

# Professional roles of university teachers in the context of adult educator competence models

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**Abstract** As a result of the increasing share of the adult population in education in recent years, the professional role of university teachers has changed and shifted more significantly towards the role of adult educators (from pedagogical to andragogical competences). It is questionable whether the consequences of massification and diversification of higher education are reflected in the development competence frameworks for adult educators. The presented overview study analyses 10 competence models in chronological order with the goal to determine whether they integrate the professional roles of university teachers. The results suggest that the described trends are not yet explicitly defined in the competence frameworks of adult educators.

**Key words** adult education, university teacher, professional roles, andragogy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Massification of university education together with the world-wide response to the changing labour market requirements and increasing qualification requirements have resulted in an expanded number of university students. The quantitative expansion has also caused significant diversity in students and at the same time, inequality in terms of their study prerequisites, since a large portion of them wish to receive practice-oriented education useful in the labour market. Inevitably, massification of university education required diversification, therefore, in many developed countries, new university sectors and subsectors have been created to ensure equal access to education but maintain the quality of universities as a sector at the same time. Apart from the traditional unitary system, the binary system allows for gradual differentiation of institutions into academically oriented universities and professionally oriented colleges. The latter provide tertiary, however, non-academic education in a shorter cycle and focused specifically on the practical industry requirements (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport – MoESR; Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information – SCSTI SR, 2015).

Although the quantitative expansion of university education around the world can be observed since the end of the previous century, the increasing number of students enrolled in Slovakia in 2003–2007 was even higher than in more developed European countries. The

share of students enrolled in universities has increased from 32.3% of the total population in 1995 by 2.5 times to a high of 84.5% in 2007. Due to this development, Slovakia produced the biggest number of Master's level graduates in the world in 2016 (CEM, 2017).

In relation to the impact of this massification, the AES („Adult Education Survey“) has pointed out that the participation of the adult population aged 25–64 in education has been increasing. In 2015, this group amounted to 44.6% of students in the EU and 46.1% in Slovakia (In EUROSTAT, 2020). Beneš (2014) has explained that interest-based education has been transforming into education focused on professional competence acquisition, therefore further qualification education has become the most rapidly growing education and by extension, service sector. Besides formal adult education, further education programmes have also become attractive – mainly those providing requalification or further specialised education and are provided by universities in the form of life-long learning. According to the statistical data pertaining to 2019 (MoESR and SCSTI SR, 2020), Slovak universities offered 72 further education study programmes, which represents 15.4% of the relevant offer. It is a 4-fold increase in comparison to the years 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, in which universities offered 3.65%, 3.85%, 3.36% and 4.48% respectively of the total number of active subjects in further education.

### 1.1 The changing role of university teachers

It is desirable to maintain the quality of universities despite their massification and diversification. Beneš (2006) has pointed out that the educational institutions are held accountable for the quality of their services. The changes in the sector of education result not only from the social development and labour market requirements, but also the requirements of the service recipients, who are getting more demanding, educated, pickier, and more critical of the quality of the educational process. The role of the university teacher in the process of improving tertiary education is of key importance; the requirements regarding their professional competences are growing.

Despite the increase in the number of students and by extension, their diversity in terms of age, study prerequisites, practical experience as well as the increasing demand for further and requalification education provided by universities, the changes in

the role of the university teachers remain overlooked. In terms of the Universities as Engines of Developing Knowledge-Based Society national project (2015), SCSTI SR has pointed out that while the traditional university education offers the “elite” model accessible exclusively to the talented students (approx. 15% of the population), massification gave way to a universal model allowing more than half of the population to attend universities. However, the effort to make university education accessible to an increasing number of (adult) population gives rise to discrepancies in terms of educational needs and expectations from the educational processes and teachers as key figures.

Beneš (2006) has pointed the terminological inconsistency in referring to the professional role of university teachers as pedagogues, adult educators, and andragogues. Moreover, despite the fact that universities do not focus primarily on further specialised education, many university teachers perform the role of lecturers in and outside the academy. According to the statistics of the Institute for Educational Information and Prognosis (MoESR and SCSTI SR, 2020), there were 5,781 lecturers working across educational institutions in total and 2,011 of them worked at universities (34.8%). Beneš (2006) has further pointed out that although the majority of students are adults, university teachers are not considered adult educators or andragogues. However, the university teacher has to take into consideration that adult students are more experienced, autonomous, and motivated, and may even possess higher education and specialised competences. It is necessary to distinguish the roles of teachers working with adults vs. those working with children.

