

# PEDAGOGICAL SCIENCES

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## SOCIAL CONTEXT AND ADULT LEARNING

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**Abstract.** Adult education comes in “all shapes and sizes” and is used by many social strata, it reflects any changes that are taking place in a society and is constantly changing to fit the demands of a changing world. The present article investigates impact of adult education on improving society. It discusses various types of adult education that are available and is answering the question whether the citizens most in need of training and upgrading their skills are indeed participating in adult education. The findings state that all types of adult education are accessed rather by more educated, motivated, younger and financially better off layers of society while poorer, uneducated, less motivated and older part of the population are left aboard. The solution to this problem is a flexible system of financial help to such people in the form of assistantships, scholarships, complete waivers of tuition and charitable sponsorship that is directly aimed at involving them in adult education.

**Key words:** Adult education, societal changes, social strata, new skills acquisition, job market, financial support.

**Is adult education doing anything to improve society?** According to Stowe “participation in adult education has grown steadily over the past three decades” [2, 37]. He states that the primary reasons for adults to engage in adult education is to update their knowledge, or to acquire new skills and information dictated by the

volatile conditions of contemporary job market. Considering the steady increase of participation of 90 million or 46% of adults in adult education in the past years, we can safely state that the same tendencies are valid at present, and that adult education will be on the increase in the years to come. This prediction is concurrent with the estimates on demographics and adult education that other adult education researchers suggest. Therefore, adult education is and will be an increasingly large influence on social processes in the future.

In order to answer whether adult education has any impact on a society we need to analyze what types of adult education are available and what social strata are most likely to participate in it. Stowe [2] mentions 5 different types of adult education.

1. Adult Basic Education provides a great opportunity for a very large number of former high-school dropouts and people who for various reasons did not hold their high school diplomas and certificates to complete their education and perhaps enter colleges and universities or get a well- paid job.

2. Related to Adult Basic education are credential programs that provide adults with opportunities to get a higher education. These are post-secondary programs that lead to colleges and universities or vocational or technical diplomas and certificates. Adult learners who choose to use credential programs become better professionals and consequently improve their well- being .

3. Apprenticeship programs provide chances to get formal education for people who need instruction in different crafts and skills not leaving a work place. I believe that these programs are crucial in a constantly changing and increasing demands of the market in additional skills and knowledge. Some of the people are in great need of getting skills other than they currently have, as job market is currently changing and they are in great risk of losing their jobs.

4. Work – related courses allow employees to update their knowledge in the trade they are currently in to become better professionals, a process that offers both personal and societal benefits.

5. Finally, development courses provide adult education opportunities for

people who would like to participate in self-improvement programs: cooking, crafts, sports and other classes. These are very important for the healthy emotional, mental and psychological climate in a society.

To summarize, adult education that comes in “all shapes and sizes” and is used by many social strata reflects any changes that are taking place in a society and is constantly changing to fit the demands of a changing world.

**Are the citizens most in need of training and upgrading their skills are given opportunities to participate in adult education?** In order to address this question I will have to examine what layers of population are most likely to have a need in adult education and which part in fact will participate in it. According to Merriam and Caffarella who provide information about the findings of a relatively recent UNESCO study “better – educated, younger, married or single (never married), American born versus immigrants, and adults employed full – time in professional and technical occupations are most likely to participate in adult education” [1, 49]. Other studies of participation in adult education discussed by Merriam and Caffarella are in general concurrent with the UNESCO study. Their findings report that the profile of adult education participants fits into the following parameters: learners are mostly better educated, relatively young, living in urban areas, have higher income, currently employed, single or divorced. Obviously these are not the only strata of the society that are in great need for adult education. What about the less educated, poor, ethnically diverse groups, unemployed, with low income, uneducated groups of people who according to these studies are classified as non- learners? Well, they choose not to participate in adult education for various reasons that I will mention further, though being provided diverse opportunities of various kinds of adult education that I addressed in detail answering the first question. Such an inconsistency between the potential opportunities for adult education, unquestionable need for it and low numbers of participation among this social stratum is explained by motivational factors among which is lack of time and what is the most important: lack of money. Education does not come cheap. Struggling adults with low income and many family members will hardly prioritize

adult education over expenses on groceries, medical care and education of their children. In short, the layers of the population that are involved in adult education are frequently not the ones that need it most.

The solution to this problem is a flexible system of financial help to such people in the form of assistantships, scholarships, complete waivers of tuition and charitable sponsorship that is directly aimed at involving them in adult education. This problem is sometimes intensified by an unfair limitations of age when a person could be involved in adult education that is affecting many people, and lack of finances for successful implementations of social programs. I believe that financial factor is among the most crucial ones in solving the problem of adult education for the social strata that need it most.

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