

European context

Chapter 5. Pedagogy

High quality of education and studies is very important for Europe to continue its movement along the path of the knowledge society and compete successfully in a globalized economy. Each Member State to the EU has its own education policy, but they set common goals and share the best practices.

The most-widely offered and delivered senior courses in partner countries (Spain, Finland, Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary), according to the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning were analysed within the implementation process of the project “Evaluation toolkit on seniors education to improve their quality of life”. Most of the competences overlap and complement each other, but the EU normative acts reveal eight competencies that seriously affect a person's quality of life: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.

The analysis of the courses mostly offered to seniors in the partner countries was carried out within the project. The courses can be divided into six groups:

- ICT
- Handicraft
- Physical activities
- Art (theatre, dancing, singing)
- Foreign languages
- Life skills

The research carried out in the European context allowed to make the following conclusions.

1. The most widely used courses in senior education in all countries are ICT courses. Their topicality is confirmed by the dynamic pace of technological development and seniors' need to use different digital devices and technologies in everyday life. These courses are directly connected with development of **digital competence**. Although **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology** include abilities for the use of technology tools and devices, as well as the use of mathematical models (logical thinking and perception of space), but these skills are only partially developed in ICT courses offered to seniors. We believe it would be necessary to integrate the development of these skills within ICT courses more closely, including activities to strengthen seniors' mathematical thinking.
2. The second biggest group is Handicraft courses that are mostly related to the persons' opportunity to express their creative energy. Many social support programs offer creative activities for seniors as an opportunity for self-realization after taking retirement. Such kind of courses are closely related to **cultural awareness and expression**, because creativity and willingness to cultivate aesthetic capacity promote artistic self-expression and participation in cultural life. Any kind of activities in groups promote also **social competences**. Although these competences are connected with **civic competences**, it must be concluded that they are not highlighted in the non-formal education courses, but they are acquired in independent and informal way of studying
3. Different types of physical activities for seniors are often mentioned in various courses. Many studies have pointed out that good health is given as one of the priorities by seniors. However, 41 % of all European seniors do not participate in any kind of physical

activities¹. Historical experience of each country in Europe must be taken into account, as well as differing physical activity of their inhabitants. There is seen a clear trend that physical activity decreases with aging. This is the reason why organized physical activities have an essential role in seniors health maintenance. These activities are connected with improvement of **social competences**, as they are related to personal and social welfare that requires knowledge of optimal physical, mental health and healthy lifestyle.

4. Artistic ways of expression (theatre, dancing, singing) are widely offered to seniors in informal education, They directly improve personal competence of **cultural awareness and expression**. Alike handicraft activities, they help people to find their way of self-expression and reduce social isolation that is an inherent problem in this age group. This kind of activity is also important for developing competence of **communication in the mother tongue**. This competence is realized in interpersonal communication.
5. Foreign language courses have a significant role in single European context, because many projects funded by Europe involve mobility activities, including ones intended for seniors. Although foreign language courses do not have a priority role in senior education at the moment, competence of communication in foreign languages is going to be one of the most important matters in the future, as European integration progresses. It is important to keep in mind that seniors are self directed in the education process, so foreign language courses need to provide an opportunity to use language skills in practice. It is therefore necessary to integrate language courses with ICT which provides an opportunity to communicate with representatives of other countries, developing social competences at the same time. Experience of Spanish partner, Jaume I University, serves as a good example, because this kind of integration is implemented in senior education. Language knowledge gives better opportunities for collaboration and communication in Europe, reduces stereotypes and discrimination and provides better opportunities for intercultural tolerance.
6. Courses that perfect seniors' understanding about various life situations and provide new skills and knowledge, can be included in the chapter 'Life skills' (for example, General Gerontology, Rural/Eco/Green Tourism Entrepreneurship, etc.). These courses improve competences of **communication in the mother tongue and social and civic competences**.

