'Situational barriers are keeping me from participating', but are they situational? Examining low-educated adults' psychosocial views on adult learning

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ABSTRACT

Despite the attention devoted to situational and institutional barriers in studying participation in adult education, psychosocial barriers are often overlooked in research. However, low-educated, and non-participating adults are more likely to experience them. In this study, we examine low-educated, both participating and non-participating, adults' psychosocial views on learning. We interviewed 15 adults by using vignettes to elicit discussion on a delicate and difficult to interview theme and carried out a qualitative content analysis. Our findings demonstrate that adults point to situational barriers for not participating and, contrary to what we anticipated, have positive general attitudes towards learning. However, there are several prerequisites to having this attitude. For instance, learning has to be useful, a learning trigger is needed, spare hours should not be devoted, and there should be no exams or tests. As a result, our research demonstrates the complex nature of perceived 'situational' barriers, which frequently pertain to psychosocial stances.

Keywords: Low-educated adults; psychosocial barriers; barriers to learning; vignettes

1. Introduction

Today's ever-changing society demands a continuous renewal of skills and knowledge (Field 2006). Lifelong learning can support adults in adapting to these demands while also providing

economic and social benefits (Boeren 2016). Participation has been linked to greater social cohesiveness, active citizenship, voter participation, income changes, increased personal wellbeing, and increased life satisfaction (Schuller and Desjardins 2010, Manninen and Meriläinen 2011). Despite the importance of continuous learning, there are differences in participation rates between subgroups. Adults with a high level of education and skills, as well as those who are younger and employed, are more likely to participate (Desjardins *et al*. 2006). This is called the Matthew effect: those who already have, obtain more. Adults with a stronger educational background have better opportunities to participate in adult learning (Boeren 2016).

In this study, we examine why adults with low educational levels are less inclined to engage in continuous learning. We define 'low-educated adults' as adults who have not completed secondary education. When analysing the causes for their lower participation rates, we will specifically focus on psychosocial barriers to learning, as we will argue later on that these may have been overlooked in previous studies.

Despite the fact that there is literature on learning barriers, there has been limited research on the barriers that prevent low-educated adults from participating in adult education, even though their participation rates are the lowest, and this target group may benefit most from participating. In fact, adults with limited educational backgrounds show greater changes in learning motivation, well-being (control of their own lives and sense of purpose in life), attitudes, social capital and meeting intimate contacts after participating in lifelong learning (Manninen and Meriläinen 2011, de Greef et al. 2015). Furthermore, examining the barriers faced by a specific disadvantaged group could help inform policy makers to install tailored measures (Desjardins 2015).

Research suggests that low-educated adults are more likely than high-educated adults to face psychosocial difficulties (Cross 1981, Illeris 2006). Psychosocial barriers are defined as 'individually held beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions that inhibit participation in organised learning activities' (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982, p. 137). Furthermore, it is critical to not only study adults who are already enrolled in adult education or adults who express interest in enrolling but experience difficulties, as a substantial portion of research on participation barriers does (Paldanius 2007, Porras-Hernández and Salinas-Amescua 2012). When focusing solely on

this subgroup, reported hurdles may be reduced to situational and institutional ones, while psychosocial barriers are neglected. Low-educated adults and non-participants, however, may be more prone to face psychosocial learning restrictions (Pennacchia et al. 2018). For example, Van Nieuwenhove and De Wever (2022) demonstrated that low-educated adults and non-participating (both low-and medium-educated) adults face considerably distinct hurdles than higher educated adults or participating adults. However, the findings of this study also demonstrate that there is currently very little detailed information about the learning barriers of low-educated non-participating adults.

Thus, more research on psychosocial barriers to learning faced by low-educated adults (particularly those who do not participate) is necessary (Damen et al. 2013). According to Boeren (2016), additional qualitative research is needed in this research field in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of perceived barriers on the one hand and how to overcome them on the other. However, because of the negative connotation that these adults may attach to learning, interview responses may be brief and accompanied by a disinterested attitude (Kyndt et al. 2013). In response to this difficulty, Kyndt et al. (2013) call for novel methods for approaching low-qualified workers about learning. In this study, we will employ vignettes as a qualitative tool to interview low-educated adults on their psychosocial views about adult learning.

Examining the barriers to participation among adults who do not engage in adult education can give rise to ethical concerns. There is a potential risk of framing participation as a moral issue, stigmatising those who choose not to participate (Rubenson 2010). Thus, it is crucial to explicitly recognise that the decision not to participate can be entirely rational. The goal of this study is to explore the psychosocial perspectives underlying adults' choices to refrain from participation.

2. Literature background

Barriers to adult learning

Barriers to learning can be perceived in several ways: they can be thought of as impediments that prevent adults from participating, or they can be thought of as decreasing involvement but not entirely preventing it. According to the first point of view, research on barriers would only include

non-participants; but, according to the second point of view, adults who are currently engaging are also of interest (Rubenson 2010).

Cross (1981) defined three different learning barriers: situational, institutional, and dispositional. The adult's particular and specific situation is referred to as a situational barrier. Income, age, health, skill level, certain roles a person has (e.g. being a parent, single, married, or caring for a sick family member) and a lack of time due to work commitments or family duties are examples of this barrier. Institutional barriers are systems and procedures that are beyond the participant's control and are frequently unintentionally put in place by educational service providers. Some examples include course accessibility (location and time), government financial support, employer support (financial as well as, for example, flexible working hours), and course variety. Personal attitudes and self-perceptions that may impede participation, such as myths and beliefs adults have about education and learning, readiness to learn, the value attached to learning, self-confidence, being anxious about learning new things, bad memories of prior education, and feeling no need for continued education, are examples of dispositional barriers (Cross 1981).

Multiple studies have shown that certain populations are more vulnerable to particular barriers than other people. Women, for example, are more likely to bring up situational barriers, particularly family duties (Rubenson and Desjardins 2009; Massing and Gauly 2017). Adults' occupations, skills, and educational level are all tied to institutional hurdles. Adults who do not want to participate, low-educated adults, elderly adults, working-class adults, and adults with poor skill levels are more likely to face dispositional barriers (Desjardins 2010; Rubenson and Desjardins 2009).

However, distinguishing between situational, institutional, and dispositional obstacles is difficult. A lack of time, for example, can relate to a situational barrier (such as family responsibilities), but it can also allude to a dispositional barrier (not valuing education or the expected outcomes sufficiently to sacrifice free time) (Rubenson and Desjardins 2009). Or, while a financial barrier may be regarded as a situational barrier for someone who does not have a large income, it can also be perceived as an institutional barrier, because it is the institution that requires the adult to pay substantial enrolment fees (Boeren 2016). Additionally, dispositions are affected by structural

barriers (Rubenson 2010). In fact, Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) describe in their research how the individual (dispositions) and structural level (structural conditions and policy measures) interact with each other.

