

Estonia

Working Paper

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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

The provision of work embedded vocational education for young adults with vulnerable backgrounds in Estonia should be better orchestrated between different institutions of employers, employers' associations, unemployment offices and VETs in order to ensure the open vacant practice places for the programme applicants who are unemployed.

The programme must be more flexible, regarding the size of study groups and offering different job-embedded professional opportunities – people need to have a chance to study what interests them in their region – this is impossible because they usually live under the care of some other people and cannot cope to go to study in other regions.

The learners reported to learn much of the provided adult education initiative, and getting aspirations from work embedded learning. On the other hand, they did not always become independent and found the job after graduating – perhaps society should also think of inservice trainings and get-together follow-ups for young adults to keep them engaged in lifelong learning. Secondly, employing all people according to their capabilities, and providing them support and specific services in becoming independent from parents is important. The programme should more develop socio-cultural and politico-legal dimensions of APC, the ensure the activism and tolerance in the society, not tailoring only the job-related goals since self development is equally important in the age of digitalization to change many jobs.

The approach of facilitating advisors mediating the young adults' challenges, increasing their coping in communication, and self-organization and responsibility is needed to initially cultivate resilience among them. Later the facilitators should gradually withdraw, but there should be personal records about educational and career progress and pitfalls kept (for all people to model the futures and not letting them out of sight and becoming lost to the society –monitoring and tracking is scary for data privacy concerns but if applied it should be equally applied to all people).

There is a mismatch in the target group of advertising of adult education. They do not proactively search for adult education information. The information sharing in vocational education ecosystem in social media is quite active between the policymakers, AE providers and advisors, and the enterprises and adult educators. The active central hubs exist in vocational education, and they are monitored by many students. Yet, the communication specialists in social media channels do not know what campaign elements have effect on young people. The young adults from vulnerable groups get information about adult education opportunities for them mainly through mediated approaches from advisors. Some of the FB pages that could attract vulnerable young adults are not very active in posting information, such as the network of youth (Noorte tugila). Others, like educational career counseling FB (Rajaledja) page have also active chat possibility for young adults in need to ask advice.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

The programme already targets the gender needs by gender neutrality communication of professions, it has some tailored means for language minorities, low educated students and students with special education needs.

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

Young adults' APC conceptions:

The active participatory citizenship conception was not clear to some respondents and they had not been thinking of it, and even asked from the interviewer the meaning of it. Some young people related all the life to being a citizen. APC was related with:

- Living and working in the country;
- Contributing to the country such as with taxes, and being an honest taxpayer;
- Paying taxes was also seen as an obligation, a contribution and a commodity to receive other commodities from the country, such as safety and help;
- APC was also associated with other rights such as health insurance and right for learning;
- Not being passive, showing interest to the government;
- Providing feedback and ideas to the regional government;
- Participating in elections;
- Having the aims and aspirations;
- Being respectful to his parents and family.

The main barriers to APC were seen by young adults as follows:

Socio-economic aspects:

- Being unemployed and not finding job.
- Being unconfident in presenting himself.
- Not ready to live independent life, paying taxes, renting the apartment, making contracts.
- Not financially coping alone in the society, and having dependency of parents who support them.

Socio-cultural aspects:

- The Adult education being too much knowledge focused instead of practices.
- Fear of communicating and particularly the fear to different people such as strangers, immigrants who do not want to learn local language.
- Lack of knowing foreign languages.
- Temporal job seekers from foreign countries such as Ukraine (potential new-immigrants) were not considered as the applicants of AE opportunity of work-embedded education, since they need to be full time on job, not wasting time on education.

Civic-political aspects:

- The young adults were sure that their voice will not be considered, if they want to be active at regional government.

Adult Educators

Adult educators had vague conceptions about APC, and they did not see it related with their GP programmes concretely. APC was related to citizen initiative; the right

to receive lifelong education, but it was considered just broadly relevant in Adult Education context. Rather it was considered the wider perspective, and human development in general. It was also described as an outcome of being trained.

