

Dušan Savicevic, Prof. Dr., University of Belgrade, SERBIA,
dusko143@gmail.com

Research Problems in Andragogy: Comparative Considerations

Abstract

Research in andragogy cannot be reduced to research techniques. It includes theoretical ground as well. Theory is a research base for understanding.

Philosophy is very important for research andragogy: spiritual values, aims of education and learning, conceptions of an adult person, andragogical ethical reflection on theory and practice. Research in andragogy has its research context.

The problem of methodology has been neglected. Research methods and procedures are not separate from philosophical grounds. Contradictions have appeared in andragogy over whether one should create knowledge through research or borrow the knowledge from other sciences. Since andragogy has become university discipline, the link between teaching and research has been asked for.

Key words: andragogy, research, methodology, philosophy, ethic, comparison, methods, techniques.

Approach to the problem

The establishment of a science depends on the scope, quality, type and nature of the research. Through research we are accumulating knowledge that is assisting us in the formulation of the theory and enabling the efficient solution of life's questions and problems. Dynamic practice of adult education and learning is not sufficiently followed by research. There are reasons for that, for example, it was thought that education and learning are part of social practice, so the teaching in this field did not need specific tasks. On the other hand, practicing andragogists themselves were encouraging such pragmatism. Turning point occurred when universities opened doors to andragogy (adult learning theory) as a course subject and as a field of research.

There are different types of research in adult education and learning. Some authors (Merriam and Simpson, 1984) stated that: "research is a systematic process by which we learn more about something than what we had known before we engaged in that process" (p.2). Over time, a division to basic (fundamental) and applied research happened. In the area of adult education both types of research can influence practice of andragogy. The results of basic research can have practical application while applied research may lead to the formulation of the theory.

Debates over the conceptual framework of research, from a comparative

perspective, are present in the andragogical literature. Conceptual frameworks are not unique. This diversity does not necessarily mean anything negative, it can also contribute to a theoretical basis for andragogy. The practice of adult education and learning varies, therefore research interests are dissimilar. Research in the field of adult education and learning has its own distinctive methodological characteristics and applications of research methods and techniques. This does not mean that adult education is not using a general research methodology of social sciences, but its use is specific and not mechanical. The uniqueness of the research in the field of andragogy is the subject of exploration itself. It involves the application of the appropriate methods and techniques. Methodology in adult education cannot be equated with the term method, because it has much wider dimensions. It examines the scientific systems and their structure, research techniques and procedures, and ways of evaluating their effectiveness. Methodology can never be reduced to technique, because it would imply its impoverishment. Researcher in the field of andragogy who intends to study these problems must be sure that they are relevant for both the society in general as well as for the implementation of the adult education practice. Research should always contribute to the solving of the problems that are vital to society. Other important goal is making sure that the results of the research can be used in adult education and learning practice. These are two requirements that cannot be overlooked in any type of research. This further means that research should lead to the logical and practical measures.

In andragogical research (as in all others), the researcher needs to be fully unbiased. Besides, the work of researcher is not a private matter. This work needs to be of interest to others. This further means that researcher has to be fully aware of the needs and demands of the society. Researcher can be affected by personal prejudices that he/she must overcome. It is essential that researcher possess the knowledge of both traditional as well as non-traditional methodological approaches, the original ways of exploration, and the ability to create new hypotheses, if the existing ones are not valid anymore.

The need to put more emphasis on non-traditional approach to research in adult education and learning is growing. The conventional approach to research seeks to explain the phenomena in a strict traditional way. This approach drew lots of criticism. Among the critics particularly notable was Canadian theorist Hall (Hall, 1977). His criticism was mainly directed at a survey research in adult learning and education. Hall pointed out that this approach simplifies the social reality. In addition, it is often alienated from the environment and the adults who participate in the study, and is not consistent with the approach and philosophy of adult education. In survey research, past can be quickly forgotten. And that is one of its biggest drawbacks. Past and present have its own interactions that run from one end to the other in the whole process. Special criticism of this research

method is focused on the fact that the subjects participating in the study do not have any opportunity to influence the research process. Such an approach does not allow respondents to actively participate in research. Some American authors (Apps, 1972) were severe critics of the traditional approaches to andragogical research. Apps argued that the traditional approach to research in the field of adult education and learning does not provide useful knowledge.

Additionally, there are problems with terminology associated with the research in the field of adult education and learning. Each discipline, including andragogy, seeks to refine and structure its own conceptual apparatus. Clear and strong terminology is essential in establishing the scientific value of a discipline. When it comes to adult education and learning, terminology distillation is only at the very beginning. This area is rich in terms, but lacking in their accuracy. However, the improvements are starting to emerge. Adult education dictionaries and encyclopedias have been published in various countries. These are the tools and resources that will contribute to the escalation of research in adult education.

