

Case Study: University of Experience and New Technologies Subject

Araceli Queiruga Dios, University of Salamanca, Spain
Ascensión Hernández Encinas, University of Salamanca, Spain
Angélica González Arrieta, University of Salamanca, Spain
Juan José Bullón Pérez, University of Salamanca, Spain

The European Conference on Education 2014
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The University Program of the Experience (UPE) at the University of Salamanca (Spain) includes three courses that consists of three obligatory subjects of 10 hours each one, three optional subjects of 10 hours each one and a minimum of 15 hours for complementary activities (conferences, monographic courses, cultural trips, etc.).

The University for mature students is an initiative promoted by the Regional Government, in which all the Universities of the Autonomous Community collaborate. The UPE is a scientific, cultural and social program to integrate people older than 55 years into the University, with the idea of lifelong learning. People assisting these courses are very varied: people with university studies, other with baccalaureate certificate, and others with no previous studies.

One of the optional subjects is New Technologies that includes topics from analogical and digital technologies, convergence between the fields of the computer science, Electronics and Telecommunications, to the Internet repercussion in the areas of the knowledge, the economy and the leisure or the nets of communication and mobility like satellites, telephony of third generation, and Wifi.

In this paper we will analyze the adult learning, and the case of the University of Experience at the University of Salamanca. The subjects, the contents, the motivation, the objectives and the skills to be acquired, are completely different from the ones from students of 18 – 25 years old, which start their studies after finalizing the High School or a Higher Technical Cycle.

Keywords: adult learning, mature students, lifelong learning, technology.

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The Declaration of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education organized by UNESCO in Hamburg in 1997 (UNESCO, 1997) establishes that lifelong learning is more than a right; it is one of the keys of the XXI century. “It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. Adult learning can shape identity and give meaning to life. Learning throughout life implies a rethinking of educational content to reflect such factors as age, gender equality, disability, language, culture and economic disparities” (Ireland, 2014). Lifelong learning must give each individual the ability to direct his destiny in a world in which the acceleration of change, together with the phenomenon of globalization, tends to change the relation between people and space and time (Delors, 1998). Therefore, education has to adapt all time to changes in society, it must continue the transmission of acquired knowledge, the principles, and the fruits of experience (Welton, 2013).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Assembly, 1948), in the 1st paragraph, of Article 26, recognizes the right of everyone to education, as well as the higher education that shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. The Amendment of the Organic Law on Universities (Lou): Law 4/2007, of April 12, is centered in a clear and precise way on the topic with which we are concerned. Thus, in the Preamble says that Universities' must also respond to the training needs throughout life and should be open to those who, at any age, want to access to any cultural or educational opportunities. Especially significant is the inclusion of a new paragraph in Article 42 related to facilitate the retraining and professionals' rehabilitation, and also the full and effective participation in cultural, economic and social life. The Government, after receiving a report from the University Council will regulate the procedures for accessing to university by people with a particular work or with professional experience, that do not have the legally required educational qualifications. The access to this system will include people who, unable to demonstrate such experience, have passed a certain age.

Everyone should have the opportunity to train throughout life, inside and outside the educational system, in order to acquire, update, add to, and expand their skills, knowledge, abilities, and aptitudes for personal and professional development (Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December, on universities).

In Spain, the first university program for older people began to take off during the nineties. It was a consequence of the demographic growth of this group of the population, which could not receive training and education apart from literacy. The goal of this program was satisfying the training needs of people over 50. This group wanted in the past, and they also continue carrying out activities that allow their personal development; updating knowledge, learning and using the needed techniques and tools that enable them to enter on the knowledge society and information. To attend to the University for the first time and even to get a possible access to other university degrees studies with official recognition become a reality.

There is an early stage that serves as a reference and had an impact on the development of studies for older people in Europe. That initial fact was the birth of the first university for seniors in France. This event is the “seed” that influences decisively over time in many educational experiences with older people. The birth and

development of the first university for seniors takes place at the *Université des Sciences Sociales* in Toulouse, the 23rd of February, 1973. At that French university, the University Council of the *Unité de Enseignement et de Recherche* creates the *Université du Troisième Âge* under the direction of Professor on International Law Prof. Pierre Vellas (see more information at <http://www.aepumayores.org/>).

