

Needs and Motivations of Adults Learning Foreign Languages. The Maltese Perspective.

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Abstract

Recent studies (Pace 2013; Pace 2018) have shown a dramatic increase in interest in foreign language learning among adult learners in the Maltese Islands. However, to date, there is lack of research about the aspects that determine participation in adult education and about the adult learners' educational needs (Borg et al. 2016, MEDE 2014). In this paper we will first explore the needs and motivations of adults learning foreign languages along with the reasons for which they enrol in such courses at the Lifelong Learning Centres. We will also analyse how different variables, such as their background, prior knowledge of the foreign language, as well as teaching and learning factors, influence their language learning process. By means of two separate questionnaires administered to adults learning foreign languages at the Lifelong Learning Centres in Malta it resulted that intrinsic motivations are the driving force behind the majority of the adults' choice to learn a foreign language. This makes the educators' role in motivating adult learners pivotal during the learning process. Consequently, the latter highlights the need for the implementation of professional training programmes for all educators in this sector.

Keywords: *Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, Adult Learning, Educational Needs, Motivations, Teaching Strategies*

Introduction

With the emergence of a knowledge society, changing employment requirements and a dramatic increase of interest in foreign languages (FL) among adults, the competency in FLs and intercultural understanding have taken on a crucial role among the members of today's society (Begotti 2019, Chao 2009, Pace 2018). As highlighted in the European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020), there has been an increase in the need for preparing the adult learners for diverse professional contexts in which the knowledge of FLs and communication skills have expanded in the European labour market.

Adults have a strong need to apply what they have learned in their everyday life. Therefore, research which identifies and understands the intrinsic and extrinsic

factors that positively and negatively affect motivation in these adult learners is essential in aiding educators to provide effective learning experiences (Chao 2009). Notwithstanding this, Borg et al. (2016) and Mede (2014) acknowledge that there is very little local research about the factors that determine participation in adult education and the learning needs of adults. In fact, to date, this is the first research dedicated entirely to discussing the needs, motivations and reasons which push adults to enrol in FL learning courses within the Lifelong Learning Centres (LLC).

This paper aims to explore and discuss the different characteristics of adults learning FLs, their linguistic needs and interests as well as their motivations and reasons for which they choose to learn specific FLs. We will also delve into how these expectations were met, and if not, what where the barriers and challenges faced by the learners. Following that, this paper aims to present suggestions on how to overcome the latter.

The Review of the Literature

The concept of lifelong learning has been the focus of several pedagogic and psychological studies in the modern civilisation that we live in, which is characterised by the emergence of a knowledge society, ever increasing new technology and changing employment requirements (Begotti 2019, Chao 2009). Interest in FLs among adults has also increased dramatically over the years. One of the main reasons for this is that, as Pace (2018) explains, “in the 21st century, competence and proficiency in FLs and intercultural understanding are no longer considered as optional but have become an essential part of being a citizen” (p. 425).

All this implies an ever increasing need to adapt the teaching of FLs to the needs of today’s learners, especially those communicative skills which are most necessary in the ever-growing globalised world that we live in. Such a need is also underlined in the European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020).

While language teaching is today considered to be an interdisciplinary field which is linked to other sciences such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, communication sciences and education sciences (Begotti 2010), adult learning is a phenomenon that researchers, such as Knowles et al (2012), find difficult to explain because of its multifaceted understanding; at the same time, this reflects the richness of this type of learning (Merriam et al. 2007). Begotti (2019), on her part, insists that the teaching of FLs to adults should be diverse and consisting of clear objectives that take into consideration the socio-economic background and individual characteristics of the learner, as well as time and resources. On the other hand, Mollica (2009) explains the importance of the communicative approach over more traditional ones, as this provides the adult learner with real communicative contexts where natural strategies for language acquisition are used. In addition, Begotti (2010) also highlights the importance of creating a communicative curriculum, of using a learner centred

approach, by preparing activities that encourage cooperative learning, as they allow adult learners to reflect about the material learnt and then share their new knowledge and opinions with others, helping each other to reach common goals. On the other hand, Frey and Alman (2003) argue that theories about adult learning help the educators to “understand their students and to design more meaningful learning experiences for them. There is not one adult learning theory that successfully applies to all adult learning environments” (p. 8). This explains why, over the years, various educational methodologies were created to teach languages to adults.

