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Planning and Implementation of an Educational Programme for Adult Educators' Training: The Case Study of a 25-hour Distance and Face-to-Face Programme

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Abstract

This article outlines the planning and implementation of a 25-hour adult educator training programme conducted at the American Farm School (AFS) in April-May 2024. The programme, entitled "Basic Principles and Teaching Methodology of Adult Education," used a combination of distance and face-to-face instruction. The target group was active adult educators and employees of this educational organisation. The programme was designed to encourage active participation and the use of experiential learning techniques in all individual modules. The participants in the programme stated that the most important motives for their participation in the training process were the acquisition of practical skills in teaching methodology, the preparation for the adult educator certification examinations, the broadening of theoretical knowledge in the field of adult education, obtaining the certificate of attendance to enrich their CVs and widening their circle of acquaintances. The trainees were enthusiastic about all the individual modules of the programme and their expectations were largely met. However, they did express a desire for more hours of face-to-face training.

Keywords: Educational Programme, Adult Educators, Training

1. Introduction

Nowadays, adult education is booming internationally, as people are hungry for knowledge and skills to stay ahead in a competitive and ever-changing world (Jarvis, 2004). Educational programmes are springing up to meet this demand, with different offerings for different target groups. By the term educational programme, we refer to an organized educational intervention addressed to a specific group of learners and comprising a set of factors, actors, processes and activities with a clear educational content, which is articulated around a central purpose and individual objectives.

The curricular content of a programme consists of individual modules that are directly linked to the learning needs of the participants and the already formulated objectives. The modules are often specified in terms of duration, educational techniques and media to be used. Depending on the design of the training programme, theoretical training may be separated from practical training, or face-to-face training from distance training. Information is also provided on the trainers who will be employed for the individual modules of the programme. This ensures that prospective trainees have the broadest possible information about the type of programme and the structure of the modules they will attend (Sork & Newman, 2004; Karalis & Papageorgiou, 2012).

The curricular content is the basis for structuring the daily programme, i.e. the plan with the distribution of modules over the days and hours of training. The educational needs of the target population and learner group, as well as the individual objectives of the programme, are the fundamental starting point for determining the curricular content (Vergidis & Karalis, 2008). Moreover, the individual objectives of the programme are primarily determined based on the theoretical knowledge, practical skills and attitudes that the participants are expected to acquire upon completion of the educational process (Vergidis & Karalis, 2008). Formulating the objectives of a programme determines the expected results from its successful implementation (Karalis & Papageorgiou, 2012). The clarity, completeness and targeted formulation of the curricular content of an educational programme contribute to its integrated design. The curricular content must be attractive to learners and stimulate their interest to ensure their most active participation.

The design of an educational programme is influenced by many factors that affect its effective implementation and successful outcome (Tzovla & Kedraka, 2020; Zaitseva & Goncharova, 2020). These factors relate to the specific characteristics of the target population, from which the group of trainees emerges, the selection of suitable trainers, the teaching methodology followed, the time of the programme and its overall duration, the cost of attendance, its structure in terms of whether it is distance, face-to-face or a combination of both, the logistical infrastructure and facilities of the programme venue (if face-to-face), and the online platforms (if e-learning). In recent years, many programmes have provided distance learning, either entirely or partially, combining some hours of face-to-face and some hours of distance learning (blended learning programmes) (Wittmann & Olivier, 2021; Ranieri, Giampaolo & Bruni, 2019).

The selection of educators is one of the most important factors involved in the design and implementation of a training programme (Tzovla & Kedraka, 2020; Vergidis & Karalis, 2008). Any educational process has a human-centred dimension, as the human factor largely shapes the learning climate and conditions. Therefore, the role of adult educators is particularly important in this context. It is therefore clear that the selection of trainers with the appropriate qualifications is a key process for the development of the programme. The effectiveness of trainers directly affects the level of achievement of the objectives set by the organization's programmes (Karalis & Papageorgiou, 2012).

In the current era of lifelong learning and the increased demands of continuing education, every adult teacher-trainer must actively participate in the training processes, to continuously improve their teaching practices (Tzovla & Kedraka, 2020). Furthermore, modern adult educators must be learners themselves, following the philosophy of lifelong learning, which they de facto advocate with their work (Papageorgiou, 2008). By adopting the role of the learner, a teacher 'steps into the role of his future learner' and develops empathy skills, which are so much needed in the field of adult education.

Training programmes for adult educators are designed and implemented regularly. These programmes are primarily aimed at improving the quality of teachers' teaching skills and providing theoretical knowledge in the field of adult education. Some of these programmes are conducted remotely, with a combination of synchronous and asynchronous on line learning (Pavlis-Korres & Leftheriotou, 2016). Others are conducted face-to-face (Sork & Newman, 2004), while some combine some distance and some face-to-face hours (Ranieri, Giampaolo & Bruni, 2019).

