

Michael Schemmann (Hg.)

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Adult Education Research and
Neo-Institutional Theory



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International Yearbook of Adult Education**

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Adult Education Research and Neo-Institutional Theory. An Introduction to the Topic

DÖRTHE HERBRECHTER & MICHAEL SCHEMMANN

Volume 45 of the International Yearbook of Adult Education is dedicated to adult education research and neo-institutional theory and is edited by Dörthe Herbrechter from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, as a guest editor and Michael Schemmann.

Neo-institutional theory advanced to be a firmly established theory in various disciplines such as educational studies, political and social sciences, economic sciences and organization studies (Hasse & Krüger 2020b, 9). The theoretical approach is considered to be very dynamic and productive triggering and inspiring both empirical studies as well as theoretical reflections. Only recently, these dynamics led to debates and initiatives both nationally and internationally, which aimed at critically discussing the current state of development of neo-institutional theory and its potential to cover and explain current societal developments (e.g. Hasse & Krüger 2020a; Alvesson & Spicer 2019). With this volume we want to contribute to the above-mentioned debate focusing on neo-institutional theory and adult education research.

This introductory article will start off by giving an overview of the development and the discussions on neo-institutional theory. Following, the outline of the concept of this year's volume and the articles will be highlighted. The article will conclude with some remarks by the editor.

1 Brief History on the Development of Sociological Neo-Institutional Theory

Neo-institutional theory can be characterized by the plurality of its approaches and manifestations. Thus, it does not comprise one consistent body of theory or a clear-cut research program. A prominent model to differentiate the various approaches and levels of analysis was developed by Türk (2004). He distinguishes a micro approach (Organizations as Institutions), a meso approach (Organizations and Institutions) and a macro approach (World Polity) of sociological neo-institutional theory.

Even though there are different levels of analysis, the approaches draw back on similar theoretical foundations and perspectives. DiMaggio and Powell sum up the core of sociological institutionalism as follows:

“The new institutionalism in organization theory and sociology comprises a rejection of rational-actor models, an interest in institutions as independent variables, a turn toward cognitive and cultural explanations and an interest in properties of supraindividual units

of analysis that cannot be reduced to aggregations or direct consequences of individuals' attributes or motives" (DiMaggio & Powell 1991, 8).

Although controversial in the aftermath, DiMaggio and Powell coined the difference between "old" and "new" institutionalism with their 1991 volume "The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis". The difference is seen in the fact that the new institutionalism emphasizes the importance of the institutionalized environment for organizations in a special way and sees it as the cause of organizational processes (Koch & Schemmann 2009).

With DiMaggio and Powell, a pair of authors who wrote one of the fundamental contributions to the constitution of neo-institutionalism in 1983 is already named. This is complemented by a paper by Meyer and Rowan from 1977 and another by Zucker, also from 1977. In their analysis of the development of sociological neo-institutionalism, Greenwood et al. (2013) summarize the phase from 1977 to 1983 as "Foundations". In this phase, central concepts and terms such as institution, institutionalized environment or isomorphism were unfolded, which were decisive for further theory development. The primarily conceptual texts have sometimes been criticized for inconsistencies, conceptual vagueness and lack of systematics. Without question, however, they have provided the development of the basic idea and the unfolding of the "new" perspective (Koch & Schemmann 2009). From this first phase, Greenwood et al. (2013) distinguish two more phases. They refer to the second phase from 1983 to 1991 as the "Early Years". They note that the basic articles initially caused little response. Only gradually did the basic considerations receive broader attention and were confronted with empirical data (ibid.). Greenwood et al. (2013) characterize four groups of studies, all of which revolve around the concept of institutions as rationalized myths. The first group focuses on the motivation of organizations to experience legitimacy by adopting procedures and practices that are assumed to be rational. The second group includes studies that addressed the proposition that nonprofits are particularly susceptible to institutional influence (Greenwood et al. 2013). Studies in group three examined practices in different countries and took on the question of whether specific cultural values also entail different organizational behaviors. Finally, group four gathers studies that examined how ideas are transferred between and across organizations.

The third phase is then dated from 1991 to the publication of the article in 2013 and is entitled "Expanding horizons". This phase is characterized by a continuation and expansion of theory building as well as the presentation of further empirical studies, which above all expanded the range of industries studied. With a view to sharpening central concepts, the notion of isomorphism came into focus in this phase with the question of how and why organizations respond to their environment in different ways being of particular interest. Furthermore, the concept of legitimacy was further differentiated and given a more action-related accent. The same is true for addressing institutional change. For this purpose, the concept of the "institutional entrepreneur" was developed. Finally, interest in the concept of "institutional logics" was renewed (Greenwood et al. 2013).

2 On the Concept and the Individual Contributions

When developing the concept for volume 45 of the International Yearbook of Adult Education, the main intention was to contribute to the debate on the current state of development of neo-institutional theory and its potential to cover and explain current societal developments by focusing on adult education research. Thus, the volume will focus on theoretical developments as well as reflections on research methods and methodologies. Additionally, the volume includes the presentation of recent studies and their findings. These contributions also represent the latest research questions and perspectives when using neo-institutional theory in adult education research.

In detail, volume 45 of the International Yearbook of Adult Education comprises the following articles:

The article *Recent Developments in the Relationship between Comparative Research on Education and Neo-Institutional Theory* by Alexander W. Wiseman explores the link as well as the exchange between comparative educational research and neo-institutional theory. It takes its starting point in the 1970s when comparative research started employing neo-institutional theory. The early focus was very much on the organization and brought common aspects and attributes of organizational as well as national education systems to the fore. However, the paper argues that new developments related to power, empirical approaches and the identity of the “schooling” person can be observed. After discussing these recent developments, the paper explores the theoretical and empirical potential that neo-institutional theory provides in the context of comparative education research.

Dörthe Herbrechter focuses on the institutional in her article titled *Empirically Grasping the Institutional – Methodological Reflections on Institutional Research Using Grounded Theory*. Following up on the idea that teaching processes are affected by institutions, the main research question of the article is how the institutional can be grasped in qualitative data. The author focuses on grounded theory as both a method and a research attitude.

The article *Three Tales of Lifelong Learning as a Travelling Idea: Diffusion, Mimesis, and Translation* by Mike Zapp focuses on lifelong learning as a program. Developed in the 1960s, it took until the 1990s to spread widely and find its way into national policy approaches. The article is interested in the adoption of lifelong learning by nation states and draws back to three modes of adoption within neo-institutional theory. As such, diffusion, mimesis and translation are focused on. The article also presents both recent and more historical empirical data.

The article *Institutional Entrepreneurship in Adult Basic Education. Recent Theoretical Developments and Empirical Analyses* by Jakob Bickeböller, Dörthe Herbrechter and Michael Schemmann employs neo-institutionalism and in particular the concept of institutional entrepreneurship as a theoretical framing when trying to shed more light on processes of institutionalization in adult basic education. Methodologically, the article is based on a guided-interview study with stakeholders in regional contexts which were analyzed under a new research question in a secondary manner. The findings

refer to the characterization of the field, the projects that are being carried out as well as the skills of institutional entrepreneurs. The article is a good example of how institutional theory helps to understand processes of institutionalization in adult education.

Finally, *Martin Reuter* focuses on the ascribed efficacy of quality management systems in adult education organizations. In the article *Quality Management in Adult Education Organisations: Modes of Integration in Different Organisational Fields* he poses the question whether these ascriptions vary depending on the organizational contexts they can be assigned to. Reuter employs organizational field and loose coupling as key neo-institutional concepts for his analysis. What is more, the contribution draws back on an analysis of data from the *wbmonitor* survey 2017.

Next to the key subject articles this year's volume of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education* also comprises one article in the section *Miscellaneous*. In his article titled *Who publishes what? – A bibliometric study of papers from the Global South in international journals of adult education research*, *Tim Vetter* follows up on the thesis of the underrepresentation of adult education researchers from the Global South. The author uses bibliometric methods and analyzes seven established journals of adult education regarding the frequency in which researchers from the Global South get published in these journals, what visibility their articles gain, and what topics they address.

3 On our Own Account

Finally, a heartfelt thanks goes to all actors who contributed to this year's volume of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education*. In particular, I would like to express gratitude to the co-editor of this volume and distinguished colleague *Dörthe Herbrechter*. The cooperation was very fruitful and thanks to Dörthe's expertise and knowledge the concept could be developed and realized in its current form. This year's volume was particularly challenging because of several necessary changes and adaptations due to COVID-19 infections.

A warm thank you goes to all authors of contributions who prepared their manuscripts within the deadlines. It guaranteed that the Yearbook could be published in time. What is more, a thank you is to be said to the reviewers of the articles and to the authors of the review section.

Once again, my personal thanks goes to *Eva Bonn* who runs the editorial department of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education*. Her engagement and her constant effort to improve the quality of processes guarantee the standard of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education*.

As regards the publication of the Yearbook I am particularly happy to announce that volume 45 of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education* is the first one to be published as a fully-open-access-journal. At the same time, the previous volumes 44 and 43 will be available in open access, too. I wish to express my gratitude to our pub-

lisher W. Bertelsmann Verlag for the support in developing and realizing the open-access strategy.

Volume 46 of the International Yearbook of Adult Education will focus on the topic “*Researching Participation in Adult Education*”. We welcome contributions to this volume as well as contributions to the sections Miscellaneous and Reviews.

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I Thematischer Schwerpunkt/Key Subject

Recent Developments in the Relationship between Empirical Comparative Research on Education and Neo-Institutional Theory

ALEXANDER W. WISEMAN

Abstract

Traditional approaches to neo-institutional theory have focused on cross-national isomorphism resulting from processes of scripting and legitimization, but more recent empirical comparative research on education increasingly addresses power critiques in both the theoretical and empirical analyses. These recent developments have also led to a shift in the types of methodological approaches framed by neo-institutional theory as well as an expansion of the institution of education from organizations to individuals. Given these developments the conceptual and empirical advantages of neo-institutional theory as applied to empirical comparative research on education are explored.

Keywords: neo-institutional theory; research methodology; institutionalization; legitimization; culture; normative isomorphism; comparative education

The relationship between empirical comparative research and neo-institutional theory has crossed from a theoretical understanding, which often looked more closely at institutionally-bounded and legitimized conceptions of identity and individuals, to a more embedded and perhaps genuinely institutionalized idea of education. Traditionally, processes of institutional change, specifically the diffusion and reproduction of “legitimated organizational forms and practices”, were the primary focus of neo-institutional theory in comparative education research (Powell, 2020, p.60). But, empirical analyses of the processes of institutional change and the discourse both contextualizing and resulting from these changes have superseded the more traditional contributions of neo-institutional theory to empirical comparative research. In fact, theoretical and empirical developments related to power, approach, and identity are key to understanding how neo-institutional theory relates to and evolves in its explanatory power in relation to comparative education research.

The applications of neo-institutional theory to empirical comparative research on education are evolving to address the critiques that developed in the late 20th century. Those developments are in part due to a clash in ideologies between those who largely critique the theory and those who frame their research with it. The most recognizable development resulting from this ideological conflict is in the expansion of empirical methodologies implemented by researchers using neo-institutional theory as a con-

ceptual framework for their research. But, perhaps the most theoretically-meaningful recent development in neo-institutional theory as applied to empirical comparative education research is the conceptual expansion of who a 'schooled' person is, which also addresses questions regarding the character, expression, and effects of education as an institution.

From its earliest appearances, neo-institutional theory has had its critics. Early critics were more focused on the challenges to addressing cultural change in administration and organization (Zucker, 1977), but this soon evolved into a focus on power (or the lack thereof) in neo-institutionally-framed analyses of educational and organizational phenomena (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a, 2013b). While some of these critiques have been meaningful and helped to develop a more robust neo-institutional theory, which enhanced the incorporation of ideas related to the sociology of organizations, cross-cultural norms development, and distinguishing isomorphism from homogenization (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013), other critiques have been more focused on issues that may be parallel to neo-institutional theory, but are more about the issues important to the critics rather than the development of a more robust neo-institutional theory (Kauko & Wermke, 2018). This has been especially true of critiques of neo-institutional theory and related empirical research within comparative education.

Yet, there are three recent developments in the relationship between comparative education research and neo-institutional theory that are worth noting. First is the more overt recognition of power, actors, and agency in neo-institutional approaches to empirical comparative education research. Second is the expansion of empirical methodological approaches to comparative education research using neo-institutional frameworks. And, third, is the ever-expanding identity of who a 'schooled' person is. Each of these recent developments are explained in more detail below, and then followed by a revised exploration of the conceptual and empirical 'advantages' that neo-institutional theory provides empirical comparative research on education.

Finding Power in Isomorphic Change

Institutional theory, broadly speaking, originated and developed from the mid-twentieth century onwards (Jepperson, 2002; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). The initial development of neo-institutional theory largely took place in the 1970s, and now has replaced (old) institutional theory in many of the scholarly fields that developed disciplinary-specific approaches to conceptual and theoretical understanding of political, social, and economic phenomena using this framework (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a). Comparative research on education explicitly began employing neo-institutional theory alongside the sociological and organizational development of the theory in the 1970s and onward, as well (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). In particular, neo-institutional theory in comparative research on education was initially aligned with organizational approaches to understanding the development of educational sys-

tems within nation-states because of the shared cultural and organizational characteristics between nation-state and educational development (Lechner & Boli, 2008). Although the organizational framework of neo-institutional theory persists, more recent applications of the theory in comparative education research have transcended the organizational scope and more explicitly embraced the institution beyond formal educational organizations. This increasingly diffuse application of neo-institutional theory has led to several waves of critique.

