

THE IMPACT OF THE TRAINER' COMMUNICATIONAL STYLE ON ADULT LEARNERS 'LEARNING STYLES



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ABSTRACT

Today, it is clear to everyone that regardless of the studies completed, the process of continuous improvement is necessary depending on the field in which they work. Each country has designed specific strategies in the field of adult education, as part of lifelong learning.

Our research had the aim to highlight, beyond the type of training program for adults, the relationship between the communication style of trainers involved in adult education and the learning style of adult learners.

In our research we used: a) the "Questionnaire S.C. (Analysis of Communication Style) b) the Romanian version of "Learning style Questionnaire"; c) non-directive interviews; d) statistical processing methods.

The results that came from the data allow us to see the influences of the trainers' communicational style upon the learning style of adult learners during the training sessions.

The conclusions are significant for developing proper vocational counselling programs for trainers that are involved in training adult learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adult' education, due to the effects: of globalization, of increasing number of aging populations, of increasing retirement age, currently is not only a subject of interest for the specialists coming from educational sciences, but also it is a subject that concern the experts from economy, sociology, communicational sciences.

The concept of "adult education" is not new, as it is about a century and a half old in European countries, from the days when the Danish Enlightenment Grundtvig campaigned for the transformation of Sorø Academy into a different school than the traditional universities.

The concept of adult education, as an ensemble integrated in the global project of lifelong learning, was imposed under momentum of UNESCO and of the Council of Europe, bodies interested in providing equal opportunities for development to each individual throughout his life and in all fields, in order to participate fully in the development

of society. Formalized under the auspices of these international forums, the expansion of the topic of adult education is explained by several reasons of a social and economic nature.

The adult education has no boundaries. Adults have equal rights of access to education, without discrimination based on age, sex, race and ethnicity, politics and religious affiliation

Each country tried to facilitate the adult education according to his specificity. In Romania, interest about adult education was expressed before joining the U.E. The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Law 202/2002) emphasizes the equal right of both sexes to participate in training programs, as well as to receive counselling and career guidance. The access of adults, employees or jobseekers (defined in accordance with Law 76/2002) to training programs is a right guaranteed by the Labour Code (Law 53/2003). After joining the EU, in Romania, adult education was approached as an integral part of lifelong learning (as it is mentioned in the Romanian National Education Law, Law no. 1/2011).

But let see what adult education stand for.

Adult education includes all the developing processes of formal and other learning, with which adults, in the spirit of the society in which they live, develop their skills, improve their technical and professional skills and enrich their knowledge or apply it for personal and social benefit. Adult education includes the forms of formal, continuing, non-formal, informal education and the whole spectrum of informal and complementary education existing in the polyvalent educational society, in which the approaches focused on theory and practice are recognized.

Adult education is not only a process of assimilation, internalization, development, but also a process of restructuring, generalization, of changing the relations between adult and environment (social, work, family, etc.). The adult sometimes has a passive attitude towards learning, generated by reluctance to change and the fear of not meeting the demands of learning or diminishing his social prestige. From this it can be concluded that adult education is a process of knowledge, but especially a practical action of capitalization and application of knowledge and life experiences. (apud. Jarvis, 2004).

As in each educational action/ activity/process, the learning is the most significant part in adult education. But we have to be honest and to mention that the learning in adulthood is not the same like in childhood. The goals of the learning process in adulthood area changed. For the adult, the learning activity is an inner act, not a constraint; he is not a passive receiver, he seeks, discovers knowledge; he is an agent of his own education (apud. Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The adult does not want to be educated. He is now "formed." He will resist to any attempt to re-educate him. The adult educates himself.

Adult learning means deepening, restructuring, creation; it is focused on concrete situations, detached from life, it appeals to experience. One can notice the reversal of the informative-formative relationship, which means putting a special emphasis on the creative - practical activities within the adult learning process.

The most obvious feature of adult learning is the responsibility with which they seek to acquire skills and knowledge. The adult engages in a learning activity if there is a correlation between his projects and the desire to achieve them (Freedman,1985).