Psychosocial Interaction Model

In contrast to Cross's (1981) typology, Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) Psychosocial Interaction Model analyzes why adults (do not) engage in continuous learning while simultaneously highlighting the social context in which participation happens. Prior research on learning barriers (Van Nieuwenhove and De Wever 2023) has recognised the importance of social context in choosing to participate. The theoretical model does not address the structural aspects of adult education. However, because of the model's comprehensiveness and emphasis on perceived barriers, it is well suited to answering our research question.

The model is illustrated below (Figure 1). According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), during pre-adulthood, initial individual and family characteristics influence subsequent experiences in school. The pre-adulthood elements define the level of Socio-economic Status (SES: educational attainment, occupational status, and income), which in turn influences learning press and the subsequent variables of the model. Ultimately, the convergence of all of these factors will lead to a decision to participate or not participate.

In this study, we will look at how low-educated adults perceive key aspects of the Psychosocial Interaction Model. These elements are expanded on in the next sections, and they are supplemented by other theories and empirical findings from participation research.

Preparatory education and socialization

Prior learning experiences can form negative or indifferent attitudes towards learning. Family characteristics, according to the Model, impact educational experiences (from kindergarten through graduate school), as well as the values and goals one acquires (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982). Negative former schooling experiences (such as humiliation, marginalisation, feeling inadequate, wanting to leave school as soon as possible) may lead to a wish to never willingly return to the place or context of education again (Illeris 2006). Furthermore, certain people may

believe that they are unable to participate in continuous learning because of their earlier learning experiences. This creates a vicious cycle in which learners avoid learning activities due to a lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy (Sanders et al. 2015). Avoiding learning activities, in turn, prevents individuals from developing higher self-confidence and self-efficacy. According to Fouarge et al. (2013), fear of examinations has a negative effect on training intention in low-educated persons. Exam anxiety may also be the result of unpleasant earlier learning experiences.

*Function of level of social participation, occupational complexity, and lifestyle
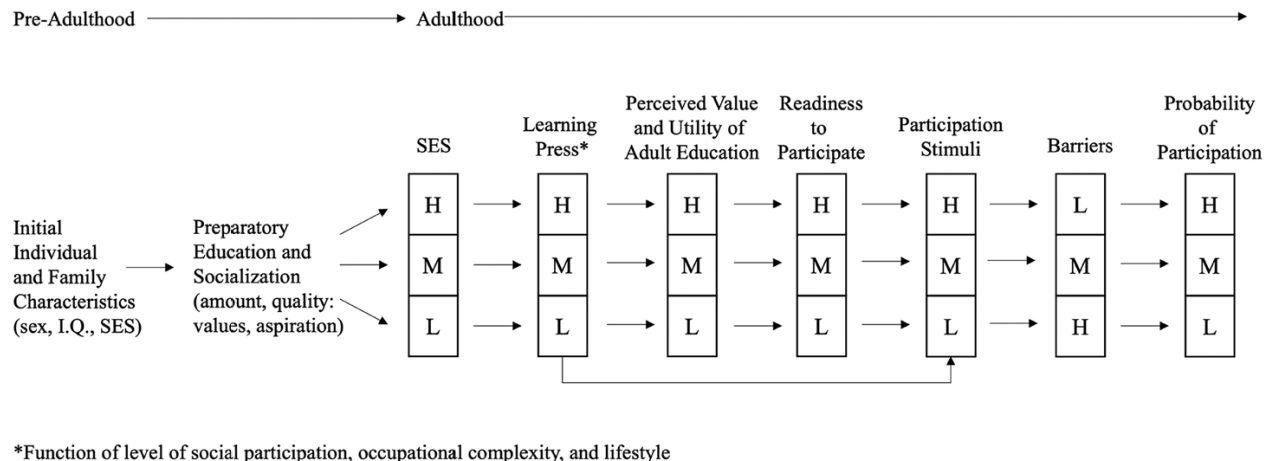
Figure 1. Psychosocial Interaction Model by Darkenwald and Merriam. Note: H, M, L refer to high, medium low.

Sanders et al. (2015), for example, revealed that positive adult learning experiences boosted low-educated workers' learning self-efficacy. However, the relationship between earlier compulsory education learning experiences and participation in adult learning activities has received far less attention, despite the fact that it may have a significant impact.

Learning press

Learning press is defined by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982, p. 142) as 'the extent to which one's total current environment requires or encourages further learning' and 'is determined by general social participation (e.g. participation in civic, cultural, religious, and recreational activities and organizations), occupational complexity (e.g. technical, professional, and managerial employment), and lifestyle (e.g. personal taste, leisure-time preference)'. SES has a significant impact on all of these components.

We broaden this concept of learning press by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) by integrating broader conceptions of perceived social norms related to adult learning. Participation is influenced by more than just the adult's own attitudes. Other people's attitudes (or social norms of members of a cultural group) can also be an important barrier to learning (Isaac 2011). Comparing oneself to a particular reference group or being part of a specific cultural group can play a role in shaping attitudes towards participation in adult education (Cross 1981, Darkenwald and Merriam 1982, Isaac 2011). Disapproval of education from the social group, particularly because of its perceived lack of value or utility, may hinder participation (Blair et al. 1995). Rubenson (1998) emphasises the role of socialising for adult learning using Bourdieu's idea of habitus. He claims that for some adults socialisation in the family, at school or at work can generate positive dispositions towards adult learning. Consequently, these positive dispositions can become part of their habitus. The experiences and expectations of the family, or the long arm of the family as Rubenson (2007) calls it, have a strong impact on the intention to participate in continuous learning. For example, if other family members have not participated in adult learning, this may discourage their family member from participating. In some cases, this person can even be mocked for wanting to participate (Isaac 2011).

Tuckett and Field (2016) demonstrated that peers, friends, spouses and co-workers or employers can all have an impact on whether or not you engage in learning as they can reinforce an individual's attitudes, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. This reinforcing might occur in a negative way by discouraging the adult from participating, but it can also occur in a positive way: peers can have a positive effect on the confidence and trust that is required to participate.

Sanders et al. (2011) show that subjective norms are associated to training intention in their research on barriers of low-educated non-participating employees. Nonetheless, social networks are frequently underestimated or ignored as a barrier to learning (Blair et al. 1995, Porras-Hernández and Salinas-Amescua 2012). To the best of our knowledge, no in-depth qualitative analysis has been undertaken on low-educated, non-participating adults' learning pressure or social norms and the relation to their non-participation in adult education.

Perceived value and utility

Adult education will be viewed as having (possible) personal value or utility when the current environment necessitates or stimulates learning (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982).

Perceived value and utility are just two components of the larger concept of attitudes towards learning. Attitudes are the most commonly addressed psychosocial barrier to (adult) learning. According to Cross (1981), attitudes emerge both directly from the learners' own past experiences but also indirectly from the attitudes and experiences of significant others. Empirical research has demonstrated that people with a positive attitude towards learning show higher participation rates, are more likely to consider participating and experience fewer barriers (Boeren et al. 2010).