2. Planning and implementation of the programme

The American Farm School (AFS) is an educational organisation that places great importance on experiential learning using participatory educational techniques at all levels of education. The School's teaching staff is unparalleled in its scientific training and active participation in the training and upgrading of teaching skills. At the start of 2024, the AGS 's Lifelong Learning Centre, in collaboration with the Personnel Department, designed and implemented a training programme entitled "Basic Principles and Teaching Methodology of Adult Education" for the AGS 's active teachers. The training programme was designed to consider the specific characteristics of the group of trainees (level of studies, previous experience, working hours and professional obligations). Based on the relevant literature, a 25-hour training programme was structured in 8 sub-modules with 2 trainers (Table 1). The training programme was conducted in April and May 2024 and was attended by a total of 32 trainees.

Table 1: Summary of the thematic modules of the educational programme

Thematic module	Hours	Form
Introduction to adult education, characteristics of adults Trainee characteristics (motivations, barriers and conditions barriers and obstacles to effective learning in adults)	3	Distance
Teaching techniques, teaching methodology in education adult education	3	Distance
Module planning, formulation of teaching objectives, objectives, planning and organisation of teaching	3	Distance
Educational media, use of modern technology in the teaching	3	Distance
Training activities, organisation, management and exploitation teaching material	3	Distance
The Adult Learner Certification Examination	2	Distance
Microteaching 1 (Practical Exercise)	4	In-person
Microteaching 2 (Practical Exercise)	4	In-person

The modules that were conducted remotely were delivered via the Zoom platform, while the face-to-face sessions were held in a modern classroom on the premises of the GSA. Particular emphasis was placed on the active participation of learners and the constructive interaction between learners and between learners and trainers (Pavlis-Korres & Leftheriotou, 2016). Besides, it is crucial to activate learners in any adult education process.

3. Feedback-Evaluation of the programme

Feedback and evaluation are essential components of any educational programme. They provide the opportunity to draw conclusions and form an overall picture of accountability (Zaitseva & Goncharova, 2020; Vergidis & Karalis, 2008). Evaluation is simply an investigation of the success of the choices made in the design of a programme and the procedures followed in the implementation of this design (Karalis & Papageorgiou, 2012). It also contributes to the detection of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, the identification of possible failures and the improvement of individual parameters in case of repetition of the educational programme in the future.

This training programme involved two forms of feedback: the evaluation of the trainees by the trainers and the evaluation of the programme and the trainers by the trainees. The trainers were able to ascertain the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes by the trainees in the last two modules of the programme. This was done by asking the participants to prepare and conduct a 20-minute microteaching session in a subject of their choice in the plenary session of their co-trainers. In these micro-teachings, the trainees incorporated elements and data from the previous modules, using principles of adult education teaching methodology and active and experiential learning techniques.

After each microteaching session, an open discussion and feedback on the individual aspects of the previous microteaching session followed, and useful conclusions were drawn. There was also an evaluation of the

microteaching sessions by the trainers. Furthermore, the trainers employed the observation technique to gather qualitative data, which cannot be obtained from questionnaires. This is because the microteaching sessions investigated the extent to which the trainees acquired specific knowledge and skills (Karalis & Papageorgiou, 2012).

Conversely, at the end of the last module, the participants of the programme were given a questionnaire designed for the occasion. This was to provide an evaluation of the educational process as a whole. The questionnaire was the most appropriate research tool for this study because it is the one that is used more often than all the others to obtain data from the participants of the programmes (Karalis & Papageorgiou, 2012). The questionnaire was designed with the specific characteristics of this programme in mind, as well as the relevant literature (Wittmann & Olivier, 2021; Kedraka & Phillips, 2017; Sork & Newman, 2004). It was kept short, simple and easy to understand to avoid fatigue among respondents. A total of 32 questionnaires were distributed and 29 were collected, representing a satisfactory response rate of 90.6%.

