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Competencies for working with adults – an example of andragogues in Croatia

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Abstract

Every discussion about theoretical and practical issues of adult education necessarily includes the education of andragogues and acquiring andragogical competencies, which is seen as directly linked to the improvement of quality of adult education. Numerous EU documents mention the education of andragogues as one of the most important factors of quality of the adult education system. The tendency towards professionalization of andragogues in Europe, as well as in Croatia, results in an increased interest in defining competencies of andragogues. This work presents the findings of research that aimed to examine what andragogical competencies andragogues in Croatia possess. The mentioned objective produced the following research tasks: determine generic and specific competencies that andragogues possess, determine whether there's a difference between competencies that andragogues possess and their field of education, functions they hold at their work and the number of years they spent working in the adult education system. Research sample was purposive and included 54 examinees. Survey questionnaire that was used in the research was created based on the *Framework of Key Andragogical Competencies* developed by Buiskool et al. Research findings point to the importance of systematic approach to designing curriculums for the initial education of andragogues and the creation of competency profile for andragogues in Croatia, since they are still non-existent.

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1. Introduction

By accepting the idea and the concept of lifelong learning, the question of qualified and competent andragogues becomes the foundation for the development of adult education.

In documents, educating andragogues so they would acquire andragogical competencies is most frequently mentioned in the context of quality assurance. Andragogues help adult learners develop their knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes during their life. Due to that fact, initial education and further professional training, as well as professional development of andragogues, is highlighted as a key determinant of the education quality and adult learning (Popović, 2010; Nijssen i sur., 2008; Nuissl, 2008; Nuissl, Latke, 2008; European Commission, 2007b; Klapan, Čavar, Živčić, 2007; European Commission, 2006; Ovesni, 2001).

Adult education systems are usually characterised by a very low level of regulation and a very high level of differentiation and complexity regarding the structure, forms of educational offers and experts included in that field (andragogues). All specificities of andragogues' work with adult learners should be included in the curriculums of the initial education and further professional training of andragogues which will provide andragogues with all necessary andragogical competencies for a quality work with adult learners, which significantly differ from pedagogical competencies for the work with children.

2. Andragogical competencies

Every discussion about theoretical and conceptual issues of adult education and their practical consequences on adult education necessarily include the question of education of andragogues who work in different organisational forms and models of adult education (Savičević, 1999) and consequently the question of andragogical competencies.

The tendency towards professionalization of andragogues in Europe leads to the greater interest in defining competency profile of andragogues. While many European countries still lack a clear definition of a competency profile of andragogues, some European countries (e.g. United Kingdom, Germany, France, Estonia, Switzerland...) developed and implemented competency profiles and standards for andragogues, although the scope of their application varies greatly given the area of the adult education system and the given institution in the adult education and the regional division within a given country (Bechtel, 2008).

The problem with defining competencies of andragogues, on the European and national levels, arises in relation to the great diversity in the field of adult education. Because of that European Commission decided to finance a research on key competencies of andragogues that was conducted by the Research voor Beleid institute with an aim to develop a common set of key andragogical competencies, from the teaching ones to the managerial ones, which can be used as a framework for Europe (Buiskool et al., 2010), and which other countries will be able to use in order to develop competency standards for andragogues.

Long lasting idea that education of andragogues is and should be identical to the education of teachers for the work with children and youth and of using short-term "additional" training in order to educate teachers for the work with adult learners, is completely discarded by those who scientifically, professionally and practically participate in the education of adults. Still, such an idea is yet to be discarded in the educational policies of certain countries, including Croatia, which still attempt to provide education of andragogues through the system of education intended for teachers for working with children and youth.

2.1. Croatian example

In Croatia, the question of professionalization of andragogy is completely neglected and there is no systematically studied policy regarding the development of the andragogical profession. Due to the lack of certain basic preconditions for the development of that profession, such as thought-through and systematic initial education of andragogues, we cannot speak of andragogical profession in Croatia.

