TRAINING EVALUATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES' EMPLOYEES
LIFELONG LEARNING IN POLAND AS PART OF ACTIONS
CO-FINANCED FROM THE EU FUNDS IN 2007-2013

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Abstract

The article covers the evaluation of local authorities’ employees lifelong learning as part of actions co-financed from the EU funds. The trainings were co-financed from the European Social Fund of the Operational Programme Human Capital.

The primary objective of the paper has been to present the opinions of local authorities' employees on the trainings completed in terms of personal and professional career development and the applicability of the knowledge and skills acquired for the jobs held.

The introduction stresses the role of lifelong learning in personnel development in terms of Polish local authorities administration HR problems diagnosis. At the same time the need of training methodology adjustment to a specific nature of working adult education has been indicated.

Then the local authority projects executed in one of the counties of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province in 3 research periods: 2008-2010, 2010-2012 and 2014-2015 are described. In that part of the paper the scope of implementations and trainings is demonstrated for 7 local authorities and their 300 employees covered by dedicated lifelong learning.

Further a thorough analysis refers to a specific nature of the trainings, namely the range of the topics, organization method and the teaching methods, means and tools applied.

Finally, the article presents the research of evaluation studies which involved 300 employees (training participants). The employees evaluated the trainings in terms of staff competence enhancement, professional career development and the training outcomes applicability for the job. Detailed questions concerned a collection of opinions on the applicability of the issues covered, number of hours, organization methods and the evaluation of the teaching methods, means and tools applied.

The article recapitulation provides conclusions and recommendations for lifelong learning of local-authorities' personnel. The guidelines can constitute good practices for designing of lifelong learning for the successive 2014-2020 programme period.

Keywords: lifelong learning, training evaluation, local authorities' employee, EU funds, Operational Programme Human Capital, personal development, professional career.

1 INTRODUCTION

The European Union appreciates the role of human capital in today's knowledge-based society. Digital competence has been acknowledged as one of the 8 key competences for Lifelong Learning [1]. The EU allocates considerable funds for its development by launching various initiatives and programmes from the European Social Fund (ESF). The primary objective and guidelines concerning education and trading are depicted in the "Education and Training 2010" (ET 2010) and "Education and Training 2020" initiatives; the second of which created a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training covering the period 2010-2020 [2]. One of the strategic objectives of the new framework states that: "The implementation of lifelong learning and mobility requires progress on lifelong learning strategies and requires also mobility extension". Lifelong learning and adult education are subjects of great interest to the European Union. One can find in the applicable literature plenty of examples which present various initiatives taken in various countries in that field as well as the evaluation of their outcomes.

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1 Article is the second part of the publication cycle on the problem of "lifelong learning" initiated in Poland thanks to dedicated European Union funds in 2007-2013 and 2014-2020.
Pepler [3] points to the results of current use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Adult Education both in universities and outside higher education in 12 Member States (UK, France, Hungary, Sweden, Latvia, Germany and Romania, with briefer reviews of Spain, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland and Portugal). The research also assesses its potential and makes recommendations for policy interventions, taking account of the European Commission’s policy frameworks. Smith et al. [4] in their studies analyse adult education policy in 6 countries: United Kingdom, Germany, Romania, Poland, Portugal and Sweden. The research focused on 3 aspects of adult education: organisation, quality assessment of institutions and/or staff and funding. Prokou [5] shows how the European Education Policy and National Practices influenced adult education and lifelong learning in Greece in the early 2010s. Achim [2] presents and discusses research results in post-communist European countries in terms of public spending at primary, secondary and tertiary level of education, and conclude among others that “among the post-communist countries, Poland registers the highest quality regarding the educational system reflected through the highest level of education funding and the participation rate of the population to education”. Another example of the use of European Union (EU) Social Fund and effects it has brought is given by Reghenzani-Kearns and Kearns [6]. Due to the “Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Programme from 2001 to 2008”, over 70 regions in Germany were supported with a substantial budget on a phasing-out funding basis. Despite many precious initiatives which have generated good effects in terms of development and qualifications enhancement, the EU policy evaluation results are ambiguous. Critical opinions about the ESF are expressed by e.g. Welbers [7] who claims that: “compared to other EU programmes and initiatives in the area of education and training, the ESF has not made a significant contribution to the debate about European cooperation in this field”. Own experience of the authors supported by the opinions of the financed training participants also justify a critical perception of the funds expenditure effectiveness; from European Social Fund and Operational Programme Human Capital in 2007-2013, which created many possibilities for improving the quality of employees, including administrative workers.

The primary objective of the paper has been to present the opinions of local authorities' employees on the trainings completed in terms of personal and professional career development and the applicability of the knowledge and skills acquired for the jobs held. The article describes the local authority projects executed in one of the counties of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province in 3 research periods: 2008-2010, 2010-2012 and 2014-2015, especially a specific nature of the trainings, namely the range of the topics, organization method and the teaching methods, means and tools applied. The most important part concerns presenting results of the evaluation studies which involved 300 employees (training participants).

