

# Developing a Competency-Based Model in Relation to the Training Needs of Adult Learners

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**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to develop an innovative model of learners' skills from the perspective of adult education. Several categories of skills are involved, as a result of the current holistic approaches in the field of adult education, as well as in connection with the current requirements of society. At the core of the model are several categories of skills, such as communication, scientific, intercultural, entrepreneurial, social and digital. Each type of competence provides the adult learner with the knowledge, skills, values and behaviors to determine professional success. The novelty of the work results from the determination of the categories of skills in accordance with the training needs of adult learners, which ensures their optimal integration in the socio-professional level.

**Keywords:** *skills, adult caregivers, professional integration, model, training needs.*

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## 1. Introduction

Current approaches in adult education focus on assessing training needs, from a personal or professional perspective. To increase learning motivation, adults want to clarify their concrete needs so that they know clearly how they will be able to use the learning experiences in which they are to be trained (Butnaru, 2012). The adult learner will be understood as skills are explored in close connection with their training needs and training strategies. Developing a competency-based model in accordance with the training needs of adult learners is an innovative approach, since many studies focus on trainers (Mikulec, 2019; Miulescu, 2018; Research voor Beleid, 2010; Zagir & Mandel, 2020; Žeravíková et al., 2015). It has been found that there is very little research centered on the identification of competencies in adult learners (Salleh et al., 2015). Therefore, the proposed study offers the possibility of developing a new model of learner skills, based on knowledge of their training needs.

Adult learners have specific needs as learners and it is important that these needs are taken into account when planning training programmes (Ota et al., 2006). Capitalizing on training needs becomes a necessity when there are individual differences in learning style, motivation, interests of learners. Based on knowledge of training needs, educators can create educational experiences that will improve the learning of participants.

The quality of adult learning depends on how trainers engage in this process. The level of professionalism of people working in adult education is both a managerial exercise related to achieving the prescribed standards, and a way to delimit the normative dimension, which indicates responsibility for the quality of professional actions in their relationship with their learners and towards the achievement of the goal of the educational profession (Biesta, 2017).

## 2. Conceptual framework

The key concepts of the paper are as follows: adult education, adult learning, skills and training needs. In the view of Schaub and Zenke (2001), adult education represents a "wide range of instructional offerings that consciously address adults with the aim of broadening their spiritual horizon and fulfilling expectations of professional qualification, which is not subject to legal regulations, having freedom of choice in terms of content and organization".

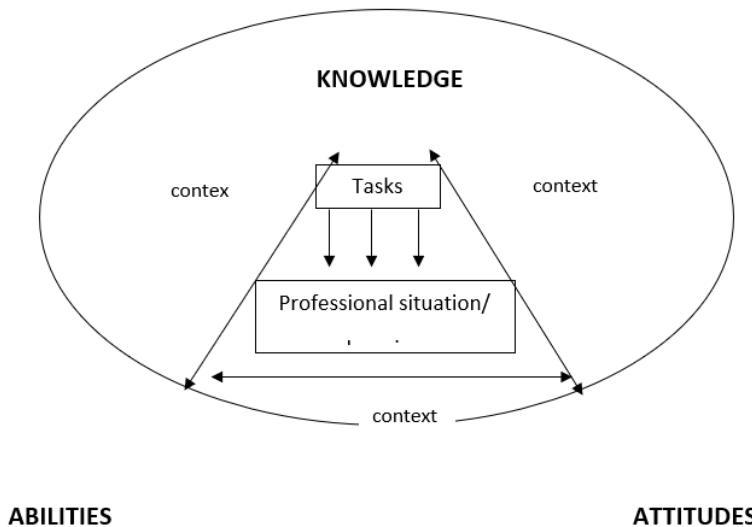
The basic characteristics of adult learning are as follows: creating and maintaining an atmosphere of respect between trainer and participant and between all trainees; taking into account the professional experience of trainees; structuring the training/ improvement program based on the needs and availability of the beneficiaries; ensuring an immediate applicability of those learned: adults are pragmatic and therefore their learning will be productive if; involving adults in solving problems relevant to concrete situations; guiding adults towards action and reflection, developing critical thinking and using multiple perspectives and approaching learning as a collaborative effort between trainees and trainers; providing the basis for their own learning, continuous training and professional development.