Among the most important factors that determine foreign language acquisition (FLA) in adulthood are the adult learners’ characteristics, together with their baggage of experience and cognitive abilities. Mikeladze (2014) argues that such characteristics should not only shape the theoretical grounds for methods and approaches in adult education but they also make the adult learning and teaching environment unique and attractive for both the learner and the educator himself. Another factor that influences FLA is memory. Singleton and Ryan (2004) suggest that adult learners find difficulties in retaining new information and that the decline in hearing sensitivity affects the recognition of speech sounds, thus hindering word memorization and comprehension of teacher instructions. On the other hand, Bosc (2007) claims that adults find it less difficult to concentrate in lessons when compared to younger learners. However, due to the traditional grammatical approaches that they might be used to in previous FL learning experiences, La Grassa and Villarini (2008) suggest that adults might find it uncomfortable to take part in activities that involve a more multimodal approach with the use of songs, videos, language games and others.

Unfortunately, one of the main characteristics of adult learning is the high drop-out rates. Borg et al. (2016) argue that this is due to several factors, among which, work schedules, family responsibilities, costs associated with participation in education or encountering difficulties when searching for a course that matches their interests. Ahl (2006) categorizes the factors that hinder motivation for learning into three types: dispositional, situational and structural. Dispositional variables are related to personal traits such as lack of self-confidence or “negative early school experiences that cause negative expectations of continued education” (Mikeladze 2014, p. 21). Situational factors are closely tied to the learner’s personal life situation, such as having lack of time or money. At the structural level, barriers such as lack of childcare arrangements, work schedule problems and non-suitable teaching pedagogies are identified. On their part, Zammit (2014) and Knowles et al. (2005) state that lack of emotional or financial support is also regarded as one of the main reasons why adults become highly demotivated and decide to quit courses. Apart from this, Wlodkowski (2008) mentions several health barriers that come with aging, making it more difficult for older adults to process information.

Another factor that is key to adult learning is the needs of the learners themselves. Begotti (2019) argues that adults choose to learn either to improve their own competences, to fill in knowledge gaps about new technological and work aspects,

or else as a personal desire to satisfy one's own needs. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) identified, on their part, six reasons why adults engage in learning. These are social relationships, external expectations, stimulation, social welfare, professional advancement, and cognitive interest. Chao (2009) argues that the first three are linked to belongingness, while the rest are linked to the physiological, safety and self-actualization needs of the adult learners. Chao also uses the employment trait to differentiate between the needs of those in employment and those unemployed. He argues that employed adults are most likely to engage in learning due to one's own initiative or through the initiative of the employer, while the unemployed are more likely to gain new competences in order to join the workforce. As a matter of fact, Chao insists that the immigrant learners' needs tend to be extrinsic, because of pressure from the government to integrate into the host country.

The learner's previous educational experience is another characteristic that impacts the learning process (Ivashko 2018). As Borg et al. (2016) explain, "people with lower educational attainment, who left formal education before the age of 19, highly value learning of basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy" (p. 55). On the other hand, participants with higher educational attainment seem to demonstrate "the greatest interest in transferable knowledge that can be used to find jobs" (Borg et al. 2016, p. 60). It is also interesting to note that, according to the findings of Borg et al. (2016), individuals with incomplete secondary or elementary education are more attracted to learning FLs. Research also indicates that adult learners have a greater intrinsic goal orientation than younger learners (Bye et al. 2007) because of the value that they attach to what is learned. Given their accumulated experience, adults are more likely to use the relevance of the material learnt as a way of sustaining their interest, and can be more critical of what they regard as not useful in contribution to their goal. In fact, Kuklewicz et al. (2018) argue that since adults often choose to learn a language because of the need to communicate with relatives or friends that live abroad, a functional or situational based syllabus that focuses on communicative language functions could be more beneficial to them. On the other hand, when motivations are extrinsic, the linguistic needs of the adult learner tend to be limited to those required by the employment sector, and it often happens that the learner stops attending lessons as soon as he or she reaches his/her goal (Caon 2005). Begotti (2019) however insists that although sometimes adults do have external factors which influence their decision for learning a language, they are more inclined to be intrinsically motivated, contrary to adolescents for whom school is compulsory.

