

Digital Competencies For Older Adults: Assessing Educational Needs, Program Design, And Implementation

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Abstract—The organization and implementation of adult education programs require thorough and meaningful planning. Such programs involve essential stages that pertain not only to the structure, application, execution, and evaluation of the program itself, but also to the learning environment and the specific educational needs of the target audience.

This study presents the implementation framework of a hypothetical digital skills training program for senior citizens. It highlights key characteristics of the target population, the collaborative efforts required for its realization, and the significance of conducting a needs assessment to ensure the effective planning and successful completion of the program.

Finally, the study discusses critical parameters to be considered in the selection of both trainers and participants, as well as the categories of personnel that require targeted training and professional development, in order to ensure the comprehensive and successful execution of the program.

Keywords — *Digital Skills; Adult Education; Educational Needs; Program Implementation; Lifelong Learning*

1. Investigation of Educational Needs of Senior Citizens

1.1. Target Population Profile, Synergies, and Negotiation of Educational Needs

The concept of *need* is complex and multidimensional, and there is no universally accepted definition among educational theorists, as its meaning is shaped by the socio-economic, pedagogical, and cultural context in which it is examined and applied (Chatzipanagiotou, 2001).

In adult education programs, the study and analysis of needs¹ is considered a fundamental element of both program planning and implementation, as addressing those needs determines both the genuine engagement of participants and the overall success of the program. In

other words, identifying learners' educational needs—through the collection, documentation, and analysis of relevant data—is a critical prerequisite for successful program delivery.

Furthermore, when the target population consists of older adults², the investigation of their educational needs becomes even more significant. In recent years, there has been growing concern regarding their diminished and devalued social roles, as well as the challenges they and their families face (Fragkou, 1987). According to Rogers (1999), the need to acquire new knowledge and skills arises when changes occur in an individual's life, responsibilities, adopted roles, or internal drive for self-actualization. Vergidis (2003) categorizes educational needs into conscious and explicit, conscious but implicit, and latent and unspoken.

Notably, the process of needs assessment is influenced primarily by two key factors: the reference framework and the target population (Karalis, 2005). Based on these considerations, data to be collected about the target population for our proposed program titled "*It's Never Too Late! Digital Skills for Older Adults*" should include demographic, family, and social characteristics, education level, prior learning and experience, socio-economic background, cultural context, and more (Hasapis, 2005).

It is also essential to take into account the particular characteristics of elderly learners, such as entering the program with specific goals, perspectives, and expectations, possessing diverse experiences and established learning styles, facing potential learning barriers, and exhibiting a tendency toward active participation in the learning process (Kokkos, 2005).

From our perspective, one of the most critical aspects of identifying educational needs is direct collaboration with the learners themselves. The input of older adults is vital for effective learning and program success, since the program directly impacts them. However, this approach can be challenging. It may therefore require intermediaries with influence

¹ See also Rogers (1999) & Caffarella (2002).

² See also Kastenbaum (1982), Paillat (1995), and Simon de Beauvoir (1980).

who are able to engage the target group—formally or informally, from within or outside the group.

In the context of this study, potential collaborations could involve key program stakeholders such as the academic supervisor, the coordinator, staff (academic or administrative) from the "Citizen's People's University," the trainers, family members of the elderly participants, local municipal authorities, social organizations serving older adults, and possibly psychosocial support groups, experiential facilitation groups, open discussion and expression groups, Senior Citizens' Centers (KAPI), and volunteer organizations.

Thus, through the investigation and negotiation of their educational needs, and the analysis of data concerning their current and desired learning status, the real needs of the target group (senior citizens) can be identified. These needs should be the first priority for program designers, enabling them to establish appropriate objectives and content (Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020).

But what is the actual significance of negotiating the educational needs of older adults in the context of effective program design and implementation? Needs assessment is a complex, structured, and ongoing process that oscillates between learners' personal needs and those of the organization. It is fulfilled when trainers and learners meet and define their terms and framework of cooperation (Karalis, 2005).

Older adults represent a core segment of the population whose needs—especially educational ones—are often overlooked. Their basic needs for safety, social acceptance, self-esteem, and self-actualization are also frequently neglected. Rapid and intense societal changes often marginalize this group and hinder their ability to adapt to new realities (Pervin & John, 2001). Empowerment through intergenerational cooperation, information access, creative engagement, community participation, involvement in educational programs, and support to combat loneliness and inactivity can significantly improve their productivity and positive adaptation to society (Ioakeimidou, 1995).

