

EXPERIENCES OF EXPRESSING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION

Ilona Zubrickienė

Klaipėda University, Lithuania

Birutė Anužienė

Klaipėda University, Lithuania

Abstract. *Social justice in education is a research area aimed at providing equal opportunities for everybody to participate in the educational system. Research in the field of social justice rather focuses on formal education, in which the perception of the social justice concept depends on the attitude framed by the state – it is inseparable from the form of governance, the set of basic principles prevailing in society, as well as from the historical and cultural context. On the contrary, non-formal adult education, as a relatively convenient and most accessible form of adult education to upgrade or acquire new skills, involves occasional studies of these service providers in terms of social justice. It is also limited to the generalised perception of this phenomenon and, usually, to the contexts of its expression that are not always regulated by the state. Therefore, it is not clear how non-formal adult education addresses the problem of perceiving and expressing the concept of social justice, what role the state might play in ensuring social justice for adults in lifelong development and acquisition of new skills. The article raises the following problematic questions: How do adults perceive and experience social justice when participating in and engaging in non-formal adult education? How and in what ways does social justice exist in non-formal adult education? The aim of the article is to show the authentic experiences of study participants, by identifying the concept of social justice and expressions thereof in non-formal adult education. The results of the study demonstrate the controversy of the concept of social justice. This helped to confirm that there is no single definition of social justice that would be acceptable in all contexts of education. The following key forms of expression of social justice were pointed out by the study participants: equal opportunities, access, non-compliance of non-formal adult education services with participants' learning needs, goals, and objectives. This has revealed a partial aspect of implementing social justice in non-formal adult education.*

Keywords: *access, different social groups of adults, equal opportunities, non-formal adult education, social justice.*

Introduction

The successful socio-economic progress of the country is subject to the development of adult education and its development trends. For the majority of residents of the European Union, constructive, active, and productive functioning means certain skills, the acquisition and development of which requires continuing professional development, the ability to run their activities on the basis of the latest knowledge, scientific and technological achievements, to adapt to the

changing labour market and compete (4th Global Report on Adult Learning and education. Leave No One Behind: Participation, Equity and Inclusion, 2019). The importance of non-formal adult education as one of the most accessible forms of adult education in modern society is growing; its need for all adult groups is enhanced by the declared general concept of effective adult education policy (An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe, 2015). It identifies six key factors for successful adult participation in lifelong learning activities: 1) Increasing learners' disposition towards learning (motivating conscious learning not by financial incentives, but facilitating by structural features of the adult learning system, such as free guidance for learners), 2) Increasing employers' investment in training (financing of employee training, arranging of training, promoting of learning culture), 3) Improving equity of access to learning for all (in particular, engaging disadvantaged and hard-to-learn groups, such as low-skilled unemployed, economically inactive population, people with low abilities), 4) Delivering learning that is relevant to employers and learners (focusing on the supply, motivating learning with relevant learning content for relevant skills, through flexible and innovative learning methods), 5) Delivering high quality adult learning (an important factor determining the participation of adults in learning), 6) Co-ordinating an effective lifelong learning policy. This common concept of effective adult education policy is implemented in line with the principle of social justice, which ensures the successful engagement of adults in lifelong learning.

It is important to emphasise that social justice is quite a broad concept, which comprises state policy, the process of implementation of it, and the evaluation of results. This concept is an integral part of the form of state governance, the totality of basic principles prevailing in society, as well as the historical and cultural identity of society. Many authors define social justice as the ideal situation in which all members of society possess the same fundamental rights, guarantees, opportunities, responsibilities, social support, while historical inequalities are recognised and addressed by special means (Thyer, 2010). One of the most vulnerable areas of social justice is education. Each state should pursue a socially just educational system for providing equal opportunities for everyone to participate in education. Social justice, therefore, is not just a theoretical concept; it is seen as a phenomenon, which requires practical solutions. In education, it has various forms self-expression: equal opportunities, equal access to education for different social classes, recognition and representation of interests of the most vulnerable social groups, identification and inclusion of different cultures, religions, traditions, and histories in educational programmes, etc. (Žalimienė et al., 2011).

