

Research of educational needs for seniors in Latgale region, Latvia¹.

Introduction

In Latvia the general, professional and the higher education network operates in a defined structure, however, in the adult and senior education there is a lack of system. The national Education Law states that the adult education programmes shall determine the content of such programmes and the conformity thereof to with the interests of the State and of employers, as well as of individual development, and adults have the right to acquire such programmes throughout the length of their whole life regardless of previously acquired formal or non-formal education programme. There is no education system for third age population in Latvia. Seniors are mainly engaged in courses or art and handicraft groups that are offered by local municipality or non-governmental organizations. As one of good practise is NGO RASA – Alliance of Active Seniors of Riga (<http://rasa.senjau.info/home.htm>), that provide English, German languages courses, dance therapy, nutrition and handicraft classes etc.

Implementation

The aim is to find out seniors' attitude towards learning and needs for senior education.

111 seniors were interviewed in Latgale region (Latvia), of these, 25.5 % was men and 74.5 % was women. 58.2 % of respondents live in the city, 41.8% live in rural areas.

Respondents were offered a questionnaire with statements. Results of the questionnaire were coded and processed in SPSS program.

Seniors evaluated their activity in various educational actions (see Figure 1).

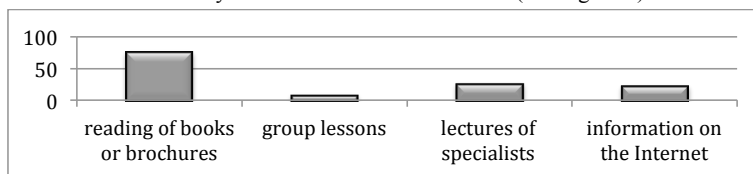


Figure 1. Seniors' activity in various educational actions

22 % consider that it is very essential to improve the existing knowledge, while 44 % of respondents think that such improvement is important. It is interesting that there are highly statistically significant differences based on age, assessing the personal importance of improving the existing knowledge ($p = 0.002$); it is the most important thing for the respondents aged 60 to 64 years (Mean rank 71.46) and respondents over the age of 80 years (Mean rank 61.03). Statistically the most significant ($p = 0.000$) differences on this issue are based on the place of residence. Seniors living in a city are more interested (Mean rank 65.95) than seniors living in rural areas (Mean rank 40.22).

Content positions that are evaluated as the most essential or essential are shown on Figure 2.

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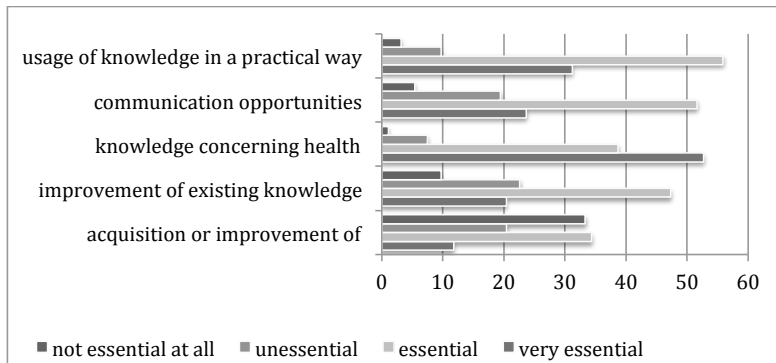


Figure 2. The most essential or essential content positions

It is interesting that there is a statistically significant gender differences in the assessment of personal importance of getting new knowledge about health maintenance ($p = 0.035$); it is more meaningful for males (Mean rank 65.07) than women (Mean rank 51.52).

Senior educational needs are higher in a city with a better arranged infrastructure, more active social and cultural life, a wide network of social relations. This indicates a double connection between an individual's behaviour and the environment: on the one hand, the environment establishes a human's behaviour, on the other hand, a human's behaviour and action changes the environment. The results confirm the conclusions of the socio-ecological theory's (Stokols, 2002,1992, Bronfenbrenner, 1979) suitability in senior education.

It is important for respondents (85 %) to use newly gained knowledge in practice. 61 % of respondents indicate that they learn willingly, based on their previous experience. It is possible to conclude that Self-directed Learning (Read, 2001) dominates in Latvia. 36.5 % of respondents would chose courses with, preferably, practical orientation. That points indirectly to both Model of Action Learning (Funch, 2007) and Model of Experiential Learning (Exeter, 2001).

Conclusions

Three key aspects of the curriculum were identified in the results of the questionnaire: new knowledge about health maintenance, communication opportunities and knowledge improvement in order to 'keep up with the time'

Seniors prefer different sources of information, and there are statistically significant differences in the content evaluation based on gender and age. The results confirm the theoretical insight about necessity to take into consideration individual needs and use various learning models within organization of senior education process.

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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