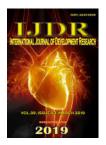


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ADULT LEARNERS' VIEWS REGARDING LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE PARTICIPATORY EDUCATIONAL TECHNIQUES USE: THE CASE OF SECOND CHANCE SCHOOLS IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses learners' views on Second Chance Schools (S.C.S.) regarding their program, Lifelong Learning and the implementation of participatory educational techniques. Incentives and obstacles to participation on S.C.S. program are examined as well. The conducted approach of the research was quantitive with the use of questionnaires in person regarding the trainees of SCS. The trainees of SCS believe in the value of lifelong education and its multiple benefits strengthen their participation in the program. Therefore, the professional and family obligations as well as the long distance of the schools from their residence, which demands private transportation, make courses participation difficult. The participatory educational techniques use contributes to high degree in active courses participation, increase of interest and effective learning and guarantee its success. On the other hand, it is influenced mostly by the trainer's lack of familiarity and training on this subject as well as the unwillingness of the trainees to collaborate.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is a scientific research on the concept and value of the program of Second-Chance Schools (SCS) in Greece in the context of adult education and Lifelong Learning (L.L.). The article aims to strengthen and improve the institution of SCS through exploring the views of adult learners in regard to the incentives of their participation and the implementation of participatory educational techniques. The instructional design of a modern country is influenced by numerous factors, such as social, political, cultural and economic changes. Particularly in Greece, the swelling economic problems, such as the rise of unemployment and the decline of economic indicators and of the sustainability of productive units intensify the need for a skilled workforce and an update on employment, in order to ensure employability and to increase the sustainability of products and services (Strategy, 2005; Palios, 2003; Magoula, 2001). The European Union enhances L.L., by supporting personal development, active citizenship and social coherence. In Greece, the SCS, one of the key pillars of L.L, plays a key role, since it alleviates the social inequalities and

*Corresponding author: Digaletou Dimitra, Pergialenis 42 - Kremasti 85104 – Rhodes, Greece marginalization and contributes to professional and personal well-being. Adult men and women over 18 years of age, who lost the "first opportunity" to complete their compulsory education, do not have the necessary skills to work or to advance in their studies. Graduates of SCS take baccalaureate title equivalent of high school. The purpose of the SCS is accomplished by adhering to three basic principles that determine the identity of the institution. a) Flexible educational resources, accessible to each trainee. b) Investigation of the needs of trainees in total and support in regarding every difficulty, not only in education but in other sectors as well (health, family, friends, work). c) Highly trained educational and scientific staff, able to cope with multidimensional tasks.

Incentives and obstacles to participation: Adult learners welcome certain and clear incentives that lead them to participate in an educational program which is linked with personal and other pursuits. According to the EPS (Educational Participation Scale) of Houle (1961), there are three orientations of adults participating in a learning activity. The first relates to specific external objective they have set, such as obtaining a degree or a promotion. With the completion and achieving of the goal, they stop learning. The second focuses on the educational process. Trainees get

excited with the idea of school climate, because beyond the everyday problems and the pressures that surround them, their participation in adult education programs satisfy personal and social needs. The third orientation focuses on the learning itself, which becomes an end in itself for the participants and through this learning, they have the opportunity to develop and to acquire knowledge and skills. Many researchers, based on the typology of Houle, determine the motivation of learning as a key factor, able to predict the effectiveness of participation (Boshier, 1971; Burgess, 1971; Boshier & Collins, 1985; Kapsalis & Papastamatis, 2013). The corresponding types of motivation are: 1. The Desire for Social Contacts, 2. External Desires, 3. The Desire to Contribute to the community, 4. The Desire for Professional Development, 5. The Desire to Escape from their everyday lives, 6. The Desire for Learning. Especially for learners in an SCS, their motives regarding the reintegration into the education system due to the aspirations for a second opportunity in personal, social and professional development and are classified into three categories: (a) Wish to become equipped with knowledge and skills and to adopt attitudes that will enable them to complete their compulsory education. b) Expectation to obtain the baccalaureate aimed to improve their living conditions or the job they have and c) Hope that the title of the baccalaureate will help them in social activities and in their personal interests (Papastamatis et al., 2010). On the other hand, there are factors that inhibit the involvement of participants in the educational process. Cross (1981) classifies the obstacles, which hinder the participation of adult learners in three categories: (a) Situational, such as lack of money, lack of time, upbringing and care of children, b) Organizational, including factors that affect directly the institutions and organizations that implement programs of adult education and define the institutional framework of these programs, and (c) Dispositional, which include negative attitudes towards learning and negative perceptions of adults about their role as learners. The trainees attending SCS come from specific population groups. Some people have job, noncompletion of compulsory education however, limits career choices which in turn leads to a disadvantage, creating at the same time, feelings of worthlessness and rejection. On the issue of education of socially vulnerable groups, adult education through the institution of SCS seeks to combat social exclusion, by strengthening and extending these people's opportunities for learning.

