Informal Learning of the Unemployed as a Factor of Social Inclusion

Edita Štuopytė1, Ieva Cesevičiūtė2

1 Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, K. Donelaičio St. 73, LT-44029 Kaunas, Lithuania, edita.stuopyte@ktu.lt
2 Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, K. Donelaičio St. 73, LT-44029 Kaunas, Lithuania, ieva.ceseviciute@ktu.lt

Abstract. Learning is an important condition for the unemployed to become socially included, as only through learning people can create their own social and emotional ability to communicate with other people and develop good social skills, improve their welfare through learning related to a profession, regain self-confidence by increasing self-knowledge, and thus become fully-fledged members of society, i.e. become socially included. The aim of the paper is to provide a rationale for informal learning of the unemployed as a factor of social inclusion.

Keywords: unemployed, informal learning, competences, social inclusion.

Introduction

Social inclusion in today’s society is becoming one of the main spheres of social life, including involvement in work, family and community. Due to the rapid pace of life and constantly changing living conditions, a person should satisfy the ever rising requirements. Therefore, the main challenge for today’s person is to go hand in hand with the challenges, in order to being able to feel a full-fledged member of the society. A. Jackson & D. Jones (2000), S. Kilpatrick et al. (2003), P. Coare (2003), K. Topping & S. Maloney (2005), M. Mayo (2000), J. Preece (2001) analyzed social inclusion and its importance for the person of nowadays, whereas P. Rasmussen (2002) emphasized the importance of learning for individual’s participation in society.

Addressing the issue of social inclusion of the unemployed, it is relevant to review the phenomenon of unemployment and its consequences to a person. The research by F.
M. McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), R. Muffels & M. Vriens (1991), E. Randy (1994), R. Gutierrez & A. M. Guillen (2000) shows that the issue of long-term unemployment is relevant in different countries of the European Union that are unable to solve it in spite of a well-developed market economy. In different European countries, social and demographic characteristics of lengthy unemployment vary (Muffels & Vriens, 1991). According to E. Randy (1994), R. Gutierrez & M. Guillen (2000), one of the most important reasons for lengthy unemployment are structural changes in the labour market; however, there are also personal traits that may define the impact of employment motivation on long-term unemployment. Structural changes may be related to lack of jobs in relation to qualifications (for instance, inadequate qualifications of individuals for inclusion into the labour market), specific features of the region or age of the unemployed, differences in supply and demand in the labour market, etc.

Learning is involved in assisting the unemployed to overcome social exclusion. The issue of learning of the unemployed is connected with the most sensitive social issues – personal integration into society, guarantee of livelihood, individual development, self-realization and assurance of social and psychological security. Teaching of this group is an integral part of adult education.

Knowledge and skills that are acquired at school or university are not sufficient for a lifetime. Education gives a person an opportunity to adapt to the changing environment and new technologies. Learning is an important condition for the unemployed to become socially included, as only by learning a person can create their own social and emotional (ability to communicate with other people, good social skills), material (learning of the profession) welfare, understand themselves (learning to know yourself), and thus become a full-fledged member of society, i.e. become part of the socially included. The analysis of different aspects of learning of the unemployed has revealed that there is a lack of literature focusing on informal learning of the unemployed. The aim of the research is to provide a rationale for informal learning of the unemployed as a factor of social inclusion. The object – informal learning of unemployed people. The objectives of the research:

- to highlight the possibilities of informal learning of unemployed people in the process of social inclusion;
- to diagnose the competencies acquired during the process of informal learning of unemployed people necessary for social inclusion.

The following methods were applied in the research: the analysis of scientific literature and semi-structured interview.

**Learning of the unemployed in the process of social inclusion**

Social inclusion can be understood in different ways: as a person’s involvement in social life, participation in social life (Preece, 2001; Mayo, 2000; Tett, 2005; Topping & Maloney, 2005).
2005) or as the use of person’s civil, political and social rights (Byrne, 2005). According to B. Madsen (2003), social inclusion is a process that refers to people’s involvement in the society through various environments and understanding themselves as a certain part of entirety. J. Preece (2001) defines social inclusion as a process of normalizing the status of a person in the society, whereas existence in social exclusion means a loss of social status, power, self-esteem, goals and aspirations.

