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OLIVEIRA, Albertina

Coimbra University,
Portugal

PINTO, Teresa

Byweb Formação e Informática,
Portugal***Portuguese experts' perspectives about key-competencies for adult educators and the role of the universities in providing quality education and training for those professionals.*****Introduction**

The Lisbon Agenda aims to make the European Union a leading economy in the world, based on information and knowledge. This golden-goal will only be possible if education and training are considered as basic principles and are used as a factor of economic growth, research and innovation, competitiveness, sustainable employment, social inclusion and active citizenship. In the same way, the Communication from the European Commission "*Adult learning. It is never too late to learn*" (2006) acknowledges that the adult learning increases social returns in terms of improved civic participation, better health, and greater individual well-being and fulfilment.

However, according to some preliminary results of *Eurostat Adult Education Survey* (2009), more than half of the population does not participate in any kind of formal or non-formal learning activity. Furthermore, the proportion of people neither attending nor wishing to attend education is frighteningly high (48%) and in a large number of EU member states the attendance rate is lower than 30%. So, after more than a decade of collective efforts in several grounds (political, academic, economic, social and others), the quest for "*Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*" is far from being reached.

This being so, the adult participation in lifelong learning needs to become the main challenge in many European countries, and several unavoidable discussions are focused on the role adult learning professionals and teachers can play on adult education. Undoubtedly, there is a need to better prepare those professionals for the many challenges that our complex and uncertain societies, called risk society (Beck, 1992), place in every citizen, as well as for the increasing worth of the paradigm of lifelong education and learning (Oliveira, 2005). An important step for that matter is to clarify and achieve a large consensus about what the key competences are for those working in adult learning. That's why, by acknowledging that there is a need for research on this issue, an investigation has been carried out based upon the consultation of Portuguese academic adult education and experienced field experts, focused on the following key-questions:

1. What are the key-competencies, knowledge and fundamental attitudes that adult educators need to develop so that they could perform effectively their different roles and tasks?
2. What would be the role of universities in providing quality education and training for adult educators and trainers?

Since it is recognized that "the professional development of people working in adult learning is a vital determinant of the quality of adult learning" (RvB, 2008, p.10) and given the challenges posed by European Commission, which drives Member States to ensure that teaching staff perform with quality and meet the needs of adult learners (European Commission, 2006), with this paper, which is part of an ongoing study, we intend to provide



a modest contribution to establish a framework of knowledge, regarding the key-competencies of adult educators in Portugal. Furthermore, it is also our intention to provide a first input on the "development of a reference framework for competence profiles at the European level" (RvB, 2008, p.165) as it's recommend by the ALPINE Study.

Methodology

The Delphi methodology was used to carry out the study. It is an inquiry tool particularly helpful when we intend to reach valid and consensual opinions about topics where we do not have certain knowledge, from a restricted group of participants, recognized as experts in the forementioned issues (Borg & Gall, 1983). Additionally, the Delphi methodology allows to attain results that truly reflect what the involved people think (given that it is anonymous), is able to get controlled feedback (reducing the possibility of irrelevant or repetitive contributions), and makes the descriptive statistical treatment of the answers possible (supplying to each participant a relative index of their position compared to those of the group), creating the opportunity of each member to rethink their opinion (Guglielmino, 1977). In order to generate ideas and achieve consensus, usually it is needed a process with three discussion rounds.

Selection of Delphi panel

The panel was made up by Portuguese academic and experienced field experts, undertaking different professional activities and holding different responsibilities in a given field of adult education. Although with a diverse profile (e.g. in terms of age, academic background and experience), all invited participants are recognized as experts and have committed themselves voluntarily to the goals of this study. Thus, the Delphi panel has integrated 14 experts with different perspectives and experience in Adult Education: scholars, experts in programme planning and management, experienced trainers, and professionals of recognition and validation of prior learning. They also represent different Portuguese regions (North, Centre as South).

Procedure

Technical implementation of the Delphi procedure, besides the constitution of the panel of experts, requires making up questionnaire, from the contributions of all panel members. Afterwards, it is sent to all participants in the discussion, for classification of the several items, and for eventual introduction of new items or exclusion of some of them, in accordance with the members' views. Throughout this process, the questionnaires are revised several times, until a convergence of opinions can be reached (Guglielmino, 1977; Rowell & Kazanas, 1992).

