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# Educational Field Trips as Part of Teaching Methodology in Adult Education

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## Abstract

In modern times, adult education is growing at a significant pace as many adults worldwide are actively involved in learning processes to update their knowledge and skills. In adult education, experiential learning plays a central role which renders learners active participants in the learning process. Educational field trips are part of experiential learning. Several scientific studies have been carried out in recent years that highlight the importance of educational field trips in a learning process, but most of them concern school education. This research focuses on the field of adult education, exploring the benefits as well as the conditions for successful visits in this field. By studying a sample of in-service learners and educators, the research demonstrates the importance of educational field trips as a useful tool for promoting experiential and participatory learning in adult education. Participants in this study highlight the main benefits of educational field trips and the preconditions that need to be met for their successful implementation.

**Keywords:** Educational Field Trips, Benefits, Preconditions, Adult Education

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Theoretical framework*

In modern times, adult education involves a wide range of formal and non-formal learning processes and activities deliberately designed for people beyond the age of compulsory education (Rogers, 1998). In a rapidly changing social and economic environment, adult education through appropriately designed actions can contribute to the development of the knowledge and skills that modern citizens need in order to adapt more effectively to the new post-COVID-19 digital era. Therefore today, perhaps more than ever before, people need to update their knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the modern labor market, improve their employment prospects as well as develop personally and professionally (Jarvis, 2004).

Moreover, adult education encourages learners to overcome possible stereotypes and prejudices and to take advantage of opportunities to develop communication and cooperative skills, which contribute to enhancing social cohesion (Charakopoulos & Tsilimeni, 2020). Also, through active participation in learning processes, adults make creative use of their free time, develop social contacts, and broaden their circle of acquaintances, which can help them on a personal, social, and professional level. In any case, adult education in its various forms is based on the specific characteristics of adult learners, which should be considered in advance during the design and implementation of the educational activities in question.

### *1.2 The specific characteristics of adult learners*

It is a fact that adult learners have some specific characteristics that differentiate them from underage learners (Kokkos, 2005; Jarvis, 2004; Rogers, 1998) More specifically, adult learners:

- come to a learning process with clear objectives, given intentions and specific expectations,
- already have a wide range of experience as they are in the middle rather than at the beginning of an evolving development process,
- have already formulated methods and models of learning, crystallizing how they wish to learn for themselves
- participate voluntarily, actively, and consciously, seeking interaction with other learners as well as with trainers
- face barriers to learning, either externally due to increased social and personal obligations, or internally due to prior knowledge and already formed perceptions.

The above characteristics have a significant impact on the way adult education programmes are organized and should be considered by trainers in the choice of the teaching methodology to be followed. In any case, teaching methodology should be as experiential and participatory as possible, based on the mobilization of learners and their active participation (Jarvis, 2004). In this context, depending on the particularities of each learning process, educational field trips can be integrated as a useful tool for experiential learning.

### *1.3 Educational field trips in adult education*

In recent years, several scientific studies have been conducted that highlight the importance of educational visits, emphasizing the multiple benefits that result from their successful implementation (Greene, Kisida & Bowen, 2014; McQueen, Wright & Fox, 2012). Most of these studies focus on school environments and mainly concern primary and secondary education (Goutzeri & Kougiourouki, 2018; Behrendt & Franklin, 2014;). However, in recent years, with the significant development of adult education internationally, scientific studies on educational field trips have started to be published in this field as well. (Radke, 2016; Vásquez Salazar, 2014). As these studies show educational field trips can be a useful tool in adult education as well, as they present several advantages-benefits.

More specifically, educational field trips: link theory and practice, promote experiential learning, provide new engaging learning experiences in real-life settings, stimulate learners' interest, and encourage their learning motivation while broadening their horizons (Forest & Rayne, 2009). Beyond the usual environment of a classroom, learners have the opportunity to visit a new place they may not have visited before and gain new perceptions and experiences. Moreover, in some cases study visits provide the possibility of contact with conditions that are impossible or extremely difficult to create in a classroom (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014).

In other cases, educational visits as a practical activity "come and build" on pre-existing knowledge and experiences gained in the classroom, ideally complementing theory with practical experience (Lei, 2010). Thus, new knowledge and new experiences learners gain from a study visit are more fully imprinted in their memory, compared to a classroom-based teaching session. Furthermore, a study visit breaks the routine of traditional teaching and helps to strengthen the relationship between learners and between learners and educators and improves the learning climate (Goutzeri & Kougiourouki, 2018). A positive learning climate ensures learners are fully engaged and feel part of the learning group. Therefore, in the context of a participatory and active teaching methodology, educational field trips can become a useful and experiential learning tool for adult educators.

