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The Role of the Adult Educator in Eliminating Internal Psychological Barriers in Adult Learning

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine, on the one hand, the internal learning barriers for adults that are derived from their emotions about their educational programme, and on the other, the role of the adult educator in eliminating these obstacles. Emotions are integrally linked to the learning process and influence the successful outcome of educational goals. As a result of the steadily increasing number of lifelong learning educational programmes, research into the emotions of adult learners is valuable as they differ significantly to those of younger students. At the same time, the role of the adult educator cannot be merely to transmit knowledge, but must also promote and motivate learning. The sample consisted of 102 adults attending either postgraduate programmes or training sessions during the time of the study. The quantitative data collection comprised 92 questionnaires, while the qualitative consisted of 10 semi-structured individual interviews. In this study mixed method design was used, where quantitative and qualitative methods were implemented for triangulation of the results. The research findings indicate that although adult learners do experience feelings of anxiety, insecurity, worry and frustration during their studies, most times, these negative emotions are not so intense as to impede study completion because motivation is a much stronger factor. Regarding adult learners' perception of the role of the adult educator, the findings show discrepancy between what they expect from the instructor and what the instructor is actually doing. The adult learners wanted the instructor to create a positive communication climate and learning environment, adapt the level of teaching to their experiences and abilities, encourage them, employ active participatory learning techniques, as well as have emotional intelligence and express empathy.

Keywords: Adult Educator, Internal Learning Barriers, Learning Climate, Educator's Teaching Skills, Educator's Communication Skills

1. Introduction

Rapid technological and scientific developments in conjunction with globalisation have created new economic and social conditions that require adults to continually upgrade their knowledge and skills (Kokkos, 2008). Thus, participation in adult education and lifelong learning programmes is considered an essential response action to meeting these new conditions. Although a fair number of studies have investigated, on the one hand, the motivational factors in adult learning participation and their enhancement, and on the other, the deterrents to participation and their elimination, only a few studies have dealt with obstacles that arise during an educational course, since most researchers seem to be more concerned with the factors that impede adult participation. Still

fewer researchers have dealt with the study of internal learning barriers stemming from psychological factors (Radovan, 2012) since the subjective aspects of these factors, and particularly emotions, makes them difficult to define and measure in terms of behaviours and attitudes (Kokkos & Lionarakis, 1998). The importance of emotions in cognitive functions has only recently been recognised, thus one cannot be engaged in adult education without making reference to the pivotal role that emotions play in the learning process (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; O'Regan, 2003; Shuck, Albornoz & Winberg, 2007). Adult learners, being older than the conventional age range of 18-22-year-old tertiary education students, bring with them different life experiences, skills and knowledge that impact their learning expectations and approaches. In the present study, we focused on the examination of emotional deterrents that hinder already motivated adults in post-graduate educational programmes and the role of the adult educator in eliminating these negative feelings.

1.1 Types of barriers

In accordance with various studies (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Cross, 1981; Caffarella & Merriam, 1999; Falasca, 2011; Radovan, 2012), barriers are divided into two categories: external, which the individual cannot control, and internal which reflect the individual's personality. More specifically, external barriers are further divided into two sub-categories: situational and institutional. Situational barriers include age, changes in personal and family life, time constraints, economic circumstances, lack of available childcare options, working hours, or the long distance from the location of the educational institution. Institutional barriers include programme duration, follow-up hours, programme flexibility, entrance criteria, the way the educational institution has organised the adult education programme, i.e., sufficient or lack of information, and the like. The category consisting of dispositional, internal barriers is the most difficult in terms of management, since these comprise the learner's own resistances, stemming from obstacles they themselves have set, either consciously or unconsciously. Cross (1981) and National Center of Education Statistics (1998) list the following factors as internal barriers: stress, insecurity, fear of inadequacy, negative past experiences, lack of self-esteem and low self-confidence, the desire of adults to know the precise educational outcomes, and skepticism about the value of adult education.

