PRIA

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Certificate Programme

International Dimensions of

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

Unit 5

National and Regional Experiences

Units of Certificate in International Dimensions of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

Unit 1 Historical Foundations of Adult Education

Unit 2 Philosophical Approaches in Adult Education

Unit 3 Role of International Organisations

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Introduction

Having gained insight into the newer models of adult education and the trends, and having learnt about the various organisations that were a part of adult education at the international level, we need a more critical analysis. This Unit provides a critical analysis of events at the regional and national levels in the sphere of adult education in terms of priorities, financing, policies, governance, administration and regional/national characteristics. As it is not possible to provide an extensive discussion of every region, examples of "current practice" are highlighted.

Learning Objectives

After reading this module, you should be familiar with:

- Various forms of national structuring of adult education
- The debate surrounding lifelong learning
- Issues of participation and access
- The issue of financing adult education

5.1 Structuring Adult Learning

In many countries, the organisation, governance and administration of adult learning are mainly the task of a partnership between the state and the voluntary sector. However, a private component, especially in the field of information technology (IT) education may also exist. In countries such as Japan, the main partnership is between the state and the business sector. The Gramscian idea that the state must be directly implicated in the education of its adult population seems to be embraced, at least at a theoretical level, by almost all countries (Belanger & Federighi, 2000). Although the government is primarily responsible for providing adult education, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and employers support continuing learning.

Typically, countries situate their offices of adult education in their ministry of education. In China, for example, the ministry of education has three specialised departments that deal with adult education: adult and technical education; higher education; and basic education. Full-time offices in charge of adult education have been placed under educational authorities at provincial, autonomous regional and municipal levels, as well as in prefectures, counties and townships. The Ministry of Education has several important partners, including:

- The Chinese Association of Science and Technology: It is responsible for education and training that offers scientific knowledge and extends applied skills among adults.

- The Chinese Association for Adult Education: Established in 1981, it is a massive academic social organization that publicises, organises and coordinates adult education activities, provides consultation, offers training, publishes educational material and carries out international exchanges. It joined the ICAE in 1983 and ASPBAE in 1988. Some affiliated research establishments exist under it, such as the Society for Anti-Illiteracy Campaign, the Society for Adult Higher Education, the Society for Workers Education in Enterprises, and the Society for Rural Adult Education. The Chinese Association of Workers' Education and the Chinese Association of Continuous Engineering Education are two other organisations that also work jointly with the association.

The other vital component of the Chinese adult education structure is embedded in the work of three major NGOs: the All-China Trade Union Federation, the All-China Women's Federation and the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Youth Leagues (CERNET, 2013).

At the same time, a large part of adult education work occurs outside the purview of ministries of education. Community health programmes, early childhood care training and environmental education courses and related skill training, to name a few, are often run, for example, by ministries of agriculture, health and child protection. There are no procedures, though, to track these programmes in a unified way and often there is lack of communication between various ministries that leads to duplication of effort and waste of resources. This is one of the organisational challenges presented to governments by decentralisation. On the one hand, various national authorities seek to contextualise adult education to increase the relevance of learning in view of local needs and to lessen central administrative burdens. On the other, decentralisation results in a great increase in coordination work if it is to avoid the pitfalls of miscommunication between various providers. This is why countries that have chosen the decentralisation route have had to create institutions dedicated to the role of managing communication between various components. Such institutions are also created to coordinate policy activity and attain policy coherence (as in the case of Sweden, which was noted in the previous unit). Among developing countries, it is also common to find that decentralisation policies are hampered by a culture of centralised decision making. This was certainly the case in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries where, after the dismantling of Communism, the initiative of creating structures dedicated to adult learning had a top-down character. In 1997, the heads of governments of eight CIS countries (Russian Federation, Belarus, Tajikistan, Armenia, Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Azerbaijan) signed the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Knowledge Dissemination and Adult Education, which led to the creation of the Interstate Committee, the main adult learning-policy lobbying body in the region (Malitikov & van de Coevering, 2002).

