

# Enhancing Adult Learning: Evaluation and Self-improvement

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Evaluation is a perennial problem that arises in all cultures, each with its unique definition. Evaluation is crucial for lifelong learning and the participants' and adult educators' personal growth. Evaluation is an essential tool both in lifelong learning and in the process of self-improvement of the adult educator and the participants. The evaluation process helps participants set clear goals for their personal development and learning the participants' and adult educators' personal growth. Evaluation is an essential tool both in lifelong learning and in the process of self-improvement of the adult educator and the participants. The evaluation process helps participants set clear goals for personal development and learning. The assessment procedure aids participants in establishing specific objectives for their growth and education. Through the evaluation, they can determine their potential and areas for improvement. Additionally, kids can observe their learning progress and accomplishments. As a result, their perseverance in studying and self-confidence increase. Self-evaluation is a crucial step in the self-improvement process. This paper emphasizes the significance of assessment within the lifelong learning framework and the inherent connection that arises.

*Keywords:* adult education, evaluation, self-improvement

## Introduction

The paper emphasizes the importance of evaluation in lifelong learning and self-improvement for adult educators and participants. Evaluation plays a fundamental role in lifelong learning and adult education, serving as a quality assurance mechanism and a tool for personal and professional growth. It is essential in helping educators and learners recognize strengths, address areas of improvement, and ensure effective learning outcomes. While evaluation has traditionally been associated with formal education, its role in adult education is equally critical, fostering continuous self-improvement and professional development.

It effectively highlights how evaluation fosters self-confidence, perseverance, and goal-setting. The concept of evaluation refers to the process by which a systematic assessment of the value, quality, or performance of an object, program, service, or individual is made. Evaluation can include various forms and methods, depending on the context and purpose for which it is conducted. The evaluation of the educational work of adult educators, both in substantive and procedural matters, has traditionally taken the form of guidance and support. Since the late 19th century, evaluation has accompanied the establishment of the inspector. However, the inspector often functioned as a deterrent for the lower-level educator through the mechanism of their inspection, within the framework of the bureaucratic hierarchy and the exercise of their administrative and supervisory duties, and was replaced by a new instrument, the School Counselor (Μαυιάτης, 2019).

Evaluating the educational work produced in schools provides the necessary feedback. It can significantly improve the quality and overall effectiveness of the education provided and the broader trend of decentralizing education. In lifelong learning, evaluation ensures participants acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. It can include both external evaluation and self-evaluation by the educators themselves. The evaluation process helps participants set clear personal development and learning goals. Through evaluation, they can recognize their strengths and areas that need improvement. Additionally, they can see their achievements and progress in the learning process. This enhances their self-confidence and persistence in learning. Self-evaluation is important in the process of self-improvement. Through it, individuals can identify their strengths and weaknesses and work towards their improvement (Κεραμέως, 2019a; Μανιάτης, 2019).

In the international literature, the evaluation of educational work is defined as a process of necessary information concerning the entirety of educational functions. It constitutes a continuous process of strengthening, feedback, and improving the quality of educational work and the professional development of the educators themselves. It is customary for most references to the educational evaluation process to relate to the levels of formal education: primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

The connection of evaluation with formal levels is indisputable, but this does not imply that in the realm of non-formal or informal education structures and, more generally, in lifelong education and adult education programs, the term evaluation does not play a primary and essential role. Evaluation is fundamental to lifelong learning, fostering self-improvement for participants and adult educators (Brookfield, 2017). It helps learners set clear personal and educational goals, identify strengths and areas for development, and track progress over time (Kolb, 1984). Through evaluation, learners build self-confidence and perseverance, which are critical for sustained engagement in education (Knowles, 1980). Self-evaluation, in particular, is a crucial step in personal growth, allowing learners to critically reflect on their progress and adapt their learning strategies accordingly (Schön, 1983). This paper explores the significance of assessment within lifelong learning, highlighting its impact on motivation, goal-setting, and continuous development (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Evaluation is an integral part of adult education, as it plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of educational programs and in the continuous improvement of the learning experience. Adult learners consider factors such as prior knowledge, professional experience, and personal goals in education. Evaluation is intertwined with the learner participating in these programs and with the instructor teaching them, who plays a significant and multidimensional role in achieving the educational goals of the program and its successful outcome. The concept of evaluation in the field of adult education is not punitive. The primary goal is the self-improvement of the evaluated individual, the awareness of personal weaknesses, the evolution of educational methods and techniques, the enhancement of the use of educational tools, the transformative view of entrenched and erroneous personal perceptions, and generally the self-awareness of the importance of self-improvement through evaluation. This work highlights these concepts and the significance of evaluating the adult educator. The method followed is a literature review and the study of sources from the Greek and international contexts.