A persistent critique of neo-institutional theory as applied to empirical comparative education research has been that neo-institutional frameworks are more concerned with slow change resulting from normative processes (i. e., isomorphism) than from explicit power dynamics (Zucker, 1987; Scharpf, 2018). Some critics have gone so far as to accuse researchers using neo-institutional theory to frame empirical comparative education research of perpetuating neo-liberal agendas and therefore have implied that researchers using neo-institutional theory are responsible for educational inequalities (Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a). But, other critiques have noted that there are several key characteristics of neo-institutional applications, which lead to a more visible focus on and prioritizing of the processes of change rather than the agendas, actors, and agencies that lead to those changes (Engel & Burch, 2021). Part of the reason for this focus is that cultural change is by nature often slow and based in broadly-accepted assumptions rather than the work of 'strong men' (Ozga, 1987), which tends to be enacted more quickly and overtly.

How change occurs in society, in organizations, and in education itself (especially national education systems) is the crux of the power critique in comparative education research. The conceptual foundation for understanding change as characterized by neo-institutional frameworks is twofold. First is the impetus for change, which neo-institutional theory in comparative education research has often attributed to legitimacy-seeking and the scripting or modelling of educational norms, structures, policies, and applications (Baker & Wiseman, 2006). Second, these legitimized scripts or models of education are then often borrowed, copied, or implemented as a result of isomorphic processes. Isomorphism is, in brief, the idea of slow change over time. Isomorphism has been most frequently explained in the literature as a process that occurs as a result of coercive, mimetic, or normative change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). But, what drives these impetuses and legitimized scripts to slowly change over time in comparative research in education is often unspecified by comparative education research framed by neo-institutional theory. From a neo-institutional perspective, comparative education research has often been more focused on how things occur when no linear, rational, direct, or obvious practical advantage exists for the change. And, more importantly, the actors themselves may not know or understand the rationale or purpose of change, but rather accept or generate change because the action aligns with legitimized, taken-for-granted, or cultural assumptions that do not reflect power and agendas in the direct fashion of more conflict-oriented or critical theories.

This ambiguity around the impetuses for change and the source of power or agency that drives this change is also a source of critique. This is often because critics of neo-institutional theory are usually linear in their understandings of change. In other words, in the lived experience of most individuals and organizations, change forces may be implicit rather than explicit and they may be soft rather than hard (Guerero, Teng-Calleja, & Hechanova, 2018), but the critics of neo-institutional theory in comparative education research often do not think beyond a linear and overt understanding of change. This is an important shift from understanding who or what receives a benefit of change even when that change is subtle or indirect.

Critics of neo-institutional theory as applied in comparative education research often limit the focus of educational change to an exchange, especially one with winners and losers of some sort. This commodification of education by power-focused interpretations reduces both the implementation and outcomes of education to often quantified commodities rather than mediated cultural shifts or the gradual alignment of norms and values across otherwise contradictory stakeholders. But, empirical comparative education research framed by neo-institutional theory has often looked to understand the process of change from a cultural, organizational, and institutional perspective rather than from a political, power, or competitive approach. This difference is significant because it suggests that there is a fundamental ideology that may underlie both theoretical and empirical research being done in comparative and international education and introduce significant subjective bias from both critical and conflict perspectives.

Regardless of these differences in ideologies and values underlying empirical and theoretical comparative education research, neo-institutional theory has shifted recently – perhaps in response to the critiques – to more frequently and overtly addressing the questions of actorhood and agency both at the individual and collective levels (Ramirez, 2012). As a result, neo-institutional theory as applied to comparative education research is also being more frequently used by researchers to explicitly understand and explain how power imbalances and different forms and levels of power interact to facilitate the legitimization of certain educational norms and scripts both within single educational systems and across those national systems (Davidson & Hylton-Fraser, 2020). This is done through a focus on changes in education policy both within and across national education systems as well as on less easily documented changes in educational expectations among individuals and communities characterized by more or less explicit agency and legitimized power (Bodovski, Kotok, & Henck, 2014).

Expansion of Empirical Approaches

There are persistent voices in comparative education that equate “league tables” with a neoliberal reproduction of inequalities (Takayama, 2008). This terminology is often associated with assumptions that positivism is a necessary partner of large-scale quan-

titative data, such as that collected by international agencies (e.g., World Bank, UNESCO, OECD) and international assessment organizations (e.g., IEA). As such, a persistent critique of comparative research in education framed by neo-institutional theory has been that it is in “league” with the neoliberal agenda and by virtue of its analysis of large-scale, cross-national quantitative data is also perpetuating this agenda. But, there have been rebuttals of this critical assumption, which have demonstrated ways that this argument is flawed (Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a, 2013b; Ramirez, 2012; Suárez & Bromley, 2016). Nonetheless, critique often serves to refocus what is critiqued or encourage those who are critiqued to reimagine how something is accomplished.

Comparative education research has been, is, and continues to dominantly be, qualitative methodologies (Davidson et al, 2018). Empirical comparative research on education framed by neo-institutional theory, however, tends to be more quantitative in nature. The empirical characteristics of research addressing institutional questions are a product of the broad institutional or system level research questions that this theory addresses. Yet, the types of questions that qualitative and quantitative approaches to educational research address are, in part, responsible for the ongoing dynamic (some might say conflict) that exists between empirical comparative education research and neo-institutional theory. This historical context is the foundation for recent developments in the relationship between empirical comparative research on education and neo-institutional theory.

Historically, neo-institutional theory has been applied most heavily in comparative education-related research employing large-scale, cross-national quantitative analyses. Yet, a recent development in the early 21st century is the slow-but-steady shift from almost exclusively cross-national time series to cross-sectional large-scale analyses, and also to include more case-focused and individual experiences as data (e.g., Wilbur, 2019). This means that quantitative approaches are becoming more balanced with qualitative approaches in comparative education research framed by neo-institutional theory. The empirical examination and understanding of how “ideas, concepts, standards, and policies” are diffused, translated, and embedded in individual as well as organizational and institutional assumptions about education occurs at both more micro and more macro levels of analysis (Powell, 2020; Zucker & Schilke, 2019; Wiseman & Chase-Mayoral, 2013; Scott, 2010).

The Stanford group represented by John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and their proteges continues to produce insightful cross-national time series analyses that examine the expansion of educational norms, values, activities, and expectations. These analyses have focused on educational enrolment (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992), higher education (Schofer & Meyer, 2005), the development of citizenship education curricula (Rauner, 1998), the growth of early childhood care (Wotipka et al, 2017), the expansion of human rights institutions (Koo & Ramirez, 2009), and many others (Bromley et al, 2021; Furuta, 2020; Buckner & Khoramshahi, 2021). This group of scholars has also been involved in the conceptual and theoretical development of neo-institutional theory as applied to comparative education phenomenon by focusing

on large-scale, cross-national analysis and, in particular, globalization (Ramirez, 2006, 2012). This has been a productive approach to comparative education because institutional effects are often observed in large-scale, ‘global’ phenomenon more readily than individual level effects.

Others have used large-scale international data to conduct both cross-national and system-specific analyses framed by neo-institutional theory. The comparison and contrast of inter- and intra-national educational phenomena has been accomplished through the specific analysis of national education policies and characteristics (e.g., Schindler, 2021) as well as through the intranational analysis of educational data framed or explained by globalization, broadly speaking (e.g., Windzio & Martens, 2021). This means that the phenomena that neo-institutional theory relates to most readily in comparative education are nested, multilevel effects. These are largely quantitative analyses using large-scale data either from secondary sources or large-scale data collections.

Globalization and the global institutionalization of norms, values, structures, behaviors, and expectations have been the purview of neo-institutional theory for quite some time. This is one of the reasons that neo-institutional theory has often intersected with “world culture” and “world society” theories and associated research (Meyer, 2010; Schofer et al, 2012). But neo-institutional theory is not by nature a global theory. It is a theory that looks at shared norms, values, and taken-for-granted expectations, and seeks to understand how those norms, values, and expectations become embedded in culture, whether that culture is organizational, societal, national, or global. As such, a more recent generation of researchers are framing qualitative comparative education research with neo-institutional theory. Neo-institutional theory applied to comparative education research has expanded to include case studies and individual experiences as both data and methodological alternatives to the large-scale, cross-national quantitative studies that continue to provide insight into comparative education phenomena (e.g., Gonzalez, Arquero Montano, & Hassall, 2014; Astiz, 2006). This is a significant development because it also signals a shift in the types of questions researchers are using neo-institutional theory for to help them explain and understand.

Expanding Identity of Schooled Person

One of the hallmarks of the institutionalization of education in the human experience is a shift in the taken-for-granted identity of an individual, which has expanded to include and perhaps be subtly-but-staunchly defined by the “schooled society” (Illich, 1971; Baker, 2014). Among the many different institutionalized cultures and expectations driving education worldwide, none are as consistent nor as pervasive as the expectation of and participation in formal schooling. Most individuals worldwide have participated in formal schooling at some level, and many have completed compulsory schooling and transitioned to further and higher levels of education. As a result of

the institutionalization of education worldwide, the identity of humans has become largely defined by their schooling.

Comparative education research using neo-institutional theory as a framework began with a focus on the development of a model or script for (a) national education systems and (b) the global expansion of formal education. This initially focused on the availability of traditional, formal K-12 schools, but increasingly expanded to include the expansion of higher education, specifically universities, in comparative education research from the 1990s and 2000s. The research in comparative education from neo-institutional perspectives has focused on (a) the shift in enrolment expansion to achievement in K-12 schooling worldwide, (b) the expansion of rights-related education and cultural identity (e. g., human rights, women's studies, etc.) in university programs, (c) the incorporation of education into the human experience, and (d) its expansion beyond formal education into the daily activities and expectations in almost every community worldwide (Jepperson & Meyer, 2021). The overt focus on educational expansion beyond basic access and the intersection of formal schooling with cultural identity and rights suggests that comparative education research increasingly reflects a broader global cultural shift. This shift has not been defined solely by basic participation in formal schooling among people around the world, but has instead increasingly focused on the quality, substance, and broader social or cultural purpose of the formal schooling that masses of people (literally generations) experience through their involvement, persistence, and often completion of a full cycle of formal schooling in either primary education, secondary education, or both and beyond.

Slowly the idea that education was institutionalized in people, not in institutions or organizations, entered the discussion (Meyer, 2020). For example, informal schooling that occurs outside of formal schools and may not be part of the national educational system was shown to mimic the forms, policies, structures, norms, and values of traditional, formal schooling (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre, & Wiseman, 2001). Shadow education and private tutoring are key out-of-school examples of this (Mori & Baker, 2010). Then, there was a focus on continuing education for adults, which also mimics the formal schooling model while not necessarily being a part of the national educational system or agenda (Verger, 2017). Further than these developments is a growing assertion that individuals seeking to learn new knowledge and skills either for themselves or serve as teachers to others are able to do so (and often mimic the formal schooling approach) because they are "schooled" (Baker, 2014).

Schooled persons, therefore, have internalized the functional, cultural, and organizational characteristics of formal education. This includes an assumption that formal education is a human right and that all people regardless of their status, background, origin, or other characteristics should and do have access to and participate in formal schooling, first during the traditional primary and secondary (or compulsory) education years, but eventually throughout their life cycle beyond formal education. Second, a schooled person accepts the teacher-student arrangement as a basic structure of learning exchange or learning relationships. This is reflected in the way they both transmit knowledge and skills to others as well as how they receive instruction or

new knowledge and skills, even when not in a formal education setting. There is a further assumption among schooled persons that more education is better or increases the value of an individual. This human capital-driven assumption suggests that in order to be socially or economically mobile, more education is required and those with more qualifications will be more qualified to perform whatever related activities are needed. Therefore, schooled persons are embedded in a culture where the norms, values, and traditions all suggest that participation and persistence in formal schooling is natural, that education is a hierarchically-organized exchange between one who has the knowledge and skills and one who does not, and that more formal schooling adds value to individuals themselves.

The conceptualization of a 'schooled' person was introduced in the late mid-20th century by critics of formal schooling, who argued that schooling dehumanizes individuals because it replaces their personal worth with exchange value. In other words, individuals who have attended or completed formal schooling are perceived to be worth more than those who have not. Illich (1971) took this even further to suggest that individuals who have not been to school are considered to be sub-humans or un-human by their schooled peers. Freire (2018) similarly discussed the role that education plays in distinguishing the oppressors from the oppressed, and that one of the ways that oppression reproduces itself is by dehumanizing those who are oppressed in order to affirm the ethical right of the oppressors to have and keep all of the advantages.

These critiques by Illich and Freire are still valid in the 21st century. Although schooled persons assume that formal schooling is normal and expect themselves and others to have participated and persisted to the highest levels possible given their situation, there is ample evidence of cultures and systems at every level of the formal education organizational structure, as well as within social and cultural communities where schools are located, that actively limit, restrict, or deny individuals and even marginalized communities from participating or persisting in formal schooling. These differences are sometimes subtle. For example, social and cultural norms often support boys in science and mathematics, while stereotypically supporting girls in languages and humanities subjects even when boys and girls are in the same classes, with the same teachers, using the same educational resources (Thébaud & Charles, 2018; Van Hek, Kraaykamp, & Pelzer, 2018). But, these differences can also be much more overt. For example, some national educational systems are completely segregated by gender (e.g., Saudi Arabia) or restrict girls' access to education (e.g., Afghanistan) (Al-bakr et al, 2017). Consequently, girls and women are often relegated to secondary status with reduced rights compared to boys and men in societies worldwide, and the inequalities among genders are reproduced through the differentiated schooling of individuals by traditional gender norms (Wiseman et al, 2018).

Education as an institution is reproduced by widely-adopted mass education systems, where formal schooling and the models and values of traditional education are transferred and embedded in organizations and institutions. This serves as the first and perhaps most impactful effect of education. But, this global social, cultural, and

political institution (formal mass schooling) now exists beyond the confines of the structures, policies, and activities of formal organizations and institutions. Instead of formal mass schooling and the norms, values, traditions, and expectations that accompany it being solely ensconced in the institution of education and the many organizational forms that formal schooling takes worldwide, there is now a much more effective carrier of these norms, values, traditions, and expectations. Individuals are the repository of the institutionalization of education in the 21st century because they reproduce the values, norms, and traditions of formal schooling even outside of or far away from the formal school setting. As a result, the individual or personalized nature of the institutionalization of education is the latest frontier of the relationship between comparative education research and neo-institutional theory.

