

METHODOLOGY SET OF EVALUATING ADULTS' PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING PROCESS: LITHUANIAN CASE

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Abstract

The article presents the main methodological issues of the survey¹ aimed to analyze the learning peculiarities of adults within the lifelong learning processes in Lithuania. Some theoretical background is revealed in the article and the main definitions as well as research methods and procedures are analyzed.

Keywords: Methodology set, social research methodology, lifelong learning process, sampling procedure.

Introduction

Adults participate in various types of educational activities in order to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the workforce, to earn a college or advanced degree, to learn basic skills or to enrich their lives (Kim, Hagedorn, Williamson, 2004). Taken as a whole, these activities constitute adult education. According to the authors, mentioned above, many societal factors influence participation in adult education activities: changing demographics, including the aging of the population, re-entry of women into the workplace, etc. The effect of the global economy and technological advances on the nature of adult education are significant as well. Thus, it has become quite problematic to set the appropriate methodological approach while evaluating correctly and broadly the adults' participation effectiveness in lifelong learning processes. As L. Pesonen (2001) states, within the so-

¹ The research was conducted within the framework of international project "Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: the Contribution of the Education System" (LLL 2010)

cial science three main methodology approaches could exist, i.e. the analytical approach, the systems approach and the actors approach.

The analytical approach (mostly seen as a more positivistic approach) represents the reality as an objective. The actors approach assumes that reality is a social construction (hermeneutic point of view). The systems approach (positioned between the two above mentioned approaches) assumes that reality is objectively accessible (Pesonen, 2001; Sayer, 1992; et al.).

This research applies the systems approach as well as comparative approach. The comparative approach has always existed in the social sciences - contrary to the natural sciences, - but the changes now taking place are opening up a new dimension for them and justify a broader view (Ghorra-Gobin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Bitinas, Rupšienė et al., 2008; Žydžiūnaitė, 2007). The comparative approach is becoming crucial to all social science researchers who aim at explaining the phenomena that accompany social transformations, e.g., the lifelong learning (*further in this text - LLL*) and other phenomena. Putting all of this into another words, comparative approach generally has a great link to triangulation principle as well while both qualitative and quantitative research instruments and design are used together in a particular research (Kardelis, 2007; Bitinas, 2006; Campbell, Stanley, 1973 et al.).

The main **goal of the article** is to analyze and discuss the methodological issues of the conducted research on adults' education. The paper deals with such methodological set issues as the appropriateness of the applied methods, possible research approaches and socio-cultural aspects of lifelong learning analysis (e.g. aging, gender role within labour market etc.). The following **tasks** are identified:

- 1) to reveal some theoretical background on lifelong learning in general;
- 2) to discuss the methods that were used in the research;
- 3) to point out some methodological issues/aspects, e.g. difficulties of selection of the required number of respondents with the lowest level of education.

Methods and research organizational steps are to be discussed in the further chapters of the article.

1. A theoretical lifelong learning research background

The existing surveys of participation of adults in lifelong learning that are based on representative samples of the working-age population do not give the required information for the analysis: often the number of effective participants is too small for more detailed questionnaires to evaluate the process of LLL. On the other hand, it would be hardly possible to include each and all questions about the specific issues of adult education (the duration and breaks in studies, experienced obstacles and support, evaluation of quality and perspectives of the courses etc.) in general questionnaires. Participation issues have always been, and still are, one of the major concerns in the field of adult education (Courtney, McGivney, McIntyre & Rubenson, 1998; Gorard & Rees, 2002; OECD, 2005; Antikainen, Harinen & Torres, 2006). An ageing population and predicted labour shortages have led many countries to develop policies to encourage mature adults to participate in employment (45 Plus, 2007). As J. Taylor and A. Furnham (2005) point out, later retirement age may have the effect of pushing mature adults into the workforce, while leaving many age barriers still in place. This could mean they are more likely to enter precarious employment, or be discouraged from continuing to look for work. In many developed countries, policy-making that looks at increasing the participation of mature adults in employment is currently in its early stages (Taylor & Furnham, 2005). On the other hand, there is a significant amount of research concerning the work-related values and expectations of mature job-seekers.

