Importance of adult learning and education serving a future of education for all citizens

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Impact of Adult Learning and Education on civic, social, cultural and economic capacities

Nowadays society is still confronted with marginalized groups of inhabitants risking poverty and social exclusion. For example still 122.3 million people in Europe (24.4% of the inhabitants) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2017). A strong strategy aiming increase of social inclusion next to employment among vulnerable citizens is still necessary. Especially the field of education can have a significant contribution in the increase of social inclusion and quality of life of vulnerable citizens in each country of the world. According to the “3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education” (GRALE III) the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2016) also underlines the importance of adult learning and education (ALE), due to the fact that ALE can be supportive to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. More and more it becomes clear that investments in ALE benefit to different fields like well-being, health, social, civic and community life, employment and the labour market (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). The GRALE III survey stated that among nine out of ten countries the knowledge of the impact of ALE has increased (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). Besides, more than half of the countries agree on the fact that ALE can have an effect on employability. Even more ALE seems to play an inevitable role in future challenges as technological changes, environmental sustainability, employment, migration and inequality (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016).

According to different studies adult learners seem to benefit joining ALE. Next to better language skills (Reder, 2009, 2010, 2012; Department of Labour New Zealand, 2010) Lupi et al. (2011) and De Greef et al. (2012) show that adult education can be a lever in order to increase the rate of social inclusion among vulnerable citizens. These results show that adult learners seem to get a better place in society after joining courses of adult education. For example they gain better language skills, seem to be more active in their near surroundings, are less isolated and seem to be more assertive. Likewise Dymock (2007) and Dymock and Billet (2008) show that adult learners gain more self-confidence, experience personal growth and have better contacts with others. Besides this for some of them their current status on the labour market will be improved after joining a course of adult education next to their skills as an employee (Tett et al., 2006; Department of Labour New Zealand, 2010; De Greef, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d) e.g.
one is more active in searching a job, some learners found a job and others became active as a volunteer. Finally adult learners seem to experience a better physical and psychological health (De Greef et al., 2014) and the rate of depression seems to decrease (Berkman et al., 2004).

Although investment in ALE seems to benefit several fields in our society the GRALE III report of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning shows that the system of ALE is still not adequate enough in order to realize a sustainable system of ALE. Still 35% of the countries show that collaboration between departments is poor and besides this 64 countries state that inadequate or misdirected funding is still an important hindering factor in realizing ALE (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). Besides the GRALE III report shows that basic data on ALE seems to be inadequate, which hinder the visibility of the impact of ALE. Central question is what is needed to strengthen the infrastructure and visibility of ALE, due to the fact ALE can contribute to the development of civic, social, cultural and economic capacities and can support community bonds, foster peaceful coexistence and strengthen social cohesion.

**An agenda of 5 pillars to show the surplus value of Adult Learning and Education**

Although ALE can support the development of civic, social, cultural and economic capacities still in a lot of countries throughout the world vulnerable adults do not join or do not have the possibility to join adult education (UNESCO, 2016). Therefore investment in awareness raising of the surplus value in adult education and the (potential) infrastructure of adult education seems to be necessary. In order to accomplish this a new agenda of ALE should be developed based on 5 pillars.

**Pillar 1: The realization of a quantitative research on the impact and success factors of adult education.**

According to Lupi et al. (2011) ALE has a meaningful impact on the increase of social inclusion among vulnerable learners. Their research shows that ALE can ensure the increase of competencies, like better language skills, increase of possibilities to do voluntary work and a significant decrease of social exclusion next to the increase of social contacts (Lupi et al., 2011). In order to make strong decisions for adult and continuing education policies a second step is to analyze what the possible influences and impact of these policies including the different learning pathways and the belonging success factors of lifelong learning for the vulnerable target groups can be. Besides this can increase the visibility of the surplus value of ALE and can possibly influence the
strengthening of the infrastructure, which is needed to realize learning pathways for vulnerable citizens.

**Pillar 2: A research and analysis of the complementary of public policies and dynamics in other life-domains.**

Second, it is needed to discern the different mechanisms of the public policies in other life-domains like health, labour market, well-being and poverty. Nowadays in many countries the public resources invested in ALE are less than in other life-domains. Still investment in ALE can benefit different aspects of life, e.g. a better health or better position on the labour market. In order to improve the dynamics between the field of ALE and other life-domains and to develop a sustainable holistic policy an in-depth analysis concerning inevitable dynamics, mismatches, overlaps, trends and actors of the cooperation between ALE and other life-domains is necessary.

**Pillar 3: A research and analysis of attraction and involvement of special target groups referring to low skilled, youngsters, older people, unemployed, disabled, learners with different gender and learners with low levels of basic and functional literacy.**

Besides the analysis of the needed factors for a strong public policy in ALE and the analysis of possible complementary investment of other life-domains still a needs analysis of the target groups (who need ALE mostly) is necessary. Therefore it is needed to conduct case studies throughout different countries in order to discern, which factors will attract low skilled, youngsters, unemployed, disabled, learners with different gender and learners with low levels of basic and functional literacy. This is necessary to ensure the involvement in and benefits of lifelong learning for these vulnerable groups.

**Pillar 4: A research and analysis of decision and policy making in adult and continuing education among policy makers and other stakeholders (like for example private markets).**

In order to realize effective awareness raising of the surplus value of adult education among policy-makers an analysis is needed concerning the needs and possibilities of policy-makers. Central question is what policy makers need in order to develop an effective, efficient, but mostly sustainable policy and system of adult education providing resources for disadvantaged learners in order to benefit lifelong learning. This has to be realized and supported by a strong cost-benefit analysis on courses of ALE.

**Pillar 5: Translation of the research results on adult and continuing education into guidelines for the development of sustainable and innovative learning pathways next to inclusive and sustainable policies for disadvantaged and vulnerable target groups like low**
skilled, youngsters, older people, unemployed, disabled, learners with different gender and learners with low levels of basic and functional literacy.

In order to implement decisions and to offer a framework for practice the results of the policies and sciences need to be translated into practice. Adult educators have to start new innovative learning pathways in order to attract and retain disadvantaged learners in ALE. Based on the research results a coherent framework for realizing innovative learning pathways has to be developed. This has to be implemented in the different countries in order to result in strong systems of ALE for disadvantaged groups of learners.

A holistic approach of Adult Learning and Education to serve the educational goals of 2030

By realising a holistic approach on ALE education can support the work of the United Nations, which underlines that ending poverty should be connected to strategies concerning economic growth and the promotion of social needs (including social protection, health, education and job opportunities).

ALE can significantly contribute to the educational goals for 2030. By the development of innovative pathways in education in cooperation with the centres of adult education and policy-makers vulnerable citizens can have a better place in society and on the labour market. Each citizen should have the possibility to learn during his or her lifetime. Therefore the accessibility for joining education should be improved in order to increase chances for lifelong learning by 2030. Lifelong learning should be a basic right supporting a durable strong future for every citizen.

References


