

## ANDRAGOGY AND FLT IN THE e-LEARNING CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** *The teaching-learning dyad has incurred significant changes of dynamics as a result of the emergence of the information sharing medium which is the online education environment. One of these changes reflects a revisitation of andragogic approaches, as increasing numbers of adult learners enrol in e-courses, mainly for convenience reasons – they allow for information dissemination in a manner which satisfies their concrete professional needs, at a pace and in a time frame that can be easily fitted into their busy schedules. Relying on the andragogic principles developed by Malcolm Knowles, this paper sets to analyse them in the framework of foreign language learning, as the study of foreign languages might be one of the most challenging instruction areas for adult learners. Thus, the article first reviews some of the most frequently used methodologies of language teaching such as the communicative approach, grammar-translation, task-based learning, the natural approach or suggestopedia. The aim of this appraisal is to detect which of them are most suited for adult students on the one hand and for virtual classrooms, on the other. Special emphasis is placed on the transformative learning theory advanced by Jack Mezirow, which is usually applied in adult education.*

**Keywords:** *language teaching, e-learning, adult learner, transformative learning*

### 1. Introduction

The digital age has led to a reorganisation of the complex structures of social, professional and economic layers. It has represented a genuine game-changer in education as well, that has entailed an adjustment of the instructional paradigm in respect of all the elements involved, from learner profiles to curriculum design and reconsideration of teaching methods. This paper draws on an interdisciplinary approach, as it tackles issues pertaining to foreign language teaching, e-learning and principles of andragogy. It focuses on three aspects of the broad educational framework: learner – in this particular case, the adult learner –, subject matter – foreign language acquisition –, and medium – online learning as opposed to traditional forms of instruction. The above-mentioned training triad can be addressed from various perspectives; however, in this particular instance, the focus

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will be on the learners, on their needs and expectations as to the result of their learning endeavours.

In the broader context of adult education, language learning is probably in the top three of all types of courses (together with computer literacy and management skills) in which adult persons enrol once they graduate some level of formal education. Most learners take up language classes as a result of a need that arises in their social and professional lives: “Some may need mainly speaking and listening skills, other may have to learn to read and write for particular purposes. Others may need informal language mainly for social interaction rather than the more formal language required for work purposes. Alternatively, they may be more interested in cultural aspects of language learning rather than the strictly functional ones” [1].

In the last decades, the advancement of the Internet and the continuous progress of information technologies have made it possible for people to engage in online learning as well, which is oftentimes preferred to traditional face-to-face education. The aim of this paper is to look into some methods of foreign language teaching such as the grammar-translation method, suggestopedia or the communicative method in an attempt to identify which would meet best the varied needs of adult language learning students.

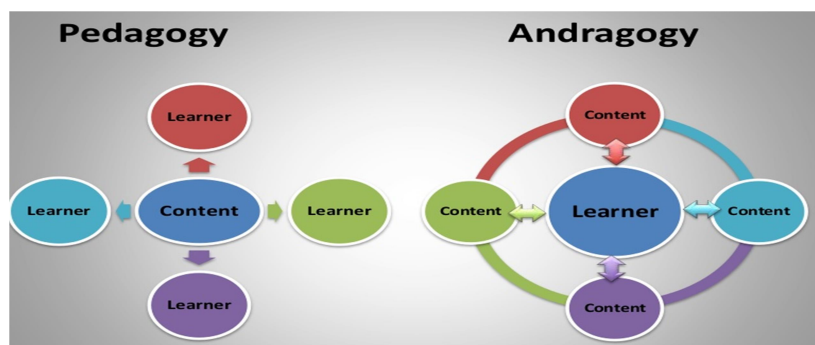
## **2. Notes on andragogic education**

In the context of continuous and fast pacing technological advances that constantly (re)shape the weave of professional interactions and expected outcomes, knowledge becomes a concept that needs constant readjustment. Such reconsideration does not necessarily refer to the content of knowledge itself, but to the actors and the general context involved in the transmission thereof. The age of students involved in ongoing learning processes has constantly increased, under the drive of new professional challenges they have to face. Likewise, the classical context of information imparting has ceased to be the norm, as both corporations and universities resort to online teaching as to a viable alternative to traditional courses. In other words, time has arrived for a reconsideration of learning in terms of how participants learn, what they learn, where and when they do it, as claimed in the 2019 UNESCO report on digital learning [2].

