

Sweden

Working Paper

*Paula Kuusipalo
Kaisa Niiranen*



Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship





Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP)

EduMAP is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.

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1. Challenges in AE provision and access

In Sweden we researched the work-oriented integration training supported with students' native language pedagogy (Yrkes-SFI). The programme is targeted to newcomers with refugee background who need to learn Swedish and are willing to work in parallel for faster entering labour market. The programme focuses on those work branches that are suffering from labour shortage, in this case forestry.

The integration policies in Sweden generally work quite well. However during and after 2015 the increased number of asylum seekers has put pressure on the integration programmes to such an extent that lack of qualified teachers hampers implementation. Thus, at the time of the interviews many students had experienced long waiting period before entering a SFI course.

The market-oriented approach and job centre -steered process has somewhat diminished the AE provider chances to influence recruiting process, since the job centre controls selection of students. The students' motivation and former job experience were considered as primary access criteria. The wide variation of different native languages and Swedish language levels in one student group was a challenge to both teachers and students.

Moreover, socio-economic emphasis dominating the programme recognises gaining employment as the students' main motivation but the promise of a job after finishing the programme caused many disappointments in cases it could not be fulfilled. Since refugees and asylum seekers originate from crises countries, the population contains many with low education and/or traumas that affect their study ability. The Yrkes SFI programme did not cater for illiterate or students with very low language skills - they were not able to reach necessary skills to enter working life after the course finish.

The competition between AE providers due to market-oriented training system was considered problematic for continuation of the programme. Since the programme was dependent on the job centre sponsorship and other partners' interests, the provider invested resources in developing the programme, networking and lobbying at their own risk .

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

The AE provider practiced diverse language policy in its activities. Over the years they had developed pedagogy that engaged the students' languages as resources in school activities. This was apparent in staff policy as well. Since the staff was diverse, they had members who mastered the students languages and hence the students had better chances to be heard and have an active role already during their initial studies.

Equality policy was essential for practices and activities of the AE provider. The provider had processed a steering document for guiding the implementation of equality policy. The guidance document was regularly updated by the staff. The measures to enhance equality included for instance teachers awareness and active role in attending to gender issues. They told for example that they encouraged the students to cooperate in the class merely as "sisters and brothers", not as representatives of opposite sex. The meticulous processing of equality issues in the AE provider practices was manifested in the students' expressions concerning equality hence showing that the education had had impact.

In the studied Yrkes SFI -group all students were male, which was assumed as a consequence of attitude issues within job centre guidance personnel. Since forestry is traditionally regarded as "male" profession the interviewees suspected that this attitude had influenced the choice of students.

Previously Swedish legislation allowed refugee women to stay home with children, thus missing their right to integration training as newcomers. Since the regulation has been changed it currently concurs with the general regulations and values of the society enhancing integration of home parents as well.

3. The concept of APC as it is defined, understood or approached in the context of the study by different respondent groups

Policy makers: The integration policy aims at ensuring that the newcomers become active participatory citizens of the Swedish society. The Integration Act entails understanding that practicing one's rights as citizens and having a job are crucial. As entering the labour market requires skills, the general entry level that is required in the Swedish labour market is upper secondary education.

Educators: The practitioners highlighted understanding of how the society works as the basis for APC. This was demonstrated already in expectations that were introduced to students in integration classes as well as in democratic values and equality that were everyday practises of the school. For instance, the educators emphasised that the learners were expected and challenged to carry responsibility of their learning. The learners' organization had a role in democratic decision within school activities and mutual learning credited the newcomers perspectives and competences that were respected as assets to contribute the society.

Learners/Participants:

The learners referred to APC as basic concept connected to following rules and legislation, having a job and being able to support one's family. Some understood it at more advanced level as understanding of the relationship between an individual and the state containing numerous responsibilities/rights. The APC concept and ability to act accordingly was linked to language skills in different formal and informal situations. The refugees made observations of the Swedish democratic system and appreciated its security and what they had experienced: respect for fellow citizens. They considered equality and mutual respect as core issues to successful state-citizen relationship. In maintaining the equilibrium voting and fair elections were considered important

4. Elements that are critical and or significant for enabling learners to become active citizens, or to develop APC competencies in the studied programmes

The Swedish Integration law requires the municipalities to provide newcomers with “society studies”. The information is provided in languages that the students understand.

Education requirements are quite high in the Swedish society. Hence, refugees with low academic skills need to achieve first elementary skills such as reading, writing, following timetables etc. The well-developed AE structure in Sweden provides various tracks to cater for different needs.