Adult learning attitudes can be thought of as a multifactorial construct that consists of three components: enjoyment of learning, intrinsic value, and perceived importance (Blunt and Yang 2002). The final two match with Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) concept of perceived value and utility.

There has been little research on attitudes to adult learning among low-educated adults. In his research, Beder (1990) discovered that a dislike for school, low perceptions of need, and the impression that participating would require too much work are the main psychosocial reasons for not taking part in adult basic education. Furthermore, there is a shortage of qualitative research on low-educated adults' attitudes as barriers to learning. Paldanius (2007) conducted interviews with low-educated adults and identified a lack of interest or motive for education. Most participants considered education as something that had to be done while they waited for the real (working) life, a fairly boring period in their lives, and they did not value learning for the sake of learning.

Readiness to participate

A high perception of the value of education will affect the individual's readiness to participate (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982). Apart from that, Darkenwald and Merriam offer little insight into what characterises readiness to participate. To determine the preparedness to participate, we use Fishbein and Ajzen's (2010) notion of Perceived Behavioural control, which is 'the extent to which people believe that they are capable of performing a given behaviour, that they have

control over its performance' (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 154). The stronger the Perceived Behavioural Control, the stronger the intention to perform the behaviour. Perceived Behavioural Control is comparable to self-efficacy', or a person's belief in one's own abilities (Bandura 1997, Fishbein and Ajzen 2010). Self-efficacy appears to be a substantial predictor of learning intentions of low-educated workers (Renkema 2006; Sanders et al. 2011). According to Illeris (2006) early school leavers lack self-confidence because of their bad pedagogical experiences, whereas Desjardins (2010) claims that adults with low levels of education are less likely to participate due to a lack of readiness to learn in terms of knowledge and skills as well motivation.

Participation stimuli and barriers

According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), in order for participation to occur, readiness to participate must be stimulated by specific stimuli. This stimulus or external 'trigger event' could be a job change or the anticipation of a job change, for example It could also indicate the activation of internal needs or desires, such as self-expression or self-improvement (for example, following a divorce). The frequency and intensity of these trigger moments varies from person to person, and adults who experience higher learning press will experience triggers more frequently. It is worth noting that these triggers are highly subjective: regardless of the objective situation, some people will view the stimulus as a learning stimulus whereas others will not (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982).

However, the presence of stimuli does not guarantee adult participation, as adults may encounter obstacles (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982). As we described earlier, next to psychosocial barriers, adults may face situational (e.g. lack of childcare), institutional (e.g. inconvenient schedules) or informational barriers (e.g. lack of information on opportunities). The severity of these barriers is related to socioeconomic status (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982).

3. The present study

To summarise, we want to investigate psychosocial learning barriers for low-educated individuals who do not (often) engage in adult learning. The study is being conducted in Belgium, a country that is known in research for its poor adult learning culture (OECD 2019). Multiple reports

attribute low participation rates to a lack of willingness to participate in lifelong learning (OECD 2022). Because nearly one in every two persons does not participate in learning and does not want to participate, increasing desire to participate is one of our greatest challenges (OECD 2022). We would want to underline, however, that involvement should not be viewed solely as an individual decision, as we agree with Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) that structural and individual factors are inextricably linked. As a result, the goal of this research is to gain insight into the individual conditions that may be influenced or even caused by structural factors.

We employ vignettes to address the complicity of investigating a difficult or even sensitive topic that may elicit opposition, hostility or disinterest if directly questioned. In general, we would like to examine if and how the individual elements of the psychosocial interaction model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) can be observed in the narratives, experiences, and opinions of the low-educated adults when it comes to lifelong learning. More specifically, we would like to examine how prevalent psychosocial barriers are in the (non-)participation of low-educated adults. Because barriers may be viewed differently depending on the perspective we take (situational, dispositional, or institutional), we recognise that what we identify as psychosocial may not be the same for other researchers or even the interviewed participants. In this sense, we opt for a middle-ground epistemology in which we avoid presenting 'facts' or 'reality' (positivism) while nonetheless departing from a theoretical framework and hypotheses (and thus not constructivist).

4. Method

We determined that a qualitative method would be most effective in achieving our research goal as a direct upfront method may not generate desired results while examining psychological constructs. Dialogue and reflection are needed to provide in-depth and contextual results. This is difficult when using quantitative methods.

More precisely, we chose to use vignettes because they are useful for examining sensitive data; they acknowledge that values, decisions, and judgements occur within context; and they capture opinions and perspectives (Barter and Renold 1999). Because of these characteristics, they are a highly suitable technique to investigate psychosocial barriers of low-educated adults, a subject

that can be delicate, occurs in a particular setting, and is not merely based on reason but also on personal opinions. This technique is covered in further detail later in the study. Overall, the goal of this research was to examine perspectives and opinions on learning, rather than to discuss personal (non)-participation choices.

Participants

The sample comprised 15 low-educated adults aged 26–58 (key characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 1). Low-educated adults are defined as adults who have not completed high school (i.e. ISCED 0, 1 and 2).

Participants were recruited via prior research on lifelong learning and via a call in local social media communities. The call was directed to adults who had not completed high school and who had not attended a training activity in the previous 12 months.

Table 1. Participant characteristics: participation profiles.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Employment status	Occupation	Participation status	If participating; content and frequency (days or hours per year)
Jimmy	M	[50–59]	PTE	Technical Staff	P	2 Non-work-related trainings, 3 days in total
Maria	F	[50–59]	PTE	Labourer	P	2 Work-related mandatory 1-day trainings + non-work-related Spanish language course (4th year)
Nancy	F	[40–49]	Sick leave	N/A	P	Graduate programme, dropped out
Alan	M	[50–59]	Full time employed	Trainer in company	P	Mandatory 3-day work-related course
Dennis	M	[20–29]	Seeking employment	N/A	P	8-day work-related training course + exam
Marco	M	[50–59]	FTE	Representative	NP	N/A
Sandra	F	[40–49]	PTE	Salesperson	NP	N/A
Colleen	F	[50–59]	PTE (reintegration after sick leave)	Household help	NP	N/A
Florence	F	[30–39]	FTE	Shop assistant	NP	N/A
Darren	M	[40–49]	FTE	Labourer	NP	N/A
Marianne	F	[30–39]	FTE	Cleaner	NP	N/A
Janet	F	[50–59]	FTE	Farmer	NP	N/A
Corey	M	[30–39]	FTE	Labourer	NP	N/A
Farah	F	[40–49]	FTE	Bookbinder	NP	N/A
Eric	M	[50–59]	FTE	Technician	NP	N/A

Note. N/A: Not Applicable; PTE: Part-time employed; FTE: Full-time employed, P: Participating in adult learning in the previous 12 months, NP: Non-participating.

Procedure

The study was carried out in Flanders in 2021. Due to Covid-restrictions, the interviews were held online. Before the interview, the participants received an information letter outlining the goal of the study. They were also given written and verbal information on how their data would be handled and anonymized. Following that, participants provided written informed consent to participate. After participating, they received a voucher for a web store. On average the interviews took 65 minutes. This study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University (ref. 2021/136).