An interesting example of the structuring of adult education is found in Europe, which has the most integrated regional supranational structure. Structural events in higher education in Europe over the last two decades can be understood only in light of the unification process. Western European nation-states decided to start a process of transforming into "network states". Although this process began with the idea of "freedom of movement," it was implemented first in the economic sphere with the creation of a common market called the Schengen space, followed by the adoption of a unique currency – the Euro – in 1999. The Schengen space was created in 1985 but did not come into full force until 1995 when border checkpoints at internal borders were eliminated and the Schengen acquis was created, which subsequently became the community acquis, the body of common European legislation, including legislation that governs adult education. Despite these changes, there is no single European system of adult education; rather, different national strategies reflect historical, cultural, political and economic differences. The integration process did, however, lead to the creation of a supranational guiding system, its main role being to establish minimum standards and benchmarks of support and attainment (EAEA, 2006).

Traditionally, European states have limited their efforts to three main activities in the sphere of adult education:

- Sponsoring the initiatives and activities of independent bodies and institutions

- Establishing a legal basis for adult education and, more recently, lifelong learning

- Encouraging co-operation between different national and international organisations

5.2 The Controversy Surrounding Lifelong Learning

When the idea of lifelong learning was first introduced by UNESCO almost 40 years ago, it was favourably received. It was seen as an idea grounded in the humanistic tradition and linked to the expectation of a better society and higher quality of life. However, the idea lost momentum and did not resurface until the 1990s. This time, the concept led to controversy due to the divisive ways in which it was understood. These can be grouped in two main views.

The first view analyses the concept of lifelong learning within the framework of the economic theory of human capital. Opponents of this view warn that the concept could be steered toward serving liberal economic interests and a global free-trade market, a scenario in which business demands for workforce qualification would expand and lead to their increased spending on training. If the state were convinced to absorb and finance part of this demand for qualification and training, it might reduce what companies have to spend on training and thereby increase their profits. As Belanger & Federighi (2000) note:

"… business is increasingly demanding that the state pay for part of the costs of the theoretical and practical training of the working population and that it create counseling and support services for companies and individuals. Demand is likewise constantly rising for state co-operation in building new 'knowledge superhighways', the expensive new information and communication infrastructures widely demanded in particular by population groups involved in 'symbolic-analytic activity'. (p. 143)

More than reducing their training costs, the private sector may benefit in even more subtle ways, such as by having the state support the social costs of reduced job security. From this perspective, the primary aim of lifelong learning is to produce a "flexible" workforce that is able to retrain and easily migrate between occupations. The social costs of retraining are to be supported by the state, in the context of the reduced social responsibility of the business sector due to globalisation. By developing a European

conscience, that is, continental loyalties placed above national loyalties, such flexibility may even mean physical migration between job locations. In this critical view, the individualisation of learning transfers the blame for failure from the adult education system to the learner.

Proponents of the second view consider the first view of lifelong learning to be narrow and simplistically focused on economics; some believe it vilifies employers and the economy as agents of the capitalist exploitation of labour. In the second, alternative interpretation, the individualisation of learning is seen as a form of empowerment and liberation that leads to personal development and contributes to creating a good society. In Europe, the lifelong learning process is seen as a way to prepare people to be active European citizens, by developing a sense of belonging to a common social and cultural area (Jarvis, 2004).

Tension of another kind also surrounds the lifelong learning concept. Lifelong learning not only embraces all areas but also regards school, vocational training, university and adult education as equal components in a comprehensive system. By so doing, it challenges the traditional notion of education and raises many questions about the nature of curricula and the practical arrangements of delivery methods and the recognition and accreditation of learning that takes place away from an institutionalised provision.

The debate surrounding lifelong learning is not European in scope, but global. The position adopted by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) vis-à-vis lifelong learning takes a middle ground (EAEA, 2006). Although it acknowledges the critiques, it has chosen to endorse the term. Its official position is that viewing lifelong learning as right or wrong is not helpful; what is needed is the nurturing of a continuing, constructive and productive dialogue in which civic and social values and needs are balanced with economic needs and "the costs of lifelong learning for adults are properly allocated and carried between the different parties — the state, employers, and individuals" (p. 6). Of course, "proper allocation" may be a subject of debate for those with different philosophical and ideological views.

The discussion on the divisive perspectives of lifelong learning has been included in this Unit because over the past decade or so it was a central and continuing theme in European Union (EU) discourse. Indeed, it resulted in the European Year of Lifelong Learning (EYLL) in 1996 and the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning that was issued by the European Commission in 2000 (EAEA, 2006).

