

# WHY THE NUMBER OF ADULT LEARNERS IS NOT GROWING - ATTITUDES OF LITHUANIAN ADULTS TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING

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**Abstract.** *This article analyzes the reasons that continue to encourage the way of a more active involvement of adults in lifelong learning in Lithuania. Lithuania is characterized by an educated society that wants to advance, but Lithuania's Lifelong Learning (LLL) Index is one of the lowest in the EU. According to LSD data in 2019, Lithuanian LLL indicator was only 7%. Lithuania's Progress Strategy Lithuania 2030 and the National Progress Program 2014-2020 mention LLL as one of the most important strategic goals to be implemented at all levels and to cover all social areas. The education strategy for 2013-2022 aims to “mobilize not only the educational community, but also all Lithuanian people to study purposefully in order to achieve personal and national success.” (p. 11). Recent research indicates that although the main challenges hindering the growth of the number of adults participating in lifelong learning in Lithuania are financial barriers and the belief that learning is too late, and learning motivation is low, yet positive attitudes of Lithuanian adults towards lifelong learning, provide general expectation of increasing motivation for adult learning and more active involvement of adults in lifelong learning.*

**Keywords:** *adult education, Lifelong Learning.*

## Introduction

The seed of changes in the economy and society affects the individual, changing one's lifestyle and requiring the individual to make new decisions and to show self-determination, which often reflects the individual's readiness and ability to adapt to new dynamic living conditions. In an ever-accelerating context of alterations, the imperative of lifelong learning is dictated by social assumptions such as global phenomena, increasing competition in the labor market, its international character, social inequality, growing knowledge and spread of information technology, increasing labor market demands for education, adaptability and competition. The dependence of population groups with different education and employment in the labor market background is not the same in various European countries, as well as it is diverse in Lithuania. The general trend is that people with lower education have a harder time finding a job than those with higher education, although once completed higher education, cannot protect against unemployment entirely. The changing labor market

situation and the impact of different levels of education on employment, the continuous improvement of competencies justify the imperative of lifelong learning.

Recent research shows that education is capable of enhancing modernization of a society, critical evaluation and implementation of innovations, and at the same time of maintaining universal values. Lithuania is characterized by an educated society that wants to advance, but Lithuania's Lifelong Learning Index is one of the lowest in the EU. According to LSD data in 2019, Lithuanian Lifelong Learning indicator was only 7%. Lithuania's Progress Strategy Lithuania 2030 and the National Progress Program 2014-2020 mention LLL as one of the most important strategic goals to be implemented at all levels and to cover all social areas. The education strategy for 2013-2022 aims to “mobilize not only the educational community, but also all Lithuanian people to study purposefully in order to achieve personal and national success. “(p. 11).

The aim of the article is to analyze the reasons that continue to satn din the way of a more active involvement of adults in lifelong learning in Lithuania.

The methodology of the study is based on document analysis, theoretical analysis of scientific literature, and secondary data analysis.

### **The Concept of Lifelong Learning**

The EU's strategy for implementing lifelong learning emphasizes that lifelong learning means providing lifelong learning opportunities for all ages and making learning a continuous activity. The idea of lifelong learning starts with the integration of learning horizontally: in the family, in the community, while studying, working, spending one`s pastime, and vertically: from birth to an old age (Laal, 2012). The Lifelong Learning Memorandum (2000) defines lifelong learning as all lifelong learning activities designed to develop knowledge, skills and competences from a personal, civic, social and / or work-related perspective. G.M. Linkaitytė and L. Žilinskaitė (2008) see lifelong learning as a combination of two paradigms in which education and learning are involved. Education creates learning opportunities, and learning is the process by which active participants take advantage of the opportunities they create. The aim of lifelong learning is to provide another chance to update basic skills and provide more opportunities for higher education (European Commission, 2010). As noted in the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020), “learning from each other is an inspiring experience. The exchange of ideas, the exploration of mutual learning opportunities and the sharing of good practice are key to innovation in education (p. 2). According to M. Teresevičienė (2001), the very term “lifelong learning” draws attention to the time dimension - to learning periodically or continuously.