For a program of adult education, such as the SCS, to be considered successful, effective and quality services, it should be formed in accordance with the principles of adult learning in order to ensure some basic conditions (Chatzidimou & Chatzidimou, 2016). Such conditions are: (a) the strengthening of dialogue and the limitation of paperwork, b) available time for contemplation and reflection, c) delineation and clear formulation of intended learning objectives and finally, d) the full utilization of the experiences of trainers and trainees regarding the object of learning, as well as with the implementation of many and diverse educational techniques in the learning process. The techniques applied in the course of instruction aim at enabling learners and meeting their needs, both individual and group (Kokkos & Koutroumpa, 2010). Directly related to the effectiveness of learning (Rogers, 1999; Kokkos, 1999) and the appropriate choice of the trainer strengthens active participation and self-determination of participants (Rogers, 1999; Kokkos, 1999; Ioannou & Athanasoula-Reppa, 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this research is to investigate the views of learners in the SCS for L.L. and adult education. In this context, the researcher examined the motives that have lead them to participate in a program of SCS and the reasons why various training techniques contribute to this and make it more rich, creative and productive. For conducting this research, a quantitative method was selected. Here are the following research questions:

- **Q1:** What insight teachers in SCS have adopted for L.L. and adult education?
- Q2: How learners in SCS use learning?
- Q3: What constitutes an incentive for the adult learners to engage in an adult education program?
- **Q4:** What is considered an obstacle for the adult learners to engage in an adult education program?
- **Q5:** How often are the training techniques in the context of adult education in SCS applied? Q6: What are the views of learners in SCS on the contribution of participatory educational techniques?
- **Q7:** To what degree various factors affect the choice and use of participatory educational techniques in accordance with the assessment of learners?

Population and Sample: The population of the survey includes all learners in SCS in Greece. The research sample constitutes of trainees who attended in the SCS of Aliveri and the SCS of Mantoudi – Limni – Agia Anna, during school period 2016 – 2017. Of the 90 people who completed the course of study, the researcher took 82 completed questionnaires.

Collection of Data: The research tool that was used to collect data is the questionnaire with closed-ended questions. It includes 5 demographics criteria: school attendance, sex, age, marital status and employment status. Each one is divided into 3 parts. In the first section, the questions were proposals regarding issues of L.L., in order to investigate the perceptions of trainees and it was built up in a section of the questionnaire of the 2nd research from the doctoral thesis of Moustakas (2013). A 5-point Likert Type grading scale was used, where respondents had to choose a series of five answers of the type 1: "Totally agree", 2: "I pretty agree", 3: "Neither agree nor disagree," 4: "I disagree quite", 5: "Totally disagree". The degree of agreement to a statement/declaration arose from the average of the numbers chosen by the set of subjects. In the second section, the questions related to the need, mood and abilities of adults that attend classes at SCS. In the last section there were questions the degree of contribution of participatory techniques and teaching methods in adult education. The 5point Likert had the following gradients: 1: "No", 2: "A little", 3: "Medium", 4: "A lot" and 5: "Too much". For research questions Q2 and Q7 related questions included categorical variables, where any chosen with "x" represented an affirmative answer.

Analysis of Data: After the data were collected, they were analyzed by coding with the SPSS 23 packaged software. For those cases where statistical significance of affinity between two categorical variables implemented non-parametric statistical criterion χ^2 (chi square test of independence), the conditions for application were met. Between an independent categorical variable and a dependent in gradation scale (likert),

non-parametric criterion Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples was used. Where the independent variable was greater than two categories (e.g. age), the Kruskal-Wallis H test was applied. All statistical tests were conducted with a statistical significance level of 5% (p=.05).