The traditional studies focus on the relationship between psychological attributes (such as motivation, attitudes, perceptions, intentions etc.) and participation in LLL. The sociological perspective on adult education emphasizes the impact of demographic, technological, economic and cultural factors on various aspects of adult education. In this view, people cannot be seen as independent from their social context in making decisions to participate in learning. The traditional studies have been criticized for being too individualistic while the sociological "streamline" is often viewed as too deterministic.

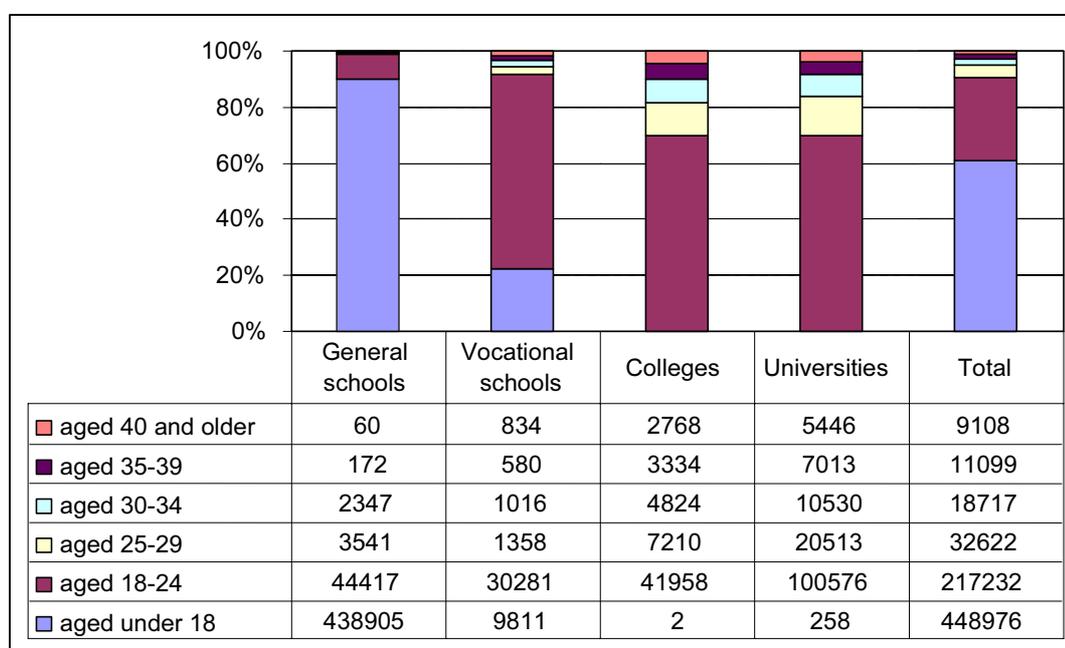
In this project both views are reconciled into a "socio-psychological approach" (as suggested by Jung and Cervero, 2002, pp. 318), following some recent in the sociology of education and educational psychology. When examining the behavior of adults in relation to participation in LLL, it is important to take into account not only the immediate social situation of individuals (such as family and work dynamics), but also to consider the broader socio-economic context and its influence on the individual,

because the objective and subjective factors are interrelated. In other words, "people are making their worlds at the same time as their worlds are making them" (Watson, 2001, in Webber, 2004).

2. Organizational steps: An overview of sampling frame and methods within Lithuanian education system

The basic research questions were to obtain in-depth comparative information about adult learners' perspectives (demand side) of formal provision for LLL and to test different hypotheses about the causes of unequal participation.

Target population. At the beginning of the survey the target group was defined as 'adults studying in the formal education system'. There was some statistical data on learners' age, and attending school type before the survey (Fig. 1). At the end of 2007 there were 737754 pupils and students who participated in formal education in Lithuania (Education, 2008, p. 25). That makes 21.8 % of total Lithuanian population. The majority of learners' are persons under 18 years (61 %), and the rest 39 % - who are over 18 years (Fig. 1). The number of adult learners in different educational institutions differs. A smaller number of such learners (who are over 18 years old) are in general schools. Meanwhile adult learners make up the major part in vocational schools. Colleges and Universities are the main places for adult learners. It is worth of notice that every fifth person participating in educational processes at Colleges and Universities is already in his/her 40s.



