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A Message from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear colleagues,

We are pleased to present you with the proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Adult Education – Competences for Life (IAEC 2024), which took place on December 10, 2024 in Prague at the Faculty of Education, Charles University.

Charles University is the oldest university in Central Europe and has traditionally supported excellence in the humanities and other fields. The Czech Andragogy Society, co-organizer of the conference with the Faculty of Education, Charles University, is the largest professional organization in the Czech Republic specializing in development and research in the field of adult education. The conference focused on the development and strengthening of adult competences not only within formal education, but also at the professional, civic and personal levels. The emphasis was placed on the changing context of the present time, characterized by constant changes and technological progress. The international scientific conference was attended by a number of experts specializing in adult education. Among the participants were representatives from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Germany and Australia.

The content of the proceedings follows the main topics of the conference, which were presented in individual sections:

- Current challenges of school management
- Support for pedagogical development of teachers
- The impact of global changes on adult education strategies
- Seniors and the contemporary world

A number of key topics were discussed during the conference, which fundamentally influence the current form of adult education. These topics are also reflected in the analytical and research articles contained in these proceedings. The main areas of interest included the use of digital technologies in adult education and learning, including artificial intelligence, which enables the personalization of the educational process and opens up new possibilities for individualized adult learning. Another key topic was the strategic document of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports entitled Competence Framework for Graduate Teachers. The Competence Framework for Graduate Teachers was presented at the conference as a key tool for improving the quality of training of future teachers in the Czech Republic. Participants discussed not only its content and significance, but also specific implementation options at faculties preparing teachers. They focused on the integration of individual competencies into the curriculum, methods of their development and assessment during studies and pedagogical practices. Last but not least, the discussion focused on supporting the competencies of seniors as a prerequisite for their active participation in social events and maintaining autonomy in various life situations.

All included contributions are the result of the authors' original professional work, have not yet been published and were not offered for publication in other periodicals or proceedings at the time of submission.

We believe that the proceedings will bring stimulating impulses to experts, practitioners and students and contribute to the development of research and innovation in the field of adult education.

Sincerely,
Jaroslav Kříž

Model for evaluating adult learning needs

Ivan Pavlov and Soňa Szabó

Abstract:

The paper describes an innovative model for evaluating adult learning needs, developed as a result of a scientific research project and applied in practice to support the professional development of teachers in Slovakia. The model conceptualizes adult learners' learning needs and their evaluation as a necessary prerequisite for an effectively designed process of professional learning support. In a broader context, this issue falls within the field of education management in organizations, and the results of the model's validation in Slovakia have demonstrated its potential in supporting teachers' professional development in practice.

Keywords:

adult learning needs, professional development, professional learning, evaluation of learning needs, diagnosis of learning needs, identification of learning needs

Introduction

The evolving educational landscape highlights the need for lifelong learning and continuous professional development for teachers (Tamášová, 2015). European policies stress the role of adult educators in lifelong learning, necessitating systematic professional development programs (Ioannou, 2023; Chen & Murphy, 2022). Mentors play a crucial role in supporting novice teachers, and their needs must be considered in models evaluating adult learning (Jones, 2009). Developing global competence is also essential, with rubrics providing a structured approach to assessment (Parmigiani et al., 2023). Additionally, digital innovation and globalization require educators to maintain pedagogical and domain expertise through reflective frameworks (Chen & Murphy, 2022). To further refine the evaluation of adult learning needs, it's essential to consider the dynamics of professional mentoring and the theoretical underpinnings of adult learning. Mentoring has a unique dimension, influencing the professional development of mentors themselves, which should be accounted for in the evaluation process (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Goldenberg, 2023). Moreover, connecting professional learning experiences with adult learning theories, such as those explored by Kelly (2017), can provide a deeper understanding of how adults engage with and benefit from professional development initiatives. This connection emphasizes the need for learning designs that acknowledge adult learners' autonomy, prior experiences, and goal orientations.

