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Transnational Wellbeing Analysis of the Needs of Professionals and Learners Engaged in Adult Education

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Abstract

The study is part of an European Lifelong Learning project named WELNESS – Skills for a true wellbeing that aims to equipping adult education professionals and learners in skills that will allow them to monitor their level of wellbeing and, when needed, to apply self-regulation strategies in order to return to satisfying level of wellbeing. This study represents the transnational wellbeing analysis – a study that aims to examine the needs of professionals and learners engaged in adult education and in particular to assess their baseline level of wellbeing and problems that they have that affect the level of their wellbeing. About 350 learners and 140 professionals in adult education were evaluated through questionnaires assessing their wellbeing and 35 learners and 35 professionals participated in focus-groups assessing their needs in relation to wellbeing. The results of the research will serve as a basis for the development of 6 workshops for educators and learners, workshops that aim to enhance their skills and level of wellbeing.

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1. Introduction

Teachers have very demanding profession. They have reported on many occasions that they often feel extremely stressed and overwhelmed by the challenges of their professional and personal lives. As a result, they experience decreased work engagement and job satisfaction and their performance and the quality of their interactions with learners and co-workers is negatively affected. Some of the principals of adult education organizations have reported that their institutions suffer from prolonged absenteeism of staff due to burn-out

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syndrome. The professionals of the highly rewarding but also challenging field of adult education are especially vulnerable

Many professionals of the educational sector face working conditions characterized by a high level of emotional involvement and strong interpersonal demands. A number of quantitative correlational studies have also found that pupil behavior and workload are demands that affect aspects of teacher wellbeing. Increased stress has been reported as related to pupil misbehavior and workload in two UK studies. Trendall (1988) made a careful study of teacher stress and found that high stress factors for staff included workload and pupil misbehavior. Her findings were supported by a later study by Chaplain (1995), who investigated job satisfaction and stress in primary teachers in England using a questionnaire to 267 teachers, and found that pupil behavior was a general stressor for the teachers surveyed. These results are also supported by research from outside the UK. Punch and Tuettemann (1996) linked workload with stress levels in teachers in Australia. Pupil behavior and workload have also been linked to reduced job satisfaction in a USA study by Stockard and Lehman (2004). Although their sample was not a representative one as it involved only teachers in their first year of teaching, a strength of their work was the longitudinal design and the national sample of 379 teachers.

The conditions teachers face in the educational sector may lead to the burnout syndrome if professionals are unable to develop effective coping strategies and manage stress adequately and sustain satisfying level of wellbeing. Burnout can significantly alter people's behavior, impair their quality of life and damage their health, contributing to significant manifestations of disease. Burnout is usually the result of chronic stress at work, combined with other negative working conditions. Existing burnout models have emphasized the role of mediating processes that may contribute to reduce the negative consequences of burnout in teachers. Some of these mediating factors are social support, psychosocial resources and coping re-sources. In the specific case of the work context, a great deal of investigations have been developed during the last years in order to explain the influence of social support from different sources on well-being, health, work satisfaction and organizational results. Evidence has also been found on the positive role of social support in the interaction between work and burnout. According to the JDCA model, social support at work has an important role: the most detrimental work situation for the employee occurs when high demands are combined with low job control and low social support (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

In the particular case of professionals of the education sector, the social support system may play a key role in mitigating the negative effects of burnout. Social support increases these professionals' self-esteem and promotes their ability to cope with problems in their work place. Another study (Finlayson, M., 2005) provided the following findings: Almost half of teachers questioned reported that they found their jobs very or extremely stressful, with nine out of ten teachers believing that the job has become more stressful; More than three-quarters of respondents believed that psychological stress at work had a knock-on effect on their physical wellbeing; Almost half suffered from a particular health problem; 12 per cent of these were mental health or behavioral problems; Main stressors were indiscipline, relationships at work and excessive workload; Two thirds of respondents reported personal problems which affected their work.