This paper focuses on the presumably optimal methods to be used in language teaching in a virtual classroom, when the students are adults. Before deciding on the most adequate teaching approach, tools, resources, assessment method etc, we will proceed to an analysis of the learner profile. Put differently, who are the learners, which is their motivation in engaging in this learning effort, previous experiences – both positive and negative and which are their expectations as to the outcome of the learning process.

The definition of the adult learner itself has made the object of debate, as researchers have taken into account different variables. Thus, some considered age as the main criterion of differentiating adult learners from children and adolescents, while others took into consideration social roles and even cognitive maturity. In this paper, we will adopt the definition that gives prominence to the criterion of age, and will concur with Myers et al. who adopt a definition “based on age (25 and over), but (which), when possible incorporates younger learners (20-24) who are still pursuing foundational learning such as a high school diploma or literacy and basic skills training as well as those who have assumed adult social roles such as having a child or working full-time as their primary activity” [3]. As can be inferred from this approach to adult learners, this is a category of students who are not only interested in the acquisition of knowledge for itself, but with a view to incorporating it in the real life and in the reality they are living and shaping.

The andragogic approach to learning dates back from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was first formally claimed that there are differences between teaching children and teaching grown-ups [4]. However, the term andragogy became to be widely used in modern times due to the works of Malcolm Knowles, who made a clear separation between the principles of adult learning and those of instruction aimed at children in his book *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy*, which was published in 1970. The principles that form the basis of these two distinct learning paradigms were emphasised not only by Knowles, but also by other researchers in the field. The main idea is that in the case of pedagogy, the core of the learning process is the content, i.e. the process starts from the assumptions that students have an insufficient amount of knowledge; therefore, they need to be instructed and provided with the necessary information and thus come to rely heavily on the trainer. On the other hand, in andragogy the focus is on the learners – they have previous experience in the field, can contribute with their own beliefs and opinions and already know how to use the conveyed information in order to embed it efficiently and usefully in their professional life. The trainer is no longer the transmitter of information; s/he becomes more of a guide, a mentor who contributes to the further development of his/her students. This is the main difference between the two paradigms, which is best illustrated in the image below – that pedagogy is mainly content-centred, whereas andragogy is particularly learner-centred.



Another distinction between pedagogy and andragogy reflects the idea of the willingness to acquire information: while in children's case the need to be instructed is imposed from the exterior, in the case of adult learners, the need is intrinsic and is driven by their desire to fulfil their responsibilities better and more efficiently. Alternatively, because of their limited life experience, children can contribute little to the learning process and rely considerably on the resources made available by the trainer; adult learners, on the other hand, bring to the educational activity a wide range of already acquired skills and knowledge that can be successfully exploited by the trainer in the teaching process. Going further, in pedagogy the objectives are set by the teacher, are determined in advance and are inflexible; in andragogy, the objectives are flexible and are set together with the learners, depending on their needs and motivations.

The characteristics proposed by Knowles as describing adult learners are useful in sketching a profile of this category of students. The first he mentions is **self-concept**, i.e. the identity learners assume in the training process, which is not that of mere receivers of knowledge. They approach the learning process through the filter of the social status and roles they fulfil: "But something dramatic happens to their self-concepts when people define themselves as adults. They begin to see their normal role in life no longer as being full-time learners. (...) Their chief sources of self-fulfilment are now their performances as workers, spouses, parents and citizens. Adults acquire a new status, in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, from these noneducational responsibilities" [5]. The implications of self-concept for the practice of teaching have mainly to do with the learning climate, both physical and psychological, perhaps with greater emphasis on the latter. Learners should feel that in this learning environment they are accepted as they are and can express their ideas freely and without the fear of being ridiculed, bullied or punished.

Another feature of adult learners has to do with **experience**. Through the experiences that have shaped their lives, adults are themselves invaluable resources in the teaching/learning process. They already have a well-formed, complex identity. As Knowles claims, "Adults *are* what they have *done*" [6]. Among others, in the acquisition of new knowledge, this also means that it is easier for them to put a frame around and make sense of new information as they can connect it with previous experience. On the other hand, it also means that they already have some fixed patterns of thinking, which makes them less flexible. The implications for the teaching practice translate into the trainer's need to be fully aware of the huge importance of placing emphasis on the practical aspect of learning and on the application of teaching techniques that can exploit the learners' rich life experience. Such techniques may be case studies, role play, projects, simulation drills etc.

