THE CONCEPT OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

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Abstract

Nontraditional student is understood as one of the older students enrolled in formal or informal studies. In the literature, there is no detailed generalisation of nontraditional student. This article aims to reveal the concept of this particular group of students. Analysing the definition of nontraditional students, researchers identify the main criteria that allow to provide a more comprehensive concept of the nontraditional student. The main one is the age of these atypical students coming to study at the university, their selected form of studies, adult social roles status characteristics, such as family, parenting and financial independence as well as the nature of work. The described features of the nontraditional student demonstrate how the unconventional nontraditional student is different from the traditional one, which features are characteristic for them and how they reflect the nontraditional student's maturity and experience in comparison with younger, traditional students. Key features - independence, internal motivation, experience, responsibility, determination. They allow nontraditional students to pursue their life goals, learn and move towards their set goals. University student identity is determined on the basis of the three positions: on the age suitability by social norms, the learning outcomes incorporated with age, on the creation of student's ideal image. There are four students' biographical profiles distinguished: wandering type, seeking a degree, intergrative and emancipatory type. They allow to see the biographical origin of nontraditional students, their social status as well as educational features. Biographical profiles presented allow to comprise the nontraditional student's portrait of different countries. Traditional and nontraditional students' learning differences are revealed by analysing their need for knowledge, independence, experience, skill to learn, orientation and motivation aspects. To sum up, the analysis of the scientific literature can formulate the concept of the nontraditional student. Nontraditional student refers to the category of 20-65 years of age who enrolls into higher education studies in a nontraditional way, is financially independent, with several social roles of life, studying full-time or part-time, and working full-time or part-time, or not working at all.

Keywords: Learning differences; Nontraditional student; Traditional student.

Background

The university classes have changed in recent years. They are more diverse both ethnically and according to the students' age (Spitzer, 2000). Nevertheless, the number of nontraditional students seeking higher education degree is increasing (NCES, 2006; Kelly & Strawn, 2011). More than 45 percent of all the university students can be called "nontraditional", because they are over 25 years old (Hirschhorn, 2008). Currently, only about 20 percent of the US students are studying full-time. Researchers Lawler (2003), Knowles (1998) maintain that nontraditional students are now rapidly becoming the largest student group. But for a long time in terms of services, learning styles and challenges these students have historically been limited their civil rights. The main principles of adult learning ideas and principles of concepts have been developed over the years, practitioners and researchers have observed the adult learning in different contexts throughout life, with different goals and motivations (Lawler, 2003). Nontraditional students' characteristics, their motives, expectations and needs are different and incredibly diverse. Studies show that more people come back to higher education, with their age growing, especially after 35 years and after 45 years of age. This finding definitely affects the broad policy direction - keeping life long learning up and the development of more rapid technological change in that context. Older people in the future will require a lifetime of new skills in order to enhance their economic, social and cultural role in society.

Foreign literature has been intensively studying the topic of learning of nontraditional students. Their learning motives, dedication to studies and identity of the students were researched by Thunborg, Bron, Edström, (2013), as well as barriers for them to return to study: commitment and adult students' support by Rabourn, Shoup, Lorenz (2015), nontraditional students' success in seeking a degree of higher education by Kansas (2014), traditional and nontraditional students' experience by Corbett (2010); learning in mixed-age groups by Schwartz (2014) and others. However, Lithuanian scientific sources show that the research on this topic is not significant: Martinkėniene (2009) of traditional and nontraditional age university students' studies leading to demographic factors (foreign experience), Tolutiene & Vėlavičiūte (2012) nontraditional university students heterogeneity of social - demographic aspects of learning; Tamuliene, (2014), the most vulnerable groups of students support needs: college case study; Andriekiene, Anužiene (2005) heterogeneity management activities as a phenomenon of andragogy.