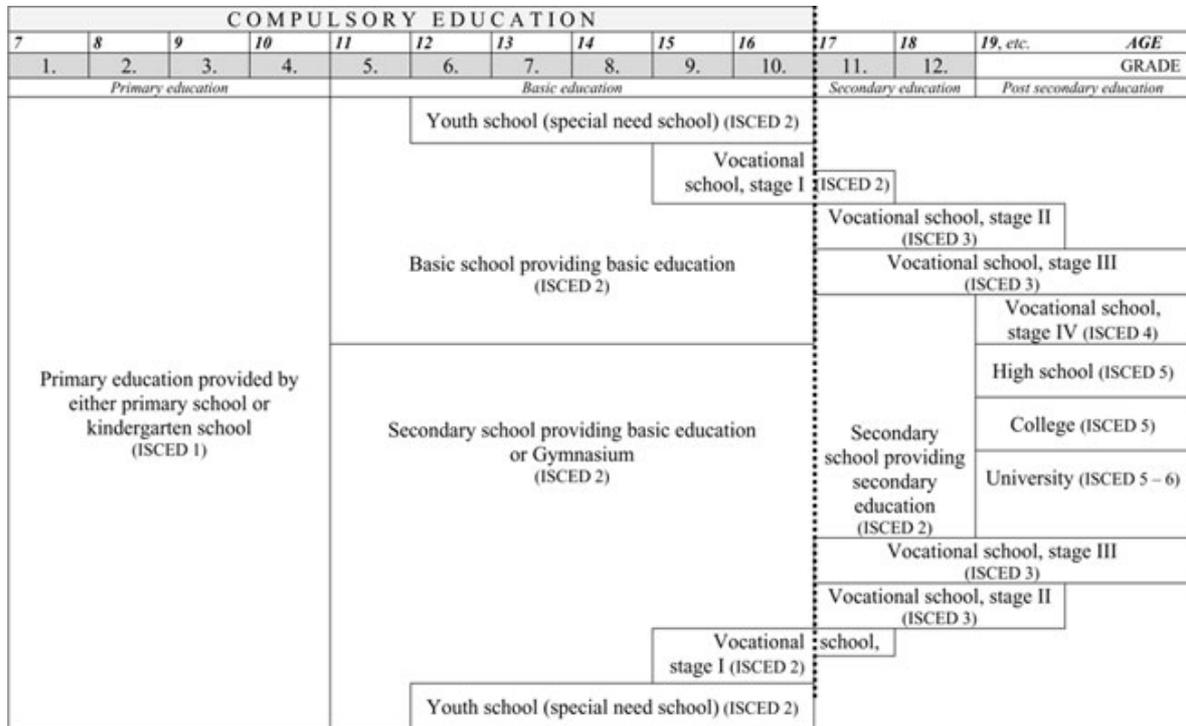
Source: Education, 2008, p. 25.

Figure 1. Number and proportion of students by age and type of education institution in Lithuania, 2007

The target group was set focusing on those adult learners who had graduated successfully from their educational institutions some years ago or dropped out. Students who are 18 years old and over were not included in the target group if they continue their studies on a higher educational level or have made a shorter than (2 year) break. Namely such a break in a person's educational career was a significant criterion for selecting participants. Thus the participants had to meet the following criteria: he/she studies at a formal educational establishment at a time of survey; he/she has withdrawn from a full-time comprehensive education in the past and the break between participation events is at least 2 years; and finally, he/she is 18 years and over. However, not having precise statistical data on such participants with these characteristics, it was quite a challenge evaluating general research set and its features.

