

A GOOD ADULT EDUCATOR AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY

Ilze Ivanova

University of Latvia, Latvia

E-mail: ilze.ivanova@lu.lv

Abstract

Lifelong Learning is not a new concept in education and in the development of personality. It has been an issue in theoretical sources, business affairs, in everyday life and on the level of politicians for many years. Nowadays Lifelong Learning in the rapidly changing world has become like an “umbrella” embracing all kinds of education leading to a certain system of education. Adult education is an important part of this system. It is never neutral. Educators provide and organize education, encourage learners, promote change based on the social, political and cultural situation and priorities in the society and country, whilst also acting in the global world. Adult educators take responsibility for being open to and responsible for personal development and social intervention. Engaging in adult education means interaction, which should be based on the democratic values and principles. The article characterizes the adult educator as a teacher, a guide, a facilitator, a trainer from the theoretical point of view and gives the real analysis, based on documents, questionnaires, discussions in the case of Latvia, leading to the point that it is a very essential issue in the policy of Lifelong Learning in the country.

Key words: *lifelong learning, adult learners, adult educators, global adult educator.*

Introduction

In today's changing world every day brings in something new in economy, social life, in the use of modern technologies. In return it requires new skills, knowledge, attitudes, a new way of thinking and doing. Those people who want to succeed in the rapidly changing world are ready to learn for life and throughout their lives. There are different ways of doing it, it depends on the learner itself and on different factors such as historical background, political and economical situation in the country as well as on the openness of the society itself to accept new trends, new ideas, to be active participants of the changes in the working place and in the country. The teacher as a professional and as a personality has a significant place in all these processes.

Lifelong Learning on the Agenda of the European Commission

The concept of Lifelong learning is not a new one. The first Global Conference on Lifelong Learning was held in Rome in 1994. This event uniting almost 500 people from 50 countries produced a lot of ideas for the development of education. The Conference outcome was an “Action Agenda

for Lifelong Learning for 21st Century”. It was a document containing plenty of recommendations (Longworth & Davis, 1996).

The year of 1996 was announced as the “European year of Lifelong Learning” by the European Commission. It gave a step forward in the development of Lifelong learning in many countries including Latvia.

The Lisbon Declaration (2000) put forward concrete objectives for the future of the European Union to make it the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Lifelong learning was foreseen to be the basis for the implementation of these purposes.

As the adult population is the main working force speeding up the economic growth and the creator of the GDP then special attention has to be paid to the renovation of adult’s knowledge and development of skills corresponding to the changes in economy, science, modern technologies and society.

European Union has developed also a wide range of documents that widen and deepen the concept of Lifelong learning as well as promote the development of learning. It is worth noting such documents as “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” (2000), the programme “Education and Training 2010” (2004), the Communication “Adult learning: it is never too late to learn” (2006). At the same time concrete action plans have been launched that are expected to help in reaching the set aims (“Adult learning action plan: it is always a good time to learn”, 2007). The importance of adult learning is stressed also in the resolution of the European Parliament (2008) and the EU Council conclusions on adult learning (2008).

Legal Basis of Lifelong Learning in Latvia

The basic guidelines of Latvian lifelong learning are developed on the basis of the following strategic documents:

- Latvian long-term economical strategy (approved in meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on 17 July, 2001, protocol Nr.: 34);
- National development plan for the years 2007-2013 (2006);
- National strategic document for the years 2007-2013
- Long-term conceptual document “Latvian Growth Model: Human in the First Place” (confirmed in the meeting of Saeima on 26 October, 2006);
- “State cultural politics guidelines for the years 2006-2015. National state.” (confirmed by the Decree of RL Cabinet of Ministers No 264 of 18 April, 2006);
- Latvian National Lisbon Programme for the years 2005-2008, the basic guideline project “Basic guidelines of educational development for the years 2007-2013” (confirmed by the Decree of RL Cabinet of Ministers No 742 of 17 September, 2006)

Perspectives of the Development of Lifelong Learning in Latvia

Lifelong learning policy is based on the idea that the individual’s personal growth shall be promoted, as well as the self-development in every stage of life, all life spheres during the whole life, thus creating preconditions for the development of inhabitants’ initiative, adaptation abilities and reaching the social integration, employment, active civil participation.

