


# Chapter 14

## Engaging Adult Learners in Higher Education: A Case Study of a Spanish University

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### ABSTRACT

*Adult learning has experienced significant growth in recent decades. In order to promote senior education, it is essential for universities to offer a variety of courses specifically tailored to the needs and interests of older adults. The teaching-learning process for older people requires continuous adaptation of teaching methodologies to the special characteristics of this group. In this chapter, firstly, we study the adaptation of teaching methodologies to enhance the participation and integration of senior students in the classroom, analysing a specific case of a University in Spain. Secondly, a survey has been conducted to determine the extent of participation, integration, motivation and engagement among senior students. A two-step ordinal logistic regression analysis is carried out to examine how participation and integration influence motivation. The participative and integrative methodologies that predominate in the Senior University Programme have resulted in high levels of student engagement and motivation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Engaging adult learners is important for fostering lifelong learning and ensuring their active participation in society. Adult learners bring diverse experiences and motivations, requiring approaches that acknowledge their unique needs. Providing career-focused, practical skills and fostering a culture of inclusivity help engage adult learners, enabling them to improve their competencies and contribute more effectively to society. Adult education is an important component of lifelong learning, which includes any form of learning that people undertake after completing their formal education, often for personal or professional development purposes.

Lifelong learning and adult education have assumed growing importance in the educational policies of the European Union. Promoting lifelong learning is a strategic priority for European institutions in building a more competitive and inclusive economy. The European Union has identified adult education and lifelong learning as fundamental pillars for adapting to labour market changes, digital transformation, global competitiveness, and social cohesion.

Adult learning has been established as a priority area in the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (2021-2030). Moreover, adult education plays a vital role in achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) emphasizes adult education as a driver for interconnecting the three dimensions of sustainable development—social, economic, and environmental—contributing to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda (EAEA, 2019, p. 13).

Among the benefits of adult education, the EAEA highlights that adult education can also foster greater democracy and participation at national and regional levels, thereby enabling transparency and the development of an active civil society, as well as contributing to critical reflection and empowerment (EAEA, 2019, p. 4). Research by Preston and Feinstein further found that adult learning can impact on voting and civic participation. They examined the effects of adult education on voting and civic participation and significant and substantial effects of adult education on these outcomes were identified (Schuller (2004), p.10).

The right to education, training, and lifelong learning is preserved in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that everyone has the right to inclusive and quality education, training, and lifelong learning to maintain and acquire skills that enable full participation in society and successful navigation of labour market transitions. It also guarantees timely and personalized assistance to enhance employment prospects, including training, reskilling, and continuous education support (COM(2017) 250 final).

Among the current challenges in adult education, we highlight the following from the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA, 2019):

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