Instruments

Kyndt et al. (2013) suggest using new approaches for analysing low-qualified adults' views on learning. As a result, we propose the usage of vignettes. A vignette is an interview technique, where a picture or description of a fictional but realistic situation is presented. This technique can be implemented to elicit discussion, generate reactions or opinions and initiate reflection (Veal 2002, Jenkins et al. 2010, Jackson et al. 2015). The respondent is asked to imagine how the vignette's character will behave or why they behave in this manner. To answer this question, the respondent draws on their own experiences. This method collects situated data on group values, beliefs, and behavioural norms (Bloor and Wood 2006), and reality is viewed as something that is subjective (Skilling and Stylianides 2020). When a vignette is used instead of direct interview questions, a distance is created between the participant and the interview subject, making the interview experience less threatening, direct, personal, and confrontational for the participant (Hughes 1998, Jenkins et al. 2010). In addition, all replies can be projected onto the hypothetical character allowing for more sensitive and rich data (Jenkins et al. 2010). The participants may reveal more about themselves and their beliefs than they would have done if they were asked direct interview questions (Jenkins et al. 2010). It is important to note that the aim of this technique is not to accurately predict the participant's behaviour but to gain insight into the participant's perceptions and interpretative framework (Jenkins et al. 2010). When designing a vignette, it is critical that the vignettes match real-life scenarios. When (some element of) the scenario appears unrealistic or impossible to the participant, it can elicit negative feelings such as

perplexity, humiliation, anger, or indifference since the vignette calls the participant's competence into doubt (Hughes 1998, Jenkins et al. 2010).

Participants in this study were shown seven scenarios (the translated vignettes may be found in Appendix A1). A brief interview guide supplements the vignettes. In this way, the vignettes promote the dialogue by allowing participants to choose which components of the story are particularly striking to them and on which they want to freely comment. However, by employing a limited interview guide, we ensure that at the end of the interview, each subcomponent of the vignette has been explored by each participant (Figure 2).

Each vignette was visually presented to the participants and also read aloud by the interviewer. Some vignettes were broken down into smaller pieces. Following each part in which either an open or more targeted approach is used, an opening question was posed. In the former approach, the content of the vignette has not yet been established for the participant (e.g. Vignette 1 in Appendix in which we ask 'Brad is worried about taking this course. What do you reckon the possible reasons or explanations are?') whereas in the latter, the content of the vignette is already defined for the participant and they must indicate how they identify with the character's view on learning (e.g. Vignette 2 in Appendix in which we ask 'Can you see why Mark still has a fear of learning almost 30 years later as a result of these experiences (i.e. having difficulties with learning)?').

Participants were asked to try to relate to the character by relying on own experiences, opinions, personal and professional background. They were also informed that there were no correct or incorrect reactions.

To design and implement the vignettes we used the framework of Skilling and Stylianides (2020). First, we drew on existing literature (discussed in the introduction) to shape the content of the vignettes (see A2 in Appendix A for the literature framework of the vignettes). The major components of the psychosocial interaction model are represented in the vignettes. Occasionally, the same component was the topic of multiple vignettes in order to capture its various aspects. Then, to enhance the realistic portrayals of the characters (statements, visions, etc.), interview

transcripts from other unpublished research on non-participation in formal adult learning were used. A group of four researchers then read and discussed the vignettes.

It is crucial that the vignettes are incomplete and not too specific as this allows participants to respond in their own unique way (Skilling and Stylianides), which is why for example we do not mention the age of the subjects in the vignettes. Skilling and Stylianides (2020) recommend that the vignettes be between 50 and 200 words. Sometimes, participants were asked to take the perspective of the character while on other occasions, their own perspective was examined. When the conversation was rather open and friendly, for example, it was possible to dig into personal attitudes. The vignettes were piloted twice prior to use and only minor changes were required, primarily related to the wording of questions.

> Brad works as a full-time labourer. His workplace has evolved dramatically during the last five years. Some of the daily tasks Brad needs to complete have also transformed. A handful of Brad's co-workers have already participated in a training program at work to learn how to work with new equipment and procedures.
> Brad is worried about taking this course. What do you reckon the possible reasons or explanations are?

Figure 2. Vignette excerpt

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in Dutch, the language in which the interview took place, and the transcripts were organised and coded using NVivo software. Excerpts were later translated into English. The data collection continued until the data was saturated, which meant that little new information could be gained using the existing vignettes when conducting additional interviews.

We conducted a directed qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define this as a method where existing theory and prior research findings are used to identify initial key themes or coding categories. The data is then used to identify subcategories. A directed method to

qualitative content analysis has the advantage of being able to support and extend current theory (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

The Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) served as the primary coding framework. To refine the key themes and identify the various sub-themes, we used the Theory of Planned Behaviour as framework and used an iterative coding technique. Although we used vignettes to interview the participants, the original vignette structure and order was not used to code and analyse data because same themes may be covered multiple times throughout multiple vignettes. Perceived value and importance, for example, was explicitly addressed in vignette 4, but codes that occurred in other vignettes related to this topic were also included in the cluster of perceived value and importance. In total, we obtained 410 individual codes, each of which was assigned into one of the six clusters of the Psychosocial Interaction Model described in the literature background. Codes that did not apply to any of the clusters were omitted.

For each of the respondents, Table A3 in Appendix A reveals the occurrence or absence of each of the clusters. As a result, when we say, 'three participants said…', it is possible to determine which one of the individuals we are to.

5. Results

Cluster 1: Preparatory education

Every adult participating in our study experienced scholastic failure when they were younger, except for Farah. There were several causes for this. Five struggled with learning difficulties or health issues. Eight adults experienced a lack of motivation and interest in school which led to low grades, repeating school years, or repeatedly changing study tracks. They did not like studying as they did not know what they wanted in life yet and preferred working or learning more practice based. By dropping out of school and joining the job market, they felt like they entered the 'grown-up world'.

> *I met my husband when I was still in high school, which is why I dropped out pretty early. So, not because of negative school experiences, but simply because I wanted to be independent and mature as fast as possible if I can put it that way. (Florence)*

Despite the fact that practically every adult obtained poor grades, this did not result in 'negative' memories of education today. In fact, ten adults enjoyed going to school when they were younger as they got to spend time with their friends. And, although almost every adult still remembers one or two very strict teachers and report that the learning climate was not always very warm or supportive (due to teachers but also parents), the overall student-teacher relationship was still perceived as rather positive. In relation to parental socialisation a variety of experiences were reported. Sandra mentioned that her parents were supportive but never took the time to sit by her and assist her with schoolwork, while Jimmy stated that his father tried to motivate him to study by making him feel stupid and calling him names which did not work for him, and Marco said that that his parents had unrealistic expectations, causing him to enrol in a study track that was too ambitious.

If, however, people would have experienced negative emotions during compulsory education, there was a general consensus by ten adults that these feelings should be left behind as Maria indicated: 'That doesn't play a role anymore. Definitely not. I am who I am. It wasn't working before, but now it is. I see that Brad [Vignette 3, Appendix] does have problems with that [=he did not like going to school, didn't feel good in the school environment]. I myself would not have a problem with it'.

