
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

During the pandemic, under the conditions of a developing economy and low technological development, the education sector became one of the most vulnerable sectors in Georgia. Due to the situation at hand, both general and higher educational institutions in Georgia faced a serious challenge. The choice was twofold: either the learning process had to stop, or it had to continue in a safe environment. To continue the educational process, by moving to online teaching was for two years the only option.

The goal of our project is to evaluate the achievements, challenges, and outcomes in the transformative educational reality and offer recommendations to interested parties.

According to the research goal, the research objectives are:

1. To study the opinions of the members of the community (administration members, professors, teachers, instructors, junkers) about the positive and negative aspects of teaching and learning management under the new reality;
2. To analyze these opinions;
3. Based on the analysis, to develop a set of recommendations for transformative learning and teaching.

The research is conducted based on desk and field studies.

As a result of the research: a) local and international experiences in the management of transformative education were studied; b) the opinions of the community members were defined regarding transformative learning and teaching; c) a recommended framework for transformative learning and teaching was created, which will be available to all parties interested in educational issues.

Keywords: Transformative Learning, Mezirow's Theory, Junker, Study, Challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations High-Level Summits and Conferences 2022, despite technological provision, the pandemic created a significant gap in the history of the education system, which affected more than 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries on every continent.³

In developed countries, e-learning has been ongoing for decades. Accordingly, in such countries, it was much easier to plan and implement regulations regarding the transformation of education due to the pandemic. In Georgia, there was limited experience with distance learning courses in some higher educational institutions. However, the reality turned out to be much more difficult, and as a result, many unforeseen problems arose in the fully remote or hybrid teaching and learning process. These included: lack of technical resources, limited knowledge of how to use these resources, interruptions in access to the internet, the need for professional training, maintaining interest in learning under the new reality, and etc. It was now necessary to establish a unified, consistent, and effective management system, which remains relevant today and is the goal of modern scientific research.

MAIN PART

The phenomenon of transformation is a topic of interest for a number of disciplines (e.g., interpersonal psychology, consciousness studies, religious studies, etc.), but for several decades, the process of adult learning and education has been considered under the theory of transformative learning.

The theory of transformative learning is a human-made construct to describe the phenomenon, but it is still not perfect. Under the influence of the phenomenon that Jack Mezirow (1923 - September 24, 2014), an American sociologist and Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, tried to describe, people change significantly. In Mezirow's original research, women returned to school under the influence of deep social changes to prepare for future employment. He observed how higher education could promote positive social changes. The author used the analytical tools at his disposal, which helped explain the experiences of women, particularly in the critical evaluation of their assumptions, the construction of meaningful dialogues, the attempt to adopt new roles, and the understanding of their motives, etc.

This background is important for understanding how Mezirow described what he meant by the word transformation: it is "learning how we are engaged in our own history and how we go through it again". He focused on the frames of knowledge that we use to interpret our

³ Jack Mezirow & Associates. 2000. Learning as Transformation. Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p. 8. <https://www.un.org/en/content/summits2022/>

experiences, to understand the world around us, and to figure out who we are. Mezirow described transformations that occur in the fields of knowledge and that are "more inclusive, different, open, emotionally changing, and expressive." This helps us, as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision-makers, to "better control our lives"

The process of transformation involves integrating the conscious and unconscious parts of our psyche. This is triggered by focusing attention on our dreams and fantasies. A person needs to be able to understand their emotions and engage in creative activities.

The focus of the theory is on how we learn to negotiate and act independently with knowledge of our goals, values, feelings, and the meanings of events, and with their consideration, rather than based on what we have unconditionally and without criticism adopted from others. Mezirow distinguishes learning in childhood from learning in adulthood as follows:

Learning in childhood is formative, as it is created and developed based on trusted sources and socialization.

Learning in adulthood is transformative because adults are more capable of breaking down and seeing changes in their beliefs, feelings, and attitudes.