Sample size and structure. While seeking to take into account both learners from different study levels and to secure research international comparability, it was decided to collect data from dif-

ferent study levels. Lithuanian education system historically is implemented at seven levels¹ (Education, 2008, p. 9) (Fig. 2) that are comparable to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 97) classification system (Education, 2008, p. 9) (Fig. 2). The adults learning position in this education system is that they may choose to study at adult schools or adult education centres, vocational schools, colleges, universities, labour market training centres in accordance with formal and non-formal education programmes, or attend courses organized by private companies or public organizations as well as study at distance education centres (*Dynot* data).



Source: *Dynot - Dynamic Online tool for Guidance*.

Figure 2. Lithuanian Education System

The aim of the survey was to question 1000 adult learners, re-entering formal education system at 2-6 ISCED level after at least two years' interval - 250 individuals studying at ISCED 1-2, ISCED 3, ISCED 4 and ISCED 5-6 levels respectively (Table 1).

¹ Lithuanian classification of education, (Education, 2008, p. 9)

Table 1. Students' population within Lithuanian education system

Lithuanian classification of education	Total number of students per education level	Number of students aged 18 and older per education level	Proportion of students aged 18 and older among the students of particular education level	Planned sample, number of adult learners	Realised sample, number of adult learners	International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 97)
General schools (Primary and basic education, 1-2 levels)	489442	50537	10,33	250	147	ISCED 1-2
Vocational schools Secondary education, 2-3-4 ¹ levels)	43880	34069	77,64	250	296	ISCED 3
Colleges (Post-secondary education, 4 level)	60096	60094	100,00	250	294	ISCED 4
Universities (Tertiary and University and Doctorate education 5-6-7 levels)	144336	144078	99,82	250	257	ISCED 5-6
Total	737754	288778	39,14	1000	994	

Source: Education, 2008, pp. 9-25.

Sampling procedures. A combination of multi-stage / cluster and non-random stratified quota sampling methods were used in order to select the respondents.

At the first stage of multi-stage sampling a sample frame was drawn. The list of secondary, adult training centres, vocational schools, higher educational institutes, colleges, and universities in Lithuania on the basis of AIKOS² database was defined. According to the Ministry of Education and Science data, there were 1647 different types of education institutions in Lithuania (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of Education Institutions in Lithuania, 2007

1.	Higher Institutions:	50
1.1.	Universities	22
1.2.	Colleges	28
3.	Further Education Schools	1
4.	Vocational Training Schools:	91
4.1.	Vocational Schools	80
4.2.	Other Vocational Training Schools	11
5.	Comprehensive schools:	1505
5.4.	Secondary Schools	457
5.5.	Gymnasiums	135
5.6.	Youth Schools	21
5.7.	Conservatories	4
5.8.	Others (kindergartens, preschool, and primary education schools)	888
	Total	1647

Source: AIKOS, 2007-01-18.

At the next stage a proportionate and representative set/cluster of selected institutions from the above list regarding the administrative region, the type of educational institution, the area of education, the level of education provided, was formed. The institutions from this cluster were invited to participate in the research. This stage was organised in the manner of stratified quota selection.³

¹ Data on separate education levels not available.

² AIKOS – Open Information, Counselling and Guidance System. Internet access: <http://www.aikos.smm.lt/aikos/webdriver.exe?kalba=lt&Mlval=/Institucijos.html>

³ In 2006/2007 academic year there functioned 759 educational institutions in Lithuania; they provide services to adults. The stratified quota sampling design allowed to produce a 75 educational institutions sample.

At the final sampling stage, the population of respondents was selected through the combination of nested sampling and opportunity sampling. That means that on the randomly chosen interview date the interviewer was provided the opportunity to meet with groups of people and not with single individuals. The target groups consisted of the students/learners' groups or classes within a certain study area, a course or a group. The adults within the group were given question "Have you taken a leave of at least two years from your educational/learning career?", the individuals who provided positive answer were approached as fit candidates and invited to take part in the survey.

