

REFORMS AND THE SYSTEM FOR ADULT EDUCATION IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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УДК: 374.7(497.7)

Abstract

The past decade in Republic of Macedonia is characterized with increased efforts for reforming educational system at all degrees, including adult education. For that matter, several strategic, legal and operative documents and institutions were established in order to create the grounds for development and affirmation of adult education in the country. Following the path for educational development of other European countries, Republic of Macedonia is facing challenges immanent for all developing countries: lack of financial resources in this educational sector, low rate of involvement of participants in all available forms of adult education, lack of educated teaching staff for working with adults, inappropriate institutional coordination, etc., which is emphasizing the necessity of serious and studious approach in reforming this educational subsystem which should strengthen the staggered foundation on which is primarily based.

Keywords: *adult education, educational challenges, lifelong learning.*

Creating system for adult education – challenge or necessity?

Contemporary conceptualization of educational systems throughout the world is based on accomplishing one goal: to enable young people to acquire competences which will secure solid foundation for further life and work. This set of “required” competences is comprised of basic, key, specific, as well as social and personal competences which will enable people to live and work together and to live happy and fulfilled life.

Serious challenge that educational systems in knowledge based societies are facing – to prepare young people for professions which will may not exist in future with competences which we don’t know whether will answer the changing demands of labor market, is accenting indispensable affirmation of the lifelong learning concept which has preventive and reeducative function.

European educational policies, expressed in the document “Education and training 2020” are tracing education and training path in correlation with lifelong learning. Namely, lifelong learning should be considered as fundamental principle on which overall framework of European education and training should be based upon from formal, non-formal and informal character stretching from early childhood development to adult education. Referent framework for development of education and training should be focused on accomplishing four strategic goals:

- making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;

- promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Structure of adult education system in Republic of Macedonia

The Republic of Macedonia, following its independency 1991, started to build and develop an authentic education system based on the principles of democracy. Although numerous steps were undertaken in order to establish an education system that will meet the challenges of the 21st century, the area of adult education and training was neglected in favour of the systems of primary and secondary education, until the beginning of the new millennium.

Turbulent changes in societal organization and educational irrepressibility and concealment, are conditioning adult education to get primacy of sporadic activity which is positioned at the bottom of the list of priorities of the independent country.

It is well known that the part which adult population has for the state development is of invaluable importance, and the fact that it is almost 83% from the overall population from the country, is confirming the need for raising awareness of the people for the importance of adult education and lifelong learning.

Regarding this question, professor Zoran Velkovski from the Faculty of philosophy in Skopje states: "...adults are the ones who have the biggest influence to socio-economic and cultural development of the country, and youngsters are those who continue that development...". The thesis that educational insufficiency is immanent only for adult structure of population, which unfortunately exists, and that by their "extinction" on one hand and coming young educated youth on the other hand, there will be suitable educational structure in the country – is not only morbid, but also profane. Generations do not "come down" to the stage of the "societal theater" to recede place of other generations, but they are entwined in longer period of time, which creates fruitful ground for caricature creation of reality which from the aspect of heritage is implying influence of destructive mechanisms in overall economic, political and cultural development of the country"

Dismayed is the fact that by 2006 Republic of Macedonia didn't had government and state strategy and specific law or law regulative for development, organization and realization of adult education. After announcing the year 1996, as a European year for lifelong learning by the Council of Europe, petrified standpoint towards adult education is starting to change and lots of activities are undertaken by the creators of educational policies in European countries and in Republic of Macedonia.

In 2006, the General Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the National Program for development of education in Republic of Macedonia 2005-2015. An integral part of this National Program was the Program for Adult Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning, as a strategic document addressing adult education as an integral part of the whole education system. In the framework of this Program, the main goal of adult education was defined as "to provide equal opportunities for all people to obtain quality education and to acquire certain knowledge, skills and competences".

The systemic approach towards adult education and training began with the adoption of the Law on Adult Education, in November, 2008, which awards adult education and training the appropriate and equal place in the overall education system,

which regulates the rights and obligations of institutions and individuals involved in the process and has the purpose to providing education, educational improvement, qualification, learning and training for adults. This is the first legal document of this kind which regulates adult education and training and treats non-formal education and learning as an important part of the person's learning path. The goal of adult education and training in Republic of Macedonia in accordance with the Law on Adult Education is to secure opportunities for obtaining appropriate education levels to all and for all age groups, and to allow everyone to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes which will be in concordance with the demands of society and the labour market.

The priorities for adult education and training in Republic of Macedonia described in the Strategy for adult education (2010-2015), developed by the Council for Adult Education, are focused towards realisation on the following strategic aims:

- Strengthening the system for adult education through developing a statistical and information system for monitoring and tracking education mobility of adults;
- Creating conditions lifelong learning and mobility to become reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training of adults;
- Promoting equality, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Promoting adult education and culture of learning through active approach to adult education and training.

Institutions involved in adult education system

Not defined role which different institutions have in affirmation of adult education and training has much to say about the place, significance and function which this subsystem has in the stairway of educational subsystems in Republic of Macedonia.

In Republic of Macedonia different types of institutions constitute the system for adult education. On one hand, there are public and state institutions and providers, which have obligations and competences for implementing adult education and training, and on the other hand there are private institutions which offer different types of training courses for adults following individual and Labor market demands.

