PSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES OF ADULT EDUCATION:
FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXT

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The article is devoted to the analysis of psychological foundations of adult education and upbringing, namely psychological theories that significantly influenced the development of the paradigm of adult education (behaviourism, activity theory, humanistic theory, genetic psychology, constructivist theory, etc.). At the same time, the psychological mechanisms of adult education are considered: motivation, interest, responsibility, and psychophysical characteristics of adult learners are also given.

Keywords: adult education, adult psychology, adult motivation, psychological mechanisms, non-formal education, lifelong learning, informal education.

PARTICULARITĂŢILE PSIHOLOGICE ALE EDUCAŢIEI ADULŢILOR:
CONTEXT FORMAL, NONFORMAL ŞI INFORMAL

Articolul este dedicat analizei bazelor psihologice ale educaţiei şi creşterii adulţilor (învăţării şi educaţiei adulţilor), şi anume – teorii psihologice care au influenţat semnificativ dezvoltarea paradigmei educaţiei adulţilor (comportamentism, teoria activităţii, teoria umanistă, psihologia genetică, teoria constructivistă etc.). În acelaşi timp, sunt luate în considerare mecanismele psihologice ale educaţiei adulţilor: sunt date motivaţia, interesul, responsabilitatea şi caracteristicile psihofizice ale cursanţilor adulţi.

Cuvinte-cheie: educaţia adulţilor, psihologia adulţilor, motivaţia adulţilor, mecanisme psihologice, educaţia nonformală, educaţia permanentă, educaţia informală.

Introduction

In recent decades, the issue of adult education has been widely debated both internationally and nationally.

At the UNESCO conference in 1976, this concept was defined as "a set of organised educational processes, extending the initial education through which all persons considered adults in a society or culture to which they belong can develop their skills, enrich their knowledge; it improves the technical or professional qualification, it reorients its attitudes and behaviours, in a double perspective: through integral personal development and through participation in the balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development" [1, p.45].

Adult learning and education therefore aim to develop all the social roles of the individual: professional, family, cultural, and civic. From the psychosocial perspective, adult education represents a continuum in the development of previously formed competencies, feeding the need for new information, but also for value and action orientations in the conditions of permanent changes.

In this sense, several researchers have tried to identify the most important features of adult learning and education: a) people learn all their life, even if they go through periods of evolution or decline in this action; b) the effect of learning consists in the individual's role changes (acquires the status of friend, citizen, family member, worker, etc.), which involve gaining professional and interpersonal skills; c) through socialisation, the individual acquires maturity (capacity for self-management, self-discipline, autonomy, self-understanding), and from this perspective they approach the events of life; d) experience (more, more diverse, organised differently) counts enormously in the adult's decision to engage in learning; e) the desire to activate, to engage, to "wake up" to life leads many adults through the status of self-taught – people who learn all their life; f) for the adult who learns, time and old age have special meanings. They perceive the reality in their own way (they see distant goals) and they save (appreciate) their time, interpersonal contacts, they appreciate the social situations satisfactorily [2].

At the same time, to this day there is no unambiguous and clear definition of an adult. It is generally believed that the criterion for an adult is their natural age. At the same time, a person may not have the same calendar, biological and social age.

However, to characterise an adult, researchers place the main emphasis on the social aspects of adulthood.

Thus, the American scientists believe that "an adult is a person who plays socially significant productive roles and is responsible for their own life". Summarising, we can say that *an adult is characterised by a certain degree of physiological, psychological, social, and moral maturity, economic independence and inner freedom for responsible self-governing behaviour* [3, pp.93-94].

Consequently, only taking into account the social and psychophysical characteristics of adults, it is possible to build an effective pedagogical model of their education.

Psychological Theories Underlying Adult Learning

Personality development is one of the main categories of pedagogy and psychology, including pedagogy and psychology of adults. In principle, all psychological theories had as an object the development of personality.

In this sense, humanistic psychology has had a significant impact on the development of the theory and practice of adult learning.

The *humanistic* approach presupposes self-directed structuring of personal experience and training for the purpose of self-development and self-realisation of the individual, providing the individual with complete freedom of choice, and the student's personal responsibility for its consequences.

