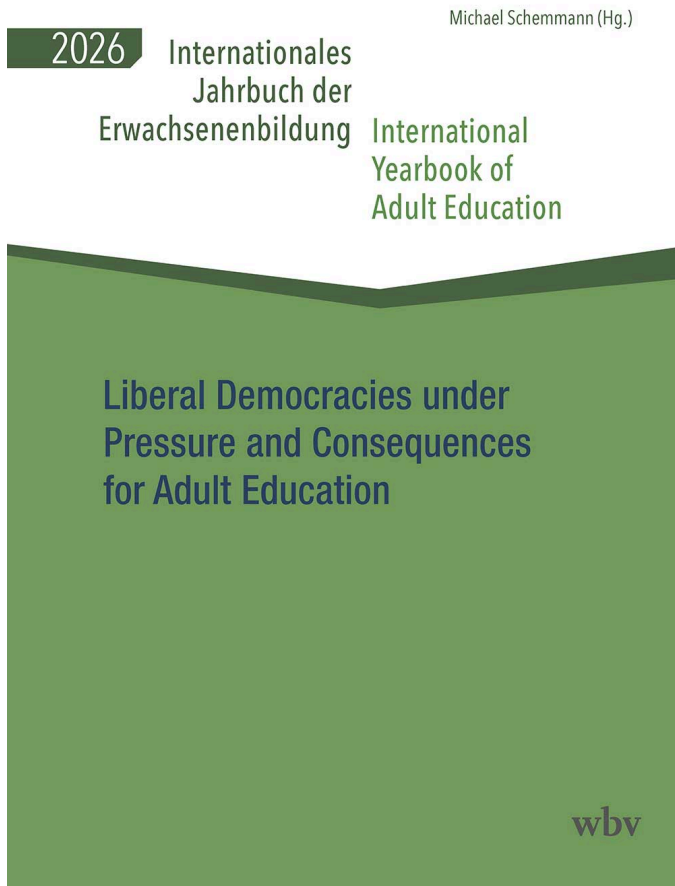


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Review: Adult Education Research on Digitalisation: Concepts – Scopes – Understandings

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Bellinger, F., Bolten-Bühler, R. & Rohs, M. (Eds.) (2025). *Adult Education Research on Digitalisation: Concepts – Scopes – Understandings*. Bielefeld: wbv Publikation. 272 Pages. The anthology *Adult Education Research on Digitalisation: Concepts – Scopes – Understandings* comprises 12 articles, providing an overview of the current academic debate on digitalisation in adult and continuing education (AE/CE). The volume originates from the Network for Adult Education Digitalisation Research (NED), which is part of the Adult Education Section of the German Educational Research Association (GERA). The anthology is divided into three main parts. These are outlined below and illustrated by a more detailed discussion of one of their contributions each. The selected contributions are particularly relevant to both practice and research in the field of AE/CE. The anthology presents new opportunities offered by digital developments, but also discusses the risks involved. Against the backdrop of a digital transformation accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the editors argue that a systematic examination of digitalisation is indispensable for AE/CE. At the same time, they emphasize that “digitalisation does not only impact educational practice – it also fundamentally reshapes the conditions and methodologies of adult education research itself” (Bellinger et al., p. 12). The aim of the anthology is to analyse the hidden effects of digitalisation, in particular power structures in AE/CE, to reflect on their significance for an open and participatory educational environment. The editors outline the need to develop conducive, sustainable and competence-oriented approaches to digital learning processes. In the introductory part the editors highlight key dimensions for a critical examination of digitalisation and AE/CE (p. 11). These include, in particular, the requirement to provide all people with access to digital technologies and the relevant skills in the spirit of lifelong learning in order to promote social justice and employability in a dynamically changing world.

Part One comprises three articles on the level of micro-didactics, meaning teaching-learning interactions. They examine how technological developments such as artificial intelligence (AI), immersive applications and digital learning opportunities are shaping the practice of AE/CE and discuss opportunities and limitations. In their article Ines Himmelsbach, Tjard de Vries, Michael Doh, Siglinde Bröder, Linda Grieser and Christina Klank focus on older adults as participants. The authors combine approaches from empirical educational research, gerontology and media education and conduct a case study in assisted living and long-term care facilities. The aim of the

study is to gain in-depth insights into the use of digital technologies (ICT) by vulnerable older adults on the basis of a case study and using data and method triangulation following a grounded theory approach. The study points out a correlation between biographical educational experiences and the use of ICT.

Part Two focuses on the social and institutional framework conditions of digitisation at the meso and macro levels. The five articles examine digital infrastructures such as platforms, for example in the health sector or in the context of social media and political education. In addition, issues of control and governance and their impact on educational offerings, organisations and forms of cooperation are examined. The article by Franziska Bellinger and Lisanne Heilmann analyses how social media, especially TikTok, shape adults' political learning and opinion-forming processes and how media use and political socialisation are becoming increasingly intertwined. Based on Negt's concept of democratic education, the article advocates for a systematic combination of media education and political education in order to promote reflective and democracy-strengthening action competence.

Part Three is devoted to theoretical, research and methodological issues at the meta-level. The four articles discuss competence requirements for different actors in dealing with AI, reflect on suitable methodological approaches to analysing the use of AI in AE/CE, and address both conceptual clarifications and the conditions for successful exchange between research and practice. The article by Katja Buntins, Anna Heinemann & Insa Reichow addresses the gap between research and practice as a central challenge in educational research and expands this perspective to include the role of technological development in digital AE/CE. Based on an interview study, communication and cooperation problems between researchers, practitioners and developers resulting from different logics, expectations and working methods are identified. The authors advocate for more research into structured cooperation models and communication strategies in order to make research results compatible with the development of practical educational technologies.

In summary, the anthology presents a differentiated picture of current research on digital transformation in AE/CE at various levels. The contributions highlight the relevance of the topic for a wide range of actors and areas of activity in the field. The anthology covers a broad spectrum of topics, from micro-didactic issues to institutional and social conditions to theoretical and methodological reflections. In doing so, it succeeds in presenting an internationally oriented academic discussion that brings together different perspectives. At the same time, many of the contributions reveal new research desiderata, for example with regard to power structures, political media education, or cooperation between research, practice, and technological development. The anthology raises numerous follow-up questions that suggest further theoretical and empirical discussions. Overall, the work is primarily aimed at academics who deal with digitalisation in AE/CE, but it also offers practitioners ideas for critically reflecting on current developments and integrating them into their own work. Therefore, it is worth reading for academics as well as actors in the field of AE/CE.

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