

# Evaluation of Adult Education Programs: Types, Models, Content, Pedagogical Principles, and Issues of Integrated Implementation

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**Abstract**—It is argued that evaluation is a multidimensional and complex process that entails multiple assumptions, hypotheses, values, preferences, semantic and meaning-making procedures. For this reason, it is considered a highly debated issue that has preoccupied education in general, and Adult Education in particular (Patton & Karalis, 2021).

Thus, the evaluation of an adult education program may be defined as the use of research tools for the collection of data to be employed for the overall assessment of the program's successful completion, based on predetermined criteria, principles, and standards (Rossi & Freeman, 1993).

In line with the above, this study refers to fundamental issues of evaluation concerning the implementation of a hypothetical adult education program entitled "It Is Never Too Late! Digital Skills in the Third Age", organized by the "People's University of Citizens", which is to be implemented through both face-to-face and distance learning.

Specifically, the study analyzes methods and models of its evaluation, while also discussing additional key issues of evaluation, in order to implement an integrated proposal with long-term successful and positive results. Furthermore, in relation to the conduct of evaluation, two objects of evaluation are identified, and two axes of evaluation are proposed.

Finally, some fundamental pedagogical principles of evaluation are presented, which can encourage and strengthen the substantial and effective support of participants.

<b>Keywords—component;</b>	<b>Evaluation;</b>
<b>Methodology;</b>	<b>Types;</b>
<b>Pedagogical Principles;</b>	<b>Models;</b>
	<b>Objects;</b>

## Topic 1

### Evaluation Methodology of the Program

#### 1.1. Type(s) of Evaluation

It is maintained that the study and analysis of evaluation processes of education programs must be integrated into their design, since through evaluation a comprehensive assessment of all their essential

components and phases (organization, implementation, results) is achieved. Therefore, evaluation must be conducted with particular care, using ethical and objective criteria, valid research methods, reliability, and responsibility (Vergidis, 2003; Cafarella, 2002).

It is noteworthy that decisions concerning the methodological framework of evaluation are also related to the selection of types and models of evaluation, the methods of data collection and analysis, the determination of criteria, the overall objectives, the program's characteristics, the organizational structure of the implementing body, institutions, and legislation, among others (Vergidis, 1992).

Thus, there are different types and models of adult education evaluation. The initial distinction is made on the basis of the purpose of evaluation, in which case we speak of formative or summative evaluation. Subsequently, depending on the evaluator's relationship with the implementing organization, a distinction is made between internal and external evaluation.

With reference to the present case study concerning the hypothetical adult education program entitled "It Is Never Too Late! Digital Skills in the Third Age" of the "People's University of Citizens", I would initially select a combination of formative and summative evaluation. This choice is justified because the program is highly demanding, as it will be conducted both in person and online, and it concerns a sensitive age group, namely older adults. Moreover, the learners' characteristics—specifically the subjective and objective conditions of exclusion in old age and the problems they may encounter—may require modifications to the program. Hence, formative evaluation, as a participatory form, could identify possible difficulties and oversights, allowing for immediate corrective changes (Karalis, 2005b; Patton & Karalis, 2021).

In this way, formative evaluation could assist in detecting deficiencies and deviations, as well as improving or modifying the solutions initially proposed and the program's features. At the same time, all stakeholders of the program benefit, as they are informed about the stages and results of evaluation and are regarded as partners in the process (especially older adults). Furthermore, data collection

is continuous and negotiable (Bagakis, 2001; Karakatsanis, 1994).

On the other hand, summative evaluation allows for drawing conclusions, as well as studying and analyzing complete proposals so that the funding body may decide on the discontinuation or continuation of the program, comparing outcomes, quality, and results against a corresponding benchmark program.

Finally, I would also propose the combined application of external evaluation, since in this case the evaluator could be more objective, being independent of the "People's University of Citizens" and its contributors, unconstrained by evaluation outcomes, and able to form a comprehensive opinion of the program due to experience with other programs (MacDonald, 1989; Yfanti, 2001).

## 1.2. Evaluation Model

An evaluation model is regarded as a complete and well-substantiated framework for designing the evaluation of an education program. It incorporates documented theoretical perspectives and proposals for its implementation, the objects, the importance and analysis of results, the research tools, and the evaluation axes.

The selection of a model depends on several factors: the particular aims and objectives of evaluation, the type and characteristics of the program, the target population and its needs, the broader institutional and legal framework, and the appropriate use of methodological tools for the study and analysis of data, among others (Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020; Karalis, 2005b).

Karalis notably refers to four significant evaluation models widely used internationally: Robert Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model, Donald Kirkpatrick's Four Levels Model, Stufflebeam's CIPP Model (Context, Input, Process, Product), and David Fetterman's Empowerment Evaluation Model (Karalis, 2005b).

In the case study examined here, and in relation to the selected types of evaluation, I propose the application of Fetterman's Empowerment Evaluation Model. In my view, this model fits both the implementation framework of the program and the conditions of evaluation. It is one of the most recent approaches, the most participatory, and is based on the view that evaluation should reinforce the active participation of all program stakeholders, especially learners—a fundamental factor in fostering self-confidence in older adults. Accordingly, the evaluator assumes the role of guide, facilitator, and collaborator, with a purely advisory function (Karalis, 2005; Solomon, 1999).