Beginning the Delphi procedure, an e-mail has been sent, asking each member of the group to draw up a list of elements, based on their experience, knowledge and reflections, regarding the two open questions mentioned above.

Questionnaire 1

Based on the replies received, a global list was elaborated, resulting from all the different ideas that could be identified. This summed up 70 items regarding key-competences, and 44 items concerning the second question. Such a questionnaire was

then forwarded to all participants, in order for each item to be classified on a Likert type scale, ranging from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important). It is noteworthy that, in this scale, the mid-point is 3.5.

Questionnaire 2

Following the compilation of responses to the questionnaire 1, the first quartile (Q1) was calculated for each item, as well as the median (Q2) and the third quartile (Q3). Then, a second questionnaire was sent to all participants, reporting these statistics and pointing out the items in which less than 25% of the members had scored likewise. In this second questionnaire we explicitly asked the panel members to reconsider their divergent answers, in order to bring them closer to the great majority group, or to justify their opinions if they decide to keep the same scores given in questionnaire two.

Sample

The Delphi panel has incorporated 14 adult education professionals. Eight are male (57%) with an average age of 48, ranging from 26 to 68 years old. Their experience in the adult education field ranges from 3 up to 40 years (with an average of 19 years). Graphic 1 shows their individual number of years as adult education professionals. It can be seen that twelve of them have ten or more years of experience in the field.

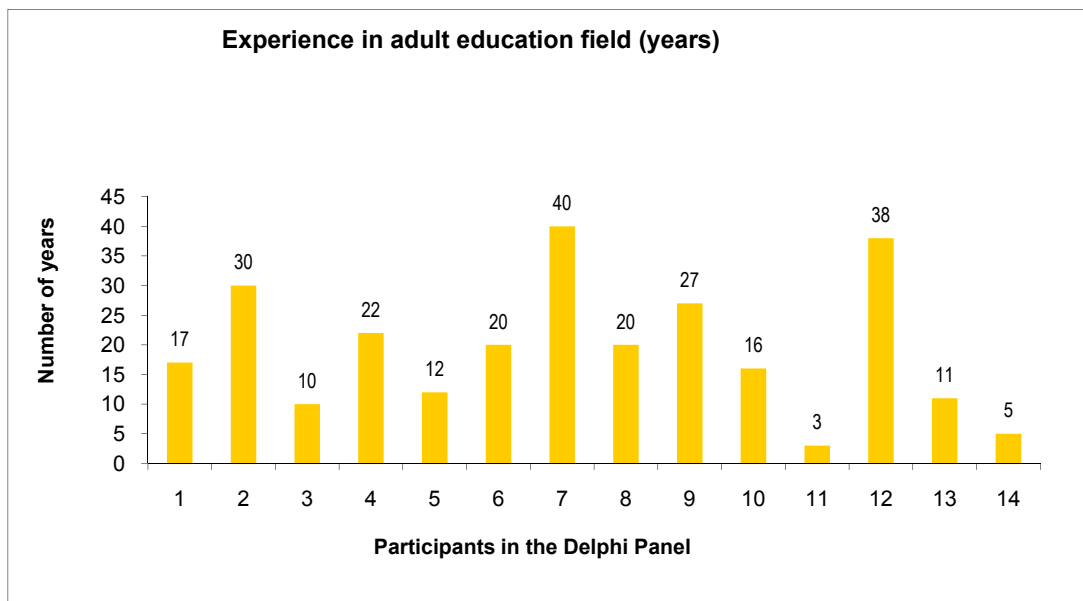


Figure 1
Years of professional experience of each participant

Although all members of the sample carry out functions in adult education, their tasks and daily activities are various and go beyond the act of teaching/training. Three of them are professionals at recognition and validation of prior learning centres and another three are university teachers and researchers. Besides one pedagogic coordinator, the panel also includes participants with management or administrative responsibilities, either at regional level (in a public employment and training centre – IEFP) or at national level (at Portuguese National Agency for Qualification).

In parallel with this diversity of professional experience, status and jobs, there is also a very sharp diversity in their academic profile. In fact, besides two lawyers, all the



remaining participants have different educational backgrounds: International Relations (1), Educational Sciences (2), Human Resource Management (1), Organizational Psychology (1), History (1), Economics (1), Primary Teaching Course (1), Psychology (1), Philosophy (1), Physics and Chemistry (1) and Sociology (1). However, regarding to their academic degree, most professionals are holders of masters or MBA (7), three have a PhD degree and the other three hold a Licentiate degree. One participant has completed a postgraduate course.

