

# Researching QoL and Education<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

During the first phase of the QEduSen project, it was necessary to clarify the relationship between QoL and education. To this end, two studies were designed and conducted, and two articles about the QEduSen project were presented at the World Congress of Education 2013 held in Rome. The first was entitled “Impact on Senior Learners' Quality of Life through Lifelong Learning”, the second, “Pedagogical Proposal to Increase Senior Citizens' Quality of Life”.

## Research

The objective of the first study, “Impact on Senior Learners' Quality of Life through Lifelong Learning”, was to find out senior learners' subjective perception of how education impacts their quality of life (QoL). A quantitative survey was carried out among 167 senior learners in four institutions (average age 67). The survey first aimed to discover which QoL component was the most significant, and second to relate how various educational components impact seniors' QoL.

The survey revealed that ‘Physical well-being’ was considered the most important, but the second with nearly the same value was ‘Psychological and emotional well-being’. The component with the least importance for their QoL was ‘To have a lot of money, material well-being’.

In the second survey, learners were asked to link eight QoL dimensions — physical well-being, psychological well-being, energy and motivations, adaptation, pleasure (enjoyment), social support and personal development — with 8-10 educational factors (which varied from one institution to another) differentiating among environment, pedagogy, types of subjects, courses, activities, teachers, tutors, and classmates. All these dimensions (the eight QoL dimensions and the eight to ten educational dimensions) were explained on the questionnaire learners were asked to complete in an attempt to minimise misunderstandings.

To a large extent, the learners coincided that the teacher and their classmates have the greatest effect on their QoL. Learners stated that the courses and pedagogies were not as important as the teacher. In qualitative interviews, learners were not able to distinguish between pedagogies, and claimed to sometimes choose courses and activities according to the teacher, not the content. In conclusion, the most important factor in enhancing a learner's QoL is the teacher, regardless of the pedagogy and the course content. This affirmation is, clearly, only true from the learners' point of view. Teachers, on the other hand, use pedagogies as tools in their courses and activities, and are also passionate about the content they teach (indeed, most of the teachers of adults interviewed also enjoyed teaching seniors).

The second report, “Pedagogical Proposal to Increase Senior Citizens' Quality of Life”, was produced after a quantitative and qualitative study of 39 experts in five partner institutions. All these experts had an average of 10.7 years' experience in teaching senior learners. The purpose of this research was to learn how education of senior citizens should be focused to impact the learners' QoL. Five dimensions were analysed: pedagogy, contents, institution, models of education and trainers/staff.

All experts agreed that QoL can be impacted through education (6 on a scale of 7), but certain necessary conditions must first be achieved for this to occur.

All the experts coincided that the most critical factor in increasing senior learners' QoL is the human factor (facilitator, teachers and technicians). The teacher is the main contact with knowledge available to the learners, but he or she is also the facilitator to achieve a better

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<sup>1</sup> Pilar Escuder-Mollon. Universitat Jaume I. Spain

understanding of themselves, their context and the society. The teacher becomes not only a provider of skills and information, but also a friend and a support, who maintains a certain distance from and respect for the learner, but who is close enough to know the learner's needs.

The topics of the activities or courses are the first tool that teachers can use to impact QoL; the second is the pedagogy that they apply. Some topics have been mentioned as teaching suggestions for students and are significant to their QoL, but there are many more topics that senior students can enjoy learning and that can be highly beneficial to their knowledge, self-esteem or personal growth. The teaching-learning process itself is highly valuable, regardless of the content, if there is interest from both parties in the process (the teacher and the learner).

The final factor that has an impact on learners' QoL is the institution or environment that is created. The learning context is important not only because it facilitates the learning process, but also because it allows the learner to become part of a group, providing benefits for socialising and support.

## **Conclusion**

The research found a conviction among learners that education improves their QoL. In the knowledge that QoL is mainly subjective, their perception is, by itself, proof that they have a higher QoL as a result of attending an educational institution.

The importance of the human factor in teaching senior citizens can be seen from the perspective of the learners and from the experts. Sometimes the content or the place do not matter, but how the person that teaches can transmit and make the learners feel active and creative.

Details of the research can be obtained from "Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences" (World Congress of Educational Sciences 2013, Rome) and the surveys can be downloaded from <http://www.eduseniior.eu>

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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