No law, regulation, strategy or other document in Croatia mention andragogical competencies, that is competencies required for working with adult learners. Instead, in the context of working in the education of adults, only pedagogical competencies are mentioned. Andragogues need to possess qualifications and competencies depending on the field of their work. For example, andragogues who work in the field of formal education of adults,

that is in the field of primary and secondary education of adults need to possess the same qualifications and competencies as teachers working with children in primary and secondary schools. They acquire those pedagogical qualifications and competencies by attending study programs for teachers at faculties for humanities and social sciences or by attending programs of additional combined pedagogical and psychological education for teachers that are carried out by centres/departments for the education of teachers, most often at faculties for humanities and social sciences. For andragogues who work in the field of organized informal education of adults there are no proscribed rules, qualifications and competencies for working with adult learners.

Based on that, andragogues are required to possess professional competencies related to their subject field and pedagogical and teaching competencies for working with children in primary and secondary schools, and only for working in formal education of adults, while andragogical competencies are not mandatory for working in the adult education system.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research objective, tasks and variables

Research objective was to examine which competences examinees (andragogues) possess for working with adult learners. In accordance with the research objective, the following research tasks were established:

- Determine the gender of examinees, their completed education, function they maintain and years of experience in working with adult learners;
- Examine what generic and specific competences examinees possess for working with adult learners;
- Examine is there a difference between the type of completed education and the competences they possess;
- Examine is there a difference between the function examinees perform in the adult education system and the competences they possess;
- Examine is there a correlation between the years of experience in working with adult learners and the competences they possess.

In this research, independent variables are gender, completed education, job function and years of experience in working with adult learners, while dependant variables are generic and specific andragogical competences that examinees possess.

3.2. Sample, research methods and the analysis of research results

The sample of this research is a purposive, convenience sample and consists of 54 examinees (andragogues) included in the adult education system in 4 institutions of adult education in three counties: High School Prelog and Public Open University in Međimurje County, Public Open University in Varaždin County and Public University in Rijeka in the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County.

For the purpose of this research we used survey questionnaire created based on the results of a research on key competences of andragogues that was conducted by Research voor Beleid institute, which can be used as a reference (framework) for Europe that countries can use on voluntary basis (Buiskool et al., 2010).

Descriptive and correlation method was used in the research.

Data collected using survey questionnaire are analysed in the SPSS programme (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The existence of a connection or a difference between variables was determined by bivariate correlation, variance analysis for independent samples and t-test for independent samples.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Gender of examinees, their completed education, function they maintain and years of experience in working with adult learners

A total of 54 examinees (andragogues) participated in this research, of which 28 (51,9%) were male and 26 (48,1%) were female.

Out of the total number of examinees, 35 (64,8%) of them completed education in the field of humanities and social sciences, while 19 (35,2%) examinees completed education in the field of natural sciences and mathematics.

Out of the total number of examinees, 3 (5,5%) of them are heads of institutions for adult education, 40 (74,1%) are teachers, 4 (7,4%) are counsellors in adult education and 7 (13%) of examinees are administrative workers. Division of examinees according to the function they perform in the adult education system is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Examinees given the function they perform in the adult education system

Function in the adult education system	Frequency	Percentage
Head of institution	3	5,5%
Teacher	40	74,1%
Counsellor	4	7,4%
Administrative worker	7	13%
Total	54	100%

Given the years of experience in working with adult learners in the adult education system, research results show that 7 (13%) examinees work less than a year in the adult education system, 26 (48,1%) works between one and five years, 12 (22,2%) works between five and ten years, and 9 (16,7%) has more that ten years of experience in working with adult learners. Number of examinees given their years of experience in working with adult learners in the adult education system is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 Years of experience in working with adult learners in the adult education system

Years of work experience	Frequency	Percentage
Les that 1 year	7	13%
Between 1 and 5 years	26	48,1%
Between 5 and 10 years	12	22,2%
More than 10 years	9	16,7%,
Total	54	100%

4.2. Generic and specific competences examinees possess for working with adult learners

According to the research on key competences of andragogues that was conducted by Research voor Beleid institute, andragogical competences can be divided into generic and specific (Buiskool et al. 2010).

