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PRELIMINARY OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING AS A TOOL FOR THE OCCUPATIONAL ACTIVATION OF INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED PEOPLE

WSTĘPNE SZKOLENIA Z ZAKRESU BHP JAKO NARZĘDZIE AKTYWIZACJI ZAWODOWEJ OSÓB Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIĄ INTELEKTUALNĄ

Summary: The article presents initial instructions on occupational health and safety (OHS) for the vocational training provided to people with intellectual disabilities within the framework of the "The differently-abled" and "Academy of equal chances" projects. The research carried out and the way in which the vocational training was conducted, were among the first within the said projects. The author conducts employment-support training courses which involve instructions on occupational health and safety. After completion of the training course, the participants of the mentioned projects undergo to a three-month internship at a local employer. The awareness and observance of occupational health and safety regulations by intellectually disabled people at their workplace has significantly increased employers' reliance upon employees belonging to this group.

Keywords: employee, intellectual disabilities, OHS, employment support

Streszczenie: Artykuł omawia wykorzystanie instruktażu wstępnego bhp do szkolenia zawodowego osób z niepełnosprawnością umysłową, które odbywało się w ramach projektów „Pełnosprawni” i „Akademia równych szans”. Przeprowadzone badanie i sposób prowadzenia szkolenia zawodowego było jednym z pierwszych tego typu w ramach w/w projektów. Autorka artykułu prowadzi szkolenia aktywizujące zawodowo właśnie poprzez instruktaż bhp. Uczestnicy projektów po zakończeniu szkolenia odbywają 3 miesięczne staże zawodowe u lokalnych pracodawców. Przestrzeganie i znajomość przepisów bezpieczeństwa i higieny w miejscu pracy przez aktywizowane zawodowo osoby z niepełnosprawnością umysłową zdecydowanie zwiększyło zaufanie pracodawców do tego typu pracowników.

Słowa kluczowe: pracownik, niepełnosprawność umysłowa, bhp, aktywizacja zawodowa

Introduction

Adult learning is a significant aspect of modern teaching methodologies, especially as regards people with intellectual disabilities. These constitute the target group of the training activity in question as they tend to show much passion for learning at the beginning, and then quickly become impatient or discouraged. By defining in detail the profile of the participant in vocational training, the teaching curriculum can be tailored to specific objectives, e.g. finding a job. It is noteworthy that no single teaching method exists that would suit a certain group of recipients [1]. This article aims at outlining the method of providing vocational training to people with mild intellectual disabilities, based on occupational health and safety training which puts emphasis on safety and the proper work performance. This form of teaching brings numerous benefits, at the same time encouraging further activities extending the range of applications of occupational health and safety training.

Characteristics of the learning process

Learning objectives define the anticipated changes to knowledge and skills resources, which concerns in particular the objective aspect. As regards the subjective aspect, they reflect the changes regarding motivation, intellectual abilities, attitudes and value systems. Learning objectives are defined, *inter alia*, in terms of

- perceptibility, i.e. determining how they will be accomplished,
- performance, i.e. accomplishment within a given time framework,
- logicity,
- concision and precision,
- measurability [2].

In other words, learning objectives are the planned outcomes which we want to achieve. At this point, it is also worth presenting another division of learning objectives based on the prioritisation criterion, i.e.

- general (long-term) objectives,
- intermediate objectives (activities),
- specific objectives defining the knowledge to be acquired [3].

We should bear in mind that adult learning is generally aimed at expanding one's knowledge (supplemental education) or at continuous professional development (mastery learning), which allows one to bring more value to their occupational or social functions, while also opening better prospects of promotion. In learning processes which lead to gaining occupational skills, on-the-job training constitutes a significant method, especially when it comes to practical professions. Practical activities in this case make it possible to learn to perform the tasks discussed in an operational (training) instruction. Errors in human work result directly from what is known as the human factor. This may include, *inter alia*, being unaware of occupational risks specific to a given position, having inadequate qualifications, acting improperly in an unexpected situation or not concentrating on the performed task. It may happen that people conducting such training have technical knowledge of a given subject but the only teaching method they employ is a multimedia presentation. Reaching to a student who is additionally intellectually disabled seems twice as hard if we fail to engage him or her in a discussion or if we merely provide ready-made solutions to emerging problems. Activity-based methods constitute an interesting and diversified way of learning and acquiring knowledge [4]. They make it possible to reach to every participant at various stages of the learning process.

Occupational problems of intellectually disabled people

Intellectual disability is characterised by a limited mental capacity, especially as regards the processes of perception, interpretation, understanding the reality, drawing conclusions, planning or solving problems [5]. Occupationally disabled people display certain occupational abilities and potential which let them perform some job-related tasks. Although their activation may appear rather hard, it is feasible as long as a proper assessment of occupational abilities is made, coupled with socio-occupational rehabilitation. In terms of the occupational abilities of intellectually disabled people, the following division can be made:

- people with mild functional capacity impairments (who face some occupational problems),
- people with moderate functional capacity impairments (who require specialised support),
- people with severe intellectual disability (who do not qualify for occupational activation programmes) [6].

For many people, and in particular for those with dysfunctions, having a job makes their life meaningful, and lets them feel valuable and useful members of society. In numerous studies, the level of education has also proven to impact on life satisfaction of occupationally active people, regardless of their income and dysfunctions [7]. Option of taking part in occupational training and professional development programmes is also a source of work satisfaction [8]. What is more, any attempts to find a job or

participate in occupational training require personal involvement [9].