1.2 Internal learning barriers

Internal barriers can have their basis in knowledge and perceptions, as well as psychological factors. An individual's set of knowledge that has been acquired throughout life, influences the particular way they engage in learning (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999; Galbraith, 1990). Additionally, adults have a crystallised system of perceptions, values, and beliefs with which they view and interpret reality. This system has been shaped by the individual's personal life experiences and the cultural capital accumulated within the socio-economic-cultural context of their socialisation (Bourdieu, 1985). They comprise elements of their personality and worldview with which they balance their inner quest with the external environment. For this reason, if these perceptions are questioned by the educator or their co-learners, the individual may feel that their character and judgment are being attacked, thus creating negative feelings. Barriers stemming from psychological factors are related to permanent personality traits, such as lack of self-esteem and low self-confidence, which result in defeatism and the debasement of an adult's skills. They can also be associated with anxiety, whose symptoms can range from simple concern or slight insecurity to a full anxiety disorder (Kokkos, 1998). Learners with low self-esteem have very little confidence in their abilities, are afraid to take risks or attempt new things, feel threatened by novel situations or new educational techniques, easily lose their desire to learn, and avoid what they think will cause them disappointment. They are usually characterised as being introverted and antisocial (Cigman, 2009; Jabari, Rajeswar & Sheykhjan, 2014). Adult learners experience particularly intense feelings of anxiety and insecurity during assessment, when they submit work or are taking exams because then they feel that their weaknesses in educational skills will be revealed. At the same time, they feel fear because they have again assumed the status of student (Rogers, 1999)

1.3 The role of the adult educator in alleviating internal learning barriers

The adult educator plays a key role in addressing the issue of internal learning barriers, namely, by not operating as a mere transmitter of academic knowledge (Knowles, 1970; Tait, 2003), but by actively creating an effective learning environment in which learners feel comfortable physically, socially, and emotionally and where they are

assured that their diversity is respected and appreciated (Polemi-Todoulou, 2005). Even in a positive classroom climate, the educator needs to pay attention to covert learning barriers that may exist. Through direct enquiry, the educator can identify adult learners' needs, wants, expectations, and feelings, which may not always be explicit or conscious (Tsiboukli, 2012; Tsiboukli & Phillips, 2008). For this reason, it is important to involve learners in the design of the educational programme, as they are in a process of self-determination and empowerment (Courau, 2000; Falasca, 2011; Rogers, 1999). In a safe and positive environment, the educator, as facilitator, encourages learner co-operation, initiative, mutual trust, honesty and acceptance, which allows the individual group members to express their spontaneity and creativity (Kokkos, 1998; Galbraith, 1990). This can be achieved through the implementation of active learning techniques, which depending on the subject matter and learners' characteristics can include discussions, brainstorming, role-play, group work, etc., and can promote an exchange of both experiences and feelings (Noye & Piveteau, 2016), as well as constructive feedback. Internal learning barriers can also be eliminated through the good communication skills of the educator (Pritsi, 2016). Being empathic, being able to step into the other person's shoes, listening to and understanding the learners' feelings, needs, and perceptions, showing genuine concern for the learners' fears and anxieties without identifying with them, being flexible by adapting the level or type of teaching (Davis, 2018; Goleman, 1995) contribute to developing a positive learning atmosphere. When the educator becomes an active listener, not only through the sense of hearing but by also applying all the other senses, he/she builds a bridge of communication which enables individual as well as interpersonal problems within the group to be successfully dealt with (Courau, 2000; Vella, 2002). Last but not least, another key factor which helps dispel negative emotions that impede the learning process is the educator's emotional intelligence. In other words, having the ability to understand learners' feelings and knowing how to work with them, reacting appropriately to their disposition, motivations and desires, and using emotional information as a guide to thought and behaviour (Goleman, 1995). The aim of the research study was to examine learners' perception of the role of the adult educator in alleviating learners' internal barriers arising from psychological factors. More specifically, the study objectives were to first identify the emotions that comprise barriers to adult learning, and second, to investigate learners' perception of the role of the educator in eliminating the internal barriers, through the two following research questions: 'Which are the emotions that comprise barriers in adult learning?' and 'What is the role of the adult educator in eliminating those emotions in learners which negatively affect the learning process?' The research findings can contribute to the body of knowledge in the literature on the role of the adult educator (Giastas, 2008) and the design of educational programmes and training seminars for educators. Following the Introduction in section 1, which includes the types of barriers, the identification of internal barriers, the role of the adult educator in eliminating learning barriers and the aims of the research, is section 2, which outlines the methodology and structure of the study by describing the research tools, the sample, and research validity. Sections 3 and 4 present an analysis and discussion of the findings, respectively while in the concluding section the overall results are summarised.

