

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING COMPETENCIES AS A PREREQUISITE FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN OPEN LEARNING RESOURCES: E-LEARNING PLATFORM CASE

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Abstract

Development of E-Learning and various of E-learning platforms as well as the development of information and communication technologies in general, is so fast that there is almost no doubt that sooner or later they will become the routine for each of us. Information and communication technologies have not only expanded our ability to access, manage, disseminate information, but also to do this very quickly, over long distances and in even huge quantities. Today, their application in the educational process is not only relevant to the aspects of visualization or activation. They become one of the essential tools of teaching and learning activities in the 21st century, but by expanding our learning opportunities they have also highlighted the need for new learning competences.

The traditional roles of teacher and learner are replaced by new ones because in E-Teaching / learning environment, the learner must not only work independently, but also more and more often have to define learning goals, methods and activities, organize his / her learning, and so on. This requires that he has the competence of self-directed learning, which can be defined as readiness and ability to formulate individual learning goals independently; adjust them according to need and / or situation; plan and organize your learning process; to solve the various problems that arise during it; reflect on your own experience and evaluate the results and the process itself and, on the basis of those reflections, manage your further learning. The extent to which learners will have mastered this competence greatly depends on how much they will be able to and how qualitatively they will be able to benefit from the E-learning education.

Obviously, one of the essential duties of today's teacher is to create, as far as possible, a learning environment that is educationally friendly, enabling, stimulating, motivating, and constructive. However, the extent to which each learner will take from that environment will depend only on his / her own, namely engagement, motivation, relevant skills and competences, especially self-directed learning. Mastering this competence would not only lead to success in teaching / learning but would also largely save time and effort on learning. This competence is relevant for all ages, and the demand for adult learners is even greater

Keywords: Self-directed learning competencies; Knowledge management; E-learning platforms

1 INTRODUCTION

Development of E-Learning and various of E-learning platforms as well as the development of information and communication technologies in general, is so fast that there is almost no doubt that sooner or later they will become the routine for each of us. Information and communication technologies have not only expanded our ability to access, manage, disseminate information, but also to do this very quickly, over long distances and in even huge quantities. Today, their application in the educational process is not only relevant to the aspects of visualization or activation. They become one of the essential tools of teaching and learning activities in the 21st

century. One of such tools, especially in adult education, is different E-learning platforms which could be treated as open learning resources.

Such knowledge systems, such platforms create a lot of opportunities for users but at the same time raise some challenges and problems also (for example, lack or limits of knowledge managing, information seeking and especially self-directed learning skills and competences. Purpose of the article is theoretically and empirically to prove self-directed learning competencies as a prerequisite for knowledge management in open learning source. And the improvement will be based on the analysis of one of such platforms - the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, 2019).

The main goal of EPALE is to bring together the community of adult education professionals in a multilingual, dynamic, interactive and innovative space. The platform is intended for adult educators, andragogues, lecturers, volunteers, as well as policy makers, researchers and lecturers working in the field of adult education, in other words, for all, who in one or another way is interested in adult education and quality improvement. It enables adult educators, experts to get acquainted with the latest trends in adult education in Europe, exchange experiences in cyberspace, comment on the information provided in the platform, participate in practical communities of EPALE, discuss relevant adult education issues, search partners for project activities, etc. (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, 2019).

Aim of the platform, as all the academic platforms or social networks (Jeng, DesAutels, He & Li, 2017) is to become the main reference point for adult learning professionals in Europe. It offers a place to meet and discuss important adult learning topics, as well as to exchange ideas and materials to support professional practice. This type of community platform is the first of its kind for the sector of adult learning, especially nonformal. It means that EPALE was established to create better possibilities for adult educators to develop their qualification, but to use it qualitatively adult educators need some skills and attitudes. At first, it is skills of self-directed learning and management of such learning. And these skills are very important for active participation on the platform.

Members of the community can engage with adult learning colleagues across Europe through the site's features, including the forums and by commenting under blogs; can also interact with your peers across Europe through the thematic areas which provide structured content according to topic or find projects and make professional connections using the partner search repository. EPALE has a strong editorial policy that also centres on the adult learning community. All users should feel welcome on the site, and to trust the information that is presented on this platform. (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, 2019).

This platform was established 3 years ago, but already now has more than 52 600 registered members, more than 20 000 different kind of resources (scientific articles, methodic, news, practical cases etc.), more than 50 different Communities of practice. Communities of practice are online groups where people with similar interests from the adult learning sector can get together. (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, 2019).