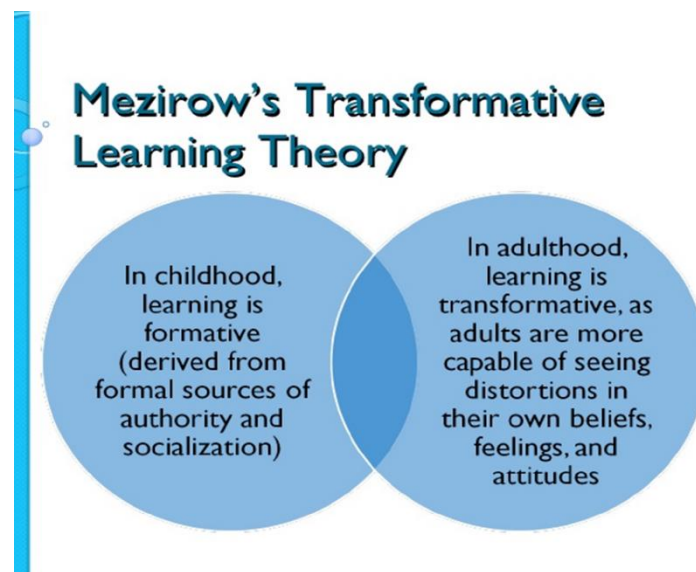


Diagram 1

The analysis conducted by the authors shows that none of the main elements of transformative learning are isolated. Moreover, each supports and strengthens the others, offering a more holistic approach to future research. These elements of learning should not only exist for transformative learning but also highlight a new and less explored element—context.

The main elements of transformative learning:

- 1) **The Role of Critical Reflection** - Describes how any transformative change hinders development and how critical reflection helps a person to reconsider their values or beliefs.
- 2) **The Role of Dialogue** - Transformative teaching can be based on dialogue that arises between the conscious and the unconscious. Because the critically reflective form of internal or external dialogue is identified by modern research, it can be considered a useful way to use the potential of personal transformative learning. The significance of the transformative concept becomes important for the learner through voluntary discourse with others.
- 3) **The Role of Individual Experience** - Mezirow described how we acquire most of our perspectives of meaning through cultural assimilation, where we learn things like what liberal, radical or conservative views represent in our culture. Stereotypes like what it means to be a man or a woman, and so on.
- 4) **Context** - According to Mezirow, contextual culture allows a person to dictate who, what, how, and when they learn. The goal of transformative learning is to encourage adults to reflect and, as a result, reassess the factors that reinforce this contextual culture.

Thus, a person undergoing transformation may encounter disorientation, self-examination, critical assessment of current assumptions, realization that these assumptions may no longer serve them best, exploration of options, attempts at new ideas or roles, and integration of a new perspective. People usually think and act based on what they have consciously or unconsciously absorbed from their surroundings. However, with the right educational resources, transformative learning can start by reinterpreting familiar concepts, exploring different perspectives, and ultimately adopting new approaches to actions and decisions.

Ultimately, Mezirow's transformative learning theory includes the following stages/phases, which are gathered in a ten-step system of a unified approach:

1. The disorienting dilemma;
2. Self-examination;
3. Critical assessment
4. Recognizing and identifying roles;
5. Exploration and testing;
6. Knowledge acquisition;
7. Creating an action plan;
8. Trying out roles;
9. Building competence;
10. Reintegration.