The concept of competence is as challenged as it is diverse in the definitions given to it from different perspectives by various authors. From a broad, general perspective, competence is understood as " the cumulative result of the personal history of an individual and his interactions with the outside world. The European Union defines key competences as "a combination of knowledge, capacities and attitudes adapted to the context" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 7). This is the ability of a person to exercise a responsibility or to execute a task" (Dumitriu, 2004, p. 190). According to a similar definition, competence means "the ability, the ability that allows success in the performance of a function or in the execution of a task". Thus, competence means an "acquired ability, thanks to the assimilation of relevant knowledge and experience, which consists in circumscribing and solving specific problems" (Dobrota, 1999, p. 544). Competence cannot be limited only to making good decisions, it also means the ability to translate decisions into actions, into deeds. Thus, competence designates the ability to achieve something right, good, useful. "Competence is often described as an intellectual capacity that has various possibilities of transfer (the ability to communicate, decide, Detect, Select, evaluate data, information, relationships), a capacity that associates affective and attitudinal components, motivating action". Competence involves " integrated complexes of knowledge, skills, capacities and attitudes (competences built on attitudes)" (Popescu-Neveanu, 1994). Legendre (Dumitriu, 2004, p. 162) also defines competence as a "set of knowledge and skills that allows the performance of a task or several tasks". In the conception of Ph. Perrenoud (1997, p. 7), competence represents "an ability to act effectively in a time defined by the situation/or well-defined situation, a capacity that relies on knowledge, but is not reduced to it". Within the framework of psychology, the distinction between skills, capabilities, competencies is operated. According to P. Popescu-Neveanu (1994), competence is demonstrated not

by long reflections and calculations, but by rapid adaptations to the changes occurring in the context. The intervening automatisms diminish the appeal to intellectual functions, giving way to specific and accumulated skills. This means that skills will always be renewed, with permanent appeal to cognitive processes and mental abilities. Having an important role in the formation of skills, skills prove their usefulness, first of all, through intellectual and cognitive qualities. Thus, the notion of competence differs from that of aptitude (operational systems, developed superior, which lead to above-average results in activity, being potential skills to be valued) and the notion of capacity (fulfilled aptitude, which has been strengthened through experience, exercise, assimilation of knowledge and training of skills). The role of skills in the acquisition of competences is manifested in the period of schooling, in the learning activity, provided that it is focused on the achievement of well-specified tasks and problem situations. In Francophone countries, the terms "savoir", "savoir - faire", "savoir-être", in the sense of an action pedagogy, are used to designate the progressive transition from "to know" to "to know how to do" and "to know how to be". Competence involves knowing, knowing how to do (succeed in a concrete professional situation), but also knowing how to be, having attitudes that support both the present action and The becoming, the evolution of competence over time. Thus, Gh. Dumitriu (2004, p. 191) states that the idea of competence signifies a shift of emphasis from the informative ("what?", "how much?") on the formative ("how?") and implies longer intervals of time for training and development. L. Şoitu (1997) highlights the same changes, stating that the notion of competence targets a new category of individual characteristics, which requires a multidimensional analysis to integrate the images of one's own competences, the possibilities of identification and those of development pursued at the individual, institutional, organizational level.

The area of competence is encoded in capabilities (skills, skills, skills) and knowledge, which helps the learner in the performance of certain tasks. In the generic sense, competence implies a system of capabilities (skills, skills, skills) and knowledge, through which the successful realization of the action in each of its moments is ensured. The ability can be understood as that "demonstrated or potential ability of the subject to be able to act, think, feel or become" (Neacşu, 1990, p. 196). Abilities constitute the ability of man to perform consciously, with a certain rapidity an action appropriate to a purpose, under variable conditions. In the activity that the student carries out there are a number of reactions, actions, operations, acts that are not always driven and performed consciously, but are carried out by themselves,

