Research and Development of Adult Education through Higher Education Institutions: A Challenge and Perspective for Better Adult Learning and Education

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Abstract
This paper will examine current challenges and perspectives of HE-based research and development of adult learning and education with a focus upon the follow-up of recommendations of the recent 2011-12 European HEAD project (Opening Higher Education to Adults).

1. Key concept and short introduction
1.1. Definition of the term “adults” in higher education

This paper is to analyse the state of art in how higher education in Hungary is prepared to open up to adult learners wanting to extend their knowledge and develop skills at an advanced level of education. Also, a detailed description of the roles and functions of higher education in adult learning will demonstrate some particular aspects of available tools and methods in use and their capacities to make HEIs to become capable to respond the adult learners’ needs. A particular issue influencing quality of education is how far educational, research and third roles of

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universities may enable them to attract atypical learners as adults.

The term “Adult” is not directly defined in the Act of Hungarian higher education as the minimum age for entering into higher education studies is 18, therefore, all students and learners must be at the age of 18 or over, regarded as adults, when entering into universities and colleges (generally in levels of ISCED 5a and 5b) regardless of the level and forms of their education within higher education. Another marker to underline one identical precondition of entering into higher education, and that is maturation, which is formally accessible through a set of exams in secondary schools and secondary vocational schools at the age of 18 and afterwards.

However, the Act on Adult Education clearly defines who is an “adult” and this adult person, apart from being able to enter a variety of adult education and training programmes, can officially learn at HEIs in Hungary for either a BA and MA level diploma or a vocation-oriented certificate available through special accredited post-secondary Higher Vocational Training (Higher Education provided VET in ISCED 5b) as an adult learner by holding a certificate of maturation. One must also bear in mind that students having finished their studies in HVET are entitled to take relevant credit points into their BA level studies (up to 60 credits as maximum!).

A general process of her/his entry to higher education to Bachelor, Master and Post-Graduate studies is achieved through a formal entry exam and this status enables the adult to become a student of the university or college and hold special rights attached to that status. One can directly enrol to full-time or part-time/distance studies, either at ISCED 5a or 5b. Students learning in non-full-time formats are recognised as students and adult learners most of whom are considered by higher education institutions, according to the HEAD-indicated typology, in majority as recurrent learners, some deferrers or returners.

The above listed types of adult learners are the ones which Hungarian higher education institutions consider as relevant in functioning and operation of colleges and universities. Again, they are dominantly recurrent learners, some deferrers and returners. There are still no available statistics related to special grouping or types of adult learners other than those with reference only to sex and form/mode of education within the HEI (e.g. full-time, part-time, evening or distance education). Most adult learner, however, take their studies in part-time mode/form!

One must note that higher education in Hungary developed and has maintained some special roles in the education of adults in special part-time, evening or corresponding forms/structures of education during the last six decades. This kind of rather varying and changing partial role in adult education and learning has not yet turned most universities and colleges to recognise such actions belonging to their mainstream functions until the very end of the twentieth century. The mere emphasis to open up higher education to adults has been there for that period, however, some follow-up policy changes have not constrained academic cycles to step forward a more flexible and adult learner centred structure of higher education which stayed rather closed, in educational functions and orientations, for adults.

1.2. Criteria (e.g. age, life course) to define “adults” in HE in Hungary according to major groups of relevant adult learners

The OECD categories to define adults in higher education cannot be automatically used in the Hungarian context for the following reasons:

- all students above the age of 18 in higher education studying for a Bachelor, Master or a Doctoral degree are formally considered as adults in legal terms;
- people learning in higher education for a vocation are officially considered as adults learners in higher education in Hungary;
- the European statistical data collection system (Eurostat) applies the age cohort of 25-64 as an indicator to measure participation of adults in lifelong learning and it generates several questions and issues whether students and adult learners who start learning in higher education under the age of 25 may not be counted into/reflected by any lifelong learning indicator;

The OECD categories have not been directly used in Hungarian higher education, however, those categories are reflected in the changing concept of an “adult learner” in higher education from 2005 (OECD, 1987). That was the time when the newly accepted strategy on lifelong learning of the Hungarian Government heavily influenced lawmakers to recognise each and all students in higher education who study in part-time, distance or in evening
educational formats both as students and adult learners. (Hungarian Strategy of LLL, 2005) The peculiar aim was to make higher education institutions turn towards growing the number of their non-traditional students with more care, better provision and services as part of university lifelong learning.

