘more important’ (score 3) in 2015. Finally, each domain ended with open-minded questions asking the additional comments.

Domain 1: Interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners

From the current perspective, all the items mentioned in Table 2 (except the item “to use suitable body language”) were rated higher by the adult educators in comparison with the adult learners. The further analysis reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean rank scores obtained on the item “to communicate clearly” ($p= .022$) and item “to handle conflicts” ($p= .018$) between adult learners and their educators’ point of view (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners: Current perspective

Items	Mann-Whitney U test			
	Mean rank		U-value	Asymp. Sig.
	Adult educators	Adult learners		
To motivate	63.95	54.22	1443.00	.064
To inspire	63.17	55.15	1493.00	.148
To use suitable body language	59.05	60.03	1699.50	.872
To communicate clearly	64.97	53.02	1378.00	.022
To manage group dynamics	63.16	55.17	1494.00	.171
To handle conflicts	65.52	52.37	1343.00	.018
To act considering democratic values	63.34	54.94	1482.00	.147

From the future perspective (see Table 3), the items such as “to inspire”, “to use suitable body language” and “to communicate clearly” were rated higher by the adult learners when compared with the adult educators. As it is shown in Table 3, there is no statistically significant difference in rating of all the items between adult learners and their educators’ opinion. However the majority of adult educators (from 46.9% up to 64.1%) evaluated the future importance of all the competences (except the item “to use suitable body language”) as ‘more important’ in the future. In adult learners’ opinion (from 55.6% up to 63.0%), the competences such as “to inspire”, “to communicate clearly” and “to handle conflicts” will be more important in the future.

Table 3

Interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners: Future perspective

Items	Mann-Whitney U test			
	Mean rank		U-value	Asymp. Sig.
	Adult educators	Adult learners		
To motivate	61.12	57.58	1624.50	.513
To inspire	59.23	59.82	1710.50	.912
To use suitable body language	58.91	60.20	1690.00	.821
To communicate clearly	58.87	60.25	1687.50	.797
To manage group dynamics	59.72	59.24	1714.00	.932
To handle conflicts	60.97	57.76	1634,00	.556
To act considering democratic values	59.76	59.19	1711.50	.921

Domain 2: Access and progression of learners

From the current perspective, all the items mentioned in Table 4 (except the item “to provide information about further training opportunities in relation to own specialist area”) were rated higher by the adult educators in comparison with the adult learners. The further analysis reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean rank scores obtained on the item “to refer learners to information on current and future learning opportunities” ($p= .026$), item “to encourage learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes” ($p= .024$) and item “to assess the entry-level of learners” ($p= .045$) between adult learners and their educators’ point of view (see Table 4).

Table 4

Access and progression of learners: Current perspective

Items	Mann-Whitney U test			
	Mean rank		U-value	Asymp. Sig.
	Adult educators	Adult learners		
To refer learners to information on current and future learning opportunities	65.23	52.70	1361.00	.026
To provide information about further training opportunities in relation to own specialist area	58.25	60.98	1648.00	.636
To refer learners to information about different external support structures (e.g., grants, childcare)	60.20	58.67	1683.00	.795
To analyse typical barriers that may be faced by adults returning to learning	60.66	58.12	1653.50	.666
To encourage learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes	65.30	52.63	1357.00	.024
To assess the entry-level of learners	64.52	53.55	1406.50	.045

From the future perspective, all the items mentioned in Table 5 (except the item “to encourage learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes”) were rated higher by the adult learners when compared with the adult educators. As it is shown in Table 5, there is no statistically significant difference in rating of all the items between adult learners and their educators’ opinion. However, from the point of view of the majority of adult learners (from 48.1% up to 53.7%), the competences such as “to provide information about further training opportunities in relation to own specialist area”, “to refer learners to information about different external support structures (e.g., grants, childcare)” and “to assess the entry-level of learners” will be more important in the future. The majority of adult educators (54.7%) evaluated the future importance of competence “to encourage learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes” as ‘more important’ in the future.

Table 5

Access and progression of learners: Future perspective

Items	Mann-Whitney U test			
	Mean rank		U-value	Asymp. Sig.
	Adult educators	Adult learners		
To refer learners to information on current and future learning opportunities	58.57	60.60	1668.50	.714
To provide information about further training opportunities in relation to own specialist area	57.04	62.42	1570.50	.334
To refer learners to information about different external support structures (e.g., grants, childcare)	58.54	60.64	1666.50	.705
To analyse typical barriers that may be faced by adults returning to learning	57.30	62.11	1587.00	.383
To encourage learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes	62.73	55.67	1521.00	.204
To assess the entry-level of learners	58.59	60.57	1670.00	.720

Domain 3: Monitoring and assessment of learning processes

From the current perspective, all the items mentioned in Table 6 were rated higher by the adult educators in comparison with the adult learners. The further analysis reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean rank scores obtained on all the items (except the item “to assess the needs of the learner”) between adult learners and their educators’ point of view (see Table 6). From the future perspective, all the items mentioned in Table 7 (except the item “to diagnose the learning attitude of the learner”) were rated higher by the adult educators when compared with the adult learners. As it is shown in Table 7,

there is no statistically significant difference in rating of all the items between adult learners and their educators' opinion.

