
Motivating Factors in Adult Education: A Systematic Literature Review

Sintija Ikauniece

Rezekne Academy of Riga Technical University, Latvia

Abstract. Latvian employers are increasingly facing a shortage of competent and highly qualified employees; therefore, strengthening adult education and workplace learning has become particularly important. Reflective practices help adults recognize their learning needs, evaluate their experience, and make informed decisions about further development. At the same time, uneven instructor competences have been observed in Latvia, which may hinder the development of a consistent and equitable feedback culture. Although the effectiveness of feedback in learners' achievement has been widely studied, systematic evidence on adult education in Latvia remains limited. The aim of this study is to identify factors influencing adult education and assess their relevance to the Latvian workplace context. The review addresses the following question: Which motivational factors may be significant for adult education and workplace learning in Latvia? A systematic theoretical review was conducted from October to December 2025. Literature was searched in the Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect databases using author-selected keywords and inclusion criteria. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were applied. From 205 scientific articles, 25 studies were selected, and their methodological validity was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). The analysis synthesizes motivational factors, their frequency of mention, and their interrelationships, highlighting in particular reflection, high-quality feedback, practically applicable learning content, a supportive work environment, and self-efficacy in adult education and workplace learning. The results of the literature review present the significance of motivational factors in adult education and workplace learning.

Keywords: motivating factors, adult education, work-based learning.

Introduction

Lifelong learning is influenced by self-motivation (Cronin-Golomb & Bauer, 2023), which is an integral component of human existence. Each learner independently “absorbs information” at the individual level and continuously builds a knowledge base (Cronin-Golomb & Bauer, 2023). Insights from Latvia's Skola2030 project (2023) highlight research on the effectiveness of feedback for students, indicating that new learning content can be acquired without assessment, but not without a teacher's feedback. In Latvian adult education, however, there is a lack of studies examining whether reflection on feedback provided by an instructor affects motivation to learn. When Latvia's residents aged 25–64 participated in the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) for the first time, the results showed that 35% of adults have insufficient literacy and weak problem-solving skills,

Corresponding author Sintija Ikauniece, E-mail: sintijaik@gmail.com

ORCID

Sintija Ikauniece <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8891-3784>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). Published by RTU Press

Under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license, the author(s) and users are free to share this work (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format giving appropriate credit, providing a link to the license).

underscoring the initial priorities that should be addressed to improve adult education in Latvia (OECD, 2025).

Kampen and others (Kampen et al., 2023) concluded that learning is not considered age-limited, emphasizing that it is possible to learn at any age. In Latvian society, the influence of implicit age-related stereotypes can be sensed, with claims that younger people are quicker in certain areas. However, it has been noted that older adults motivation differs from that of younger students, who are more strongly oriented toward professional goals. According to the latest 2025 OECD data summary reported by the Ministry of Education and Science, 65% of learning activities in Latvia are organized during working hours, while 35% take place outside working hours (Ministry of Education and Science, 2025). This indicates that learning most often occurs in the context of employment, including within the workplace.

There is increasing discussion about what motivates adults to learn, develop, and improve, as well as which factors influence and enhance this process. Research indicates that several patterns and interrelationships among motivational factors are significant in adult education:

- 1) The ability to act and consciously direct one's life, including self-directed learning (Broek et al., 2023);
- 2) Positive and/or successful learning experiences increase self-efficacy (Broek et al., 2023);
- 3) Self-efficacy strengthens motivation to learn in the future (Broek et al., 2023);
- 4) The relevance of learning content to real life or work (LeMire, 2024; Beier et al., 2025);
- 5) Practical applicability in everyday life and professional development (LeMire, 2024; Beier et al., 2025);
- 6) Societal necessity in a rapidly changing world – technological, social and economic changes (Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2025);
- 7) Adults ability to adapt to new circumstances (Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2025);
- 8) Maintaining competitiveness and employability (Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2025);
- 9) Active participation in society (Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2025);
- 10) Personal development (Broek et al., 2023; Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2025).

Today, technology is developing rapidly, and artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly integrated into everyday life and the learning process. Lin&Schmidt (2025) note that artificial intelligence can support adults by fostering reflective thinking and real-world problem-solving learning. In the educational process, emphasis is placed on the core principles of M. Knowles andragogical theory—namely, experience, participation, task-oriented learning, and alignment with personal or professional goals. This approach is grounded in the fact that adults often balance learning with work, family responsibilities, and financial obligations, therefore, flexible, personalized, and practically applicable education is needed (Lin&Schmidt, 2025).