The American psychologist K.Rogers (1902-1987) attributed the central place in human behaviour to motives that ensure not adaptation to the environment, but the growth of the constructive principle of the human "I", i.e. actualisation of the innate desire to realise their abilities, the organisation of their inner (phenomenal) world, as well as the achievement of personality integrity, understanding the meaning of its existence. The ideal is a "fully functioning personality", saturated with life, adapting to changing conditions, emotional and at the same time reflexive, trusting themselves as the main source of information. Striving for this, a person cognises themselves and their inner experience, makes this experience open (perceiving it without defensive reactions and distortions), adequately expressed by verbal and non-verbal means of communication.

According to Rogers' concept, the student is offered help in finding a positive beginning in themselves. The basis of training is the complete acceptance of the adult's personality, relieving their anxiety and fears, the development of defensive reactions, client-centeredness, step-by-step assistance, non-directive group management, reliance on the aspiration for integrity, self-actualisation, and competence that is inherent in everyone [4, pp.23].

The psychotherapeutic principles of self-actualisation and the concept of the hierarchy of fundamental needs proposed by the American psychologist A.Maslow (1908-1970) are extremely valuable for the pedagogy of adults. Self-actualisation is the process of personality formation, realisation and development of its potential capabilities, rejection of illusory problems and movement towards solving real problems. Focusing on trusting relationships, A.Maslow offers a model of assistance without the intervention of a specialist.

Humanistic views on adult education and learning are reflected in the following provisions:

- orientation to universal human values;
- goal of education is self-realisation of the individual;
- personality development occurs in a holistic manner, under the unity of mind and feeling, soul and body;
- a person has the right to free choice of content, forms, mode of education;
- education is carried out through self-education, since no one can teach another person, but only promote their self-learning, combining individual and group work;
- personality education is based on full-fledged communication of an adult, as well as on the internal motivation of an adult, since a condition for successful learning is the perception of what is being studied as directly significant for maintaining or improving one's own "I";
- learning takes place in the most comfortable environment, in which the threat to the "I" of the adult is minimised and the possibilities of perception are optimised;
- training should take place in real life conditions, with the aim of solving real life problems using the student's personal experience.

It should be noted that humanistic psychology overestimates the level of self-government of an adult, as well as the level of the necessary scientific and methodological support for the learning process, which is difficult to achieve in real life [5, pp.24].

In adult learning, *behaviourism* views behaviour as the primary measure of learning outcomes. According to the concept of operant (from "operation") learning, developed by Harvard University professor B.Skinner (1904-1990), the positive aspects of learning (knowledge, competencies, skills, qualities and moral values)

are fixed with the help of incentives [6]. Personality development is achieved by practicing correct responses to external stimuli with the help of positive reinforcement.

Gestalt psychology builds a functional structure. This theory is based on the following provisions:
- mental phenomena represent integral structures, images - gestalts (from German *gestalt* - image, form);
- internal, systemic organisation of a holistic image determines the properties and functions of its constituent parts (principles of consistency and integrity);
- the construction of an image (gestalt) occurs through a special mental act of comprehension, instant grasp of relationships in the perceived field - insight (from the English *insight* - discretion, comprehension, revelation).
- Based on these provisions, *a dynamic theory of personality* is built, which takes as a basis the goals of a person's life, needs and motives that arise in a particular situation ("psychological field"). Rather rigid determinism and weak meaningfulness of an adult's activities are assumed.
- *Cognitivist ideas* in adult education assign a decisive role to knowledge, properly organised in the memory of the subject. Education is viewed as a process of adults creating their own "cultural field" of a social nature, conditioned by a specific cultural and historical context [7, pp.24].

It is assumed that the learning process should be built taking into account the system of relations in the structure of the educational process, the formation of readiness for learning, the spiral structure of the learning content, the three-phase process of obtaining information (understanding - transformation - assessment). The learning process is based on a hierarchy of learned skills: 1) learning phenomena; 2) learning conditions - external (organization of the learning process) and internal (concepts and skills of students necessary for learning); 3) learning products (the main types of behaviour learned in the course of learning). Cognitivist ideas do not sufficiently argue the "intellectualization" of a person and the learning process, reduce the goal of learning to mastering knowledge and formal logical operations.

