Using Cybergogy and Andragogy Paradigms in Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

The paper is focused on valorising principles of cybergogy and andragogy in the framework of self-formative paradigm, and their implementation for the amelioration of the lifelong learning processes. The paper approach related to the synergy between andragogy, cybergogy and self-formative paradigms represents a contribution for changing contexts and attitudes related to the lifelong learning, based on self-education and e-Learning. A study case related to the implementation of a pilot e-Learning tool will complement the conceptual approach with practical outlook.

Keywords: andragogy, cybergogy, self formative paradigm, lifelong learn

1. Introduction

The study is emphasizing role of the continuous education, as main pillar of knowledge society. Within actual framework, the main pressure consists in the knowledge creation, as a reflection of the knowledge and experience acquisition, combined with personal creativity. Consequently, the development of self-formative capacity and the stimulation of creativity are most important current adults competences.

The statistical data analysis carried out demonstrates that, in fact, some European countries, including Romania, the rate of participating in continuous learning processes is very low. Thus, the study is centered on finding solutions for ameliorating participation in the lifelong learning (LLL) process. In this perspective, it has been noticed that the most important principles of andragogy and cybergogy paradigms have not been sufficiently exploited in the LLL process. Moreover, the societal need of new skills and competences should be harmonized with the people’s motivation and capacity to adapt themselves to the actual challenges. The theoretical approach has been valorized within a research project framework, which has implemented the specific principles of the andragogy and cybergogy.
2. Actual challenges for the lifelong learning process

Beginning with Comenius and his well-known words “Entire life is a school”, the continuous learning process became a reality for the human life. Moving from the Comenius’ holistic approach (Pansophism) to the actual dynamic changing world, the need of continuous learning represents a permanent requirement, in order to cope with the societal challenges. The doctrine of the permanent education has been formulated in the first quarter of the 20th century, within the framework of the Memorandum attached to the report of the Committee for the Adult Education in Great Britain (London, 1919). In this report the role of the continuous education has been clearly emphasised: “The adults’ education does not represent a luxury for a limited number of persons, being a component of the social life. Consequently, the adults’ education should be accessible for all and should represent a continuous process” (Postan, L., 2007, p. 60). Though the permanent education is not a new concept, only during the second half of the 20th century, the concept became a vehicle, creating equal chances for the personal development along the whole life. Beginning with the years '60s, the concept has been implemented, through the special efforts of the UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

The main characteristics of the LLL have been formulated by Dave (Dave, H. R., 1992, p.65-66), who has emphasised the necessity of changing the objectives of education, and to focus on the adult education. In the context of the knowledge society, the European Strategy 2020 is focused on the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Moreover, the Strategy for Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) has very ambitious objectives, such as: the share of 30-34 year old people with tertiary education attainment should be at least 40%, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%, an average of at least 15% of adults (age group 25-64%) should participate in lifelong training, the share of 15-years youngsters with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%. The ET 2020 Strategy has as main priorities: continuous learning and mobility, quality and efficiency in education and training, equity and social cohesion, as well as the improvement of the the creativity and innovation at all educational levels (Council of the European Union, 2009).

The actual EU average rate related to the participation in LLL processes (8.9%) is still very low compared to the target for 2020 (15%). In relation with this indicator, there are three groups of countries:

- the countries with a favourable position, which have values over the 2020 target (e.g.: the Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Netherland - and UK);
- the countries with values around the actual EU average (e.g.: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium etc.);
- the countries with the most unfavourable position, i.e. values well below the actual European average (e.g.: Greece, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria).

Romania, with 1.6% participation rate in lifelong learning, has the penultimate position before Bulgaria with 1.2% participation rate in LLL. The statistical data demonstrate the existing discrepancies within the European space, and the gap related to the target set for 2020. In the last 12 years, the participation rate in LLL had a constant upward evolution between 2000 and 2006, and a steady with a slight downward trend in the last 6 years, except Portugal, where the indicator had a positive evolution.

The analysis of the current European situation highlights a discrepancy between new skills and competences needs and the real market situation, especially in the countries of the third group. The adults’ participation in training is unsatisfactory, even in the countries belonging to the second group. One of the barriers in the LLL process consists in its actual formal framework, which is not enough flexible. In addition, the training process takes too long in relation with the adults’ needs and their availability. The low participation rate in Romania and other countries illustrates that the LLL approach is inadequate, and changes should be made for improving the current situation.