In Latvia, a development plan has been launched that includes strengthening adults motivation to learn. The Latvian National Development Plan for 2021–2027 emphasizes, in the field of adult education, the need to ensure a high-quality and flexible learning offer that can be combined with current employment and family responsibilities. Expanding access to education and recognizing competences acquired outside formal education are considered important motivational factors, as they enable existing skills to be validated and taken into account in further learning pathways. A significant role in motivating adults is attributed to the involvement of employers and sectoral stakeholders, which is directly linked to the needs of the economy and the labour market (National Development Council, 2020).

In a study on workplace learning in enterprises, Billett (2020) concluded that learning outcomes are significantly influenced by three elements: meaningful reflection on the feedback

received, positive interpersonal communication, and a supportive work environment. Effectively delivered feedback helps employees clearly understand which skills need to be improved and in which direction to continue their development.

The aim of this study is to identify factors influencing adult education and assess their relevance to the Latvian workplace context. The review addresses the following question: Which motivational factors may be significant for adult education and workplace learning in Latvia?

Metodology

The study adopts a systematic review approach which, as noted previously (Davies et al., 2013), is considered a reliable evidence base capable of incorporating high-quality data. Three online databases were used for the literature search: Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. The search was conducted from October to December 2025, applying restrictions regarding the year of publication. Scientific articles published within the last five years - between 2020 and 2025 - were considered, taking into account transformational changes and their impact on adult education. In each database, the literature was searched using the predefined key-word synonyms presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Keywords and synonyms

Keywords	Synonyms/Related concepts
Motivational factors (in adult education)	Motivation, self-motivation, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, motivating elements, motivational constraints
Adult education (cross-searching)	Lifelong learning, adult learning, andragogy, workplace learning
Patterns among motivational factors for learning (in adult education)	Relations, links, interaction, associations, correlations
In the workplace (adult education)	In the workplace, workplace culture, working conditions, professional environment
Feedback (in adult education)	Teacher recommendations/criticism, pedagogical feedback, understanding

Qualitative and quantitative studies in Latvian and English that evaluated motivational factors in adult education were included. Meanwhile, studies examining or describing characteristics of secondary school, lower secondary, or primary school students—and their motivational factors in pursuing education—were excluded. Table 2 specifies the criteria according to which the scientific articles included in the study will be assessed.

Table 2. Criteria for inclusion in a systematic literature review

Criteria	Criteria for inclusion
Content	The literature sources must focus on adult education and research on its motivational factors (pedagogy, andragogy, workplace learning, psychological and social factors).
Publication period	The literature sources must be published between 2020 and 2025 (older sources are included if they have substantial theoretical significance).
Study population	The studies must relate to adults aged 18 and over.
Geographic location	Countries with similar adult education policies (European, Baltic, or Nordic countries).
Access	The full-text version of the scientific article is available.

Before selecting the scientific articles, the suitability of the databases used was assessed in relation to the study aim (see Table 3) to ensure that they provide high-quality, topic-relevant literature on adult education and workplace learning. Based on this assessment, the subsequent selection was conducted in two stages.

In the first stage, in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria specified in Table 2, scientific articles on motivational factors in adult education in general were selected. In the second stage, using the same criteria, the selection was narrowed to focus only on publications that analyze motivational factors in adult education specifically within the workplace context. This sequential approach made it possible to first obtain a broader overview of key motivational factors in adult education and then purposefully identify those that are relevant to learning and to improving learning in the workplace.

Table 3. Description of digital libraries in pedagogy and adult education

Database	Publisher	Content	Relevance	URL
Scopus	Elsevier	Broad availability of scientific articles	Latest research trends in education	https://www.scopus.com/
Web of Science	Clarivate Analytics	Interdisciplinary scientific articles and citations	Reliable sources and their analysis in educational sciences	https://www.webofscience.com/
ScienceDirect	Elsevier	Full-text scientific articles and books	Pedagogy, andragogy	https://www.sciencedirect.com/

The significance of the study is also determined by the selection of appropriate digital library databases (Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). Table 3 presents a comparative assessment of the suitability of the selected databases. The Scopus database contains more than 2.4 billion cited references, ensuring access to important information needed to advance research and

scholarly work. In the ScienceDirect database, 3.3 million articles are freely available, enabling convenient access for reading and downloading. However, it may also be necessary to conduct literature searches in the Web of Science database.

