



Title of Paper MASTER: Empowering Low-skilled Adults Through the Self-assessment of Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Competence

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Abstract

The MASTER self-assessment allowed 160 low-skilled adults in Italy, Cyprus, Portugal and United Kingdom, to identify and evaluate their Personal, Social and Learning to learn competence (PSL), by participating in the piloting foreseen in the framework of the ERASMUS+ MASTER project.

PSL was set as a key competence by the European Council and has been chosen for the self-assessment because, since it regards how to manage personal resources, social relationships as well as learning opportunities and career, it is crucial to increase adults' awareness and empowerment, and to favour their full participation in society.

In Italy, the self-assessment has been carried out through 2 tools, adapted at pedagogical level by the Roma Tre University: the Questionnaire about the perception of one's own competences and beliefs (QPCC) and the Competence Cards for professional and immigration counselling, both already tested with different objectives and target groups from the ones of the MASTER self-assessment.

The tools have been administered online, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, by guidance and training professionals, during 3 sessions: the first one meant at introducing the self-assessment process, objectives and the competences to be evaluated; the second one aimed at the individual self-assessment through one of the selected tools; the third one for discussing with the users the outcomes of the self-assessment.

The innovation of the MASTER self-assessment process mainly stands in the following elements: Focus on PSL competence - it represents a wide range of skills that, applying to all spheres of life and favouring self-awareness, are essential for the re-engagement of low-skilled adults.

Bottom-up cooperation between professionals from private Adult Education providers and Public Employment Services who built, used and systematised common approach and methodologies.

Involvement of the users in a process giving them the opportunity to improve their self-esteem, to reflect about the possibility to learn from failures, and to gain relevant information for their future participation in reskilling paths.

Keywords: *Adult education, Low-skilled, Key competences, Self-assessment*

1. Introduction

As in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, the **Personal, Social and Learning to Learn competence** (PSL) is "the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient and manage one's own learning and career. It includes the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one's physical and emotional well-being, to maintain physical and mental health, and to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, empathise and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context".

As it represents a wide range of skills that are cross-cutting across jobs and sectors, and that can boost self-awareness and motivation, the PSL competence is particularly relevant for low-skilled adults. Despite this, it remains one of the least addressed key competences, both in the context of institutional priorities and in the definition of guidance, training and evaluation tools.

By putting in place a process for guiding low-skilled adults in self-assessing their PSL competence, the MASTER project contributed to increase the relevance of PSL competence among Adult Education practitioners and policy makers, as well as the opportunities for low-skilled adults to understand, develop and/or reinforce it.

2. General information

2.1. Context

In Italy, the self-assessment experience was carried out from FORMA.Azione (www.azione.com), Adult Education provider located in the Umbria region.



In order to set the testing, FORMA.Azione contacted and engaged the Public Employment Services (PES) and the social enterprises dealing with active labour policies at regional level: this cooperation allowed the recruitment of users with different characteristics and needs, and the activation of a permanent exchange with the PES practitioners with reference to the whole development of the self-assessment process.

2.2. Self-assessment tools

FORMA.Azione tested two tools, pedagogically adapted by the Roma Tre University, for the specific purpose of self-assessing the PSL competence.

The **QPCC - Questionario di Percezione delle proprie Competenze e Convinzioni**, is a questionnaire based on the self-assessment of one's skills and beliefs, and it's generally used as tool for adults' and youth's guidance. The questionnaire, intended for self-administration, explores four areas/dimensions and the reference factors: affective – emotional, volitional, cognitive, motivational. To evaluate these areas, specific situations are presented to the users, and they have to tell how frequently they are in those situations. At the end of the questionnaire, the users receive a report including a score for each of the evaluated factors, the explanation of most factors and some insights for improvement.

The **Competence Cards for immigration counseling** are developed for supporting the analysis of migrants' social, personal, and technical and methodological competences. Each competence is illustrated by a picture on the front of the card, and described by a short sentence translated in seven languages. On the back of the card, there are further explanations and questions about the competence, useful for the practitioners. Using the cards is an interactive process involving the user and the professional in working together; the tool is adaptable to the needs of the user, to the available time, to the selection of the competences. The results of the process can be documented for planning/taking further actions.

2.3. Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries involved in testing the tools were 40, 27 men and 13 women, long-term unemployed and low-skilled, most of them with vulnerable backgrounds.

The QPCC has been administered to 17 adults owning sufficient language and elaborative skills, as well as abilities in abstract thinking. The Cards have been used with 23 adults owning a low level of language and elaborative skills (regardless of their mother tongue), who needed a graphic support to understand better the meaning of the different competences; moreover, the Card have been used with people who needed a stronger solicitation to interact in the self-assessment process because the tool supports expression and dialogue.

