

Self-Directed Learning in Later Age – PALADIN Project

1. Project Relevance

Promoting Active Learning and Ageing of Disadvantage Seniors – PALADIN project has the explicit goal to contribute to the empowerment of seniors through the development of their readiness for self-directed learning, especially in 5 fields of their lives: health, activity, education, citizenship and finance. The concept of self-directed learning defines a very powerful approach in education, as the individual takes the initiative and the responsibility for what occurs. It is the individual who selects, manages and assesses his/her learning process and activities. If education is considered as enabling people to cope with the difficulties in their everyday life and to have better social relations, PALADIN project proposes a set of self-directed tools having the purpose to stimulate seniors to improve their civic participation, health, and generally their individual well-being and fulfilment.

PALADIN project faces the challenge of helping the disadvantaged seniors in Europe to better manage their lives; it makes a statement about the need to strengthen each and every one's abilities to learn and develop in those domains as a way of becoming more empowered. The focus is placed on the readiness of seniors (older than 50 years) for self-learning in the domains mentioned, beginning with the development of several resources and instruments. It is implied that more awareness about the readiness in both seniors and adult educators will facilitate the self-learning processes of the seniors, development of a self-directed approach, better learning outcomes and, thus, their well-being. The notions of 'readiness', 'self-efficacy' and self-directedness' as well as more awareness about the phenomena behind them can enrich our understanding about inclusion.

2. Background and Aims

PALADIN partnership was composed of 7 institutions from 6 countries (Portugal, Spain, Greece, Malta, Hungary and Switzerland) and two European associations, one based in Brussels and the other one in Graz (Austria), countries that have some of the lowest rates of participation in lifelong learning in the EU. Its focus was on the development and testing of the methodology and instruments to facilitate self-learning processes of disadvantaged seniors. One assumption stating the ground for the project is that people who consciously become skilled learners gain in autonomy and take more responsibility for their own learning and development; they are also more likely to develop a sense of well-being and fulfilment. Partners undertook both desktop documentation and a large research involving hundreds of seniors in order to develop sound tools for abilities and learning measurement.

University of Coimbra, Portugal, and Aristotle University, Greece lead the process of scales construction on the subjects of health, activity, education, citizenship and finances, which departed from several focus groups aiming at analyzing the relevant domains of functioning in each area. Working with the developed methodology and instruments, adult learning



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Countries involved: Portugal, Spain, Greece, Malta, Hungary, Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Switzerland

Types of organisations involved: Non-profit organisations, universities, local administration and European associations,

Implementation level: European level

Website: <http://projectpaladin.eu/>

professionals can facilitate a process of awareness and can thus affect the readiness of disadvantaged seniors to learn and develop a self-directed approach.

3. Description of the target groups

PALADIN project addresses disadvantaged seniors, persons over 50. What is significant concerning the definition of the “disadvantaged seniors” is that promoters don’t want to treat seniors as a homogenous group, but make a distinction among those seniors who make the conscious decision to access and participate in learning activities and those who don’t, in order to identify the ones benefiting from learning and the ones who don’t and therefore may be considered disadvantaged.

4. Outputs and Multiplying Outcomes

Self-Directed Learning index

The self-directed learning index of PALADIN’s aims at providing information about self-directed learning and other relevant themes for adult education to a wide public which includes students, researchers, trainers, and other professionals in the field of Lifelong learning: formal, non-formal and informal.

In this publication, the documents were organised in the five fields of study under PALADIN: health, activity (employment, voluntary or other), education (formal, non-formal and informal), citizenship and finances. The categorisation of each document under just one field was not an easy task, so it’s possible that, for example, a document framed under the category, “health” can also cross the category “education”. In the searchable online version, you can have access to all the publications mentioned in this document. The online Index will enable you to make an easier search and discovery of around 200 publications available in PDF format categorised by year of publication, language version and key-words. In the paper publication (section “Other References”), you will find links to other similar catalogues, which will give you access to 879 extra documents.

Self-Directed Learning Didactic Tools

Having the aim of providing self-directed learning tools that enable the use and sharing among professionals working with adults (especially low qualified seniors older than 50 years). **Self-Directed Learning Didactic Tools** can also be used by adults in general who wish to empower themselves or improve their skills through self-directed learning. Each of the 20 scales provides information and improves development especially in 5 fields: activity (employment or voluntary), health, finances, citizenship, and education (formal/non-formal/informal).

The didactic tools are available in 6 languages: English, Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian and Maltese.

Self-Direction Scales for Disadvantage Seniors

The prime product of PALADIN is a set of 5 self-efficacy for self-direction scales for disadvantage seniors in health, activity, education, citizenship and finances.

