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Evaluative strategies in adult education

Marin Manolescu^{a*}, Lucica Magdalena Tâlván^a, Alina Carmen Bozon^a^aUniversity of Bucharest, 1-3 Iuliu Maniu Avenue, Bucharest, 061071, Romania

Abstract

Structural changes in post-revolutionary Romanian society require affirmation of adult education as a prerequisite for harmonious integration and development on the socio-professional plan. If in the past, the adult education was specific to academic environment, nowadays this educational term covers most social groups as a consequence of the ability of human beings to be educated. It can be said that the process of education occurs during the adult's life, based on their learning needs and in correspondence with the adult's psychological features. In the message Declaration of the First National Conference regarding adult education, Timisoara 2001, it's stated that "it is necessary to recognize adult education as a national priority, as part of the national education system" (Sava, 2001: 194). An important role in adult education is played by the access to the latest information from the social, cultural and professional domains, as a premise for skills development at individual level but also macro-economical level, for the society progress based on knowledge. Learning can be performed in specialized institutions through courses, training programs and/ or e-learning platform which are completed by an official diploma certifying a particular professional qualification. Improving the quality of evaluation trough training programs for adults require the identification of evaluation strategies that highlight correctly the skills acquired by the students. This article aims to identify the main evaluation strategies used in adult education from teacher-trainers' perspective in order to optimize courses' design and development for adults. The paper is structured in four chapters, as follows: the first chapter outlines general characteristics of adult assessment activity. The second chapter presents various conceptual approaches in the literature on assessment strategies used in courses for adults. The third chapter presents the authors contribution to the dynamics of educational policy elements of Romania relating to adult education The fourth chapter highlights the conclusions drawn from the proposed study.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +40722 491 839
E-mail address: manole_manolescu@yahoo.com

1. Evaluation in the field of adult education

Teaching-learning-evaluation activity leads to the achievement of the educational process. All these activities are in a relationship of interdependence. From modern didactics perspective evaluation activity is integrated in the educational process.

The concept of evaluation has a series of important definitions both in European and International environment and also in Romanian pedagogy. As far as we are concerned we consider the following assessment of the meaning to the term: the evaluation is the activity through which are issued value judgments about student's learning process and product, based on predetermined quality criteria in order to take decisions according to the meaning given to the evaluation approach: adjustment, improvement, selection, certification, etc. (Manolescu, 2010).

Numerous prestigious specialists in the field of Education Sciences have suggested various definitions of the evaluation concept. Therefore, Hadji (1989: 21) defines the concept of evaluation as follows: "to evaluate could mean: check to judge, to evaluate, to lie, to represent, to cause, to give a verdict, etc." Another well known definition of the evaluation concept is the following: "In school, the evaluation concept has the meaning of a note or a letter grade assigned to pupil's activity "(Abernot, 1998: 5). What we have to remember from these definitions (Manolescu, 2003), is that two fundamental concepts are part of the evaluative process in agreement with the current stage of evaluation development: objectives and assessment criteria.

Regarding adult education, currently there are numerous definitions of this concept, but we'll stop to Hallenbeck's definition (1955 *apud* Popescu, 1974: 19) "adult education is a social movement joining all efforts to educate adults in a large self-conscious movement that can meet the requirement of this century, adults more capable, more balanced and happier". We can talk about a series of characteristics of adult education. Thus, in author Bhola's opinion (1985, *apud* Neculau, 2004: 46) there are five major characteristics of the concept of adult education:

- „Globality and continuity- because adult education has a permanent character being sinonimous with terms like continuous education, community education.
- Indispensable minimum- because all people need a basic education in order to understand the mechanisms of life.
- Structural freedom- offers individuals the opportunity to be educated outside the traditional educational institutions.
- Usefulness- adult education has a functional character and helps the individual to solve their daily problems.
- Equity- because it addresses equally to all”.

In adult education, the evaluation is conducted by a trainer who has some expertise in this area, representing the main topic regarding the training and adult education. To educate adults, the trainer needs to carry on its business in a predetermined space so that the proposed learning activities, leading to the attainment of the objectives set. In higher education, student training involves a laborious process of design and operation of specialized courses for training in a specific area of interest.

2. Evaluation strategies of adults

In a large acception, the strategy represents “a set of coordinating actions in order to reach a goal” (Manolescu, 2010: 51). We can state that in field of adult education the evaluative strategy is a prior and advance guide meant to offers the perspective from which evaluation will be designed, having a key role with regard to issuing value judgments on the process and results of adult training.

