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Educational Needs of Adult Refugees' Educators: A Greek Case Study

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Abstract
In the present paper we tried to describe the educational needs of the adult refugees' educators in the area of Leros, Greece. To collect our data, we used the qualitative approach and conducted interviews throughout the avalanche sampling, so that the participants could express their ideas and perceptions. Our sample consists of adult refugees' educators working in NGO ECHO100PLUS, which is activated in Leros. The analysis of the data revealed the educators' inexperience and lack of training, At the same time, those areas where trainers need further training, as well as their preferences for trainers and the type of training, were recorded.

Keywords: Adult Education, Educational Needs, Refugees' Trainers

1. Introduction

The unprecedented influx of refugees and immigrants into Greece has created new conditions and has pointed out on the one hand the need for support and assistance and on the other hand the problems and shortcomings of Greek structures. The Greek state is called upon to meet the basic needs of a growing refugee population. These needs have to do not only with food and housing, but also with their integration and adaptation to the new cultural environment, mainly through education, not only of children and adolescents, but also of adults.

After all, the main and primary goal of adult education is to compensate for social inequalities through the progress and improvement of the educational level of the vulnerable social groups (Kokkos, 2008, p.9). Adult refugee education programs seem to help improve self-image and self-confidence, smooth socialization and integration into society (Xirouchakis, 2019), as well as to avoid marginalization, social exclusion and social pathogenesis (Bezati & Theodosopou, 2006).

The success factor of a program is, basically, the educator. The educator's work is considered quite demanding, as he/she needs to be knowledgeable about the subject, to know how to perform his/her role and which his/her position in the team is depending on the educational circumstances. In addition, he/she has to cope with adversity arising from the fact that he/she is addressed to a vulnerable group. Of course, even if the educator fulfills all the above criteria, he/she must always be vigilant, as there are additional parameters and obstacles that can put a program at risk.

In general, the education of adults with different nationalities and cultures in combination with the economic and educational deficiencies and weaknesses makes it necessary to probe the educational needs of the adults refugee's trainers that arise from the teaching of a socially vulnerable group, such as refugees.

The aim of this survey is to record the views of trainers teaching adult refugees in Leros about their educational and professional needs. The investigation of the needs of trainers offers important findings that will strengthen the training programmes provided for refugee trainers, as the need for such programmes has arisen in recent years in Leros. (Rogers, 1998, p.51).

In order to achieve this goal, we conducted a qualitative approach, using telephone and live interviews with the adult refugees' educators who work for the NGO ECHO100PLUS. The results of the survey revealed the increased training needs of the refugees' trainers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Adult education

In general, education is considered the preparation for life. As life is constantly changing, the preparation should be unremitting and endless. Adult education was founded on this basis (Lindeman, 1926, p.3-4). According to Jarvis (2004, p.32), adult education can help people connect more easily with modern culture, make creative use of their free time and enrich their lives. Adult education has its own characteristics. According to Thompson (2019), the characteristics that differentiate it from the education of minors have to do both with the variety of its forms and its voluntary nature, as well as with the fact that it takes care of the individual needs through a detailed curriculum. The great theorists of education, such as Piaget, Vygotsky, etc., often developed conflicting theories concerning the way in which minors and/or adults learn (Kokkos, 1998, p.23). Of course, despite the points of controversy, the above theories have in common the following basic principles:

  a) all people have cognitive needs, ie a need for knowledge, exploration and understanding (McLeod, 2018);
  b) the active involvement of the learner in the learning process is more effective than the passive transmission of knowledge;
  c) all people, depending on their personality, age, and previous educational experiences, express specific preferences as to how they are educated and taught; and
  d) previous knowledge and experiences are very important, as they are the foundation for building new cognitive paths (Kokkos, 2008, pp.46-47).

The adult educator to perform his/her work should be guided by the basic principles of adult education, which emphasize in social theories of action and not psychological theories of learning (Collins, 1991), although according to Imel (1998) the above is not a definitive list of adult education principles, but a guide of good practices that the educator should know and handle.

