Open issue

RELA

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults

2025, Vol. 16, No. 3

RELA

European Journal for Research
on the Education and Learning of Adults

Volume 16, No. 3, October 2025

Linköping University Electronic Press
ISSN 2000-7426
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Editorial board

Editors/Editorial group

Editorial assistants

Consulting editors

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults – RELA

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 3 OCTOBER 2025

Open papers

289 Empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning: A scoping review
Michaela Bílá & Jan Kalenda

321 Experiences of stigma among adult learners in second-chance education: A life-history approach
Samuel Raoufi-Kvist

339 Superdiverse and multilingual, but still languageless: How unconscious and unintended raciolinguistic attitudes in school-based parent cafés can co-promote exclusion
Alexei Medvedev & Anke Grotlüschen

355 Pathways into the profession of *older adult educator* in the non-formal education sector
Agnieszka Konieczna

375 Turning prisons into a place for learning: Conditions for providing adult education in correctional settings
Kiki Maleika Qiu

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2025, pp. 289-320

Empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning: A scoping review

Michaela Bílá
Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic (bila@utb.cz)

Jan Kalenda
Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic (kalenda@utb.cz)

Abstract

This scoping review maps empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning, analysing 95 studies published between 1971 and 2024. Drawing on data from Web of Science and Scopus databases, it delineates key thematic areas, geographical patterns, and methodological orientations. The findings highlight a marked increase in publications since 2016, with a pronounced focus on specific learner populations – including non-traditional students, low-skilled adults, and second-chance learners in adult basic education. Research activity is heavily concentrated in European and Anglophone contexts, pointing to the need for broader cultural representation. While quantitative methods dominate, many studies employ instruments lacking validation. Notable gaps emerge in the use of mixed-methods and longitudinal designs. Overall, the review calls for more inclusive and methodologically robust inquiry to deepen our understanding of adult learner motivation across diverse educational landscapes.

Keywords: motivation, adult education and learning, lifelong learning, scoping review, methodology

Introduction

Rapid technological advancements, which drive disruptive changes in the labour market, generate increasing pressure for individuals to acquire new knowledge and skills to remain adaptable (Draghi, 2024; Şentürk & Duran, 2020). In this context, *adult education and learning* continue to be key tools for facilitating this resilience, playing a significant

ISSN 2000-7426

http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5721
www.rela.ep.liu.se

role in reducing skill mismatches and fostering alignment between workforce competencies and evolving labour market demands (OECD, 2023, 2024), as well as enhancing the well-being and health outcomes of adults (Schuller & Desjardins, 2010).

For the purposes of this scoping review, adult education and learning is understood as encompassing a broad continuum of structured and unstructured learning activities undertaken by individuals after the completion of their initial formal education. Drawing on international frameworks (UNESCO, 2016; OECD, 2024), this includes formal, non-formal education, and informal learning that serves a variety of purposes – from enhancing employability through reskilling and upskilling to supporting personal development, civic engagement and lifelong curiosity.

Given the multifaceted nature of adult education and learning, it is essential to understand the factors that influence adults' engagement in learning. Among these, *motivation* is one of the key prerequisites for adult education and learning (Boeren, 2017; Coşkun & Demirel, 2010; Yamashita et al., 2019), which affects not only participation in adult education and learning but also the outcomes of learning process itself (Bukhori et al., 2019; Pont, 2004; Wlodkowski, 2008). Conversely, the lack of motivation for adult education and learning is sometimes considered one of the reasons why adults do not participate in this activity (Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022). Similarly, a lower level of motivation towards specific learning content is considered to be a negative factor in the acquisition of the intended knowledge and skills (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2012).

Despite the prevalence of the term, motivation remains a concept that is not universally or firmly defined (Cook & Artino, 2016; Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). This construct is best understood as a hypothetical psychological state used to explain the initiation, maintenance, or cessation of action (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Miguel, 2013; Pincus, 2020), which is a general understanding of motivation adopted in this scoping review. Rather than being directly observable, we agree with other authors (e.g., Macey & Schneider, 2008) that motivation is constructed through theoretical frameworks and operationalised differently depending on the researchers' theoretical perspectives. In the context of adult education and learning, it is typically an individual's intention, desire, or reason for participating in learning (Aljohani & Alajlan, 2020; Knowles et al., 2012).

Although the significance of motivation in adult education and learning has long been acknowledged and widely discussed (Kondrup, 2015), some scholars (e.g., Boeren et al., 2012a; Boeren et al., 2012b; Boeren, 2016; Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022) argue that the topic still lacks sufficient empirical attention. Moreover, it is noteworthy that motivation in adult education and learning has largely been overlooked in the recent comprehensive disciplinary monographs (e.g., Evans et al., 2023; Milana et al., 2018) and systematic mappings of research in adult education and learning (e.g., Fejes & Nylander, 2019; Holford et al., 2022). This absence underscores a gap in the literature, suggesting a need for a more focused and systematic assessment of research on motivation within this field.

In response to this identified gap, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning. This is achieved through a scoping review, utilising two leading scientific databases – Web of Science and Scopus – as primary sources of information. The study spans a temporal scope from the first indexed publication in 1971 to 2024. The starting point was deliberately selected based on an initial scoping phase, which identified 1971 as the publication year of the earliest empirical study meeting the inclusion criteria. Based on such delineation, this study not only provides a map of empirical research on this research

topic in the field of adult education and learning, but also helps to indicate where further research should be directed.

The following text begins by situating the mapping of empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning within the context of current meta-theoretical research on constructing the 'territory' (Rubenson, 1982) of adult education and learning. This approach enables the formulation of four research questions (RQ1-RQ4), which guide the analysis by focusing on specific aspects of empirical research on this topic. Subsequently, the methodology for conducting a scoping literature review is outlined. The results are then presented and organised according to the four research questions. The study concludes with a discussion of findings, outlines key limitations, and offers recommendations for advancing empirical research.

Mapping the field and empirical research on motivation

This study is part of a broader effort to map the field of adult education and learning, contributing to a systematic understanding of its key themes, trends, and research priorities (see, e.g., Boeren, 2018, 2019; Fejes & Nylander, 2014, 2015, 2019; Nylander et al., 2022; Nylander & Fejes, 2023; Rubenson & Elfert, 2015, 2019; Taylor, 2001). In particular, it shares with previous works an interest in analysing: (1) *research topics* (what is the subject of the research?), (2) the *geographical context* of the research (where is the research conducted?) and (3) the *methodological design* (how is the research conducted?). From a particular perspective, the analysis presented below can be seen as a narrowing of this research agenda to a much smaller and less general part of the field, namely the topic of motivation.

Research topics

In a recently published analysis of themes from six flagship journals in the field of adult education and learning from 1950 to 2020, or a narrower analysis since 1982, Nylander and Fejes (2023; see also Nylander et al., 2022) identified fifteen key areas that represent the most frequent foci of thematic interest for researchers. One such topic is 'research on motivation, participation, and attitudes among employees in different organizations' (Nylander & Fejes, 2023, p. 129), which includes motivation as a sub-theme. While this is considered a relatively minor area within the broader field of adult education and learning, Nylander and Fejes (2023) have demonstrated that interest in this sub-theme has been steadily growing since the early 1990s.

However, it remains unclear from their findings whether the conclusions about this trend apply uniformly across all sub-topics within this thematic group (i.e., attitudes, participation, motivation, etc.; see above), as identified by their large-scale text-mining analysis, or if they pertain specifically to motivation. Additionally, the aforementioned analysis does not sufficiently delve into the empirical sub-themes being investigated under the umbrella of motivation in adult education and learning. As a result, it does not offer enough 'zoom-in' needed to explore the nuanced aspects of motivation within this field.

This observation also applies to other papers addressing motivation in adult education and learning. Such studies are often more inclined to focus on reviewing theories or examining selected canonised studies, rather than conducting a systematic mapping of empirical research (see, e.g., Boeren, 2016; Gopalan et al., 2017; Ilie, 2019; Kondrup, 2015).

For these reasons, we are focusing on two complementary research questions:

- **RQ1**: *How has interest in the empirical investigation of motivation in adult education and learning evolved over time?*
- **RQ2**: *What specific topics have been explored in the area of motivation in adult education and learning?*

Geographical context

Another significant dimension considered when mapping the field of adult education and learning is the geographical context, which is frequently associated with the specific location where the research is conducted – most commonly with the nation-state. In this respect, it is typical that research in adult education and learning focuses predominantly on Anglophone countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia (Fejes & Nylander, 2014, 2015, 2019; Rubenson & Elfert, 2015, 2019; Taylor, 2001). However, this conclusion could be influenced by the sampling of previous studies that mainly focus on research published in a small set of disciplinary journals, primarily from Anglophone countries, and featuring studies published in English. Such a focus risks introducing systematics epistemological biases, as the research tends to concentrate on individuals in developed (post-)industrial democracies, particularly those with higher levels of education and socioeconomic status (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Due to the absence of findings on the geographical distribution of research into motivation in adult education and learning, we aim to address this gap. In contrast to previous approaches in the field, we do not confine our scope to studies published solely in English. By including research in other languages, we seek to develop a more comprehensive understanding of where motivation in adult education and learning is being studied. This consideration leads us to formulate our third research question:

- **RQ3**: *In which countries has the topic of motivation in adult education and learning been the subject of empirical investigation?*

Methodological design

Moreover, the researchers also discuss the methodological direction of research in the field of adult education and learning. After a phase of early inspiration by quantitative methodology, symptomatic of the 1950s and 1960s (Rubenson, 1982), the 1990s brought a phase of renewed interest in qualitative-oriented research and an equalisation of the share of both methodologies during the 1990s (Taylor, 2001). The methodological developments of the last two decades are characterised by an overwhelming turn to qualitative research design, which currently dominates empirical research in the field (e.g., Boeren, 2018, 2019; Rubenson & Elfert, 2015, 2019).

With this in mind, it is noteworthy that the theme of 'research on motivation, participation and attitudes among employees in different organisations', as identified by Nylander and Fejes (2023, p. 129), systematically uses quantitative research methods. However, as with this broader thematic focus (see above), it remains unclear whether such a conclusion applies equally to empirical studies investigating motivation in adult education and learning only. Moreover, there is a notable lack of detailed knowledge

about the specific research procedures employed in studies on motivation in adult education and learning. Key aspects such as sample sizes, methods of data collection, and research instruments remain insufficiently explored. This gap limits our ability to assess how advanced research in this sub-field truly is and whether it continues to be a methodological underdog (Boeren, 2018), as is often the case with many quantitatively oriented studies in the broader field of adult education and learning.

To address this gap, we have formulated our final research question:

- **RQ4:** *What methodological designs are employed in empirical studies focusing on motivation in adult education and learning?*

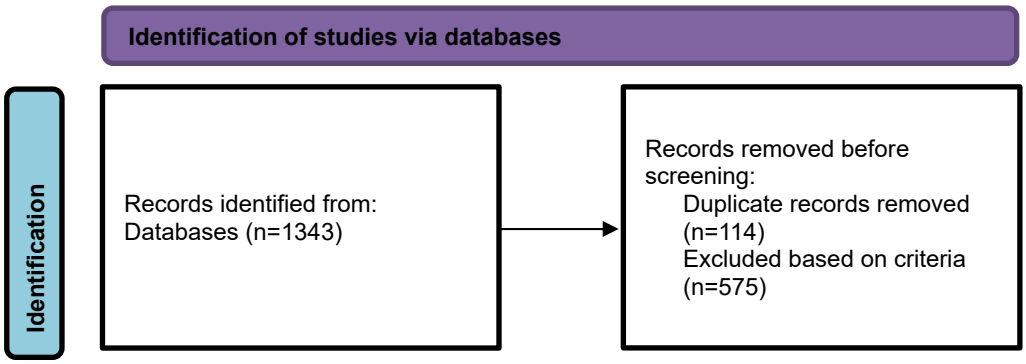
Methods

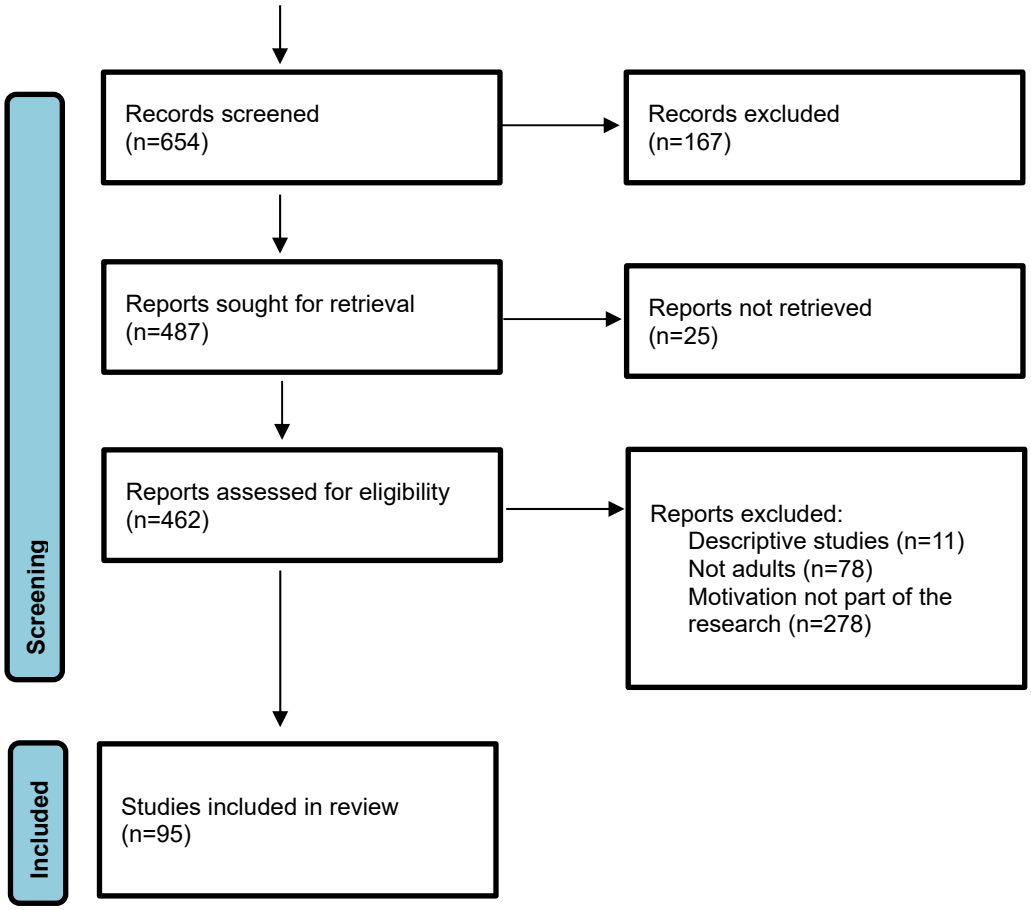
Scoping review

In order to systematically map and explore the scope and characteristics of empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning, we employed a scoping review methodology. Scoping reviews have become increasingly popular in recent years, being employed effectively to review research in higher education and related fields (Li et al., 2021). This approach is particularly well-suited to identifying the scope, nature, and extent of evidence in emerging or complex research fields, as well as to clarifying key concepts and knowledge gaps (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). Unlike systematic reviews, which aim to narrowly synthesise results, scoping reviews seek to map how a topic has been approached across studies, disciplines and contexts. This makes it especially relevant for our research subject, which spans multiple theoretical and methodological traditions.

The review process adhered to the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines, which aim to ensure the transparent and comprehensive reporting of scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018; Page et al., 2021). These guidelines provide a structured framework for documenting the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion of studies, thereby enhancing transparency and reproducibility. When designing the review, we were guided by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005). Figure 1 below illustrates the procedure used for study selection and exclusion, presenting the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram adapted to the scoping review process.

Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR model of the study selection procedure. Source: Authors' own figure





Identification, screening, and study inclusion

The identification of relevant literature was conducted in two phases. The initial search, conducted in January 2024, used two major multidisciplinary databases: Web of Science and Scopus. These platforms were chosen because of their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic journals, and because of their well-established role in facilitating transparent and reproducible literature searches in evidence mapping studies (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2021; Martín-Martín et al., 2018). Subsequently, the search strategy was refined and expanded using additional keywords to ensure broader coverage of relevant studies. The second phase of the search was conducted in March 2025. This extended search included records published up to 2024, which were then applied retrospectively to the original databases.

The search strategy was built around the keyword *motivation*, combined with one of the following terms: *adult education*, *adult learning*, or *continuous education*. This combination was chosen to capture a broad yet thematically coherent body of literature focused on motivational aspects in adult education and learning contexts. The intention was to include diverse conceptualisations of adult education and learning while maintaining a clear thematic link to motivation. The search terms were simultaneously applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords in both databases to ensure the relevance and consistency of retrieved studies.

A total of 1 343 studies were identified and screened based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) publication in a peer-reviewed journal with full-text availability (publication type); (2) classification in the field of Psychology or Social Sciences, where the subcategory Education is most frequently assigned (field of study); (3) publication in any language (language); and (4) empirical research design. Studies that presented purely theoretical discussions of motivation without empirical data were excluded. As a result of this process, 654 studies were identified.

Contrary to previous studies in the field (e.g., Fejes & Nylander, 2014; Nylander et al., 2022; Rubenson & Elfert, 2015; Taylor, 2001), our criteria differ, particularly regarding the *field of study* and *language*. Most prior research focused on systematically mapping studies within a narrow range of journals (typically five to six) specifically related to adult education and learning. In contrast, we adopted much broader inclusion criteria, allowing us to identify empirical research on motivation beyond this limited subset of journals. Furthermore, we included studies not published in English to broaden our scope, as the previously identified anglophone orientation might stem from an overly narrow focus on a limited set of journals published in English by anglophone publishing houses. This inclusion strategy has a direct connection to our RQ2 and RQ3.

The initial screening of the 654 retrieved records was based solely on the content of their abstracts. Each abstract was evaluated for its relevance to the topic and for evidence of an empirical investigation of motivation in the context of adult education and learning. Studies were excluded at this stage only if the abstract clearly indicated that the paper did not involve empirical research on motivation or was unrelated to adult learning contexts. In cases where the abstract was ambiguous or lacked sufficient detail to determine its empirical focus, the full text was obtained and reviewed to ensure accurate inclusion or exclusion. This screening process let to the exclusion of 167 studies.

The remaining 487 studies underwent a comprehensive full-text review. This phase involved a secondary assessment of relevance, with prior attention given to each study‘s empirical dimension. To enable their assessment, full texts of non-English articles (n=13) were translated into English using large language models.

Papers were excluded if they were purely theoretical, involved respondents under the age of 16, or referred to motivation only within the theoretical framework without incorporating it into the empirical investigation – this latter criterion accounted for the majority of exclusions. The minimum age threshold for participants in our review was set at 16, aligning with the standard used by the PIAAC survey (OECD, 2024), which includes individuals aged 16 and above. This age represents the lowest reasonable limit.

Furthermore, to ensure the reliability of the inclusion process, the screening was conducted jointly by two reviewers. Any discrepancies or borderline cases were discussed and resolved through consensus. Ultimately, 95 studies were selected for content analysis, guided by the four research questions (RQ1-RQ4) (see also Fig. 1 above). Although our analysis was not confined to English-language texts, 82 of the 95 studies examined were published in English. Spanish appeared in six studies, while Hungarian and German were each represented in two. Czech, French, and Serbian featured in one study each, underscoring the relatively limited linguistic diversity within the published literature.

The content analysis was conducted by two researchers. The categorisation of the included studies was developed inductively during the coding process, with the recurring thematic foci serving as the basis for identifying categories related to RQ2 and RQ4. The initial phase involved a comprehensive review of all articles, followed by the refinement of a preliminary set of categories through the comparison and grouping of thematically similar topics. When assigning individual studies to specific categories, particular attention was paid to the primary analytical focus of each article. In cases where a study

addressed multiple overlapping domains, classification was determined by the dominant research objective, as articulated through the study's research questions, stated aims, or analytical framework.

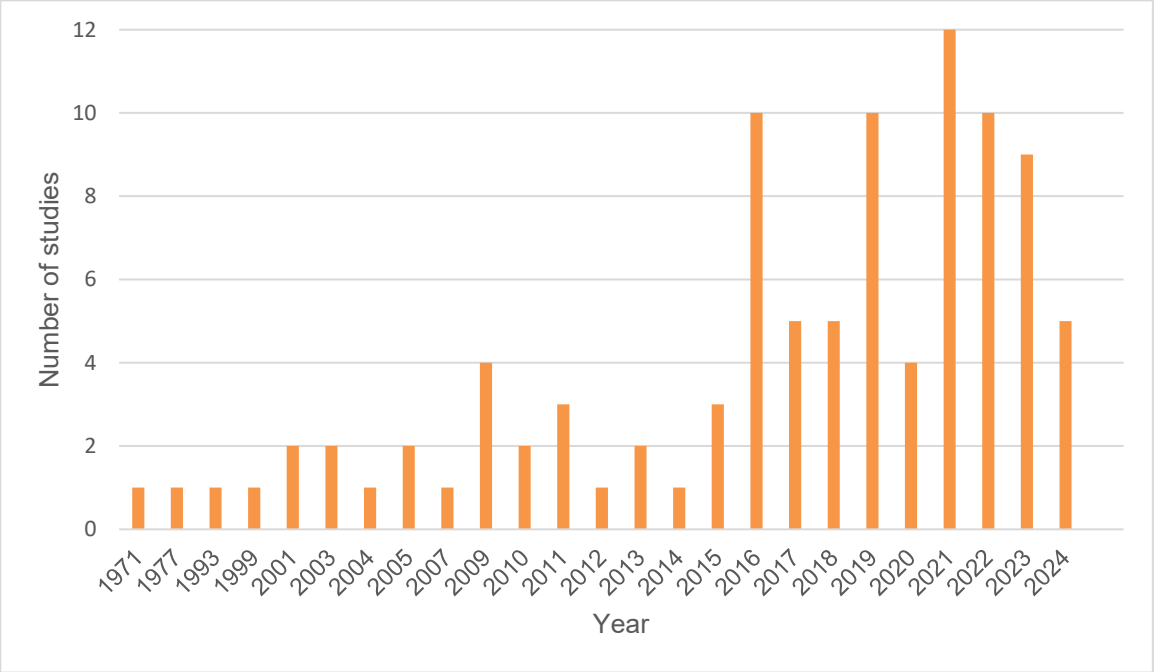
Results

This section presents the results of the analysis of the selected studies, organised according to the research questions. Particular attention is given to the evolution of research on the topic, the identification of key areas, the geographical distribution of studies, and methodological approach adopted. A comprehensive overview and classification of the individual studies are provided in the Appendices (Tables 4-7).

RQ1: How has interest in the empirical investigation of motivation in adult education and learning evolved over time?

The first key area of analysis focused on the evolution of empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning. The earliest study included in this scoping review was published in 1971 (Boshier, 1971). This publication was the first empirical study identified through our search strategy that met all inclusion criteria. As a result, the review covers the period from 1971 to 2024 (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Trends in the empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning since 1971. Source: Authors' own figure



The temporal distribution of studies reveals that empirical research on this topic remained sporadic until 2015, with typically no more than one or two studies published per year. A more noticeable and sustained increase began around 2016, with distinct peaks in 2016, 2019, 2021, and 2022. Notably, 2021 emerged as the most prolific, with a total of 12

studies included. Over 85% of the studies were published within the past two decades, indicating a significant rise in scholarly interest in recent years.

RQ2: What specific topics have been explored in the area of motivation in adult education and learning?

The second key area of analysis examined the themes explored by researchers. The content analysis revealed that studies on motivation exhibit considerable thematic diversity and a marked degree of fragmentation (see Table 1). Within this framework, five primary thematic categories emerged: (1) motivation of educators, (2) motivation as an aspect of work motivation, (3) motivation in relation to self-regulation and learning strategies, (4) motivation within national populations, and (5) motivation among specific target groups in adult education and learning.

Table 1. Overview of research topics. Source: Authors' own table

General Topic	Subtopic	Number of studies (n)
Motivation of educators		5
Motivation as an aspect of work motivation		5
Motivation in relation to self-regulation and learning strategies		11
Motivation within national populations		12
Motivation among specific target groups in adult education and learning	Course participants	21
	Non-traditional students	13
	Second-chance learners	10
	Low-skilled adults	7
	Elderly adults	6
	Migrants	3
	Prisoners	2

In the thematic categories, *the motivation among specific target groups in adult education and learning* was identified as a particularly prominent area (n=62), with further subdivision into several subtopics (see also Table 1). Among these subtopics, a notable concentration of research focused on the motivation of course participants (n=21), specifically, learners in longer education courses regarding the acquisition of language, digital, or entrepreneurial skills. For instance, Gondim and Mutti (2011) investigated the impact of affective experiences on the motivation of adult learners in a training course aimed at developing entrepreneurial competencies.

Other significantly represented subgroups included *non-traditional students* (n=13), who returned to secondary or higher education after a prolonged absence, *second-chance learners* (n=10), who resumed primary education to complete their basic education, and *low-skilled adults* (n=7), definied by low levels of formal education and basic skills. For instance, Justice and Dornan's (2001) study investigated metacognitive differences, including motivation to learn, between traditional college students (18-23-year-olds) and non-traditional students (24-64-year-olds). Other specific target groups – thought less

frequently addressed – included *elderly adults* (n=6), *migrants* (n=3), and *prisoners* (n=2).

In addition to studies focusing on specific target groups, several papers explored motivation in relation to broader cognitive and metacognitive constructs – like self-regulation. *Motivation in relation to self-regulation and learning strategies* featured in 11 studies, often examining how adult learners manage their engagement, time, and learning environments – particularly in online and blended learning contexts. For example, Vanslambrouck et al. (2019) identified key motivational self-regulation strategies employed by adult learners in blended settings, including goal setting, time management, and proactive help-seeking.

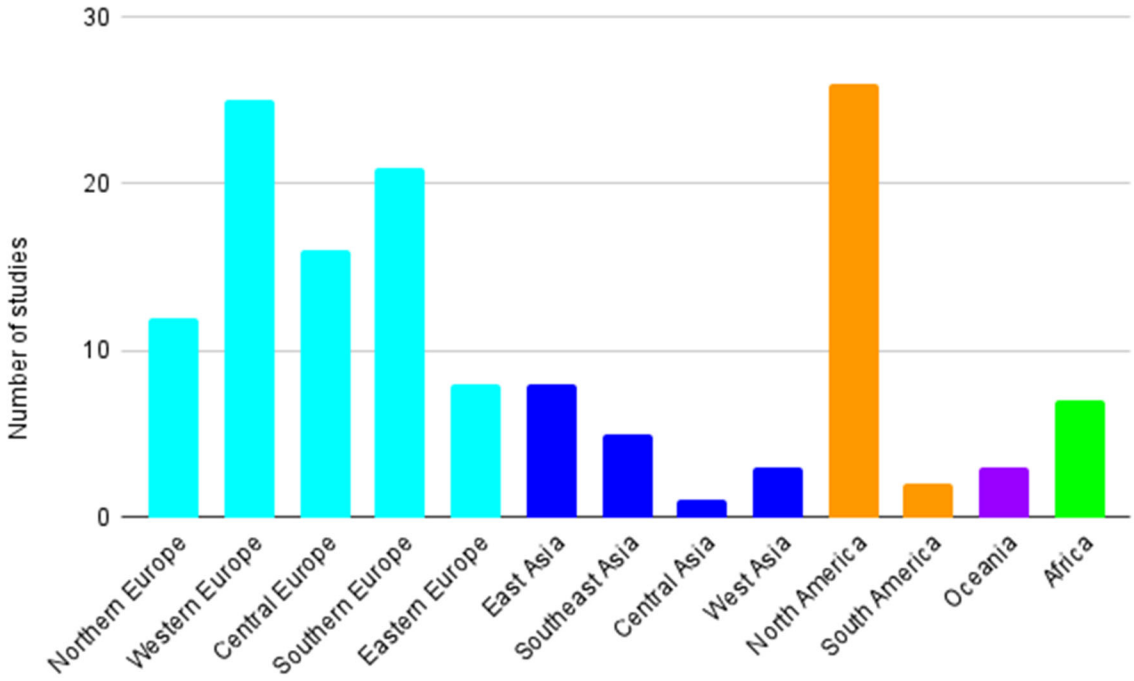
Moreover, another prominent thematic category was *motivation within national populations* (n=12; see Table 1). The present studies specifically examined features of motivation for adult education and learning at the population level, either within individual countries or across multiple national contexts. For instance, Boeren and Holford's (2016) study examined motivation across a total of 12 European countries, utilising a quota sample of participants in formal adult education. The study revealed that motivation for participation in formal education is influenced not only by personal factors, such as age and gender, but also by broader national context.

Five studies investigated *motivation as an aspect of work motivation,* primarily addressing the motivational drivers of professionals working in the adult education sector. For example, Chen and Aryadoust (2023) developed and validated a scale to assess work motivation, including lifelong learning, within Singapore's adult education sector, offering insights into the specific factors that influence professionals in this field. In contrast, the final category, *motivation of educators* (n=5), focused directly on educators' motivation for the provision of learning.

RQ3: In which countries has the topic of motivation in adult education and learning been the subject of empirical investigation?

Within the geographical context, the analysis explored the regional distribution of empirical studies on motivation in adult education and learning (see Fig. 3). A detailed breakdown by individual countries is provided in Table 5 of the Appendices. The findings indicate a strong concentration of research in North America, particularly in the United States (n=22) and Canada (n=4). Nonetheless, Europe emerged as the principal geographical hub, accounting for the majority of studies. Research activity is especially prominent across Western and Southern Europe, with substantial contributions also from Central Europe. The most frequently represented European countries include Spain (n=8), Germany (n=7), Czechia (n=6), the UK (n=5), and Greece (n=5). By contrast, significantly lower levels of research were identified in Asia, Africa, South America, and Oceania.

Figure 3. Overview of the countries where the research was conducted. Source: Authors' own figure



Note: Results are not cumulative

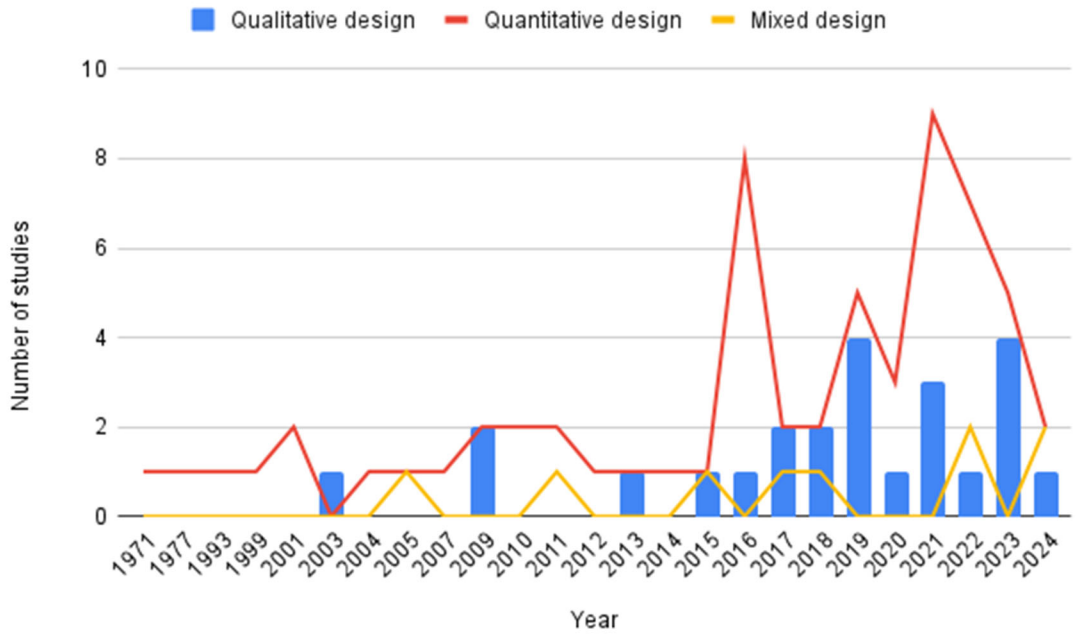
RQ4: What methodological designs are employed in empirical studies focusing on motivation in adult education and learning?

The final area of our analysis focused on the methodological design of the studies. As shown in Figure 4, quantitative methodologies clearly dominate the research on motivation in adult education and learning, especially in recent years. Out of the total number of studies, nearly two-thirds employed a quantitative approach (n=62). Qualitative methodologies were used in 24 studies, while mixed-method designs appeared in 9 cases (e.g., Gondim & Mutti, 2011; Leow et al., 2022).

We also examined the evolution of methodological orientations over time (see Fig. 4). Up to 2014, the field was clearly dominated by quantitative research, with relatively few studies employing qualitative or mixed-methods approaches during this early phase. However, this trend began to shift around 2016, marked by a noticeable increase in the use of quantiative methods.

Between 2017 and 2023, a more balanced distribution emerged between qualitative and quantitative approaches, although quantitative methods continued to predominate, reaching peaks in 2019 and 2021. Mixed-methods studies, while present as early as 2005, remained consistently infrequent throughout the period, never surpassing two instances in any given year.

Figure 4. The evolution of the research methodology since 1971. Source: Authors' own figure



The analysis also highlighted the variety of research instruments employed in studies (see Tables 2 and 3). The most frequently used instruments in quantitative research were surveys that could be divided into two types. First, non-validated questionnaires designed specifically to meet the needs of individual studies (n=33). Second, international comparative surveys, such as PIAAC, focused on adult education and learning that also included items for measuring motivation for participation in organised adult learning (n=9).

A second significant category of research tools consisted of *validated instruments*, primarily designed to measure motivation to participate in adult education or to engage in learning among adult learners. For a detailed overview of the various types of scales used in research on motivation in adult education, see Table 3 below. Among these scales, two prominent examples stand out. First, the Education Participation Scale (EPS), developed by Boshier (1971), which is a currently well-established psychometric tool designed to measure the motivational orientation of adult learners. Constructed in the early 1970s, the EPS has undergone multiple modifications and validations. It is widely recognised for its ability to categorise adult learners' motivations into distinctive factors that provide valuable insights into reasons adults engage in educational programs (Liodaki & Karalis, 2023). A second example is the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), developed by Pintrich and de Groot (1990). It is a self-assessment instrument designed to evaluate university students' motivational orientations and their use of various learning strategies.