Therefore, social inclusion can be described as a multidimensional phenomenon, which comprises social welfare and personal social rights as well as involvement in social, economic, political and cultural life. Social inclusion is a phenomenon caused by different spheres of social life, and depending on the person’s involvement in them. Therefore, in terms of social inclusion, social exclusion should be considered.

With reference to social inclusion as the involvement into the teaching / learning process, the question regarding the impact learning has for the person’s social inclusion has to be answered.

According to P. Rasmussen (2002), learning as a phenomenon has historical significance: first, it was a chance for disadvantaged groups to acquire more resources for improving their welfare and, secondly, learning should not be separated from the understanding of social heritage. Learning as a chance for the poor sectors of the society to acquire more resources becomes an economic factor of social inclusion. A person, to create a safer material well-being, must learn to be able to get a better paid job.

The rationale for learning of unemployed adults is provided by different philosophical and psychological theories and concepts, constructivism among them. Constructivism focuses on the way learners construct their own experiential knowledge. Learners get involved into learning by constructing their individual conceptions about facts, phenomena, processes and concepts required for individual cognition of the world. This is a precondition for relating the acquisition of knowledge, or, more specifically, its construction, to students, for developing those personal traits that are related to independent activity. The importance of environment is emphasized by P. Jarvis (2001, p. 17) who points out that learning is the essence of daily life and conscious experience; it is a process when experience is transformed into knowledge, skills, attitudes, when sense is given to daily experience, as experience takes place in time and space and is related to human relationships.

Thus the Constructivist Learning Theory refers to learning as individual construction of new understanding which encompasses individual unique experience and new information. As the constructivist approach holds that learning is processing information, development of new structures of information and memory management, the impact of learning may often be indirect. The conditions provided for learning of the unemployed should allow them processing the information they have collected in their own environment in relation and interaction with other environments. There is no single right method at this point.
The following main features of constructive learning can be distinguished (Balevičienė et al., 2003):

- Learners are active creators of meaning, knowledge and his individual understanding;
- The focus is on the learning process (while focusing on the learning process, particular attention is drawn at the problem-solving strategies, learners’ understanding is developed by their involvement in various learning activities, using various methods);
- Teaching activities are focused on the learner and the learning process (learning does not recognize a mechanical transfer of knowledge; it is important that learners not only develop their formal knowledge base, but also develop understanding and attitudes or maybe even change their values).

Therefore, considering the unemployed, it is important to point out that constructive learning methods (learning from other people’s experiences, discussion about received information, expression – reflection of their feelings and ideas) can help them reengage in life, which is the essence of social inclusion.

Learning can be considered as integral part of participation in the society, and the act of participation in the society is one of the frameworks of social inclusion. The importance of learning for social participation is pointed out by M. Mayo (2000), by maintaining that learning forms human existence, e.g. person’s knowledge, capacity, skills, critical thinking because it allows people to become aware of their surrounding environment, encourages them to assume and perform social roles at work and in the society.

Another educational feature of social inclusion can be revealed through curriculum theory. According to J. Preece (2001), learning as the process of awakening individual’s identity is needed for developing their skills which are necessary for participation in the society. Curriculum theory is based on a person’s skills and status in a society, the concept that can be only conceivable by maintaining certain knowledge. In other words, people develop their competencies only through learning (Mayo, 2000). Learning and participation in social life are strongly related with social capital, which can restore social inequalities (Mayo, 2000). Social capital can be understood as entirety of people’s knowledge-based competences. Therefore, only through learning a person can develop social capital and thus become a full-fledged member of the society, i.e. participate in social life and become part of social inclusion. This highlights the importance of learning in the process of social inclusion.

G. Foley (2007) considers learning as one of the most important issues in human life, as important as work or friendship, in addition learning aspect is characteristic for all human activities. People learn constantly in formal and informal ways in different environments: workplace, family, through leisure or community activities.

Informal learning is a focused and organized learning, which can be characterized by one or more of the following characteristics: has no hierarchical structure, admission
requirements, registration and defined duration, schedule, no formal documents of education level evidence are issued (but certificates about competencies or qualifications might be issued).