“In the educational evaluation, the strategy represents the responsible conduct evaluator demeanor in all aspects and the entire expanse of the evaluative approach, as well as the option for the most appropriate and more suitable type/ mode of teaching evaluation in the given situation of educational” (Ungureanu, 2001: 148).

The strategic approach of an adult evaluation strategies takes into account the following aspects: “establishing the beneficiaries of the evaluation, establishing agents of the evaluation, justification of the evaluation, establishing the goal of the evaluation, make the evaluation compatible intrinsically linked with the type of training, the identification of constraints, determining the object of evaluation, development of assessment tools, optimal

placement in time to start evaluating and determining its length, setting option for the manner of interpretation of evaluation results to establish how the valorisation of the evaluation results to be materialized in post-evaluative decisions recovery-breakthrough-change” (Manolescu, 2010: 52).

2.1. Possible teaching action

Regarding the concept of didactic strategy, we can say there is an extremely large variety of combinations or pedagogical strategies applicable to direct learning. These combinations are not haphazard, but according to certain criteria. From the structural point of view a strategy consists of: methods and procedures, education, activities organization forms. Didactic strategy (Cerghit, 2008) designates how the teacher choose, combines and organizes all the methods, materials and means of education, organizes activities to achieve predetermined objectives.

Cerghit (2008) highlights three meanings of the concept of didactic strategy:

- As adopting a specific approach to learning (through heuristics, problematization: experimental facts etc.).
- As an option on how to combine the methods, means and forms of organization of teaching.
- Programming mode as (select, order, hierarchy) in an optimal sequence of specific phases and stages of the process conducted in activity, delimiting the time and respecting the principles and rule.

Also, depending on the characteristics of thinking students can identify: inductive strategies, deductive strategies, joint strategies. After routing method of learning we have: algorithmic strategies, heuristic strategies, joint strategies. In constructing pedagogical teaching strategies can be taken into account six criteria, each by three subdivisions. From this combinations may result a “possible teaching action” (Manolescu, 2000 *apud* Iucu, 2005: 55-56).

2.2. The modernization of evaluative strategies

Evaluative strategies meet a series of classification:

From the perspective of the polar axis can be identified:

- “Summary-formative; criterial-normative; product-process; Description / measurement-evaluation; proactive-retroactive; overall, holistic-analytical; internal-external;-personal; Category/custom-front; integrative-contextualized; the reflexive-participatory; imperative-tradable; motivating-punishing; formal-informal.
- Criterial strategies versus comparative strategies.

By the integration mode in the educational process:

- Initial evaluation conducted at the onset of a training program;
- Formative evaluation and formative evaluation conducted during the program and its integrated;
- Summative evaluation, cumulative realized at the end of the program” (Manolescu, 2010: 54-64).

We can also talk about metacognitive strategies in teachers’ self-evaluation of pedagogical concepts. Related to metacognition concepts we can mention: self-awareness, self-education, self-knowledge, self-control, self-evaluation, self-assessment, self-management, competence. Flavell is the father of metacognition, which together with Wellman (1977) have defined conceptual universe metacognition integrated into a taxonomy. The metacognitive variables of this taxonomy are:

- Personal variables: knowledge, ideas about personal cognitive capabilities;
- Variables related to the learning tasks: information about the nature and actual level of difficulties which need to be solved tasks;
- Strategic variables: knowledge about different types of cognitive strategies that could be used for certain issues and to identify those which are the most suitable for a given learning context.

Cognitive strategies underline the metacognitive, but are not reducible to them:

- Any cognitive strategy can turn into a metacognitive strategy, if the learning situation subject begins to deliberately use them in this purpose.
- Moving from cognition to metacognition involves a deliberate effort, volunteer, reflective, and proactive.
- Metacognition Draws attention to the subject in the act of knowing, the awareness of it, by appealing to self, self-esteem and self-improvement of their beliefs.
- Metacognition involves self-awareness of cognitive functioning.

3. Statistical elements with regards to educational policy in higher education

Educational policies of higher education aim to optimize the decisions of national education (educational ideal, general objectives relating to the education of a nation) in relation to the specific social context of a defined period of time. We note that "the objectives of university education system cannot be achieved if a significant number of people have no direct access to education" (Miroiu, Crăciun, & Florian, 2007: 21).