The first step to get those university studies for older people in Spain took place some years after the first European experience. In 1978, the General Division of the Family proposed and signed several agreements with different private cultural organizations to promote those studies. Moreover, it is from the last decade of the twentieth century where the university programs for adults, with different names (University of Experience, Classroom Experience, Senior's University, etc.) appear in Spain, as a response to university-level education for older people. The University of Alcalá de Henares, the Pontifical University of Salamanca, and the University of Granada were pioneers on these initiatives.

In 1992 in Spain, some public services (residential services for the elderly, centers for the disabled, home of pensioner) were transferred to the autonomous communities; and the new social policies for the elderly and disabled were organized and structured. Once the first university experiences have been consolidated in 1993 (University of Alcalá de Henares, Pontifical University of Salamanca, and the University of Granada), new similar projects born in different territories and universities. Nowadays, the National Association of University Elderly Programs (AEPUM, *Asociación Estatal de Programas Universitarios de Mayores*) includes more than 50 experiences, among partner members, full members, and other entities that develop some kind of training for seniors.

The University Program of the Experience at the University of Salamanca

The university program of the experience at the University of Salamanca is an initiative funded by the Castilla y León Regional Government and carried out in collaboration with all public and private universities in the Community. Since its creation, the program has been attracted a greater number of older people. In fact, in the first year, 1993-1994, 60 people were registered, while the number of students in the last year reached almost 4300. Forecasts point to a similar participation in this course.

This UPE is under the programs for active aging, which aims to give older people the chance to access to culture and science as a formula for personal growth. The objectives of this UPE could be summarized in the following items:

- To facilitate the approach of older people to culture and science as a means of expression of experiences and knowledge.
- To promote the exchange of relations, becoming the university environment in a context of social and intergenerational relationship.
- To promote learning and personal growth through reflection and dialogue.

The UPE offers knowledge on current issues, cultural activities, teaching methodology adapted to the elderly, the necessary material needed for each subject, the university faculty as teachers and tutors. Moreover, the students have access to all

the university facilities. After the completion of three academic years, students will receive their accreditation by a university diploma.

The program duration is three academic years, with a total of 60 hours minimum for each of them, and each course includes three mandatory 10-hours subjects, three optional 10-hours subjects, and a minimum of 15 hours for additional activities like conferences, specialized courses, cultural tours, etc. For the UPE that will start this year, these possible subjects are:

- Mandatory subjects:
 - Psychology (1st year)
 - Interpersonal communication (1st)
 - The history of Castile and Leon (1st)
 - Sociology (2nd)
 - Spanish literature (2nd)
 - Ecology and environment (2nd)
 - Politics and society (3rd)
 - Introduction to Law (3rd)
 - Health and quality of life (3rd)
- Optional subjects
 - Education development and citizenship
 - Performing arts: music, theatre and dance
 - Current scientific advances
 - New Technologies
 - Introduction to philosophy
 - Local history
 - Contemporary art
 - Population, migration and interculturality
 - Latin American culture
 - Physics and chemistry of everyday life
 - Consumer education and active ageing
- Complementary subjects
 - Cyber security and the administration
 - Important painters
 - Romantic opera
 - Literature and cinema
 - Women in Democracy
 - Romanesque art

New Technologies Subject and Methodology

One of the optional subjects in the UPE is: New Technologies. This subject includes topics from analogical and digital technologies, convergence between the fields of the computer science, electronics and telecommunications, to the Internet repercussion in the areas of the knowledge, the economy and the leisure or the nets of communication and mobility like satellites, telephony of third generation, and Wifi. The New Technologies subject includes the following 6 modules:

1. Analog and digital technologies.
2. Convergence between the fields of computer, telecommunications, and electronics.
3. Birth and development of the Internet.

4. Impact of the Internet in the fields of knowledge, economy and leisure.
5. Multimedia communication.
6. Communication networks and mobility (satellites, third generation telephony, wireless).

The modules, the topics, the motivation, the objectives and the skills to be acquired, are completely different from the ones from students of 18 – 25 years old, which start their studies after finalizing the High School or a Higher Technical Cycle.