The platform is very important also because the general agreement that adult learning by 2030 will be able to take advantage of an abundance of learning materials including open educational resources (OER), produced in multiple and collaborative ways, offered by many different providers and players, and used/reused by learners, enabling strong personalization of the learning processes. Fluidity will be the key to allowing learners to move easily from one educational setting to another without impediments, according to their own interests and needs of the moment. This vision is not necessarily new but is becoming more likely as we move towards a digital networked society. (Castaño Muñoz, Redecker, Vuorikari & Punie, 2013).

The exceptional feature of this platform is that active users can not only use the information, but also create or reconstruct, in other words, manage, the content of the platform also. This offers opportunities for creative thinking and the application of technological tools to support pedagogy, which, in turn, will empower us to participate in our societies knowledgeably and with respect for all. (Grassian, 2017, p.232-239).

In this case the knowledge systems especially specialized are very important and useful, but by expanding our learning opportunities they have also highlighted the need for new learning competences. Of course, such knowledge systems create a lot of opportunities for users but at the same time raise some challenges and problems also (for example, lack or limits of knowledge managing, information seeking, self-directed learning and other skills).

Meaningful and successful personal and professional life of today and the future requires the person's ability to adjust to the constantly changing environment, the ability and inclination to constructively react to changes, act in accordance with constantly renewing and increasing information. In this context learning to learn is understood as the person's wish and readiness to take up new tasks, the ability to control cognitive and emotional processes during learning and apply acquired abilities in various contexts. (Knowles, 1983, Sahlberg, 2005 et al.).

In order to succeed in learning, the learner has to understand the worth of learning, treat it as the lifelong learning process, feel the need to learn and improve, seek to know himself/herself as a learning person, have disposition and be able to independently, purposefully and persistently seek the set aim, be self-confident, believe in success of learning, feel responsibility for his/her learning activities, process and outcomes, be able to share knowledge and acquired experience with others, etc.

Anyway, developed approaches do not ensure success of learning to learn. It is necessary to know and understand how the learning process takes place, what ways and strategies are suitable for solving one or another learning problem, one must know that there are various learning styles, what concrete learning style, learning powers and possibilities of the concrete person are, what sources are available for learning, etc.

Therefore, the competency of learning to learn can be defined as readiness and the ability to independently raise learning aims and according to the need and/or situation correct them, plan and organize the learning process, solve arising various type problems, reflect on one's learning experience and evaluate obtained results considering them, manage the process of one's further learning, etc. It is important to perceive that learning to learn is not only acquisition of subject knowledge or abilities, this is thinking about one's learning process and its management. This, first of all, requires knowledge of the process of learning and its management peculiarities, cognition of oneself as a person and as a learner, the ability to apply various learning strategies and technologies, etc.

The importance of independent, responsible, creative, active person who is able to learn and act in a self-directed way is still more actualized when the (self-)educational process steps beyond the traditional environments and forms and takes place in new real (teaching and learning in the library, in the nature, enterprise, etc.) and virtual (eLearning, distance learning) environments, using the reality that is being created here and now, one's and others' experience as sources of teaching and learning and, based on them, creating one's individual knowing and acting here and now. Emphasizing the learner's active and conscious participation, also taking part of responsibility for both learning outcomes and the process of the very learning and teaching, the learning paradigm also presupposes the need to (self-)develop the corresponding abilities and competencies.

Considering quantity and quality of information existing today, the speed with which it is created and updated, presented to the consumer, etc., it is evident that today it is impossible and there is no need to cover all flow of information. On the contrary, it is particularly important to be able to find, select, analyze, evaluate information and perform other information management operations. In addition to general literacy, ICT management, critical thinking, creativity, etc., today it is particularly relevant for the person to be able to act and manage that information responsibly. The general culture of information literacy also becomes important.

One of the possible variants of (self-) development of this ability could be work with literature (usage of various printed sources), seeking not only to acquire subject knowledge but also emphasizing (self-) development of thinking. This, in turn, would encourage communication and cooperation of the (self-) educational process participants not only performing the activity but also

planning it, develop the student's responsibility for this activity and its results, enable to differentiate and individualize the (self-) educational process, etc.

Identification of the person's learning needs and resources on one's own initiative, formulation of learning aims, choice of the most suitable learning strategy, self-assessment of learning outcomes according to chosen criteria, etc. are essential characteristics of self-directed learning, emphasized in this model. It is important that already at school the child should learn to manage his/her learning process; i.e., be able to set a learning aim, foresee necessary activities and most suitable ways to reach it, monitor the learning process and outcome, be able to organize and if necessary change the learning process, based on assessments and reflections.