**Readiness to learn** reflects adult learners' interest in acquiring knowledge that has applicability for their particular situations, for the roles that they assume in real life. This feature is closely linked to the idea of motivation (of the learners) and

relevance (of the content). Again resorting to Knowles as reference, the implication for teaching is that care should be given to the structure of student groups, which should be established based on learners' interests, and to the relevance of the approached topics.

Finally, **orientation to learning** mirrors the fact that adult learners engage in the learning process as a result of the need to address specific and very concrete issues they are faced with. Therefore, as opposed to children – who are provided with information to be used at a later stage in life – adult learners need information that can be applied and implemented immediately; they are largely interested in knowledge that can assist them in solving problems and achieving performance. For trainers, this means that they have to be attuned to the concerns and interests of their learners, which would help them in properly designing the curriculum and in guiding the learning experience in the correct direction.

To sum up, one may claim that the adult learner profile suggests someone who has a very clear idea of who s/he is and why s/he engages in learning activities; someone who already possesses a certain life experience, that s/he is willing and even expecting to use as contribution to the learning experience; someone who has a very clear image of the relevance of the content s/he is expecting to be provided with and someone who, as a result of the learning process, hopes and demands to be able and use the newly acquired knowledge in everyday situations that represented in the first place the drive for enrolling in the respective instructional activity. Starting from here, the next step in our endeavour is to identify the particular case of adult learners in foreign language classroom, taking into account their main features and approaches to the learning process as indicated by Knowles.

### **3. Foreign language teaching and the adult learner**

As can be noticed from the consideration of the adult learner discussed above which takes into account age as the main defining factor, college students could be counted among adult learners. However, students pursuing academic training are not considered within the scope of this paper. Instead, it will focus on persons who have already graduated some form of formal training, who have already assumed a number of social roles and who are at the beginning of or already have a set career path. This category comprises for, instance, corporate workers, free lancers or simply persons who wish to improve their knowledge in a given field.

The area of knowledge under discussion in this paper is foreign language acquisition. Learners' motivation in pursuing language study is manifold. We could talk of extrinsic motivation, in the case of employees who are pressured by a multicultural work environment to handle a given foreign language better, this being a condition of improved performance; this form of motivation also reflects immigration intentions, when the learner is preparing for immersion into a

completely new culture and language. In these cases, we talk of integrative motivation, which “is identified with positive attitudes toward the target language group and the potential for integrating into that group, or at least an interest in meeting and interacting with members of the target language group” [7].

On the other hand – or sometimes adding to the extrinsic motivation – there are issues related to intrinsic motivation, in which case learners engage in language courses on their own accord. The underlying reasons for doing so may be trying not to lose face to younger peers at work who have a better command of the foreign language(s) most frequently used at the workplace; a drive for personal development that could be enhanced by accessing various resources which are mainly available in another language or simply because they feel the need to master a foreign language in order to be able and communicate better in an increasingly multicultural world. It is also true that many foreign language learners are drawn towards studying another language by previous and future expected travelling experiences, in which case they are also interested in acquiring skills that would assist them in mastering a certain level of intercultural competence.

As such, they enrol in language classes provided by language institutes and organisations, universities and colleges or continuous education institutions. In some situations, as is the case with large corporations, language courses are organised in-house, which allows for better structuring of classes and a customised curriculum which considers the particular needs of the employees in terms of language levels, desire to develop a particular skill (such as speaking or writing) and/or familiarisation with certain lexical fields, depending on the company profile. The success of the learning endeavour depends on a number of factors, among which the most relevant are “positive beliefs, motivation and self-confidence” [8]. To this, another significant one should be added, namely previous experience in learning in general and in language study in particular. Especially if the motivation is intrinsic, it is highly challenging for an adult learner to engage in language classes and not drop off in the early stages if his/her previous experience in the field was negative, with memories of failure and frustration.

We have seen above that in andragogy, the learner profile is more complex than in pedagogy, the implications for the trainers being that they have to adjust their teaching strategies and techniques to the particular needs, expectations, studying patterns and habits of this class of learners. In order to identify the optimal teaching strategies when dealing with adult foreign language learners, perhaps it would be opportune to take a look at some of the methods of foreign language teaching which are most frequently used.

