

EDUCATIONAL OFFER AND INCLUSION IN NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION AREA

Abstract

Profound changes in requirements and demands of new skills and competences in the field of labour, which are preconditioned by significant technological development, changing economies, social and political establishments, place educational systems throughout the world (especially vocational education and training and adult education) ahead of a major challenge. – How to enable individuals to gain the skills and competences needed for the labour market of the future?

Accomplishing this ambitious goal means that it is necessary to change the old paradigm of “job for a life time” to the new paradigm “learning throughout life” or “lifelong learning”. Non-formal education in the context of lifelong learning concept is one of the paths that ensures equal opportunities for obtaining relevant skills, attitudes and competences among individuals. It is compensating the disadvantages of the formal education system which adapts too slowly to the socio-economic changes and is characterized with conservatism leading to inertia of the societies themselves.

This paper tends to present educational offer and inclusion in non-formal adult education area, analysing the educational programme offer on one hand, and inclusiveness of the process of non-formal education on other hand. Results will point out the good practices, as well as the challenges that will need to be addressed urgently in order to accomplish the goal of inclusion and equity in the context of lifelong learning concept.

Keywords: *NON-FORMAL EDUCATION, LABOUR MARKET, INCLUSION*

Introduction

As the world moved to an industrialized economy, the need for continuing education and improved access for adults in education challenged traditional educational venues and created opportunities for both professional and personal skill enhancement and enrichment. These change shifts that are developing in the context of lifelong learning concept are driven by several factors, such as: abundant access to information, rapid technology changes, increased global interactions, industry shifts, as well as increasing entry level credentials and skill requirements.

Hence, today more than ever, it is crucial that all citizens receive high quality education and training in order to equip themselves with the key competences that they need to be economically active and employable, and to im-

prove life as a whole. As a consequence, each country should focus on continuously strengthening the workforce with knowledge, skills and attitudes that cannot be acquired only through the formal education system. (Ministry of Education and Science of Republic of North Macedonia, 2017)

Having in mind that the petrification of formal education cannot follow the dynamics of new demands and needs of life, there is obvious necessity of restructuring the overall education and training system throughout all educational levels (Rizova, 2020). The result will be seen through decreasing the emanation of obtaining only certificate qualifications and increasing capabilities for permanent educational and employment activity. Non-formal education offer is representing one of the "solutions" of very complex and serious challenges of the contemporary societies such as unemployment, poverty, exclusion and discrimination, etc.

It is very important that non-formal educational offer is in close correlation with labour market demands, but also to provide the right to equal participation to all, as well as respecting the principle of inclusiveness that gives equal opportunities of vulnerable categories of citizens to be active participants in the world of labour.

Non-formal education

In its wider sense, non-formal education has an objective to enable expanding and upgrading of the current knowledge, skills and competences that have been obtained early in the initial education and training. It has become the most common form learning and education, as well as real perspective of adult education and professional development in the modern era. Several authors are defining it as "any other educational activity organized outside the formal educational system, no matter whether separated or as a part of some other activity: social, religious, family, etc." (Savičević, 2003)

In the European Union official educational documents, non-formal education is broadly defined as any education and training that includes all types/forms of activities of teaching and learning that are not part of the formal education process. (Youth Cultural Centre – Bitola, 2009)

Non-formal education in today's knowledge based societies has become a necessity, because it provides individuals at any stage of life to be up to date with the societal development and it counters all that formal education system of education is missing. Hence, it should be stipulated that the goal of non-formal education is not creating a parallel education system to the formal one, but the contrary: complementary support of the formal education and learning, mostly because of its flexibility and capability for adjustment to societal changes happening in the contemporary societies. Non-formal education is contributing towards fulfilling the European vision of "knowledge-based society".