It is implicited that adults, even those with the necessary level of experience in the labour market, are encouraged to initiate their university academic way for a variety of reasons. And while universities are aware of the growing number of older students, they do not provide an adequate assertion related with their specific education. Goncalves (2007) empathises that the institutions, which receive these students, must harmoniously integrate them, they must combine their cultural and social work organization and dynamics so that this group of students would be properly integrated and followed into lifelong learning strategies, which is a reality. In addition, Conrad (2008) writes that "taking care of the issue of academic services is vitally important for nontraditional students to ensure their success" (p. 29). Nontraditional students face obstacles because policies and institutions continue to focus on traditional students. The study raises the question: What are the main criteria specific to the nontraditional student? It is therefore important to emphasize and explore the concept of the characteristics of the older students, who are referred to as nontraditional ones. The aim of the study is to reveal the concept of the nontraditional student.

Definition of the nontraditional (non-standard) student (clarification)

There is no unanimous definition of the nontraditional student either in national or international research analysis (Goncalves, 2007). The term "nontraditional student" does not currently have any common functional category as a concept. The term some foreign countries have previously used as "nontraditional student" was introduced in order to distinguish an adult learner, full-time or part-time form, from the young student (Andriekienė & Anužienė, 2006).

The previous education system was designed for young people. Scientific works analysed the needs of young people, motivation, their learning outcomes, learning strategies and so on. The emergence of adult learner besides the youth is problematic at least for the fact that it is necessary to find out what the main features are of full - time adult learner or part-time one. The fact that the adult learner is different from the young learner is recognised by many scientists (Knowles, 1999; Abrami, 1996; Brazziel, 1989; Courtney, 1983).

A few years ago there was not a big age difference envisaged between the students learners. Currently, there is an obvious age difference observed between them. Socio-economic context has allowed to extend the concept of "nontraditional student". Thus, each investigator of

the definition is enabled to interpret it, adapt it, broaden its meaning, having regard to the study of the context and its circumstances.

Knowles (1999) introduces a number of adult definitions:

- biological definition associated with reproductive functions;
- the legal definition of an adult associated with some human rights: the right to vote, to start a family (18 years);
- social definition associated with some social roles: employee, parent, spouse and others.
- psychological definition - the ability to make a decision, determine life.

Most of Knowles (1999) distinguished adult definitions are integrated into the nontraditional student definitions used by foreign scientists. Researchers conducted the study as how the term had been defined, and the results showed a wide range of options (Chung, Turnbull & Chur-Hansen, 2014). There were different categories of its meaning used, including such as: age, gender, roles, form of study, academic study leave, method of registration for study in "nontraditional" programs, "unfavorable" students, disability and injury findings, ethnicity and previous education census acquisition.

Cross (2009) defines a comprehensive nontraditional student's definition, introducing nontraditional students as having at least one of the following seven characteristics: 1) can not (do not want) to enter college immediately after high school, 2) do not work full-time, 3) work 35 hours a week or more, 4) financially independent, 5) have other responsibilities than the spouse, 6) is one of the parents, 7) seek a college diploma. Foreign researchers still divide nontraditional students according to the number of the above mentioned basic seven characteristics they correspond to, the least nontraditional student is the one who corresponds to one of the above mentioned characteridtics, two or three characteristics - the average nontraditional, and those that meet four or more characteristics - very unconventional nontraditional students (Macari, 2005).

Researchers Chung et.al. (2014) in their studies discerned several approaches, which are reflected in the formulation of the concept of the nontraditional student. These views are subjective, because one of the author's definition of the dominant nontraditional student describes the criteria which may not be used in the definition of another author. It is observed that the concept of nontraditional student is very broad, it depends on what context or study it is used. The definition distinguishes the main criteria: age, their atypical way of coming to study at the university, their selected form of study, adult social roles performance status, such as family, parenting and

financial independence as well as the nature of work: work full-time or part-time (Chung et. al., 2014).

Nontraditional student's concept is associated with age, but it is doubtful whether age is the only criterion that describes the student. In terms of age, it is hard to tell when one becomes an adult would. Researchers present nontraditional students' age as one of the main criteria for the definition in different ways. However, the age cut-off point, which was supported by the vast majority of authors is 25 years old. It can be assumed that the definition of most of the traditional and nontraditional students in literature is based on age (usually 25 years or older). Nevertheless, younger students may also take a regular full-time work during the college year and may also have child-rearing responsibilities, as well as the successful completion of undergraduate studies. This is what extends the general definition of the nontraditional student, not only by age, both Choy (2002) and Horn (1996) offer a broader definition.

