

# Researching and Analyzing Adult Education Policies. An Introduction to the Topic

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Volume 43 of the International Yearbook of Adult Education is dedicated to Researching and Analyzing Adult Education Policies and is edited by Simona Sava from the University of Timisoara, Romania, as a guest editor and Michael Schemmann.

Our starting point to pick this topic is the observation that research on both national and international adult education policies has increased massively during the last decade. What is more, it seems that this dynamic is also fueled by international comparison in the field of adult education policies, which can be traced back to an overall intention to find best practice solutions for societal problems.

Thus, the goal of this volume is to display current research questions and pieces of work, theoretical and methodological approaches as well as recent empirical findings.

However, before presenting the concept of this year's volume, this article will start off by presenting some introductory remarks, outlining central notions and concepts as well as highlighting the dynamics in this research field. Following, we will give an overview of the concept of this volume and the contributions. The article will conclude with some short remarks by the editor.

## 1 Fundamental Notions and Dynamics in Researching Adult Education Policies

Derived from the Greek word *politiká* the term policy generally refers to all activities concerning the public welfare. It can be understood as statesmanship and refers to the public realm and to citizens. Adult education policy understood as statesmanship or referring to the public realm is a rather young field of policy. In general, adult education was developed independently from state influence by various initiatives and interest groups of society. In Germany, for example, it was only in 1919 in the Constitution of Weimar that the state claimed responsibility for adult education.

However, as regards central notions and terminology, in the meantime the differentiation between policy as a normative or content dimension, polity as the formal and institutional framework and politics as the procedural aspect is widely established. This is the case even in languages like e.g. German, which knows only one word for all three aspects. We will use this differentiation in the following as an underlying structure to analyze the dynamics in researching adult education policies.

As regards the dimension of polity, the community, regional and national level have to be taken into account. Depending on the type of welfare state (Desjardins 2017; Schemmann, Herbrechter & Engels 2020), actors on the respective levels are of importance for adult education policies. Additionally, organizations on the international level have to be taken into account. In particular, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), but also regional organizations like the European Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) need to be considered here.

The contribution to the dynamics in research of these organizations is threefold. Firstly, the increase of their importance for adult education policies was object of various studies (e. g. Schemmann 2007; Ioannidou 2010).

Secondly, the dynamics in the research field can also be traced back to the activities of international organizations. In as much as data on adult education are produced on the other levels as well (Schemmann 2015), it is in particular the growth of reliable data provided by international organizations which contributed to the dynamics. In particular, we would like to point out the PIAAC study (Dinis da Costa et al 2014) by OECD or the GRALE report (UIL 2019) by UNESCO as examples. What is more, not only the organizations themselves analyze these data, but there is also secondary analysis of the data by (groups of) scientists (e. g. Sava & Novotny 2016; Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2018).

Thirdly, the international organizations also fund research and thus contribute to the dynamics in researching adult education policies. As an example we want to refer to the ENLIVEN<sup>1</sup> project funded in the context of Horizon 2020 (e. g. Milana, Klatt & Vatrella 2020). Furthermore, activities that are loosely coupled to the organizations also evolve (Schemmann 2007, 153 ff.). As an example, the “European Society for Research on the Education of Adults” (ESREA) founded in 1992 can be referred to. Within ESREA, the Network on Policy Studies in Adult Education was initiated in 2008 and held its inaugural conference in 2012. Since then, it contributed massively to the dynamics in researching adult education policies by publishing several compilations (e. g. Milana & Holford 2014) and special issues of journals (Holford, Milana, & Mohorčič Špolar 2014; Milana, Holford, & Mohorčič Špolar 2014; Mohorčič Špolar, Holford, & Milana 2015), interacting with other research networks of ESREA for widening the field of adult education and learning research (Grummell & Finnegan 2020), and at the same time contributing to the advancement of the state-of-the-art research in this field.

As regards politics, i. e. the procedural dimension, it can be pointed out that adult education policies can be broadly characterized as consensus-oriented. There are very few cases of conflict-ridden processes in which diverging interests clashed as regards decisions about adult education. As one example, the process of establishing

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1 Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe (ENLIVEN) (<https://h2020enliven.org/>) is a project funded by the European Commission which researches how the effectiveness of policy interventions in adult education markets can be increased.

acts for paid educational leave in Germany in the 1970s can be referred to. But as the adoption of a lifelong learning decree in Lao PDR as one of the most recent examples shows, adult education policies hardly cause any controversy (Gartenschlaeger & Khammang 2019).

Regarding policy, i. e. the normative or content dimension, adult education experienced a boom during the phase of educational expansion between the 1960s and 1980s. During this phase, legislation concerning organizations, participants, special target groups and contents were prepared and passed in various countries in the world.

A second boom phase can be observed in the ongoing national and international discussions and adoptions of lifelong learning policies which started in the 1990s and, as pointed out above with reference to the adoption of the lifelong learning decree in Lao PDR, still goes on. Certainly, this boom phase also triggered several analyses and analytical studies and has thus also contributed to the dynamics in researching adult education policies.