As regards the concept of social justice, it is generally assumed as a matter of course and, therefore, implies a variety of uses. In the absence of a well-defined term, social justice has the definitions assigned by users at their own discretion

(Fraser & Bourdieu, 2007). And even though the concept of social justice and its expression in education has become the norm today, the analysis of it at various levels of the educational system, in particular, formal and non-formal, shows that its meaning varies.

Research in the field of social justice (Šliavaitė, 2018; Meernik, Golcevski, McKay, Feinberg, King, & Krastev, 2016; Iljina, 2014) rather focuses on formal education, in which the perception of the social justice concept depends on the attitude framed by the state – it is inseparable from the form of governance, from the set of basic principles prevailing in society, as well as from the historical and cultural context. On the contrary, non-formal adult education, as a relatively convenient and most accessible form of adult education to upgrade or acquire new skills, involves occasional studies of such service providers in terms of social justice (Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, Klumbytė, Marcinkevičius, & Šliavaitė, 2018; Jean Francois, 2014). It is also limited to the generalised perception of this phenomenon and, usually, to the contexts of its expression that are not always regulated by the state. Thus, it is not possible to adapt the requirements of the formal education system to non-formal adult education so as to provide adequate opportunities for all adults to take part in lifelong learning. This means that the concept of social justice in non-formal adult education is often interpreted more freely and more ambiguously, while its expression depends not only on the public education policy, but on the needs of such service providers, too. It is observed that providers of non-formal adult education involve various institutions (state, public sector, private), which pursue different goals and are financed from different sources. Also, such providers of non-formal adult education services usually run uncoordinated activities, i.e., each of them is guided by their own priorities and goals. It is, therefore, not clear how non-formal adult education addresses the problem of perceiving and expressing the concept of social justice, what role the state might play in ensuring social justice for adults in lifelong development and in acquisition of new skills.

The perception and expression of social justice in non-formal adult education are revealed through various philosophical theories of adult education, which have historically been different. Scientific literature (Šliavaitė, 2018; Frėjutė-Rakauskienė et al., 2018; Lawless & Guy, 2011) allows identifying the three following key conceptualisations of adult education, with the discourse of social justice: conservative, liberal and radical. According to conservatism, adult education is available for anyone; its obtainment is up to the individual, however, since each individual differs, inequalities result naturally from capabilities and individual efforts. Liberalism focuses on equal opportunities and fair distribution of social goods, in which education plays a key role. Radicalism, meanwhile, seeks to ensure equality of societal participation in education without marginalisation based on gender, race, socio-economic class, age, sexual orientation, beliefs, religious views, or abilities. The positions of each of the above

conceptualisations can be seen as certain forms of the concept of social justice and expression thereof that provide non-formal adult education with social justice. However, the authors Sh. Lawless and T. C. Guy (2011) are of the opinion that no one can define social justice and expression thereof in non-formal adult education better than practitioners who experience and can provide insights into the relationship between formal theoretical sources and practice. So, based on this assumption of the authors, we looked at this phenomenon from the perspective of real situations in adult learning, i. e., how the concept of social justice and expression thereof is assessed by learners who participate in various events held by non-formal adult education facilities.

The article raises the following problematic questions: How do adults perceive and experience social justice when participating in and engaging in non-formal adult education? How and in what ways does social justice exist in non-formal adult education?

The object of the research is social justice and expression thereof in non-formal adult education.

The aim of the research is to show the authentic experiences of study participants, by identifying the concept of social justice and expression thereof in non-formal adult education.

This article has been prepared using scientific literature analysis and qualitative study. The analysis of scientific literature has helped to elaborate various theories of social justice, to view the problem of perception and interpretation of this phenomenon in the context of non-formal adult education. The qualitative study has helped to reveal the experience of adults participating in non-formal adult education and representing various social groups, in reflecting aspects of the perception of social justice and expression thereof in the context of non-formal adult education.

