

Denmark

Working Paper

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Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship





Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP)

EduMAP is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.

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1. Challenges in AE provision and access

The young refugees (18-25) -programme is tailored for gaining necessary skills for entering Danish education system and labour market. The programme combines learning Danish language and other theoretical subjects, internships at work place, and opportunity to engage socially with local volunteers. The observations made here are based on our study of this chosen good practice.

In general the Danish integration programme works quite efficiently based on legislation and clearly articulated responsibilities for different social actors. The integration programme is implemented by all municipalities following a structured language learning scheme: the students' skills level is assessed and they are guided to training and moving to next levels based on test results. The integration programme skills levels are matched to the Danish school system in order to enable access to education after reaching the entrance level.

Many refugee youth have interrupted education (or they completely lack one) and therefore they have weak academic skills that are necessary for entering the Danish system. Some are illiterate in their native language or are not familiar with Latin alphabets. Thus, their skill level does not match the standards of Danish integration programme scheme that is primarily designed for adult learners, but rather falls somewhere between levels 1 and 2 of the scale.

The refugee youth's difficult life situation and previous trauma may compromise their chances of fulfilling the expectations set by the hosting Danish society: completing successfully the integration programme, learning Danish language, entering working life and becoming self-supportive. Young refugees without parents are a particularly vulnerable student group according to the AE providers.

The current "activity model" -unemployment policy is applied to newcomers as well. The basic idea is that all who are receiving unemployment benefit have an obligation to seek work regularly. Thus the refugee youth have the obligation already during the integration period despite of their skills level or fluency in Danish language. This expectation conflicts with prevailing knowledge that in Denmark getting an education is the primary goal for the youth and a key to accessing labour market. The activity model is criticised for encouraging, instead, to take up any job already during integration training and to become self supported as quickly as possible.

The withdrawing of the social benefits as the sanction of not participating regularly in the integration programme has on one hand reduced the number of non-attendance but on the other hand the strict practice has been reported as reducing the participants' autonomy and thus, consequently, counteracting the APC goal. Furthermore, cutting social benefits may lead to quitting the programme completely and opt for entering working life.

The AE providers are themselves faced with harsh competition as market-oriented actors have entered the education and training field. The austerity policy that is

accelerated by marketisation of the integration programme implementation affects some providers' willingness to cater for "needy" students who demand extra resources.

The efficient monitoring of the integration programme puts pressure to municipalities and hence to AE providers as service providers leaving less space, for instance, to mutual negotiating of the ratio and terms of student intake. Since municipalities are expected to activate the newcomers "from day one" of the arrival, consequently they insist on AE providers adapting to the situation and accepting constant intake of new students without time to gain necessary knowledge about their background and skills level in advance.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

In Danish society gender equality is a crosscutting and active principle that is enforced by legislation. Both the policy makers and AE providers emphasised that they practice “same treatment for all”, regardless of gender. Applying this principle of “sameness” was quite strongly expressed by the practitioners reflecting the values of Danish society. While beneficial in cases of home parents, for instance obliging them too to enter the integration programmes, this policy has to some extent lead to silencing the discussion of difference of views. Since the society’s sameness approach dominates public discussion, it leaves the various individual conceptions of gender roles on the background. However, the local volunteers reported having experienced instances and situations that required further explicating gender issues and normative/culturally (per)formed behavior codes. They also brought up the issue of the need to reach out for certain groups such as young single men who seemed to have fallen outside the service system. They had failed to live up to the expectations of the host society and were currently living on unofficial income on the boundary of legal/illegal activities.

In relation to religion and wearing a hijab a young person expressed a wish that s/he wanted rather to become recognised as a person instead of “a religious figure”.

3. The concept of APC as it is defined, understood or approached in the context of the study by different respondent groups

Policy makers:

National legislation defines the objectives of integration as to secure the newcomers' possibilities to access and participate in society's political, economic, social, religious and cultural activities and working life *the same manner* as other citizens.

The Integration Act defines AC as understanding the norms and values of Danish society, participating politically, economically, in social, cultural and religious activities as well as working and earning one's living. In addition, understanding the rights and obligations and acting accordingly is required. Learning Danish language is considered the primary means to APC, since local language is the key to participating in work and education as well as gaining legal citizenship and earning one's living. These activities are parallel to the main indicators of successful integration. Also political participation and living conditions are monitored.