By applying descriptive statistics, we determined a level of (dis)agreement of examinees with statements in the survey questionnaire that represent generic and specific competences. Examinees have expressed their (dis)agreement with the statements listed in the survey questionnaire using the Likert scale (1 – I completely disagree; 2 – I mostly disagree; 3 – I'm not sure/I cannot decide; 4 – I mostly agree; 5 – I completely agree).

4.2.1. Generic andragogical competences

Generic andragogical competences represent competences which are relevant for the performance of all activities in the field of adult education. All andragogues should poses those competences, regardless of their function and

whether they maintain a teaching, counselling, managerial or administrative function, since they actually define what it means to be an andragogue. Accordingly, generic competences include: **personal competences** (statements 1, 2, 3)[†], **interpersonal competences** (statements 4, 13, 14), **professional competences** (statements 7, 8, 20), competences that relate to the **ability of using theoretical and practical knowledge** in one's own field of teaching, that is, in one's own work (statements 9, 17), **didactical competences** (statements 10, 11, 19), **motivational competences** (statements 12, 18), competences that relate to the **ability of working within diverse or heterogeneous groups** (statements 5, 6, 15, 16).

Table 3 Generic andragogical competences that examinees possess

Generic andragogical competences	1+2	3	4+5	M	SD
3. I am interested in my own development in the adult education system	0	0	54 (100%)	4,93	0,264
14. I am skilled at team work	0	0	54 (100%)	4,91	0,293
7. I am open for changes	0	2(4%)	52 (96%)	4,70	0,537
15. I possess the knowledge on the methods how to resolve potential conflicts	0	1 (2%)	53 (98%)	4,63	0,525
1. I possess the knowledge on the possibilities how to further develop my own practice in the adult education system	0	1 (2%)	53 (98%)	4,61	0,529
2. I am skilled at organizing my time and work	0	8 (15%)	46 (85%)	4,50	0,746
16. I am skilled at recognizing tensions, problems and conflicts	0	8 (15%)	46 (85%)	4,48	0,764
11. I am skilled at adjusting the styles of the learning process to adult learners	0	4 (7%)	50 (93%)	4,43	0,633
12. I possess the knowledge on how to motivate adult learners for the learning process	0	8 (15%)	46 (85%)	4,19	0,675
19. I poses the knowledge on the adult learners learning methods	0	9 (17%)	45 (83%)	4,17	0,694
9. I am skilled at motivating adult learners to learn independently using suggested sources of learning	0	11 (20%)	43 (80%)	4,15	0,737
5. I am emphatic in the work with adult learners	0	11 (20%)	43 (80%)	4,09	0,708
13. I am skilled at giving and receiving feedback from adult learners, colleagues and other participants	0	13 (24%)	41 (76%)	3,98	0,687
10. I posses the knowledge on the learning techniques relevant to the adult learners learning process	0	13 (24%)	41 (76%)	3,96	0,672
4. I posses the knowledge on how to establish confidential relationships with adult learners, colleagues and other participants	2 (4%)	17 (32%)	35 (64%)	3,83	0,818
18. I poses the knowledge on cultural differences between adult learners	4 (7%)	17 (32%)	33 (61%)	3,76	0,889
20. I take responsibility for the further development and the improvement of the institution and the adult education system	6 (11%)	16 (30%)	32 (59%)	3,70	0,944
8. I posses the knowledge on institutional preconditions for the education of adults	2 (4%)	29 (53%)	23 (43%)	3,41	0,599
17. I poses theoretical and practical knowledge from the field of adult education	2 (4%)	30 (55%)	22 (41%)	3,39	0,596
6. I possess the knowledge on the human development stages in the adult age	19 (35%)	19 (35%)	16 (30%)	3,00	0,971

[†] After every group of competences, enclosed within brackets are ordinal numbers of statements from the survey questionnaire that describe a given competence. In tables, an ordinal number of the statement from the survey questionnaire is indicated before every statement.