These results demonstrate that the self-formative approach should be stimulated, taking into consideration the principles of the andragogy, and the facilities of the cybergogy. In addition, LLL should be more focused on informal learning and on the recognition of the competences acquired during the self-formative or informal processes. Accordingly, the LLL processes should be redesigned in order to be more responsive to the adults’ profile and interests. Current practice in LLL should include the assessment of the level of competence, and the training should cover only the real lack of certain skills and competences.
3. Self-formative approach based on the andragogy paradigm

As it has been revealed, the lifelong learning, based especially on the self-education, represents the main direction responding to the social and individual challenges. From the personal perspective, the self-education has an important contribution to the self-awareness, i.e. the capacity of self-determination and personal development in the cognitive, affective and volitional levels. The self-education, directly related to the person and his psychological dimension, has simultaneously a social determination, creating the premises for the self-improvement and social progress. The definition of the self-education concept has various approaches, such as: “the search of the personal learning path, discovered by each person with the others’ support, a search process based on performance, will and self-realization” (Second World Meeting on Education, June 2000, Paris); “a direction to personality development, which transforms the object into a subject, i.e. the learner into a teacher” (Cristea, S., 2008, p. 348); “the human being’s activity aiming at improving his personality” (Barna A., 1995, p. 23); “the individual’s efforts for self-modelling his intellectual capacity, feelings, attitudes and personality traits” (Comanescu, I., 1996, p. 33).

In the context of the LLL paradigm, self-education becomes a natural process offering a better valorisation of the internet and information technologies potential. The self-education increases the capacity of the memory and the creative valences of the brain (Neacșu, I., 2006, p. 15). The whole process relies on “a new balanced approach between external and internal factors of the personality development... where education, initially perceived as an external factor, becomes gradually, by self-education and LLL, a stable internal factor reflecting the human beings’ capacity of permanent self-improvement of their individual and social activities” (Cristea, S., 2000, p. 23). As Salade underlines, the self-education in relation with the lifelong learning represents its core, as “both self-education and permanent education address the development of the continuous learning desire” (Salade, D., 1998, p. 210).

The role of the self-education consists in developing all the human beings’ abilities and creating a “bridge between the self-education and the permanent education, as an ideal of the integral education” (ibidem, p. 223). The main dimensions of the self-education refer to: self-learning (autonomous activity enabling the independent achievement of the learning goals, which have been set by a trainer); self-training (full autonomy during the learning process, facilitating the development of the self-education capacity, generating new knowledge relationships); self-formative approach (full independent learning process, the person being able to acquire and use new knowledge in a creative way).

The self-formative process could be a process based on documents and structured situations (e.g.: computer based learning, online learning), a process based on non-structured documents and situations or a process based on an independent identification of the information and documents, their analysis and evaluation, in order to solve new problems and to find adequate answers to new situations (Raynal, Rieuher, 1997, p. 48-49). In a strategic perspective, the abilities related to the self-formative capacity rely on: objective self-knowledge and awareness; formal, non-formal and informal learning; achievement of the objectives; prospective view on the self-evolution in various contexts (educational, social, professional); a balanced approach between aspirations and opportunities; self-evaluation of the results and achievements, in terms of success and failure; motivation/self-motivation aiming at acquiring new knowledge, competences, skills, attitudes and mentalities. The operational premises of the self-education consist in the development of the subject’s capacity to design its own educational path (Cristea, S., 2008, p. 356).

An innovative approach consists in integrating the specific elements of the self-education with the adults’ formative paradigm, defined as andragogy. Andragogy, should be clearly distinguished from the pedagogy (Matai, P., H., L. d. S., 2009). Initially, this concept has been introduced by a German teacher, Alexander Kappin 1833 (Kapp, A., 1833), but the development of the whole paradigm belongs to Malcom Knowles, American teacher. As Malcom Knowles has emphasised, andragogy represents a special theory for the adults’ learning style, characterised by the responsibility of the decisions, i.e. the independent decisional process related to the personal development directions. The hypothesis considered by Knowles (Knowles, M., 1980) as the basis of the andragogy refers the main adults’ characteristics: changing the concepts according to new experiences; autonomy; increasing own motivation level, according to the social role assumed; a pragmatic approach concerning the immediate use of the knowledge, focused on solving practical issues. Accordingly, the knowledge resources for the adults and the education programmes should be focused on solving problems faced in socio-professional and family life.
case, a re-engineering of the whole LLL process should be considered, according to these findings, i.e. the LLL activities should be more practical oriented, more focused on specific topics and shaped according to the adults’ needs and interests.

The scholars and practitioners approaches toward andragogy concept range from acceptance to criticism and denial. In many countries, this concept has been capitalised for the adults’ education as a science for the substantiation of the lifelong learning ("lifelong and life wide education for adults"). In the USA, andragogy represents a theoretical and practical approach based on the humanistic concept of the self-directed and autonomous learning. In Europe, the conceptualisation of this theory is only a reflection topic, not being fully accepted. Even Knowles has changed his position, considering that:"pedagogy-andragogy represents a positioning from the teacher-centered education to the student-centered education, being suitable to the children’s or adults’ education according to the context” (Merriam, 2007, p. 87).