Cluster 2: Learning press

The concept of Learning Press by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) was clustered into four subclusters. In the first subcluster we collected everything that aims to answer the question to which extent the work environment requests or supports further learning. For twelve adults, the work environment requests some form of continued learning (for example having to learn new technologies, procedures, or regulations). However, this learning does not always take place in the form of organised training. In fact, ten adults mostly learned from colleagues or other peers (for example distributors of specific machinery) and preferred learning by doing. For example, Darren and Jimmy respectively state: 'And if you run into someone at the plant who uses the same machine, you can ask him, the one with more experience. And, if he's a decent person, he'll explain it. So that's how I do it' and 'When a new co-worker arrives, they [employers] hand him a

scanner, point to one of us and say: "You'll train the new guy".' Whether the work environment requests learning depends on the occupation, for example Sandra says: 'Not at the moment [changes at the workplace for which she could use training] because I am working as a salesperson. But if I wanted to become a branch manager, I would have to participate in a course.'.

Three adults have a perceived need for work-related training, but the employer does not provide this. Nine of the adults believe they could request a course if they wanted to as they have a good perceived employee-employer relationship, but four adults believe it is the employer's job to provide training and it is not their job to look for appropriate training themselves. For example, Farah says the following about the employer's role: 'With all of these modern evolutions, it's only natural that your boss would offer you those classes, right? In my opinion, the employer should actually offer it to him [instead of him having to ask for training, see Vignette 7 in Appendix A]'.

Seven participants believe that optional training that is provided by the employer has to be attended, even when you do not feel like it or they are not particularly useful. Not attending or not having the same knowledge or skills as colleagues could have consequences. In addition, according to seven adults, participating with colleagues can encourage team spirit. Nonetheless, these courses should not be mandatory as this will compromise motivation.

When reflecting on why other people might not participate in learning (for example in Vignettes 1 and 2 in Appendix A) resistance to change is mentioned by eight participants. This resistance to change is said to be stronger for older adults.

> *I see that Brad's age [Vignette 1 in Appendix] isn't specified. If he's a little older or nearing the end of his career. I've also worked with someone like that. That [learning] was then sort of excused; they didn't have to learn anymore. (Sandra)*

A second subcluster within learning press consisted of the 'reputation' of learning activities. In this cluster we examine the reputation of lifelong learning activities and the value the adults attach to others' opinions about learning. When the participants talked about colleagues, it appeared that learning is often perceived as something negative by colleagues, asking a lot of energy. For example, when discussing Vignette 5 (Appendix A), a potential negative evaluation by

colleagues was mentioned by five adults as a result of requesting a training course while a possibly negative evaluation by the employer was only mentioned by three.

> *I can understand that [he does not want to request a training] because he is probably afraid of his co-workers' reactions, as they will have to train because of him. They will blame him: 'It's because of you we are now here and obliged to do this'. (Sandra)*

Related to the employer, some participants believe requesting a training shows weakness, proving you are unable to do certain things or makes you come across as an overachiever. Especially when you know your colleagues do not like participating.

The participants understand that fear for a negative response of peers can be real and difficult for other adults, but twelve participants indicate that to them others' opinion of continued learning is not important. Their own opinions and perceptions of learning are essential. Two even indicate that a negative reaction could lead to increased motivation. Four adults believe no-one's opinion is important when it comes to learning but seven of the participants believe that if there is no support from their partner, participating will be difficult or even impossible. So, not everyone's opinion is as important.

In a third subcluster of learning press, we included the actual and/or perceived behaviour of the interviewees' peers. Every participant states that peers' or colleagues' participation or non-participation would not impact their own learning behaviour. Only three adults indicate they do not know anyone who is participating at this moment. Most of them do believe that for others who are reluctant to participate it might be interesting to hear experiences of participating peers or to participate together. Thus, for others the participating behaviour of peers can be stimulating, but for themselves they deem it is not important. Contradictory, although they all express the behaviour of others would not influence their behaviour, five of them refer to comparing yourself with colleagues and wanting to perform better than them or comparing yourself with younger course members as putting increased pressure on them.

> *When I took the course, I was in my thirties or so. Of course, it was a group of young folks, and there were perhaps 30 of us, with maybe three or four of us being my age. You think*

to yourself, 'I'm going to be the weakest of the bunch here,' but in the end it wasn't that bad. (Eric)

Finally, in the fourth subcluster, all information on lifestyle and leisure time preferences was gathered. Four of the participants believe it is difficult to participate in learning in your leisure time (see also providing of courses by the employer above). They also find it understandable that other people prefer practicing specific hobby's such as sports, hanging out with friends or just relaxing as they themselves also value their free time.

But in your spare time, I get it. I'm experiencing the same situation now that I am a father, with a second daughter. I understand that people don't have much time and they would rather do something else than learn. (Darren)

However, this is not their reason for not participating. Only a few strongly believe leisure time should be used for learning as this is a useful activity. In Cluster 3 we expand on this required usefulness of learning.

Cluster 3: Perceived value and utility

The cluster of Perceived Value and Utility within the Psychosocial Interaction Model was expanded with wider attitudes and perceptions about (1) the learning activity itself and (2) the adult as learner.

Seven participants stressed several times that the learning activity needs to be useful. Most often this means that the training has to be work-related, enabling the participants to use new knowledge and skills at the workplace. Therefore, not feeling any need for work-related training because you already have a job (you like) was mentioned by four participants as a reason for not participating in training.

Why should he be learning if he has an exciting job that he enjoys doing? Of course, if he doesn't enjoy his job, that's a different situation. Right now, I'm in the same boat; I enjoy my work and won't be doing any further learning or studying soon. (Alan)

In general, non-work-related learning was very little mentioned during the interviews. Two participants explicitly expressed that they do not value work and non-work-related training equally. But because training should be useful and work-related, this does not mean that it should not be a little fun or enjoyable. Courses that are too theoretical, too long, or mandatory are said to be demotivating.

General attitudes towards learning of eleven participants are very positive: statements are made that you can always learn new things, you are never too old to learn, you learn every day in this ever-evolving world (society in general but also the workplace in specific) and it is important to be willing to do so, learning is enriching, even if a course does not seem useful at first it may help you in the future, it offers new opportunities, can protect employment (especially for older adults), it can facilitate the current job tasks or help change jobs, it is time-consuming but useful etc. Thus, the usefulness of learning or functionality recurs frequently when naming reasons for and consequences of participating. For three participants, this usefulness is linked to rewards: new knowledge and skills lead to more work and without the proper (financial) rewards, the usefulness of the activity is no longer that appealing.

> *A few years ago, we were asked: 'Who here wants to attend this program and learn something new?' A few said, 'Oh, I want to,' and I said, 'I don't want to do that.' Because I knew that taking that course would require me to do a lot more evening work in the future. And to work even longer hours, and I didn't consider that an option, so I decided not to take the course. (Corey)*

Thus, when discussing why people may not participate in terms of the learning activity, it seems that the perceived usefulness of the training activity is crucial.