2.2. Vulnerable groups

All people who experience social exclusion, become victims of racism and prejudice and as a result are deprived of access to the labor market (such as people with disabilities, drug users, ex-prisoners, refugees, and minorities) consider to be socially vulnerable groups (Tsimpoukli, 2008, p.281). In the education of vulnerable groups,

especially refugees, both the special needs of this group and the different ethnocultural capital of its members must be taken into account, as they can become causes of a failed educational program (Kefala, 2017).

2.3. Educational needs of adult educators

As noted by Vergidis (2012) several researches have been carried out in Greece, which aimed to investigate the educational needs of teachers. A common denominator of these researches is, inter alia, the need for support and training in the teaching of pupils with different cultural backgrounds, despite the fact that teacher training in intercultural education is a central area in the curricula of the Country's Pedagogical Departments (Palaiologou & Dimitriadou, 2013).

With regard to adult trainers, a recent survey by Brinia, Fotakeli & Vasileiou (2019) highlighted the need for additional training, expertise and information on new knowledge so that they can respond more effectively to their role.

It follows from the above that adult trainers and in particular adult refugee educators have increased educational needs, especially considering that central planning and coordinated efforts on the part of the State are lacking (Kantzou, Manoli, Mouti & Papadopoulou 2017).

Due to the fact that the refugee crisis is a very recent event, not enough research has yet been carried out to investigate and record the educational needs of adult refugee trainers in our country.

However, according to a recent research by Proiou (2019), adult refugee educators need training on intercultural issues and the basic principles of adult education. At the same time, according to international literature, it appears that educators need to be ready to manage deviant behaviors due to traumatic experiences (Gagné, Schmidt & Markus 2017; Richardson, MacEwen & Naylor, 2018), but also to be able to be equipped to facilitate critical and creative engagement with the language of the host country (Nelson & Appleby, 2015).

In general, additional training should be such as to extend flexibility in the selection of teaching practices and methods, but also to foster international awareness and intercultural sensitivity among trainers (Walters, Garii & Walters, 2009).

The above finding is of particular importance, considering the fact that according to Simopoulos (2014) the majority of adult refugee educators in Greece do not introduce intercultural dimensions into their teaching, exploit more conservative educational practices, such as frontal teaching, and maintain stereotypical and derogatory perceptions of different cultures.

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative approach

The choice of methodological approach was largely determined by the theoretical position, interests and political perspective of the researchers (Diefenbach, 2008). Additional factors that lead us to this choice are the fact that the literature gives us little information about the obstacles that adult refugee educators face and, therefore, it is very important to draw information from the participants themselves through investigation (Mason, 2003, p.96), as well as the fact that the size of the available sample makes the qualitative approach necessary (Creswell, 2016, p.209).

3.2.Sampling and data collection process

The sample consisted of 9 educators who were teaching in 2019-2020, when the researsh was conducted, or had recently taught adult refugees in Leros. The sample was selected based on speaking Greeks, in order to facilitate the research and to avoid any wrong conclusions due to the translation. Participants were approached through the

avalanche process (Creswell, 2016, p.206, 209). The first seven interviews were conducted by telephone due to quarantine, while the last two of them were conducted live.

3.3. Limitations of the research

In the present study a first constraint stems from the fact that most of the data were collected by telephone. Although its implementation was imposed by the circumstances, it nevertheless creates research limitations related to the impossibility of recording non-verbal frameworks and actions (Bergmann, 2004, p.301).

Our research deals with a phenomenon (the refugee crisis), which is quite recent. As a result, there are not enough references to ensure high levels of quality, such as books or scholarly articles. The use, mainly, of early stage material creates another limitation in our research (Creswell, 2016, p.86).

Taking into account the above limitations we can say that the results obtained from the present study cannot be generalized. The present research recorded a reality at a given time in a given place. The results compose an interpretation, which, however, cannot be arbitrarily transferred to different contexts (Matt, 2004, p.328).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Lack of training – aspects of training

The participants' responses show that only 2 out of 9, i.e. have attended some kind of training in teaching vulnerable groups.