Reimagining the Advantages of Neo-Institutional Theory

The influence and use of neo-institutional theory on comparative education research is unique from neo-institutional theory's development and history in other disciplines, although it arguably originated out of and continues to be closely aligned with sociological neo-institutionalism (Jepperson & Meyer, 2021). Therefore, the relationship between comparative research in education and neo-institutional theory also is better understood if the origins, distinctions, and contributions that neo-institutional theory makes to comparative education research are explored. Previous summaries of the origins and characteristics of neo-institutional theory from both sociological and comparative education perspectives adequately explain both (e.g., Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Baker & Wiseman, 2006; Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a, 2013b; Jepperson & Meyer, 2021); however, there are several key distinctions that are worth noting. These distinctions play the role of both an 'advantage' as well as a uniquely 'comparative education' application, and lie in four areas of conceptual 'advantage', plus the empirical 'advantage' of contextualization.

Conceptual Advantage

There are four basic conceptual advantages to neo-institutional theory that characterize its relationship with empirical research in education. Conceptual advantages mean that neo-institutional theory is often helpful in framing phenomenon for both empirical investigation as well as for functional recommendations or activities. In particular, neo-institutional theory is at its core a cultural theory (Meyer, 2021). Comparative education research is also highly cultural and, specifically, often focuses on cross-cultural contexts and their effects on the practice and impact of education internationally, intra-nationally, and individually. In the exploration and investigation of comparative education phenomena, therefore, the role of culture and context are foremost considerations. But, comparative education research is most often concerned with the formal

implementation of schooling through national education systems, system-wide education policies and their applications in local contexts, and with the individual educator's or learner's experiences within an organizational, societal, or political cultural context.

Given the foundational requirements and expectations of comparative education research related to organizational, social, and political cultural context, neo-institutional theory, in contrast to other theoretical frameworks often applied to comparative education research (1) provides for shifts in educational legitimacies, (2) allows for an understanding of the non-linear effects of formal education on non-technical outcomes of education, (3) conceptualizes the coupling of formal educational organizations and institutional factors with non-school implementations, and (4) is grounded in culture rather than function.

Shifts in Educational Legitimacies. Neo-institutional theory provides a conceptual advantage to comparative education research because it allows for the flexible conceptualization of shifts in educational legitimacies. These include shifts in legitimacy among diverse approaches to schooling delivery, schooling duration, schooling governance, and school as a public versus a private good (Baker, 2014). What counts as legitimized education has shifted significantly over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is a big leap from a factory model of education where classrooms were stuffed full of students and individual learning preferences and needs were ignored due to the belief that the 'science' of education could better track or stream students into the training and eventual knowledge and skills output that best fit them and the labor market's needs, to the often personalized and individually constructed educational system that is the hallmark of many adult education programs and initiatives worldwide.

As a result, what is considered legitimate education can refer to the structure and governance of educational organizations, the official curriculum and how it is implemented, teacher qualifications and pedagogues, and who comprises the student body of a formal school (Van Noord, Spruyt, Kuppens, & Spears, 2019). Questionable legitimacies in education can occur when curriculum content that is not sanctioned by the governing board in an educational organization (i. e., school or university) is taught or is not in line with government- or accrediting agency-approved content (Park, 2010; Stensaker & Harvey, 2006). Or, it can occur when people who are neither qualified to teach nor use the assumed methods to teach are employed or assume the role of a teacher in a formal school (Cochran-Smith et al, 2020). Finally, legitimate education can be compromised when the students in a particular school do not fit the assumed model of what a student should be either because they are not of traditional school age or because they do not conform to the community's standards for who is eligible to participate in formal schooling based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status (Bernhard, 2021).

Neo-institutional theory, however, provides for the shifting of educational legitimacies to follow the norms, values, and traditions of the local community while also considering the boundaries or limits of differing local legitimacies to the broader and

often global institution of education. For example, some comparative education researchers focus exclusively on the unique shifts or differing implementations of formal schooling in micro-communities around the world, and then decry neo-institutional theory for suggesting that formal schooling is normed worldwide (Akiba, 2017). But, these comparative education researchers ignore the dual legitimacies that educational organizations and individuals who embody formal schooling exhibit. Schools are both aligned with local norms, values, traditions, and culture as well as with the formal educational institution at the regional, national, and international levels because they are populated by individuals who carry the legitimacy of education with them. Legitimacy is not in doing the 'one right thing' according to neo-institutional theory.

Legitimacy is in doing what is normed, expected, assumed, and considered appropriate or needed by the community and the individuals engaged in education. In other words, deviations from the norm in terms of school organization and governance, teachers and pedagogy, or students and learning are not illegitimate forms of education, largely because they all still occur under the provenance of formal schooling writ large. Instead, there are multiple forms of legitimacy, which may conflict with each other, but do not break or erase the educational charter of the schools. These deviations from the broader institutional norms, values, traditions, and culture may conflict with or even contradict what the broader educational community takes-for-granted about formal education, but these deviations neither result in schools disengaging from the broader educational endeavor, nor in teachers refusing to transmit knowledge and skills, nor in students refusing to learn. In fact, deviations from institutional norms, values, traditions, and culture – especially in education – often results in the exact opposite. There may be schools that lose their accreditation and funding, or teachers who lose their teaching license and are fired from their jobs, or students who are prevented from attending school or expelled, but these are localized aberrations that occur within the broader individually-institutionalized educational norms, values, traditions, and culture which views education as a human right and assumes and encourages all people to participate.

Non-Linear Effects on Non-Technical Outcomes. Another conceptual advantage is that neo-institutional theory provides a framework for understanding the non-linear effects of formal schooling on non-technical outputs like citizenship, healthcare, culture, and labor market participation (Wiseman, 2021; Wiseman & Baker, 2006). In fact, neo-institutional theory suggests that education persists and develops – often in uniquely contextualized circumstances – in ways that a more linear, functional, or conflict-oriented approach would not expect. For example, why does formal schooling persist when evidence suggests that there is neither a consistent nor standardized return on educational investment to every individual participating in or completing formal education? In fact, partial completion without a leaving certificate or diploma is often worse than not participating at all because it signals an inability to complete tasks and is often misunderstood as a moral failing on the part of the individual rather than as an organizational failing of the school (Campbell, 2015). Why do most local differences

or variations in educational implementation lead to improved educational outcomes rather than a breakdown of the formal schooling system itself? If there were only one legitimized way to educate people then educational systems that persist in segregating students and schools based on personal individual characteristics would either fail or be delegitimized, but they are not. And, individuals who graduate from unaccredited educational institutions should not be able to progress through to higher levels of education that are accredited, but they do. In other words, the linear expectations of more functional, conflict, and critical educational theories create false dichotomies, but neo-institutional theory is based on the assumption that education is cultural. Education is not a linear functional phenomenon, but is instead based in norms, values, and expectations more than activities, outcomes, and rational choice.

In comparative education research, the non-linear approach of neo-institutional theory is valuable because of the duality of education both as a cultural norm as well as an organizational relic. As a cultural norm, education is embedded in the schooled person. It is individualized and it serves both individuals' expectations as well as the collective assumptions pertaining to education. As an organizational relic, schools are esteemed and even venerated in international, national, regional, and local communities because of their association with expectations related to social and economic mobility, national political and economic legitimacy, cultural capital, and normative assumptions because, "that's the way it's always been done." But, a non-linear approach is required to understand why a community adopts and implements a system of education that is characterized by testing and accountability more than individual learning, or features curriculum that may be irrelevant to the needs and mores of local communities, or leads to outcomes that do not serve the economic, political, or social needs of individuals. In fact, most formal education from comparative and international perspectives has unintended consequences or serves a purpose other than what is officially stated (Marques et al, 2017; Pareja Roblin et al, 2018). Neo-institutional theory allows for those variations and conflicts in purpose and activity by framing variation or resistance in terms of institutional level (i. e., local versus systemwide) and providing a framework for examining variation within broader and less specific boundaries or limits of legitimacy (Tal & Tubin, 2021).

Loose-Coupling between Formal and Informal Elements. A further conceptual advantage is that neo-institutional theory allows for the conceptualization of loose- and even sometimes de-coupling between formal, official, or structural factors and informal, unofficial, and implementation activities (Wiseman & Baker, 2006). This is a core conceptual advantage when considering policy borrowing either across, between, or within schools and educational systems (Wiseman, 2021). This concept of institutional and organizational coupling has been a key characteristic of research understandings of education at least since Weick's (1977) groundbreaking work on schools as loosely-coupled organizations.

As an example of loose coupling, national languages may have a standardized version (e. g., Hochdeutsch in Germany) that is the official dialect of that language for media or curriculum, but the people may and often do speak their dialect of that lan-

guage in their local communities (e.g., Schwabisch in Baden-Wurtemberg compared to Sud Deutsch in Bavaria). These dialectical differences often make it difficult for individuals from one region to fully understand their fellow citizens in other regions, but they are still both speaking the same language, just different forms of it. There is a loose-coupling of the dialect to the standardized version of the language. In English, some dialects are more loosely-coupled than others, for example a Glaswegian Scottish accent and dialect is different from a Highlands accent or dialect, but is even more de-coupled from a posh London accent, yet all of these accents or dialects are English. In the same way, formal schooling is loosely-coupled across the local, regional, national, and global institutions of education, and especially in the formal schooling systems within and across each of these system levels.

For the most part, education systems worldwide are hierarchical. Even if they are decentralized, they are still hierarchical because the national or federal education system will have governance, funding, or other types of power and decision-making authority with which each of the sub-system levels of governance (i.e., regional, local, campus) will be expected to align with. This in no way suggests that each of these sub-system levels conform exactly to the parent system's mandates, but they often must implement education in ways that vary but do not exceed the limits or boundaries set by the parent system. If they do not conform exactly to the higher organizational governance authority, then there are a variety of responses. They may be sanctioned, or not. They may have funding or resources withheld, or not. Occasionally, the higher governance authority will adjust its boundaries or limits to accommodate the local level implementation or variations (e.g., Tao, 2021). Neo-institutional theory provides a framework for understanding how formal education continues to function in spite of these variations (and in spite of the non-linearity of these variations as well).

Grounded in Culture, Not Function. A final conceptual advantage is that neo-institutional theory is grounded in culture; not the functional behavior of individuals or organizations. Culture is often defined as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a group or community (Mannheim, 2012). As explained above, culture also resides in persons, who believe and behave in accordance with the way that culture has been individually institutionalized within them. The schooled person is someone whose culture is heavily shaped by their experiences in and related to formal schooling, and often at the most formative years of their childhood and adolescence (Baker, 2014). Culture is also where prejudices, stereotypes, expectations, and assumptions are often rooted (Bourdieu, 2005).

Neo-institutional theory's fundamental elements are legitimacy-seeking, scripting or modeling, loose- or de-coupling, and isomorphic change (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). It is the isomorphic change that is the most overt advantage for examining the culture of education and how it spreads, changes, and institutionalizes itself in society, organizations, and individuals over time. Isomorphic change is typically categorized as coercive, mimetic, or normative. Coercive and mimetic are isomorphic changes due to force and copying or borrowing, and in comparative education research this has been fruitfully applied to policy borrowing, in particular (Shields, 2015). In particular,

though, normative isomorphism is a key approach to understanding cultural change and dissemination or embeddedness over time. Normative isomorphism is the less explicit, but more powerful force of change. And, it is also the most critiqued among comparative education researchers (Wiseman & Al-bakr, 2013).

Some have said that comparative education researchers who use normative isomorphism as a conceptual framework for understanding educational change are ignoring the technical or “real” forces of change (often identified as neoliberal agency among more politically and conflict-oriented researchers) (Arnové, 2009). There have been some critics who have claimed this is akin to claiming that change ‘magically’ occurs or that education is like a religion and therefore there are mysteries that cannot be explained. But, this is an obtuse critique. Normative isomorphism is about culture, and it provides comparative education researchers with a framework for acknowledging the subtle and often subversive role that culture plays in changing educational policies, organizational functions and structures, and individual behavior and beliefs about education. It does so by focusing on the norms that are embedded in culture (hence the term ‘normative’) and their reproduction.

One of the hallmarks of normative isomorphism as understood via a neo-institutional framing of comparative education phenomena is that educational expectations, activities, and behaviors become normative both over time (i. e., isomorphism), through repetition (i. e., reproduction), and through legitimation (i. e., legitimacy-seeking). Legitimation can come about through an alignment of structure, activity, and expectations with known or standardized forms of education. These processes often do begin with a more overt form of coercion or mimicry either by or of a hegemonic entity, like a colonial nation-state, but the normative part of the process occurs when the coercion and mimicry become more implicit and the known or standardized forms of education, which were perhaps originally more forceful and explicit (as many assert neoliberal entities and agendas are), become the norm or the usual among both the educational organizations and the individuals in a nation, society, or local community.

In other words, normative isomorphism goes hand-in-hand with cultural embeddedness and cultural transmission. To say that people ‘believe’ in education is not to make it magical or mystical and avoid explaining how it happens. That is the explanation that neo-institutional theory may provide in some situations because of normative isomorphism. It is another way of saying that there are normed expectations for education, which may or may not be technically or logically fulfilled in the practical application of education. For example, ample comparative education research has shown that individuals in developed countries often persist in education beyond labor market demands and the likelihood of a maximum return on a family’s or individual’s educational investment (McGuinness, 2006). Likewise, other comparative education research has shown that education in some nations and communities is actively engaged in the oppression of already marginalized individuals and groups (Altbach, 1991). Yet, in both situations, there is also evidence of a strong legitimization of education as an institution and of individuals’ participation in formal schooling, despite evidence of the ineffectiveness or even damaging effects of education in practice (Van

Noord et al, 2019). This is not magical or mystical behavior, nor is it often coercion or mimicry beyond the original instances of education as a national or development project. This is culture and normative isomorphism in action, and is a key conceptual advantage of neo-institutional theory.

