



INCORPORATE NON-FORMAL METHODS INTO LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR ADULT IMMIGRANTS

Policy report

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Background

Europe is experiencing one of the most significant influxes of immigrants and refugees in its history. Pushed by civil war, violence, abuses and poverty and pulled by the promise of a better life more than a million immigrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015 and much more in 2016. While European countries are struggling to cope with the influx and best deal with resettling people a serious matter arises regarding their integration in the host societies and their inclusion in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the Member States.

The first asset that an immigrant needs upon his/her arrival in a new country of residence and the lack of which is a key factor that hinders his/her inclusion, is the knowledge of the spoken language in the host country. The lack of sufficient knowledge of the language makes them weak to perform any daily activity, to search, find and maintain a job, to meet the needs of their families and to integrate in the local communities, resulting in low living standards, unemployment and marginalization.

Adult education sector can respond to this need by offering effective educational opportunities based on the needs and characteristics of the target group. By incorporating in the learning process new methods and practices and continuously improving the skills of the people active in the field, better results will be achieved for both the learners and the society as a whole.

In this context a partnership of three organizations from Greece (**NGO CIVIS PLUS**), Spain (**NEO SAPIENS**) and Cyprus (**Euroculture**) with rich experience on adult education, working with immigrants/refugees, formal and non- formal education has been implementing the project **“Incorporate Non- formal Methods into language education for adult immigrants”**. It is a strategic partnership in the field of adult education in the context of the European program **“Erasmus Plus”** that started in **September 2015** and will be completed in **August 2017**. Its overall aim is to improve the quality of teaching a foreign language to adult immigrants/refugees by incorporating in the teaching process non formal learning methods.

The idea of the current project was based on two main facts:

- The first asset that an immigrant/refugee needs upon his/her arrival in a new country of residence and the lack of which is a key factor that hinders his/her inclusion, is the knowledge of the spoken language in the host country. Knowing the language of the host country is a prerequisite for survival, interaction with the local community, education, employment and integration.
- Non formal learning methods are gaining more and more recognition and are indicated as highly effective means of acquiring knowledge and skills. Their use can offer a more innovative, targeted and participatory learning process that can develop simultaneously varying learners' abilities and skills.

A big process, as described below, has been followed these months in order to collect information on the topic from the educators themselves and prepare a relevant booklet:

- 6 focus groups were implemented which involved 49 people active or willing to work in the field both in formal and non-formal education. During the focus groups and through participatory activities the participants discussed the dynamics of using non-formal learning methods in adult training and language teaching as well as the possibility of strengthening the traditional curricula by incorporating non formal learning methods.
- 24 workshops took place and 104 educators discussed about the topic and created in total 40 practical language teaching activities. 30 of them were selected, updated and improved and are presented in the booklet's part 3.
- 41 meetings with educational bodies and relevant organizations were implemented in order to discuss about the use of non- formal methods in language teaching and especially when adult immigrants are the learners. Best practices, methodologies, opinions and concerns were shared during these meetings and were incorporated in the booklet.
- When all these information were gathered the working groups undertook a **research** on the topic and drafted the current booklet, based on the reports of the previously mentioned activities and the new data from their research. The booklet was tested before its final publication and adjustments were made based on the opinion of the educators and the learners.
- 6 training courses were implemented and 92 people were trained on the content of the booklet. Special emphasis was given on the application of the 30 practical teaching activities.

Key findings& policy recommendations

During these two years and the activities being implemented in the context of the project **“Incorporate Non- Formal Methods into Language Education for Adult Immigrants”**, the consortium had the opportunity to come in contact with a big number of educators and bodies providing language courses for immigrants/ refugees. This contact provided the consortium with rich and useful information on the topic, deep insight on the immigrants/ refugees’ learning needs and interesting ideas on language teaching. In the current report one can find for his/her reference some key findings and policy recommendations that came as a result of the process described above. For a deeper insight one can download the booklet “Non formal Pathways in Language Teaching” at <https://nonformalmethods.wordpress.com/intellectual-output/>.

Key findings

- Acquiring the language spoken in the host country is a prerequisite for immigrants' inclusion in the host society. Better language skills can improve their daily lives, make them feel more powerful, protect them from victimization and minimize the racism against them.
- The effectiveness and success of a language course addressed to immigrants/ refugees depends a lot on whether it covers their urgent and basic needs. The topics and the other language aspects to be taught should be carefully chosen based on their real situation and needs and teaching should be as personalized as possible.
- All the participants agreed that the use of only one book, that will be strictly followed, is not an effective choice for this target group. The combination of different resources and the creation of original materials for the specific learners each time are really important and can improve the learning outcomes.
- The teaching methods should be adapted to the needs of the specific groups of learners. Immigrants/ refugees are usually emotionally tired, so an interactive and more participatory method is more effective. Non – formal methods can make the learning process more pleasant and attractive and can help the learners see the learning process not as a duty.
- Most adults are very used to the formal learning methods so the application of non-formal learning methods will be a “surprise” for them and will attract their interest.
- The adult learners usually have a strong opinion on what they should learn; the educators should take into consideration these opinions and adapt their methodology. This can be effectively happened by introducing non- formal methods.
- Adult immigrant learners usually want to learn very fast the things needed for their daily life. Non- formal methods can offer them this opportunity as selected topics and aspects will be taught based on their real needs.
- The immigrant adult learners are observed to be less patient and to get easier disappointed if they don't see immediate results. Non formal learning methods, through the practical exercise of the things taught already from the class, minimize this risk and keep the learners motivated.
- Educators are not used to the non- formal methods due to their own learning experiences and their familiarity with formal and traditional teaching methods. The need to increase their knowledge and skills in the field is really urgent.
- It is really important the educator to be culturally sensitive and informed about the cultures of his/her learners. Moreover to promote activities of cultural exchange between the learners in order to promote mutual understanding and create a sense of equality in the classroom. Adults are even more connected with their own culture and it should be totally respected by all. Discussions and activities around culture is a very good mean to promote peer learning and create bonds between the peers.
- Regarding the teaching of a language through non formal methods most of the participants agreed that there should be a balance between the use of formal and non-