With regards to the local situation, recent data (Eurostat 2016; NSO 2018) has demonstrated a growing interest and level of involvement of adults in lifelong learning, with an increase of 3.8% of the Maltese population participating in education and training (MEDE 2014). Notwithstanding this, the participation in tertiary education in Malta is significantly lower than the ET 2020 average target of 15%, given that according to the Eurostat data for 2018, Malta has 10.8% of adult participation in learning. This increased interest, in recent years, in adult education is due to factors

such as job mobility, the increase in the number of foreigners residing in Malta and mixed marriages. Moreover, Mayo (2012) contends that such an increase is also due to the fact that funds from the European Commission, such as the Grundtvig and Leonardo Da Vinci programmes, started to be utilised to improve the knowledge and employability of adult learners, as well as to promote lifelong learning. Following the EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning of 2000 and the Resolution for a Renewed European Agenda for Adult learning of 2011, in which the European Council urged the member states to focus on adult learning, the Ministry for Education published a Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 as well as the Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (MEDE 2014), comprising ten strategies, all focusing on the current challenges in adult learning whilst proposing measures to mitigate them. The second of these strategies encourages the teaching of FLs due to the increasingly multicultural society that is present in the Maltese Islands. And while on the one hand the local situation is worrying when considering the declining number of students who are studying FLs at post-secondary, on the other hand, Pace (2018) argues that “the number of adult learners who have applied to learn a foreign language at a LLC during the year 2018/19 has reached a staggering 1054” (p. 430). This dramatic increase in participation is proof of the ever-growing need for educational opportunities in FL teaching and learning. In fact, Pace (2018) emphasises the fact that “there is an urgent need for a planned, sustained commitment to a programme of change” (p. 432). Some of these much-needed changes are in fact now being implemented. These include the introduction of FL courses at MQF levels 1 and 2 based on proficiency in the speaking, reading, writing and listening competences in real-world situations, a wide array of languages on offer, including Arabic, Chinese, English as a FL (EFL), French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Maltese as a FL (MFL), Russian, Spanish, and Turkish, as well as the provision to equal access to lifelong learning that supports inclusivity in a diverse Maltese society, and that helps the individual in making social advancements, especially when it comes to migrants who require tailor-made courses and support systems that may facilitate their entry in the workplace, including courses in EFL and MFL.

Methodology

For this research, a quantitative methodology has been chosen. Such a methodology not only facilitates the collection of a wide sample of responses intended to represent the rest of the population, in this case of adult learners, but it also allows the researchers to analyse data which can help provide information about future outcomes with regards to the needs and motivations of adult learners following FL courses at LLCs. As stated by Coe et al. (2017), it is considered as a collection of numerical data, where the research takes on a natural science approach with an objective perspective of reality.

The starting point was the testing of the basis of theoretical findings about the type of needs and motivations the adult learners have, which have been divided into categories in the questionnaires. This was followed by the testing of the hypothesis of whether the socio-demographic and academic variables influence the types of motivation that adult learners have. In addition, when quantifying the research, the data gathered has been structured in a clear way, avoiding any ambiguity while making it ideal for large sample studies. Since the research focused on the needs and motivations of adults learning FLs in Malta, it was decided to collect data from the LLCs which form part of the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (DRLE) within MEDE given that, on the local scene, DRLE offers the biggest and most varied amount of language courses for adult learners, thus being highly representative of the population of adult learners in Malta. In fact, the DRLE offers accredited courses in 12 different FLs with lessons offered both in the mornings and in the evenings from October to June, with a 2 week break over the Christmas and the Easter period. Following consultations with the Assistant Director for the DRLE, it was decided that the questionnaires be administered in the two different LLCs offering the widest range of FL courses and attended by a considerable number of adults.

In order to measure objectively the social reality of adults learning a FL, data was gathered through survey research to a sample of 140 participants. Although most of the questions asked were close-ended with multiple choices, the questionnaire also incorporated several open-ended questions in those instances where further explanations were needed. In order to avoid misunderstandings, the questions were direct, straightforward, and easy to understand, with participants also having the option of choosing to answer either in Maltese or in English. Following a pilot-test, three questions within the questionnaire were restructured as it transpired that they were not coherent or specific enough to the respondents. A total of 2 questionnaires were administered to the same participants. The first one consisted of 19 questions and was distributed at the beginning of the course term in October, while a second questionnaire consisting of 7 questions was distributed towards the end of the same course term in March. The former intended to identify the learners' needs and motivations, while the latter aimed to discover whether the language courses have met the learners' expectations and needs. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants, the directors of the LLCs were asked to administer the questionnaires themselves to the adult learners. To ensure the reliability and validity of the results obtained, an objective quantitative approach was used, wherein it was assured that the sample chosen consisted of participants who vary in age, gender, and nationality. Other than representing the majority of the population, this variety in the participants' background and choice of FLs helped to generalise the findings and reach the research's aims. All ethical concerns and considerations were taken into account and approval was obtained from all relevant authorities both at University of Malta as well as the Ministry of Education.