automatically, and become skills (reading, writing, calculation operations, etc.). these are "automated components of activity" formed by exercise (Popescu-Neveanu, 1978, p. 187). As a rule, these components of activity are automated by the fact that they are repeated several times, a lot of practice is done by the student. An activity cannot be fully automated because it is triggered, directed and controlled as a whole consciously, being the result of learning and exercise. Once formed skills have schematization, abbreviation, operationalization, cursivity, stability and efficiency (Dumitriu & Dumitriu, 2003, p. 112). Skills represent an optimal combination and restructuring of skills and knowledge, in order to carry out an action in new situations (Popescu-Neveanu, 1994). By its specificity, skill confers superior quality in the exploitation of knowledge and the integration of skills, giving them plasticity. Behaviors constitute "the objective manifestation of global human action" (Popescu-Neveanu, 1978, p. 123). Competence is assessed not only by the number (volume) of information assimilated in a given time, but also by the degree of their understanding, by the ease of their integration into the previous system of knowledge and, above all, by the skill of operating with them (in practice, in solving problems, in producing material) (Neacsu, 1990, p. 340). The Integrative model of the functioning of a competence is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The Integrative model of the functioning of a competence

Source: Authors' own conception

### **3. Training needs of adult learners**

According to Knowles et al. (2005), there are six types of specific needs that are involved in the learning process in adult education (Figure 2): need to know, self-concept, previous experience, willingness to learn, learning orientation, and motivation to learn. Trainers will facilitate adult learning by determining them to become aware of their "need to know". Also, the role of trainers is to create environments in which adults develop their self-directed learning skills, which gives them a high level of personal responsibility. The richest resource for learning in adult education is one's own experience, which will be harnessed through various experiential techniques, such as participation in discussions, conducting simulations, implementing problem-solving activities (McKeachie, 2002). Adults' willingness to learn is driven by their ability to discover things they want to know and achieve in order to deal with real-life situations effectively. Learning orientation indicates that adults are focused on solving the problems they face in everyday situations. The basic need of adults is to perform various tasks in the context of application in real life. As for motivation towards learning, adults are receptive to certain external factors, such as a better job, higher wages, but the strongest motivators are internal, which are visible through the desire to increase job satisfaction, improve self-esteem.



**Figure 2.** Specific learning needs in adult education (Knowles et al., 2005)

Understanding the training needs of andragogy prepares facilitators to create successful programs for adult learners. To develop the quality of education of teachers and to facilitate socio-professional integration, emphasis will be placed on the training and development of a set of skills with general and specific functions.

### **3. Types of skills specific to adult learning**

The educational action centered on the formation of skills implies both the presentation of theoretical notions and the cultivation and consolidation on the basis of concrete activity, motivation and attitudes, norms and practical principles of approach and solution of various problems. In 2011, the Council of the European Union (2011) adopted the "resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning", which refers to the "Europe 2020" strategy. One of the priority areas is "improving the quality and efficiency of education and training".

At the basis of the competency model in the context of adult learning, several categories are delimited: communication, scientific, intercultural, social, entrepreneurial, digital skills.

Communication competence can be understood as the most important function of communication (Panisoara, 2004, p. 37). According to Parks (Jablin & Putnam, 2001, p. 820), communication competence represents "the degree to which individuals satisfy the goals they have set themselves within the limits of the social situation, without risking their abilities or opportunities to pursue other, more important goals from an individual point of view". The competence of a speaking subject is given by the set of possibilities put exclusively on account of the fact that the subject Masters the respective language, which implies his ability to construct and recognize the infinity of grammatically correct phrases, to interpret those endowed with meaning. Another perspective is provided by the ecological model, according to which communication competence is a result of the dynamic interaction between the environment and the development of the person/group/organization. The development of communication competence at the individual, group or organizational level is influenced and in turn influences the environment in each process that occurs. Conceived as schemes, mobilized knowledge, skills, etc., communication skills can become major stakes of trainees ' training, because they correspond to social requirements aimed at adapting to the labor market and dynamic changes. They can also empower learners with the means to master reality and relate effectively. Gh. Dumitriu (2004, pp. 130-131) highlights the role of communication skills on the harmonious and balanced psychological development of the personality. It can be stated that the meaning of communication competence in the context of adult education refers to the ability of the learner to perform verbal behaviors in the intentional relationship of situational communication, by activating a set of personal abilities.