The AE providers need to address not only educational needs but the mental distress of the students: war traumas and other hardships, the frustration and helplessness of those students with family members left behind. Lack of decent housing and difficult housing situations may affect study abilities, too.

The studied programme successfully combined language learning to practical work in forestry, vocation-oriented language learning and job-seeking skills.

The teaching was based on the students’ mother tongue - assisted language learning and support. The language support was provided both on the job and classroom, and the students themselves were activated to bring real-life examples and situations back to the classroom by using smartphones and personal notes. Modern communication channels were used including apps for language learning and translation.

Systematic monitoring of the individual learning plan helped to develop critical thinking and self-evaluation skills as well as matching teaching to the individual learning needs and finding the best learning track.

The authentic working life experience was crucial for learning communication skills, labour market regulations, employer responsibilities, taxpaying and other employer/employee duties. Socialising with Swedish workmates developed language and communication skills, the students gained valuable local references for future job seeking. The practical training with “salary” was a step towards self-supportive life.

The programme enabled the students’ widening awareness of the education system and opportunities in Sweden and gave them confidence to try new things and educate oneself further.

5. Competencies and qualifications possessed, represented and/or cultivated through by the AE practitioners who contribute to the design, development and delivery of APC programmes for VYAs

In folk high schools it is possible to recruit teachers with practical experience rather than academic backgrounds, but the ambition was to hire teachers with university education and with formal Swedish- as- a- second- language competence. The Swedish for Foreigners (SFI) teachers were formally qualified. The organisation supported and encouraged the mother tongue teachers to gain formal qualifications, too. The provider offered in-service training and pedagogical training to its staff. In addition, participation in the regional collaboration ant networks was considered important. The teachers worked in close contact with employers and fieldwork supervisors; this multi-professional collaboration was seen as key for developing the programme.

6. Critical factors and conditions (favourable and unfavourable) that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for VYAs

Favourable conditions:

- Sweden has a well-established AE system with generous public funding. In addition, the activities are documented and participation data from all levels of education are gathered and the derived statistics are publicly available.
- Sweden has long tradition and large provision of non-formal AE including municipal AE centres and non-formal AE organisers (folk high schools and study associations). These organisations have an active role in providing Swedish language learning and second chance education for newcomers and immigrants.
- The Integration Act legislates that newcomers with refugee background between 20-64 have a right to integration programme. Furthermore, those who participate have right to living allowance for maximum two years.
- The cooperation and roles of different social actors are regulated and described in the law.

Unfavourable conditions:

- The students (with asylum seeker background) reported long waiting time in the reception centres before studying which affected negatively their study ability.
- Although collaboration of different actors is a favourable condition, it is quite time-consuming with meetings and networking. Collaboration between various actors with different background, motivation and aims for the activity entails willingness to listen and accept different viewpoints.
- In Sweden there is little need for low-educated workforce, hence it is important to educate the newcomers who lack matching competences. This however can be a long and difficult path for an adult that is primarily motivated to work and support a family.
- The Swedish social housing has some neglected issues of grey/black market that somewhat undermines the fairness ideal of the society and can lead to societal problems. Thus an open policy concerning fair affordable rental housing is needed.

7. Lessons learnt from laws and policies that contribute effectively to cultivating APC for VYAs

The actors in the field have agreed about the roles and regional cooperation of different social actors in the refugees' integration to society.

The Swedish Integration Act defines three core activities: the Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), orientation to society and measures enhancing active labour market participation. These are organised according to national framework. SFI is differentiated to tracks and course levels according to the participants' previous language skills and educational background. Orientation to society is provided in students' native languages. Entrance to labour market is accelerated by combining internships to integration programme.

The national SFI framework is well-structured and fully integrated into the overall education system. SFI is legislated under the same law as other forms of general education which guarantees the same guidelines and definitions to basic education and to newcomers' integration training. Democratic values are guiding principles.

The Integration Act revision has adopted a principle of encouraging everybody who can to enter job market. This contains recognising of skills and competences, speeding up access to Swedish courses, enhancing individual responsibility, and creating fast track jobs. The new policy is aimed at shortening the time the newcomers will take to integrate and find a job.

To guarantee the right to participate in education, the new Integration Act removed 18-19 olds from the integration act activities and suggest prioritising their continuing compulsory education instead.