Empirical Advantage

Neo-institutional theory provides an empirical advantage to comparative education research because neo-institutional theory nests individual experiences and outcomes within institutional conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p.28; Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a, 2013b). Context is key to comparison and mediates the effects of education. Individuals, organizations (i.e., schools), institutions (i.e., education), and societies and nation-states create shared experiences, expectations, and actions (Bourdieu, 1981, p.309; Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2013a). Empirical comparative education research that does not nest individual educational behaviors and expectations within the broader organizational, societal, or political context misses the full and often contradictory effects of education at these different levels as well. For example, neo-institutional theory provides an empirical advantage because it reduces polemics and false dichotomies. There is a tendency among comparativists to focus on differences and power (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Wiseman, 2021). Neo-institutional theory provides a framework for empirical analysis of comparative education phenomena that allows for both differences and similarities to coexist.

An example of this is gender segregation in Saudi Arabian education. Comparative education researchers empirically investigating the educational system in Saudi Arabia have focused on the differences between boys' and girls' education, and argued that girls, in particular, are limited in their educational opportunities and, as a result, their post-schooling labor market opportunities as well (Ahmed, 2020). This is not false, but it is only a partial understanding because it focuses only on the power dynamics and differentiation of a marginalized community (girls and women) as seen from an outsider's or Westerner's perspective. In fact, there is a dual process at play, which empirical comparative education research addresses more clearly when applying a neo-institutional understanding of legitimacy-seeking and loose-coupling.

Saudi boys and men do not persist in education as long nor attain as much education as Saudi girls and women typically do, nor do they transition from high school to college at the same rate. Because of this, boys education in the Gulf region has been declared a 'crisis' by comparative education researchers (Ridge, 2014). First of all, this contradicts the system level critique of male dominance in education, although the gender segregation of education in Saudi Arabia certainly reinforces and reproduces culturally-embedded notions of male-dominated sexism and paternalism. Second, the opportunities provided for girls and women in education outstrip those available for them outside of the educational system. Girls and women perform at higher levels

than boys on average on educational assessments, attain higher levels of education, and have begun transitioning to higher education at higher rates (within gender comparisons) than boys (Wiseman, 2008).

A neo-institutional framing of the gender-segregated educational system in Saudi Arabia recognizes that there are formal organizational structures, policies, and cultural norms at the system and national levels, but also allows for both local level variation (between schools, for example) as well as for nested level variation (between individuals, schools, and national education systems, for example). This empirical advantage provides a more complete understanding of the phenomenon, which has both elements of hegemony and oppression as well as opportunity and mobility. And, these seemingly contradictory elements coexist within the same broader educational phenomenon of gender-segregated schooling in Saudi Arabia.

A further empirical advantage is that neo-institutional theory gives comparativists a framework for looking at what is shared or similar rather than only what is different. Comparison does not exclusively equate with differentiation, although differences are a constant component of comparison. Perhaps from the beginning of comparative education research, the focus has been on identifying what is different, unusual, or not normal for those researchers doing the investigating (Manzon, 2011; Cowen, 2021). This colonial otherness has shaped and continues to shape empirical research in comparative education by only focusing on what is different from the researchers' implied 'normal' education, and can be taken and applied to improve the educational system a researcher identifies with as their normal or home education system. This applies to the policy-borrowing bureaucrat as much as the post-colonial, critical theorist because both operate based on the concept of otherness.

Neo-institutional theory's empirical advantage, therefore, is that it recognizes differences, but also sees how variation is limited in its scope and often is bounded by structures, norms, values, and expectations that are unusually similar given the differences in social, economic, or political culture and practice that exist in different communities. Critics of neo-institutional theory have accused comparative education researchers who use the theory to frame their empirical research as agents of the neoliberal agenda and are bent on the homogenization of education according to Western standards and neoliberal interests (Schriewer, 2012). But, this is also an othering, which does not recognize the usefulness of neo-institutional theory's application of isomorphism to understanding comparative education phenomena.

Similarities are what make comparison empirically possible. There is no opportunity to compare unless there is a baseline or foundation to use as a reference point for the education policies, practices, organizations, or individuals being compared. If there were no similarities in what the norms for formal schooling were, then those who identify conflict and inequality could not do so because there would be no norm for what comprises equality or equity in education. If we look at the inequalities in education among girls and boys in Saudi Arabian education again, for example, there is no way to identify what is equal versus unequal unless the researcher has a normed (and citable) reference for what equal education is.

Beyond the Politics of Theory

Although persistently critical comparativists continue to create their own version of reality wherein neo-institutional theory is a tool of neoliberal discourse to somehow dominate and subjugate, most comparativists either see neo-institutional theory as just one of many different theoretical options for analyzing empirical phenomena in education worldwide or they recognize the diversity of approaches and value in framing international and comparative education research from a neo-institutional perspective. Either way, the relationship between empirical comparative education research and neo-institutional theory supersedes the politics of scholarship through the following developments: (1) an overt recognition of power, actors, and agency either within or alongside institutionalization processes in comparative education; (2) an expansion of comparative education research methodologies framed by neo-institutional theory to include more than the traditional large-scale quantitative methods frequently associated with it; and (3) an expanding identity of who a 'schooled' person is to extend beyond the formal education system into both individuals and society more broadly and indistinctly. In addition, the advantages of neo-institutional theory for empirical comparative education research are that neo-institutional theory provides a framework for an empirical examination of (a) shifting educational legitimacies, (b) non-linear effects of education on non-technical outcomes, (c) the coupling of formal education with non-school factors, (d) education grounded in culture instead of functional or instrumentalist outcomes, and (e) a systematic approach to analyzing educational effects nested within both organizationally- and institutionally-contextualized cultural contexts.

These developments in the relationship between neo-institutional theory and empirical comparative education research supersede the politics of comparative education by demonstrating how social science theories and methodologies can respond to and develop beyond their critiques. For example, as demonstrated above, research framed with neo-institutional theory extends beyond simple impressions of economic or political neo-liberalism by gradually incorporating an overt recognition, measurement, and interpretation of conflict, power, and agency into comparative education research. Also, neo-institutional theory provides a valid and reliable framework for understanding comparative education phenomena in spite of popular politics and reactive ideologies. This is demonstrated by the expansion of neo-institutionally-framed empirical methodologies beyond the stereotypical large-scale quantitative analyses of comparative education phenomena to include more qualitative and mixed approaches. Neo-institutional theory reflects and seeks to understand the social construction of both the theory and its application as evidenced by the expansion of the identity of a schooled person. And, even though some comparativists of education may critique neo-institutional theory, it still provides several conceptual and empirical advantages for the empirical investigation of comparative education as outlined in the sections above.

It is significant that neo-institutional theory has been critiqued as heavily as it has, especially in its application to comparative education, because this suggests both the relevance of the theory and its explanatory power within a field that is often influenced by less empirical and even atheoretical assumptions (Skic, 2020). There is a delicate balance between positivism and the rejection of theory, cultural, and social value. Laudan (1990, p.x) said,

“The displacement of the idea that facts and evidence matter by the idea that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is...the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our time.”

This is a blunt statement, which suggests that confusing a rejection and critique of oppression and injustice with hostility towards and critique of a highly relevant and application theoretical approach is neither “truthful, wise, humane, [nor] strategic” (Albert, 1996, p.69). It is instead a tactic of attack and blame that is better left to politics than to empirical comparative education research.

This highlights perhaps one of the most obvious recent developments in the relationship between neo-institutional theory and empirical comparative education research: that the forms of conducting, analyzing, interpreting, and applying research in the field of comparative education have become institutionalized to the degree that even a theoretical recognition of what is now institutionalized (and no longer overtly seen) in education seems to some to be purposeful oppression of critical thought when it is more accurately a reflection itself of the process it explains.

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Empirically Grasping the Institutional: Methodological Reflections on Institutional Research Using Grounded Theory

DÖRTHE HERBRECHTER

Abstract

The article draws on the multi-level perspective on adult education and considers institutional conditions as important influencing factors which enable adult learning. It is characteristic of these institutional conditions (especially in a highly institutionalised form) to appear self-evident, without alternative and therefore self-explanatory. This poses challenges for the empirical analysis of the institutional in general and its comprehension using qualitative data collection and analysis methods. Against this background, the article focuses on the extent to which the institutional can be systematically grasped in verbal data. For this purpose, the article refers to grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin, which is often used in organisational research but discussed controversially in neoinstitutionalist research.

Keywords: Multi-level perspective on adult learning; Institutional conditions; Grounded theory

Abstract

Der Beitrag schließt an die Mehrebenenperspektive auf das Weiterbildungssystem an und versteht vor diesem Hintergrund auch die institutionellen Rahmenbedingungen als wichtige Einflussfaktoren für die Ermöglichung des Lernens Erwachsener. Dabei ist für institutionelle Rahmungen (vor allem in ihrer hochinstitutionalisierten Form) charakteristisch, dass sie selbstverständlich, alternativlos und daher oftmals auch nicht erklärungsbedürftig erscheinen. Dies stellt die empirische Analyse des Institutionellen im Allgemeinen und seine systematische Spezifikation anhand qualitativer Methoden der Datenerhebung und -analyse im Besonderen vor Herausforderungen. Vor diesem Hintergrund rückt der Beitrag die Frage in den Mittelpunkt, inwiefern das Institutionelle in verbalen Daten systematisch erfasst werden kann. Hierfür nimmt der Beitrag auf die Grounded Theory nach Strauss und Corbin Bezug, da sie in der Organisationsforschung häufig Verwendung findet, in der neoinstitutionalistischen Forschung aber durchaus kontrovers diskutiert wird.

Keywords: Mehrebenenperspektive auf das organisierte Lernen Erwachsener; institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen; Grounded Theory

1 Introduction

‘How is education possible?’ (Tenorth, 2003). In adult education, this genuinely pedagogical question has often been discussed from a multi-level perspective (e. g. Boeren, Nicaise & Baert, 2010; Flechsig & Haller, 1975; Tietgens, 1984; Schrader, 2011). Central to this is the assumption that adults’ learning processes cannot be adequately understood and explained if only the teaching-learning level is taken into account but not its organisational framing and institutional anchoring (Herbrechter & Schrader, 2018).

Empirical studies also point to this assumption of the organisational and institutional embeddedness of adult education. For example, with regard to the increasing spread of quality management systems, Hartz (2011) conveyed that this primarily improves the structures and processes of the adult education organisation but has little impact on the teaching-learning process itself. This finding draws special attention to institutionalised process qualities of the organisational and teaching-learning levels. Furthermore, the findings of a study on leadership in adult education organisations indicate that adult education leading staffs’ ideas of appropriate leadership are also shaped by the institutional context and influence the development of the educational offer. The organisation thus seems to have an impact on the educational via the institutionally influenced understanding of leadership (Herbrechter, 2016a). In addition, empirical findings on the pedagogical staff indicate that they refer to organisation-specific patterns of interpretation in their offer development decisions, which make certain offer decisions more likely than others (Dollhausen, 2008).

Such studies on the organisational and institutional conditions of adult education have become increasingly important in recent decades, especially in adult education research in Germany (Klingovsky, 2016; Herbrechter & Schrader, 2018; for the international discussion, see e. g. Rubenson & Elfert, 2014; Yelich-Biniecki & Schmidt 2021). However, how the organisational and institutional conditions are empirically grasped varies with regard to methods and theoretical assumptions (Dollhausen, 2010). For a long time, adult education research theoretically did not distinguish between the terms ‘organisation’ and ‘institution’ (Dollhausen & Schrader, 2015; e. g. Kade, Nittel & Seitter, 2007; Strunk, 1999). In the meantime, a more differentiated view with reference to sociological assumptions has been considered (e. g. Hartz & Schardt, 2010; Koch & Schemmann, 2009; Herbrechter & Schrader, 2018). In this understanding, organisations are defined by membership, programmes, hierarchy and specific goals towards which all members’ activities are directed (Schreyögg, 2008). Institutions are understood as permanently established, collectively shared orientation patterns that legitimise and regulate social action (Schimank, 2008; Lipp, 2002). Nevertheless, organisations and institutions share a common core in that they ensure a regulated interaction which is neither random nor arbitrary (Gukenbiehl, 2000). Beyond these general definitions, an analysis of conference proceedings and journal articles indicates that, in addition to assumptions from Luhmann’s systems theory, neoinstitutionalist approaches are frequently used to address the organisational and institutional conditions of adult learning (Pätzold, 2015).

Although neoinstitutionalist research activities have developed great productivity since the 1980s, the operationalisation of theoretical key concepts and their systematic identification in empirical data is still considered methodologically challenging (Hellmann, 2006; Deephouse & Suchman, 2013; Senge, 2006). This especially applies to measuring the institutional construct (Koch, 2018). A particular challenge here is the definition of clear measurement procedures which determine how institutions are to be accurately grasped. This methodological challenge mainly occurs because institutions are typically self-evident and therefore do not necessarily need to be verbalised or explained (Senge, 2011). Basically, institutions elude direct measurement; instead, their impact must be gathered through the traces they leave behind (Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008, p. 180).

Even if such questions about the precise specification of measurement operations arise in quantitative research contexts, the methodologically controlled empirical search for a social phenomenon whose existence is characterised by the fact that it does not require explanation or verbalisation is problematic, especially for qualitative research designs that often rely on verbal data. Although quantitative designs still dominate neoinstitutionalist research today, qualitative case studies also play a role. Especially since the turn of the century, they have been increasingly used to analyse the successive emergence, change and social meaning of institutional orientation patterns (Walgenbach & Mayer, 2008). Methodologically, methods such as discourse analyses (Strang & Soule, 1998), content analyses (Koch, 2018), and grounded theory (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Zilber, 2002) are applied, although the usefulness of grounded theory for neoinstitutionalist research is discussed controversially. On the one hand, its usefulness is emphasised for research areas for which no precise or exhaustive assumptions can yet be derived from neoinstitutionalist theory (Zbaracki, 1998). On the other hand, especially with regard to the 'classical' variant of grounded theory initially advocated by Strauss and Glaser, it is criticised for not methodologically supporting an intersubjectively comprehensible analytical approach (Lueger, 2007). Due to its iterative procedure, Lueger (2007), for example, cautions using grounded theory as a 'methodological fig leaf' and warns against misunderstanding the methodological flexibility of grounded theory as 'anything goes'. Suddaby also critically remarks, 'grounded theory is not an excuse for the absence of a methodology' (Suddaby, 2006, p. 640).