In the course of the field work it turned out that the learners at certain study levels (particularly at ISCED 1-2) are difficult to find. In order to complete the number of the initially intended sample it was decided to extend the respondent numbers in the successive study stages. Researchers could find only 147 adult learners at ISCED 1-2 stage. The difference was made up by attracting a proportionately increased numbers of respondents in ISCED 3 and ISCED 4 levels, 296 and 294 respectively. 257 adult learners at ISCED 5-6 level were interviewed¹. The number of institutions was 75. The method of collection of empirical information was adapted to the study level of adult learners. On the grounds of the pilot survey conclusions, the learners at ISCED 1-2 level were subjected to face-to-face interview method, the higher study levels were interviewed using group method.

Research instruments. In order to collect thorough information about the situation in LLL and pursuing to identify the needs of adult students, a specific survey among actual participants was conducted and the representatives of the institutions of formal adult education were interviewed.

The questionnaires for the learners ("Your participation in formal adult education in Lithuania") and for the institutions („Formal adult education in Lithuania”) - have been developed. The research instruments were designed by international team – all Project partners. In order to verify the draft versions of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted. To produce high quality translation of the national research instrument, the questionnaires for the learners and for the institutions, the double-blind translation method was applied. The national questionnaires used in Lithuania comprised all the compulsory questions.

Methods for collecting the empirical data. Speaking of methods for collecting the empirical data, it is necessary to stress that they were adapted to the study level of adult learners. On the grounds of the *pilot survey* conclusions, the learners at ISCED 1-2 level were subjected to *face-to-face interview method*, the higher study levels were interviewed using *group method* (the respondents have completed the questionnaires themselves in the classrooms/auditorium). The information from the adult education institutions was collected by *telephoning interview* or using the *questionnaire survey method* (the respondents have completed the questionnaires themselves). These particular research methods have helped identifying some specific socio-cultural peculiarities of adults' participation in LLL process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Gray et al., 2007). The fieldwork was conducted by the Market and Opinion Research Centre "Vilmorus Ltd." during April–December, 2007.

3. Some methodological issues/aspects (difficulties while picking the right amount of participants from the lowest learning levels)

As it is well known, the general set is the group on which there is a scientific need to gather all necessary information and then to make some conclusions or summation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Mayring (2007) states that generalization traditionally is seen as a central aim of science, as a process of theory formulation for further applications. There are different possibilities to arrive at a generalization: analysis of total population, random or stratified samples, theoretical sampling, variation, triangulation etc. Depending on the type of research or its design some of those strategies of generalization can be important for either qualitative or quantitative oriented research.

It becomes quite clear that one of the criteria for research participants that need to be met in order to complete the representative demand – being absent for 2 years from education system – is an obstacle and simultaneously complicates the sampling procedure. In the absence of exact statistical data it is quite difficult to find randomly appropriate respondents, i.e. it is hard to make sure that each adult who did return to education system after being absent for 2 years would have equal possibilities to be selected. On the other hand, a representative randomization in this case would have been a receptive method for sources (e.g. travel, phone connections, time etc.). Thus, having in mind those

¹ The overall number of questionnaires yielded 1063 answers, however after examination 69 from this number were rejected as inappropriate for the survey (mostly because of the reason that the respondents did not fit the criteria, the learners would not have the minimum of two-year interruption between the learning episodes in their careers). Therefore, the total number of questionnaires from adult learners that matched the survey category was 994.

methodologically based obstacles and arguments, the *target group* was formed using a non-random mixed multilevel sampling.

Conclusions

1. The systems and comparative approaches were the key stones in this research as comparative approach becomes crucial to all social science researchers who aim at explaining and accompanying social transformations, such as lifelong learning process etc.

2. Seeking the effectiveness of methods used in the survey for this project, both views – traditional studies focus, and sociological approach – were combined and so reconciled into a socio-psychological approach.

3. Methodology set, has included specific methods of collection of empirical data and they were adapted to the study level of adult learners: *a face-to-face interview method, group method, a telephoning interview, and a questionnaire survey method*. These particular research methods have helped identifying some specific socio-cultural peculiarities of adults' participation in LLL process.