Although many researches prove negative impact of decreased wellbeing on teaching and learning process, practical tools for monitoring and managing one's inner state and enhancing one's wellbeing are not easily accessible among educators and/or learners.

Working with professionals of the adult education sector as well as with adult learners inspired a European Lifelong Learning project that aims to equipping adult education professionals and learners in skills that will allow them to monitor their level of wellbeing and, when needed, to apply self-regulation strategies in order to return to satisfying level of wellness. The name of the project is WELLNESS – Skills for true wellbeing and is a 2 years project for teams from 6 countries: Cyprus, United Kingdom, Italy, Slovenia, Poland and Romania. The results of the research will serve as a basis for defining the main needs of professionals and learners in relation to their wellbeing. In the next phase of the project 6 workshops will be elaborated for learners and professionals, centered on different sets of skills that are essential for enhancing their wellbeing.

The aims and objectives of the WELLNESS Project:

- To examine the needs of professionals in adult education and learners in particular, to assess their baseline level of wellbeing;
- To provide tools for staff and learners engaged in adult education to:
- To produce high quality resources for professionals in adult education;
- To increase job satisfaction and work engagement for professionals in adult education and prevent burn-out syndrome;
- To enhance the quality and European dimension of adult education;
- To contribute to developing measurable indicators of wellbeing.

This paper will present the first step of this project, namely the **Trans-national Wellbeing Analysis** – the examination of a baseline wellbeing level in adult educators and learners on national and European levels as well as the definition of key needs related to promoting wellbeing

2. General objectives of the study (transnational wellbeing analysis)

- To examine the needs of professionals engaged in adult education (teachers and trainers working with adults, management and administrative staff from adult education organizations), and in particular to assess their baseline level of wellbeing and problems that they have that affect the level of their wellbeing;
- To examine the needs of adult learners, in particular to assess their baseline level of wellbeing and problems that they have that affect the level of their wellbeing;
- To compare the level of wellbeing in the groups of learners and trainers in different countries;
- To create practical implications to strengthen a sense of wellbeing in selected areas where deficiencies were noted.

Each project partner collected the data for the research in their respective countries. The results were collected and analysed on European level.

3. Definition of target groups (subjects)

- Adult education professional (educator) – a person who teaches adults in the non-vocational education. Training usually takes place in: centres of lifelong education; Universities of Third Age; Educational Associations; Libraries, general adult education centres etc.
- Adult learners - learners participating in non-vocational adult education – e.g. language courses; personal training; courses for seniors (excluding e.g. university education; or postgraduate studies), and general adult education.

4. Research tools

1. Questionnaire for trainers and Questionnaire for adult learners (those questionnaires were developed by the Polish partner in the project and aim to evaluate the level of wellbeing).

Number of respondents from each partner organization was of 50 learners and 20 educators. Each participant completed, by his self, a questionnaire (paper-pencil tool).

2. Focus groups - the general aim of the focus group interviews is to better understand the needs of adult learners in connection with assessment of their baseline level of wellbeing and problems that may affect.

Basic personal data was collected and then a series of questions were asked. The examples of questions include: describing the professional and life situation, skills felt as helpful in the work as a teacher, strengths and weaknesses in the work, new skills to be learned or developed, sources of satisfaction in professional and

personal life, appreciating the own average level happiness and the own emotional status and what could affect these.

Number of respondents from each partner organization was of 5 learners and 5 educators.

5. Results

5.1. Report on questionnaires

5.1.1. Adult education professionals (Educators)

There were 20 respondents from each partner organizations, they were of similar age. The average age of all respondents is 40.23. About 26.85% of respondents were male and 73,15% female.