This research determined that examinees possess most generic andragogical competences (Table 3), although they expressed the highest degree of agreement with statements describing personal competences, followed by interpersonal and didactical competences. In a bit smaller degree they expressed their agreement with those statements about competences that relate to the ability of working within diverse or heterogeneous groups and with statements about competences related to the ability of using theoretical and practical knowledge in one's own field of teaching, as well as professional competences. These results can be explained by the fact that examinees possess teaching competences for working with children and accordingly possess personal, interpersonal and didactical competences, while at the same time possessing a smaller degree of competences related to working with adult learners (e.g. motivating adult learners, ability of working within heterogeneous groups, professional competences that include taking responsibility and awareness regarding institutional frameworks of adult education at all levels...).

4.2.2. Specific andragogical competences

The other type of andragogical competences are specific competences that are needed for carrying out certain specific activities in the field of adult education, such as teaching, counselling, managing institution, administrative tasks etc. Accordingly, specific competences include: competences related to the **evaluation of previous experience, motivation, demands, needs and wishes of adult learners** (statements 6, 7, 32), competences related to **designing the learning process** (statements 3, 11, 24), competences related to **facilitating the learning process and motivating adult learners** (statements 1, 9, 12, 18, 33), competences related to **monitoring and evaluating the learning process** (statements 14, 15, 19), **counselling** competences (statements 13, 16, 17), competences related to **designing and creating programmes** (statements 19, 20, 24), competences related to **managing financial resources and evaluating social and economic benefits of provided services** (statements 22, 27), competences related to **managing human resources** (statements 5, 10, 23), competences related to **governing and managing institutions** for adult education (statements 23, 25, 26), competences related to **marketing and public relations** (statements 21, 28, 29, 30), competences related to **administration and transferring information** to adult learners and andragogues (2, 4, 31), competences related to **creating (ICT) learning environment** (statements 8, 33, 34).

Andragogues do not need to possess all mentioned specific competences. Instead, depending on what specific activities they perform, they should possess corresponding specific competences. In accordance with that, first six competences are necessary for those andragogues who are directly involved in the learning process, while other competences are indirectly connected with the learning process and are directed towards activities that support the learning process, such as managing activities, counselling and administrative support.

Table 4 Specific andragogical competences that examinees possess

Specific andragogical competences	1+2	3	4+5	M	SD
12. I am skilled at encouraging adult learners to independent learning	0	0	54 (100%)	4,70	0,461
1. I am skilled at connecting everyday life with the learning process	0	7 (13%)	47 (87%)	4,43	0,716
17. I possess the knowledge on organizing professional help and support to adult learners	0	6 (11%)	48 (89%)	4,39	0,685
10. I am skilled at selecting and employing adequate people	1 (2%)	7 (13%)	46 (85%)	4,37	0,784
30. I recognize new opportunities and possibilities for development in the adult education system	3 (5%)	16 (30%)	35 (65%)	4,33	0,727
24. I possess the knowledge on designing and creating curriculums for adult education programmes	0	7 (13%)	47 (87%)	4,30	0,690
28. I am skilled at recognizing opportunities for new adult education programmes	2 (4%)	7 (13%)	45 (83%)	4,22	0,816
25. I am skilled at governing and managing institution in accordance with its mission	0	10 (19%)	44 (81%)	4,20	0,737
18. I am flexible in harmonising the learning process with adult learners' needs	0	8 (15%)	46 (85%)	4,19	0,675