Research results

Using the keywords and search criteria (Table 4) in the databases listed above, a total of 205 scientific articles were identified. Of these, 167 articles addressed the topic of motivational factors in adult education. Using the same search criteria and keywords, but refining the topic by specifying that the search focused on motivational factors in the workplace, 38 scientific articles were found.

In total, 25 scientific articles were appraised and selected to ensure an appropriate identification and evaluation of motivational factors. The largest number of eligible articles 11 was found in the Scopus database, while 9 articles were identified in Web of Science. The fewest suitable articles were retrieved from ScienceDirect, 5 of those articles were included following the appraisal.

Table 4. Number of criteria-selected scientific articles in databases on motivating factors in adult education, including work-based learning

Database	Scopus	Web of Science	ScienceDirect
Total number of scientific articles on motivational factors in adult education	31	71	65
References/Citations	294	380	342
Total number of scientific articles on motivational factors in adult education in the workplace	15	13	10
References/Citations	96	50	48

Citation data analysis was available in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. In contrast, compiling citation data in the ScienceDirect database proved challenging because citations are presented individually for each article, without offering an option to generate an aggregated analysis for the selected articles.

The learning influencing factors affect one another and together create a motivating environment for professional development. Differences in motivation by age group were summarized as follows:

- Up to 30 years – development of professional skills, learning from colleagues experience, career opportunities;
- 30 to 45 years – development of research skills and knowledge, acquisition and expansion of theoretical knowledge;
- 45 to 55 years – familiarization with new technologies, opportunities to increase salary;
- Over 55 years – job retention in the context of reorganization or optimization, obtaining a certificate upon completion of training courses (Blinova, 2023).

Figure 1 presents a grouping of the motivational factors identified in the 25 selected scientific articles and the frequency with which each factor was mentioned.