4. There are different possibilities to arrive at a generalization: analysis of total population, falsification, random or stratified samples, theoretical sampling, variation, triangulation etc. Not having the exact statistical data it became hard to ensure that each adult who did return into education system after absence of 2 years would have equal possibilities to get into sampling process. Also a representative randomization in this case would have been a receptive method for sources (e.g. travel, phone connections, time etc.). Eventually the target group was formed using a non-random mixed multilevel sampling.

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METODOLOGINIS PAGRINDAS VERTINANT SUAUGUSIŲJŲ DALYVAVIMĄ MOKYMOSI VISĄ GYVENIMĄ PROCESE: LIETUVOS ATVEJIS

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje dėmesys daugiau telkiamas į kelias socialinių mokslų tyrimuose išryškėjančias kryptis – a) metodologinio pagrindimo, leidžiančio nuodugniau analizuoti mokymosi visą gyvenimą procesą Lietuvoje ir b) pagrindinių tyrimo procedūrinių aspektų, t. y. metodų, imties (suaugusiųjų besimokančiųjų) sudarymo, definicijų apibrėžimo ir kt. Siekiant gauti išsamią palyginamąją informaciją apie situaciją suaugusiųjų formaliojo švietimo institucijose bei nustatyti pačių besimokančiųjų poreikius, buvo apklausti šių institucijų atstovai ir asmenys, dalyvaujantys suaugusiųjų švietime. Kitaip tariant, šių paslaugų teikėjai bei gavėjai. Vienas iš svarbiausių tyrimo uždavinių buvo įvertinti nevienodų mokymosi visą gyvenimą galimybių priežastis, ypač dėmesį atkreipiant į žemo išsilavinimo ar neturinčius profesinio pasirengimo asmenis. Taigi buvo remiamasi prielaida, kad patys besimokantieji gali geriausiai kritiškai įvertinti tiek savo asmeninę mokymosi patirtį, tiek ir mokymosi visą gyvenimą sąlygas.

Konstruojant šio tyrimo metodologinį pagrindą, išieties pozicijomis pasirinkta a) asmeninės mokymosi patirties reikšmingumas, didžiausią dėmesį skiriant asmenybės psichologinių bruožų įtakai dalyvavimo mokymosi visą gyvenimą procese; b) sociologinis požiūris į mokymąsi visą gyvenimą, akcentuojant demografinių, technologinių, ekonominių ir kultūrinių veiksnių reikšmę, nes pirmiausia visuomenė, socialinė aplinka daro įtaką individų mokymosi galimybėms (Durkheim, Parsons, Davis ir kt., pagal Haralambos ir Holborn, 2000).

Straipsnyje taip pat aprašomas tyrimo instrumentarijus, padėjęs atskleisti suaugusiųjų mokymosi visą gyvenimą sociokultūrinį kontekstualumą Lietuvoje. Šiam tikslui buvo parengtos dvi apklausos anketos: anketa, skirta asmenims, besimokantiems pagal kokią nors formaliojo suaugusiųjų švietimo programą, ir anketa, skirta suaugusiųjų švietimo institucijoms. Tyrimo instrumentai buvo rengiami bendradarbiaujant visoms projekte dalyvaujančioms nacionalinėms mokslininkų grupėms, siekiant parengtas anketas validuoti, buvo atliktas pilotinis tyrimas. Buvo siekiama apklausti 1 000 besimokančiųjų suaugusiųjų, turinčių dvejų metų ar ilgesnės trukmės dalyvavimo švietimo sistemoje pertrauką, tarp jų atrenkant po vienodą skaičių ($N = 250$) asmenų atitinkamai iš visų švietimo pakopų (ISCED 1-2, ISCED 3, ISCED 4 ir ISCED 5-6). Respondentų atrankai pasirinkta daugiapakopės-klasterinės ir netikimybinės stratifikuotos kvotinės atrankos būdų kombinacija. Besimokančiųjų suaugusiųjų atranka buvo vykdoma per formaliojo švietimo įstaigas. Atitinkamai šių įstaigų atstovai taip pat turėjo užpildyti švietimo institucijoms skirtą anketą.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: metodologinis aprašas, socialinių tyrimų metodologija, mokymosi visą gyvenimą procesas, atrankos procedūra.