2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE’S TRAINING FINANCING AND PLANNING

The local government administration is responsible for the security and operation of social infrastructure and it must meet growing expectations of citizens, both the residents and entrepreneurs. It is therefore essential to provide an adequate preparation of the local authorities’ administration to ensure the right performance of public tasks for a given job [8]. It is possible, thanks to the process of successive training and lifelong learning of local authorities’ personnel to improve qualifications and competence in order to increase their work efficiency [9].

Over the recent years in Poland there has been a growing interest in public administration personnel education, including the local authorities’ personnel, which is due to a possibility of local authorities' education from European funds; from the Operational Programme Human Capital (OP HC), which is one of the operational programs supporting Poland’s social policy and financing actions in two domains: counteracting unemployment and human resources development in 2007-2013. The funds were mostly provided by the European Social Fund (ESF). The whole amount allocated to OP HC amounted to 11.5 billion EUR, including 9.7 billion EUR (85%) from the ESF and the other part (15%) - the domestic funds. As part of the Programme, support was provided to employment, education, social integration, development of the adaptation potential of employees and enterprises, as well as aspects of human resources development in rural areas, the construction of efficient and effective public administration at all levels and human resources health promotion. The programme includes nine priority axes, executed parallel at the central and regional level, including Priority V Good Governance dedicated to public administration [10].
As for the employee training planning process, it is essential to provide the right diagnosis, corresponding to HR and institutional problems of local authorities administration. Indicated in the diagnostic part of OP HC, the problems of Polish administration point to a need of support to focus on the priority challenges of enhancing the potential of the Polish administration; strengthening the capacity for creating a high quality law, long-term development of programmes and strategies as well as public services quality improvement.

To ensure a high personnel learning process effectiveness, it is essential to have the right training organization as well as adjusting the teaching methodology to the specific nature of adult education (Kolb's cycle) [11]. At the same time it is justifiable to perform the evaluation of the usefulness and effectiveness of the training measures executed to meet the needs of improving local authorities' personnel lifelong learning process [12].

3 CONCEPTS OF THE TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS EXECUTED FOR THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES' ADMINISTRATION

The concepts of training and implementation projects dedicated to local authorities are based on OP HC programme guidelines for priority V Good Governance:

- Operational Programme Human Capital,
- Detailed Description of Operational Programme Human Capital,
- Measure plans (approved for each programming year),
- Competition documentations (announced in each programming year).

The aim of Priory V OP HC, Measure 5.2. *Strengthening potential of local government* is: Increase in the quality of public services rendered by local authorities and enhanced quality of regional and local policies and programmes [7]. Based on that, the Intermediate Body annually approves the measure plan for Priority V, and Intermediate Body II regularly announces competitions dedicated to local authorities.

In response, local authorities prepare application for co-financing in which they plan and budget the training and implementation measures addressed to their local authorities' employees. Table 1 provides a concept of 3 projects executed, addressed to local authorities and local authorities' employees in 7 local authorities and local authorities' employees in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province in 2007-2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities covered by the project</td>
<td>Barcin Commune, Gąsawa Commune, Janowiec Wielkopolski Commune, Labiszyn Commune, Rogowo Commune, Żnin Commune, Żnin County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project title</td>
<td>European Competencies of the Public Servant</td>
<td>Professional Personnel – Efficient Authorities of the Żnin County</td>
<td>Żnin County Authorities – ready for rendering public e-services for residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition no.</td>
<td>1/OP HC/5.2.1/2008</td>
<td>2/OP HC/5.2.1/2009</td>
<td>2/OP HC/5.2.1/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project execution period</td>
<td>01.07.2008–30.06.2010</td>
<td>01.07.2010–30.06.2012</td>
<td>01.01.2014–30.06.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project value (EUR*)</td>
<td>210,480.65</td>
<td>290,917.32</td>
<td>451,955.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of people trained</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project value per person (EUR*)</td>
<td>5,800.24</td>
<td>8,072.38</td>
<td>6,497.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key problem</td>
<td>Insufficient efficiency of the operation of local authorities’ administration at the commune and county level due to low competencies of public servants</td>
<td>Low operation efficiency of commune authorities and municipality-commune authorities in terms of public services rendered and insufficient competencies of public servants</td>
<td>Low standard of rendering e-services and an insufficient electronization level, including exchange of correspondence with the ePUAP platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key objective</td>
<td>Increased operation efficiency of local authorities’ administration at the commune and county level by increasing the competencies of public servants as part of training</td>
<td>Increased operation efficiency of local authorities in terms of the public services rendered and increasing public servants’ competencies</td>
<td>Increasing the standard of rendering e-services and increasing the electronization level, including the exchange of correspondence via the ePUAP platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project training measures</td>
<td>5 trainings modules</td>
<td>8 trainings modules</td>
<td>3 trainings modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project implementation measures</td>
<td>No implementations</td>
<td>3 implementations: 1. customers’ public services quality satisfaction monitoring system 2. local authorities’ personnel competencies system based on investigating competency gaps and training needs of public servants based on the updated job descriptions 3. procedure of updating the description of services rendered by local authorities</td>
<td>3 implementations: 1. displaying new e-services rendered by local authorities on the ePUAP platform 2. local authorities launching Confidential Profile approval centres 3. information and promotional measures enhancing the level of residents using e-services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of the conferences held</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*project value converted according to the EUR average exchange rate on 4.05.2017: 1 EUR=PLN 4.2177
Source: authors' own study