This scepticism about the usefulness of grounded theory is linked, at least in part, to its differentiation into variants. Especially the classical variant, now represented by Glaser alone, has been criticised for its naïve, inductivist approach (e.g. Kelle, 2011; Strübing, 2008; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2009, p. 187). In contrast, Strauss (in collaboration with Corbin) made efforts in later years to further elaborate and substantiate grounded theory in terms of research logic (Strübing, 2011). In the neoinstitutionalist discussion, these developments, which ultimately led to variants of grounded theory, are rarely considered.

Against this background, and due to the previously outlined relevance of institutional conditions for enabling adult learning, this article is dedicated to the question of how to grasp the institutional in verbal data with grounded theory. Before discussing

the analytical potential of grounded theory with a view to systematically grasping the institutional, Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the general epistemological interest and the methodological research traditions of neoinstitutionalism. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the research question of the article. It exemplarily discusses the analytical possibilities of grounded theory for neoinstitutionalist research questions by means of a case study on the ideas of good leadership in different organisational and institutional contexts in the field of adult education. Section 3.1 briefly introduces the case study, and Section 3.2 explores the potential of grounded theory using the data material of the case study as an example. The article ends with a summary and a concluding discussion (Chapter 4).¹

2 On the Epistemological Interest and Methods of Neoinstitutionalist Research

Neoinstitutionalism in organisational sociology is currently an influential approach in social science organisation theory. On the one hand, a boom in neoinstitutionalist research is evident from the growing number of (inter-)nationally edited volumes, introductory books and journal articles which explicitly address this ‘new’ perspective on organisations and their institutional environment (e. g. Bonazzi, 2008; Clegg, Hardy & Nord, 1996; Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2013a; Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence & Meyer, 2017; Kieser & Ebers, 2014; Senge, 2011). On the other hand, the increasing influence of neoinstitutionalism is seen in the growing interest of various disciplines. Not only sociology, but also political science, economics and education are turning to neoinstitutionalist reflections on the interaction of institutions and organisations (i. e. from the perspective of educational science in Germany, e. g. Koch & Schemmann, 2009; Klingovsky, 2016; Kuper, 2001; Kuper & Tiehl, 2018; Schaefers, 2002; Schemmann, 2016; Tippelt & Lindemann, 2018). For educational science and adult education, research questions come into focus about

- the dissemination of educational policy programmes, such as the lifelong learning programme (Jakobi, 2006; Schemmann, 2007);
- questions about the institutional conditions for securing the existence of adult education organisations (Schrader, 2010, 2011); and
- the perception and implementation of external requirements (e. g. quality management systems and reform model of school autonomy) by educational organisations (Hartz, 2011, 2015; Schaefers, 2009).

The intensive research activities of academics from various disciplines have led to a wide range of theoretical concepts and empirical findings that make it difficult to define neoinstitutionalism as a uniform theoretical approach. As DiMaggio and Powell

¹ This article is based on parts of the text from an earlier publication (Herbrechter, 2018) which have been translated and re-accentuated to make them accessible for international discussion.

stated in the early 1990s, “it is often easier to gain agreement about what it is *not* than about what it is” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 1; emphasis in original).

Against this background, the guiding epistemological interest of the neoinstitutionalist approach is at best outlined in terms of a minimal consensus. In this sense, the main focus of neoinstitutionalist research is on the conditions and forms of expression of the institutional embeddedness of organisations and its consequences for external and internal activities. Organisations are understood to be socially generated “open systems” (Scott, 2003), which in their formal structure, everyday practice and existence are decisively shaped by the institutional influences of their environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008). Regarding the key neoinstitutionalist term, ‘institution’, various definitions are found in the literature. Among the classic definitional contributions is Scott’s proposal: “Institutions are composed of cultured-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2001, p. 48). Especially for the neoinstitutionalist perspective on organisations, the cognitive side of institutions is of particular interest. With reference to Scott, neoinstitutionalists often assume that the structures and processes in organisations can only be adequately understood if the self-evident ideas and action routines of the actors involved are also considered. Such cognitive institutions have a strong impact because their self-evidence makes it unlikely that their validity will be questioned (Senge, 2011).

With this in mind, neoinstitutionalist researchers typically follow an understanding of science which refers to understanding and explaining social reality. Other positions in science, such as critical questioning of social conditions and the development of social counter-designs as the purpose of science (Habermas, 1968), do not seem to be decisive, at least not for the relevant contributions of previous research. With reference to Berger and Luckmann (1991), a social constructivist understanding of reality is held (Meyer, 2013, p. 519): social reality is based on a collectively shared knowledge basis that has been created socio-historically by people in interactions but has become objectified over time through processes of externalisation, typification, habitualisation and institutionalisation from the situation of their social production. “The reality of everyday life is taken for granted *as* reality. [...] It is simply *there*, as self-evident and compelling facticity. I *know* that it is real” (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 37; emphasis in original).

Due to this social constructivist understanding of reality, neoinstitutionalist research is not fixed on specific methods of gaining knowledge. On the contrary, neoinstitutionalism has a social-theoretical foundation which, on the one hand, refers to regularities and institutional structures of social reality (i. e. institutions as social facticity), which can be examined in a standardised way with quantifying methods. On the other hand, it can also focus more strongly on the fact that institutional structures emerge from the generalisation and objectification of collective ways of perceiving and acting (i. e. institutions as the result of joint beliefs and action in interaction). It then comes into view that institutions require interpretation, the nature of which can be analysed more appropriately with the help of qualitative methods. Although quantita-

tive and qualitative methods can be used, quantitative methods of data collection and analysis have predominated in neoinstitutionalist research to date and are mainly applied in studies on the adaptation or diffusion of institutions (Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008, p.179). As mentioned previously, in these diffusion studies the institutional is typically gathered dichotomously (i. e. non-existing versus existing). The frequency of its adaptation is taken as an indication of progressive institutionalisation or alignment of organisations within an organisational field or, in the case of low diffusion, as an indication that weak institutionalisation or deinstitutionalisation has begun (Senge, 2011, p.165). How the institutional is adopted and with what meaning is usually not the focus of research interest (Zilber, 2013, p.161), and it requires more qualitative research (Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008).

Against this background, the article now explores how grounded theory, as a frequently used method of qualitative research (Lueger, 2007), supports researchers in identifying the institutional and the associated attributions of meaning in the data material in a methodologically controlled manner.

3 Grasping the Institutional Using Verbal Data: Methodological Considerations Using a Grounded Theory Case Study to Analyse Ideas of Good Leadership

As noted, a basic assumption of neoinstitutionalism is that organisations depend on the legitimacy of the environment relevant to them to ensure their survival. For their formal structural design and internal action practice, organisations adapt institutional ideas of what is appropriate to present themselves as a valuable organisation, which conforms to the applicable rules (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In neoinstitutionalist research, the fact that such adaptations are based on the views and actions of individual actors is typically regarded as such a basic prerequisite that they rarely come into view as a unit of analysis (Senge, 2011). How individual actors perceive and interpret institutional expectations, how they refer to institutional specifications and to what extent they thereby contribute to their emergence, maintenance and changes are questions that have increasingly received attention in recent years (e.g. Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). A stronger micro foundation of neoinstitutionalism is called for, which specifies the neoinstitutionalist understanding of actors without disclosing the interplay of individual contributions to interpretation and action with institutional influences and organisational framework conditions (Powell & Colyvas, 2013; Powell & Rerup, 2017; Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006).

In this context, qualitative methods of data collection and analysis have gained importance in neoinstitutionalist research. For example, in the context of an ethnographic field study, Hallett (2010) explores how institutional myths and organisational practices in a US elementary school, which were once loosely coupled are gradually becoming more closely linked. Based on field notes, interviews and participant observation (e. g., of teaching), he finds that institutional requirements (i. e. accountability)

become so internalised over time by individual actors that they are linked back to the originally relatively autonomous level of teaching. Significantly, such 'recoupling' processes are driven by local agents who bring the given structural element of 'accountability' to life at both the organisational and interactional levels (i.e. inhabited institutions).

Furthermore, in a rape crisis centre in Israel, Zilber (2002) analyses the development of professional agency practices within the organisation. By using grounded theory according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) and techniques of narrative, discourse, conversation and script analysis, she evaluates ethnographic field notes, interviews, organisational documents and archival materials. On this basis, she conveys that the established practices of action persisted relatively unchanged for 20 years, although their interpretation and legitimating rationale changed over time. While the crisis centre emerged from the feminist movement in the late 1970s and was run by feminists, in the 1990s it employed mainly professionally trained therapists who were committed to reorganising the centre as primarily a medical rather than a political institution. Nevertheless, they clung to established practices whose feminist origins they were no longer aware of and which they instead legitimise therapeutically with reference to their professional background. Zilber's findings indicate that ways of seeing and ways of acting are not necessarily inseparable. Even if the institutionally based interpretations and assignments of meaning change over time, for example, due to the addition of new actors, the observable interactions can persist relatively unchanged.

From a methodologically interested perspective, both case studies' results unfolded in an intersubjectively comprehensible way. However, one does not learn more about the methodical means used to systematically explore the interaction of institution, organisation and individual actor. In this respect, the studies do not represent an isolated case. Overall, there is a lack of a differentiated discussion of the methodical procedures used in neoinstitutionalist research (Senge, 2011, p.164).

For instance, questions about the precise specification of measurement operations tend to arise in quantitative research contexts. To test whether (and how) social reality can be explained more adequately, hypotheses must be extracted from theories at the beginning of research and made measurable so that they can subsequently be tested for falsifiability (i.e. critical rationalism; Raithel, 2006, p.13). Although in qualitative social research, no importance is attached to the translation of theoretical concepts into unambiguous measurement instructions – due to their explorative, theory-building claim – the handling of theoretical (prior) knowledge is definitely discussed (partly controversially). In grounded theory, the differently evaluated significance of theoretical prior knowledge has led to the fact that its two founding fathers (i.e. Glaser and Strauss) have each shaped their own variant of grounded theory over the course of time. Glaser, for example, now claims to represent 'classical grounded theory', which has an unbroken connection to the methodological considerations of their joint founding paper, "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser & Holton, 2004). For him, grounded theory is still based on a primarily inductive pro-

cedure, which rejects theoretical prior knowledge until a categorical core of the data material is discovered through permanent comparison.

“I wish to remind people, yet again, that classic GT [grounded theory] is simply a set of integrated conceptual hypotheses systematically generated to produce an inductive theory about a substantive area. [...] To undertake an extensive review of literature before the emergence of a core category violates the basic premise of GT that being, the theory emerges from the data not from extant theory” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 3, 12).

In contrast, Strauss held theoretical (prior) knowledge in greater esteem in his later publications, which he published alone or with Corbin. For him, prior theoretical knowledge is part of ‘contextual knowledge’, which includes not only researchers’ expertise but also their accumulated research skills and individual experiences (Strauss, 1998, pp. 36–37). Following his former teacher Herbert Blumer, Strauss understands this contextual knowledge as something that researchers possess to an extent that is unique to each individual and that can repeatedly be a sensitising source for data generation and analysis (Blumer, 1954, pp. 7–9; Blumer, 2004, pp. 359–360; Strübing, 2007, pp. 15–16; Strübing, 2008, p. 59). Against this background, reading literature both before and during the research phase is legitimate, provided that the relevance of the prior knowledge is grounded in the data at hand in each case and is an expression of the researchers’ discovering attitude (Strauss & Corbin, 1996, pp. 38, 33). Unlike Glaser, Strauss thus clearly distances himself from the principle of inductive theory building and instead opposes it with a continuously circulating process of induction, deduction and provisional verification of generated categories (Strauss, 1998, pp. 37–40). In retrospect, Strauss thematises “The Discovery of Grounded Theory” with regard to its pointed linguistic style as an expression of its time-historical context of origin. From his perspective, it needed further methodological elaboration in later publications, for at that time, the ‘Discovery Book’ programmatically opposed existing conventions of US research in which qualitative research work was not recognised (Interview ‘Research is hard work, ...’, 2011, p. 73).

“Because of the partly rhetorical purpose of that book [‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory’] and the authors’ emphasis on the need for *grounded* theory, Glaser and Strauss overplayed the inductive aspects. Correspondingly, they greatly underplayed both the potential role of extant (grounded) theories and the unquestionable fact (and advantage) that trained researchers are theoretically sensitized. Researchers carry into their research the sensitizing possibilities of their training, reading, and research experience, as well as explicit theories that might be useful if played against systematically gathered data, in conjunction with theories emerging from analysis of these data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 277, emphasis in original).

Not least due to this differentiated approach to theoretical knowledge and the systematically elaborated methodical means, the following reflections on the systematic analysis of the institutional with qualitative methods refer to the grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin. To explore the potential of grounded theory for the

analysis of the institutional in the field of adult education using data from a case study (see Section 3.2), Section 3.1 first briefly describes the case study.

3.1 Case Study on the Ideas of Good Leadership of Adult Education Leading Staff

In addition to formal and informal structures, the perceptions and actions of leading staff members are central to successful working relationships in (adult education) organisations. In examining issues of leadership, previous (psychological) research has focused primarily on the leading staff, their employees and the situation of the work group (Bryman, Collinson, Grint, Jackson & Uhl-Bien, 2011). In contrast, the meaning of the institutional environment for leading staff members' ways of thinking and acting needs further study. Against this background, the case study focuses on the institutional and organisational foundations of leading staff members' understanding of leadership in adult education. Inspired by considerations of organisational sociological neoinstitutionalism, the case study pursues the following research questions: (1) 'What do leading staff members in adult education understand to be good leadership and to what extent do they succeed in realising it?' and (2) 'How do leading staff members in adult education relate to institutional requirements of the environment and structural conditions of the adult education organisation?'.