Table 2. Summary of quantitative research instruments utilised in studies on motivation in adult education and learning. Source: authors' own table

Non-validated Research instruments			
Research Instrument	**Number**	**Type**	**Number**
Surveys	42	Authors inventory/questionnaire	33
		International comparative survey (PIAAC; LLL; AES)	9

Validated Psychometrics Scales			
Research Instrument	**Number**	**Type**	**Number**
Scales with a focus on attitudes to Adult Education	4	Adult Attitudes Toward Adult Education Scale (AACES)	1
		Lifelong Learning Tendencies Scale	3
Scales with a focus on motivation to Adult Education	18	Education Participation Scale (EPS)	7
		Academic Motivation Scale (AMS)	3
		Prison Education Motivation Scale (PEMS)	1
		Mergener's Education Participation Scale (M-EPS)	1
		Motivation to Nonparticipation Scale (MNP-S)	1
		Deterrence to Participation Scale (DPS-G)	2
		Global Motivation Scale (GMS)	1
		Learning and Motivation Questionnaire (LEMO)	1
		Personal Achievement Goal Orientations Scale	1
Scales with a focus on work-related behavior	5	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9)	3
		Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS)	1
		Characteristics of Lifelong Learning in the Professions	1
Scales with a focus on self-efficacy	4	General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)	1
		Academic Self-Efficacy Scale	1
		Self-concept of ability (SCA)	1
		Online Learning Value and Self-Efficacy Scale (OLVSES)	1
Scales with a focus on self-regulation	25	Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)	4
		Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SLQ-R)	3
		Online Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ)	1
		Deeper Learning Self-Assessment Scale (DLSS)	1
		Academic Self-Description Questionnaire-III	1
		University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)	1
		Self-report Measure of Routine Study Behaviors (SAS-R)	1

		Elicits students' self-reports of their memory abilities and capacities (IME)	1
		Self-Reported Engagement Scale	1
		Adult Learning Strategies Evaluation Scale	2
		Intrinsic task value (ITV)	1
		Need for cognition scale (NFC)	1
		Transfer Interest Questionnaire (TIQ)	1
		Mature Student Experience Survey (MSES)	1
		Differential Emotions Scale IV-A (DES)	1
		Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)	1
		Immersion Experience Scale	1
		Gamification for Adults Questionnaires (GAQ)	1
		Behavioral Engagement Questionnaire	1
Teacher related questionnaires	1	Teacher-Rated Student Engagement Scale	1

Note: Results are not cumulative

The qualitative studies predominantly utilised semi-structured interviews as data collection procedures, which were employed in 26 cases (see Table 3). One illustrative study examined the experiences of senior students participating in a reduced tuition programme at a large university in the southeastern United States. Using semi-structured interviews, the researchers explored the participants' motivations for returning to formal education and the challenges they encountered in adapting to a traditional campus environment (Parks et al., 2013). Other qualitative methods – such as observations or focus groups – were employed less frequently.

Table 3. Summary of qualitative research procedures used by studies on motivation in adult education and learning. Source: Authors' own table

Data collection	**Number**	**Merged categories**
Focus groups	7	Focus groups interviews
Semi-structured interview	26	Interviews, semi-structured interviews, semi-structured protocol
Observation and ethnography	5	Observation, field notes

Note: results are not cumulative

Discussion

This scoping review mapped empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning by analysing studies published between 1971 and 2024. The study aimed to identify the *key research themes*, the *geographical distribution* of research, and the *methodological approaches* employed in this subfield.

Regarding the evolution of the *thematic focus* (RQ1), the analysis revealed a steady increase in research on motivation since 1971. While Fejes and Nylander (2023) observed a rise in research on motivation, participation and attitudes among employees in different organisations starting in the 1990s, our findings suggest that the boom in interest in empirical research on motivation comes almost two decades later. Although a modest increase in research activity can be observed around 2009, this rise was short-lived and followed by a temporary decline. A more consistent and sustained growth began only after 2016, culminating in 2021 – the most prolific year, with 12 studies included.

Contrary to the assumptions of some scholars (e.g., Boeren, 2016; Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022), motivation in adult education and learning is currently a frequently researched topic. However, it remains underrepresented in the field's leading journals and is marked by considerable heterogeneity (see discussion related to RQ2 below).

This upward trend may reflect the growing influence of international organisations such as the OECD, whose policy frameworks have increasingly highlighted learner motivation as a critical factor in fostering adult participation in lifelong learning (OECD, 2023). Additionally, the availability of large-scale international surveys, like the PIAAC from 2012 and the Adult Education Survey from 2011 and 2016, which also included items for measuring motivation, has become accessible for researchers.

The analysis of specific empirical research themes on motivation within adult education and learning (RQ2) revealed its complexity, encompassing a broad range of subtopics. The most extensively examined thematic category focused on specific motivation among specific target groups, such as course participants, non-traditional students, or second-chance learners. The interest aligns closely with the evolving nature of formal education systems in late modern society as they continue to adapt to the dynamic of higher demands for adult education. Over the last decades, participation in formal education across many European countries has expanded (Eurostat, 2024), accompanied by a rise in the proportion of non-traditional students (Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). This development is further marked by an increased focus on previously overlooked target groups, such as low-skilled individuals historically marginalised by education policy and institutions (Boeren, 2016; Kondrup, 2015). This shift highlights a growing recognition of the need for education for all population groups – not only from a perspective of social justice perspective but also in terms of economic and social sustainability (Gesthuizen & Scheepers, 2010). The second most prominent theme was motivation for learning at the national population level, which may indicate increasing efforts by governments and international organisations to enhance adult participation in learning (Desjardins, 2017; Dæhlen & Ure, 2009; Kondrup, 2015), as well as the growing presence of international comparative data on motivation that was mentioned above.

The third research question (RQ3) explored the geographical context framing the empirical studies. Our findings only partially align with previous research (Fejes & Nylander, 2014, 2015, 2019; Rubenson & Elfert, 2015, 2019). Anglophone countries continue to dominate the field of motivation research, contributing 39 of the 95 studies reviewed. However, when viewed from a geographical perspective, the majority of motivation-related research originates in Europe, with a marked concentration across the

continent. In contrast, non-Western countries account for only a small fraction of the overall research corpus.

Although studies published in languages other than English were included, they represent less than 14% of the total. This limited representation is likely influenced by the nature of the databases utilised, which tend to privilege publications in English (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016).

The final research question (RQ4) examined methodological approaches used in studying motivation in adult education. Although qualitative methodologies have traditionally been favoured in adult education research (Boeren, 2019; Rubenson & Elfert, 2019), quantitative methods have consistently dominated this specific area of study from its inception. Over time, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches have also emerged, broadening the methodological spectrum. However, quantitative research continues to prevail, reflecting the research´s historical emphasis on measurable outcomes and statistical analysis. The dominance of quantitative methods in this context can probably be attributed to the psychometric tradition. Motivation, as a concept, originates in psychology, where it has historically been examined using quantitative approaches (Lamb et al., 2019). While quantitative methods are powerful tools for data analysis, their application does not automatically guarantee high-quality results. Identified weaknesses in methodological rigour – such as the frequent use of unvalidated research instruments in the research (n=33) – highlighted the need for improved design and application of measurement instruments. These limitations can compromise the validity and reliability of the findings, restricting the generalisability of results to a broader population. Moreover, this research subfield demonstrates a notable lack of mixed-methods research and studies with longitudinal design, which could provide a deeper insight into the evolution of motivational factors over time (Field, 2011; Yamashita et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing the methodological robustness and comprehensiveness of research on motivation in adult education.

Limits of the study

This scoping review is subject to several methodological limitations. Firstly, the exclusive use of Web of Science and Scopus may have restricted the range of included studies, potentially overlooking valuable contributions found in grey literature, lesser-known regional journals, or specialised disciplinary databases. Secondly, despite efforts to incorporate non-English studies, the final dataset is heavily weighted towards English-language publications – a reflection of both inherent database biases and prevailing norms in academic publishing (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Thirdly, the deliberate exclusion of purely theoretical papers, while methodologically consistent, may have inadvertently omitted significant conceptual work that informs and shapes empirical research in the field.

Future directions

Based on our findings, several key directions for advancing research on motivation in adult education and learning can be identified. Despite its importance and the growing interest of scholars, motivation research remains highly fragmented in the field.

In this context, it is important to further investigate the roots of this fragmentation, which may stem from the varying disciplinary frameworks that shape research and differing publication strategies. This includes an analysis of the disciplinary backgrounds

of researchers focusing on motivation in adult education and learning. Additionally, this fragmentation may be driven by divergent conceptualisations and theoretical approaches to motivation. These must be examined in order to better understand the theoretical framing underpinning this body of research. Both of these directions are well-suited for the future scoping research.

Beyond that, future empirical research should prioritise investigating the motivation of different subpopulations of adult learners even more. These groups may include: (1) individuals pursuing (non-formal) education not only for career development but also outside the world of work; (2) adults returning to (formal) education after an extended break, especially with a specific demographic background, like migrants or the first-generation-university-students; and (3) adults with specific learning needs. Each of these subpopulations has distinct motivational drivers, influenced by intrinsic factors like personal interest and self-fulfilment and extrinsic factors such as labour market demands and social pressures. A nuanced understanding of these groups would help tailor both national and local (regional) educational strategies to their unique contexts.

The motivation of educators warrants greater attention, as their motivation significantly impacts the quality of learning and participants' engagement. Understanding what drives educators could lead to strategies that enhance teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes.

Improving the methodological quality of research is essential for producing reliable results and deepening our understanding of motivation in adult education. Future studies should: (1) use more validated tools in quantitative research to ensure the reliability and accuracy of findings; (2) embrace more mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive view of motivational phenomena in adult education; (3) employ new innovative methodologies, such as card-sorting method (Broek et al., 2024) or panel surveys (dos Santos et al., 2024) to explore long-term changes in motivation and the contextual factors shaping adult learning trajectories.

By addressing these directions, future research can significantly contribute to understanding motivation in adult education.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

Funding

This paper was supported by the project Motivace k účasti na vzdělávání a školení dospělých" [Motivation to Participation in Adult Education and Training] (IGA/FHS/2024/002).

References

Aljohani, O. H., & Alajlan, S. M. (2020). Motivating Adult Learners to Learn at Adult-Education Schools in Saudi Arabia. *Adult Learning, 31*(4), 150-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159519899655

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 19-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Boeren, E. (2016). *Lifelong learning participation in a changing policy context: An interdisciplinary theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Boeren, E. (2017). Researching lifelong learning participation through an interdisciplinary lens. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 40*(3), 299-310. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727x.2017.1287893

Boeren, E. (2018). The Methodological Underdog: A Review of Quantitative Research in the Key Adult Education Journals. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *68*(1), 63-79. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713617739347

Boeren, E. (2019). Quantitative research in research on the education and learning of adults. In A. Fejes & E. Nylander (Eds.), *Mapping out the research field of adult education and learning* (pp. 139-155). Springer.

Boeren, E., & Holford, J. (2016). Vocationalism Varies (a Lot): A 12-Country Multivariate Analysis of Participation in Formal Adult Learning. *Adult Education Quarterly, 66*(2), 120-142. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615624207

Boeren, E., Holford, J., Nicaise, I., & Baert, H. (2012a). Why do adults learn? Developing a motivational typology across 12 European countries. *Globalisation Societies and Education, 10*(2), 247-269. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2012.678764

Boeren, E., Nicaise, I., Roosmaa, E.-L., & Saar, E. (2012b). Formal adult education in the spotlight: Profiles, motivations and experiences of participants in 12 European countries. In S. Riddell, J. Markowitsch, & E. Weedon (Eds.), *Lifelong learning in Europe: Equity and efficiency in the balance* (pp. 63-86). Bristol University Press.

Boshier, R., W. (1971). Motivational orientations of adult education participants: A factor analytic exploration of Houle‘s typology. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *21*(2), 3-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367102100201

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. University of Chicago Press.

Broek, S. D., Van der Linden, J., Kuijpers, C., & Semeijn, J. H. (2024). Local level conducive socio-spatial environments for adults to engage in learning: Piloting an empirical exploration based on card-sorting. In C. Nägele, B. Esmond, N. Kersh, & B. E. Stalder (Eds.), *Trends in vocational education and training research: Proceedings of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Vocational Education and Training Network* (pp. 17-29). VETNET. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13236259

Bukhori, B., Said, H., Wijaya, T., & Mohamad Nor, F. (2019). The Effect of Smartphone Addiction, Achievement Motivation, and Textbook Reading Intensity on Students’ Academic Achievement. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies, 13*(09), 66-80. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v13i09.9566

Chen, Z., & Aryadoust, V. (2023). Testing the measurement invariance of the work motivation scale for training and adult education in a nationwide study of Singapore. *Current Psychology, 42*(4), 3122-3133. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01579-w

Cook, D. A., & Artino, A. R. (2016). Motivation to learn: an overview of contemporary theories. *Medical Education, 50*(10), 997-1014. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13074

Coşkun, Y. D., & Demirel, M. (2010). Lifelong learning tendency scale: The study of validity and reliability. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 5, 2343-2350. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.461

Dæhlen, M., & Ure, O. B. (2009). Low-skilled adults in formal continuing education: Does their motivation differ from other learners? *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 28*(5), 661-674. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370903189948

Desjardins, R. (2017). *Political economy of adult learning systems. Comparative study of strategies, policies, and constraints*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

dos Santos, S., Dieckhoff, M., Ehlert, M., & Mertens, A. (2024). Does training beget training over the life course? Cumulative advantage in work-related non-formal training participation in Germany and the UK. *European Sociological Review*, *40*(3), 464-478. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcae022

Draghi, M. (2024). *The Future of European Competitiveness. Part A. A competitiveness strategy for Europe*. European Commission.

Eurostat. (2024). *Participation rate in education and training by sex*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/trng_aes_100/default/table?lang=en

Evans, K., Markowitsch, J., Lee, W. O., & Zukas, M. (Eds.). (2023). *Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning. Springer International Handbooks of Education*. Springer.

Fejes, A., & Nylander, E. (2014). The Anglophone International(e): A Bibliometric Analysis of Three Adult Education Journals, 2005-2012. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *64*(3), 222-239. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713614528025

Fejes, A., & Nylander, E. (2015). How pluralistic is the research field on adult education? Dominating bibliometrical trends, 2005-2012. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *6*(2), 103-123. http://dx.doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9063

Fejes, A., & Nylander, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Mapping out the Research Field of Adult Education and Learning*. Springer.

Field, J. (2011). Researching the benefits of learning: the persuasive power of longitudinal studies. *London Review of Education*, *9*(3), 283-292. https://doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2011.616320

Gesthuizen, M., & Scheepers, P. (2010). Economic Vulnerability among Low-Educated Europeans: Resource, Composition, Labour Market and Welfare State Influences. *Acta Sociologica*, *53*(3), 247-267. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25782140

Gondim, S. M. G., & Mutti, C. (2011). Affections in learning situations: a study of an entrepreneurship skills development course. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 23*(3), 195-208. https://doi.org/10.1108/13665621111117224

Gopalan, V., Abu Bakar, J. A., Zulkifli, A. N., Alwi, A., & Che Mat, R. (2017). A review of the motivation theories in learning. *AIP Conference Proceedings, 1891*(1), 020043. https://doi.org/10.1063/1.5005376

Gusenbauer, M., & Haddaway, N. R. (2021). What every researcher should know about searching – clarified concepts, search advice, and an agenda to improve finding in academia. *Research Synthesis Methods, 12*(2), 136-147. https://doi.org/10.1002/jrsm.1457

Holford, J., Milana, M., Webb, S., Waller, R., Hodge, S., & Knight, E. (2022). Shaping the field of lifelong education through three critical debates in the International Journal of Lifelong Education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 41*(6), 549-571. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2022.2160020

Ilie, V. (2019). Study on Adult Learning Motivation. *International Journal of Human and Behavioral Science*, *5*(1), 11-28. https://doi.org/10.19148/ijhbs.543980

Justice, E. M., & Dornan, T. M. (2001). Metacognitive Differences between Traditional-Age and Nontraditional-Age College Students. *Adult Education Quarterly, 51*(3), 236-249. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171360105100305

Kalenda, J., & Kočvarová, I. (2022). "Why don‘t they participate?". Reasons for nonparticipation in adult learning and education from the viewpoint of self-determination theory. *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults 13*(2), 193-208. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:25177

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E., & Swanson, R. (2012). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development (7th ed.)*. Taylor & Francis.

Kondrup, S. (2015). Understanding Unskilled Work as a Condition for Participation in Adult Education Training. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *6*(2), 159-173. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:11454

Lamb, M., Csizér, K., Henry, A., & Ryan, S. (2019). *The Palgrave handbook of motivation for language learning*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28380-3

Lazowski, R. A., & Hulleman, C. S. (2016). Motivation Interventions in Education: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(2), 602-640. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315617832

Leow, A., Billett, S., Le, A. H., & Chua, S. (2022). Graduates' perspectives on effective continuing education and training: participation, access and engagement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 41*(2), 212-228. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2022.2044398

Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. K. (2010). Scoping studies: advancing the methodology. *Implementation Science, 5*, 69. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-5-69

Li, R., Lund, A., & Nordsteien, A. (2021). The link between flipped and active learning: a scoping review. *Teaching in Higher Education, 28*(8), 1993-2027. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1943655

Liodaki, N., & Karalis, T. (2023). Reasons of Employees' Participation in Continuing Professional Education Programs. *European Journal of Education Studies, 10*(10), 292-308. ISSN: 2501-1111.

Macey, W. H., & Schneider, B. (2008). The meaning of employee engagement. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *1*(1), 3-30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2007.0002.x

Martín-Martín, A., Orduna-Malea, E., Thelwall, M., & Delgado López-Cózar, E. (2018). Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus: A systematic comparison of citations in 252 subject categories. *Journal of Informetrics, 12*(4), 1160-1177. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2018.09.002

Miguel, C. F. (2013). Jack Michael's motivation. *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior, 29*(1), 3-11. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03393119

Milana, M., Webb, S., Holford, J., Waller, R., & Jarvis, P. (Eds.). (2018). *The Palgrave international handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mongeon, P., & Paul-Hus, A. (2016). The journal coverage of Web of Science and Scopus: a comparative analysis. *Scientometrics 106*(1), 213-228. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-015-1765-5

Nylander, E., & Fejes, A. (2023). Lifelong learning research: The themes of the territory. In K. Evans, W. O. Lee, J. Markowitsch, & M. Zukas (Eds.), *Third international handbook of lifelong learning* (pp. 119-138). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67930-9_2-2

Nylander, E., Fejes, A., & Milana, M. (2022). Exploring the themes of the territory. A topic modelling approach to 40 years of publications in International Journal of Lifelong Education (1982–2021). *International journal of lifelong education, 41*(1), 27-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2021.2015636

OECD. (2023). *OECD Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/27452f29-en

OECD. (2024). *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World: Survey of Adult Skills 2023.* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en

Page, M. J., Moher, D., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., ... McKenzie, J. E. (2021). PRISMA 2020 explanation and elaboration: Updated guidance and exemplars for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ,* 372, n160. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n160

Parks, R., Evans, B., & Getch, Y. (2013). Motivations and enculturation of older students returning to a traditional university. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 25*(3), 62-75. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20031

Pincus, J. D. (2020). Engagement as Motivation: Academic Models. *Advance,* December 02, 1-35. https://doi.org/10.31124/advance.13270574.v1

Pintrich, P. R., & de Groot, E. V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82*(1), 33-40. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.82.1.33

Pont, B. (2004). Improving Access to and Participation in Adult Learning in OECD Countries. *European Journal of Education, 39*(1), 31-45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0141-8211.2004.00165.x

Rotgans, I. J., & Schmidt, G. H. (2012). The Intricate Relationship Between Motivation and Achievement: Examining the Mediating Role of Self-Regulated Learning and Achievement-Related Classroom Behaviors. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 24*(2), 197-208. ISSN 1812-9129.

Rubenson, K. (1982). Adult education research: In quest of a map of the territory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *32*(2), 57-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171368203200201

Rubenson, K., & Elfert, M. (2015). Adult Education Research: Exploring an Increasingly Fragmented Map. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 6*(2), 125-138. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:11451

Rubenson, K., & Elfert, M. (2019). Examining the "weak field" of adult education. In A. Fejes & E. Nylander (Eds.), *Mapping out the research field of adult education and learning* (pp. 15-31). Springer.

Schuller, T., & Desjardins, R. (2010). The wider benefits of adult education. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 229-233). Elsevier.

Şentürk, Ş., & Duran, V. (2020). Lifelong learning tendencies of trainers in adult education. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education, 9*(1), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i1.20365

Shillingford, S., & Karlin, N. J. (2013). The role of intrinsic motivation in the academic pursuits of nontraditional students. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 25*(3), 91-102. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20033

Taylor, E. W. (2001). Adult Education Quarterly from 1989 to 1999: A Content Analysis of all Submissions. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *51*(4), 322-340. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417130122087322

Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O'Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., Moher, D., Peters, M. D. J., Horsley, T., Weeks, L., Hempel, S., Akl, E. A., Chang, C., McGowan, J., Stewart, L., Hartling, L., Aldcroft, A., Wilson, M. G., Garritty, C., ... Straus, S. E. (2018). Prisma extension for scoping reviews (Prisma-ScR): Checklist and explanation. *Annals of Internal Medicine, 169*(7), 467-473. https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-0850

UNESCO. (2016). *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education, 2015*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245179

Vanslambrouck, S., Zhu, C., Pynoo, B., Lombaerts, K., Tondeur, J., & Scherer, R. (2019). A latent profile analysis of adult students' online self-regulation in blended learning environments. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *99*, 126-136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.05.021

Wlodkowski, R. J. (2008). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Wlodkowski, R. J., & Ginsberg, M. B. (2017). *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Yamashita, T., Cummins, P. A., Millar, R. J., Sahoo, S., & Smith, T. J. (2019). Associations between motivation to learn, basic skills, and adult education and training participation among older adults in the USA. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 38*(5), 538-552. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2019.1666927

Yamashita, T., Smith, T. J., Sahoo, S., & Cummins, P. A. (2022). Motivation to learn by age, education, and literacy skills among working-age adults in the United States. *Large-scale Assessments in Education, 10*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40536-022-00119-7

Appendices

Table 4. Overview of research topics with references. Source: Authors' own table

General Topic	Subtopic	Number of studies (n)	References
Motivation of educators		5	Livneh & Livneh (1999); Karoulis (2011); Heystek & Terhoven (2015); Şentürk & Duran (2020); Tzafilkou et al. (2022)
Motivation as an aspect of work motivation		5	Renta-Davids et al. (2016); Zavodchikov et al. (2016); Leow et al. (2022); Bellare et al. (2023); Chen & Aryadoust (2023)
Motivation in relation to self-regulation and learning strategies		11	Prenzel (1993); Hammond & Feinstein (2005); Kalenda & Vávrová (2017); Gravani (2019); Vanslambrouck et al. (2019a); Vanslambrouck et al. (2019b); Chukwuedo et al. (2021); Rothes et al. (2022); Sánchez-Doménech et al. (2023); Đorđić et al. (2024); Zainuddin et al. (2024)
Motivation within national populations		12	Boshier (1971); Boshier (1977); Gorges & Hollmann (2015); Boeren & Holford (2016); Gorges et al. (2016); Pikturnaitė et al. (2017); Kalenda & Kočvarová (2021); Koludrovic & Ercegovac (2021); Sahoo et al. (2021); Gorges & Schmidt (2022); Kalenda & Kočvarová (2022); Yamashita et al. (2022)
Motivation among specific target groups in adult education and learning	Course participants	21	Isaac et al. (2001); Wright & McGrory (2005); Van Den Berg et al. (2009); Baker et al. (2010); Delialioglu et al. (2010); Strong & Harder (2010); Gondim & Mutti (2011); Gorges & Kandler (2011); Cui et al. (2016); Rothes et al. (2016); Duguine (2017); Aittola & Ursin (2018); Gegenfurtner et al. (2019); Kallinikou & Nicolaidou (2019); Lee (2019); Magos & Georgopapadakou (2021); Mavropoulos et al. (2021); Ali et al. (2022); Niksadat et al. (2022); Chen et al. (2023); Nguyen & Nguyen (2024)
	Non-traditional students	13	Justice & Dornan (2001); Coker (2003); Bye et al. (2007); Shillingford & Karlin (2013); Francois (2014); Abbas (2016); Iñiguez-Berrozpe & Marcaletti (2016); van Rhijn et al. (2016); Amponsah et al (2018); Ho & Kember (2018); Gardner et al. (2021);Wang et al. (2022); Szalkowicz & Andrewartha (2024)

General Topic	Subtopic	Number of studies (n)	References
	Second-chance learners	0	Goto & Martin (2009); De Oña Cots et al. (2018); Randevåg & Boström (2019); Aljohani & Alajlan (2020); Keita & Lee (2022); Okwuduba et al. (2022); Cavallo-Bertelet (2023); Gutiérrez-De-Rozas et al. (2023a); Gutiérrez-De-Rozas et al. (2023b); Mertens et al. (2024)
	Low-skilled adults	7	Dæhlen & Ure (2009); Prins & Schafft (2009); Mariager-Anderson et al. (2016); Tikkanen & Nissinen (2018); Liu (2019); Hajdú & Koncz (2021); Hajdú et al. (2022)
	Elderly adults	6	Kim & Merriam (2004); Parks et al. (2013); Carragher & Golding (2015); Helterbran (2016); Lin (2020); Hachem (2023)
	Migrants	3	Kisiara (2020); Jõgi & Karu (2021); Kamisli (2023)
	Prisoners	2	Panitsides & Moussiou (2019); Héctor-Moreira et al. (2020)

Table 5. Overview of research countries included in the studies with references. Source: Authors' own table

Linguistic group	Region	Number of cases in studies	Country	Number of cases in studies	References
Anglophone countries	North America	26	Canada	4	Boshier (1977); Bye et al. (2007); Gorges et al. (2016); van Rhijn et al. (2016)
			United States	22	Livneh & Livneh (1999); Isaac et al. (2001); Justice & Dornan (2001); Coker (2003); Kim & Merriam (2004); Goto & Martin (2009); Prins & Schafft (2009); van Den Berg et al. (2009); Delialioglu et al. (2010); Strong & Harder (2010); Parks et al. (2013); Shillingford & Karlin (2013); Francois (2014); Helterbran (2016); Gorges et al. (2016); Liu (2019); Kisiara (2020); Gardner et al. (2021); Sahoo et al. (2021); Yamashita et al. (2022); Bellare et al. (2023); Kamisli (2023)
	Europe	10	Ireland	4	Wright & McGrory (2005); Carragher & Golding (2015); Boeren & Holford (2016); Gorges et al. (2016)
			Scotland	1	Boeren & Holford (2016)
			United Kingdom	5	Hammond & Feinstein (2005); Baker et al. (2010); Abbas (2016); Boeren & Holford (2016); Gorges et al. (2016)
	Oceania	3	Australia	2	Gorges et al. (2016); Szalkowicz & Andrewartha (2024)
			New Zealand	1	Boshier (1971)

Linguistic group	Region	Number of cases in studies	Country	Number of cases in studies	References
Non-Anglophone countries	Northern Europe	17	Denmark	3	Gorges et al. (2016); Mariager-Anderson et al. (2016); Tikkanen & Nissinen (2018)
			Finland	3	Gorges et al. (2016); Aittola & Ursin (2018); Tikkanen & Nissinen (2018)
			Norway	3	Dæhlen & Ure (2009); Gorges et al. (2016); Tikkanen & Nissinen (2018)
			Sweden	3	Gorges et al. (2016); Tikkanen & Nissinen (2018); Randevåg & Boström (2019)
	Western Europe	15	Belgium	4	Boeren & Holford (2016); Vanslambrouck et al. (2019a); Vanslambrouck et al. (2019b); Mertens et al. (2024)
			France	2	Gorges et al. (2016); Duguine (2017)
			Germany	7	Prenzel (1993); Gorges & Kandler (2011); Karoulis (2011); Gorges & Hollmann (2015); Gorges et al. (2016); Gegenfurtner et al. (2019); Liu (2019); Gorges & Schmidt (2022)
			Netherlands	1	Gorges et al. (2016)
	Central Europe	16	Austria	2	Boeren & Holford (2016); Gorges et al. (2016)
			Czech Republic	6	Boeren & Holford (2016); Gorges et al. (2016); Kalenda & Vávrová (2017); Kalenda & Kočvarová (2021); Kalenda & Kočvarová (2022); Đorđić et al. (2024)
			Hungary	3	Boeren & Holford (2016); Hajdú & Koncz (2021); Hajdú et al. (2022)
			Slovak Republic	2	Gorges et al. (2016); Đorđić et al. (2024)
			Slovenia	1	Boeren & Holford (2016)
			Poland	2	Đorđić et al. (2024); Gorges et al. (2016)
	Eastern Europe	3	Bulgaria	1	Boeren & Holford (2016)
			Estonia	3	Boeren & Holford (2016); Gorges et al. (2016); Jõgi & Karu (2021)
			Lithuania	2	Boeren & Holford (2016); Rothes et al. (2016)
			Russia	2	Boeren & Holford (2016); Zavodchikov et al. (2016)
	Southern Europe	21	Croatia	1	Koludrovic & Ercegovac (2021)
			Cyprus	2	Gravani (2019); Kallinikou & Nicolaidou (2019)
			Greece	5	Gravani (2019); Panitsides & Moussiou (2019); Magos & Georgopapadakou (2021); Mavropoulos et al. (2021); Tzafilkou et al. (2022)

Linguistic group	Region	Number of cases in studies	Country	Number of cases in studies	References
			Italy	2	Gorges et al. (2016); Iñiguez-Berrozpe & Marcaletti (2016)
			Portugal	2	Rothes et al. (2016); Rothes et al. (2022)
			Serbia	1	Đorđić et al. (2024)
			Spain	8	Héctor-Moreira et al. (2020); Gorges et al. (2016); Iñiguez-Berrozpe & Marcaletti (2016); Renta-Davids et al. (2016); De Oña Cots et al. (2018); Gutiérrez-De-Rozas et al. (2022); Gutiérrez-De-Rozas et al. (2023); Sánchez-Doménech et al. (2023)
	East Asia	8	China	2	Cui et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2022)
			Hong Kong	1	Ho & Kember (2018)
			Korea	2	Gorges et al. (2016); Liu (2019)
			Taiwan	2	Lin (2020); Chen et al. (2023)
			Japan	1	Gorges et al. (2016)
	Southeast Asia	5	Singapore	2	Chen & Aryadoust (2023); Leow et al. (2022)
			Thailand	1	Lee (2019)
			Vietnam	1	Nguyen & Nguyen (2024)
			Indonesia	1	Zainuddin et al. (2024)
	Central Asia	1	Iran	1	Niksadat et al. (2022)
	West Asia	3	Lebanon	1	Hachem (2023)
			Saudi Arabia	1	Aljohani & Alajlan (2020)
			Turkey	1	Şentürk & Duran (2020)
	Africa	7	Nigeria	2	Chukwuedo et al. (2021); Okwuduba et al. (2022)
			Ghana	1	Amponsah et al (2018)
			South Africa	1	Heystek & Terhoven (2015)
			Morocco	1	Ali et al. (2022)
			Egypt	1	Abbas (2016)
			Gambia	1	Keita & Lee (2022)
	South America	2	Brazil	1	Gondim & Mutti (2011)
			Chile	1	Cavallo-Bertelet (2023)

Note: Results are not cumulative

Table 6. Summary of quantitative research instruments used in adult education studies with references. Source: Authors' own table

Non-validated Research instruments				
Research Instrument	**Number**	**Type**	**Number**	**References**
Surveys	42	Authors inventory/questionnaire	33	Prenzel (1993); Isaac et al. (2001); Wright & McGrory (2005); Van Den Berg et al. (2009); Baker et al. (2010); Delialioglu et al. (2010); Gondim & Mutti (2011); Gorges & Kandler (2011); Karoulis (2011); Carragher &

				Golding (2015); Abbas (2016); Boeren & Holford (2016); Iñiguez-Berrozpe & Marcaletti (2016); Renta-Davids et al. (2016); Zavodchikov et al. (2016); Duguine (2017); Pikturnaitė et al. (2017); Aittola & Ursin (2018); Amponsah et al (2018); Gegenfurther et al. (2019); Lee (2019); Héctor-Moreira et al. (2020); Gardner et al. (2021); Hajdú & Koncz (2021); Ali et al. (2022); Hajdú et al. (2022); Leow et al. (2022); Niksadat et al. (2022); Tzafilkou et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2022); Gutiérrez-De-Rozas et al. (2023); Sánchez-Doménech et al. (2023); Nguyen & Nguyen (2024)
		International comparative survey (PIAAC; LLL; AES)	9	Hammond & Feinstein (2005); Dæhlen & Ure (2009); Gorges & Hollmann (2015); Gorges et al. (2016); Tikkanen & Nissinen (2018); Liu (2019); Sahoo et al. (2021); Kalenda & Kočvarová (2022); Yamashita et al. (2022)
Validated Psychometrics Scales				
Research Instrument	**Number**	**Type**	**Number**	**References**
Scales with a focus on attitudes to Adult Education	4	Adult Attitudes Toward Adult Education Scale (AACES)	1	Koludrovic & Ercegovac (2021)
		Lifelong Learning Tendencies Scale	3	Şentürk & Duran (2020); Chukwuedo et al. (2021); Okwuduba et al. (2022)
Scales with a focus on motivation to Adult Education	18	Education Participation Scale (EPS)	7	Boshier (1971); Boshier (1977); Kim & Merriam (2004); Francois (2014); Cui et al. (2016); Aljohani & Alajlan (2020); Mavropoulos et al. (2021)
		Academic Motivation Scale (AMS)	3	Shillingford & Karlin (2013); Koludrovic & Ercegovac (2021); Đorđić et al. (2024)
		Prison Education Motivation Scale (PEMS)	1	Panitsides & Moussiou (2019)
		Mergener‘s Education Participation Scale (M-EPS)	1	Strong & Harder (2010)
		Motivation to Nonparticipation Scale (MNP-S)	1	Kalenda & Kočvarová (2022)
		Deterrence to Participation Scale (DPS-G)	2	Cui et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2022)
		Global Motivation Scale (GMS)	1	Lin (2020)
		Learning	1	Mertens et al. (2024)

		and Motivation Questionnaire (LEMO)		
		Personal Achievement Goal Orientations Scale	1	Rothes et al. (2022)
Scales with a focus on work-related behavior	5	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9)	3	Cui et al. (2016); Chukwuedo et al. (2021); Okwubuda et al. (2022)
		Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS)	1	Chen & Aryadoust (2023)
		Characteristics of Lifelong Learning in the Professions	1	Livneh & Livneh (1999)
Scales with a focus on self-efficacy	4	General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)	1	Koludrovic & Ercegovac (2021)
		Academic Self-Efficacy Scale	1	Rothes et al. (2016)
		Self-concept of ability (SCA)	1	Gorges & Schmidt (2022)
		Online Learning Value and Self-Efficacy Scale (OLVSES)	1	Vanslambrouck et al. (2019a)
Scales with a focus on self-regulation	25	Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)	4	Justice & Dornan (2001); Bye et al. (2007); Kallinikou & Nicolaidou (2019); Chen et al. (2023)
		Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SLQ-R)	3	Rothes et al. (2016); Rothes et al. (2022); Đorđić et al. (2024)
		Online Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ)	1	Vanslambrouck et al. (2019b)
		Deeper Learning Self-Assessment Scale (DLSS)	1	Wang et al. (2022)
		Academic Self-Description Questionnaire-III	1	Rothes et al. (2016)
		University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)	1	Okwubuda et al. (2022)
		Self-report Measure of Routine Study Behaviors (SAS-R)	1	Justice & Dornan (2001)
		Elicits students' self-reports of their memory abilities and capacities (IME)	1	Justice & Dornan (2001)
		Self-Reported Engagement Scale	1	Rothes et al. (2016)
		Adult Learning Strategies Evaluation Scale	2	Rothes et al. (2016); Rothes et al. (2022)
		Intrinsic task value (ITV)	1	Gorges & Schmidt (2022)
		Need for cognition scale (NFC)	1	Gorges & Schmidt (2022)