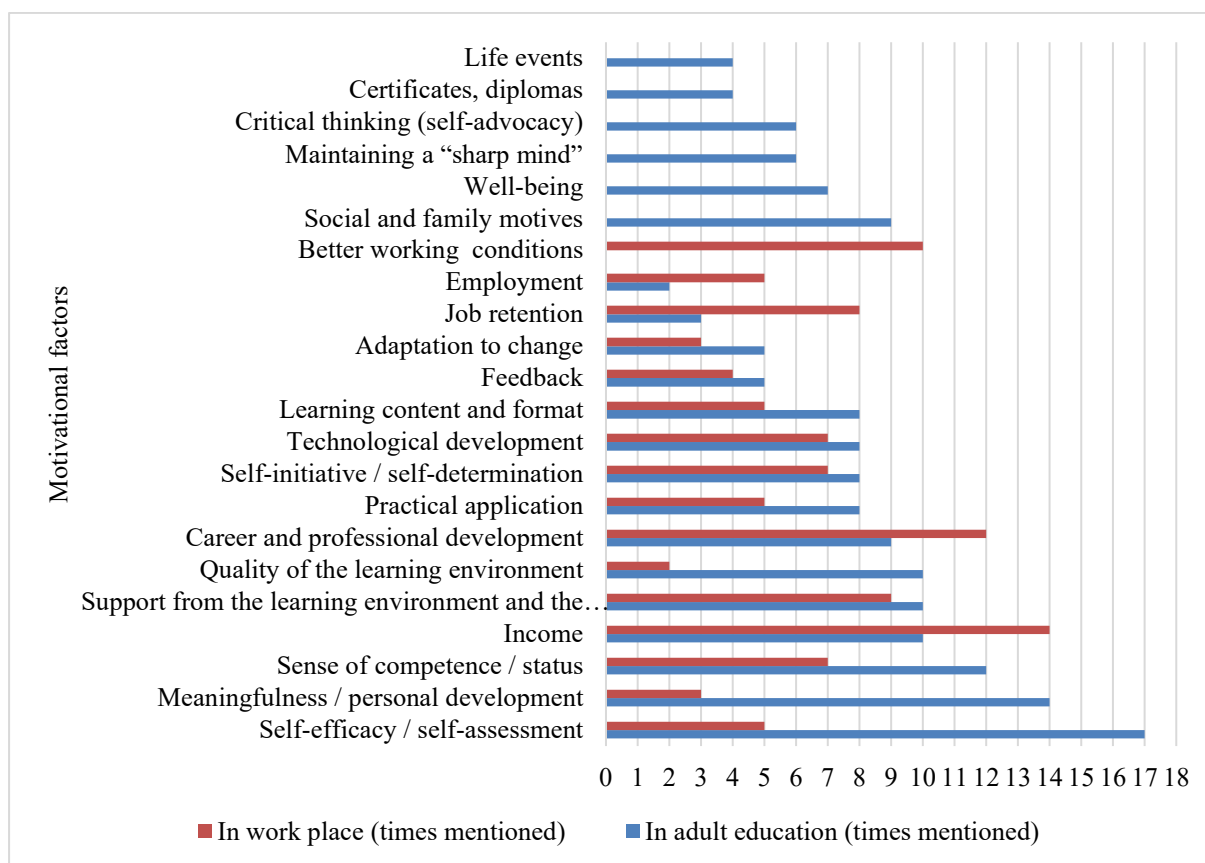


Figure 1. Grouping and frequency of motivational factors in scientific articles (compiled by the author)

Based on the analysis of the selected scientific articles (Figure 1), a total of 22 motivational factors were identified, indicating that 15 of them were emphasized both in adult education in general and in adult workplace learning.

Discussion

The most frequently mentioned motivational factor in adult education is self-efficacy, which includes self-assessment. This factor shapes adults’ decisions to engage in and continue the learning process, reflecting the feeling of “I can or I cannot” (Loeng, 2020; Broek et al., 2023; Chacon-Cuberos et al., 2025; Kostainen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2025; Mertens et al., 2025; Wang, 2025; Wijga et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2025). It is also influenced by factors such as willingness, support from the learning environment and the organization, practical application, meaningful personal development, and achieving learning outcomes (Gal et al., 2020; Blinova, 2023; Oppl et al., 2024; Wallo et al., 2025; Wijga et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2025).

Motivational factors mentioned only in relation to motivating adult education include social and family motives, such as acquiring knowledge to help one’s children, serving as a role model for the family, gaining the family’s respect, and socializing in society. Adults who engage in learning indicate that well-being is a determining motivational factor, as it supports healthy mental activity, improves quality of life, and enhances one’s self-perception. Interrelated with this is the aim of maintaining a “sharp mind,” which ensures independence and self-sufficiency—for example, being able to participate in conversations and understand news, data, and other important information (Loeng, 2020; Hachem, 2022; Broek et al., 2023;

Osborne, 2024; LeMire, 2024; Oppl et al., 2024; Lang, 2025). Meanwhile, the factor of critical thinking (i.e., self-advocacy) refers to the ability to critically analyze information, participate in decision-making, and defend one's views with justification (Loeng, 2020; Smeplass, 2023). The obtaining of certificates or diplomas after the learning process and the influence of life events were mentioned with the same frequency. For adults, it is important to receive confirmation that learning has been completed, to understand the results, and to obtain a lasting benefit (Blinova, 2023; Lang, 2025; Udeh et al., 2025). It is also noted that both negative and positive life events can create motivation to learn—for example, job loss, relocation, or children leaving home, which may result in more free time (Hachem, 2022; Broek et al., 2023; Görtzen et al., 2025).

The most frequently mentioned motivational factor in the workplace is income. The economic factor was mentioned 10 times as a stimulus for motivation in adult education. Stable income is important for individuals to support themselves and their families. Financial stability provides a sense of security and can also enable participation in learning when it is not funded by the state budget. Consequently, the desire to earn higher income creates motivation for career and professional development, achieving better working conditions, and keeping pace with technological advances in order to retain one's job (Broek et al., 2023; Osborne, 2024; Boyadjieva&Ilieva-Trichkova, 2025).

In organizing workplace learning in Latvia, these motivational factors imply that a one-size-fits-all programme will not be effective; learning must be aligned both with organizational goals and with the needs and life circumstances of different age groups. Particular attention should be paid to self-efficacy, ensuring that the learning environment is psychologically safe, offers a gradual increase in complexity, includes practical application, and provides managerial and organizational support—namely time for learning, resources, and feedback—because these directly determine whether a person will be willing to learn.