2. Method

In this study, a mixed method approach was used, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed for triangulation of the results, which provides a better understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2011; Karalis, 2013). The research tool for quantitative data collection was a questionnaire based on the research questions consisting of 60 items of closed questions divided into 3 sections. The questionnaire was sent to 102 participants by e-mail. Before the bulk dispatch of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted to identify errors and ambiguities of the research tool and to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. The research tool for qualitative data collection was a semi-structured interview given to 10 participants individually lasting 20 minutes. After getting the verbal consent of the participants, a suitable location was chosen, either in our office or theirs, to ensure there was quiet and comfort to assist the participants to express themselves freely. The aim of the study, the duration of the interview, and the plans for future utilisation of the results were explained to the participants, while confidentiality of the data was also stressed. The need to respond sincerely and spontaneously to the questions of the interview was highlighted. The interviewers kept notes of the responses and followed the structure of the interview closely. The research data were processed using the text

analysis method, where the raw data from transcribed interview texts were coded and categorised. The research study was conducted in the first half of 2018.

2.1 Sample

The target population was a total of 102 adult learners who were attending or had recently completed training courses or postgraduate programmes in the school year 2017-2018. The criteria of having recently completed the course was so that the participants would be able to reproduce the emotions felt during their studies with credibility, since as time passes, one tends to forget their actual feelings or emotions. Ninety-two (92) completed questionnaires and ten (10) gave a semi-structured interview. Non-probability convenience sampling was employed. The population came from the researchers' work (3 high schools and 3 hospitals in Metropolitan Thessaloniki) consisting of adult learners enrolled in postgraduate programmes in Educational Sciences, and Healthcare Management who volunteered and were available (Creswell, 2011; Robson, 2010). Despite the drawbacks of convenience sampling, such as the inability to generalise research findings, and its vulnerability to selection bias, it nevertheless has the advantages of simplicity of sampling, low-cost implementation, as well as speed and facilitation of data collection, which was the best option in the present situation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012)

2.2 Research reliability and validity

Research reliability and validity was attempted by standardising the procedures and calculating the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency at a value higher than 0.70. More specifically, the electronic questionnaire was sent to all 102 participants at the same time, and instructions and clarification for completion were included in writing on the questionnaire. No further clarification was given individually to any participant, nor was any individual invitation made to a participant to complete the questionnaire if they did not want to. Each participant could complete only one questionnaire. Also, it was attempted to give the same instructions and clarifications in the interviews so as to ensure that no participant had more information than the others.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic figures

In the quantitative study, 81.5% of the participants were female and 18.5% were male. The majority of respondents (40.2%) fell in the age group '41 – 50', followed by 32.6% in the '31 – 40' age group, the 'over 51 years old' age group was at 15.2%, and the '20 – 30' age group was the lowest at 12%. The educational level of participants was as follows: 64.1% had a Master's degree, 30.4% had a University degree, while 5.4% had a Ph. D. degree. All of them were doing another Master's degree that was more relevant to their professional tasks. The majority of participants (60.2%) were married with children, whereas their main partners were single without children. In the qualitative study, out of the ten participants interviewed: six were females and four were males; six were in the '41 – 50' age group and the other four in the '31 – 40' age group; nine were attending a Master's programme, while one (female) was in the final year of an undergraduate course in European Culture at the Hellenic Open University, and eight were married with children, while the other two were single without children.