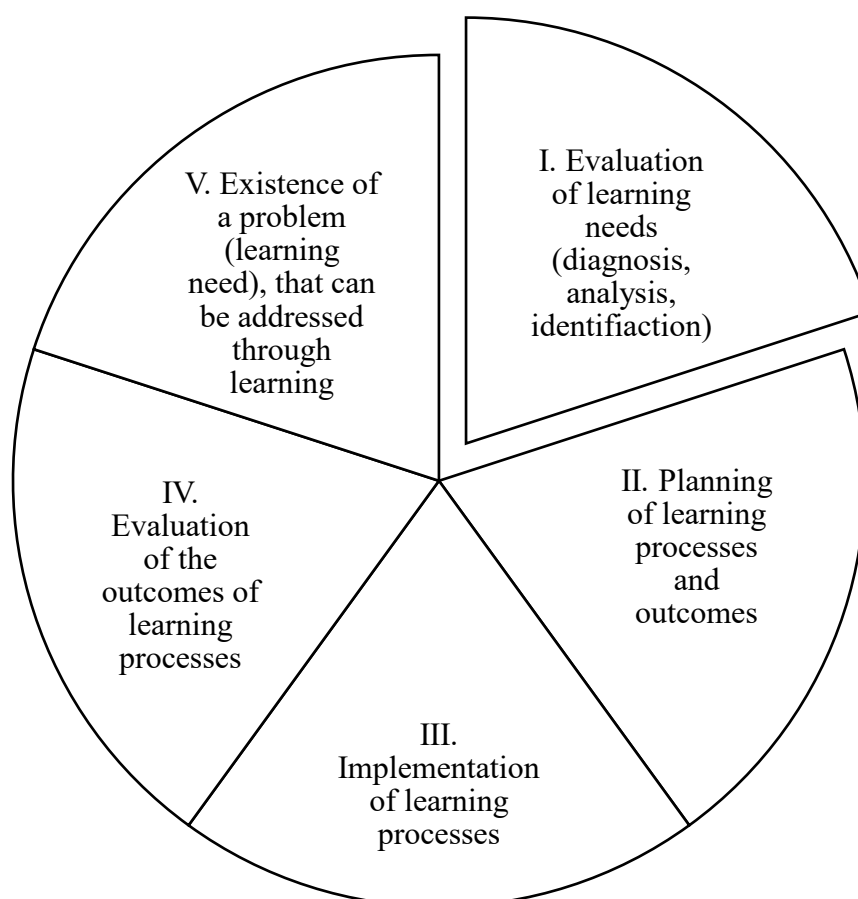
Effective professional development should integrate active learner engagement (Dunst & Trivette, 2009) and account for diverse teaching goals and methods (Njenga, 2022). Social factors such as trust, power, and recognition further shape educators' learning experiences (Salo, Francisco, & Almquist, 2024). A holistic approach to evaluating adult learning needs should incorporate insights on lifelong learning (Tamášová, 2015), teacher professional development (Ioannou, 2023), mentor support (Jones, 2009), evolving educator competencies (Chen & Murphy, 2022), global competence (Parmigiani et al., 2023), and social learning dynamics (Salo, Francisco, & Almquist, 2024). Addressing these elements ensures a more effective framework for professional growth in education.

In connection with the upcoming curricular reform in Slovakia, which is a challenge not only for decision-makers but also for basic and applied research. Research team³ faced the problem of how adult learners' (teachers') learning needs are evaluated in school organizations. Findings by Pavlov (2022b) demonstrated low validity and reliability of the evaluation methods applied not

³ The study was made possible thanks to the support of the KEGA project (006UMB-4/2023) Competence development for adult learning by modern electronic tools of learning.

only in supporting the professional development of teachers in Slovak schools but also in other organizations (Pavlu 2024). Jarvis (2004) raises doubts about the empirical study of learning needs, as it is an ambiguously defined construct. This is reflected in the fact that, during operationalization, it is often confused with learners' wishes, desires, or specific demands. Another reason for skepticism is that learning needs alone cannot serve as a basis for structuring educational offerings. This prompted a renewed conceptualization and contextualization of learning needs evaluation as a key factor in setting up effective professional learning support. The model we developed describes an optimal approach and procedure for evaluating (assessing) adult (teachers) learning needs. It is based on the fundamental principle that professional learning support should respond to the individual learning needs of adult learners. While this idea is widely accepted in the field of andragogy, there is no consensus on the conceptual foundations and methodological procedures that could be implemented directly in organizations and schools with a certain degree of external advisory support. We understand professional development and its support in a systemic way (Schema 1), as a process of continuously adapting to changes in the profession. This process includes all dimensions of personal and competency development, simultaneously fostering personal prerequisites and intrinsic motivation to lifelong learning. It enables individuals to make use of opportunities for formal, non-formal, and informal learning to creatively enhance their professional performance quality (Pavlov, 2020).