In 1984, M. Knowles pointed the principle of adult education: 1. Adults are motivated to learn as they develop certain needs and interests that are met by learning. Therefore, the needs and interests of adult learners are the starting point suitable for structuring adult educational activities - the essential landmarks for preparing a training session; 2. The orientation of adults towards learning is determined by the life or work they carry out. Therefore, the appropriate framework for structuring adult education must consist of situations of life or work and not from academic or theoretical subjects; 3. Experience is the richest resource for adult education. Therefore, the basic methodology for adult education programs involves active participation in a planned set of experiences, analysis of those experiences and their implementation in life or work situations; 4. Adults feel an urgent need to self-direct. Therefore, the role of the trainer is rather to engage with students in a process of research, analysis and decision than to pass on knowledge to them and then test whether they have mastered it; 5. The individual differences between adult students are accentuated by age and by personal experience. Therefore, adult education programs must take into account in particular the differences in style, time, place and pace of learning (apud. Caffarella, 2001, p.57).

In the same period, in 1984, D. Kolb wanted to show how adults analyse their own experience in order to understand and apply it in new situations, David Kolb developed a model of experiential learning. The fundamental idea of experiential learning is that the learner is directly involved in a learning experience. event, then draw conclusions based on it. These conclusions are "teachings"

Kolb suggested a cycle of activities in the process of learning through experience, consisting of four elements: a) Concrete experience; b) Reflection. Remember what happened; c) Abstract conceptualization: you start to realize the experience, draw conclusions, try to frame the experience in known patterns (schemes), formulate theories and rules; d) Application and testing of concepts in new conditions. (Kolb, 1984)

The learning process is in continuum developing and each person has his own learning style. The learning style can be defined as the way in which an individual / person assimilates knowledge, skills, abilities and integrates them according to their specificity and complexity, in a specific dynamic conceptual system that is structured pyramidally in relation to the learning experience. The learning style has three basic elements: 1.- the person's attitudes, as constant ways of relating it to the social life, to the fellows and to oneself; 2.- the learning models with which he was confused during his life learned communication - assertive, non-assertive, aggressive (with its passive-aggressive variant), manipulative; 3.- temperament, as a type of nerve cell reactivity.

Two developmental and learning management specialists, P. Honey and A. Mumford, researching Kolb's studies, among others, have developed in 1986 a theory of adult learning styles. They classified the four learning styles as follows: a) Active style. Active people get involved in new experiences, without prejudices. They enjoy the present and have an open mind, which makes them enthusiastic about anything new. They make judgments based more on feelings and intuition than on theory, which characterizes it as "too abstract.; b) Reflective style. Reflective people stand aside and judge experiences, observing them from different perspectives. They collect data both personally and through others, and prefer to analyse it carefully before reaching a conclusion; c) Theoretical style. Theorists adapt and integrate their observations into theories that sound logical. They analyse a problem logically, step by step, and assemble all the circumstances into a coherent theory. They tend to be perfectionists, they are concerned with principles, theories, models; d) The pragmatic style. Pragmatists are people eager to try ideas, theories, techniques to see if they work in practice. They are always looking for new ideas and take the first opportunity to experience them in practice (apud. Honey, Mumford, 1986).

Research related to adult learning style shows that during different activities, each person can use one or two learning styles (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, 2000) and maintaining awareness of his/her particular learning style has a huge impact on learning outcomes and increase choices for personal development (Margot, Arlene., 2018).

Learning activities, in spite of the forms that is done- informal, formal, long life learning, social, cognitive, etc., involve sending and receiving messages between the participants; directly or indirect, verbal or not. - it involves communication. Practically, communication is the binder between the person that provides information (teacher, trainer) and the person that gets information (students, adult learners, mentees, etc.).

In adult education the communication process involved has distinct features, mainly that the training programs, in particular those that are developed in private and accredited organizations, are led up by the fundamental principles: the adult learner is an active participant; the adult attend training programs in order to get knowledges, skills, experiences for achieving better professional insertion in labour field and social environment_Therefore, the trainer' communicational style suits more in the practicum aria for understanding the utility of the information that the training program provides.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this context, the following questions arise: which are the influences of the trainer' communication style on the adult' learning style? Are specific areas of the training program that we notice these influences more present than in other?