In order educational field trips to ensure maximum benefits for adult learners, they should be planned in an integrated manner and specifically in three phases (Fragoulis & Frantzi, 2010). In the first phase educational activities should be planned and implemented before the field trip, in the second phase educational activities should be implemented during the field trip to maximize the benefits for the learners, and in the third phase activities should be implemented which relate to the consolidation of the knowledge and further development of the skills acquired by the learners during the trip (Fragoulis & Frantzi, 2010; Tsimboukli & Phillips, 2007).

## 2. Method

Several scientific research has been conducted in recent years regarding educational field trips in school education, enriching the relevant literature. Nevertheless there is no extensive scientific research on similar actions in the field of adult education. This fact was an extra motivation for the present study, for the needs of which qualitative and quantitative research was used with the method of purposive sampling. More specifically, purposive sampling was chosen for both the qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) research as it was deemed by the researchers to be the most appropriate method for this particular circumstance.

Purposive sampling presents specific advantages as it exploits the researchers' experience and network of contacts, selects cases typical of the topic under study and saves time and costs during the implementation of the research (Campbell et al., 2020; Kelly, Bourgeault & Dingwall, 2010). On the other hand, purposive sampling also presents some weak points-disadvantages, as it involves researchers' subjective judgment and the survey's results may not always be generalizable and representative (Robson, 2010).

In this case, a purposive sample of learners and educators was used from specific adult education and training structures in Northern Greece, such as Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK in Greek), Second Chance Schools (SDE in Greek), Lifelong Learning Centers (KEDIVIM in Greek), School of Pedagogical and Technological Education (ASPAITE in Greek) and higher education institutions (AEI in Greek). Initially, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted, 5 with learners and 3 with adult educators.

The interviews at the qualitative research stage were conducted in May 2023, in Northern Greece and constituted a first recording of opinions and perceptions, preparing at the same time the axes for the design of the questionnaire that would be used in a second phase, during the quantitative research. Thus, taking into consideration the conclusions of the interviews and based on the objectives of the study, the questionnaire was designed simple in its structure but also comprehensive, so as not to "get the respondents tired". More specifically, the questionnaire contained closed-ended Likert scale questions and was sent via Google Forms by email in June 2023 to a sample of 206 trainees and 48 trainers. Of the 206 learners, 193 responded, a response rate of 93.7%, and of the 48 educators, 45 responded, a response rate 93.8%, both very high rates for related surveys.

## 3. Results

As can be seen in Table 1, of the 193 learners, 101 were women (52.3%) and 92 were men (47.7%). Regarding learners' age, at the time of the survey 39 of them were aged 21-30 (20.2%), 42 between 31-40 years (21.8%), 51 between 41-50 years (26.4%) and 16 over 60 years (8.3%). As purposive sampling was used in this survey, a conscious effort was made to ensure that respondents were not only from one adult education and training provider institution, but that there was representation from five different provider institutions and organizations. Thus, of the quantitative research participants, 38 were from IEK (19.7%), 29 from SDE (15%), 46 from KEDIBIM (23.8%), 44 from ASPAITE (22.8%) and 36 from AEI (18.7%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Learners' participating in the research profile.

| Gender                      | Men: 92             | Women: 101          | Total: 193            |                       |                        |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Age (years)                 | 21-30<br>39 (20.2%) | 31-40<br>42 (21.8%) | 41-50<br>51 (26.4%)   | 51-60<br>45 (23.3%)   | >60 years<br>16 (8.3%) |
| Institution or organisation | IEK<br>38 (19.7%)   | SDE<br>29 (15%)     | KEDIVIM<br>46 (23.8%) | ASPAITE<br>44 (22.8%) | AEI<br>36 (18.7%)      |

Regarding the adult educators who responded to the questionnaire, out of 48, 25 were women (52.1%) and 23 were men (47.9%). Of the total number of participating educators, 6 of them were between 21-30 years old (12.5%), 14 between 31-40 years old (29.2%), 16 between 41-50 (33.3%), 10 between 51-60 (20.8%) and only 2 over 60 years old (4.2%). Moreover, an important parameter in adult educators' profile is their years of experience in the field. Of the research participants, 7 had 1-5 years of experience (14.6%), 15 had 6-10 years (31.3%), 12 had 11-15 years (25%) and 3 had more than 20 years of experience (6.2%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Adult educators' participating in the research profile.