Once the distribution and collection of the questionnaires was concluded, a thematic analysis of the data followed, with a more qualitative approach. Themes which emerged include the background of the participants, their knowledge of the FLs, needs and motivations for learning a FL, barriers and difficulties encountered during the course, as well as choice of institution.

Findings

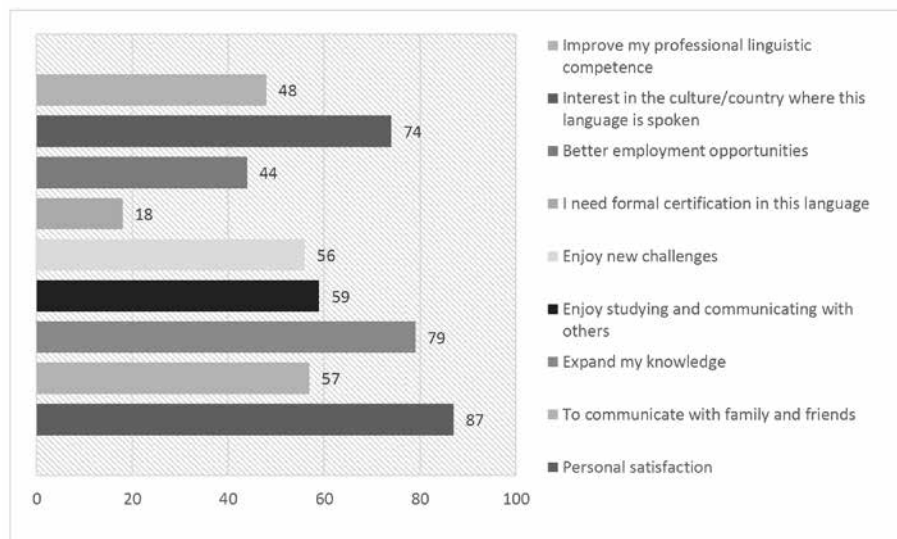
Within the LLCs in Malta, over recent years, there has been an increasing number of adults applying to learn a FL. In scholastic year 2019/2020 the number of applicants reached a staggering 3415, while in 2020/2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the number of applicants reached 1327. The majority of the participants (32%) were following an English as a Foreign language course. This could be due to the fact that the majority (61%) of them were arriving from countries where English is not their L1 and in a bilingual country like Malta, it is essential for them to be able to communicate and understand at least one of the country's official languages. Italian was the second language most chosen by the participants (28%). In Malta there has always been a vast interest in Italian mainly because of the geographical vicinity and the historic affiliations between the two countries apart from the fact that the Maltese lexicon itself is replete with Italianisms (Brincat 2011, p. 401-415). It is interesting to note that there was a considerable number of participants learning languages like Japanese, Turkish, Russian, Chinese, Greek and Arabic, which are either not offered in compulsory education or not popular choices among Maltese students. Diadori et al (2009) argue that most likely, whoever chooses to enrol in a language course in adulthood already has basic prior knowledge of the FL chosen. This is confirmed by 64% of the participants of this study's findings. It seems appropriate to follow the recommendations from the National Research Report (Bugre, Chana 2018) which suggests that Assessment of Prior Learning needs to take place in order to get a clear indication of the level of the skills and competences of the migrant learners. Such an awareness of the previous learning experiences of the learners and their country's school system enables the educators to better analyse their learning styles and motivate them to learn how to learn.

This research is based on the idea that "Knowing how motivated a person may be is important, but equally important is knowing why they are motivated" (Gonzalez Peitado et al. 2017, p. 125), because as soon as that purpose for learning is brought to light, it will be easier to engage the adult learners and widen their participation in lifelong learning (Chao 2009). In L2 and FL acquisition, motivation is fundamental, as it acts as a driving force for the process of learning and influences the different factors that make up the teaching-learning process (Richards et al. 1985, Dornyei 1998; Gonzalez Peitado et al. 2017).

