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ANDRAGOGY IN WORKPLACE TRAINING: A CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE REVIEW WITH INSIGHTS FOR VIETNAM

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Abstract

As Vietnam undergoes rapid economic transformation, upgrading quality of workplace training with adult learning approaches has become imperative. This conceptual review examines the relevance and applicability of Andragogy, Malcolm Knowles' foundational theory, in Vietnamese organizations. A systematic literature search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar (2021–2025), followed by PRISMA-consistent appraisal of methodological transparency, peer-review status, and plausibility of replication. The synthesis shows that internationally, Andragogical designs consistently enhance learner engagement, satisfaction, and training transfer, while adoption in Vietnam remains limited due to hierarchical culture, resource constraints, and uneven organizational readiness. To address these gaps, the study develops a hypothesized causal mapping of barriers, mediators, and opportunities, and thereby proposes a three-level conceptual framework (policy–organization–trainer/learner). The contribution is threefold: (1) theoretically, by clarifying how cultural and structural factors mediate the transfer of Andragogy into non-Western contexts; (2) practically, by offering a framework for policymakers and enterprises to align incentives, build readiness, and upskill trainers; and (3) methodologically, by highlighting the need for longitudinal and sector-comparative research beyond descriptive case studies. Embedding Andragogy in sequenced, context-sensitive interventions is essential to building a workforce adaptable, motivated, and globally competitive.

Keywords: *Adult learning, andragogy, employee development, human resource development, workplace training.*

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ANDRAGOGY TRONG ĐÀO TẠO TẠI NƠI LÀM VIỆC: TỔNG QUAN LÝ THUYẾT VÀ GỢI Ý CHO VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt

Trong bối cảnh Việt Nam đang trải qua quá trình chuyển đổi kinh tế nhanh chóng, nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo tại nơi làm việc dựa trên các tiếp cận học tập người trưởng thành trở nên cấp thiết. Bài tổng quan khái niệm này phân tích mức độ phù hợp và khả năng ứng dụng của Andragogy – lý thuyết nền tảng do Malcolm Knowles phát triển – trong các doanh nghiệp Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu tiến hành tìm kiếm tài liệu có hệ thống trên các cơ sở dữ liệu Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC và Google Scholar (giai đoạn 2021–2025), đồng thời thẩm định chất lượng theo tiêu chí nhất quán với PRISMA (tính minh bạch phương pháp, tình trạng bình duyệt, và khả năng tái lập). Kết quả tổng hợp cho thấy, trên phạm vi quốc tế, các thiết kế đào tạo theo Andragogy giúp gia tăng đáng kể mức độ tham gia, sự hài lòng và khả năng chuyển giao học tập; trong khi đó, tại Việt Nam, việc áp dụng vẫn còn hạn chế do ảnh hưởng của văn hóa thứ bậc, ràng buộc về nguồn lực và sự chênh lệch về mức độ sẵn sàng của tổ chức. Để giải quyết khoảng trống này, nghiên cứu xây dựng một bản đồ nhân quả giả định về rào cản, yếu tố trung gian và cơ hội, đồng thời đề xuất một khung khái niệm ba cấp độ (chính sách – tổ chức – giảng viên/người học). Đóng góp của nghiên cứu bao gồm: (1) lý thuyết – làm rõ cách các yếu tố văn hóa và cấu trúc chi phối việc chuyển giao Andragogy vào bối cảnh ngoài phương Tây; (2) thực tiễn – đề xuất khung khái niệm giúp nhà hoạch định chính sách và doanh nghiệp điều chỉnh chính sách khuyến khích, nâng cao mức độ sẵn sàng và phát triển năng lực giảng viên; và (3) phương pháp – nhấn mạnh nhu cầu thực hiện nghiên cứu dọc, so sánh liên ngành thay vì chỉ dừng lại ở các nghiên cứu mô tả. Việc triển khai Andragogy theo cách tiếp cận tuần tự và phù hợp với bối cảnh sẽ là chìa khóa để xây dựng lực lượng lao động Việt Nam linh hoạt, có động lực và năng lực cạnh tranh toàn cầu.

