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Adult Education in Developed Countries

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Abstract

Even though, the purposes, functions, organizational formats and financial resources of adult education show certain common features in all countries, they also show significant differences especially according to the development levels of various countries. On the other hand, it should be considered that, in today's Globalized world, education in general and adult education in particular has undergone a transformation under the effect of neo- liberalism. This transformation has created results which should be discussed in terms of developed and underdeveloped countries. This paper deals with the subject within the defined framework.

Keywords: *Adult education, life long learning, neo-liberalism.*

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Even though, the purposes, functions, organizational formats and financial resources of adult education show certain common features in all countries, they also show significant differences especially according to the development levels of various countries. On the other hand, it should be considered that, in today's Globalized world, education in general and adult education in particular has undergone a transformation under the effect of neo-liberalism. And this transformation has created results which should be discussed in terms of developed and underdeveloped countries. This paper deals with the subject within the said framework.

If we set aside vocational education – one of the most important differences between adult education practices in developed versus underdeveloped countries – although adult education remains as a negligible and scattered field of activity in developed countries, it is regarded as a national issue in underdeveloped countries. Certainly there are many reasons for this.

In the intent to overcome the heavy deprivation which burdens underdeveloped countries, deprived masses attach optimistic hopes to adult education within the realization of education at all levels, starting from formal education. One of these optimistic hopes is that the gulf between people who have and who have not received adult education may be narrowed, and that adult education may be regarded as a second chance for those who have not had the possibilities for other forms of education.

Adult education has a functional role in national development efforts. This insight is in line with the concept of social state where the relationship between individuals and the state is based on more humanistic grounds. In underdeveloped countries, public education is practically viewed as equal to literacy activities. In Turkey, the historical background of adult education includes to a great extent the history of campaigns intended for providing literacy education for adults. This is one of the reasons why the concept of “public education” is preferred instead of the concept of adult education. Because of the urgency of the need for formal education in Africa and in Arabian countries, adult education is foremost perceived as literacy education. Literacy education is also seen as a tool for democratization that provides political awareness and resurgence. Several other examples can be given regarding

underdeveloped countries. When considered in terms of adult education, illiteracy is certainly not only a problem peculiar to underdeveloped countries. There is also a problem of illiteracy in developed countries, which arises as a result of the immigrant population coming from underdeveloped countries. Yet basically, illiteracy and underdevelopment are concurrent.

The greatest development in terms of quantitative participation to the programs in both developed and underdeveloped countries is seen in institutions that offer programs designed as a second chance for formal education. Although these programs have become prevalent at the formal education level in underdeveloped countries, the emphasis is on secondary and higher education in developed countries. Open universities, the typical model of which can be seen in England, provide graduate and post graduate degrees for adult students. In Sweden the law stipulates a minimum rate for the percentage of adult students in correspondence to the total number of students admitted. Several universities in the U.S. provide programs intended for adults and workers who would like to acquire a graduate degree. On the other hand, some universities conduct community service projects within the framework of social responsibility. Among other things, I would also like to specify that the open university model in Turkey is mostly aimed at increasing the capacity of higher education for young people rather than being a practice intended for adults.

If a comparison is made between developed versus underdeveloped countries in terms of institutions that offer adult education; in underdeveloped countries, providing education primarily in the form of literacy education for citizens, is a public responsibility which should be mainly fulfilled by establishments such as the ministry of education. By contrast, in developed countries, adult education is largely regarded as a voluntary activity offered by non-governmental organizations. In any case, programs offered by non-governmental organizations in underdeveloped countries are not much likely to succeed. Since there is no custom of non-government, these programs are based on the financial contributions made by international organizations of developed countries and do not display any continuity. In developed countries, within the context of new communal events intended for peace, the environment, women's rights and the

like, it seems possible to speak of an adult education movement, where non-governmental organizations act as a driving force. On the other hand, the elderly population in developed countries continues to increase as a result of improved health care facilities. This fact puts an emphasis on educational programs intended for the elderly population. Especially in Western Europe and North America, associations are founded for dealing with the difficulties faced by retired or nearly retired people, and adult education activities are conducted aimed at handling problems such as adapting to changing physical, economical and social circumstances faced by adults at elderly ages, and for providing assistance in coping with the shock of retirement. A similar field where programs are conducted is consumer education. I would also like to stress once more that such activities are often conducted by voluntary organizations.

