

COACHING FOR ADULT LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS- NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *The article presents the results of a pre-analysis of learners' and educators' needs and expectations carried out under the multilateral Grundtvig project Coaching Skills for Adult Education (COACH4U) with the aim of establishing the nature of their work and communication with adult learners. The research was conducted during January – February 2015 through a focus-group discussion with 47 participants from the UK, Spain, Cyprus, Poland, Sweden and Bulgaria. The indicators used in the study are: communication with adult learners in and out of the classroom; general awareness of coaching and coaching skills; knowledge of specific coaching techniques; use of coaching techniques; expectations about the application of coaching to participants' personal expertise; expectations about improving participants' expertise in different areas; application of acquired coaching knowledge and skills to the context of partner organisations. Some conclusions oriented towards professional competences in adult education are formulated on the basis of the research.*

KEY WORDS: Coaching, Adult Learners, Educators, Project, Needs, Expectations

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades coaching has established itself as a powerful tool for enhancing self-development and self-actualization, which is applicable to a variety of contexts. There are different types of coaching depending on its purposes and contexts of application, such as performance, skills, career, life and business coaching, to name but a few. The key to any effective coaching relationship is the idea of improving coachees' performance and developing their personal potential and skills. This can be achieved through identifying the relevant areas where coaching can help and devising tasks and activities leading to the implementation of the outlined development plan.

Extensive research has been done on using coaching skills and techniques in adult education (see Cavanagh 2013; Clancy and Blinkert 2010; Cornett and Knight 2008;

Forde 2011). The need for developing learners' knowledge, skills and professional competencies in line with market demands and the pressure for lifelong learning has prioritized abilities such as goal-setting, self-regulation and creativity. Coaching views the interaction between learners and educators as "focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate" (Nieuwerburgh 2012: 17).

The article presents the results of a pre-analysis of learners' and educators' needs and expectations in selected institutions which are partners in the multilateral Grundtvig project

COACH4U with the aim of establishing the nature of their work and communication with adult learners.

METHODOLOGY

The information about the institutions and participants in the survey was obtained by means of informal interviews conducted both in small focus-groups and individually with participants in piloting three scenarios for coaching seminars. The interviews provided information on participants' awareness of the benefits of coaching techniques and estimated their coaching skills level. The research was conducted during January – February 2015 through a focus-group discussion with 47 participants from the UK, Spain, Cyprus, Poland, Sweden and Bulgaria.

The main indicators for measuring participants' awareness, knowledge and expectations corresponded to the indicators used in the needs analysis conducted for the purposes of the project. The indicators aimed to reveal and measure participants' expectations in terms of seminars' contents and methodology. They included:

- Communication with adult learners in the classroom;
- Communication with adult learners outside classroom;
- General awareness of coaching and coaching skills;
- Knowledge of specific coaching techniques;
- Use of coaching techniques;
- Expectations about the application of coaching to participants' personal expertise;
- Expectations about improving participants' expertise in different areas;
- Application of acquired coaching knowledge and skills to the context of partner organisations.

The participants in the surveys are adult educators working in institutions in six European countries: Wandsworth Council Lifelong Learning (WCLL), a department of Wandsworth Borough Council, a local public authority in central London, UK; Inspired Learning Centre - a company located in Cyprus, specialized in training and coaching services; the University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz, Poland - an accredited higher education institution; Association of Business Services and Other Activities (ADESEMA) from Madrid, Spain; Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen - a national higher school from Bulgaria, and Folkuniversitetet - an adult educational association from Sweden.

The results of the survey, collected by means of open-ended questions or a Likert scale responses, are presented as a summary of the main findings or statistical analysis in pie-charts, bar-charts and tables with calculation of mean and standard deviation for each of the selected indicators.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis below follows the main indicators as outlined above.

Communication with adult learners in the classroom

The results from the partner institutions show that the nature of communication between learners and educators differs depending on the profile of the respective institution. Thus, for example, the participants from Wandsworth Council, **UK**, outline the following ways of communication: whole group teaching, small group work, 1:1 tutorial (to complete individual learning plans) and observations of apprentices in the workplace. Participants from ILC, **Cyprus**, give preference to face-to-face dialogue, group discussion, question/answer sessions, advice sessions, work on mistakes, practical exercises and role plays. **Polish** participants outline both verbal and non-verbal communication, emphasizing the importance of mimicry and gestures and various e-learning tools. At the University of the Third Age the need to refer to some very private topics and personal experience comes to the fore. In **Spain** the participants emphasize the importance of respect, closeness and professional attitude in communication. **Bulgarian** educators mention some traditional forms for auditory work and communication at university, such as lectures, seminars, tutorial, distance learning and e-learning. The preferred ways of communication with learners at Folks University, **Sweden**, involve classroom teaching, group work, face-to-face meetings and face-to-face coaching.