RESULTS AND DISCUSS

Initially the demographic distribution of learners was examined, where that 2 out of 3 stemmed from the SCS of Aliveri. The 75.6% of the participants of the survey were men, almost all of them over the age of 30 and 24.4% over the age of 49. The 20.7% were never married, a 17.1% were unemployed, while those who had a job were employed in low-skilled occupations, such as ordinary workers, tourist officials, farmers, employees. The findings in A section showed that 69.5% of respondents believes that "the risk to become unemployed is lower when they continue to learn". The 90.2% agrees that "participation in training programs helps to better manage their daily life" and that it "is a good example for their children". It "increases self-confidence" (84.1%), while "it is never too late to learn new things" (83.4%), or "to get acquainted with new people" (92.7%). 73.2% of respondents believe that self-learning is achieved through "a visit to a Museum", 62.2% through "the Internet", 56.1% through "books", 22% through "a colleague" and only 14.6% through "a visit to a library". Trainees attend courses mostly for "professional reasons" (93.9%), for "economic reasons" (76.8%), for "social reasons" (92.6%), and for "their personal development and skill cultivation" (91.5%). Factors that hamper the smooth and continuous monitoring of the course are: "lack of time due to family responsibilities" (64.6%), "lack of support from family" (63.4%), or "lack of support from the employer" (58.6%), "negative experiences of previous educational system" (63.4%), "great mileage from the place of residence" (67.1%) and the "lack of means of transport" (73.1%).

The techniques most commonly used are the "debate" (90.2%), "work in groups" (86.5%), "questions-answers" (75.6%), "brainstorming" (76.9%), "educational game" (65.9%) and the "teaching with teaching aids" (92.7%). Those less often applied are: the "technique of moral dilemma" (30.5%), the "show" (33%) and "role-playing" (31.7%). The participatory techniques help "a lot" to "too much" in "increasing interest in the educational process" (96.3%), "involvement of learners" (100%), in the "improvement of relations between participants and trainers" (93.9%), to "increase the effectiveness of the course" (100%), in "cultivating critical thinking" (92.7%), "self-empowerment" (70.7%) and "learning to learn" (81.7%). The factors found to influence the choice and application of techniques are "non-instructor's familiarity with these techniques" (91.5%), "reluctance by co-trainees to participate" (87.8%), the "training of the trainer certificate degree" (84.1%), the "institutional framework" (81.7%) and the "lack of logistical infrastructure" (80.5%). Factors that appear to affect less are the "unsuitable area" (70.7%) and the "lack of teaching time" (72%). In the next stage the values of all variables were examined in order to determine whether they differed according to the demographic variables. Only those cases where statistically significant differences were found, are presented. Following the Mann Whitney U test, there was a statistically significant difference by regarding "the risk of becoming unemployed is lower when they continue to learn" (U=454.000, p=.050). It seems that men trainees agree with the proposal to a larger extent than women (Mean: 2.05 and 2.60 responsively). Regarding the reasons for attending courses the survey found a statistically significant difference in school-based proposal "to get acquainted with new people" (U=445,000, p=.001). In respect to the frequency of use of participatory techniques statistically significant differences based on the school, were found in "brainstorming" (U=537.500, p=.022), "educational game" (U=559.500, p=.033) and "role-playing" (U=483.500, p=.006). About the benefits of the application of participatory techniques, statistically significant differences were found in "self-empowerment" (U=459.000, p=.002) and the "learning to learn" (U=552.500, p=.037).

Regarding the ways of learning beyond the school environment that are based on the school, the results showed that there is a statistically significant difference in three areas: Through "the Internet" ($\chi^2(1)=4.495$, p=.034), through "a colleague" ($\chi^2(1)=8.384$, p=.004) and through "a visit to a Museum" ($\chi^2(1)=5.564$, p=.018). On the basis of age, through "the Internet" ($\chi^2(2)=8.343$, p=.015), on the basis of marital status through "a visit to a Museum" ($\chi^2(2)=7.263$, p=.026) and on the basis of the occupation, through "a visit to a Museum" $(\chi^2(4)=9.695, p=.046)$. Following a Kruskall-Wallis H test, a statistically significant difference was found in the age area on the view that "participation in training programs is a good example for their children" (H(2)=9.513, p=.009), and in the marital status area on the proposals "participation in training programs helps to better manage their daily life" (H(2)=6.068, p=.048) and "is a good example for their children" (H(2)=7.155, p=.028). "Negative experiences of previous educational system" affects more the single participants (H(2)=7,005, p=,030), while the "lack of means of transport" affects more the unemployed ones (H(2)=6.375, p=.041).

