



## Adult education in transformation - challenges as opportunities in Ukraine

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2019.2.1.10>

According to the Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018, Ukraine ranks 16th in the world in terms of tertiary education enrolment. Up to 82% of its population have either degrees or certificates of higher education. With its 657 universities, Ukraine has about 6.35 universities per 1 million people (versus 2.48 universities per 1 million people in Britain and 5.28 universities in Germany).

At the same time, there is a significant gap between the requirements of employers and the education outcomes. Higher education in Ukraine today hardly meets the needs of the economy, and importantly, does not appear to address the interests of the students themselves. More than 30% of Ukrainians, having graduated from higher education institutions, feel that they have a higher level of education than required for the work available in the labour market. Up to 80% of university graduates, having spent up to five years in their alma mater, most probably will hardly find jobs in their fields.

The 2014 Ukrainian revolution led to a visa-free regime with EU countries, thus opening up opportunities for Ukrainians to travel, study and work in the European Union. Many graduates, including young and skilled professionals, strive to build their careers abroad.

Being not effective in developing employee-employer relations and vocational training, as well as attracting and retaining talents, the country faces hard challenges at present and in the future. National education reform started in 2018 and aims to modernize school education and give stimuli for professional education development, although higher education still remains unchanged.

Speaking about today's global transformations, Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, says that "we stand on the brink of a

technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another... We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society" (Schwab, 2015). These transformations have their manifestations not only in the technological shift but also in economic, social and personal dimensions, where education is one of the key factors.

Recent debates on education have repeatedly raised concerns on its ability to cope with current challenges. We especially refer to adult education and its institutions, as they, above all, contribute to the formation of a specialist, professional, and an individual personality.

So, what are the challenges facing adult education today? What is the role of adult education and does it have to reposition itself? Can the challenges be turned into opportunities?

There are three Ukrainian experts in adult and higher education who joined the discussion on today's education challenges and trends, analysing them from their national perspectives. Eduard Rubin is the former head of Kharkiv Computer and Technological College and former head of the National Technical University, Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute. Rubin is co-founder of Telesens Academy, IT and business education, and currently develops a number of public/private projects in the sphere of adult business education and international programmes for talented teenagers (in Ukraine, Israel and Lithuania).

Ivan Prymachenko, a co-founder of Ukraine's most popular Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platform Prometheus, cooperates with leading national and international

universities, including Teachers College Columbia University, Queensland University of Technology, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At present, Prymachenko is Visiting Practitioner, Ukrainian Emerging Leaders Program (UELPP) at Stanford University.

Dr Serhiy Babak, another expert who joined the discussion, is the head of the Scientific Center at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, a member of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Ukraine, and the former Vice-Rector of a private university. At present, Babak is the Director of Educational Programs at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future.

Talking about the challenges and opportunities of higher and adult education, Eduard Rubin mentions three of them – relevance, intensity, and practicality. Lifelong Learning has fundamentally changed the goals and formats of contemporary education. Accelerating the pace of society's development and the technological revolution led to the need to prepare people for life in rapidly and constantly changing conditions. Deep structural changes in the sphere of employment determine the constant need for retraining workers, and the growth of their professional mobility. The gap between those who succeed in the labour market, constantly maintaining and updating their skills, and those who hopelessly lag behind, not keeping pace with rapidly growing professional requirements, is getting ever larger. Adults thoughtfully choose the spheres and place of the study looking for practical, relevant and fresh knowledge.

As a person who came to education with a solid business background, Rubin states that the main task of higher and adult education institutions is to provide individuals with a strong, intense training in their chosen professional field. Alongside traditional universities with competitive selection, high requirements, and serious theoretical trainings, many other types of institutions have appeared – among them, technical institutes offering short programmes, colleges, polytechnics, distance learning centers, and open universities. They create ample opportunities to meet the growing public demand for practical experience in a particular industry and the ability to teach in a 'practical situations mode' with reduced curricula, but offering a degree. There are many teaching methods, and not all of them are effective. The main indicator of the quality of education here is the ability of a graduate to find a job within his/ her specialty or a related one, or the ability to start a business based on the knowledge gained.

For this, universities and businesses should work as trusted partners and develop a high level of business confidence that determines the high degree and high quality of their cooperation. Each educational department and faculty should cooperate with companies of the corresponding profile, draw up curricula, and define the quality criteria for specialists' training and practice. There is a mutually beneficial process based on transparency and trust.

Thus, maximizing employability – the attributes of a person allowing to gain and maintain employment - becomes one of the key objectives for the institutions of adult education. Closer co-operation of academia with other fields, focused

on the students and employers' needs, should be the vector of the transformation of adult education, in order to cope with current challenges and remain a key factor of the economic and social change through the provision of fresh knowledge, and competencies for the future professional and personal development.

