

РОЗДІЛ I

ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ТА ПРИКЛАДНІ АСПЕКТИ ОСВІТИ ДОРОСЛИХ

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THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF ADULT SELF-LEARNING IN INFORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract. The article has conducted conceptualization of non-formal adult learning within the context of andragogical theory and practice. The purpose of the study is to analyze the theoretical and applied aspects of adult self-directed learning in a non-formal educational environment. The research employed a comprehensive set of methods, including theoretical analysis, synthesis and generalization of academic literature, classification and modeling, as well as interviews with learners and analysis of their experiences in order to identify the specific features of the learning process and the factors influencing it. The study analyzes informational, philosophical, and andragogical concepts related to «learning ability» and «self-learning» as the main prerequisites for an individual's learning capacity within the framework of lifelong learning. Particular attention is paid to theoretical ambiguities and terminological contradictions in the interpretation of non-formal learning, which is often understood as a spontaneous, unorganized, and unconscious process. It is argued that non-formal learning is associated with the concept of «learning ability» as an individual's educational potential that can be developed through andragogical approaches. It is

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concluded that, from the perspective of andragogy, non-formal learning is an integral component of lifelong learning and requires a specific approach and appropriate support. Unlike formal and informal education, it lacks clear institutional coordination, which necessitates the use of focused andragogical tools, including systems for the validation of learning outcomes, individual support, and counselling mechanisms that connect personal experience with the educational context. Future research should focus on a deeper understanding the mechanisms of self-directed and incidental learning, as well as on identifying effective ways to support these processes in the context of professional activity, community life, and everyday practices.

Key words: non-formal learning; in-formal learning; self-education; humility (ability to learn); andragogical intervention.

ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ТА ПРИКЛАДНІ АСПЕКТИ САМОНАВЧАННЯ ДОРΟΣЛИХ У НЕФОРМАЛЬНОМУ ОСВІТНЬОМУ ПРОСТОРІ

Анотація. У статті здійснено концептуалізацію неформального навчання дорослих у контексті андрагогічної теорії та практики. Метою дослідження є аналіз теоретичних і прикладних аспектів самостійного навчання дорослих у неформальному освітньому середовищі. У процесі дослідження використано комплекс методів, зокрема теоретичний аналіз, синтез і узагальнення наукової літератури, класифікацію та моделювання, а також інтерв'ювання суб'єктів навчання й аналіз їхнього досвіду з метою з'ясування особливостей перебігу навчального процесу та чинників, що на нього впливають. Здійснено аналіз інформаційних, філософських та андрагогічних понять щодо «здатності до навчання» та «самонавчання» як основних передумов навчальних здібностей людини у процесі навчання протягом усього життя. Акцентується увага на теоретичних неоднозначних трактуваннях та термінологічних суперечностях у розумінні неформального навчання, яке часто трактується як спонтанний, неорганізований та несвідомий процес. Доведено, що неформальне навчання пов'язується з концепцією «здатності до навчання» як навчального потенціалу особистості, який можна розвивати за допомогою андрагогіки. Зроблено висновок, що з позицій андрагогіки неформальне навчання є невід'ємною складовою навчання впродовж життя та потребує специфічного підходу й належної підтримки. На відміну від формальної та інформальної освіти, воно не має чіткої інституційної координації, що зумовлює необхідність застосування цілеспрямованих андрагогічних інструментів, зокрема систем валідації результатів навчання, індивідуального супроводу та консультативних механізмів, які поєднують особистий досвід людини з освітнім контекстом. Подальші дослідження мають бути спрямовані на глибше осмислення механізмів самостійного та випадкового навчання, а також на пошук ефективних способів підтримки цих процесів у контексті професійної діяльності, громадського життя та повсякденних практик.

Ключові слова: неформальне навчання; інформальне навчання; самоосвіта; покірність (здатність до навчання); андрагогічне втручання.