		Transfer Interest Questionnaire (TIQ)	1	Gegenfurtner et al. (2019)
		Mature Student Experience Survey (MSES)	1	van Rhijn et al. (2016)
		Differential Emotions Scale IV-A (DES)	1	Bye et al. (2007)
		Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)	1	Bye et al. (2007)
		Immersion Experience Scale	1	Chen et al. (2023)
		Gamification for Adults Questionnaires (GAQ)	1	Zainuddin et al. (2024)
		Behavioral Engagement Questionnaire	1	Rothes et al. (2022)
Teacher related questionnaires	1	Teacher-Rated Student Engagement Scale	1	Rothes et al. (2016)

Note: Results are not cumulative

Table 7. Summary of qualitative research instruments and data analysis methods in adult education studies with references. Source: Authors' own table

Data collection	Number	Merged categories	References
Focus groups	7	Focus groups interviews	Coker (2003); Carragher & Golding (2015); Kalenda & Vávrová (2017); De Oña Cots et al. (2018); Randevåg & Boström (2019); Kisiara (2020); Bellare et al. (2023)
Semi-structured interview	26	Interviews, semi-structured interviews, semi-structured protocol	Hammond & Feinstein (2005); Goto & Martin (2009); Prins & Schafft (2009); Gondim & Mutti (2011); Parks et al. (2013); Heystek & Terhoven (2015); Helterbran (2016); Mariager-Anderson et al. (2016); Duguine (2017); Aittola & Ursin (2018); Ho & Kember (2018); Gravani (2019); Lee (2019); Randevåg & Boström (2019); Vanslambrouck et al. (2019b); Jõgi & Karu (2021); Magos & Georgopapadakou (2021); Gutiérrez-De-Rozas et al. (2022); Keita & Lee (2022); Leow et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2022); Cavallo-Bertelet (2023); Hachem (2023); Kamisli (2023); Nguyen & Nguyen (2024); Szalkowicz & Andrewartha (2024); Zainuddin et al. (2024)
Observation and etnography	5	Observation, field notes	Gondim & Mutti (2011); Lee (2019); Randevåg & Boström (2019); Jõgi & Karu (2021); Zainuddin et al. (2024)

Note: Results are not cumulative

List of analysed studies

Abbas, T. M. (2016). Predictors of Satisfaction among Nontraditional Students in Tourism and Hospitality Higher Education: A Structural Equation Modeling approach. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, *28*(3), 113-126. https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2016.1189830

Aittola, H., & Ursin, J. (2018). Finnish adult students' perspectives on short-cycle study programmes: motives and evaluations. *Higher Education Research & Development, 38*(2), 205-218. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1515182

Ali, D. A., Fazaz, M., Ounaceur, B., Houate, B. E., Koutbi, M. E., Khiat, A. E., & Senhaji, F. (2022). Motivational factors influencing nurses' participation in continuing education sessions: A hospital-based study. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 29*(2), 395-407. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714221140925

Aljohani, O. H., & Alajlan, S. M. (2020). Motivating Adult Learners to Learn at Adult-Education Schools in Saudi Arabia. *Adult Learning, 31*(4), 150-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159519899655

Amponsah, S., Torto, B. A. & Badu-Nyarko, S. K. (2018). Ghanaian mature students' motivation to pursue degree programmes through distance education. International *Review of Education 64*, 585-606. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-018-9728-8

Baker, C., Andrews, H., Gruffydd, I., & Lewis, G. (2010). Adult language learning: a survey of Welsh for Adults in the context of language planning. *Evaluation & Research in Education, 24*(1), 41-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500790.2010.526204

Bellare, Y., Smith, A., Cochran, K., & Lopez, S. G. (2022). Motivations and Barriers for Adult Learner Achievement: Recommendations for Institutions of Higher Education. *Adult Learning, 34*(1), 30-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595211059574

Boeren, E., & Holford, J. (2016). Vocationalism Varies (a Lot): A 12-Country Multivariate Analysis of Participation in Formal Adult Learning. *Adult Education Quarterly, 66*(2), 120-142. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615624207

Boshier, R., W. (1971). Motivational orientations of adult education participants: A factor analytic exploration of Houle's typology. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *21*(2), 3-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367102100201

Boshier, R. (1977). Motivational Orientations Re-Visited: Life-Space Motives and the Education Participation Scale. *Adult Education, 27*(2), 89-115. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367702700202

Bye, D., Pushkar, D., & Conway, M. (2007). Motivation, Interest, and Positive Affect in Traditional and Nontraditional Undergraduate Students. *Adult Education Quarterly, 57*(2), 141-158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713606294235

Carragher, L., & Golding, B. (2015). Older men as learners. *Adult Education Quarterly, 65*(2), 152-168. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615570894

Cavallo-Bertelet, L. (2023). Estudiar en la adultez: Percepciones de un reto motivacional [Studying in Adulthood: Perceptions of a Motivational Challenge]. *Estudios PedagóGicos*, *49*(3), 327-348. https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-07052023000400327

Chen, C., Ming-Chaun, L., & Kuo, C. (2023). A game-based learning system based on octalysis gamification framework to promote employees' Japanese learning. *Computers & Education*, 205, 104899. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2023.104899

Chen, Z., & Aryadoust, V. (2023). Testing the measurement invariance of the work motivation scale for training and adult education in a nationwide study of Singapore. *Current Psychology, 42*(4), 3122-3133. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01579-w

Chukwuedo, S. O., Mbagwu, F. O., & Ogbuanya, T. C. (2021). Motivating academic engagement and lifelong learning among vocational and adult education students via self-direction in learning. *Learning and Motivation, 74*, 101729. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2021.101729

Coker, A. D. (2003). African American Female Adult Learners: Motivations, Challenges, and Coping Strategies. *Journal of Black Studies, 33*(5), 654-674. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934703033005007

Cui, G., Yao, M., Zhang, X., Guo, Y., Li, H., & Yao, X. (2016). The effects of initial participation motivations on learning engagement in transition training for future general practitioners in rural China: perceived deterrents as mediator. *Medical Education Online, 21*(1), 30998. https://doi.org/10.3402/meo.v21.30998

Davids, A. I. R., Fandos-Garrido, M., Jiménez-González, J. M., & González-Soto, Á. P. (2016). Adult's Participation in Work-related Training: The Balance between Improving Job and a Desire for Learning. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research, 6*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.17583/remie.2016.1531

Dæhlen, M., & Ure, O. B. (2009). Low-skilled adults in formal continuing education: does their motivation differ from other learners? *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 28*(5), 661-674. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370903189948

De Oña Cots, J. M., Gálvez, E. a. G., & Magaña, E. C. (2018). Educación de Adultos e Inclusión Social. Experiencias y Opiniones de un Grupo de Estudiantes [Adult Education and Social Inclusion: Experiences and Opinions of a Group of Students]. *Revista Internacional De Educación Para La Justicia Social*, *7*(2), 95-112. https://doi.org/10.15366/riejs2018.7.2.006

Delialioglu, O., Cakir, H., Bichelmeyer, B. A., Dennis, A. R., & Duffy, T. M. (2010). Factors impacting adult learner achievement in a technology certificate program on computer networks. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 9*(2), 97-107.

Đorđić, D., Vukčević-Cvijetić, M., Marić, M., Šimonji-Černak, R., & Beljanski, M. (2024). Self-regulation factors as predictors of academic motivation in adults. *Zbornik Instituta za pedagoška istraživanja*, *56*(1), 123-140. https://doi.org/10.2298/zipi2401123d

Duguine, I. (2017). Motivation et apprentissage du basque chez les adultes francophones [Motivation and Learning of Basque Among French-speaking Adults]. *Lidil*, 55. https://doi.org/10.4000/lidil.4198

Francois, E. J. (2014). Motivational orientations of non-traditional adult students to enroll in a degree-seeking program. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 26*(2), 19-35. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20060

Gardner, A. C., Maietta, H. N., Gardner, P. D., & Perkins, N. (2021). Postsecondary Adult Learner Motivation: An analysis of credentialing patterns and decision making within higher education programs. *Adult Learning*, *33*(1), 15-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159520988361

Gegenfurtner, A., Knogler, M., & Schwab, S. (2019). Transfer interest: measuring interest in training content and interest in training transfer. *Human Resource Development International, 23*(2), 146-167. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2019.1644002

Gondim, S. M. G., & Mutti, C. (2011). Affections in learning situations: a study of an entrepreneurship skills development course. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 23*(3), 195-208. https://doi.org/10.1108/13665621111117224

Gorges, J., & Hollmann, J. (2015). Motivationale Faktoren der Weiterbildungsbeteiligung bei hohem, mittlerem und niedrigem Bildungsniveau [Motivational factors for participation in continuing education at high, medium, and low levels of education]. *Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft, 18*(S1), 51-69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11618-014-0595-1

Gorges, J., & Kandler, C. (2011). Adults' learning motivation: Expectancy of success, value, and the role of affective memories. *Learning and Individual Differences, 22*(5), 610-617. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2011.09.016

Gorges, J., Maehler, D. B., Koch, T., & Offerhaus, J. (2016). Who likes to learn new things: measuring adult motivation to learn with PIAAC data from 21 countries. Large-scale *Assessments in Education, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40536-016-0024-4

Gorges, J., & Schmidt, L. C. (2022). Motivation towards novel learning content: Perceived similarity of learning content, but not need for cognition, moderates the generalization of motivation. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*(4), 1403-1421. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12507

Goto, S. T., & Martin, C. (2009). Psychology of Success: Overcoming Barriers to Pursuing Further Education. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 57*(1), 10-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377360902810744

Gravani, M. N. (2019). Learner-centred education as a tool for enhancing adult learning in distance learning universities. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 25*(2), 198-216. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971419858689

Gutiérrez-de-Rozas, B., López-Martín, E., & Carpintero Molina, E. (2023). Análisis del abandono educativo temprano en España: Condicionantes del abandono y motivos para regresar al sistema educativo [Analysis of Early School Leaving in Spain: Factors Behind Dropout and Reasons for Returning to the Education System]. *Revista de Investigación Educativa, 41*(2), 523-549. https://doi.org/10.6018/rie.546521

Gutiérrez-de-Rozas B., Macedo E., Carpintero Molina E. y López-Martín E. (2023). Los condicionantes del abandono temprano y del retorno educativo bajo la mirada de sus protagonistas [The factors behind early school leaving and educational return through the eyes of those directly affected]. *Revista Complutense de Educación, 34*(4), 931-944. https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.80318

Hachem, H. (2023). Ask them why: Older learners' motivational reasons for learning at a university for the third age. *Studies in the Education of Adults, 55*(1), 82-100. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2022.2040347

Hajdú, D., & Koncz, G. (2021). Megélhetési tanulók a Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megyei felnőttképzésben [Subsistence learners in adult education in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County]. *Területi Statisztika*, *61*(2), 229-254. https://doi.org/10.15196/ts610206

Hajdú, D., Koncz, G., & Lipták, K. (2022). A közfoglalkoztatottak munkaerőpiacra való kilépését segítő képzések Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megyében, 2016-2020 [Training programs supporting the labor market integration of public workers in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, 2016–2020]. *Területi Statisztika*, *62*(5), 510-537. https://doi.org/10.15196/ts620502

Hammond, C., & Feinstein, L. (2005). The effects of adult learning on self-efficacy. *London Review of Education, 3*(3). https://doi.org/10.1080/14748460500372754

Héctor-Moreira, C., Martín, A. M., & García-García, J. (2020). Desempeño académico de alumnos de educación para adultos en prisión [Academic performance of adult education students in prison]. *Educación XX1, 24*(1). https://doi.org/10.5944/educxx1.26672

Helterbran, V. R. (2016). Lessons in lifelong learning. *Adult Learning, 28*(1), 12-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159516643942

Heystek, J., & Terhoven, R. (2014). Motivation as critical factor for teacher development in contextually challenging underperforming schools in South Africa. *Professional Development in Education, 41*(4), 624-639. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.940628

Ho, A., & Kember, D. (2018). Motivating the learning of part-time taught-postgraduate students through pedagogy and curriculum design: are there differences in undergraduate teaching? *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 37*(3), 315-332. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2018.1470115

Iñiguez-Berrozpe, T. I., & Marcaletti, F. (2016). “We Are Not a Small Island, We Are the Ocean”. Becoming a Student in Mature Age. An Exploratory Analysis on Italy and Spain. *Research on Ageing and Social Policy, 4*(2), 56-95. https://doi.org/10.17583/rasp.2016.2080

Isaac, E. P., Guy, T., & Valentine, T. (2001). Understanding African American Learners‘ Motivations to Learn in Church-Based Adult Education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 52*(1), 23-38. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417130122087377

Jõgi, L., & Karu, K. (2021). Learner-centred education and adult education for migrants in Estonia. In *Learner-centred education for adult migrants in Europe* (pp. 54-78). https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004461529_004

Justice, E. M., & Dornan, T. M. (2001). Metacognitive Differences between Traditional-Age and Nontraditional-Age College Students. *Adult Education Quarterly, 51*(3), 236-249. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171360105100305

Kalenda, J., & Kočvarová, I. (2021). Changing motivations for non-formal adult education in the Czech Republic: from Non-Work-Related self-realisation to the need for a Job-Oriented education. *Czech Sociological Review, 57*(1), 75-100. https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2021.001

Kalenda, J., & Kočvarová, I. (2022). "Why don‘t they participate?". Reasons for nonparticipation in adult learning and education from the viewpoint of self-determination theory. *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults 13*(2), 193-208. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:25177

Kalenda, J., & Vávrová, S. (2017). Adult part-time students´ self-regulated learning. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology – Special Issue for INTE 2017*, 199-214. ISSN 2146-7242.

Kallinikou, E., & Nicolaidou, I. (2019). Digital Storytelling to Enhance Adults’ Speaking Skills in Learning Foreign Languages: A Case Study. *Multimodal Technologies and Interaction, 3*(3), 59. https://doi.org/10.3390/mti3030059

Kamisli, M. U. (2023). Adult immigrant learners‘ perspectives of language learning experiences. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 63*(1), 76-98.

Karoulis, A. (2011). On Motivation to Apply ODL in Adult Teachers' Education. *Informatics in Education, 10*(1), 37-45. https://doi.org/10.15388/infedu.2011.03

Keita, O., & Lee, Y. (2022). Transforming adult learners: The experiences of participating in second chance education program in the Gambia. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning 62*(1). 76-96.

Kim, A., & Merriam, S. B. (2004). Motivations for Learning Among Older Adults in a Learning in Retirement Institute. *Educational Gerontology, 30*(6), 441-455. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601270490445069

Kisiara, O. (2020). Motivations of Refugee-Background Adults in Enrolling in English Language Classes in the United States. *Adult Learning, 32*(3), 115-124. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159520969859

Koludrovic, M., & Ercegovac, I. R. (2021). Attitudes, Motivation, and Self-Efficacy in Adult Education in Croatia. *Sodobna pedagogika/Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies, 72*(3), 214-229. ISSN 0038 0474.

Lee, H. Y. (2019). Learning Chinese as the United Nations Language? Implications for Language Learning Motivation and Identity. *International Journal of Higher Education, 9*(1), 168. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v9n1p168

Leow, A., Billett, S., Le, A. H., & Chua, S. (2022). Graduates' perspectives on effective continuing education and training: participation, access and engagement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 41*(2), 212-228. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2022.2044398

Lin, Y. (2020). Support Matters: Predictors of intrinsic motivation in older learners in Taiwan. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 60*(2), 190-212. ISSN: 1443-1394.

Liu, H. (2019). Low-numerate adults, motivational factors in learning, and their employment, education and training status in Germany, the US, and South Korea. *ZDM – Mathematics Education, 52*(3), 419-431. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-019-01108-x

Livneh, C., & Livneh, H. (1999). Continuing Professional Education among Educators: Predictors of Participation in Learning Activities. *Adult Education Quarterly, 49*(2), 91-106. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369904900202

Magos, K., & Georgopapadakou, K. (2021). "Why do you learn Turkish, Maria?". Researching the Greek citizens' motives and difficulties in learning Turkish as foreign language. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, 11*(1), 40-52.

Mariager-Anderson, K., Cort, P., & Thomsen, R. (2016). 'In reality, I motivate myself!'. 'Low-skilled' workers' motivation: between individual and societal narratives. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 44*(2), 171-184. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2016.1145191

Mavropoulos, A., Pampouri, A., & Kiriatzakou, K. (2021). Adults' motives and barriers of participation in mixed and asynchronous learning training programs. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society, 17*(1), 29-38. https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1135256

Mertens, B., De Maeyer, S., & Donche, V. (2024). Exploring learner profiles among low-educated adults in second-chance education: individual differences in quantity and quality of learning motivation and learning strategies. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *39*(4), 3963-3987. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-024-00834-5

Nguyen, L. a. P., & Nguyen, T. H. B. (2024). A study on adult learners of English as a Foreign language in Vietnam: Motivations, advantages, and challenges. *International Journal of Language Instruction*, *3*(1), 31-42. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.24313

Niksadat, N., Rakhshanderou, S., Negarandeh, R., Ramezankhani, A., Farahani, A. V., & Ghaffari, M. (2022). Concordance of the cardiovascular patient education with the principles of Andragogy model. *Archives of Public Health, 80*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-021-00763-5

Okwuduba, E. N., Rauf, R. a. A., Zulnaidi, H., & Nwosu, K. C. (2022). Contribution of perceived faculty caring (FC) and student engagement (SE) to lifelong learning (LLL) of post-secondary remediated (PSR) science students. *Heliyon, 8*(9), e10546. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10546

Panitsides, E. A., & Moussiou, E. (2019). What does it take to motivate inmates to participate in prison education? An exploratory study in a Greek prison. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 25*(2), 157-177. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971419840667

Parks, R., Evans, B., & Getch, Y. (2013). Motivations and enculturation of older students returning to a traditional university. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 25*(3), 62-75. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20031

Pikturnaitė, I., Jonuševičienė, J., & Kavolius, R. (2017). Adult non-formal learning motives and future needs: Klaipėda city's case. *Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development, 39*(1), 69-85. https://doi.org/10.15544/mts.2017.06

Prenzel, M. (1993). Autonomie und Motivation im Lernen Erwachsener [Autonomy and Motivation in Adult Learning]. *Zeitschrift Für Pädagogik, 39*(2), 239-253. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:11174

Prins, E., & Schafft, K. A. (2009). Individual and Structural Attributions for Poverty and Persistence in Family Literacy Programs: The Resurgence of the Culture of Poverty. *Teachers College Record the Voice of Scholarship in Education, 111*(9), 2280-2310. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810911100902

Randevåg, L., & Boström, L. (2019). Completing Studies in Alternative Ways in Adult Education. 'Who has told me that I cannot . . .?' *International Journal of Learning Teaching and Educational Research*, *18*(7), 165-183. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.18.7.11

Rothes, A., Lemos, M. S., & Gonçalves, T. (2016). Motivational Profiles of Adult Learners. *Adult Education Quarterly, 67*(1), 3-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713616669588

Rothes, A., Lemos, M. S., & Gonçalves, T. (2022). The Influence of Students' Self-Determination and Personal Achievement Goals in Learning and Engagement: A Mediation Model for traditional and Nontraditional students. *Education Sciences, 12*(6), 369. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12060369

Sahoo, S., Millar, R. J., Yamashita, T., & Cummins, P. A. (2021). Educational attainment, literacy skills, nativity, and motivation to learn among Middle-Aged adults in the United States. *Adult Learning, 34*(1), 15-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595211048554

Sánchez-Doménech, I., Cabeza-Rodríguez, M.A., Caraballo-Román, R. (2023). New online master student profiles: self-directed learning and motivation in the theoretical. REDU. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria, 21*(1), 83-98. https://doi.org/10.4995/redu.2023.16894

Şentürk, Ş., & Duran, V. (2020). Lifelong learning tendencies of trainers in adult education. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE), 9*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i1.20365

Shillingford, S., & Karlin, N. J. (2013). The role of intrinsic motivation in the academic pursuits of nontraditional students. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 25*(3), 91-102. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20033

Strong, R., & Harder, A. (2010). Motivational orientations of adults participating in a cooperative Extension Master Gardener program. *The Journal of Extension, 48*(4). https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.48.04.17

Szalkowicz, G., & Andrewartha, L. (2024). Supporting students who are parents to succeed in Australian higher education. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 64*(1). 105-125.

Tikkanen, T., & Nissinen, K. (2018). Drivers of job-related learning among low-educated employees in the Nordic countries. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 37*(5), 615-632. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2018.1554720

Tzafilkou, K., Perifanou, M., & Economides, A. A. (2022). Factors affecting teachers' transfer of ICT training: Considering usefulness and satisfaction in a PLS-SEM transfer training model. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 29*(1), 86-105. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714221096500

Van Den Berg, H. A., Dann, S. L., & Dirkx, J. M. (2009). Motivations of Adults for Non-Formal Conservation Education and Volunteerism: Implications for Programming. *Applied Environmental Education & Communication, 8*(1), 6-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/15330150902847328

Van Rhijn, T., Lero, D. S., & Burke, T. (2016). Why Go Back to School? Investigating the Motivations of Student Parents to Pursue Post–Secondary Education. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 28*(2), 14-26. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20135

Vanslambrouck, S., Zhu, C., Pynoo, B., Lombaerts, K., Tondeur, J., & Scherer, R. (2019a). A latent profile analysis of adult students' online self-regulation in blended learning environments. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *99*, 126-136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.05.021

Vanslambrouck, S., Zhu, C., Pynoo, B., Thomas, V., Lombaerts, K., & Tondeur, J. (2019b). An in-depth analysis of adult students in blended environments: Do they regulate their learning in an 'old school' way? *Computers & Education, 128*, 75-87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.09.008

Wang, B., Du, Y., & Shen, Q. (2022). Influence of Sustained Learning on Knowledge Transferability in Distance Learning. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning, 17*(10), 273-285. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v17i10.30917

Wright, M., & McGrory, O. (2005). Motivation and the adult Irish language learner. *Educational Research, 47*(2), 191-204. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880500104317

Yamashita, T., Smith, T. J., Sahoo, S., & Cummins, P. A. (2022). Motivation to learn by age, education, and literacy skills among working-age adults in the United States. *Large-scale Assessments in Education, 10*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40536-022-00119-7

Zainuddin, Z., Chu, S. K. W., & Othman, J. (2024). The evaluation of gamification implementation for adult learners: A scale development study based on andragogical principles. *Education and Information Technologies, 29*(14), 18591-18620. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12561-x

Zavodchikov, D. P., Sharov, A. A., Tolstykh, A. A., Kholopova, E. S., & Krivtsov, A. I. (2016). Particular features of interrelation of motivation, values and sense of life's meaning as subjective factors of individualizing trajectory in the system of continuous education. *The International Journal of Environmental and Science Education, 11*(15), 8252-8268.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2025, pp. 321-338

Experiences of stigma among adult learners in second-chance education: A life-history approach

Samuel Raoufi-Kvist
Linköping University, Sweden (samuel.raoufi-kvist@liu.se)

Abstract

This article examines four life-histories from students who recently completed second-chance education at a Swedish folk high school, having previously left upper secondary school without full qualifications – an experience often associated with academic failure. Through their studies, they have now gained eligibility for further education. Their narratives – shaped by different explanations for their earlier difficulties – are analysed using Erving Goffman's concept of stigma. The study highlights the varied ways individuals navigate school failure and departure from dominant educational norms. At the same time, their stories reflect pride in having forged alternative paths, particularly through labour market experiences. Using an educational life-history approach, the article explores how participants relate to their past school failure – retrospectively, in the present, and with regard to their futures. Particular attention is paid to how stigma tied to compulsory school failure influence their educational trajectories and how they position themselves as students.

Keywords: adult education, academic failure, second-chance education, stigma, life-history

Introduction

Academic failure

Academic failure can have significant consequences; education can open doors to career opportunities. Particularly higher education often provides individuals with the means to enjoy socioeconomic advantages in western capitalist societies (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011). The social exclusion that can result from school failure may create lasting ripple

ISSN 2000-7426

http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5973
www.rela.ep.liu.se

effects – a risk factor for social exclusion later in life is precisely having experienced social exclusion at a younger age (Nilsen et al., 2022). Similarly, a lack of educational attainment can create conditions for poverty, which in turn perpetuates the same conditions for subsequent generations, even in a welfare state where equalising measures have been implemented (Brea-Martinez et al., 2023). Overall, researchers have found that a low level of education can be linked to a wide range of outcomes, from an increased likelihood of dying in accidents such as falls in old age (Ahmad Kiadaliri et al., 2018) to a reluctance to participate in cancer screenings (Altová et al., 2024).

Reasons for not completing high school can be ascribed to the individual, parents, schools, or educational policies (Gustafsson et al., 2016). It has been argued that contemporary western societies increasingly shift the responsibility for educational success onto individuals rather than institutions (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013). Within this view, failure is seen as a personal shortcoming rather than a structural issue. Individuals are held accountable for their performance, choices, and ability to navigate the system. Studies from Sweden – the context of this article – suggest that the burden on individuals to uphold high academic expectations and goals, as well as the pressure to make themselves successful, contribute to increased school stress (Högberg, 2024). Those who fail risk being perceived as careless, irresponsible, or incapable. Some students may, early on, discern that school may not offer genuine equal opportunities. In research some go as far as to claim that education has been transformed into a tool to instil acceptance of marginalisation (Sernhede, 2011).

Pertinent to the question at hand might also be the so called 'relevant adults' – the people who surround the young person both within and outside their family. For some graduating from high school may not appear to be a sufficiently attractive option to be worth the effort. This can occur if, in their environment, they observe adults who have pursued extensive education but are nonetheless unable to support themselves (Gustafsson et al., 2016). Examples include stories of non-traditional students who have achieved higher education yet continue to face challenges in becoming employable (Bron & Thunborg, 2020). Presumably, the opposite might also hold true – observing adults who are successful and self-supporting despite not having pursued long education could serve as evidence for the perceived unimportance of attaining higher education. It is possible that early school leaving itself may not be the sole cause of the well-documented greater risk of developing health, social, and financial problems. In a Scandinavian context, however, young people who remain unemployed or outside of education for two years face a significant risk of becoming permanently unemployed and marginalised (Cederberg & Hartsmar, 2013).

Early school leaving, often explained through socio-economic factors (Newcomb et al., 2002) also involves emotional-relational dimensions. Authoritarian teaching and lack of conflict resolution may contribute to alienation and dropout, alongside mental health challenges (Downes, 2018). Peer victimisation is another risk factor linked to non-completion of high school (Frick et al., 2024; Siebecke, 2024), whereas supportive teachers and learning environments have been shown to strengthen academic well-being (Siebecke, 2024). Educational aspirations – shaped by parents or the individual – are associated with achievement and access to future opportunities (Hammarström, 1996). Parental involvement also reduces the likelihood of dropout (Parr & Bonitz, 2015). In the context of adult education, where school leavers often return, inclusive social networks have proven important for persistence; their absence can significantly undermine engagement (Tacchi et al., 2023).

In Sweden the correlation between academic failure and alcohol-related issues, mental health problems, as well as with suicidal tendencies, is becoming increasingly

apparent (Högberg et al., 2024). As of 2023, approximately 20% of students in Swedish high school (upper secondary school) graduate without attaining a complete degree (Skolverket, 2023). This statistic underscores a significant challenge within the Swedish educational system, highlighting issues such as academic underachievement, disengagement, and disparities in educational outcomes. A school system that systematically fails a fifth of its students, risks perpetuating cycles of exclusion, limiting opportunities for social mobility, and diminishing the societal belief in education as a meaningful and attainable goal.

In a society where lifelong learning is the norm, the ability to learn becomes a defining trait of the successful and sensible individual (Andersson & Bergstedt, 1996; World Economic Forum, 2018). Those who struggle in school, particularly those who fail to obtain a complete secondary education, may therefore be seen as deficient – deviating from the expected trajectory. And deviation, in turn, carries stigma (Goffman, 1963/1986). While the reasons for not completing upper secondary education vary, what unites those who leave without full qualifications is, in some sense, the experience of educational failure. However, their responses to this failure differ. Some disengage from formal education altogether, entering or making attempts to enter the labour market where learning takes place in other ways. Others, at some point, return to education through what is commonly referred to as 'second-chance education', which is the context of this study.

The structure of such institutions varies across national contexts. In Sweden, two primary pathways for second-chance education stand out: a) municipal adult education (MAE) and b) folk high schools. This article focuses on young adults who return to education through folk high schools in pursuit of qualifications for higher education. Using an educational life-history approach it examines how they relate to their past educational failure and how they perceive themselves as students – retrospectively, in the present, and looking ahead. In particular, it explores the stigma they may experience as a result of having failed within the compulsory school system.

The folk high school

Across the Nordic countries, folk high schools provide voluntary, grade- and tuition-free education to any adult learner. In Sweden alone, there are more than 150 publicly funded folk high schools, which offer both 'second-chance' education, comparable to upper-secondary qualification, and specialised courses ranging from introductory levels to prestigious, advanced programmes (Hallqvist et al., 2020).

In Sweden, folk high schools often serve as a second chance for those who have struggled with or rejected traditional education. Participants may include individuals who view education as enforcement rather than opportunity (Nylander et al., 2020). The folk high school is oftentimes described as an adaptable institution, in that it is and has been ready to cater to societal demands (Andersén, 2011). The folk high school has been described as the 'super nanny' of the Swedish educational system, in that it has a compensatory role (Nylander et al., 2020). Yet being rooted in *Bildung*-ideals it is not always evident that the folk high school should work solely as a second-chance school or as a back-up plan for the people that struggle in ordinary school. It has been argued that tensions exist between viewing the folk high school as a stepping stone to further studies and as a place offering education for life in its own right (Berndtsson, 2000).

The folk high school can also be seen in the light of *lifelong learning* in that it is not just aiming to correct or supplement degrees – it is also a springboard for further education and for attaining a sustainable relationship to education and learning. It can be said to

have motivational purposes, and it has been noted that there has been a shift from empowering objectives towards a focus on those not succeeding in comprehensive education (Bernhard & Andersson, 2017).

In addition, the folk high school has increasingly been catering to people with disabilities in recent years, with around 30-35% of its second-chance program now consisting of individuals with disabilities (Nylander et al., 2020). Folk high schools have been shown to support participants with neuropsychiatric disabilities and mental health issues (Hugo et al., 2019; Hugo & Hedegaard, 2022). They may also function in an institutionalising way, offering an environment and accommodations that make it difficult for some students to transition elsewhere (Hugo et al., 2019), and have been portrayed as both adaptable and compensatory (Andersén, 2011). Consequently, the folk high school houses a multitude of mentalities towards learning, within their group of students, yet; the reasons for studying on the second chance program at a folk high school are primarily to get one's qualifications in order.

Conceptual framework: Goffman – stigma

To understand how people carrying academic failures present themselves, this article draws on Goffman's (1963/1986) concept of stigma – seen as a process where traits deemed undesirable, such as skin colour, impairments, or queer identities, lead to exclusion (Shulman, 2017; Dillon, 2020). The focus herein is on young adults who have completed second-chance education at a Swedish folk high school, and how they relate to learning, studenthood, and education. As noted by Field et al. (2012):

> [t]he experience of studenthood can pose basic questions of who a person is, who they have been, and who they wish to become. This in turn may provoke intense anxiety about one's ability to cope with change, or about whether a person is good enough in the eyes of significant people, whether fellow students or lectures; or conversely, it may provoke excessive (and often ill-founded) confidence about these things. (Field et al., 2012, p. 82)

In the case of students on the second-chance course of the folk high school many of them have struggled in compulsory school and high school. Their stories incorporate a from-the-outside perspective, describing themselves as has having failed or being 'fuckups', harbouring ideas about what others as well as society think of them. Their stories reflect an awareness of how they are perceived by others. As Andersén (2011) points out, folk high school students may be viewed as 'second-class students,' marked by earlier failure.

According to Goffman (1963/1986), biography takes shape in interaction with others. Our past actions influence what is expected of us, and the present is often filtered through the past – making certain labels hard to shake:

> [p]ersonal identity, then, has to do with the assumption that the individual can be differentiated from all others and that around this means of differentiation a single continuous record of social facts can be attached, entangled, like candy floss, becoming then the sticky substance to which still other biographical facts can be attached. (Goffman, 1963/1986, p. 57)

The implications for someone having 'failed in school' may, in this explanatory model, be that stigma is attached to the person having failed school – an internalisation process may have them doubt their capabilities for studying. As Goffman (1963/1986) states: 'biography attached to documented identity can place clear limitations on the way in which an individual can elect to present himself […]' (p. 61).