Conclusions

Exploring the sample's identity, the majority of the trainees are between 30 to 50 years old (75.6%), which is considered the most "productive" age group. The members of this group are able to utilize the knowledge, skills and the certificate, acquired through these programs. In other European countries the age of those who attend to the SCS is under 30 (European Commission, 2000), but the Greek program has not yet managed to attract the younger ages. Additionally, 82.3% of all trainees have a job, albeit seasonal, so they cannot be classified as socially excluded people. These results are also confirmed by the survey of Vergidis et al. (2007), which is stating that the population of SCS consists of adult workers 30-45 years. Teachers are employed in low-skill occupations with limited growth potential and therefore it is necessary to improve their working situation. With the baccalaureate that high school graduates of the SCS receive, they achieve not only the improvement of their working conditions, but also the right to pursue a new job or secure their place. Respondents are very positive in terms of continuing their education, which is also affirmed by the findings of previous surveys (Tsiakalos, 2016; Moustakas, 2013; Kyndt et al., 2011; Hori & Cusack, 2006; Field, 2003), and are convinced of the value and its beneficial benefits. Great is the response of trainees for organized visits to specific sites organized by the SCS, which confirms the supremacy of positive perceptions of trainees for museums (Kouveli, 2001; Chadwick, 2000). About the incentives for the engagement of trainees in SCS programs, it is safe to assume that professional and social reasons and personal development greatly influence their decision to attend

classes. These incentives come fully in line with the desire for professional development, for social contacts and learning (Boshier, 1971; Boshier & Collins, 1985; Kapsalis, & Papastamatis, 2013; Kouklatzidou, 2017; Konstantinou, 2016). Regarding the factors that hinder the participation of trainees in SCS programs, "lack of means of transport», «great distance to the school from their place of residence", "lack of time and support from family or the employer "greatly affect and belong to the conditional barriers. This is also confirmed by the nationwide research of the Ministry of Education (2011) for the assessment of public opinion on issues related to lifelong learning. A lesser degree of influence comes from "the negative attitude on adult education" and the "negative experiences of previous educational system», which belongs to the predisposition barriers (Karalis, 2013).

The technical "discussion", the "work in teams", the "teaching by using supervisory instruments" and the "questions-answers" are the most common techniques applied in SCS programs, exemplified by the surveys of Mavromoustakakis (2016) and Margalia (2016). The use of participatory educational techniques has a positive reaction in the learning process to adult learners/s, as they get involved actively in the course of the lesson (Margalia, 2016; Kalogianni, 2015; Gravolou, 2010; Kotti, 2007). On the last research question regarding the factors that affect the choice and application of techniques, seven factors were selected by the majority of trainees. Hierarchically, the "non-familiarity of the instructor with these techniques", the "reluctance by co- trainees participate" and the "grade training of the instructor" were the factors with the most positive responses, information that is confirmed by the work of Choudetsanaki (2017) and Mavromoustakakis (2016). Finally, the executive management team of SCS plays an important role in order to amplify and to facilitate the implementation of participatory educational techniques. This is exemplified by the surveys of Vergidou (2016) and Maggopoulos (2011) on the positive contribution of school leadership in developing collaborative climate and in adopting the culture of SCS. Taking into account the evidence presented, the following are highlighted: the participants are positive in regard to the institution and the value of learning. They participate in the program mainly for their professional, social and personal growth. Unfortunately, many professional and family obligations as well as the great distance to the school hinder their participation. The application of educational techniques and teaching methods that are governed by the principles of adult learning and blended with the innovative and appealing character of the SCS, contributes in increasing the interest for participation and effective learning. Adult educators need to be effective in diverse roles, to create a positive climate of cooperation, to enable learners in the learning process. They also need to be educated on these techniques. The cooperation and support of the headmaster of SCS in using these techniques, contribute equally to a successful participation. This research seeks to strengthen the institution of SCS, a task which requires more intensive effort and broader participation by all groups involved in planning, organizing and implementing a sound educational program.

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