Schema 1: Evaluation of learning needs in a systemic approach to education



Source: Pavlov (2020)

Learning needs that apply in a specific work environment are not isolated from other needs of the individual. In organizations, the consideration of employee needs begins mainly when management cares about work efficiency and improvement, understanding that recognizing

employees' learning needs is an integral part of their professional development cycle and must be given professional attention. Learning needs are determined by dynamic changes on the employer's side, changes in the performed profession, labor market shifts, as well as the unique individual learning needs of employees. Learning needs represent a deficit in a person's personal or work life, which can be addressed through interventions in their learning processes. In organizations, learning needs represent a gap (the difference between what should be and what actually is) in the work performance of employees, work teams, or entire organizations, which can be filled through interventions in the learning processes of individuals, teams, or the entire organization (organizational learning).

In this sense, we can speak of individual learning needs and organizational learning needs. "Filtering" the real learning needs of adults from other (psychological, social, economic, etc.) needs is essential for effective andragogical support. Průcha (2014) defines the educational needs of individuals as states of experiencing or sensing a lack of something, a necessity for something that the subject feels is missing, something they perceive as a preference or ideal, which can be achieved through some form of education. Educational needs are influenced, on one hand, by the values shared by the individual, and on the other hand, they become a motivational stimulus for their activities. It is natural for an individual's educational needs to change throughout life (youth, adulthood, old age). Furthermore, it is emphasized that any professional education for adults can have positive outcomes only if it is based on an accurate assessment of the relevant workers' needs in relation to the content and goals of the education.

The deficit can arise from many (objective) external societal, economic, professional, and civic demands, as well as from internally (subjectively) felt learning needs oriented toward personal satisfaction and self-development. By satisfying learning needs, an individual responds throughout their life to changing external conditions and demands or internal motives, ambitions, and goals. When identifying learning needs in individual learners, we must distinguish their primary purpose (external, internal), i.e., with what goal we are examining the learning need, although both are inextricably linked and interdependent.

A learning need (triggered externally or internally) represents a deficit, for which an individual needs certain equipment, potential (tendency for self-fulfillment), which we refer to as docility (learnability) (Pavlov & Neupauer 2019). Without knowledge of the theoretical foundations of adult learning needs (subject of psychology), it is impossible to set up an effective system for their evaluation and satisfaction (subject of andragogy) in the practice of supporting lifelong learning. To identify, name, and uncover the deficit of learning needs⁴, something needs to be done, performed, because needs do not reveal themselves automatically. It is a process with certain stages and essentially involves carrying out a specific research project, as its task is to collect data using appropriate tools and techniques, analyze them, explain them, and based on them, set an intervention in practice. The classification of (learning) needs demonstrates the extraordinary variability of approaches and the complexity of their study (Zatloukal et al. 2011):

Subjective/Objective (aspect of the subject):

- subjective (assumption of the existence of a need from the employee's perspective);
- objective (recognition of the real, actual need, usually by another subject, independent of the needs evaluated by the subject).

Grouping of workers by number (aspect of quantity):

- individual;
- workgroup, team;
- organization.

Urgency (aspect of urgency):

⁴ In this topic, terms such as audit (a concept similar to financial auditing, which assesses and evaluates employee performance against a standard and has a qualitative nature) are used in professional literature, as well as mapping, diagnostics, analysis, or needs identification.

- urgent, acute, requiring immediate, priority resolution and satisfaction (e.g., biological, physiological needs);
- non-urgent, latent, dormant (e.g., higher developmental needs, historically and culturally conditioned).