At the same time, it is critical to pay attention to the diversity of learning activities, the fact that learning is an activity and roles that can be exchanged at different times and places, that learning can and does take place in the family, leisure, community life and daily work. In addition to the definition *lifelong learning*, there is an increasing use of the new term *lifewide learning*, which is more focused on the dissemination of learning - lifelong learning in all areas. The comprehensive term may be analyzed from the perspective of the individual, arguing that learning can be purposeful, thoughtful, and guided externally (workplace requirements) or as a result of self-management (for career, for fun). Learning can also be incidental, ill-considered and then planned, but not the main goal (due to social need), and it can take place without any planning at all, for example due to an accidental event or a life experience related to a person's life routine. living, aging and learning from their experiences. According to researchers (Teresevičienė, 2001; Pires, 2009; Laal, 2012; Žemaitaitytė, 2017.), incidental learning can become a goal or lead to goal-based learning. Targeted learning, as a matter of fact, will always possess elements of incidental learning.

Thus, in summary, it can be stated that lifelong learning includes the opportunities for learning provided by institutions, organizations and society, as well as the development of the individual, the individual's efforts to improve one's knowledge, abilities and competencies.

### **So, what are the reasons that are in the way of a more active involvement of Lithuanian adults in lifelong learning?**

Lithuania has made significant progress in the area of learning accessibility. Legal documents regulating the development of lifelong learning in Lithuania have been adopted, such as the Law on Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education (2014), which define legal guarantees for a person to exercise his / her innate right to lifelong learning; to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for professional activity, to discover new meanings of life and to create meaningful leisure time; to promote active membership of a democratic society. In 2014-2020 The National Progress Program highlights the need to pay more attention to the quality assurance system of non-formal education for working and socially excluded older people, linking funds to the needs of the learner. Lithuania in its 2030- strategic country growth document sets the goal to create an effective lifelong learning system that would effectively apply information communication and the possibilities of implementation of new technologies. However, according to the Department of Statistics, in 2020 the share of the adult learning population in Lithuania was 7.0%. At that time, the overall European Union average was 11.3%. According to this indicator, Lithuania ranks 23rd among 35 countries. The state education

strategy for 2013–2022 set a goal until the year 2022 to increase the share of adult learners to 12%. And, though, since 2014 in Lithuania, the growth of the indicator is recorded (it increased by 1.9 percentage points by 2019), the participation of adults in learning activities is still considered insufficient (Strata, 2020). So, what are the reasons for such a small percentage of Lithuanian adults participating in lifelong learning?

The question arises in numerous discussions, perhaps, the matter is that the data is incorrectly collected in Lithuania, and that the number of persons participating in education is not calculated in this system? Nevertheless, the research reveals the current situation of adult participation in lifelong learning in Lithuania.

Studies conducted ever since Lithuanian accession to the European Union have highlighted the main reasons for adult participation in lifelong learning: the lack of financial opportunities, of information and motivation to learn: "The state of non-formal adult education and the attitudes of the population and employers towards non-formal adult education" (Tamosiunas et al. , 2005), "The State of Adult Education Organization in Municipalities" (2006), "Applied Adult Education Survey" (2011), "Analysis of Non-Formal Adult Learning Concepts in the Context of Lifelong Learning" (Linkaityte et al., 2011). What the analysis has revealed is that the focus on adult education is often declarative in nature, with both state and sub-municipal documenting it as important, but with a more 'paper' focus that is not supported by real action. As a result, there has been no success in increasing the number of people participating in adult education. Unfortunately, the research carried out in recent years, although revealing a somewhat positive development, still leaves the main problematic issues unchanged.

In order to attract public attention of and to increase accessibility to adult education in the provinces and in the implementation of lifelong learning, in 2014 a new Law on Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education of the Republic of Lithuania was adopted (TAR 2014-07-22, No. 10429), whose article 8, part 2 instructed municipalities to draw up an action plan for non-formal and informal adult learning and to appoint coordinators for its implementation. A few years after the law was passed, a new study was conducted interviewing non-formal adult education coordinators in municipalities. Coordinators participated in the research as the individuals who are best informed of the situation of adult education in the regions and who implement the functions defined by law for municipalities: coordinate, plan and implement non-formal adult education and continuing education.

