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The presence of andragogical competencies in graduate study programmes of foreign languages

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Abstract

The development of the quality of adult education is directly connected with andragogical competencies of teachers. As andragogical institutions offer more foreign language learning programmes, foreign language teachers have an integral role in adult education and their competencies for working with adult learners are extremely important. However, it is disputable how foreign language teachers gain the mentioned competencies during their initial education. According to that, the first part of the paper analyses the presence of andragogical competencies in graduate study programme curriculums of English Language and Literature, German Language and Literature and Italian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. Based on the results of the analysis, the second part of the paper will provide guidelines and recommendations for including andragogical competencies into initial educational curriculums for foreign language teachers. Furthermore, as an example of good practice, the paper will present the programme designed for the students (future teachers) of English, German and Italian language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka with the purpose of developing andragogical competencies.

Keywords: Andragogical competencies, analysis of curriculums of graduate foreign language study programmes, foreign language students, project/programme for gaining andragogical competencies.

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1. Introduction

All developed countries have accepted adult education as an important constituent of lifelong learning. One of the reasons for the unsatisfactory level of inclusion of adult population into lifelong learning programmes in Croatia (2.4%) is the unattractive offer of educational programmes and a lack of quality, therefore it is pointed out how future development of adult education has to be directed towards the development of “work quality and relevance of the offer” (Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, 2014, pp. 145-146), whereby the issue of qualified and competent andragogues is most emphasized in the context of quality insurance. In accordance with that, there is an increasing emphasis placed on creating andragogical standards and competence profiles of experts employed in adult education (Kusic, Vrcelj & Zovko, 2016; Martinko & Svedruzic, 2011; Nijssen et al., 2008; Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, 2014; Ziljak, 2011). The referenced works also point out the need for professionalization of andragogues, which first of all implies dealing with initial education and continuous professional development of andragogues (Buiskool, Broek, Van-Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne, 2010; European Commission, 2007; Nijssen et al., 2008; Ovesni, 2011; Popovic, 2010).

The programmes of foreign language learning are certainly among the most represented in the offer of formal and non-formal adult education. According to the Andragogical Joint Data Registry, there are 779 different foreign language learning programmes carried out on various levels in the Republic of Croatia. Foreign language teachers employed in adult education institutions possess teaching competencies necessary for elementary and secondary school education, however, it is questionable how many competencies necessary for working with adult learners they gain during their initial education.

2. Andragogical Profession and Competencies of Andragogues

Owing to heterogeneous qualifications of andragogues and various educational offers in andragogical institutions on the national and European level, it is difficult to define the necessary andragogical competencies. Among the series of European research studies about andragogical competencies conducted during the last decade, we would like to single out the research entitled Key Competencies for Adult Learning Professionals, carried out by the institute Research voor Beleid in 2010. It groups competencies into two categories – “generic” and “specific” (Buiskool et al., 2010, p. 33). Generic competencies are necessary for performing activities within the adult education sector and every professional working within the sector should have those. The second group of andragogical competencies consists of specific competencies necessary for performing specific activities, such as teaching, counselling, institution management, administrative jobs, etc. Specific competencies are therefore, divided into competencies directly involved in the learning process and competencies supportive for the learning process (Buiskool et al., 2010). Not all andragogues need to have all the specific competencies, but depending on the activities they perform, they should own certain specific competencies. In accordance with that, foreign language teachers should have generic and certain specific competencies important for quality participation in conducting the adult learning process. These competencies should be gained during their initial education as adequate university education and continuous professional development of teachers are the basic preconditions for professionalization of adult learning staff (Kusić, Vrcelj, Zovko, 2016; Ovesni, 2011).

According to the valid Croatian laws and regulations, andragogues have to own certain subject-specific and pedagogical competencies for working with children in elementary and secondary schools, only in the area of formal adult education (for andragogues working in non-formal adult education there are no prescribed conditions, qualifications or competencies), while andragogical competencies are not obligatory for working in the adult education system. Although the recent national strategic document explicitly states “andragogical education”, “licensing andragogical workers”, “additional education for adult learning staff”, “andragogical methodics and methods and approach to adult education” (Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, 2014, pp. 144 - 163), there are no university programmes in Croatia for initial education of andragogues, or regulations which would

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prescribe the introduction of andragogical objectives and content of learning into university programmes for initial education of teachers.

