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Non-Formal Adult Education: Challenges and Prospects of 21st Century

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Abstract

The article defines the essence and significance of adult non-formal education as an important component of the system of continuing education; analyzes changes in the definition of the phenomenon of non-formal adult education, its role and place in the knowledge society; emphasizes on the importance of development of mechanisms for validation of results of non-formal and informal adult education, training of and ragogues; outlines perspectives of its development.

Keywords: adult education, non-formal adult education, knowledge society, lifelong learning, institutionalization, validation, training

Introduction

Global economy is viewed by scientists as mega tendency of the 21st century which has dramatic implications for adult education (Milana, Nesbit, 2015). It is connected with obsolescence of knowledge and lack of competences, vital necessity of professional training of employees, changes in workforce structure, transition to information society, achievements of scientific progress, development of new technologies.

Continuous education is viewed nowadays not only as life-long but also as life-wide education (Council of the European Union, 2000). It draws attention to broadening of opportunities of usage of formal, non-formal and informal education. In this context non-formal adult education is viewed as equal component of adult education system, as socio-cultural component, which reflects necessity of adults to get diverse educational services.

The aim of the article is to characterize changes, which take place in definition of essence of non-formal adult education, its role and place in modern society, to single out perspectives of its development.

Theoretical framework and research methods. Over the past decades, scholars have actively pursued research on the problems of adult education as a whole

and non-formal adult education in particular: philosophical foundations of adult education (Elias, Merriam, 2004; Kidd, 1973), conceptual foundations of non-formal adult education (Jarvis, 2004; Cross, 1982; Merriam, 2006), andragogical approaches to adult education (Brocket, 1991; Knowles, 1980;), features of andragogue training (Griffin, 1987; Henshke, 1998).

For our research we have used general scientific methods, namely, analysis, synthesis and generalization of the scientific information on different theoretical approaches to the problem of non-formal adult education.

Non-formal Adult Education – Demand of Knowledge Society

In modern knowledge society the conception of “life-long education” takes priority. It influences intensive development of formal and non-formal adult education. Lengrand (1975) argues that future of education in general and ability of education to renovation depend on adult education development (c. 28).

Main factors of intensive education development are social and economic changes that take place in society. Merriam (2006) thinks that sociocultural context which unites three dimensions: demography, technology and economics globalization creates specific interests and necessities of adults and educational opportunities which are provided

The response of adult education to sociocultural context of modern society is integration and interpenetration of formal and non-formal education, which is the basis of building the knowledge society.

In summary resolution of the Sixth International UNESCO Conference on Adult Education, it is declared that learning and education of adults are an important solution to the problems which we face. Adult learning and education are key components of holistic and many-sided system of learning and education during the whole life which comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning and which is aimed directly or indirectly at young and adult learners. Adult learning and education, in the long run, are connected with provision of important conditions and processes of attractive nature that meet needs of adults as active citizens. They are connected with development of independent individuals, making and remaking their lives under complex and rapidly changing cultural, social and economic conditions – at work, in family, in community and in society (UNESCO, 2009). Non-formal education is any organized and systematized learning, conducted outside formal education which amplifies it, providing acquisition of knowledge and skills, necessary for economically and socially active citizens of the country. This educational activity is structured, has educational aim, certain time constraints, infrastructural support and is conducted consciously.

From Enlightenment to Institutionalization: Ways of Non-formal Adult Education Development

Adult education as a complex phenomenon began its development in 18th century. Adults have always been included in the cognition process since the ancient times. In general adult education development was based on the Enlightenment idea of moving “from darkness to light”. The Danish scientist L. Zolner states that enlightenment helps to achieve interpretation of life’s problems and “understanding” of life. It is more than acquisition of information or knowledge transition, for enlightenment implies not only knowledge acquisition (intellectual aspect), but also active part of every member in this process (emotional aspect). Enlightenment gives everyone a belief that he or she can act, take responsibility in problem solution (Zøllner, 2000). For this reason Enlightenment is viewed by us as special form of adult education, which acts as its vital, system-forming element, closely connected with adult non-formal education.

The first fundamental theoretical works on adult education appeared at the beginning of the 20th century. In these works adult education was identified with continuous education and necessity “to earn from life”. They stressed on the necessity to create life conditions, which give opportunities to study during life irrespective of age. At the same time it was stressed that adult education cannot be accessible only to limited number of people, it is a vital element of society life and for this reason it should be viewed as necessity for everyone during the whole life (Griffin, 1987, p. 55). Such approach to adult education was followed in majority of Western countries, including the Scandinavian countries, till the 1960s.

E. Lindeman viewed adult education as constructive force of social activity and making of democratic society. He wrote that for him adult education was the basis for establishment of democracy, opportunity to get information for solution of everyday problems. Its aim is to disclose human potential for democracy (Ohienko, 2009, p. 116).

