Online Participatory Learning for Low-Qualified Adult Learners

Gilberto Marzano, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Rezekne, Latvia & Janusz Korczak University in Warsaw, Poland
Luis Ochoa Siguencia, The Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice, Katowice, Poland

ABSTRACT

Participatory learning and online learning are increasingly appealing as educational approaches which can positively affect learners. Participatory learning engages students as active participants in the full educational programme, including homework and exercises, whilst online learning offers tools that facilitate learners’ collaboration and peer evaluation, minimising student and instructor overhead in the conduction of courses. This article reports on EScAIADE, a two-year EU-funded project initiated at the end of 2015, which focuses on the education of low-skilled adults through participatory online non-formal and informal learning. This article presents and discusses the first phase of the EScAIADE project. Indeed, although their project is still in progress, the authors decided to report on the survey they made at the beginning of the project as well as on a collaborative training event that took place in the intermediate project phase, since a few interesting findings have emerged from them.

KEYWORDS

Adult Education, Adult Learning, Collaborative Learning, Online Learning, Participatory Learning, Social Learning

INTRODUCTION

Researchers engaged in social analysis have defined contemporary society as an on-going risk society (Schedler, 1998; Schedler & Santiso,1998) that is increasingly creating conditions of poverty and social exclusion (de Greef, 2012). They point to globalisation, individualisation, and labour deregulation as the factors responsible for the increasing rates of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion (Stiglitz, 2002; Heine & Thakur eds., 2011).

Recently, the OECD presented a bleak picture of adults with poor literacy skills (Figure 1), and reported that one in five adults, on average, has poor reading and numeracy skills (OECD, 2016). In Europe, the Cedefop-European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training calculated that adults with low or no qualifications comprise 30% of the unemployed (Dehmel, 2013).

There is a broad consensus that education and lifelong learning represent the main keys for combating social inequality (Volles, 2016) as well as for mitigating some of the alarming consequences of rapid technological change. Today, most work tasks are becoming computerised or computer-guided, and this carries two negative consequences. The first is that digital technologies are changing some jobs completely, and causing others to disappear altogether. The second is that those lacking digital skills are at a significant disadvantage when they search for a job. These new types of low-qualified people - those who are being replaced by robots and electronic programmes and those who have poor digital competence – are increasing the population of low-skilled people.
There is a substantial agreement that it is necessary to intensify educational programmes for low-skilled adults, since a low level of skills both severely limits a person’s employability and favours their social exclusion (de Greef, Verté & Segers, 2015; Windisch, 2016).

In contemporary society, education and employability are much more closely related than they were in the past. In fact, although a significant part of the overall labour market (45% globally) is represented by low skilled jobs today (International Labour Office, 2015), many of these jobs, such as waiters, retail stock assistants, retail cashiers, front desk receptionists, and so on, require specific physical abilities and mechanical skills. Paradoxically, nowadays, several low-skilled jobs actually need skills at higher levels than other jobs (Maxwell, 2006) and, as a consequence, require well-targeted educational interventions. This poses some challenging educational issues, both at a methodological and a practical level, since low-skilled adults are an inhomogeneous class encompassing people of all different ages and backgrounds. Indeed, the low attainment of skills can derive from various contextual factors, such as status (employed, unemployed, inactive), background, general knowledge, gender, and cultural barriers, including the digital cultural divide. In addition, linguistic barriers and restrictions in national legislation may lead adults towards a low-skilled or low-qualified status, as is the case for immigrants and refugees who are subject to greater rates of unemployment than any other group.

As a consequence, educational programmes cannot be the same for all the different low-skilled adult groups, for example, different learning approaches are needed for adult immigrants on one hand, and for adults who lack technical abilities or skills on the other.

At the moment, many low-skilled adult learning programmes are derived from entirely disparate practices, sometimes rendering them unsuitable or even completely ineffective (Merriam, 2015).

New technologies can be useful, and can facilitate the development of educational programmes for adults, making adult learning more effective and flexible. Adults that cannot attend classes in-person can alternatively make use of mobile access. Moreover, online personalised learning pathways can be created to support learner differences, social networks can enable peer-to-peer learning and collaborative learning solutions, whilst the vast and continuously updated online information sources can be utilised as learning resources. Figure 2 shows the principal current modalities of online learning.

However, although there is an increasing demand, ICT-based adult learning is still in a nascent state, and poses various methodological and practical questions (Tyton Partners, 2015). One question is how we can create online learning environments that provide adult learners, especially low-qualified
Related Content

Supporting the Interconnection of Communities of Practice: The Example of TE-Cap 2
www.igi-global.com/article/supporting-interconnection-communities-practice/44691?camid=4v1a

Sustaining Organizational Innovation
www.igi-global.com/chapter/sustaining-organizational-innovation/62924?camid=4v1a
A Mobile-Based E-Learning System
[www.igi-global.com/article/a-mobile-based-e-learning-system/102694?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/a-mobile-based-e-learning-system/102694?camid=4v1a)

ICT Impact on Knowledge Industries: The Case of E-Learning at Universities
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/ict-impact-knowledge-industries/19413?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/ict-impact-knowledge-industries/19413?camid=4v1a)