

TRAINING PREFERENCES OF ADULT LEARNERS IN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: DISTANCE LEARNING GATE

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ABSTRACT

Adults are independent learners and are expected to direct their own learning. Nowadays, there are many MOOC platforms preferred by adult learners. Many states have adapted to these developments and established an online learning platform in order to carry out the training and development activities of civil servants. The Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Human Resources Office has established the Distance Learning Gate (DLG) platform in order to carry out educational activities. In this study, learning preferences of adult learners were determined in order to improve the relevant online learning environment and to structure appropriate trainings for public personnel. For this purpose, the training preferences of adult learners were determined according to their title groups and education levels. The participants of the research consisted of 4864 civil servants who received training from the DLG platform. According to the results, it was determined that adult learners preferred personal development training the most and professional development training in the last place. It is seen that the servants in the service title group that watched the most training in all categories according to the title groups. It is seen that the groups that received the least education are the senior manager and manager title group. On the other hand, it has been determined that the number of adult learners' training and the education categories differ according to the education level. According to the findings, it is seen that those who watched the most education are adults at the compulsory primary education level, while those who watched the least education are those who are at the graduate level. This research includes the first phase of a series of research and a design-based research. As a first step, the training preferences of adult learners were determined. In the next stage, a recommendation system will be integrated into the DLG platform based on the determined profiles.

KEYWORDS

Adult Learners, Digital Learning Environments, Distance Learning Gate, Civil Servants, Training Preferences

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no single definition, model, or theory that explains how or why adults learn, and our understanding of adult learning is changing. Adult learning is a broad concept that extends from continuing vocational training to basic literacy training and on-the-job training (Merriam, 2018). Personal growth and development are emphasized within the framework of lifelong learning approach in adult learning. It is possible to talk about three basic theories in the context of adult learning: (1) andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning (Merriam, 2017). A common understanding of adult learning among these theories is that adult learners are independent and manage their own learning processes. According to adult learners, learning is a part of life independent of formal educational institutions such as schools, and adults systematically carry out the learning process without being dependent on an instructor (Merriam, 2018). It can be said that this information is also valid in online learning environments. According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), more successful online learners are also more self-directed learners.

Deepening our understanding in the context of adult learning is critical as it provides the answer to how adult learning environments should be designed. In this research, by determining the training preferences of adult learners in online learning environments; It is aimed to create a framework for relevant stakeholders,

especially instructional designers, and to contribute to the adult education literature. In addition, it is aimed to reveal the training preferences of adults in these environments.

Designing online learning environments as to appropriate the needs of adults constitutes the balance point in capturing and sustaining the potential of these environments. Today, there are different widely used online learning platforms preferred by adults. When the reports of these platforms are examined, it is seen that only descriptive statistics are presented (edX, 2022; edX, 2021; Coursera, 2021). Thanks to the universality of these platforms, the amount of information they contain in adult learning has reached a serious level. However, this potential brought by the data cannot be fully utilized in the academic context. In this research, it will be tried to explain the learning path of adult learners in the distance learning gate, which is a widely used national online learning platform, in terms of training preferences. Every trace that adults leave in online learning environments contains a clue to their learning journey. These tips can be considered as powerful collaborators that can be used to improve or facilitate learning. For this reason, it is important for researchers to carry out advanced analyzes and share the results with the literature in order to capture the potential of big data beyond descriptive statistics. In this study, it was aimed to determine the educational preferences of adult learners in different occupational groups in online learning environments. The research questions are; 1) What are the preferences of adult learners in training categories? 2) How a pattern does the training preferences of adult learners show according to their job title groups? 3) What are the training preferences of adult learners according to their education levels?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design and Participants

The study was structured as a correlational research. The participants of the research are 4864 civil servants working in the public sector and receiving training from the DLG platform. 69% (3377) of the participants were male and 31% (1487) were female.

2.2 Distance Learning Gate

Distance Learning Gate (DLG) is an online learning platform that has been opened to the use of civil servants by Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Human Resources Office since 2020. DLG consists of training, exam, survey, and live conference modules. Trainings can be carried out both synchronously and asynchronously. Video-conference (Live Class) and webinar modules are used for synchronous training, which are integrated into the system. As asynchronous trainings, it can be presented as video, interactive video, presentation, textual content and infographic. There are more than 6000 training events in different categories such as professional development, personal development, legislation, human resources management, information technologies, human rights, etc. The trainings are structured by institutions specialized in their fields and made available to certain individuals, institutions, organizations or all civil servants.