The following vision of the development of lifelong learning: (the desirable situation in 2013) is put forward:

- People recognise education as the main resource of their welfare, and where they have possibilities to learn in every life situation in all spheres from childhood till old age days regardless of what previous education they have acquired, as well as of their age, place of living, experience, social status, gender;
- People possess confidence, initiative, knowledge, creative approach to things and skills, so that they can take part in economical, social and civil life;

- Education throughout the whole life results in the attitudes of people and a coordinated, favourable social environment is being created;
- Knowledge, skills and abilities of people are created and developed in order to increase work efficiency and ensure the socially economical development of the state, basing on a highly qualified workforce;
- People have free access to information, consultations, education and support, so that they can make effective decisions in respect to the changes and feel safe among them;
- New learning approaches under the influence of ICT will continue to be created, their frameworks will expand, the contents will become deeper, the accessibility and organization will improve.

Analyzing all the above mentioned documents one may see that the concepts of “learning” and “learner” go through like a thread, but little is said about the role of the educator. Learning, supporting and teaching are processes that are closely linked, but they do not find the adequate reflection. In the documents of the European Commission a certain attention is paid to the development of the staff, its quality, but not to the professionalism of the adult educator as such.

The Necessity for Global Adult Educator

Learning today is of utmost importance also due to different global factors such as:

- a rapid change in the social structure, joining the international labour market and organizations;
- a rapid change in the environment and in the application of new technologies and new organizational forms in the social life;
- disappearance of old professions and the emergence of new ones;
- changes in the structures of firms, companies, enterprises;
- rapid decrease of unqualified work against the application of modern technologies.

All the above mentioned factors raise the necessity for the development of new programmes, courses. It widens the educational market, the appearance of different ways of learning. It means there is a necessity for a global adult educator who is able to promote democratic processes, manage controversial issues, work in a multicultural environment, apply the subject knowledge, understand international labour market, changes in the workforce, good in the application of new technologies and new organizational forms in the social life, able to speak in three or four foreign languages, think globally, act locally (Steiner, 1996).

A Man in the Lifelong Learning Process in Latvia

The European Union considers a human as the most important value whose well-rounded education in most cases enhances prosperity and development of the whole Europe. It is pursued to invest as much as possible in the development of human resources, to form a favourable, qualitative and efficient educational system in the member states, which would be accessible to all EU citizens and provided through all their life. Therefore, alongside with formal education, an important role is assigned to non-formal learning as the basic element of a new adult learning system (A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000).

It is necessary to find out how it is being implemented in Latvia, how the adults themselves perceive the concept of learning, the necessity of learning, what their expectations for learning are. The other questions raised are - What skills adults want to get, how ready they are for learning, how they estimate the quality of the courses. What is the role of the adult educator in the learning processes? To give answers to all these questions the author used the research results from the study “Accessibility of Lifelong learning and possibilities of getting education in Latvia” (2006). It is the widest research in Lifelong learning carried out by the Institute of Baltic Social Sciences.

More than 4000 adults aged 15 – 75 from different regions participated in this research. The questionnairng was used as a research tool. The results were widely discussed on different

political and social levels. At the same time it is necessary to mention that there was only one question about the adult educator, namely, were the participants satisfied with the adult educator, but nothing about its role in the learning process, in managing of knowledge.

From this research we got the answers how active people are in the learning, whether they are motivated to learn, what stimuli for learning are.

31% of adults consider that it is necessary to learn to improve their professionalism, 23% had learned during last 3 years because of personal interests, more than a half of the respondents had used self-studies. It means that informal learning is also of great importance. The percentage differs in age groups. The highest percent (about 40%) of adults in the age group 35 – 54 considered they learned to raise their qualification to be more useful in their profession, in working place.