Methodology

This qualitative study is aimed to reveal unique experiences of learners in terms of the expression of social justice in non-formal adult education. Phenomenological research has been chosen to discover the essence and importance of this phenomenon in social reality and, thus, to find out how users of non-formal adult education services actually experience this phenomenon. In this manner, the study helped to reproduce the overall picture of the situation.

The study is based on the following theoretical and methodological provisions: 1) Empiricism, which emphasises cognition through experience, leads to the conclusion that each individual should be offered appropriate learning opportunities that march his or her existing experience. This is one of the factors for adults' attitudes towards lifelong learning; 2) Pragmatism justifies the importance of lifelong learning as one of the key elements of the current adult

education policy; 3) Existentialism, which emphasises freedom of choice and responsibility for one's actions and justifies the importance of individual learning whereby the need for learning arises from the adult and non-formal adult education services provided (courses, seminars and other training) must meet the existing need; and 4) Social constructivism, which calls attention to the role of social processes and points out that the legal framework can provide theoretical opportunities for adult learning, yet, the rate of participation will only depend on the individuals in practice.

There were semi-structured interviews with respondents from different social groups used in the study. The qualitative study was conducted in September-December of 2021 in cities, towns and districts of Lithuania (Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Kretinga, Gargždai, Šilutė), where non-formal adult education facilities exist. The study participants were selected by the following key criteria for target selection: 1) the informants have accumulated considerable experience in using the services of non-formal adult education facilities, 2) the informants belong to different social groups by gender, age, education, and employment. The study has involved 38 informants from 11 non-formal adult education institutions (6 public and 5 private). In the semi-structured interview with residents of different Lithuanian cities, towns, and districts, 22 women and 16 men were spoken to. The age of the informants ranged from 28 to 65 years. They were of different educational background (higher education: 17, vocational: 12, secondary: 8, basic: 1) and occupational level in the labour market (working skilled work: 21, unskilled work: 10, unemployed: 7). There were 2 disabled people among all of the informants participating in the study. The study participants were interviewed using a prepared questionnaire. In developing questions, it was aimed to make them as open as possible and, thus, to allow the research participants to freely reflect on their experiences in the context of the concept and expression of social justice. Reaction moments, i. e., respondents' conscious or unconscious tendency to pose conformist responses, were taken into account when planning the interview questions. Informants were given unlimited time to answer questions. Interviews were combined with observational techniques to capture moments of informants' behaviour, speech, and expression of feelings.

In the study, the general ethical principles were followed: the principle of voluntariness, the principle confidentiality, the principle of anonymity, and respect for the subject. None of the above principles of research ethics were violated during the study. The consent of the study participants to participate in the research was obtained. They were introduced to the purpose and procedures of the study before sharing their experiences. Confidentiality and anonymity of the responses were also guaranteed – it was emphasised that the information received would not be accessible to anyone other than the informants themselves, and that the results would only be presented as a summary form, thus guaranteeing

the participant's irrerecognisability. During every meeting, a communication-friendly atmosphere was created, an opinion of each participant was heard, and respect was ensured.

