

EMPOWERMENT OF OLDER PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. *The article examines the empowerment of older adults to participate in educational activities in order to remain active members of the society. Empowerment is defined as the activation of the member to act on the basis of inner and outer resources. The growing number of older people in the society prompt to constantly review and adjust the resources of the society in the area of economy, education and health care to the new needs. Therefore, in order that older people would feel a fulfilling quality of life, it is necessary to promote them to be active, underpin social roles, provide them possibilities to engage in volunteering, educational, cultural activity and learn new things.*

Keywords: *educational activities, empowerment, learning, motivation, older people.*

Introduction

The ever growing number of older people both in Lithuania and Europe requires manifold social and economic changes which are necessary in order to secure further development of the country. The changing ratio between the younger and older population in the society stimulates the application of the present social, political, economic, educational, health care and other resources of the society for the new needs. According to the Eurostat data, the share of older people (i.e. 65 years old and older) in the member states of the EU will rise from 17.1 per cent in 2008 to 30 per cent in 2060. It would show that even one third of the population of EU will be 65 years old and older in 2060. It is predicted that the number of old people (i.e. of 80 years old and older) will treble during the mentioned period. According to Statistics Lithuania, in 2003 over 20 per cent of the population of Lithuania was 60 years old and older, and, if current demographic trends persist, it is predicted that by 2030 the share of the population that is 60 years old and older will have reached over 27 per cent. Therefore, it is recognized that, with the ageing of society, more attention should be paid to the quality of life for older people, because it is this group of people that will determine the general standard of living and societal stability of the country.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the importance of empowerment in the changing environment and the role of motivation when empowering older adults to participate in the educational activity and highlight the good practice of Lithuania.

At the present time the most important measure of the policy of Lithuanian State towards older people is the National Strategy to Overcome Ageing

Consequences by which Lithuania undertook to take measures to solve the problem of ageing at national level. “Although quite a few measures are being undertaken in order to create conditions for older people to lead a full life socially, professionally and culturally, however, it still does not ensure all the essential changes that are necessary for the well-being of older people, therefore, a necessity remains to make a joint effort to create such conditions that older people would be able to lead a full life socially, professionally and culturally.” (National Programme, 2012).

Personal empowerment in the changing global environment

Rapid change of the modern world is one of the key characteristics of postmodern society (Fullan, 1998). A.Hargreaves (1994) describes postmodernism as conditions when economic, political, organizational and even personal life are determined by very different and not always modern principles, whereas postmodern world itself is mobility, complexity, rush and doubts. Although globalization is not only today's phenomenon, in the epoch of postmodernism the development of information and communication technologies has become one of the key factors of a shrinking world (Zemaitaityte, 2007). O.Korsgard (2000) defines the concept of globalization as the system of ideas reflecting intensive social ties encompassing the whole world, connecting countries and regions that are far away from each other. Events and processes occurring in one country determine events and processes in other countries; therefore, the essence of the concept of globalization is the idea of a bond connecting the whole world. N.F.McGinn (1999) emphasizes that globality is characteristic to all the areas of today's life: politics, economy, culture, education. People often change their residence, go to work to another city or country; there is a constant increase in information, and progressive means of communication accelerate the transfer of this information; in addition, new technologies of information storage, processing, dissemination change the work style of organizations, change lifestyle; due to new technologies the turnover on international financial markets accelerates; in addition, the movement of new technologies, migrations, capital movement also determine “culture migration,” which through close cooperation of people, television, books, newspapers is disseminated in various ethnic territories.

Due to emergence of new technologies and the development of post-industrial society and their mutual interaction the education of older adults becomes a necessary condition of society's survival. B. Hake (1997) maintains that people learn in order to survive; it does not matter whether it concerns society, organization or a person, learning is mostly related to the present time than to the future. Globalization, the erosion of traditions and institutional reflexivity, according to B.Hake (1997), confer on learning an exceptional role in all the social processes, learning encompasses all society.

