

CONDITION AND BARRIERS OF ADULT EDUCATION IN POLAND

The article presents data about adult education in Poland, its subject and its motives of education. The focus was put on the difficulties faced by adults seeking to complete their education. Studies show that adults have identified barriers to formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Key words: adult education, lifelong learning, formal education, informal education, non-formal education.

УМОВИ ТА ПЕРЕШКОДИ ОСВІТИ ДЛЯ ДОРΟΣЛИХ У ПОЛЬЩІ

У статті представлені дані про освіту дорослих у Польщі, предмет та мотивацію у навчанні. Основна увага приділена проблемам, з якими стикаються дорослі, які прагнуть завершити свою освіту. Дослідження показують, що дорослі визначають перешкоди для формального, неформального та позаформального навчання.

Ключові слова: освіта дорослих, безперервне навчання, формальна освіта, неформальна освіта, позаформальна освіта.

The changing needs of the European labor market in recent years and the need to modernize the European economy, caused by the range and pace of economic and social changes and the transition to a knowledge-based society, have made knowledge-building and skills-building a priority for the development of European Union countries. Continuing education has become a necessary indicator of the contemporary world, occupying an important place in the economic and social strategies of the European Union, including the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Education and Training 2020 program. Continuing education (alternatively called lifelong education, permanent or lifelong education, lifelong learning, lifelong education, further education, recurrent education) is a process of continuous improvement of the general and professional qualifications of a person, throughout his whole life [4, p. 65]. Included in the project Europe 2020 target which is related to the education above all else concerns early school leavers (reducing the drop to 10% compared to the current level of 15%) and increasing the percentage of people with higher education aged 30-34 from 31% to at least 40% (European Commission. Europe 2020). Simultaneously with the work undertaken with the Europe 2020 Strategy, specific communication plans and actions for adult education have been developed, such as *Never Too Late to Learn* (European Commission, 2006) and *There is always the right time for learning* (European Commission, 2007). These documents emphasize that it is very important in continuing education not to associate it with additional and further training. This is a much broader concept, a lifelong development strategy, lifelong learning that covers not only learning in schools but also in the workplace and through participation in social and cultural life. This postulate is linked to strong demographic pressure, which is a result of aging societies in Europe. As T. Aleksander pointed out, one of the first and undoubtedly the most important problems or challenges of modern adult education with a global reach is that it is an element of lifelong education. Lifelong education extends from cradle to grave.

Part of this education is adult education, starting from the moment of leaving the school up to late age. If you assume that in well-developed countries more and more people live to see their 100 years, it is easy to say that youth education is no more than 25 years old. The next 75 years is the time of adult education. It is accepted in the world that the concept of lifelong education means nowadays the abandonment of the traditional division of human life into the study of youth and the working age of adult life. Today, learning has not only stretched – as we know – for the whole life, but its intensity in adulthood is constantly increasing. The cause of this situation is rapidly changing life. These changes are caused by technical, technological and organizational progress and the accompanying them: production race and growing competition in all areas of life, such as industry, trade, arms industry, consumption. Adult education has thus become a stimulant of development and growing competition [7, p. 11]. In November 2012 were publicated Council's conclusions on "*Education and training in comparison to Europe's 2020 strategy - the role of education and training in economic recovery, economic growth and job creation*", where it is stated that the needs of the economy and of the labor market are changing, to which the skills and abilities of both young and adult citizens need to be constantly adjusted. Promotion of the employability of an individual should be made through both the education and training system and in the workplace. It is a shared responsibility of the public and private sectors, which is part of the context of lifelong learning. It was assumed that by 2020 the average value of the indicator defining participation of people aged 25-64 in lifelong learning would reach level of at least 15 percent, which would increase the participation of adults, especially those with low qualifications, in learning by lifetime. Achieving a set benchmark is seriously compromised.

Currently, the share of adults in education and training is 10,7 per cent, according to the Labor Force Participation Survey. In addition, only six of the Member States can display an index that exceeds the reference level. This problem is particularly affecting in particular under qualified people and the elders [4, p. 68].

Available statistics show that one out of ten adults in the European Union aged 25-64 – about 70 million people – did not complete formal secondary school education (upper secondary school). This number also includes about 20 million people who have left the education system with only basic education. The low level of education affects mainly South Europe. There are also fundamental differences between generations, young adults have a much higher level of education than older people [8, p. 2].

Continuing adults education in Poland. In Poland, adult education is designed to give adults the opportunity to complete and broaden their knowledge, acquire qualifications and skills for professional and personal purposes, adapt to changing technologies and prepare for change of job. On July 2, 2010, the Interministerial Team meeting adopted the Assumptions to *Perspectives for Lifelong Learning* document. In February 2011, the Interministerial Lifelong Learning Team, including the National Qualifications Framework, adopted and directed the aforementioned document for interdepartmental negotiations and public consultation, and was signed in September 2013 [9].