Communication with adult learners outside classroom

In the **UK**, there is apprenticeship provision which uses an electronic portfolio system (Onefile) through which learner progress is tracked. Learners can upload evidence and their assessors can post tasks for the apprentices to complete. The system also includes an email message system. Tutors communicate with learners via their workplace email contact and the learners' personal email (where provided). Wandsworth Council lifelong learning does not have a virtual learning environment. In **Cyprus** e-mail contact is deemed necessary. One participant said that he tries to recognize students' needs and help them to find a good way to meet their expectations. Other ways of support for learners out of class involve random 1:1 support as the learner identifies a need or the teacher recognizes the need; 1:1 tutorial support; advice sessions; email and online support and communication, Skype, email, texting and social media. In **Poland** professional contact with learners is established through cooperation outside the classroom, often in the implementation of various projects. In **Spain** the support can be provided through the training web platform, in tutorials and counselling sessions, by e-mail and other forms of online communication depending on the needs of the learners. In communicating with individual learners counselling sessions are preferred. In **Bulgaria** students can communicate with lecturers on a special day when the lecturer is available at work to provide individual help and instruction. They can also communicate via e-mail or Skype. In **Sweden** out-of-class communication is done by means of coach sessions, face-to-face meetings, coach meetings at work placements and tutorial support.

General awareness of coaching and coaching skills

The information about participants' general awareness of coaching skills is presented as percentages by country (Table 1) and a summary of the findings is given as a pie chart containing data about all participants (see Fig. 1).

The pie chart below summarizes the answers of all participants from all countries. It shows that about half of them know very little about coaching in general. More than one third of all participants have enough knowledge and only 15% know a lot. These results justify the overall aim of the project to raise the awareness of coaching skills and their potential application to the needs of adult learners and educators.

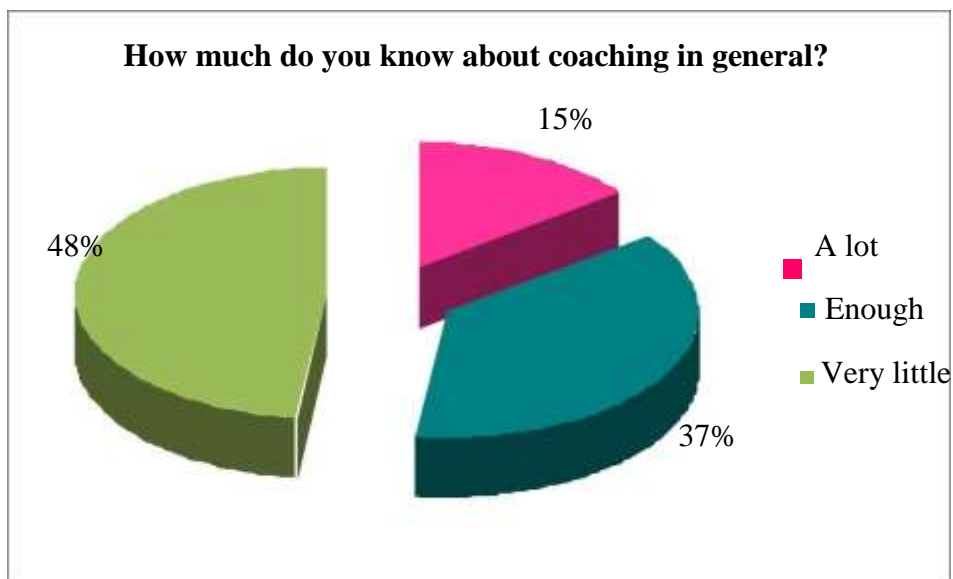


Figure 1. General awareness of coaching and coaching skills for all

The results show that only the British and the Spanish participants have a lot of knowledge about coaching. About one-third of these participants have enough knowledge, and approximately half of their participants have very little knowledge. About the same percent of participants from Cyprus, Poland and Bulgaria have enough knowledge of coaching skills, and a significant percentage of people (more than a half) have very little knowledge. In Sweden the majority of the participants have enough knowledge of coaching, and only 17, 13% have very little knowledge.