By providing the nontraditional student definition, foreign researchers emphasize the path of their coming to study in higher education (Teichler & Wolter, 2004). Nontraditional students often opt for atypical (nontraditional) coming way to study at the university. Before coming to university these students had taken weekend training programs, evening courses, hold a bachelor's degree from the past, had graduated from other higher education institutions and acquired a degree in a nontraditional way (Christie, 2008; Kirby, 2004). This category includes nontraditional students who finished high school, but right away did not intervene to study at a college or university, and have at least a one-year study break between secondary and higher education (Bennett, 2007, Macari, 2005; Schuetz and Slowey 2002, Tichler and Wolter, 2004). Unconventional choice to seek higher education degree is more identified with the sense that these students did not consistently study to get a higher education diploma, namely as usual, finished high school and enrolled in college or university. Their study is associated with interruptions in learning between the return back to study after academic leave or work and the like (Dill, 1998; Sweet, 2007; Everly, 1994). Researchers analysing the learning of nontraditional students draw attention to the students' choice of study form. The definitions identify incomplete, partial and full study form. This criterion allows a better understanding of nontraditional students enrollment, help them to identify the distribution of their study and work time (Chartrand, 1992; Quimby, 2006; Query, 1992; Hudson, 2008).

The defining of social roles is one of the criteria that is used by presenting the concept of the nontraditional student. Nontraditional learners students were considered to be those that had at least two major roles in life (working, partner or parent). These are the students who meet at least one of the adult social roles: a) a first subsistence b) is a direct relative carer or c) married and living in the family, divorced or widowed, but do not live with their parents, who receive basic support from other (Chartrand, 1990; Hemby, 1997). The definitions do not only indicate the social roles of nontraditional students, but also imply their liabilities: work, family, parents. The engagement status of nontraditional students is often indicated in the definitions, where researchers state one of the criteria: work full-time, part-time (Adebayo, 2006; Query, 2008). To sum up, the nontraditional student's definitions are very different. Each definition presents the primary criterion of the nontraditional student - namely age. Other criteria are selected in accordance with the topic or context of the investigation. The nontraditional students' teaching-related studies always reflect the main criteria that have been described: study form, social status, engagement, their chosen form of study. However, nontraditional student's definition is highly dependent on the social and economic context. It can be said that this definition is related to the socio-economic status of each country.

Characteristics of the nontraditional student

Nontraditional student has several key features which are introduced by researchers in their accomplished studies (Shankar, 2004; Jarvis, 1995; Sewell, 2000; Rogers, 2002). Nontraditional students are more focused, have a self-target prior to joining the college. The student is forced to have multiple goals (Crawford, 2004): personal, social, cognitive and professional. They must know how to manage a new life time, or to change their emotional and external expectations, give up certain objectives (Lovell, 1979). Nontraditional student has the ability to contextualize ideas, themes, competencies and knowledge in a more general perspective, particularly in the professional context. They have their own sets of learning models. In addition, they are independent, have accumulated life experience and knowledge, are responsible for their own learning, combine goals and their efficiency with their intellectual capabilities, learning ability and competence development (Dupond & Ossandón, 1998).

The nontraditional student's learning idea involves the concept of critical thinking and the learner becomes an important part of independent study. Autonomous adult student can

assess their knowledge and make decisions. In other words, the independent study is related to the terms of facts and ideas, as well as the relationship between them. The nontraditional student prefers independent rather than authoritarian learning. They tend to get the most knowledge of their own life experience, from the research and feel appreciated when the learning environment allows them to be critical and analytical. Independent, confident is the nontraditional student. The appellation can be used to describe the learners who can mobilize and organise their learning environment without help, directions and guidelines. It emphasizes the student's ability to create an environment conducive to the learning based on personal needs: program choice of learning schedules, methods and techniques of learning, as well as the ability to set goals, complete tasks and projects as part of the training course. The nontraditional learner has the intellectual ability to be assertive, bold to express their ideas, rather than be well organised. They feel comfortable and confident in choosing their own learning path, even when faced with the existing institutional and traditional thinking. Themselves they choose what is best suited for them in the extended education programs and create their own customized model.