The development of the scales involved up to now 12 studies in Portugal, Spain, Greece, Malta, Hungary and Switzerland, with more than 670 seniors. With a few exceptions, most of them have the following characteristics: they live in their homes with their relatives; they are females; they have low levels of education, no qualification or level 1; they are married; they have a low monthly income; they don’t participate in training sessions or educational activities; and most of them live in urban areas. The participants were contacted in different places (homes, residences, nursing homes, day care centres, new opportunities centres, institutions for social and local development, etc.) and their age ranged from 50 to 101 years. This extensive work, which involved all PALADIN Partners, was conducted by a team of the University of Coimbra (coordinated by Albertina Lima Oliveira), Portugal and co-assisted by George Zarifis from Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Each scale takes about 10 minutes to answer; most seniors didn't have any difficulties when answering the items. On the contrary, the items seemed to be understandable, meaningful and interesting to the seniors. You can try yourself to answer one of these scales in one of the following fields.

Education
Health
Activity
Citizenship
Finances

The Scales are available and were tested in Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian and Maltese; they are also available in 3 other languages: English, German and Swedish.

Memorandum: Self-Efficacy and Worthy Old Age Memorandum

The Memorandum aims at providing a Recommendation to policy makers, social services, as well as education and training structures. It presents a set of Action Principles based on the research results of the PALADIN project and on the participating experts' experience, and several policy recommendations. The Memorandum is available in 21 EU languages.

5. Impact and Sustainability

The main demonstrated/potential impact is in attracting the attention of the adult education professionals to self-efficacy and self-directedness as issues when discussing about the learning and engagement of seniors. The project included four big international scientific conferences that aim at promoting the instruments developed; nonetheless, the notions of 'self-efficacy' and 'self-directedness' as part of seniors' learning and engagement will spread widely. The notion of 'self-efficacy' is a shift from thinking about the efficacy of teachers or materials or anything else outside the learner. The notion of 'self-directedness' is not perceived as a guiding principle, but a complex phenomenon to be understood. Considering that EU seeks new attractive and flexible learning methods, self-directed learning fulfils these characteristics with a plus: it's inexpensive, as PALADIN outcomes can become very useful and used from now on.

The incorporation of PALADIN products and points of view into policies will achieve also a set of activities, namely because of the Conference organised at the European Parliament, in Brussels, November 16, 2010.

6. Educational Process

As a general strategy, PALADIN followed the usual approach of most projects coordinated by Association VIDA, which respects 9 principles:

1. Involving end users since the beginning'
2. Enlarging the original partnership'
3. Producing project products that reflect end users' choices, opinions and needs;
4. Producing graphic materials: printed and distributed via web/email;
5. Online/digital visibility of the project and its products;
6. Media visibility (newspaper, radio and newsletter);
7. Networking and academic/scientific dialogue and presentation;
8. Strategic email contacts and face-to-face meetings;
9. Contribution to policies: at EU and national levels.

For the development of PALADIN Scales, the following method was used:

Participants

Up to now, the development of scales involved 12 studies in Portugal, Spain, Greece, Malta, Hungary and Switzerland, with more than 670 seniors, as it was described above.

Instruments

All the scales have the same structure, beginning with the instructions, the rating scale (from 0 to 10), and followed by the items. The respondents put their confidence value in the space on the right side of each item. The final versions of all the scales have 20 structured items plus an open question. The only exception is the health scale since one more item was added, as a measure of the subjective perception of health.

Procedures

The *first step* in developing the scales was to define the relevant domain of functioning for each of them. Health Scale contains items assessing physical exercise, food, life hygiene, visits to health professionals and learning about health. Activity Scale considers the professional situation, voluntary and associative activities, cultural activities, leisure time, occupation, as well as personal and social development. Education Scale includes formal paths of education/training, non-formal experiences of education/training, general understanding of education/training, and motivations and strategies for involvement in education/training. Citizenship Scale measures the confidence in civic participation at an individual level, in the sphere of interpersonal relationships and in the domain of social and intercultural relationships. Finally, the Finances Scale includes items related to managing the budget, income and spending sources, prioritizing, and medium and long-term budgeting. The item generation process came from the researchers' experience, a small literature review and mainly from 10 focus groups carried out with 23 seniors from New Opportunities Centres and Day Care Centres for the elders in Coimbra (Portugal).

In the pilot and final studies, all the seniors in the several countries answered the scales in a warm atmosphere and voluntarily. Besides the 5 new scales, the seniors answered the PANAS SWLS and ROS scales and a demographic sheet. These instruments were included in the study as measures of construct validity. In addition, the Portuguese participants answered a scale of self-learning as a measure of convergent validity, produced by Portuguese researchers.