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Antonio Gramsci: On Intellectuals

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist who was imprisoned during the Fascist reign under Mussolini, had written a series of notebooks called 'The Prison Diaries'. In this series, he proposed a theory on intellectual and society that has hugely influenced many theorists after him.

Gramsci's pioneering theory was that of 'organic intellectuals'. This means that every class has its own set of intellectuals who are ideologically oriented towards that particular class. Thus, he says that although modern day thinkers claim unbiasedness, they do promote a certain stream of thought that strengthens the hegemony (ideological domination) of the ruling classes.

Gramsci believed that this hegemony can be fought by the ideological assimilation of traditional intellectuals into the working class struggle as well as through the elaboration of organic intellectuals from the proletariat itself (Gramsci, 1989).

To Gramsci, modern day education needs to imbibe the union of manual work with intellectual labour. This was politically charged as a move to recognise that all people have intellectual capacities even though they may not 'in society have the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1989, p. 115).

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What have been the AE policies in your country? How has it helped in the process of social inclusion? Has it looked at the rights of indigenous/tribal populations?

5.2.1 A European Area of Lifelong Learning

The 2000 Memorandum on Lifelong Learning formed the basis for a conference and a pan-European consultation process in 2001 that included EU-candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The result was a programmatic document for the future. This document identified six key priorities (Commission of the European Communities, 2001):

- New basic skills for all (a broadened view of literacy)
- More investment in human resources
- Innovation in teaching and learning
- Valuing learning
- Rethinking guidance and counseling
- Bringing learning closer to home

Although meant to give direction for future development, the document was too vague to have a practical impact on legislation and funding. This is an inherent challenge of such an endeavour: it should adopt language that is broad enough to embrace national and regional specifics and cultures but, at the same time, be focused enough to set directions. Nonetheless, this document still conveyed four clear objectives for achieving adult education with a European dimension:

1) Personal fulfillment;
2) Active citizenship;
3) Social inclusion; and
4) Employability/adaptability.

5.2.2 Trends in Legislation and Financing

The European norm is that national laws with a bearing on adult learning are part of other policy areas. This is the case in the northern and western nations of Europe, where adult education is more institutionalised and has a long tradition. In southern and eastern European countries, adult learning often takes place in work or other social settings, rather than in specific institutions, which gives adult education little visibility. (Some parts

of Germany have laws specific to adult education but these are exceptions.) Political responsibility for adult learning is fragmented between various structures, especially in the federal countries, with the exception of England (where responsibility for education and training rests with one ministry) and the Nordic countries (where coordination for legislative purposes has been well settled) (EAEA, 2006).

Regulations tend to fall into four categories:

1) Offering public financial support to providers;
2) Offering financial incentives to learners;
3) Establishing entitlements to educational leave; and
4) Establishing a framework for recognition of prior non-formal or informal learning.

Unlike the case of higher education, in adult education there is no political will to harmonise national policies. The idea is even considered inappropriate on the basis that all legislation must take into account a state's available facilities and providers, financial resources, and overall socio-economic and market conditions. Many of the newly integrated European states do not have the necessary policies, frameworks, institutional structures and administrative systems, nor can they provide adequate financial support for adult education. The ex-socialist countries that are now part of the EU had very similar adult education systems, which were based on three pillars: popular universities, unions and culture houses.

Financing of adult education is the responsibility of national governments. Recent data from national budgets have suggested that spending growth has slowed since 2001 (EAEA, 2006).

5.2.3 Participation Trends in Adult Learning throughout Europe

According to studies conducted by Eurostat (2003), participation has the following overall characteristics:

- It is four times higher in non-formal and informal learning than in formal learning
- It declines with age
- It declines with the social situation
- It is lower in rural areas than in urban areas
- It is lower for ethnic minorities than for the native population

5.2.4 Adult Education and Social Inclusion

A major preoccupation for adult education throughout Europe is the social inclusion of disadvantaged communities and categories. These have been identified as individuals with low basic skills; adults in low-skilled employment; immigrants; refugees; people with disabilities and long-term illnesses; the long-term unemployed; some minority ethnic groups, including the Roma; ex-prisoners; the homeless; drug addicts; and some groups of women and older people. Many countries employ adult education in their welfare policies as a means to increase employability by emphasising vocational education and training.