33.	I am skilled at creating efficient learning environment	1 (2%)	6 (11%)	47 (87%)	4,19	0,702
29.	I am skilled at communicating with external parties and organizations	0	8 (15%)	46 (85%)	4,17	0,694
14.	I am skilled at using various monitoring and evaluation techniques	0	11 (20%)	43 (80%)	4,17	0,746
13.	I am skilled at establishing confidential relationships with adult learners	0	10 (19%)	44 (81%)	4,15	0,711
3.	I am skilled at choosing adequate learning sources	0	11 (20%)	43 (80%)	4,07	0,696
21.	I possess the knowledge on public relations and marketing	0	12 (22%)	42 (78%)	4,06	0,738
23.	I possess management qualities	0	14 (26%)	40 (74%)	4,04	0,751
27.	I possess the knowledge on managing financial resources	1 (2%)	14 (26%)	39 (72%)	4,02	0,816
11.	I am skilled at adjusting the learning process adult learners' needs	0	26 (48%)	28 (52%)	4,02	0,675
22.	I am skilled at identifying and evaluating social and economic factors in the education of adults	4 (7%)	22 (41%)	28 (52%)	4,02	0,739
31.	I handle questions and requests in a friendly and cooperative way	2 (4%)	14 (26%)	38 (70%)	4,00	0,869
6.	I possess the knowledge on cultural, social and religious backgrounds of adult learners with an aim to understand the context for the development and motivation of adult learners	0	13 (24%)	41 (76%)	3,98	0,687
16.	I am familiar with career and work environment of adult learners	0	11 (20%)	43 (80%)	3,96	0,672
8.	I possess the knowledge on ICT design and learning environments	1 (2%)	13 (24%)	40 (74%)	3,96	0,751
19.	I possess basic knowledge on evaluation techniques	0	15 (28%)	39 (72%)	3,83	0,607
2.	I am skilled at administrative tasks	0	18 (33%)	36 (67%)	3,81	0,675
7.	I am skilled at connecting previous experiences of adult learners with learning objectives and learning outcomes	2 (4%)	17 (32%)	35 (65%)	3,80	0,786
5.	I poses the knowledge on human resource management	0	17 (32%)	37 (68%)	3,78	0,604
20.	I am skilled at directing other andragogues in using educational programme	4 (7%)	16 (30%)	34 (63%)	3,78	0,883
15.	I use the evaluation process results for directing further work with adult learners	5 (9%)	16 (30%)	33 (61%)	3,78	0,883
26.	I understand the educational needs of the society and adults and I harmonize the institution in accordance with those needs	2 (4%)	20 (37%)	32 (59%)	3,78	0,839
4.	I am skilled at working with administrative systems, programmes and software	4 (7%)	20 (37%)	30 (56%)	3,69	0,886
34.	I critically ponder over the influence of ICT on adult learners' and andragogues' behaviour	7 (13%)	19 (35%)	28 (52%)	3,57	0,944
32.	I am skilled at evaluating non-verbal communication of adult learners	12 (22%)	18 (33%)	24 (45%)	3,41	1,037
9.	I possess the knowledge on the range of learning styles and didactic methods	19 (35%)	19 (35%)	16 (30%)	2,96	0,910

According to Table 4, research results show that examinees express the highest degree of agreement with statements describing competences indirectly related with the learning process and oriented towards activities that support the learning process. In a bit smaller degree they express their agreement with statements describing competences that are needed for the direct work in the teaching process. Accordingly, in relation to the competences indirectly connected with the learning process and activities that support the learning process, examinees expressed that they possess a higher degree of competences connected with marketing and public relations, a somewhat smaller degree of management competences (managing institution, human and financial resources), and a smaller degree of administrative competences and competences for creating (ICT) learning environment. In relation to the competences needed for the direct work in the teaching process, examinees express a higher degree of agreement with statements describing competences that facilitate learning process and counselling competences, a somewhat smaller degree of agreement with statements describing competences related to designing the learning process, and a

smaller degree of agreement with statements describing competences related to designing and creating programmes, evaluating previous experience and monitoring and evaluating the learning process.

Such results demonstrate that although andragogues possess certain specific andragogical competences in a higher degree, they still lack a sufficient degree of competences needed for the direct teaching work with adult learners. Having certain specific andragogical competences can be explained by the fact that 30 (55,6 %) examinees attended some form of further professional training for acquiring andragogical competences. Also, the fact that examinees do not possess a sufficient degree of specific andragogical competences which are necessary for high quality work with adult learners, points to the need of designing curriculums for the initial education of andragogues and redesigning existing programmes of further professional trainings for acquiring andragogical competences in Croatia.