Scientific competencies constitute a complex ensemble, comprising the skills necessary for problem solving, as well as the ability to reflect on problem solving at a meta-level (Krell et al., 2018). These categories of skills promote the acquisition and generation of knowledge for learners, with a view to qualification through training in the field of Sciences (Véliz et al., 2015). Therefore, scientific competencies become elements that favor the development of critical thinking in learners (Conchado et al., 2015; Falicoff, 2015), which is one of the main factors of professional integration. Two types of scientific competences have been delineated (Valdés et al., 2013): basic and advanced. Basic skills allow the discovery, generation of knowledge, to facilitate the ability to use them in practice, as well as the ability to formulate an evidence-based conclusion. Advanced skills enable resource management and knowledge marketing. According to Campos and



Chinchilla (2009), scientific competences have a transversal character, since they are necessary for learners in the context of skill development for all disciplines.

Intercultural competencies refer to " the ability to interact effectively and adequately in intercultural situations, based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and behaviors (Bebenova-Nikolova, 2014, p. 180). These are the key competences for the development and maintenance of sustainable democratic societies. Through the prism of its function, intercultural competence represents "the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and adequately perform effective communication behaviors that recognize the different identities of interactions in a specific environment "and implies" the ability to mobilize knowledge, methods of action, but also affective experiences, positive attitudes in solving intercultural interaction situations"(Cozma et al., 2006, p. 85). Intercultural competence represents "a set of specific intercultural beliefs and conduct that advocate for openness, empathy, and communication, for understanding and valorizing the logic of each culture, whether appropriate or distant, for perceiving and respecting otherness in all its differentiating elements" (Nedelcu, 2008, p.25). After an analysis of several definitions, Deardorff (2020) considers that these categories of skills involve improving human interactions between different people within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, etc.) or across borders. M. Barrett (2018) proposes a classification a types of intercultural competences, based on other studies and conceptual models proposed: attitudes towards other cultures, expressed by respect, curiosity, desire to a know more about them, openness, elimination of judgments, adaptation to what is unknown and putting into value a cultural differences; skills good listener, and of the interactions related to the use of a language is related to the degree of flexibility in the culture of the foreign and skills related to empathy, and the existence of a of multiple perspectives, as well as the skills of the critical assessment; knowledge of their own culture in the first place, but also the knowledge about the importance of communication, in other cultures, literacy, and other skills that help in the process of intercultural interaction, and the individual.; behaviour with reference to the way of communication, reaction and action in general in meetings with different cultures, but also to express a slight adaptation from a behavioral and communicative point of view, so as to easily reach a common and beneficial agreement for both parties. Some of the common elements of intercultural competencies in different cultures include (UNESCO, 2013, p. 24): respect, self-awareness/identity, different worldviews, obedience, adaptation, relationship building,

and cultural humility. It is important to look at the acquisition of intercultural skills as a learner-centered process.

Entrepreneurial skills are a complex set, comprising personality traits, skills and knowledge. They reflect the total ability of an entrepreneur to successfully fulfill professional roles. Bolzani and Luppi (2021) developed an entrepreneurial model based on five areas of competence: positive attitude and initiative, communication and interaction, teamwork and collaboration, critical and analytical thinking or problem solving, including risk assessment; creativity and innovation. On the basis of a systematic review, Tittel, and Terzidis (2020) has identified the key entrepreneurial skills: the acquisition and development of resources, collaboration, communication, and the development of business plans, co-operation, co-ordination, the ability to make decisions, and the development of the organizational culture, empathy, skills, financial skills, ethics, creativity, leadership skills, logical thinking, and monitoring of the activities, skill, planning, problem-solving, etc. the recent Research on entrepreneurship education (Bureau & Komporozos-Athanasίου, 2017; Stenholm et al., 2021) focus on learning environments and contexts that are specifically designed to develop learners' entrepreneurial skills.