Motivation can be distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation

is oriented towards knowledge, when learners are motivated to learn for an internally rewarding satisfaction and focus “on the process rather than the product” (Gonzalez Peitado et al. 2017, p. 126). Several studies (Begotti 2019, Bye et al. 2007; Gonzalez Peitado et al. 2017) have shown that this type of motivation is more common amongst adult learners and it leads to more positive outcomes when compared to extrinsic motivation (Deci, Ryan 2000, Richer et al. 2002). The results of this research confirm all this, given that, as illustrated in Figure 1, the most common motivational factors which have led the participants to choose to learn a FL in their adulthood were of an intrinsic nature. When the participants were asked to mention the reasons and motivations which led them to their choice, 62% of the participants mentioned personal satisfaction and enrichment. The next most common motivational factor, indicated by 56% of the learners, was knowledge acquisition, while 40% argued that they were enticed to learn the language by the idea of embarking on a new challenge. Furthermore, there were others who argued that they chose to learn a new language with the aim of keeping an active and healthy mind. These motivations are quite similar to those that, according to Gonzalez Peitado et al. (2017) and Begotti (2010, 2019), drive adult learners to study FLs in other countries. Having an interest for the culture, the country, and the language itself is considered by Khasinah (2014) as a type of integrative motivation and 53% of our participants mentioned such an interest as their prime motivation for learning a FL. In fact, non-Maltese learners expressed their desire to learn more about the local way of thinking, with the aspiration of being able to integrate better in the host country. Eventually, the learners’ attitudes towards native speakers and their culture will reflect how successful the learning process was.

Figure 1: Motivations of the learners.



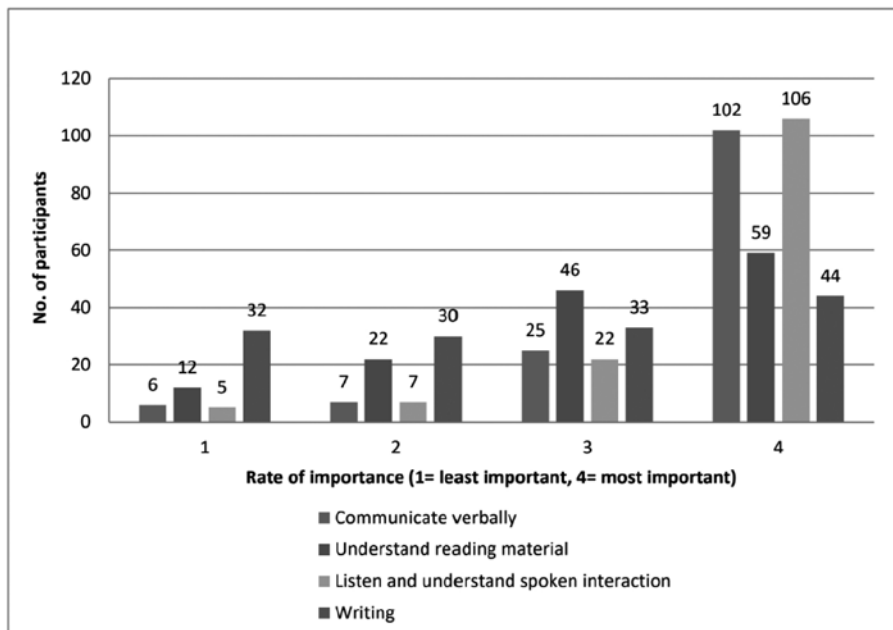
The extrinsically oriented motivations present in the results are significantly lower when compared to the intrinsically oriented ones. The vast majority of the participants (94%) declared to be learning the FL on a personal initiative and out of their free choice, while only 6% stated that they were obliged to do so. According to Gonzalez Peitado et al (2017), when the motivation is purely extrinsic, “the purpose is no longer oriented towards personal satisfaction, but towards external recognition” (p. 129). Learning a language as an adult is often linked to work-oriented or professional reasons, such as “getting a promotion, receiving a higher salary, acquiring a higher qualification, or transferring out of a current job and venturing into a new domain that is anticipated to give greater rewards or better conditions” (Gom 2009, p. 18). In fact, 34% of the participants remarked that their main reason for learning a FL was to improve their professional linguistic competence, while 13% stated that they were required to obtain formal certification in the FL. Moreover, another 34% said that they were driven by the better employment opportunities that a FL could offer.