Từ khóa: *Andragogy, Đào tạo tại nơi làm việc, Học tập người trưởng thành, Phát triển nguồn nhân lực, Phát triển nhân viên.*

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic economic and technological landscape, effective adult learning is central to workforce development (Anderson, 2021). Andragogy, Malcolm Knowles' foundational theory, highlights self-direction, experiential learning, and relevance to professional practice, and is widely recognized for boosting engagement and productivity in organizations (Tessier et al., 2021; Rivers & Winner, 2021). While Andragogy specifically refers to Knowles' model for adult learners, the broader "Adult Learning Theory" covers various frameworks on how adults acquire and apply knowledge. Both terms are used here to ensure a comprehensive review, recognizing Andragogy as a core, but not sole, perspective.

Despite its global prominence, Andragogy remains underutilized in emerging economies like Vietnam. Most Vietnamese organizations still rely on traditional, instructor-led training shaped by hierarchical cultures and resource limitations, creating a notable gap with international best practices (Holm, 2024). This gap is further widened by a lack of empirical research and professional development for trainers.

In the Vietnamese context, it is crucial to differentiate between Andragogy and the broader field of adult learning theory. While Andragogy, as developed by Knowles et al. (2005), emphasizes six core principles (need to know, self-concept, prior experience, readiness, orientation to learning, and motivation), adult learning theory encompasses a wider range of approaches, including experiential learning, transformative learning, and self-directed learning theories. Previous Vietnamese studies have often used the terms interchangeably, which risks obscuring important conceptual boundaries. Clarifying this distinction provides a stronger theoretical foundation for analyzing how workplace training in Vietnam can selectively adopt and adapt different elements of adult learning scholarship.

On Vietnam's rapid economic transformation and integration into the global economy, modernizing workforce training is now essential. Traditional approaches no longer suffice in cultivating the adaptability, critical thinking, and lifelong learning skills that today's workplaces demand. Addressing this gap, this review study seeks to clarify how Andragogy can empower Vietnamese organizations to build a more agile and competitive workforce in a fast-changing world. Guided by this rationale, the study is organized around the following research questions:

RQ1: What barriers, mediating factors, and opportunities most strongly shape the adoption of Andragogy in Vietnamese workplaces?

RQ2: How can a three-level framework (policy–organization–trainer/learner) be operationalized to improve design fidelity and training transfer in Vietnam?

2. Data and research methods

A systematic literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, covering peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and dissertations. The search targeted publications from 2021 to 2025, a period chosen to capture post-pandemic shifts in adult learning and workplace training when digitalization and new models of delivery accelerated globally. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation strategies were used to expand or refine search results, with sample queries such as:

- ("Andragogy" OR "adult learning theory" OR "adult education") AND ("workplace training" OR "professional development") AND (principle* OR concept* OR framework*)
- ("Andragogy" OR "adult learning") AND ("corporate training" OR "organizational learning") AND (model* OR strateg* OR best practice*)

- (“Andragogy”) AND (“workplace training”) AND (“Vietnam” OR “Vietnamese enterprise”) AND (barrier* OR challenge* OR implementation*)

The inclusion criteria consisted of:

- Publications in English.
- Empirical or theoretical studies focusing on adult learning or Andragogy in the workplace.
- Studies providing conceptual models, implementation insights, or evaluation data.
- At least partial relevance to Southeast Asian or developing country contexts.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Studies focused exclusively on formal adult education in schools or universities.
- Non-peer-reviewed blog posts, opinion pieces, or editorials.
- Publications lacking methodological transparency or relevant findings.

To strengthen reliability, this researcher conducted a quality appraisal consistent with PRISMA guidance. The researcher retained only sources demonstrating methodological transparency, peer-reviewed status, and plausible replicability. Each study was screened for clarity of design, appropriateness of data collection/analysis, and warrant for conclusions, ensuring that the synthesized evidence reflects both conceptual rigor and practical relevance.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Applications of Andragogy in Workplace Training

