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Adult Training In Romania - Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight some aspects of adult education in Romania, the institutions responsible for adult training and the current trends in this field, focusing on training needs and options’ analysis of adult learners.

The idea of this study came in sight as a result of our interests in this area and due to the changes that have occurred at national and European level in adults training. We deemed appropriate to use a quantitative research method for gathering the information (questionnaire-based survey). The survey included over 100 adult respondents, aged between 18 and 60 years.

More specifically this study was designed to explore the following questions:

- *What is the opinion of adults regarding training courses offer on the market?*
- *What factors affect the choice of a training course for adults?*
- *What are the ways and degree of access to information about training courses for adults?*
- *What are the main training fields covered by the training providers in Romania ?*

By conclusions and recommendations from the research conducted, we intend to shape a real picture of the trend regarding the degree of access to adults’ courses in Romania.

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Keywords: Adult education; training courses offer; training fields; training providers; degree of access to adult training.

1. Introduction

Education, being a complex activity, begins in infancy and continues throughout one's life. Ever since the seventeenth century Czech teacher Comenius Jan Amos stated: "Tota schola vita est" (all life is school).

Europe is experiencing major transformation in which knowledge and innovation are the most valued assets. [...] So much the more this need is stressed in adult and continuing education from the perspective of the stringent upskilling demand of Europe's labour force (Sava, S., Lupou R., 2009).

Adult education includes all educational processes that continue or replace initial education; this expansion of the educational offer is meant to compensate for inadequate initial education; to complete general knowledge. In a purely temporal sense, adult education includes continuous training, recurrent education, compensatory education (or "second chance"), literacy, education during leisure time ("leisure education") (Romanian Government, 2000).

2. Problem Statement

The concept of "Andragogy", explained as the science and practice of adult education was introduced in scientific circles in 1883 by Alexander Kapp, and it was developed into a theory about adult education by American educator Malcolm Knowles. In 1919, in England, the Committee for adult education launched the idea of lifelong learning, and in 1929 a paper was published with the same title. It should be noted that the idea of lifelong learning appeared, perhaps not by accident, in the adult education system.

Regardless of the terminology adopted – "general knowledge, permanent education, recurrent education, popular education, voluntary education, adult education, continuing education, accelerated professional education, adult training, adult pedagogy, adult sociopedagogy, andragogy etc." – (Jinga, I., Istrate, E., 2001, p. 163) it is generally acknowledged that adults engaged in training/learning activities have characteristics and specific needs which differentiates them from students, who are traditionally the subject of the educational process. Adult education is carried out in three distinct areas: attitudes, skills and knowledge. Each area is important in order to achieve good performance in work. A prerequisite for maintaining flexibility in profession is continuous training. In the common sense, training is considered complete when a skill is certified with a document; in fact, it is just a proof of basic skills (necessary but not sufficient) and a platform for building a complex professional route later (Jigău, 2003, p. 79).

In the last decade, adult learning took center stage in the European policies for cooperation in education and training. Thus, chief ministers of the Department for Education in all member states of the European Union agreed that by 2020 at least 15% of adults should participate in some form of education or training, due to the key contribution of adult education to competitiveness, job market and social adaptability.

At European level, three surveys provide data enabling evaluation of adult participation in education and training: Labour Force Survey of the EU (EU LFS), the Adult Education Survey (AES) and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011, p. 10). Adult participation in lifelong learning is far from reaching the agreed reference

level of 15% in most EU states; only Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and the UK have exceeded this target. The percentage varies significantly from 1.4% to 31.6% (2012). In Romania and Bulgaria adult participation in education and training lags far behind EU indicators - less than 2% of adults are involved in educational and training programs). The same can be said about Greece, Hungary, Slovakia and Turkey (where the percentage is below 4%, as it can be seen in the figure below) (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011, p. 12).