4. Results

This section presents the main results of the questionnaire for the evaluation of the training programme by the trainees. The first step was to record the profile of the 29 participants in the programme. 21 were female (72.4%) and 8 were male (27.6%) (Table 2). The participants' ages were as follows: two were between 21 and 30 years old (6.9%), eight were between 31 and 40 years old (27.6%), 12 were between 41 and 50 years old (41.4%) and seven were over 51 years old (24.1%). Regarding their level of education, 9 of them were higher education degree holders (31%), 15 were Master's degree holders (51.8%) and 5 were PhD holders (17). Finally, at the time of the project, 4 participants had no previous experience in adult education (13.8%), 6 of them had 1-5 years of experience (20.7%), 10 of them stated that they had 6-10 years of experience (34.5%) and 9 of them stated that they had more than 10 years of experience in adult education (31%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Profile of the participants in the training programme

Gender	Men - Women Total 8 (27.6%) 21 (72.4%) 29			
Age (years)	21-30, 31-40, 41-50, >51 Total 2 (6.9%) 8 (27.6%) 12 (41.4%) 7 (24.1%) 29			
Level of education	University Degree Master Degree Ph.D. Total 9 (31%) 15 (51.8%) 5 (17.2%) 29			
Years of experience in adult education	0 1-5 6-10 >10 Total 4 (13.8%) 6 (20.7%) 10 (34.5%) 9 (31%) 29			

The trainees' motivations for participating in the program were then investigated. Five key motivations were assessed, and the trainees were asked to rate each of them on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = moderately important, 2 = slightly important, 1 = not at all important). The respondents' answers in Table 3 clearly show that the primary motivation for participating in the programme was to gain practical skills in teaching methodology (4.92). Preparation for the adult educator certification exam was also a strong motivation (4.89), while another measurable motivation was to broaden theoretical knowledge in adult education (4.11). Two further motivating reasons for learners to participate in this programme were obtaining a certificate of attendance (3.46) and the desire to widen their circle of acquaintances (3.06).

Table 3: Incentives to participate in the training programme

Motive	Mean Score
Acquisition of practical skills in teaching methodology	4.92
Preparation for the instructor certification exams	4.82
Broadening theoretical knowledge in adult education	4.11

Obtaining a certificate of attendance	3.46
Broadening the circle of acquaintances	3.06

The trainees were then asked to evaluate how interesting they found the individual modules of the programme. As recorded in Table 4, the most interesting module for them was the micro-teaching (4.95), followed by the design of the teaching module (4.89), the teaching techniques (4.19), the educational tools and the use of modern technology (3.83) and the characteristics of adult learners (3.21).

Table 4: Evaluation of interest in the individual programme modules

Module	Mean Score
Microteaching	4.95
Teaching module design	4.89
Educational techniques	4.19
Educational tools, use of modern technology	3.83
Characteristics of adult learners (motivation, motivation, barriers and conditions for effective learning)	3.21

The trainees were then asked to evaluate how interesting they found the individual modules of the programme. As recorded in Table 4, the most interesting module for them was the micro-teaching (4.95), followed by the design of the teaching module (4.89), the teaching techniques (4.19), the educational tools and the use of modern technology (3.83) and the characteristics of adult learners (3.21).

Table 5: Degree of satisfaction with participation in the programme

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Unsure	Satisfied	Very satisfied
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.4%)	5 (17.3%)	23 (79.3%)

Finally, an open-ended question asked trainees to record *"if they were to attend this programme again, what would they want to change about it?"* A total of 14 out of 29 participants answered that they would *"not want anything to change in the programme because they were completely satisfied with its design and implementation"* while 14 of the respondents answered that they *"would like more hours of internships with micro-teaching".* In addition, 3 of the participants replied that *"they would like the programme to be entirely face-to-face".*

5. Discussion

It is a fact that the role of the trainers in any adult education programme is crucial for the successful completion of the programme. Adult educators must therefore update their knowledge and upgrade their skills while paying particular attention to understanding the basic principles of adult education and applying modern teaching methodology using participatory learning techniques. Participation in teacher training programmes is an option in this direction.

Adult teacher education programmes must be designed and implemented with the specific characteristics of the participants in mind. They must be adapted to their learning needs and the particular circumstances of the situation. After all, learners are at the heart of any training programme. Adult educators bridge the gap between the initial education and training they have received and the demands of a constantly changing socio-economic and technological environment through their own continuing education. At the same time, trainers improve their teaching effectiveness through training, so that when they are called upon to teach their future learners, they are better prepared.

The design of training programmes is a multidimensional process involving many factors, leading to the formulation of a targeted educational intervention aimed at a particular group of trainees. In modern times, educational programmes of all kinds are constantly being carried out, in many individual subjects and in many areas. Some programmes achieve their objectives and become a benchmark for trainers and trainees. Others do not achieve their objectives but are successfully implemented. In any case, the evaluation of programmes and feedback from participating trainers and trainees help us draw useful conclusions.

This study addresses a topical issue, thus contributing to the enrichment of the relevant literature. The findings of this research are limited by the specific case study design, which used a purposive sample of adult educator trainees. However, the specific characteristics of the participants make the results applicable to a wider population of adult educators and useful for the design of similar programmes by other educational organizations and institutions.

Further research should be conducted in other adult educator training programmes to compare the results with those of this study and draw useful conclusions in this field.

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