The goal of self-directed learning organization system is to educate self-directly learning personalities making innovative decisions, which have acquired bullying prevention and non-discrimination competencies. This is emphasized in many European documents on education and national documents regulating education (in the conclusions of the European Council "On Preparing Young People for the 21 Century" (2008/C 319/08),

Communication from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions „Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-economic Outcomes“ (COM (2012) 669, Strasbourg, 20.11.2012) etc.).

The system of self-directed learning orientated to innovative solutions and its suitability responding to requirements and challenges arising for today's comprehensive school and the educational process in general. The idea of self-directed learning as meaningful learning, which increases learner' independence, responsibility, expands their social participation, is grounded. Otherness, which is often the basis and the pretext of bullying, is acknowledged as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Learning cooperatively, sharing experiences, searching for innovative solutions and implementing them, otherness is perceived as one of the favourable and even necessary conditions enabling to reach more efficient, better quality holistic result of any teaching and learning activity. From the perspective of learning to learn (self-) education orientated to innovative solutions is significant because it is sought to activate learners to solve problems, individually but responsibly make adequate, innovative decisions in order to solve a corresponding problem.

Implementation of the self-directed learning system at school changes both the learner's and educator's activities and their roles. The traditional roles of teacher and learner are replaced by new ones because in E-Teaching / learning environment, the learner must not only work independently, but also more and more often have to define learning goals, methods and activities, organize his / her learning, and so on. This requires that he has the competence of self-directed learning, which can be defined as readiness and ability to formulate individual learning goals independently; adjust them according to need and / or situation; plan and organize your learning process; to solve the various problems that arise during it; reflect on your own experience and evaluate the results and the process itself and, on the basis of those reflections, manage your further learning. The extent to which learners will have mastered this competence greatly depends on how much they will be able to and how qualitatively they will be able to benefit from the E-learning education.

The educator turns into an assistant, advisor for the learner and not a direct renderer of knowledge who takes responsibility for the person's learning and mastering. This means that limits of responsibilities are redistributed, formal and non-formal environments merge, the learner's freedom and responsibility show up, autonomy dominates. In this respect the educator's ability to cognize the learner, notice his/her individual traits, needs, etc. becomes important. Teaching and learning in the individualization aspect is grounded on the essential condition: not teaching, rendering of knowledge, skills and faculties is important but the learning process in which the educator helps the learner to find the individual way of learning that is suitable only for him/her, grounded on his/her individual inclinations, interests, abilities. This way the educator helps the learner to form as a personality, realize him/her, be proactive, participating. Proactiveness here

means the learner's freedom of action and personal responsibility for decisions and actions which he/she takes and performs in the teaching and learning process.

This platform is very useful virtual learning environment for all adults. The exceptional feature of this platform is that active users can not only use the information, but also create or reconstruct, in other words, manage, the content of the platform also. It offers a place to meet and discuss important adult learning topics, as well as to exchange ideas and materials to support professional practice. This type of community platform is the first of its kind for the sector of adult learning, especially non-formal., but to use all the possibilities of this platform it is necessary to be active and able to manage your own learning process, in other words, the learner needs skills to manage self-directed learning.

The respondents' survey showed that they prefer to be more passive user of the platform and majority of them lack self-directed learning skills and abilities to manage their own learning not to mention their ability to develop these skills of their students.

Obviously, one of the essential duties of today's teacher is to create, as far as possible, a learning environment that is educationally friendly, enabling, stimulating, motivating, and constructive. However, the extent to which each learner will take from that environment will depend only on his / her own, namely engagement, motivation, relevant skills and competences, especially self-directed learning. Mastering this competence would not only lead to success in teaching / learning but would also largely save time and effort on learning. This competence is relevant for all ages, and the demand for adult learners is even greater

2 METHODOLOGY

The research deal with the main aspects of the development of knowledge and eLearning management system in an institution or organization based on content analysis of scientific sources, documents and analysis of empirical data.

Research Ethics. The research is based on the principles of benevolence, respect for personal dignity and justice. Respondents are guaranteed confidentiality.

Research instruments. An anonymous electronic questionnaire survey using closed and open-ended questions was used to collect data. This choice was determined by the benefits of the group questionnaire survey, for example the survey can be carried out remotely, the survey ensures a sufficient sampling rate, 100% or close to questionnaire reciprocity, the questionnaire takes less time than the interview (Luobikienė, 2003, p. 84).

The survey sample. In total, the study involved 126 respondents. As demographic characteristics did not have a significant impact on the results of the study, they will be summarized as a general characteristic, enabling better reflection of the respondents and understanding of the results of the study.