Despite long-term initiatives aimed to professionalise the area, many authors including Despotović (2012) have emphasized that it is difficult to precisely specify the profession and professional roles when it comes to adult education. The dictionary of andragogy (Průcha, Veteška, 2012) broadly defines an adult educator as an expert, usually with university education, who teaches adults in and outside the school environment. It can be seen that “adult educator” is a broad term encompassing a whole range of activities related to preparation, leadership, and evaluation in an educational process. In fact, the adult educator roles can be categorised as e.g. supervisor, instructor, consultant, methodologist, lecturer, education manager, trainer, mentor, facilitator, etc.

Initiatives to unify the professional standards and adult educator competences can also be seen in a number of European research projects. For example, the Q-ACT (“Qualifying the Actors in Adult and Continuing Education”) and ALPINE (“Adult Learning Professions in Europe”) projects (both 2007–2008) focused on the diversity in adult educator professional roles. Both these studies have indicated that adult educator as a profession is diverse in terms of e.g. degree of qualification, working time, or job position (statistics show that 65% of adult educators are in fact, lecturers). There is a variety of professional specialisations, types and levels of educational institutions (state, private, non-profit), and forms of education (formal, informal) (ALPINE, 2008).

## 1.2 Research goals

In the context of the long-term processes steering towards adult educator professionalisation and the desire to unify the respective standards and competences, the first step is to define the professional focus and role. The ALPINE and Q-ACT studies (2008) have both admitted that adult educators also work at universities. The objective is to identify whether other research projects abroad have identified adult educators in tertiary education as well. The adult educators’ degrees of qualification will also be

addressed. The question is whether the qualifications specified in adult educator competence models correspond with the university teacher qualifications.

## 2. METHODS

This study involves theoretical research and takes the form of a systematic overview study. The material will be collected from specialised literature and analysed in terms of content (qualitative analysis).

The material comprises 10 research projects, 8 European and 2 American ones. The research projects were selected based on the following criteria: they were implemented after 2000 (current research was opted for to allow for the observation of short-term changes in university education), involved creation of complex adult educator competence models, and included these key words: adult educator, adult learning professionals, adult learning facilitators, or adult education teacher. Understandably, the selection (first, databases ResearchGate, WOS, Scopus, Science Direct were searched, then a detailed search based on primary sources) does not include all foreign research studies on adult educator competence models from the specified period.

The content analysis allowed for the identification of qualification categories (according to the European Qualifications Framework) and adult educator professional roles in the individual research projects, which are listed in chronological order in Table 1 based on their implementation period.

## 3. RESULTS

The results of the systematic overview study (see the overview in Table 1) indicate that the professional foci of adult educators vary based on their professional role, qualifications, and working time.

The AGADE, VINEPAC, FLEXI-PATH, and “The Concept for a transnational qualification framework for learning facilitators in adult and continuing education in Europe” projects have specified the professional roles of adult educators in detail and determined the criteria for their professional foci (specific qualification requirements, job positions, and practice hours). In the follow-up projects, the effort to generalise and perform representative mapping of the adult educator professional roles can be observed. The “Key competences for adult learning professionals” QF2TEACH, and DEMAL projects have summarised the terms referring to adult educators (adult education professionals, teaching staff, or facilitators) and identified their professional roles (lecturer, consultant, trainer, manager, etc.). On the other hand, three projects, i.e. “Adult Education Teacher Competencies”, “Maryland Adult Education Teacher Standards Framework”, and GRETA have not determined specific professional roles of adult educators, which shows more flexibility in the attitude to their diversity. However, none of these projects included university teaching among the professional roles of adult educators. Only four competence models analysed in this study (“Key competences of adult learning professionals”, “Adult Education Teacher Competencies”, “Professional Standards for Teachers in Adult Education”, and GRETA) are potentially applicable to university teachers in terms of their qualification requirements because they have not explicitly defined them.

Table 1: Overview of results

Project name	Qualification requirement EQF*	Professional roles
<b>AGADE</b> A good adult educator in Europe 2004–2006	5	Lector, consultant, facilitator, supervisor
<b>VINEPAC</b> Validation of informal and non-formal psychopedagogical competencies of adult educators 2006–2008	5	Trainer
<b>FLEXI-PATH</b> Flexible professional pathways for adult educator between the 6th and 7th level of EQF 2009–2011	6-7	Educators in managing and leadership positions
<b>Key competences for adult learning professionals</b> 2010	No restrictions	Adult education professionals (lector, manager, facilitator...)
<b>DEMAL</b> Designing, Monitoring and Evaluation of Adult Learning Processes 2018	4-7	Teaching staff (lector, facilitator, trainer...)
<b>QF2TEACH</b> Qualified to teach – Core competencies of adult learning facilitators in Europe 2009–2011	5-6	Facilitator (lector, trainer, supervisor, consultant)
<b>The Concept for a transnational qualification framework for learning facilitators in adult and continuing education in Europe</b> 2011	5-6	Facilitator
<b>Adult Education Teacher Competencies</b> 2015	No restrictions	Adult educator
<b>Maryland Adult Education Teacher Standards Framework</b> 2015	No restrictions	Adult educator
<b>GRETA</b> A Competence Model for Teachers and Trainers 2019–2021	No restrictions	Adult educator