Not only attitudes towards the learning activity are rather positive, but we also notice that attitudes towards themselves as learners are quite positive as well. Almost half of the participants express they enjoy learning new things and are eager to do so. If you are interested and motivated enough, successfully participating will be easy. It was mentioned by nine interviewees that people who are not open to learning are narrow-minded, for example by Maria: 'That is not something I can agree with [Vignette 4 in Appendix A]. Learning is knowing and knowing is progressing. You

must be interested in something; else, your life will become monotonous if you do the same thing, all the time.'

Expressed negative attitudes towards themselves as learners (which have nothing to do with lack of skills, which are described later in Cluster 4) are scarce. Fear of failure was very present for one adult. For three adults, there were several indications during the interviews that, although self-perceptions were quite positive, they did compare themselves with younger course members (also described in Cluster 2) and experienced fear of failure towards them. Thus, although self-perceptions may seem positive at first, digging deeper during the interview sometimes revealed specific conditions (in this case not being the oldest of the class) in order to experience positive self-perceptions.

When discussing others' attitudes, fear of the unknown is mentioned a few times next to challenging your comfort zone and just 'not feeling like it', being too stubborn or not being 'prompted' to learn, for example Nancy says: 'At home, I don't have to ask my husband to read a book or anything like that. (…) Just not eager to learn.'

Cluster 4: Readiness to participate

When it comes to adult learning, the most frequently expressed concern by eight participants referred to having to memorise things, for example Janet: 'I think I need a training to learn how to learn'. Some participants were never good at memorising and feel they have never learned the appropriate study method to do so, others think it is harder to do so at the current age or with current (family and work) responsibilities.

That is why practical courses are preferred. The fear of memorising goes hand in hand with fear of taking exams. For two people, this fear is very dominantly present, strongly hindering participation in (formal) adult learning. They are uncertain and concerned about their ability to participate in theoretical, formal courses, as for example Marianne indicates: 'Yeah, I don't even bother to enrol. If I merely go over the subjects and study material and everything, I already give up. Then I'm already convinced I won't be able to do it.'

Being aware of your learning needs and actively address them could also enhance readiness to participate. However, the participants did not seem to express many urgent learning needs. Marianne has expressed needs and talked to her supervisor about it, she also felt a personal need to get her degree but was hindered due to fear of failure.

In addition, three participants emphasised the importance of positive prior adult learning experiences to facilitate readiness to participate as these experiences can help to gain self-confidence and to let go of negative attitudes towards learning and negative memories of compulsory education.

Cluster 5: Participation stimuli

In addition to the findings above, nine participants report that there must be a need or trigger in order to participate in training. If it is not 'necessary' they will not attend training. This trigger can be a desire to change jobs (feeling miserable at work), find a job, ensure job security (especially for people of age), facilitate current job tasks, etc. Farah stated she would participate in training if the current job would disappear due to digitalisation.

> *I've had some difficulties in the business, in terms of finding my way around and interacting with co-workers, and for a while I considered obtaining my degree and seeing what I could do with it. But now I'm really enjoying myself in this group and it has faded into the background. (Florence)*

And, as we argued before, even when some adults feel a need to participate (because there are new job tasks) they purposely do not attend this training to avoid more work without receiving the proper rewards as for example Corey did. Other proposed stimulating aspects, next to financial rewards, are educational leave, training and studying during office hours and compensation of training costs by the employer.

Colleen expressed during the interview that there have been some evolutions at work that she does not really know how to deal with and could use some help with. However, she had not really interpreted this stimulus as a learning stimulus.

Colleen: 'I have a few clients who are starting to show signs of dementia. I used to have an aunt who was suffering from dementia. I used to talk to her, but I don't know my clients' past. That makes it more difficult. It's hard to deal with that at times. At times, you're not sure how to deal with it.'

Interviewer: 'That would be something you could learn some more about?'

Colleen: 'Yes'

Interviewer: 'Is that something you had already considered, or did it come up by talking about it here?'

Colleen: 'Actually by talking about it with you.'

Cluster 6: Barriers

Situational barriers such as age, health issues and financial costs of learning were frequently brought up during the interviews. In addition, time as a major barrier to learning, in relation to both family and work responsibilities, is mentioned by seven participants. For example, we asked Darren whether the fact that he obtained low grades in high school would stop him from participating in continued education and he said: 'No. The only thing that would stop me would be the hours that I currently work. Because I simply do not have the time. That's the only thing.' (Darren)

Combining (formal) learning outside the office hours and outside the class in combination with a full-time job and taking care of your family is deemed almost impossible. Within certain parts of the life cycle, these situational barriers are more or less present. Janet and Maria argue that it is harder to participate when your children are underage. Once they grow up there is more room and time for learning.

However, five participants explicitly state that lack of time cannot be considered a barrier to learning but instead refers to priorities (see for example Vignette 4 in Appendix A).

Institutional barriers were indicated far less frequently than situational barriers during the interviews. Nonetheless, some interviewees did face them, for example: for Marco there was a lack of training offer due to covid, Nancy thought it was too much of an administrative hassle to get prior learning credited before participating and for Jimmy the travel time was too long to attend the desired training. Florence related her institutional barriers to her perceived need of training:

> I went to the Adult Education Centre last year. I asked for more information. But the thing is: I have to work at the store until 6:30 p.m., which is challenging because class starts at 6:00 p.m. So, for the time being, I've put it on hold. (…) Then I think to myself, 'I have a decent job now; is it really necessary for me to make that effort?'

6. Discussion and conclusion

Situational and institutional factors, without a doubt, can be major impediments. However, in this research, we intended to look at participation barriers from a psychosocial viewpoint. Low-educated, non-participating adults may be more likely to face psychosocial difficulties than high-educated adults (Gibney *et al*. 2018). To investigate this type of barrier, we used the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) as a framework and vignettes as qualitative research instrument.

Our results indicate that almost every participant expresses a clear situational reason for not engaging in continued learning (for example lack of time). According to Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), even situational barriers (such as lack of time or lack of money) frequently pertain to the value assigned to education. In survey research, psychosocial barriers are difficult to study, therefore often neglected. In qualitative research, especially when using vignettes, participants reveal more about their views on learning than they do in quantitative research. Being able to dig deeper has shown that the situational constraints in this research are always accompanied with psychosocial factors that are described in the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). In most cases, we see that (1) there is a lack of need, trigger, or stimuli to engage in continued learning. In line with this, (2) still having sufficient leisure time, not having to study outside office hours or course hours is very important. Leisure time hours can be sacrificed, but

only if the learning activity is extremely useful. This usefulness (i.e. 'what does the learning activity bring me?') is crucial.