Studies show lots of advantages of the nontraditional student. They are more motivated and assertive, (Njumbwa, 2008; Ross Gordon, 2011; Scott & Lewis, 2012), better oriented to their learning goals (Bennett el.al. March 2007 Bye et.al. March 2007 Hoyert & O'Dell, 2009), are able to perform additional project work in a more motivated way, what seems to make sense for them (Njumbwa, 2008), and are able to act accordingly when faced with stress (Forbus et al. 2011), perhaps because they see stressors as challenges to be overcome (Giancola et al . 2009). The main features of the nontraditional student are their autonomy, responsibility, goal achievement, life experience, internal motivation. The listed features allow the students to see their uniqueness compared to other fellows. These positive features contribute to the achievement of better study results and assure faster integration into the university environment.

Types of the nontraditional students

Kasworm (2005) identified three positions to describe the adult student's integrity, the ones that affect their behaviour and learning at the university. The first empathises belief in their age appropriateness according to social norms. The second is the pursuit of learning outcomes associated with age and the third is the student's ideal image creation.

1. Belief of age appropriateness by social norms. Nontraditional students may feel anxiety for their elderly age and public expectations, as the university is of younger people learning place. They can feel like risking to lose their sense of identity and self-esteem, but they are convinced that they have to be there due to their attainment of the set objective - an education degree, which is a guarantee for a better future.

2. In terms of academic activities related with age it is necessary to realise that nontraditional students may feel that their academic success is linked with a greater commitment to education than of younger students, so they devote more time and exert more of an effort towards their learning in order to achieve the success.

3. In order to perfect the student's image, nontraditional students can identify themselves with the students having regard to the criteria which, in their opinion, determine "ideal student". In this regard, the ideal student is:

   - serious and committed to - the adult learner chooses to pursue further education while retaining their place of work and carrying out family responsibilities.

   - accept university attendance as a life choice and see their learning at university as purposeful free choice in life and understand the younger students who are just trying to set their life goals for future.

   - assessment of previous life experiences – treat their previous experience as a "pillar of strengthening their success and see the younger students who" lack of maturity and true hardiness". They believe that life experience should be formally assessed in class (Kasworm, 2005).

In assessing themselves as the ideal image of the student, adults believe they are more responsible, better attend lectures and workshops as well as they work harder than younger students. The nontraditional student understands the traditional students as the ones who cultivate the study process experience in a lesser way, but have a similar evaluation of the results, so there is a competition between them because of it.

Tinto (2002) indicates that nontraditional students is a part of heterogeneous population of society, and it is difficult to "create their profile". The traditional student attends college for both social and academic reasons, the academic reasons are the most important ones for the nontraditional student. The nontraditional student is determined by the type of motivation and

liability to the university. According to the study of foreign scientists (Thunborg et.al, 2013) there are seven types of the nontraditional student:

- *Altruistic student* engages in studies, seeks knowledge in order to change something in their life or help others change, advance society, and is committed towards their studies.

- *The controversial student* enters the university in order to test their learning success, but they constantly feel inner conflict, are hesitant, if they need education. While showing a growing interest in the university, they are neither very committed nor dedicated to studies.

- *Car park student* wants to do, to act, while waiting for a job, and is only partially committed to study. Car park student drops out, when loses interest and resumes when nothing else is happening in his life.

- *Student at risk of dropping out* is in the situation when risks to drop out of university. He is very committed and at the same time struggling to keep afloat in the exams. Nontraditional student resides, demanding more from himself than from others. The student will always have high expectations not only for themselves but also for others. When he defines himself as a loser, he cannot continue studying.

- *Instrumental student* engages in studies in order to get a job, a better life, or social status, but does not seem to be interested in acquiring knowledge. He is weakly committed to learning, but in the future he would like to get a degree, by using the university knowledge to gain social mobility.