The activity theory developed by A.N.Leontiev and S.L.Rubinstein considers activity as a specific form of social and historical being and historical and cultural creativity of a person, which most fully expresses their essence. Now the thesis about the combination of mental and practical activity, the validity of the structure of activity: need - motive - task - means - actions - operations are no longer questioned. In this theory, with the strengthening of the role of the student, the social determinism of their activity is somewhat exaggerated.

Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Adult Learning

Psychological science has developed a variety of mechanisms to improve adult learning. In this sense, motivation is considered as the most effective mechanism.

Motivation refers to the key components of the cognitive process, which determine its focus, intensity and duration of preservation of its main results. It directly predetermines the nature of educational activity and develops in conjunction with the development of worldview and abilities. Motivation for learning can be controlled by exerting a targeted influence on interests, aspirations, intentions, drives, attitudes, etc.

The motives that induce adults to learn can be material and socio-economic, internal psychological, safety, a means of self-affirmation, even leisure. Complementing each other, they constitute the driving force of full-fledged cognitive activity. Their stimulation and support will ensure continued interest in learning and its success. Adults are motivated to learn by:
- *making the educational process as confidential as possible*. The inclusion of a third party in the contact between the student and the teacher is undesirable, especially when discussing the student's failures;
- *a positive reaction of the teacher* to any actions of the student, which serves as a psychological basis for continuing education. The teacher should always note the positive side of the student's behaviour;
- *encouraging "learning with a purpose"*, i.e. learners should see for themselves jointly set goals, and above all short-term goals for small learning stages. Achievement of this goal is the beginning of a new stage, a step towards achieving the main goal (for example, obtaining a diploma that allows you to get a job);
- *maintaining a constructive opinion of the learner about their own cognitive abilities* (most effectively);
- assigning to the learners the functions of selecting the content of training, organising it, planning, stimulating, monitoring, etc. At the same time, the teacher contributes to the effective fulfilment of the learner's

tasks. In this case, the reference point should be the level of motivation and signs of its weakening (justification of their academic failure, systematic failure to complete educational tasks, etc.). However, we should not forget that over-motivation reduces the effectiveness of any activity.

The maintenance of high motivation for learning is significantly influenced by modern teaching technologies, which create a "tense psychological field" and develop educational activity as an achievement activity. The combination of traditional teaching methods and methods that enhance cognitive activity increases the motivation for further education [8, pp.28].

The psychological problems of adult learners can manifest themselves in the fear of taking responsibility for their studies, in the unwillingness to change their habitual stable position, in the doubts about their abilities (including learning), competence, and in the fear of being worse than others. In solving these problems, the teacher will be helped by various psychocorrectional and relaxation activities, consultations, trainings (for example, motivational training, which develops attitudes towards learning and professional activity; training behaviour and communication in typical situations; training of individual protection in stressful situations; training to increase the efficiency of mental actions etc.).

Since in modern educational concepts responsibility is raised to the rank of the most important characteristic of a socially mature personality and transferred to the personality itself, the teacher must be able to develop this feeling in the student. This strengthens their faith in the ability to influence events, enter into the positions of other people and respect their needs, deny themselves to satisfy their needs. The psychological concept of locus-control of two types of responsibility serves as a support: the internal assigns all responsibility for what is happening to them on themselves; external - to external circumstances [9, pp.27].

Psychological Assistance in Adult Education

The main goal of psychological assistance in learning is to maintain an optimal level of activity as a psychological basis for professional and social mobility. It should optimise the inclusion of a person in educational activities, taking into account their psychological potential. For this, various psychocorrectional and relaxation activities, consultations, trainings (motivational training; training of behaviour and communication in typical situations and business relationships; training of personal psychological protection means in stressful situations; training of the mental function of assessment; training of means of correcting personal qualities, etc.).

One of the most difficult problems that adults face in the transition from professional to educational activities is the problem of *re-motivation* - from motivation to work to motivation to study. The closest attention should be paid to the stage of transition from professional activity to educational activity. Since learning skills are most often lost in adulthood, a special adaptation period is required to reorganise psychological subsystems into new activities. Taking into account the peculiarities of adult education, adaptation should be controlled, special and intensive.