2.4. Testing activity

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the tools were tested online during three sessions, with the support of guidance/training professionals:

- the **first session**, addressed to small groups of users, allowed to introduce the self-assessment process, the objectives and the competences to be evaluated;
- the **second one** was aimed at the individual self-assessment through one of the selected tools. The QPCC was already suitable to be used online but, to make the administration more effective in terms of users' self-awareness and empowerment, the practitioners supported them in filling it, by explaining the different items and asking questions for activating a reflection process. The Cards needed to be adapted for being administrated online: specific cards have been selected among the proposed ones according to their relevance for the PSL competence, grouped in 4, and included in a slide presentation. For each slide, the practitioner explained the meaning of the competences/skills presented in the Cards; then, users were asked to select a Card including a competence/skill they thought to own, and another introducing a competence/skill they thought to be improved. Once selected the two Cards, the users were asked to explain the reasons of their selection, making concrete examples coming from their life experience;
- the **third session** allowed to report and discuss with the users the outcomes of the self-assessment, by sharing a report synthetizing their individual strengths and competences to be improved.

During the process, users were requested for a feedback by asking direct questions, and through specific questionnaires developed by the Roma Tre University: at the beginning, in order to check their understanding of the PSL competence and the path to be followed; at the end, to collect their feeling



about self-evaluation and their perception about its usefulness for self-awareness and reactivation.

3. Results and lessons learnt

3.1. Users

According to the feedback received from users, the experience of PSL self-assessment has been very relevant for the low-skilled adults participating in: it gave them the opportunity to be more aware of their abilities, to improve their self-esteem, to reflect on the possibility of learning from failures, to acquire relevant information for their future participation in reskilling paths and, as a side effect, to improve their digital skills related to the use of videoconferencing tools.

With specific reference to their understanding of PSL and the way they experienced the self-assessment process, the evaluation highlighted some interesting issues:

- the skills related to the Personal area of the PSL competence weren't easily understandable, so it is important to find a clearer way to explain them from practitioners;
- the users thought to own the PSL competence even if they didn't, showing a lack of awareness about;
- the trustiness to the professionals who propose the participation in the self-assessment was very relevant for engaging adults;
- the users showed the explicit willingness to improve themselves and to participate in new training opportunities, and this is particularly true for women.

About the self-assessment tools, while QPCC is more suitable for low-skilled adults who have sufficient skills in terms of attention, concentration, understanding of the Italian language, the Cards allow a simple explanation of the PSL competence through images, short and clear sentences, and allow to involve the user through questions that facilitate interaction, dialogue, reflection. So this last tool seems more suitable for low-skilled adults and activates a process that allows, in se, to improve the PSL competence.

The online administration of the tools worked well; users felt at ease while carrying out the activities, which represented also a way to relieve them from isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The role of the practitioners, directly or indirectly involved in the self-assessment, has been fundamental because they selected the most suitable tool for each user, adapted the common testing procedures to the specific individual needs, and provided targeted support during the whole process.

3.2. Practitioners

The commitment and exchange among all the professionals involved in the testing activities has been constant, specifically in light of re-adjusting approaches and procedures according to users' emerging needs. Thanks to this experience, the practitioners improved relevant competences, perceived to have concretely impacted on their target groups, and have been protagonist in the application of the subsidiarity principle to a practical case, according to a bottom-up approach.

3.3. Stakeholders

The results of the self-assessment process were shared with national stakeholders (policy makers, research and Third sector organisations, Adult Education national networks), so as to collect specific suggestions for guaranteeing their sustainability/re-usability.

Primarily, they highlighted the need for enhancing the PSL competence, both in institutional priorities and in the definition of guidance, training and evaluation tools: for this purpose, they suggested to modelling the key assumptions emerged from this experience in permanent adult guidance, learning and validation, and for systematically monitoring PSL competence. Then, they proposed to further develop the subsidiarity model built with PES, also by applying experimented tools and procedures in the framework of existing policies and cooperation models.

4. Conclusions

The experience of supporting low-skilled adults in evaluating their PSL competence, by using the self-assessment tools selected and adapted in the framework of MASTER, shows that it's essential to work on PSL development, reinforcement and monitoring for adults' empowerment, activation and awareness, so as to make them all able to concretely act as full citizens. In this regard, the adaptation of existing guidance, training and evaluation tools is a first important step, also considering that - at the present moment - in Italy PSL is not included in any formal education curricula neither taken into account in the monitoring of learning outcomes. And this is suggested also from the **LIFECOMP**, the European framework meant at establishing a shared understanding on the "Personal, Social and



Learning to learn” key competence.

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