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Adult learning and employability: International research and practice

Abstract: Adult education has deep connections with employment contexts. This chapter outlines interrelations within transnational contexts studied during the 2017 Winter School on Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning (COMPALL). The paper shows that adult education and work contexts are influenced by international and transnational issues.

Introduction

Adult education and employment have long been understood as oppositional contexts in society. Whereas adult education seems to follow pedagogical principles designed to develop people according to their individual abilities and interests, employment contexts seem to primarily follow economic principles of profit maximisation. This dichotomy is quite difficult to uphold in today's heterogeneous societies, in which individual interests and lives are interdependent with various societal contexts. Whereas school education, in principle, offers pupils a protected space to develop away from real life for several years, adult education is traditionally much more embedded into 'real life' and people's *Lebenswelt*. Adult education offerings have shorter time perspectives (sometimes just a few hours), and there is often an immediate interest in transferring skills to life and work. Likewise, financial resources frequently show the need for making links. This is already evident in the first studies on adult education participation in Germany (Strzelewicz, Raapke, & Schulenberg, 1966). Furthermore, employment contexts are rather diverse. The economic sector is not the only employment context. Public bodies and civil society also provide employment contexts (for adult education in Germany, see Autorengruppe wb-personalmonitor, 2017).

The chapters in this book focus on the interdependencies between adult learning and education on the one hand and employment contexts on the other. The internationally comparative focus of all papers shows how these interdependencies are interrelated with international developments and their transnational contexts. Employment contexts and employability are the focus of policies of international

1 The two authors have made equal contributions to this chapter.

stakeholders (e.g. European Union, 2012; see chapters in this volume). Adult and continuing learning and education – besides other educational fields – seem to be understood as an activity promoting the employment opportunities of adults on the one hand and supporting the development of competences required by the employment market on the other hand. Adult and continuing learning and education are not only essential because of the ongoing development of technologies, innovations, and societies. They also become essential because of demographic developments. Education can no longer be understood under the perspective of a ‘normal biography’ (Kohli, 1985) – birth, education, and employment – as it was seen in several European countries. Moreover, individuals experience a range of options but also new pressure to develop their own life. Migration within and between countries and continents challenges people to adapt to new situations. Adult people migrating to find employment are faced with huge learning projects (Tough, 1971) when trying to adapt to the needs of the new employment contexts. But besides the perspectives on individuals and society at large, the contributions from India in this volume in particular show the political focus on skill development, which can be understood as a call from policy makers to adults to develop the skills needed by the economy.

From a transnational perspective, the papers in this volume analyse similarities and differences in adult education and their related developments. Besides all differences, the papers outline similarities in the terminology related to adult education and employment contexts: Terms such as skill development, soft skills, qualification framework, entrepreneurship, employability, and professional identity seem to be used in different international, national, and transnational contexts. The data in this volume only allow for formulating assumptions regarding these interdependencies, and one should be careful to identify an internationally implicit hegemonic development, as is frequently found in the ‘soft law’ discourse (Marcussen, 2004; Bieber & Martens, 2011) concerning the role of international organisations. Political scientists stress that international organisations do not have policies of their own (Klatt, 2014). Moreover, the policies of international organisations represent the agreements of national governments and stakeholders. This means that organisations do not develop policies contradicting those of national governments, and neither do they act as superordinate bodies to national governments. But in contrast to national developments, the development of international policies seems to be less transparent and less accessible compared to national discourses. One may ask if international educational policies can be understood as being above national agreements, or if they represent an agreement of some powerful members of international organisations. The Bologna Process,

as well as the comparative analysis of educational policies performed outside of the COMPALL Winter Schools (Egetenmeyer 2016; Egetenmeyer, Schmidt-Lauff, & Boffo, 2017), indicate that international educational policies have an influence going way beyond member states. This can raise the question of an internationally hegemonic influence of international policies, but it can also raise the question whether international agreements are an expression of the cross-national developments indicated above. Maybe both developments reinforce each other and can even be analysed at the same time.

The contributions in this volume indicate that the employment contexts of university graduates in adult education are framed by international developments: National and international policies frame learning times (Schiller, Schmidt-Lauff, & Camilloni, in this volume). National governments develop qualification frameworks targeting the development of transparency with respect to international concepts (Breitschwerdt & Sen, in this volume). Results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) serve as a reference for developments in national educational policies (Lechner et. al., in this volume). These few examples support the argument that the employment opportunities of people working in adult education are not only contextualized locally but also influenced by international developments. Besides these developments in the context of international policies, employment contexts in adult education have also become more international as a result of the internationalisation of societies and thereby through the international background of participants and through the development of an international market for continuing education (Egetenmeyer, forthcoming). This supports the argument that the employment contexts of university graduates in adult education are highly interwoven with international developments.