For a better picture of educational policy context of adult education, we did a secondary analysis of statistical indicators on adult education in Romania considering the data provided by INSE through statistical yearbooks.

In the study we analyzed the evolution of the number of students enrolled in higher education from 2001 to 2013.

Table 1. Evolution of the number of students enrolled in higher education during 2001-2013

Years	Day	Seral	IFR	IDD	Total
2001-2002	459057	3363	72895	46906	582221
2002-2003	462932	3006	70778	59581	596297
2003-2004	482869	2433	66698	68785	620785
2004-2005	499329	1229	61272	88505	650335
2005-2006	518997	2602	60874	133991	716464
2006-2007	539174	1115	68013	177204	785506
2007-2008	555975	1132	89335	260911	907353
2008-2009	516468	1616	93842	279172	891098
2009-2010	562105	1626	132654	78934	775319
2010-2011	513491	995	94239	64276	673001
2011-2012	442613	592	46628	50019	539852
2012-2013	401099	439	26346	36708	464592

Data source: INSE

Figure 1 shows the evolution of the number of students enrolled in higher education from 2001 to 2013, in Romania.

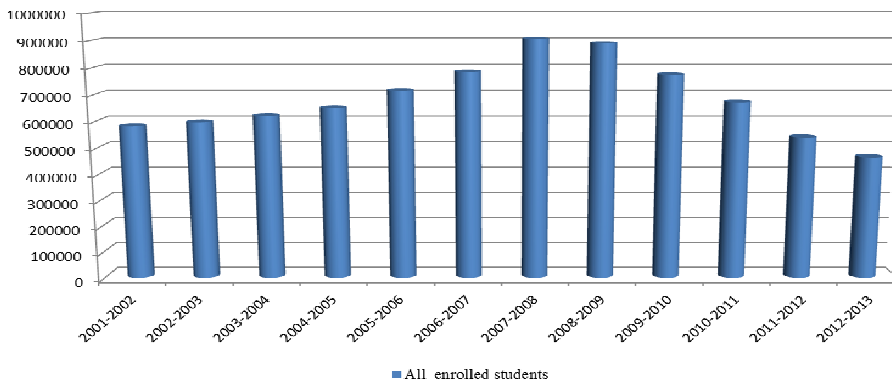


Fig.1 Evolution of the number of students enrolled in higher education from 2001 to 2013.

The chart shows an uptrend on the number of students enrolled in higher education from 2001 to 2009, with peaks in 2007-2008 (907353 students) and 2008-2009 (891098 students). Starting 2009-2010, the trend is downward, to the end of the analysis period (464592 students enrolled in the academic year 2012-2013) to a lower number of enrolled students than the number of students enrolled in 2001-2002 (582221 student).

Figure 2 highlights the evolution of the number of students enrolled in higher education in 2001-2013 in relation to forms of education (day, evening, part-time, distance learning).

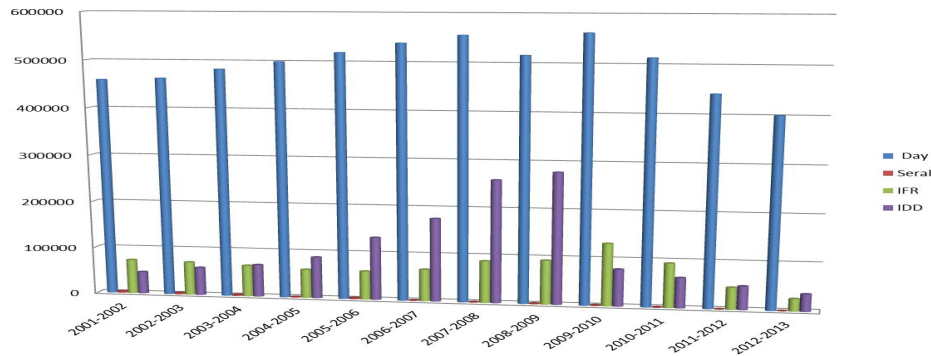


Fig. 2 Evolution of students enrolled in higher education during 2001-2013 in relation to forms of education