Research results

The analysis of the obtained data on the perception of social justice and its expression in non-formal adult education focuses on the differently expressed experiences of the study participants. The research data disclose the opinions of the informants, which were formed on the basis of their learning experiences. It was interesting to find out how such a broad, ambiguous concept of social justice, which is shaped not only by the state education policy, exists in practice and what interpretational variations of the concept of this phenomenon have been personally experienced by informants. The complicated perception of social justice, which causes a problem to its definition, is illustrated by fragments from the informants' speeches, *<...as for me personally, this is a quite a 'vague' concept, although it is defined in educational materials and, I think, is necessary>* (14); *<...it is easier for me to say what is being done socially wrong than just. It is an aspiration rather than a tribute>* (21). The informants identify the concept of social justice as multifaceted, with different meanings and interpretations, thus, making it difficult for them to describe it. As one informant states, *"I think social justice makes a lot more sense, maybe, I don't even know them all"* (34). This demonstrates that different interpretations of the concept in both scientific literature and educational policy tools make it difficult to describe it in practice, as well. Each participant in the study attempted to interpret it differently, in a way in which he or she has personally experienced and understood it. The speeches of the research participants underline the units of meaning for describing the concept of social justice; they can be divided into equal learning opportunities, access to learning, and socio-economic security. The said units of meaning can be justified by ambiguous answers of the research participants: 1) equal learning opportunities, *<...to me, it sounds like something utopian: 'share equally'>* (3); 2) access to learning, *<...the word 'just' is too abstract in our society <...>, but it reflects the right to learning>* (21); 3) social security, *<...the state assures the right to learn, to upgrade qualifications and, thus, to keep staying on the market>* (9); 4) economic security, *<...through continuing learning, you grow and improve as a professional; this guarantees economic stability>* (5). The informants' thoughts show that they do understand the essence of social justice, however, they understand this concept in terms of their personal experience. They also see differences in the manifestation of social justice in formal and non-formal education, *<...its concept in children's education is much clearer and I know in this case that it is necessary to ensure that all children have access to education. As for adult education, it is quite vague, indefinite. It's like the opportunity to*

learn is given to everyone, but it does not meet everyone's wishes <...> I am not happy with that> (19). The experiences of the research participants show not only the vagueness of the concept of social justice in non-formal adult education, but also the uncertainty of its expression in real situations of adult learning. Informants believe that the social justice in practice is lacking features which are declared in educational materials, *<...how social justice manifests itself in practice – it remains unclear to me. I believe that I am not alone at that> (6); <...it's like everyone knows what it [the concept] means, but you actually cannot see it> (28).* It has been observed that informants, when reflecting on the concept of social justice, fail to define it precisely because they tend either to concretise it (divide into separate parts, such as accessibility, equal opportunities) or to abstract, to name it as an ideal situation. This is illustrated by the following experience of an informant, *<...I would call this concept a social good that should ideally be implemented> (7).* Personal experiences of the informants demonstrate their understanding that social justice is necessary as a guarantor of a state as regards their lifelong learning, yet, the problem of perception and expression of this concept in practice creates a lot of uncertainty for them.

Social justice in non-formal adult education is primarily associated with access to learning, which is enshrined in educational documents and enables lifelong learning for all adults. Access to learning is also perceived differently from the subjective point of view of the study participants, since the definition of this concept is ambiguous, too. The informants analyse and assess the access to learning in various aspects: legal, geographical, economic, and the quality of learning services.

From a legal point of view of the informants, access to learning is nothing more than the legal regulation of social justice in adult education, *<...the state that creates conditions for all adults to learn is the access to education > (17).* According to the informants, the validation of social justice in educational documents (the Law on Education, adult education materials, lifelong learning strategy, etc.) shows that the state pays attention to adult education and lifelong learning. The importance of access to learning in educational documents is illustrated by the following personal experiences of the research participants, *<...it is very important that Lithuania, with due regard for the EU directives, provides opportunities for everyone to study> (31); <...the enshrinement of social justice in the law shows the state's acknowledgment that a person has the right to lifelong learning> (4).* Informants believe that the mere declaration of access to learning in educational documents so as to guarantee the right to study, education and professional qualifications does not yet mean the efficiency of the adult education system and its capacities to meet their various learning needs in a flexible manner. They, therefore, have doubts as to whether what is set forth in educational documents is actually being implemented and works in practice, *<...I do not think that what is contained in educational documents is sufficient to create*

the necessary conditions for us to learn> (7); <...frankly, I would say that all the laws that have been passed in this regard are mere formalities <...> they declare the availability of adult education, but it not so good in reality> (25); <...they are just mandatory legal steps, though, no one actually implements them> (9); <...if the state documents lay it down, we think, it should work but, unfortunately, everything remains at the documentary level> (34). So, the informants' experience shows that the adult education policy with regard to adult learning to some extent deviates from the real situation of adult education, i.e., the actions planned, methods and measures are not properly implemented to make it work effectively in practice, <...the legislation on education only declares, foresees measures, actions, but does not oblige it to be implemented, leaves freedom, but nothing good is coming of it> (38). The experience of this informant shows that he or she would like the state not only to regulate access to adult learning, but also to undertake the coordination of this process. The responses of the research participants demonstrate that it is very important for them that their right to education is not just legally regulated by various applicable legislation, but also that specific measures, methods and actions are provided for to implement the right in practice. Personal experiences of the informants illustrate that the most important thing for them is that this process works properly in real learning situations.