Employment contexts from the perspective of comparative adult education

The present volume is a result of the comparisons started by participants during the 4th International Winter School on 'Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning'² at the University of Würzburg. Based on the experiences of the first two winter schools, a consortium of seven European partner universities is developing a joint module as part of the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning (COMPALL)

2 Cf. International Winter School homepage: www.lifelonglearning.uni-wuerzburg.de.

(Egetenmeyer, Guimarães, & Németh, forthcoming). The consortium includes the universities of Aarhus/Denmark, Florence/Italy, Lisbon/Portugal, Padua/Italy, Pécs/Hungary, Würzburg/Germany, and Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg/Germany. The COMPALL Winter School enrolls international students from the partner universities. The 2017 programme brought together more than 90 participants from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Participation in the COMPALL Winter School is open to master's and doctoral students studying subjects linked to adult education and lifelong learning. In 2017, around half of the participants were doctoral students. They received the possibility to work further on the comparisons they started during the COMPALL Winter School and to publish a paper in this volume. All papers in this volume have successfully passed a peer review process supported by international experts in adult education.

The COMPALL Winter School is designed to promote the development of comparative adult education, which differs from comparative education (Egetenmeyer, 2016). For that reason, the comparative perspective is developed from the research interests of international experts in adult education. International experts in adult education serve as moderators in comparative groups composed of eight to ten students from three to five different countries. In preparation for the Winter School, the experts develop short reports in which they present their research interests for a comparative approach. To that end, they develop comparative research questions for the COMPALL Winter School comparative group work to pursue. The questions are linked to the contexts in which they are being researched. Transnational developments such as those found in adult education (see above) do not necessarily have countries as units of comparison, as it is often the case in comparative education research. Through its links to school systems, comparative education is linked much closer to national or regional structures. Adult education, by contrast, has much broader reference units than countries and/or regions. Adult education programmes offered by Catholic adult education providers in different countries may have more in common than adult education programmes offered by a Catholic adult education provider and a university-based continuing education centre in the same country or region. As a consequence, countries or regions are not the context of comparisons in all comparative groups; other units such as universities or cities also play a role. In this sense, international developments cannot always be attributed to national or regional policies or local contexts but also directly, without national intervention. By defining contexts for comparison, comparative cases studies are developed, which are prepared in advance in transnational essays by each participant of the comparative groups

during the COMPALL Winter School. Each participant acts as a representative of his or her case and country.

Categories of comparison – called *tertium comparationis* in comparative education – do not form a starting frame of comparative research in adult education. Moreover, they have to be developed during the process of juxtaposition – the side-by-side placing of the selected cases (comparative units). The juxtaposition clearly shows which category is relevant for all cases and which can lead to a meaningful analysis of similarities and differences. The development of a meaningful *tertium comparationis* can be understood as an important result of comparative research in adult education. It creates a terminology for generating links between adult education in different countries. The *tertium comparationis* in adult education is called ‘comparative categories’ for the working process during the COMPALL Winter School. These categories are communication results for comparative research.

This argument should not restrict the call of Charters and Hilton (1989) to go beyond juxtaposition to work on the interpretation of the similarities and differences of phenomena in adult education. But it stresses the fact that the *tertium comparationis* is not deductively available in adult education, as frames of adult education differ from context to context. With this perspective, this volume is full of developed comparative categories which are analysed as meaningful in the research contexts. Several (but not all!) comparative categories are more connected to employment and policy contexts than to adult education: qualification frameworks, the influence of PIAAC results, entrepreneurship, or soft skills. The question arises whether categories outside of adult education may be more meaningful for the comparative analysis of adult education than adult education itself. Or whether they are simply easier to identify. The deep and dynamic adaptation of adult education to societal change may make adult education understandable only in its interrelations.

As in previous COMPALL Winter School publications, the authors experience the interpretation of their juxtaposition as the most challenging part of their comparisons: It is quite challenging to formulate assumptions on why similarities and differences occur in different contexts. A theoretical analysis may help to find arguments for similarities in particular (e.g. by globalisation theories, transnational theories, or policy analysis). Differences seem to be more difficult to understand and interpret. Therefore, the cases seem to need framing, and the question arises what is important for understanding the case (e.g. the reaction to PIAAC results in Estonia compared to reactions in Austria). The COMPALL consortium will

further work on the development of the case framing for generating interpretation anchors for explaining the differences in adult education juxtapositions as well.