| Gender                              | Men: 23                | Women: 25                | Total: 48               |                           |                        |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Age (years)                         | 21-30<br>6 (12.5%)     | 31-40<br>14 (29.2%)      | 41-50<br>16 (33.3%)     | 51-60<br>10 (20.8%)       | > 60 years<br>2 (4.2%) |
| Years of service in adult education | 1-5 years<br>7 (14.6%) | 6-10 years<br>15 (31.3%) | 11-15 years<br>12 (25%) | 16-20 years<br>11 (22.9%) | > 20 years<br>4 (8.2%) |

Subsequently, the research focused on the educational field trips expected benefits. Taking into account the findings of the interviews conducted during the qualitative research stage as well as the relevant literature (Radke, 2016; Espree-Conaway, 2016; Vásquez Salazar, 2014; Lei, 2010; Forest & Rayne, 2009), the quantitative research participants, learners and educators, were asked to rate the importance of each expected benefit on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = moderately important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not at all important). As can be seen from the responses (Table 3), the five most important expected benefits of educational field trips were enhancement of experiential learning (4.91 - 4.97), linking theory to practice (4.89 - 4.90), activation of learning motivation (4.86 - 4.32), learning experience in a real environment (4.13 - 4.65) and strengthening learners'-educators' relationships (4.01 - 4.11).

Table 3: Expected benefits of educational field trips in adult education

| Educational field trip benefit                   | Learners | Educators |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Enhancement of experiential learning             | 4.91     | 4.97      |
| Linking theory to practice                       | 4.89     | 4.90      |
| Activation of learning motivation                | 4.86     | 4.32      |
| Learning experience in a real environment        | 4.13     | 4.65      |
| Strengthening learners'-educators' relationships | 4.01     | 4.11      |

Next, the preconditions for successfully conducting an educational field trip were explored by asking participants to rate the importance of each prerequisite on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = moderately important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not at all important). Already from the interviews of the qualitative research as well as from the relevant literature (Espree-Conaway, 2016; Lei, 2010) five specific preconditions had emerged which were set to the learners and educators for evaluation (Table 4).

Thus, as illustrated below, the factors that have a catalytic effect on the successful conduct of an educational visit time availability (4.88 - 4.83), appropriate choice of the field trip's place (4.67 - 4.79), learners' active involvement and participation (4.06 - 4.12), field trip's organisational preparation (4.06 - 4.68) and linking the field trip with learning objectives (3.76 - 4.02).

Table 4: Preconditions for a successful educational field trip

| Precondition                                    | Learners | Educators |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Time availability                               | 4.88     | 4.83      |
| Appropriate choice of place                     | 4.67     | 4.79      |
| Learners' active involvement and participation  | 4.06     | 4.68      |
| Field trip's organizational preparation         | 3.93     | 4.12      |
| Linking the field trip with learning objectives | 3.76     | 4.02      |

#### 4. Discussion

In today's era of rapid socio-economic developments, adult education can play a key role in promoting lifelong learning and adults' successful adaptation to the new conditions emerging internationally. Today, perhaps more than ever before, people do not stick to the basic knowledge and skills of formal education, but engage in lifelong learning, education, and training processes. These individual adult learning processes should be experiential in nature to ensure learners' active participation. After all, adult learners are not passive recipients of knowledge and skills, but active participants in the learning process. In this direction, the implementation of educational field trips in the context of a learning process can have significant benefits in the field of adult education. As found in this research, according to learners and adult educators, the most important of these benefits focus on enhancing experiential learning, linking theory-practice, activating learning motivation, learning experience in a real-life setting, and strengthening learner-educator relationships.

The above benefits should be taken into account by adult educators who wish to integrate educational field trips into their teaching methodology to complement classroom teaching with practical field activities. Moreover, through field trips, experience and experiential learning are promoted, concepts which are vital to adult education (Jarvis, 2004).

Obviously, for a study visit to be successful, certain conditions must be met. As the research has shown, these conditions are time availability, appropriate choice of the place of the visit, learners' active participation, organisational preparation of the visit and its connection with the respective teaching objectives. Taking the above factors into account, adult educators are therefore able to plan and implement a successful educational field trip with the best possible learning outcomes.

This study deals with an issue that has not been the subject of extensive scientific research in the past, thus contributing to the enrichment of the relevant literature. Regarding the generalizability of the findings, there are limitations arising from the use of a purposive sample, but careful sample selection makes the results applicable to a wider population. Regarding suggestions for further research, it would be interesting to conduct similar research in other regions of Greece, studying other samples of adult learners and adult educators, possibly from different adult education and training structures. It would also be of research interest to carry out similar research in the future, to compare the results with those of the present study and to see if there are any changes in trends and assessments of learners and trainers.

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