3. The Presence of Andragogical Competencies in Teaching Study Curricula of Graduate Programmes of English Language and Literature, German Language and Literature and Italian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka

The Act on Elementary and Secondary Education (Article 105, Official Gazette 87/08) stipulates that elementary and secondary school teachers have to gain teaching competencies equal to 60 ECTS. In accordance with that, the constituent part of university teaching study curricula, besides the subject-specific courses, are courses which belong to the Teaching Module. The Centre for Teacher Education conducts the Teaching Module at the Teaching Studies of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Teaching Module curriculum consists of four groups of courses: (1) obligatory general courses in the area of pedagogy, psychology and Croatian studies, (2) methodics of subjects and school practice, (3) elective courses and (4) internal elective or obligatory courses offered by the basic department. Table 1 shows the obligatory general courses, methodics of subjects and practice and the elective courses of the Teaching Module. Offer of elective courses occasionally changes in accordance with the estimate of purposefulness and efficient use of human resources in certain departments, first of all, the Department of Pedagogy and the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka.

Table 1. Obligatory general courses, methodics of subjects, practice and elective courses of the Teaching Module

Obligatory general courses	Methodics of subjects and practice	Elective courses
Developmental Psychology, Educational Psychology I, Educational Psychology II, General Pedagogy, Didactics I, Didactics II, Teaching Learners with Special Needs, Basics of Language Culture (excluding students of Croatian Language and Literature)	Methodics of teaching subjects, School practice	Philosophy of Education, Sociology of Education, Application of Computers in Teaching, Psychology of Gifted Students, Psychology of Parenting, Moral Judgement, Critical Thinking for Teachers, Rhetoric, Methods of Efficient Learning, Docimology, Families and Children at Risk, Education for Democratic Community, Pedagogical Communication I, Family and Prevention of Asocial Forms of Behaviour, School Pedagogy, School Management

Table 2 shows the internal elective and/or obligatory courses offered to students by their basic departments in the framework of the Teaching Module. The table shows that the programmes of the Department of English Language and Literature and the Department of German Language and Literature offer internal courses which are a part of the Teaching Module, while the Department of Italian Language and Literature does not offer internal courses to its students.

Table 2. Internal elective and/or obligatory courses at basic departments in the framework of the Teaching Module

Graduate foreign language study programmes – teaching track			
	English Language and Literature	German Language and Literature	Italian Language and Literature
Internal elective and obligatory courses of the Teaching Module	Introduction into Learning and Teaching English Language, Academic Literacy 1, Practice: Teaching English Language, Academic Literacy 2, Methods of Teaching English Language, Presentation Skills, Teaching Literature, Checking and Evaluating Foreign Language Knowledge, Culturology Views in Learning and Teaching English Language, Reading Culture	Introduction into the Methodics of German Language, Strategies of Learning and Teaching in German Language Classes, Analysis of Textbooks and Typology of Exercises in German Language Teaching, Literature for Children and the Young in German Language Teaching, Speaking and Writing in German Language Teaching, Creative Writing in German Language Teaching	No obligatory and/or elective internal courses

Offer of internal courses occasionally changes in accordance with the estimate of purposefulness and efficient use of human resources in basic departments of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. Besides the mentioned courses of the Teaching Module, the three study programmes encompass subject-specific content and learning outcomes in the area of linguistics, literature, culture and civilisation of the speaking area, with each study programme additionally reflecting the specific traits of the language and literature which is the subject of its study.

The analysis of the teaching graduate study curricula of English Language and Literature, German Language and Literature and Italian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka showed that the students gain subject-specific, pedagogical, psychological and methodical competencies for working with children in elementary and secondary school, but not andragogical competencies necessary for working with adults. It has been noted that courses in the area of andragogy are not included in the Teaching Module or parts of the programme directed towards the profession of certain departments. Although it cannot be safely said that certain andragogical content is not treated in the framework of the existing courses, the analysis of learning outcomes of the said curricula showed that none of them mention explicitly any study outcomes which would suggest gaining andragogical competencies necessary for working with adult learners. It has been noticed that a few learning outcomes state that the students shall be able to adapt their work to age or the target group, however, as there is no explicit mention of “adult learners”, but only “elementary and secondary school learners”, it is difficult to conclude that this statement relates to adult learners. Although the analysis can lead to the conclusion that the students do not have the minimal andragogical competencies necessary for working with adults, the students of these study programmes gain the academic title of the master of education of English, German or Italian language and literature at the end of their studies, which makes them qualified to work in the adult education system and considerably influences the quality of adult education.