For the analyses, publicly accessible organisational data were collected and guided interviews were conducted with leading staff members of adult education organisations, which offer educational programmes but operate under different organisational and institutional contextual conditions. The diversity of contextual conditions was empirically determined based on the organisational purpose, number of employees and public funding. Overall, the sample consists of publicly funded organisations, adult education organisations sponsored by social interest groups and private-sector adult education organisations (Herbrechter, 2016c). The data analysis is based on grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin (1996), as this variant of grounded theory offers helpful methodical means for the analysis of the research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 135 ff.).

A contrastive case comparison of adult education organisations embedded in primarily state- or market-regulated contexts indicates that in their understanding of good leadership, leading staff members not only refer to the theoretically expected form of coordination by 'hierarchy' (Schimank, 2007b; Herbrechter, 2016a), but also draw on the institutional logic of the context relevant to them. In their understanding of good leadership, they adapt typical media of action coordination for the respective institutional context (e.g. money for the market context) to the organisation and, through their understanding of leadership, also make them valid for action coordination with their employees (Herbrechter, 2016b). They actively aim to compensate for the 'shadow sides' of these media (e.g. a tendency to 'hidden action' through primary leadership via monetary incentives by advocating an open error culture). Even if leading staff members are primarily concerned with ensuring the smoothest possible action processes within the organisation, they perform institutional work by adapting

context-specific media and compensating for the typical downsides of these media by indirectly contributing to the stabilisation of the institutional logic of the respective context through their idea of good leadership.

3.2 Analysing the Institutional with Grounded Theory Coding Techniques

In this section, quotations from the case study interview material are used to illustrate grounded theory analysis techniques, which can support researchers in systematically seeking the institutional within the generated data material. The exemplary interview passages are taken from the aforementioned case study. The quotations refer to an interview with the head of a publicly funded adult education organisation (A05).

Analysing institutional influences systematically and in-depth is challenging. Their effectiveness can only be traced indirectly – for example, through their existing or non-existing manifestation in the organisational structure or in the attribution of meaning of the individual actors. Special attention should be paid to problematic situations in which the institutional context of expectations no longer appear self-evident, alternatives become conscious and, if necessary, justifications for deviating ways of seeing and acting are developed. Conversely, however, assumed self-evident facts and ideas about what is considered appropriate also allow an analytical approach (Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008, p. 180; Senge, 2006, p. 43).

With regard to data analysis, Strauss and Corbin recommend continuously asking questions and making initial comparisons in the first phase of open coding. One technique related to institutional influences is the so-called ‘waving of the red flag’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 70). That is, researchers should pay particular attention to what is self-evident.

“Words like ‘never’, ‘always’, ‘it can’t possibly be like this’, ‘everyone knows it’s done this way’, ‘there’s no need for discussion’. Every time you hear such a word or phrase, you should wave the red flag – in your mind! *These words and phrases can be seen as signals to look more closely.* What is happening here? What do you mean by ‘never’? Or ‘always’? Why is that? Never, under what conditions? How is this condition of never maintained? What are its consequences? [...] *The analytic consequence is to never take anything for granted*” (Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 71; emphasis in original; translation by the author).

An example of an institutional-sensitive phrase taken from the aforementioned case study and referring to the importance of the coordination medium ‘rules’ institutionalised in the state context (Schrader, 2011) is a statement by the head of a publicly funded adult education organisation (A05), in which he emphasises the relevance of rules for smooth intra-organisational coordination.

“And when I notice, for example, that in an organisation, [...], there are no rules in important things, but rather that somehow actions are taken quite arbitrarily and situationally. And then I see what negative consequences this has on the willingness to work, on job satisfaction, on the overall organisation or something like that, then I already feel confirmed that one should look for and define these rules and areas of responsibility and then can better deal with them within such a framework. So that’s also a piece of philosophy again, when you see how many possibilities are laid out in the music in counterpoint, that

you actually have infinite possibilities of expression with such a system, but without the system somehow you get lost very quickly – so then you can also recognise this connection there. Or there is even a composer in the twentieth century who, after a long search, decided on one-note music. An Italian Giacinto Scelsi, he has composed orchestral works and works of all kinds in large numbers and is increasingly performed in recent years, he died at the end of the last century, where it consists only of the tone F, for example. One hundred twenty musicians in the opera and all of them play only F in different octaves, but only F, for 20 minutes and out of it becomes a complex and impressive diverse whole. It is not a contradiction” (A05, ll. 705–734).

The statement, “[...] I already *feel confirmed* that one *should* look for and define these rules and areas of responsibility”, as well as the comparisons with orchestral works and orchestral musicians, indicate the high importance of rules for A05 as a structural condition for successful interaction. Following Strauss and Corbin, the way A05 explains the meaning of rules for successful employee leadership gives indications of self-evidence, which point to an institutional embeddedness of what is being stated.

Furthermore, for later phases of the advanced coding process, Strauss and Corbin recommend referring to two general heuristics: the coding paradigm and the condition matrix. With the coding paradigm (see Figure 1), Strauss and Corbin integrate a basic action model into the coding procedures of grounded theory with reference to basic pragmatic-interactionist considerations. The starting point is the following assumption, also referred to as the Thomas theorem: individual actors are involved in interaction contexts, the nature of which is only constituted by the interpretation and situation definition of the participants. Nevertheless, interaction situations are real and practically significant because the situation definitions and associated courses of action of individual actors have concrete consequences. Once set in motion, the situation is subsequently different from what it was before due to the actors’ contributions to interpretation and action. “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). With this in mind, Strauss and Corbin call for searching the underlying data for strategies of handling situation definitions and for explanations of action choices made because these contain clues to the (institutional) conditions and consequences of the situation at issue. The targeted search for situation definitions, their conditions, chosen strategies and emerging consequences is intended to support researchers in systematically relating the initially openly formed codes to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1996, pp. 75–85).

With the condition matrix (see Figure 2), they differentiate various levels on which conditions (and consequences) may be located. Although Strauss and Corbin do not analytically distinguish institutional systems of rules, norms, values and beliefs from the level of the organisation within the condition matrix, the coding paradigm and the condition matrix support researchers in systematically seeking connections between institutional influences, organisational conditions and individual actors’ perspectives and strategies.

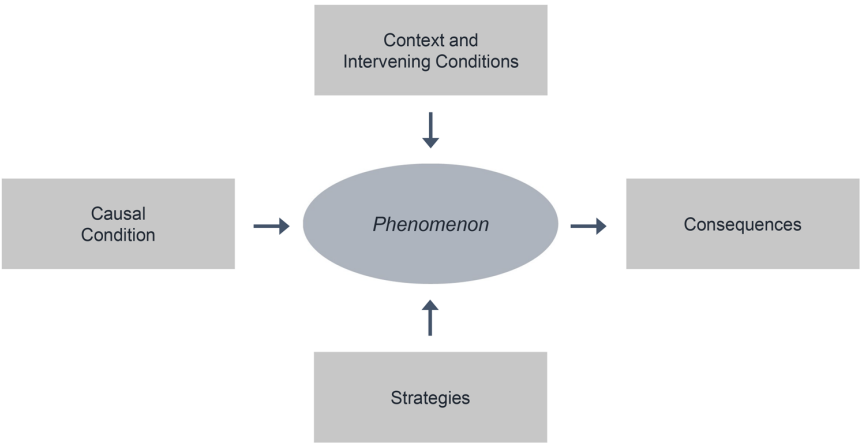


Figure 1: Coding Paradigm (Source: Böhm, 2008, p. 479, reproduced figure)

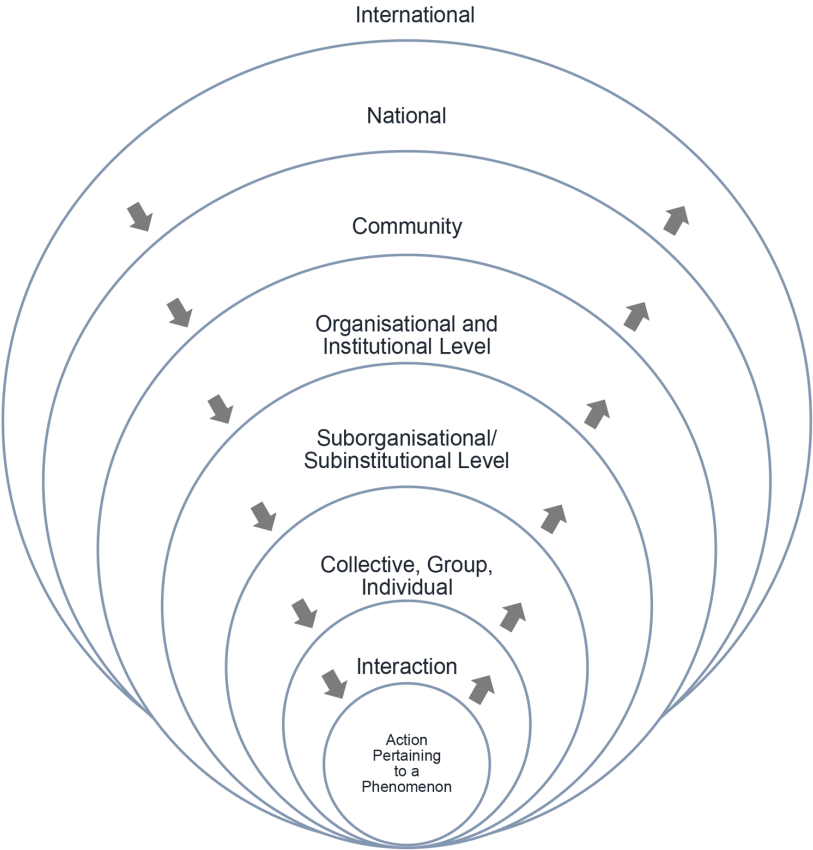


Figure 2: Conditional Matrix (Source: Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 136, reproduced figure)

4 Summary and Discussion

This article takes up the multi-level perspective of adult education, which draws attention to the fact that adult learning is influenced by the organisational and institutional conditions in which it is embedded. However, neoinstitutionalist research in particular focuses on the fact that a systematic and in-depth analysis of the institutional can be challenging (Deephouse & Suchman, 2013; Senge, 2011). On the one hand, a high degree of institutionalisation is characterised by a high degree of self-evidence, so that highly institutionalised ideas, requirements or practices are difficult to identify in empirical data (Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008). On the other hand, qualitative research methods, which enable in-depth analysis may be accused of a lack of systematicity and intersubjective comprehensibility. Grounded theory in particular has been confronted with this accusation in neoinstitutionalist research (Luger, 2007; Suddaby, 2006), as it remains a frequently used method in qualitative organisational research (Goulding, 2009). Against this background, this article also concentrated on grounded theory and addressed the question of whether and in which manner grounded theory is useful for identifying the institutional in-depth and simultaneously systematically in the data material.

A closer look at the methodical procedures of grounded theory has shown that especially the variant of grounded theory elaborated by Strauss and Corbin provides concrete analytical techniques, which also support researchers in identifying the institutional conditions of the social phenomenon of interest in their data material. In particular, the application-oriented publication co-authored with Juliett Corbin names concrete procedures and heuristics with the technique of ‘waving the red flag’ for early phases of analysis and with the ‘coding paradigm’ and the ‘conditional matrix’ for the advanced analysis. These methodical tools appear promising because they support researchers in systematically identifying the institutional conditions in their analyses and documenting them in an intersubjectively comprehensible way but without anticipating the actual analysis findings (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

However, within qualitative social research, the techniques of grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin are appreciated differently. For example, Oevermann criticises grounded theory coding procedures for succumbing to a “classificatory subsumption logic” and therefore inevitably groping “around the surface of the expressed phenomenon” (Oevermann, 2001, p. 61; translation by the author). Among the harshest critics, however, is Glaser himself. He considers the techniques of coding elaborated by Strauss and Corbin (i. e. primarily the coding paradigm) to be an inadmissible methodical procedure which forces a specific code structure on the data material rather than allowing it to emerge from the data itself (Glaser, 1992). This accusation can be countered by the fact that Strauss and Corbin consider general principles of gaining knowledge more strongly than Glaser does. Without an orientation of the analytic gaze, researchers will see nothing in the plethora of data generated because (potentially) everything seems relevant to them. With the coding paradigm, Strauss and Corbin propose a basic model of action for the analysis of the collected data appli-

cable to different social phenomena. It provides a useful structuring of the analysis process and does not jeopardise the open-ended character of grounded theory (Kelle & Kluge, 2010, p. 63–64).

Finally, it remains to be asked which ability to generalise empirical results achieve that have been determined with the coding procedures of grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin. In their publications, Strauss and Corbin emphasise that assumptions about relationships between codes are formed with the goal of specifying conditions, strategies and consequences for a particular empirical situation to develop theory-building assumptions which reveal starting points for further research. What matters here is not the representativeness of the selected cases for the entire population, but rather “*the representativeness of the concepts in their varying forms*” (Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 161; emphasis in original). While quantitative research uses randomisation to draw a representative sample, qualitative research chooses contrast with a view to adequately representing the social phenomenon of interest. This is not about playing the two methodological approaches against each other. Quite the contrary: both were and are necessary and useful for research on the institutional. Especially with regard to the interplay of institutional conditions, organisational structures and teaching-learning processes in adult education, further research is needed (Herbrechter, Hahnraht & Jenner, 2022; Jenner, 2022; Herbrechter & Schrader, 2018; Rubenson & Elfert, 2014). Which methodological approach is chosen for this remains open at first and is ultimately decided by the object of research, the state of research and the research question.