It can be seen that the number of students enrolled in tertiary education has increased steadily during 2001-2008 from 459057 students in the academic year 2001-2002, to 555975 students in the academic year 2007-2008. Also in 2008-2009 academic year, even if the total number of students was nearly at an equal level with the previous academic year (as shown in Figure 1), the students from the daily classes were much fewer than those in the previous academic year (516468 students in 2008-2009 academic year to 555975 in 2007-2008). The largest number of students enrolled in tertiary education was registered in the academic year 2009-2010 (562105 students). Starting with the academic year 2011-2012 the graph shows results in a downtrend, it is the year 2012-2013 at a lowest level on the number of students enrolled to date (401099 students). Regarding the number of students enrolled from other forms of education, we can see that the number is significantly reduced in comparison with the number of day students. The fewest students are enrolled in evening classes, and their numbers have been dwindling, with small upward fluctuations in the years 2005-2006 (2,602 students) and 2008-2010 (1616 students in 2008-2009 and 1626 students in 2009-2010). If we look at the evolution of the number of students enrolled in the forms of part-time education and distance education, we observe that the level has developed similar trends while maintaining the relative constant in the period 2001-2004, increasing slightly over the period 2005-2009, and decreasing in the period 2009-2013.

Student evaluation at the end of the program is achieved through the support of a written examination/oral, which they can obtain a graduate degree. In the Report on the State Regarding the Education in Higher Education in Romania, design of MECT, it is highlighted in 2011 the graduation rate of higher education, within the section for the results of education and training in the labor market" (p. 4). According to the document, this indicator shows the percentage of higher education graduates from "total population age-specific graduation level theoretical question of education. It is an indicator that reflects the quality and effectiveness of the internal system of education, and its results" (p. 14). Figure 3 shows the evolution of the number of graduation rate of higher education in the period 2003-2010.

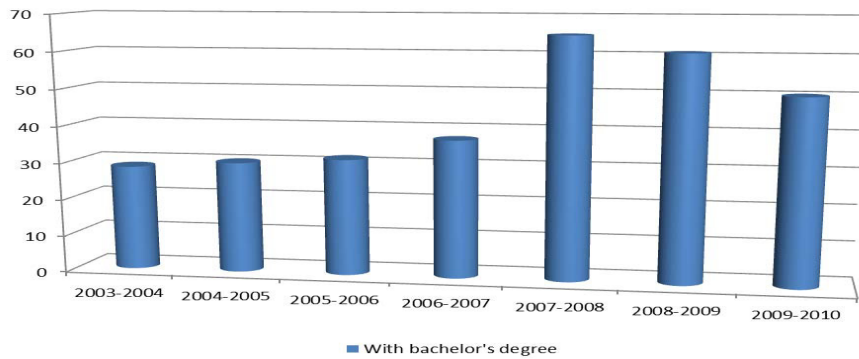


Fig.3. The evolution of graduates having bachelor's degree

Data Source: Report on the state of higher education in Romania, Ministry of Education 2007

As can be seen in the graph above, the graduation rate for students who have obtained bachelor's degree, during the period under review, increased in the period 2003-2008, 28,5% at 65,1%. In the period between 2008 and 2010, this indicator has declined steadily, reaching 50, 1% (in 2010).

4. Conclusions

Evaluation activity in the field of adult education is a critical structural factor for educational approach optimization, both at the level of the process and the product of learning. That means that we are talking about the need for an appropriation level standardization of competence at the beginning, during and at the end of a training program in a specific field. The importance of evaluative strategies is fundamental for obtaining information that reflects the extent to which an adult, having the quality of being formed has acquired skills to help him for a social integration and a professional approach. The study highlights the existence of a broad range of evaluative strategies, divided into various classifications, providing multiple opportunities for trainers to choose and combine them, depending on the contexts of learning. Statistical indicators relating to educational policies in Romania reveals that between 2000 and 2008, characterized by economic ascent, there was an increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education, the percentage of graduates with Bachelor degree being about 65% in 2008. Global economic crisis manifested after this year is reflected in the level of education, because it is found that in recent years the trend of statistical indicators is, with minor fluctuations, descending.

It requires a revival of the educational field with major implications for economic social and cultural development of a society. In this line of action it is necessary to use for informational and decision purpose some data concerning the educational arrangements intended for adults. In this context it is also highlighted the importance of the application of optimal combination of evaluative strategies within the framework of educational activities intended for adults, at the individual level (trainers-trainees), institutional and procedural, as good information leads to qualified decisions concerning the development of adult education in the long-term.

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