Overview of the book

With this perspective in mind, the book is divided into three chapters, which take into account specific interrelations between adult education and learning on the one hand and transnational contexts and employment on the other hand.

Lifelong learning policies targeting employment contexts

The first part provides three contributions analysing lifelong learning policies targeting employment contexts.

Schiller, Schmidt-Lauff, and Camilloni analyse temporal agendas in lifelong learning policies in Germany and Italy. The authors find diverse influences of national structures as well as international influences. Time for adult education is identified as a resource and an educational investment besides financial needs. Aside from all policy influences, the paper encourages readers to think about the general influence of the human resource management approach, which is present outside of national and international policies as well.

Chauha, Subbaswamy, Bak, and Dixit analyse lifelong learning and skill development policies and programmes in India and South Korea. The authors identify the countries' different approaches towards lifelong learning and skill development. These approaches are also highly influenced by differences in national employment contexts, the development of initial education, the different political organisations and systems, the differences in the size of the two countries, and the size of the population. The paper impressively shows how a seemingly sub-national idea such as lifelong learning needs to be closely adapted to the diversity of contextual influences for realising lifelong learning.

Singh, Silveira, and da Silva Castro compare continuing vocational education and training policies in Italy, Brazil, and India and discuss the selection of units of comparison for comparative studies in scientific research. The authors identify the differences between the countries as comparable units and focus on two research questions. The first question concerns the way continuing vocational education and training policies are formulated in Italy, Brazil, and India, including primary influences on policies, actors, policy objectives, and target groups. The second question emerges from the first question and concerns the reasons for the formulation of continuing vocational education and training policies in Italy, Brazil, and India. Interesting implications and practices are discussed.

Transnational perspectives on lifelong learning policies

In the second part, the authors analyse transnational perspectives on lifelong learning policies. Specifically, they analyse the reactions and interventions of national stakeholders in response to activities in the educational policies of international organisations.

Lechner, Ráis, Anand, Yetkin, and Guimarães analyse the influence of PIAAC results on adult education policies in Austria and Estonia. Although the authors find an overall influence of human resource management guidelines in national policies, they also identify differences between the reactions in Austria and Estonia. These differences are tentatively explained by the different country contexts of Austria and Estonia (e.g. language needs, country/population size, geographical position in Europe).

Breitschwerdt and Sen analyse difficulties in the implementation of national qualification frameworks in Cambodia and Germany. To that end, the authors refer to Young's (2009) framework on challenges regarding the implementation of qualification frameworks. Aside from several similarities in the implementation, differences mainly refer to the political and educational structure in the two countries. These refer to historical developments, which are highly challenged by transnational and international qualification frameworks.

Terzaroli, Adebakin, and Boffo perform a comparative analysis of theoretical aspects and policy statements concerning entrepreneurship in the Italian and Nigerian higher education systems. The authors analyse the development of entrepreneurial education, concluding that both countries share common values. They therefore recommend making entrepreneurship one pillar of future university development. The analysis focuses on the best higher education models for the development of global citizens, taking into account the strategic challenge of work and employment.

Employment perspectives and professionalisation in adult education

Part three focuses on the interrelation between employment perspectives and professionalisation in adult education.

Cieslak, Ricardo, Fehrenbacher, Praveen, and Nierobisch present a comparative, transnational reflection on the main theories and concepts of academic professionalisation and the development of a professional identity, as an individual or as a profession. They provide an overview of the concepts and theories of professional identity, followed by a comparison of these concepts in India, Germany, and Portugal. Adult education in India is dominated by an endeavour to foster literacy and numeracy, whereas in the German academic context, professional development

takes precedence. Portugal, however, emphasises the political and emancipatory aspects of adult education. The overview is followed by a transnational comparison of the different concepts and developments of professional identities in the three countries. Finally, the study presents the core dimensions of professional identity in adult education and points out potential issues to be tackled.

Gioli, Tomei, Kumar, and Sijwali compare the structure of the Italian and Indian master's degree curricula in education and the ways in which soft skills are developed during these programmes, creating a theoretical framework for comparison. The study shows how strategies and practices in higher education promote the employability and soft skills of young adults enrolled in master's degree courses in education in Italy and India. The authors also identify the most important soft skills for employability in the two countries and the ways in which master's degree curricula support the development of soft skills, for instance in courses, lectures, and workshops, or in an implicit or explicit way.