Of those who learned to improve their professionalism 57% had attended short courses, 43% longer (several days) courses.

As regards the content people have studied in different courses, like, language, ICT, auto drivers, social care workers, accountant and agricultural. The greatest amount of adults have attended courses connected with education, state management, defence, health and social care, assurance, financial matters, property. Fewer adults have shown interest about courses in building, agriculture, forestry.

People with higher education (42%) constitute the majority of the course participants, while 13% of attendees have professional education.

20% of adults mentioned that they had acquired skills connected with the work in the field of education, research, 16% - ICT skills, 15% - skills necessary for changes in Law Regulation. Many adults had pointed out that they had acquired skills in the field of health and social care, marketing, trading, ergonomics, taxes, project management, foreign languages.

Most of the courses took place in Riga and bigger cities, a small amount in villages, but the adults, in their turn, would like to learn in the nearest town, village or in the workplace.

31% of respondents want to learn during the working day, 25% in the evenings, 15% on Sundays and Saturdays, 2 % during vocations, about 20% point out that it is not so important. The majority (65%) of adults want to attend longer courses, 21% shorter courses for a smaller price.

Not all people are motivated to learn, the highest percentage (75%) showed up in Riga, but in the countryside this percentage was quite low. The motivation is very low at the age of 60-75. They do not see the necessity and in many cases it is not accessible for them. They take more part in the interest education such as handicraft, folk singing, interest groups for retired people. One of the reasons why the motivation in the countryside and smaller towns is low lies in the factor that the employers do not pay attention to education; the experience is considered valuable and only then comes education. Nevertheless 32% of adults say that they felt a more positive attitude towards him/her after the courses. 95% of adults were satisfied with the content and the work of adult educator, as well as with the study environment.

36% of respondents plan to learn in future, 53% - do not plan, 11% - do not know.

The wide range of data proves that learning is going on and it means that teaching, corresponding to adults' peculiarities is developing. The data and the tendencies of the development of Lifelong Learning prove the necessity for a new profession – the adult educator who is able to create new exciting courses, programmes, is ready to be very flexible to work in different places, time, to meet people, to learn from them. They themselves have to be creative, developed and mature personalities to give adults the possibilities to acquire such a wide range of skills.

A Good Adult Educator

Interesting and useful materials were created during Socrates Gruntvig project “A good adult educator in Europe – curriculum development project AGADE” No. 114092 –CP- 2004-EE-Gruntvig-G11 where 4 roles (teacher, guide, facilitator, trainer) of the adult educator are described, as well as the adult teacher's personal development – ethical dimension- is being characterized(2006).

In the Lifelong learning context the characteristics of the adult teacher's professional areas for the development that are based on the project ”Learning 4 sharing” within the Nordic Council of Ministers Working Programme for Co-operation with Areas Adjacent to the Nordic Region admin-

istered by the Nordick Folk Academy (2003) also seem valuable. At the same time it is necessary to mention that there is no “uniformity” in the terminology – adult educator or adult teacher. In many European countries the concept andragogue is used as well. It is important to come to one concept if the professional standards are being prepared for the adult educator who should be able to act in the Lifelong learning processes.

A Good Adult Educator from the Point of Last Year Students

The author herself asked undergraduate students (207) during the course of Andragogy to write an essay “A good adult educator” using the ideas of Brookfield (1990), Jarvis (2000, 2003), Knowles (1980, 1988), Lonstrup (1995, 2003).

37% of all students pointed out that a good adult educator had profound knowledge in psychology, andragogy and pedagogy; they have forgotten that the adult educator has to be good also in teaching and learning methods and the curriculum development.

Using M. Knowles (1980) theory about the change of the stereotype of the adult educator, 40% of the students have pointed out that the adult educator had to support, to help, to create possibilities, to form a favourable environment and relations, to respect and encourage learners, to involve in learning, to participate together.