3.2 Emotions that comprise barriers to adult learning

As illustrated in Table 1, professional and family responsibilities were a barrier, as they create anxiety, stress and other negative feelings, to a relatively large extent for 44.6% and 34.8% of participants respectively. A high 63% of participants considered that they can acquire new knowledge and skills to a great extent especially when these rely on pre-existing knowledge and experiences. Almost half (49%) of adult learners stated that they experienced anxiety to a high degree when they had to present work to the rest of the class, while over half (54.3%) stated that the high degree of anxiety intensified when they had to take exams. While 44.6% of participants noted they felt moderate anxiety that they might fail, almost double (88%) stated that they had a small degree of feelings of insecurity about their ability to meet the requirements of the educational programme. Research participants appear to have high self-confidence since, 42.4% stated that they felt confident about themselves, set high goals but knew their limitations and had good relations with the other group members.

Almost half (47.8%) of adult learners said that during the post-graduate or training study programme they never felt the need to quit.

	mean	standard deviation
1. I feel that further education is not appropriate for my age	1.6087	0.94876
2. I think adult education does not offer anything	1.5543	1.17074
3. At the moment my job is my main priority	3.1957	1.00809
4. My family obligations limit the amount of time that I can devote to my education	2.9783	1.14813
5. I believe that a good memory is necessary in learning	3.3152	0.98259
6. I feel intellectually drained and I cannot concentrate	2.7935	1.07456
7. I can acquire new skills	3.8370	0.85520
8. I can understand new knowledge when it is transmitted through rules I know from the past	3.6196	0.76808
9. It is difficult for me to change my opinion on things	2.0761	0.72980
10. I accept information that is consistent with my own perceptual system more easily	3.3043	0.82194
11. I feel worried when I am going to make a presentation	3.4239	1.15057
12. I feel anxious when I am going to take an examination	3.5978	1.16788
13. I am afraid that I will be ridiculed in front of my co-learners	2.4674	1.20850
14. I feel insecure about my ability to meet the program requirements	2.3261	1.07016
15. I feel anxious when doing work that require creativity and original thinking	2.3804	1.12750
16. I feel anxious when participatory techniques are used	2.0870	1.14501
17. I feel anxiety that I might fail	2.5870	1.12075
18. It is easy for me to express my feelings	2.9457	0.96492
19. I feel fear when I am not treated like an adult learner	2.1413	1.06473
20. I set high goals because I think I can achieve them	3.3152	0.93679
21. I set goals that I can achieve because I know my limits	3.5000	0.87077
22. I accept my failures	3.3261	0.84005
23. I do not hesitate to express opinions contrary to those prevailing in the group	3.0870	1.02338
24. I have good relations with the rest of the group	3.7174	0.82975
25. I feel confident about myself	3.4674	0.80454
26. It is difficult for me to express my ideas to others	2.0109	0.88323
27. I feel safe when the instructor has control of the group	3.2717	0.90303
28. I identify with other members of the group who are considered competent	2.9674	0.88269

3.3. The role of the adult educator in eliminating internal barriers based on psychological factors

In Table 2, it can be seen that the majority (71.8%) of participants to a high degree wanted the educator to show interest in them and to encourage them to participate in the educational process. A high percentage (77.1%) of adult learners said they felt better when the educator is seen as a member of the group, and the vast majority (95.7%) felt better when a cooperative, team spirit prevailed. This positive climate resulted in 85.9% feeling satisfied with their participation in the group. Non-verbal communication seems to be an important factor, as 76.8% of the participants felt the need to a high degree to be encouraged by their educator with non-verbal cues. According to 91.4% of participants, learning barriers can be eliminated with individual constructive feedback.

When learners are frustrated because they feel they will not succeed, 93.5% expect their educator to motivate them to a high degree in order for them to continue. Three quarters(75%) of the participants stated that they wished that their instructor understood their feelings, and was empathic.