European and world economies increasingly rely on the remedial power of non-formal education and training to complement gaps in formal education,

as well as "keeping pace" with new and modern occupations that are conditioned by the new way we live, learn and work. Through non-formal education and training, youth and adults can acquire and advance competencies, gain an appropriate qualification and become competitive in the labour market, but it also serves as a means for personal development and fulfilment, as well as active citizenship. This is among other things possible because of its greater flexibility and opportunity for faster adaptation to the needs of the participants in the trainings, as well as the needs of the labour market/employers. (Education for Employment in North Macedonia – Project Report, 2019)

Non-formal education became part of the international discourse on education policy in the late 1960's and early 1970's because of the increased need for education and training of unqualified workers at that time. It can be seen as related to the concepts of recurrent and lifelong learning. (Tight, 1996) suggests that whereas the latter concepts have to do with the extension of education and learning throughout life, non-formal education is about 'acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognized educational institutions'. (Fordham, 1993) suggests that in the 1970's, four characteristics came to be associated with non-formal education:

- Relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups;
- Concern with specific categories of person;
- A focus on clearly defined purposes;
- Flexibility in organization and methods.

Table 1: Characteristics of the formal and non-formal education

	formal	non-formal
purposes	Long-term & general Credential-based	Short-term & specific Non-credential-based
timing	long cycle / preparatory	short cycle / recurrent
content	standardized / input centered academic	individualized / output centered practical
delivery system	institution-based, isolated from environment. rigidly structured, teacher- centered	environment-based, community related. flexible, learner-centered
control	external / hierarchical	self-governing / democratic

(Adapted by Fordham, 1993)

Social inclusion and employment

We live in times of increased marked economic turbulence accompanied by crises, and with needs that are difficult to predict. Demographic trends that

are characterized by a growing percentage of adult population contribute significantly to increasing labour market pressure. Namely, as a result of man's life expectancy and the reduced population growth in the world, the world population growth is in a significant decline and such a trajectory is expected to continue in the next few decades. According to the World employment social outlook – trends 2018 by International labour office, in developed countries around the world, it is estimated that five out of ten labour market workers will be over 65 years old, compared to 3.5 in ten in 2017. This means that new challenges arise in front of the adult population that force it to modernize its competencies in the context of innovation and structural changes in the labour market.

Social inclusion is a concept that is said to be desirable in communities with the goal of achieving unified communities which involves the equal participation of all individuals within the community. Policy makers and governments all around the world recognize that social inclusion is vital to the sustainability and development of their countries, and as such enforce policies and laws in order to allow for the equal participation of all citizens (Beland, 2007).

Social inclusion aims at equal rights, education and opportunities for all individuals in society regardless of social status, gender, race and abilities across all social contexts and environments. Cloete and Kotze (2009) emphasize this with their definition of social inclusion as the binding factor between individuals and groups in society. The authors further explain that social inclusion is “linked to community, social capital and nation building” and binds individuals, breaking the barriers of ethnic and class differences. In communities where there is a lack of social inclusion, there are often high levels of poverty and underdevelopment. This is due to the fact that individuals who are marginalized are denied equal opportunities and therefore do not or cannot participate in the labour force.

Republic of North Macedonia, has an increased trend of aging of the population, so particular attention should be given to the issue of improving living conditions and working life for adult population. The share of young people aged 15-24 years in the total working age population is in constant decline. Thus, in 2016 it was 16.3%, compared with 19.0% in 2011. At the same time, the distribution of young people according to the economic status of the labour market shows that 68.7% are inactive; 16.2% are employed and 15.1% are unemployed; women are less active in the labour market and are less likely than men to find work. The unemployment rate for young people (15-24 years) in Macedonia was 48.2% in 2016 and is significantly above that of the EU countries where the average unemployment rate is 18.7%. (Novkovska, 2017)

Towards the education of the adults, there is still no complete orientation and true commitment, although this is not only important, but also a strategic element for the economic and social development of the trade. Such a policy, among other things, caused the increase in the poor educational structure of the population, insufficient restructuring of the workforce, as well as lack of greater possibilities for genuine protection of the marginalised groups. The

adult education needs to be accepted as a whole, which is the ideal of global economic development policies. The principle of inclusiveness in vocational education and training and adult education implies developing a higher awareness of interconnectedness, dependence and solidarity among all stakeholders, regardless of their race, gender, disability or social, ethnic, religious and cultural background, as well as material and health, developmental disabilities. Inclusivity actually means providing access, conditions for genuine involvement and efforts to achieve results for all learners / participants in the process of teaching and training¹.