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Three Tales of Lifelong Learning as a Travelling Idea: Diffusion, Mimesis, and Translation

MIKE ZAPP

Abstract

Variants of lifelong learning have been discussed internationally since the early 1960s, yet cross-national adoption and implementation remained limited. It was only in the 1990s that the concept saw worldwide diffusion across countries and international organizations. Such diffusion is not to be confused with institutionalization and tells us little about how actors such as nation-states adopt lifelong learning in their specific contexts. Three scenarios of policy adoption and institutionalization have been widely discussed in the literature. One is diffusion, i.e., the formal (and often decoupled) adoption of ideas, the second scenario is mimesis, i.e., the unfiltered uptake of ideas, and, third, translation which describes a more complex process of partial and selective adoption. This contribution discusses these three theoretical perspectives and presents empirical data, both historical and more recent, on the diffusion, mimesis and translation of lifelong learning in a global perspective.

Keywords: lifelong learning; neoinstitutionalism; diffusion; mimesis; translation

1 Introduction: Lifelong learning as a Travelling Idea

This work rests on the assumption that notions of individual and collective progress represent enlightenment ideologies that contain a number of ‘traveling ideas’ which “built a bridge between the passing fashion and a lasting institution” (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996: 36). Education, including adult education, represents an instructive example of such traveling ideas. Education – in its structure, form and content – has diffused widely in the past two centuries and has become the pinnacle of the global knowledge society in the more recent period (Frank & Meyer 2020). Such formal diffusion of education, as a legal and systemic phenomenon, is undisputed among educational scholars and this work adds evidence of such diffusion for the idea of lifelong learning (LLL).

The 1960s and 1970s already saw the rise of concepts such as ‘permanent education’ (Council of Europe, CoE), ‘recurrent education’ (OECD) and ‘lifelong education’ (UNESCO), all of which revolved around the idea of the educationalized life-course. In the 1990s, organizations and nation-states had come to agree on a unified terminology, lifelong learning, which remains on the global educational agenda until today (see, for example, the 2015 Incheon Declaration).

The journey of such concepts as lifelong learning begs important theoretical questions familiar to many neoinstitutional researchers. Most importantly, how does it diffuse, that is, in which form and under which conditions? Diffusion may occur in a purely mimetic fashion, that is, templates are taken up in a rather unfiltered process. This assumption is often found in the so-called world society or world polity institutionalism mainly developed by John Meyer and his colleagues and students at Stanford University. In this perspective, in a highly scientized global educational discourse – awash with ready-made policy templates – rapid diffusion and mimesis have become more likely than ever before (Strang & Meyer 1991; Zapp & Dahmen 2017).

At the same time, it is a common finding among comparative education and organization scholars that ideas “morph as they move” (Cowen 2009: 315). In such a bricolage perspective, analysis pays attention to specific translation processes at various levels (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996; also Jakobi 2012; Sahlin-Andersson 1996). Researchers from this so-called Scandinavian neoinstitutionalist perspective often stress that an idea moves in time and space, but also through different ontological states: a moment and place witness an idea translated into an object, then translated into action. In repeating and formalizing such action, it may gradually stabilize into an institution, increasingly legitimate and taken-for-granted.

This contribution utilizes these three theoretical perspectives – diffusion, mimesis and translation – to empirically examine the manifold trajectories of lifelong learning across time, regions and countries as well as the various forms of policy implementation. I will present empirical data to support the presence of each of these perspectives and the widespread, yet diverse institutionalization and conclude with some thoughts on further research.

2 Lifelong Learning as Diffusion

In a neoinstitutionalist perspective, the rational adoption of a given innovation (be it an idea, a social or technological practice, organizational form or identity) is only half the story. Starting from the constructivist position of an externally-generated identity-formation, Strang and Meyer (1993: 493) identify theorization as the prerequisite and accelerator of diffusion processes. By theorization they mean “[...] the self-conscious development and specification of abstract categories and the formulation of patterned relationships such as chains of cause and effect.” These abstract cultural categories are made of actors whose cognitive map identifies reference groups that bound social comparison processes. In modern societies, individuals, organizations and nation-states are the main entities.

The underlying theorization suggests perceptions of strong similarity among adopters and their cultural linkages outstrip any direct relations in creating diffusion. Put simply, entities recognize each other as such, as they presumably share the same form and functioning. They seem to us as internally consistent – an impression that is reinforced by theoretical models replete with abstraction, simplification, typologies

and generalizations about cause and effect chains. These models can vary in complexity, but tend to higher levels of abstraction to allow for universal relevance across adopters, space and time.

Theorization is not necessarily scientific in the strict sense of the term, but is much more successful if so. With LLL, science has substantially contributed to its prominence. Figure 1 traces the proliferation of scientific publications dealing with LLL and related concepts. Starting in the mid-1990s, scientific attention to LLL has seen a striking momentum until today.

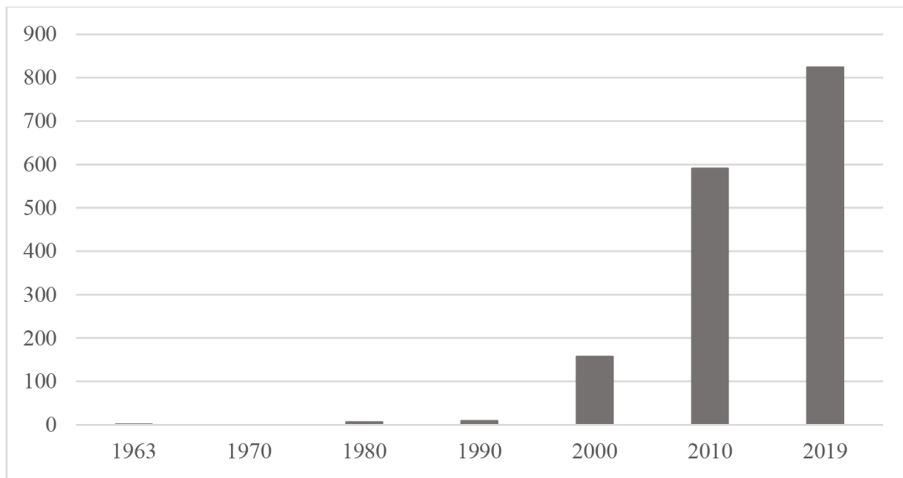


Figure 1: Scientific publications referring to lifelong learning in their title and abstract, 1963–2019 (Source: Scopus 2020)

Theorization involves the identification of adopting populations, which supposedly share a similar identity and social practice. They are homogeneous in a theoretical perspective and receive their respective script of how to act appropriately. Thus, all nation-states would be considered equally apt and in need of adopting LLL. The consequence of such theorized receptibility has seen strong empirical support. Jakobi (2006) traced the uptake of LLL in official policy documents. Similar to the diffusion in science, country diffusion accelerated considerably in the 1990s.

The diffusion of LLL is not limited to nation-states. Zapp and Dahmen (2017), tracing the diffusion of LLL across a sample of $N = 61$ intergovernmental and non-governmental international organizations (IOs), find the same pattern of intensified concept-travelling since the 1990s.

At the same time, such formal diffusion tells us little about concrete policy reforms, legislation and initiatives ‘on the ground’. One may even argue that such rapid and widespread diffusion can only occur if the substance of diffusion is a highly abstract and theorized template with little reference to local or country-specific conditions. In an extreme scenario, formally-adopting actors do not ‘walk the talk’ and the concept remains decoupled from real action (Bromley & Powell 2012).

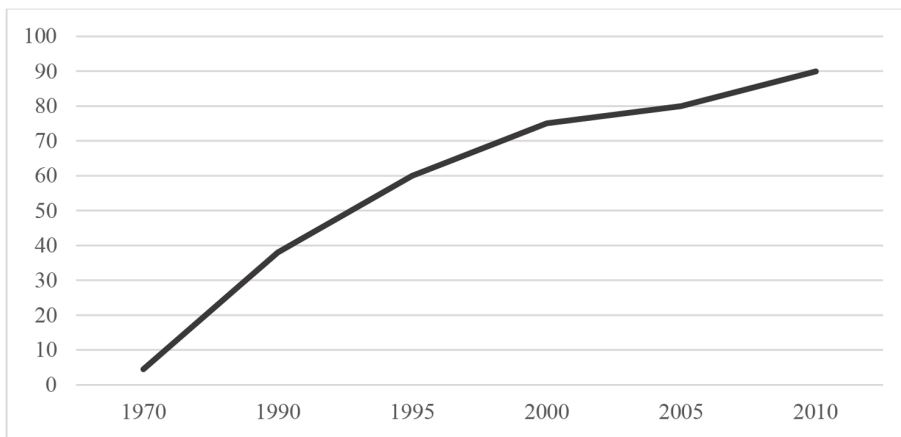


Figure 2: Cumulated % of countries referring to lifelong learning (Source: Jakobi 2006; extended; own account)

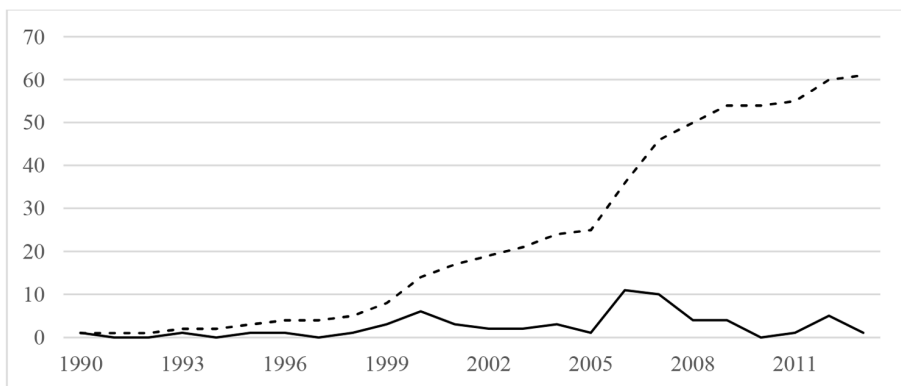


Figure 3: International organizations referring to lifelong learning, 1990–2013 (N = 61; own account)

3 Lifelong Learning as Mimesis

If diffusion in world society is conditioned by theorization, it is imperative to elaborate on the ‘theorists’. World society scholars have highlighted the role of IOs as agents of wider cultural goods or ‘rationalized others’ – a reference to Mead’s generalized others who serve as a fund of expectations of how to act in world society (Meyer et al. 1997: 165). IOs derive much of their authority from the fact that they accumulate much rationalistic and universalistic knowledge within their bodies. This knowledge, in turn, is generated by its highly professionalized and scientific personnel (Zapp 2017). The high degree of rationalization in IOs may facilitate the strikingly homogeneous, if not identical elaboration of LLL models. Analyzing N = 252 official documents from a

sample of $N = 88$ organizations, Zapp (2015) found strong evidence of mimetic diffusion in IOs' theorization of lifelong learning:

- (1) LLL is depicted as geographically universal, i.e. global, in that all organizations emanating from all continents have picked up the idea and apply it within their area context;
- (2) organizations representing countries varying 1 to 100 in economic, demographic, educational or other socioeconomic indicators, state that LLL is a viable means to solve problems quite similar to these represented by the indicators in which they differ. Put differently, the whole development continuum reflected in the UN Human Development Index, from bottom to the top, is treated with the same language and the same hope and is proposed highly similar reforms;
- (3) there is no cultural pattern discernible. Language, religion, history – none of these aspects make for a specific LLL concept. Where LLL is given some 'cultural flavor', culture becomes just the source as to why LLL is perfectly suitable to the Asian or the Muslim world and Confucian or Koranic imperatives are translated into a modern LLL imperative, while getting rid of the 'wrong' traditions from that primordial culture;
- (4) LLL might be called a concept of educational radicalization. The whole life-course – and, peculiarly enough, even before (e.g. prenatal cognition and health) – becomes educationally-structured. Temporal universality is also implied when LLL is depicted in terms of an anthropological continuity: learning has always happened (it is the human condition) and will determine our future.

Interestingly, such mimesis occurs beyond functional evidence or even despite evidence of failure largely displaying the ideological character of the phenomenon and the process. Mimesis is not institutionalization, but rather the epistemological and ontological prerequisite of institutionalization. Just as with education, and much more radicalized now, LLL is backed by a highly rationalized and highly normative epistemology – the dream of a better society achieved through education – ascribing ultimate ontological status to the individual actor and its aggregation in a national and, increasingly, global society.

4 Lifelong Learning as Translation

Formal diffusion and mimesis are hard to capture empirically other than through an analysis of the formal (e.g. nominal, legal or constitutional) adoption and such assumptions need to be put in the perspective of international and intra-national implementation. Below the macroscopic analysis of large-scale trends, other neoinstitutionalist strands focus on lower-level adoption processes (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996; Campbell 2004; Suárez & Bromley 2016).

In our context, lifelong learning has seen various interpretations according to the national contexts in which uptake occurs. For example, Jakobi (2006) identifies six different substantive and contextual categories of LLL found cross-nationally: (1) awareness; (2) foundations; (3) background; (4) adult education; (5) competitive workforce and (6) others such as literacy, family education, higher education.

In the (1) case, states seek to raise the awareness among their citizens that knowledge becomes more important in modern economies. Such statements do not specify how LLL policies might look like and remain rather superficial in their message. In a (2) type of statement, countries declare that they want to strengthen the foundations for LLL. This can happen at different educational levels. For instance, Sweden mentions early childhood care and education and Norway speaks of basic education, while Belize and Botswana refer to secondary and vocational education. For LLL to (3) serve as a background concept, countries had to state that it is the “principle of their education system” (Jakobi 2006: 119). These principles can be seen as goals attached to education or as elements woven into laws and development programs. In a (4) interpretation, countries understand LLL as a synonym for further or continuing education. In Kuwait, for instance, a network of educational institutions (ministries, universities etc.) provides post-basic education in Islamic studies, sciences, language and history. LLL is also (5) framed in terms of competitiveness in the knowledge economy. Korea equates to the “lifelong learning society” with “high quality human resources” and the Estonian Law on adult education is seen in the context of permanent change and economic development (Jakobi 2006: 122). The (6) category includes meanings of LLL that can mostly be found in less industrialized countries. Here, LLL can be non-formal education (Angola), literacy (Chad, Iran) or access to higher education (Sudan).