- *Lifelong learner* is interested in learning, but does not want to study responsibly to pass exams. The university is like learning arena: if falls out of it, comes back again, behaves dependently on the learning interests.

- *Straight way acting student* has a specific entity with a great commitment to the university, which he accepts as a knowledge arena, interests.

- *Self conscious student* is usually a mature student who begins to learn after radical changes in life. The university is his personal change arena and he is very committed to learning. He usually sacrifices to be able to study, and shows a desire to do so.

In conclusion, the nontraditional student's identity is described by three distinct positions: the age suitability of faith by social norms, learning outcomes incorporated with age, the student's ideal image creation. The presented nontraditional student's identification positions allow a better understanding of the student's current situation in the group, their well-being in the study

environment. The types of the students reflect the learning motives of the nontraditional student, the reasons for their commitment to education and the university.

Biographical profiles of the nontraditional student

The research, which was conducted in six foreign countries, releases and provides students' biographical profiles (Field et. al., 2011). Revealed the four dominant biographical profiles of the nontraditional student.

Wandering type of nontraditional student, the one who does not stick to one activity, he changes a job, begins to learn, but does not complete studies. He has a fragmented biography. Kim (1998) defines this type of the biography as having post-modern way of life. Long-term plans for him do not exist and he often lacks both the cultural and social knowledge capital. Such a nontraditional student enters the university, but does not get involved in the education. This group of students is in a risk assessment among all the types of students.

Seeking a degree. Often this mature student comes from the working class and is very ambitious. The desire to learn is evident and it is reflected in the biography. He wanted to go to university after school, but the road was blocked due to structural and cultural constraints. The university is a tool to change their social world, to distance themselves from their social situation. However, the breakaway of the origin is not always a guarantee of success to develop their new social world, because the students of this type often experience a feeling of insecurity.

Integrative type of student is a pragmatist. Originated from the working class, but unlike seeking a degree student type, he breaks away from his social status and terminates with the past social relationships. Instead, they enrich their existing social capital, because they come to university in order to broaden their horizons without being too ambitious. They are successfully enrolled in study whereas at the same time they feel like strangers at the university.

Emancipatory type of the nontraditional student is deliberately trying to move away from their traditional roots, because they suffer inequality, such as the racism of the critical event, as divorce or domestic violence. Most are women from the working class. University education is a choice to free themselves and change their lives. The university is almost a starting point to give them a new status, although they maintain some contact with their social class. This nontraditional type of student usually learns successfully, because of the enhanced obligation to improve their

lives and their children's education assistance policy. They expect the education will help them to do it.

The four acclaimed students' biographical profiles: wandering type, seeking a degree, intergrative and emancipatory type. They allow to see the nontraditional student's biographical origin, social status, educational features. The summarized biographical profiles reflect the nontraditional student's portrait of a certain country.

Learning differences of traditional and nontraditional students

Traditionally, the understanding of the student by a certain age limit, the age was seen as growth and cognitive criteria of learning strategy for predicting university students' learning styles and highlighting the learning differences of nontraditional and traditional students (Alexander et al. 1997; Gadzella et. al., 2002; Justice & Dornan 2001; Macpherson, 2002). Students are divided into traditional and nontraditional ones. Traditional students 18-25 years of age, the students studying at post-secondary institutions of higher education who receive financial support from their parents, who work part-time or do not work at all (Cross, 2009; Wyatt, 2011). Nontraditional students describe themselves as adults who bring a lot of experience and value package to studies, who come to university with their intents, expectations and interests. They have already got their own set of learning models. Nontraditional students are different from traditional ones because of their allowcated learning time (Rogers, 2002; Taylor et.al, 2000). Nontraditional students are likely more than traditional ones learn individually, on their own, striving for formal and informal learning sense. Characterized by Knowles (1984) here are some distinguished learning principles of the nontraditional students:

1. Nontraditional students are autonomous in their learning process, take responsibility for their actions and do not agree to accept arbitrarily imposed information on them.
2. They have extensive broad experience, which serves as a critical component of their identity foundation.
3. They are ready to learn. Most adult learners come back to higher education on a voluntary basis, they are actively involved in the learning process.
4. They have motivation. Nontraditional students, returning to the university, have specific goals and a key component of their motivation is internal (Knowles, 1984).