Social skills are aimed at "the ability to engage in meaningful interactions with others" (Junge et al., 2020), "a type of behavior that leads to social performance" (Chelcea, 1998). From a social perspective, competence is the ability of a person or group to interpret a phenomenon, solve a problem, make a decision or perform an action. Argyle (1999) proposed a descriptive and explanatory model of social competencies, in which it differentiates seven components: assertiveness, gratification and support, nonverbal communication, verbal communication, empathy and cooperation, knowledge and problem solving, respectively self-presentation. Social skills "facilitate positive interactions, corresponding to cultural norms, in such a way as to allow achieving one's own goals and, at the same time, respecting the needs of others" (Stefan & Kallay, 2010, p. 27). In the conception of author Goleman (2001), social competence is an important dimension of emotional intelligence. The elements that make up this type of intelligence are self-confidence, self-control, motivation, empathy, establishing and directing human relationships. After Topping et al. (2000), social competencies include both the knowledge and capabilities involved in processing information revealing for social interaction contexts, and the skills and abilities that include: perceiving relevant social cues, interpreting social cues, anticipating obstacles that may arise in the way of personal behavior designed in a particular social context and the consequences of this

behavior for oneself and others, identifying effective solutions to various, transposition of decisions taken in connection with various problems into effective social behavior, expression of a sense of self-efficiency in interpersonal relationships. Social skills are formed during experiences in family life, through interactions within informal groups of friends and, later, on the basis of interactions occasioned by professional activity in various organizations. Therefore, the social skills of an individual are constantly changing, as they evolve with age, due to the permanent influences exerted by the family, the school, the group of friends and, later, the relationships at work.

Digital skills are related to the development of technology, as well as the formation of citizenship in a knowledge society. Types of digital skills involve technical skills of general use of digital technologies, skills of harnessing them in professional activities, learning and everyday life in various activities, skills of critical evaluation of digital technologies and motivation to participate in digital culture (Ilomäki et al., 2011). Currently, digital competence becomes an indicator of quality education in the Twenty-First Century (Maderick et al., 2016). Digital competence is required in various activities (Punie et al., 2013): technical information on the use of digital technologies, formal and informal digital environments, evaluation and management, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, digital media, security and problem solving, professional integration, community inclusion. Some concrete tools have been developed, such as the DigComp framework, to help improve digital skills and to plan initiatives at the level of training programmes (Vuorikari et al., 2016). According to this tool, five different areas of digital skills are delineated (Punie et al., 2013): Information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving.

At the level of expression of competences specific to adult learning, a synthesis of specific knowledge, skills, skills, attitudes and behaviors is carried out. Therefore, a visible and measurable product results, defined in concrete situations of solving problem-situations created in the framework of training programs, as well as life situations involving solving difficulties.

#### **4. A new competency-based model in line with the training needs of adult learners**

The model in the context of adult learners, based on your skills, you will promote a more systematic analysis of the intervention, to education, which covers all of the components of the curriculum (see Table 1). the objectives and content of the curriculum, which perform the function of

