

## Adult Lifelong Learning Psychology, Theories, Principles and Insights

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**Abstract.** Adult lifelong learning becomes more and more popular scientific and public theme and is constantly in the center of researchers' activity. The purpose of the current study is to make clear and discuss multiple aspects of adult learning process as a complex phenomenon. For this aim the attention is concentrated on notions of psychology, theories, principles and insights of adult lifelong education. What we know at present about adult learning is an expanding mosaic of theories, models, principles, and insights that together make up what we know about adult learning just at any one point. And in the current study an attempt has been made in order to distinguish all key points and peculiarities of adult education.

**Key words:** adult learning, education, educational theories, lifelong learning.

### Introduction

There is no theory or set of principles that can capture the full range of what we know about adult learning (Sharan, 2017). The more we know about how adults learn, the better we can design learning activities that facilitate learning and the better we can prepare adults to live full and engaging lives in today's world (Illeris, 2018).

Workplace is an important aspect that could be the locus of learning for many adults throughout their working career and thus work place learning represents an integral and a substantive part of lifelong learning (Chacko, 2018: 278). An increasing amount of modern employment requires complex skills and mastery of new technologies, resulting in the need for a 'new emphasis on lifelong learning. These skill requirements are not static and, in a rapidly changing work environment, employers are having to find ways to develop their existing workforce, rather than rely on recruitment. In this context, a better understanding of work place learning is becoming increasingly important (Olsen and Tikkanen, 2018; Castañeda, 2017).

Therefore, transfer of knowledge and skills is very essential to adult learners' psychology which is defined as the effective application by program participants of what they learnt as a result of attending an educational or training program. A number of other factors that affect transfer of learning were identified, such as learner characteristics, professional background, learner motivation, program design and delivery, and organizational strategies (Chacko, 2018: 278). Transfer of learning is important because learning needs to be transferred to assist learners in implementing their acquired skills and knowledge in the workplace.

Learning in later life has been well researched by psychologists, sociologists, educationalists and gerontologists over many decades, and there is much rigorous academic work that has helped to debunk some of the popular stereotypes surrounding the decline of cognition, activity and overall engagement of older persons (Lebedeva, 2015). Findsen for example, have presented theoretical and empirically grounded work concerning implications for policy-makers and practitioners in terms of practice in their handbook on older learning and this text provides an overview on the historical, epistemological, philosophical and gerontological aspects of the topic as well as implications for policy and practice (Findsen, 2018).

Several authors have argued that there are no universally accepted definitions of adult learning, whereas different theories are used to discuss adult learning processes

and practices, other authors describe adult learning as a structured process that allow adult learners to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes (Mukhalalati and Taylor, 2019; Lido et al., 2016; Battistone et al., 2016). The constructivist theory, however, serves as the theoretical underpinning of this study. Consistent with constructivism (Yilmaz, 2008: 164).

Scientists argue that adult learners develop their knowledge through comprehension, reflection and active engagement with the learning processes (Mukhalalati and Taylor, 2019). Through the formulation and reformulation of ideas and reflection, adult learners are able to develop new ideas, however, emphasize that adult learners' perspectives of their learning are primarily shaped by their experiences that is reinforced through interpretation and reflection of their environment. Additionally, Andragogy, which defines the process of developing the knowledge and skills of adult learners through active participation and curriculum co-ownership, exemplifies the learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Importantly, andragogy as a theory identifies the importance of developing a conducive learning environment including planning adult learning programs with adults and engaging students in the evaluation of the teaching and learning (Owusu-Agyeman and Fourie-Malherbe, 2018; Palis and Quiros, 2014).

### **Theories in adult education**

Knowles 1984, one of the leading teachers, scholars, and practitioner of adult-learning and education was considered the father of andragogy. After extensive research, Knowles outlined four principles related to adult learning that applied to non-traditional students. These principles are: adult learners must be included in the assessment and planning of their learning; adult learners' experiences and mistakes form the foundation for learning; adult students are interested in subjects that are immediately connected to their lives or employment; and learning is more meaningful when problem-based as opposed to theoretical or ambiguous (Owusu-Agyeman and Fourie-Malherbe, 2018).

Situated Cognition theory, the second theory, is based on the premise that knowledge is formed and supported by the cultural, social, and physical experiences and situations of an individual. Learning occurs in the everyday life experiences of an individual and the theoretical model emphasizes an authentic context for skill acquisition. Learning is organic, meaningful, and effective when materials are rooted in personal connections and reflect real-life experiences. Students persist academically when course lessons and materials are made relevant to the lived experience.