Goffman argues that biography is often thought of as coherent – that individuals carry with them one single biography (Goffman, 1963/1986). To reinvent oneself, to forge new paths, can therefore be seen as disruptive or even provocative acts. To come across as fragmented is seen as suspicious. Connected to this mode of being is a certain hesitation and doubt – in short, an ambivalent stance toward existence and the choices one must make within it. Zygmunt Bauman, in a discussion revolving around stigma, writes that '[a]t best, uncertainty is confusing and felt as discomforting. At worst, it carries a sense of danger' (Bauman, 1991, p. 56). Ambivalence, then, can be understood as something that unsettles – in hesitation, there is a latent potential to deviate, to move outside expected frames of action.

The one who hesitates may be perceived as unpredictable – someone who does not immediately conform to established rhythms and expectations. In an economic sense, hesitation entails a temporal disruption, as it introduces delays in decision-making and action, which, in systems structured around efficiency and productivity, may be perceived as costly. Ergo: the failed students' stigma may spring from perceptions of being a societal burden – a cost.

In the life stories presented here, stigma helps illuminate life choices. As Goffman describes, stigma can harm individuals, but it also functions as a social force that motivates action. It regulates behaviour by making the stigmatised position uncomfortable, prompting attempts to escape it. Yet stigma also constrains action, especially among those lacking resources or recognition, and may instead lead to frustration, which can turn into violence – against society, oneself, or both (Sernhede, 2011).

While internalising stereotypes can serve as a coping strategy, stigma may also become a source of pride, prompting individuals to reject negative treatment (Shulman, 2017). Stigmatisation serves as a mechanism of social control: it marginalises those who deviate from norms, while also offering conditional reintegration to those who conform. Both exclusion and the possibility of redemption work to reinforce dominant expectations (Shulman, 2017).

Stigma has been used in academic contexts to illustrate the consequences for individuals positioned outside normative frameworks (Costa et al., 2020; McWilliams, 2017). It operates on both macro and micro levels – through institutional structures, societal discourses, peer pressure, parental expectations, and personal internalisation. The concept has been applied in studies on minority students navigating dominant educational norms (Turgut & Çelik, 2022), and on peer regulation in digital spaces (Vanherle et al., 2023). Related dynamics are also seen in research on students in state care, where internalised school failure contributes to feelings of educational unfitness (Hugo, 2013). Within folk high schools, stigma has been examined in relation to supportive pedagogical environments that may foster recovery and self-worth (Hedegaard & Hugo, 2022). Scholars have also argued for addressing stigma explicitly within educational pedagogy to confront discrimination (Sernhede, 2011)

Furthermore, stigma can be tied to a prevailing paradigm centered on self-fulfillment – those who fail to realise their potential are pathologised. Within the discourse on the widespread mental health crisis among young people, scholars have linked this phenomenon to the shifting burden of responsibility from society to the individual (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013).

In relation to this study, pathologisation can be seen as either a precursor to or closely intertwined with stigmatisation. In the past, when access to higher education was reserved for those deemed suitable, the responsibility largely rested with institutions that made these determinations. Under today's neoliberal paradigm, however, the responsibility

increasingly falls on the individual. If failure occurs, it is framed as a result of personal missteps – wrong choices, poor conduct, or a failure to handle the responsibility that society has entrusted to them (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013; Han, 2017). Consequently: the individual must bear the consequences, regardless of whether their struggles could have been avoided or were shaped by factors such as reading and writing difficulties, dyslexia, attention disorders, socioeconomic hardships, or relational challenges, etc.

Method

This study employs a biographical approach drawing on research conducted within the field of education and in particular adult education. Biographical methods in educational research offer an approach to understanding individuals' educational experiences within broader social contexts (Roberts, 2002; Bainbridge et al., 2021; Formenti & West, 2021). This tradition stresses the importance of capturing the complexities of individuals' life trajectories, including their personal narratives, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic circumstances, to illuminate the complex nature of learning and development (Merrill & West, 2009). Life narratives are shaped by broader cultural and historical contexts, biographies reflect the values of the time in which they are told (Roberts, 2002; West et al., 2007). Educational engagement can be understood as a dialectical process shaped by the tension between conformity and deviation. Departing from normative paths may result in stigma (Goffman, 1963/1986).

Although participants were asked to recount their educational journeys from preschool to adult education, they were free to move back and forth in memory and choose which parts to emphasise. It was stressed that their stories – however told – were valuable. As Atkinson (2007) puts it:

> The point of the life story interview is to give the person the opportunity to tell his or her story, the way he or she chooses to tell it, so we can learn from their voice, their words, and their subjective meaning of their experience of life. (Atkinson, 2007, p. 233)

Since the interview prompts reflection, biographical narratives are often, as Evans (2013) notes, attempts at coherence and evolving accounts of motivation.

It is important to be aware of the unusual situation a life history interview may pose and how interviewees might adjust their story to resonate with the interviewer (Riessman, 1993; Roberts, 2002). As the interviews were processed and written out by the researcher it is correspondingly important to assert that the assembling of a story is part of the story. In this study four educational life history interviews were performed with four former students at the folk high school of which all four had attained qualification to higher education through their studies at the folk high school. The interviews with additional follow-ups took place between autumn 2023 and spring 2024. The follow-up process involved participants meeting in person with me to review the drafts of their stories. During these sessions, they had the opportunity to make adjustments, remove misunderstood parts, add or correct details. Additionally, I contacted participants by phone or email if further information was needed after the in-person meetings.

The data was provided by two men and two women between the ages of 20 and 25, interviews spanning 56-138 minutes. Although the initial interviews were conducted in an open-ended manner, there was also an effort to establish a narrative structure – a sequence of events that could serve as a foundation for the follow-up dialogue. As the process unfolded, it became evident that some participants spoke freely and expansively, while others expressed themselves more succinctly.

This raised a methodological question: are only highly talkative individuals suitable for biographical research? I decided against such an exclusion criterion, as it risks rendering stories invisible. Moreover, it could exclude those who may not feel entitled to speak – a group that, theoretically, might include individuals who are more cautious in their wording, face certain language challenges, or simply lack the inclination to elaborate on certain aspects of their lives. Accordingly, each interviewee had to be met on their own terms, and each interview thus generated different types of follow-up work. The interviews were designed to explore participants' educational journeys, examining their motivations and challenges.

Interpretation of collected data

Given that four life stories were to be analysed within the scope of an article, it became logical to take a cross-sectional approach, focusing on what the participants chose to highlight – where they placed emphasis and which parts of their lives they deemed important to narrate and explain. This consideration guided the process of identifying the categories used to structure and analyse their stories.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the life history interviews, focusing on participants' experiences at the folk high school as well as their broader educational trajectories. The process involved immersion in the biographical material – relistening, rereading, and involving other researchers – to identify central ideas (Merrill & West, 2009). This approach 'involves a rigorous attention to generate patterns' (Roberts, 2002), and decisions about what to include were guided by the research aims (Merrill & West, 2009). Recurring themes and significant moments were identified across participants' narratives, spanning their earlier schooling and later engagement in second-chance education.

In analysing the material, it became clear that participants' stories often carried elements of defence – efforts to explain or justify their perceived deviation from a conventional path. Much of their narration aimed to make sense of experiences otherwise seen as failure or misconduct. This pattern pointed to the role of stigma, which became the guiding lens for analysis, focusing on continuity and discontinuity in their educational trajectories and how past experiences shaped perceptions, motivations, and challenges.

The narratives were often front-loaded, with more detailed accounts of recent events. While early and middle school experiences were less elaborated, they remained present as a latent backdrop. Although not directly asked why they had not completed high school, all participants addressed this, often explaining how their school years had gone astray.

Alongside justification, their stories expressed pride – often tied to work gained by stepping away from school. The folk high school emerged as a space for renegotiation, where fixed identities could be reconsidered and futures reflected upon. In the light of the aforementioned, I developed three themes from the collected interviews*: i) Stigmatisation from having failed school, ii) Work experience as a time for gaining perspective,* and *iii) The folk high school – an environment for revaluing.*

The analysis does not aim to claim authority over participants' narratives but offers possible interpretations. By exploring patterns and connections, it seeks to suggest insights that align with, rather than override, the meanings expressed by the participants. Outtakes from the life stories serve as representative examples. Although told partly non-chronologically, excerpts are presented in chronological order with the above-mentioned overarching categories as anchor points, for clarity.

Results

Stigmatisation from having failed school

To have failed in completing high school was for the respondents a cause for self-reproach. Although all of them had their own unique story and explanation for what prevented them from completing high school they had all to various degrees internalised a sense of downfall. Thomas (all names are pseudonyms) expressed having felt abnormal from an early age: 'I've felt all my life that there's something wrong with me. I can't do it. I can't handle this. Sitting still for as long as everyone else, how the hell can you do that? It's unbelievably dull.'

Thomas' frustration echoes findings that suggest disengagement is not merely about individual shortcomings but also about the rigid structures of schooling that fail to accommodate diverse needs and ways of learning. Thomas said that he felt 'like something crooked in something straight' and although he suspected that he was 'wrong' he has come to understand his attempts to adjust as futile, even expressing regret over having tried to fit in:

> So I don't understand why I cared about it so damn much, really. There's no point in struggling at that age, struggle when you become an adult instead. This is just crap, it should be fun here, that's what I'd say. And that's what I'll teach my children, I mean it's better if you have fun in high school because that's when you can have fun, because it sure as hell won't be fun later.

There is a duality in Thomas's story – on one hand, he initially made efforts to fit in and conform to expectations, but upon realising the personal stakes, he began to scrutinise the game instead of the player. Positioning himself as someone who struggled and failed he addresses not the failure but the struggle, turning the experience on its head. Using Goffman (1963/1986), it can be interpreted as a form of stigma-management. Goffman exemplifies with a girl with only one leg who, when confronted with sympathetic comments about having lost her leg, uses similar inverting techniques as she responds with irony: 'How careless of me!' (Goffman, 1963/1986, p. 136). Consequently, Thomas' account can be read as a variation on Aesop's 'The Fox and the Grapes' – dismissing what he cannot reach – yet unlike the fable's fox, Thomas offers a sharp critique of what he opted out of:

> A 100 years ago, people sat at school desks and listened to lectures. Back then, they rode horse-drawn carriages to school; now, you can practically take a helicopter to school if you have enough money, but you're still sitting at the same school desk with the same educational materials, you know?

Although he acknowledged that he did not fit the mould of traditional educational settings, calling himself a 'fuck-up', he has shifted his criticism from himself to school.

Another respondent employed similar modes of handling himself. Emil was from an early age not particularly interested in acquiring high grades. When choosing high school, he found it difficult: 'Should a fifteen-year-old boy, who has no idea who he is, be expected to decide who he wants to be the next day?' Emil continues his story, acting out the emotional turmoil he felt back then:

> It was like getting drafted into the military when that letter arrived. Do I even like this? My whole worldview was shaken. I don't even like hockey – do I want to work with kids? What is this? Who am I?

He decides to go for a Childcare and Recreation-program. Slowly but surely, he came to the realisation that it was not for him: 'I don't want to listen to all these courses about children. So I left. And that had never happened before.'. Not finishing high school, Emil explains, was seen as strange by those around him. Emil describes it as 'shaky' – not knowing why you are attending high school while it is viewed as so important and as the norm. Not completing high school was seen as 'strange' – people who did not finish high school were considered strange.

Emil's account aligns with Goffman's (1963/1986) stigma concept; deviating from the normative path of completing high school results in a socially discrediting mark, shaping how others perceive and interact with him. It also highlights how the inability to make clear and decisive choices creates unease and positions one outside normative behaviour – suggesting that hesitation itself can be stigmatising.

In due course, Emil came to the conclusion that 'life wasn't over just because you made the wrong choice, which was incredibly comforting to realise.' Emil describes that when he was done, life still lay ahead of him. Life would go on, and he could start working. Having not completed school became an itch for Emil, eventually propelling him to apply for second-chance education at a folk high school. Taking his qualifications (at the folk high school), and doing it relatively easily, was a way for Emil to prove to others that he could do it. Emil describes that by completing the qualifications, he said, quote: 'fuck you' to those who had looked down on him for not having completed high school: 'People kept asking if I wasn't going to finish high school, and it followed me until I finally decided, 'Just get the damn diploma and be done with it. Leave me alone.' In Emil's world, the stigma seems to lie in having closed a door (to higher education) rather than not having walked through it. Being eligible for higher education appears more important than actually using that eligibility – at least at the stage Emil is in.

Having difficulty engaging in studies for various reasons and falling behind became a stigma in itself. Already 'standing out' led one respondent, Susanna, who had struggled with mental health from an early age, to resist when the school initiated an ADHD assessment: 'I didn't want another reason for people to bully me,' she explained, indicating how the fear of further stigmatisation influenced her decisions.

For another respondent, Hiwa, dyslexia became a concerning factor. In this case it was a family member, namely Hiwa's mother, who objected to having her diagnosed:

> She just thought I was lazy. It's kind of a thing in Somali culture that a child doesn't have diagnoses. She didn't want me to get my diagnosis, but I had a very good Swedish teacher who supported me and said that it would be easier for me if I got my diagnosis. The teacher noticed that reading and writing were difficult and did some tests. But my mom didn't want us to do further tests, but my teacher did them anyway, and after that, she talked to my mom about how it would be easier for me if I got the diagnosis.

Returning to Susanna, she explains that she felt ashamed and inadequate for not completing high school, feeling like 'society's black sheep'. It was especially embarrassing to have to tell her family.

> You felt a bit ashamed. You felt bad, like you saw how everyone else your age, well, they finished high school, they went to prom, they went on student trips, and there was so much you felt like you missed because you were unwell and didn't stay in school. You felt so bad

> in comparison to everyone else, because they were somewhere I could never really catch up to.

When she dropped out, she gave a small farewell speech to her high school class – a speech she remembers was about how some people take highways while others have to find their own paths, and that she was now going to take one of those paths. That was easier said than done, as Susanna articulates: 'After I dropped out, I felt so bad that in my head, it was like I was locked in my room with the blinds down for several months.'

Not completing high school left many with a sense of failure. Thomas felt he never belonged and later blamed the system. Emil, overwhelmed by early expectations, returned to education to silence doubt, not chase ambition. Susanna avoided an ADHD diagnosis to escape stigma and withdrew after dropping out. Hiwa's dyslexia was ignored at home, and support came through one teacher – showing how help often depends on individuals rather than systems.

Work experience as a time for gaining perspective

All four respondents struggled in school, and several mentioned that their waning interest in education was influenced by exposure to the possibility of work. The work experience they all eventually gained affected them in different ways – starting to work felt liberating and rewarding, giving them a sense of capability. However, their work experiences also played a role in motivating them to explore other sectors of work and eventually return to education.

Emil started working during the time he was skipping school – a setup he describes as fairly common. He felt a bit like a 'juvenile delinquent', and his parents questioned his skipping. After a while, however, they realised that (Emil enacts his parents): 'he's just completely uninterested in this [school].' He explains that, in the end, his parents did not have much say in the matter. But his father did tell him that if he was going to skip school, he should at least do something productive – do not skip just for the sake of rebellion, was the advice. Emil expresses that if that was the case, he might as well start to earn some money. Emil's narrative puts forth a view on the labour market as an accessible place – almost a smorgasbord of possibilities – in stark contrast to how people struggling with school are usually portrayed, especially in research, as shown in this article's opening section.

He did not really think about the long-term consequences of skipping school. He focused on how great it would be when those three years of high school were over, so he would never have to study again. To Emil, starting work felt like beginning adulthood a little earlier. 'We're going to work for the rest of our lives anyway, so why not start now?', he says. He looked forward to trying out different jobs.

Shortly after high school, Emil moved to Stockholm – he had found love there and also got a job, which allowed him to spend more time on his music hobby. Once again, he could devote himself to music. Emil rhetorically asks himself, 'Emil, do you want to learn more? No, I want to do something on my own. I'll pack up and see what life is like.' In Stockholm, he tried various jobs, including working as a substitute teacher at a preschool. Some of the jobs, like stocking candy in candy stores, were looked down upon by others, as if it was a 'pretend job.' 'It didn't matter if I was happy with the job as long as society, or whatever you want to call it, didn't see it as something important.' On being a substitute teacher Emil says: 'Many people say being a substitute isn't a real job. So, if it wasn't a job, what was I doing there for eight hours a day? In that case, I had to find something else.'

Stocking candy, he actually found quite nice. He got to see Stockholm and meet interesting people. But explaining the job to others often led to raised eyebrows.

Another respondent, Hiwa, were also keen on making her way into the job market. When she skipped school in high school, she worked instead. 'It wasn't worth being in school, so I worked instead.' She worked in home care, and if anyone asked why she was not in school, she had ready answers. 'I just said, no, we have independent study today… so I got away with it.' It felt good for Hiwa to start earning her own money.

Thomas in turn worked in various jobs, ranging from car dealerships to the restaurant industry and healthcare centers. The positions he held were both permanent and temporary contracts, and Thomas says that it has always been easy for him to find and get a job. Even during high school, Thomas had started working. The connections he made back then helped him in his professional life even after finishing high school. He says he had '2-3 jobs to juggle, that I was trying to manage.' It felt meaningful and rewarding: 'You're doing something, plus you're getting something in return.' By going his own way Thomas found fulfilment on different levels: 'For me, it has always been a source of pride to stay true to myself.'

Thomas says that it is difficult to know what you truly want, especially when you are young or a young adult. That's why he is glad he did not make life decisions too early but instead gave himself time to get to know himself. "Because, after all, it's your life we're talking about – I mean, you can't just waste it.'

Although Thomas enjoyed his job as a car tester, which was his last job before starting his studies at the folk high school, he says he has always thought about doing something more creative. Thomas explains that his approach to life choices comes largely from his upbringing. He has learned not to make decisions based on external expectations but rather that it is important to decide for oneself. Thomas explains that his decision to apply to a folk high school to complete his grades was largely due to a kind of stress about time passing. He was approaching the age of 25 and did not want to completely close the door on further studies.

Another respondent, Susanna, began looking for work after having dropped out of high school. Susanna's grandmother was getting older, so Susanna and her mother moved closer to her – into a house in the countryside. Susanna signed up for a substitute teaching pool. After a few months, she got a job at a preschool. 'I grew there, you know, when I was working, because I felt like I was doing something,' she recalls.

When COVID-19 hit, Susanna had a job, which she describes as a relief. Many people were laid off when the pandemic struck, and having a job and earning her own money gave her a sense of security. Susanna worked at various preschools in the area. Eventually, she became more permanent at one preschool and stayed there for 2.5-3 years. 'I grew there because when you work with responsibility, you start to feel, OK, I actually can do these things.' She describes working with small children as affirmative: 'A hug, smiles, and waves when you arrive.'

The accounts imply that stigma is contextual. Within the educational system – a setting that all children, adolescents, and young adults inevitably find themselves in – there is, in essence, one primary recognised role: to study and to earn the credentials necessary to progress to the next stage of education. However, upon stepping outside of this system, the interviewees encounter different contexts governed by other value systems. In some settings, performing well without formal education may, in fact, be a source of recognition. Taken to its extreme, education itself could even be perceived as a hindrance to engaging with 'real life.' Moreover, in these contexts, skills other than academic achievement may be valued more highly.

Yet, after a few years in the labour market the interviewees express gaining an eagerness to finish their studies. Susanna had told herself she would take a gap year, but it had now turned into far more than that. Hiwa too expresses similar feelings of urgency: 'With my poor motivation in school, it's been kind of... hard. I've felt the pressure. After high school, I thought, damn, now I have to get it together, now I have to get an education.'

All four interviewees describe relatively smooth entries into the labour market, often transitioning gradually as they left school to start working. Their experiences challenge dominant narratives and research that link academic failure directly to unemployment and poverty. As their stories show, work offered not only financial steadiness but also a sense of belonging and a renewed self-esteem after their stumbling journey through the education system.

Although in employment and relatively satisfied, Susanna, Thomas, and Hiwa talk of stress as a factor for applying to folk high school. For Emil it is more a question of being fed up with people looking down upon him and once he completed his folk high school studies he went back to work.

The folk high school – an environment for revaluing

We have already discussed how the narratives conveyed a critique of traditional educational settings. For many, rigidity posed a problem – whether due to diagnoses, mental health issues, anti-authoritarian attitudes, or an unwillingness to follow informal codes, such as dress or conversational norms, the interviewees struggled to meet the demands that traditional schooling presented.

When turning to the folk high school to acquire qualifications that had not been obtained in the past, students did so in the hope of finding a different type of learning environment. It is unclear to what extent the respondents were familiar with the pedagogy of the folk high school and how it would differ from traditional education. Thomas jokingly, yet somewhat seriously, says that he thinks he googled something like 'how the hell do you do it, how do I get my grades?'

Before applying for a folk high school Thomas tried municipal adult education (MAE) of which he said: 'it doesn't work for me. Meeting once a week for a lesson, that doesn't work. It's like school is something abstract. It doesn't really exist.'

Susanna in turn had relatives that had attended folk high schools. She looked up some folk high schools online and sent an email to one of the schools. She was invited for a visit over a cup of coffee.

> No one knew about it either, because I felt like, I don't want any pressure that I'm going there and have to follow through with something. I had only told my mom that I was going into town for something... so no one knew about this meeting except me. I went there, we talked a bit, and I told them a little about my school background and about who I am as a person.

The person from the folk high school encouraged Susanna to apply. 'And then he said, "I think you should apply," and he also added, "I'm not really supposed to say this, but I think if you apply, you'll definitely get in."'

In a sense, the initial cup of coffee with its accompanying 'secret' remarks becomes a way of initiating Susanna into the school. The interaction can be seen as an inversion of a typical admissions interview – both the coffee and the comments suggest a desire to immediately shift the interaction toward social aspects, setting aside the academic and

qualification-oriented dimensions of learning and schooling, or at least, for the time being, placing them in the background.

The relationship between student and teacher is mentioned in all the stories. It is described as relaxed, with learning taking place on more equal terms – where everyone is treated as an adult. Thomas highlights that some of his teachers were more or less 'of the same age' as the students, adding that 'there isn't the same authority. It's more like a friend teaching you things, or more like a colleague. And then you might listen a little more carefully.' A connection was established further by common interests:

> And sometimes, you even share the same interests as some teachers, you know? Like, there's this teacher who collects vinyl records, just like I do, and it just makes everything easier, you know? Everything he says just feels closer to me now.

For Thomas, having a personal relationship with the teachers enabled him to engage and pay attention in class. In a place where having messed up in the past was the norm, a sense of kinship and common ground developed among the students through their shared experiences with traditional school. Thomas again: 'You have something in common with everyone in that, well, obviously we've all fucked up when we were kids.'

For some, who choose to live in the housing provided by the school – an option offered by many folk high schools – the lines between what is formal and informal learning blurred. One moment you are in the classroom, and the next, you are in the dormitory, making it harder to distinguish between formal learning spaces and informal, relaxed environments. Hiwa, for instance, lived at the school when studying there: 'We baked and did a lot of fun things!'

One way in which the permissive folk high school-environment might manifest itself is also in how people (both teachers and students) dress. About the other students Emil says:

> I have never seen such an odd collection of people as I have here. If you think you've seen everything or met all kinds of people, you haven't until you come here. You think you're unique, and then someone shows up with cat ears.

Although the person wearing cat ears may stand out in their outfit, they simultaneously push the boundaries of the surrounding environment, shifting the threshold of eccentricity. What might be considered odd outside the school becomes unremarkable within it. Emil's account suggests that the folk high school milieu may reshape perceptions of what stands out. The cat ears serve as a playful subversion of norms, exposing the arbitrariness of conventions – making explicit that normativity is contextual. Goffman puts forth that 'a necessary condition for social life is the sharing of a single set of normative expectations' (Goffman, 1963/1986, p. 127). Juxtaposed with Emil's narrative, we might even consider that oddness itself has acquired a normative symbolic value.

The same passage, in a Goffmanesque (1963/1986) analysis, can simultaneously function as a consolidation practice, reinforcing the folk high school and its participants as strange, positioned on the outside, and perpetually marginal. In this way, the playful mockery of conventions does not merely expose their arbitrariness but also highlights the uncertain position of those who exist outside dominant expectations. The playact is allowed only on stage.

An aspect to consider is whether the environment itself prepares individuals for other settings. When Thomas reflects on how he absorbs teaching, he returns to high school

and what did not work for him there, drawing parallels to university studies, which he imagines are similar to high school studies:

> And I'm just like, it doesn't work for me, and that's probably why I've been kind of scared to apply to university. If I sit in a lecture hall like that, I'll just… it'll be hard to focus for that long. I just don't think I can sit at home and study for four hours for an exam. I have a hard time imagining myself doing that.

In an extended reasoning, one can question whether this type of space becomes a space to withdraw into rather than a space for rehearsals. Hiwa navigates similar waters but is more straightforward in her analysis. She says that the folk high school's second-chance course did not really prepare her for university studies.

> At university, there's a lot of self-study. At folk high school, it's more about finishing things on site, and then you're done, while at university, it's more about organising it yourself. If you have an exam in about a month, it's your own responsibility to attend the lectures and prepare for the exam. At folk high school, we didn't have exams; everything is done on-site, and then it's finished.

She continues and explains that high school was more preparatory for university:

> Because there, it's more like you have an assignment to complete by the following week, and it's your job to make sure it's done. Then, when you turn it in, you get feedback, or you've succeeded or not, and you get a grade – same as in university. Pass or fail.

Susanna's story expresses comparable sentiments, but here one senses that the underlying question is whether success at a folk high school is truly a significant achievement.

> I feel like I've failed at everything, and that I keep on failing. It's hard because even though I felt like graduating from [the folk high school] was an achievement, I still feel like I haven't succeeded.

Implicitly Susanna raises the question of whether or not the learning that takes place at the folk high school is considered genuinely valid learning.

Discussion

The analysis of the participants' narratives illustrates how educational experiences, societal structures, and personal choices intertwine to shape their trajectories. Previous research emphasises the far-reaching consequences of school failure, including risks of social exclusion and poverty (Cederberg & Hartsmar, 2013; Nilsen et al., 2022).

The stories herein cannot so easily be integrated into such broad views. Although it is noticeable that low-skilled jobs can bring stigma – Emil's story openly addresses this – he expresses no desire, at least for now, to pursue higher education to land a white-collar job. Thomas and Susanna, in turn, seem hesitant to pursue higher education, stemming not so much from unwillingness as from an uncertainty regarding whether their newly won qualifications have proven them ready for higher education – indicating that stigma lingers. This can be said to shed light on the complexities regarding academic failure and the need for recognising individual stories, having them penetrate generalisations.

Work experience, a significant component in the participants' stories, acted as both an enabler and a limitation. Participants described feeling empowered by earning their own income and gaining independence, yet their narratives also highlighted the limitations of low-skilled jobs, which often led to a renewed desire for further education. This duality aligns with research suggesting that perceptions of labour market outcomes can both motivate and constrain educational decision-making (Gustafsson et al., 2016). These perceptions influence how individuals weigh the value of further education against immediate opportunities in the labour market.

One way to interpret participants' narratives is as discourses of agency. Their stories suggest an implicit expectation that individuals bear personal responsibility for their failures, potentially reframing academic failure as intentional – something done 'knowingly'. Even resistance or deliberate rejection can be forms of agency, and given the cultural value placed on not being passive or victimised (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013), agency might partially redeem failure. You have failed, yes, but at least you have agency.

Conversely, the truly stigmatised position emerges from passivity – being 'a seed in the wind', lacking choice or decisiveness. Susanna's narrative exemplifies this clearly, as her greatest distress stems not from dropping out itself but from the subsequent passive phase of inactivity.

Yet agency can also appear as intentional divergence from normative expectations. Second-chance education is typically understood as a pathway to higher education. Particularly Emil's case complicates this view: he earns qualifications only to return deliberately to his previous type of work, 'wasting' education as a conscious and unrepentant choice rather than through passivity. This kind of agency positions students as empowered, able to act against institutional expectations. While Emil's stance might not be widely shared, it highlights how educational systems, framed as marketplaces offering commodities (Page, 1998; Brancaleone & O'Brien, 2011), inherently allow individuals the freedom to refuse or repurpose their 'purchases.'

In addition, keeping people – particularly those at risk of long-term unemployment due to past academic struggles – in school longer is helped by stigmatising academic failure. Education in this train of thought helps managing unemployment. Students are taught to stay busy, to stay active in so as idleness does not become a learnt way of living. This may funnel individuals toward more schooling when they might prefer to try to find a job (Andersson & Bergstedt, 1996). Society pushes ideals of self-fulfilment and independence but paradoxically stigmatises people, like Emil, who truly pursue such ideals.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Cecilia Bjursell and Robert Aman for their guidance in my writing. I am also grateful to Baharan Raoufi-Kvist and Martin Hugo for reading numerous drafts, and to Marianne Kvist for her support with linguistic considerations.

References

Ahmad Kiadaliri, A., Turkiewicz, A., & Englund, M. (2018). Educational inequalities in falls mortality among older adults: Population-based multiple cause of death data from Sweden. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 72*, 68-70. DOI: 10.1136/jech-2017-209616

Altová, A., Kulhánová, I., Reisser, K, Netrdová, P., Brož, J., Eikemo, T. A., Balaj, M., & Lustigová, M. (2024). Educational inequalities in cervical cancer screening participation in 24 European countries. *Public Health, 233*, 1-7. DOI: 10.1016/j.puhe.2024.04.036

Andersén, A. (2011). *Ett särskilt perspektiv på högre studier?: Folkhögskoledeltagares sociala representationer om högskola och universitet* [A particular perspective on higher education?: Folk high school participants' social representations of university] [Doctoral dissertation, Jönköping University, School of Education and Communication]. Digital Scientific Archive. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hj:diva-15067

Andersson, P., & Bergstedt, B. (1996). Kunskapens makt: Om Foucault, förnuftskritik och självomsorg [The power of knowledge: On Foucault, criticism of reason, and self-care]. In P.-E. Ellström, B. Gustavsson, & S. Larsson (Eds.), *Livslångt lärande* (pp. 98-120). Studentlitteratur.

Atkinson, R. (2007). The life story interview as a bridge in narrative inquiry. In D. Jean Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 224-245). Sage Publications.

Bainbridge, A., Formenti, L., & West, L. (2021). Introduction Towards an Ecological Perspective on Learning and the Stories People Tell. In A. Bainbridge, L. Formenti, & L. West (Eds.), *Discourses, Dialogue and Diversity in Biographical Research: An Ecology of Life and Learning* (pp. 1-19). Brill.

Bauman, Z. (1991). *Modernity and ambivalence*. Polity press.

Berndtsson, R. (2000). *Om folkhögskolans dynamik: Möten mellan olika bildningsprojekt* [About the dynamics in the folk high school: The meeting between different projects of bildung in the folk high school] [Doctoral dissertation, Linköping University]. Digital Scientific Archive. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-143161

Bernhard, D., & Andersson, P. (2017). Swedish Folk High Schools and Inclusive Education. *Nordic Studies in Education, 37*(2), 87-101. DOI: 10.18261/issn.1891-5949-2017-02-03

Brancaleone, D., & O'Brien, S. (2011). Educational commodification and the (economic) sign value of learning outcomes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *32*(4), 501-519. DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2011.578435

Brea-Martinez, G., Dribe, M., & Stanfors, M (2023). The price of poverty: The association between childhood poverty and adult income and education in Sweden, 1947-2015. *Economic History Review*, *76*(4), 1281-1304. DOI: 10.1111/ehr.13244

Bron, A., & Thunborg, C. (2020). Struggles in Becoming Employable: Non-Traditional Student Narratives of the Transition from Higher Education to Working Life in Sweden. *Studia Paedagogica, 25*(4), 161-182. DOI: 10.5817/SP2020-4-8

Cederberg, M., & Hartsmar, N. (2013). Some Aspects of Early School Leaving in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. *European Journal of Education*, *48*(3), 378-389. DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12036

Costa, C., Taylor, Y., Goodfellow, C., & Ecochard, S. (2020). Student estrangement in higher education: identity formation and the struggle against stigma. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *41*(5), 685-700. DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2020.1770575

Dillon, M. (2020). *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, concepts, and their applicability to the twenty-first century* (3rd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Downes, P. (2018). The Neglected Shadow: European perspectives on emotional supports for early school leaving prevention. *International Journal of Emotional Education, Special Issue: 10th Anniversary Edition of the International Journal of Emotional Education, 10*(2), 122-130. http://files.eric.ed.gov.e.bibl.liu.se/fulltext/EJ1198066.pdf

Evans, R. (2013). Emotions close up – the interview, learning biographies and the language of emotion. *Plumilla Educativa*, *11*(1), 11-26. https://doi.org/10.30554/plumillaedu.11.370.2013

Fejes, A., & Dahlstedt, M. (2013). *The Confessing Society: Foucault, Confession and Practices of Lifelong Learning*. Routledge.

Field, J., Merrill, B., & West, L. (2012). Life history approaches to access and retention of nontraditional students in higher education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *3*(1), 77-89. DOI: 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela0062

Formenti, L., & West, L. (2021). When Lake Erie Is Polluted, We Are Too. In A. Bainbridge, L. Formenti, & L. West (Eds.), *Discourses, Dialogue and Diversity in Biographical Research: An Ecology of Life and Learning* (pp. 23-38). Brill.

Frick, M. A., Isaksson, J., Vadlin, S., & Olofsdotter, S. (2024). Direct and Indirect Effects of Adolescent Peer Victimization and Mental Health on Academic Achievement in Early Adulthood: A 6-Year Longitudinal Cohort Study. *Youth & Society*, *56*(3), 579-596. DOI: 10.1177/0044118X231185364

Goffman, E. (1963/1986). *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon & Schuster.

Gustafsson, B., Katz, K., & Österberg, T. (2016). Why Do Some Young Adults not Graduate From Upper-Secondary School? On the Importance of Signals of Labour Market Failure. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *61*(6), 701-720. DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2016.1188145

Hallqvist, A., Malmström, L., & Millenberg, F. (2020). Vad är en folkhögskola? [What is a folk high school?]. In P. Andersson, H. Colliander, & E-H. Harlin (Eds.), Om folkhögskolan: en särskild utbildningsform för vuxna (pp. 47-66). Studentlitteratur.

Hammarström, M. (1996). *Varför inte högskola?: En longitudinell studie av olika faktorers betydelse för studiebegåvade ungdomars utbildningskarriär* [Why not higher education?: A longitudinal study of the significance of different factors for the educational career of young adults with good study aptitudes] (Publication no. 107) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Gothenburg]. Gothenburg University library. http://hdl.handle.net/2077/11423

Han, B. (2017). *Psychopolitics: neoliberalism and new technologies of power*. Verso Books.