Problem statement and its relevance. The concept of lifelong learning is based on the triad of formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012). The European Union understands lifelong learning and its forms as a central project for the integration of the European Education Area, in which the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000), Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Council of the European Union, 2018), European Education Area (Council of the European Union, 2021), and Recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts (Council of the European Union, 2022) are the programming documents. Their initiative gives rise to theoretical concepts,

application models, policy recommendations, and interpretative frameworks of discourse on the types of lifelong learning and its support. Formal, non-formal, and informal learning should be equal in terms of program qualifications, and therefore, mechanisms for certification, validation of informal learning (formalization of informal learning and non-formalization of formal education) are created. Informal learning is understood as the result of everyday activities related to work, family life, or leisure time and is not organised or structured according to the objectives, time, or support of learning. Informal learning does not have to be merely intentional from the learner's point of view. This concept is often a scientifically discussed topic because its conceptualization is based on many theoretical starting points, and despite considerable research efforts, it is still unconvincingly anchored and interpreted.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Efforts to conceptualize informal learning undertaken by Livingstone (2002), Schugurensky (2000), and Bennett (2012) have introduced new perspectives and interpretations; however, they have not yet fully clarified this multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Solarczyk-Szwec (2024) characterizes informal learning as a culturally variable phenomenon dependent on the socio-political context, closely connected with everyday life and the diversity of learning contexts, occurring consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously, which creates significant definitional and conceptual difficulties. Schugurensky (2000), using the categories of intentionality and awareness, distinguishes three types of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization. Self-directed learning is intentional and conscious, incidental learning is unintentional but conscious, whereas socialization (also referred to as tacit learning) involves the internalization of values, attitudes, and behaviors in everyday life that occurs unintentionally and unconsciously. Bennett (2012) reconceptualized this model into a four-dimensional matrix by adding integrative learning as a fourth dimension. The Polish scholar Pierscieniak (2023) defines this newly introduced dimension as autonomously selective learning.

The professional discourse surrounding the politically established concept of informal learning also develops in the context of criticism of European Union educational policies and practices. These policies are often interpreted as manifestations of neoliberal approaches to education, where economic utility becomes the dominant criterion for evaluating educational quality (Pupala & Kaščák, 2011). At the same time, research on non-formal adult education continues to expand. In particular, Lukianova (2021), Kravchenko (2025), and others investigate various aspects of adult learning and professional development in non-formal educational settings. Anishchenko (2025) emphasizes that the non-formal educational space plays a significant role in ensuring the continuous professional development of higher education teachers by creating flexible opportunities for lifelong learning, professional self-improvement, and adaptation to contemporary educational challenges.

Non-formal adult education is currently regarded as one of the key components of lifelong learning policies in Europe, as it provides flexible opportunities for both professional and personal development. As researchers emphasize, «Non-formal adult education represents a key pillar of lifelong learning policies in Europe» (Vaculíková et al., 2024). At the same time, its significance extends beyond the purely educational function, since non-formal education promotes active citizenship, social inclusion, and the development of sustainable societies. In this context, the statement that «Non-formal adult education contributes to sustainable social transformation» (Košmerl, 2025) appears particularly relevant. Recognition of non-formal learning has become central to European education policy (Lukianova, 2021; Andersson, Fejes, & Sandberg, 2023).

The general cultivation and academic concept of education is gradually being replaced by the priorities of vocational education and training aimed at meeting the demands of the labor market and employers.

The purpose of the article is to study the theoretical and applied aspects of adult self-directed learning in a non-formal educational environment.

Research methods. The study employed a comprehensive set of methods to ensure an in-depth investigation of both theoretical and practical aspects of self-directed adult learning in informal settings. Primarily, a theoretical analysis of various aspects of adult self-learning was conducted, alongside the synthesis and generalization of academic literature. Classification and modeling were utilized to distinguish between types of informal learning, including a reimagined Schugurensky model based on the categories of intentionality and awareness. Empirical methods included interviews with learners and an analysis of their experiences to determine how learning occurs and which factors influence it.

Presentation of the main research material. Docility represents a potential formed from multiple dispositions and develops in a person initially primarily as implicit (accidental) and explicit (intentional) learning and gradually enriched by implementing elements of self-regulation in learning about purposefully directed learning activities (self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, self-learning). The components that change the quality of self-learning (implicit and explicit) into self-directed learning can include, for example, consciously and intentionally used abilities:

- learning and intrinsic motivation;
- evaluation of one's own learning needs;
- setting a learning goal;
- the choice of teaching methods and procedures in learning;
- the choice of resources, means necessary for learning;
- monitoring and feedback on the learning process and outcomes;
- flexible changes in learning practices according to updated needs and requirements.

Human self-learning is a life function that is historically conditioned and socially and individually anchored. Self-learning is an inherent formative and creative activity for man, which is part of his evolution and a manifestation of human docility. Human self-learning is characterized as a lifelong, conscious, voluntary, planned, active, individual learning activity, which is determined by many factors (internal and external), which creates the ability to docility (learn to learn) perfected throughout life. As a result, the process of self-learning of a person leads not only to the acquisition of planned learning content (knowledge, skills, and attitudes), but also to the cultivation of his personality (trust in his own abilities, motives, will, character, ideals, values, etc.) (Pavlov, Valášková Vincejová, 2024).