One has to keep in mind that languages have become crucial in all sectors of today’s global marketplace (Pace 2013, Pace 2018). In fact, the ET2020 framework highlights the rising demand for FLs and communication skills on the European labour market, as well as the need for new teaching methods of FLs that are oriented towards preparing the learner for diverse professional contexts. As Pace (2013) affirms, those who are required to learn a language for work purposes need to learn specific competences that are unique to their job sectors. Given the wide variety of job sectors from which the participants of this study prevail, it might be the case for the DRLE to introduce language courses for specific purposes, to better prepare and support adults in their linguistic needs for work purposes. This should be taken into consideration even in the light of the Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 in which it is stated that “Alternative learning pathways and opportunities – whether it be second chance adult education or more job-related continuing training – need new approaches and new forms of governance” (MEDE 2014, p. 7). Furthermore, non-Maltese participants who took part in this study, stated that their main reasons for learning MFL or EFL were to avoid being discriminated against, to integrate better in the Maltese society, as well as to have better chances at obtaining Maltese citizenship and long-term residence in Malta. Other than reflecting the idea that immigrant learners’ needs tend to be extrinsic, it feels imperative that such needs are given enough thought and consideration when preparing the language learning content.

As illustrated in Figure 2, when the participants were asked to rate their preferences regarding which of the four basic language skills they consider most necessary for their needs, listening and speaking were by far regarded as the most relevant. This is no surprise given that 42% of the 140 participants of this research declared that their main source of motivation to study a FL was related to communication needs. Moreover, the educators commented that some foreign

learners who were at their early stages of learning kept a translator app at hand, as they couldn't communicate neither in Maltese nor in English. This, needless to say, has serious implications on the nature and content to be presented in the course of study, meaning that the learners would benefit most from teaching and learning approaches that are more communicative in nature.

Figure 2: Language skills relevant to the needs of the learners.



It is to be noted that the majority of the participants (76%) who identified the listening skills as being the most relevant for their needs, felt that the course had met their expectations. On the contrary, the majority (73%) of those who considered speaking as the most essential skill felt that the course failed to help them improve their competencies, and thus were not satisfied with the course content and approach. Unfortunately, when the participants were asked how confident they felt to communicate in the FL that they were learning, only 14% felt that they made the highest improvement in their communicative competence, while another 12% expressed their disappointment at not having enough conversation-oriented lessons. In fact, when discussing possible barriers they found to learning, a common shortcoming mentioned by many is that there was not enough importance given and time dedicated throughout the language courses to content that deals with everyday life and to conversation skills. This research's findings are also in line with a similar study held in Krakow, Poland, by Jaroszewska's (2013), as cited in Ivashko

(2018), wherein the adults learning FLs emphasised that it was necessary to lessen the amount of writing and reading during the FL classes and increase the time dedicated to speaking and listening. However, two important considerations need to be mentioned here. First of all, one must keep in mind that from the first to the second questionnaire, only 5 months had elapsed, making it very difficult, if not impossible for learners to gain enough confidence to be able to communicate in the TL. The second consideration is that the FL courses offered by the LLC are not specifically intended for work purposes. In addition, time constraints were another issue that hindered the adults' learning process. In fact, many remarked how their work schedules made it challenging for them to revise what was done in class and to dedicate enough time to individual study.

The way forward

In view of the findings of this research, we are putting forward our suggestions to offer a better learning experience to adult learners.

Firstly, since adults commented on the challenges they face in maintaining a balance between family, work and study, they would become more motivated to participate in lifelong learning when and where they have their employers' support. There could also be the introduction of a flexible schedule of the courses held at the LLCs, together with other incentives similar to the Get Qualified scheme, launched with the scope of inviting employers to help employees develop their knowledge and skills. Such incentives would not only benefit the employees but also the employers, since they would be investing in having more skilled workers. The employers' support is also crucial for non-Maltese adult learners studying MFL or EFL, who probably have no knowledge of either the Maltese or English language prior to the start of these courses. Yet, the only way to communicate with the educator and other classmates would be through one of these two languages. This reveals the importance, as suggested by Begotti (2019), of having educators and an educational system that supports and motivates them. They require a more urgent need to learn the L2 in order to integrate into the host country's society and be able to carry out their work with less communication obstacles between workmates, clients and customers. This is especially needed in places such as hospitals, where there are several foreign health care workers whose patients depend on their ability to communicate well with them either in English or Maltese. Since migrants' linguistic demands are very often work-related and therefore vary according to the different job sectors in which they work, maybe the time has come for the DRLE to consider introducing FL courses for specific purposes to better support their learners in their quest to upskill their linguistic abilities for work purposes.