At the same time, to scientifically take into account the influence of age on learning abilities, we adhere to the opinion of B.G.Ananyev, who proved that learning potential does not become lower with age [10, pp.14-15].

In other words, the learning potential of an adult is quite high. In this sense, gerontologists consider education as the most important factor contributing to longevity. L.S.Vygotsky argued that learning stimulates the learning process. A higher level of development of verbal intelligence in adult learners occurs as a result of an increase in the working capacity of memory, attention, and thinking. In addition, according to research, memory changes not only in level, but also in structure. Learning and active intellectual activity have a positive effect on the development of memory in adults [11, pp.103].

Thus, at all age stages, mental functions remain stable, which is conducive to the further development of the personality through education. Education is both a technical, cultural function and a life-supporting one, since it allows flexible adaptation to innovative processes.

Some Features of Education and Upbringing of Adults in the Framework of Non-Formal and Informal Education

The psychological mechanisms of adult learning are equally manifested in the framework of formal, non-formal and informal learning. At the same time, the significance of certain psychological mechanisms can manifest itself in different ways in different situations.

So, within the framework of formal education of an adult, when their main goal is to get a new profession, or retraining, motivation and responsibility for learning outcomes are more clearly manifested. Yet, in the

framework of non-formal learning and education/upbringing, when the main goal is personal development, responsibility for the learning outcome is significantly reduced.

The manifestation of psychological mechanisms in the framework of informal education largely depends on the level of education of the adult and their value orientations.

General Conclusions:

1. The analysis of various psychological theories underlying the construction of pedagogy for adults made it possible to formulate the main provisions of the theory and methodology of adults' education/upbringing.

Within the framework of the ***humanistic*** approach, the teaching of adults is a self-directed structuring of personal experience in order for the individual to self-develop and self-realise: you cannot directly teach another person, you can only help them learn; a person successfully learns only when they perceive what is being studied as directly related to the maintenance or improvement of their "I". The experience, which seems to the adult to be insignificant in relation to their "I", can be assimilated only when the existing structure of the "I" is relaxed and predisposed to receive it; the experience, being assimilated by the learner, can lead to changes in the organisation of the personality and tends to be distorted through symbolisation; the structure and organisation of "I" becomes more rigid* in the face of a threat; the learning situation that is most conducive to effective learning is a situation in which: a) the threat of the learner's "I" is minimised and b) the differentiated perception of the field is facilitated.

The essence of the learning process: learning is an independent activity of an adult; the leading role belongs to the learner; training should take place in real life conditions to solve actual life problems; it is necessary to use the personal experience of the learner; training is the way to achieve personal self-realisation; learners are given the freedom to choose various aspects of training.

Within the framework of the *behaviouristic* approach, the process of adult learning is associated with the concept of "input" – "output" – "stimulus", "reaction".

This approach reinforces the positive aspects of learning (knowledge, skill and value relationships.

Within the framework of the *dynamic* theory of personality, the leading role in learning is assigned to life goals, needs and motivation.

Within the framework of the *cognitivist* approach, the main role in learning is assigned to knowledge properly organised in memory. The learner must integrate, produce information and create cognitive structures.

2. Analysis of various psychological mechanisms used in teaching and upbringing of adults, we single out motivation, which has a special role. Educational activity, like any other, is stimulated and carried out under the influence of human *needs,* concretised in motives. Therefore, it is extremely important to form a motive, maintain and stimulate it. The motives that stimulate adults to learn can be *material* (the opportunity to learn a new profession through training and earn more money); *social* (learning can improve social status); *internal* (learning can serve as a stabilising moment); *assuring* (training can increase competitiveness); *self-affirmational* (self-development, gaining recognition); *leisure* (pleasure from interesting communication, rest from the monotony of household chores). In life, all types of motivation interact, complementing each other, and only together constitute a driving force sufficient to generate a full-fledged activity, in particular educational. The integration of all motives will ensure a constant interest in learning and its success.

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* Rigidity (from the Latin *rigidus* – rigid, hard) – difficulty (up to complete inability) in changing the program of activity outlined by the subject in conditions that objectively require its restructuring.

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