The Roots and the Development of Research in Andragogy

This topic can be the whole study in itself. Due to the space limitations we are able to present it in its framework. Contemporary discussions often emphasize that research in the field of adult education and learning is a recent development. This is only partially true. Study of adult education and learning has deeper roots in the history of human civilization. It is possible to establish a historical vertical of ancient civilizations to the present time. Naturally, it was not a disciplinary research. Experiential knowledge of adult education differs from one European country to another. Emerging of the new institutions of adult education in England and France created the foundations for the development of the global adult education movement. World association for adult education is established. Adult education research (on a comparative basis) appeared in the first decades of the 19th century in England. In 19th and the first decades of the twentieth century, there is a movement in Russia of studying the experiences gained in adult education in England, France, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Russian authors not only described what the adult education status and conditions were in other countries, but also compared it to the Russian methods at that time. In the early years of the twentieth century, work done by E. N. Madinski set forth the theoretical foundations of andragogy, helping to establish the adult education and learning as a scientific discipline. Scientific approach to adult education and learning in particular came to the fore at the All-Russian Congress of Extracurricular Education in 1919. At the same congress, the importance of research, particularly experimental research in adult education and learning was strongly emphasized, in addition to theoretical and historical research.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the new trends and initiatives for empirical research are starting to develop in England. These spread to the other countries in the continental Europe, North America and Africa. This process of expansion was not possible without comparisons. This is the most fully evident in the renowned report of the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1919. "We are aware of the difficulty of comparisons. Education is intertwined with other conditions and institutions as well as national traditions. It is developing in correlation to specific needs and is influenced by variety of factors that fluctuate with time and circumstances. It is impossible, therefore, to judge the education systems without taking into account the political, social and intellectual atmosphere in which they exist." (The Report, 1919, pp. 358). The first comparative research studies in adult education are starting to emerge. For example, the famous English comparatist Sadler (1924) compared all schools for adults in England and folk high schools in Denmark. There have been other studies, for example, Browning Octavio (1920) conducted research and compared the English education of workers and Germany National High Schools and Burger (1926) compared folk high schools in Denmark, England and Germany. Interesting research done by Gertrude Hermes (1927), compared all English and German ventures in adult education and sought similarities and differences among them.

The period from the 1930s provides abundant information about the ups and downs of andragogical research, the continuous efforts of individuals, institutions and organizations to go into more depth in comprehending the problems of adult education and learning. Data and facts show that such studies were not random, but that they were formed from the social, economic and cultural needs of a community. These investigations are intertwined with expanding efforts of other sciences to engage in research activities in the field of adult education and learning. The results were passed on to other countries and became general scientific property.

In the course of the 19th century, Americans started following the path of Europeans, especially the Germans and the French. From the 1930s, they are developing a strong research activity in the field of adult education and learning. These investigations are related to the prominent American psychologist Thorndike and his associates. Thorndike dedicated the largest part of his research in the period from 1925-1935, to adult education and learning. (E.L. Thorndike, *Adult Learning and Adult Interests*). He insisted on gathering facts about adult education and learning, asserting that the "facts are our best weapon."

In the aftermath of the Second World War, a quiet period ensued in research activities related to adult education and learning. However, with the development of graduate and doctoral programs there is an increasing need for research in this area of education. For example, Professor Houle, from the University of Chicago, one of the pioneers in the adult education field, was a

strong advocate of expanding research activities in this area (Houle, 1962). On the other hand, some authors are criticizing research in the field of adult education and learning (Griffith, 1979). But despite these critical objections, no other country devoted more attention and effort to research in adult education and learning than the United States. From 1930 to 1988 approximately 2500 doctoral candidates successfully defended their dissertations in adult education. Also, there was a significant increase in the number of teachers in this field, which was the essential premise of the research (Deshler, 1989, pp. 147). The number of studies was considerable with various orientations. Some authors (Knox, 1985) grouped the research into four categories: the adult learning and development, programming, conduct and evaluation and administration (Knox, 1985, pp. 512). Equally, the results of published research in Canada should not be overlooked. This primarily refers to studies performed by C. Werner, R. Kidd and A. Tough. Significant research has been carried out at the University of Montreal. The Department of Education at the University of Montreal was granting certificates, master and doctoral degrees, all in the field of adult education. The number of students from the developing countries was increasing, which was particularly important for spreading the spirit of inquiry around the world.