Awareness (aspect of ownership):

- unconscious, attributed, tacit, unspoken, hidden, unawareness (unexpressed does not mean non-existent), it is often labeled by others, which reduces the motivation of the client to satisfy it, though it can still be useful. If the client identifies with it and accepts it as their own, they gain higher motivation to address it;
- conscious, acknowledged, explicit, named, expressible (expressed does not mean it truly exists), the individual usually has a higher motivation to satisfy it.

Feasibility (aspect of implementability):

- satisfied, fulfilled, saturated, already realized;
- unsatisfied, unfulfilled, unsaturated, not yet realized.

Orientation (aspect of focus):

- personal life, leisure;
- civic life;
- work, profession.

Stimulus (aspect of motivation - why I want to satisfy the need):

- satisfaction for economic effect (money);
- satisfaction for career advancement, employment;
- satisfaction due to a command (to gain, retain employment, qualification, application);
- satisfaction for acquiring and expressing values;
- other motives.

Self-confidence (aspect of commitment and independence):

- heteronomous – requiring support, advice, external help;
- autonomous – relying on oneself, self-help from within;
- combined – requiring both approaches.

Reactivity/Proactivity (aspect of response):

- reactive need, when the individual reacts to an immediate situation they need to manage (focus on deficit);
- proactive need, when the individual sees a goal or challenge to overcome in the future (focus on development).

Career Path (aspect of professional experience or career position):

- beginner;
- experienced, independent;
- expert, certified.

Cause of Origin (aspect of the reason for the need):

- legislative regulations, internal organizational norms;
- absence of necessary competencies for work performance (due to external evaluation);
- self-reflection of work activities.

Type of Learning Need (aspect of "didactic" deficit):

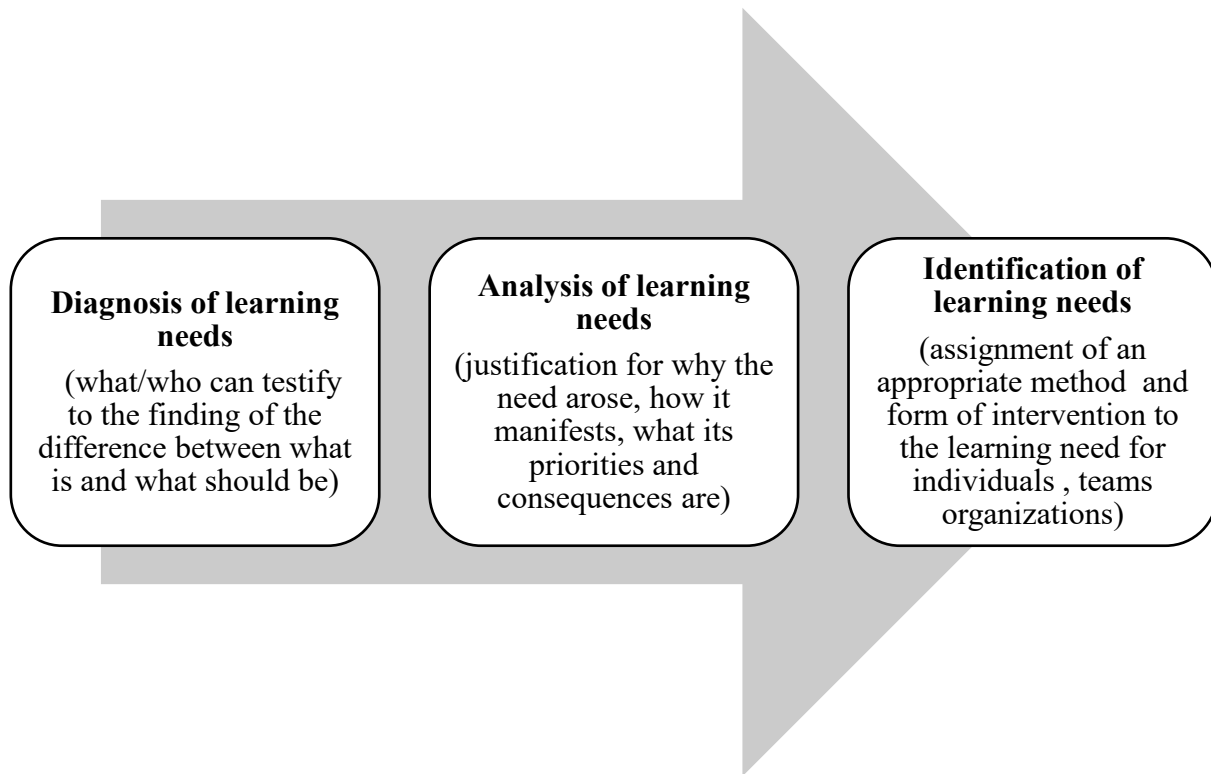
- lack of knowledge;
- lack of skills;
- lack of experience;
- lack of attitudes.