During the study, the informants have shared different experiences of access to learning geographically. Part of participants of the study see this aspect of accessibility positively, stating that, *<...the whole learning system has been developed and works > there are adult education facilities, various trainings offered, we have a choice> (22). Yet, at the same time, they see shortcomings and cases of discrimination. The informants believe that they are to some extent discriminated when they cannot choose a training programme they want at their place of residence, <...access to education must make it possible to study in place: at work, in an educational establishment, or where you live> (7); <...It would be nice not to leave for studies but to stay and study right here> (4); <...I 'm all for on-the-job training, but <...> there are no conditions, the employer does not buy training> (15). The experiences of the informants further show that those who live in cities have a better opportunity to study than in remote regions, <...I think those who live in big cities have better opportunities to study and the greater choice> (16); <...what learning in our district? Nothing of the kind! No one provides such services> (30). Participants in the study also point to the main reasons why social justice is restricted by the lack of geographical accessibility. One of the reasons is an uneven allocation of the labour market, <...there are so many companies and establishments concentrated in cities, and there is a big choice for people working here. <...> what will they teach me in the countryside where there are no "normal" jobs or unskilled jobs only> (2). Another reason is an uneven infrastructure for the provision of training services. This is illustrated*

by the following experiences of informants, *<...those living in remote regions do not have access to education because there are no such services available there>* (15). According to the study participants, another reason is the lack of information on the training programmes, *<...as regards information, there is windless calm, no offers for those living in the depth of the country, no one provides information about training>* (20). Time costs also hinder informants from learning, *<...it takes me half a day to go to the wanted training and back home; after I come back home, I am tired, irritable, and then the training becomes unexciting>* (14). As the experiences of the informants show, the content the available training programmes is still mostly focused on the learning needs of urban population, *<...why should I waste time looking for training if they all have their potential client in the city. I don't see the training I need>* (27). On the other hand, the informants point to information technology for training that diminishes the geographical gap. This discrimination is also mitigated by distance learning; formerly, there was no high supply in the country, but Covid-19 has led to an increase in supply and demand for such training. The advantages of such distance training programmes are illustrated by the statements of the participants in the study, *<...quarantine made it easier <...>, now you are not isolated from the best training programmes, they are distance, you don't need to go anywhere>* (16); *<...perhaps, distance training is good, I can participate from home in any training held in Lithuania>* (12). This suggests that informants as adults had so far been offered too little choice of distance learning, which would partly solve their problem of access to learning geographically. As this practice is still new, not all informants are able to take advantage of it. Opportunities to learn in cyberspace are often being hampered by other reasons, such as a lack of IT equipment or information technology skills, *<...but I still can't participate in them, I don't have a PC with a video and audio camera, <...> I can't use Zoom>* (8). Thus, the geographical aspect of access to learning points out an unequal allocation of training services by the criteria of: residence, time, information, demand and supply of training services. This inequality might be partially addressed by distance study, which, however, has some shortcomings. The experience of informants who have participated in distance learning shows that not all of them are fully happy with such learning. According to the research participants, the key disadvantages of distance learning are the lack of communication and limited access to practical skills, *<...and what about communication, direct contact? Virtual cannot substitute it, no matter what methods are used>* (16); *<...I personally have little use for it <...>, I want to try, to train in practice during the study, it is not always possible>* (3). The study demonstrates that, on the one hand, the access to learning is judged positively by informants in a broad sense, as adults are provided with opportunities to learn; on the other hand, there is an inequality observed in terms of location, time, information, supply and demand of training

programmes. As the experiences of study participants show, inequality in access to learning might be to some extent solved by distance learning.