1.3. Prevailing concepts of adults in HE in Hungary

The general concept of adults in higher education in Hungary is a bit different from the concepts indicated in the DIE-HEAD Definitions and conceptions, as some particular indicators of the approach may not be identifiable in the Hungarian context.

Adults learners in higher education programmes are defined as those who have completed their compulsory education period (according to the new Act on Public Education, it is the age of 16 until which compulsory public education lasts!) and have enrolled to any vocational training, Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programme of the university/college; The age cohort of 25-64 matters in the context of the EC, Eurydice, Eurostat surveys of lifelong learning. The issue of participation of non-traditional students to represent underrepresented groups as minorities, disabled matters from the point of view of equal opportunities guaranteed by the Act on Higher Education (Act on Higher Education, 2011).

Most students, studying for a vocational certificate, a bachelor or a master degree, or even for a Doctorate degree in part-time, distance or evening course formats, can be described as persons who continue their studies which often paired with a family biography.

In the area of access and admission, one must recognize that access is formally open to any adult who holds a certificate of maturation and collects enough entry points through an entrance exam to Bachelor or Master programmes. Vocational programmes are open to all adults holding a Certificate of Maturation. Doctorate programmes require, as part of their admission criteria, a Diploma of Master studies and a successful entry exam. No alternative entrance and admission is available to accredited programmes of higher education institutions in Hungary. The only exception is the field of short non-degree courses, programmes for adults who want to upgrade their knowledge, skills in special continuing education for lifelong learners, for example in the programmes and courses as part of the university of the third age. This point clearly underlines the orientation of universities and colleges to widen their Bachelor and Master programmes in part-time and distance formats of education for non-traditional courses, and, moreover, some exceptions show that particular universities and colleges open access and admission to non-traditional adult learners into their adult continuing education programmes or non-degree/non-credit courses also in part-time, evening and distance education, week-end, etc. forms.

Since recognition and validation of prior learning has just taken some early experimental forms in higher education, it is just about to accelerate special admission or entry in its testing phase.

Some universities have already created special partnerships with employers, trade-unions, city/regional councils to promote smart city, creative city programmes, or to join in for the cultural capital programme, like in the case of the City of Pécs for 2010, with open lectures and courses together with both citizens of the municipality and the visitors. Another aspect is to organise summer universities/open lectures, adult learners’ weeks according to a major UNESCO initiative from 1997.

On the other hand, the typology of Slowley and Schuetze for lifelong learners can be partially and very cautiously applied in the context of Hungarian higher education. (Slowley & Schuetze, 2013) In Hungary, a second chance learner is a person who wishes to take or to complete her/his public education in special schools offering second chance programmes. Therefore, the notion is not used in that direct meaning, or to reflect an alternative way of access/admission through special examination or assessment. This would, on the other hand, require a rather sophisticated RPL or VPL system in higher education which is still in experimental and early phase. In Hungarian higher education recurrent learners and returners are the majority of lifelong learners, but refreshers and learners in later life are people who expand the number of new learners entering into higher education for gathering either scientific knowledge or practical skills.

2. Background survey

2.1. Important regulatory issues and policies
So far as the regulation of higher education is concerned, it is the Act on Higher education that clearly regulates that only accredited degree programmes can be advertised and be accessible for candidate students within Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels. The Act also describes the number, forms (universities and colleges) of higher education institutions (state-funded, and private) and defines what makes a higher education institution. The Act demonstrates the process of accreditation of degree/credit programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate (PhD) levels and describes how the state finances state universities, colleges and regulates the forms of financing of studies at higher education institutions. This law regulates participation and defines entry forms and processes to degree and non-degree courses at Hungarian universities and colleges.

2.2. Relevant regulatory issues at national, regional and/or institutional level to stimulate the participation of adults in HE in Hungary (e.g. access and admission to HE, funding of HEIs, student grants/loans)

A major principle of higher education in Hungary that it is attached to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), therefore, higher education applies all achievements of the Bologna-process and considers itself as a significant actor in lifelong learning. Another principle is quality education and research, and this issue underlines the necessity of accreditation towards educational activities and the application of relevant quality assurance methods, tools so as to raise effectiveness of research, development and innovation potentials in consideration of partnerships with major stakeholders at national, regional and local levels. Hungarian state universities are active partners of EUA, and it means that most of them apply major principles and goals of EUA statements and charters, for example, the Charter of EUA on lifelong learning. (EUA, 2008)

Participation in Higher Education is formally regulated by the Act on Higher Education, namely, any person who enrols to a certain university must pass an entrance exam, by holding a certificate of maturation, on the other hand, anyone can decide which major to enrol and choose what available format of education to take (e.g. full-time, part-time, distance or evening teaching). Another route is to take non-degree higher level vocational training, postgraduate specialisation, partial trainings, summer university courses which can also be accessed depending on the current level of education of the person. Such courses and trainings open flexible learning for adults and imply innovative methodologies and the use a certain VPL and recognition of prior experience in workplace environment.