Table 1. Type of educational institution which the respondents represent

Partner organisation	Type of educational institution (%)			
	Adult Education Centre	University	Private business	Others
Poland	-	50	20	30
Cyprus	15	10	55	20
Italy – FCN	30	-	15	55
Italy – Promimpresa	100	-	-	-
Slovenia	100	-	-	-
Romania	5	55	30	10
UK	60	10	-	30

The respondents come from various educational institutions – in Italy (Promimpresa) and Slovenia this is only Adult Education Centre. The respondents from other countries represent various types of workplaces.

The highest level of general wellbeing has been shown among respondents from Italy. However, within each variable high scores have been achieved by respondents from Cyprus and Poland. The average level of wellbeing (for all groups) is 93.40.

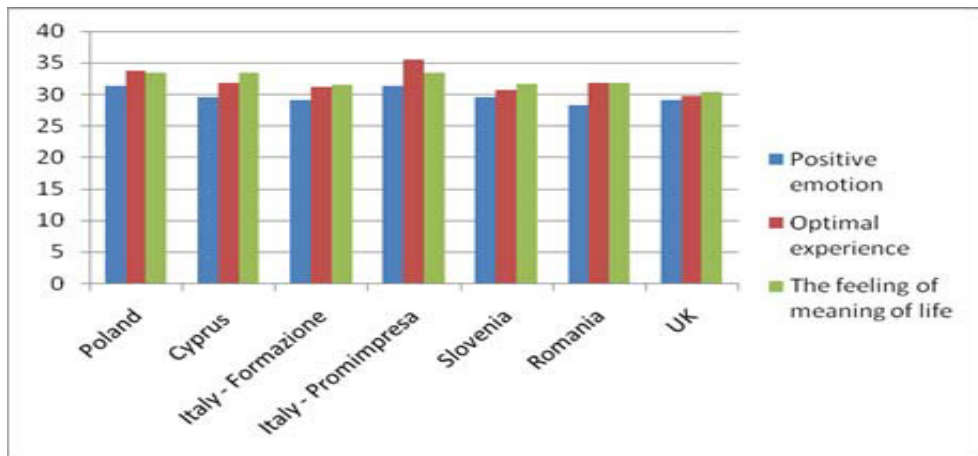


Fig. 1. Average levels of wellbeing

Respondents from various countries show varied levels of each of dimensions of wellbeing. ‘Positive emotions’ is in most cases lower than ‘The feeling of meaning of life’ and ‘Optimal experience’. It indicates heterogeneous structure of wellbeing.

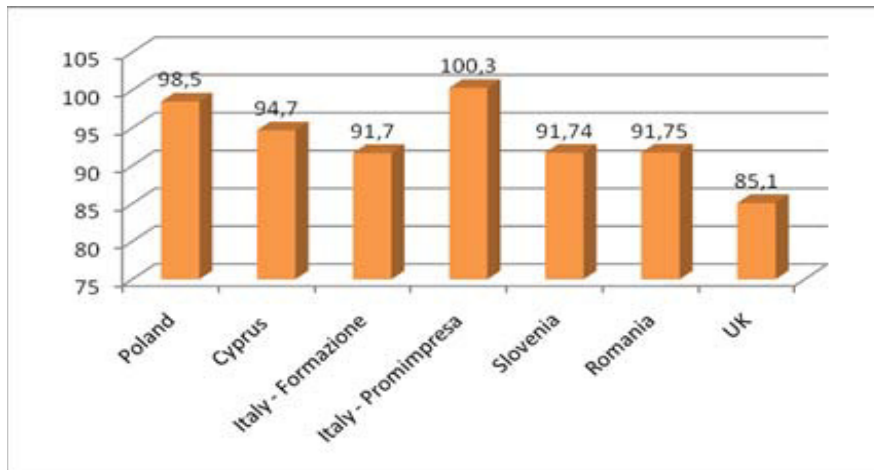


Fig 2. General level of wellbeing

5.1.2.Learners

The 50 respondents from each partner organization belonged to various age groups. The average age of all respondents is 36,4. In each research group one can notice that women (60-84%) outnumber men - especially in Poland and Slovenia. In the whole group of respondents, 75,86% of respondents were women and 24,14% men.

