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**VALUES AND PERSEPECTIVES IN ADULT EDUCATION**

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***Abstract***

The need to organize lifelong learning activities is present in all societies. Education not only adapts to the specific of anticipated changes that are meant to take place, but it also prepares the condition for other changes to occur, shaping, through its actions, the very specific of future society. Non-formal contexts represent a significant dimension of supporting high-quality education, by standing as an answer for both people's individual/ specific needs as well as the needs of societies. In accordance to the facts stated above, the current study investigates, based on a survey, the extent to which nonformal activities respond to the need for sufficiency and efficiency within adult lifelong learning programs. The study revealed that within such ongoing learning programs for adults in secondary education, non-formal activities are preferable, due to increased attractiveness, promotion and access to debates, capitalisation of natural contexts that are specific to the taught issues. It is considered that the inclusion of non-formal activities in lifelong learning programmers increases their attractiveness, and the success of these programs depends both on the quality and skills of trainers, as well as on the novelty of taught contents. The conclusions of the study confirm the fact that non-formal education supports the coherence increase of the learning and development process present in permanent education and a prospective orientation of education.

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## 1. Introduction

Adult education encompasses, along the acquisition of knowledge, competence and abilities, the development of skills in specific, the capacity to be creative, to integrate new items of knowledge, skills and abilities into cognitive and behavioural constructs that are relatively balanced; in other words, it means always learning how to maximize one's skills, how man can innovate new work and life conditions and how to develop in one's own directions (Sirghi, 2018). At the level of developed Western societies, there has been a need to organise ongoing learning actions and lifelong learning programs, with non-formal education programs having the role of completing or reaching the places where the formal educational system did not have access (Rizvi, 2010). Qualitative education is highly dependent on the time variable, through lifelong learning, as well as on the beneficiary of education programs, through self-learning.

## 2. Problem Statement

Paradigmatic changes and advanced technology that dominate contemporary society imply the development of alternative educational processes that are carried out in formal contexts, and the use of non-formal and informal education throughout one's entire life. Non-formal education thus becomes an educational resource that completes and supports social actions and interventions, as well as an instrument that integrates day by day activities, emphasising education outside the classroom and ongoing professional training (Chacón-Ortiz, 2015). Non-formal education must stem from the understanding of the area outside the classroom, becoming aware of it and capitalisation of this area and the creative trainer needs to critically evaluate the strategy, especially since in this situation no strict training rules actually exist (Sefton-Green, 2013). Indeed, non-formal education may be appreciated as an empowerment and social transformation tool (Hoppers, 2006). The design of training activities in adult education is in accordance to learning needs, free development, in a personal, public, economic benefit of the adults, as well as being in accordance to the specific legislation that creates premises for the increase of systemic coherence of adult education and for the coverage of workforce needs, of the European qualifications' mobility (Poștan, 2016). Lifelong learning represents a solution to the problems related to workforce and work productivity (Manea, 2014). This way, there are studies (Dumicic, Milun, & Antic, 2019) testifying that development indicators of the economic, social and digital society influence lifelong learning in the European countries that were selected for the study. There are positive correlations with the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), workforce occupation, and percentage of people with higher education having the strongest positive correlation with digital skills, whereas the weak negative correlations have been tracked with the indicators of secondary education. One's interests, needs, personal aspirations are decisive in the triggering and support of motivation towards self-learning and self-development. The engagement mode suggested by Tuama (2016) is reflexive activation, which may contribute to the design of solutions that are adequate to positive engagement, to lifelong learning and to building a long-lasting support for the workforce occupation.

### 3. Research Questions

Considering the importance of training activities regarding adults' professional and personal success, the design of content and its organisation forms becomes essential for reaching objectives, namely for the satisfaction of needs that learners have. Therefore, it is mandatory to identify the preferred activities that educational customers may have with regards to ongoing training sessions, or which elements may contribute to the increase in attractiveness of the suggested programs.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the purpose and use of non-formal activities within lifelong learning programs among adults.