To answer this question, we developed an investigative research that had the aim to identify the influences of the trainer' communication style upon the learning style of adult learners; the wider goal was to see if we can increase the efficiency of the training' adult programs developed by the private educational providers.

Our research focused on two major objectives: a) investigation of the trainers' communication style; b) investigation the learning styles of adult learners.

We started our investigation from the following hypothesis: taking into consideration that the adult learners choose the training programs according with their personal development goals, we will find specific influences of the trainers communicational style on adult learners' learning style in relation with trainers' training experience.

Participants

Our research had an initial testing procedure on 15 Romanian trainers coming from private educational organizations and 36 adult learners that followed training programs provided by private organizations and the Cronbach Alpha index ($\alpha = .764$) obtained allowed us to proceed to an extended psychological research.

We performed our research on: a) 39 Romanian trainers coming from private educational organizations, aged 31-56 years (with mean of 42.26 years and median =39.05 years) and 6-20 years' experience in the field of training adult. The trainers' participation to this investigation was voluntary and based on personal accord. Distribution is uniform, skewness index values from .821 to 1.893, and with a standard error of skewness from .673 to 1.581; kurtosis index values from .675 to 1.862, and with a standard error of kurtosis from .761 to 1.729); b) on 118 adult learners that followed training programs provided by private organizations, aged 29-54 years (with mean of 44.07 years and median =43.05 years). The adult learners' participation to this investigation was voluntary and based on personal accord. Distribution is uniform, skewness index values from .953 to 1.784, and with a standard error of skewness from .791 to 1.642; kurtosis index values from .748 to 1.621, and with a standard error of kurtosis from .725 to 1.587).

Methods

In our research we used the following instruments: a) the "Questionnaire S.C. (Analysis of Communication Style) – built in 2010 for Romanian trainers by R. Urea based on the S. Marcus's Questionnaire S.C. (fidelity index = .784, test- retest index=. 744) b) the "Learning style Questionnaire" Romanian version - an adapted questionnaire for Romanian adults (fidelity index = .804, test- retest index=, 781) by R. Urea in 2015 (of the questionnaire created by Honey and Mumford in 1986); c) non-directive interviews; d) statistical processing methods.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. INVESTIGATION OF THE TRAINERS' COMMUNICATION STYLE

Investigation of the role of the communication was the objects of concern of experts, especially of those coming from educational sciences, psychology, sociology. In current practice, in education, the data collected from serious researchers proved to be valued and strategies was developed in order to facilitate the process of understanding of the contents during the training session. Each training program for adult 'learners has a distinct section regarding communication associated to the specific topic.

There are serious researches done on the effectiveness of training in diversity (Holladay., Quiñones, 2008), on the impact of teachers' communication on pupil's self- safety in learning process (Urea, 2013) on treatment the anxious patients (Van der Molen, Klaver, Duyx 2004), etc.

In this study, we were focus upon revealing the specific communication styles of trainers involved in training programs for adult learners. Therefore, we used the S.C. Questionnaire aimed to reveal the for types of communication styles: assertive, non-assertive, aggressive and manipulator; the data are presented in table no 1.

Table 1: Communication styles of investigated trainers.

Type of indicators	Types of communication style			
	Non-assertive style	Aggressive style	Manipulative style	Assertive Style
Mean	5.5167	5.9400	6.3500	11.8000
Std. Error of Mean	.34890	.35471	.28801	.26913
Std. Deviation	2.70258	2.74757	2.23095	2.08465

From the data presented in table no.1, we noticed that the dominant style among our investigated trainers is the assertive one. It means, that during the training sessions, they have the abilities to clear expression of their' opinions and are also able to pursue the training objectives without violating the adult learners need. In other words, it means that during the training session, the trainers know how to combine different methods and strategies that allow them to maintain a proper psychological distance with adult 'learners, to generate curiosity and satisfaction in relation to adult learners need.