10% of the students had used the ideas that the educator gives learners the possibility to use him/her as a lecturer, adviser, promoter and an experienced man.

Students had been fond of B. Lonstrup’s (1995) ideas characterising a good adult educator as a psychologist and mediator, a former of the dialogue with the adults (70 %).

Students had very widely characterized the necessary skills for the adult educator, such as being communicative, organizational, speaking skills, critical thinking, adopting to the changing world, using modern technologies and foreign languages, creating new ideas, carrying out research. Characterizing the personal features 60% of students had pointed out the responsibility as the most essential feature, 20% - flexibility and empathy, 15% honesty and trust and only 5% tolerance.

Summing up and adding the author’s view it is possible to draw the conclusion that a good adult educator has many roles such as:

- a curriculum developer who has the knowledge of the real situation in the labour market, the working force development, the psychological character of the adults, the professional standards, the needs of the adults, the needs of the state, the methodology of adults and has the responsibility for the development of the society;
- an expert, promoting self – directed learning process, the development of thinking skills, critical thinking, selecting & summarizing of the information, the development of curiosity of the participants, the connecting of the theory and practise;
- a guide who acquaints adults with new ideas, possibilities, challenges in the further development, promotes the inner motivation for the learning, directs to the concentration to the learning process, promotes the development of individual responsibility for the learning results;
- an adviser, supporter and facilitator helping to choose the corresponding technologies for learning, form relations in the group, to “find the place and the role” in the study group, to avoid any discrimination in the learning group;
- a coach promoting the development of the personality, promoting self development process, influencing the development of the individuality;
- an actor, being attractive as a personality, good speaker, able to reach the aim of the learning and teaching, good organizer, to be in the centre of the teaching & learning (Lonstrup, 1993)
- a psychologist able to understand different target groups, able to plan the activities for different adults, able to perceive different ethnic groups, people, views;
- a study material developer, who needs to know the target group, use different materials, use different technologies, be able to work in the team.

Adult educator has to become a profession having knowledge -

- in psychology, andragogy, pedagogy,
- about the methods of teaching and learning of adults,
- the curriculum development ,
- about the target group,
- the management of the teaching and learning,
- the ways of assessment,
- in the use of modern technologies,
- the work in a multicultural society,
- the inclusive education,
- innovation in teaching and learning.

The concept a “Good adult educator” comprises also skills and competences.

The essay allowed also to make the conclusion that every teacher graduating from University or any other teacher education institution has to have knowledge how to work with adults because in everyday life they work with parents, work in educational establishments that serve as centres for culture and education, especially in the countryside. The analysis of study programmes proved that only in three educational establishments in Latvia the adult education or andragogy course is being offered to students.

Conclusion

As the learning has become the key word for Lifelong learning it requires viewing the teaching where the main actor is adult educator as well. If the adult educator is not able to fulfil its roles then the learning will lose its attractiveness, effectiveness and it will not serve as a tool for the development of knowledge based society and the society will not be able to be the most competitive in the labour market.

Education has its dual character. It looks back for good experiences, for ethical cultural values, decides about forms and methods how to pass this experience to the younger generation. Education looks forward, it has to do it very quickly because of the rapid changes in the society, science and technologies. Education has to become sustainable for the development of the society. All these processes put a great responsibility on the adult educator.

If the adult educator is a profession, then it has concrete tasks and responsibilities in all the processes of education because Lifelong learning requires a system of education from the cradle to the grave. This very short research makes us think about the uniformity in terminology (adult teacher, andragogue, teacher, adult educator) and the development of the professional standard for the global adult educator and adult educator as such.

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*Advised by Dainuvite Bluma,
University of Latvia, Latvia*

Ilze Ivanova

Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia.
Phone: +371 67034039
E-mail: ilze.ivanova@lu.lv
Website: <http://www.lu.lv>