As the group of students attending to this subject is from different level of preparation, the methodology must be according to that. The goals of the students attending the university program of experience and the aspects that assure their quality of life are the same. Some of those most important elements that we could mention are (Kim et al., 2004; Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014; Rothes et al., 2014): the independence from their family, being included in society as part of a community, motivation, energy, and capacity for changing, satisfaction with the things they do, personal and emotional development in attitudes and values, dignity, equality, justice, enjoying their spare time, being productive, or doing useful and constructive things.

The students enrolled at the University of Experience are a diverse group, not only because the age, but for the heterogeneity. There are different levels of knowledge in the group of students. Some of them have university studies but others left school after mandatory education. The New Technologies subject is a course with a didactical focus, highly practical and in the educational level of the students. As we are several teachers who impart the subject, we can make groups depending on the level of students and the number of students enrolled. Every new course we are looking towards the possibility of conducting new practice sessions in the computer lab.

It is different to explain the technologies to elderly or to young students, because young students are digital natives, but elders and even most adults, they are called digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001). Although there are some adult learners that have to reconcile their university activities with family life, they show better academic performance than their younger colleagues (Hoyert, 2009). So, the way of teaching is different depending of the population group. In general, the group of UPE is separated between traditional lessons where the teacher explain the contents and the students are simple listeners, and lessons using the computer. Some students learn how to create an e-mail account, while others use to send e-mails or whatsapp messages to their sons and daughters. Some easy exercises are proposed to the students and there is no exam and no mark for these studies.

Conclusions

The University Program of the Experience at the University of Salamanca was born 20 years ago, as an initiative of the Castilla y León Regional Government. Learning in later life is becoming common, and the Program of the Experience increases the students' quality of life. The program enables individuals aged 55 or more have access to the University to participate in curses of the same quality as any other student, with university professors and lectures. The UPE goal is to facilitate the participation of older people in our society.

Education is not considered in a context where teachers provide learners with information to memorize. Students are provided by the attitudes and competences necessary to remain as part of the community, through participation, being active, understanding, etc.

One of the optional subjects included in the UPE is New Technologies, which allow elders the use of information and communication technologies in their daily life and becomes very useful and interesting to them. One of the main conclusions of this course is that some students saw technology (internet, e-mails and so on) as inaccessible and difficult to understand. After attending the course, they realize that it's not as complicated and starts to use it, in particular some tools like Skype, e-mail, and search with Google. Those who do not yet have e-mail account; they create one and start sending messages to peers. This tends to give elders a lot of satisfaction because they saw it as an inaccessible field. They begin to believe that they are already "digital" and that opens a world of possibilities. Students lose the fear of damage the computer. Now they understand how the computer works, and how to use some basic and useful programs to be in contact with grandchildren and friends, and to look for a hotel for vacation or a kitchen recipe with Google, or read the news every day.

References

Assembly, U. G. (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. Retrieved February, 22, 2010.

Delors, J. (1998). *Learning: The treasure within*. Unesco.

Escuder-Mollon, P., Esteller-Curto, R., Ochoa, L., & Bardus, M. (2014). Impact on Senior Learners' Quality of Life through Lifelong Learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 131, 510-516.

Hoyert, M. D., & O'Dell, C. (2009). Goal orientation and academic failure in traditional and nontraditional aged college students. *College Student Journal*, 43(4), 1052-1061.

Ireland, T. D., & Spezia, C. H. (2014). Adult education in retrospective: 60 years of CONFINTEA.

Kim, A., & Merriam, S. (2004). Motivation for learning among older adults in a learning in retirement institute. *Educational Gerontology*, 30, 441-455.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.

Roths, A., Lemos, M. S., & Gonçalves, T. (2014). Motives and Beliefs of Learners Enrolled in Adult Education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 112, 939-948.

UNESCO (1997). The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning. Adult Learning: A Key for the Twenty-First Century. *Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V)*, Hamburg, July 14-18.

Welton, M. (2013). Adult Education and Learning in a Precarious Age: The Hamburg Declaration Revisited: New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 138. In T. Nesbit, & M. Welton (Eds.), *Subjects to Citizens: Adult Learning and the Challenges of Democracy in the Twenty-First Century*. Jossey-Bass.