The volatile change of the structure of population age – from the society where the youth dominates the society where all the age groups of population are represented proportionally, according to S.Mikulionienė (2011), is and will be a challenge to social, economic and cultural development of the society in the future. Due to the scope and irreversibility demographic, ageing of the population is essentially changing the structures of society's needs and at the same time raises new challenges to the social institutes that satisfy those needs. The growing number of older people stimulates to review and society's resources in the areas of social security, economy, health care and education to the new needs. The increasing average life expectancy requires changes in the development of an individual and the institution of family and education when, due to the acceleration of social changes, the need for lifelong learning and improvement arises.

E.Ogarevas, G.Kliučarevas (2000) distinguish two aspects of the problem of education and social change of older adults: 1) - changing requirements to the man as a subject which are affected by the changes occurring in the society; 2) - the role of the education of older adults as a factor securing the success of progressive changes of the society.

When analyzing the activation of older people in the participation in educational activities, it is necessary to discuss the role of empowerment in these processes. Detraux (cit. by Elijosius, 2011) defines empowerment as a process due to which the man who is in certain circumstances of life develops assisted by concrete actions and the feeling that he is able himself or to control more or less his inner and outer reality assisted by the surrounding people. In order to strengthen empowerment, three factors are important:

- activity (professional orientation in order to empower);
- resources (all the competences; knowledge, abilities, skills, values);
- communication, i.e. initiation and maintenance of interactions with the surrounding people and factors of the environment (institutions, technologies etc.) (Elijosius, 2011).

B.Kairienė (2013) also defines empowerment as provision of powers, activation and stimulation to act on the basis of inner and outer resources. Empowerment is closely related to the activity theory of a person which is based on the premise the satisfaction of an older person is related to an ability to maintain social roles, get involved in volunteering, cultural activity, learn new things (Mikulionienė, 2011). Free and voluntary education, when the man seeks knowledge together with others on the basis of his experience and needs, is especially characteristic to the education of older adults. The education of adults is inseparable from activity and experience which is large and in which subjectivity (individuality) and objectivity (social environment), which are closely interrelated and are not possible without each other, are revealed (Zemaitaityte, 2007). J.Dewey (1916) maintains that adult education is a social process, whereas education institutions

(organizations) is the form of community life revealing accumulated experience of mankind and stimulating the learner to use his abilities for the benefit of society, therefore, education should be life, and not preparation for life.

Social environments, the importance of social relationships for the education of older adults is emphasized by B.F. Skinner (1968), A. Bandura (1977) and L.S. Vygotsky (1978), the latter of whom, in sociocultural theory, distinguishes complex transformations of the man that occur only with an active participation of the person himself, because it is exactly the thing that secures the development of a personality. Learning takes place through the adoption of culture and it is impossible without an active participation of the learner.

In the education of older adults, social inclusion encompasses the development of the increasing of accessibility and participation in learning. G. Gray (2000) notes that that social inclusion takes place when every member of the society participates in the life of the society actively, when nobody is prevented from participating in an activity which is important to the society.

G. Fischer, E. Scarff (1998) point out the difference between the opinion of industrial society about learning as a separate period of life and the modern concept about learning when learning becomes one of constituent parts of life. O. Peters (1998) compliments the concept of learning: learning is understood as a key function of life; a rapid change of the means of transmission of learning content, methods, information empowers to adapt to changing conditions of life and work faster; learning based on experience is necessary, whereas informal learning is understood as learning guided by the person himself for which the responsibility lies on the learner himself; learning is aimed at achieving the goals of social reform: it can help improve social and economic status of the man, solve unemployment, social inequality and other problems of the society. D.A. Kolb and R. Fry (1975) distinguish four most important elements of adult learning: concrete experience; reflexive observation; formulation of generalizations, conceptions, concepts; active application. It means that in order to learn effectively, it is important to openly and completely immerse himself in activities, not to have preconceived notions about new future experience; be able to think over and observe experience; be able to create conceptions and generalizations; be able to know newly created theories, apply generalizations in practice and use them in new situations.

In S. Brookfield (1986), P. Jarvis (1996), P. Freire (1998) opinion independent learning of older adult people is clearly expressed when process and reflection merge in search for meaning. True reflection encourages action and actions are true practice only when their consequences are well critically thought about.