Today, with the effects of globalization and neo-liberalism, the concept of lifelong learning has become one of the key concepts of education. In the 1960's, lifelong education carried the emphasis of vocational education and re-education. Yet in recent years it has emerged as a concept which comprises the prevalence of all kinds of educational facilities at all levels aimed at all social segments. Lifelong education, which is maintained by international organizations such as UNESCO and OECD, has turned out to be a concept that integrates school education and out-of-school education, and comprises economic goals along with social purposes.

In developed countries, if you set aside the above-mentioned adult education practices, adult education is practically considered equal to vocational education for adults. As it is well known, vocational education has two basic directions. The first is providing the knowledge and skills required for the training of individuals who join the working force. The second is providing a means for re-qualification in line with new developments for the existing working force. While the first direction is considered as a function that should be fulfilled mostly by formal education systems, the second corresponds to the educational needs of adulthood. In underdeveloped countries, acquiring the qualifications required for acceptance to a certain profession is an area addressed not only by formal education systems but also by adult education, due to factors such as the incompetence of formal education facilities and migration from rural

areas. Whereas in developed countries one of the primary goals of adult education is to provide continuous education for the working force. In developed countries – Germany and France can be shown as models for this – in the 1960's and 1970's when the insight of social state was particularly strong, “paid education leave” designed for adaptation to changing employment conditions, has become a claim covered by regulation. Today, under the influence of globalization and neo- liberalism, vocational education stands as an essential requirement for competitiveness and continued employment.

What kind of a transformation does adult education undergo in a world of globalization and what are the consequences thereof? As we have previously implied, in the early 1960's, lifelong education – a concept intertwined with adult education – was expected to serve rather egalitarian educational purposes with a more humane and democratic approach. By the 1990's, the concept of lifelong education had evolved into a concept of “lifelong learning.” This evolution process bears an intrinsic ideological preference. Hereby education and learning are no longer a public responsibility but rather a responsibility delegated to individuals personally, as active subjects liable for their own education. One of the most basic and typical findings of research related to participation in adult education shows that a relationship exists between the level of income and education, and participation in education. In other words, the level of participation in education increases in proportion to the level of education and income. Research has shown that the number of adult population participating in adult education is limited in developed countries. This means that those who have previously benefited from educational facilities also benefit from lifelong learning facilities. We might add that this situation can lead to grave results in underdeveloped countries.

We recognize that we live in an information age. Developed countries are those that capture the information age. Within this rational framework, lifelong learning becomes an essential tool for gaining access to rapidly augmenting information. Individuals shall find place in the market, through the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Education that plans on adapting to the market rational is shelving education aimed at multi-dimensional human development. Competitiveness does not only involve competition among individuals – it is a point at issue in conjunction with

globalization processes at an international level. As Barry Hake puts it, “globalization is regarded as the driving force behind information society, the knowledge economy in turn demands the development of lifelong learning, and today the dominant agenda of the knowledge economy emerges as ‘learning for earning.’” We are now speaking of human resource specialists, not adult educators. Improving human resources serves as a concept for the purposes of earning money and learning. When we examine the texts of international organizations such as the EU, OECD and WB we can clearly see that all discussions related to education are associated to goals for economic development. Today, unemployment has come to be a problem even in developed countries. Lifelong learning is shown as a solution to the unemployment problem. However, the fact that education does not create work areas but instead merely leads to competition among those who learn better, should be taken into consideration. Human resources and human capital approach views people as an input of economic processes; in the field of adult education, personal improvement transforms into an undertaking of the knowledge and skills that serve productivity in economic terms.

A rapidly ageing population is one of the processes that has turned lifelong learning into a key concept. The young population is low. It is considered impossible that the rising generation can meet up-to-date information. Rapidly changing knowledge and skills must be updated. Information technologies and foreign languages emerge as the most functional learning areas. In this tendency, adult education is dealt with as a means of vocational education based on satisfying the needs of the market within the working life.

As a result, in developed countries we may speak of an adult education approach, which is regarded as a tool for adapting to the rapidly changing conditions of a globalized world, which acknowledges the investment in human resources as a main rule to achieve knowledge economy and knowledge society, and which is mainly based on vocational education where other areas of education are to a large extent delegated to non-government organizations.

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