The basic principle for degree courses is that they are to be accredited, namely, only accredited programmes/courses can only be advertised to adult learners. They may be accredited by the Hungarian Board of Accreditation (MAB) This approach, on the other hand, allows higher education organisations to provide their accredited courses with flexible provision and methodologies referring to time (e.g. part-time, evening or distance forms of education) and new ways of knowledge transfer (e.g. e-learning, blended-learning, m-learning, etc.). Moreover, universities and colleges are autonomous to provide non-accredited non-degree courses in any format they recognise as beneficial to adult learners and, form another angle, they are responding either to current adult learning needs or local/regional stakeholders’ claims. There are no other specific laws to regulate this area with any particular orientation and claims.

2.3. National policies and trends in HE as well as in adult education, vocational education and training to overcome barriers between the sectors (e.g. cooperation between HE and adult education sector and NGOs, strategies for RPL)

A significant policy element and trend, as part of the one-step up orientation, is to urge students to learn for vocations, BA and MA/MSc and Doctorate degrees and gain knowledge, develop competences, and skills which are needed in the labour market. Higher education policy in Hungary has turned towards trying to raise the number of students in higher education, in accordance with the goals of the Education and Training 2020 programme of the European Union, referring to attainment in higher education by 2020 (ET2020, EC - 2012). However, demographic trends and the direct involvement of the Government to raise the number of state-funded places of full-time programmes in higher education in natural and technical sciences, engineering, and to radically reduce state-funded places in social sciences, humanities, economics and law will eventually make it difficult to raise the overall number of students in higher education. Additionally, the number of graduating students in higher education fell after 2010 from 38.000 to 35.000 in 2011 (a 6.5% fall). (KSH, 2011) It is seems fairly difficult to
overcome barriers amongst sectors of education and training, as most adult education and training programmes are organised in the non-formal sector and consider higher education as a separate actor in the education of adults. Co-operation amongst higher education, vocational education and training and adult education is very rare and mainly demonstrated, within higher education, by departments and/ or institutes of adult education/andragogy through their education and training programmes for the development of adult learning and education through the followings:

- accredited education and training of adult educators within Bachelor and Master programmes;
- research and development initiatives, projects in adult learning and education through partnership with major stakeholders, like labour market key actors, employers, chambers of commerce and industry, local councils, labour offices, training centres, adult training enterprises, civic organisations, churches, etc.;
- accredited adult training programmes for adult learners.

Universities having a rather strong adult education/adult training orientation have their own partnerships/consortia with VET and adult education organisations to appear in joint development or research projects for quality adult learning and education targeted in the national development plan or maintaining partnerships for raising practice-oriented education and training dimensions of their own portfolio.

Since the application of RPL, VPL mechanism is at a very early stage, most Hungarian higher education institutions have no or limited practice in the validation of prior learning, however, the new model for universities will be probably launched from 2014 and onwards at state-owned universities at least, and this can be regarded as a strategic development. One can only find an existing practice of RPL in non-formal initial (iVET) and continuing vocational (CVET) training programmes.

2.4. Specific conditions/ events/ policy decisions shaping policy in the field of opening HE to adults (e.g. national policies which specifically mention the openness of HE to adults)

The new Act on Higher Education of 2011 urges for a better higher education developing its educational and training provision to support adult learning, as universities and colleges ought to open for new adult learners’ needs in their localities and should develop partnerships with several institutions and organisations of education, culture, enterprises so as to raise joint actions of knowledge transfer by applying new ICT –tools, methods, curricula and identifying new needs of learners, organisations where higher education may play a significant, leading role implementing, developing and expanding quality leaning. Such efforts can go along with place management, social capital development, local and regional development programmes, interregional projects, like that of the cross-border partnerships within higher education, local and regional councils, joint ventures, chambers of commerce, etc. Basically, one has to acknowledge that the conditions are provided for opening higher education for more adult learners, as, formally, each and all university and college lectures are open for adults to visit. Several universities and colleges organise their own actions by involving people from several age-groups to disseminate their services, their education and training portfolio through various programmes, festivals, projects, web-based contacts, public events, adult learners’ weeks, third age university initiatives, city-region festivals, summer universities, etc. Most universities’ and colleges’ websites offer several programmes, lectures, training-packages for adult learners at a bargain price or even for free. Universities and colleges are promoters of the dissemination of sciences through open lectures, public speeches in lecture halls combined with broadcasted events, labelled as open university programme.