The empowerment evaluation model, influenced by Paulo Freire's pioneering pedagogical principles, embraces self-determination and freedom, aiming to help individuals act autonomously, free from internal and external constraints. Ultimately, this evaluation

model is considered innovative, since learners are regarded as co-evaluators and co-designers of the program, with the aim of achieving psychological empowerment and resilience (Patton & Karalis, 2021; Patton, 2017).

## 1.3. Additional Issues in Designing and Implementing Evaluation

A pedagogical approach to evaluation presupposes the study of how, in what way, and what evaluation contributes. Analyses include theoretical and ideological frameworks, assumptions of all kinds, values, and procedures that generate principles, give meaning to evaluation, and substantiate its application (Patton & Karalis, 2021).

Beyond these, further issues arise in shaping a valid and complete proposal. These include the detailed description of the educational program, the well-documented presentation of evaluative judgments, and the dissemination of evaluation results to stakeholders (Cervero & Wilson, 1994).

In particular, evaluation, to be feasible and useful, must be carefully conducted, focus on processes and outcomes, be based on reliable techniques, respect the specific needs of learners, conform to the philosophy and broader ideology of the implementing organization, and adhere to ethical standards. Moreover, it must be feasible with available resources, tools, and personnel, involve effective cooperation between all bodies (internally and externally), employ specialized knowledge and practices for positive outcomes, utilize both formal and informal judgments, and provide meaningful feedback (Vergidis, 2010; Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020).

Additionally, emphasis must be placed on the broader culture of evaluation, the personal views, expectations, and attitudes of all stakeholders, the design environment (both face-to-face and online education), with its technological and pedagogical opportunities and constraints. Finally, the general institutional and legislative framework, the in-depth analysis, and the accurate definition of target group characteristics are critical factors (Patton, 2017; Chasapis, 2005).

## Topic 2

### Conducting the Evaluation

#### 2.1. Objects and Axes of Evaluation

It should be noted that while evaluation objectives are directly linked to program objectives, they do not always coincide, particularly when program objectives are deemed sufficient and evaluation merely measures their degree of implementation. Thus, the objects and axes of evaluation may include goals and results, design and implementation issues, organizational practices, techniques, and methods, among others (Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020; Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004).

In the “People’s University of Citizens” program, two selected objects of evaluation are trainers and learners. For the first, I propose the axes: use of participatory methods and techniques, and relationships with older learners. For the second, I propose the axes: knowledge and skills acquired, and their active participation in the program.

This choice is due to the fact that in this case, both trainers and learners are fundamental factors for the program’s success. The role of the adult educator, in both online and face-to-face environments, is demanding and complex, requiring essential knowledge and technical skills to achieve optimal learning outcomes, strengthen relations with older learners, and employ participatory methods and techniques. Thus, the training of educators in communicative and collaborative pedagogical tools is deemed necessary for effective support of teaching in blended learning environments, as well as for addressing obstacles, deficiencies, and learners’ reservations (Leftheriotou, 2014).

On the other hand, examining the skills acquired by this sensitive age group regarding computer use, along with their consistent participation, constitutes a set of crucial indicators which, combined with other aspects of evaluation, become decisive factors for the implementing body’s feedback and for the possible improvement, modification, continuation, or termination of the program (Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020).

## 2.2. Pedagogical Principles of Evaluation

What, then, are the essential pedagogical principles of evaluation for encouraging learners’ substantial participation?

According to the eminent educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (Patton & Karalis, 2021), participants in an evaluation process are confronted with explicit or implicit pedagogical principles—direct or indirect—that inform and guide educational and institutional decisions.

Accordingly, evaluation in the present case study should be objective, valid, reliable, interactive, participatory, dialogical, and respectful of learners’ socioeconomic backgrounds, opinions, expectations, and diverse experiences (Pavli & Leftheriotou, 2020).

Furthermore, the meaningful involvement of learners requires the creation of a climate of collaboration, immediacy, and genuine interaction, constant support and feedback, technical assistance, continuous encouragement for active participation, promotion of cooperative and self-regulated learning, cultivation of critical reflection through dialogue, discussions, and educational activities of all kinds, the provision of instructional material adapted to learners’ specific needs, continuous formative evaluation, and respect for diversity and culture (Salmon, 2004; Pavlis Korres, 2010).

## 3. Conclusions

In this study, we analyzed issues related to the evaluation methodology of a program of the “People’s University of Citizens”. It became evident that evaluation constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon and a fundamental pedagogical process and interaction, linked with attitudes, priorities, values, expectations, assumptions, embedded principles, specific skills, aptitudes, and knowledge of all participants.

In addition, specific types, models, objects, and evaluation indicators were presented in relation to face-to-face and online learning. Reference was made to the pedagogical principles of evaluation, as well as to other key issues for its design and the development of a complete and well-documented proposal.

In conclusion, it is clear that evaluation should be carried out through objective and reliable processes, respecting ethical principles and the needs of all stakeholders, while also taking into account all variables, processes, functions, objectives, purposes, and the overall culture of the implementing organization.

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