The recent literature consistently affirms the centrality of Andragogical principles in enhancing the effectiveness of workplace training for adult learners. Anderson (2021), through a case study of mid-career employees, demonstrates that integrating Andragogy into e-learning platforms fosters greater engagement, particularly when supported by both individual digital readiness and an enabling organizational infrastructure. Building on this, Tessier et al. (2021) show that adapting the Andragogical process model to fit organizational constraints enables the systematic design, delivery, and evaluation of training programs, resulting in high learner satisfaction and demonstrable outcomes. Expanding on the application of adult learning theory, Knowles (2021) emphasizes the importance of reflection, feedback, and skill practice in professional development and coaching, noting their positive impact on the transfer of learning and workplace performance. Similarly, Akinyooye and Fajimi (2022) conclude that aligning organizational training with Knowles’ principles leads to improved program effectiveness and enhanced employee productivity, underscoring the compatibility of Andragogy with workplace needs.

Innovative approaches such as gamification are also examined within this conceptual framework. Zainuddin et al. (2023) found that incorporating gamification elements based on Andragogical principles significantly increased motivation and learning outcomes among adults in online settings. This was further substantiated by Zainuddin et al. (2024), who developed and validated a robust scale for assessing gamification in adult online learning environments grounded in Andragogy. Beyond specific instructional strategies, Tan (2023) provides empirical validation for a holistic model wherein motivation, proactive attitudes, metacognitive skills, and enriched learning environments collectively foster lifelong learning among professionals. Likewise, Knapke et al. (2024) illustrate that Knowles’ framework can effectively guide the evaluation and design of interdisciplinary team science training, with

participant feedback strongly supporting Andragogical approaches.

The enduring relevance of Andragogy is further discussed by Clair (2024), who highlights its continued support within contemporary research and its practical value for instructional design, despite occasional theoretical critiques. Grus et al. (2025) extend these insights to the realm of continuing education, providing evidence-based recommendations for applying Andragogical principles in technology-driven learning formats. Findık (2025) reinforces that Andragogy fundamentally centers on self-directed, experience-based, and pragmatic learning tailored to the distinctive motivations of adult learners. Finally, Thomas and Harrison (2025) demonstrate how integrating Andragogical principles with the WHOLE Experience Framework can advance inclusive faculty development and foster diversity practices, particularly benefiting nontraditional adult learners.

Collectively, these studies establish a cohesive body of evidence supporting the application of Andragogy in workplace training. They illustrate not only the theoretical soundness of the approach but also its practical adaptability across diverse organizational contexts and evolving educational technologies.

3.2. International Approaches in Workplace Training

The international literature offers robust evidence of how Andragogical principles and self-directed learning theories have been operationalized to enhance both organizational and individual outcomes in workplace training. Rivers and Winner (2021) demonstrate that the integration of adult learning theory within human resource development (HRD) initiatives not only aligns learning processes with organizational purposes but also fosters individual development through a self-directed, learner-centric approach. Building upon this, van Heerden (2022) developed a comprehensive framework for online corporate training rooted in adult learning theories, highlighting the importance of self-directedness, relevance, prior experience, perceived usefulness, and a supportive organizational learning environment. This model illustrates how theoretically-informed design can address the evolving needs of adult learners in the digital age.

Addressing the imperative to support disadvantaged workers, Hwang and Yoon (2023) advocate for advancing workplace learning theories and strengthening collaboration between adult education and HRD disciplines. Their review underscores the need for research-informed practice, especially in contexts of socioeconomic inequality. Mughal (2023) provides empirical support for the efficacy of learner-centered, collaborative models such as the 70:20:10 instructional design, which significantly improves training transfer and organizational learning effectiveness by emphasizing experiential and social learning alongside formal instruction. In contexts of organizational change and instability, Wang and Gordon (2023) argue that the ability to understand and apply Andragogical and self-directed learning theories is critical for workforce training and adaptation. Their analysis suggests that organizations embracing these paradigms are better positioned to navigate uncertainty and drive continuous improvement.

Several studies confirm the positive impact of embedding Andragogical principles directly into corporate training programs. Bahrani (2024) reports marked improvements in employee engagement, satisfaction, and long-term skill retention, while Yuliani et al. (2024) demonstrate that advanced training for early childhood educators structured around Andragogy leads to substantive gains in professional knowledge and skills. Expanding into public service organizations, Viterouli et al. (2025) find that integrating self-directed learning principles into HRD management enhances employee motivation, engagement, and ongoing skill development. Meanwhile, Boon and Brinkerhoff (2025) show a case where management training, grounded in adult learning theory and delivered through innovative blended methods,

resulted in high participant engagement, successful skill transfer, and measurable organizational impact.