However, besides Knowles' (1984) set of the four principles, nontraditional students may have a set context of their lives, which determines their learning. Nontraditional students are likely to want to have the sense of corporation between the student and the educator in the study process (Zmeyev, 1998). In addition, the adults returning to education bring additional skills, such as a higher level of maturity, and the other than the traditional understanding of learning (Byman, 2007).

Traditional and nontraditional students' learning differences revealed by the following criteria are: the need for knowledge, learner autonomy, experience, skill to learn, orientation, focus and motivation.

The commitment, need to know. While studying traditional students know that they have to learn what their educator teaches them, what they require, get a good evaluation and pass examinations. The learning process focuses solely on academic knowledge assimilation. Traditional students stipulate that after a successful graduation they will receive a diploma, acquire a profession, education and start working (Tolutiene &Vėlavičiūte, 2012). However, it is not necessary for these students to know how the things they are learning are applied and manifested into reality.

When nontraditional students begin to study, they know why they are going to learn and what specifically will change, why they need to study subjects, which are offered by a training program (Knowles, 1990). Nontraditional students seek to improve their skills and qualifications, become qualified professionals and make a career. They have a purpose of the study (Graham & Donaldson, 1999).

Thus, the commitment, need of the knowledge of traditional students is still being formed by the educator, nontraditional students have already built this commitment. Learning voluntarily, providing positive consequences, the participation of nontraditional students is more active, and their efforts to learn are more effective. Unlike traditional students, nontraditional ones find it to be more difficult to integrate into students' life and other activities, but they have a strong commitment to get a university degree, which they will use to solve their life problems (Bradley & Cleveland-Innes, 1992). Nontraditional students show a stronger academic responsibility and willingness to keep learning than traditional ones (Cleveland-Innes, 1994). The commitment and need of knowledge of nontraditional students, as opposed to traditional ones, are associated with their higher academic and intellectual growth level (Graham & Donaldson, 1999). Kuh (1993)

argues that nontraditional students as well as or even better than traditional students perform various operational tasks. Thus, nontraditional students are more responsible and motivated, because they have a specific reason for attending higher school, and another reason why the sets of their tasks must be performed in a short period of time, despite their high level of engagement (Clark, 2006). These students do not need a lot of encouragement, they are self-motivated.

Learner's autonomy. The concept of independent learning is associated with the learner's level of responsibility and autonomy, critical thinking, a critical assessment of the environment, their knowledge and acquired skills in assessment. (Žydžiūnaitė & Teresevičienė, 2012). Traditional students are considered as individuals, who depend on the educator's presented material in the learning process and the information provided to them. Traditional students' autonomy rate is abundantly low as there are no adequate conditions to develop their independence, not even in high school. Independence is stopped when there is a contradiction between the need to be independent and the lack of opportunities to develop independence. In the view of traditional students (Rutkienė & Tandzegolskienė 2014), prevails a cognitive learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of the educator and the student and an active process of information. Students emphasize that the most suitable conditions for learning are when the learning objectives are identified and results outlined in the course, while the methods to achieve the results they would like to choose for themselves.

When a personality matures, the need to be independent, make their own decisions, organise their activities and learning is growing. So the older the learner, the lower is their dependence on authorities, and the information provided by the textbook. Nontraditional students themselves decide what to study and where to study. Nontraditional students are more responsible for their lives, for the decisions they make and the actions perform. They resist and express dissatisfaction, if someone seeks to impose their will on them, they work the ways out and decide where to start, what is useful to learn for them and where to acquire education. Nunn's research (1994) revealed differences related to traditional and nontraditional students' self-perception, learning autonomy and temperament. Older nontraditional students are more focused on the goals and achievements of the learning process, show less anxiety, prefer more formal learning approaches, methods, choose to learn in different forms, are less impulsive and regard themselves to be more abstract because of their distinctive thinking.