formal methods. In this way the learning process is not boring and tiring and the learning is easier.

- It was highlighted that for adults the motif “The educator tells, the learners hear, keep notes and do exercises at home” is not appealing. With non-formal methods the lesson is not perceived as duty and it takes a fresh character, more interesting and effective. Non formal methods enable experiential learning and the use of learners’ all senses with better learning results. They also allow peer learning. Learners have the opportunity to influence and assist each other.
- Some participants with experiences with immigrants said that it must not escape our attention the fact that different group of immigrants behave according to their culture limitations so any implemented method must consider all relative factors in order to be effective.
- As most of the entities providing language courses to immigrants/refugees work with volunteer teachers, some of them are not totally prepared to work with the target group even if they are mainly language teachers. They need an extra training about what this work means. The entities have a lot of problems with the logistics, coordination and establishing efficient trainings according to the needs of the users and with the resources that they have as the language level of the learners is usually different inside a class.
- There is a big need to promote networking activities among entities working on the project field that could allow their professionals not only to exchange good practices, but also to try to arrange and agree common working approaches and steps that could cover the needs of the majority.
- Villages or small towns do not usually have entities offering language courses. Learners cannot afford public transport to bigger cities. A regional strategy to include them and promote the mobility of teachers should be created.

Policy Recommendations

- ❖ Integration policies and actions must give emphasis on language learning. Language learning must be recognized as one of the most important parts of the integration process.
- ❖ More bodies of formal and non-formal education must be established and states should form also regulations for non-formal bodies. More state funds must be spent and offered to non-formal bodies in order to provide more qualitative and structured services.
- ❖ Language curricula and text books should emphasize more on the real needs of immigrants/ refugees based on the different factors shaping their learning needs such as the duration of their stay in the host country, their educational level, their legal status, age etc. Curricula should be more flexible and educators should be offered more freedom to make choices on the teaching topics and implementing methods, make changes in the order the topics will be introduced and to use their own original materials.

- ❖ At least two different official text books should be available for the educators. They should be motivated to create and use their own original materials based on the needs of the learners. Means to share these materials with their colleagues must be developed by the official educational bodies and promoted to the educators. e.g. a special website or forums.
- ❖ Non – formal methods must be promoted more by the states. Their use in combination with the formal ones must be encouraged and included in the curricula. New educational resources based on non-formal methods must be drafted and educators must be trained on their application.
- ❖ Educators should be trained on and encouraged to apply needs assessment practices in the beginning of their courses and adapt the course’s structure on the results.
- ❖ The practical application of what is taught must be encouraged during the lessons inside or outside the classroom. Interaction between the learners and the local society must be part of the teaching process either by bringing elements of the local society in the classroom or by opening the educational process to the local societies.
- ❖ Structured and organized courses and seminars must be provided by the states in order to train the educators, increase their knowledge and familiarity with non- formal education.
- ❖ A new lesson about non formal learning methods could be included in the university curricula.
- ❖ Curricula and textbooks should ensure that language teaching is closely connected with employment by providing opportunities for the learners to exercise basic things on the topic. e.g. writing a CV, looking for job vacancies e.t.c.
- ❖ A system of certification should be developed for non-formal education and validity should be given to the non-formal learning opportunities.
- ❖ More opportunities of multicultural education must be provided to the educators. Motilities and traineeships in multicultural environments could offer a practical experience and must be combined with relevant training courses and seminars. Educators should be prepared and trained on how to effectively manage mixed groups of learners and multicultural classrooms. Activities of cultural exchanges between the learners must be incorporated in the language curricula.
- ❖ More funds and opportunities must be offered to non-formal educational bodies in order to properly train their staff, prepare educational materials and maintain for longer their educational programs addressed to immigrants/refugees.
- ❖ More language entities must be developed in rural areas as people living there cannot afford the travel costs to bigger cities for attending the lessons. Otherwise the states should make provisions for educators’ mobility in these areas. A regional strategy should be developed in order all the people to have access in language learning opportunities independently of their financial status.

One can find more information about the project activities at

<https://nonformalmethods.wordpress.com/>