People learn in various situations most of which are not traditionally educational. As knowledge changes very quickly learning becomes individualized and fragmentary. Fast change of knowledge changes the conception of knowledge too from something that is true and right to something that always changes and is conditional. It means that the basis of evolving

society becomes experimenting, which stimulates constant reflection of human situations and application of available knowledge while solving difficulties (Zemaitaityte, 2007). Reflexivity is pointed out by P.Jarvis (1997) as an attribute of modernity. Reflexive learning is more of a life style and, in scientist's opinion, it should not be taught in educational institutions. Reflection is turning back and looking at oneself in the past, contemplation of oneself: what I was like, what I am like and what I could be like. It is enrichment of human experience with new knowledge. Reflection helps not only to understand oneself, one's connection to the environment and the world, but also to rule them, regulate and change (Jovaiša, 1996). The more people learn the more experience they gain. Therefore, learning becomes a social process that helps to create conditions for further learning.

Role of motivation in enabling older people to participate in educational activities

While studying participation of older adults in educational activities an issue of motivation arises. A lot of authors observe that in adult education, motivation to participate, not learning is stressed. If adults participate in education they are motivated to learn.

Motivation to learn is a complex and changeable phenomenon. Individuals learn following different motives. There could often be a few of them. However, only one usually dominates. G.Butkienė, A.Kepalaitė (1996) divide motivation to learn into two parts (subsystems):

- Content, which consists of the following attributes: a personal meaning of learning, the content of learning motif and its' place in common personal motivational system, the effectiveness of a motif that is connected with independent emergence and expression, the degree of awareness of a motif and the spread of learning motif into other areas of activity.
- Dynamic, which has the following attributes: strength, endurance and modality connected to emotions strengthening or weakening a personality.
- Likewise, G. Butkienė, A.Kepalaitė (1996) divide motivation to learn into: internal which arises from the subject itself and which is followed by inner joy when something is learned or external that depends on the environment of individuals, opinions of other people and relationships.

L.B.Resnick (1987) distinguishes four causes why adults start learning:

- An adult wants to participate in solving social problems;
- He wants to learn to use a lot of things, for example: modern technologies;
- He wants to learn to solve important problematic situations in different ways;
- An adult needs knowledge, skills and experience that would help in specific problematic situations.

S. De Camillis (1999) defines motivation of older adults as a need that spontaneously arises from an individual and also as a push from environment. Therefore, the importance of environment in the process of motivation is important. Two types of these needs could be distinguished: educational cognitive need and need for socialization. Educational cognitive need is understood as a motivation or a push to get to know and understand the environment which surrounds a person. This need is concretized by means of new knowledge, information and search of experience as well as understanding. Reading of books and magazines, watching of movies and performances is an active search for information that satisfies cognitive need and encourages development of a personality. The need for socialization is a need to join and live in a group, relationships and sharing of experience. This need is expressed while researching and communicating or being in a group. The decision of older adults to participate in education is conditioned by various factors, which can be divided into social psychological and institutional psychological. Social psychological factors determine individual's attitude towards himself as a learner and learning in general (self image, psychological need to be independent, experience, need to know and etc.). Institutional psychological factors determine educational policy, peculiarities of educational system and the supply of education (Žemaitaityte, 2007).

Readiness of adults to learn is determined not only by the factors mentioned above, but also by the environment where they intend to do it. If organizers and implementers of the education of older adult are able to create non formal, friendly environment that is based on cooperation, mutual support and trust they can expect more of those who want to learn. The creation of an environment that is favorable for learning is balance between security and personal intentions of adults to learn, and it means that proper environment for learning makes informal education far more attractive (Teresevičienė, 1997). Alongside to social environment of learning great attention is paid to forms of learning. The concept of a learning adult marks social status, because learning does not evolve in a socially isolated environment and different forms of learning can be a result of social and cultural effect.

According to E. Lindeman (1961), older adults have a motif to participate in educational activities when they feel a need that can be satisfied by learning. The attitude of adults towards learning is true-life. Therefore, they choose an area of education themselves and their world of learning is the world of actions. By participating in adult education individuals not only improve as personalities, but also contribute to the development of the society.