Brazilian educator and theorist Freire made major contributions to the theory and practice of adult education and learning. Freire was placing research in a certain philosophical context, emphasizing that "there is no text without context." From this philosophical approach he derived his methodological belief about research in the field of adult education and learning. He urged the researchers to understand the concrete reality, to understand the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. The attitude of researcher towards research is essentially an epistemological question. The research methodology is not neutral (Freire, 1973). Freire's belief was that the goal of establishing a good program in adult education and learning could only be achieved through research. From this standpoint it is possible to apply a different organization and different research methods. Freire argued for a participatory approach to the study of adult education and learning. This approach assumes inclusion of individuals involved in the research area being studied. However, Freire did not consider participatory research "a magic wand", but a means of engaging and enlightening of larger number of individuals, which is consistent with his philosophy of education (P. Freire, 1993).

In the European context, the research of adult education and learning can be viewed and analyzed from two perspectives, Western and Eastern Europe, with a tendency of these approaching and converging to mutual interaction. Western European studies reflect national characteristics and idiosyncrasies. Universities in several countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden) offer masters and doctoral programs of study in the field of adult education. But a number of

institutions outside university systems (Germany, France, Great Britain and Norway) have yielded notable contributions to research in the field of adult learning and education. Useful role, played by the Council of Europe and the European Bureau of Adult Education, should be mentioned. Studies have taken more sociological than psychological approach. Greater emphasis was on the need and the social group, than on the psychological dimensions of adult learning. There have been notable contributions of other disciplines (history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology in particular) to the study of adult education and learning. A somewhat smaller contribution of economics and political science can be noted. European Society for Research in the field of adult education and learning was established in the Netherlands (Hake, 1994). Rubenson criticizes practice-oriented research, referring to it as “non-theoretical”. He says that individualistic perspective prevails in North America, while in Europe the attention is given to participation from the viewpoint of social perspective. It should be emphasized that no form of reductionism (psychological or sociological) is desirable, and that theoretical pluralism is necessary.

Despite the common elements with the rest of the Europe, research in the field of adult education in the countries of Eastern Europe had certain specific traits and was under the influence of earlier Soviet conceptions of pedagogy as an integral science. These ideas, however, have been gradually changing starting in 1960s. In terms of research in adult education, the biggest contributor was renowned Russian psychologist Ananyev, with his aides. The Leningrad school is well known in the field of adult education. The researchers there have conducted experimental investigation of intellectual abilities of adults while supporting the establishment of theory of adult learning and education suggesting differentiation between pedagogy and andragogy (Ananyev, 1977, pp.362). Research has intensified in Czechoslovakia and Poland in the 1990s (Domalewski, 1992). Hungarian approach was very similar to the one developed earlier in Poland and former Yugoslavia. The last decade of the 20th century was the time of major change. Events in the Russian Federation have opened new areas for research. Some authors (Zmeyov, 1998) reported on establishment of new departments of adult education, publishing of numerous studies of adult learning and education, increase in numbers of doctoral dissertations and spreading of the study of andragogy in numerous institutions of higher education. Similar positive trends occurred in Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Serbia.

Past comparative considerations indicate that the relevance of research results from one social environment quickly exceeds its limits, becoming a general scientific good or are alternatively rejected as inadequate or outdated. Research in adult education and learning has its own cultural context, which should be taken into consideration when evaluating the theoretical research,

adopting methodologies or adaptation and use of other instruments and techniques for data collection. It should also be pointed out that research in adult education and learning has numerous weaknesses of theoretical and methodological nature. These are, through comparative analysis, evident in many countries. The research in the field of adult education will be more widespread and sophisticated in the future. At this stage of its development, andragogy needs generation of new synthesis and generalization from a number of partial studies.

Philosophical framework of the research in adult education

Comparative analyses show that adult education can hardly become a theoretical discipline, without its close ties to philosophy. Philosophical reflection on the essence of man is of particular importance for adult education, as well as the resulting interaction and convergence of philosophical and andragogical thinking. The early studies emphasized that the philosophy of adult education represents a challenge to the philosophical and scientific thought. "Only on the basis of adequate philosophy we hope to create a better way of life to which we aspire." (Yeaxlee, 1925, p.6).

Of all the philosophical categories significant for adult education and learning, the values are most often emphasized. It has been argued that erosion of basic values is one of the ills of modern world. The subject of the philosophy of adult education is the human spirit. Philosophy of adult education should have a clear concept of adulthood, and should interpret what it means to be an adult. Both philosophical and andragogical ideas intersect in deliberation of the term “adult”. Philosophical considerations should be built into the foundations of andragogy. Attempts to formulate a “philosophy of work” are a way to combine thinking in andragogy. That does not mean uniformity, but full appreciation for individuality and individual approaches. Therefore it is necessary to know the essence of different philosophical schools and trends of thought.