The survey respondents were mostly middle-aged (57.1% - 41-50 years old and 33.3% - 31-40 years old), women (95.4%), working in cities (52.4%) and small towns (23, 8%). It is broadly in line with the main characteristics of the community of adult educators. 76.2 percent are registered on EPALE platform users, i.e. they can not only read the material provided on the platform but also place it, comment on it, participate in practical communities and groups, search for partners, etc.

3 RESULTS

When analyzing how EPALE responds to the needs of respondents' education and upgrading their qualification, they were asked what competencies (educational, managerial, research or general) would be most relevant to them. Educational competencies were named as the most important ones; other competencies were mentioned only by individual users. Although the need of the respondents in the development of other competences is the lowest, in particular general

competences, the EPALE platform should not be abandoned to fill the resources of this topic, primarily because the relevance of general competences is increasingly highlighted by employers (for example, the TOP 20 skills identified by the World Economic Forum in 2016, etc.). In addition, the content of already recognized competences, as well as their educational capabilities and methodologies, vary greatly. Therefore, enough attention should be paid to the development of general and other competences on the EPALE platform. Similarly, some themes may appear on the platform to be new or separate, more relevant or more specific to the various educational themes.

The 5 main topics are presented on EPALE: „Life skills“, „Quality“, „Learning environment“, „Support for students“ and „Politics“. Which topics are more prioritized by respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to which topics they prioritize

Topics	Percentage (%)
Life skills	81
Languages	47,6
Cultural education	85,7
Entrepreneurship and employment	28,6
Quality	42,9
Professional development of personnel	81
Learning environment	81
E-learning	76,2
Learning at work	71,4
Support for students	61,9
Social inclusion	45
Elderly people	60
Politics	15
European policy, projects and funding	45

Of the five themes outlined in the platform, 3 - "Life skills" and "Learning environment" (81%) and "Support for students" (61.9%) - are most important for our respondents.

It is obvious that in the themes of "Life skills" group of subjects, according to respondents, the most relevant theme is cultural education; the second issue would be language education. The problems of entrepreneurship and employability are relevant for about one quarter of respondents. The most relevant themes are the Basic skills and financial literacy.

In „Quality" topic the most relevant for respondents is the professional development of personnel, the second place is for quality assurance and approval of service providers.

The respondents' opinion on the relevance of the topic "Learning Environment" is that regarding educational environments, respondents considered the most relevant is eLearning and learning at work. Such a choice of respondents is understandable, because both themes have been highlighted in both theory and practice in recent times. In addition, in the context of the rapid development of information and communication technologies and in the context of the IV Industrial Revolution, their relevance will only increase. Due to the increasing need for assessment and recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning, which is becoming increasingly common in the past, different types of resources for non-formal and informal learning will be even more relevant.

As far as support for students is concerned, it is obvious that the theme of elderly education is most relevant here, since adult educators, especially in the field of nonformal education, mainly work with elderly people. On the other hand, acknowledgment of previous learning, social

inclusion and the analysis of learning disruptions and their overcoming is becoming more and more relevant - almost one third of respondents approve it.

Summing up the respondents' views on the topics presented in the EPALE platform and their relevance for adult educators, we can say that all topics are focused and needed. Some of them might even be even fragmented. This would help them find out more quickly and use the knowledge gained during their studies to improve the quality of adult learning.

Although registered visitors, the vast majority of respondents are passive users, although 50%. They are not on the platform of a tangible article, blog, event information, or resource, most likely because they do not have the relevant information they can put on the platform. However, knowing how many different events take place in adult education, this is unbelievable.

Obviously, more than half of the respondents tend to be active in commenting on or evaluating other articles and other resources embedded in the EPALE platform. On the other hand, even here they like to be at least active. The activity of respondents in commenting and evaluating resources only reaffirms that on this platform their informational behaviour is similar to behaviour on other web sites, i.e. they tend to perform their usual activities: marking "likes" or "dislikes", commenting, evaluating the information provided by others, but not putting them on their own.

Most of them do not have experience in practical EPALE platform communities or groups. This may be explained by the fact that they do not like to comment or evaluate, or because this activity on the platform is new enough. Non-participation is also explained by the ignorance of such a possibility (it should be remembered that this activity is sufficiently new on the platform) or lackluster. All cases indicate that there is a need for another person, i.e. in most cases, most likely, expert assistance, as well as the need of self-directed learning management skills.