Lithuanian Union of Pensioners “Bočiai” is an example of good practice while enabling older adults to participate in educational activities

When Lithuania regained its independence in 1990 the citizen of the country started actively joining various organizations and fellowships. In the April of 1991 a group of patriotically minded pensioners got together and created Lithuanian Union “Bočiai” in 1992. As of now the Union “Bočiai” link 54 communities and 8 independent clubs uniting 45 thousand members in Lithuanian towns and regions as well as municipalities. The main goals and purposes of the Union “Bočiai” is to represent social, economic and cultural interests of pension and pre-pension age people and to defend them in the governmental institutions of all levels; provide their members and society with information about the situation of older people in Lithuania and around the world, organize discussions, conferences, seminars, involve the members of older age into various cultural activities, promote clubs and classes according to their interests, publish materials, participate in international projects, cultivate healthy life style, mutual help, support and implant national cultural traditions and protect historical heritage. In 2004 the Union “Bočiai” was accepted to international organization “European Older People’s Platform,” and it actively participates in the activities of the organization.

In order to encourage Lithuanian older people to learn, particularly to become computer literate the Lithuanian Union of Pensioners “Bočiai” actively integrated into project activity. As its chairman P.Ruzgus (2011) noted in his annual review, in 2007-2008 the Union implemented a project “The Development of Computer Literacy of the Members of the Lithuanian Union of Pensioners “Bočiai” funded by the structural funds of the European Union. Throughout the project “Bočiai” union members had a chance to learn how to use computers and to master modern and progressive technology. In P. Ruzgus’ (2011) opinion, theoretical knowledge regarding computer literacy and gained practical experience to use information technologies encouraged social integration of the participants and also increased competitiveness of elderly people in labor market. Having implemented the project, 1500 of “Bociiai” members were educated according to ECDL computer literacy program. A lot of those that finished the courses rejoiced that now they can communicate with their children and grandchildren on the internet not only in Lithuania, but also abroad and can understand each other better when they talk about informational technologies.

Another important accomplished project is “The Preparation and Involvement of the People Older than 50 years old into Administration Activities of Blocks of Flats”, during which (in 2009-2010) 500 people completed the course of the administrator of the block of flats. This project was chosen to implement, because there are 38 thousand blocks of flats in Lithuania that were built according to old fashioned standards, and most of those houses lacked house

self-rule and local administrator (Ruzgus, 2011). In order to get older people interested in this activity the Union “Bočiai” published a book “The Manual of an Administrator”. The project helped involve older people into a very important and useful activity, feel that they are important and active members of communities.

The union also actively sets targets of cultural activity – organize cultural and interesting activity of older people and improve their life style. Having this purpose in mind, art self-rule clubs, handicraft groups and intelligent housewives circles are founded. Older people that participate in them not only enrich their senility, vary their daily life, but also attract their contemporaries. “Bočiai” choirs, ensembles, groups of dancers and musicians, readers, drama and other clubs are very popular in the society. “Bočiai” art self-rule clubs participate not only in regional events, but also actively participate in various national and regional celebrations. “Bočiai” union communities and units constantly organize attendance of theatres and museums for their members as well as purposeful trips around Lithuania and abroad, memorable meetings, parties and exhibitions that pleasantly exhilarate their visitors. All the “Bočiai” communities organize around 1800 various events a year.

One of the most important goals unifying the members of Lithuania Union of Pensioners “Bočiai” is having got to pension age to stay independent, self-sufficient and valuable members of their communities. By organizing various educational activities and trying to involve participants of elderly age, the union tries to reduce social gap, respect dignity of older people. It also pursues to achieve that the attitudes of volunteering, goodwill, humanism, tolerance and democracy would dominate in mutual relationships.

Conclusions

To conclude with, we could state that the participation of older adults in educational activities reflects possibilities of personal development, socialization and importance of learning. Satisfaction with life of an older person is connected to his ability to keep social roles, be active, get involved into voluntary and cultural activities, and learn new things. Therefore, active participation in educational activities helps older adults stay independent and valuable members of their communities.

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