3. Excourse: An Example of Andragogical Student Training Programme

In their professional and high-quality work in adult education system, foreign language teachers need andragogical competencies, which are not encompassed in the adult education system. Therefore, the following example of good practice will serve to demonstrate the andragogical student training programme of graduate foreign language students, realized in the framework of the tender of *Grants for Doctoral Study Students – Realizing Strategic Goals of the University in Rijeka*, issued in December 2014. The programme contributed to the realization of one of the university's strategic goals – gaining qualifications in the period planned by the study programme. It was designed for senior year students of the graduate study of English, German and Italian Language and Literature – teaching track, and it was realized in the period from March to June 2015. In the design and performance of the programme activities, the leaders used the material *Andragogical Teaching Models – Manual for Working with Adult Learners, Module 1*, issued in 2010 by the Agency for Vocational Training and Adult Education. The programme was designed for 12 students, four from each study programme. However, owing to difficulties in communication with the departments and insufficient motivation, the response was considerably lower. The programme encompassed four students, all of whom were female students of German language and literature, two of them had English language and literature as their second subject, one had Croatian language and literature and one had Pedagogy as the second subject. The purpose of the programme was the development of andragogical competencies (generic and specific competencies directly related to the process of learning and teaching) in students from the mentioned study programmes. Specific goals were the following: (1) identify relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for foreign language teachers dealing with adult education, (2) gather available information about the responsibilities, duties, roles and work environment of foreign language teachers in adult education, (3) develop communication and presentation skills, evaluation, self-evaluation and reflection skills, (4) develop competencies of designing and guiding the learning process, competencies of facilitating the learning process and motivating the students, competencies of following and evaluating the learning process. The programme included a total of 25 hours of education, realized through interactive lectures, workshops, visits to classes, working with mentors and carrying out the lessons in an adult education institution. At the end of each visit, the work was evaluated and at the end of the programme the students completed an evaluation form*. By evaluating the activities, the students pointed out the usefulness of the programme on many occasions for a more successful mastering of the obligatory programme and their future work as teachers. They considered the connecting of theory and practice, interactive workshop approach and direct inclusion into the work of an andragogical institution as particularly successful. In the final evaluation, they showed a high level of satisfaction by the conducted activities. All participants considered the presented topics as interesting and useful, most of them thought that the gained knowledge will be highly applicable in practice; they estimated the training methodology as very efficient, the language used as understandable, and the programme itself as professionally stimulating. Half of the participants thought that it would be difficult to transfer the knowledge they gained to their colleagues, while the other half thought it would be easy. Although the results of the evaluation can hardly be used for any generalizations owing to the small number of participants, they can still be considered as indicative in the sense of recognizing the significance and usefulness of such programmes in the area of andragogy.

* Final questionnaire taken from the *Manual for Training Teachers in Adult Education System*, p. 42. Available at <http://www.asoo.hr/UserDocsImages/CARDS2004/Priru%C4%8Dnik%20za%20treniranje%20nastavnika%20u%20sustavu%20obrazovanja%20odraslih.pdf> (accessed on 25 Jan 2015).

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Since the analyzed curricula of the teaching graduate studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka do not plan any contents related to developing andragogical competencies, such short-term programmes represent one of the possible models that are necessary to supplement and upgrade teaching competencies needed for creating a successful position at the labour market, which besides regular education, encompasses adult education, with a large number of teachers included in some form of adult education during their work experience. If we take into consideration the fact that a small number of highly (intrinsically) motivated students took part in the programme, we have to conclude that it is necessary to put additional effort into the student motivation for participating in such programmes, but also into making departments and teachers aware of the necessity to include andragogical content and learning outcomes into graduate study curricula.

4. Conclusion

Teacher competencies are primarily gained during initial university education and they are prescribed by the study programme curriculum. The sub-acts arranging for this kind of qualifications and teacher development do not deal specifically with adult education, so “the lack of andragogical competencies is obvious in all profiles of teaching departments” (Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, 2014, p. 147). Therefore, it should be expected from relevant institutions to develop theoretically based and empirically supported initial education programmes, as well as continuous professional development of teachers included in the adult education system. The analysis of graduate teaching study programmes curricula of English, German, and Italian language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka showed that andragogical competencies are not included in the initial foreign language teacher education, which implies that these organized studies do not prepare their students for all manifestations of their future professional teaching work. The introduction of obligatory course of andragogy into the Teaching Module curriculum is suggested as one possible solution, according to the model of teaching studies in Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Serbia and some other European countries. Besides that, it is necessary to start a two-course study of andragogy which could be combined with different studies of teaching and general track. With necessary modifications in initial education, it is necessary to design various programmes of continuous professional development at the university level, such as specialist programmes in the area of andragogy and lifelong learning programmes, which can be developed in the framework of various projects, based on the programme described in the paper.

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