Levels of analysis and realization of learning needs (aspect of hierarchy in the social context):

- individuals;
- age, socio-economic, ethnic, and socio-professional groups (young adults, unemployed, ethnic minorities, soldiers, teachers, civil servants, etc.);
- entire society (as national priorities, strategies, and education concepts).

The evaluation stage of learning needs in this process is characterized as the first step. It responds to those needs that have emerged in the practice of professional learning and require satisfaction (Stage V). The evaluation of learning needs internally consists of three logically and systematically interconnected steps, which are a prerequisite for effective professional learning planning (Schema 2).

Schema 2: Steps in the learning needs evaluation process

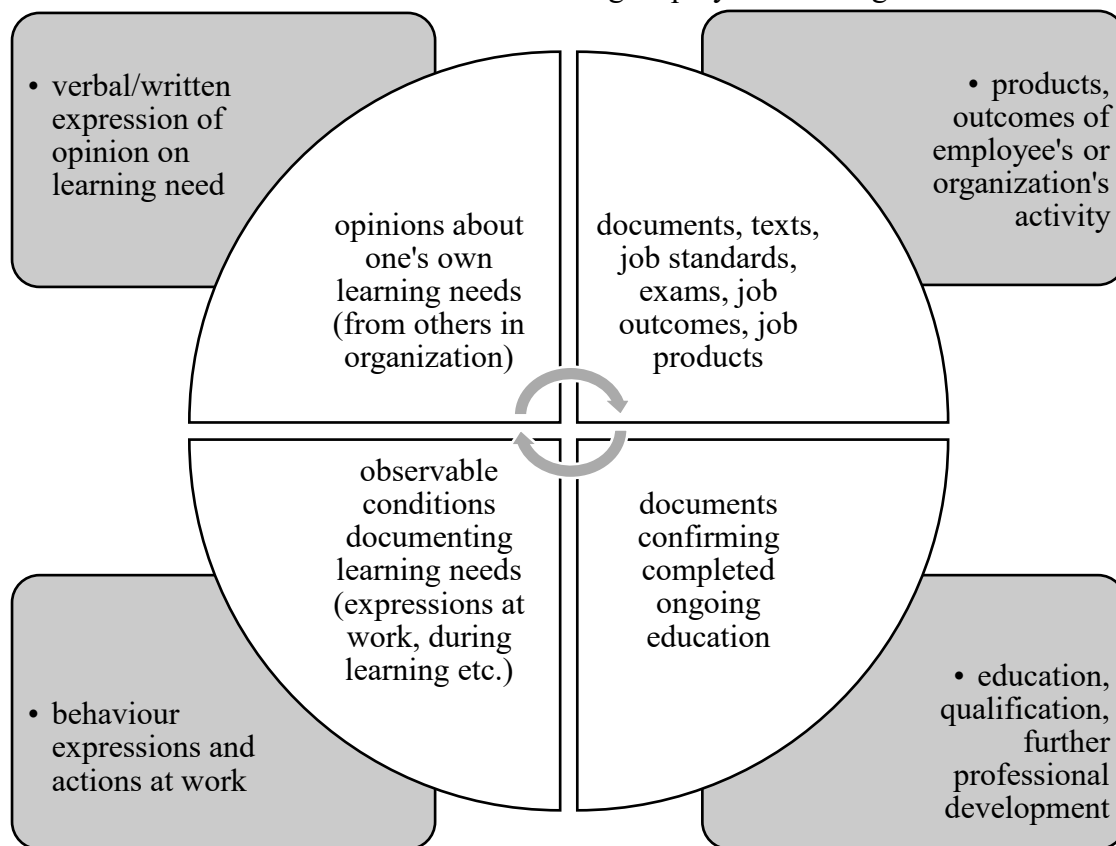


Source: Pavlov & Valent (2020)

Diagnosing learning needs

Where can information about potential learning needs be obtained? In Schema 3, we have outlined four main areas (verbal expressions, work outputs, behavioral manifestations, and learning outcomes) where sources (evidence) of potential learning needs of employees in an organization can be identified.