The principles of the andragogy have been intensively valorised to design and develop online resources and programmes. Although Knowles considered the andragogy as a framework for the adults’ education programmes and for redefining the role of the trainer or facilitator, the andragogy principles are useful also for the self-education and for the development of specific online resources (e-Learning programmes).

4. Articulating the self-formative approach with the cybergogy paradigm

The need for new learning opportunities based on information and communication technologies positioned the online learning in the center of various discussions about education. In this context, new concept emerged: cybergogy. This concept refers the online self-formative process (Carrier & Moulds, 2003 and Wang & Kang, 2004, Wang, M. 2008). The cybergogy represents the synergy between the fundamentals of the andragogy and pedagogy, articulated with the web paradigms. This new paradigm has been developed by Minjuan Wang, who has highlighted the facilities provided by the virtual space for the autonomous and collaborative learning. In this case, the learner has the opportunity to achieve his learning objectives in a flexible way, according to his profile and to his personal way of time management. Cybergogy describes strategies for new learning experiences, based on the person’s active engagement in the learning process, being a component of the self-formative paradigm.

The theoretic cybergogy model integrates the cognitive, emotional and social processes of engaged online learning (Wang, M. J. 2008). Due to the lack of time, the adults prefer the online learning which enables a flexible time planning and a greater accessibility to the information. In this new created context, the self-formative paradigm is strongly linked to the intensive use of the virtual environment, in an informal and non-formal way. The subject/learner could be involved in self-formative processes aiming at finding solutions to various personal or professional problems or improving his professional profile. The cognitive web resources cover a wide palette, and various structured or unstructured presentation forms (wikis, virtual libraries, virtual dictionaries, blogs etc.). In addition, the web space provides online self-training facilities, integrating structured resources (online learning units, self-evaluation tests and links to other related web resources) and providing a single access point for a specific topic. Using the web space facilitates, virtual learning processes (e-Learning) could be designed, enabling an autonomous and independent learning process in an informal way.

The e-Learning represents a self-training tool based on web 2.0 technologies, characterised by a flexible accessibility via internet to the structured learning resources. Despite the advantages of the online training, in Romania the legal framework has not validated the e-Learning system as a means of training and hence acquiring a qualification. This limited approach of the training is a barrier for the LLL in Romania. Moreover, there are no specific tools for the assessment of the skills and competences acquired in an informal way.

The implementation of the self-learning paradigm articulated with the cybergogy concepts has been carried out within the framework of a research, financed under the national budget for research and innovation. The project goal focused on the development of linguistic competences and the improvement of the intercultural sensitivity, as basis for an efficient intercultural dialogue in an organisational environment. The educational model has been designed using the Ulla Lundgren’s trinomial approach (Lundrgen, U. 2005), articulated with the organisational culture dimension (Hofstede, G., 2004).

The model proposed aims at facilitating the acquisition of new foreign language competences and new communication skills in a multicultural organisational environment, with direct impact on a better social insertion. The implementation of the model has took into consideration the Bloom’s and Anderson’s cognitive and affective taxonomies (Bloom, B.S., 1956), articulated with the intercultural sensitivity dimension introduced by
Kratwohl (Krathwohl, D.R., Bloom, B.S., Masia, B.B. 1964), and with a pragmatic approach introduced by the research team. This holistic approach integrates various views related to foreign languages learning, according to the European Framework for Foreign Languages. The concrete implementation of the e-Learning system refers to the English language learning, including the American and Australian English approaches. In this perspective, the cybergogy represents an extension of the auto-formative paradigm, enabling the personal and professional development and, consequently, employability.

5. Conclusions

The self-formative paradigm is interfering and partially overlapping with other adults educational paradigms, addressing active and engaged learning. In addition, the cybergogy creates the opportunity to enlarge the self-formative approach, by the valorisation of the web environment potential. In the postmodernist perspective, the practical self-education issues have been amplified, inducing an appropriate delimitation from other educational paradigms. Simultaneously, the integration and the interference of the specific views emerging from different theories and approaches leads to the full education.

Taking into consideration the internal motivation, the permanent self-regulation of the formative process and its continuity, there are favourable conditions for a better capitalization of the educational process on the personal and social level. The self-formative paradigm becomes an important leveraging factor for self-improvement, a major challenge of the actual knowledge society, representing a real catalyst for the LLL. The self-education should be perceived, on one side as a component of the lifelong training and an important social development factor, and on the other side, a component of the permanent human personality development. The valorisation of the andragogy and cybergogy paradigms could improve the adults’ participation in the LLL processes.

References