Although 50% of respondents are passive users of the platform, they are very pleased with the platform's usefulness to its professional activities. By specifying in which areas, according to respondents, the platform is most useful to them, the opinions were distributed accordingly (see table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to EPALE utility for their professional activities (in marks)

Statements	Percentage (%)
I can find information for improving my andragogy activity	23,8
I can discuss various relevant adult education topics	38,1
I can find out about events taking place in Lithuania and in the field of adult education and get acquainted with their content	57,1
I can share my experiences and learn about other adult education experiences	52,4
I can find colleagues who like to initiate and run new projects	47,6
I can read scientific articles about adult education trends in Lithuania, Europe and the world	42,9
I can find out about people who are active in adult education and their merits	19
I can publish information on adult education	38,1
I can communicate with other by blogs (blogs), discussions, comments	23,8
I can find legal information for me in adult education	23,8
I can participate in the EPALE community	4,8

According to respondents, the most useful professional activity is the possibility to find out about events taking place in Lithuania and in the field of adult education (57.1%), as well as the opportunity to share their experiences and learn about others' experiences in adult education 52.4, to find I am able to read scientific articles about the tendencies of adult education in Lithuania, Europe and the world for 42.9, as well as colleagues who are thinking of new projects. The general assessment reaffirmed the opinion of the respondents about the possibility of communicating with other, discussions, comments, which are not very relevant to the respondents and which they find useful for their profession (23.8%), but the least useful is participation in practical EPAL communities (4.8 %).

The fact that the EPAL Platform is a useful, up-to-date and positively evaluated platform is due to the fact that almost 76.2% respondents would recommend their colleagues, friends and peers become registered visitors to the EPAL platform, which means they will be able to not only read the information provided there, but also actively participate in information placement, possess the platform's methodological and other resources, comment on the participation in practical EPAL, communities and groups by finding or becoming participants, partners, etc. of projects, conferences or other activities. But to use it qualitatively adult educators need some skills and attitudes. At first, it is skills of self-directed learning and management of such learning.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Respondents believe that the platform is most conducive to educational (their educational need remains the highest) and general competences. Although the opinion of the respondents is that the competence of the latter is the smallest one, the EPAL platform should not be abandoned by the resources of this topic, primarily because the relevance of the general competences is increasingly emphasized by employers, and the content of the already known competences is very variable as well and the possibilities and methods of their education.

All EPAL platform ("Life skills", "Quality", "Learning environment", "Help for students" and "Politics") and their relevance are appreciated by adult educators, although they are "Life skills" most relevant to them. "Learning environment" and "Support for students". On the other hand, some of them might even be even fragmented. This would help them find out more quickly and use the knowledge gained during their studies to improve the quality of adult learning.

Although registered visitors, the vast majority of respondents are passive users. They are not on the platform of a tangible article, blog, event information, or resource, most likely because they do not have the relevant information they can put on the platform. However, knowing how many different events take place in adult education, this is unbelievable. On the other hand, it in a sense indicates that adult educators underestimate their experience, the significance and uniqueness of their activities, and therefore most actual and unique events, methodologies, and experiences are not shared. At the same time, this once again substantiates the need for EPAL experts as well as the need of some new skills and competencies. At first, skills of self-directed learning and management of such learning.

Obviously, more than half of the respondents tend to be active in commenting or evaluating articles and other resources embedded in the EPAL platform. On the other hand, even here they like to be at least active. And on this platform their informational behaviour is similar to behaviour on other websites, i.e. they tend to perform their usual activities: marking "likes" or "dislikes", commenting, evaluating the information provided by others, but not putting them on their own.

Most of them do not have experience in the practical EPAL platform communities or groups. This may be explained by the fact that they do not like to comment or evaluate, or because this activity on the platform is new enough. Non-participation is also explained by the ignorance of such a possibility (it should be remembered that this activity is sufficiently new on the platform) or

lackluster. All cases indicate that there is a need for another person, i.e. in most cases, most likely, expert assistance.

According to the respondents, the most useful professional activities are the possibility to learn about events taking place in Lithuania and in the field of adult education, to get acquainted with their content, to share their experiences and learn about other experiences in adult education 52.4, to find colleagues who are interested in initiating and implementing new projects. 47,6, I can read scientific articles about adult education trends in Lithuania, Europe and the world 42,9.

The fact that the information provided on the EPAL platform is relevant and useful is also well illustrated by the opinion of the respondents on recommending that other colleagues, associates become registered visitors to the platform. Three quarters of respondents tend to do this.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

To encourage adult educators to be not only passive, i.e. only use the information on the platform but become active users of EPAL platform, i.e. to put on its own a variety of mutually beneficial information on this platform, to share news, submit their comments, and so on. This is likely to further enhance the perceived need and utility of each adult learner.

To make EPAL platform a virtual community of adult educators in Lithuania providing opportunities to communicate, share experiences, search for partners, express opinions, etc., as well as to the international level.

Develop their self-directed learning abilities.

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