As it was mentioned above, these lifelong competences cannot be seen in isolation from one another, as factors, that are important in one area, can facilitate skills in other areas. Basic language skills, mathematical thinking skills, information and communication technology skills are essential foundation for any learning process. Learning to learn is a significant skill, needed in all areas. Learning process is measured by personality's development in entity. Only the harmonious development of competencies provides social welfare and quality of life. Evaluating the offer of courses, it can be concluded that insufficient attention is paid to development of **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** and civic competence. Taking into consideration demographical situation in the future, initiative and entrepreneurship, as well as civic attitudes and seniors' participation in social and economic processes will be of increasing importance. As a result, there would be a change in society's attitude towards seniors, as, for example, elderly population status in the society in the Baltic States is lower than in the old EU Member States. It is believed that the negative attitude toward old people is associated with the assessment of the economic contribution - young people's contribution to the economy is greater and they are better suited to leadership than older people (Rungule, 2011). Latvia is among those European countries where, according to the Eurobarometer Survey, discrimination on grounds of age is the most common (Rungule, 2011).

Goals in senior education are not focused on receiving a qualification document. Development and improvement of appropriate knowledge and skills dominate in the changing world, so we believe that the choice of method depends on a particular learning task.

¹ Afonso, C., Graça, P., Kearney, J., Gibney, M., & de Almeida, M. (2001). Physical activity in European seniors: attitudes, beliefs and levels. *The Journal Of Nutrition, Health & Aging*, 5(4), 226-229.

Research carried out proved that the EU legislation is united in all partner countries, and it makes a base for choosing pedagogical theories for introduction and provision of senior education. A country's economy, politics, traditions and other factors determine approaches and methods for implementation of seniors education, as the introduced content is similar to a greater or lesser extent in all partner countries.

Table 1. Learning methods and techniques for specific tasks

Learning task (Andersone, 2007)	Learning methods, techniques	Usage
Activation of activities	Exercises, working in groups, creative exercises, projects, role plays, excursions, questions and answers	ICT Handicraft Physical activities Art (theatre, dancing, singing) Foreign languages Life skills
Excitement of curiosity	Role plays, narration, visualisation, collage, colour palette, circle of associations, brainstorm, creative exercises, analysis of situations, Online café of interest, excursion	
Development of thinking processes	Exercises, visualisation, circle of associations, projects, analysis of situations, creative exercises, writing of stories, mind-mapping, brainstorm, community mapping, stepping into the picture, cooperative integrated learning method, learning, prognostication	
Usage of knowledge into the practice	Exercises, writing of stories, projects, integrated learning method, Online café of interest, community mapping, stepping into the picture, role plays, prognostication	
Encouragement of searching activities	Projects, integrated learning method, brainstorm, stepping into the picture, prognostication	
Promotion of joint responsibility for results	Working in groups, projects, planning and organization of events, integrated learning method, community mapping, Online café of interest, stepping into the picture	

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According to the results of adults (25 - 64 years old) education survey, 84 % of population participated in the non-formal education, as it was associated with their work. This trend

indicates that the main attention in education in Latvia is paid to improvement of job skills and competencies. It is not interesting for seniors who have taken retirement. There is still no governmental program for ensuring seniors' non-formal education in Latvia. In other EU countries it is done by supporting University of Third Age. Seniors' non-formal and informal education is generally ensured by such municipal institutions as retirees' day centres, social security institutions, collectives of creative expression (dance, choirs, handicrafts) supported by local governments. There are municipal social service support centres in Latvia that give people free social services and leisure activities. The aim is to improve people's quality of life. Day care centre provides social care and social rehabilitation services, development of social skills and education for persons who have reached the age of receiving pension. The main task of the social service is to render social assistance services, promoting self-help and persons' involvement in public life, as well as contributing to their sense of responsibility to themselves and their families. Social services include social care that aims to ensure stable quality of life to a person, who cannot do it by himself/herself because of the age or functional disorder, and social rehabilitation that aims to prevent or reduce invalidity, disability, dependency and social consequences in person's life, caused by other factors. This indicates that senior education activities are primarily implemented as social support events.

Great contribution to informal senior education is provided by non-governmental organizations. Latvian Pensioners' Federation is founded as an organization unifying senior's interests. It brings together 138 local organizations. It is a non-political, non-governmental organization that represents seniors' interests in a governmental level, as well as implements a variety of projects, including the educational ones. Seniors' associations are established in almost every city and region. These associations raise funds from local governments, European projects and private financing and implement different types of educational activities.

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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