Experience. The traditional students' experience is limited, so its value is low. It is not used as a source of learning (Teresevičiene, Gedviliene & Zuzevičiūte, 2006). Evaluated by the educator together with a group of nontraditional students learners, the gained experience has to be conveyed to traditional students. It is therefore particularly important to know-how to transfer it, what techniques and methods to use. Traditional students usually fail to understand the complicated / complex problems as well as nontraditional students. They are less motivated, because they do not understand the importance of their studied subjects to the extent as nontraditional, more experienced students. Training can be traditional student's main activity. They can commit more time to their education, if they so wish. However, due to the lack of maturity and motivation, compared to nontraditional students they need to be often encouraged.

Nontraditional students come to educational institutions after having accumulated different experience. These experiences affect the characteristics of adult learning process. First, any nontraditional student group has a broader scale of experience of individual differences than any traditional learning group of students. Second, in lots of the learning situations this nontraditional students' learning experience is a valuable resource that can be used for group discussions. Nontraditional students are known for their knowledge and experience, which they have gained in their professional fields (Fidishun, 2011). When bringing it to a group, these students feel they should be recognized for their experience and their subtleties. According to Fidishun (2011), educators must create opportunities of "... reflective learning, which includes the assessment or approval of assumptions ..." (p. 49). Reflective learning helps students to understand their subtleties and experience and move towards understanding of new information.

Skill to learn. Skill to learn is related to stages and goals of personality development. Also, it depends on the age and intellectual level of development. The educator on the basis of the program decides what traditional students have to learn so that they would pass exams and receive positive evaluations. Studies are organized according to the logic of the subject content, while traditional students perceive learning as a specific subject knowledge uptake. Traditional students' skill to learn is closely linked with the need to know, what they need to learn and what kind of learning problems are solved.

However, life challenges for the nontraditional student is a key factor. Nontraditional students are ready to learn the things that are necessary for solving their life problems. Despite some certain failing in the participation of the university academic activities the nontraditional

students have the same or even more academic and practical knowledge than traditional students (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). This means that nontraditional students can use different skills, techniques, attitudes or interact with traditional students in order to achieve their desired objectives and learning outcomes. In addition, adult students apply the method in the context of lifelong learning (Knowles, 1984). Hence the level of their skill and readiness to study goes of an upward trend. In comparison with the traditional students, the older students tend more to integrate into new and different life roles (Donaldson, 1999). Graham & Donaldson (1999) point out that younger students mostly communicate with their peers through interrelated activities, while the older students are less involved in university activities and are more likely to take care of the family. Despite this trend, the older students showed readiness and skill to learn and their progress in the growth rate is higher than of the traditional students both in academic and intellectual development spheres. Completely similarly Carney-Crompton & Tan (2002) establish, that the nontraditional students achieve higher academic level than the traditional ones, despite the fact that they have more stressors and obligations.

Orientation. Traditional students are more focused on the uptake of the subject content. The training is organised according to the logic of the subject content. Traditional students pursue academic goals. Learning orientation is directed towards the study of the subject. The fundamental goal in the academic field is the level, which makes the traditional students perceive, that they themselves will participate in the development of learning tasks for the reasons such as: challenge, curiosity and skill (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, McKeachie & Bye, 1991). However, both traditional and nontraditional student's participation is individually oriented.

Consciously or unconsciously nontraditional students choose the learning, with an intention to solve life, career and personal issues. These motivated students learn as much as it can help them achieve goals or solve problems that arise in life. A student of increased motivation can show independence and work, initiating self-discoveries and strategies. High external target orientated student's involvement in the solution of learning tasks is the way to achieve goals (Sansone & Smith, 2000). Properly targeted are these nontraditional students who are practical, seek knowledge absorption and benefits of adaptation of them to life (Knowles 1998). They think they have certain characteristics that can help them become mature professionals, because they have a higher level of self-confidence and motivation, work experience, responsible family obligations, financial challenges, and are not much interested in the college social life (Walsh et.al. 2005; Kasambira, 1998). Nontraditional students fall into the group, where their educators, who

know their perspectives and experience, can take advantage of their life experiences, by using a variety of personal and training methods (Walsh et al., 2005). As they feel they need to meet challenges and believe in their success, they will favorably become very well organised.