Adult educators considered the following barriers to AE and APC:

- Young persons' age was considered as a restriction to take part of work-embedded Adult Education – young adults with vulnerable background were described as not having self-discipline and ability to plan own life. Lack of self-responsibility was seen as a barrier to AE and indirectly to APC.
- It was considered critical to have transmission-mentor for helping the young adults when they are in between different educational and work opportunities (eg. When they are falling out from vocational education).
- It was also considered critical to provide mentoring for working and self regulation habits both at the AE side as well as at the work-embedded AE situations.
- They pointed to the gap in linking the young vulnerable adults with Unemployment office, and expected that there would be also a circular loop.

Polymakers

The polymakers from the Ministry of Education, vocational education section were familiar with the APC concept from some strategies, but they could not relate it with the concrete agendas for the GP practice of on-job vocational training.

The polymakers described the compulsory learning modules in vocational curricula related with entrepreneurship as active citizenship training. They noted APC as an active engagement, involvement to community and polymaking and as a quality of being knowledgeable and aware of the things in society, not out casted. APC was related with the person who fulfils its citizen duties. It was also related with economic success of the country through increasing employment.

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 practice-based learning at work helps young adults with vulnerable groups to know how certain practices must be applied, they have got salary while studying, they have received job and have better understanding what they want to do in their life.

- The tailored mentorship has helped to improve their self-organization competences.
- The learning peers have become friends and they have wider social arena.
- The joint activities at VET have tied them better to seeing what way society functions.

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 Participants

There is the lack of good mentoring competences at workplaces to make maximum learning for the vocation. The competence of orchestrating mentoring and counseling the learners across the borders of educational stages is important. Generally, there is the need to increase the self-esteem, aspirations, communication, and self-organizing of young adults from vulnerable backgrounds at work-embedded vocational education – the teachers need to learn how to facilitate the development of general competences in the work and studies embedded mode. The AE practitioners should also promote civic-juridical competence development in the programme to prompt activism of young adults in local life.

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

The programme of work-embedded education is a general national programme provided for all age groups and has wide accessibility in VETs. The general nature of the programme does not highlight and create sufficient conditions needed by young adults with vulnerable background to access the education, because they need to enter to the programme having the job placement. The policies must promote the orchestrated approach between the employment offices, the organizations that offer practice places and the vocational schools to provide places for students who have no job. Currently this approach does not work in real situations. The more successful vocational institutions that recruit young adults from vulnerable groups organise work-embedded studies among several enterprises, which provide temporally different type of practice opportunities. This mode fits also for young adults without workplaces, but may later on not guarantee a job for them in those enterprises.

The AE policies should involve the vulnerable minority groups' representatives among other stakeholders in making the favourable conditions for all young adults at VETs.

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

The concept of active citizenship in Government acts is rare and it is prevalingly not defined:

- The active citizenship concept appears in multidimensionality and are defined way in national curricula;
- In High school acts and specific universities acts responsible citizenship concept is defined through ability of demonstrating initiative;
- The Adult Education and Hobby Education Acts do not define active citizenship concept;
- Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy defines active citizenship through application of key competences;
- Social Acts use the concept of participation in social life;
- Citizenship acts define new citizens by coping in society and language competences.

In Estonia the focus of adult education lies in developing the citizen's capability and willingness to have a positive impact in the society. Neo-liberal tendencies are obvious in the ways active citizenship is understood in Estonia. Neo-liberal views can be seen in the ways the national curricula treat citizenship at both basic and secondary levels. The concept of 'active and responsible citizen' is used in the curriculum for basic schools (Art. 11), in which it is named as one of the democratic competences to be achieved, and the curriculum for secondary level (Art. 5) highlights 'civic initiative and entrepreneurship', aiming at the students to become responsible and economically proactive members of the society. The market and job-related goal of AE and LLL still prevail and the AE focuses on continuing education and on the job training models. Estonian legal acts in AE determine LLL from the market and job point of view, the main trends in AE are on the job training as a form of vocational training, flexible transfer between study levels, bringing NEET to education and work, social cohesion programs. There is lack of attention to informal education, the self-directed educational development is underestimated compared with job-related development, validating the competences from informal education as part of formal education and qualification is possible only at higher education level, and has not become a mainstream practice.