Research methodology

The main purpose of the research was to obtain relevant information about the current state of educational offer and inclusion in non-formal adult education area, i.e. opinions of providers and service users of non-formal education about labour market orientation and inclusiveness of the trainings.

Research activities and data processing included overall approach of consultation and assessment of attitudes among all stakeholders in the area of providing and realization of non-formal adult educational programs (verified providers of adult education services, as well as services users of non-formal adult educational programs - participants from trainings).

For the purposes of the research, we created and conducted several instruments for gathering data about opinions of verified providers of AE services and opinions of services users of non-formal adult educational programs, as well as focus groups with representatives of providers of services of adult education. Research is characterized as quantitative and qualitative, where besides questionnaires for opinions of subjects there are other qualitative research techniques used as interviews and focus groups, as well as desktop analyses of relevant literature and research in order to achieve appropriate methodological triangulation for objectification of the gathered data.

The sample of the research was consisted of 22 active service providers of adult education programs and 113 service users of non-formal adult educational programs from 4 different municipalities all over Republic of Macedonia: Skopje, Tetovo, Ohrid and Strumica.

Results, conclusions and recommendations

From the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data obtained from the conducted research we can conclude the issue of educational offer and inclusiveness of non-formal adult education is of a complex nature and requires a

¹ According to the three-party system of OECD for defining people for increased inclusiveness (especially in the systems for education and training) encompasses three categories.

studious approach in its elaboration. Therefore, we will group the conclusions according to the key indicators around which the analysis of the obtained data gravitated. It should be noted that in analysing and interpreting the results we noticed the emergence of socially desirable responses that occur almost in all social research, mainly because of the mentality that governs this region, as well as the fear of expressing their sincere opinion (especially if it is not in accordance with what the respondents think the researcher wants to hear).

Regarding the educational offer of the programs for non-formal adult education, all categories of respondents, without exception, consider that the programs for non-formal adult education that are offered are mainly in line with the requirements of the labour market. These attitudes can be considered as subjective, because in the further examination of their opinions we find that the respondents in a very small percentage serve additional analyses and documentation for deficient professions and professions in the Republic of Macedonia and that they are faced with a lack of such analyses and strategic directions for the development of deficient occupations. Detailed analysis tells us that during employment, beneficiaries face the need for additional competencies for employment or for advancement in the workplace, that is, the need for adaptation of curricula to contemporary trends from the relevant vocation/profile is emerging, in order to ensure adequate placement on the labour market and increase the attractiveness of the programs themselves.

Inclusion of non-formal adult education programs as one of the prerequisites for creating a contemporary education and training system where there will be no discrimination against ethnic, gender, religious, racial or other nature and where persons from vulnerable categories as well as persons with disabilities will be able to fulfil their potential and to become active participants in the labour market, we can conclude that it is declaratively respected. This is reflected in the affirmative views of the providers on non-formal adult education programs that take care of the programs they offer to be available for all categories of citizens. These views are supported by the opinions of most of the beneficiaries of the non-formal adult education programs that did not feel discriminated against any kind of training during the training. Although a small percentage of beneficiaries state that people with disabilities participated in the training that was attended, it is nevertheless encouraging and is a sign that the prejudices of persons with disabilities and their active inclusion in the labour market are starting to crush. It is also important to note that the providers of non-formal adult education programs are free to make changes in the curricula for this category of citizens in accordance with their disability, as well as to provide an appropriate trainer who would help them to progress better in acquiring competences.

Regarding the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the non-formal adult education programs, it can be concluded that the principle of inclusion is respected in terms of ethnic, gender and religious determination. The principle for the implementation of the non-formal adult education programs

in the native language of the participants is respected, so if necessary, trainers or translators for certain programs and teaching materials are provided.

Some of the basic functions and benefits of vocational education and training, as well as the education of adults, are to improve the ability of young people and adults to work opportunities, to enable them to progress in the labour market, but also to increase their potential. Developing these functions will contribute to reducing the ubiquitous exclusion from the world of work and society as a whole.

Only through continuous adaptation to the changing needs of the modern labour market, introducing innovations in teaching and delivering training, respecting and fully implementing the concept of inclusion in the context of lifelong learning, youth and adults can reduce poverty and social differences and support sustainable development processes.

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