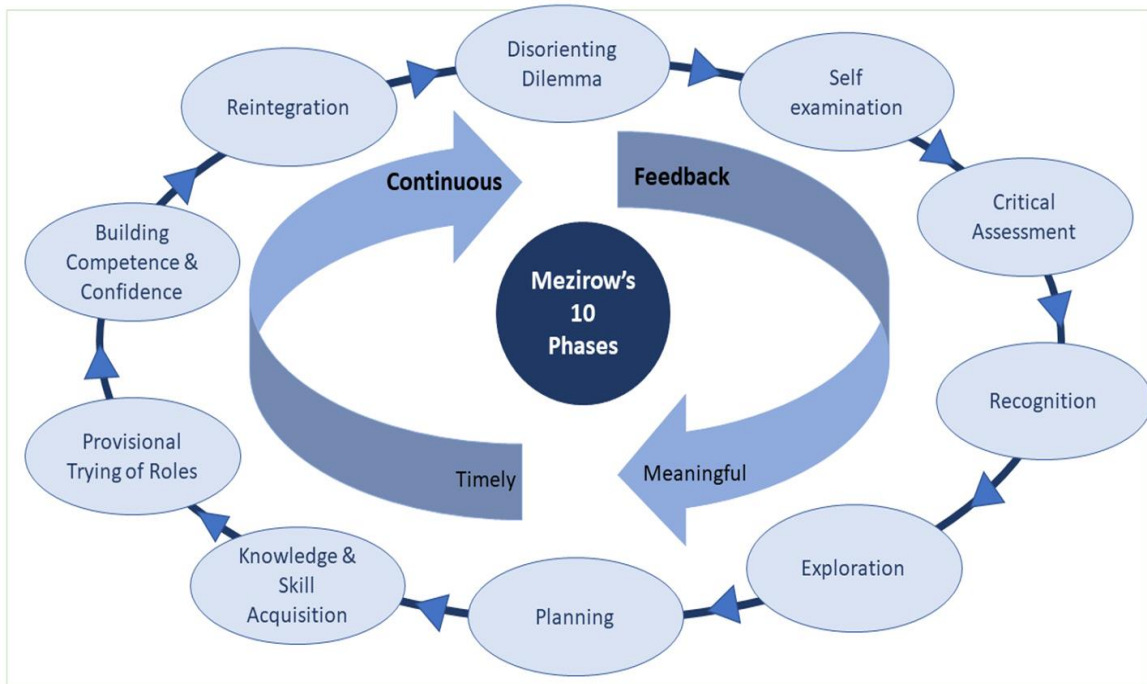


Diagram 2. The 10 Phases of Mezirow's Transformative Theory⁴

Research Methods

Between September (2022) and December (2023), to accomplish our research goals and objectives, we used the following research methods:

1. Desk Research, which included the following steps:

- Reviewing and analyzing the latest local and international scientific literature on transformative learning.
- Developing a questionnaire to study the opinions of a) management, professors, and instructors of the NDA and b) junkers regarding transformative learning and teaching.
- Soliciting an expert opinion on the quality of the questionnaire with a group of colleagues.

2. Field Research, which included the following steps:

- Conducting face-to-face interviews with NDA's management, professors, instructors, and junkers to determine existing experiences with transformative learning and teaching.
- Creating a database.
- Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data.

⁴ ŞAHİN İZMİRLİ O., KABAKÇI YURDAKUL I., Investigation of Prospective Teachers' Information and Communication Technology Integration Practices in Terms of Transformative Learning Theory, Educational Sciences Theory & Practice, January 2015, p. 2295, DOI: 10.12738/estp.2014.6.2076

Research Results

- Developing a framework of recommendations for transformative learning and teaching based on the analysis of literature and survey results.
- Sharing the framework of recommendations for transformative learning and teaching with Georgia's universities and all interested parties.