From the perspective of the study participants' experience, access to learning in economic terms is evaluated to the extent to which learning and professional development depend on the learners' financial situation, prices of educational services, and financial support provided by the state and employers. According to the informants, adult lifelong learning needs a well-functioning system to be created so as to support the financing of educational services; the financing, accordingly, should have certain value and pay off for both parties, i.e., the state (the employer) and the employee. Otherwise, in their opinion, social justice is not possible, *<...financial support in adult education is essential. The state invests in me and it pays off – the state acquires a skilled workforce>* (36). The informants reveal in their experiences that their participation in adult education is directly related to their own financial capacities, *<...it depends on how much you can afford <...> if a wage is low and is only enough to live on, then how can I pay for the course? Even if I need them much>* (26); *<...you choose the training that you are capable to pay for>* (14). Every adult, through the participation in training, upgrades his or her vocational skills, acquires new competencies and, thus, makes a useful investment in himself or herself. Although the participants in the study realise the benefits of study for their professionalism, they, however, believe that the state or the employer should also be interested in and support them financially, *<...I understand that investment in myself is good for me, but why the state has no financial mechanism to cover the costs?>* (3); *<...training should be financed by the state or by the employer, at least, in part>* (17). Another problem, as the experience of informants suggests, is the cost of training – it is not regulated at the state level and is subject to a service provider. The study participants argue that training costs are too high and sometimes do not match the quality of non-formal adult education services. The prices of educational services are illustrated by the following negative experiences of the participants in the study, *<...you must pay for your own training, spend a lot of money, and they are of no value to you>* (9). Informants believe that adults would be motivated to learn and improve their skills if the state financed providers of adult education services and, thus, reduce the cost of education. Or, at least, the prices of adult education services should be regulated at the state level. The informants provide the following arguments in this regard, *<...the state should take into account the economic situation of the country, the income received by the workforce and <...> show an interest in contributing financially or regulating the prices of services>* (29). It is also important for informants that employers collaborate with the state in providing access to learning in economic terms, *<...employers should have a strong interest in employee training, as this brings a profit to the company, so, they should be more concerned about financing employee training>* (11). Thus, the experience of the study participants reveals that the aspect of economic accessibility in non-

formal adult education is not controlled at the state level. Consequently, providers of such service have freedom when setting the prices of training. This suggests that social justice in economic terms is only partially implemented in non-formal adult education.

The attitude of the research participants belonging to different social groups toward the phenomenon of social justice as an equal opportunity is quite favourable. They do not feel disadvantaged as regards to restriction of their learning opportunities due to their age, gender, linguistic, ethnic or other criteria. They recognise and name equal opportunities as a human right to learning, implementation without marginalisation based on age, gender, socio-economic class, nationality, beliefs, religious views, abilities, etc. As the informants state, *<...equal opportunities mean that no one will be discriminated against due to their gender, age, beliefs, or other differences> (25); <...we all have equal opportunities to learn, regardless of nationality, age, gender, or talent> (1)*. Although the principle of equality is enshrined in adult education documents, nonetheless, as informants point out, it is not fully implemented in practice. Some informants feel that they sometimes experience social discrimination, *<...I don't earn much, I don't hold high positions, so, I can't always pay for good training> (37)*. According to the informants, they also have had different experiences as being members of the most socially vulnerable groups, such as the unemployed or disabled. The research participants reveal that unemployment sometimes hinders learning, *<...when I was unemployed, I couldn't choose what I wanted to study> (28); <...I didn't work for a couple of years, so, I didn't have the opportunity to study, I had no resources for that> (4)*. As to the participation of socially vulnerable people in non-formal adult education, the experiences of informants about persons with disabilities have mostly distinguished. The study participants say that the state tends to leave this social group out of consideration, even though it documents equal opportunities. As the experience of the informants of this social group shows, *<...the most painful thing is that my close friends have virtually no access to education> (39); <...training takes place when EU projects are won <...> Once the training ends, we are no longer needed> (23)*. People with disabilities are also discriminated against because of educational facilities that are not always adapted to people with reduced mobility. This is illustrated by the experience of one informant, *<...I am not always able to study what I want – sometimes I find out that I will not be able to study because the educational facilities are not adapted for people with disabilities> (23)*. We may assume that equal opportunities without marginalisation are implemented only partially in Lithuanian non-formal adult education. As evidenced by the experience of the research participants, problems of the most vulnerable social groups are still not adequately addressed.