\* (European Qualifications Framework levels), 5=post-high school study; 6=Bachelor degree; 7=Master degree; 8=Doctoral degree

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of the overview study correspond with the information from the theoretical resources (Beneš, 2006; Despotovič, 2012; Průcha, Veteška, 2012; ALPINE, 2008); it is indeed difficult to explicitly specify the professional foci and roles of adult educators. A gradual increase in the qualification requirements can be observed during the analysed period. The projects have defined educators with university education; specifically, the ALPINE study of 2008 play an important role by drawing attention to the growing group of adult educators working at universities who are required to be PhDs. The study has provided a number of examples (e.g. Poland) in which the majority of educators regardless of the workplace type have tertiary education which correspond with EQF level 8. The following project entitled “Key competences for adult learning professionals”, which drew from the ALPINE study did not define the qualification level for the adult educators and left this aspect open. On the other hand, the projects QF2TEACH and its follow-up “The Concept for a transnational qualification framework for learning facilitators in adult and continuing education in Europe”, which also draw from ALPINE, both specify the required qualifications as EQF levels 5–6. Romania and Italy disagreed with this requirement and pointed out that many adult educators actually have doctoral degrees and work at universities.

The projects implemented since 2015 have specified a complex set of competences and standards focusing on knowledge and skills

required from all adult educators regardless of their professional focus. It can be stated that the last three projects have responded to the world-wide massification trend in education and changing educational requirements of the service recipients by promoting initiatives to create and implement generally applicable adult educator competence models in all educational institutions and any qualification requirements.

The qualification requirements for adult educators are increasing (e.g. in terms of variety) or remain undefined for the sake of flexibility. This study aims to point out that the professional role of university teachers as adult educators has not been explicitly determined and the andragogical context of their job needs attention.

The ultimate goal is to reform universities while retaining their quality, which results in the increased requirements regarding university teachers’ professional competences. Although both their role and approach to education as such are changing, the fact that (adult) student groups are becoming more heterogeneous remains overlooked. The increase in the number of students require university teachers to adapt if they are to address their needs, however, the expert community still pays little attention to this issue.

As Yoshimoto, Inenaga and Yamada (2007) have pointed out, in this situation, pedagogical and andragogical approaches need to be combined. The current, universal approach to university education requires adaptation of the curricula as well as teaching methodology to cater to a broader population group. The traditional approach relying on pedagogical approaches focused on passive learning is shifting towards active forms of adult learning support taking into account their potential, experience, and needs. The traditional pedagogical role of university teachers will have to transform into the professional role of adult educators and incorporate andragogical teaching approaches.

Despotovič (2012) has pointed out that the ongoing changes are bringing forward andragogical knowledge and competences. They remain underestimated in the qualification requirements despite the fact that andragogical training is a factor determining the quality of adult educators at universities and many other educational institutions. “The professional qualification standard of adult educator/andragogue” (Estonia) is a good example of how the adult educators’ qualifications can be unified (in Despotovič, 2012). It specifies the role of adult educators and andragogues as a single profession performed (besides other environments) at universities by professionals who have completed tertiary education.

The question is whether and how much the roles of adult educators, lectors, andragogues, and university teachers differ, since their students are adults enrolled in internal/external, further specialised, and requalification study programmes. Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016) have offered some interesting ideas regarding the changes in university education. They have pointed out the variety of challenges tackled by university teachers on the daily basis, e.g. they have to facilitate the same educational conditions for students of different ages, work experience, and education – and sometimes deal with young students freshly out of high schools who arrive unprepared. The authors consider important for the teachers to approach internal and external students identically in terms of methodology relevant for adult educational needs. According to Beneš (2006), university teachers apply identical pedagogical and didactic competences whether they perform the role of a pedagogue or a lector.

The question is whether adult education as a profession should integrate university teachers since they inevitably apply andragogical competences in the teaching process.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results of the systematic overview indicated that the role of university teacher has not yet been explicitly defined in terms of adult education and the respective professional focus. However, the massification of university education, changing educational needs, and increasing numbers of adult students are shifting the tasks of university teachers towards adult education. Therefore, university teachers' professional preparation and further development should respond to this situation.

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