2.5. Disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of adult learners in HE

There are some disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of adult learners in higher education in Hungary, like the members of the Roma minority, however, universities and colleges make every effort to turn their institutions easily accessible for those groups and raise the number of Roma adults to learn and study in various programmes in higher education. Students from social disadvantages families can apply for additional social support from the university and it is a tool to compensate a significant part of social disadvantage. Such students can apply for being accommodated in halls of residence for the time of higher education studies. Also, students with disadvantaged
family background can apply for a reduction of any occurring tuition fees or to state-funds in order to cover a proportion of or the total of their tuition fee. This approach applies to part-time students as well!

2.6. Successful policies in regard to opening higher education to adults

An analytical approach must underline that successful policies for opening higher education to adults are to cover up and measure the learning needs of adults and their own communities in the localities of the higher education institutions. Therefore, policies, missions of universities and colleges must focus on needs-oriented programmes as part of their education and training provisions. Also, universities and colleges are to demonstrate and maintain open access to several forms of scientific lectures, programmes and organize new forms of knowledge and data-bases where adult learners can decide which programme or service to take through a more formalised way. Higher education institutions may not consider themselves as places for adult learning, as they are, and not necessarily understand or rather slowly move in the direction of what makes an university a place for lifelong learning.

The Hungarian Universities’ Lifelong Learning Network (MELLearN) and its actions, annual conferences help universities and colleges to explore their potentials how to expand their education and training provision towards adult learners (MELLearN, 2012).

2.7. Important measures that have been initiated to increase openness of HE

Some initiated measures for widening the openness of higher education in Hungary are widening access to courses in part-time, open-distance and evening course formats for adult learners, establishing and developing new distance/e-learning programmes of non-degree programmes for adult learners, introducing and developing new higher vocational training programmes for adult learners and increasing new and effective methodologies of teaching and assessment. Universities and colleges have widened their collaboration with local and regional stakeholders, NGOs, etc. to collect some peculiar feedback upon which dimension and direction to expand provision and services in order to attain more learners from the local public. Therefore, institutions and organisations of adult education and training were also asked to give advice on how to increase openness of HEIs. One specific aspect has been the website-based virtual openness of the institution, and another has been the capability of recognising the corporate role of the university to respond effectively to local needs of adults, with new learning spaces, methods, contents amongst those needs (Jarvis, 2001).

3. Résumé and outlook

3.1. The focus of existing evaluations on measures to increase openness and participation of adults in HE and structural changes initiated by these measures (e.g. monitoring mechanism for participation of adults in HE)

Existing statistical monitoring of the Central Statistical Office (KSH) only focuses on the number of adults who enrol to higher vocational trainings, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate programmes, post-graduate specialisation, however, direct monitoring and evaluation of programmes exist only at institutional level. The only exception is the MELLearN organisation and the Adult Education/ Andragogy Sub-Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which have generated some irregular national and regional comparative evaluations of universities and colleges to participate in adult education through their programmes.

3.2. The influence of the Bologna process, Lisbon strategy, Copenhagen process etc. on the enhancement of adult learners in Higher Education in Hungary

The Bologna-process has not had direct impact on adult learning in higher education other than the separation of bachelor and master degree majors helped many young adults to return for a higher master degree after collecting a significant work experience in relation to their first degree. Also, the Bologna-process has generated a rather floating shift of students from one scientific area to another to develop and raise scientific knowledge according to the concrete needs of the learner or/and, for example, of her/ his employer.
The Lisbon Strategy opened up the debate over lifelong learning and helped higher education institutions to
demonstrate their capacities and actual steps towards becoming institutions of lifelong learning for raising
employment and active citizenship in their localities. The Copenhagen-process has generated a more quality
and performance-centred thinking to get strengthened within HEIs by starting to apply more quality mechanisms as
CQAF and other quality assurance methods (e.g. ISO 9001). The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the
University of Pécs was the first HEI in Hungary to introduce the ISO system for monitoring processes of educational
administration (Jakab – Németh, 2006).

One must mention the peculiar example of the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs
which developed and initiated the Bologna-structured education of adult educators both at BA and MA levels which
started after 2006. The main goal was to improve the professional development and character of adult
educators/trainers in Hungary and, also, to provide relevant research and development programmes focusing on
adult learning and education from the position of higher education. This example and special delivery of adult
education related knowledge was shown as a best practice within higher education management (Davies – Németh –
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