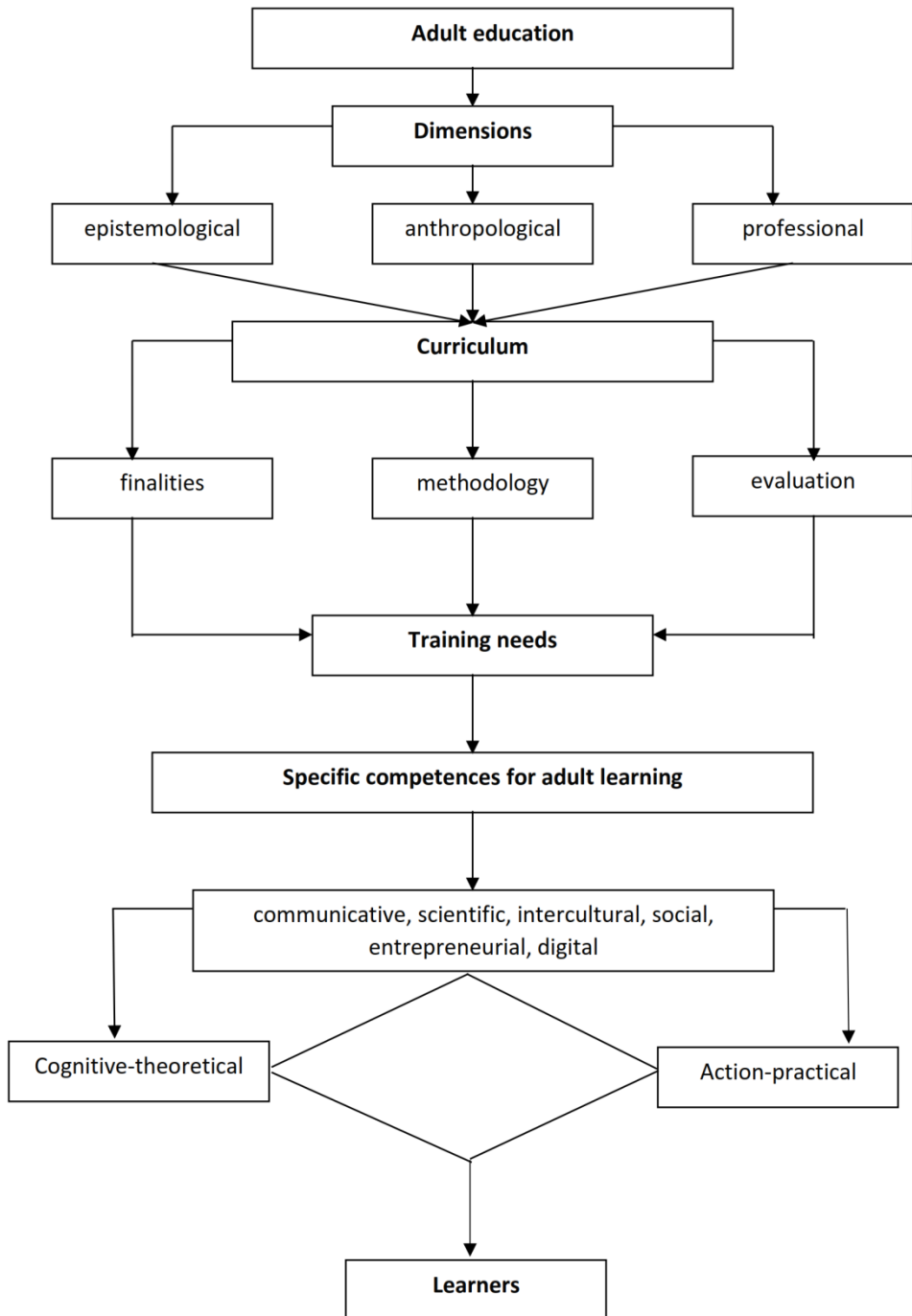
guidance/ planning/ design of the training, strategies that perform the function of making the training for problem-solving and problem-situations; to evaluate, which performs the function of the expert and of the regulation-self-regulation of the activity of the training. Pedagogy of competences (Gillet, 1991) offers an integrative vision on the training of learners, in accordance with social-economic expectations.

**Table 1.** Pedagogy of competences from the perspective of adult learning

<b>Components</b>	<b>Pedagogy through skills</b>
<b>Purposes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are distinguished by clarity and utility from a social point of view.</li> <li>- The aims are formulated from the perspective of the training needs of the learners.</li> <li>- The pedagogical goal is achievable: it offers a field of practical realization.</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The activity of the trainer is centered on the development of skills.</li> <li>- It is focused on the training needs of learners.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The results of integrated learning in skills are harnessed.</li> <li>- Competences provide a real basis for the integration of knowledge.</li> <li>- Evaluation results become significant for learners.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' own conception

At the base of the competency-based model are the three main dimensions (epistemological, anthropological, professional) and the component elements of the curriculum (aims, methodology, evaluation), closely related to the training needs of adult learners (Figure 3). The structural components arranged in a logical sequence outline the model of formation of specific learning skills in adult education. The proposed model stages the skills training actions from the cognitive-theoretical and action-practical perspectives, being closely related to the objectives of the training program. The starting point in the development of the model is the consideration that adult education materializes in practice through the dimensions analyzed: epistemological, which includes all current concepts and approaches in this field; anthropological and professional, in order to highlight the importance of adapting to the dynamic requirements of the labor market.



**Figure 3.** The competency-based model in the context of adult learning  
Source: Authors' own conception

## Conclusions

The development of the competency-based model in line with the professional development needs of adult learners facilitates the adaptation of learning according to the psycho-pedagogical characteristics of the age. Communication skills, scientific, intercultural, social, entrepreneurial, digital can be formed in adult learners based on the three dimensions (epistemological, anthropological, professional), which express the current tendencies of adult education to modify its purpose, evolving from knowing to knowing to be, to know what you have to do and act.

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