Hedegaard, J., & Hugo, M. (2022). Education as Change: Liberation from Mental Illness and Self-Stigma in Favour of Empowerment. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 62*(1), 98-123. http://files.eric.ed.gov.e.bibl.liu.se/fulltext/EJ1346003.pdf

Hugo, M. (2013). *Meningsfullt lärande i skolverksamheten på särskilda ungdomshem [Institutional care in focus]*. Statens institutionsstyrelse. https://www.stat-inst.se/contentassets/0f1a5a4dda7844a39fd11370791ba350/1-2013-meningsfullt-larande-i-skolverksamheten-pa-sarskilda-ungdomshem.pdf

Hugo, M., & Hedegaard, J. (2022). *Folkhögskolans stödjande roll vid psykisk ohälsa: ett deltagarperspektiv* [The folk high school's supportive role in mental health]. Encell, Nationellt kompetenscentrum för livslångt lärande.

Hugo, M., Hedegaard, J., & Bjursell, C. (2019). *Folkhögskolan som inkluderande miljö för deltagare med neuropsykiatriska funktionsnedsättningar* [The folk high school as an inclusive environment for participants with neuropsychiatric disabilities]. Encell, Nationellt kompetenscentrum för livslångt lärande.

Högberg, B. (2024). Explaining temporal trends in school-related stress: a decomposition analysis of repeated Swedish survey data. *European Journal of Education*, *59*(4), 1-10. DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12779

Högberg, B., Strandh, M., Petersen, S., & Nilsson, K. (2024). Associations between academic achievement and internalizing disorders in Swedish students aged 16 years between 1990 and 2018. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, *34*, 1661-1671. DOI: 10.1007/s00787-024-02597-2

McWilliams, J. A. (2017). The neighborhood school stigma: School choice, stratification, and shame. *Policy Futures in Education*, *15*(2), 221-238. DOI: 10.1177/1478210317705740

Merrill, B., & West, L. (2009). *Using biographical methods in social research*. Sage.

Newcomb, M. D., Abbott, R. D., Catalano, R. F., Hawkins, J. D., Battin-Pearson, S., & Hill, K. (2002). Mediational and deviance theories of late high school failure: Process Roles of Structural Strains, Academic Competence, and General versus Specific Problem Behavior. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 49*(2), 172-186. DOI: 10.1037/0022-0167.49.2.172

Nilsen, C., Celeste, R. K., Lennartsson, C., McKee, K. J., & Dahlberg, L. (2022). Long-term risk factors for old-age social exclusion in Sweden: A 30-year longitudinal study. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics, 103,* 104760. DOI: 10.1016/j.archger.2022.104760

Nylander, E., Rahm, L., & Fejes, A. (2020). Vem studerar på folkhögskola och varför? [Who studies at a folk high school and why?]. In P. Andersson, H. Colliander, & E-M. Harlin (Eds.), *Om folkhögskolan: en särskild utbildningsform för vuxna* (pp. 87-111). Studentlitteratur.

Oreopoulos, P., & Salvanes, K. G. (2011). Priceless: The Nonpecuniary Benefits of Schooling. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *25*(1), 159-84. DOI: 10.1257/jep.25.1.159

Page. M., (1998). Collecting Slices of College Dropouts' Lives. In M. Erben (Ed.), *Biography and Education: A Reader* (pp. 104-118). Routledge.

Parr, A. K., & Bonitz, V. S. (2015). Role of Family Background, Student Behaviors, and School-Related Beliefs in Predicting High School Dropout. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *108*(6), 504-514. DOI: 10.1080/00220671.2014.917256

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Sage.

Roberts, B. (2002). *Biographical research*. Open University Press.

Sernhede, O. (2011). Från fostran till lönearbete till anpassning för ett liv i marginalitet [From upbringing to wage labor to adaptation for a life in marginality]. In O. Sernhede (Ed.), *Förorten, skolan och ungdomskulturen: Reproduktionen av marginalitet och ungas informella lärande* (pp. 197-213). Daidalos.

Shulman, D. (2017). *The presentation of self in contemporary social life*. Sage.

Siebecke, D. E. (2024). Does social well-being predict academic resilience and achievement? Analysis of Swedish PISA 2018 data. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *39*(3), 2105-2128. DOI: 10.1007/s10212-023-00762-w

Skolverket. (2023). *Betyg och studieresultat i gymnasieskolan år 2023* [Grades and results in upper secondary school in Sweden, 2023]. https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.24463e0518bfea357e144/1700836581311/pdf12198.pdf

Tacchi, J., Toiviainen, H., Kersh, N. (2023). The Role That Adult Education Can Play in Supporting Young Adults with Vulnerabilities. In K. Evans, W. O. Lee, J. Markowitsch, & M. Zukas (Eds.), *Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning. Springer International Handbooks of Education.* Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-67930-9_33-1

Turgut, S., & Çelik, Ç. (2022). Kurdish students' perceptions of stigma and their destigmatization strategies in urban contexts in Turkey. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *27*(7), 1125-1140. DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2022.2069735

Vanherle, R., Trekels, J., Hermans, S., Vranken, P., & Beullens, K. (2023). How it feels to be 'left on read': Social surveillance on Snapchat and young individuals' mental health. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 17*(5). Article 3. DOI: 10.5817/CP2023-5-3

West, L., Alheit, P., Anderson, A. S., & Merrill, B. (2007). Introduction: Why this Book, and Why Now? In L. West, P. Alheit, A. S. Anderson, & B. Merrill (Eds.) (2007), *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning: European perspectives* (pp. 11-25). Peter Lang. DOI: 10.3726/978-3-653-03237-6

World Economic Forum. (2018). *Toward a reskilling revolution: A future of jobs for all*. https://www.skillsforemployment.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/edmsp1_208010.pdf

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2025, pp. 339-353

Superdiverse and multilingual, but still languageless: How unconscious and unintended raciolinguistic attitudes in school-based parent cafés can co-promote exclusion

Alexei Medvedev
University of Hamburg / KWB e. V., Germany (alexei.medvedev@kwb.de)

Anke Grotlüschen
University of Hamburg, Germany (anke.grotlueschen@uni-hamburg.de)

Abstract

It is widely emphasized that there are existing gaps between parents who understand themselves as residents and parents who are positioned as immigrants or even 'perpetual foreigners'. This qualitative study illustrates how unconscious and unintended raciolinguistic attitudes position some groups of parents and keep them excluded despite the programmatic idea of school-based parent cafés, legitimized by governmental strategies of better inclusion. The theories of raciolinguicism and monolingual habitus are further explored to understand intertwined mechanisms of creating groups. The analysis was planned and carried out using the Grounded Theory based on interviews. As the main findings, it is argued that German is understood as the language that leaves parents with another first language languageless with no or just limited communication skills. In certain school-related contexts, the monolingual habitus of German can be replaced by another dominant language. The study also showcases the phenomenon of (self)othering that can occur unintendedly in parent cafés.

Keywords: school parent cafés, raciolinguicism, monolingual habitus, migrant parents, perpetual foreigners

ISSN 2000-7426

http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5895
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Introduction

Migrants become more diverse, even superdiverse, i.e., the reasons for migration, legal and social status of immigrants, their languages, beliefs, and religions vary substantially. At the same time, societies with immigrant influx also (have) become super-diverse regarding these factors (Vertovec, 2024). National governments of the receiving societies apply strategies and instruments to manage this development. This is especially relevant for education, both for adults and for children. One of these instruments is called the *school-based parent café*. The intention and program of parent cafés aim at integrating diverse populations (Medvedev, 2020). Parent cafés are a well-established part of adult education, educational authorities usually fund them, and they offer informal opening hours (Medvedev, in press). In our case, a public adult education training institution regularly offers courses for parents to become 'mentors'. These mentors are the parents who start parent cafés in their children's schools and run them. In the opening hours, trained mentors typically offer counselling on the educational system and learning opportunities for children in the neighbourhood. The visitors are less experienced parents, new to the school or neighbourhood, or those searching to become mentors themselves. Mentors in the cafés also offer learning opportunities for adults, e.g., on cooking international cuisines. Some use festive days for intercultural activities, and others offer trips to places of interest in the cities (Medvedev, in press). Many countries have similar family learning[1] programs and consider them part of the Adult Basic Education system (Desjardins, 2017).

However, a well-organized program and good intentions regarding the acknowledgement of a superdiverse society do not always end up in normalizing this urban superdiversity. Scholars point to long-lasting gaps between groups who understand themselves as residents and groups who are positioned as immigrants. This process builds on collective *racial knowledge* (Terkessidis, 1998). Several factors play a role in this process. Denying a legal status with formal rights (to work and vote) keeps immigrants at the margins of societies as well as out of (adult) education (Heinemann, 2014). On the other hand, education reproduces power relations, e.g., by reproducing racism (Doğmuş et al., 2022) and a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1994). This often happens without full intention (El-Mafaalani, 2021). Racialisation and linguicism (Heinemann & Dirim, 2016) intersect substantially in the educational sector because, since the establishment of nation-states, one dominant language has been considered constitutional for a state (Gogolin, 1994). The establishment of this language takes place via the educational system (Gogolin, 1994) and is reproduced in integration courses for adults (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020). Overall, linguistic practices as well as racialization play a fundamental role in keeping immigrants in a status of *perpetual foreigners* (Wu, 2023), even though government activities (like the establishment of school-based parent cafés) try to invest in better integration. Therefore, this article focuses on how raciolinguistic attitudes can be expressed, also with no intention. The basis for the analysis is interviews with parents, teachers, and social pedagogues who run school-based parent cafes, conducted in 2023 in Hamburg.

The paper starts with a theoretical lens regarding linguistic diversity within the larger framework of Bourdieu's theory of habitus. Building on this, a short literature review reveals that parent cafés reproduce power relations in many ways. The research question narrows the focus to school-based parent cafés. For the main study, a qualitative empirical approach with an open-ended methodological approach was chosen, based on Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 2010), including coding procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1996). 18 qualitative interviews form the basis for an

inductive grounded theory-based analysis. Some GTM-generated codes that did not match the initial research question, but seemed relevant, have not yet been published. The authors discussed these codes and searched for theory. Especially the raciolingiustic theory helped understand the ambiguity, sharpen the research question, and identify new semantic connections in the prior collected material. Findings are presented in three main categories: German as a metaphor of human language, Alternative linguae francae, and Racolinguistic deprofiling. The discussion suggests that migrants are kept perpetual foreign because monolingualism dominates the discourse.

Theoretical approaches: From monolingual habitus to linguicism and raciolinguicism

Pioneering theories on language and education, especially Gogolin (1994) have built on Pierre Bourdieu's approach to explaining how Language contributes to the reproduction of power (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu shows how languages, as well as types of speech, distinguish between social classes, and how the formality of writing stabilizes these power relations. In the mid-nineties, in a very early phase of educational research on migration in Germany, Gogolin (1994) connected the concept of habitus to language diversity and immigration. Gogolin's research with schoolteachers shows that teachers do not know about the nation-building process and understand German as the only relevant language within and above education. This process of forgetting the historical development and the process of playing out power relations without reflected intentions to do so are core characteristics of what Bourdieu calls habitus (Wittpoth, 2004). Gogolin thus summarizes her findings in the term of a monolingual habitus of teachers and in schools. Today, as the term *habitus* has become common in educational research, the concept of a monolingual habitus is easy to understand and apply. But re-reading Gogolin's monograph calls to mind that migration was seen as a minority issue in the educational discussion, marginalized as something only necessary during a temporary *migration crisis* (Gogolin 1994), which would not need any attention *after the so-called crisis* in the 1990s anymore. It is an unfinished process towards understanding Germany as an immigration country, to see migration and linguistic diversity as an ongoing process, and to build substantial capacities for educational and interdisciplinary migration research. Nevertheless, some seemingly long-discussed issues are being (re-)discovered by groups pleading for a conservative or even right-wing societal turn. Linguistic concepts, often also built on Bourdieu's theory, inspire this research in many ways (Piller, 2016). A more recent discourse now interferes with the discussion of linguistic diversity. The early discourse on *racial knowledge* (Terkessidis, 1998), personal and structural violence, and racism (Hall, 2008) was modified and broadened, e.g., as *unintentional racism* (El-Mafaalani, 2021).

Post-colonial theories intertwine with linguistic and educational theories in many ways (Akbaba & Heinemann, 2023; Dusi & Addi-Raccah, 2025). These theories inserted the term *othering* (Said, 1978) into the educational discourse. For this article, othering is understood as a process of constructing an autochthonous group as normal and that of discriminating populations that do not match the criteria of normality as others. The concept is also applied to populations within countries (Jansson, 2017) as well as to between-country othering processes on a global scale (Grotlüschen & Buddeberg, 2020). Moreover, the othering process also occurs as *self-othering* (Medvedev, in press).

Within this discussion, early notions of linguicism (Heinemann & Dirim, 2016) as language-based racism were reconsidered (Akbaba, 2024). Linguicism discriminates against languages by understanding some as more prestigious and others as less so. The authors of this paper also understand the non-acceptance of grammatically or phonetically imperfect use of language in everyday communication as discrimination. Furthermore, research shows that teachers do not accept (playful) multilingual mixtures of dialect and informal registers within a school that they understand monolingually. Thus, language receives full validation when it is used without accent and dialect, and any mistakes in grammar and spelling (Akbaba, 2024).

This relates to international discourses on raciolinguicism, that resonate with educational research and point to the racism that lies within linguicism: Flores and Rosa (2015, 2023) as well as Rosa and Flores (2017, 2020) build on research regarding education, employment, legal representation, asylum, citizenship, and migration and conclude based on their review: 'Linguistic classifications and procedures can exclude racialized populations from access to opportunities and resources' (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 630)

The raciolinguistic perspective (Rosa & Flores, 2020) is considered in this paper as a precise instrument to figure out how racisms play out and how this reproduces a status as languageless foreigners, even when government programs come with the best intentions. Rosa and Flores' approach points to ambiguities in structures and practices: 'While on one level this framing of the issue celebrates multiculturalism and multilingualism, on another level it is premised on modifying the behaviors of racialized populations in ways that obscure how white supremacy structures these populations' experiences and societal positionalities' (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 149f).

As our research builds on infrastructure that according to its programming has been established to foster a better representation of all parents in schools through parent cafés, this approach allows a deeper understanding and questioning 'how structures of privilege and power are reproduced or disrupted through such programming' (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 640).

One of the mechanisms that keeps people in a minority position is understood as ascribing a form of *languagelessness* (Rosa, 2019) that discriminates against every other language than the monolingually dominant one as irrelevant and as non-language. For this article, we use the approach of a monolingual habitus as the broadest and most influential concept. We also use the categories of (self)othering and raciolinguicism as a frame for a deeper analysis of the language-related categories derived from the main study (Medvedev, in press) that dealt with the question how does the practice of the school parent cafés address the anticipated superdiversity of the target groups and the perceived diversity of the participants, and what decisions does this entail. The additional in-depth study can be presented in and through the following three main categories: German as a metaphor for human language, Languages of 'major minorities' as alternative linguae francae, and Raciolinguistic deprofiling.

Literature review: Parent cafés between empowerment and marginalization

Parenting is seen as part of lifelong and lifewide learning (Aarsand, 2014). Many adult education centers offer parent or family education (Mallows, 2008). In adult education, 'cafés' are a metaphor for learning opportunities that do not require formal enrolment (regarding the characteristics of a café: Medvedev, 2013). Adult learning and education

thus can take place in learning cafés, parent cafés or school-based parent cafés. The themes vary:

- Learning cafés may offer language learning opportunities for test-takers or offer a variety of themes within adult basic education (Grotlüschen, 2025)
- Parent cafés can focus more on parenting, e.g., regarding the changing roles of parents (Faircloth, 2023) or the shift of responsibility between state and the individual (Oelkers, 2012) but also address school-related themes (Hackstein et al., 2023)
- School-based parent cafés aim at school-parent co-operation and offer recreational and social activities (Medvedev, 2020)

Learning café settings that can also address parents are normally located in and run by non-school institutions. In this way, school-based parent cafés are a very specific example of an adult-learning format placed in a school context. Some empirical studies that build on school-based parent cafés are presented in this literature review.
Parent cafés provide opportunities to talk and ask for advice, but also offer cooking, sports, or sewing events (Hackstein et al., 2023). The cafés serve as centres for information, e.g., on institutions for children and youth in the area. The parents who organize the cafes have a multiplier and communicator function in their communities and back into the schools (Hackstein et al., 2023; see also Medvedev, 2020). However, cafes report that few parents regularly participate (Hackstein et al., 2023). It can be assumed that they form an in-group of multipliers who try to keep the café open for the neighbourhood. Parents and parent cafés are also seen as a facilitating structure for inclusive education (Schuppener et al., 2023).

As part of a compilation on power relations regarding the cooperation of parents and schools, Dean (2021) claims that schools label some parents as difficult to reach, but that these parents feel empowered and reinforced in school-based parent cafés. On the other hand, Dean shows how formal parent boards are dominated by privileged parents so that both parent groups find themselves in a competitive relationship with each other. The negotiations between these groups reveal unequal power relations with deprivileged parent groups experiencing racism and classism (Dean 2021, similar findings: Medvedev, 2020). This is not a singular experience, as racism in German schools has been discussed for quite a while (Doğmuş et al., 2022).

Overall, this literature suggests that school-based parent cafés are organized to empower and integrate (linguistically) diverse families. The qualitative studies we find also show convincingly, that racism, classism, and overall power relations have already been indicated within school and parent co-operation. Theories of power reproduction, monolingual habitus, linguicism, and raciolinguistics argue that existing power relations are (subtly) stabilized even though government programs are installed to overcome them. This leads to the research question of how possible unconscious and unintended raciolinguistic attitudes in school-based parent cafés co-promote exclusion.

Methods and data

Alexei Medvedev has been working as a practitioner for over 10 years and, therefore, is well-established within this infrastructure. At the same time, Author 1 belongs to a university research group led by Anke Grotlüschen. This double positioning requires a high reflection of the researcher's role regarding possible biases and prior knowledge

constraints derived from being a practitioner in the field for a long time. Before the data collection started, ethical clearance was obtained from the school authority. The faculty's doctoral committee approved the research design. Besides, the coding process and the analysis steps were discussed and validated by a research colloquium of a postgraduate school of the same faculty.

Data were collected via a large infrastructure of school-based parent cafés (hereafter: SPC) in Hamburg. At that point, 50 schools took part in the Schulmentoren project, 40 of which were active in parent education. 64% of these schools (n=32) have or have had a parent café, 10% of other schools (n=5) state that they are planning one. This means that 74% of all schools (n=37) have dealt with the topic of parent cafés.

All the schools participating in the Schulmentoren project were reached out to, 18 of them gave a positive response. So, the full sample consists of 18 interviews with 47 participants (45 female, 2 male). The teams responsible for the parent cafés - school staff members (teachers or social pedagogues) and volunteer parent mentors - were interviewed using problem-centred interviews (PCI). 17 interviews took place in person between September and November 2023 in Hamburg in schools and in one case in an out-of-school venue. The language of the interviews was German. The linguistic and functional composition of the interviewees was as follows: 21 interviewees spoke German as their first language, 26 as a second language. 25 parents in their function as parent mentors and 22 school staff members (teachers and social pedagogues) were interviewed. For the moment of the study, all the interviewees were involved in the management of their school's parent café.

All interviews have been recorded, auto-transcribed, manually revised, anonymized, and approved by all the participants. The analysis was planned and carried out using the Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). The qualitative interview protocol was developed in an open mode to allow for inductive analyses.

The main part of the study was submitted for publication (Medvedev, in press). Within the full coding and publication process, it became obvious that there are many more relevant aspects of racism, stereotypes, and linguistic exclusion left out of the coverage of the main study. These aspects were fully coded, but because they did not belong to the initial research question, they were put aside for a new in-depth analysis that is presented in this article. This analysis builds on the theories of racism and linguicism (see above). The initial codes 'Othering', 'Self-othering', 'Programmatic', 'Challenging participants', 'Linguistic practices', 'Supposed knowledge about non-participants', and 'Perceived heterogeneity' were elaborated anew. New semantic connections were identified.

Findings: How the status of being forever foreign is produced

The most important findings of this study can be summarised in three thematic blocks: German as a metaphor for human language, Languages of 'major minorities' as alternative linguae francae, and Raciolinguistic deprofiling.

German as a metaphor for human language

Several recurring patterns in the interviews reveal presumably unconscious and unintended monolingual habitual attitudes. The concept of 'a language' is consistently equated with the idea of speaking 'the German language'. By saying someone is not speaking 'the language' the interviewees probably do not mean the parents would not

have any command of any language. However, by perpetuating it, the German language is repeatedly considered the only relevant language (which mirrors a monolingual habitus). The interviewees (interviews#1, 8, 9, 14) seem to forget about the multilingualism of the parents, sometimes their command of different script systems like Arabic and Cyrillic, their efforts to manage their children's language skills. German becomes a metaphor of 'the language'. If parents do not speak (enough) German, any other language competence is made invisible. This happens because in the interviews on a symbolic and metaphorical level, German, as one of the languages spoken today is made into the human language per se: In the statements, the assessment of the parents' (supposed) German competence(s) becomes a judgment on the (in)ability or partial ability of human speech par excellence. This can be observed in many interview passages (see below). A post-colonial interpretation of this finding refers to what Rosa and Flores (2017) call 'longstanding racialized ideologies of languagelessness' (p. 624).

Three levels of this subjective-symbolic languagelessness can be distinguished. The most radical level implies that parents who do not speak or understand German, alias 'the language', would be rather languageless than multilingual, because other languages than German are made invisible, as this quote of a parent volunteer expresses: 'It doesn't matter that the language is not there. Nevertheless, they [parents who don't speak German] can do something for the school and for the pupils. And I think that's something very important' (interview#9, items[2] 13, 17, 26, 61-64, see also interview#1, item 16 interview#8, item 37; interview#14, item, 35).

Although the second level of languagelessness acknowledges that the parents speak some German, i.e. 'the language', it emphasizes language deficits that take the form of 'some', 'many', 'several', 'relatively high' 'linguistic barriers' (interview#1, item 16; interview#6, item 59; interview#12, item 23), 'comprehension barriers' (interview#14, item 54) 'perhaps language difficulties' (interview#17, item 13), 'language problems' (interview#17, item 32) and would therefore possibly impair communication in the SPC:

> If we know that someone is coming who is not so proficient in the language, that we can have someone come in to translate and all sorts of things, because that's just...many people don't know that the parents come to school and are integrated. (interview#15, item 21)

If parents 'with language barriers' dare to speak German, i.e. 'the language', at school, there was a risk that their language skills would be 'judged' (interview#12, item 43) by other parents or that they even might be 'laughed at' (interview#6, item 59).

The third level of linguistic de-recognition qualifies strongly developed German competence(s) of parents with a first language other than German rather as an exceptional situation, which only conceals the deficient view: 'We offered German courses. I remember, for example, that in those eight years, the mothers, who have a migrant background but still speak German very well, taught German to each other. What a great thing!' (interview#5, item 50). As a significant contrast, a quote from another interview can be cited here, which also attests that language deficits of parents with German as their first language are the exception rather than the rule: '[...] I even have German parents that I care of who are illiterate, who can't read the marks at all but would never say so. And then of course they are afraid' (interview#1, item 44).

Even if the programmatic of the individual SPCs sounds positive at first glance, for example by announcing a notion to create 'a broad linguistic base' (interview #1, item 35) or 'to develop something in the field of language' (interview #14, item 50), such a

positive agenda can also contain exclusionary traces that shape a biased view of the target groups and later the participants: ‘We don't just provide linguistic support, even if you can also speak the language but need support from a mum or dad, then we are also responsible for that’ (interview #8, item 20, see also interview#1, item 16; interview#17, item 13).

The thesis of the monolingual habitus of the German school is confirmed several times in the interviews, in that a dichotomous structure of German vs. other languages is repeatedly evident, which is well expressed in this quote, for example:

> Well, we speak German in the group. But we have a few options, and it has also happened that parents who have found each other have then spoken something in their language. It was also the case that (...) that didn't bother them. It was kind of like, well, if one of them didn't understand something, the other mum would tell them. So, it was quite pleasant so far. (interview#12, item 40, see also interview#1, item 35; interview#6, item 60; interview#8, item 11; interview#18, item 26)

This pattern is typical and repeated often. It shows that the interviewees stick to German. They see multilingual practices as an auxiliary construct of the parents and accept it. However, the interviewees aim to communicate monolingually.

Another interview provides concrete compensatory approaches that, on the one hand, contribute directly to language support for parents, but at the same time emphasize the language deficits of German learners who still speak ‘*broken German’* and anchor the status of German in its educational language variant even more firmly as a normative (language) education goal: ‘Yes, in the German language, there is plenty of proverbs and all these images and metaphors. And if you can just drop something like that, as someone who is a German learner, it's perceived very differently’ (interview#6, item 22). The preservation of the monolingual habitus is not only justified by the intention to promote language, as shown above with the example of proverbs but is also problematized as a resource issue: ‘[...] multilingual design. It is simply enormously time-consuming, especially when we have to make every single invitation’ (interview#6, item 61). Nevertheless, it would be presumptuous to claim that the monolingual habitus concerning German remains constant or solely dominant in the SPC.

Languages of ‘major minorities’ as alternative linguae francae

The image of the dichotomous positioning of German as the hegemonic language in the school system vs. other languages described above requires two additions in the context of the study conducted.

Firstly, this positioning does not reveal neither language hierarchies nor language competition relating to the languages as a whole in the interviews[3]. For example, English or other languages of the global North don’t dominate and are not valued differently from the languages of origin of the largest parent communities. The interviews tend to show that because of gentrification and the increasing superdiversity in the neighbourhoods, new individual parents or parent groups with additional languages are being added that were not previously represented in the SPC, even though these languages may belong to the global players:

> I don't know why other immigrants have joined. (...) Apparently, several other countries have been added, such as Portugal. Spanish, which we didn't have, is now available and the parents also come to the parents' café. (...) Today we had four Spanish-speaking

> mums, so no German, but Spanish. And they came anyway and felt really comfortable. (interview#9, item 32)

In this specific situation, the two classic (post)colonial world languages Spanish and Portuguese are perceived more as unexpected guests with astonishment, with no corresponding coverage to be provided yet.

Secondly, linguistic majorities and constellations can arise permanently or situationally in the specific SPC settings in which a language other than German can become the alternative lingua franca, like Albanian (interview#9, item 39), Arabic (interview#8, item 37), English (interview#6, item 36) or Russian (interview#14, item 20). Turkish as the 'majority language' (interview#9, item 43) stands out in particular (interview#3, item 42), also when it comes to parents who do not come from Turkey but 'fortunately understand Turkish' (interview#16, item 32; interview#3, item 30). Despite their own German-as-a-second-language (or educational language) support agenda, the SPC managers are prepared to allow an urged, pragmatic change of monolingual habitus from German in favour of another language, which in turn takes place with othering backlashes: 'Actually, we always want to speak German, but when the Turks come together, that's just the way we always speak' (interview#3, item 49). In another interview, a new parent mentor is praised for being 'a German native speaker' and a 'Turkish learner' (interview#9, item 45), which is supposed to be an indication that there are also spaces within the school system in which the German monolingual habitus does not (or no longer) apply and is replaced by a different monolingual practice. Although this may correspond to the linguistic majority situation in the specific SPC, it does not lead to the permanent establishment of a multilingual habitus that would consider the actual multilingualism of the superdiverse parents.

The interviews reveal the programme's focus on linguistic diversity, which is seen as a positive and welcome challenge by the project teams:

> There are always conversations in our own language, because some parents don't speak German, for example, Arabic or Turkish. We also have Polish, well, they are there. We have also tried to find an Albanian-speaking parent mentor. We haven't found one yet. But that always offers diversity to reach other parents as well. (interview#1, item 35)

In such interviews, the focus is both on the broadest possible representation of linguistic diversity in the SPC and on the pragmatic complementarity of the limited linguistic resources available and the languages of origin of the participants that can be covered:

> I speak Albanian, it means all the dialects. We have twelve different dialects and that's what I speak. So, people can come to me from Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, everywhere who are here, I can translate that, and then of course we have the other parents, so there's a lot of Turkish. (interview#9, item 39)

However, the interviews show that in fact, the idea of multilingualism remains at the level of the programme, while the spoken practice in the SPC tends to be rather monolingual, even if the dominant language is other than German. There is a contrast when the interviewees speak of imagined communities as well as imagined (super-)diversity of parents as target groups outside, and when it comes to linguistic practices on the micro-level. This imagined linguistic diversity often turns to become monolingual (or at best bilingual) due to the lack of ever-functioning recipes how to deal with more than 2 languages at a time in one place.

Raciolinguistic deprofiling

As already mentioned, apart from the binaries German vs. other languages or the language of the quantitatively strongest community vs. other languages, the findings show no other linguistic hierarchical patterns of thought and action. In addition to the phenomena described above, the interviews also show how undifferentiated grouping occurs, which can be described as a raciolinguistic deprofiling, a term that emerged empirically during the study. This becomes visible when umbrella terms, for example, names of (sub)continents or religions are used as labels for the designation of some groups of parents. This kind of deprofiling racialize, exoticize and depersonalize these groups and thus attempt to objectivistically justify their positioning as '*perpetual foreigners'*, i.e., as ever non-participants outside the scope of the SPC:

> [...] at the moment, they are of Turkish, Arab, Serbian background, i.e. mothers from this background (...). Of course, we have ten other nationalities at the school. We certainly also had African mothers. That's not the case right now, but that's a completely different topic. (interview#5, item 33)

Black parents are often directly associated with the continent of Africa. Undifferentiated statements are made that construct a speechless group of 'African parents' (interview#1, item 41), parents 'from African background' (interview#5, item 35) or even an amorphous, depersonalized entity *'the African'* (interview#1, item: 39) that will always remain outside. The same applies to parents with an ascribed religious identity, which also appears as a linguistically undifferentiated group: 'Yes, these are mothers: Turkish, Arabic, Serbian origin. They are Moslems, partly from a Moslem background, Moslems with headscarves' (interview#5, item 25).

These findings demonstrate, as mentioned above, an astonishing parallelism with the tradition of racializing and devaluing practices and ideologies of the colonial era by positioning 'colonized subjects as incapable of communicating legitimately in any language' (Flores & Rosa 2017, p. 624). Applied to SPC settings, it means that the immanent languagelessness assumes a permanent inability of constructed (groups of) parents to participate independently in the German school system. This, in turn, legitimizes even more the need for permanent supportive, mediating structures: '[...] the headmistress always came, introduced herself and also had small conversations. But they tended to be migrant parents. And gradually it turned out that they came because they had problems' (interview#18, item 16). Strictly speaking, this formulation contradicts a typical SPC programme, because it is precisely the parents who should be allowed to participate better in school activities and, among other things, to articulate their needs. While the problematic motivation to participate is declared to be a disposition for parents with a first language other than German, it is assessed differently for parents with German as their first language. This is illustrated by a quote on the question of why the parents' café is rarely or not at all frequented by parents whose first language is German:

> From the outside, they [parents whose first language is German] probably see the parent café more like a social welfare centre where they can get help. (...) They don't really need to visit the parent café because they can usually solve their problems themselves. (interview#1, item 53)

At first glance, another interview develops a contrary mode of explanation, as it is about parents with German as their first language who come to the café for advice. At the

same time, however, it is emphasized that it is about 'individual appointments' in an '*adjacent room'*. This separation into main and side rooms shows how processes of othering and self-othering (Medvedev, in press) are also reproduced in the SPC. This creates an exclusivity and special position of German-speaking individual parents within, or more precisely, alongside the group of regular host parents with other first languages, by creating a mixture of 'othering' ('they are the others') and 'self-othering' ('we are the others'). The parents not affected by othering are characterized as being close to education and their search for advice is legitimized by a lack of time:

> They are also close to education, many with German roots, who simply come when they are unsure. Even if they can't find the time, don't have much time when they're working and then this application again and then they don't know that they come from the daycare centre, all-day. (interview#16, item 20)

As a result, their search for advice is declared to be understandable and they are constructed as independent and having few problems. In this respect, it seems to require an explanation that they seek advice, and it seems impossible that they could be a regular part of the group subject to othering or self-othering.

It should be noted that most of these statements were made by interviewees who speak German as a second language, mostly parents. This shows how the institutional context of the school system, with its monolingual habitus and internalized racist knowledge, can be adopted and reproduced, probably unconsciously and unintendedly, by the SPC staff. It manifests itself, as we have seen, when the staff describes the language practice of the participants in the SPC or makes general judgments about the language abilities of the target groups.

The binary opposition German vs. other languages is repeated when the interviewees speculate about the reasons for and against participation in the SPC: 'I don't remember that we had parents here who only spoke German' (interview#5, items 37-39). Here too, in the construction of German and non-German, attributions and racist knowledge are used: 'Well, I looked at the list again for the first time. It was a really mixed group of parents. Not a single German parent was there. They were all migrant parents' (interview#18, item 16, see also interview#3, item 57). In another interview, there is talk of a single pupil in the class 'who really has parents from Hamburg' (interview#14, item 54). It can also be seen that an intersectional raciolinguistic and classist attribution also takes place, in that German as a first language automatically suggests a different social status of the parents: 'Parents with only German roots who enrol their children here. Then it's academic parents who register their children here, newcomers from other privileged neighbourhoods' (interview#16, item 24) This constantly and literally leads to othering or self-othering: 'Of course, you realize, at the beginning you already noticed, the difference or the demands of both, of the other parents are different' (interview#16, item 24).

The interviews with SPC staff explicitly show that in socio-spatial contexts such as the SPC as 'an institution within an institution' (Medvedev, 2020), unconscious and unintended reproduction of the monolingual habitual patterns, internalized racist knowledge, and as a result, raciolinguistically driven intersectional inclusion and exclusion mechanisms can intertwine. Besides, they go in two directions: outwards, when different constructed (target) groups are evaluated differently and their participation or non-participation is justified in different raciolinguistic and sometimes also classist, ways (othering), and inwards, where comparable processes take place at

the level of the participants and the café staff, and where self-reflective mechanisms can be described as self-othering.