Self-learning is a concept that lacks a uniform definition. In our conception, we define it broadly as an activity in which a person has taken the initiative and responsibility for his or her own learning, and can take place in formal and non-formal education, and is classified as informal learning (unorganized, unsystematic, and institutionally uncoordinated) together with incidental (accidental) and tacit (silent) learning. Unlike incidental and tacit learning, which are unintentional (tacit learning and unconscious), self-learning is intentional, conscious, and open to empirical research. The characteristic features of a self-learning person are their autonomy (I make decisions freely, on my own), responsibility (I am aware of my own value and my own goals), self-management (I take control of learning from other subjects into my own hands), activity (I consciously learn), and intrinsic motivation (what stimuli evoke my interest in learning).

Figure 1 outlines the fundamental differences between functional and intentional

learning dimensions in informal learning, where the criterion for differentiation is the degree of self-regulation in learning.

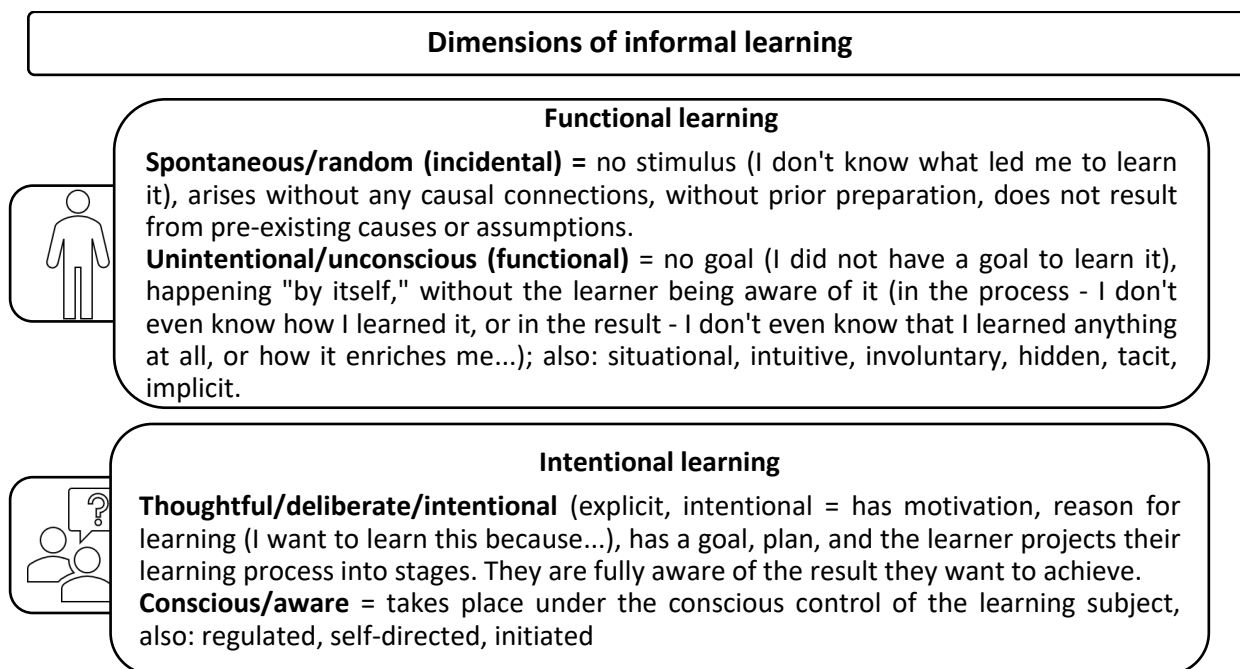


Fig. 1. Dimensions of informal learning

Source: created by authors.

In Figure 1, we outline two dimensions of informal human learning, which are complementary and from the perspective of a learning adult, but not andragogic. Both cannot be open to andragogical intervention (adult upbringing, education, and counselling is always, unlike other social influences, non-accidental, intentional, purposeful, and planned). Andragogical intervention is a planned, systematic algorithm of interventions leading to the satisfaction of the learning needs of an adult client. It is a targeted professional procedure (method, set of methods, and forms or strategies) applied in influencing adult learning processes. It is an intervention from the outside into the internal processes of management (self-management) of the learning of an adult («tea management» or «self-management» of learning processes). Lukianova highlights that non-formal adult education serves as a powerful catalyst for personal growth and self-development. This process is driven by the necessity for lifelong learning, arising from the socio-economic and cultural shifts within society (Lukianova, 2021, p. 400).