2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Within the scope of the research, log data obtained from the DLG platform was used as a data collection tool. The log data consists of the categories of the trainings completed and the training titles in these categories. As the training category, instead of all the categories in the platform, the categories of professional development, personal development, legislation, information technologies and about life were examined in the context of the research. In addition, the title groups and educational level of the participants were included in the analysis. One-way MANOVA and one-way ANOVA analysis were used in the analysis of the data. Tukey test was used as Post Hoc analysis in order to determine the differences between the groups.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Training Category Preferences of Adult Learners

It has been revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the training category preferences of adult learners on the DLG platform ($F(4, 24315) = 2109.56, p < .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .257$). In order to determine the source of the difference, the Tukey test was conducted as a Post-hoc analysis. Personal Development ($M = 25.39; SD = 16.07$) is the most watched category and more preferred than Legislation ($M = 18.31; SD = 15.71$), Information Technologies ($M = 12.51; SD = 8.97$), About Life ($M = 7.90; SD = 6.36$) and Professional Development ($M = 7.66; SD = 5.40$) categories. On the other hand, the Legislation ($M = 18.31; SD = 15.71$) category is more preferred than the Information Technologies ($M = 12.51; SD = 8.97$), About Life ($M = 7.90; SD = 6.36$) and Professional Development ($M = 7.66; SD = 5.40$) categories. Finally, it is another finding that the Information Technologies ($M = 12.51; SD = 8.97$) category is more preferred than the About Life ($M = 7.90; SD = 6.36$) and Professional Development ($M = 7.66; SD = 5.40$) categories.

3.2 Training Preferences of Adult Learners According to the Job Title Groups

It has been revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the training preferences of the adult learners according to the title groups ($F(5, 4858) = 23.87, p < .000; \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.886, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .024$). In order to determine the source of this difference, the Tukey test was used as a Post Hoc analysis. According to the results, the servants in the service title group that watched the most training in all categories. It is seen that the groups that received the least education are the senior manager and manager title group.

3.3 Training Preferences of Adult Learners According to the Education Level

It has been revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the training preferences of the adult learners according to the education levels ($F(5, 4858) = 9.11, p < .000; \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.954, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .009$). In order to determine the source of this difference, the Tukey test was used as a Post Hoc analysis. According to the results, it has been determined that the number of adult learners' training and the education categories differ according to the education level. According to the findings, it is seen that those who watched the most education are adults at the compulsory primary education level, while those who watched the least education are those who are at the graduate level.

4. CONCLUSION

Within the scope of the research, it was examined whether the training preferences of adult learners differ according to a) job title groups, b) education categories and c) education levels. In the DLG platform, it was found that the training preferences of adult learners differ according to the categories. Training preferences of adult learners were distributed in the categories of personal development, legislation, information technologies, about life, and professional development, respectively. In the light of these findings, it is planned to investigate the reasons for these preferences of the adult learners.

It is seen that the training preferences and numbers of adult learners differ according to their job title groups and education levels. According to the title groups, it is seen that the groups receiving the most education are service, technical, professional, administrative, manager and top manager, respectively. In this case, it is seen that the title group that received the least training in the DLG platform is the manager and senior top manager. It is thought that there may be two main reasons for this situation. The first of these is that the learners in this title group have less needs and therefore do not participate in the training. The second is that the training on the platform is not suitable for the public personnel in the manager and top manager title group. In the next stage, it is recommended to add special training for these title groups to the system.

On the other hand, it was found that the training preferences and the number of training follow-ups differed according to the education levels of adult learners. According to the education levels of adult learners, it was found that those who received the most education was compulsory primary education, high school, associate degree, undergraduate, doctorate and graduate, respectively. In this case, it was found that adult learners with low education and high education received more education than learners with high education levels. In other words, while the level of education increases, the number of people receiving education decreases. According to this finding, it is possible to say that there is a negative correlation between the number of trainings in the DLG platform and the level of education.

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