AE practitioners:

The AE practitioners' work is guided by the above-mentioned official aims of the integration programme and implemented by following the national curriculum. In addition the AE practitioners expressed willingness to empower the VYAs and to work holistically with them spurring them to achieve their individual learning and life goals.

The holistic ideology has its background in specific national philosophy: the Grundtvigian thought and pedagogy that is embedded in the Danish society. The meaning of education (dannelse) is in becoming a person and a member of the society. Thus the AE providers are struggling between this deep educational attitude driven by humanistic values and the demands of a market driven policy that is steering their practice.

Volunteers:

The local people who organised the social activities emphasised the importance of mutual learning with the locals. They highlighted in their activities the importance of learning democracy and Danish way of living, learning the language and finding jobs as a mutual activity of the locals and the newcomers.

VYA learners:

The learners' articulated views of APC followed the lines of the formal policies. They also expressed understanding citizenship as equaling with "having a passport" referring to a secure residence in safe environment. For the most part the learners found work-related language learning beneficial for their long-term goals: for getting a job and becoming self-supported.

4. Elements that are critical and or significant for enabling learners to become active citizens, or to develop APC competencies in the studied programmes

Based on the Grundtvigian thought the AE providers consider dialogical and democratic approach in classroom communication and learning environment important.

The integration training system is based on constant evaluation of the programme, the work of the practitioners, learning results and the students' progress.

Some VYAs had difficulties in expressing the issue when they felt that they had been appointed to unsuitable programmes or internships.

Volunteers organizing learning cafés were an important part of the success of the programme, enabling the students to connect and mix with locals and learn Danish language in authentic situations.

The teachers struggled with contradiction of implementing “western” pedagogy to newcomers who were not prepared or able to learn according to demands of self-directed and learner-centered teaching style.

Many young students required more support than solely teaching and appointing them to internships. They needed to become self-supportive and taking responsibility of their own learning and to understand various aspects of living in Denmark.

5. Competencies and qualifications possessed, represented and/or cultivated through by the AE practitioners who contribute to the design, development and delivery of APC programmes for VYAs

Ministry of Education regulates the profession of Danish language teachers with qualification standards.

Currently the role of teachers and counsellors is changing due to market-oriented policy aiming to fast employment of the newcomers. The teachers are urged to exit the classrooms and cooperate closely with working life. In addition they need skills for working with specific needs of traumatized students. They are expected to work as facilitators and to be able to communicate their students' needs to employers. In addition, teachers are expected to engage and become active in social contacts and informal communication with the local community and their students.

6. Critical factors and conditions (favourable and unfavourable) that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for VYAs

Favourable:

Denmark has long tradition in publicly supported lifelong learning and AE, administered by the Ministry of Education. The integration programme of new arrivals is organized and monitored by the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI).

Integration system is organised based on skills testing and steering students to “right learning tracks”. Students need to pass an exam in order to move to next level. The ultimate goal is Danish citizenship exam and gaining citizenship. The process is strictly monitored and evaluated at all levels.

The newly introduced work-related integration programme (introduced in 2016) has brought new opportunities for refugees’ training and job placements. The programme is based on cross-sectional collaboration between social actors. The Ministry of Immigration and Integration (SIRI), municipalities and employers collaborate with AE providers. SIRI monitors and supports the municipalities and gathers information for policymaking purposes.

Learning about Danish citizenship and APC aspects is incorporated into integration programme curriculum. The programme for refugees is free of charge and learners get social benefits for living expenses during the programme.

Denmark has strong tradition in adult education (Grundtvig and Dannelse), popular movements and activism, enabling volunteer partnership with the official integration policies and service providers.

The municipality monitors the learners’ attendance of integration training with regular reports from the AE providers. After the programme the municipality has access to monitoring their activity through Jobnet -portal. Thus, the authorities are able to follow-up and collect data about the success of the programmes. At national level the programme is constantly evaluated by authorities and developed in cooperation with the municipalities and practitioners (SIRI responsible).

