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Adult Education in Latvia within the system of Lifelong Learning: issues and solutions in the context of citizenship education.

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Abstract

In the 21st century, lifelong learning has become an important social issue. It has a significant impact on the policy of human resource development and promotes the formation of the body of active, participating citizens in democratic Europe. The article is concerned with lifelong learning in adult education, which is a topical issue in the present stage of social and cultural development in Latvia, and focuses on the study of its achievements and drawbacks. Clearly, it is necessary to create a flexible system of education taking into account the needs, interests, and possibilities of personality in accordance with the changes taking place in the society and ensure well-considered cooperation between various educational institutions, employers, and the society so that lifelong learning could achieve its goals. In this respect, formal, informal, and non-formal learning are all equally important and complementary within the context of lifelong learning. The article presents a closer analysis of seven different regional and institutional level projects in lifelong learning, regulatory documents, and the data of empirical studies reflecting the achievements and drawbacks in the strategy of lifelong learning and the implementation of citizenship education in Latvia.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the actual situation in adult lifelong learning, the possibilities of its advancement, and desirable improvements in Latvia. The authors conclude that in Latvia: 1) a uniform strategy of lifelong learning reflecting all the plans and intentions of various governmental institutions has not been developed yet, one which could serve the main purpose of lifelong learning – personal satisfaction, active citizenship, social inclusion, employability, and individual's ability to adapt to changeable life situations; 2) it is necessary to ensure the accessibility of lifelong learning and the flexible and integrated supply of lifelong learning corresponding to the needs of adult learners; 3) it is necessary to improve the cooperation between state institutions and local authorities, educational institutions, employers, and the society for the implementation of the programmes of lifelong learning; 4) it is necessary to ensure the involvement of all adults in the programmes of lifelong learning, thus promoting the social and economic mobility of the population and their civic participation, which reduces the number of socially excluded people.

Keywords: *Lifelong learning, Citizenship Education, Adult Education*

In the 21st century, lifelong learning has become a socially important issue on a global scale having a considerable impact on the sustainable policy of human resource development in various countries. In the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning issued by the European Commission, it is emphasized that an individual participates in a

knowledge-based society as a personality with a coordinated feeling of awareness and the direction of life (*A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, 2001). Thus, lifelong learning serves several purposes in the development of personality: personal satisfaction, active civic position, social inclusion and employment, and adaptability.

In order for lifelong learning to reach its goals, it is necessary to set up a flexible system of adult education taking into account the educational needs, interests, and possibilities of adult learners in accordance with the changes taking place in the society and ensuring the cooperation of educational institutions, institutions governing education, employers, and the society. Adult education is known to refer to processes 'whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development' (*Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, 1976).

In *The Latvian Policy Guidelines on Lifelong Learning for 2007 – 2013*, adult education is defined as formal, non-formal, and informal learning which ensures the development of an individual, social inclusion, civic participation, and competitiveness in the labour market throughout all individual's life (*Policy Guidelines on Lifelong Learning for 2007-2013*).

Within the context of the implementation of this Latvian policy of lifelong learning, an important role is allocated to the objectives of promoting 'active citizenship' and ensuring 'civic participation'. As regards the development of citizenship, responsibility is one of the key aspects for the manifestation of citizenship. Within the context of providing lifelong learning, civic participation has become an integral part in the value orientations of adult people.

The requirement for responsibility at the level of citizenship has not been ensured in the contemporary Latvian society both at the level of individuals and social groups, as well as governmental institutions, and it still remains a question to what extent the Latvian society in general and each individual in particular is ready to demand responsibility from others and from oneself.

The ability to be aware of one's responsibility and to be able to express it through one's actions forms a link ensuring sustainability among individuals, social and political groups, thus providing for the process of lifelong learning.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the actual situation in adult lifelong learning, the possibilities for its advancement, and desirable improvements in Latvia.

1. The System of Lifelong Learning in Latvia

It is widely believed in Latvia that lifelong learning is the leading principle interwoven through the whole system of education to promote its conformity to the sustainable

development of the society and the economy. The beginnings of the system of lifelong learning in Latvia date back to 1993, when the Latvian Adult Education Association (LAEA) was established. The development of the system of lifelong learning and promoting adult education in Latvia were considered as the key directions of its activity. At the level of local governments, Adult Education Centres and the network of coordinators were set up. This can be considered as an important institutional support for the successful development of lifelong learning.

In order to ensure cooperation at the national level, there was established a trilateral cooperation council in the areas of vocational education and employment in 2000. Its purpose was to ensure cooperation between governmental institutions and the associations of employers and employees. It stimulated the development of the strategy of vocational education and human resource development and its connection with the national policy issues.

With the help of the structural funds of the European Union, various activities were carried out in Latvia aimed at the development of lifelong learning, including the development of the national strategy of lifelong learning, the purpose of which is creating uniform guidelines for the development of the principles of lifelong learning.

On 27 February 2007, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the *Policy Guidelines on Lifelong Learning for 2007 – 2013*. A new institution was set up in the Ministry of Education and Science – the Department for the Development of Lifelong Learning. It was assumed that the Academic Programme Agency would ensure the implementation of the EU mobility programme in Latvia as well as maintain necessary communication with the institutions of the European Union.

