

Adult Learning and Lifelong Learning and their Socio-Economic Contribution

Ahmed Hamdan Lafta
University of Baghdad

Jasim Mohammed Salih
Department of Agribusiness and Information System, Faculty of Agriculture, University Putra Malaysia

Norsida binti Man
Department of Agribusiness and Information System, Faculty of Agriculture, University Putra Malaysia

Bahaman Abu Samah
Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, University Putra Malaysia

Raja Nerina binti Raja Yusof
Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Management

Nolila binti Mohd Nawi
Department of Agribusiness and Information System, Faculty of Agriculture, University Putra Malaysia

Abstract

This paper provides a synthesis learning from in adult learning literature. The paper starts by looking the rationale for adult learning which has its roots on informal learning. It offers in a nutshell some benefit of learning from adult education perspective. The paper provides a substantiation of a wide-ranging perspective of learning that accommodate social aspect of life than a narrowly understood classroom learning for certification. This paper intends to identify the immediate results of learning, offer the understanding of how learning influence on outcomes and offer practical examples from previous research. Last but not the least, the paper concludes by highlighting the wide understanding of learning from an adult education perspective.

Keyword: adult learning, lifelong learning, social networking, socio-economic

Introduction

Adult education is defined by The 1997 Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning as the “entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society”. Adult education takes different forms (formal, non-formal, informal). The UNESCO identifies and provides different places and setups where adult education can conducted among others: community learning centres, folk high schools, and on-the-job, evening classes. It also articulates different purposes for provision of adult education and adult learning such as; general, vocational and at different levels from primary to postdoctoral, adult basic education, continuing education, higher education. Thus term adult education in this regard for many years repeatedly been substituted by adult learning giving more prominence on the demand than on the provision. This difference is, however, controversial and often a reconciliation is reached by merging and using concurrently the two terms as adult learning and education.

Participation in adults to education programmes and learning is a necessary feature of the right to education and accelerates the issue of the right to get involved in political, socio-economic, cultural activities, creative art and technical life. The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning view the concept of adult learning as a powerful model for fostering naturally sustainable development, for promoting democratic awareness, impartiality, gender equality and equity, and technological, and socio-economic development, and for building a peace and tranquility in world in which conflicts can be resolved through dialogue and a fair justice in a society. Adult learning can resolve the racial and discrimination give meaning to humanity.

Learning from Adult Education Perspective

It is now widely accepted that adult learning has more benefit to learners than any other types of training. It is argued that for example job-related adult training has more profitable benefit (Blundell, Dearden and Meghir, 1996; Feinstein, Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles, 2004) than does formal schooling. Thus, to reduce learning to

merely formal schooling or training offered formal educational institutions is narrow view of what counts as training. Research has shown that, attaining trainings for women has improved their participation into labour market (Jenkins, Vignoles, Wolfe, & Galindo Rueda, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). In the same way, participation in adult training has also influenced positive behavioural on adults who were once smoker, their attitudes on exercise and satisfaction of life (Feinstein and Hammond, 2004). In this regards, Nonetheless, a comprehensive explanation of learning should not just be limited to adult learning, but learning that is permanent or rather lifelong learning.

The idea of broad definition of learning does not discard other form of training, but the idea is it has to encompass every form of training ranging from provision of qualification, basic skills vocational skills academic skills as well as adult training. The assumption behind this discussion is that, adult training matters a lot and to ignore this category of training, underestimates the roles that adult education plays on the life of individuals, communities and nations at large. We would therefore like to argue that to put more emphasis only on accomplishment and attaining of qualifications is not correct.

Learning of Outcomes

Generally learning offers three characteristics of results which a different but mutually related, they are beliefs, competence and skills, social networks and qualifications. This section will identify these outcomes and discuss them in wider perspective.

Beliefs, competence and skills

From human capital point of view, education and training is an understood to be an investment that leads to increased productivity in the labour market through improvement of skills and competencies which are of worth in the manufacture of goods and provision of services (Reynolds, 1997). These features comprise a variety of self-concept, intellectual skills, social and communication skills and technical and vocational skills. For adult learners, flexibility and adjustment in the face of adversity is very crucial (Schoon and Bynner, 2003). This feature has been not a result of inborn characteristics, but rather a process training as a result of significant difficulty or need to change (Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, 2000). This has an impact on how adult learners and so for educators it is prerequisite to make sure that certain adult learners' skills and competences are developed (Kennedy, 2002). In this regard, adult learners' skills, competencies and beliefs are structures of the individual that that can impact their lifelong learning in very complex ways and with very important consequences for learning outcomes.