Discussion of findings, limitations, and implications

The research question was whether and how unconscious and unintended raciolinguistic attitudes reproduce or challenge power relations in school-based parent cafés. The data revealed three categories: German as a metaphor of human language, Languages of 'major minorities' as alternative linguae francae, and Raciolinguistic deprofiling. The main study was not conducted to understand raciolinguistic attitudes, so the interview protocol did not integrate raciolinguistic theory. That means there may be more hidden or unintended mechanisms than the ones reported here. It would be most interesting to continue with an interview protocol that starts from the findings regarding languagelessness, the pro and contra of alternative linguae francae, and the many ways of raciolinguistic deprofiling by adding assumptions of belonging to lower social class because of insufficient skills in the dominant language. However, the findings show several procedures that contribute to keeping some groups of migrants as perpetual foreigners in the school system.

First, German is understood as 'the language', and this leaves migrants languageless with a racialised understanding of them as being without communication skills. Applying the raciolinguistic theory to this finding, one identifies attitudinal patterns that can also be read as 'the ideological assumption that racialized subjects' language practices are unfit for legitimate participation in a modern world' (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 627). These procedures are reproduced by the dominant use of the word *language* as a synonym and metaphor for *the German language*. The school's power relations stay in place, as only those parents are considered fully integrated who have the language and therefore do not have problems anymore that would direct them to parent cafés. The parent café community is thus othered itself and kept in an implicitly proclaimed status of *perpetual foreigners* (Wu, 2023).

Second, *major minorities* play a certain role by providing more linguae francae, that come with informal translation services and self-help. However, the interviewees consider this only as pleasant as long as it does not disturb them. The major minority languages such as Turkish or Arabic are not integrated into the school system, e.g., in the linguistic landscape of a school, of textbooks or forms. Nevertheless, our findings also demonstrate how in certain school-related contexts the monolingual habitus of German as status quo can be replaced by another dominant language. This leads us to a broader understanding of the study by Gogolin (1994).

Third, raciolinguistic patterns are in several places visible in the interview sample. The interviewees subtly connect the command of the German language with academic achievement, higher social class, and the true ability to cope with life. Migrants are understood as others, as those who are different and who have problems that direct them to the cafés where they will find help. This confirms the study by Dean (2021), which shows how intensely classism and racism is reproduced in schools. In our study, the processes of othering and self-othering – e.g., by migrant parent mentors who run the parent cafés – go hand in hand. At the same time, these exclusion practices and attitudes take place unintendedly and unconsciously as shown in the study by El-Mafaalani (2021). This study also shows that othering can also occur in the reciprocal form of self-othering.

Linguicism on the level of more or less prestigious languages is not relevant in the interviews. However, broken German is often repeated as a status that needs to be healed, and this shows linguicism on the level of accents and dialects (Akbaba, 2024).

Overall, the study shows how several subtle mechanisms, unintendedly and unconsciously, keep groups of parents at a distance despite the programmatic idea of school-based parent cafés as part of governmental strategies of better inclusion. These micro-level practices that can also co-produce exclusion backlashes need to be critically interrogated along with discourses on a policy level standing behind these practices, that Rosa and Flores (2017) define as 'the foundational forms of governance through which such diversity discoursed deceptively perpetuate disparities by stipulating the terms on which perceived differences are embraced or abjected' (p. 641)

The raciolinguistic perspective reveals that even well-intended programs can become part of an excluding society. By comparing the findings with earlier research on adult family learning, a substantial lack of critical perspectives becomes visible. Some earlier family learning providers were substantially rooted in the feminist movement with critical standpoints and themes, e.g., on bodies and self-optimization (Macha, 2017). The special characteristics of the program under consideration are twofold: First, it is not just a parent café in an adult education centre, but a *school-based* parent café. This implies a move from non-formal adult education towards formal, school-oriented learning. Second, the program is not critical of any institution or authority, but the authority itself funds and uses it as a tool for integration. This makes it much more difficult to insert critical perspectives into the program (e.g., postcolonial or queer-feminist perspectives) than if it were a café hosted as part of a social movement for popular adult education (von Kotze & Walters, 2023). It would be interesting to see what changes when the adult mentors are trained and encouraged to offer a more critical family learning program that empowers mentors and parents to scrutinize the racialized and gendered position they are given in the German educational system. This would also strengthen the ties with the adult education community and may weaken the formal power of the schools in the (school-based) parent cafés.

One of the core elements of multilayered intersectional super-diversity (Vertovec, 2024) is to integrate awareness of multilingualism. This also affects adult education and learning, including teacher training. As the school-based parent cafés in this study are part of an overarching urban structure, it would be possible to offer further adult education modules on linguicism, raciolinguicism, monolingual habitus, as well as othering and self-othering. Otherwise, some (constructed) groups or individuals will always be kept in a position of being perpetual foreigners.

Notes

1 In German: *Familienbildung* – this has overlaps with family literacy as well as family learning/education. We use family learning, because it is not misunderstood as being focused on literacy only or on children's education only.

2 The interview numbers point to the person. The items point to the paragraph in the interview.

3 Linguicism in the sense of a rejection of dialect, accent, or grammatically incorrect expressions can occur in many ways, but the interview protocol does not cover this aspect.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

References

Aarsand, L. (2014). Parental self-work. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *5*(1), 67-80. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9025

Akbaba, Y. (2024, March 13). *Sprache Macht (Un)Ordnung* [Language Enables (Dis)Order] [Video]. 29. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft, Halle. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQArKKHfSqk

Akbaba, Y., & Heinemann, A. (Eds.). (2023). *Erziehungswissenschaften dekolonisieren: Theoretische Debatten und praxisorientierte Impulse* [Decolonizing Educational Sciences: Theoretical Debates and Practice-oriented Impulses]. Beltz Juventa.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.

Dean, I. (2021). Elternengagement an einer Berlin-Neuköllner Grundschule im Spannungsfeld rassistischer und klassistischer Machtverhältnisse [Parental Involvement at a Primary School in Berlin-Neukölln Amid Conflicting Racist and Classist Power Relations]. In L. Chamakalayil, O. Ivanova-Chessex, B. Leutwyler, & W. Scharathow (Eds.), *Eltern und pädagogische Institutionen: Macht- und ungleichheitskritische Perspektiven* (pp. 109-128). Beltz.

Desjardins, R. (2017). *Political economy of adult learning systems: Comparative study of strategies, policies and constraints*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Doğmuş, A., Kourabas, V., & Rose, N. (2022). Beredtes Schweigen über Rassismus: Be- und Entlastung von Lehrer*innen im Sprechen über Rassismus und das Potential von Rassismushinweisen [Eloquent Silence on Racism: The Burden and Relief of Teachers When Talking About Racism and the Potential of Reporting Racism]. In O. Ivanova-Chessex, S. Shure, & A. Steinbach (Eds.), *Lehrer*innenbildung: (Re-)Visionen für die Migrationsgesellschaft* (pp. 168-185). Beltz Juventa.

Dusi, P. & Addi-Raccah, A. (2025). *Decolonising Thought and Knowledge: Unmasking Deficit Thinking in Education*. 14th Biennial conference of the European Research Network About Parents in Education (ERNAPE), Verona, Italy, June 6.

El-Mafaalani, A. (2021). *Wozu Rassismus? Von der Erfindung der Menschenrassen bis zum rassismuskritischen Widerstand* [Why Racism? From the Invention of Human Races to Anti-racist Resistance]. Kiepenheuer & Witsch. https://www.book2look.com/book/9783462002232

Faircloth, C. (2023). Intensive Parenting and the Expansion of Parenting. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting Culture Studies* (pp. 33-67). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44156-1_2

Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *85*(2), 149-171. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149

Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2023). Undoing raciolinguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 27*(5), 421-427. https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12643

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (2010). *Grounded Theory. Strategien qualitativer Forschung*. Hans Huber.

Gogolin, I. (1994). *Der monolinguale Habitus der multilingualen Schule* [The Monolingual Habitus of the Multilingual School]. Waxmann.

Grotlüschen, A. (2025). „Wir müssen hingehen". Ansprachewege und Motivationen zur Grundbildungsteilnahme im Projekt „Literalität im Alltag - vernetzt in evangelischer Erwachsenenbildung" ["We have to go": Approaches and Motivations for Participating in Basic Education in the Project "Literacy in everyday life – networked in Protestant adult education"]. In S. Botters, M. Glatz, & C. Sturm (Eds.), *Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung in Evangelischer Erwachsenenbildung: Auf gutem Grund* (pp. 139-159). Waxmann.

Grotlüschen, A., & Buddeberg, K. (2020). PIAAC and the South - Is Southering the new Othering? Global Expansion of dominant Discourses on Adult Literacy. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *49*(3), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9214

Hackstein, P., Micheel, B., & Stöbe-Blossey, S. (2023). Familiengrundschulzentren im Sozialraum: Gelingensbedingungen für eine kontextsensible Zusammenarbeit zwischen Grundschule und Familien [Family Elementary School Centers in the Social Space: Conditions for Successful Context-sensitive Cooperation Between Elementary Schools and Families]. In M. Forell, G. Bellenberg, L. Gerhards, & L. Schleenbecker (Eds.), *Schule als Sozialraum im Sozialraum: Theoretische und empirische Erkundung sozialräumlicher Dimensionen von Schule* (pp. 98-107). Waxmann.

Hall, S. (2008). *Rassismus und kulturelle Identität*. *Ausgewählte Schriften, 2* [Racism and Cultural Identity]. Argument-Verlag.

Heinemann, A. M. B. (2014). *Teilnahme an Weiterbildung in der Migrationsgesellschaft* [Participation in Continuing Education in the Migration Society]. (Vol. 33). transcript Verlag. https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839427187

Heinemann, A. M. B., & Dirim, I. (2016). „Die sprechen bestimmt (schlecht) über mich“ [“They're definitely talking (badly) about me”]. In E. Arslan & K. Bozay (Eds.), *Symbolische Ordnung und Bildungsungleichheit in der Migrationsgesellschaft* (pp. 199-214). Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13703-8_11

Heinemann, A. M. B., & Sarabi, S. A. (2020). Paternalistic benevolence – Enabling violence. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *11*(3), 309-320. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.ojs1712

Jansson, D. R. (2017). The Work of Southering: “Southern Justice” and the Moral Landscape of Uneven Racism. *Southeastern Geographer*, *57*(2), 131-150. https://doi.org/10.1353/sgo.2017.0014

Macha, H. (2017). Die neue Körperlichkeit in der Eltern- und Familienbildung [The New Physicality in Parent and Family Education]. *Forum Erwachsenenbildung*, *1*, 45-48.

Mallows, D. (2008). *Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: Family literacy, language and numeracy: a practitioner handbook*. CfBT Education Trust.

Medvedev, A. (2013). Germany’s School-Based Parent Cafés: A New Hype or a Sustainable Way to Update Home-School Policies? *International Journal about Parents in Education*, *7*(2), 59-68. https://doi.org/10.54195/ijpe.18215

Medvedev, A. (2020). *Heterogene Eltern. Die Kooperation von Eltern und Schule neu denken und umsetzen* [Diverse Parents. Rethinking and Implementing Cooperation Between Parents and Schools]. Beltz Juventa.

Medvedev, A. (in press). Between Superdiversity and Doing Diversity: School-Based Parent Cafés as Places of Parent Education. *International Review of Education (REVI)*.

Oelkers, N. (2012). The Redistribution of Responsibility Between State and Parents: Family in the Context of Post-Welfare-State Transformation. In M. Richter & S. Andresen (Eds.), *Children’s Well-Being: Indicators and Research. The Politicization of Parenthood,* 5, 101-110. Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2972-8_8

Piller, I. (2016). *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Rosa, J., & Flores M. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, *46*(5), 621-647. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404517000562

Rosa, J., & Flores M. (2020). Reimagining Race and Language: From Raciolinguistic Ideologies to a Raciolinguistic Perspective. In H. Samy Alim (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race* (pp. 90-107). Oxford University Press.

Rosa, J. (2019). “They’re Bilingual… That Means They Don’t Know the Language”: The Ideology of Languagelessness in Practice, Policy, and Theory. In J. Rosa (Ed.), *Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad* (pp. 124-143). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190634728.003.0005

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon.

Schuppener, S., Leonhardt, N., & Kruschel, R. (2023). *Inklusive Schule im Sozialraum. Entwicklungsprozesse durch Kooperation und Interprofessionalität in herausfordernder Lage.* [Inclusive Schooling in the Social Space. Development Processes Through Cooperation and Interprofessionality in Challenging Situations]. Springer VS.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1996). *Grounded Theory. Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung*. Beltz.

Terkessidis, M. (1998). *Psychologie des Rassismus* [Psychology of Racism]. Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Vertovec, S. (2024). *Superdiversität. Migration und soziale Komplexität* [Superdiversity. Migration and Social Complexity]. Suhrkamp.

von Kotze, A., & Walters, S. (2023). Taking risks: Exploring ecofeminist, climate-just popular education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 14*(1), 17-33. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4324

Wittpoth, J. (2004). Gerahmte Subjektivität [Framed Subjectivity]. In P. Faulstich & J. Ludwig (Eds.), *Expansives Lernen* (pp. 256-262). Schneider.

Wu, A. (2023). Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype: Third Class Americans. In *Asian American Educators and Microaggressions* (pp. 41-60). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23459-0_3

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2025, pp. 355-373

Pathways into the profession of *older adult educator* in the non-formal education sector

Agnieszka Konieczna
Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland (akonieczna@aps.edu.pl)

Abstract

This article addresses the underexplored issue of professional trajectories among educators of older adults within Poland's non-formal education sector. Based on a qualitative analysis of 17 in-depth interviews, three distinct entry models into the profession were identified: adaptive, pragmatic, and mission-driven. The trajectories of the educators proved to be diverse, non-linear, and often shaped by external factors, chance events, or personal experiences, rather than long-term career planning. The study also highlights the absence of formal qualifications, fragmented institutional support, irregular employment conditions, and ambivalences regarding professional identity. It expands the existing knowledge about this group and points to the need for establishing frameworks of support, training systems, and formal recognition of this profession within educational policy, particularly in the context of an aging society.

Keywords: older adult educator, non-formal education, professional trajectories, professional identity

Introduction

Non-formal education for older adults, implemented within local communities, is experiencing dynamic development both in Poland and globally. This trend reflects the growing importance of educational activation in public policy responses to an aging population. In 2023, over 151,000 older adults in Poland participated in educational and cultural activities organised by Universities of the Third Age (U3A), cultural centers, senior clubs, and other public and private institutions (GUS, 2023; MRiPS, 2023). These institutions offer a wide range of activities, from computer and language courses to artistic, sports, and recreational classes (Szarota, 2022).

ISSN 2000-7426

http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5664
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Individuals with diverse professional pathways are behind the implementation of these activities. Although the data is fragmented (Hansen, 2021), it shows that the teaching workforce in senior education – includes teachers, sports instructors, therapists, entertainers, artists, university lecturers, health professionals, as well as passionate professionals and volunteers (e.g., de Maio Nascimento & Giannouli, 2019; Formosa, 2014; Gołdys et al., 2012; Jun & Evans, 2014; Kops, 2020). Despite widespread recognition of their role in non-formal education and their importance in ensuring the quality of educational programs (Jacob et al., 2023), knowledge about who older adult educators are, how they enter the profession, and how they construct their professional identities remains incomplete and fragmented (Jacob et al., 2023; Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017).

Their roles are not clearly defined, and the terminology used in the literature – such as *teacher*, *trainer*, *instructor*, *facilitator*, or *leader* – reflects affiliations with different institutional traditions and work styles (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014; Hallam et al., 2016; Jacob et al., 2023; Kops, 2020; Luppi, 2009; Sobral & Sobral, 2021; Szarota, 2022). This study adopts the term *educator*, which emphasises both the professional and structured nature of educational activities, as well as the necessity for psychosocial and didactic competencies (Gierszewski & Kluzowicz, 2021; Jacob et al., 2023; Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017; Szarota, 2022). The lack of standardised terminology may indicate the difficulty of clearly delineating this group as a distinct occupational category. In order to function as practitioner-educators, these individuals continually negotiate their roles and identities within fluid and often informal contexts (Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017; Jacob et al., 2023). Similarly, the very concept of *adult educator* as a profession remains elusive (Bierema, 2011; Lattke, 2016).

Previous studies – both domestic and international – have primarily focused on the description of courses, participants' needs, and the required competencies of educators (Jacob et al., 2023; Kops, 2020; Koutska, 2024; Lan et al., 2016; Szarota, 2022). While these studies provide valuable insights, they predominantly concentrate on instrumental aspects – didactic methods, curriculum content, and sets of competencies. Rarely have questions been raised regarding the educators themselves – their motivations, professional trajectories, or the ways in which they assume their roles.

Particularly noteworthy in this context are the studies by Hallam et al. (2016), which are among the few that attempted to capture both the motivations of educators and their professional preparation. These studies demonstrated that many educators lack formal pedagogical training, and their career choices result from complex determinants – personal, institutional, and financial. However, it is important to emphasise that this analysis focused solely on British music facilitators, which limits the potential for generalisation to other areas of older adult education.

In the Polish context, data on U3A (Gołdys et al., 2012; GUS, 2023) indicate the significant role of volunteerism. The work of educators is often casual, project-based, or unpaid, which makes it particularly vulnerable to employment instability, multitasking, and the necessity of redefining their role. This situation raises questions about the qualification standards of staff and the uniformity of competence levels (Gierszewski & Kluzowicz, 2021; Gołdys et al., 2012; Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017). At the same time, this picture does not take into account individuals working in cultural centers, day support centers, or senior centers. Despite the growing number of studies on the institutional aspects of senior education, the educators themselves remain at the margins of scholarly reflection.

Some earlier analyses have addressed the career paths of adult educators, exploring the formation of their professional identity and their decisions to engage in educational

practice (e.g., Andersson et al., 2012; Maier-Gutheil & Hof, 2011; Rushbrook et al., 2014). Although these studies effectively illustrate the complexity and dynamics of entering the profession, they do not directly concern educators specialising in work with older adults. Nevertheless, they emphasise the need to consider individual trajectories and the specificity of the context of practice – not only formal qualifications but also personal experiences, aspirations, and working conditions (Lattke, 2016). They also highlight the importance of turning points, events that initiate career decisions, and the influence of significant individuals from the surrounding environment (Rushbrook et al., 2014). An approach combining structural and individual perspectives further enables the capture of tensions between systemic expectations toward educators and their personal resources, beliefs, and institutional conditions (Rushbrook et al., 2014). However, such a perspective has not yet been applied to those working with older adults. It remains unclear how they enter this field of activity, what motivates them to undertake this work, and what their career plans are.

The aim of the present study is therefore an in-depth analysis of the career paths of older adult educators, focused on understanding their choices, motivations, and the conditions influencing their engagement and continuation in this field. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader discourse on the professionalisation of educators working with older adults in Poland, shedding light on a professional group that remains poorly recognised.

Method

The study was qualitative in nature and based on semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This procedure made it possible to capture individual perspectives and experiences of educators working with older adults, while maintaining a structure that enabled data comparison. The use of semi-structured interviews was intended to balance two dimensions – on the one hand, allowing participants to engage in free biographical reflection, and on the other, focusing on key thematic areas related to their professional trajectories and identities.

Selection and context

Seventeen individuals working in ten senior-focused institutions located in central Poland were recruited for the study. The respondents varied in age, level of education, length of experience working with older adults (ranging from six months to over twenty years), and prior professional backgrounds. The recruitment followed a purposive sampling strategy, aiming for maximum variation in order to capture a broad spectrum of motivations, entry pathways into the profession, and various models of combining educational work with other occupational activities. Table 1 below presents the basic information about the participants.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants (n=17) (author's table)

Participant pseudonym	**Gender**	**Age**	**Education**	**Work experience**	**Type of institution/ location**	**Type of activities**
ADAM	M	54	Higher: Pedagogy	10	Community integration centre at the city office, e-senior program, metropolitan area	IT courses, 2 groups, twice a week for 2 hours each; in addition, a supervisor in an open-access computer lab, also provides individual consultations
EWA	F	37	Higher: Pedagogy	3	Senior club at a social assistance centre, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Integration activities, once a week for 4 hours
ALEKSANDER	M	30	Higher: English studies	1	Cultural centre, metropolitan area	English language courses, 3 groups, once a week for 60 minutes
ANDRZEJ	M	42	Higher: History, postgraduate Library Science	1	Senior club in a housing cooperative, town with 30,000 inhabitants	Integration activities, once a week for 4 hours
MARTYNA	F	36	Secondary: Administrative	4	Recreational and active holidays for 60+ individuals, holiday resort, town with 20,000 inhabitants	Leisure and integration animation, daily for 6-8 hours
MARTA	F	53	Higher: Visual artist	9	Senior club at a cultural centre, town with 30,000 inhabitants	Handicraft classes, once a week for approximately 2 hours; additionally, a club supervisor

AGATA	F	64	Secondary: General	21	Village women's circle, rural area	Folk ensemble, once a week for 1.5 hours
OLA	F	26	Higher: Artistic education in music	1	Cultural centre, metropolitan area	Singing classes, 1 group, once a week for 1.5 hours
GABRYSIA	F	23	Higher: Psychology	1	Senior club at a social assistance centre, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Zumba classes, 1 group, once a week for 1 hour
MAGDA	F	33	Higher: Pedagogy, Post-secondary: Occupational therapist	6	Cultural centre, metropolitan area	Art classes, 3 times a week for 1.5 hours, 4 groups
ANNA	F	31	Higher: Theatre arts	1.5	Senior club at a housing cooperative, metropolitan area	Theatre classes, once a week for 1-2 hours; additionally, a coordinator
WOJTEK	M	30	Secondary: IT technician	1	Senior club at the city office, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Computer course, once a week for 1.5 hours
MICHAŁ	M	36	Higher: Public health	5	Active senior zone in a cultural centre, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Computer classes, once a week for 1 hour; additionally, assistant coordinator
MARLENA	F	28	Higher: Pedagogy	2	Senior club at a cultural centre, town with 30,000 inhabitants	Fitness classes, 1 group, once a week for 1 hour
ANTOSIA	F	41	Higher: Pedagogy	2	Senior club at a social assistance centre, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Creative thinking workshops, 1 group, once a week for 1.5 hours

EWELINA	F	65	Secondary: Accounting	3	Senior club at the city office, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Integration activities, 3 times a week for 3 hours; additionally, a supervisor
ZBYSZEK	M	37	Higher: Pedagogy	1	Senior club at the city office, town with 50,000 inhabitants	Integration activities, once a week for 4 hours, 1 group

Data collection

The interviews were conducted using a pre-prepared thematic guide, which included questions about, among others, the participants' beginnings in working with older adults, motivations for engaging in such work, previous professional experiences, and plans regarding the continuation of their educational activities. The guide was informed by a literature review on older adult education and the role of educators in cultural institutions. The interviews, which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were audio-recorded in their entirety and fully transcribed. The flexible structure of the conversations allowed for the elicitation of individual professional narratives and the identification of internal tensions, transitions, and motivational contradictions, forming the basis for an in-depth thematic analysis.

Although biographical and narrative elements appeared in the participants' responses, the aim of the study was not to reconstruct complete autobiographies. Instead, the focus was on fragments of personal experience that gave meaning to their professional trajectories. Thus, the collected data are thematic and contextual in nature – they reflect the participants' personal experiences and reflections while remaining embedded within the structure of the interview guide-based study.

Ethical considerations

Participants were thoroughly informed about the aims and procedures of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. They were assured anonymity, the right to withdraw at any stage, and the right to refrain from answering any specific questions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and served as the basis for conducting the interviews in accordance with ethical standards.

Data analysis

The analysis followed the thematic approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which enabled both the identification of recurring patterns and the exploration of the diversity of participants' experiences. The process involved repeated reading of the transcripts, coding, grouping codes into thematic categories, and conceptualising broader analytical themes. The text was divided into segments, which were assigned to preliminary thematic categories. These categories were then clustered into broader themes. In the final stage, the themes were named and described in detail.

The themes not only address the research questions but also reveal connections between life experiences, motivations, professional identity, and the institutional context of the participants' activities. Selected quotes serve an illustrative function, giving voice to the participants and deepening the understanding of the phenomena described.

Results

Building on the thematic analysis, three main axes of meaning were identified: (1) pathways into the educator role and prior professional experiences, (2) meanings ascribed to working with older adults, and (3) plans for continuation and reflections on professional status. These axes organise the following presentation of findings.

How do educators perceive working with older adults – as a primary or secondary profession?

Participants' accounts portray a complex picture of work with older adults – most often described as a supplementary activity carried out alongside other forms of employment, and less frequently as a main professional path. Underlying this are both structural factors (e.g., work under mandate contracts, fragmented funding, multitasking) and personal narratives in which working with seniors holds varying degrees of importance – from a marginal role to a central element of professional identity.

A fragmented sense of professional identity as the norm

For most respondents, senior education does not represent the core of their career. It often takes the form of a few hours per week and does not involve full immersion in the life of the institution. Wojtek, an IT course instructor, states frankly: 'It's hard to say I work there [at the senior club] as a regular employee. I go there once a week to teach. [...] On a daily basis, I work as helpdesk support in a finance company.' His statement reveals not only the limited time commitment but also a discontinuity in professional identity – the lack of daily contact with the facility and its organisational culture results in a sense of temporariness, even alienation: "I don't really know how the club operates because I'm here more like an instructor than permanent staff.' A similar sense of detachment is expressed by Ewa, a social integration animator at a senior club: 'I'm simply not there on a daily basis.' Her professional identity is dispersed, oscillating between her role as a schoolteacher and an employee of a social assistance center. Although she sees herself as socially engaged, she feels more like a 'mercenary,' emphasising that she views her involvement more as occasional support for the institution rather than being its integral part.

For Magda, a preschool teacher and art therapist, art courses for older adults are just one aspect of her instructional work at a cultural center. Her narrative highlights professional continuity with children, and views working with seniors as an additional, albeit satisfying, pathway. Despite long-term involvement at the cultural center, she notes that these are 'commissions,' engaging her three afternoons a week with various age groups, while her 'full-time job' and source of professional stability lie elsewhere.

The fragmented nature of employment also shapes professional identity. Respondents rarely refer to themselves as 'educators,' which reflects the low standing of this role in their professional self-conception. Andrzej emphasises: 'I work mostly full-time in a school library – this is my second job,' thus underlining that his primary income

comes from a different occupation. Aleksander – a language teacher at a language school and a public school – admits that he also 'picks up extra hours' at a cultural center. Courses for seniors are a 'new thing' introduced experimentally. Although involving only three participant groups and three hours per week, this activity remains marginal in his professional life: 'This isn't my main occupation.'

Similarly, Marta, despite having run handicraft courses for nine years and officially acting as a senior club supervisor, also points to the fragmented nature of her involvement, the multiplicity of professional roles, and the peripheral status of this activity:

> I work one-quarter time. In addition to working with seniors, I also work at the cultural center. For years I've run courses for various age groups. I've worked with seniors at the club for nine years. Here, I focus only on seniors.

Although she emphasises institutional stability at the cultural center, she clearly reveals the dual nature of her professional involvement, where work with seniors is only one part of her broader educational and cultural activities – and a source of modest additional income.

Although Adam and Michal both work in the same institution, where they also teach older people, they still consider this educational part of their work to be secondary. Michal notes, 'Besides that, I also work in administration at the cultural centre', which is his main job, suggesting that his involvement in education is complementary. Similarly, Adam, who leads computer courses as part of the 'e-senior' program, describes his work as part of a broader role, since he also manages a computer lab accessible to all age groups.

Respondents' statements indicate that the peripheral nature of work with older people is not only due to the conditions of employment, but also to its place in the broader scheme of professional roles. These activities are sometimes important, but they are rarely a core part of one's identity – more often they function on the margins of everyday professional activity.

Work with older adults as a primary area of professional engagement: Exceptions

Against the backdrop of the dominant pattern, a few respondents stand out for having made work with older adults the central focus of their professional engagement. Martyna, an activity facilitator during organised retreats, explains: 'I work full time, I'm here every day, available to them.' Her account is one of the few where the language of continuity, full responsibility, and daily presence emerges. Similarly, Anna, a theatre instructor and coordinator in a large social animation center, states: 'I do many things. I'm generally responsible for the cultural life of our housing estate residents. Besides that, I coordinate the senior club, which is a main part of my work, and I also conduct theatre classes there.' Although her work involves multiple target groups, older adults are at the center of her professional routine. Despite juggling various roles and commitments outside the institution, she describes her involvement as a 'combo' – a complex yet coherent narrative of socio-cultural engagement.

In these cases, professional identity is built around role coherence and consistent presence. A sense of continuity, greater autonomy, and stronger institutional anchoring becomes visible. This indicates that full-time employment with older adults is indeed possible – albeit rare – and requires specific conditions: large-scale facilities, comprehensive programs, and coordinating responsibilities.

Does age influence the decision to work with older adults?

The respondents' age at the time they began working with older adults ranged from 22 to 62, suggesting that engagement in older adult education is not confined to any particular stage of a professional career. These differences reflect broader biographical trajectories, revealing diverse motivations, entry points, and outlooks for the future.

Participants who began working with older adults early in their careers (e.g., Gabrysia, Ola, Aleksander, Marlena) often view this engagement as a space for professional experimentation – a formative experience as they seek their place in the labor market.

A markedly different path is observed in mature professionals entering older adult education, such as Ewelina, who took up this work after concluding her primary career. For her, this engagement is not merely a new chapter but a recontextualisation of earlier caregiving and professional roles.

Those who began working with older adults in their thirties or forties (e.g., Antosia, Andrzej, Ewa, Martyna, Michał, Marta) frequently interpret this involvement as a redirection of professional energy, stemming from personal reflection, shifting priorities, or life changes affecting close relatives. Most of these individuals had already achieved a degree of professional and personal stability that enabled them to embrace new challenges.

Thus, the decision to work with older adults may result from both external circumstances and an internal redefinition of one's professional role. While age is not a determining factor, it serves as a context within which particular life strategies and social sensitivities are shaped.

How long do educators work with older adults?

As with age, seniority in working with older adults does not easily lend itself to a uniform classification.

Although most respondents have less than five years of experience, their narratives reveal a more nuanced picture – not only in terms of duration but also in the way this work is experienced and valued.

For many (e.g., Zbyszek, Ola, Aleksander), less than two years of experience does not imply a lack of professional competence, but rather that working with this age group is still a relatively new domain. In these cases, a shorter tenure serves as an initiatory phase – a first contact that may evolve into long-term commitment or remain a temporary episode.

More rooted experiences are found among those with 3-5 years of experience (e.g., Ewa, Martyna), who are beginning to develop a sense of competence and their own methodology. They describe their work with a growing sense of agency and impact. A longer tenure (5-10 years), especially when coupled with original program development, becomes a space for both routine and the deliberate cultivation of specialisation.

The longest tenure – over 20 years – is represented by Agata, who almost exclusively engages in this work as a volunteer. Her experience transcends the category of 'professional' in the institutional sense, yet it testifies to sustained and committed social involvement in a rural setting, focused on preserving local cultural traditions.

Across this spectrum, clear qualitative differences emerge: novelty does not always mean lack of experience, and long-term practice does not necessarily equate to reflexivity. What appears to drive sustained engagement is rather the degree of identification with the

role of educator, the sense of influence on the community, and the opportunity for autonomous activity design.

What paths lead to the role of educator for older adults? Career trajectories, transitions, and decisions

The professional biographies of individuals who lead educational courses for older adults show that entering this role is not the result of a single scenario, but rather the outcome of diverse and multi-step pathways – often unexpected and repeatedly redefined. In this analysis, we examine how these trajectories unfold, what motivations lie behind them, and how professional and life experiences have influenced the choice to work with older people.

'It started with a substitution…': Side jobs and exploration

For some respondents, stepping into the role of senior educator happened by chance or on a temporary basis. Ola, a vocal coach, recalls: 'It started with a one-time substitution at a community center, and then they offered me regular courses.' She notes that she accepted the additional group only because it didn't conflict with her schedule, and she saw it as an opportunity to enrich her professional experience. Similarly, Wojtek – a trained IT technician working daily in a financial company – was 'drawn' into senior education by a friend: 'One day, he told me they needed someone to run a classes.… He suggested I try, and everyone liked it.' Initially, Wojtek treated it as an additional source of income: 'It's not big money, but I feel like I'm doing something really nice and fulfilling, and I enjoy it.' What began as 'accidental' part-time work turned into a conscious commitment that allowed him to fulfill values, develop skills, and explore new professional areas.

Younger participants, such as Gabrysia and Marlena, also started working in senior centers due to organisational opportunities, such as an institution expanding its offerings. Gabrysia, a Zumba instructor, admits: 'It wasn't my choice, but I'm glad I tried.' Similarly, Marlena, a fitness instructor, emphasises that the 'opportunity' was supposed to be just a temporary phase, but over time she realised she could combine her passion with her work.

Although in these cases the initial impulse was external, for many respondents working with the elderly has become a new field of professional expression, an important, though still peripheral one. Coincidence can also set in motion a process of gradual transformation of incidental involvement into conscious professional activity.

From working with children and youth to educating older adults

For a significant portion of the respondents, working with seniors was a continuation of previous educational roles – particularly those involving children and adolescents. This applies to individuals such as Zbyszek, Gabrysia, Ewa, Antosia, Aleksander, Andrzej, Ola, Marlena, and Magda, whose education and work experience stem from fields such as pedagogy, early childhood education, cultural animation, or art therapy.

Magda, a teacher, simultaneously worked at a preschool and conducted art courses for children and youth at a local cultural center. When the opportunity arose to work with older adults, she saw it as an extension of her pedagogical toolkit, not a shift. She clearly emphasises her passion for working with people and her desire to use and further develop her skills in a new area.

Aleksander and Antosia similarly exhibit continuity – both have pedagogical backgrounds and experience with younger age groups, and seniors became a new field for professional expression rather than a break with the past. This path shows that senior education often results from a smooth transition, not a radical change.

Turning points, career changes, and professional reorientation

For other respondents, the decision to start working with seniors was clearly tied to a need for change – stemming from burnout, dissatisfaction with previous work, or desire to redefine their professional role.

Antosia, a teacher and creative thinking coach, at age 39, consciously decided to 'try something new. Her previous work with younger groups no longer offered enough room for growth. She hasn't given up working with children but notes that educating older adults provides her more freedom in designing lessons and more opportunities to pursue both new passions and business goals.

Similarly, Aleksander, who runs courses at a community center as a secondary source of income, sees senior education as an opportunity that opened the door to a new audience. For Zbyszek, also a teacher, taking on such work in midlife is a way to find greater job satisfaction.