Intellectual disability can have different origins, including genetic factors, congenital disorders, childhood diseases, insufficient living conditions and improper care-taking in childhood and adolescence. In occupational life, it can pose difficulties related to the perception and interpretation of complex situations at work, communication with co-workers, acquisition of knowledge, independent job-related problem-solving, and – last but not least – socio-occupational adaptation at the initial stage of employment. Prospective workers with mild occupational disability should be able to deal with all sorts of blue-collar jobs. They should not be entrusted with executive or managerial duties which usually involve a high degree of responsibility. At the initial stage of employment, in order to be able to effectively perform the entrusted duties, they frequently need auxiliary on-the-job training and assistance in developing the appropriate attitudes to occupational health and safety. As regards people with more severe intellectual disability, supported employment enterprises are the recommended solution, as these people often show a low degree of manipulative and motor coordination abilities. Previous teaching and labour market activation experience has shown that providing the adequate support, supervision and assistance to this group of people is likely to generate outcomes satisfactory to employers.

Preliminary occupational health and safety training (research results)

Unconventional learning methods make use of various activities that are not strictly related to education. These can include elements of play, experimentation, exploration or even circus activities, all of which require special props, or even places to conduct observations [10]. Occupational training for intellectually disabled people in the position of maintenance worker it began rather atypically – from a preliminary multiple-choice test of general occupational health and safety knowledge (the Academy of Equal Opportunities-project implemented in Association of Local Initiatives Lubartów-february 2019). It consisted of 29 questions, with a maximum of 44 points, including the following: which health and safety training should a newly hired worker complete, does the employer have to provide the worker with protective clothing, what should you do when you see fire, what medical examinations should the worker undergo.

The training participants did the test based on their general knowledge, with only two participants having some job experience. Most of the participants had secondary (vocational) education, and their age ranged between 45 and 56.

During the occupational training in the aforementioned projects in the position of maintenance worker, the participants picked and tried on a set of protective clothing and equipment, including a protective helmet, hearing protectors, protective glasses, goggles, filtering full-face masks and half-masks, gloves and aprons. Individual sets were prepared for the prospective internship locations reported by the participants,

considering that maintenance workers may be hired in various industrial and service sectors. The participants were also familiarised with elements of the first aid kit, and were tasked with identifying an indoor hydrant, a fire extinguisher and evacuation route markings in the building. All the participants individually were asked to outline the procedure of calling 112 to report a fire; to identify the tools usually used by maintenance workers from among a sample set and discuss their basic maintenance procedures; and to demonstrate the right body posture when lifting, for instance, heavy packaging. This exercise made the participants familiar with the applicable heavy object lifting standards both for women and men, and drew their particular attention to the need to take care of the osteo-articular system. On the last day of the training, the participants redid the test with exactly the same questions, which made it possible to verify their knowledge.

Occupational activation of mentally disabled people through preliminary occupational health and safety training makes it possible to consolidate the knowledge indispensable for the proper performance of job-related duties, and in particular to:

- take proper care of the machinery, devices and equipment,
- adequately use protective clothing and workwear,
- immediately notify supervisors of any accidents at work and threats to human life or health. All these activities form part of occupational health and safety training, considering that occupational health and safety by definition refers to the conditions, work organisation and workers' behaviours ensuring the required level of protection of human life and health against various threats emerging in the working environment [11].

A range of positive conclusions can be drawn from observations of the mentally disabled people taking part in occupational activation. They understand work processes and know how important it is to use personal protective equipment, to obey their supervisors and to report equipment failures and any events that may put human life or health at risk. With a view to extending the participants' experience, subsequent training will also include outdoor activities in a municipal park, which is where some maintenance workers and groundskeepers perform their duties in order to put more emphasis on work processes specific to these positions. The participants' engagement was even greater than expected by the organisers of this occupational activation and stimulated interest in searching for other equally interesting ways of reaching to people with intellectual disabilities:

Concluding remarks

The described concept of a proconsumer small hydropower unit is characterized by simple design and reduced investment costs thanks to the use of largely recycled components.

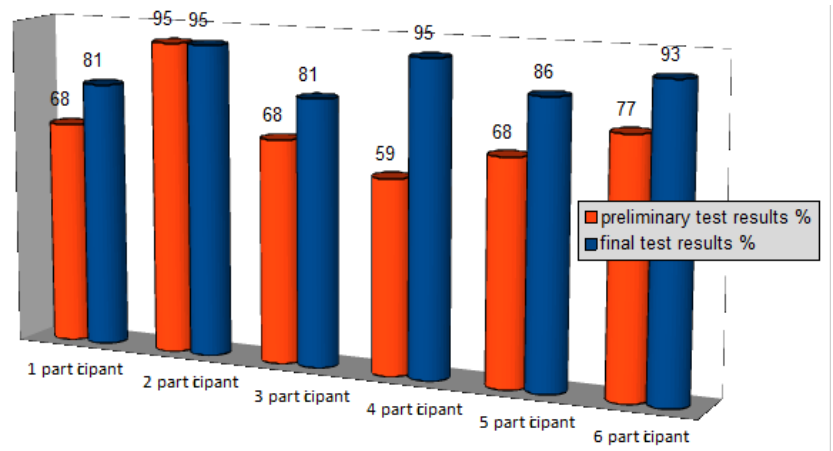


Fig. 1. Layout of the system of a proconsumer hydropower unit
Source: own elaboration

The design of a small hydropower unit can be implemented with a large participation of direct users of the generated electricity. The system enables to achieve high technical and economic effects in the form of network energy savings. It is especially designed for the applications where the availability of energy is limited. Hybrid bearing of the main shaft of the unit ensures easy start-up and high-energy efficiency with a particularly long service life.

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