Goals are philosophical category. The basic prerequisite for consideration in adult education and learning are their philosophical considerations. The objectives of adult education and learning have multiple dimensions. In literature, some authors are indicating goals of adult education as intrinsic, where some others indicate them as instrumental. The first emphasize the development of personality and experience of students, and the others are seeing knowledge and education as means to achieve certain goals, demanding that education needs to be useful and has to have practical value. Supporters of analytical philosophy are critical of adult educators who are imposing social and political ideals in their adult education practice. Advocates of this philosophy strongly believe that adult education should not determine what social and political changes are necessary and needed (Paterson, 1973, pp.357). Others

reason that adult education cannot be separated from other activities of the society. In the philosophy of adult education, questions are posed about how the objectives are defined: through external factors like the state or through mutual agreement between the teachers and students.

Adult education and learning seeks thorough consideration of ethical issues. The key question to consider is who should make decisions in determining what valuable skills are and what is the useful knowledge. Choice of educational content is not only didactic, but above all ethical issue. Choosing the right educational content requires the moral perspective. Multiple ethical issues and dilemmas are arising in adult education research problems, starting from conceptualization of research, collecting and analyzing data, all the way to their interpretation. The question emerges what are the intentions and purposes of the research, how will the provided knowledge be used and whose property it will be. There is also the question of responsibility of the research team for the consequences of the results. Conclusion can be made that philosophy has a great significance for andragogical research. This points to the close relationship between philosophy and adult education and the need to intertwine philosophical and andragogical beliefs.

Analysis of adult education and learning research suggests that theoretical framework is particularly significant for this field. There is a growing need for creative linking of theory and research. Since andragogy came to be a university discipline it became crucial to connect the teaching and research. Successfully linking them is contributing to creation of a research foundation of andragogy. Research work in adult education should be the basis for teaching. Educators, who base their teaching on research, are influencing the inquisitive spirit of their students and inspire them towards the new scholarly endeavors. Students involved in the research work are provided with the valuable opportunity to learn about the practical problems of research and the use of different examination methods, techniques and instruments.

In previous analyses, we did not include a number of other research problems and issues in adult education, such as the problem of determining research territory in adult education, the types of research, paradigms in andragogical research, the relationship between qualitative and quantitative research, the contribution of other disciplines to research of adult education and learning, etc. In terms of research, andragogy faces new problems and challenges.

References

- Merriam, Sh. B., Simpson, E. L. (1984), A Guide to Research Educators and Trainers of Adults, Krieger, Malabar.
 Hall, B. L. and Kidd, J. R., eds (1977), Adult Learning, a design for action: comprehensive international survey, Pergamon Press, Oxford.

- Apps, J. W. (1972), Toward Working Philosophy of Adult Education, SUPCE, Syracuse.
The Report 1919 (1919), Ministry for Reconstruction, London.
 Sadler, M. (1924), Introduction, in: Martin, G. G., The Adult School Movement, National Union School, London.
 Browning-Oktavio, H. (1920), Die Englische Arbeiterbildung und die Deutsche Volkshohe Schulen, Berlin.
 Burger, J. F. (1926), Vergleichende Untersuchungen und die Volkshochschulbewegung in Anmark, England und Deutschland, Munich.
 Hermes, Gz. (1927), From Hermes' Report, WAAE Bulletin, No. XXVII, May 1927th
 Thorndike, E. L. (1928), Adult Learning, Macmillan, New York.
 Thorndike, E. L. (1935), Adult Interests, Macmillan, New York.
 Houle, C. O. (1962), Ends and Means in Adult Education Research, in: Dh. I. Dubois, K. M. Wenitage (eds.), Objectives and Methods of Research in Adult Education, Washington University, St. Louis.
 Griffith, W. S. (1979), Adult Education Research – Emerging Development, Studies in Adult Education, Vol. 11, No. 2.
 Deshler, D. with Hagen, N. (1989), Adult Education Research: Issues and direction, in: Sh. B. Merriam and Ph. M. Cunningham (eds.), Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
 Knox, A. B. (1985), Adult Education Research: United States, The International Encyclopedia of Education-Research and Studies, Pergamon Press, Oxford.
 Freire, P. (1973), Research Methods, Studies in Adult Education, No. 7, University of Dar as Salaam.
 Freire, P. (1993), Forward, in: M. Paek, et all (eds.), Voices of Change, OISE, Toronto.
 Hake, B. J. (1994) Is there a Forum for Research on Education of Adults in Europe? Some problems and Trends, International Journal of University Adult Education, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1.
 Rubenson, K. (1985), Adult Education Research, The International Encyclopedia of Education Research and Studies, Pergamon Press, Oxford.
 Ananyev, B. G. (1977), O problemah savremenoga covelokoznania (Russian text), Nauka, Moscow.
 Malewski, M. (1992), Adult Education Research in Poland, IJUE, No. 3.
 Zmayov, S. I. (1998), Andragogy: Origins, Development and Trends, Internationale Zeitschrift für-Erziehung Wissenschaft, 44, (I).
 Patterson, C. H. (1973), Humanistic Education, Prentice Hall, Englewood.