Besides the historical evolution in policy making, underlined by the research on the history of adult education, we would like to make one last note on the methodological aspects of researching policy in adult education and its impact. The recent publications and literature in adult education tend to turn more and more on quantitative aspects. Drawing on large pools of data (e. g. Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova 2018), on big data collected mainly by the international organizations, which favor more large-scale correlations and analysis, the quantitative research tends to expand, mainly with the view to impact analysis. This is true even for other types of methodological approaches, ranging from content analysis of policy documents (Antunes 2019) to bibliometric studies or digital research, combined with critical mixed methodologies and critical quantitative research, even though qualitative research still dominates (Boeren 2019; Fejes & Nylander 2019). International comparative adult education research is still actively used as a fruitful source of policy learning (Desjardins 2017; Ioannidou 2010; Verdier 2018; Field, Künzel & Schemmann 2016). All in all, we would like to welcome the increased concern for methodologically sound research in the field of adult learning and education, as the dedicated publications only in the last three years tend to demonstrate (Verdier 2018; Fejes & Nylander 2019; Grummell & Finnegan 2020). This consolidates our option for this thematic number on researching policy in adult learning and education.

## 2 On the Concept and the Individual Contributions

In view of the dynamics as regards researching and analyzing adult education policy, this year's volume of the International Yearbook of Adult Education aims at characterizing the current state-of-the-art of research. As such, the volume will focus on the theoretical scope as well as the research methods being used. What is more, the concept also includes the presentation of findings from selected current research projects, which at the same time represent the range of research questions and per-

spectives within the field. Therefore, findings from international policy research, from comparative policy research and from research on national policies will be displayed.

The article *Theories and Theoretical Concepts in Adult Education Policy Research* by *Eva Bonn* and *Michael Schemmann* focuses on the theoretical perspectives which are employed when researching adult education policies. Bearing in mind that there is no specific theory of educational policy, scientists analyzing adult education policies fall back on theory offers made by reference disciplines like philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, education and law. The authors concentrate on the three most present theoretical approaches in adult education policy research and firstly analyze the foundations of the respective theoretical approach. Then, they highlight examples of the usage of the perspective in studies before exploring the insights that can be gained with the theoretical perspective.

*Lisa Breyer* places special emphasis on the methodological approaches in her article *Research Interests and Methodological Approaches of Policy Analysis in Adult Education Research*. The intention of the article is to provide an overview of current studies that can be assigned to policy research and to analyze which methodological approaches are employed to work on research questions in the field of adult education policy analysis. As such, the article provides a review of current empirical studies on the topic of adult education policy and discusses various methodological perspectives leading to the choice of different methods in policy research.

The contribution *Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All. Who pays for it?* by *Kapil Dev Regmi* takes its starting point in international adult education policy. Lifelong Learning for all has become a widely accepted policy norm which is actively promoted by international organizations like the European Union, UNESCO or OECD and has found its way into the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, the paper points to an opportunity gap between Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and more developed countries based on the observation that lifelong learning opportunities are increasingly provided by private institutions and that the responsibility for managing time and resources for learning is transferred to the individual. Consequently, adults are not equally able to afford learning opportunities and especially the economically poor countries are at risk when it comes to ensuring lifelong learning opportunities for all.

*Diana Trevino-Eberhard* and *Katrin Kaufmann-Kuchta* make a contribution to the comparative adult education policy analysis with their article *Regulation and Financing of Continuing Higher Education in England and Spain: A Comparison of Adult Education Governance Structures in National Contexts*. The authors regard Continuing higher education (CHE) as a multi-level system and analyze the governance of CHE. Thereby, the authors bring actors on different levels and interrelations between the levels to the fore. The article provides a theory-guided and empirically based comparison of national frameworks and structures of CHE in England and Spain.

The article *An Analysis and Critique of U. S. Adult and Workforce Education Policy in a Historical Perspective* by *Elizabeth A. Roumell*, *Florin D. Salajan* and *Aaron J. Reyna* focuses on national policy analysis. It provides a nuanced understanding of the fed-

eral level policies establishing adult and workforce education in the United States of America. By looking at the governance structures and codified values regarding the education of adults in the form of legislation and federal policy, the paper contributes to an analysis of the relation between institutional arrangements and national educational goals. The article offers a sketch of the current polycyscape in the U. S. as well as an insight into the conditions for public adult educational programming.

Finally, *Suwithida Charungkaittikul's* article titled *Lifelong Learning Policies in Thailand. A Comprehensive Analysis and Reform Recommendations* also provides an analysis of national adult education policies. It takes its starting point in the fact, that the advancement of lifelong learning is one of the central goals on the educational policy agenda in Thailand. The article analyzes the socio-historical backgrounds and recent developments of lifelong learning approaches and policies in Thailand. The paper opens with a differentiated view on central concepts concerning lifelong learning (LLL) in Thailand, then takes a closer look on the status quo of LLL in Thailand and finally uses these insights to develop recommendations on strengthening the role of LLL in Thailand and support the country's pathway to a learning society.

### 3 On Our Own Account

Finally, the editor would like to express thanks to all actors who made a contribution to this year's volume of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education*. Firstly, a warm thanks goes to my co-editor and distinguished colleague *Simona Sava*. Our cooperation was very rich and fruitful and it is thanks to Simona's expertise and knowledge that the concept of this volume could be developed.

A heartfelt thanks is also to be said to all the authors preparing their manuscripts within the deadlines who thus made it possible that this year's volume could be published in due time. A further thanks is to be said to the reviewers of the articles and to the authors of the review section.

My personal thanks goes to *Eva Bonn* who took over the editorial department of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education* last year. This year's volume is her first and I would like to express my gratitude for her engagement and her outstanding work on the *International Yearbook of Adult Education*.

Volume 44 of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education* will focus on "Optimization". We welcome contributions to this volume as well as contributions to the sections Miscellaneous and Reviews.

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