In Estonian case of work-embedded vocational education we see that active citizenship concept is considered in preparing programmes but not as explicitly defined, central and clearly addressed goal. The programmes are targeting wide learner groups (inclusion of all), but do not specifically address vulnerable young people – and we have seen that in real application of the programme it causes for vulnerable jobless young people not gaining access as easily as the programme policy goal is.

Estonia uses some means for bilingual AE opportunities. In the national acts and agendas of Estonia the national language space protection is highlighted but it is combined with the social and cultural cohesion agendas and ecological sustainability means.

The vulnerability is somewhat considered with extra social services (travel support,

some scholarship support, rules that support getting salary while studying) and mentor services (for being embedded to learning and working habits). Estonia has particular focus on digital service provision, that enables discovering the sets of constraints and requirements for supportive allowances in case of each service. When searching for AE services, it is not yet possible to filter the prerequisites that young at risk may have as enablers or constraints to accessing AE services. Such services are not available at study program or informal education discovery level. There are issues in discovering in digital environment what fits to vulnerable youth at combination of Adult education and additional social services level; the specific adult education programmes, and their benefit to vulnerable youth are not so visible both in web and at leaflets.

There are gaps how vulnerable are handed over from one mentorship and adviser to another in another institution.

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 advertising of the AE programme of work-embedded education is done by the ministry specialists as well as by the schools themselves.

Ministry of Education responsibilities: The booklet of vocational education opportunities; the website of all the opportunities; the FB page and social media campaign of vocational education (including Instagram, YouTube); the leaflets; the campaign activities with Employers' association.

The vocational schools' responsibilities: The leaflets of certain study programmes, the WebPages of programme opportunities at institution webpage; the FB page and social media campaign, the network of alumni.

The main elements in FB social media campaign are cross-promoting AE opportunities across the wider network in social media. Different counterparts are part of this ecosystem: vocational schools' FB pages, ministry of education with its vocational education FM page, career counseling organizations, work advisers, association of employers, association of enterprises, specific job associations, regional innovation and development agencies, EPALE forum, individual persons (vocational students, AE educators). Media information is pushed to this FB ecosystem. There are the following campaigns: career competitions are mostly marketed using pictures posted in Instagram (both by vocational schools, ministries) – because this form of communication has temporal nature; the videos of career representatives, vocational schools virtual visits, and the programmes are made by ministry and posted to YouTube and FB, these are shared and liked; there are games to collect information for prizes to engage visitors of the hub; the ministry is also posting different regulations and information of new project opportunities; media news and FB events are posted by ministry as well as by different ecosystem counterparts; EPALE is actively posting information of face-to-face and virtual events for adult educators, some EPALE blog topics also relate with vulnerable young adults, informal learning etc. The communication specialists do not know what campaign elements have effect on young people.

Bloggers and you tubers do not seem to play big role in this ecosystem of vocational education. Blogs as information sharing environments have been tried out by few vocational schools at earlier period (2013- 2014), but have little role.

Ministry of Education, Vocational education strand has special budget for communication activities in work-embedded vocational education. It is channeled also to advising vocational schools web pages to make the work-embedded educational opportunities more prominent. However, still the observed schools had discrepancies in web-pages – the work embedded opportunities were not clearly discoverable, these were reported under Projects.

Communication with printed media – leaflets and the booklet is managed both by ministry and the schools – it was possible to find the leaflets in Career counselling

and Unemployment offices. However, these educational career specialists that were interviewed had only general understanding that such programme exists and they did not know particular constraints how to bring young unemployed adults to the programme.

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

Young adults with vulnerable background mentioned using tablets and mobiles for exchanging information and communicating telephone apps were mentioned. None of the young adults interviewed at this case mentioned digital or social media as the source of AE information. Information of AE was received orally from relatives, from teachers and special advisers. They had received guidance to study from their teacher-facilitators in special education school and from family members. The respondents with special education needs may rely on personal guardian in their communication practices. Learners did not complain about the communication during studies.