Table 6

Monitoring and assessment of learning processes: Current perspective

Items	Mann-Whitney U test			
	Mean rank		U-value	Asymp. Sig.
	Adult educators	Adult learners		
To assess the needs of the learner	63.91	54.28	1446.00	.080
To analyse learning barriers of the learner	67.14	50.44	1239.00	.004
To monitor the learning process	66.63	51.06	1272.00	.005
To evaluate the learning outcomes	65.70	52.15	1331.00	.012
To diagnose the learning capacity of the learner	68.33	49.04	1163.00	.001
To diagnose the learning attitude of the learner	65.21	52.73	1362.50	.031

Table 7

Monitoring and assessment of learning processes: Future perspective

Items	Mann-Whitney U test			
	Mean rank		U-value	Asymp. Sig.
	Adult educators	Adult learners		
To assess the needs of the learner	60.16	58.71	1685.50	.792
To analyse learning barriers of the learner	59.60	59.38	1721.50	.968
To monitor the learning process	59.78	59.17	1710.00	.911
To evaluate the learning outcomes	60.86	57.89	1641.00	.590
To diagnose the learning capacity of the learner	61.70	56.89	1587.00	.385
To diagnose the learning attitude of the learner	58.84	60.28	1686.00	.797

Both the adult educators (51.6%) and adult learners (50.0%) evaluated the future importance of competence “to assess the needs of the learner” as ‘more important’ in the future. Furthermore, the adult learners (50.0%) thought that the competences such as “to analyse learning barriers of the learner” and “to diagnose the learning attitude of the learner” would be more important in the future. On the other hand, the adult educators (53.1%) thought that the competence “to evaluate the learning outcomes” would be more important in the future.

Conclusions

The main research results have been analysed in order to identify the core competences of educators as adult learning facilitators and to compare the adult learners and their educators' opinion concerning these competences within the domains such as interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners, access and progression of learners, monitoring and assessment of learning processes.

As it has been identified, from the current perspective the competences within the domain "Interpersonal behaviour and communication with learners" such as motivating and inspiring the learners, communicating clearly, managing group dynamics, handling the conflicts, and acting taking into consideration democratic values have been rated higher by the adult educators. The adult learners have rated higher on using suitable body language. Furthermore, the majority of adult educators have evaluated the future importance of all the competences (except using suitable body language) as 'more important' in the future. But adult learners thought that inspiring the learners, communicating clearly and handling the conflicts will be more important in the future.

As regards the competences within the domain "Access and progression of learners", it can be summarised that from the current perspective referring the learners to information on current and future learning opportunities, different external support structures (e.g., grants, childcare); analysing the typical barriers that may be faced by adults returning to learning; encouraging the learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes; assessing the entry-level of learners have been rated higher by the adult educators. The adult learners have rated higher on providing information about further training opportunities in relation to own specialist area. According to the majority of adult learners, providing information about further training opportunities, referring the learners to information about different external support structures and assessing the entry-level of learners will be more important in the future. The majority of adult educators have evaluated the future importance of encouraging the learners to take over responsibility for their future learning processes as 'more important' in the future.

It can be concluded that from the current perspective all the competences within the domain "Monitoring and assessment of learning processes" (e.g., assessing the needs of the learner, analysing the learning barriers of the learner, monitoring the learning process, evaluating the learning outcomes, diagnosing the learning capacity and learning attitude of the learner) have been rated higher by the adult educators in comparison with adult learners. Both the adult educators and adult learners have evaluated the future importance of assessing the needs of the learner as 'more important' in the future. Furthermore, the adult learners have emphasised that analysing the learning barriers of the learner and diagnosing the learning attitude of the learner would be more important in the

future as well. On the other hand, the adult educators thought that evaluating the learning outcomes would be more important in the future.

Finally, it should be stressed that encouraging the adult learners to take over responsibility for their learning processes and involving the adult learners in facilitating their own learning processes (e.g., self-motivating, self-inspiring, diagnosing and assessing their own learning needs, monitoring their own learning processes, analysing their own learning barriers, evaluating their own learning outcomes, etc) is a crucial moment not only in the field of second chance education but also in Latvian adult education system as whole.

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