The **grammar-translation method** relies heavily on the acquisition of grammar rules, which students put into practice through grammar exercises and translations from and into the target language. Although it places great emphasis on the structure of the language and enhances a quicker and better understanding of lexis,

this method does not hone the development of other skills such as speaking and listening; moreover, it does not help students think directly in L2 and does not account for untranslatable items and subtle meanings.

The **direct method** or the **natural method** of language teaching involves no use of the native language, which means that grammar rules are inferred from the resources used, vocabulary is taught through demonstration, realia and miming and there is a focus on question-answer drills. Since it stimulates learners to think mostly in the target language, places emphasis on speech, improves an increased language sense and encourages active student participation, it is particularly useful for learners who need to communicate efficiently in L2. However, it is not recommended for slow learners or those with no previous exposure to the language, it is difficult to apply in large classes and does not teach grammar in a systematic manner, if learners' focus is to improve grammatical proficiency.

**Suggestopodia** is a teaching method whose aim is to assist the command of conversational proficiency in a short span of time. According to Georgi Lozanov, the founder of this approach, learners' feelings are extremely important in the learning process and have to be "desuggested" of their psychological obstacles in order to focus fully on the process. "Suggestopodia sees learning as a process taking place through the interaction of two levels; the conscious linguistic level, which deals with language items, and a subconscious level which gives learners the impression that learning is easy and that they can carry out learning tasks" [9]. With this language teaching technique, the focus is on the content, some native language is used in order to explain vocabulary and grammar is presented without extensive explanations.

The **communicative approach** or **communicative language teaching (CLT)** has been largely used since the seventies, when it represented a breakaway from the then-classical audiolingual method of teaching languages. CLT has been greatly appraised for developing learners' linguistic competence in the context of real-life situations. With CLT, the syllabus focuses from the very beginning on the development of the four skills, which are worked on in an integrated-skills approach (which means enhancing more skills simultaneously). Learners study from authentic materials and the teacher is not a mere imparter of information, but a mentor, a guide, whose main role is to supervise student-student interaction, to stimulate learner motivation, to provide instructions and suggest activities and to offer constructive and effective feedback. Among the teaching activities preferred with this method are role-playing, open-ended debates and discussions, collaborative activities. The focus of CLT is assisting learners in communicating in authentic contexts, as ultimately "successfully learning a foreign language is assessed in terms of how well learners have developed their communicative competence, which can be loosely defined as their ability to apply knowledge of a language with adequate proficiency to communicate" [10]. The greatest advantage

is that learners have the opportunity to bring to class their own life experience, turning it into a valuable resource for language learning.

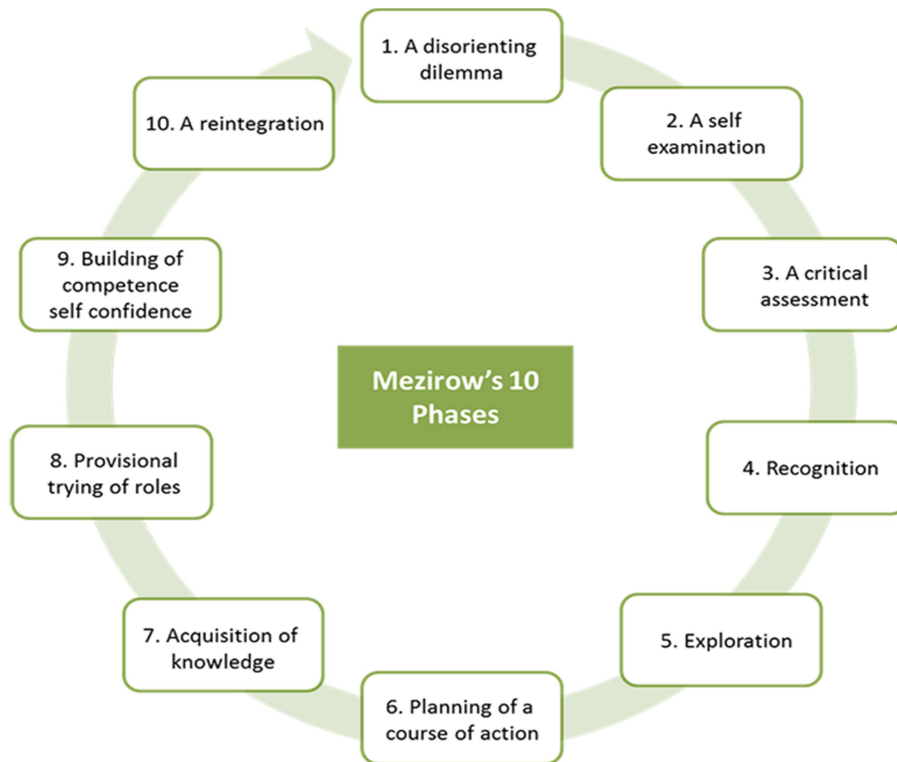
Jack Mezirow developed the **transformative learning theory** in the late seventies. It was aimed specifically at adult learners who are encouraged to stimulate their thinking through disorienting dilemmas. Through critical thinking and questions, they are then expected to check whether their opinions and basic assumptions about the surrounding world are correct. With his theory, Mezirow's aim was to identify how people use self-reflecting to change their perspective on the world. He considered that they manage to achieve this by means of what he calls "disorienting dilemmas". When faced with such dilemmas, people are forced to use their critical thinking and reconsider their former perspective so as to frame the new experience into their general outlook.