	mean	standard deviation
1. The educators should show personal interest in and care for group members		
2. The educator should encourage group participation in the educational process	4.0326	0.88269
3. The educator should involve learners in the design of the lesson with the free expression of their needs and expectations	4.3043	0.67513
4. The educator should keep the interest and attention of the group unchanged at each educational meeting	3.9891	0.84508
5. The educator should be enthusiastic about the subject they teach	4.3587	0.65602
6. The educator should be regarded by the group as a member	4.3043	0.76660
7. Group members should be required to get the educator's permission before they talk	4.0217	0.83834
8. The educator should be seen as a figure of authority by the group members	2.7609	1.05215
9. The educator should have confidence in the group members	1.9130	0.90968
10. There should be team spirit and co-operation between the members of this group	4.2391	0.66909
11. Group members tend to hide their feelings from one another	4.5109	0.58356
12. Group members should be able to discuss personal/family issues in the group	1.5543	0.80335
13. There should be pressure to comply with the group		1.01987
14. Members should need the group's approval for their decisions before they put them into practice	2.2826	0.89719
15. I should feel content participating in this group	2.2500	1.02151
16. The educator should have eye contact with the learners when they are speaking	2.5217	0.69329
17. The educator should not interrupt the learners when they are speaking	4.2609	0.93013
18. The educator should use encouraging non-verbal communication	3.9457	0.92859
19. The educator should give the learner time to think before answering	3.9239	0.80935
20. The educator should provide individualized constructive feedback	4.0652	0.81866
21. The educator should encourage learners when they feel that they cannot succeed	4.0109	0.64138
22. The educator should encourage learners to take initiative	4.3696	0.61931
23. The educator should be aware of the learners' feelings	4.5326	0.65383
24. The educator should encourage the free expression of emotions without getting involved by either agreeing or disagreeing	4.4674	0.81493
25. The educator should encourage learners to utilise their skills	4.1304	0.95996
26. The educator should adapt their feelings to changing situations	3.8152	0.66398
27. The educator should ask open questions	4.4022	0.86857
28. The educator should show personal interest in and care for group members	3.7174	0.73996

4. Discussion

In contrast to findings in the literature (Caffarella& Merriam, 1999; Falasca, 2011; Radovan, 2013; Scanlan, 1986), the results of the present study showed that the majority of adult learners recognised the importance and necessity of lifelong learning in order to keep their knowledge and skills in line with developments. Women, more so than men, did not consider education to be inadequate. An explanation for the discrepancy between the findings of the present study and the literature might be the participants' level of education. All adult learners in this study had a high level of education, in fact all were university degree holders and half had a post-graduate degree. The results could very well have been different had the participants only completed compulsory education (Bourdieu, 1985; Radovan, 2012).

It was found that the adult learners acknowledged the phenomenon of memory decline with the passing of the years, however, most participants believed that their weaker memory was due to the inability to concentrate as a result of increased family and professional obligations (Falasca, 2011) rather than age. Almost all participants in the present study were positive about their ability to acquire new skills, competencies and knowledge by applying rules they knew from past learning and experience. Contrary to that reported by Falasca (2011), Rogers (1999) and Galanis (1993), they did not have feelings of anxiety or insecurity. It appears from the findings that while adults are able to better understand and accept more easily what is in agreement with their own perceptual system, they find it difficult to accept that the knowledge they have acquired and concepts they have adopted no longer apply. The process of unlearning a skill or discarding a perception is a difficult and often painful process (Kokkos, 1998; Shuck, Albornoz & Winberg, 2007).

The most important positive emotions that the adult learners in this study stated were: satisfaction, enthusiasm and pride for high performance, good grades and positive feedback, as well as a good classroom climate, calmness and pleasure (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; O'Regan, 2003). In contrast, the key negative emotions stated were: anxiety, frustration and insecurity. Most adult learners stated that they felt anxious when they had to sit exams and when they had to make a presentation in front of the class. Often, this latter experience is accompanied by the fear of being exposed or ridiculed in front of the group due to a lack of knowledge or because one has returned to learning and has again, often after many years, assumed a student status (Khoshlessan & Das, 2017; Satir, 1989).

Another obstacle to adult learning is the insecurity of not being able to meet the requirements of the educational programme. From the findings, it appears that participants attribute this insecurity to external rather than internal factors, such as inadequate educational material, low level of teachers' competency, non-objective assessment, as well as the lack of constructive feedback and encouragement (Rogers, 1999).