Adam, an IT instructor, left teaching 10 years ago and moved to a city-funded computer lab, gaining a stable job. His transition was smooth because before radically starting a new professional chapter, he was already involved in educational programs for various groups funded by grants. Engagement in senior education was not his original career goal but a life opportunity.

Zbyszek, who had previously linked his career to the service industry, began studying pedagogy after the birth of his child, seeing many benefits and new opportunities in the teaching profession. Working with older adults became a stage in his newly redefined professional path. Although his journey as an educator began with younger groups, the next stage – another 'test' of his skills and sensitivity – turned out to be a senior club.

Continuing an earlier path: Passion, profession, and continuity

Some respondents – like Michał and Magda – present a completely different model: senior education as a natural continuation of a career path, aligned with prior education, passions, and experiences. Michał, the manager of a senior center, emphasises: 'The idea for this profession came to me during my studies. It started with a few groups, and now I run around 70 courses weekly.' His story clearly shows educational and professional coherence – studies, internships, family and professional observations that all come together. Similarly, Magda – a therapeutic and pedagogical professional – moves smoothly from working with children to working with seniors, pointing to the universality of art therapy methods and the continuity of her skills.

Another interesting category includes individuals from artistic sectors. In Anna's case, the career change is more complex. Working with older adults was not her main goal but fits into broader social and artistic engagement throughout her career. 'I've learned a lot about working with people,' she notes, emphasising that her work with people experiencing homelessness, disabilities, and addiction provided a strong foundation for her current role and empathetic approach to older participants. Her career naturally evolved through transitions between various people-focused fields (while maintaining skill continuity).

Close relationships with older people as an impulse – care, empathy, identification

For Andrzej, a history teacher and later a school librarian, a turning point was caring for his mother after her retirement: 'I was looking for something for her, because retirement was a tragedy. […] That's when I first encountered such a place, and surprisingly, I stayed.' In his case, the decision was not strategic, but rather the result of concern for a parent, institutional changes (job reduction), and an unexpected job offer. Entering the role of educator was thus the result of a biographical constellation of circumstances in which personal sensitivity and life situation created space for an entirely new professional role.

Ewelina, an accountant by profession, worked for many years as a casual carer on social welfare. After retiring, she became involved in senior education. She believes that in her new role, she is more of a community initiator than a formal educator. She points out that as a senior herself, she shares generational experiences with the participants: 'I'm a senior myself, so I understand their needs.' She sees her entry into this professional sphere as a natural transition. Her professional identity is not ruptured but reinterpreted – her previous experiences (in social work), reinforced by empathy and a willingness to share, become the foundation for authentic relationships.

Michał, in turn, points to both his university internship in a care home and family observations: 'Grandpa in front of the TV, grandma too,' 'they didn't do anything in their free time.' These experiences, combined with academic knowledge, shaped his belief that his role goes beyond service provision – it is a form of social intervention addressing issues like loneliness and lack of activity.

Agata, active in a rural environment, notes the impact of local demographic context: 'In our village, young people move to the city, so it's just older people who stay.' She explains that her involvement in senior education does not stem from formal job responsibilities, but rather from the natural presence of seniors in daily life.

Antosia, fascinated by cognitive training, identifies caregiving for relatives as a source of reflection: 'Those moments showed me how important it is to fill time with meaningful activities.' In her case, the impulse was personal observation, although she notes that the decision to continue in this field also had a pragmatic dimension: expanding her professional offerings and a source of income.

In these stories, biographical closeness to older adults leads to a deep identification with their situation – often crossing the boundary of professional distance. Education becomes an extension of personal care, not just the execution of institutional tasks.

Civic-mindedness and local embeddedness

For some respondents, involvement in senior education does not stem from professional necessity but from a deeply rooted need to act for the benefit of the local community. Agata, a long-time volunteer, does not see her activity as work but as simply being in the world: 'I really enjoy being active and taking initiative. […] It's pure pleasure, not work.'

A similar attitude is shown by Ewelina and Marta – even though they are formally employed, their narratives are driven by a sense of mission and civic engagement. In their case, relationships with course participants are based more on neighborhood and generational ties than on formal structures. Thus, the identity of an educator is formed through action and relation to the community, rather than institutional legitimacy.

Senior education in this light becomes less of a profession and more of a form of presence in the local social space – a way to maintain relationships, stay active after retirement, and find personal satisfaction.

What are educators' career plans and attitudes toward work in the sector?

An analysis of respondents' statements reveals that decisions regarding continued engagement in the field of education for older adults are complex and ambivalent. These decisions are shaped by both individual aspirations and institutional working conditions, levels of job satisfaction, as well as a sense of meaning and belonging. Within these diverse narratives, there is a noticeable tendency to reflectively weigh professional choices in light of daily experience, biographical life stage, and available alternatives.

Among those who express a desire to remain in the sector are Marta, Martyna, Magda, and Adam. Despite often working under unstable conditions (e.g., lacking permanent contracts), they report a strong sense of attachment to their current workplaces and to the participants they work with. Even in the face of low remuneration, they value the stability and meaning derived from interpersonal relationships. Their professional identity is hybrid – they develop across multiple domains simultaneously. Nevertheless, they articulate an intention to continue working in their current environment and do not anticipate career changes. Their broad perception of their professional role leads them to seek growth within the cultural and educational sector, without limiting themselves exclusively to older adult education.

A different case is Michał, the only respondent employed full-time in a senior-focused institution. Although educational activities are secondary to his organisational duties, he demonstrates a commitment to deepening his knowledge and competencies – completing courses in andragogy and occupational therapy. Similarly, Marta, a visual artist, notes that her postgraduate studies in gerontology were not institutionally mandated but undertaken on her own initiative. She emphasises that she considers working with seniors as part of her long-term career plan.

Ewelina and Agata view their continued involvement as a form of civic participation. Their accounts are rooted in an ethos of 'being needed' and a sense of belonging to the local community. They clearly state that they have no plans to leave their roles, as long as health and circumstances allow them to continue – for as long as possible. Ewa, Zbyszek, and Andrzej – although not employed full-time with older adults – do not intend to abandon this activity, even if their involvement has no clearly defined timeframe.

Some educators perceive the sector as offering potential for professional development. Although their current roles are part-time or temporary, they view the field as a possible future career path. Wojtek, previously employed in the IT sector, is considering a career change. He plans to settle permanently in a new location to overcome stagnation in his previous work, in which he says he felt 'stuck': 'For a year now, I've seen that there's some potential here for me,' he says, adding, 'I'm even thinking about looking for another place where I could run similar courses.' His identification with this new path is growing along with his experience and increasing satisfaction in the role. Similarly, Aleksander, who leads courses within a ne wly launched senior education program, hopes for continuity: 'Discussions are underway to make these courses a permanent feature at our institution.' Both express a clear desire to turn this 'experiment' into a sustainable career direction, while also voicing concerns about the lack of institutional guarantees and financial insecurity.

Marlena and Antosia also express a desire to expand their professional activity in this area. Marlena sees movement-based classes as 'a chance to gain a foothold in the profession' and is considering obtaining additional qualifications. While she has no concrete long-term plans, she identifies a niche in the market that motivates her to pursue this direction. Antosia plans to develop her own program for cognitive training workshops incorporating elements of art therapy. She states, 'I feel like this is the perfect moment.'

She perceives this step as a move toward professional independence and plans to extend her competencies in methods for activating older adults.

However, not all participants intend to remain in this role. Anna, despite being employed full-time, expresses reservations: ‘It’s not entirely within my area of interest, I must admit. The topic is interesting, but I’m still unsure if I want to continue down this path.’ She also confesses, ‘I’m not sure if I’m starting to feel stuck here,’ revealing a tension between team loyalty and personal aspirations. Although she enjoys considerable autonomy, Anna sees her job at the community center more as a source of stability than fulfillment.

A similar attitude is shared by Gabrysia and Ola, who do not see their future in this role or institution. Ola openly expresses frustration with working conditions: ‘I don’t know if I’ll continue doing this,’ emphasising that ‘you can’t make a living working in culture’ and that the need to ‘chase hours’ across multiple institutions hampers her engagement. Gabrysia plans to focus on developing skills in dance movement therapy and psychology. She views her current work as a temporary solution within her broader career trajectory.

Job satisfaction plays a significant role in decisions about continuing this work. Michał speaks of seniors as a group who ‘know how to be grateful for every little thing.’ Magda, Ewelina, and Marta also stress the importance of relationships and the sense of impact on participants’ lives. They frequently mention a sense of meaning and reciprocity in these relationships – the awareness that their work is not anonymous but recognised and felt by those they serve. According to them, satisfaction often serves as a form of compensation for a lack of job stability or financial shortcomings.

Nonetheless, alongside positive experiences, there are challenges that may weaken motivation. Wojtek points to the irregular attendance of participants: ‘Sometimes they lack consistency,’ Anna highlights ‘negative and demanding’ attitudes among some seniors, while Martyna notes a lack of dynamism: ‘Working with seniors is calmer, but sometimes I miss the pace and energy that come with working with youth.’ There are also infrastructural and institutional challenges. Wojtek mentions a lack of equipment, and Andrzej points to difficulties in balancing this work with other responsibilities.

These narratives indicate that remaining in this role depends not only on passion or a sense of mission, but equally on real opportunities for development, the quality of institutional support, and a subjective cost-benefit evaluation. The career paths of educators working with older adults emerge as a space of ongoing negotiation – not of ready-made choices, but of dynamically formed responses to evolving conditions and personal needs.

Discussion

This study offers a significant contribution to the still rarely explored reflection on the professional group of educators working with older adults in the non-formal education sector. It is one of the first national papers attempting to capture the complexity of motivations, entry points, individual trajectories, and determinants of professional decisions made by teaching staff – individuals who perform this work on a daily basis.

In line with previous research on adult educators (Hansen, 2021; Ioannou, 2023), educators of older adults also constitute a heterogeneous group – a professional mosaic diverse in terms of age, experience, and formal preparation (e.g., Jacob et al., 2023; Luppi, 2009). Most Polish educators are women, often with higher education and experience working with other age groups. This profession attracts people of various ages – from young professionals to those nearing the end of their careers (Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz,

2017). Education for older adults is rarely their main form of professional activity; it is often an addition to other work, treated as an episodic or hobby-like activity, or as a supplementary source of income.

The career paths of educators working with older adults also reveal a complex mosaic of motivations, decisions, and biographical transitions. The study's findings allowed us to distinguish three models of entering the profession: adaptive, pragmatic, and mission-driven. While this typology is not exhaustive, it organises the empirical material and enables interpretation of educators' diverse biographies, pointing to dominant patterns and mechanisms of professional engagement. Identifying these patterns helps better grasp the logic behind their career decisions.

The **adaptive model** pertains to educators who began working with older adults in response to external circumstances – such as the need to fill a staffing gap, institutional reorganisation, or a temporary substitution offer. Their decision was not the result of previous career planning but rather a response to organisational needs, unexpected life changes, or a consequence of seizing a professional 'opportunity'. This aligns with observations by Hallam et al. (2016, p. 6), who described the 'headhunting' of educators in the context of staffing shortages. It also parallels the 'Plan B' described by Andersson et al. (2012, p. 111), referring to a career direction shift due to labor market realities or other events. This path is also confirmed by Rushbrook et al. (2014), who discussed external pressures. Although adaptability is often a survival strategy, it does not exclude the development of commitment – some participants discovered new meaning in this work and chose to stay in the profession longer.

The **pragmatic model** includes those educators who take up work with older adults as a rational choice that complements other forms of professional activity – due to an additional source of income, the opportunity to use prior competencies, flexible working hours, or a convenient location. Their decisions are well-considered and result from active career management – balancing competencies, working time, and finances. Many educators lead only a few classes per week, which forces multitasking, employment in multiple institutions simultaneously, and combining various income sources (e.g., working in schools, cultural institutions). Flexibility, resource optimisation, and the ability to juggle roles are characteristic of this group, consistent with findings by Rushbrook et al. (2014), who emphasised the ability to operate in conditions of professional uncertainty. Often, this is a result of an evolution of previous activities – a natural, 'organic' entry into new roles (Brown et al., 2012). Such career management strategies were also described by Hallam et al. (2016). From the facilitators' perspective, working in senior centers turned out to be a flexible module, allowing the combination of many roles while aligning with existing skills. It is worth noting that the motivations of educators in this group may evolve – from purely instrumental toward those linked with a sense of satisfaction and value realisation. Pragmatism, therefore, does not exclude engagement but requires navigating between multiple commitments. However, the 'dual-professionality' typical of this model may also result in a sense of alienation or limited institutional identification.

The **mission-driven model**, although the rarest, is characterised by the strongest professional identification. Educators in this category are guided by a deep sense of purpose, social commitment, and a strong belief in the value of working with older adults. Their motivations are often linked to personal experiences, family history, or a desire to share their own resources with others. Working with older adults is seen as a calling – frequently situated at the intersection of professional work and volunteerism – providing a sense of community and fulfillment. Similar mechanisms have been described by Hallam et al. (2016), who emphasised the opportunity to share one's passion as a key

driver for entering the profession. Research by Malec-Rawiński and Bartosz (2017) also highlights that empathy, the need to share experience, satisfaction derived from relationships with course participants, and a sense of purpose play significant roles in the decision to engage in work with seniors. It is important to note that the mission-driven approach does not always come with formal recognition or professional stability, which can create tensions between commitment and the lack of institutional support.

Each of the described professional trajectories – adaptive, pragmatic, and mission-driven – reflects a broader trend of nonlinear, multi-phase, and often precarious career paths typical of the contemporary adult education sector. The study's findings confirm earlier observations by Rushbrook et al. (2014) and Brown et al. (2012), noting that entry into this profession rarely results from long-term career planning. More often, it is a response to external circumstances or life turning points that redefine personal and professional priorities. The process of 'becoming' an educator in this field is shaped by learning through practice and the gradual accumulation of experience, rather than by the consistent execution of a predetermined professional development path (Acomi et al., 2021).

The study also reveals important structural features of the working environment of senior educators – common to both the Polish and broader European contexts – such as employment fragmentation, the dominance of temporary work forms, and low levels of institutional embeddedness (Hansen, 2021; Ioannou, 2023; Nuissl, 2009). Employment is often based on civil law contracts or project-based collaboration, lacking long-term stability.

As in previous studies (Hallam et al., 2016; Koutska, 2024), most respondents in this research did not possess formal qualifications for working with older adults. Their professional preparedness was most often the result of experience with other age groups and informal learning, which further confirms the absence of a clear path to professionalisation in this area (Ioannou, 2023). While some universities offer specialisations in gerontology or andragogy, these initiatives remain fragmented and uncoordinated with national education policies concerning the training of educators in the non-formal sector (Chabior et al., 2021; Jakimiuk, 2020).

In contrast to some Western European countries (e.g., Spain and Italy), in Poland, access to the profession of senior educator remains open, unregulated, and dependent on local employment practices (Acomi et al., 2021; Ioannou, 2023). This profession is not formally defined in legal regulations nor subject to qualification requirements, resulting in dispersed competency standards and limited development opportunities. Consequently, the socio-professional status of this group remains ambiguous (Acomi et al., 2021; Chabior et al., 2021).

From a broader analytical perspective, this study not only reveals the diversity of individual career paths among senior educators but, more importantly, highlights their entanglement in systemic deficiencies: the lack of professional formalisation, inconsistencies in recruitment mechanisms, and limited frameworks for skills development. This points to the need for a renewed perspective on the role of the educator in non-formal education and a deeper reflection on how institutions and public policy can better support the professionalisation of this essential, yet still underappreciated, occupational group.

Research limitations

This study is based on the experiences of 17 practitioners working in ten senior centers managed by local governments, cultural institutions, social welfare centers, and housing

communities. Only one participant was employed in the commercial sector (tourism services). The exclusive focus on public programs limits the generalisability of the findings to a broader range of services and types of activities. A deeper understanding and more detailed analysis could be achieved by increasing the sample size and including a wider diversity of research contexts, such as various types of activities and their specific characteristics.

Conclusion

This study offers a new perspective on the professional situation of senior educators in Poland, shedding light on their career trajectories, motivations, and work within a sector that – despite its growing importance – remains poorly recognised and institutionally undefined. The collected empirical material shows that the career paths of senior educators are more diverse, dynamic, and context-dependent than previous adult education literature has suggested.

Senior education is not currently a clearly defined or structured career path. Work in this field often results from incidental entry into the profession, adaptive strategies, and personal commitment. There is a lack of coherent institutional frameworks and formal support mechanisms, and educators operate at the intersection of multiple professional identities.

The study provides an analytical framework that can serve as a foundation for more in-depth research on learning facilitators for older adults – both in Poland and in a broader international context. Although the findings confirm phenomena already known from the literature (such as lack of preparation, diversity of paths, and lack of regulation), they offer insights into the challenges faced by a small group of educators working with older adults. They also highlight the urgent need to professionalise this occupational group – through public policy, academic education, and a certification system.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

Funding

This article was researched and written with the kind financial support of the Maria Grzegorzewska University.

Acknowledgement

The author thanks the staff of senior education institutions for their assistance in data collection and all study participants for sharing their experiences.

References

Acomi, N., Ochoa Siguencia, L., Carabias, M., Dragan, A., Porcelli, F., Ochoa-Daderska, R., Dragan, D., Ricchiuto, S., Sudano, D., Chiris, B., Amoruso, L., Chmielarz, A., Martin Vega, J., & Acomi, O. (2021). *Essential needs of educators to support seniors*. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4739252

Andersson, P., Köpsén, S., Larson, A., & Milana, M. (2012). Qualification paths of adult educators in Sweden and Denmark. *Studies in Continuing Education, 35*(1), 102-118. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2012.712036

Bierema, L. L. (2011). Reflections on the profession and professionalization of adult education. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning, 20*(1), 21-36. https://www.iup.edu/pse/files/programs/graduate_programs_r/instructional_design_and_technology_ma/paace_journal_of_lifelong_learning/volume_20,_2011/bierema.pdf

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, A., Karmel, A., & Ye, R. (2012). *Professionalizing adult educators in Singapore: What practitioners make of it*. Institute for Adult Learning. https://www.ial.edu.sg/getmedia/688d9fe0-b2a8-4faf-a851-884774a871b4/Professionalising-Adult-Educators-in-Singapore.pdf

Chabior, A., Leszczyńska-Rejchert, A., & Szarota, Z. (2021). Uniwersyteckie kształcenie gerontologiczne na kierunku pedagogika [University gerontological education in the field of pedagogy]. *Exlibris Social Gerontology Journal, 20*(1), 9-24. https://ojs.wsb.edu.pl/index.php/bgs/article/download/841/617/1742

de Maio Nascimento, M., & Giannouli, E. (2019). Active aging through the University of the Third Age: The Brazilian model. *Educational Gerontology, 45*(1), 11-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1572998

Escuder-Mollon, P., Esteller-Curto, R., Issakainen, C., Lubkina, V., & Lozanova, S. (2014). Pedagogical proposal to increase senior citizens' quality of life. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 3152-3159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.725

Formosa, M. (2014). Four decades of Universities of the Third Age: Past, present, future. *Ageing & Society, 34*(1), 42-66. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X12000797

Gierszewski, D., & Kluzowicz, J. (2021). The role of the University of the Third Age in meeting the needs of older adult learners in Poland. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education, 42*(3), 437-451. https://doi.org/10.1080/02701960.2021.1871904

Gołdys, A., Krzyżanowska, Ł., Stec , M., & Ostrowski, Ł. (2012). *Zoom na UTW. Raport z badań* [Zoom in on UTW. Research report]. Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych „ę". https://www.mazowieckieobserwatorium.pl/media/_mik/files/2395/zoomnautwraportcalosciowyww w.pdf

GUS [Główny Urząd Statystyczny/Main Statistical Office of Poland]. (2023). *Analizy statystyczne. Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2022 r* [Statistical analyses. The situation of older people in Poland in 2022]. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/osoby-starsze/osoby-starsze/sytuacja-osob-starszych-w-polsce-w-2022-roku,2,5.html

Hallam, S., Creech, A., McQueen, H., Varvarigou, M., & Gaunt, H. (2016). The facilitator of community music-making with older learners: Characteristics, motivations and challenges. *International Journal of Music Education, 34*(1), 19-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761415617039

Hansen, R. C. (2021). *Information on training and professional development of adult learning staff*. PLA. https://enovicke.acs.si/datoteke/2021/Updated_document_on_the_training_of_Adult_Learning-staff_in_Member_States,_23-06-21.pdf

Ioannou, N. (2023). Professional development of adult educators: A European perspective. *International Review of Education, 69*(3), 379-399. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-023-10014-0

Jacob, L., Flauzino, K. D. L., & Cachioni, M. (2023). The educator in the Portuguese Senior University. *Educação & Realidade*, 48, e123514. https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-6236123514vs02

Jakimiuk, B. (2020). The professionalization of adult educators: Some implications for education and training. In M. N. Gravani, L. Jõgi, & G. K. Zarifis (Eds.), *The role of higher education in the professionalisation of adult educators* (pp. 46-58). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Jun, S. K., & Evans, K. (2014). Learning organisations for older people: Comparing models of learning in the University of Third Age (U3A) in the UK and the Senior University (SU) in Korea. *World Studies in Education, 15*(2), 53-72. https://doi.org/10.7459/wse/15.2.04

Kops, W. J. (2020). Older adult education: Towards Age-Friendly Canadian Universities. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, 32*(1), 59-73. https://doi.org/10.56105/cjsae.v32i1.5480

Koutska, I. (2024). Teaching English as a foreign language to older adult learners: A qualitative exploration of four perspectives. *Educational Gerontology, 50*(6), 492-508. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2024.2312043

Lan, H. C., Li, C. P., & Zheng, H. W. (2016). The construction of the indicators of professional competence for exercise instructors of the elderly. *Technology and Health Care, 24*(1), 325-335. https://doi.org/10.3233/THC-151090

Lattke, S. (2016). Research on professionalisation of adult educators. In S. Sava & P. Novotný (Eds.), *Researches in adult learning and education: The European dimension* (pp. 85-99). Firenze University Press.

Luppi, E. (2009). Education in old age: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 28*(2), 241-276. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370902757125

Maier-Gutheil, C., & Hof, C. (2011). The development of the professionalism of adult educators: A biographical and learning perspective. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 2*(1), 75-88. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela0024

Malec-Rawiński, M., & Bartosz, B. (2017). An educational model for work with seniors – experiences of teachers working at the University of the Third Age. *Dyskursy Młodych Andragogów*, (18), 219-232. https://doi.org/10.34768/dma.vi18.80

MRiPS [Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej/Ministry of the Family and Social Policy]. (2023). *Informacja o sytuacji osób starszych w Polsce za 2022 r* [Information on the situation of older people in Poland for 2022]. https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/informacja-o-sytuacji-osob-starszych-za-2022-r

Nuissl, E. (2009). Profession and professional work in adult education in Europe. *Studi Sulla Formazione, 12*(1/2), 127-132. https://doi.org/10.13128/Studi_Formaz-8591

Rushbrook, P. , Karmel, A., & Bound, H. (2014). Staying in a certain state of mind: Becoming and being a freelance adult educator in Singapore. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 54*(3), 415-435. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/staying-certain-state-mind-becoming-being/docview/1636542273/se-2

Sobral, S. R., & Sobral, M. (2021). Computer education and third age universities: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(14), 7390. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18147390

Szarota, Z. (2022). Specyfika oferty dla uczących się w starości [Specifics of the offer for learners in old age]. *Dyskursy Młodych Andragogów*, (23), 287-303. https://doi.org/10.34768/dma.vi23.658

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2025, pp. 375-390

Turning prisons into a place for learning: Conditions for providing adult education in correctional settings

Kiki Maleika Qiu
Stockholm University, Sweden (kiki.qiu@edu.su.se)

Abstract

This study investigates the organisation of adult education in Swedish prisons and examines how education is integrated into a highly regimented environment. Using documents as empirical data, the study applies template analysis and the theory of practice architecture to explore the conditions shaping education in prison. The findings show that security concerns impede students' learning opportunities and development of digital literacy. In addition, due to a lack of resources, prisoners' right to education becomes conditioned, with some individuals excluded from participation. At the same time, efforts are made to turn the prison into an educational space through design choices, employment of non-prison staff, and language use. Furthermore, participation in education has recently been linked to the opportunity for parole. This has the potential to increase participation and completion rates through coercion, thus increasingly embedding education into the system of control and sanctions that is inherent in prisons.

Keywords: adult education, prison education, correctional education, system of control, theory of practice architecture

Introduction

Within many prison systems, education has been seen as an important part of prisoners' rehabilitation (Behan, 2014; Halimi et al., 2017; Novek, 2019; Roth et al., 2017), and the importance of prison education has been acknowledged by international organisations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, with calls to encourage prisoners to partake in educational programmes (Council of Europe, 2006; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). Education, among other rehabilitative measures, can facilitate reintegration into society; lead to better prerequisites for living a responsible,

ISSN 2000-7426

http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5577
www.rela.ep.liu.se

law-abiding life; and improve employment opportunities. Previous research has shown that the provision of education in prisons has had a positive impact on the individual, as it can improve self-esteem, self-efficacy, and well-being. Through participating in education, a sense of purpose and agency can be achieved, stimulating new ways of thinking and mitigating the negative effects of imprisonment (Behan, 2014; Bhatti, 2010; Bovill & Anderson, 2020; Brosens et al., 2020; Costelloe, 2003; Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019; Roth et al., 2017; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Providing education (and other activities) can lead to safer and better functioning daily operations in prison, as prisoners are occupied with other activities and are therefore less likely to engage in misconduct (Brosens et al., 2015, 2020; Halimi et al., 2017). The value of providing education is also discussed from a financial perspective, as reduced recidivism leads to lower public costs associated with criminality or welfare allowances (Behan, 2014; Brosens et al., 2015; Roth et al., 2016, 2017; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006).

How education in correctional settings is organised and what educational programmes are offered varies greatly across countries. Previous studies have explored the provision of, for example, basic, academic, vocational, and art education (Brosens et al., 2015; Costelloe & Warner, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Lukacova et al., 2018; Miner-Romanoff, 2016; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006; Watts, 2010) with the majority of studies conducted in the English-speaking world (Berglund et al., 2025). To the best of available knowledge, there is no study that has examined the conditions for providing adult education in Swedish prisons. This article aims at addressing this gap by exploring how education is integrated in correctional settings in Sweden. Adult education at large is deeply embedded in Swedish society, and is central to educational and labour-market policies (Andersson & Muhrman, 2024; Laginder et al., 2013; Rubenson, 1997, 2002). Nordic prisons have also been praised internationally for their humane treatment of prisoners (Scharff Smith & Ugelvik, 2017). The provision of education in prison thus takes its departure in a seemingly favourable societal context that nonetheless is framed by processes and security concerns that are inherent to the prison as an institution across the world. In addition, prisoners often have a brief educational background and struggle with low academic self-efficacy or concentration difficulties, which require more attention and support (Bhatti, 2010; Delaere et al., 2013; Halimi et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Skolinspektionen, 2012). This study investigates how these challenges and tensions pertaining to prisons are met and translated into the provision of adult education in correctional settings.

The study's aim is therefore to examine the organisation of adult education within Swedish prisons and explore how education is integrated into such a strictly regimented environment. Prisons are not primarily designed for the provision of education, and are faced with unique conditions not found in the wider society. In order to turn prisons into an educational setting for adults, different arrangements have to be established and existing ones altered. This article addresses the following research questions:

1. How do regulations and conditions within prisons shape opportunities and challenges for the provision of education?
2. What kinds of arrangements are established to turn prisons into a place for adult education?

In order to answer these questions, documents outlining regulations and conditions for providing education in prison are analysed by drawing on the theory of practice architecture (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017). The article is structured as follows: first,

a short description of municipal adult education and its implementation in Swedish prisons is provided. The next section presents the theory of practice architecture and how it is used to examine the enabling and constraining arrangements framing the provision of education in prison. This is followed by a section on methods. After that, the findings are presented and then discussed in relation to both the research questions and the tension that can arise when integrating education into a setting that primarily serves correctional rather than pedagogical purposes. The article ends with a conclusion offering suggestions for further research.

Municipal adult education in Swedish prisons

Municipal adult education (*komvux*) is available, free of charge, to all residents of Sweden who are over the age of (in most cases) 20. They can take compulsory, upper-secondary, and vocational courses as well as Swedish for non-native speakers at one of the schools in their municipality. In 2023, around 363000 students were enrolled in municipal adult education, which was approximately the same number of students enrolled in upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2024a, 2024b). Prisoners have the opportunity to study municipal adult education while incarcerated through learning centres that each prison, regardless of its security class, runs on its premises. The courses and the diploma that is earned are equivalent to those earned in the wider society.

Teaching in prisons is conducted in one-on-one format, with every student following their own individual study plan. The teachers are employed at one prison facility but can teach both in person and in distance mode, meaning that a student can be serving their sentence at another facility than where the teacher is located. In order for a prisoner to be able to study at the learning centre, an assessment needs to be made, resulting in a decision of whether or not they are eligible for studies (Kriminalvården, 2005, 2007b; KVFS 2011:1). In 2024, 3566 prisoners had started some kind of education, which corresponds to 20% of all prisoners (Kriminalvården, 2025).

Theoretical framework

The study draws on the theory of practice architecture (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017), which will be used as a lens to examine regulations and conditions that shape the provision of education. The theory has previously been applied in examining educational practices in various contexts, such as early childhood education (Salamon et al., 2016), English education (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015), professional learning (Kemmis et al., 2014) and study circles for migrants (Pastuhov et al., 2021). According to the available knowledge, however, the theory of practice architecture has not yet been applied in examining education in correctional settings. Using this theory as a lens allows for an exploration of the tensions, challenges, and possibilities that arise from prisons being the setting for educational practices. The provision of education in prison has to comply with and adapt to arrangements pertaining to the prison at large, while new arrangements simultaneously need to be created in order to make it possible for prisoners to study while incarcerated. Together, the different types of arrangements are termed *practice architecture* and hold a particular practice in place. The practice is therefore enmeshed in these arrangements and cannot exist without them (Kemmis et al., 2014). Within the theory, three different types of arrangements can be identified that together shape the sayings, doings, and relatings:

1. **Cultural-discursive arrangements** prefigure the sayings and are located in the semantic space through the medium of language. They affect what can be said and thought in relation to describing, interpreting, performing, or justifying the provision of education in prison.
2. **Material-economic arrangements** shape the doings and take place in the physical and material world. These arrangements precondition where, when, and how prisoners and teachers can meet and engage in education. They are dependent on the resources distributed to pedagogical staff, equipment, and material, as well as the prison layout and schedules.
3. **Social-political arrangements** shape how people can relate to one another and non-human objects in the social space linked to power and solidarity (Kemmis et al., 2014). The meeting between teacher and student, usually taking place outside prisons, is inserted into the dynamic of the prison context with its traditionally strict distinction between us and them (Drake, 2011).

These arrangements enable and constrain how a practice can unfold, and are specific to the site where it takes place (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014). Applying the theory of practice architecture in this study makes it possible to identify those specific cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that precondition the provision of education in prisons. It provides a deeper understanding of how educational and correctional arrangements are entangled and affect the provision of education in the semantic, physical and material, and social space.

Method

In this study, relevant documents regarding the organisation of education in prison were collected and analysed using template analysis (Brooks et al., 2015; King, 2012). The document selection was informed by the website of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalvården*), where laws, ordinances, and regulations as well as external and internal steering documents are listed. For this study, the Act on Imprisonment (SFS 2010:610), Ordinance on Prison (SFS 2010:2010), Ordinance on Adult Education (SFS 2011:1108), Curriculum for Municipal Adult Education (SKOLFS, 2022), and appropriation directions (*regleringsbrev*) were identified as relevant for answering the research questions. Additional documents, collected by contacting the Prison and Probation Service, included handbooks on education, memos, official decisions, and newspaper articles. These, as well as publicly available annual reports, were included in the analysis. The chosen documents describe education in prison in a detailed way, thus providing insight into the conditions shaping education from different angles.

The chosen timeframe was 2007 to 2023 as the first uniform guidelines on adult education for the Prison and Probation Service in the form of a handbook were issued in 2007. This was also the year that was dedicated to implementing learning centres in all prisons, which resemble how adult education is organised today in terms of, for example, the sole organiser in charge of municipal adult education in prison, approval to assess, and supervision by the National Agency for Education.

The documents were analysed following a template analysis within a qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2019; King, 2012). The analysis was conducted in an iterative manner. In the beginning, the material was read through, and relevant parts to the research questions were highlighted, such as descriptions of how education in prison is organised, challenges that prisons have faced when providing education, and any shifts pertaining to

education that have occurred. In the case of the annual reports, the focus was on the Introduction of the Director General in order to get a more general overview of each year; then, more specifically, the chapter on occupational activities in prison was analysed. The material was coded and preliminary themes were generated and, in turn, were organised in a template structure. The following is an example of an initial template:

1. Prisons as a place for adult education
1.1 Being different from prison
1.1.1 Teachers' wearing civilian clothing
1.2 Being different from school
1.2.1 Language use
1.2.2 Interior design

The initial templates and themes were successively refined by analysing more documents, going through the codes and themes repeatedly, and testing out theoretical ideas in order to further analyse the material. New ways of organising the data emerged during the writing process, which led to further modifications such as moving codes to different themes and renaming the themes to capture their meaning in a more poignant way. For example, the theme '1.2.1 Language use' as shown in the example of the initial template above was refined to the final theme '1.2.1 Becoming Part of the Mainstream Adult Education Landscape', which is presented in the *Findings* section of this article. The renaming of the theme deepens it by not only capturing the language and discourse surrounding education in prison but also emphasising the purpose and consequences of the language used. Here, the purpose is to become part of the mainstream adult education landscape and discourse, which, in turn, is intended to impact the actors and the practice. The final themes that were generated through iteratively refining the templates and themes are presented in the following *Findings* section, where the theory of practice architecture serves as a theoretical perspective to illuminate how arrangements exist in different realms that together both enable and constrain practice.

Findings

In the following, five themes are presented: *Becoming part of the mainstream adult education landscape, Overarching security concerns, Lost rights and opportunities, Increased steering,* and *Turning prisons into a place for adult learning*. Within these themes, the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that shape the provision of education are explored. The arrangements are analysed in terms of how they affect the ways one can speak about education in prison, what form education can take in practice, and how teachers and students can relate to each other.

The quotes presented below were originally in Swedish and have been translated by the author.