Table 2. Type of educational institution which the respondents attended

Partner organisation	Type of educational institution (%)			
	Adult Education Centre	University	Private business	Others
Poland		100 (UTW)		
Cyprus	40	36	22	2
Italy – FCN	82	16	2	-
Italy – Promimpresa	100	-	-	-
Slovenia	96	2	-	2
Romania	8	10	36	38
UK	-	100	-	-

The respondents come from various educational institutions –in Poland and the UK it is a university, in Italy it is Adult Education Centre. Other countries show various groups of respondents representing different types of institutions. Average level of wellbeing is 94.12.

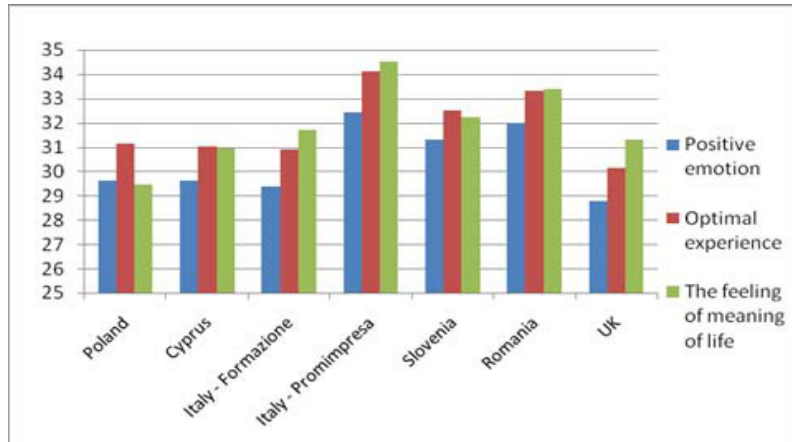


Fig. 3. Average levels of wellbeing

Respondents from various countries show varied levels of each of dimensions of wellbeing. ‘Positive emotions’ is in most cases the lowest and ‘The feeling of meaning of life’ – the highest. It indicates heterogeneous wellbeing.

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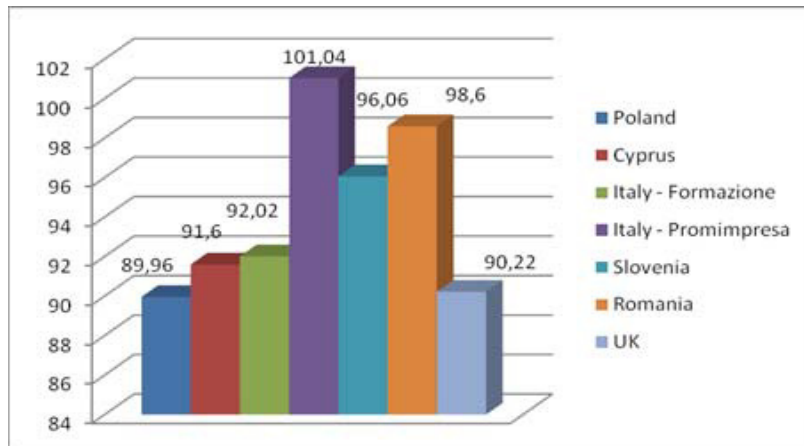


Fig. 4. General level of wellbeing

Within general wellbeing, its highest level can be noticed among respondents from Italy (Promimpresa) and Poland, the lowest level among learners from the UK.