Results

Since the first quantitative analyses, which focused on the answers to the questionnaire 1, a high rating was found for the majority of the items. Indeed it could be seen, concerning the key-competences, that 83% of the values of Q1 (1st quartile) were above the mid-point of the scale (3.5), and that 55.7% of the items reached very high values of Q1 (5, 6 and 7). Considering the second question, 29.5% of the items have also obtained highly valued items. In addition, and pointing to a tendency to consensus opinions, the inter-quartile range (Q3 – Q1) of most of the items has denoted a low variability in responses. Only 25.7% of the items regarding key-competences and 29.5% concerning university roles were greater than 2. From questionnaire 1 to questionnaire 2, following the requirement to reconsider their own position on the items where scores were more distant from the central values, a substantial change toward consensus was found: 71.5% of answers have moved into convergence, whereas 28.5% of them have been maintained. In what concerns the second question, the movement registered was also in the expected direction, since 59.6% of the total possible changes went into convergence.

Tables 1 and table 2 present the items highly rated (those above the lowest value plus half of the range) in the third round, concerning the key competences of adult learning professionals (first question) and the specific roles of universities in developing quality programs for adult educators and trainers (second question). The ranked items are in decreasing order of importance. It is worth noting that in the first case, since the possible range of scores could vary between 0 and 91 and since the average point of the scale is 45.5, all items in table 1 were considered very important. Similar results were found in the second question (table 2).

Table 1. Key-competences highly rated in third round

| Key-competences of adult learning professionals/adult educators | Score |
|---|-------|
| Being assertive (e.g. being able to say no, without being hostile). | 81 |
| Being able to foster adult skills for lifelong learning. | 80 |
| To show and express an ethical conduct (to respect confidentiality and act in accordance with professional ethics). | 78 |
| To master the methods and techniques of education, training and adult learning. | 76,5 |
| Being able to carry out procedures for the recognition of acquired experience, using them as a starting point for establishing training situations. | 76 |
| Being able to develop in the adult learners an increasing capacity for critical analysis, testing it first in the learning process, but always within an educational perspective, leading to constructive proposals for improvement and not just for negative and self-destructive reactions. | 76 |
| Being able to bring about tasks and dynamics having the potential to foster self-reflection. | 75 |

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| Being able to understand and value the experience of adults. | 75 |
| Being able to use methods and techniques of conception, planning, management, organization, development, monitoring, control and evaluation of education, training and adult learning processes. | 75 |
| Being able to develop a curriculum, a methodology of work and training contents tailored to each adult, regarding their personal, social and professional background. | 75 |
| Being able to build a project around educational intentions, emerging from interests and needs of the adults, with appropriate methodologies (active, participatory and constructivist or others more traditional) and contextualized contents. | 74,5 |
| Being able to establish equality relations with the adult learner. | 74 |
| Critical reflection. | 74 |
| Being able to use various methods of work (debates, roleplaying, newspaper production, exhibition documentation, development of video, field trip, etc.). To capitalize on previous experiences, interests and strengths of participants. | 74 |
| Being able to establish active and dynamic methodologies (encouraging less active adults). | 74 |
| Being able to provide a satisfactory feedback on the performance of the group and that of each participant. | 74 |
| Being able to manage projects on adult education to encourage lifelong learning, which always requires a lot of creativity and entrepreneurship from the Educator and openness to the development of an ongoing process of reflection-action. | 73 |
| Being able to inspire confidence, motivation and encouragement. | 73 |
| Recognize that each person has its own intelligence profile, resulting from combining their various capacities: linguistic, mathematical, physical, aesthetic, emotional, etc.. and thereby showing a greater or lesser capacity of understanding or learning before the situations and problems it faces. | 73 |
| Being able to communicate effectively, both in a verbal and nonverbal way (produce oral and written discourse with versatility, use oral and written language adjusted to the adults, use body language which endorse trust, acceptance and host). | 72,5 |
| Being able to take co-responsibility and engage adults in new scenarios of learning, encouraging them to learn more. | 72,5 |
| Being able to take the role of facilitator of learning. | 72 |
| Being able to manage a group, working with tools for managing people. | 72 |
| To be able to act flexibly and impartially regarding the intrinsic differences of adults. | 72 |
| To have scientific and educational skills as well as being able to involve adults in different activities (to adapt teaching strategies, organizing spaces and lead the processes of learning). | 71,5 |
| Showing high ability of observation of non-verbal language: valuing the importance of silence, «reading» of body cues, facial expressions, etc | 71,5 |
| Being able to articulate the processes of education and training initiatives for social, cultural, civic and environmental, artistic expression, leisure and sports, socio-economic development, entrepreneurship, etc.. in which adult people feel heavily involved. | 71 |
| Learning to learn. | 71 |
| Being able to understand different cultures and values and to interact with them. | 71 |
| Being able to mobilize, guide and ensure space for discussion and reflection within the group. | 71 |
| Being able to use the knowledge coming from his own life story. | 71 |
| Being able to stimulate adults to find and make reformulations required to get a quality product. | 71 |
| Being able to play the role of facilitator, providing sharing and discovering of the adults potential, leading them to recognize in their own experience production, their implicit learning and possible interaction. | 71 |
| Mastering a set of cross-sectional skills, such as those of citizenship, problem solving, taking initiative and cooperating with stakeholders. | 70 |