4 TRAINING TOPIC COVERAGE, ORGANIZATION AND METHODOLOGY

This point, table 2, demonstrates a specific nature of the trainings organised, co-financed as part of 3 EU projects. Trainings involved a total of 300 local authorities’ administration employees of 7 local authorities. A variation in the approach to education process organization was especially indicated: namely a selection of the training venue, number of training hours per module, number of training days per month and the module topic coverage. The other elements: the methods and teaching means and tools used during training were common for all the projects.
Table 2: Characteristics of the training process as part of the EU co-financed training and implementation projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project topic</td>
<td>European Competencies of the Public Servant</td>
<td>Professional Personnel – Efficient Authorities of the Żnin County</td>
<td>Authorities of the Żnin County: ready for rendering public e-services for residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training participants</td>
<td>Local authorities' administration employees from 7 local authorities: Barcin Commune, Gaśawa Commune, Janowiec Wielkopolski Commune, Labiszyn Commune, Rogowo Commune, Żnin Commune, Żnin County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training venue</td>
<td>Outside the facility (off-site)</td>
<td>Outside the facility (on-site)</td>
<td>In the facility (on-the-job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of training hours per module</td>
<td>10 days x 8h =80h</td>
<td>8 days x 8 h =64h</td>
<td>6 days x 8h=48h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of training days per month</td>
<td>4 days</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>lecture, tutorials, discussion, case study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching means and tools</td>
<td>Printed matter, flipchart, multimedia presentation, interactive table, computer programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors' own study
5 TRAINING PROCESS EVALUATION STUDY RESULTS

This section presents the results of the evaluation study performed among 300 employees participating in training as part of 3 EU projects completed.

The employees were evaluating the trainings for the module they took part in using an anonymous survey questionnaire applying the 5-degree scale (where 5 stands for the maximum score and 1 – the lowest score). Averaged results for all the projects and separately for each project have been presented in Figures 1-4.

Fig. 1. Evaluation of the usefulness of training topics for a given job and for professional employee career development

Source: authors' own study

The average training topic usefulness score for a given job was (4.4) and in professional career development – slightly less (4.2). The scores varied across the projects:

- training topic usefulness for a given job; the highest score received (4.8) in project 2, and the lowest score (4.1) in project 3;
- the usefulness of training topic for the needs of professional employee career development – the highest score received (4.6) in project 1, and the lowest score (3.9) in project 3.

Fig. 2. Training organization process evaluation: adequacy of the number of training hours per module and the number of training days per month

Source: authors' own study
The average training organization score, namely the number of training hours per module was (4.2) and the number of training days per month – slightly above (4.3). The scores varied across the projects:

- the adequacy of the number of training hours scored highest (4.8) in project 3, and lowest (3.8) in project 1;
- the adequacy of the number of training days per month scored highest (4.6) in project 2, and lowest (4.2) in the other projects: 1 and 3.

Fig. 3. Evaluation of the methods used and the teaching means and tools applied
Source: authors’ own study

The average score for the teaching methods was (4.2) and the teaching means and tools – slightly higher (4.3). The evaluation of the methods and tools varied across the projects:

- the teaching methods scored highest (4.5) in project 1, and lowest (4.0) in project 3;
- the teaching means and tools scored highest (4.6) in project 1, and lowest (4.1) in project 3.

Fig. 4. Training venue and total training evaluation
Source: authors’ own study
The average score for the training venue was (4.4), whereas the total training score was slightly lower (4.3). Scores varied across the projects:

- the training venue scored highest (4.8) in project 1, and lowest (3.9) in project 3;
- the highest total training score (4.4) was reported for project 1, and the lowest (4.2) in project 3.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Drawing on the training process evaluation study results, the following conclusions have been formulated for the local authorities education process:

- Optimal training for local authorities’ employees should be held in 6 days x 8 training hours cycles during the working hours, namely the training module should not exceed 48 hours.
- The training venue should be located outside the work place (in the training hall); off-site 2-day training with 1-night accommodation, held 2 days a month, in a group not bigger than 15 persons, has been considered most effective.
- Training topic coverage per module should vary; next to specialist issues (hard training) on content-wise knowledge for a given job, general issues (soft training) focused on the development of individual features in the participants (interpersonal communication, assertiveness, motivation, stress management, time management, group conflict solving) should be included.
- The class methodology should be based on a short introduction (lecture), followed by individual or group exercises, applying case study and involving participants into discussion and exchange of good practises. Training process must refer to participants’ experience and knowledge of real problems faced in a given job according to Kolb’s cycle (experience – reflecting on – generalising - application).
- Teaching means and tools must vary, participants should be given a chance of working with the text and the coach should, to the greatest extent, use various media (flipchart, multimedia presentation, interactive table and computer programs).

The recommendations can constitute good practises while designing lifelong learning process in the successive programming period: 2014-2020.

REFERENCES