Social Networking

Social networks are distinctive to skills, capabilities and philosophies in that a network is not a feature of an individual, but a feature of society (Hammond & Feinstein, 2006). In fact, social networks have been conceptualised by many theorists as entailing of diverse forms of social capital (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995). Social networking has been a source for adult learners and support as they offer strength and compatible as sources for learning (Arfaa & Wang, 2013). In essence social capital as outcome makes stronger homogeneousness of a particular group. Connecting social capital in this regards, means that relationships in society has to transcend social, ethnic, cultural and geographical boundaries. This includes also how individuals, groups and societies relate in terms of power and resources sharing. For social networking includes communication through social media of which adoption and inclusion of such tools in everyday life for adult learners brings the chance of unceasing connectivity for a current knowledge society in search of information (McCarthy, 2010; Solomon & Schrum, 2010). As such, social networking is very essential feature of the adult educational experiences as it encompasses engagement of individuals and their personalities in collective experiences of learning and development.

Qualifications

This concept evidently relates more readily to vocational qualifications where, in many cases, it is important to know that someone is capable of competently carrying out particular tasks (Karmel, 2007; Young, 2003). In this regards, qualifications are categorised independently here for the reason that they are not a feature of an adult learner, they are something that adult learner receives and owns and can apply as a signal in the labour market or as a signal to themselves about their own capabilities. While adult learners are self-directed, have experience as learners and have "life experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning". Knowles (1984, p.12), college or polytechnic learners are usually seeking qualifications that will grant them entry to employment, workplace-based learners do not. As they are already in the workforce, they tend to be most often concerned with promotion or a change in career direction."

As far as adult education is concerned, individuals earn qualifications from some experiences of learning and not from others and those qualifications are then very important in their interactions in social networks and in economic transactions. Qualifications can also reproduce individuals' achievement, so they make available a signal of the capability to learn, as well as indicating persistence and the ability to complete tasks or assignments. For others, qualifications may also be summary displays of learning but they do not equate to the learning experience (Karmel, 2007). This means that certain skills particularly the vocational training qualifications may also point toward acquisition of skills, particularly for vocational qualifications.

Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning

This section reviews empirical literatures that focus on whether education has underlying impact on broader outcomes and the extent of its influence. Most of this evidence focuses on highest qualifications attained or years of schooling as measures of education. For this reason, this part correspondingly, reviews the evidence on the impact of adult education on broader outcomes.

It is without any reasonable doubt, empirical evidence have demonstrated that education is a powerful predictor of extensive outcomes of issues such as personal health, lifestyles, wellbeing, children's education, parenting, acquisition of information and effective use of information, family planning, voting and civic participation, saving, adapting to technological change, among others (Feinstein, Sabates, Anderson, Sorhaindo, & Hammond, 2006; Grossman, 2005; Haveman and Wolfe, 1984). In this regards, this section provide some example of the impact of education and the extent to which to which is computed.

The influences among social capital, human capital, and learning have not gone overlooked by researchers of adult education and learning (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Schuller & Field, 1998). In 20th century for example the, OECD (2001) reported on an empirical analysis of "the relationships between learning (in its different methods) and economic performance at the regional level" (p. 31). As far as OECD is concerned, the core research question was: "What is the importance of social capital in determining the processes of learning?" The answer to this question, in general terms, is that a "lack of social capital impedes learning and economic success" (p. 100).

In essence, the relationships between learning, social capital, and human or intellectual capital have been put forward in different way (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Fevre, Rees, & Gorard, 1999; Field & Spence, 2000). However, according to According to the Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) the social capital model the value available to the individuals and the interaction between them is determined by two factors: first, the match between the desired outcome and the collective knowledge and identity resources available to the interaction, second, and the nature of the interaction itself. Central to the social capital is the interaction among people. The effectiveness with which resources are obtained is judged by the disposition that occurs within the interaction and the conditions under which the interaction takes place.