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| Mastering a diverse set of skills that can be co-substantiate a set of words forged in action, such as: listening, stimulate, engage and be empathetic, communicate, appreciate, recognize, encourage/motivate. | 70 |
| Being able to organize and stimulate debates among all participants, in a spirit of mutual listening and collective demand a greater degree of understanding. | 69 |
| Tolerate the ambiguity and the uncertainty. | 69 |
| Being able to develop a high initial knowledge about the adults groups, and to redesign work strategies to develop with them and all the exploratory work for the target group and the individual. | 69 |
| Be skilful in the use of practices that minimize relevance of participants' mistakes, creating thereafter learning opportunities, and encouraging the learner to seek solutions. | 69 |
| Being able to lead the learner to improve his personal understanding of problematic situations under analysis, trying to reach a constant balance between concrete experience and detached analysis. | 69 |
| Being able to have a critical thinking and evaluation of initial education, training and learning undertaken by adults. | 69 |

Table 2. Specific roles of universities in developing quality programs for adult educators and trainers

| Specific roles of universities in developing quality programs | Scores |
|--|--------|
| Promote scientific research in the field of education and training of adults. | 81 |
| Provide a space of reflection and discussion through workshops or seminars with experienced professionals in the field | 75 |
| The main target should be made in training of who has been active as a professional or volunteer in activities related to the promotion of cultural, educational or technical adult. | 74,5 |
| Develop curricula which address content related to adult education, focusing on sociological, cultural, economic and relational aspects | 74 |
| Offer courses in postgraduate education and training of adults. | 74 |
| Promote non-formal lifelong learning | 74 |
| Promote the study of knowledge, contexts, methods, times and places of education, training and adult learning. | 73 |
| Promote the development of projects of research-action-training. | 73 |
| In addition to face-to-face training, it is up to universities to provide an online theoretical and methodological follow-up, regarding different activities of education and training of adults, across the country. | 72 |
| Prioritize the research-action methodology, so that it could be a facilitator of compromise between stakeholders, and used as a platform of learning, reflection on action and about action and training of educators in context. | 72 |
| Promote the dissemination of new knowledge related to adult education and adult educators (organizing events, seminars, conferences, short courses, organizing magazines, information on reports, etc.) | 71 |
| Collect, analyze and compile best practices, suggesting lines of work, preparing materials with content adjusted to adult audiences, offering practical exercises, etc.. (this process of training consultancy, would be based on a b-learning approach, in which the material provided online would be operated on local units coordinated by tutors of proximity). | 70 |
| Engage with new audiences, through the promotion of forums, meetings, open weeks, etc. in order to discuss their role as Educators/trainer entities, near them. | 70 |
| Foster research processes based on observation / action / intervention, working for some activities on assemblers of a triple objective: to improve them (especially the educational intentions, methodologies, the objectives statement and realistic skills), to evaluate them, and increase knowledge in the field.. | 70 |