In accordance with the Education Law, the programmes in adult education were focused on individual's right to acquire such education throughout the length of their whole life regardless of previously acquired education. (*Education Law*, 1998).

Generally, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the overall development of adult education in Latvia. According to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 528 (2003), promoting the development of informal adult education is one of the tasks set for the Ministry of Education and Science (*Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 528*, 2003). Having analysed the development of adult education in Latvia, it has to be admitted that so far the development of adult education has been quite chaotic – without the purposeful and strategic national policy approach and without adequate financing.

2. The Actual Situation in Adult Lifelong Learning in Latvia

In order to clarify the actual situation in adult lifelong learning in Latvia, several studies were carried out, which revealed the key problems in adult education, including the citizenship aspects of education. The main conclusions of regional studies were not very optimistic: adult lifelong learning has not been included in the list of key priorities for sustainable and balanced development; it has been underestimated as the resource for the

spiritual, moral, cultural, social, and political integration of the society as well as its economic development (*Education for Human Future*, 2000).

The studies show quite clearly that the implementation of lifelong learning is a fragmented process which lacks appropriate coordination. Although the *Concept on the Development of Education for 2002 – 2005* was based on the principles and objectives of the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, it is not clear yet who is responsible for the implementation of the principle of lifelong learning. The term 'lifelong learning' was not used in regulatory enactments, and the strategy of lifelong learning was not developed until the year 2006.

Analysing the ideas expressed during the consultation process of the memorandum, it has to be concluded that the curricula of various educational institutions do not pay due attention to the key skills important for the European society and necessary for the labour market, including readiness to learn. Readiness to learn promotes and confirms active citizenship and is one of the criteria of a democratic society.

Educational institutions still focus on imparting knowledge not emphasizing the development of skills and the experience of relationships, including political and social ones (readiness to undertake responsibility, participate in group decision-making, readiness to live in a multicultural society, etc). Besides, educational institutions have insufficient contacts with employers, other institutions, and enterprises.

The system of education lacks a model how to work with those individuals who stop attending institutions of secondary education, have not finished them, or have a low level of knowledge. (*The Consultation Process of Memorandum on Lifelong Learning in Latvia, Final Report*, 2002). In many cases, the acquisition of basic skills outside school is only available as a fee paying education; therefore, it depends on the income level of the population and their willingness to learn (Stasane, 2007).

According to the Labour Force Survey of 2003, a half of the people surveyed in Latvia aged 15 - 74 (50.3% or 913.5 thousand) have not stopped learning – they have taken part in regular educational activities, e.g. courses/seminars or have engaged in informal learning (*Aspects of Lifelong Learning in Latvia*, 2004).

The analysis of the statistical data leads to the conclusion that participation in courses/seminars is linked with the respondents' previous level of education. The statistics show a direct correlation between the level of education and employability: the employed people and economically active people have a higher level of education than job seekers and economically inactive people. According to the statistics, in the 3rd quarter of 2006, 34.2 thousand people (3.1%) out of all the employed people in the country (1 118.8 thousand) participated in some courses/seminars. Among them, there were quite many – 27.1 thousand (79.4%) – who acquired or developed the knowledge and skills necessary for their work (*The Level of Education of the Population*).

The statistics show a trend that the number of programmes offered in adult education and the number of people involved in adult education are increasing.

Table 1: Institutions Involved in Adult Education

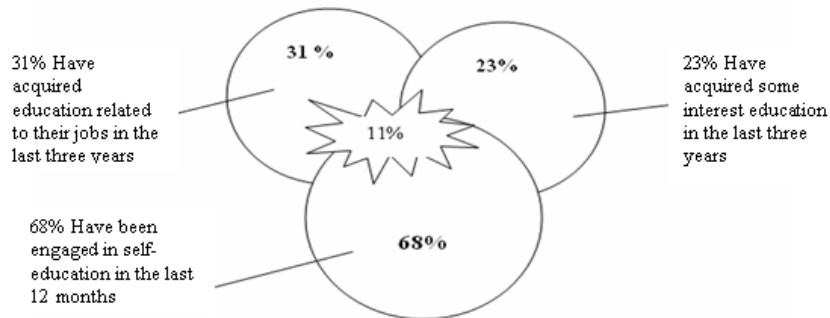
Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Offered programmes	4456	5101	5062	5134	5731	5399
Educatees	196160	204856	210741	217547	266622	268844

(Statistical Yearbook of Latvia, 2005, p 302)

According to the data of Central Statistical Bureau, in 2005/2006, there were 1595 educational programmes in Latvia offered to adults in social sciences, business, and law, 767 programmes in arts and humanities, 653 programmes in the professional development of teachers, and 619 programmes in languages (*Educational Institutions in Latvia at the Beginning of the Academic Year 2005/2006*, 2006).