Intervention in functional learning processes is unpromising for andragogy, because it is not very accessible and locked, unconscious, and hidden. It is only during intentional learning that the adult becomes aware of their presence, because it usually requires active participation and a certain degree of self-regulation. Here, andragogy uses its proven tools, training, training, mentoring, tutoring, coaching, but also counseling in the selection, choice of providers of formal, non-formal educational activities or learning problems. Průcha (Průcha, 2014) states that new concepts are gradually being formed in the psychology of learning, which makes it possible to clarify certain aspects of informal learning processes (Průcha, 2014, pp. 71–76). The difficulty of this type of research lies in the fact that informal learning is visible, the subjects involved do not consider it as learning, the resulting knowledge is understood as part of the subject's overall ability, rather than something learned, and the subjects interviewed often

cannot explain the nature and complexity of the experience gained.

Below, we discuss three andragogical interventions in informal learning processes that have the potential to support the development of adult docility. These are individual educational accounts, which, according to a press release from the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (<https://www.minedu.sk/slovensko-bude-mat-unikatny-system-individualnych-vzdelavacich-uctov/>) in Slovakia, from January 1, 2026, are to become a tool of individualized support for an individual, which will allow them to take over from the age of 16 (regardless of current education, social conditions, or disadvantageous factors) decision on their educational and professional development, which they can manage and finance through this instrument. This creates an opportunity to freely choose the content, place, and form of the required educational programmes from their register (they can be accredited or non-accredited, or even in the form of micro-certificates) and to finance them by accumulating funds from several sources. Individual accounts allow individuals to choose the learning activities that best suit their needs while working with a career counselor and employer. From January 1, 2026, the module of individual learning accounts on the electronic platform for citizens (<https://isvd.iedu.sk/Citizens>) will be accessible. The priority areas of the supported programs include the development of digital and green skills.

The second tool to support adults in learning is through counselling. Habodaszová (2022) points out that if individual educational accounts scheme to be successful, it requires counselling support (addressing information and administrative barriers and accompanying career counselling), the task of which is to help the effective selection of an educational activity about the specific situation of the applicant, such as existing skills, possible employment in the labour market, personal circumstances, etc. (pp. 54-55). This is a rather reductionist concept of adult counseling. The task of andragogy and andragogical counseling is to look for methods and forms that enable and encourage the teachability and docility of adults. Kravchenko (2025) point out that incorporating andragogical principles allows for the organization of learning in a way that ensures it is both relevant and practically significant (p. 1795).

The third tool can be described as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (validation) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). It is based on a strategic vision in which the individual is the center of attention. The individual and their specific requirements and circumstances must be considered in all elements of the recognition mechanism. Although it is linked to and depends on the political, institutional, financial, technical, and legal context, each recognition mechanism must serve the individual specifically. Only by adequately capturing the knowledge, skills, and competences acquired by an individual can recognition serve the broader objectives set for the education and training system, the labour market, and society at large. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to validation, as it must serve a wide range of individual conditions and needs.

The European Validation Inventory and the evaluation of the 2012 Recommendation showed (Council of the European Union, 2012) that individuals are still largely unaware of validation opportunities for non-formal and informal learning. Validation is based on the idea that all learning, regardless of where, when, or how it takes place, is potentially valuable. Given the traditionally strong trust in formal education, this idea cannot be ignored. Promoting validation, therefore, requires a systematic effort to demonstrate the relevance of all forms of learning, in particular at work, at home, or through civic engagement, and how direct and legitimate validation can make these results more visible and accessible for further education and employment. The value of validation is not always obvious to individual users:

the processes leading to validation can be perceived as dispersed, fragmented, and often solved individually. For validation to be used more widely and to promote lifelong and lifelong learning, potential users need to see and trust the (exchange) value of validation. We see the risks of the model of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the fact that target groups of adults who show a low value orientation towards education and learning may have a fundamental problem in understanding its importance for their learning development. In the case of disadvantaged, socially excluded groups of the population on the margins of society, it is not realistic to count on their responsibility and learning autonomy, which leads to a deepening of the gap between motivated, responsible, autonomous adult learners who can use and draw from a rich range of validation mechanisms and those who cannot.