In more detail, the first participant argued that: *"I did not have such teaching experience before I started work, the truth is"*. The next participant said the same thing: *"in general, I have not done any training, I have not been taught how to teach"*. The following participants were also involved in this with phrases such as: *"no, and I am sure it would help a great deal"*, *"no, unfortunately and it is something I would like to do"*, etc.

The only exceptions were one participant (5th interview) who stated: *"I have done, but not on the subject of music"* and one participant (6th interview) who stated that: *"yes, let's say. Elders, because they too are actually considered (vulnerable group) and I have also been certified"*.

There is therefore a need for a debate on the areas in which adult refugee educators need training.

4.1.1 Adult education – vulnerable groups

Studying the results of the present research, we find that Leros 4 out of 9 adult refugee trainers expressed a desire to be educated on the basic principles of adult and vulnerable groups education, as the Proiou survey (2019) shows too.

More specifically, the fourth participant said he would like to be educated in teaching *"both adult and vulnerable groups"*. The seventh participant prefers training in the teaching of vulnerable groups, as he said that: *"I would like to be trained in how we trainers should treat people who have [...] difficult experiences"*. In the same context, the last two participants argued that they would like to be educated on *"adult education and not just for vulnerable groups"* and *"something in a more general context (on adult education)"*.

4.1.2 Psychology

In addition 3 out of 9 stated that they would also like to be educated in psychology so that they can manage deviant behaviours resulting from traumatic experiences. The importance of managing painful experiences on the part of the instructor is also underlined by the international literature (Gagné, et al, 2017; Richardson, et al, 2018).

The first participant stressed the importance of *"understanding how you can help people who have suffered psychological trauma"*. The third participant seems to have the same concern, who said that he would like to be educated *"in the part of supporting these people. Psychology or something like that"*, but also the sixth participant who stated that: *"I would like psychology"*.

4.1.3 Interculturalism - culture

2 participants understand the importance of forming intercultural awareness, getting to know the national and cultural capital of their learners and adopting corresponding educational practices, a fact that emerges from Simopoulos' research (2014) as well.

The first participant stated that she would like to be educated *"on the culture of refugees from the countries they come from"* and *"how you deal with a class that has within a mix of nationalities and different cultural elements"*. The second participant indirectly advocated the above, which stressed the difficulty of selecting scenes in the cinema course because of different religious and cultural beliefs (*"cinema by its very nature also has [...], excessive violence or sex. [...] I don't know if there's a way [...] to make a choice, what I could show them because they're also persons that we don't know exactly where they come from and I didn't want to show them overly violent scenes"*).

4.1.4 Teaching foreign languages

One thing mentioned in the literature (Nelson & Appleby, 2015), but only one participant in this study argued is training in how to teach the language (in this research English and not the language of the host country, as Nelson & Appleby, 2015 report). In particular, the sixth participant highlighted the importance of *"languages and education"*.

4.1.5 No further education

One participant stated that he did not wish to be educated.
To be more specific, the fifth participant argued that: "*I do not have anything to work on"*.

4.2 Selection of trainers

With regard to the characteristics that the instructor should have, participants seem to largely agree that the most basic thing is to have experience in teaching refugee trainers, but also a good knowledge of his/her subject. Some participants refer to the mood and love for their work and the knowledge of current events.

4.2.1 The role of the experience

The majority of participants consider that someone who has experience in the training of vulnerable groups and can give practical and meaningful guidance is more appropriate.

In more detail, the first participant stated that the experience of the instructor plays an important role (*R: So the experience plays an important role. M: Yes*). The third participant argued that he/she would be more appropriate to be *"someone who knows the situation and is also in the situation, to have the experience"* Respectively, the fourth participant would choose as trainer *"someone who would have experience"*. For the fifth participant, the trainer should have *"a set"* of knowledge and experience. The seventh participant would like to be educated by *"someone who knows the situation and is in the middle of things and of course has the experience"*. The eighth participant also agreed (*"a person or a group of people who would have experience"*), but also the ninth participant (*"it has to do with the experience in the subject matter"*).