The perspective sets out the objectives and course of actions for lifelong learning in Poland by 2020. The content of the document takes into account the obligations arising from the establishment of the European lifelong learning area, including the European qualifications framework and specific for our country conditions listed in the diagnosis. This education is provided in school and out-of-school forms in adult schools,

continuing and practical education centers, further education and training centers, as well as postgraduate studies. At the same time, within the limits of training system of the unemployed and job seekers, vocational training courses are organized for example in labor offices [5].

Apart from the aforementioned forms of education, adults also undertake education through non-formal education. It involves self-learning in order to gain knowledge or improve skills. Unlike formal and non-formal education, it should be done without the teacher's involvement. This type of education is provided outside of organized forms of school and out-of-school education (not including courses, training and instructor-led lectures).

This category includes lessons provided by family members, households, neighbours, friends who do not receive financial compensation. Informal learning is less organized and may include, for example, learning related events (activities) that occur in the family, workplace and in the daily lives of each person, in the context of family and society guided education [1, p. 11].

Research conducted in Poland in 2011 shows that six out of ten adults do not participate in any form of education, even in the form of self-education, which does not require financial costs. The majority of the respondents aged 18-69 are urban dwellers (56,3%) and the remaining (43,7%) are rural residents. Approximately 63% of the respondents who did not participate in any form of education reported that they did not see the need. 42% of respondents indicated that training courses were too expensive [1, p. 95].

Chart 1.

People aged 25-64, by participation in formal, informal and non-formal education, gender and place of residence, year 2011.

Specification	Altogether in thousands.	People participating)				People not participating in any form of education
		In any form of education	In formal education	In non-formal education	In informal education	
		w %				
Altogether	22299	40,0	5,4	21,0	29,0	60,0
Males	11054	39,5	4,5	20,6	28,3	60,5
Females	11244	40,4	6,2	21,4	29,7	59,6
City	13931	45,8	6,6	25,2	33,4	54,2
Village	8367	30,4	3,3	14,0	21,8	69,6

The data does not add up because one person could participate in several forms at the same time. Source: *Kształcenie dorosłych 2011*. Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 2013, s. 16.

The subject matter of undertaken courses is interesting. It was mainly related to the job occupation - 73,0% of those involved in non-formal education decided on such educational activities (Table 2). Men more often than women chose different forms of job-related education (77,9% in comparison to 68,3% of women). The percentage of vocational completing training was also higher among urban dwellers (almost 75% of them compared to 68,4% of the rural population).

It should be noted, however, that access to training (especially related to one's own needs and interests) for people in rural areas was more difficult. Among the

educational activities that mainly eventuating from own needs and interests, both in cities and in rural areas, the initiatives undertaken in terms of personal development and foreign language learning were strongly dominating. Language courses generally require systematic work, which is less accessible to the villagers, who often have to travel to the nearest city (32,4% of those living in urban areas participating in non-formal education in comparison to 16,4% of those from rural areas).

When analyzing participation in educational activities resulting mainly from own needs and interests, in the face of the need to transform the employment structure of the rural population (outflow to the non-agricultural sector), it is important to note as positive the phenomenon rather widespread participation in training not directly related to the agricultural sector. Among the areas which these educational activities concerned and involved, where participated relatively more rural than the urban population, we can point out services for the population and the use of computers.

Table 2

People aged 18-69 studying in non-formal systems according to place of residence and sex and training areas

Educational activities	Altogether	Males	Females	City	Village
	w %				
Educational activity mainly related to work, including:	73,0	77,9	68,2	74,7	68,4
Personal development (personal skills)	4,8	4,7	5,0	5,3	3,4
Education of teachers and pedagogy	7,9	2,7	13,5	8,0	7,4
Artistic / fine arts	1,1	.	1,9	1,2	.
Foreign Languages	4,9	5,2	4,7	5,6	2,6
Humanities	0,7	.	.	.	.
Social Studies	2,3	1,9	2,8	2,4	2,0
Business and administration	13,9	7,5	20,8	14,9	10,6
Law	4,0	2,9	5,3	4,6	2,0
Informatics	4,4	5,3	3,4	4,9	2,9
Use of computers	3,7	2,7	4,8	3,6	4,0
Engineering and technical sciences	7,8	13,3	1,7	7,5	8,4
Manufacturing and processing	3,4	4,8	1,8	3,4	3,2
Architecture and construction	2,4	4,3	.	2,0	3,8
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	2,7	4,5	.	.	9,5
Medical science / health	7,9	4,2	12,0	8,5	6,3
Services for the population	3,0	2,5	3,5	2,9	.
Transportation services	4,8	8,4	.	4,0	7,2
Environmental Protection	0,6	1,0	.	.	.
Security and safety	16,8	20,9	12,2	16,2	18,3
Educational activity resulting primarily from personal needs and interests, including:	27,0	22,1	31,8	25,3	31,6
Personal development (personal skills)	24,3	23,2	25,1	21,6	30,7
Education of teachers and pedagogy	1,5	.	.	.	.
Artistic / fine arts	4,1	.	4,3	4,6	.
Foreign Languages	27,5	21,5	31,5	32,4	16,4
Business and administration	4,1	.	5,2	4,1	4,2