Adding to already existing challenges of social inclusion are an ageing population and immigration. Immigration has massive implications for adult learning, because new residents require knowledge and skills to manage in their new country, even those who have high skills on entry. Immigration numbers have grown considerably over the last decade and account for three-quarters of the net growth of the EU-15.[1] Yet, although almost all EU countries have implemented programmes for some form of social inclusion, little progress has been reported. A recent report of the EAEA (2006) contended that "…adult education in Europe has lost its valuable tradition in as much as it came to life and became a diverse activity in Europe as a tool of civil society-based voluntarism and community and personality development of democratic society."(p. 55)

In this module, Europe has been used as an exponent of the industrialised world. In a broad sense, it can be argued that recent adult education trends in the European space are duplicated throughout the industrialised world, or the North, as it is called in many circles. We believe that in terms of adult education characteristics, the level of development, rather than geographical proximity, is the decisive factor that leads to commonalities between countries and regions. As such, there are more commonalities between, say, Germany and Singapore, than between the United States and Mexico, even though the latter two share a border

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[1] EU-15 refers to European Union before May 1st, 2004, when it had fifteen member   states. After that another ten countries joined the Union. As of July 1st, 2013 the EU has 28 member states.

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Existence of multiplicity of knowledge systems in a 'Knowledge Democracy'

Along with the rise of global phenomena like industrialisation, colonisation, globalisation etc., there arose a simultaneous rise and domination of a particular system of knowledge. This hegemony and the acceptance of an inherent superiority of rational-scientific thought have only strengthened with time.

No doubt, a lot of material progress was possible only due to many innovations spurred by the scientific and industrial revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries. But, the problem lies in how these developments have undermined the validity of already existent forms of indigenous, community-based knowledge.

Although knowledge democracy was a term that has been in existence for a few decades, it has increasingly been tending towards a medium of training people to suit the current neo-liberal economy. To revert this movement, there has been a move to form a knowledge democracy where different knowledge systems are seen as equally valuable and not placed in a hierarchy (Hall, 2013).

People who have worked with communities have increasingly come to appreciate the knowledge that people from communities have about the problems that they face (Tandon & PRIA, 2014). Thus the move needs to be towards AEPs that inculcate these factors and not merely look at people's qualification from a 'white, male, Euro-centric' paradigm.

The epistemology of Western science, that looks at problems individually and which thrives on intense specialization needs to be questioned. Ancient systems of knowing, that have holistic approaches and place the community at its centre may prove helpful in resolving many crises of the modern world (Muñoz & Wangoola, 2014).

It is when this integration happens that we can say knowledge is truly democratic. The process will not only lead to social justice, but also cognitive justice where democratic spaces for expression are available to all (Hall, 2013)

THINK TANK

AE is seen as a means of operationalising lifelong learning in the industrialised countries. Does such an approach benefit the traditionally marginalised communities in these regions like the Roma of East and Central Europe, the Aborigines of Australia etc.? Do you think modern approaches to AE include vast amounts of indigenous knowledge possessed by these communities?

5.3 The Policy Divide

The lack of shared understanding of adult education and lifelong learning, coupled with diverse social, political and economic contexts, has led to a policy-discourse divide that runs particularly along the lines between industrialised and developing countries (UNESCO, 2003). While industrialised countries and regions are largely preoccupied with the operationalisation of lifelong learning in pursuit of a knowledge society, developing countries tend to focus on basic education for all, especially literacy. Overall, very few of these countries ground their educational priorities in the lifelong learning paradigm; thus, the broad scope of adult learning is reflected in the policies of only a small number of countries and regions.

One such country is Canada, where not only has the idea of lifelong learning been around for some 30 years but it has also mainly been attributed a humanistic view, even though the same concerns about the various terms have existed. In a report about lifelong learning as public policy in Canada, MacNeil (2002) asserted that, despite the large debate about it, the concept is not well understood by policy makers. Indeed, they often equate it with adult education because the concept of lifelong learning is so broad that it encompasses everything, which is not useful from an operational point of view. According to MacNeil, the dominant purpose of lifelong learning policy in Canada is to develop human capital in order to build a flexible and competent labour force, presumably to ensure a strong economy. However, it is not the single purpose — the government of Canada has strongly articulated a sense that lifelong learning is a force of social development (MacNeil, 2002).