In this research we used bivariate correlation, variance analysis for independent samples (ANOVA) and t-test for independent samples to examine the connection between certain groups of variables. Bivariate correlation was used to analyse the connection between generic and specific competences that examinees possess. The results of bivariate correlation showed a statistically significant connection between variables of generic and specific competences that examinees possess ($r=0,613$, $p<0,01$).

4.3. Andragogical competences which examinees possess and the type of completed education

In order to determine whether there is a difference between the type of education examinees completed and the competences they possess for working with adult learners, we used a t-test for independent samples. Research results demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference between the type of education examinees completed and specific competences they possess for working with adult learners ($F(52,54)=1,018$, $p<0,01$). Examinees that completed education in the field of humanities and social sciences possess more specific competences than examinees that completed education in the field of natural sciences and mathematics. There is no statistically significant difference between the type of education examinees completed and the generic competences they possess for working with adult learners ($F(52,54)=0,219$, $p>0,05$).

4.4. Andragogical competences which examinees possess and the function they perform in the adult education system

In order to determine whether there is a difference between the function examinees perform in the adult education system and the competences they possess we used ANOVA for independent samples. Research results demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference between the function examinees perform in the adult education system and specific competences they possess ($F(3,54)=4,729$, $p<0,01$). There is no statistically significant difference between the function examinees perform in the adult education system and the generic competences they possess ($F(3,54)=0,971$, $p>0,05$). Research results analysis revealed that the greatest difference in competences exists between those who work as teachers and those who have an administrative job.

4.5. Andragogical competences which examinees possess and the years they spent working with adult learners

In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the years examinees spent working with adult learners and the andragogical competences they possess we used ANOVA for independent samples. Research results demonstrated that there is no statistically significant difference between the years examinees spent working with adult learners and the generic competences they possess ($F(3,54)=1,206$, $p>0,05$). There is a statistically significant difference between the years examinees spent working with adult learners and the specific competences they possess ($F(3,54)=5,662$, $p<0,01$). Post-Hoc analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between examinees with less than a year of experience in working with adult learners and those with more than ten years of experience in working with adults ($M=132,000$, $SE=2,286$; $M=141,111$, $SE=2,016$).

5. Conclusions

Although Croatia had a great tradition of educating andragogues, which included Summer School and Winter School for andragogues, as well as Correspondence school, today the education of andragogues is mostly carried out by non-university institutions. Such practice implies many questions, especially the question of neglecting professionalization of andragogues in educational policies, that is, the non-existence of andragogical profession. Because of that, in most cases the education of andragogues has come down to further professional training programmes. Although andragogy is perceived as an important part of the curriculum of pedagogical studies, there is still no framework for systematic university education at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate level, for acquiring academic degree in the scientific field of andragogy. Although non-university institutions carry out certain programmes for further professional training of andragogues, the aim of which is acquiring andragogical competences, those programmes are not mandatory.

Existing practice reflects on the competences of andragogues, which is confirmed by the research results. It was revealed that examinees possess more generic competences than specific andragogical competences. In relation to generic andragogical competences, it was revealed that examinees possess a greater degree of personal and interpersonal competences, while in relation to specific andragogical competences they possess a greater degree of competences which are indirectly related with the learning process and oriented towards activities that support the learning process, unlike competences needed for the direct teaching work with adult learners which they possess in a smaller degree. Also, research results show that the type of education examinees completed, function they maintain in the adult education system and the years they spent working with adult learners do not have an influence on the generic competences they possess, but that those factors do have a significant influence on the specific andragogical competences.

Although research results, due to methodological limitations (purposive, convenience research sample, that is, a small number of examinees), do not allow generalisations, it is possible to recognize directions and tendencies in relation to possessing (needed) andragogical competences. In this respect, research results reveal a need for a continuous research of the education of andragogues and their competences, that is, designing curriculums for initial education of andragogues in Croatia seem necessary. Paying attention to the needs of andragogues also imposes a need to examine educational needs of andragogues and to redesign existing programmes of further professional trainings for a more efficient acquiring of andragogical competences.

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