Informal learning has several characteristics. According to R. M. Torres (2001), informal learning is often oriented towards the needs of the poor and socially excluded and takes place at non-governmental organizations on a voluntary basis (as the services of non-governmental organizations are often not paid). The following characteristics of informal learning are distinguished: flexible, democratic, learner-oriented, affected by cultural and specific needs of a particular need.

An integral part of learning is context. It context appears in social environment, and knowledge and expertise generally are a result of performance in business communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning is often understood as a process in which the learner personalizes and discovers knowledge, or knowledge is transferred, lived through interaction with the environment. J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991) suggest considering not only the rational aspects of learning (individual action in a social group), but the aspect of communication in learning (negotiations, involvement in activities). Learning is a formulation, knowledge update and skills acquisition. The second characteristic of learning is that competencies are implicit, and sometimes it is difficult to describe them in words. Often people do not realize that they have a certain competence. The ‘know how’ comprises a large part of informal learning and knowledge acquiring process (Bjornavold, 2000). What encourages the unemployed to learn? What are the needs the unemployed are willing to meet through the learning process? According to various studies (Tereseviciene et al., 2006; Jarvis, 2001; Crossan et al., 2003), the following learning needs of the unemployed can be identified:

- Educational needs as a possibility for a change: to grow as a person, developing the intellectual capabilities, ability to adapt to constantly changing conditions of contemporary life to exchange: to grow as a person, developing the intellectual capabilities to adapt to constantly changing conditions of contemporary life.
- Social needs as an ability to integrate into the labour market, or find a better job;
- Psychological needs as an opportunity to implement personal goals, continuous contact and communication with other people, a sense of identity, positive self-evaluation, and activity stimulation.

In terms of the training of the unemployed, it is important to distinguish competencies necessary to achieve this socially vulnerable group. According to the European Parliament and Council Recommendation Concerning the Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2006a, 2006b), as globalization and the European Union is facing new challenges, each citizen will need a wide range of key skills, in order to adapt to a rapidly changing world. For the unemployed, acquisition of certain competencies is another important step towards integration into the labour market and becoming full-fledged members of the society. In relation to these competencies, special
attention is paid to employability (Van der Heijden, 2002; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Des-cy & Tessaring, 2002; Čepas, 2008; Atkins, 2009).

According to Pan and Lee (2011), employability is a skill that makes people attractive to potential employers. P. Čepas (2007) notes that the concept of employability involves skills relevant to people in relation to their occupation in the world of work. According to P. McKenzie and R. Wurzburg (1998), employability is a life-long skill to be productive and acquire jobs. J. Bickenbach et al. (2006) point out that it is an ability to get a job. It means either objective situation or a specific individual skill, whereas J. Hillage & E. Pollard (1998) conceptualise employability as an ability to find one’s place in the labour market, which depends on individual knowledge, skills, attitudes and also on the way a person uses them and presents them to employers. According to J. Berkeley (1995), employability may be characteristic of individuals who have a tendency to learn everywhere and all the time.

Nauta et al. (2009) note that employability may be conceptualised from different perspectives: economic-social, organizational and individual. The economic-social perspective implies the ability of labour force to get and maintain a job. The organizational perspective is related to organizational flexibility; to be flexible, organizations need to develop employees’ skills. The individual perspective highlights adaptability, mobility, career development, professional experience and life-long learning.

According to P. Čepas (2008), employability competence is an ability based on the knowledge, skills, abilities and values as a whole to choose a job, prepare for work activities, get employed and maintain working place. Employability competence consists of a specific set of elements of both specific and general competencies. According to R. Laužackas et al. (2005), specific competencies are the competencies related to very specific skills required for particular professions. Generic competencies are knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that determine consistent personal development, professional flexibility and mobility (Laužackas et al., 2005).

In informal learning of the unemployed specific attention is paid to developing generic skills of employability competence – self-confidence, responsibility, adaptability, continuing learning, communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovativeness, team-work, etc. (Čepas, 2008). The unemployed who acquire or improve these generic thus develop new opportunities for their re-integration into the labour market.

**Competencies acquired by the unemployed through informal learning**

*Research methodology.* To provide rationale for informal learning as a factor of social inclusion of the unemployed, empirical research was carried out. It was based on qualitative research approach; the questions of oral (interview) were formulated with reference
to analysis of documents and research literature. The respondents were unemployed participants of courses organized by non-governmental organizations X and Y.