According to Brison and Verner adult education includes all activities of adults for educational purposes, which are conducted by adults beyond their professional life and lead to intellectual development, necessary for business. It consumes energy and time (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgarther, 2006, p. 37).

This definition is based on three important conclusions: firstly, adult education is specially organized for a particular aim, but not an occasional activity; secondly, it is voluntary, for every adult acquires education according to his or her own wish and takes into consideration his or her incentives; thirdly – it is supplementary to the main activity of an individual.

Merriam mentions that high speed of industry development, increase in number of enterprises caused the need in adults’ professional knowledge acquisition. For this reason the most common was a wide definition of this term. Adult education includes any kind of adult educational activity, including types

of formal and non-formal education, which give educational opportunities for adults that can be used in business, industry, family etc. (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgarther, 2006, p. 157).

The term “non-formal education” has been in use since 1968. Its emergence was connected with the crisis in education, when non-formal education was viewed as “panacea” from all problems in education, as perfect form of education which is better than formal education (Illeris, 2004). The basic factor of this process was the ability of non-formal education to embrace a large number of people, activating the whole educational potential that exists beyond formal education and makes education cheaper and more accessible.

Thus, adult non-formal education developed and began to be viewed not as supplementary to formal education, but as an equal component (sometimes even as leading) of adult education system.

Perspectives of Non-formal Adult Education Development in the 21st Century

In European and world theory and practice of continuous adult education, key principles determining its functioning have been formulated. They determine perspectives of development of adult education as a whole and non-formal adult education in particular.

They are basic and universal: new basic knowledge and skills for everyone; increase in investment in human resources; innovative methods of teaching and learning; new system of assessment of acquired education; development of consultation system; connection of personality and education (Council of the European Union, 2000).

There are some changes in adult education conception. There is a transition from functional-professional training to development of personality. It means that modern mission of adult education is wider and implies inclusion of citizens to many-sided life not only to job market, for the necessity to study during life plays the key role in renovation of stability, dynamic development of society, its civil, professional and family spheres. Adult education in all its dimensions – formal, non-formal and informal is aimed at development of personality and must have support at the estate level. Such approach together with the right of individuals to acquire education at any age must become a basic norm of laws in world’s countries.

It should be stressed that non-formal adult education is the main factor of continuous education development and building of democratic civil society. The main demands to non-formal adult education are prognostic capability, i. e. orientation of non-formal education to changes of socio-economic environment and optional educational needs of population; diversity which provides a wide range of educational services according to educational needs of an individual and society; adaptation as ability to flexible reorientation of content, forms and

methods of teaching to meet the demands of job market, individual needs of an individual; accessibility as an important condition of state guarantee for education of citizens.

At present, one of the ways of development of adult education as a whole and non-formal education in particular was outlined in the summary declaration of the Sixth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education CONFINTEA VI. It stated that policy efficiency, management and financing, inclusiveness, equality and quality are vital conditions for realization of adults' rights for education (UNESCO, 2010).

International organizations and governments associate the perspectives of adult education development with working out special strategies and national programs, and mechanisms of validation of results of non-formal and informal adult education. Recognition of results of these forms of education is viewed as a process which leads to achievement of benefits and merits of economic, social, psychological and educational character (Ohienko, 2009).

Important direction of non-formal adult education is training of specialists in the field of adult education. M. Knowles wrote that primary assignment of the world pedagogical community is training of efficient specialists in the field of adult education who are able to use their knowledge under constantly changing conditions, who are able to be engaged in self-improvement and self-education during life (Knowles, 1980, p. 65).

Conclusion

The results of our research give ground to conclude that non-formal education as a trend of adult education becomes more and more popular. It is characterized by innovations, dynamics, is able to react adequately to modern needs of state, society, adult individual; is formed on the basis of modern values and methodology; has potential opportunities for the increase in quality of life of people and society. Structures of non-formal adult education are characterized by high level of flexibility and diversity of forms, ability to embrace all socio-professional and age groups. Flexibility is realized through selection of a wide range of programs, terms and places of learning, their individualization, orientation at specific needs and interests of every learner. Perception of adult education as profitable service which is successfully sold at the international market substantially narrows its civil and cultural assignments.

The main directions of non-formal adult education are: fulfillment of the increasing cognitive needs during free time; comprehensive cultural development of an individual, fulfillment of educational and aesthetic needs; narrowing of generation knowledge gap; help in adaptation of an individual to society and world of nature; compensation of lack of formal education and correction of drawbacks of its functioning; development of the need in education, ability to study independently, cognize oneself and ones abilities.

We believe that non-formal adult education can be an effective tool in complete or partial meeting of challenges of the modern world, particularly, social inequality, migration, demographic processes, unemployment, spread of digital technologies, climate changes.

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