The study highlights that the quality of informal non-formal adult education services is of high importance for the informants. In reflections on the quality of

non-formal adult education, the participants have revealed their attitudes toward the training service providers, who also determine the effective implementation of social justice in adult education, *<...the aim must be to ensure the high quality of all adult education services>* (26). The personal experiences of the informants allowed shaping a detailed picture of the qualitative aspects of the content of training programmes, teaching methods, lecturers' competence, as well as organisational and administrative services. Advertising for training programmes is very important for informants, *<...a training programme must have a commercial appearance to make me want to buy it>* (6). Aspects of a high-quality training programme are illustrated by the following experiences of the informants, *<...practical content, which is interestingly presented by a lecturer, is very important for me; practical, visual techniques should engage me >* (7); *<...of course, teaching material with practical examples, a variety of methods used <...> the most important thing for me is to use it in my job>* (17). When choosing a training programme, informants first pay attention to its title, *<...often the title is not clear whether it is worth>* (12); *<...titled in scientific terms, a content, too; a lecturer is unknown, and they [providers] think that it should catch the eye, intrigue>* (9). The research participants name the reasons for not choosing training programmes: 1) training program structure, *<...a programme content should attract attention, yet, sometimes I lack a clear aim of a training programme, specific objectives and results>* (28); 2) more focus on practical aspects, *<...less time for theoretical aspects and more analysis of practical situations, innovative methods; they would motivate to learn>* (33); 3) benefits for the learner, *<...if I see practical benefits in the course, it is much easier and more exciting for me to study>* (16). Curricula should meet the needs of adult learning. This requires the adult education providers to continuously study the learning needs of adults. The informants argue that not all of such providers do this, *<...did anybody ask what I needed, what knowledge and skills were lacking?>* (34); *<...it's good when a company orders training; it finally delves into what we need and sometimes management makes a decision for us>* (5); *<...if they studied the needs of all of us, it would be more useful training programmes>* (31). So, in the opinion of the research participants, a training programme must be prepared in a high-quality and informative manner so as to encourage adults to learn and improve their skills. In order to ensure social justice in non-formal adult education, the state's efforts alone are not enough - providers of these services must get involved in this process, too. The participants' experience made it clear that the problem of social justice must also be addressed at the level of informal service providers, *<...the policy is established by the state and must be implemented by service providers, who should focus on making adult education accessible and of high quality>* (22). There must also be certain requirements imposed for providers of non-formal adult education services. The experience of the informants shows that training providers should be experts in the field of adult

education, <...adult education field must be staffed by competent people, experts in adult education, not just any education> (16); <...in this field, it is still necessary to pursue high-quality training, high-quality teaching, high-quality practical tasks, high-quality organisation of training, which can only be achieved by qualified professionals> (8). The study participants have pointed out in their experiences the problems prevailing in non-formal adult education, which should be addressed as soon as possible so that the training is focused on adult learning needs, whereby curriculum content and the desired results should be in line with the development of general skills and competencies relevant to the labour market, as well as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, etc., necessary for vocational activities.

Conclusions

The implementation of social justice in non-formal adult education is becoming one of the main reasons of why adults learn. Looking at the participants' personal experiences, their assessment of the concept and expression of social justice in real learning situations of non-formal adult education shows contradictions with the attitude toward the nature of this phenomenon as declared by the state education policy. According to the informants, social justice is associated with accessibility, equal opportunities, and the quality of educational services where every adult wants to feel and be appreciated as an equal participant in learning. The study has revealed that its participants do not fully understand the concept of social justice due to its complicated meaning; neither can they precisely define it. Therefore, it is controversial in non-formal adult education.