Digital game-based learning aligned with many of the suggested parameters outlined by theories of Situated Cognition and Adult Learning promotes effective adult learning. The digital gaming experience provides learning within a specific problem-solving context which allows adult learners to use their experiences and errors as a gauge for learning. In many cases, the games are related to real life experiences or careers skills found in the work environment. Digital game-based learning provides nontraditional learners with more authentic context for skill acquisition. Important features connecting adult learning and digital games are genuine context which mirrors how information is utilized in real-life, presents authentic activities, numerous points of view and roles and games can give linked assessment of the learning, can scaffold learning or instruction at decisive points.

However, D. Taylor and H. Hamdy (2013) presented an overview of adult learning theories. They thought that in broad terms, theories of adult learning can be grouped into, or related to, several categories.

1. Theories of instrumental learning. They focus on individual experience and involve such sub-theories:
  - *behavioral* (environment influence strongly on the individual behavior);
  - *cognitive learning* – put learning into direct dependence on mental and psychological processes;
  - *experiential learning* – this theory has made educators responsible for creating and facilitating access as well as organizing experiences with aim of learning process stimulation; the theory has wide application and is especially relevant for medical education as it focuses on developing necessary individual professional competences, practical skills in specific case context.
2. Humanistic theories of learning stand for individual development and concentrates more on the person of learner in order to enhance immanent potential for self-actualization, self-direction and motivation internally.
3. Transformative theory of learning investigates the conditions for critical reflection to be used in order to challenge the beliefs and assumptions of learner.
4. Social learning theories. Learning and thinking are considered as social activities.
5. Reflective learning theories. The main formula of the theory is that reflection leads to action and forces changes. Reflective learning is especially valuable for educators and help to develop autonomous learning among student audience.

Even such a brief consideration of multiple theories of adult learning helps realize that each one has its independent strengths but is incomplete and less effective without taking into account the other ones (Taylor and Hamdy, 2013).

### **Lifelong learning**

Adults understand the need for training, especially in the current conditions of rapid growth of innovation, and see the opportunities to apply the results in practice. Therefore, the basic approach in the organization of educational process for adults is practice-oriented. Psychology of adult additional professional education focuses on professional and personal development of students. The process of professional and personal development is unique in its integrated structure through formed psychological components of professional self-identity (Lebedeva, 2015).

Lifelong learning has become a key factor for adult students attempting to improve their working conditions. However, such learning has ceased to be considered a personal challenge and, instead, has become a socio-economic imposition of a hypercompetitive society. Lifelong learning process characteristically addresses a wide range of students with different needs and objectives and suggests that teaching should be adapted to such plurality (Taylor and Hamdy, 2013). Adult students encompass a group that has very specific and delimited objectives and who possess a great cognitive maturity broadened by their professional experiences right up to the time they restart their education. Lifelong learning is an increasingly relevant concept that has been studied in depth by the educational community in recent decades. According to studies by various authors concerning adult students from other countries. lifelong learning is an educational paradigm through which education is conceived as an indispensable and continuous element in an individual's lifespan that functions as a means to achieve stable and evolutionary training in competencies, knowledge and attitudes. Engaging or continuing to engage with formal education in adulthood has long been seen as being beneficial to learners in a number of ways, these include the obvious social classes are good ways to meet others with similar interests – and economic benefits including enhanced

knowledge, skills general employability are often cited as being important to the encouragement to 'learn to earn'.

### **Significance of learning and Basic Education in Adult Life**

Research into the ways in which life-chances are shaped by structures of opportunity and risk has been increasingly influenced by theories of reflexive modernization focusing on the role of human agency, and the availability of large-scale data sets and cohort studies to model relationships between structure and agency from the early years into and through adult life (Aspin et al., 2012). Reflexive modernization refers to a condition in which the growth of knowledge 'forces decisions and opens up contexts for action' (Hiemstra and Carré, 2013). It is assumed that individuals are released from the chains of social structures, and that they must 're-define their context for action under conditions of constructed insecurity (Evans et al., 2013).

The importance of a highly skilled and well-qualified workforce to the modern economy has been repeatedly emphasized by policy-makers. The raising of citizens' education levels is widely regarded as essential both for individuals to make progress in their own careers and for the health and vigor of the national economy in competitive global markets (Jenkins, 2017).

Research using cohort studies and large data sets has identified the importance of basic skills, education, vocational training and work experience on dynamic progression through the life course, identifying both the average effects of such factors and their impact on the disturbances people face to their income and employment. Moreover, 'acquisition of skills generally is critically dependent on acquisition of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, without which educational processes are unable to proceed (Evans et al., 2013).

### **Barriers to participation in adult education programs**

When discussing why people would *not* engage in learning, the concept of barriers is central. Barriers may be anything that stands in the way of someone taking part in adult education and training (Smith, 2010). Thus, barriers may include lack of motivation or other forms of emotional barriers, as well as external factors, such as costs, access to information or lack of employers' support.