The AE educators are on the opinion that the of AE opportunities information is provided by vocational education and ministry and other organizations' communication specialists not by adult educators themselves. Adult educators relied on admission process on the admission people at vocational schools, to electronic systems. They mentioned the problem of admitting students without a former working place. Since the 3 sided contract should be made there must be the employer at the moment of being admitted and the young people without job can hardly apply. The educators are more involved into studies related communication across students, workplace mentors and the educators at vocational institutes. Adult educators told about paper-based and digitally mediated portfolio practices and face-to face meetings and email communication with mentors and young adults at studies. Social media is not used for studies related communication. During vocational programmes digital technology (Moodle, email) is used for managing the mentors and vocational education students' portfolios and tasks, as well as learning resources are distributed digitally. In several cases the portfolio is still a paper-based folder that is filled in and approved by mentors at the working places and used for professional competences validation at schools. Email and email lists are a common form of communication between vocational schools and students as well as between the schools and their alumni. Most common form of communication is face-to-face meetings between mentors-students at work and students-teachers, and mentors-teachers at the vocational school. The Facebook communities are rather informally formed among students themselves. Young people did not talk much of the digitally mediated or face to face mediated communication during the studies and about informal communication among themselves. The students use sometimes Skype, Facebook chat for being in touch and coping with tasks. Students usually own FB pages, often also Instagram accounts and know how to channel information using hash tags.

Direct communication between workplace mentors and adult educators and students seems to be effective and supporting VYA in their career and development. There is a mismatch in the target group of advertising of adult education – usually vulnerable young adults get information through mediated channels from advisors. They do not proactively search for adult education information. During studies, many students are part of the FB communities of their schools and follow Instagram. The information sharing in vocational education ecosystem is quite active between the

policymakers, AE providers and advisors, and the enterprises and adult educators. The active central hubs exist in vocational education, and they are monitored by many students (8130 Followers, 8266 Likes of the hub). It seems that some of the FB pages that could attract vulnerable young adults are not very active such as the network of youth (Noorte tugila) has last posts at 2016. Others like educational career counseling FB (Rajaledja) page have also active chat possibility to ask advice. The recruitment process is managed centrally by vocational schools' electronic system. Different employment office advisers, the career advisers and advisers at the youth centres (the youth guarantee project) prompt young people to the work-embedded vocational education programmes. However, the obstacle is that in order to be accepted the young person needs the working place where to do the studies, and often they cannot find it when applying through the vocational school only (schools usually do not have a network of enterprises with free job places to offer for studies). The good practice was observed of the vocational school that used a network of enterprise partners and circulated the work-embedded vocational education students temporarily between these.

Alumni network is often used as the network for working places and mentors in work-embedded studies. Educators have personal contacts with some alumni who are recruited in work-embedded learning as mentors of new VYA, they also have lists of alumni.

The career counselors do not keep contact with advised young people after the case is closed. The career counselors perceived the inadequacy in advising during the transfer stages while the VYA is moving between educational opportunities. External communication across different stakeholder organizations is too much communication specialist mediated, is not based on evidences what works and what not, and has not sufficient feedback of its effectiveness to actual targets.

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

Institutional and across institutional communication about the work-embedded education uses face-to face meetings, emails, google tools for preparing joint documents and scheduling times. All vocational schools have their own institutional information management systems and e-learning platform Moodle is used. There are some issues in the cross-organizational communication between vocational schools and workplaces – for this face-to-face meetings, training with Moodle and emails are used.

Ministry is organizing certain networking and practice-sharing events to the people and different stakeholders (employers, career and job counselors) engaged in work-embedded vocational education. The involvement of representatives of VYA is not often planned. There is a social media cross-communication ecosystem in vocational education, counseling and enterprises – however it is mostly maintained by communication experts, and accessed personally by adult educators, current and former students, other interested counterparts. There is no information if and how VYA join to such.



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