



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

International Journal of Current Research
Vol. 12, Issue, 06, pp.11968-11973, June, 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.38845.06.2020>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE VIEWS OF EDUCATORS OF ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS REGARDING THE BARRIERS LEARNERS FACE IN LIFELONG LEARNING THE IMPACT OF THE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND THE SECTOR

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 20th March, 2020
Received in revised form
09th April, 2020
Accepted 17th May, 2020
Published online 29th June, 2020

Key Words:

Lifelong learning, people with special needs, reasons of hindrance, educational level, work sector.

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Citation: Dr. Loukas Moustakas and M.Ed. Danae-Sofia Pylou. 2020. “The views of educators of adults with special needs regarding the barriers learners face in lifelong learning The impact of the educational level and the sector.”, *International Journal of Current Research*, 12, (06), 11968-11973.

ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to investigate the views of educators of people with special needs on the barriers faced by people with disabilities in their education. Quantitative research was conducted with questionnaires on participants / educators of adults working in five different public and private educational institutes in Attica. The results of the research showed that the educators consider lifelong learning vital because of the multiple positive elements it offers at each level of the life of the program participants, while also demonstrating a number of barriers related to economic factors, such as expensive program fees. Regarding the factors that influence and differentiate to a great extent the views of the educators in this specific research, they distinguished the educational level and their work sector.

INTRODUCTION

There is an inextricably linked relationship between education and the social exclusion of people with special needs. While the existing education system is possible to contribute to social inclusion, it also functions as a mechanism of social exclusion (Tressou, 1999). In other words, there is such an interdependence between education and social exclusion that the former is preferentially offered to combat various forms of social exclusion but also works for its preferential development (Mavrogiorgos, 1999). Regarding disability, several studies have highlighted a wide range of definitions, as formulated in the studies (Bolderson et al., 2002), while most studies aim to highlight a holistic definition of disability, which presents all the special characteristics, but in a comprehensive way. At a theoretical level, people with disabilities seem to be treated equally by the education system, but in fact they are found to face a large grid of barriers and numerous stereotypes (European Constitutional Law Center, 2014). As part of the lifelong learning of people with disabilities, a number of barriers are identified, which hinder their participation in educational programs.

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According to Christofi (2013) the barriers faced by people with disabilities are divided into the following categories:

- Barriers due to disability: People with physical disabilities encounter difficulties in their movements although they can use aiding equipment. People with visual impairments have great difficulty in orienting themselves in the space and as a result they find it difficult to receive information and although they are provided with special equipment, they do not use it as it does not cover their needs. People with hearing impairments use hearing aids, but they are not adapted to their needs, as a result of which they find it difficult to receive information and communicate. People with mental or intellectual disabilities, most of the time, need individualized learning that is not possible in the Greek educational system.
- Social barriers: Social barriers are related to the stereotypes and prejudices that people with disabilities can develop during their involvement in education, regarding their abilities.
- Environmental barriers.
- Natural barriers: are called any kind of barriers that are in the environment and are in such a way created or constructed that they prevent people with disabilities from either using it or entering from it. For example, this

category includes hall doors that may have prohibitive dimensions for the entry of a wheelchair of a person with mobility difficulties, the placement of furniture in a space that may prevent entry or movement into it to a person with vision problems, even sanitary equipment that may be prohibitory for use by people with disabilities.