8. Existing practices of information access and communication (emerging patterns and tendencies; people/social networks; media/platforms/channels; content/messages) about adult education in the studied programmes

The labour -market -related integration activities are organised by job centres. The society orientation and SFI are organised by the municipality . Thus communication between social partners is important. In our case study the regional administration had taken coordination responsibility and was organising communication between stakeholders. For instance the regional provision of job-related language courses was gathered and available on the designated webpage (incl. translations). However, this information is not necessarily relevant for the target population, who still need to consult case workers at Public employment services in order to register in a course.

The job centres are responsible for choosing the participants for the programme. One of the tools in job centres is gathering information and depositing it in the PES client register, which is used for steering the clients' processes towards the labour market.

The AE provider complained not receiving much information about the students beforehand. Thus they organised student interviews in the beginning of the programme for gaining understanding of the personal learning needs and ambitions in order to plan the courses individually and avoiding failures. The AE provider's genuine engagement in attending the students' learning needs was demonstrated in the organisation's diversity policy and use of different languages as resources in teaching. The role of native language teachers was manifold: they assisted in Swedish classes by explaining and translating, they had multiple facilitator roles at internship workplaces and at school. In addition they had working hours for assisting students with various social issues that needed attention thus enabling the students to concentrate in studies.

From the VYAs perspective the native language instructors, teachers and authorities were their main information sources. For solving practical issues their friends and relatives who have lived longer in Sweden are an important sources of information.

Although VYAs' role in programme choice is passive, they still seemed relatively well informed in general, but from the VYAs' perspective they had not entered the programme via recruitment or application process.

The partners of the AE providers were various regional and local authorities, for the teachers the fieldwork supervisor and the national forestry agency and the job centre.

The general respecting attitude and appreciating the students as skillful adults with resources was basis for creating positive learning environment and enhanced active mutual communication.

Various technical learning and communication solutions were actively utilised: Itslearning-platform, smartphones/iPads, apps, videoclips, audiobooks etc. to increase communication and understanding.

Teachers were encouraged to participate in the students' lives and utilise informal communication, with the exception of those teachers who were involved in student

assessment.

Swedish workmates at the workplace were also sources of information, but more importantly they increased the VYAs' chances for informal communication in authentic situations, for instance learning the local dialect and informal communication style.

9. Leveraging on VYA's information access and communication practices about adult education

- The forestry programme was not advertised for women by the job centre which was interpreted as an attitude problem to be attended to in the future.
- Job centre caseworkers have a key role in sharing information while VYAs are merely receivers of that information. They are in the beginning heavily dependent on the information received from PES case workers, until they connect to their peers and local networks.
- Although the regional coordination body utilised an internet platform to share information of the regional provision of the programme, the ultimate choice of students for programmes was controlled by job centre. The platform was mostly intended to social partners, not learners themselves.
- Some students felt they had been told to attend without genuine consent. For them the aims and procedures of the programme were not clear in the beginning which sometimes led to disappointments. Sometimes they experienced the situation as not having other choice than to accept what job centre (PES) instructs them to do.
- Various technical learning and communication solutions were actively utilised in studies: Itslearning-platform, smartphones/iPads, apps, video clips, audiobooks ect. to increase communication and understanding. The students themselves were active participants and producers of learning material.

10. Information accessed and used during the design of AE for APC programmes

The legislative framework and statistics in Sweden are openly available in the web and constantly updated by authorities. The AE providers have a duty to report to the state every 6 months about the results. Information of the participants is gathered routinely. The Job centre monitors those courses that they finance and track the status of the students after finishing the course.

Considering the case study, the folk high school, employer and the job centre organised reflection seminars to discuss the activities and what needed further improving. The AE provider had joined the regional Yrkes-SFI programme and participated the networking of social partners. Their ambition was to bring their specific learner-centred approach to the programme and hence they were less socio-economically oriented than the job centre and some other AE providers.

The regional Yrkes-SFI is based on cooperation and formal agreement between 33 municipalities. It is coordinated by a full-time coordination worker in regional administration who has an essential role as a link between different municipalities and stakeholders organising regular evaluations and monitoring the work.

PES had made decisions about student selection based more on information they had gained about their self-reported previous work experience rather than future plans or language levels. Thus some mismatches were reported by the AE providers and work supervisors back to the PES.

The teachers of the programme worked in teams and mentoring was also utilised to ensure information flow and learning among staff. The native language teachers participated in programme planning, assisting Swedish language teachers and workplace supervisors in many ways. One important aspect of communication and information flow was low hierarchy within the organisation and between social partners.



<http://blogs.uta.fi/edumap/>