Table 1. General awareness of coaching and coaching skills (in %)

Answers	UK	CY	PL	SP	BG	SW
A lot	6,38	4,25	2,21	17,2	4,25	2,12
Enough	23,40	21,27	18,04	32,07	33,04	80,84
Very little	70,22	74,48	80,84	50,73	62,71	17,13

Knowledge of specific coaching techniques

The information about participants' knowledge of specific coaching techniques is presented as a percentage by country first (Table 2) and then a summary of the findings is given as a pie chart containing data about all participants (Fig. 2).

The summary from all countries shows that the majority of the participants (75%) know very little about specific coaching techniques. 14% know enough, and only 11% know a lot. Understandably, these participants come from the UK and Spain where coaching has a longer tradition of use in educational contexts.

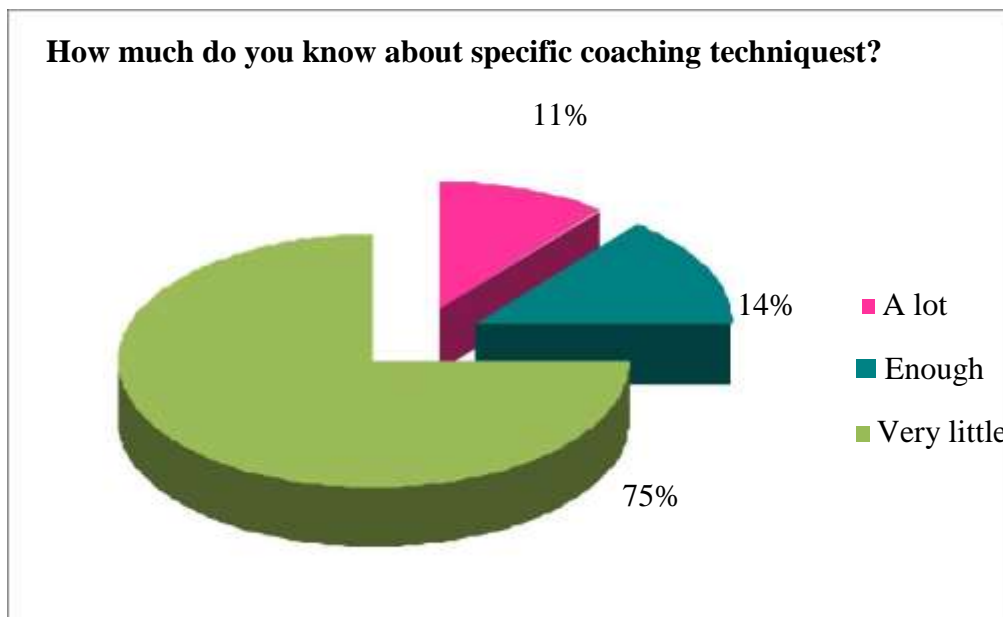


Figure 2. Knowledge of specific coaching techniques for all

The results show that only the British and the Spanish participants have a lot of knowledge about specific coaching techniques. About one-third of these participants have enough knowledge and approximately half of their participants have very little knowledge. About the same percent of participants from Cyprus, Poland and Bulgaria have enough knowledge of specific coaching techniques, and a significant percentage of people (more than a half) have very little knowledge. In Sweden the majority of the participants have enough knowledge of coaching, and only 20% have very little knowledge (see Table 2).

Table 2. Knowledge of specific coaching techniques (in %)

Answers	UK	CY	PL	SP	BG	SW
A lot	29,77	2,12	4,24	17,02	0	2,12
Enough	44,80	17,03	15	2,12	33,3	80,85
Very little	45,43	80,85	80,85	80,86	67,7	17,03

Use of coaching techniques

Participants from **Cyprus** think that knowledge of coaching techniques will help them to improve their ability to listen carefully, and will give them a better understanding of students' needs. In this way educators will be able help learners solve their problems. Another opinion is that coaching skills will enhance the relationship between teachers and learners, by making teachers more aware of learners' needs, and giving them new perspectives. In three of the seminars participants admitted that they do not know or use any coaching techniques in their work with adult learners. One of the participants said that he tries to ask proper questions to students so that they can find their own solution to their problems and discover their strengths. **Polish** participants agree that coaching skills and techniques will be useful to improve their communication with adult learners. They agreed that they use just a few coaching skills and would like to learn more. **Spanish** participants think that everything that helps to enhance communication and understanding in students is a good tool. Among other advantages, coaching clearly improves communication between teacher and student. The participants mentioned the importance of having more proactive attitude. Their expectations about the seminars concern the types of support that can be offered, the profile of a good coach, skills and benefits of a coaching process, its methodology and practical application. Four of the participants said that they do not know or use coaching techniques, and the other two only know some techniques. **Bulgarian** participants, the majority of whom are lecturers in pedagogy and psychology said they are aware of and use in their work with students most of the techniques, such as active listening, mirroring the interlocutor, asking different types of questions, etc., without necessarily using them as part of the coaching paradigm. **Swedish** partners emphasize the role of individual coaching, which is very helpful for unemployed, youngsters, etc., since they need to find their place in the labour market, their studies and life