At the same time, economic motivation is very strong in the Latvian workplace context; therefore, it is important to transparently link learning to tangible benefits, such as opportunities for salary increases, competence development, better job mobility, and improved working conditions. Flexible learning formats should be provided—for example, hybrid learning, short modules, and training during working hours—so that learning does not reduce time with family or become inaccessible due to difficulties in reaching the training location. Finally, life events and well-being must be taken into account, therefore, training programmes should include support mechanisms, clear objectives, and meaningful content. In addition, in practice in Latvia, the most effective learning tends to be directly connected to real work tasks, where the manager and employee discuss learning goals together before and after training and provide feedback on whether the goals have been achieved. By contrast, it has been observed that a single training programme for everyone and one-off theoretical training without application in life or the workplace does not work. Workplace learning that is not allocated time and resources often fails to transfer into practice, and motivation decreases. Problems arise when there is a gap between training content and its application in everyday work, often due to unclear benefits. It is important to demonstrate what learning will provide for the person or employee within the organization and to ensure ongoing support or an opportunity to stay in contact even after the training has ended.

Conclusions

1. The study identified 22 motivational factors, 15 of which are shared by both adult education in general and workplace learning. These motivational factors are interrelated, with self-efficacy and adults confidence in their abilities playing a central role, shaped by individual, organizational, and learning-environment influences. At the same time,

some factors are specific to adult learning in a broader sense (e.g., social and family motives, well-being, critical thinking, etc.).

2. The results emphasize that adult motivation is strongly driven by practical learning content that is closely connected to real life and work, as well as by a supportive learning environment, organizational support, and high-quality feedback, which strengthens self-efficacy and encourages continued engagement in learning.
3. In workplace learning, the strongest motivational factor is increasing income and professional growth opportunities, which is linked to a sense of security, better working conditions, and the ability to adapt to technological change.
4. The study also highlights the need to strengthen adult education research in Latvia in order to develop flexible, experience-based, and workplace-adapted learning solutions for adults.

References

- Beier, M.E., Saxena, M., Kraiger, K., Costanza, D.P., Rudolph, C.W., Cadiz, D.M., Petery, G.A., & Fisher, G.G. (2025). Workplace learning and the future of work. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 18, 84-109. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2024.57>
- Billett, S. (2020). *Learning in the workplace: strategies for effective practice*. Routledge, London. 22 - 42. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003116318>
- Blinova, A.S. (2023). On motivating Adults to Learn. *MMGU Herald*, 4, 54-57. Retrieved from <https://journals.rcsi.science/2541-8580/article/view/274154>
- Boyadjieva, P. & Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (2025). Bulgaria: adult learning system as a bricolage in the context of overlapping modernities. *A Modern Guide to Adult Learning Systems*, 339-360. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035359523.00030>
- Broek, S., Linden, J.V.D., Kuijpers, M.A.C.T., & Semeijn, J.H. (2023). What makes adults choose to learn: Factors that stimulate or prevent adults from learning. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 29 (2), 620-642. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714231169684?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle
- Carrera-Rivera, A., Ochoa, W., Larrinaga, F., & Lasar, G. (2022). How-to conduct a systematic literature review: A quick guide for computer science research. *MethodsX*, 9, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2022.101895>
- Chacón-Cuberos, R., Serrano-García, J., Serrano-García I., & Castro-Sánchez, M. (2025). Self-Concept Modulates Motivation and Learning Strategies in Higher Education: Comparison According to Sex. *Education Sciences*, 15(7), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070873>
- Cronin-Golomb, L. M. & Bauer, P. J. (2023). Self-motivated and directed learning across the lifespan. *Acta Psychologica*, 232, 10-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103816>
- Davies, D., Jindal-Snape, D., Collier, C., Digby, R., Hay, P., & Howe, A. (2013). Creative learning environments in education – A systematic literature review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 8, 80-91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2012.07.004>
- Gal, I., Grotlüschen, A., Tout, D., & Kaiser, G. (2020). Numeracy, adult education, and vulnerable adults: a critical view of a neglected field. *ZDM*, 52, 377-394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-020-01155-9>
- Görtzen, J.J.H, Stollman, S.H.M., Schellings, G.L.M., Vermunt, J.D., & Nieveen, N.M. (2025). Promoting students' reflection through process-oriented feedback: Teachers' conceptions, practices and learning needs. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 86, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2025.101483>
- Hachem, H. (2022). Ask them why: Older learners' motivational reasons for learning at a university for the third age. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 55, 82-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2022.2040347>
- Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija (2025). OECD'S Latest Data: Adult Education Becoming More Accessible and Diverse. Retrieved from <https://www.esfondi.lv/en/about-eu-funds/news/oecd-s-latest-data-adult-education-becoming-more-accessible-and-diverse>
- Kampen, E.V., Berg, F.V.D., Brouwer, J., & Keijzer, M. (2023). Never too old to learn – Third age adults experience little (self-)ageism or barriers to learning. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 7, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2022.100384>
- Kostiainen, E. & Poysa-Tarhonen, J. (2025). Meaningful learning over the course of teacher education: Students' reflections. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 168, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.105241>