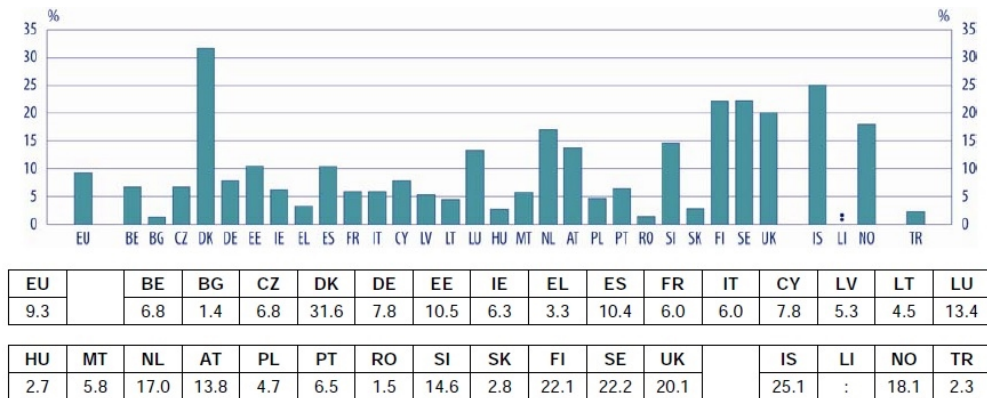


Fig.1. Adult participation in education and training programs in the four weeks preceding the survey (EU LFS), aged between 25 and 64 years old (%), 2009. Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey in the EU (data extracted in January 2011)

Validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning are necessary tools to motivate adults to engage in learning throughout life. All EU member states, including Romania, have developed or are currently developing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). More than half of EU countries have taken measures addressing the development of qualifications and quality assurance in education and training. According to the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), one of the challenges Romania is presented with is increasing the participation of adults (25-64) in lifelong learning to 10% by 2020. So far, Romania has made considerable progress in that respect, considering that in the last 6 years (2007-2013) adult participation in training programs grew only by 0.7 percent (2% currently). In the opinion of Sava (2008) the Romanian society is still experiencing ongoing reform and transformation, which is in turn affecting the whole of society as well, from the economic, cultural, social, and political point of view. The magnitude of these changes is producing many personal, social, and economic crises.

As claimed by some statistics, our country has one of the lowest rates of adult participation in lifelong learning, recording progress under the minimum standard set by the European Commission. EU Strategy 2020 sets the achievement of a 15% to adults participating in lifelong learning. Nationwide there are a series of educational programs for adults; most of these programs are financed by European funds in the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013, Priority 1: Education and training in support of growth and development of knowledge based society. With regard to educational programs conducted in Romania, the European Commission had a significant intervention through the "learning throughout life" - "Lifelong Learning Programme".

In Romania, the National Qualifications Authority, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour are the main institutions that manage the authorization, accreditation and certification of adult training. The minimum duration of the qualification programs depends on the level of qualification. The

total duration of these programs, expressed in hours of training is as follows: 80-120 hours for the first level of qualification; 360 hours for the second level of qualification; 720 hours for the third level of qualification; 1080 hours for the fourth level.

Upon completion of the training activities, adult learners receive a certificate of professional competence). Certificates are issued to persons who have completed vocational training in the following categories: Initiation programs, improvement programs, specialization programs and common skills.

Training programs for adults are offered by training providers that can come from the public or private sector. Training providers in the *public sector* are represented by the Regional Centres for Adult Training, which analyze regional training needs and propose training programs (currently operates six such centers); training centers for certain fields of activity with public funding (eg Romanian Aviation Academy, the National Cinematography Center, Training Centre for Court Clerks, the National Institute of Administration, etc.).

Private sector providers are represented by cultural associations and religious unions and organizations belonging to trade unions, NGOs, political parties (by departments and foundations of education), professional associations or employers (eg Romanian Banking Institute, the Romanian Business School of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Romania, network training for public administration in Romania).

These institutions offer specific training for specific fields of activity as well as several of courses for the general public. Some of these institutions also have a role in setting quality standards in adult training.

According to the National Qualifications Authority, in January 2015, the situation of authorized training providers (who organized courses and in which were held graduation exams) was as follows: 28 companies, 13 public institutions and 25 NGOs and associations or foundations.

3. Research Questions

We believe that adult education can bring innovative solutions to problems of individuals and society. Currently, adult education performs various functions, including: second chance to obtain a qualification; fosters personal development; increases professional competence; helps adults to solve important problems and to identify new ways to address them.

This study was designed to explore the following questions:

- What is the opinion of adults regarding training courses offer on the market?
- What factors affect the choice of a training course for adults?
- What are the ways and degree of access to information about training courses for adults?
- What are the main fields of training covered by the training providers in Romania?

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to highlight some aspects of adult education in Romania, the institutions responsible for adult training and the current trends in this field, focusing on training needs and options' analysis of adult learners. More accurate, our research aims to highlight the current situation of adult

training in Romania from the perspective of their motivation in attending courses, choosing training providers, and areas of interest.