Expectations about the application of coaching to participants' personal expertise

In the **UK** participants wish to gain useful tips to put into practice. There was a query whether the course would be suitable for learners in the age range of 18-20 years old. It was clarified that the answer is a definite yes. Participants from **Cyprus** outline different areas of expertise they expect to improve, among which: encouraging students to express themselves more openly and without fear of making mistakes; improving their own time management, decision making, stress management, creativity, communication, motivation, greater understanding of clients' needs. One participant expected to improve his interaction skills. **Polish** participants expect to improve their listening, communication, relationships, handling emotions. **Spanish** participants' expectations are related to increasing learners' motivation and improving the communication between teachers and learners. Other areas mentioned involve mentoring and guidance, and labour guidance in particular. Some mentioned teaching in general, active listening, effective questioning and providing feedback. **Bulgarian** participants expect to learn some new coaching tools and techniques which they can incorporate into their work with adult learners. In **Sweden** the seminar participants expect to improve the awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, their stress management, time management, communication, motivation and trust.

Expectations about improving participants' expertise in different areas

The data about participants' expectations is presented in a bar chart where the figures for all countries are shown for the selected indicators, and presented as mean values with a consideration of a standard deviation.

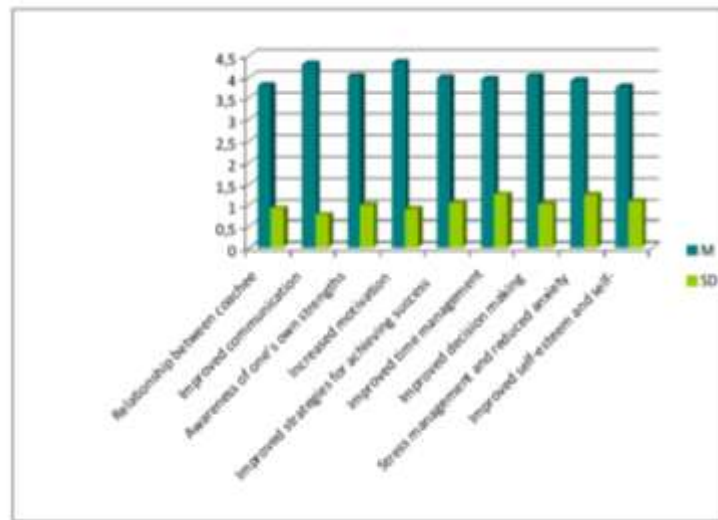


Figure 3. Participants' expectations about improving their expertise in different areas for all countries

The figures show that in general the expectations are the highest about increased motivation and improved communication skills. These results are in line with the needs analysis conducted in the project, and suggest that participants' expectations as a whole correspond to their needs.

Application of acquired coaching knowledge and skills to the context of partner organisations