In Mezirow's own words, transformative learning is "a process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (...) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" [11]. It is particularly effective in the context of adult learning, when recipients of new content are more aware of the need to constantly check and reconsider their view of reality and of using their experience as a frame for the acquisition of further information. Moreover, it is relevant in the context of learning as a general driver of change, as it places emphasis on "sociocultural awareness and understanding, with an objective of personal growth and positive changes in society as a whole" [12].

The concept of disorienting dilemmas is often used in learning environments, when trainers challenge learners to approach subjects and fields of study from new perspectives. Transformative learning can be easily and efficiently used in adult learner classrooms as it provides a good opportunity for practicing critical thinking – when dealing with new content, learners can debate upon it by engaging into discussions with their peers, confronting their own assumptions with those of their colleagues. It also offers the opportunity to relate to other learners who undergo similar transformative processes – learners exchange ideas and their own beliefs are altered and inspired by those of their peers. Finally, a transformative learning environment allows learners to act upon their newly acquired beliefs.

Mezirow claimed that transformational learning follows ten stages, which are illustrated below:





Source: [www.researchgate.com](http://www.researchgate.com)

The entire process starts with the occurrence of a disorienting dilemma, which leads to an analysis of the self under the form of a critical evaluation of one's own assumptions. The fourth stage is the recognition of the fact that there are other persons facing a similar dilemma, this triggering an exploration of potential options through discussions with those others. The next stage is designing a plan of action, with the logical sequence of acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to put the plan into action. In the eighth stage, the person/learner is trying new roles, and s/he builds on skills and self-confidence necessary to fulfil these new roles. The final stage is the reintegration of the newly possessed perspective into the person/learner's life. These stages can be easily interpreted in the language learning context, but their implementation requires a significant amount of critical thinking and judgment; which is why this frame of learning is suited for adult learners, who have reached a certain level of maturity, are accustomed to juggling with frames of references in the process of knowledge acquisition and are willing to accept the idea that development entails at times necessary perspective shifts.

The language teaching methods briefly discussed above present both advantages and drawbacks in the context of adult learning. It is obvious that trainers could not

opt for a given approach based solely on learners' type. Things are more complex and more nuanced than that. Although students may all be included in the category of adult learners, there are other variables that determine the choice of a given teaching method or of a mixture of strategies. Such variables comprise the learners' level of language knowledge (in a mixed-level classroom, a blend of teaching approaches should probably best be put into practice), motivation (need of immediate application of language knowledge or simply improvement of one's language skills), different interests in content as far as lexis and grammar are concerned (some learners are more interested in consolidating grammar rules, while others are more preoccupied with acquiring new vocabulary) etc.

Therefore, the grammar-translation method may be useful for groups where the main emphasis is on the acquisition of language structures, with focus on writing and reading, as is the case with a business correspondence course, for instance. This approach would not be effective, however, with a large group of students or with learners who need to attain a level of speaking that may enable them to communicate efficiently in the studied language, in which case the direct method or the communicative one is best suited. Similarly, these methods are most frequently used in classes with advanced language level. On the other hand, they are unsuited for groups of beginners, as there is little to no use of the native language, or in the situation of learners with a negative previous experience of language learning, since such approaches might increase learners' frustration and sense of helplessness, probably leading to the undesirable outcome of drop off.