- Lang, S. (2025). Adults' participation in non-formal literacy programmes in Cambodia: A mixed-methods study of motivational factors and barriers. *International Review of Education*, 71, 55-79. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-024-10093-7>
- LeMire, S. (2024). Adult learning and open educational resources. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2024.2311768>
- Lin, X. & Schmidt, S.W. (2025). Empowering Online Adult Educators: Integrating Artificial Intelligence for Enhanced Instructional Strategies. *New Directions for Adults and Continuing Education*, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.70011>
- Loeng, S. (2020). Self-Direct Learning: A Core Concept in Adult Education. *Education Research International*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/3816132>
- Mertens, B., Cuyvers, K., Maeyer, S.D., & Donche, V. (2025). Unraveling low-educated adults' motivation for second-chance education: A multidimensional perspective. *Learning and Instruction*, 97, 1-13. <https://doi-org.resursi.rtu.lv/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2024.102075>
- Nacionālās attīstības padome (2020). *Latvijas Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2021.–2027. gadam*. Pieejams: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/315879-par-latvijas-nacionalo-attistibas-planu-20212027-gadam-nap2027>
- OECD (2025). Education at a Glance 2025: Latvia. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2025_1a3543e2-en/latvia_cf017b16-en.html
- Oppl, S., Kronberger, N., Stary, C., & Oppl, S. (2024). The Power of a Human Bridge: Motivating Adults to Long-Term Engagement with Touchscreen Devices in a SDT-Based Learning Session. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*, 29, 1499-1523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10758-023-09721-2>
- Osborne, M. (2024). The benefits of university adult learning. *International Review of Applied Economics*, 38, 395-409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02692171.2024.2362130>
- Skola2030 (2023). *Atgriezeniskā saite* Pieejams: <https://www.skola2030.lv/lv/jaunumi/blogs/bez-atzimem-labi-apgut-jauno-macibu-vielu-skolens-var-bez-skolotaja-atgriezeniskas-saites-ne>
- Smeplass, E. (2023). Investigating adult learners' experiences from using slow reading as a pedagogical approach. *International Journal of Education Research*, 122, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102252>
- Udeh, S.O.U., Tobail, A., Crowe, J., & Rashwan, W. (2025). Exploring the impact of gamification on employee training and development: a comprehensive literature review. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 37(9), 206-224. DOI: 10.1108/JWL-05-2025-0149
- Wallo, A., Reineholm, C., Öhman, H., & Lundqvist, D. (2025). Learning-oriented leadership in hybrid work. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 37(9), 152-168. DOI: 10.1108/JWL-05-2025-0155
- Wang, Y-L. (2025). Examining engagement orientations and learning profiles of older adult learners in technology-enhanced environments through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 58, 1-14. <https://doi-org.resursi.rtu.lv/10.1016/j.tsc.2025.101945>
- Wijga, M., Beusaert, S., & Kyndt, E. (2025). What drives workplace learning: a systematic review of key antecedents. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 37(9), 90-113. DOI: 10.1108/JWL-05-2025-0119
- Wood, R., Quinn, G., Jones, S., & Tweddell, S. (2025). Team-based learning (TBL) for professional development (PD): optimising everyone's potential in the workplace. *Quality Education for All*, 2(1), 616-641. DOI: 10.1108/QEA-12-2024-0152