Motivation. The traditional students' motivation for learning is determined by external factors: grades, incentives, parental pressure, possibility to choose their future field of activity. The students' motivation is influenced by the novelty of lectures, interest, educator's teaching style, the complexity of the subject, the university microclimate. Learning motivation is associated with the educator's managerial functions realization as well as the student's learning competencies (Jegelevičienė, Merfeldaitė & Railienė, 2016). Educators' managerial factors are associated with the elements of the students negative learning environment, which is created by the problems arising from mastering the content of teaching, also, a huge amount of the learning materials. Students' competence to learn obstacles are associated with the lack of time management skills and the loss of the ability to choose an acceptable way of learning.

If the nontraditional students' approach, a quality learning differs from the traditional students, then it can be assumed that equally both motivation and factors that influence learning differ because of their age. Nontraditional students' motivation is internal (job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, self-expression). Every adult has the intrinsic motivation to advance. Kasworm (2003) studied the adult students' understanding of the learning that comes with age, and found that nontraditional students, as a group, have a strong internal and external motivation for learning. Nontraditional students who have intrinsic motivation, read and absorb the material broader, have better estimates and show more persistence than the students with external motivation (Vansteenkiste et. al., 2004). Age, interests, interest and internal motivation are envisaged as having a positive impact on learning. They act as strong learning motives for the acquisition of new skills, take on new challenges in life, based on previous experience. The bond of internal motivation and positive impact is stronger of the nontraditional students than traditional ones.

In conclusion, the learning differences of the traditional and nontraditional students are revealed by analysing key aspects of learning: the need for knowledge, learner's autonomy, experience, skill to learn, learning orientation and motivation. Nontraditional students know why they are going to study, what a particular change is on. They are autonomous and responsible for their own lives. Nontraditional students have accumulated a great foundation of different life

experience and knowledge. Life challenges for them is an essential factor. They learn to compromise with life, career and personal issues. They are accordingly oriented, practical and seek knowledge absorption and benefits of adaptation of them to life, every adult has the intrinsic motivation for learning. Age is specified as a strong motive to overcome challenges in adopting new life.

Conclusions

Scientific literature suggests that there is no single definition of the nontraditional student. The researchers submit several definitions of the main criteria that characterize the nontraditional student: age, the way of the coming of the nontraditional students to study in higher education, social roles, form of study, engagement status. The main criterion is the age, the definition of which varies from 22 to 65 years of age. The traits of the nontraditional student: independence, responsibility, having clear life goals, conceptualization of ideas, internal motivation, resistance to stress. There are three positions for adult students to identify: the age suitability of faith according to social norms; learning outcomes associated with age, the pursuit; the ideal student image creation. This identification allows the positions to reveal the nontraditional student's status and well-being in the academic environment. These types of the students present their learning motivation and commitment to the university.

The main learning differences of the traditional and nontraditional students are revealed on the basis of the following criteria: the need for knowledge, learner's autonomy, experience, skill to learn, orientation and motivation. The need of the knowledge of the traditional students is formed by the educator. These students in their study process are dependent on the educator, the material taught and the information provided to them. The level of their independence is rather low. The experience of the traditional student is limited, its value is low. Their skill to study depends on the educator, who decides what traditional students must learn in order to pass exams and receive positive evaluations. Training orientation is aimed to assimilate the subject content. The students' motivation for learning is determined by external factors: grades, parental pressure, possibility to choose their future activity. Whereas the nontraditional students themselves decide what and how much to learn. They are responsible for their life decisions. Experience is their valuable source of learning. Their pre-study skill level is growing. They themselves decide what learning methods to choose, as well as an attitude change or interactive communication with

traditional students. The nontraditional students are accordingly oriented, seek knowledge absorption and benefits of adaptation of them to life. Their motivation is internal. Age, interests, interest and intrinsic motivation are strong drivers for the acquisition of new skills, take on life challenges.

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