Jjuuko, Alhallak, and Tino analyse the relation between learning and work in educational studies in two universities in Syria and Uganda. For that purpose, they analyse the integration of internships in teacher education programmes at a university in Damascus and in adult education programmes in Kyambogo in Uganda. Although the academic programmes, employment contexts, and current situations in these two countries are very different, the authors find several similarities. The paper implicitly provides an insight into the expectations of two doctoral students towards their studies, which may differ from a European perspective. Universities are implicitly expected to provide close guidance in the search for internships, whereas European universities tend to put a stronger emphasis on developing students' self-organisation skills.

Simeon-Fayomi, Ajayi, Koruga, and Baswani present a study based on the theory of andragogy, examining innovative teaching methods in adult education in Nigeria and India and presenting the life stories of ten adults. Based on their findings, the authors analyse different teaching methods in the two countries and conclude that innovative self-directed, experiential, and active strategies can be used in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts to promote employability in educational contexts.

International employment context of graduates in adult education

Whereas the analysis of the research perspectives in this volume provides insights to understand employment contexts as part of international and transnational developments, this can also be illustrated using the concrete employment situation

of graduates of the COMPALL Winter School. As part of the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership and the COMPALL project, participants were asked about the impact of their participation 14 to 15 months after the Winter School. For that purpose, an external evaluation (mid-term evaluation) was done in collaboration with the German Institute for Adult Education (Lattke & Egetenmeyer, not published). Within the limitations of an online survey (65 answers), the data show the high impact of participation concerning labour market entrance, networking activities, and academic perspectives.

Participants who were already employed at the time of the mid-term evaluation stress that their work involves international perspectives (around two-thirds), but even more (around 80%) state that they are very motivated to engage with international issues in the future as part of their employment. This also includes cross-border mobility for employment purposes. That is why they think it is crucial to understand 'adult and lifelong learning in adult education', to which they think their participating in the COMPALL Winter School has made a strong contribution. The most highly valued competencies are 'interacting with people from a different cultural background', which the Winter School has also supported tremendously, according to participants. Further contributions are seen in the development of comparative research methods, which participants also view as highly valuable in their career perspectives.

Whereas these perspectives seem to be standard in other disciplines (Alves & Guimarães, forthcoming), they have to be understood as very new perspectives for students and graduates in adult education. Adult education is typically a very national discipline. In study programmes at German universities, international and/or comparative perspectives on adult education frequently seem to be discussed only in single lectures or seminars. This means that the COMPALL Winter School closes a gap in academic adult education offerings in Europe: It integrates international and comparative perspectives in a broad way into adult education studies. One result of the Winter School is that participants feel integrated into an international network of adult education professionals and that they have the impression that they can contact several people in the field.

The mid-term evaluation also seems to indicate that the COMPALL Winter School has an impact on participants' academic perspectives. Around two-thirds of the participants included or will include international perspectives in their master's or doctoral thesis. Several of these projects involve travel abroad. Participants who did not include international perspectives because they already have a concrete plan or offer for their thesis argue the same way. According to participants, the highest value of including an international perspective in their

thesis is gaining a more differentiated view on their own topic but also encouraging others to adopt an internationally comparative perspective.

Conclusion and acknowledgments

The results of this volume are based on strong collaboration with international researchers in adult education. Researchers in adult education designed comparative working groups, guided participants in the preparation of transnational essays, served as moderators in the comparative groups, and supervised the writing process of doctoral students preparing articles for this volume. Thank you very much to all moderators of the comparative groups: Prof Natalia Alves (University of Lisbon), Prof Vanna Boffo (University of Florence), Dr Tino Concetta (University of Padua), Prof Soeren Ehlers (Aarhus University), Prof Monica Fedeli (University of Padua), Dr Daniel Frison (University of Padua), Dr Gaia Gioli (University of Florence), Prof Paula Guimarães (University of Lisbon), Prof Marcella Milana (University of Verona), Prof Balasz Németh (University of Pécs), Dr Kira Nierobisch (University of Education in Ludwigsburg), Prof Hajo Petsch (University of Würzburg), Prof Sabine Schmidt-Lauff (Helmut-Schmidt-University in Hamburg), and Prof Bolanle Simeon-Fayomi (Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife).

Thank you very much to all the reviewers named at the end of this volume. Thank you to the colleagues at the Professorship of Adult and Continuing Education at Julius-Maximilian University in Würzburg. Special thanks to the coordinator of the COMPALL Winter Schools, Stefanie Kröner. Thank you very much to Jenny Fehrenbacher and Monika Staab for their support during the COMPALL project. Thank you to Clara Kuhlen, Lisa Breitschwerdt, Reinhard Lechner, Jutta Rüttger, and all student assistants at the professorship for their support.

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