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| Making the «practice theory» of models and methods of Adults education undertaking the revolving door between the contexts of their applicability (practice in context) and the theory that is being produced in universities (this way could honour the Adult Education, which would not go on a easy way or even fall in enrolment or autonomy damaging of the learning subject). | 70 |
| Adapt their schedules and ways of learning. | 70 |
| Provide long duration training, leading to formal certification, but based on short units, after work organized with a small number of hours per week. | 69 |
| Give basic training to adult educators, that is, to prepare them properly bearing in mind the difference between educating adults and children | 69 |
| Conceptualizer and promoter of adult education programs. | 69 |
| Training educators to be open to modern times and to features of world organizations, rather than to the past role of training elites. | 68,5 |
| The training should primarily aim to better equip professionals for Adult Education, both methodologically and theoretically, as well as to allow the rising of a «community of practice» between students and teachers. | 68 |
| Promote face-to-face discussion forums and / or interactive, between students and former students, through which they can share relevant experiences, discuss and debate strategies to work, obstacles and difficulties of adaptation, impact and importance of lifelong learning, identifying of operational needs and promotion of strategies for action (e.g. organization of small training taking place in academic and / or real-life context, targeted to the needs uncovered in these forums ... in a technological term or for personal development and / or citizenship). | 68 |
| Reflection and official statement by the academic staff on issues, dilemmas, challenges concerning adult education and adult educators today. | 68 |
| Promote basic and advanced training (graduate and postgraduate). | 67,5 |
| Promote small workshops, fostered by working groups interested in given projects or activities for discussion and / or presentations of new work practices. | 67,5 |

Discussion

Regarding the key-competences of adult educators and trainers, the ideas generated and highly valued, translated in the 41 items listed above, point to complex and high level abilities and skills. Some of them have an air of being specific, others cross-sectional and still others personal. Relating to the latter, the psychological and emotional maturity appears to be seen as fundamental to perform a good educational job with adults. Summarizing the ideas in table 1, the following categories of competencies seem to be imperative in the adult educators' training: (1) Ethical behaviour (showing respect for the dignity of all adults and fostering an open attitude to different cultures and values); (2) Establishing positive interpersonal relationships (ability to be assertive and to communicate verbally and non-verbally bringing about a climate of confidence and acceptance, conducive to learning); (3) To be able to call up adults to learn (inspiring, motivating, encouraging, giving adequate feedback); (4) To be able to promote and strengthen adults' ability to learn (lifelong learning, learning how to learn, learning autonomy); (5) Technical competencies: mastering process design, planning, implementing and evaluating training/educational programmes for adults; mastering several methods and techniques of adult education, with emphasis on methods oriented to increase action, collaboration and participation; (6) Skills in adapting the training processes to individual characteristics, interests and needs (personalizing education and training); (7) Ability for giving relevance to adults' experience and for recognizing and validating prior learning; 8) Competencies in advanced cognitive abilities, such as self-reflection, critical thinking and reflection in action.

Concerning the specific roles of universities in developing quality programs for adult educators and trainers (table 2), the proposals focus around the main goals of the universities – the pioneer's action in the field research, training and intervention. As to research, the suggestions pointed out to scientific studies and projects that should focus on practices and activities in context, in order to get improvements through processes in which observation, reflection and intervention are privileged. Related to this aspect, promoting the integration of theory and practice is seen as an important role of the universities. Regarding training, several suggestions have been made, stressing the provision of undergraduate training for adult educators and the need to diversify postgraduate courses, organizing them in more accessible formats for the adult population. Contributing to methodological and theoretical training of adult education professionals, through brief courses, non-formal education, etc. in a lifelong learning perspective, is regarded as another great added value in universities training offering. Promoting reflections and discussions with experienced professionals in the area and other publics, through different means (workshops, seminars, forums, open weeks, etc.) is also highly appreciated. Offering training-consultation services, departing from the systematization of best practices, accompanying at distance (from theoretical and methodological point of view) different education-training activities in the country, as well as preparing materials and suggesting work clues are considered other fundamental roles of the universities. It is worth stressing the relevance given to the universities in terms of taking official positions about problems, dilemmas and challenges facing the adult educators.

As was previously mentioned, since this study is still under way, there is the need to better integrate the proposals on the various items and to eliminate redundancy. That's the reason why the results that have been presented in this paper, although important, should be regarded as preliminary, requiring further research.

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