On the other hand, Chevalier and Feinstein (2006) first appraised a causal consequence of education on reducing the risk of depression during adulthood and then simulated that policies that took women without qualifications to Level 2 in the U.K. would lead to a reduction in their risk of adult depression at age 42 from 26% to 22%, that is a reduction of 15%; this population represents 17% of depressed individuals. Assuming that this reduction was constant throughout the working life, and with an estimated cost of depression of £9 billion a year (Thomas & Morris, 2003), the benefit of education would be to reduce the total cost of depression for the population of interest by £200 million a year.

Similarly, available evidence have discovered that in United States an additional year of education lowers the probability of dying in the next 10 years between 1.3 to 3.6 percentage points (Lleras-Muney, 2005). In this case it was assumed that term of life expectancy, for people in the USA in 1960, one more year of education increased life expectancy at age 35 by as much as 1.7 years. In the same way, substantiation from Sweden recommends that some of the outcome of education on health was mediated by income, but not all (Spasojevic, 2003). In fact, education produced considerably better effects through channels other than income. In monetary terms, the impact of education on health was translated into an increase in income that ranged between \$1,700 to \$17,700 dollars.

So far, turning to the evidence on the influence of adult learning, Feinstein and Hammond (2004) carried out primary analysis of longitudinal group studies in England to consider whether experiences of adult learning are related to changes in adult life. In this study, the researchers used 1958 group to examine the contribution of adult learning to a wide range of health and health behaviours. The analysis was showed that changes between the ages of 33 and 42 years in life outcomes for adults, controlling for their development and context up to age

33. The results indicated that involvement in adult learning had positive effects on changes in smoking exercise taken, and life satisfaction. However, the study also revealed that there is little change in behaviours during mid-adulthood, and relative to this baseline, participation in adult learning is therefore an important motivation for behavioural change.

Another study was carried out by Feinstein and Hammond (2004). This study showed that being involved in adult learning had positive effects on tolerance related to skin colour (these adults had no racial discrimination), dictatorial attitudes, political distrust, political interest, number of memberships, and behaviour to vote. Feinstein and Hammond used four indicators of adult learning, courses taken leading to qualifications, courses taken not leading to qualifications, work-based learning and leisure courses. Feinstein and Hammond discovered that there are benefits for all four types of courses analysed, with the possible exception of vocational courses leading to certification. Academic courses appear to be particularly important in relation to changing social and political attitudes, but taking time-out and occupational training courses has effects on a much wide-ranging range of results than doing either vocational or academic courses leading to accreditation.

Furthermore, works on the other areas of adult learning made the connection concerning youthful experiences of learning and youth development to adult health outcomes and whether adult education could change earlier patterns (Hammond and Feinstein, 2006). The study demonstrated that those who participated in adult learning have positive transformations in wellbeing, optimism, efficacy (apparent control over significant factors) and self-rated health. The extents to which they build relationships are small, yet they are significant. The adjusted odds for transformed well-being are between 1.2 and 1.3 times greater for those who took courses than they are for those who did not. Associations were not found between participation in adult learning and sustained or transformed satisfaction with life so far, depression, excessive drinking or obesity. What we highlight about these results is that adult learning can transform poor self-efficacy to good self-efficacy for those who were engaged in school but didn't get qualifications. It can also increase self-efficacy for those who were disengaged from school and left without qualifications. In conclusion, amongst those adults who did learning between the ages of 33 and 42 we observed substantial transformations in their health outcomes.

Some studies have also examined the connection between the education of parents and the development of the children (Feinstein, Duckworth & Sabates, 2004), education and social cohesion (Green, Preston & Sabates, 2003), participation in post compulsory schooling and engagement in crime (Feinstein and Sabates, 2005). In general, these findings suggest that there are high returns to learning and the capacity of education to reimburse social class inequalities. However, in order to realise this purpose, education has to be provided in a way that does not worsen social class disparities, in other words it has to attain equality in access and quality that is provided.

Conclusion

In concluding this discussion, we do maintain that adult learning has a very important role to play to achieve the overall aim of education in any society. So, whether adult education is considered as consumption or whether it is considered as investment, there is a need much better it has to be implemented. The paper has explained and illustrated the significance of the notion of social capital in helping identify and understand the socioeconomic contributions that adult learning can make to the community. Social capital in this regard, is implicated in operation through lifelong learning.

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