- **Architectural barriers:** In this category belongs everything that is designed in such a way that prevents its use by people with disabilities. For example, this category includes classrooms with prohibitory dimensions for a person with disabilities, poor quality of materials with which something may be made, as well as the lack of escape in case of emergency.
- **Information barriers regarding communication:** These barriers are related to the inability of these individuals to communicate or be informed. For example, a person with visual impairments has great difficulty reading a form, a person with hearing impairments cannot communicate with another person and in this case with the educator without the proper equipment, and a person with visual impairments cannot see road signs, as a result of which their own life is in danger.
- **Technological barriers:** They are related to technology aids such as computers, keyboards, the use of software and the internet that cannot be adapted to the needs of a person with a disability.
- **Obstacles due to political processes:** These obstacles are related to the deviation of people with disabilities from regulations, practices and all kinds of policies. For example, a person with a disability may not apply for a job opening even though he or she may have all the qualifications required, as the opening may not refer to the specific categories of people with disabilities.
- Of course, in addition to this categorization of the barriers adults face with their involvement in education, there are other types of categorizations such as that of Cross (Cross 1981, as mentioned in Karalis 2013) which classifies the types of barriers into three different categories.
- **Situational barriers:** They are related to the difficulties that the adult may face at a certain stage of their life, such as lack of time.
- **Institutional barriers:** They refer to the exclusion of adults from a program because of the conditions of the program itself, such as the schedule.
- **Predisposing barriers:** They include all negative emotions and perceptions regarding the title of "learner" of a person with a disability.
- On the other hand, Kokkos (2008) categorizes learning barriers into three other different categories (Moustakas, & Fokiali, 2019, Moustakas, 2018).
- The first category includes any kind of barrier related to the educational program itself, such as its planning and organization that may not meet the needs of the adult. As is well known, this can cause insecurity, stress and even lead to withdrawal from the program.
- In the second category belong the learners with multiple roles in each area of their lives who, due to their increased obligations, cannot participate in the program and drop out prematurely. In addition, this category includes people with physical disabilities such as learning difficulties and health problems.
- The third and last category includes people who are dominated by internal barriers, i.e. any kind of emotion that prevents them from participating in a training

program. Such feelings can include anxiety, low self-esteem, insecurity, negativity, depression, and fear of negative criticism from other team members.

- Internal barriers fall into two categories:
- Barriers related to pre-existing knowledge and values.
- It is a well-known fact that adult learners engage in education with the knowledge and values they have acquired through their life experiences. So they are so entrenched in these values that it is very difficult for them to accept new knowledge. This "phenomenon", we would say, is more common in adults than in children, due to the fact that over time adults become less malleable compared to children. They think in a very specific way and have thus shaped their beliefs that new knowledge might reconstruct the imaginary world that they have created and that they are not willing to change (Bourdieu, 1999). In addition to experience, another reason they are attached to certain values and positions is that they have invested emotionally in them. In this case, the educators should not transform the theory they have created in their minds because in this way it will be as if they have challenged their personality. What they can do, is present the new knowledge without its being necessary to express the learners as well.
- Barriers related to psychological factors.
- This category includes the key personality traits that adults have during the educational process, such as insecurity, low self-esteem and sense of self-value. In addition, stress is a deterrent that works in both of these categories. Stress can be due to either the fear of failure and ridicule, or the fear of new and therefore uncertain situations. There are many adults who want to join an educational program but cannot because of their stress and uncertainty about whether they will be able to meet the requirements of the program. In addition, one of the main reasons adults feel stressed is how they are evaluated. Thus, people with disabilities also have great stress and question their abilities due to their misconception that only people with a typical development who have the necessary knowledge have the right to learn.

CURRENT METHODOLOGY

Research Objective: The present study was conducted to investigate and understand in more depth the perceptions of educators of adults with special needs about the barriers encountered by both learners and educators. Finally, proposals are being made for the removal of these barriers. As stated in the theoretical part, typical adult education differs from adult special education. Educators of adults with special needs are called upon to deal with and consequently address a number of difficulties. By accepting diversity, they are called to bring out and develop skills in each learner individually. Nevertheless, in most cases there are adults with disabilities who face further difficulties and barriers, which discourage them from participating in education. In this context, the main research question is *"what are the difficulties and barriers faced by educators in the education of adults with disabilities?"*

Research Methodology: In order to investigate the views of educators of adults with special needs, a variety of techniques and methods were used, selected by the researcher based on the nature of the research to be prepared (Vamvoukas, 2002).

In this research, the collection of answers to research questions was selected through questionnaires. The research that uses questionnaires to collect the findings is quantitative research (Koulikourdi, 2009). Thus, according to Koulikourdi (2009), a survey is considered quantitative when it uses a systematic methodology to collect information from a specific sample of the population that should be representative so that there is no margin of error (Creswell, 2011). In this research, the collection of answers to research questions was selected through questionnaires. The advantage of using questionnaires include the anonymity of the respondents, who can answer each question separately, freely without having any fear or anxiety lest they be stigmatized for their answers (Paraskevopoulos, 1993). In the questionnaire, the questions were written in such a way that the results are based on the thematic axes that have been set (Robson, 2010). The closed-ended questions are arranged on a five-point Likert scale. This scale was chosen as it is a fairly clear, targeted and easy-to-use and because it includes various responses representative of all the different views of the respondents (Vryonidis, Roussos & Tsaousis, 2014). The questionnaire was distributed to the respective organizations which undertake the organization of training programs for adults with disabilities in Western Attica. Initially, the questionnaire was tested on a number of 25 people in order to mainly examine the structure, clarity and quality of the questions and to highlight any "blurred" points which would pose difficulties for the educators who would complete them. In addition, another goal in the trial application of the completion of the questionnaires was to measure the duration of its completion, so that under no circumstances would it exceed 15 minutes. The answers of the participants in the trial application were not taken into account in the final result (Creswell, 2011).