The topic of interview questions correspond to the topics of the questionnaire: learning needs, opportunities for graduates of training, acquired competencies, employability competence skills. The research sample for the oral part of the research was criterion-based. Research informants were selected according to the following criteria: NGO employees, participants of the unemployed training courses. The demographic characteristics of the informants: sample size: N = 10; sex: 10 females (100 percent). Education: all the informants have a university degree. Average age: 35 years, working experience with the unemployed average – 3.5 years. Content analysis was employed to analyse the interview data.

One of the interview questions elicited the learning needs of the unemployed that are satisfied through informal learning. The research informants point out that they were encouraged to participate in training courses to respond to the changes taking place in the society, opening up greater opportunities to find work, offering more opportunities to choose a job they want, a large proportion of respondents are motivated to learn.

The unemployed pay great attention to educational needs when they consider joining training. Willingness to acquire new knowledge and apply it in practice and the expectation that during the training they will acquire the valuable competencies for the future working place is of important value for the participants of the training. The most significant learning need of the unemployed has become ability to communicate with other people, desire to acquire new knowledge and high motivation to learn.

Drawing on the analysis of data, different educational (‘I have acquired new knowledge’; ‘I have acquired new knowledge and developed as a person’, ‘I have succeeded to learn some English, also learnt some new things in the classes of computer literacy’, ‘<…> I have acquired some practical and theoretical knowledge in the classes’) and social (‘the training has been an opportunity for personal development <…>, I met new people. I am happy I have had this opportunity’; ‘communication with people is a source of positive emotions’; ‘my social skills have improved’; ‘the training helped me to understand myself better and be creative in decision making <…>’).

In order to find out the opinion of the organizers about the opportunities for the graduates after the training, the informants were asked the following question: ‘What possibilities open up to the trainees?’ Analyzing the research findings, opportunities for the unemployed in the future professional and personal life might be identified. Social skills gained during the training process influence self-confidence of the unemployed ‘<…> acquire at least basic social skills, after lengthy discussion in groups begin to trust themselves <…>’, and this is important because self-confidence is especially important for a person looking for work. One may note that the training also opens up the possibility of learning continuity, possibility to improve skills: ‘<…> because the trainees have
learnt the basics, they have an opportunity to continue learning, to work with advanced programmes, to improve', but it depends on the person’s desire to seek perfection.

Seeking for social inclusion of the unemployed, skills and competencies they have acquired are important. In order to clarify the employability skills that were addressed during the training, the informants were asked: ‘What kind of competencies the participants acquire during the training?’

P. Čepas (2008), P. Descy & M. Tessaring (2002) and others analyse employability skills that are relevant to the contemporary labour market. The analysis of the obtained results has pointed out personal competencies (‘acquired self-awareness skills’, ‘a person acquires self-knowledge skills’), social competencies (‘interaction and communication skills’, ‘the participants cooperate with each other, work in small groups’), educational competencies (‘participants learn how to ask questions, discuss and find out what they are interested in or what is not clear to them’; ‘become able to find additional literature required for classes’) and professional competencies (‘in the classes of computer literacy and English language courses more competencies for work and professional activities are gained’).

Thus one may note that the participants of the training have learnt to work as a team; they received regular training and development opportunities, have gained self-confidence skills, ability to set personal goals and priorities balancing work and private life, learn from mistakes. This is consistent with the general employability skills competencies, e.g. one of the components of employability competencies.

The interview data analysis revealed that, when creating a training program not only the needs of the unemployed, but also the needs of employers are considered. The informant mediates between the employers and the unemployed, thus considering the employers demands and facilitating job-search process for the unemployed. Training programs and methods are chosen by specialist initiative.

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During informal learning process a possibility to employ, gain knowledge and improve competencies and skills opens up for the unemployed. It is likely that employment opportunities emerge for the trainees after they complete the training, as 25 percent of male and 75 percent of female trainees in the sample of 50 training participant found jobs after completing the training. According to the informants, to increase access to employment, training should be organized for a longer period of time.
Thus one may note that social and psychological needs of their own are of great importance during the training process for the unemployed. This confirms the provisions by R. Oreniene & L. Sajiene (2001) that unemployment negatively affects further life of a person. Lack of communication, low self-esteem makes negative impact on the unemployed. Therefore, during the training it is necessary to take into account social and psychological needs of the unemployed. The training participants focus on educational needs – ability to change: to grow as a person, education, development of intellectual abilities and ability to adapt to constantly changing conditions of contemporary life.