Unfavourable:

The increased number of asylum seekers in 2015 led to tightened asylum policy in Denmark. The Government’s strict policy was however counterbalanced by civil mobilization and growing number of volunteering showing positive public atmosphere, which in turn contributed favourably to refugees’ integration.

Receiving financial support to cover living expenses during integration training is tied to active participation and attendance. The strict monitoring of the social benefits has both favourable and unfavourable effects. The AE providers report reduced no-shows and absence from classes but they also consider the sanction practice not flexible enough for young and traumatized refugees who are not fit for studying/working. The situation of withdrawing the social benefits is not motivating for learning and sometimes can lead to exclusion from the official system and finding other types of income sources (illegal). AE providers reported that the demand for

strict monitoring was both effective and ineffective since drawing the reports consumed a lot of time and resources reducing time and resources from other duties and student-teacher time.

Both practitioners and students considered the condition that AE providers were obliged to accept new students non-stop as unfavourable for creating secure learning environment and coherent programme.

The AE providers are competing against each other and the private sector for contracts. Their funding and competitiveness is partially based on number of the students who successfully pass the final tests. This formula is not favourable for young refugees and students who are not able to follow the study track as expected, since they need longer time to achieve same goals.

7. Lessons learnt from laws and policies that contribute effectively to cultivating APC for VYAs

- Denmark has in many aspects more stringent targets than required by EU and is actively fulfilling the EU standards, too.
- Danish integration programme and language learning system is well-structured and effective.
- All refugees are directed to integration activities as soon as they arrive at their home municipality.
- Parallel language training schemes are provided for different target groups; self-supportive persons and those who need economic support.

8. Existing practices of information access and communication (emerging patterns and tendencies; people/social networks; media/platforms/channels; content/messages) about adult education in the studied programmes

- Municipalities have a statutory obligation to guarantee access to integration education to all refugees who have appointed residence in the area. The municipality contracts the service providers who are obliged to take new students non-stop. The municipality case worker contacts the new students and coordinates the linkage to the internship employers.
- Municipalities, AE providers, SIRI and internship employers' efficient mutual communication is important. Organisations have often specific coordinators for handling the communication and information flow that enables coherent implementation of the integration programme. For instance, the municipality had an appointed internship coordinator to build and maintain contacts with employers and to find suitable internship placements for students.
- The AE provider welcomed the local volunteers to work in collaboration and some of the activities (language café) was organised within the school premises.
- Regarding communication, the internships at work places are important in many ways for the VYAs: to learn authentic language, to get work experience and to create network with local people.
- The AE provider has continuous communication with the ministry and SIRI. The AE practitioners work in teams enabling information flow and constant development within the organisation.

9. Leveraging on VYA's information access and communication practices about adult education

Since enrolment and guidance to integration programme is municipality's responsibility, the students lack autonomy of their own choices. In some cases the students felt they had no say in their own choice of appointed programme and internships. This practice situated the VYAs to remain in a passive role instead of encouraging them actively finding information about different options.

Despite having smartphones many learners struggled with computer use or they did not know the Latin alphabet that were necessary for written communication. Thus face-to-face communication and physical attendance in teaching was considered the most effective by many teachers.

The students, AE providers and municipality counsellor had regular "status discussions" for monitoring the student progress. The authorities were working closely together to improve the VYA's learning and enabled information access to all participants.

10. Information accessed and used during the design of AE for APC programmes

The programme was constantly monitored and steered by municipality and SIRI. However AE providers reported some difficulties in getting their message through to the policymakers. In a country with low hierarchy and relatively small population the social actors had both official and unofficial channels for communicating their concerns to decision makers.

The connection between classroom learning, work and other aspects of life in Denmark was reported somewhat lacking. The teachers expressed need to learn more about their learners' social conditions and working life in general in order to be able to assist students with appropriate language learning.

The AE provider worked in close contact with municipality, which enabled smooth information flow and identifying specific learning needs of the refugees. However, AE providers had no control of who was pointed to their programmes and had not much information of the students prior to course start, since municipality case workers were the ones contacting the refugees.

The provider did surveys to students to find out how to improve the programme. The municipality monitored the students track after the programme finish via digital Jobnet.



<http://blogs.uta.fi/edumap/>