#### **4. e-Learning and the adult foreign language learner**

The adult learners whom we have mentioned above have to be functional in the current knowledge-based environment. This is their main stimulus for engaging in language learning courses after all. Actually, the challenge for them is double: on the one hand, to become familiar with new content, and on the other, to acquire the skills that could assist them in assimilating new knowledge as they need it. In other words, "as new technologies continue to quicken the pace of change in all parts of people's lives, learning to become a better learner is far more important than learning, for instance, the most recent finances or marketing tools" [13]. The focus is no longer necessarily on what you need to know, but on how to acquire the necessary strategies to help you learning the things that you still need to learn.

There is a wide range of institutions offering language courses for adult education – language institutes, universities or even high schools. In recent decades language courses, similar to other education forms that provide content for lifelong learning to adult learners, have largely moved to the virtual environment. E-learning is actually an extension of the distance learning that has been in used throughout the entire twentieth century and even before. Virtual instruction has become possible due to the development of a multitude of learning technologies which present a

number of valuable advantages to learners and training institutions alike. E-learning, as this form of education is mainly called, is increasingly preferred by learners to the detriment of face-to-face classes. However, there is a significant number of differences between the traditional form of instruction and virtual learning and for an optimal outcome of the learning experience, both trainers and organising institutions need to have “a sound understanding of the link between adult learners’ characteristics and the appropriateness of the online environments for their online experiences” [14].

The advent and evolution of information technologies have made education more accessible than ever to an ever-larger number of learners. Leaving aside the technological obstacles that may be significant, e-learning is increasingly favoured by adult learners for a variety of reasons. One of them refers to the feature known as “just-in-time and just-for-me learning” [15], which mirrors the advantage most valued by this category of learners, i.e. that it is convenient in terms of time availability – it can be available 24/7 – (when we do not talk of synchronous teaching) and it provides the opportunity of benefiting from customised forms of information sharing and content structuring.

Two other great advantages of e-learning are flexibility and accessibility. Regardless of whether they are university students or corporation workers, people from remote locations have the chance to attend courses and improve their training without having to travel, with the associated perk of saving costs. Moreover, in the case of adult learners, who have to fulfil their professional and personal roles at the same time, they value greatly the opportunity of self-paced instruction. Unless they are enrolled in synchronously held courses, they can study when their schedule allows them to and if they miss some classes, they can also resort to recorded lessons, webinars or collaborative instruction software.

One of the main arguments invoked by detractors of the e-learning system is the diminished social interaction among peers or between the trainer and the learners. Although this may be the case in some situations (but the existence of forums, chat rooms, eTandem - “interaction between language learners ...that allows users to learn a new language and teach their native languages by using a communication tool” [16] -, collaborative learning activities has significantly diminished this communication gap), this form of training is most convenient for people who prefer individual study and/or are not willing to interact with peers.

Despite the many advantages of e-learning for adult learners, an important issue that needs to be take into account refers to the barriers that still exist. Penina [17] mentions seven main e-learning obstacles: personal barriers, learning style barriers, instructional barriers, organisational barriers, situational barriers, content suitability barriers and technological barriers. To these, a number of other variables are added such as age, gender, ethnic belonging, marital status, education level, job position, computer literacy, venue of the study and any prior experience with e-learning

environments. This paper looks into an instance of education by taking into account three components: type of learners, studied content and form of content delivery, namely e-learning. This triad comes with a good number of challenges – if not downright barriers – which are generated by each of its component elements. When we mention barriers, we consider them from the perspective of the training outcome – in this case learners’ attaining the desired language level following graduation of the course(s) – and we focus on their own view of the entire process.

In respect of the category of learners envisaged, the obstacles may have to do with their academic skills, their motivation, the time they are willing to dedicate to instruction, previous experience with language courses and the performance achieved at the time, availability to engage in tasks that may require a significant amount of time spent individually considering the social roles they have to assume as well in the family and at work, but also age.

Age is a significant factor when we consider the type of content envisaged in this paper, namely foreign languages. It is a well-known fact that people manifest some form of reluctance to engage in language classes especially if the class is of mixed age groups. Learners of a certain age may be embarrassed. This obstacle is further enhanced if the learner’s previous experience in language learning was not successful and the approach is governed from the onset by feelings of frustration and lack of self-confidence. It may be daunting to embark in an activity that was previously marked by failure and the learner’s mindset in this particular case may represent a genuine roadblock. The trainer’s role in helping such students overcome this obstacle is essential, both through the approach meant to help them be active during classes and through the creation of a relaxed and collaborative atmosphere in the group.