It turned out that training providers are taking into account not only the needs of unemployed but also the needs of employers.

The research conducted by M. Tereseviciene et al. (2006) showed that employers indicate it is important for employees to improve foreign language skills, social skills and to acquire information technology literacy skills. Training providers select training programs, which facilitates the employment process for the unemployed taking into consideration the needs of employers.

During the training self-confidence and self-presentation skills are gained which are necessary for the entry into the labour market. However, the research data has shown that the share of the trainees who managed to find jobs is smaller than the share of those who remained unemployed. This may be determined by other objective reasons. According to D. Berzinskeiene (2006), these objective reasons are structural changes in the labour market, unsatisfactory salaries, relatively high social security for the unemployed, lack of effective labour market policy measures.

Both the unemployed and training providers indicate that during the training the unemployed receive training in personal, social and learning skills. According to V. Stanisauskiene (2004), these competencies are distinguished as characteristic for a career, allowing to gain necessary skills for employment. Regarding the fact that this was informal training of the unemployed, the possibility of acquiring professional competence was limited; the trainees improved their general employability skills. Still, the satisfaction of social, educational and psychological needs allows the unemployed to acquire competencies (personal, social, learning, employability) rather than feel isolated.

Conclusion

Learning is an important specification for the unemployed to become socially included, as only through learning people can create their own social, psychological and material well-being, to discover themselves and become full-fledged members of the society.

In the process of informal learning, educational, social, psychological and learning needs of the unemployed, also personal, social, educational and employment skills of the unemployed are distinguished. Opportunities for the informal learning of the un-
employed are ample: organized daytime, evening and continuing courses, seminars, schools (classes), comprehensive training programs.

The data analysis suggests that during informal learning the unemployed improve their personal, social and learning skills and thus gain the opportunity to compete successfully in the labour market, search for employment and thereby restore their social status in the community.

In seeking for social inclusion of the unemployed, their involvement in the activities of various institutions is obligatory, and this may be reached during the learning process, when an unemployed joins various informal education courses organized by different non-governmental organizations. Through learning the unemployed develop their social capital and participate in social life, and thus become socially included. Therefore, informal learning of the unemployed is a factor of their inclusion into society through learning.

References


Neformalus bedarbių mokymasis kaip socialinės aprėpties veiksnys

Edita Štuopytė¹, Ieva Cesevičiūtė²

¹ Kauno technologijos universitetas, Socialinių, humanitarinių mokslų ir menų fakultetas, Edukologijos katedra, A. Mickevičiaus g. 37-1205, 44244 Kaunas, edita.stuopyte@ktu.lt
² Kauno technologijos universitetas, Socialinių, humanitarinių mokslų ir menų fakultetas, Edukologijos katedra, A. Mickevičiaus g. 37-1207, 44244 Kaunas, ieva.ceseviciute@ktu.lt

Santrauka


Mokymasis yra svarbi sąlyga bedarbiui socializuotis, nes tik mokymasis įgūdžia gali sustiprinti savo socialinę ir psichologinę bei materialinę gerovę, atrasti save ir tapti visuomenės nariu. Atliekant tyrimo duomenų analizę, atlikta bedarbių neformaliojo mokymosi procese, išskirtinis dėmesys skiriamas bendriesiems įsidarbinimo kompetencijos ugdymui. Neformaliojo mokymosi metu bedarbias tobulina savo asmenines, socialines ir mokymosi kompetencijas ir tokiu būdu ji gali galimybę sėkmingiau konkuruoti darbo rinkoje, įsidarinti ir tapti atkurti savo socialinį statusą bendruomenėje, tapti socialiai įtraukti į bendruomenę. Siekiant bedarbių socialinės aprėpties, būtinas jų įsitraukimas į įvairių institucijų veiklą, o tai pasiekiama mokymosi procese, kai bedarbis įsijungia į įvairių nevyriausybinių organizacijų organizuojamąs neformalus mokymus.

Esminiai žodžiai: bedarbiai, neformalusis mokymasis, kompetencijos, socialinė aprėptis.

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