Collectively, these studies reveal that international models grounded in Andragogical and self-directed learning theories offer versatile and effective strategies for workplace training. Their consistent emphasis on learner agency, experiential learning, and contextual relevance sets a foundation for designing and implementing workplace education that is both impactful and adaptable across diverse organizational environments.

3.3. Andragogy in Vietnam: Applications, Barriers, and Opportunities

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Andragogy in Workplace Training: International and Vietnamese Perspectives

Dimension/Aspect	International Practice	Vietnamese Context
Dominant training models	Learner-centered, participatory, Andragogical; approaches common	Instructor-led, hierarchical, less blended/digital participatory; some pilot learner-centered programs
Barriers	Socioeconomic gaps, digital divide, organizational readiness (but often less severe)	Hierarchical culture, lack of empirical research, resource constraints, risk aversion
Opportunities	Tech integration, cross-sector collaboration, strong research base	Digital platform adoption, policy interest, international partnerships
Empirical research	Robust, large-scale, theory-driven studies	Limited, mostly small-scale or case studies
Outcomes/evidence	Demonstrated gains in motivation, skill retention, learning	Early evidence of improved organizational motivation, skills, but impact not yet widespread

Source: Synthesized by the researcher based on international studies and Vietnam-focused sources

The application of Andragogical principles in Vietnamese workplace training remains a developing field, shaped by both local innovation and persistent structural barriers. While the international literature strongly confirms the value of adult learning theories for organizational effectiveness (Dashew & Gayeski, 2023; Holton et al., 2025), the practical adoption of Andragogy within Vietnamese enterprises is still emergent and often uneven.

Holm (2024), for example, demonstrates that integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and flexible, work-oriented education models can foster productive vocational training cooperation between Finland and Vietnam, yet also highlights the legal, financial, and cultural complexities facing such cross-national efforts. Most Vietnamese organizations, particularly outside the multinational sector, continue to rely on traditional, instructor-centered training paradigms. Deeply embedded cultural norms, including hierarchical structures, deference to authority, and a general reluctance to embrace risk, frequently inhibit the implementation of self-directed and participatory learning central to Andragogy.

These cultural traits not only restrict open dialogue but also interact with structural and technological factors. For example, limited digital infrastructure and trainer competence can magnify hierarchical dynamics by reducing opportunities for self-directed learning. Organizational risk aversion further discourages experimentation with participatory methods. Together, these elements form a multi-layered barrier system, suggesting that interventions must simultaneously address cultural, technological, and human-capital dimensions rather than focusing on any single factor in isolation.

Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs of change. Vietnamese HRD professionals and policymakers are increasingly recognizing the importance of aligning workplace training with adult learning principles. Recent pilot programs and empirical studies in urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi provide early evidence that learner-centered approaches can improve employee motivation, accelerate skill acquisition, and enhance problem-solving capabilities. However, these initiatives remain isolated, with most evidence limited to small-scale projects or descriptive case studies, reflecting the nascent stage of Andragogical practice nationwide.

Reviewing both international and Vietnamese research reveals several persistent barriers: hierarchical management cultures, resource constraints, and a notable shortage of large-scale, empirical studies on the long-term impacts of Andragogical training in Vietnam. These factors leave policymakers and practitioners with limited evidence for effective, context-sensitive implementation. At the same time, emerging opportunities are evident, the growth of digital learning platforms, international partnerships, and ongoing educational reforms are expanding avenues for innovative practice and experimentation.

3.4. Discussion

This conceptual review reaffirms the ongoing relevance of Andragogy as a foundational framework for adult learning in workplace settings. Knowles’ six principles remain conceptually robust and empirically supported, especially in advanced economies where learner-centered and participatory training are widely practiced. However, the Vietnamese context reveals distinctive causal barriers and mediating factors that shape the extent to which Andragogical principles can be applied.