Council for Adult Education. The Government of Republic of Macedonia established the Council for Adult Education as advisory state body addressing strategic questions related to adult education policy and it is constituted of 13 members. Following activities are under competence of the Council for Adult Education:

- Proposes Strategy for developing adult education in the context of lifelong learning to the Ministry of Education and Science;
- Monitors implementation of action plans of the Strategy for Development of Adult Education;
- Proposes national qualifications and standards of occupations to the Ministry of Education and Science;
- Proposes financial paths for financing adult education programmes from the State budget;
- Proposes solutions for developing networks of institutions that provide adult education (together with local authorities) to the Ministry of Education and Science.

Center for adult education is a public institution for adult education which is constituted as a legal asset by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

The mission of the Center for adult education is to establish functional, contemporary and Europe compatible system for adult education in context of lifelong learning which will secure high quality education and possibilities for obtaining qualifications in accordance with individual needs, increasing employability and entrepreneurship, labor market demands and will contribute towards economic, social and personal development.

Main goals of the Center for adult education are: to contribute in realization of socio-economic needs of the country, to answer the demands of the labor market and to assist individuals to fulfill their personal development.

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia has the responsibilities in the area of adult education to: adopt Strategy for Adult Education and Action Plans for its implementation based on the proposal of the Council for Adult Education; Verifies institutions and issues licenses for adult education pursuant to Law; Provides national syllabi and curricula for adult education; provides syllabi and curricula for primary and general and vocational secondary education for adults based on the proposal of the Centre for Adult Education; provides financial assets from the Budget from Republic of Macedonia for financing, research and development adult education based on the appointed state needs and the priorities of the European Union.

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has an obligation to participate in state policy in the area for adult education throughout the following assignments: analyses the labour market and proposes certain opinions for requalification and new qualification of the labour force; participates in creating national standards of occupations.

Local authority. Following decentralization and devolution of authority, part of the competence in the area of adult education is under local authorities. The Council of the Local Self-government has several obligations: to conduct analyses of labour market needs at local level and to distribute them to the Centre for Adult Education and institutions for adult education; to establish institutions for adult education; to make proposals for the enrolment policy of students in adult education programmes.

National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility in Republic of Macedonia. The Agency has the responsibility to manage and conduct several European educational and mobility programmes which should contribute towards development of adult education and training in the country, as well as to increase the societal awareness of the importance of lifelong learning and adult education to the state and individual progress.

Private institutions for adult education, centres of excellence, social partners, non-governmental organizations, civil society associations and individual adult trainers can also be providers of adult education and training programmes, according to the Law on Adult Education. Several groups of providers can be identified as important for adult education and training:

Public and private specialized institutions for adult education and training: Community civic universities for lifelong learning (workers universities), education consultancy companies, training centres, centres for foreign languages, centres for computer education, centres for counselling and professional orientation, elementary schools for adult education.

Secondary education schools.

Labour unions(which provide proposals to the employers for improving conditions for conducting practical training of participants in adult education; have possibility to form institutions for adult education and training funded by the Union).

Chambers and associations(which provide proposals to the Centre for Adult Education for new and innovative programmes, as well as creating new standards of occupations;have possibility to form institutions for adult education and training funded by the chamber or association).

Agencies for employment.

Professional bodies.

Universities.

Non-governmental organisations.

There are other institutions and organizations, which in addition to their main function provide certain adult education and training activities, such as: libraries, museums, publishing companies, cultural centres, etc. Bigger private companies often provide for their employees contemporary training or other forms of further education.

Program provision in adult education and training

Adult education and training in the Republic of Macedonia is conducted through formal, non-formal and informal types of learning.

In the Macedonian adult education system, participants can acquire education in programmes for elementary, secondary and high education adjusted to their needs and possibilities. Adults can obtain education and training in formal and private licensed institutions with verified programmes for adult education.

All programmes are adjusted to the age, prior education, knowledge, skills and attitudes of the participants. They can be conducted through several forms: regular teaching, consultative and instructional teaching, distance learning and other participant appropriate forms of teaching. Programs can also have modular structure.

Programmes are conducted by teaching staff (professors, teachers, instructors for practical training and external experts), who must possess special training for teaching adults organized by certain institutions and organizations. Adult educators have obligation to permanently improve their knowledge, skills and competences.

Pursuant to the Law on Adult Education, anyone who is 15 years old or over and fulfils other specific conditions and demands of the program can become participant in adult education and training programmes.

Adults who possess knowledge, skills and competences from certain area can prove it through passing certain exams in the institutions and organizations which provide that kind of programmes, except the State Matura exam, the School Matura exam and Final Leaving exam in secondary education. This is an alternative way to acknowledge prior and experiential learning of adults who did not have the possibility to be a part of the formal education process. After finishing adult education programmes, participants are provided with certificates testifying to knowledge, skills and competences obtained with the program.

Future steps?

Current asset of the system for adult education and training in Republic of Macedonia is implying lots of deficiencies reflected in decrease of number and providers of services in this sector. Accomplishing referent goals set in European strategic educational documents for active participation of adult population in all forms of lifelong learning process with 15% by the year 2020 is imposing necessity of thorough reforms in this area.

Revising, reconstructing and contemporariness of elementary adult education trough flexible programs which will meet the demands and the characteristics of the people; standardized system for evaluating prior and experiential learning, reviving distance and e-learning; strengthening infrastructural and didactical capacities of elementary schools for adults.

Upgrading the competences of the teaching staff which works with adults by incorporating set of compulsory andragogycal subjects in their initial education.

Cooperation between formal and non-formal sector in the area of adult education.

Raising awareness of the people for the significance of the adult education and lifelong learning trough campaigns of different kind (joint efforts of mass media, societal and local educational centers, non-governmental organizations, etc.)

Recognition of non-formal and informal education and learning.

Building system for adult education which will be based on the Labor market demands.

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