Finally, the barrier that is most frequently invoked by adult learners refers to the use of technology. It may be the fact that some of them doubt their skills in using technology because they are aware that their level of computer proficiency is low, or ignorance of the plethora of resources – which include both materials and people willing to assist them in the language learning process - that may become available to them once they access the virtually unlimited universe of the Internet.

The ultimate goal of instruction is to satisfy the needs of learners, a target which can only be achieved with the adoption of the appropriate strategies and learning environment. The principle of active learning, promoted by D. Barnes [18] is of utmost relevance in adult learning. He suggested a number of principles that ensure the active participation of learners. Thus, active learning is assumed to display the features below. It should be:

- purposive: assignments and tasks should be considered by learners as relevant for their interests;
- reflective: learners are supposed to reflect and ponder on the conveyed content;

- negotiated: learners negotiate with their trainer the methods and objectives of learning;
- critical: learners evaluate various methods of content acquisition;
- complex: the tasks received by learners mirror the complexity of real-life situations;
- situation-driven: genuine situations are considered when establishing learning tasks;
- engaged: the activities used in learning follow real life tasks.

If the above-mentioned principles of active learning are complied with, then one may indeed assume that the conditions for efficient content communication are ensured and that the outcome of the learning process could successfully mirror learners' expectations.

Andragogy is an instruction model which places emphasis on the learners, with their own needs, expectations, learning styles and patterns, experiences and motivation. Online learning is also an education system that is learner-centred. Therefore, when engaged in an adult learning environment which also happens to be online, teachers should become aware of a necessary shift in their role in the teaching-learning duo. The teacher becomes a guide, a facilitator, a mentor, who has to abandon the former role of a supreme authority in his/her fields of knowledge. Although this adjustment may be a challenge in itself for teachers, the outcome of their efforts to adjust to the requirements of online learning interaction is worth the trouble. "Facilitating learning is empowering for both the learner and the teacher and frees the teacher from many of the burdens that having to be an 'expert' might entail" [19]. Indeed, when none of the parties involved in the process assumes or is attributed a position of power, there is more room for collaboration, learner initiative and active participation.

## **5. Conclusions**

Adult learning – in this paper we excluded college students from the definition of 'adult learners', and we focused rather on persons with defined social and professional roles and responsibilities – has a number of specific features with important implications for teaching and assessment methods, classroom environment, teacher role and student involvement. The learner has greater autonomy than in the case of pedagogy and participates actively in the decision-making process related to learning methods and activities. "A student who desires to be self-directed is one who will thrive in a learner-centred classroom where his or her ideas, experiences, learning styles and personal learning objectives are valued and included" [20]. Learners can use their life experiences, beliefs and knowledge as valuable resources to be used in the classroom.

These are all the more important in language learning, when content transmission envisages not only linguistic structures and lexis, but also cultural knowledge. In

adult learning, the efficiency of second language acquisition depends basically on several major factors: satisfaction of learners' expectations (which translates into the opportunity of using the language immediately in the various communication situations in which they have to be functional), learners' active participation and the use of their own experiences and beliefs, which emphasise the idea of contribution to the training process. "Adults studying a foreign language are usually learning it for a specific purpose: to be more effective professionally, to be able to survive in an anticipated foreign situation, or for other instrumental reasons. They are not willing to tolerate boring or irrelevant content or lessons that stress the learning of grammar rules out of context" [21]. Embedding new knowledge in the learners' reality is paramount for an efficient learning outcome.

Taking into account the main features of androgenic learning, but also those of online learning, one could draw the conclusion that this form of instruction best responds to the educational needs of adult learners: it is flexible enough to accommodate adult learners' busy schedules, it allows for self-paced training, it is more cost effective as compared to traditional forms of education and it can be customised so as to reflect the exact needs of the learner. In this paper the focus was on adult language learning in the online context. After looking into some of the methods most frequently used for language teaching, and in the context of androgenic instruction, we may conclude that the approach that best suits the needs of this learner category is the communicative method, implemented on the background of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The activities most frequently used in CLT – information gathering, task completion, information transfer, opinion sharing – and the resources which represent mostly genuine, real-life materials, can ensure the expected outcome in terms of language acquisition.

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