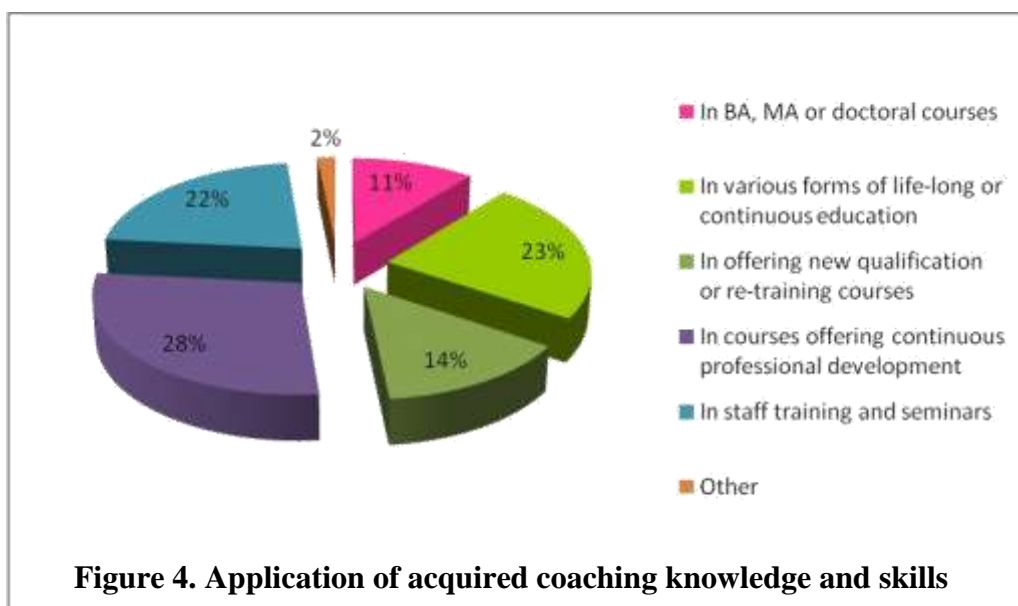
The information about the potential application of the acquired coaching knowledge and skills to the context of each participating organisation is presented as a percentage by field of study and work first (Table 3) and then a summary of the findings is given as a pie chart containing data about all participants (Fig. 4).

Table 3. Application of acquired coaching knowledge and skills (in %)

Answers	UK	CY	PL	SP	BG	SW
In BA, MA or doctoral courses	2,12	0	17,03	19,14	19,14	0
In various forms of life-long or continuous education	17,03	21,03	27,65	31,19	23,40	0
In offering new qualification or re-training courses	21,27	19,14	16,6	6	10,63	21,27
In courses offering continuous professional development	19,14	31,91	21,27	31,19	27,65	40,42
In staff training and seminars	40,44	12,82	34,05	12,48	19,18	18,31
Other	0	0	0	0	0	20

The results vary depending on the respective institutions' profile and the type of adult learners they work with. Thus, for example, private and state universities expect to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in their BA, MA and Ph.D. programmes, whereas NGOs and business associations see the application of coaching mainly in continuous professional development courses and staff training.

The summary for all countries shows that the three main areas of application of coaching skills are: the courses for continuous professional development (28%), lifelong or continuous education (23%) and staff training and seminars (22%). 14% of all participants see the appeal of coaching in the possibility of offering new qualification and retraining courses, and 11% - in different forms of higher and post-graduate education (Fig. 4).



CONCLUSIONS

The results from the survey show that partner institutions differ in terms of their relations with adult learners in and out of class. Depending on the profile of the respective institution and the type of learners they work with there is a variety of interaction formats such as formal lectures, seminars, one-to-one tutorials, individual coaching sessions, etc. The latter formats aim at developing adult learners' competencies in line with the European Reference Framework of Key Competencies.

With respect to partners' general awareness of coaching and coaching skills the results show that only the British and the Spanish participants have a lot of knowledge about coaching. About the same percent of participants from Cyprus, Poland and Bulgaria have enough knowledge of coaching skills, and a significant percentage of people (more than half) have very little knowledge. In Sweden the majority of the participants have enough knowledge of coaching, and only 20% have very little knowledge.

In terms of participants' knowledge of specific coaching techniques, the summary from all countries shows that the majority of the participants (75%) know very little about specific coaching techniques, 14% know enough, and only 11% know a lot. Understandably, these participants come from the UK and Spain where coaching has a longer tradition of use in educational contexts.

As for participants' expectations about the application of coaching techniques, the figures show that in general the expectations are the highest about increased motivation and improved communication skills. These results are in line with the needs analysis conducted in the project, and suggest that participants' expectations as a whole correspond to their needs. The values are lower in the areas related to raising the awareness of educators' own strengths and weaknesses, planning strategies of self-realisation and improving the relationships between coach and coachee.

The results regarding the application of coaching techniques vary depending on the respective institutions' profile and the type of adult learners they work with. Thus, for example, private and state universities expect to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in their BA, MA and Ph.D. programmes, whereas NGOs and business associations see the application of coaching mainly in continuous professional development courses and staff training.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the overall analysis further research should be done to provide evaluation of courses and recommendations on the most relevant scenarios as well as guidance for optimizing their implementation. As the main outcomes of coaching are to encourage self-reflective individuals who can assess themselves and come up with their own solutions, further work could be done to devise a set of coaching tools and techniques which can facilitate the teaching and learning process in a whole range of education providers.

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