On the other hand, the majority of adult learners in the study appear to have high self-esteem. Their responses show that they believe in themselves and set high goals without being over-ambitious because they know their abilities and limitations. They claim that they are able to handle their failures in such a way so as not to repeat the same mistakes in the future. Even though initially they felt angry or frustrated with themselves, they attempted to determine the causes of their failure in order to deal with and avoid them henceforth (Cigman, 2009; Jabari et al., 2014; Kristjánsson, 2010). Overall, the findings indicate that lifelong learning improves adult learners' self-esteem.

Regarding group relations, adult learners with high self-esteem tend to be extroverted, have a good relationship with all the other members, voice their feelings, and do not hesitate to support their opinions even if they conflict with those of the rest of the group. In contrast, those with low self-esteem do not freely express themselves and tend to yield to group pressure (Cigman, 2009; Kristjánsson, 2010; Lee, 2017).

A large percentage of participants stated that they felt secure when the educator is in control of the class and when they identify with other group members whom they consider competent. These behaviours are learners' defense mechanisms when their educational goals are hampered by emotional reasons, mainly by feelings of anxiety (Tsiboukli, 2012). The correlation of the variables showed that the lower the education all level of the participants, the more frequently these mechanisms appear.

The study findings showed that the adult educator plays a crucial role in cultivating an appropriate climate for effective adult learning and creating positive emotions of pleasure and security (Polemi-Todoulou, 2005; Knowles, 1970; Vella, 2002). This supportive environment is developed when the educator acts not only as a mere transmitter of knowledge but shows personal interest and care for the group members, as well as fostering a climate of trust among learners to encourage them to express their feelings and experiences (Knowles, 1970; Rell, 2000; Tait, 2003). For this reason, adult learners stated that they wanted the educator to: function as a member of the group and not as a person of authority; encourage cooperation; as well as encourage learners to take initiative and express their spontaneity and creativity (Kokkos, 1998; Galbraith, 1990).

Focusing on the participants' perception of the role of their instructor in the educational programmes they were attending or had recently completed, the findings from the semi-structured interviews were used to triangulate the research results. The interviews revealed that in fact the adult educator in most cases acted as a figure of authority, who had power over the learners, and did not always succeed in cultivating trust with the result that learners did not feel comfortable to express their emotions.

Adult learners come to the educational programme with different experiences, knowledge, and learning models, they have different characteristics, needs and expectations, and for these reasons, they want the educator to actively involve them in course design (Courau, 2000; Rogers, 1999). It has been shown that engaging adults in developing their own learning objectives and putting forward proposals for the achievement of these, has a positive impact on reducing anxiety and insecurity (Falasca, 2011). From the interview findings it was stated by most respondents that their instructors involved them in the design of the educational programmes only to a moderate degree, as in the majority of cases the adult educators had decided and prepared in advance what and how they would teach. This behaviour is contrary to what adult learning theories prescribe good teaching practice (Brookfield, 1986; Giannakopoulou, 2008; Grass, 2008; Rogers, 1999).

The teaching outcome is also determined by the educational techniques used by the educator, which influence the degree of involvement, interaction, and free expression of the learners. The present study findings - from both the questionnaires and the interviews - confirmed that adult educators use active learning techniques, mainly group work and discussion (Noye & Piveteau, 2016; Gray, 2008). Of interest is the finding from comparative statistical analysis which showed that adult male learners want more discussion, while female learners prefer group work.

The negative feelings of frustration, insecurity and anxiety that impede the learning process can be eliminated by appropriate feedback. Constructive feedback helps adults to identify their weaknesses, feel pleasure, satisfaction and pride, as well as enhance their motivation in learning (Galbraith, 1990; Lee, 2017; Wlodkowski, 1985). However, in the present findings, it was observed that in fact, the feedback given by the educators was quite general and not instructive.

According to the participants, empathy, as well as perceiving and understanding the emotions, needs and views of adult learners are necessary conditions for creating a climate of confidence within the group (Davis, 2018; Goleman, 1995). When the educator perceives that a learner is overwhelmed by negative emotions, they are able to counter the resignation mechanisms setting in with understanding and encouragement. A very large number, seven out of the ten interview respondents, stated that they looked for encouragement from the educator when they felt they would not succeed, but in reality they claimed that encouragement was provided by only a few instructors (Kokkos, 1998; Galbraith, 1990; Tait, 2003).