Experiences in the expression of social justice show real learning situations in which the study participants, representing different social groups, do not always succeed in certain areas. During the interviews, the informants have pointed out the social groups (unemployed, disabled) who are most affected by discrimination and social exclusion. Representatives of other groups just partially feel discriminated in geographical (place of residence), economic (financial opportunities) terms, and in terms of quality of training services.

The interviewed respondents see the state as responsible for the implementation of social justice in non-formal adult education, for shaping the education policy; non-formal adult education service providers – as responsible for education policy implementation; employers – as intermediaries between the state and education service providers, who might also promote lifelong learning.

The analysis of the phenomenon of social justice and expression thereof allows assuming that the learning adults' reflections on their experiences show the controversy of the concept of social justice. This helped to prove that there is no single definition of social justice acceptable in all educational contexts. The following key forms of expression of social justice were pointed out by study

participants: equal opportunities, access to education and training, non-compliance of non-formal adult education services with participants' learning needs, goals, and objectives. The latter just partially show an attitude toward the implementation of social justice in non-formal adult education.

References

- 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and education. Leave No One Behind: Participation, Equity and Inclusion (2019). *UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372274>
- An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe (2015). *European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c8c38dc9-89d0-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- Fraser, N., & Bourdieu, P. (2007). (Mis)recognition, Social Inequality and Social Justice. *Critical Realism Interventions*. (T. Lovell ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, M., Klumbytė, N., Marcinkevičius, A., & Šliavaitė K. (2018). Socialinis ir istorinis teisingumas daugiaetninėje Lietuvos visuomenėje: sampratos, patirtys ir kontekstai. Monografija [Social and Historical Justice in the Multi-Ethnic Lithuanian Society: Concepts, Experiences and Contexts. Monograph]. *Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras*. Vilnius.
- Iljina, O. (2014). Socialinis teisingumas Lietuvos mokyklose: grindžiamosios teorijos pagrindu [Social justice in Lithuanian schools: on the basis of underlying theory]. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 32, 133-146. Vilnius.
- Jean Francois, E. (2014). Social Justice and Philosophies of Adult Education. The Meaning of Social Justice in Philosophy of Adult Education Theories. *European Journal of Academic Essays*, 1(6), 7-11. Retrieved from <https://docplayer.net/12222261-Social-justice-and-philosophies-of-adult-education-the-meaning-of-social-justice-in-philosophy-of-adult-education-theories.html>
- Lawless, Sh., & Guy, T. C. (2011). Transcending traditional social justice conceptualizations: adult educator activists enacting a fourth way. *Paper presented at the 41st Annual SCUTREA Conference*, 5-7 July. University of Lancaster.
- Meernik, J., Golcevski, N., McKay, M., Feinberg, A., King, K., & Krastev R. (2016). Truth, Justice, and Education: Towards Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(3), 413–431.
- Šliavaitė, K. (2018). Ar galimas neoliberalus socialinis teisingumas? Lietuvos mokyklų tinklo optimizavimo interpretacijos ir patirtys [Is neoliberal social justice possible? Interpretations and experiences of Lithuanian school network optimisation]. *Socialinių tyrimų žurnalas Kultūra ir visuomenė*, 9(2), 37-60. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.7220/2335-8777.9.2.2>
- Thyer, B. A. (2010). Social justice: a conservative perspective. *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare*, 26(2-3), 261-274.
- Žalimienė, L., Lazutka, R., Skučienė, D., Aidukaitė, J., Kazakevičiūtė, J., Navickė, J., & Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė V. (2011). Socialinis teisingumas švietime: teorinė samprata ir praktinis vertinimas. Mokslo studija [Social justice in education: theoretical concept and practical evaluation, Science study]. *Švietimo ir mokslo ministerija, Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras*, Vilnius: Švietimo aprūpinimo centras.