5.4 Financing and Participation

5.4.1 Financing

Historically, adult education has suffered from inadequate financing almost everywhere in the world. One reason for this might be its lack of visibility. Although adult learning is part of a wide range of sectors from agriculture and labour to health and the environment, there continues to be little recognition of the way learning substantially contributes to attaining the objectives in these domains of activity. The lack of systematic and comprehensive monitoring that cuts across various spheres of activity is a common feature worldwide, one consequence of which is the difficulty of reporting accurately on investments made in adult learning. The financial aspect of adult education is further complicated by the work of volunteers who contribute their time and effort, factors not easily quantified.

A pattern that cuts across all regions is the financial involvement of state authorities in collaboration with the private sector. A second major source of financing may come from international co-operation. At a national level, NGOs play an important role in mobilising funding through fund-raising.

5.4.2 Participation

Due to adult education and lifelong learning's breadth and inherent lack of visibility, it is difficult to ascertain the numbers of people who actively participate in it. Very few countries can provide statistical data and even those are only estimates; existing data reveal that participation rates vary among diverse population groups and even among different regions of the same country.

In the Nordic and Caribbean countries, it seems that more women take advantage of learning opportunities, while in the Middle East, men outnumber women (UNESCO, 2003). However, there is a global trend toward increased participation of women in learning opportunities.

An example of women's increased participation in adult education activities is the Women's Empowerment Through Literacy and Livelihood Development (WELLD) project in India. Its overall goal was to develop an effective educational and asset-building model for women in India; to achieve this; the project took a holistic approach, dealing with the model's educational and socio-economic aspects at the same time. The project's specific goals were to prepare women, first, to master basic literacy skills and, then, acquire the skills to manage an independent savings and credit group. Financial support for this project came from the Ford Foundation (PRIA, 2002). In the next Unit, we look at the WELLD project from the perspective of gender.

To this point in the course, examples have been drawn from upper- or middle-income countries and regions. However, the greatest need for adult education is in low-income countries, where adult basic literacy remains the priority. As Oduaran (2000) aptly remarked: "For Africa, all the hue and cry about globalisation, post-modernism, post-Fordism, among a host of other concepts, make very little sense. For Africa, our concerns are relatively different. We are concerned about the growing incidence of HIV/AIDS, homelessness, hunger, illiteracy, poverty, marginalization, exclusionism, inept political leadership, corruption, growing rates of crimes, pandemic and endemic diseases, political instability, irrelevant education, socioeconomic immobility and emasculated economic systems." (p. 6)

According to Omolewa (2000), the language barrier is another factor that contributes to the urgent need for a vibrant adult-learning programme, with Nigeria alone having over 400 major language groups.

Another regional characteristic is the lack of agreement on borders established arbitrarily during the colonial past and the resulting military conflicts.

Due to the many significant problems requiring funding in Africa, adult education is not commonly on the priority lists of African governments, with a few exceptions, such as in Botswana (Omolewa, 2000).

African adult educators face daunting challenges: a lack of funding or dependency on foreign funding (hence, lack of control); an ongoing military conflict in many cases; and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in addition to all the social problems that derive from abject poverty. It is no wonder that eradicating illiteracy in such conditions is an extremely difficult and ambitious project and that there is still much to be done to reach the goal.

In a letter to adult education workers, Paulo Freire (1990) stated:

"To put it in a nutshell, an adult literacy programme will only succeed in being part of, and making a real contribution to, the reconstruction process to the extent that it is undertaken and perceived as a political act and an act of knowledge, closely linked to production and health, and not merely as a mechanical exercise in memorizing syllables and words." (p. 124)

Summary

Looking at various examples from different parts of the world and their policies on adult education gives us a clear idea of what are the current trends popular in this field. Having looked at the situations in places like China, Europe and Canada, we have also seen how social and political conditions in these regions shape their policies on adult education.

Trends in financing and participation have been affected by the structural changes many of the young economies have undergone in tandem with the diktats of the World Bank and other international organisations. To this effect, we have also seen why adult education in Africa needs to deal with questions of hunger, illiteracy and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, almost unheard of in many other parts of the world.

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