Like Rubin, Ivan Prymachenko considers lifelong learning a factor that determines the trends and models of the development of modern education. The times when a person received education once or maximally twice in life to pursue a good career are long gone. Now a person needs to practice continuous learning in the form of 'study-work-study-work' in order to remain competitive.

According to an Annual Trends in Online Education report (Best Colleges, 2018), 73% of online students in the US report job and employment goals as a reason for enrolling. These include students planning transition to a new career field (35%) and those who want to earn academic credentials to bolster their standing in their current line of work (30%). This requires, from the educational providers, great flexibility and ability to effectively supply the students with necessary knowledge and skills within a short period of time and at the convenience of the students.

Rapid development of educational internet and mobile technologies and the constantly growing rate of distance learning courses which offer a handy format and fresh knowledge, confirm their attractiveness and competitiveness. In many areas, notably in the field of IT, business and entrepreneurship, where dynamics and fast feedback are very important, distance education successfully competes with traditional education models.

However, the main challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity, for adult education institutions is to break through into principally new teaching-learning formats. At present, online courses usually reconstitute offline ones (video lectures, practical tasks, etc.). Although it may still be prevalent, this approach does not employ all the opportunities of web-based and blended learning. It also has quite limited room for further development. Distance education in this 'rehashed' format lacks dynamism, interaction, live communication and reflection. At the same time, distance students are often unprepared to study and to manage their time independently, without tuition. It often causes high student attrition rates in MOOCs.

The transition from the reproduction to the designing of online courses on a principally different basis – technologies, mobility, interactivity, hybrid classes with blended online education and traditional face-to-face teaching and instructions — allows to employ the internet potential for teaching and learning, and to capitalize on mass coverage and possibilities for development of individual learning trajectories.

This leads to another big challenge of finding an effective way of scaling up best cases and practices. The methods that work with a limited group of students in a private institution may not work well, if at all, with a larger number in public institutions or MOOCs. In this instance, we have

to pay special attention to evidence-based education. There are many experiments and best cases, but none of them can turn into the best practice that can work in other circumstances. Processes and strategies that have empirically demonstrated successful learning outcomes in different groups and environments should be evaluated and implemented. It ensures the quality of education products and satisfactory results for students.

And, finally, Prymachenko draws attention to an extremely important but quite underestimated aspect – the psychological component of education and the necessity to elaborate on the approaches to personalized education. Numerous students face behavioural and emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, etc.; which, are not easily recognised as impeding effective learning (especially online). Being unable to concentrate and independently follow the learning plan without instructions or control, students are rarely successful in distance learning. Thus, the teaching of strategies of psychological self-tuning, modification of behaviour and adaptation to changing environments, is one of the key conditions of efficient online education.

When speaking about modern trends of adults and especially university education, Serhiy Babak notes that in the absence of unconditional income, fresh knowledge becomes a real value – it allows you to be competitive in the labour market, and at the same time, to be a member of communities. This forms strong self-motivation for constant knowledge updates and self-development. Thus, the goal of higher education here is to provide conditions for professional / personal development and networking.

Considering the development of online and traditional learning institutions, Babak argues that we should not underestimate the unique resources of traditional universities — on-campus training, possibilities of direct communication and collaboration of participants within the educational process, interaction, live discussions and face-to-face mentoring, building teams and communities, and also huge intellectual and financial resources of the graduates. These opportunities are difficult to realise solely through online education.

Referring to improving the effectiveness of the results of adult education institutions, Babak notes the need to develop dual education, retraining, and training for contiguous professions. Formation of professional competencies actualizes the need to change the traditional training formats and instruments. The use of augmented reality (AR) and interactive tasks allows for greater involvement and simulates certain conditions to practice necessary knowledge and skills. Educational environments that combine a variety of life situations and professional orientation of the educational and extracurricular spheres of development of participants in the educational process are the most relevant for meeting demands and goals of modern education.

However, these innovations may lead to a rise in the cost of educational content and may result in the need to increase study fees. This may also force educational providers to

search for private-public partnerships or diverse cross-sector partnership formats for the benefit of adult education and all its stakeholders.

As a result of the discussion, one can conclude that adult education is an important economic and societal influence by providing necessary knowledge and competencies. Four main theses can be outlined in terms of the challenges and opportunities of adult education in the current socio-economic transformation:

- co-operation of academia and business and a cross-sector partnership provide a more balanced 'demand-and-supply' educational product, and thus, more value in the market; this also may open new opportunities, funding and financial support;
- online education and its products need to be transformed on the strength of the optionalities and scope of the internet and mobile technologies in order to effectively respond to the technological revolution;
- evidence-based methods, and priorities/needs of the learners should be in focus since they increase quality and results of education, especially for people having difficulties with effective distance learning;
- traditional universities need to ponder on their opportunities to provide both offline and online training, combining them to take advantage of both resources and in order to cope with current trends.

There is still an open question on how policy makers see a role of the sector in socio-economic development and in meeting the challenges caused by the global transformations today.

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