In this context, and with an understanding of the distinct needs of this age group, it is essential to take into serious consideration their internal motivations, their desire to learn, their drive for autonomy, their prior experiences, and their specific demands and deficits. These elements are critical to the successful implementation of our proposed program. Cultivating a sense of active participation, motivation, creativity, and adaptive learning—through personalized instructional strategies and experiential learning—can offer older adults a meaningful and successful educational experience.

2. Program Planning and Implementation

2.1. Criteria for Selecting Trainers and Learners, and the Training of Human Resources

One of the core responsibilities of education program designers is the definition of roles and responsibilities of the human resources required for successful implementation. This process enables the selection of the appropriate personnel who will contribute effectively to the program's application and fulfill their duties accordingly. Simultaneously, this approach helps identify the areas in which personnel require training, thereby preventing potential overlaps in responsibilities³ (Karalis, 2005a).

The contribution of trainers is especially critical, as their role is multifaceted—coordinative, mediating, facilitative, collaborative, and motivational. Thus, the position requires a distinct set of knowledge, skills, and competencies. The selection criteria for both trainers and learners should be defined based on rigorous standards and their qualifications (Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020).

Specifically, the criteria for selecting trainers for the program *"It's Never Too Late! Digital Skills for Older Adults"* must first be grounded in the scientific foundations of adult education. Trainers should also demonstrate essential pedagogical, social, interpersonal, and negotiation skills. These include relevant training and instructional experience, content expertise, prior interaction with elderly learners, empathy, full acceptance of participants, and a demonstrated attitude of care, respect, and understanding toward learners' uniqueness, expectations, and personal goals.

In this context, the call for applications to participate in the program should clearly outline the required formal and substantive qualifications of the learners. The selection process will be based on criteria such as prior knowledge of digital skills, motivation and interest, availability and willingness to commit to the program, as well as the social and economic status of participants. Therefore, the central objective of the selection procedure is the accurate and objective assessment of applications to identify those with the most suitable qualifications for meaningful participation and engagement in the program (Rogers, 1999; Hasapis, 2005).

Of particular note is that successful program implementation requires targeted training of all human resources, beginning with the trainers. They must adopt attitudes and acquire competencies aligned with the principles of adult education. This necessity has led to the broader mobilization of adult education and training providers to organize systematic professional

³ See also Papakonstantinou & Anastasiou (2013); Karalis (2005a).

development opportunities for trainers, both before and during program delivery. Typically, the scientific coordinator leads this process, addressing topics such as program goals and objectives, characteristics of the target group, methodological training tools, specific challenges faced by older adults, appropriate instructional content and modules, and the knowledge, attitudes, and skills learners are expected to acquire (Karalis, 2005a).

Moreover, it is essential that all stakeholders involved in the program undergo training to become aware of their roles in relation to colleagues and to understand the unique characteristics of the older adult population. Such training fosters alignment of perspectives and promotes effective collaboration.

Beyond the training of educators, it is equally important to ensure that all implementing agents receive appropriate information and training. This should address both technical and methodological issues as well as traits of the reference population. It must be emphasized that this includes the administrative personnel of the municipality's *People's University*, as many of these individuals will have direct interaction with program participants.

In conclusion, the study and application of educational programs should not be viewed as a linear process, but rather as a cyclical and multidimensional phenomenon. This understanding must guide the designers and all contributors to the program so that the structure of relationships and the design framework are established in the most effective and collaborative manner (Canton, 2000).

3. Conclusions

This study examined key issues related to the implementation of a hypothetical educational program aimed at enhancing digital skills among older adults. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying core characteristics of the target population, the necessary implementation synergies, and the critical importance of conducting a thorough needs assessment and analysis.

Subsequently, the study outlined the parameters that must be considered in selecting both trainers and learners, as well as the categories of human resources requiring specialized training and professional development to ensure the program's successful implementation from all perspectives.

Finally, the analysis highlighted the importance of prioritizing and negotiating the educational needs of older adults in terms of both their significance and feasibility. It also underscored the pivotal role of key stakeholders in the successful execution of the proposed program, as well as in shaping the identity and operational character of the Municipality's *People's University*.

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