Although the adults seem to show a very positive attitude towards learning ('you are never too old to learn', 'you learn every day', 'you should just try it'…), this necessary usefulness demonstrates Paldanius (2007) findings that learning for the sake of learning is not valued. A cost-benefit analysis is made in which sacrificing leisure time and investing energy is not worth it when the training is not useful enough. This functional view of learning can be found in the research of Black *et al*. (2012) on early school leavers, who discovered that finding (pleasing) work is a key motivator for returning to schooling.

Next, almost no participants explicitly mention psychosocial factors, however, during the elicited discussions on learning it often appeared that next to the lack of triggers, (3) the adults are unsure about their learning skills (especially when talking about formal learning). This because of their age but also because they never learned the appropriate study methods in compulsory education. This is in line with Desjardins (2010) who states that low-educated adults lack a readiness to participate, both in lack of skills as in lack of motivation, which we also notice in our research. Especially the lack of skills is striking.

Illeris (2006) refers to a lack of self-confidence because of bad pedagogical experiences. We see that the pedagogical experiences in se are not that 'bad' or 'negative', however, there is a lack of self-confidence when it comes to memorising and taking exams. This lack of self-confidence is said to be the consequence of poor teaching when they were younger. These findings are in line with those of Fouarge et al. (2013) who demonstrated that a fear of exams negatively influences training intention for low-educated adults. In addition, Illeris (2006) pointed to low-educated adults' negative prior schooling experiences.

Although the adults did wish to leave school as soon as possible due to lack of motivation, most of them did not experience very negative emotions. They even explicitly state that adult learning cannot be compared to prior education and negative schooling experiences should be left behind. However, contrary to non-formal adult education, our findings imply that the association

between compulsory education and formal adult education persists, as the concept of taking exams, memorising, and self-studying does seem to elicit unpleasant feelings.

Thus, contrary to what we expected, 'negative' attitudes towards learning cannot be detected, although, when digging deeper, this positive view on learning seems to be accompanied with many prerequisites. For example, the above-described preference for practical, non-theoretical learning which is mostly job-related (in line with the necessity of being useful).

Last, related to (5) learning press it is striking that the adults indicate they do not experience any social pressure to (not) engage in learning behaviour. Thus, contrary to Tuckett and Field (2016) findings, the participants do not experience positive or negative pressure from others. If people were to put pressure on them (for example by making negative remarks), they say they would not listen. Still, comparing with younger participants does seem to evoke insecurity. When it comes to the reputation of training at the workplace, asking your employer for additional training sometimes shows weakness and many colleagues do not enjoy participating in workplace learning. For a lot of the respondents, the (work) environment seems to require further learning to some extent, but this learning can easily take place in the shape of learning by doing instead of attending organised training. Further, the respondents are also unbothered by 'positive' pressure (for example by seeing others in your close network participate, participating together with a friend or colleague etc.). The only referent whose opinion matters is their partner.

Using vignettes as interview method enabled demonstrating the multi-layeredness of views on learning and the interactions which are also described in the Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). At first, the vignettes generated rather socially acceptable answers and perceptions related to learning in that the participants often did not understand why the vignette-character was not participating while they themselves are not participating either. By using the vignettes, we avoided the upfront approach of directly asking why respondents were not participating. Discussing the vignettes and a thorough analysis afterwards, however, did show that there was more to these positive attitudes, and they are accompanied with quite some prerequisites. We believe vignettes are an adequate method for studying (low-educated, non-participating adults') psychosocial perspectives on adult learning. Participants indicated they enjoyed being

interviewed with this technique as it 'elicited discussion' and was a 'fun way for being interviewed'.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. First, this study only looks at micro-level aspects of learning barriers. A multilevel approach that combines macro and micro aspects may yield richer findings. Next, respondents of this research signalled to the researchers on their own initiative that they were interested in taking part in the study. Attitudes of adults who are harder to reach may be more negative. The adults who participated may also be more outspoken, which could affect the amount of social pressure they (do not) feel to pursue lifelong learning. In addition, only Dutch speaking adults could read or respond to the call of the research or participate in the interviews as the interviews were only conducted in Dutch. Next, in the vignettes learning referred to both formal and non-formal learning. However, due to this, perspectives on learning may be too vague. Future research could focus on either formal or non-formal learning (and work-related and non-work-related learning) as there does seem to be a difference in perspectives related to the first or the latter. Additionally, the included vignettes could be altered in future research to gain more information. For example, some vignettes were not vague enough, referring to specific interests, jobs, or referents (such as an employer) that were not realistic for the interviewee. Sometimes this led to awkward or difficult interviewing. Jackson et al. (2015) point to the importance of vignettes resembling realistic situations. Using the transcripts from this research could help create even more realistic vignettes. Next, a qualitative comparison with high-educated but especially medium-educated adults' psychosocial perspectives could also generate interesting results. Do they have the same concerns related to memorising? Do they experience the same necessity for learning stimuli? Do they experience more or less learning press?

Despite these limitations, we were able to shed light on psychosocial barriers, a type of barrier that is often neglected, especially when it comes to low-educated, non-participating adults.

Implications

Our study adds to the (limited) existing literature on psychosocial barriers as it displays the multi-layeredness and interactionism of psychosocial factors. Often, when psychosocial barriers are mentioned, it is in a rather vague way. By using a directed approach to qualitative content analysis, we were able to extend the theory behind the Psychosocial Interaction Model of Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). In fact, we demonstrated that low-educated adults attitudes are not necessarily negative, neither are their prior school experiences, as is often claimed in research. Using vignettes yielded rich interview data. Our study demonstrates that vignettes can be used to study barriers. In the future, they can be adapted to study specific (psychosocial) barriers, non-participation in different types of learning or non-participation of different populations. Furthermore, our research indicates that educational institutions should devote sufficient attention to ensuring adults that no learning skills are needed in order to participate, all participants will start from scratch or that adults will be able to develop learning skills during the training (if this is the case), in order to attract non-participating low-educated adults, a group that is difficult to reach but has much to gain. Consequently, a more humanist approach to adult learning may be needed where there is a broader concern for the development and the learning process of the learner (Broek and Buiskool 2013). This learner-centered pedagogy should be effectively communicated to potential participants before their engagement, perhaps through specific information channels such as educational institutes' websites. Finally, we believe this research generates interesting findings for compulsory education. Compulsory education can help individuals prepare for later learning. On the one hand, by equipping them with the necessary skills for learning. 'Learning to learn' is one aspect of this that could stimulate later learning. On the other hand, compulsory education could increase participation by strengthening individuals' psychosocial beliefs. As there is a rather weak learning culture among adults in Flanders (OECD 2019), we agree with Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2017) that compulsory education systems should seek to provide their students with a mindset that is open to absorbing new information. Given that learning is primarily valued for functional purposes, it would be beneficial to foster a mindset that also values learning for its intrinsic value and recognises learning's broad and long-run value.

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Appendix A

A1. Vignettes

Vignette 1

Brad works as a full-time labourer. His workplace has evolved dramatically during the last five years. Some of the daily tasks Brad needs to complete have also transformed. A handful of Brad's co-workers have already participated in a training program at work to learn how to work with new equipment and procedures.