Following strategy number 9 of MEDE (2014), the education sector must ensure that the educators are equipped with innovative pedagogies and curricula that,

according to Begotti (2010), can aid them to identify the variables that influence FLA. With the feedback presented by the participants, it emerged that there is a need for educators to continually consult their learners about their expectations of the course, by adopting a more learner-centred approach in class and involving in a more dynamic way the adult learners in the teaching and learning process itself. Such an approach would enable educators to become more sensitive to the most relevant language abilities needed by their adult learners.

It is very clear that the communicative competence is valued by adult learners of FLs, given their strong need to be able to listen, understand and communicate in real-life situations. This is also confirmed by Kuklewicz (2018), who states that a functional or situational based syllabus, together with task-based learning (TBT), can be more beneficial to adult learners, as it promotes a more communicative approach in class which engages the learners in a more meaningful learning process, also through the use of authentic material (Ellis, Shintani 2014). The educator needs to find a balance between the skills and present authentic content that deals with everyday life situations. Presenting new knowledge within familiar contexts would also help overcome the issue of age-related difficulties encountered by the older learners. Indeed, when the skills and knowledge gained in class are useful and supported by authentic examples, the learners will become more stimulated, as their intrinsic needs are more likely to be fulfilled. Further to this, even the National Research Report (Bugre, Chana 2018) proposes that educators should be trained on issues of cultural diversity to be better prepared in creating an environment of mutual respect and inclusivity within the classroom. Introducing Professional Development Courses or a study-unit within the Masters in Teaching and Learning course at the University of Malta that specialises entirely in adult learning, would guarantee having better prepared educators.

Conclusion

The process of learning can be facilitated when the educator makes an effort to understand “who the adult learner is, how the social context shapes the learning that adults are engaged in, why adults are involved in learning activities, how adults learn, and how aging affects learning ability” (Merriam et al. 2007, p. 11). In addition, it is fundamental that courses in FLs for adults should have clear objectives that take into consideration factors such as the socio-economic background and individual characteristics of the learner, together with time and resources.

Adults make a conscious choice of embarking on an educational journey and this is influenced by a number of social, economic and political aspects (Begotti 2019). Hence, identifying and understanding which are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that positively and negatively affect their motivations, can aid researchers and educators into creating effective learning. This is what this research aims to do. Through the

analysis of data from questionnaires administered to adult learners following a FL course at the LLC, it provides a clearer picture of the needs and motivations of adult learners studying FLs, while also presenting various suggestions which can improve and make the learning experience of these adults more relevant to their needs and interests, from a personal, educational and professional point of view.

The findings of this research, which are also very similar to those of other international studies (Begotti 2019, Bye et al. 2007, González Peiteado et al. 2017), show, among other things, how the main driving forces that attract individuals to learn FLs in their adulthood are of an intrinsic nature, such as personal satisfaction, knowledge acquisition and interest in the culture as well as the country in which the FL is spoken. For these learners, personal satisfaction derives simply from the process of systemising the learned material, linking it to previous experiences and being able to expand one's own knowledge at a mature age (Begotti 2019). On the other hand, other participants were driven by extrinsically oriented reasons for enrolling in the FL courses such as better employment opportunities, integrating better in the Maltese society and obtaining formal certification. These reflected the majority of the migrants' linguistic demands who took part in this study, which were often work-related. Nonetheless, a number of existing conflicts among the adult learners were highlighted, such as maintaining a good balance between work and study schedules, which further confirms the need for having incentives which support both employers and employees to encourage more adult participation.

Another two important aspects that have emerged from our research are the importance of being aware of the previous learning experiences of the adult learners and of the exposure they have to the FLs, as well as the need for educators to be aware of their learners' expectations from the FL course, both at the start as well as throughout the course. It also resulted that the most important language abilities for adult learners are listening and speaking. Unfortunately, a considerable number of participants felt that the communicative aspect was not given so much importance throughout their course of studies. This feedback illustrates the need for having teaching and learning approaches that are more communicative in nature and a more learner-centred approach in class, with the educator acting as a facilitator for learning by involving the adult learner in the process of choosing the content to be covered in class. Hence, having well-trained educators in innovative pedagogies, would help them be more prepared in applying teaching and learning strategies that meet the expectations and needs of adult learners.

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