Population and Research Sample: The research sample is comprised of educators working in institutions, public or private, who carry out lifelong learning programs for adults with special educational needs. The questionnaires were distributed to five separate institutions in Attica and they were completed by 234 educators, of which 111 were men (47.4%) and 123 women (52.6%). In terms of age, 24.8% of participants belong to the 21-31 age group, 45.3% to the 31-40 age group, while 29.9% are over 40 years old. Regarding their educational level, 43.6% are graduates of Higher Education, 33.8% have a Master's degree, 5.1% have a doctorate and 17.5% are holders of postgraduate degrees in special education. Concerning the sector where the educators work, 138 (59%) work in private institutions and 96 (41%) are employed in public educational institutions.

As far as the reliability and validity of the research is concerned, all the necessary actions have been taken to ensure it. The internal consistency reliability index Cronbach was measured to be above 0.78 in all the scales, and the validity was checked at the stage of pilot research (Babbie, 2011). In terms of content validity, the questionnaires were initially distributed to a small number of people on an experimental stage, so that remarks could be made about the wording, the clarity of the questions and the completion time. In addition, tests were conducted to verify whether the research questions were in line with the research thematic axis. The statistical package SPSS was used in the statistical analysis of the findings. For each individual research variable, there was a stage of descriptive and then inductive analysis. Subsequently, prior to the inductive research, a normality test was performed

using the Kolmogorov - Smirnov criterion, which found that the normality conditions were in no way guaranteed (KS sig <.05). Therefore, two different non-parametric criteria were used. In the case where the independent variable referred to two categories (work sector), the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used, while in the case where the independent variable referred to more than two categories (educational field), the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis was used. It should be clarified that all statistical tests were performed at a level with a statistical significance of less than 5% ($p = 0.05$) (Moustakas, & Fokiali, 2019).

RESULTS

Barriers in the attendance of education programs for people with special needs: The third thematic axis explores issues related to the barriers encountered by people with disabilities when attending programs in lifelong education. 83.5% of the sample disagree with the view that "Personal Development" may be a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 1.89). 80.8% agree that "Economic reasons" are indeed a barrier in individual participation in programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.09). 45.7% agree that "Professional Reasons" constitute a barrier, while 41.5% neither agree nor disagree with this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.36). Finally, 22.3% of the sample agree that "Social reasons" constitute a barrier, while 50.9% neither agree nor disagree with the specific statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.95). Then, the reasons that hinder adults with special needs from attending a lifelong learning program are recorded in detail, examining each of the above areas in depth.

Personal reasons: 80.8% of the sample agree that "Dealing with Health Problems" is a barrier to participation in Lifelong Learning programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.06). 57.7% neither agree nor disagree with the "Existence of age restrictions" being a barrier, while 22.7% agree and 19.6% disagree with this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.03). 65.4% consider "Psychological reasons (decreased self-confidence, fear)" to be a deterrent (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.69). 53% believe that "Negative previous educational experiences" are a barrier to participation, while 31.2% neither agree nor disagree with this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.44). 47.9% consider the "Negative attitude of the learners regarding education" to be a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.39). 44.9% neither agree nor disagree with the fact that the "Complex Schedules" of the programs are a barrier, while 38.9% agree with this view (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.24). 76.5% agree that "Limited time due to the variety of obligations on behalf of learners" is a disincentive (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.01). 82.6% consider that "Limited time due to family obligations of the learners" is a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.03). 46.3% reject the view that "Lack of support from the family environment" is a barrier and 38% neither agree nor disagree with this view (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.85). 40.6% neither agree nor disagree with the view that "Lack of available time" is a barrier while 36.8% agree (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.18). 65.9% believe that "Lack of means of transport" constitutes a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.71). 77.4% agree with the view that "Lack of Financial Resources" is a disincentive for learners to participate in Lifelong Learning programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.93).