4.2.2 Theoretical background

4 participants consider that it is also very important that the trainer, in addition to experience, is aware of the theoretical background of the basic principles of adult education.

The first participant argued that the instructor should possess *"a combination (knowledge) for adult education and intercultural education"*. The fifth participant pointed out the same (*"it's a total"*), as the eighth participant (*"a man or a group of people who would have experience and knowledge"*) and the ninth participant (*"wants a theoretical basis"*) did.

4.2.3 Love for his/her work

One participant argues that the educator is necessary to love what he/she does. In particular, the sixth participant stresses that it is important *"to love it"*.

4.2.4 Knowledge of the current affairs

One participant argues that the instructor must be aware of the current situation in order to be efficient. More specifically, the ninth participant highlights the importance of *"monitoring the updates of the time"*.

4.3 Types of training

Of course, we could not omit the participants' preferences as to the type of training. Based on their interviews, the majority prefers mixed training methods, while the rest share equal life and distance learning,

4.3.1 Mixed training type

The type of education chosen by Leros adult refugee trainers seems to be a combination of living and distance learning, as while they find lifelong learning more efficient, they take into account the factor of the difficulty of travel due to insularity – barren line and recent travel restrictions.

More precisely, the first participant stressed that she would prefer something that combines both (live and distance education): *"personally I prefer lifelong learning, [...] but because most of us are on islands I think the solution of on-line education is more practical"*. The second participant stated that in order to be educated, she would choose a programme *"combining both (live and distance)"*. The third participant argues that *"living education is irreplaceable, but also because of the special situation, with quarantine and all this I believe that good work can be done at a distance"*, to conclude that *"if there was a way to combine these two we would talk [...] for ideal situations"*. The seventh and eighth participants also argued that *"a combination of the two would be ideal"* and that *"because we live on an island and the movements are not always favorable, [...] the combination would be ideal"*.

4.3.2 Distance training

The fourth participant pointed out the obstacles that lifelong learning would encounter and the primacy of distance learning (*"because of the restrictive measures everything works remotely. But even without the restrictive measures the fact that we live in Leros..."*). The last participant argued that *"live (learning) helps more, but since I live and work in Leros I would prefer it remotely because it is difficult to travel"*.
4.3.3 Live training

On the contrary, the fifth participant prefers *"live"*, as does the 6th participant who states that prefers personal contact (*"(My children) prefer personal contact. So am I"*).

5. Conclusions

According to the data collected, the majority of trainers want to be educated on the basic principles of adult and vulnerable group education, diversity and interculturalism issues and psychology. The above are consistent with findings of research carried out in Greece on adult trainers and refugee trainers (Brinia et al, 2019· Gagné et al, 2017· Nelson & Appleby, 2015· Palaiologou & Dimitriadou, 2013· Proiou 2019· Richardson et al, 2018). The voluntary nature of the whole project is entirely related to the fact that the training of refugees was undertaken by trainers who are mostly inexperienced. This makes the need for training, particularly in adult education and intercultural education, all the more urgent. Psychology is also a very serious area, but it can be covered by the use of psychologists and/or social workers, who will support both refugees and their trainers. Participants choose to be trained using mixed teaching methods. Although most argue that the personal contact that lifelong teaching provides is irreplaceable, the fact that they live and work on a remote island such as Leros, and recent travel bans due to the coronavirus emergency, have led them to reconsider and to evaluate the benefits of distance learning, ending with the choice of mixed methods. Ideally, as trainers, participants would like people who are primarily experienced, ie have their own knowledge of the conditions faced by both refugees and educators, so that they can give them tangible advice with immediate results, and secondly, be adequately theoretically trained.

In a future research, the views of the trainers regarding the duration of the training could be explored, as well as the possibility of practical application in the context of the training, as the above were issues raised by participants in the present study. The role played by demographics (gender, age, marital status) in the educational choices of participants/subjects could also be explored.

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