### 5. Research Methods

The investigation method we used is the survey. Using the questionnaire that consisted of 14 questions with multiple choice options, we conducted the interview with 162 subjects. The subject sample is made of teachers who work in primary and secondary education systems, of whom 111 are primary and preschool teachers, and 51 have other specialties at secondary and high school levels.

### 6. Findings

The first item of the questionnaire looked at the type of activities that learners prefer within lifelong learning programs. The answers we got are indicated in Table 1 below.

**Table 01.** Values promoted through religious education

Type of activities	N	%
Formal activities	61	37.65%
Non-formal activities	101	62.35%
Total	162	100.00%

The analysis of the answers indicates that adults prefer non-formal activities to be over 50%, respectively 62.35% as compared to formal ones. It is well-known that in school practice most students prefer this type of activities, considering them to be easier, more pleasant, funnier, which shows that adults preferring the same category of activities is not surprising.

Another element of the questionnaire indicated the extent to which the continuous training through non-formal activities facilitates learning. The answers are found in Table 2.

**Table 02.** Extent to which non-formal activities facilitate learning

Appreciation level	N	%
Not at all	10	6.17%
Little	9	5.56%
A lot	121	74.69%
To a large extent	22	13.58%
Total	162	100.00%

The answers we received as synchronous with those of the first item of the questionnaire, in the sense that non-formal activities are appreciated by 74.49% of respondents as having a large contribution to facilitating learning, which confirms that they are preferred by the majority of training adults within lifelong learning programs.

Throughout the following item, our intention was to investigate the non-formal activities that are considered to be most efficient in the training programs. The answers are found in Table 3.

**Table 03.** Efficiency of various non-formal activities

Non-formal activities	N	%
Fairs and exhibitions	4	2.47%
Book launches	9	5.56%
Outdoor or teambuilding activities	32	19.75%
Roundtables, debates	30	18.72%
Investigations, observations, case studies in specific contexts	67	41.36%
Group participations in different contests	18	11.11%
Symposiums, conferences or other scientific events	2	1.23%
Total	162	100.00%

The non-formal activities considered to be most effective are represented, according to 41.36% respondents, by investigations, observations, case studies carried out in natural contexts. Nearly the same percentage of respondents claimed that such appreciated activities are outdoor activities or team-building sessions (19.75%) and roundtables or debates (18.52%). Respondents considered that the activities with low efficiency are those that refer to competitions/contests (11.11%), book launches (5.56%), shows and exhibitions (2.47%) and to a very low extent the scientific events (1.23%). These options may be explained as pretty subjective and due to the respondents' experiences, as teaching practice usually reckons that scientific events are highly efficient activities in the process of adult education.

There are multiple factors that may contribute to the success of a training programme. Table 4 below shows the analysis of answers provided by our respondents, who are considered to be specialists, since all the members of the sample have didactic professional skills, in accordance to their specialities.

**Table 04.** Factors that influence the success of lifelong learning programme

Value indicators of lifelong learning programs	Rank	Nr.
Quality and skills of trainers	1	61
Novelty of presented information	2	35
Practical applicability of the data input	3	27
Interactivity and promoting active participation of learners	4	25
Variety of methods and pedagogical resources in use	5	10
Information complexity	6	4
Total		162

Among the factors influencing the success of a lifelong learning programme, the first position is occupied by the "quality and skills of trainers", followed by "novelty of presented information". The last positions are filled by "variety of methods and pedagogical resources" and "information complexity". This ranking indicates that human resources remain the most valuable component of lifelong learning

programs, together with the novelty of the suggested contents. Although we expected to find interaction elements, the active-participative feature or practical aspects of contents taking the first positions, we noticed that our respondents ranked these aspects in middle positioning, namely on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ranks. An explanation for this situation would be that it stands as an answer to the needs, interests of learners, meaning that they wish to learn new things, which would be presented by experts, trainers who have a multitude of skills (scientific, interrelation, digital, psycho pedagogical, management ones). The effect of including non-formal activities within lifelong learning programs is shown in the data presented in Table 5.