5. Research Methods

The idea of this study came in sight as a result of our interests in this area and due to the changes that have occurred at national and European level in adults training. We deemed appropriate to use a quantitative research method for gathering the information (questionnaire-based survey). The survey included 114 adult respondents, aged between 18 and 60 years. Survey respondents are active adults in the labor market, adults who participate in professional reconversion programs and students.

Considering that training providers on the market in Romania offers, broadly, training courses that meet similar standards, this research will not refer to specific courses but rather wants to identify opinions of adults about training courses, generally speaking.

5.1. Establishing Research Objectives:

The main objectives are:

- Identifying the profile of adults interested in vocational training courses;
- Identifying the frequency of participation in vocational training courses by the people interviewed;
- Identifying the training providers preferred by adults;
- Identifying the availability to participate in vocational training courses;
- Identifying the preferences of respondents on areas in which they have completed a training course and areas where they want to work;
- Identifying the subjects opinion on training courses;
- Identifying the extent to which media coverage of training courses by the providers influence the choice of a training by respondents;
- Identifying the influence that the demands of the labour market have on choosing of a field of professional training.

5.2. Choosing of the Information Sources

Collection of information was done by survey method as a structured form of communication. All subjects have been presented to the same questionnaire applied in the online environment.

5.3. Sampling, Choosing Sampling Methods, and Sample Size

The research was conducted online between 03.06.2016 - 12.06. 2016. The instrument used was the questionnaire to which 114 people responded. The questionnaire was disseminated using online platforms in virtual environments. Subjects responded to a total of 10 questions. Completion of the questionnaire took an average of 7 minutes.

6. Findings

As mentioned previously, 114 adults responded to the questionnaire, the responses were centralized, processed and represented in graphical form, as can be seen further.

First question that opens the series of 10 questions aimed at identifying the structure of the questionnaire respondents by gender. We can see that 66.6% of respondents were female and the remaining 33.3% are male. In terms of age groups, we can see that: 25.1% of respondents aged 18-25 years, 41.8% between 25-35 years and 7.8% over 35 years.

An important aspect of the research is to identify adults 'awareness on the issues and needs regarding continuous training. In this respect, when asking the question "To what extent are you familiar with the issues and needs of continuous training?" we identified the following responses:

Table 1. Awareness on the issues and needs regarding continuous training

Criterion / level of awareness	To a very small extent	To a small extent	Somewhat	To some extent	To a great extent
Number of respondents	6	10	30	38	30

Source: data processed by the authors based on questionnaire answers

Following the answers given by respondents we computed the level of awareness, as follows: level of awareness = $(1*6+2*10+3*30+4*38+5*30)/114=3,66$

We can see that a share of 33.3% of respondents are familiar with the issues and needs regarding continuous training. There are some respondents, even if very few (5.3%) who are inadequately informed about this topic.

All respondents are willing to pay for a training course, 50.9% of whom were willing to pay between 100 and 400 lei, while 43% are willing to pay over 400 lei. We can see the availability of most respondents about attending vocational training courses.

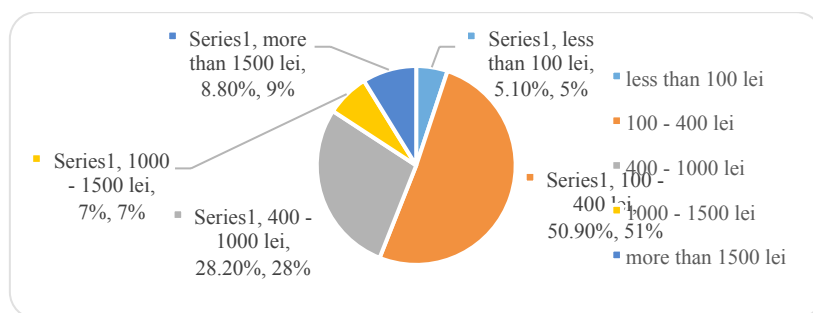


Fig. 2. Degree of availability regarding fees payment for participation in vocational training courses. Source: data processed by the authors based on questionnaire answers

An interesting answer was obtained to the question "Do you think that your professional training meets the current requirements of the labor market?". 66,7% respondents said that their professional training corresponds to some extent with the demands of the labor market. So we can say that there is a great need for continuous training, especially if we take into account the dynamics of competencies required in the labor market.