In 2018, the study "Review of the State of Non-formal Adult Education in Municipalities" (Steponavičius, 2018) highlighted that municipalities unfortunately continue to disregard non-formal adult education as important area. Only 10 percent of responders, municipal coordinators indicated that

non-formal and informal adult learning for was the main function of their work, 20 per cent of responders indicated that they had funding for these activities. The findings of the study revealed that in the event of the creation of a separate coordinator post and the allocation of funding, the coordinator has the opportunity to perform the functions assigned to him / her more thoroughly, especially in the areas of adult education planning and organization. This is definitely related to the aspect of activating adult education in the municipality. In order to collect more data of the experience of municipal coordinators and the situation and development perspectives of adult non-formal learning in municipalities, in 2020 a qualitative study “Implementation of Non-formal Adult Education in the Regions of the Country” was conducted (Petrauskiene & Zemaitaityte, 2020). The study revealed that the implementation of lifelong learning in the regions is difficult when the concept of implementation of non-formal adult education is not clear, when identifying educational needs is problematic and when seeking mass participation in non-formal adult education programs, ignoring the needs and context of implementation. The availability of non-formal adult education for different population groups in the regions varies, depending on the political decisions of the country, city and local municipalities regarding the financing and implementation of non-formal adult education programs. In some municipalities, funding for planned non-formal adult education activities is not provided, and the implementation of adult education is rather chaotic, fragmented and momentary, often with EU-funded non-formal adult education projects dropped by ministries. The study highlighted the relevance of training program quality assessment, but as noted by the study participants, in reality such survey is problematic to implement, especially in cases where the training program is implemented without funding guarantees or by mobilizing minimal funding resources through voluntary community efforts.

Strata agency study of 2020 on adult lifelong learning “Lifelong learning. Habits, attractiveness, barriers, perceptions of benefits” (Strata, 2020) revealed that more than half of all respondents (58%) had learning experience in the last three years, 42% of all respondents indicated that they had not studied in the last three years. The study involved 2,050 respondents (Strata, 2020). Analysis of the study data revealed differences in learning experiences by age groups- the youngest (15–19 years old) respondents with learning experience in the last three years were six times more (86%) than the oldest (70 years and older group) which was 13%. As early as in the age group of 30-49 years old’s, the share of learners has been declining, and since the age of 50 there has been a significant decrease in the number of learners. The fact that adults with higher education participate more actively in education (Tamosiunas et al, 2005; Zemaitaityte, 2017; Hubackova & Semradova, 2014; Pires, 2018) is also confirmed by this Strata study - 72% of respondents with higher education have been involved in studies in the last 3 years. The majority of respondents were satisfied with their

learning experience and rated it positively: three quarters of those who rated the learning experience described it as very positive or positive, only 4% as negative. It is important to note that middle-aged respondents (30–49 years old) rated learning experiences better than younger ones (81% and 71%, respectively) which would show a positive experience of adult education participants. An analysis of the barriers that prevented adults from participating in learning (interviewing non-learners over a three-year period) revealed that one of the main barriers is adults' perceptions that it is too late to learn. It was particularly salient in the older (60-year-old) group of respondents. A quarter (23%) of respondents indicated financial barriers - too expensive, difficult to pay for learning. One-fifth of respondents cited personal or professional commitments as an obstacle.

In order to encourage more active involvement of adults in lifelong learning, it is important to understand how adults perceive the purposefulness and usefulness of learning. A study by Strata (Strata, 2020) found that learners were more likely to report personal change, personal development, good time, communication, and less likely to report positive changes in the professional field, especially in relation to better careers or pay increases. Those who were not involved in learning primarily associated their learning expectations with changes in the professional field, they would be motivated to study for the opportunity to receive a higher salary or a new position.

Although, as mentioned above, statistics show that a relatively small number (7%) of adults in Lithuania still participate in lifelong learning, it is necessary to be proud that, as the Strata study (Strata, 2020) showed, a positive attitude towards adult learning dominates in Lithuanian society. 67 per cent of all respondents accept the importance of adult learning, fewer respondents (60%) enjoy the learning process and enjoy learning.

## **Conclusions**

Adult education is one of the most important aspects of lifelong learning, which is actively pursued by various non-governmental organizations and educational institutions defending the interests of adult education. It is noticeable that there are a number of organizations and educational institutions providing lifelong learning services, but the average index of lifelong learning in Lithuania still remains low and not steady. This situation is influenced by the economic, social and political circumstances in the country. Summarizing the research review, it can be stated that although the main challenges hindering the growth of the number of adults participating in lifelong learning in Lithuania are financial barriers and the belief that learning is too late, and learning motivation is low, yet, positive attitudes of Lithuanian adults towards lifelong learning,

provide general expectation of increasing motivation for adult learning and more active involvement of adults in lifelong learning.

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