This paper aims to highlight the importance of evaluation within the framework of lifelong education and, more specifically, adult education, and the special connection that arises from the concept of evaluation with that of self-improvement for both the adult educator and the learner. In recent years, the concept of evaluation has been widely discussed in formal education, having provoked many reactions regarding its usefulness and

effectiveness in the educational realm. However, the connection between evaluation and the structures of adult education is almost non-existent. Therefore, the question arises: Does the concept of evaluation have a place in this field?

### **The Fundamentals of Evaluation**

According to the word's etymology, evaluation means assigning a specific value to a person, object, or situation (Κασσωτάκης, 1998). The term "value" usually refers to (a) the attribution of quality, positive or negative, to whatever is being evaluated, (b) the result of comparing something with another similar thing, and (c) the degree of achieving a specific purpose (Kassotakis, 2004). Evaluation is a fundamental element of the educational process and is therefore found in all educational systems worldwide. The purposes of evaluation reflect the reasons for which evaluation is conducted and answer the question "why" a specific object is evaluated. Kassotakis (1998) believes that "evaluation is the attribution of a value to a person, object, or thing based on specific, clear, and predetermined criteria" and method of evaluation. Kassotakis (1998) also perceives evaluation as a systematic process based on established scientific criteria. These criteria ensure the "scientific" nature of the evaluation and make comparisons feasible and acceptable.

Thus, "evaluation is the expression of the result of comparing measurements with each other or against a predetermined standard" (Kassotakis, 2004). Evaluation is significantly different from measurement and grading, which are more limited to the quantitative assessment of the presentation of the evaluated individual. It is not based solely on the grades the evaluated individual receives from standardized and non-standardized tests but also on the questions posed, the various tasks and exercises they undertake, the written and oral exams that assess their progress, as well as other modern evaluation methods such as rubrics, concept maps, and projects.

The evaluation discussion is fascinating, as different opinions shape a fruitful dialogue about its strengths and weaknesses. The arguments supporting the implementation of evaluation are as follows (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1995; Δημητρόπουλος, 1998; Fitzpatrick et al., 2004): The quality of services provided to learners is improved, it allows those involved to assess their true abilities and be assisted in their further improvement, it identifies needs and activates continuous improvement and self-criticism, it supports educational work through feedback, the state monitors the effectiveness of the educational system on one hand and the allocation of resources on the other, positive educational practices are recognized and rewarded, the quality of the educational system is improved by promoting changes and innovations by the state, the prestige of educators as well as the programs, in general, is enhanced, the progress of learners is monitored, and their performance is improved.

### **Assessing the Importance of Evaluation in Adult Education**

Evaluation in Adult Education Evaluation is a critical tool that allows adult educators to improve their teaching methods and ensure that learners achieve their learning goals while enabling learners to enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they bring to the educational process. The evaluation concept in adult education is fundamental and multidimensional, as it encompasses a range of processes and practices aimed at measuring, providing feedback, and improving the learning process. Evaluation is not limited to the final assessment of learners' performance but extends to continuous monitoring and support of their learning throughout the educational experience. The evaluation of educational work has a social character, as it involves the awareness of all participants in the educational process. The evaluation of the quality of the educational process through the interaction of the parameters of the educational system aims to ensure that all schools share commonly accepted

values. Educational assessment is a multidimensional concept at the center of educational discussions regarding modern teaching methods. However, the common denominator of all these discussions is the shared understanding that educational assessment is a process aimed at maximizing positive outcomes in all areas of education. In other words, educational assessment takes on real meaning when it aims to improve the quality of all the components that make up the educational system. Therefore, students, teachers, educational programs, and learning environments must be considered for effective implementation (Archer, 2013).