Becoming part of the mainstream adult education landscape

The adult education provided in prisons is described as follows in the 2007 handbook on education: 'The activities should, as far as possible, mimic the adult education available in the wider society. Adult education in prison should therefore not be made "prison-specific"' (Kriminalvården, 2007c, p. 6; author's translation). Despite taking place in prison, the education provided should be similar to that found outside prison. Adult

education reaches out to those who are physically separated from other citizens; a fact, however, which should not affect the educational form and content. The similarity of municipal adult education provided within and outside prisons is also marked by repealing the Ordinance on Education in Prison (SFS 2007:152) and replacing it with the Ordinance on Municipal Adult Education (SFS 2011:1108), thus including education that takes place in prison in the discourse on adult education in general. This arrangement enables education in prison and the involved actors to strengthen their position and present themselves as an integral part of the adult education landscape in Sweden.

Education in prison has also been linked to lifelong learning. In the preface of the 2007 handbook on education it is stated: 'Education must be provided in ways that make it possible to study no matter where one is located. Therefore, education must be made available to people throughout their lives, regardless of their life situation' (Kriminalvården, 2007c, p. 2; author's translation). The need to continuously learn – regardless of where one is located physically, how old one is or what kind of situation one is in – is emphasised. Consequently, education in prison has to be made available to prisoners. Placing education in prison in the context of lifelong learning carries with it the opportunity for prisoners to participate, but simultaneously implies a responsibility to do so. It is now possible, and even required, to participate in education even in a difficult life situation, which imprisonment often is. The emphasis on the responsible *adult* learner can also be found in the 2011 handbook on education, which stresses the importance of distinguishing education in prison from school for children and teenagers. Different language should be used when talking about education in prison, as certain terms are deemed inappropriate for describing, performing, interpreting, or justifying the educational practice taking place (Kemmis et al., 2014). Instead of using the word 'skola [school]', the term 'lärcentrum [learning centre]' should be used (Kriminalvården, 2011b, 2018b) and the term *elev* is exchanged for the term *studerande*:

> Student: Prisoners enrolled in adult education within the Prison and Probation Service. The term is used in everyday work (instead of the legal term *elev* found in laws and regulations etc.) to emphasise that studying as an adult differs from studying in compulsory school. (Kriminalvården, 2018b, p. 13; author's translation)

Both terms *elev* and *studerande* describe someone who is studying. In Swedish, the term *elev* is more commonly associated with children in compulsory school rather than adults. However, in official documents such as the Curriculum for Municipal Adult Education, adult students are also referred to as *elev* as it is the official legal term. While the provision of education in the Prison and Probation Service is steered by regulations related to municipal adult education, they have made the decision to avoid the term *elev* in their everyday practices. Instead, they use the term *studerande* when talking about education and their students in order to emphasise that the students are adult learners. Embedding these terms in the official handbook on education establishes a shared language and creates an image of who the students are, what demands can be made, and how to interact with them. This cultural-discursive arrangement shapes the sayings (and thinkings) in relation to education of those involved in the practice, which, in turn, can affect the doings. For example, prisoners may be more motivated to start studying: as many have previously had negative school experiences, the use of different terminology may mitigate their aversion to education (Kriminalvården, 2011b). Simultaneously, teachers might also potentially adopt different ways of thinking and acting because of the established shared language for describing the practice and its participants.

Overarching security concerns

The material arrangements in prison for providing education fall under the overarching objective of maintaining security. Security issues have to be considered, and are typically not a part of other educational practices in the same way. In other educational practices, security issues may concern keeping others out of the school rather than making sure that the students themselves are restricted in reaching out to the outside world. Security concerns in prisons affect both the educational practices within the learning centres and logistical operations surrounding the education that pose significant challenges, especially in high-security prisons (Kriminalvården, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2024). Moving prisoners to and from the learning centre can be difficult, as prison officers have to accompany students in the higher-security classes (Kriminalvården, 2012, 2013). Additionally, some prisoners have to be separated from each other as they cannot attend the learning centre simultaneously. As a result, some students have fewer hours to study at the learning centre and the number of students per study session has been reduced, thus not utilising the entire capacity of the learning centre (Kriminalvården, 2024). The material arrangements based on security concerns limit how students can access places for learning, i.e. the learning centre, where they can study, progress in their studies, and meet with their teacher. Here, the prison context clashes with the stated requirements in the Curriculum for Municipal Adult Education regarding flexibility: 'Flexibility should always be aimed for in the provision of education. This includes the location of the education, time, pace of study, mode of study and forms of learning' (SKOLFS, 2022, p. 2; author's translation). The aim of flexibility, as stated in the Curriculum, and the way the prison can translate its elements into the prison context are restricted. The provision of education has to be adapted to the necessary internal routines, which are not directly linked to the education itself but rather to security and logistics. This, in turn, is also closely connected to the staff that are available to oversee the prisoners. The security issue has been exacerbated by the growing number of prisoners in recent years:

> Occupancy rates in prisons and jails have been very high throughout the year [...] Providing meaningful activities to prisoners is crucial to maintaining security, especially in a high occupancy situation. At the same time, providing occupational activities to all prisoners is a growing challenge. (Kriminalvården, 2020, p. 1; author's translation)

The importance of occupational activities is emphasised in relation to both rehabilitation and its importance for maintaining security in the prison day-to-day. In order to meet the educational needs of prisoners, student intake needs to increase alongside the growing population. This can prove challenging, as it would entail the recruitment of more teachers on top of the already existing difficulty in recruiting staff (Kriminalvården, 2013, 2018a, 2019a, 2024) as well as creating more physical spaces for teaching and learning (Kriminalvården, 2011a). To enable all prisoners to study, material-economic arrangements need to be established by allocating resources for staff and infrastructure in line with the growing number of prisoners.

Lost rights and opportunities

How incarcerated individuals can relate to education is enabled and constrained by social-political arrangements that exist within prisons. While education can be made obligatory (see also the theme *Increased Steering*), the *right* to education does not exist in the prison context: 'There is no right to education for prisoners or individuals in jails. This differs

from the wider society, where the right to education through municipal adult education is more far-reaching' (Kriminalvården, 2018b, p. 14; author's translation). This suggests an imbalance between prisoners' obligations, responsibilities, and rights. While the individual is given the responsibility to engage in lifelong learning, whereby participation can be made obligatory for prisoners, prisoners themselves are not in a position to unconditionally exercise their right to education. For instance, those who want to study in order to avoid prison work should not take up study spots (Kriminalvården, 2008). The right to education becomes conditional, with individual reasonings mattering less, and choosing education as a 'lesser evil' compared to prison work is not a valid reason. The decision as to whether or not someone can participate in education is made by someone other than the affected individual. This reflects the power imbalance present in correctional settings, and is not found in the same way when it comes to municipal adult education outside prisons, where admission is much more permissive.

Due to limited resources, prisons prioritise individuals under age 21 and those without a high school diploma, which excludes those who do not fit the criteria or who want to study something other than municipal adult education. Previously, it was possible for prisoners to study at universities in distance mode. However, these studies were officially discontinued in 2019 as internet access has to be continuously monitored by staff, which is resource-intensive, in order to prevent illegitimate communication (Kriminalvården, 2010a, 2010b, 2011b, 2013, 2014a, 2019b). The lack of material-economic arrangements that enable students to study on university level also affects the relatings as doings and relatings 'hang together' (Kemmis et al., 2014). Students cannot relate to education taking place outside prisons and the people and objects associated with it. It can also result in social consequences (Mahon et al., 2017), where students are excluded from future possibilities such as employment in fields where higher education is required.

The prohibition of internet access affects not only the possibility for university studies but also how the provision of existing municipal adult education can unfold. The Curriculum for Municipal Adult Education states that all students 'should be given the opportunity to develop their ability to use digital technologies' (SKOLFS, 2022, p. 3; author's translation). Within Swedish prisons, however, prisoners are not allowed to use the internet or other digital tools in the same way as those outside prisons can. In their annual report for 2017, the Prison and Probation Service mentions the difficulty of living up to the requirements of the National Agency for Education:

> This poses challenges for the Prison and Probation Service, since security issues have to be taken into account as prisoners are not allowed to communicate with others or the outside world through the internet. At the same time, learning requires training in how to search for information, evaluate sources, programming and more, as well as support in teaching through audio, visual and interactive exercises. (Kriminalvården, 2018a, p. 44; author's translation)

The material-economic arrangements that enable the development of digital literacy do not exist, as there is no access to the internet. This prevents students from learning to navigate and critically evaluate the broad range of information and sources available in the digital space. Prisoners thus become excluded from both the physical and digital spaces for learning. They become passive recipients of the learning opportunities and programmes which have been made available to them and which were deemed worthy of receiving resources. The possibility of offering a wider variety of educational opportunities has also been further restricted for the future. It can be seen that funding for education in prison has already decreased, as noted in the yearly allocations received by

the Prison and Probation Service in the appropriation directions. In the most recent appropriation directions, for 2024, a stronger focus on medical treatments can be found, while no specific provision is made in relation to education (Justitiedepartementet, 2022, 2023). The Prison and Probation Service is restricted in how it develops and makes available different forms of education, as the economic arrangements are simply not available.

Increased steering

Participation in occupational activities aimed at equipping prisoners with knowledge and skills to live a crime-free life is obligatory and embedded in legislation (SFS 2010:610; SFS 2010:2010), and in recent years recidivism prevention measures such as education have been linked to the opportunity for parole. This means that 'prisoners can be directed to seek education' (Kriminalvården, 2022, p. 48; author's translation), which stands in contrast to earlier handbooks on education that stress its voluntariness (Kriminalvården, 2007c, 2011b). If a prisoner is instructed to participate in education and decides not to, this will be noted. Drop-out, misbehaviour, as well as not making progress over time, will also be noted and taken into account when a holistic evaluation is made regarding parole (Kriminalvården, 2018b). While the parole decision is not made by the pedagogical staff, education nonetheless becomes increasingly embedded in the prison's punishment and reward system, whereby undesirable behaviour leads to sanctions. This, in turn, can affect how the pedagogical staff can relate to their students and their work. Their work and professional role have been connected to the prison, having become more than solely serving pedagogical aims but also acting as a tool for managing prisoners (Burns, 1992; Goffman, 1991). Teachers' decisions and evaluations can lead to far-reaching consequences beyond the educational context. However, the link between parole and participation is also ascribed pedagogical value:

> The purpose of the routines [...] is to support the prisoner in completing what they have started. It can support the prisoner in understanding the purpose of the education and of the study plan, as well as the goal to be achieved with the studies. It clarifies that there are rules for being at the learning centre. (Kriminalvården, 2018b, p. 27; author's translation)

Supporting learning, helping students to understand the purpose of the studies, and increasing completion rates can now be reached not only through pedagogical expertise among staff but also through the link between participation and parole. This link, as social-political arrangement, shapes individuals' doings and relatings and affects prisoners' decision-making since not participating can have negative effects on their parole. Prisoners may participate in education without true interest but rather solely for the purpose of avoiding having their parole deferred, which can make teaching more difficult. On the other hand, teachers are provided with more time to support the students' learning, as students are unwilling to drop out due to fear of deferred parole. The social-political arrangement, therefore, has both constraining and enabling effects that alter relationships between pedagogical staff and prisoners as well as how individuals relate to themselves and the educational activities.

Turning prisons into a place for adult learning

While education has become increasingly embedded in the prison's system of sanctions, and security concerns overshadow the provision of education, the learning centre itself

aims to create conditions supporting learning through the design of the physical space: ‘Study spaces should be designed as a pleasant, inspiring and functional environment. A study space should not be furnished like a traditional, old-fashioned classroom. On the contrary, the less classroom-like it is in furnishing and appearance, the better’ (Kriminalvården, 2007c, p. 14; author's translation). And: ‘The learning centre is a physical environment for study, designed as an adult workplace where students have access to support from teachers, learning materials, computers, contact with subject teachers located at different prisons and with study and career counsellors’ (Kriminalvården, 2011b, p. 16; author's translation). It is important for the learning centre to look like an adult workplace and not a traditional school classroom, as many prisoners have had negative experiences in the traditional school environment (Kriminalvården, 2011b). Through the physical design of the learning centre, the Prison and Probation Service creates adult learners who are dedicated to formal education. The learning centre seeks to impose on participants an identity and conception of self that is built right into the social arrangements of said organisation (Burns, 1992; Goffman, 1991). In this case, the material arrangements of the prison, together with the cultural-discursive arrangements discussed previously, prefigure practice and work towards the same goal – which is to create a responsible adult learner.

In addition to the material arrangements of the learning centre aimed at shaping students’ doings, the teachers’ clothing also constitutes a central aspect of turning the prison into a place for adult learning by influencing social relations. The Prison and Probation Service has made the decision that teachers working in prison will not wear uniforms. This decision is justified as follows: ‘Professional roles are clearly outlined in relation to other colleagues and provide the opportunity to give the learning centre the character of a municipal learning centre rather than an “institutional school”’ (Kriminalvården, 2007a, p. 1; author's translation). In contrast to prison officers who wear uniforms, teachers wear their own clothes. This civilian clothing symbolises their distinct role in prison and reinforces their role as educators rather than enforcers. Teachers can more clearly be perceived as representatives of the municipal adult education rather than the prison, thus mitigating inherent power imbalances in correctional settings. Combined with the design of the learning centre, the civilian clothing shapes both doings and relatings as it contributes to a more relaxed atmosphere where the learning centre feels like an educational space rather than a correctional one. This, in turn, can encourage student engagement and stimulate relationships based on more equal terms.

Discussion

This article aims to answer two research questions: (1) how regulations and conditions within prisons shape opportunities and challenges for the provision of education, and (2) what kinds of arrangements are established to turn prisons into a place for adult education. In relation to the first question, the analysis shows that the provision of education is subordinate to the more overarching regulations of prisons, namely security concerns, that have to be considered. The arrangements that hold security in place extensively affect the doings related to education in the physical space (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014). Within prisons, the doings connected to education are concentrated on the physical learning centre as it is here that students can use a computer with access to learning materials and the intranet. However, students cannot decide themselves when or how long they will study at the learning centre, as access is regulated. It is also scheduled based upon security considerations, as it has to be taken into account which prisoners cannot be at the learning centre simultaneously due to the potential for

conflict. The social space where people can relate to each other (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014) also becomes connected to the physical space within prisons, as it is only at the learning centre that students have the possibility to meet with their teachers and build relationships with them.

No prisoners are allowed to access the internet in order to avoid illegitimate communication. This material-economic arrangement affects how the educational practice can unfold as students are prohibited from accessing the internet even for educational purposes. It excludes incarcerated students from the digital learning space and therefore also restricting their possibilities to relate to other people and non-human objects in the social space existing outside prisons. The provision of education is enmeshed in (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014) and subordinate to the arrangements that hold security in place within prisons. This, however, impedes students' right to education and learning opportunities, such as developing digital literacy and studying at university level in distance mode. These learning opportunities can theoretically be made possible by changing the material-economic arrangements (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014), for instance allocating more resources to staff who can supervise students' internet access or by providing necessary equipment.

The opportunity to work with other students, as stated in the Curriculum for Municipal Adult Education, is also made more difficult as the teaching is conducted one-on-one without opportunities for group work or similar methods. It can also be challenging to conduct laboratory work or practical exercises linked to vocational education (Kriminalvården, 2009). From another perspective, the arguably most favourable condition for students' learning in prison might be precisely that the provision takes place in one-on-one format. Prisoners, both in Sweden and internationally, often have a background that requires additional support in their studies (Bhatti, 2010; Delaere et al., 2013; Halimi et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Kriminalvården, 2011a, 2012, 2013, 2014b; Skolinspektionen, 2012). The one-on-one format provides students with the opportunity to receive this type of individualised teaching and support from the teacher, which is not available to the same extent and form in municipal adult education outside prisons.

In prison, therefore, both exist: favourable cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that promote learning, and arrangements upholding security that impede learning. However, while arrangements holding security in place limit prisoners' learning opportunities and how the education can unfold, the education cannot exist without it. Ignoring security considerations, for instance when placing students at the learning centre, could lead to potentially dangerous situations for both teachers and students. Ensuring prison security and upholding the safety of all involved actors when providing education is crucial. In that sense, relevant doings and relatings of education and security are 'harnessed together' (Mahon et al., 2017) in order to make the provision of education in prison possible, and to hold it in place (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Another regulation affecting the provision of education is the newly established link between participation in education and parole, which has created the unique possibility to increase participation and completion rates through coercion. While the right to education for all cannot be fulfilled within prisons due to limited resources, it is possible to utilise prisoners' fear of deferred parole to coerce them into participating. Education has become increasingly embedded in the system of control and sanctions that is inherent in prisons, and the supposedly free decision to participate in education has come to be steered by the ever-present question in prisons of when can I be released and what do I need to do to be released earlier (Burns, 1992; Goffman, 1991). While the link between participation in

education and parole is ascribed pedagogical value, such as persistence and understanding the purpose of education, it can be argued that it corrodes the integrity of education by making it more vulnerable to policy shifts, non-pedagogical objectives, and performance indicators (Behan, 2014). This link also draws attention to the question of participation in education from a broader perspective. The recruitment, and creating a demand for education, among those who are disinclined to participate in studies, still form one of the main issues in educational policy (Paldanius, 2002; Rubenson, 2002; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). This issue, in a sense, is solved by linking parole and participation and therefore creating an extrinsic motivation that is not found or needed in the wider society. It can be questioned, from a pedagogical perspective, to what extent meaningful learning can take place if the motivation to participate builds upon a fear of deferred parole. However, this link can also be viewed in a more positive light. While some students might start participating in education due to the wish to minimise the time spent in prison, it can turn into meaningful learning experiences where the value of education is discovered. The link, therefore, enables incarcerated students to see studies as a possible doing, which they might not have seen and experienced without the link. The positive experiences made when studying in prison can also become a platform for further learning (Costelloe, 2003), and enable individuals to participate in a wider range of practices and contexts when returning to society.

Aside from security concerns and limited resources that shape the provision of education and that, in many cases, impede learning opportunities, the Prison and Probation Service actively creates conditions for promoting learning. This leads to the second research question: What kinds of arrangements are established to turn prisons into a place for adult education? The analysis shows that turning correctional settings into places for adult education is made possible through the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that have been altered or established. The learning centre is not supposed to look like either a school for children and teenagers or a prison-specific school, but rather an adult workplace. While the learning centre is part of the prison and its conditions of confinement and institutional dynamics (Behan, 2014), it possesses a level of freedom to be designed in a way that serves its educational vision and purposes. In addition, the teachers do not wear a uniform but rather their own clothes, in contrast to prison officers, whose tasks are associated with security and control rather than pedagogy. According to Behan (2014), the employment of non-prison staff constitutes a distinguishing feature between the educational space and the rest of the prison. The teachers bring in pedagogical principles and lack the disciplinary rationale of prison officers, thus contributing to a different culture that can facilitate the establishment of a trusting teacher-student relationship.

Education in prison is also embedded in the lifelong learning discourse, ruled by the same steering documents and leading to the same diploma, thus positioned as equivalent to the education provided outside prisons. In addition, different terms such as *studerande* (a term to signify adult learners) and learning centre are used to distinguish adult education from traditional school. This is done with the hopes of promoting positive attitudes towards studying while incarcerated, as many prisoners have had negative experiences in the past. The chosen terms and the integration of adult education in prison into wider societal discourses and steering documents are cultural-discursive arrangements that promote specific views on education in prison. It shapes sayings and naturalises certain ways of thinking regarding what education should look like, as well as who the participants should be and how they should act. By establishing these sayings, it constrains alternative interpretations and ways of thinking. This, in turn, then also comes to constrain and enable subsequent doings and relatings. Sayings ‘hang together’ with

doings and relatings, giving the educational practice in prison its distinctiveness (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017; Salamon et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The provision of education in correctional settings faces different logics and arrangements shaping sayings, doings, and relatings that create a dynamic, multi-layered space for teaching and learning. This article has outlined how the educational space within prisons is created and regulated, and how education is integrated in prisons in the context of Sweden. The elements signifying prison and the traditional school in the semantic, physical, and social space are reduced, for instance by using different language, design choices, and civilian clothing with the aim of establishing a space for adult education. However, arrangements upholding security take precedence and pose challenges to the provision of education as they constrain prisoners' right to education and their learning opportunities. This also raises the question of how equal educational opportunities can be provided to all prisoners without compromising security, and to what extent altering these arrangements is both feasible and desirable. How can educational purposes and aims be aligned with correctional necessities? How this tension plays out in prisons of different security classes is worth investigating further, in order to gain a more nuanced picture of the provision of education in correctional settings. Further research could also explore the experiences of pedagogical staff and incarcerated individuals in order to understand how the prison as an educational space is navigated. Including the voices of those who are involved in practice can provide valuable insights into how the arrangements, as identified in this study, are understood by the participants and how they affect actual practice.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council (grant number 2021-00526).

References

Andersson, P., & Muhrman, K. (2024). Discourses on quality in Swedish adult education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *15*(2), 141-158. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5072

Behan, C. (2014). Learning to Escape: Prison Education, Rehabilitation and the Potential for Transformation. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry*, *1*(1), 20-31. https://doi.org/10.25771/8039

Berglund, J., Bjursell, C., & Hugo, M. (2025). Research on education in prisons: A scoping review. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *44*(4), 436-449. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2025.2465740

Bhatti, G. (2010). Learning behind bars: Education in prisons. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(1), 31-36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.06.020

Bovill, M., & Anderson, C. (2020). Changing the Subject: A Community of Philosophical Inquiry in Prisons. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *11*(2), 183-198. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.ojs981

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589-597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The Utility of Template Analysis in Qualitative Psychology Research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *12*(2), 202-222. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.955224

Brosens, D., Croux, F., Claes, B., Vandevelde, S., & De Donder, L. (2020). An Organizational Analysis of Foreign National Prisoners' Participation Possibilities in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Prison Education Reentry*, *6*(2), 144-161. https://doi.org/10.25771/mh4f-0996

Brosens, D., De Donder, L., Dury, S., & Verté, D. (2015). Barriers to Participation in Vocational Orientation Programmes Among Prisoners. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry*, *2*(2), 8-22. http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v2i2.817

Burns, T. (1992). *Erving Goffman*. Routledge.

Costelloe, A. (2003). *Third level education in Irish prisons: Who participates and why?* [Dissertation, Open university]. https://oro.open.ac.uk/63999/1/27532740.pdf

Costelloe, A., & Warner, K. (2014). Prison education across Europe: Policy, practice, politics. *London Review of Education*, *12*(2), 175-183. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.12.2.03

Council of Europe. (2006). *European Prison Rules*. Council of Europe Publishing. https://rm.coe.int/european-prison-rules-978-92-871-5982-3/16806ab9ae

Delaere, G., De Caluwé, S., & Clarebout, G. (2013). Prison Education and Breaking Through the Walls in Flanders: The Motivational Orientations of Long-Term Prisoners. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *64*(3), 2-21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26508104

Drake, D. (2011). The "dangerous other" in maximum-security prisons. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *11*(4), 367-382. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1177/1748895811408836

Edwards-Groves, C., & Grootenboer, P. (2015). Praxis and the theory of practice architectures: Resources for re-envisioning English education. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, *38*(3), 150-161. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03651896

Goffman, E. (1991). *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Penguin.

Grootenboer, P., & Edwards-Groves, C. (2023). *The Theory of Practice Architectures. Researching Practices*. SpringerBriefs in Education.

Halimi, M., Brosens, D., De Donder, L., & Engels, N. (2017). Learning during Imprisonment: Prisoners' Motives to Educational Participation within a Remand Prison in Belgium. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *68*(1), 3-31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26508015

Jones, L. Ø., Manger, T., Eikeland, O.-J., & Asbjørnsen, A. (2013). Participation in Prison Education: Is it a Question of Reading and Writing Self-Efficacy Rather than Actual Skills? *Journal of Correctional Education*, *64*(2), 41-62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508099

Justitiedepartementet. (2022). *Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2023 avseende Kriminalvården* [Appropriation directions for the fiscal year 2023 concerning the Prison and Probation Service].

Justitiedepartementet. (2023). *Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2024 avseende Kriminalvården* [Appropriation directions for the fiscal year 2024 concerning the Prison and Probation Service].

Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Hardy, I., Grootenboer, P., & Bristol, L. (2014). *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Springer Science+Business Media.

King, N. (2012). Doing Template Analysis. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges* (pp. 426-450). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526435620

Kriminalvården. (2005). *PM Kriminalvårdens klientutbildning* [PM Prison and Probation Service's education for prisoners].

Kriminalvården. (2007a). *Beredningspm. Förslag till ändring av KVAF 2006:11* [Prepatory PM. Proposal for amendment of KVAF 2006:11].

Kriminalvården. (2007b). *Kriminalvårdens klientutbildning – Lärcentrum-modellen* [Prison and Probation Service's education for prisoners - Learning centre model].

Kriminalvården. (2007c). *Riktlinjer för Kriminalvårdens klientutbildning (2007:4)* [Guidelines for the Prison and Probation Service's education for prisoners].

Kriminalvården. (2008). *Årsredovisning 2007* [Annual Report, 2007].

Kriminalvården. (2009). *Årsredovisning 2008* [Annual Report, 2008].

Kriminalvården. (2010a). *Årsredovisning 2009* [Annual Report, 2009].

Kriminalvården. (2010b). *Kriminalvårdens handbok om högskolestudier i anstalt och häkte (2010:3)* [Prison and Probation Service's handbook on university studies in prison and jail].

Kriminalvården. (2011a). *Årsredovisning 2010* [Annual Report, 2010].

Kriminalvården. (2011b). *Handbok för Kriminalvårdens Klientutbildning (2011:5)* [Handbook on education in the Prison and Probation Service].
Kriminalvården. (2012). *Årsredovisning 2011* [Annual Report, 2011].
Kriminalvården. (2013). *Årsredovisning 2012* [Annual Report, 2012].
Kriminalvården. (2014a). *Årsredovisning 2013* [Annual Report, 2013].
Kriminalvården. (2014b). *Klientkartläggning 2013 – Ett regeringsuppdrag. En presentation av bakgrundsfaktorer hos Kriminalvårdens klienter* [Mapping of prisoners 2013 - A government assignment. A presentation of background factors among the Prison and Probation Service's inmates]. https://www.kriminalvarden.se/om-kriminalvarden/publikationer/analys-och-statistik/klientkartlaggning-2013/
Kriminalvården. (2015). *Årsredovisning 2014* [Annual Report, 2014].
Kriminalvården. (2016). *Årsredovisning 2015* [Annual Report, 2015].
Kriminalvården. (2017). *Årsredovisning 2016* [Annual Report, 2016].
Kriminalvården. (2018a). *Årsredovisning 2017* [Annual Report, 2017].
Kriminalvården. (2018b). *Kriminalvårdens handbok för vuxenutbildning (2018:14)* [Prison and Probation Service's handbook on adult education].
Kriminalvården. (2019a). *Årsredovisning 2018* [Annual report, 2018].
Kriminalvården. (2019b). *Beslut avseende avveckling av högskolestudier i anstalt (KV 2019-23133)* [Decision regarding the discontinuation of university studies in prison].
Kriminalvården. (2020). *Årsredovisning 2019* [Annual Report, 2019].
Kriminalvården. (2022). *Årsredovisning 2021* [Annual Report, 2021].
Kriminalvården. (2024). *Årsredovisning 2023* [Annual Report, 2023].
Kriminalvården. (2025). *Årsredovisning 2024* [Annual Report, 2024].
KVFS 2011:1. *Kriminalvårdens föreskrifter och allmänna råd för fängelse* [Prison and Probation Service's regulations and guidelines for prisons]. https://www.kriminalvarden.se/globalassets/publikationer/regelverk/kvfs-20111---kriminalvardens-foreskrifter-och-allmanna-rad-for-fangelse.pdf
Laginder, A.-M., Nordvall, H., & Crowther, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Popular education, power and democracy: Swedish experiences and contributions*. NIACE.
Lukacova, S., Lukac, M., Lukac, E., Pirohova, I., & Hartmannova, L. (2018). Prison Education in Slovakia from the Teacher's Perspective. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *5*(1), 63-79. https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jper/vol5/iss1/5/
Mahon, K., Kemmis, S., Francisco, S., & Lloyd, A. (2017). Introduction: Practice Theory and the Theory of Practice Architectures. In K. Mahon, S. Francisco, & S. Kemmis (Eds.), *Exploring Education and Professional Practice* (pp. 1-30). Springer.
Miner-Romanoff, K. (2016). Voices from Inside: The Power of Art to Transform and Restore. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, *67*(2), 58-74. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26506627
Novek, E. (2019). Making meaning: Reflections on the act of teaching in prison. *Review of Communication*, *19*(1), 55-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2018.1554824
Paldanius, S. (2002). *Ointressets rationalitet: Om svårigheter att rekrytera arbetslösa till vuxenstudier* [The rationality of reluctance and indifference toward adult education: On difficulties in recruiting unemployed adults to adult education]. Linköping University.
Panitsides, E. A., & Moussiou, E. (2019). What does it take to motivate inmates to participate in prison education? An exploratory study in a Greek prison. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *25*(2), 157-177. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1177/1477971419840667
Pastuhov, A., Nordvall, H., & Osman, A. (2021). Popular education by and for migrants. A study of preconditions for involvement of migrant study circle participants in the Swedish Workers' Educational Association. *Education Inquiry*, *14*(2), 178-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2021.1971364
Roth, B. B., Asbjørnsen, A., & Manger, T. (2016). The Relationship Between Prisoners' Academic Self-efficacy and Participation in Education, Previous Convictions, Sentence Length, and Portion of Sentence Served. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *3*(2), 106-121. https://doi.org/10.25771/6473
Roth, B. B., Westrheim, K., Jones, L., & Manger, T. (2017). Academic Self-Efficacy, Educational Motives and Aspects of the Prison Sentence as Predictors for Participation in Prison Education. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *68*(3), 19-40. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/academic-self-efficacy-educational-motives/docview/2226386764/se-2
Rubenson, K. (1997). Sweden: The Impact of the Politics of Participation. In P. Belanger & S. Valdivielso (Eds.), *The Emergence of Learning Societies: Who Participates in Adult Education?* (pp. 71-93). Pergamon.

Rubenson, K. (2002). Adult Education Policy in Sweden 1967-2001. In D. Istance, H. Schuetze, & T. Schuller (Eds.), *International Perspectives on Lifelong Learning: From Recurrent Education to the Knowledge Society* (pp. 203-216). Open University Press.

Rubenson, K., & Desjardins, R. (2009). The Impact of Welfare State Regimes on Barriers to Participation in Adult Education: A Bounded Agency Model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *59*(3), 187-207. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713609331548

Salamon, A., Sumsion, J., Press, F., & Harrison, L. (2016). Implicit theories and naive beliefs: Using the theory of practice architectures to deconstruct the practices of early childhood educators. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *14*(4), 431-443. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X14563857

Scharff Smith, P., & Ugelvik, T. (Eds.). (2017). *Scandinavian Penal History, Culture and Prison Practice: Embraced By the Welfare State?* Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58529-5

SFS 2007:152. *Förordning om utbildning vid kriminalvård i anstalt* [Ordinance on education in prison].

SFS 2010:610. *Fängelselagen* [The Prison Act].

SFS 2010:2010. *Fängelseförordning* [Prison Ordinance].

SFS 2011:1108. *Förordning om vuxenutbildning* [Ordinance on adult education].

SKOLFS. (2022). *Läroplan för vuxenutbildningen* [Curriculum for adult education]. Regeringen.

Skolinspektionen. (2012). *Vuxenutbildning i anstalt. En kvalitetsgranskning av Kriminalvårdens klientutbildning med fokus på motivationsarbete och anpassning* [Adult education in prison. A quality audit of the Prison and Probation Service's education for prisoners with focus on motivation work and adaptation]. https://www.skolinspektionen.se/beslut-rapporter/publikationer/kvalitetsgranskning/2012/vuxenutbildning-i-anstalt/

Skolverket. (2024a). *Elever i gymnasieskolan. Läsåret 2023/2024* [Students in upper secondary school. Academic year 2023/2024].

Skolverket. (2024b). *Elever och studieresultat i kommunal vuxenutbildning 2023* [Students and study results in municipal adult education 2023].

Tewksbury, R., & Stengel, K. M. (2006). Assessing Correctional Education Programs: The Students' Perspective. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *57*(1), 13-25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282685

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). *The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)*. https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf

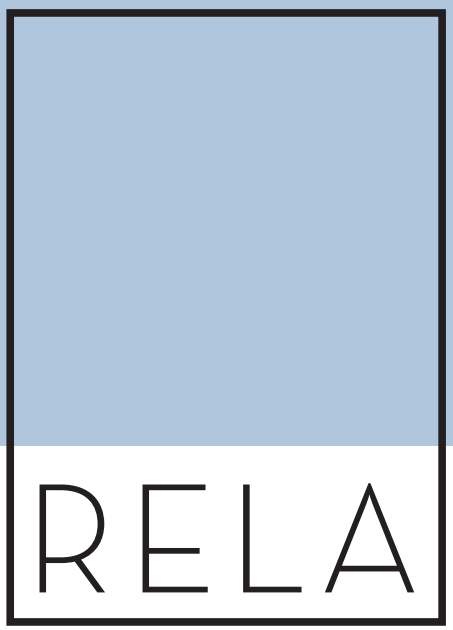
Watts, J. H. (2010). Teaching a distance higher education curriculum behind bars: Challenges and opportunities. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, *25*(1), 57-64. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680510903482256

Aims & Scope

The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) is a refereed academic journal creating a forum for the publication of critical research on adult education and learning. It has a particular focus on issues at stake for adult education and learning in Europe, as these emerge in connection with wider international and transnational dynamics and trends. Such a forum is important at a time when local and regional explorations of issues are often difficult to foreground across language barriers. As academic and policy debate is increasingly carried out in the English language, this masks the richness of research knowledge, responses and trends from diverse traditions and foci. The journal thus attempts to be linguistically 'open access'. Whilst creating a forum for international and transnational debate, contributions are particularly welcome from authors in Europe and other locations where English is not the first language.

RELA invites original, scholarly articles that discuss the education and learning of adults from different academic disciplines, perspectives and traditions. It encourages diversity in theoretical and methodological approach and submissions from non-English speakers. All published contributions in RELA are subjected to a rigorous peer review process based on two moments of selection: an initial editorial screening and a double-blind review by at least two anonymous referees. Clarity and conciseness of thought are crucial requirements for publication.

RELA is published on behalf of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA).



www.rela.ep.liu.se

www.esrea.org

ISSN 2000-7426