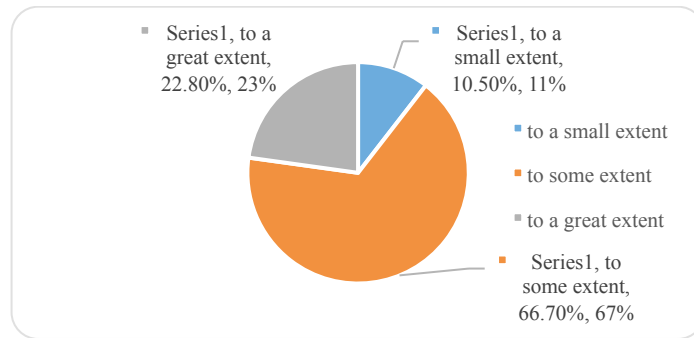


Fig. 3. Harmonization of professional training with the demands of the labor market. Source: data processed by the authors based on questionnaire answers

The question regarding the number of vocational training courses attended highlighted the fact that most respondents had participated in at least one training course, as can be seen in the graph below:

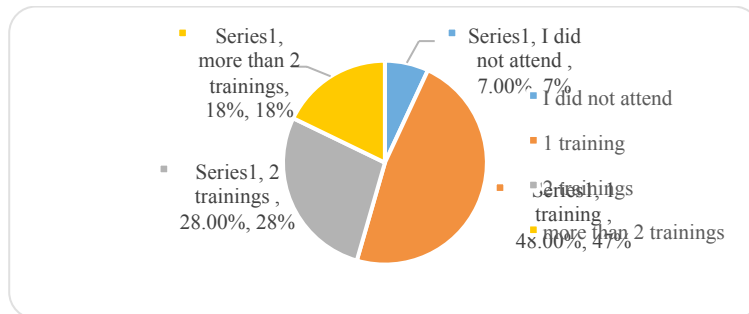


Fig. 4. Number of vocational training courses attended. Source: data processed by the authors based on questionnaire answers

Regarding the choice of training providers, 71.9% of respondents prefer private providers at the expense of the public because they believe that the level of professionalism and quality teaching materials are superior in the case of the former. The fact that most respondents prefer to pay more to get high quality training highlights the level of awareness regarding the importance of quality vocational training.

Centralizing answers to questions referring to the domains of training preferred by the respondents has revealed that most of the respondents prefer courses in economics. The most interesting areas are: trade - 35.1%, accounting - 15.8%, IT & C 14%, management 14%.

The main criterion in terms of choosing a course of training is the demands of the labor market (over 80% of respondents).

Of all adults who were surveyed, 54.4% believe that continuing education programs are accessible, in some measure due to the affordable participation fees. Insufficient promotion of training offers on the one hand and the requirements in terms of professional training in the labor market, on the other hand, are the main reasons for not attending training programs by adults.

An objective of this research was to identify the main criteria in terms of choosing a course of training. Thus, 50% of respondents take into account the scientific quality of the course, 33.9% have as a prime criterion for choosing the usefulness of the course, reflected in promotion at work, and the remaining respondents take into account, first, the participation fee.

7. Conclusions and Discussions

We conducted this research with the intention of responding to four questions related to adults' training in Romania. The first question was: *What is the opinion of adults regarding training courses offer on the market?* Following this research we found that a share of 33.3% of respondents are familiar with the issues and needs regarding continuous training and over 90% of respondents are willing to pay for a training course. For the second question - *What factors affect the choice of a training course for adults?* we can highlight the following aspects drawn from the responses of those surveyed: the demands of the labor market, the type of provider (71.9% of respondents prefer private providers at the expense of the public ones), and the affordable participation fee (of all adults who were surveyed, 54.4% believe that continuing education programs are accessible, in some measure due to the affordable participation fees). Regarding the third question - *What are the ways and degree of access to information about training courses for adults?* We have found out that the sources of information on available training courses for adults are the media and the Internet. The majority of the respondents choose the second option to get information about courses for adults, mainly because of fast access, but also because they can focus on specific search fields using search filters. The last research question referred to *the main fields of training covered by the training providers in Romania* revealed that most of the respondents prefer courses in economics (the most interesting areas are: trade, accounting, IT & C, and management)

As recommendations, we believe that it should be paid more attention to promoting training courses so that adults could find out about them more easily and also, training courses should be more closely linked to labor market needs.

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