5.2. Report on questionnaires

5.2.1. Adult education professionals (teachers)

Research conclusions

Table 3. Educators' obstacles to enjoying work

Country	Obstacles
Poland	High level of stress Factors related to the organization of your work
Cyprus	Factors related to the organization of your work
Italy (FCN)	Factors related to the organization of your work
Italy (Prommimpresa)	High level of stress
Slovenia	High level of stress
Romania	High level of stress Factors related to the organization of your work
United Kingdom	Disturbing emotions

Table 4. Educators' needs related to wellbeing (news skills needed)

Country	New Skills
Poland	Effective coping with stress
Cyprus	Ability to deal with negative emotions Ability to relax Effective coping with stress
Italy (FCN)	Assertiveness Ability to deal with negative emotions Goal setting
Italy (Prommimpresa)	Effective coping with stress Ability to relax Goal setting
Slovenia	Self-esteem Effective coping with stress
Romania	Effective coping with stress Ability to deal with negative emotions
United Kingdom	Ability to relax

- The source of the meaning of life is having an objective, self-awareness and self-satisfaction.
- The latest successes are related to overcoming difficulties in their professional and private life.
- In their professional life the respondents would like to expand their knowledge, managerial skills and be able to cope with organizational tasks
- The general feeling of happiness can be affected by health and other people.
- In their statements one can see high awareness of their role as educators.
- Most of them have noticed that job satisfaction can be enhanced by personal psychological resources, to a lesser extent external and organizational factors.
- The main obstacles in educator's job are both internal factors (stress, tiredness, doubts, insufficient competences) and external ones, related to work management and learners themselves.
- The strengths of educator's job are flexibility, developmental opportunities and ability to positively influence other people, weaknesses are related to low stability, much effort needed to prepare for professional assignments, and factors related to addressees e.g. low motivation

- The most desired qualities to be developed encompass psychosocial competences, development of subject matter competences.
- The respondents can see the need for their personal development, expanding their psychosocial competences in order to improve quality of their work and the way they influence their learners.

The research results imply that the WELLNESS project should focus on developing courses/seminars/workshops that would improve the following skills among the group of educators: coping with stress, ability to deal with negative emotions, ability to relax, assertiveness, goal setting, self-esteem.

5.2.2. Learners

Research conclusions:

- Desired qualities to be developed are those related to self-confidence, ability to make mental synthesis of information, a feeling of calmness, methodology of a particular job.
- Respondents make self-analysis of their life situation very often.
- The sources of job satisfaction for the respondents are the feeling of being helpful and exerting positive influence on people.
- Family and personal relationships are the main sources of personal satisfaction.
- Self-development and appreciating life have been indicated as the sources of the meaning of life.
- The latest successes are connected with job and personal life.

Conclusions:

- Teacher's characteristics, which have been indicated by the respondents, which enhance learners' motivation and its efficiency, are mainly personal qualities such as communication skills, empathy, extensive knowledge of the subject matter, ways of teaching on the basis of examples and case studies.
- Personal factors enhancing learning encompass regularity, involvement, self-motivation. Obstacles to effective learning – difficulties in memorizing facts, inconsistency, 'a flash in the pan', lack of motivation.
- Desired qualities to be developed are those related to psychosocial skills, fitness, health, expertise and professional competence.

Table 5. Obstacles to enjoying learning

Country	Obstacles
Poland	Insufficient possibilities to acquire new knowledge
Cyprus	High level of stress
Italy (FCN)	High level of stress Low self-esteem
Italy (Prommimpresa)	High level of stress
Slovenia	High level of stress Problems with motivating yourself
Romania	High level of stress Inability to organize learning effectively
United Kingdom	High level of stress

Table 6. Learners' needs related to wellbeing (new skills needed)

Country	Skills
Poland	Effective coping with stress
Cyprus	Effective coping with stress Ability to deal with negative emotions effectively
Italy (FCN)	Ability to relax
Italy (Prommimpresa)	Effective coping with stress
Slovenia	Effective coping with stress Assertiveness
Romania	Effective coping with stress Ability to deal with negative emotions effectively
United Kingdom	Creativity Leadership

The research results imply that the WELLNESS project should focus on developing courses/seminars/workshops, that would improve the following skills among the group of learners: effective coping with stress, ability to deal with negative emotions effectively, Ability to relax, Assertiveness, Creativity, Leadership

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