Social reasons: 53.4% of the sample stated that they reject the view that the "Negative attitude of the social environment" is a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.45). 58.6% disagree with the fact that the "Non-existence of company" is a disincentive for learners to participate in programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.47). 60.7% agree that "Marginalization" is a disincentive to their participation in programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.68).

Professional reasons: 53% agree that "Unemployment" consists a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.44) and 62.8% also accept that "Lack of support from the work environment" is a disincentive (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.69). 49.5% of the sample consider that "Limited usefulness at work" is a barrier to the participation of learners in programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.54). 39.7% believe that "Excessive workload" is a deterrent and 38% neither agree nor disagree with this view (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.76). Finally, 38.9% neither agree nor disagree with the fact that "Working Hours" is a barrier, while 32.5% reject this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.97).

Organizational reasons: 81.2% of the sample believe that "Expensive program tuition" is a barrier to the participation of learners in programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.12). 74.3% consider that the "Absence of appropriate educational structures" is a disincentive for the participants (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.97). 57.7% of the sample disagree with the view that the "Suitability of venues for seminars" is a barrier, while 40.2% neither agree nor disagree with this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.36). 88.4% agree with the statement that the "poor reputation of the institution" is a deterrent (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.28) and 81.6% consider as disincentive the "Indifferent topics of the programs" (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.17). 95.3% agree that the "Doubtful content of the programs" is a disincentive (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.49). 90.6% agree with the statement that "Difficulty of access" constitutes a barrier (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.32) and 94% consider that "Remote educational facilities" are equally a disincentive (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.44). 55.3% agree with the statement that "Bad conditions for holding meetings" are a reason that prevents participation in programs (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.31) and 83% agree with the statement that "Bad course planning in inappropriate days and hours" is a disincentive (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 4.05). 50.4% reject the view that the reason for the existence of barriers is the "Existence of long-term programs" (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.70). 59.8% do not agree with the statement that the "Large number of participants" is a disincentive (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 2.49). 41.9% neither agree nor disagree with the statement that the "High Level of Difficulty of Programs" is a disincentive, while 37.6% agree with this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.17). 50.5% agree with the statement that the "Strict evaluation process" is a disincentive, 24.4% neither disagree nor agree with this statement, while 25.3% disagree (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.25). 46.2% agree with the statement that the "Strict Absenteeism Framework" is a reason for people to be hindered from attending the programs, 32.5% neither agree nor disagree with the statement, while 21.4% reject this statement (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.29). 62.4% consider that "Insufficient information" is a reason of hindrance (M.V. of the degree of

agreement is 3.54). Finally, 41.9% neither agree nor disagree with the statement that "Untimely information" is a disincentive, 35.9% agree while 22.3% disagree (M.V. of the degree of agreement is 3.14).

Differentiation of educators' views based on their educational level: Regarding the differences in the views of educators of different educational levels concerning the reasons that hinder the attendance of lifelong learning programs for people with disabilities, it was found that educators who have completed postgraduate training in special education disagree more strongly than those belonging to another educational level ($H(3) = 19,483, p = .000$) and that psychological reasons and the lack of means of transport are barriers to people's participation in the programs ($H(3) = 10,538, p = .015$). In contrast, those educators who have completed their postgraduate studies disagree more strongly than those who belong to another educational level, believing that limited time due to family obligations is a barrier for individuals to participate in the programs ($H(3) = 12,596, p = .006$). Statistically significant differences were also observed in the views of educators, who consider as barriers the lack of company ($H(3) = 16,911, p = .001$) and marginalization ($H(3) = 18,040, p = .000$). In particular, educators who have a doctorate disagree more strongly than those who belong to another educational level that the lack of company is a barrier to participation in the programs. In contrast, educators who have completed their postgraduate studies disagree more strongly than those who belong to another educational level that marginalization is a barrier for individuals to participate in programs. Educators who have graduated from Higher Education disagree more strongly than those belonging to another educational level that unemployment is a barrier to the participation of people in the programs (M.V. 3.67 = vs. M.V. = 3.23 vs. M.V. = 3.33 vs. M.V. = 3.34), ($H(3) = 9,652, p = .022$).