However, the latest statistics show a downward trend in the acquisition of formal education. According to the data obtained in the study *The Availability of Lifelong Learning in Latvia*, the participation of the population in educational activities has decreased in the last years. Almost one in three of those questioned have pointed out that they have acquired some education in the last three years in connection with their job. Almost one respondent in four (23%) has indicated that they have acquired some interest education. Over a third has done it in the form of self-education. Only one respondent in nine (11%) aged 15 – 75 has used all these opportunities. This can be clearly seen in the following chart.

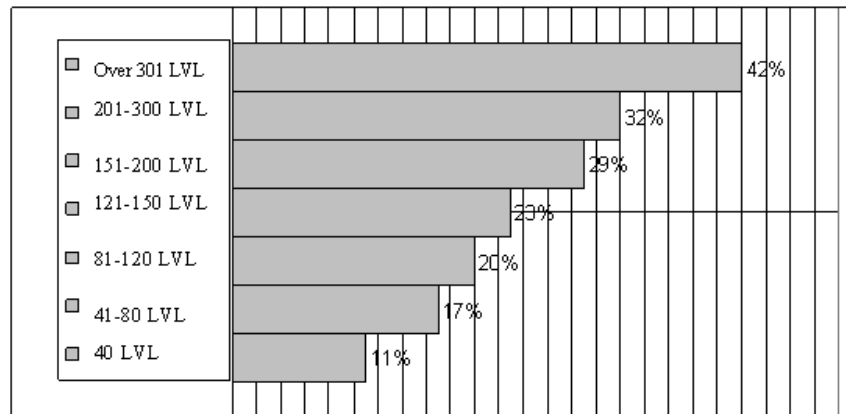
Figure 1: The Participation of the Population in Various Educational Activities in the Last Twelve Months and Three Years



(Study "The Availability of Lifelong Learning in Latvia", 2007, p 39)

The participation of the population in educational activities is closely connected with the household income per one family member per month. It is clear that the possibility to spend money on education is an important issue in Latvia. It can be seen in the following chart.

Figure 2: People who have attended long-term courses in the last three years or have been involved in distance education according to their level of income



Base: all the respondents who have given an answer, n=3282
(Study "The Availability of Lifelong Learning in Latvia", 2007, p 45)

Taking into account the fact that part of the adults have to pay for their education in Latvia, it can be concluded that the segment of the population that needs skills and knowledge most of all are not able to cover the costs of education and acquire this education due to the lack of financial resources.

Within the context of this study, it has to be noted that readiness to learn clearly promotes active citizenship, which is an indicator for the development of a democratic society. This idea was particularly emphasized in the final report of the UNESCO Commission on Education headed by J. Delors. According to the commission, the key question of democracy is, "Do we want to participate in the social life and can we do it?" (*Learning: the Treasure Within*, 2001, p. 19). Thus, each individual can decide independently in which cases, when, and why he/she can be a potential participant in learning. According to the views expressed by the respondents of the survey, the potential directions for the development of adult education in Latvia are those related to the acquisition of general skills as basic skills are necessary for personal growth and development, active citizenship, social inclusion, and employability. Serious contradictions can be observed in Latvia in this respect.

According to the *Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion* prepared by Latvia, several social groups can be identified in Latvia as subject to the risk of social exclusion. They experience difficulties or could experience difficulties in the future trying to join the labour market. Most of them are job-seekers aged 15 – 24 (young people) or those aged 55 – 64 (pre-retirement age group), as well as job seekers with a low level of basic skills and education, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed people (more than twelve months), women after child-care leave, ex-prisoners, and those suffering from addictions (*Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion*).

The high level of unemployment among people aged 15-24 (22.2%), which is considerably higher than among other age groups and also exceeds the average European level of 15.1%, indicates that support is needed for the integration of young people in the labour market. (*Aspects of Lifelong Learning in Latvia*, 2004). The 17.2% unemployment in Latvia is the indicator of the dramatic economic situation and the increasing difficulties the Latvian population face trying to engage in lifelong learning (*Ir No2*, 2010, p4).

Having summarised the policy guidelines concerning adult education and the analysis of the statistical data, it can be concluded that creating motivation for adults to engage in lifelong learning is a particularly topical issue.

In order to facilitate the possibilities of different social groups to engage in lifelong learning, it is necessary to design programmes in the form of modules for all levels of education – full-time studies, part-time studies, and distance education – and to promote cooperation between educational institutions and local governments, employers, the State Employment Agency, and various non-governmental organizations.

Conclusion

A uniform strategy of lifelong learning reflecting all the strategic plans and intentions of various governmental institutions has not been developed yet, the one which could serve the main purpose of lifelong learning – personal satisfaction, active citizenship, social inclusion, employability, and individual's ability to adapt to changeable life situations.

It is necessary to ensure the accessibility of lifelong learning and flexible and integrated supply of lifelong learning corresponding to the citizenship needs of adult learners.

It is necessary to improve the cooperation between state institutions and local governments, educational institutions, employers, and the society (non-governmental organizations) for the implementation of the programmes of lifelong learning.

It is necessary to ensure the involvement of all adults in the programmes of lifelong learning, thus promoting the social and economic mobility of the population and their civic participation, which reduces the number of socially excluded people.

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