

CR&DALL Seminar: Empirical research on motivation in adult education and learning

Speakers: Jan Kalenda and Michaela Bílá, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic

Date: Wednesday, 4th February 2026, 12:00-1:00 PM

Location: Room 230, St Andrews Building, 11 Eldon St, Glasgow G3 6NH

Abstract

This seminar presents key findings from a recently published scoping review providing a systematic mapping of the literature on motivation in adult education and learning between 1971 and 2024. The review traced the evolution of the research over time, including its main topics, geographical scope, and methodological approaches.

The evidence shows a pronounced rise in empirical research from the mid-2010s onwards, signalling renewed scholarly attention to motivation in relation to adult learning and education. Much of the existing work focuses on specific learner populations (e.g., non-traditional students and second-chance learners), while educators' motivation remains comparatively neglected. Geographically, empirical contributions are concentrated in Europe and Anglophone settings, indicating a substantial imbalance in global knowledge production and a limited evidential base for understanding motivational dynamics across a wider range of institutional contexts. Methodologically, the field is dominated by quantitative designs that frequently rely on self-developed and insufficiently validated instruments. By contrast, mixed-methods and longitudinal research remain constraining, constraining the field's capacity to examine motivational processes over time and across learning environments.

Overall, the review revealed a fragmented research landscape, shaped by heterogeneous theoretical traditions and uneven methodological standards. It underscores the need for more inclusive and methodologically robust research if the field is to strengthen its empirical foundations and generate more generalisable insights into motivation in adult education and learning across diverse educational settings.

About the speakers

Jan Kalenda is Associate Professor of adult education and head of the Research Centre of the Faculty of Humanities of Tomas Bata University in Zlín, where he has previously served as vice-rector for educational activities and quality management. After the end of this administrative tenure, he spent the academic year 2022/2023 as a Fulbright fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles. As a researcher, he has participated in many scientific projects focusing on adult education and learning related policy, supported by the Czech

Science Agency (GAČR), Slovakia Science Agency (VEGA), European Training Foundation (ETF), CEDEFOP, or ERASMUS plus from the European Commission. For fifteen years, he has been actively involved in research on lifelong learning.

His research has focused on three key topics. First, factors and processes influencing participation in lifelong learning included related inequalities to participation and relevant educational policies. Second, an analysis of macro-social processes and long-term social change related to evolution of Adult Learning Systems. In this regard, he has coedited The Modern Guide to Adult Learning Systems (2025), together with Richard Desjardins, and Formation of Adult Learning Systems in Central Europe (2024). Third, applying new theoretical and methodological approaches to measurement of lifelong learning, including development of new research instruments (e.g., Self-regulation questionnaire, Self-determination questionnaire, Metacognitive reading strategies questionnaire, Attitudes to adult education questionnaire, and Factors of nonparticipation in non-formal education questionnaire).



Michaela Bílá is a junior researcher at the Institute of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, where her academic work focuses on adult education and learning as well as social pedagogy. She teaches undergraduate courses in communication, teaching skills, and academic writing. Currently a doctoral candidate at the same faculty, her dissertation examines the motivations underpinning adult participation in education and learning. She is proficient in both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and her work has been published in several international journals, including The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, and Cogent Education.