Previous research on barriers to adult education and training participation includes classifications of barriers into different sets of groups. A frequently used classification is the distinction between institutional, situational and dispositional barriers to participation. Institutional barriers are commonly understood as being created by workplace factors or by policy in general, such as a lack of relevant programs or that programs are offered at an inconvenient time/place. Situational barriers are understood as obstacles associated with the individual, such as family responsibilities causing time constraints or lack of employers' support. Dispositional barriers differ from the other two types of barriers as it is not an external barrier, but rather is linked to 'attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner (Hovdhaugen and Opheim, 2018). E. Hovdhaugen and V. Opheim continued that K. P. Cross (1981), pointed out that it is possible to place the same items in different categories, using 'lack of information' as an example. In her list, this is categorized as an institutional barrier, but this is only correct if providing information on educational opportunities is seen as a responsibility that lies with the educational institution. It can equally be seen as a situational barrier, if lack of information is linked to individuals living in certain neighborhoods or working in a particular kind of firm and rarely getting information. Alternatively, it would be a dispositional barrier if we consider that

those who have a negative attitude about participating in learning activities are less likely to inform themselves about educational opportunities. Thus, the classification of barriers is not straight forward and has been discussed in a number of previous studies. They explained that for instance, in the original overview, K. P. Cross (1981), included various forms of cost under situational barriers, while R. Desjardins, K. Rubenson, M. Milana (2006), E.-L. Roosmaa and E. Saar (2017), included no money fees and training too expensive/could not afford it' under institutional barriers (Evans et al., 2012). Others have simply classified all factors related to monetary and non-monetary costs of education to the term 'costs', without separating between personal and institutional cost.

However, H. Ross (2014) in a book review argued that adult education has emancipatory roots in its self-help tradition, from the Plebs League, through women's studies, University of the Third age, working-class self-help organizations, and life skills-based adult education. The relationships between learner, provider, and established hegemonies, in this sector, position the learner as a critically active stakeholder/citizen from the outset. However, the citizenship educator is therefore presented with the problem that the learner must be approached on the learner's terms. He notes for example that a student in a conversational Spanish class might reject the prospect of engaging in a citizenship education project. And yet that relationship between teacher and learner is at some level a condition of the strength of the learner's stake of her active citizenship (Ross, 2014).

### **Aspects of support**

There are two aspects of adult education that provide a unique opportunity for diffusion of knowledge and skills: social support and a similarity to lay health advisor models (Freedman et al., 2011). Social support has been demonstrated to help chronic disease patients with self-management skills and may serve to help students in adult education acquire knowledge and skills and motivate them to share with others. Social support involves several domains, including informational and emotional support. Informational support involves giving advice or sharing informational resources, while emotional support involves providing encouragement, reassurance, or empathy. As an extension of social support, many adult literacy centers function similarly to lay health advisors by placing emphasis on information shared among peers. Lay health advisors within a group or community are trusted individuals, known to be a source of accurate information and able to explain it in understandable terms. The teachers in adult education courses typically serve in this capacity, but other students may, as well (Freedman et al., 2011).

Education is a strong predictor of health. Studies have robustly shown that a low educational attainment is associated with poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancies. Additionally, education predicts an individual's future occupational prospects and earning capacities and influences one's life-course opportunities, including those of the offspring. It is commonly used as an indicator of socioeconomic status and recognized as a key marker of success in adulthood.

Language of learning has facilitated a description of the language of education in terms of an economic transaction, that is a transaction in which the learner is the potential consumer, the one who has certain 'needs', in which the teacher, the educator or the educational institution is seen as the provider and education itself becomes a commodity a thing to be provided or delivered (Milana et al., 2017).

### Conclusion

Considering the information gathered concerning adult learning process as a concept it might be concluded that the more we read, the more we realize that there are a lot of ways to explain how, why, when, what for, etc., adults learn. None of the individual theories is able to explain fundamentally and comprehensively what is happening when an aspiring, health adult person is engaged in learning. A tendency among modern authors devoted their works for the mentioned topic might be seen: majority of them has broadly constructivist view. Malcolm Knowles (1988) stresses that adults learn in different ways from children and specially because of this reason he has introduced the term "andragogy" in order to differentiate adult learning from ordinary pedagogy that concentrates too little on education of adults during their life being. Many of the principles of andragogy can be applied equally to children's learning. It is much more appropriate to consider it in terms of a learning continuum, which stretches throughout life and has specific emphases, problems and strategies at different stages of human life. The relation between adult learning and education has been made the object of academic debates. Educationalists usually have been critical towards the general tendency to replace education for learning in policy debates and deliberations.

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