Mathematics and statistics	3,0	3,4	.	3,1	.
Informatics	2,2	.	.	.	.
Use of computers	5,3	5,6	5,1	5,0	5,8
Engineering and technical sciences	2,1	5,0	.	.	3,5
Architecture and construction	1,5	.	.	.	.
Medical science / health	3,2	.	3,9	3,1	.
Social care / social services	1,2	.	1,9	.	.
Services for the population	4,1	.	4,7	3,6	5,2
Transportation services	6,8	11,6	3,5	5,6	9,6
Security and safety	1,6	.	.	.	.

Source: *Kształcenie dorosłych 2011*. Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 2013, s. 42.

Difficulties in undertaking adult continuous education. Participation in adult education is dependent on a number of factors, particularly the level of education, labor market status, occupation, age and skills. Adults with low qualifications or without them, employed in professions that do not require complex skills, unemployed and economically inactive, older people and low skilled are less likely to participate in various forms of lifelong learning. It can be said that those adults who most need education and training have the least access to the opportunities offered by the concept of lifelong learning [8, p. 2].

Respondents who did not undertake any form of education pointed out the following difficulties:

- I did not meet the initial requirements,
- learning / training was/were too expensive, I could not afford to cover costs
- I did not have the support / encouragement from the employer
- learning / training collided with my work / schedule/ took place at an inconvenient time
- In the case of distance learning, I did not have access to a computer or the Internet
- I did not have time because of family responsibilities
- health or age related reasons
- other personal reasons
- no suitable school / training
- no need for (further) education / training
- none of the above [8, p. 94].

The analysis of these responses made possible to determine that adults encounter numerous barriers in learning process. These include:

- responsibility for family, career, social position,
- lack of time and lack of money,
- problems with commuting to the university,
- insufficient self-confidence in the learning group,
- compulsion to learn in the form of a command of a superior or coercion to maintain his or her current professional position in the institutional sphere.

A significant factor is the age of the respondents. The older the people, the less they participate in different forms of completion or education [6, p. 12].

An adult education survey shows that barriers that prevent adults from learning are often related to time constraints due to family or professional reasons, but also due to the inability to meet prerequisites (eg qualification required for participation in a

training program) or financial reasons. On the basis of the analysis of the barriers identified by adults with low qualifications (adults with education lower than secondary education), 21,8% of respondents listed family responsibilities as the main obstacle to learning and training, 13,6% pointed problems with the reconciliation of the duties of the listener with their working hours, 13,3% mentions financial reasons and 7,1% indicate insufficient qualifications to meet the initial requirements. The emphasis placed on the flexibility of education programs (eg distance learning, module-based learning, alternative access to adult education, or confirmation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes), and the question of the financial availability of education are issues that require greater interest in educational policy makers [8, p. 3].

Summary. The level of political recognition of adult education in individual countries is reflected in the level of organization of its policy, which, inter alia, is attributed to the existence of the political institutions supervising it, whose task is to take care of this education and pursue legislative activity beneficial to these institutions. An expression of concerns of the political and administrative institutions of a country for higher education is the level of law regulations that affects it. These regulations are relevant documents, ranging from the Constitution through various government decisions and legislative acts to medium-term development plans. High levels of regulation in the field of adult education can be seen as an expression of the level of professionalisation and formalisation (institutionalization) of adult education. In addition, it is crucial to modernize vocational education and training and to care for its quality.

In recent years, in many successful countries in the development of adult education, wise and effective management constantly evolves. In this area we can observe decentralization of the management and supervision of this education. With this evolution, adult education is better embedded in concrete social, political, economic and cultural contexts. From these contexts, it draws - at least in some part - the vitality and the tendency to democratize. With decentralization, there is a hope for support for the planning and organization of educational activities by local social, collective (local governments, social associations, work places, trade unions, parishes) and individual (local leaders). Today's stimulation of adult learning is also counteracting barriers (institutional, situational, predispositional) of learning.

This support area also includes strengthening the motivation system for learners to continue learning. Part of this strategy is to create educational programs for special groups (the unemployed, the disabled, migrants and refugees, prisoners, ethnic minorities) adapted to their educational needs, abilities and learning conditions. Authors of contemporary andragogical academic works in EU countries also point to more psychological strategies to weaken barriers and difficulties in accessing adult education [7, p. 16-17]. One of them is to indicate current and potential learners the benefits of this education in terms of improving living and working conditions.

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