The perception of adult learners regarding active listening confirms that when an educator is able to do so, it not only promotes communication but also creates positive emotions (Courau, 2000; Vella, 2002). Indications that the educator is able to implement the skill of active listening is the attention they give the learner when she/he is speaking, their body language, and generally by verbal communication, such as the way they ask questions (Betts, 2013; Anagnostopoulou, 2005). When the educator asks open questions, adult learners are given the opportunity to express their opinions, their thoughts and their feelings (Courau, 2000), which makes them feel accepted and strengthens their self-esteem.

Regarding the adult educators' emotional intelligence, the participants stated that they wanted the instructor to understand their feelings, however, it was just as important for the instructor to be aware of his/her own emotions. The reason given for this response was so that the educator would be able to self-regulate and adapt his/her emotions to changing situations. Nevertheless, from the interviews it was ascertained that although the educators tried, they did not always manage to understand the learners' feelings. This implies that the adult educator cannot control or redirect their emotions to facilitate cognitive processes in the group (Goleman, 1995; Kapetanakis & Sepentz, 2016; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Finally, a small number of participants felt the need to withdraw from the educational programme they were attending. Pearson's Correlation indicated that these participants wanted the educator to have control of the class, did not want feelings to be freely expressed, and did not want to be asked open questions, characteristics which studies have shown to belong to people with low self-esteem (Cigman, 2009; Kristjánsson, 2010; Lee, 2017). There were many participants who felt great emotional pressure but did not give up. The fact that this emotional pressure was intense in the beginning but was able to be defused as the course progressed indicates the important role of the educator in eliminating the internal barriers that arise from psychological factors.

Often, the main reason why nowadays, an adult returns to learning is because they want updated knowledge, competencies, and skills to give them a cutting edge in the highly competitive job market. An adult learner has taken the important decision to add an educational programme to their already busy lives, and is, thus, a highly motivated, self-directed individual, who works hard in order to be successful. Nevertheless, emotion is an essential element of human experience whose influence on the learning process cannot be ignored. Positive emotions lead to constructive outcomes, whereas negative emotions to adverse ones.

Summing up, the emotional responses of adults participating in educational programmes may promote or inhibit the learning process. Feelings of anxiety, insecurity and frustration hamper adult learning. To address these inhibitory factors, the educators called on to apply their pedagogical and communication skills, as well as implement the appropriate teaching techniques to create an effective climate of communication and learning. The results of the present study found a discrepancy between learner expectations on the role of adult educators, which are in agreement with those reported in the literature, and the actual role of the educator that the learners experience in daily educational practice. Although challenging, we believe that real and lasting solutions can be achieved by the role of the adult educator in making learner-identified needs a central focus of educational programme planning, enhancing the quality of the educational programme structure, and tackling the internal psychological barriers of adult learners through the provision of quality learning support, communication and guidance.

As with any research, several factors may limit the generalisability of the results and threaten the internal and external validity of the study. In our study one factor is the fact that all the respondents were post-graduate students at the time of the research. This means that they were a-priori positive towards lifelong learning and this may have affected their feelings. Another factor is that the sample for the questionnaires and interviews was self-selecting and the participants may have responded in a desirable manner instead of honestly adding a degree of bias to the results. The small sample size and the short study period was a limitation in gathering data and in generalisability. Another limit is that most of the participants were women and the results might have been different had there been an equal number of both sexes. The subjectivity of the researchers is also a limitation, as with any qualitative research which we tried to reduce through triangulation.

Our research showed a difference between adult students' expectations of the educator's role and the actual role they experience. Future research should seek to study further such differences conducting deeper qualitative research using other research methods such as action research. Also, the role of the adult educator in the elimination of negative emotions in a larger sample, especially with qualitative methods, needs to be further studied. Finally, it seems important to examine what elements contribute to the elimination of negative feelings by providing more interviews and focus groups and expanding the current study with additional variables.

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