According to Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (1995), Dimitropoulos (1998), and Fitzpatrick (2004), the benefits of implementing evaluation in adult education are undoubtedly significant. According to the aforementioned authors, evaluation improves the quality of services provided to learners by the organizations and structures responsible for organizing educational programs. It allows the participants to assess their actual abilities and to be assisted in their further improvement. Their needs are identified, and the need for continuous improvement and self-criticism is activated. The educational work is supported through feedback. The state monitors, on the one hand, the educational system's effectiveness and, on the other hand, the allocation of resources. Positive educational practices are recognized and rewarded. The stakeholders are empowered. The quality of the educational system is improving with the state's promotion of changes and innovations. The prestige of the educators, as well as the programs in general, is being strengthened. The progress of the trainees is monitored, and their performance is improved.

### **Fundamental Purposes of Evaluation in Adult Learning**

The application of assessment in adult education can have various goals. This does not mean that every time an assessment is conducted, all the following goals are explored. The corresponding goals emerge depending on the case and the subject of the assessment. Assessment helps learners better understand their knowledge and skills, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies for their improvement. The assessment process will lead to a better understanding of each learner's acquired knowledge and skills, where they fall short, their progress, and their potential for development in various personal or professional fields.

It provides educators with valuable information about the effectiveness of their teaching methods, allowing them to adapt and improve their instruction. Evaluation is considered a vital tool for adult educators, enabling them to assess their educational methods and techniques in terms of their effectiveness. It is helpful because it will provide valuable information that will lead to improving, modifying, and evolving teaching practices and their effectiveness as educators. Evaluation allows for adapting the educational program to the individual needs and preferences of the learners, making learning more effective and engaging. In adult education, a personalized approach for each learner is essential, considering that the composition of educational groups is characterized by significant heterogeneity. Consequently, the evaluation process serves as an auxiliary tool in clarifying (Xaidemenakou, 2006) and individualizing the needs of the learners (Theodorakopoulou, 2019). The most well-known evaluation tools in adult education are Written Assignments and Tests, which assess learners' theoretical knowledge and understanding. Oral exams and presentations enhance communication skills and the ability of learners to present and support their views (Theodorakopoulou, 2023).

They evaluate the application of knowledge in practical environments. They promote cooperation and teamwork while assessing project management and communication skills. Through evaluation, educators can identify and develop professional skills such as classroom management, communication, and the use of technology in teaching.

Learners learn to assess their performance and develop personal improvement strategies through evaluation, self-evaluation, and feedback. Therefore, applying evaluation offers valuable information to each learner, enabling them to assess their performance and improve necessary areas during the educational process. Evaluation recognizes and rewards learners' achievements, enhancing their confidence and motivation for continuous learning. Evaluation also serves as a reward and positive reinforcement in learners' progress and boosts their self-image and self-esteem, creating further motivation for personal development. It is a tool for ensuring the quality of educational programs, helping educational organizations identify and address problems and improve the services provided. The indicators resulting from the evaluation application undoubtedly offer helpful information for ensuring the quality of educational programs, which either lead to their maintenance or to necessary changes to improve the existing programs.

### **Evaluating and Advancing Self-development**

In lifelong education, evaluation ensures learners acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. It can include both external evaluation by educators and self-evaluation by the learners. The evaluation process helps learners set clear goals for personal development and learning. Through evaluation, they can recognize their strengths and areas that need improvement. Through evaluation, learners can see their achievements and learning progress. This enhances their self-confidence and persistence in learning. Self-evaluation is important in the process of self-improvement. Through it, individuals can identify their strengths and weaknesses and work towards improvement. Through the evaluation process, individuals learn to critically assess their information and skills and the effectiveness of their learning methods.

Adult learners can understand their strengths and weaknesses. This allows them to focus on developing areas that need improvement. Regular assessment helps learners set specific learning goals and maintain high motivation, as they can see their progress and recognize their achievements. Self-assessment encourages critical thinking and self-awareness, helping learners take responsibility for their learning and development. Assessment procedures enhance adults' ability to think critically and analyze information, which is vital for self-improvement. Through assessment, learners learn to identify problems and develop strategies to solve them in their educational and daily lives. Regular assessments allow learners to track their progress and understand when they have achieved their learning goals. Successful assessments recognize learners' achievements, boosting their confidence and self-esteem.