The above-mentioned tools to support adult self-learning are the subject of interest of andragogy. Benes (2014) states that andragogy is looking for ways to facilitate self-directed learning for adults, especially by counseling and diagnosing their learning styles (pp. 80–81). The point is that the adult is aware of the motives and attitudes towards learning, knows the different sources, and consciously develops learning strategies. The concept of self-directed learning changes the requirements for learners, teachers, education providers, and educational policies. The learner should be able to find out his learning needs and goals, plan, implement and evaluate the processes of his own learning, decide what he wants to learn on his own and what he wants to learn with help, maintain his concentration and motivation, as well as knowledge of various learning strategies, which also increases the demands on his personality traits and autodidactic skills. The teacher becomes more of an advisor and creator of an environment that stimulates learning, and in this spirit, the role of educational organizations as supportive, counseling, and certification facilities for self-directed learning is changing. The preference for the "didactic paradigm" of recognized models of learning support applied especially in the professional development of adults is complemented by the examination of the processes of their incidental, but also purposeful, self-directed learning. Hiemstra & Brockett (2012) acknowledge that the concept of learners' personal responsibility for their learning decisions (1991) introduced by them has been misinterpreted and misused to blame some groups of learners for not properly assuming their personal responsibility. Therefore, they reconfigured their original model of self-directed learning (Personal – Responsibility – Orientation, Model PRO, 1991) and the concepts on which it was based. The updated model (Figure 2) emphasizes the equivalence of the basic components: Person – Process – Context. Person - includes characteristics of an individual such as creativity, critical reflection, enthusiasm, life experience, life satisfaction, motivation, previous education, resilience, and self-concept. Process – involves the transaction between teaching and learning, including facilitation, learning skills, learning styles, planning, organizing, and assessing abilities, teaching styles, and technological skills. Context – includes the environmental and sociopolitical environment, such as culture, power, educational environment, finance, gender, educational climate, organizational policies, political environment, race, and sexual orientation.



Fig. 2. Person – Process – Context (PPC) Model

Source: created by authors.

The dynamic interrelationships between the three elements (as seen in Figure 2) are key to all three elements of self-directed learning and are considered essentially equally important. Although there are situations where one element can take on a larger role, overall, we believe that their impact is comparable. In the PPC model, the optimal situation for self-directed learning is most effective when the person, process, and context are in balance. In other words, the learner is highly self-directed, the teaching and learning process is set up to encourage them to take control of their own learning, and the socio-political context and learning environment promote a climate for self-directed learning.

Conclusions and further research perspectives. The discussion on informal adult learning confirms that it is an extremely complex, multi-layered, and culturally conditioned phenomenon that cannot be reduced to spontaneous or random forms of learning. Comprehensive andragogical support for lifelong learning presupposes a deep understanding of the learning processes of an adult in their entirety and the connection of these processes with the development of their docility. Traditional approaches to supporting adult learning have so far focused mainly on the offer of formal and non-formal educational activities, while there is no systematic support for self-learning as a natural and authentic form of individual development. Directly organised formal and non-formal educational programmes that do not strengthen learners' autonomy and self-regulation can lead to a weakening of their autonomy, motivation, and co-responsibility for their own learning. If we want to create an environment that encourages self-learning, we need to better understand its specifics, conditions, and contexts in adulthood. It is here that andragogy stands at the beginning of the systematic conceptualization and research of self-learning processes, to contribute to the development and optimal use of the potential of docility through its theoretical and practical interventions. Informal adult learning is an extremely complex and culturally conditioned phenomenon that cannot be reduced to spontaneous or random learning. In a broader sense, including self-directed, incidental, and tacit forms of learning, it is a natural and dynamic space for the development of human teachability – the ability to learn, adapt, and self-regulate one's own learning processes throughout one's life.

Future research should therefore focus on a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of self-directed and incidental learning and on finding ways to effectively support these processes in the context of work, community, and everyday life. Informal learning of adults thus ceases to be just a spontaneous accompanying phenomenon of everyday practice. Directives and rigidly organized opportunities for formal and non-formal education, which do not include support for further self-development (self-learning) of participants, «deactivate» their independence, autonomy, and co-responsibility for the choice of goals, progress, and

learning results. If we want to create such an offer, we need to understand what it means to learn self-learning in adulthood, what the starting points and contexts of this form of learning are. Here, andragogy stands at the beginning of a journey of conceptualization, contextualization, and research of self-learning processes, to contribute through its interventions to its optimal use for the potential of docility.

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