Schema 3: Sources indicating employees' learning needs



Source: Pavlov (2022, s.38)

Analysis of learning needs

After collecting and processing data and information, the next step is to analyze them. The analysis of learning needs involves breaking down, organizing, and classifying the findings. Quantitative analysis requires the use of mathematical and statistical methods (frequency, sorting, evaluating significance and weight, distribution, etc.). Qualitative analysis requires systematic analytical work with non-numerical data to uncover hidden themes, patterns, relationships, etc. During this analysis, the expert (requiring theoretical preparation, experience, and analytical-synthetic abilities) interprets the collected results – explaining certain texts, ideas, or phenomena.

It is a systematic breakdown of what the data indicate, the relationships between them, what they mean for the individual and the organization, why they occurred, and at the same time clarifies the significance and peculiarities of the findings for future development. The outcome (analysis report) has variant character and generally serves as a basis for further decisions (identification of additional measures and interventions to improve the situation). The evaluator will provide the client with justification for the learning needs identified, provide arguments for why they are considered significant, explain their causes, manifestations, and consequences, and make recommendations for implementing measures (e.g., prioritizing those learning needs that should be urgently addressed).

Identification of learning needs

Identification of learning needs refers to assigning a known variable – an identifier (the recognized learning need) – to an unknown entity (organization, team, individual) in such a way that it becomes known. The identified learning needs are then assigned recommendations for further action (how to address them). In our context, this includes assigning:

- the optimal, effective tool or method to satisfy the learning need, such as education (in-person or distance), self-education, training, coaching, mentoring, tutoring, etc. (Pavlov, 2021);
- a suitable timeframe for organizing the intervention, possibly specifying the duration of the intervention;
- the form of support (internal or external, formal, informal, or non-formal);
- the provider (external supplier or self-directed).

It is clear that the person preparing the intervention for learning needs must understand and directly target the learning activity to meet the employee's need. Practically, this means designing learning activities that align with the identified needs. Before identifying suitable tools to address diagnosed learning needs, it is important to recognize that each need has a specific method for its effective satisfaction. The approach to satisfying a need related to knowledge differs from that of satisfying a need related to skills, experience, or attitudes. Naturally, a learning need may also involve a combination of these aspects.

Vodák and Kucharčíková (2011) state that the result of analyzing and identifying educational needs is a list of educational and other needs of employees, along with a proposal for an educational program or suggestions for addressing other identified problems and needs. In our view, the outcome of identifying learning needs is the proposal of recommendations for the client (depending on the client's order), such as a proposal (plan) and implementation of a professional development support program. This is tailored and includes specific activities (in all phases of the cycle) that have a broad spectrum (educational, training, counseling, etc.).

When designing a professional development plan, the critical question is whether the need is related to learning or another issue (i.e., whether the problem can be solved exclusively through learning). If the problem cannot be solved through learning, it is necessary to make further decisions about the next steps.

Conclusion

The proposed theoretical-empirical study presents a model for evaluating the learning needs of adult learners in workplace organizations, developed by a team of researchers in an applied andragogical research project. Its strengths include clarity, contextual grounding, and conceptualization within a broad field of andragogical theories (Veteška, 2016).

The verification of the pilot phase of the model revealed findings that it has the potential to appeal to school managements (Pavlov, 2020b) as an effective tool for planning professional development support for teachers in preparation for curriculum reform (Valent, 2019). A concomitant result was the training of professional development advisors and teachers at schools, who adopted the methodology for evaluating learning needs. The collected experiences and insights will be expanded in the next phase of the applied research to include the forthcoming methodology for planning professional development support (Pavlov et al., 2021).

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