Probably the data are better understood if we take in consideration the opinions expressed by our investigated students (adult learners) during the interviews that we conducted. Most of them associated the trainer' assertive style with:

- the ability to provide explanations of the training contents depending on the field in which they work (79%);
- the ability to create problematic situations appropriate to the understanding of the contents (68%);
- the ability to create role-playing games appropriate to the students' personality (54%);
- the ability to plan training time (46%).
- From statistical data we found that there is a direct, significant correlation between the trainer' experience and the assertive communication style used in training sessions $r = .789, p = .01$.

We can say the assertive communication style of the trainers for adult learners develops as the trainer's experience grows. Satisfying development needs of adult learners during the training programs determines the permanent reconsideration of objectives and prioritization of activities.

3.2. INVESTIGATION OF THE ADULT LEARNERS' LEARNING STYLE

One of the major area of researches in educational sciences is related to improve the efficiency of the learning outcomes by taking in consideration the students' learning style. There are studies done in relation with educational psychology (Redifer, Norman, Ryle, 2019), in relation with academic performance (İlçin, Tomruk, Yeşilyaprak, 2018), etc.

In our study we investigated the four learning styles developed by Honey and Mumford in 1986; the data collected are presented in table no.2.

Table 2: Learning styles of investigated adult learners

Type of indicators	Types of learning style			
	Reflective style	Active style	Theoretical style	Pragmatic Style
Mean	5.8302	6.2400	6.7150	12.6400
Std. Error of Mean	.37880	.39531	.32480	.25743
Std. Deviation	2.80358	2.94657	2.53195	2.25485

We can see from data presented above (table no.2) that the dominant learning style among our investigated adult learner is the pragmatic style. It means that at these subjects the learning outcomes are higher because:

- there is an obvious link between the topic discussed and the activity they performed in labour market;
- ideas with obvious applicability are presented by the trainers;
- they have had the opportunity to practice, to benefiting from the comments / assistance of an expert trainer;
- the trainer presents them with a useful model, which they can replicate in different work' contexts;
- they are offered techniques and skills that are currently applied to the activity they carry out in labour market.

We wanted to see that really means the findings that we presented in paragraphs above. So, we asked our investigated learners that revealed the pragmatic learning style about the significances associated with. We find that:

- 82% pointed the utility of the learning contents;
- 74% pointed the transferability of skills formed to other work' contexts;
- 69% pointed the possibility of differentiated use of abilities, skills formed in interdisciplinary teams on tasks
- 55% pointed the satisfaction with the new opportunities offered by new knowledge, skills
- formed in the training sessions.

The statistical data analyses pointed that, in training sessions there are a direct and very significant correlations between the trainers' communication style and the adult learners' learning style:

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- trainers that have assertive communication style work better with adult learners that have pragmatic learning style ($r=.887, p=.01$);
- trainers that have non- assertive communication style work better with adult learners that have reflective learning style ($r=.769, p=.05$);
- trainers that have aggressive communication style work better with adult learners that have active learning style ($r=.724, p=.05$);
- trainers that have manipulator communication style work better with adult learners that have theoretical learning style ($r=.759, p=.05$).

So, we can say that learning style of adult learners is shaped during the training sessions by the contents, by the strategies used by the trainers and is associated with personal goals related with the activities they carry out in labour market.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research had the goal to identify the influences of the trainer' communication style upon the adult learners and are relevant for increasing the quality of the training programs

We used in our investigation instruments adapted for Romanian adult population.

We found that:

- 1) the communication style of the trainers for adult learners develops as the trainer's experience grows and become a landmark for trainer' personal brand.
- 2) adult learners' personal goals have key roles in learning style during the training sessions.
- 3) the success of the training program with adult learners depends the relation between their learning style and trainer' communication style

The assumption of our research was confirmed.

We can use the previous conclusions for:

- developing vocational counselling programs for trainers involved in adult education.
- developing modern strategies of training the adult learners in relation with their learning styles;
- increasing the efficiency of training sessions by selecting contents in relation with adult learners' goals;
- encouraging the "good practices changes" between trainers who train adult learners;
- developing stress copying techniques for trainers who train adult learners.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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