### **Core Methods for Assessing Adult Educators**

The self-improvement of adult educators through evaluation is a process that promotes their professional development and enhances the quality of the education they provide. Evaluation helps educators identify their strengths and weaknesses, develop new skills, and improve teaching practices.

#### **Evaluation by Learners**

It provides feedback from learners regarding the quality of teaching and their learning experience—improvement of adult educators' teaching methods. Feedback from learners and evaluations provide significant feedback to educators on the effectiveness of their teaching methods. This feedback is vital for adapting and improving teaching approaches. Adjusting learning activities according to evaluation results, educators can adjust activities and learning materials to meet learners' needs and preferences better. Evaluation helps educators

identify which teaching tools and approaches are effective and which needs improvement, allowing them to tailor their teaching to the needs of learners.

### **Administrative Evaluation**

It provides feedback from administrative personnel or program coordinators, helping to align with organizational goals and expectations. Administrative evaluation in adult education is a vital process that assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of educational programs and institutions. It systematically collects and analyzes data to inform decision-making, enhance program quality, and ensure accountability. Administrative evaluation is an essential component of adult education that supports continuous improvement, accountability, and informed decision-making. By systematically assessing programs and practices, educational institutions can better meet the needs of adult learners and adapt to evolving educational landscapes.

### **Self-evaluation**

This allows educators to assess their performance, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and set personal improvement goals. It encourages self-criticism and the continuous improvement of learners. Self-evaluation is a crucial practice for adult educators, promoting continuous professional development and enhancing teaching effectiveness. By engaging in self-assessment, educators can critically reflect on their teaching methods, identify areas for improvement, and set personal development goals. Engaging in reflective practice enables educators to critically assess their teaching experiences, recognize their strengths and areas for improvement, and make informed decisions to enhance their teaching strategies.

## **Exploring the Dimensions of Lifelong Assessment**

Lifelong assessment is an approach that lasts throughout an educational program, aiming at the continuous improvement of its members, whether in terms of knowledge, skills, or attitudes. It is a continuous process that includes different forms of assessment. Specifically, it can be either an initial or diagnostic assessment to determine the level of knowledge, interests, and potential problems. Diagnostic assessment should be conducted at the beginning of each teaching unit or hourly lesson. Alternatively, it can be intermediate-formative, that is, during the implementation of a program or a teaching unit. Its purpose is to improve the internal functioning and the expected outcomes of the program or teaching unit. Finally, it can be final or summative and is conducted after the end of an educational program or a teaching unit with the aim of drawing conclusions and formulating well-founded judgments regarding the value of the program or the teaching unit.

From what has been mentioned above, it follows that the application of the evaluation process in the field of adult education is an imperative need and has multiple and multidimensional benefits for both the learners who participate and the adult educators, as well as for the educational programs themselves and the organizations that implement them, in terms of their quality and the proper management of available financial resources. Therefore, it implies that evaluation in lifelong learning must also have a lifelong character and some of the following characteristics.

It is not limited to a specific moment in time or a specific educational program. It is a continuous process that follows the entire course of the educational process. It includes various assessment forms, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and initial, formative, and summative assessment. The combination of more than one form of assessment leads to more reliable and valid results. The methods and tools of assessment are adapted to the needs, abilities, and interests of the individual, as well as to the circumstances under which an educational

program unfolds. Assessment can be formal or informal, internal or external, depending on the case and what we are investigating at any given time. The main focus of lifelong assessment is self-improvement and development. The goal is to help individuals recognize their strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies for continuous improvement.

### Summarizing

Considering the above, it is clear that evaluation in adult education emerges as an essential European strategy to ensure the quality of processes and outcomes. Building a sustainable, efficient, and high-quality lifelong learning system in Greece requires the cooperation of all involved political, educational, and social stakeholders, as well as public consultation and consensus processes. Evaluation is an integral part of the entire process. It contains significant elements that contribute to the progress, development, and self-improvement of adult educators and learners. Therefore, it is deemed appropriate to systematically incorporate the evaluation process into adult education programs implemented by the respective educational structures. It is evident that adult education programs, to be sustainable, must integrate evaluation as an integral part so that they have reliable criteria for their sustainability and usefulness. In this context, by combining all types of evaluation, conclusions should be drawn for the learners participating and the adult educators teaching them, utilizing the tools available for the evaluation process.

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