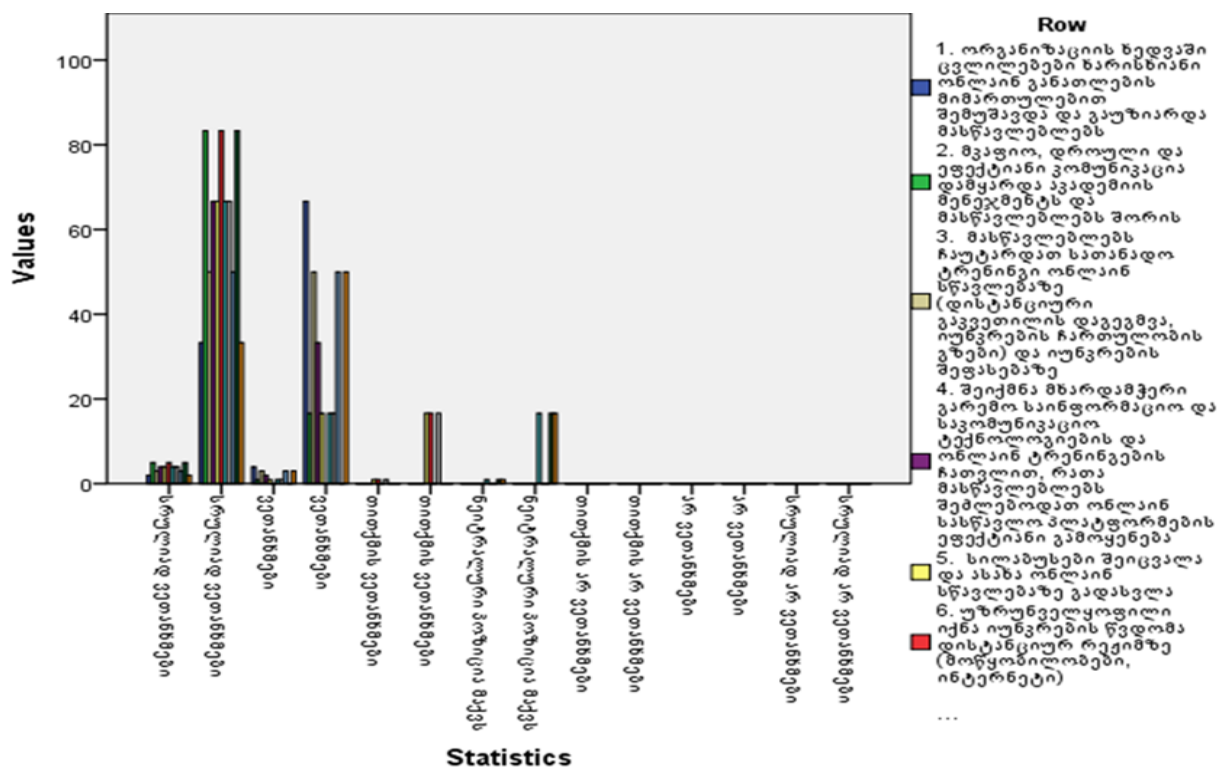
Empirical Analysis

For the analysis of the challenges and outcomes of managing transformative learning and teaching, a study was conducted at the NDA using quantitative methods—specifically, surveys involving 6 staff members and 101 junkers.

Staff Research Results

The respondents, 5 were male and 1 was female, aged between 36 and 45. One belongs to the academic staff, while five are administrative staff.

The questionnaire for the staff consisted of three groups of factors (closed questions with Likert scale responses):



- **Factor 1:** Immediate response to disruptions caused by COVID-19 (strategies for responding to university closures).
- **Factor 2:** Analysis of the transition to distance and hybrid teaching methods.
- **Factor 3:** Building resilience and sustainability in the Defense Academy.

Responses to 10 different questions assessed the response to disruptions caused by COVID-19. The strategy for responding to university closures included answers to 11 questions, categorized into 7 responses based on the Likert scale.

The majority of respondents are confident and believe that the academy successfully handled the following issues:

To assess the knowledge gained through distance learning, respondents answered 10 questions. Most of the academy staff believes that the knowledge gained through distance learning is:

- ✓ Reliable (trusted in the teaching-learning process).
- ✓ Updated.
- ✓ Suitable for modern demands.
- ✓ Interdisciplinary (connected to other skills and knowledge in different fields).
- ✓ Social (aligned with social sustainability goals).
- ✓ Adaptable, etc.

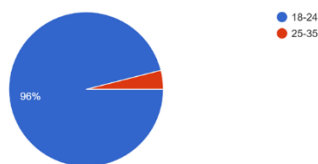
Junkers' Research Results

101 junkers participated in the research, including 97 aged 18 to 24, and 4 aged 25 to 35. Among the respondents, 89 were male, and 12 were female.

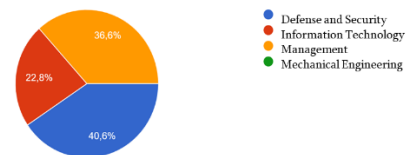
The junkers expressed their opinions on three issues:

- Coping with challenges created by the transition to online learning due to the pandemic.
- Immediate response to disruptions caused by COVID-19 (support for junkers).
- The final outcomes of the academy's activities (measuring the quality of knowledge, quality criteria).

Age
101 answers



Directions
101 answers



CONCLUSION

The research results revealed issues that, if addressed, would help the academy overcome challenges, strengthen resilience, and achieve sustainable development.

Respondents consider the knowledge acquired at the academy to be reliable, modern, adaptable to various realities, and aligned with the country's social sustainability goals. It is also easy to evaluate.

The vast majority of junkers believe that the learning experience gained during the pandemic is helpful, but 28% of them feel that it has not made them study more effectively. This observation gives us more incentive to base transformative education on certain steps so that knowledge becomes more practical, applicable to real-life situations, and usable; creating a sense of resilience at the individual level, within social groups, in society as a whole, and in the economy and national defense sectors. Consistently following the steps of Mezirow's theory in our teaching process will allow us to make the knowledge transfer system more consistent and structured, thereby improving the quality of knowledge acquired by the junkers.

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