**Table 05.** The effect of including non-formal activities within lifelong learning programs

Attractiveness level	N	%
Lessattractive	2	1.24%
Similarly attractive	55	33.95%
Moreattractive	105	81
Total	162	100.00%

The analysis of the answers shows that 64.81% of respondents claimed that training programs would be more attractive if they included non-formal activities. The fact that 33.95% of the people in our sample don't consider that there are any direct effects of non-formal activities over the attractiveness of lifelong learning programs may be interpreted by comparing the appreciations identified earlier, according to which the success of a program depends on the quality of trainers and the novelty of contents.

The advantages and disadvantages of including non-formal activities in lifelong learning programs represent a strong argument in shaping the role and usefulness of non-formalactivities within such programs. The advantages reported are found in the Table 6.

**Table 06.** Advantages of including non-formal activities in lifelong learning programs

Advantages/Strengths	N	%
Interaction with other students in the learning process	34	20.99%
Learning in a flexible educational context	68	41.98%
Direct participation and active engagement in the learning process	23	14.20%
Curriculum that is customized according to genuine training needs	28	17.28%
Personal advantages and mental comfort as a result of interpersonal interaction in a non-formal context	9	5.56%
Total	162	100.00%

The main advantage of including non-formal activities in lifelong learning programs, identified as such by 41.98%, is represented by "learning in a flexible educational context". "Interaction with other students in the learning process" is chosen by 20.99% of respondents as a great advantage of non-formal activities, as well as the possibility of a "curriculum that is customized according to genuine training needs" (17.28%). "Direct participation and active engagement in the learning process" is considered to be an advantage by only 14.20% of the subjects, whereas "personal advantages and mental comfort as a result of interpersonal interaction in a non-formal context" was chosen by 5.56%. Such numbers are

correct as long as we understand that formal activities can be designed just as well on active-participative emphasis and they may be capable of generating mental comfort and personal gains as a result of interpersonal interactions.

**Table 07.** Disadvantages of including non-formal activities in lifelong learning programs

Disadvantages/Threats	N	%
The risk that learning programs including non-formal activities may be considered sketchy	59	36.42%
The non-formal educational context may include certain elements that reduce the efficiency of learning	57	35.19%
Decreased efficiency of teaching because of the limited feature of pedagogical resources	22	13.58%
The possibility that learners might wrongly focus their attention on secondary elements rather than on the primary ones	4	14.81%
Total	162	100.00%

From the data presented in Table 7 it appears that among the disadvantages and risks that the inclusion of non-formal activities in continuing education has, the ones scoring the highest threat refers to “the risk that learning programs including non-formal activities may be considered sketchy”, with 36.42% of respondents identifying this aspect, while 35.10% claimed that “non-formal educational context may include certain elements that reduce the efficiency of learning”. Disadvantages such as “decreased efficiency of teaching because of the limited feature of pedagogical resources” and “the possibility that learners might wrongly focus on secondary elements rather than on the primary ones” have lower ranks in the opinion of respondents, namely 13.58% and 14.81%, which is not surprising if we consider the educational reality, when such similar situation of focusing on less important aspects may occur in formal learning as well or when the efficiency of teaching is decreased because of the lack of use of adequate pedagogical resources.

## 7. Conclusion

The benefit, respectively the contribution that the inclusion of non-formal activities in continuing education has, refers to increasing their attractiveness. At the same time, non-formal activities facilitate the satisfaction of needs for improvement and development by accomplishing learning in flexible educational contexts, by using a curriculum that is customised and by generating interrelation activities. Investigations, observations and case studies represent non-formal activities that are most favoured and that are considered to have the highest efficiency within lifelong learning programs.

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