A key finding as seen above is the persistent gap between international best practices and current training approaches in Vietnam. While multinational organizations have piloted Andragogy-based programs with encouraging results, most domestic enterprises continue to rely on traditional, instructor-led models. This reflects enduring cultural norms of hierarchy and deference to authority, which lower psychological safety and suppress learner voice – two conditions essential for self-directed learning. In addition, resource constraints and limited organizational readiness further restrict experimentation with participatory methods. These effects are not isolated; they interact through mediating factors such as trainer competence, digital infrastructure, and organizational policy signals, which either reinforce or mitigate the influence of hierarchical culture.

This interaction suggests that barriers and opportunities must be analyzed together. For example, hierarchical culture (a barrier) reduces participation, but digital platforms (an opportunity) can provide alternative spaces for dialogue and collaboration, thereby offsetting the effect. Likewise, limited trainer capacity constrains learner-centered approaches, yet targeted professional development pathways can act as a mediator that converts organizational readiness into higher design fidelity and training transfer. Similarly, resource shortages can be partly compensated through international partnerships that bring in shared tools, curricula, and evaluation practices. In short, the causal dynamics show that barriers do not operate in isolation; they can be counterbalanced when opportunities are strategically leveraged.

Table 2. Hypothesized causal mapping of barriers, mediators, and opportunities for applying Andragogy in Vietnam. Source: Synthesized by the researcher

Barriers	Mediating Factors	Opportunities	Anticipated Outcome
Hierarchical culture, deference to authority	Leadership modeling; psychological safety	Digital platforms enabling dialogue	Enhances learner agency and participation

Barriers	Mediating Factors	Opportunities	Anticipated Outcome
Resource constraints (budget, time)	Digital learning-experience design	readiness; Blended microlearning formats	Expands access and reduces costs
Trainer skill gaps (lecture-heavy delivery)	Professional development pathways	Targeted upskilling in facilitation assessment	Strengthens fidelity to & Andragogical principles
Organizational aversion	risk Governance and alignment	KPI Policy incentives; pilot programs	Encourages experimentation and innovation
Fragmented research base	Shared metrics	evaluation International partnerships & sector studies	Supports development of cross-scalable, evidence-based practices

To make these relationships more explicit, this review proposes a three-level conceptual framework:

- Policy level (macro): Incentives, accreditation standards, and public-private partnerships create legitimacy and motivate enterprises to adopt learner-centered practices. Strong policy signals increase organizational readiness and investment.
- Organizational level (meso): Leadership commitment, participatory norms, and governance systems determine whether Andragogical principles are supported or blocked. This level translates external policy signals into concrete structures and resources.
- Trainer and learner level (micro): Trainer competence, digital literacy, and learner agency mediate the effectiveness of program design. Professional development pathways and microlearning strategies can strengthen this link.

Together, these three levels form an interdependent system: macro incentives enable meso readiness, which in turn empowers micro-level fidelity and transfer. The weakest level constrains the overall impact, underscoring the need for sequencing and cross-level alignment.

3.5. Limitations

First, the review prioritizes English-language sources, which may underrepresent Vietnamese-language evidence and practice notes. Second, the temporal focus (2021–2025) captures post-pandemic developments but may exclude earlier foundational studies beyond the seminal works already cited. Third, as a conceptual synthesis, the causal mapping is hypothesized and requires empirical testing (e.g., longitudinal and sector-comparative studies) to estimate effect sizes and boundary conditions.

4. Conclusion

This conceptual review study demonstrates that Andragogy remains a robust framework for adult learning while revealing context-specific constraints in Vietnam. It contributes theoretically by clarifying the causal interplay among cultural hierarchy, resource constraints, and organizational readiness; practically by proposing a three-level framework (policy, organization, trainer/learner) that specifies pathways for context-sensitive adoption; and methodologically by identifying the need for longitudinal, comparative, and sectoral research beyond descriptive case studies.

For policymakers and practitioners, the implication is clear: embedding Andragogy requires sequenced and aligned interventions – macro-level incentives that create legitimacy, meso-level reforms that build organizational readiness, and micro-level competence that

ensures design fidelity and training transfer. Embracing this structured, multi-level approach will be key to cultivating a workforce that is adaptable, motivated, and globally competitive.

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