Brad is worried about taking this course. What do you reckon the possible reasons or explanations are?

Vignette 2

Brad isn't overjoyed about the prospect of resuming learning after such a long time. When he was still in high school, it was already a little more difficult for him.

He hated taking tests and exams. He never had good grades and changed school tracks a few times. When he was 15, he couldn't wait to get out of school and start working as soon as possible. As an adult, he does not want to return to the same setting (teachers, learning, and pressure) that made him feel so insecure as a child.

Vignette 3

It wasn't just studying that was difficult. Brad also did not feel great in the school environment because he didn't have many friends and had a difficult relationship with his teachers. Often, he really didn't feel like going to class. He felt lonely at times and is concerned that learning again may elicit the same bad emotions.

Vignette 4

A. Tom is married to Sarah. Together they have three children. Both parents have full time jobs.

Tom does not participate in lifelong learning. He believes that learning while already working is only for those who have nothing better to do. What are your thoughts on Tom's view on lifelong learning?

(…)

B. Aside from work and raising his children, he wants to spend his free time with relaxing activities. Learning is not relaxing according to Tom. He believes that learning takes a lot of time and energy (and isn't very enjoyable), thus it's best for people who don't have anything else to do in the evenings and weekends. He already has a job; therefore, he doesn't see why he should continue to learn.

Vignette 5

A. Sarah also does not participate in lifelong learning. Sometimes she wishes she did. In addition to her full-time job and raising her children, she would like to learn Italian. What do you believe are possible motivations for Sarah to do so?

(…)

She would like to have some alone time in addition to working and raising the children. She sometimes thinks that it would be nice to meet new people. And that mastering a new skill can help her feel more confident and prouder.

(…)

B. But the thought of all the work she'd have to put in outside of the courses (learning words, grammar, reading books, final exams, etc.) makes her nervous. She believes she is already out of the study rhythm, and she will not succeed. Therefore, she decides not to do it.

Vignette 6

Aneshka works as a branch manager for a large retail company. When she was younger, Jess was motivated by her parents to start working as soon as possible, therefore she did not continue her education. Today, she somewhat regrets this. Especially on the subject of make-up, she would

have liked to know more. She would have liked to know more about cosmetics. But she is unaware of anyone who is enrolled in adult education at the moment. This discourages her from taking the leap. Why do you feel Aneshka thinks it's so important for others in her life to attend courses as well?

(...)

'Learning' isn't something she talks about with her friends and family. She believes her decision to participate in training will be well received, but it is nonetheless frightening to be the first in her close community to do so without being able to hear other people's experiences.

Vignette 7

Jake has been working as an electrician for almost 20 years. He is confident in his job and likes doing it. However, the past few years, he experienced some insecurities. Home automation, solar panels, and other smart technology are becoming increasingly popular. Jake has little experience in this area, so he frequently watches videos at home to learn the necessary techniques. Jake would like to take a course to learn more about the subject, but none of his co-workers do so. This keeps him from approaching his employer about the problem.

A2. Vignette framework

	Aspect of the psychosocial interaction model	Literature
Vignette 1	(Introductory vignette on non-participation)	
Vignette 2	Preparatory Education	Fear of exams (Fouarge et al. 2013)
		Wishing to leave school as soon as possible (Illeris 2006)
		Lack of self-confidence (Illeris 2006)
Vignette 3	Preparatory Education	Humiliation and marginalisation (Illeris 2006)
Vignette 4	Perceived Value and Utility	A. Perceived importance (Blunt & Yang)
		B. Perceived importance and enjoyment of learning (Blunt & Yang)
Vignette 5	A. Perceived Value and Utility	A. Intrinsic Value (Blunt & Yang)
	B. Readiness to learn	B. Perceived Behavioural Control (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).
Vignette 6	Learning Press	Non-participation of peers as barrier for own participation (Isaac 2011).
Vignette 7	Learning Press	Social disapproval of peers (Blair et al. 1995)

Table A3. Detailed overview of each cluster per participant.

	Marco	Sandra	Colleen	Florence	Darren	Marianne	Janet	Corey	Farah	Eric	Jimmy[a]	Maria[a]	Nancy[a]	Alan[a]	Dennis[a]
Preparatory education															
Scholastic failure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Lack of motivation/ did not like studying		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	
Learning difficulties/ health issues	●	●		●	●						●				●
Good school results									●						
Positive school memories	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	
Bad memories should be left behind		●	●	●	●	●	●					●	●		
Learning press															
Work environment requests learning	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Learning from peers and learning by doing	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●			
Needs but no provided trainings	●									●	●				
Asking employer for training would not be an issue	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Trainings should not be 'on demand' but provided when necessary									●		●				
All provided trainings should be attended	●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Resistance to change (only others)	●		●	●	●					●	●		●		
Reputation of learning activities															
Negative reputation activities peers				●		●							●	●	
Could result in increased team spirit			●	●	●	●				●				●	●
Negative evaluation co-worker when requesting training	●		●	●	●					●		●	●	●	
Negative evaluation employer when requesting training		●								●	●		●	●	●
Others' opinions are not important	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
No-ones opinion is important					●	●	●	●							
Partner's opinion is important	●	●		●					●		●			●	●
Would not want other people to know they have failed						●									
Behaviour of peers															
Other's participation is not important	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Others' participation would facilitate own participation			●												
Comparing with others creates pressure	●			●		●	●		●	●			●		
Lifestyle preference															
Participating in leisure time is hard	●				●	●	●					●	●		
Perceived value and utility															
Learning activity															
Usefulness is critical	●	●			●				●	●			●	●	
No need because already employed/ satisfied with job				●					●				●		

(Continued)

Table A3. Continued.

	Marco	Sandra	Colleen	Florence	Darren	Marianne	Janet	Corey	Farah	Eric	Jimmy[a]	Maria[a]	Nancy[a]	Alan[a]	Dennis[a]
Work-/non-work-related training are not equal					o								o		
Enjoyability training				o	o				o			o			
Positive attitudes		o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o		o
Financial incentives/ educational leave are crucial	o							o				o			
Should be during working hours	o			o				o	o						
Adult as learner															
Negative views on people who do not want to participate	o	o		o			o		o	o	o	o	o	o	
Fear of failure						o									
Readiness to participate															
Concerns with memorising/ exams	o	o		o		o	o		o	o		o	o		o
Participation stimuli															
Work-related triggers are necessary	o	o		o		o	o		o	o		o	o	o	
Barriers						o									
Age	o	o													
Time (family or work responsibilities)	o			o		o		o	o				o		o
Health issues			o									o			
Harder when having young children		o		o		o						o			
Lack of time refers to priorities				o						o		o			
Institutional barriers															

Note. 1. Not all of the codes or items were discussed by all of the participants. As a result, the absence of a certain code for a specific participant does not necessarily imply that the person did not share this perspective. It could also indicate that the opinion was not expressed directly or that the matter was not brought up during the interview. 2. [a]Adult learning participants in the past 12 months.