Regarding the organizational reasons for the hindrance in the attendance of lifelong learning programs for people with disabilities and with regards to the educational level of the instructors, statistically significant differences were observed concerning the expensive tuition fees of the programs ($H(3) = 12,568, p = .006$), the suitability of the venues for the seminars ($H(3) = 9,263, p = .026$), the poor reputation of the institution ($H(3) = 12,558, p = .006$) and insufficient information ($H(3) = 9,421, p = .024$). In particular, educators who hold a doctoral degree strongly disagree that expensive tuition is a deterrent to the individuals' participation in programs. The instructors with a degree from Higher Education disagree more strongly with the statement that the suitability of the venues for the seminars and the insufficient information are barriers for the participation of the individuals in the programs. Finally, the institution's poor reputation is not considered such a significant barrier for educators with postgraduate training.

Differentiation of educators' views based on the sector in which they work: In the context of analyzing the differences in the educators' views on the reasons which hinder the attendance of lifelong learning programs for people with disabilities and with regards to the sector in which the educators work, it was found that educators in public institutions disagree more strongly than those who work in a private institutions that the psychological reasons ($U = 54291,500, p = .000$), lack of available time ($U = 5561,500, p = .028$) and lack of transport means are barriers for the

participation of individuals in the programs ($U = 4636,000$, $p = , 000$). At the same time, it was found that public educators disagree more strongly than those working in private institutions that the lack of company ($U = 1985,5000$, $p = , 000$) and marginalization constitute barriers for the participation of individuals in the programs ($U = 3113,000$, $p = , 000$). Regarding unemployment as a reason which prevents the participation of the disabled people in lifelong learning programs, private sector educators disagree to a greater extent compared to public sector educators ($M.V. = 3.62$ vs. $MO = 3.20$), ($U = 5222,500$, $p = , 004$). Corresponding results were observed for the professional reasons of hindrance of "Lack of support from the work environment" ($U = 5501,500$, $p = , 018$) with the educators of private institutions disagreeing to a great extent and the educators of public institutions not disagreeing to a large extent ($M.V. = 3.82$ vs. $M.V. = 3.50$). Opposing views were presented for the professional reasons of "Working Hours" ($U = 5012,000$, $p = , 001$) with private tutors agreeing more that this reason is a barrier to the participation of the disabled people in lifelong programs compared to public educators ($M.V. = 2.78$ vs. $M.V. = 3.26$). Then, in testing the existence of a statistically significant difference regarding the sector in which the educators work with reference to the organizational reasons, we notice that there is a statistically significant difference in the educators' views depending on their sector of work and in particular, that educators in public institutions disagree more compared to educators in the private sector that the expensive program tuition ($M.V. = 4,24$ vs. $M.V.= 4,04$, $U = 5486,500$, $p = , 015$), the lack of adequate educational structures ($M.V. = 4.08$ vs. $M.V. = 3.89$, $U = 5,659.000$, $p = , 040$), the poor reputation of the institution ($M.V = 4.46$ vs. $M.V. = 4,14$, $U = 4995.000$, $p = , 000$) and the indifferent subject of programs ($M.V. = 4.31$ vs. $M.V = 4.07$, $U = 5449.000$, $p = , 013$) are deterring organizational reasons. In contrast, private sector educators disagree more compared to public sector educators that the suitability of the seminar facilities ($M.V. = 2,52$ vs. $M.V. 2,14 = , U = 4693,500$, $p = , 000$), the poor conditions for conducting meetings ($M.V. = 4,39$ vs. $M.V. = 4,19$, $U = 5319,000$, $p = , 003$) and inadequate information ($M.V. = 3.80$ vs. $M.V. = 3.18$, $U = 4426,000$, $p = , 000$) are deterring organizational reasons.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the views of educators for adults with special needs on the reasons that deter these individuals from participating in lifelong learning programs, it emerged that the most important reasons for this deterrence are financial and professional reasons (Moustakas, & Fokiali, 2019). Different views were observed on the views of educators of different sectors of work and educational level regarding the psychological and social factors. Regarding the organizational reasons, the educators considered as a disincentive the expensive tuition fees of the programs, the absence of appropriate educational structures, the poor reputation of the institution, the dubious content of the programs, the poor meeting conditions, the remote educational facilities, the poor course planning in inappropriate days and hours, the indifferent topics of the programs and the insufficient information (Moustakas, & Fokiali, 2019, & Paklatzoglou and Vacharoglou, 2018). Finally, regarding the sector in which the educators are employed, it was observed that public sector educators disagree more compared to private sector educators that the expensive tuition fees of the programs, the lack of

appropriate educational structures, the poor reputation and the indifferent subject matter are organic factors of deterrence.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding Statement: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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