In addition to these conceptual interpretations of LLL, we find diverse national educational reforms linked to the concept. First, there have been regulative efforts and programs to put LLL into practice. Countries such as Japan, Estonia and Australia introduced Lifelong Learning Laws that guarantee adults to continue their studies, establish new educational administration and widen the learning options for participants. A second measure consists of new funding mechanisms for adult learning. Countries like the UK, the Netherlands or Brazil have established learning accounts and new funding schemes to increase participation (Jakobi 2012). Finally, Zapp and Ramirez (2019) identify striking cross-national adoption of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) since the 1990s that stimulate, categorize and assess learning in adult life. Data, based on official ministry websites, shows that between 2006 and 2016 more than a hundred countries adopted NQFs, now including 120 states worldwide. If we include countries for which no date could be found and those with NQFs in preparation, the number climbs to almost 150 countries (CEDEFOP 2013) (Figure 4).

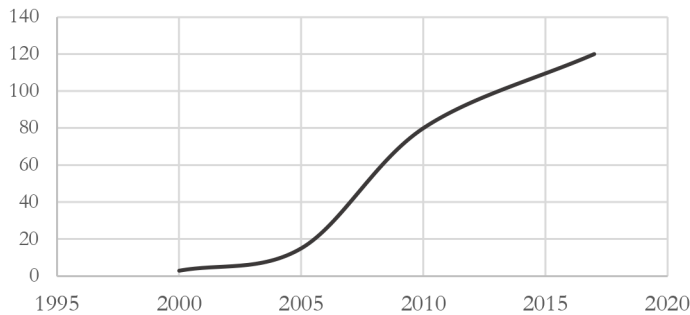


Figure 4: Cross-national adoption of national qualification frameworks (cumulative; own account)

Yet, even within a fairly standardized policy implementation such as NQFs, there are a number of considerable differences. Some QFs include both vocational and HE qualifications, others only one of each. Again, others are directly linked to one or more regional QFs such as the European QF. At the same time, qualification frameworks, together with large-scale assessments, all have in common to introduce the new language of competencies into the (adult) education discourse (Zapp 2018). Often, these competencies and skills are meant to facilitate standardized measuring and testing, yet remain subject to highly controversial debates both among scholars and policy-makers (Biesta 2009).

Lost in translation: When ideas travel through time. A particular case of translation occurs when phenomena are considered in their historical evolution. Time is perhaps the most important explanatory proxy variable in all these processes. Ideas need time to move, even under ideal conditions of seamless digital communication. However, while locales matter, at times more, at times less, in explaining the remaining variance in models and their resulting adoption, time needs to be considered as an important proxy that represents underlying political, social and cultural change. For example, a different strand of neoinstitutionalism, the so-called historical institutionalism, stresses timing, path dependence and ideas in order to explain institutional change (or inertia) (e. g. Mahoney & Thelen 2009). It is important to stress that ideational change does not only mean that ideas matter in explaining change, it can also mean that ideas themselves change over time. Rarely noticed in longitudinal research on policy diffusion and translation is the rather curious observation that, over time, particular features of an idea are sometimes, deliberately or not, lost.

This also holds for LLL. Earlier versions of LLL still bore education in their name. The OECD's recurrent education (e. g. OECD 1973; 1975), UNESCO's lifelong education (e. g. UNESCO 1970; 1972) and the Council of Europe's permanent education (e. g. CoE 1969; 1970) were all conceptualized around a *system*. What did policy designers motivate to name their concepts lifelong *learning* instead of *education* in the 1990s? Rivera (2006: 118) recalls this "American and English-speaking anomaly with regard to the UNESCO-developed concept of lifelong education, that we say 'lifelong learning', a phrase meant to suggest the absence of system and the presence of the learner as final authority in the educational transaction." The same observer remembers the

UNESCO conference on lifelong education in 1976 where most European participants approved of lifelong education, while those from the UK, the USA and Australia stressed “the importance of the individual’s capacity and responsibility for learning”, as expressed in the notion of lifelong learning (Rivera 2009: 284). For many observers such a difference is not merely a terminological quarrel. Instead, the priority of learning over education since the 1990s would reflect both the increasing commodification and marketization of education, and the shift away from the system, state, society and collective responsibility toward the individual (Duke 1999; Field 2006; Griffin 1999; Gruber 2007).

5 Conclusion and Outlook

Lifelong learning has seen striking worldwide diffusion since the 1990s both at the level of national and international organizations’ discourse. Such diffusion is facilitated by its strongly theorized character that spells out the benefits of more education for individuals and societies alike across national economic, cultural and social differences. As a substantive lightweight, the notion flows easily and quickly and in a mimetic process across the most similar adopters, i. e. international organizations.

Such a focus on diffusion and mimesis provides little insight into whether LLL remains a decoupled phenomenon where formal structure is disconnected from real activities. However, in an increasingly data-based, goal-driven, monitored and multi-stakeholder international arena concerned with accountability, such non-action may become rare. Instead, it is more likely to assume that organizational actors (including nation-states) uptake these templates. At the same time, a new form of decoupling, between ends and means, may become salient (Bromley & Powell 2012). Since the 2000s, the global educational discourse has seen the production of many more goals and related monitoring instruments aided by growing data availability (Zapp 2020). With such heightened ambitions increasingly dominating the international community, it remains to be seen whether and to what extent national settings permit policy-makers to comply with these growing demands, both in developed and developing countries.

Instead, it may remain true that LLL and other educational ideas will see specific translation outcomes reflective of the wider political and economic discourse in which the policy uptake is embedded. In this case, both the neoliberal slim state, the growing twin emphasis on human capital but also on human rights will impact on the future of LLL (Schuetze 2006; Schuetze & Casey 2006). They have already altered not only the formal conceptual shell of lifelong learning (instead of education) and it remains the task of future adult educational research to also examine the policy implications that come with it. This research task echoes long-standing debates in neoinstitutionalist research about cross-national isomorphism and convergence of policies on one side versus persistent national path dependencies and ongoing translation of these policies on the other. With the growing role of international organizations, international com-

parison and large-scale assessment as well as supranational governance (e. g. within the EU) further convergence in educational policies – comprising both educational goals and content – can be expected, perhaps to the dismay of those who believe particular national legacies such as humanistic principles, public provision and an educational curriculum beyond labor market demands should still have their place in (or in spite of) the global knowledge economy.

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Institutional Entrepreneurship in Adult Basic Education. Recent Theoretical Developments and Empirical Analyses

JAKOB BICKEBÖLLER, DÖRTHE HERBRECHTER & MICHAEL SCHEMMANN

Abstract

Using the neo-institutionalist concept of the *institutional entrepreneur*, this article examines the process of institutionalization in the field of adult literacy and basic education, which is in a process of structural development. The aim of the analysis is to identify relevant actors at the *regional level* of basic education and to reconstruct the *projects* in which they are involved. Another focus is on the applied *skills* that actors use to drive the process of institutionalization. The article is based on a *secondary analysis* of an interview-based study with experts from the field of basic education. The findings point to a field characterized by fragility, in which actors engage in diverse projects. Depending on the form of the project, different skills become relevant.

Keywords: Institutional Entrepreneur; neo-institutionalism; Adult basic education; Institutionalization; Constellation of actors

Abstract

Der Beitrag betrachtet mithilfe des neo-institutionalistischen Konzepts des *Institutional Entrepreneurs* den Prozess der Institutionalisierung im sich in der Strukturentwicklung befindenden Feld der Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung Erwachsener. Ziel der Analyse ist die Identifikation relevanter Akteure auf der *regionalen Ebene* der Grundbildung sowie die Rekonstruktion der *Projekte*, in denen sie involviert sind. Ein weiterer Fokus liegt auf den angewendeten *Skills*, mit denen die Akteure den Prozess der Institutionalisierung vorantreiben. Der Beitrag basiert auf einer *Sekundäranalyse* einer interviewbasierten Studie mit Expertinnen und Experten aus dem Feld der Grundbildung. Die Befunde weisen auf ein von Fragilität geprägtes Feld hin, in dem sich die Akteure in diversen Projekten zusammenfinden und engagieren. Je nach Form des Projekts werden unterschiedliche Skills relevant.

Keywords: Institutional Entrepreneur; Neo-Institutionalismus; Grundbildung; Institutionalisierung; Akteurkonstellation

1 Introduction

Even though adult basic education has been on the adult education policy agenda for decades it is still considered a fragile part of adult education. Thus, adult basic education programs and seminars are not as institutionalized as programs and seminars offered in realms like languages or health. A study carried out by Loreit, Schemmann and Herbrechter (2014) shows that it is particularly the public adult education providers who guarantee the seminars offered.

However, a number of political initiatives both on the international and on the national level have been launched within the last years to increase the attention paid to adult basic education (Koller, Klinkhammer & Schemmann 2020). Starting in 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar integrated the efforts around literacy and adult basic education into the “Education for All”-initiative (UNESCO 2000). One of the goals was to establish basic adult education for all as a right (Lenhart 2018, 14). What is more, in 2003 UNESCO launched the “United Nations Literacy Decade” (UNESCO 2003) to grant more attention for literacy and adult basic education.

On the national level of German education policy, the topic also received a lot of political attention. In 2006, the federal government established a funding scheme for more than 100 literacy and adult basic education projects. From 2012 to 2016, Germany ran a so-called National Strategy for Literacy and Adult Basic Education. Finally, in 2016 the “AlphaDekade 2016–2026” (BMBF & KMK 2016) was launched aiming at the reduction of functional literacy in Germany. Within this “AlphaDekade” various projects are being funded from both adult basic education practice as well as adult basic education research. Within the federal initiative one strand of funding is dedicated to research only. Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that research outcomes and findings increased during these last years and that the knowledge base extended, especially as regards the institutionalization of adult basic education.

As such, adult basic education policies were analyzed in a comparative way focusing on the interplay of policy, polity and politics in England, the Netherlands, Austria and Turkey (Knauber & Ioannidou 2016). The study covered processes of policy formulation as well as policy implementation.

Additionally, Euringer (2016) focused on the adult basic education understanding of public administrators in the German Laender. Her study made clear that the administrators’ definition of adult basic education does not only refer to universal goals such as participation or learning but also encompasses notions of responsibility and finances.

Koller, Arbeiter and Schemmann (2021) analyzed the fragile field of work-oriented adult basic education from both an educational governance as well as a neo-institutionalist perspective. The article analyzes different organizational and institutional structures, the involved actors and the coordination of action between those actors.

And finally, Schemmann (2020) analyzed the institutionalization of work-oriented adult basic education particularly focusing on the institutionalization within

companies. The study identified six factors, which support the successful institutionalization in companies. One central finding in both the study by Koller, Arbeiter and Schemmann (2021) as well as in Schemmann (2020) makes it clear that institutionalization of adult basic education involves a special actor, a so-called institutional entrepreneur, who brings together various actors in new constellations. In general, institutional entrepreneurship refers to "... the activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones" (Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence 2004, 657). Consequently, institutional entrepreneurs are the actors that change of institutions can be ascribed to.

In sum, while we have research findings in a multilevel perspective covering the national level, the level of the German Laender and the level of the companies, there is a lack of findings regarding the regional level. We know little about the role of the actors and their strategies as regards the institutionalization of adult basic education on this level.

Our article intends to provide knowledge on this regional level and analyzes actors and the coordination of actors. However, we want to focus particularly on this special actor responsible for the successful institutionalization by employing the neo-institutionalist concept of the institutional entrepreneur. Thus, we will concentrate on the institutional entrepreneurs, the field and the projects they engage in as well as the activities and skills needed to propagate new organizational forms and institutions.

The research questions can be put as follows: How can the field of adult basic education be characterized on the regional level? What kinds of projects do institutional entrepreneurs in adult basic education engage in? What kinds of skills are needed to be successful?

As indicated above, the article will employ neo-institutionalism and in particular the concept of institutional entrepreneurship as a theoretical framing (2). Methodologically, the article is based on a guided-interview study with stakeholders in regional contexts. Following our research questions we carried out a secondary analysis of the data (3). The findings will cover our results regarding the field characterization, the projects as well as the skills of institutional entrepreneurs (4). The findings will also be discussed against the background of the theoretical framing (5), and subsequently, conclusions will be drawn (6).

2 Neo-Institutionalism and Institutional Entrepreneurship – Theoretical Foundations and Development

Currently, neo-institutional theory is considered one of the most outstanding and dynamic theoretical approaches in the study of organizations (Alvesson & Spicer 2019). Following the classical account, neo-institutionalism goes back to the papers of Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). One of the core ideas is the understanding of organizations and their development in view of their

institutional environment. This institutionalized environment is conceptualized by the term organizational field which is understood as a set of organizations which "... constitute an area of institutional life; key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 148 f). What is more, it is assumed that organizations adopt new structures and practices not for reasons of efficacy but rather of legitimacy (Alvesson & Spicer 2019, 200).

Another key concept is that of the institution understood as taken for granted "... cultured-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that ... provide stability and meaning to social life" (Scott 1999, 48). For a long time, the studies presented focused on the stabilizing effect of institutions as well as on how the generated isomorphisms were established within the organizations of a particular organizational field. But recently, neo-institutionalist theory and research has also started focusing on the change of institutions. Key concepts in this respect are institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work (Herbrechter & Schemmann 2019).

The concept of institutional entrepreneurship, as it was developed within neo-institutionalist theory, is at the center of the theoretical framework for this study.

The concept is closely associated with DiMaggio who already pointed out in a critical paper in 1988 that neo-institutionalist theory also needs to address the creation, development and change of institutions. Thus, he promoted the consideration of actors in neo-institutionalist theory and focused on institutional entrepreneurs: "New institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value high" (DiMaggio 1988, 14).

Perkmann and Spicer (2007) made an important contribution to the conceptual development of institutional entrepreneurship. They took the diffusion of organizational forms, once accepted as legitimate, as a starting point and stated that this happens due to the work of institutional entrepreneurs. They indicated that even though a number of studies focused on the characteristics of institutional entrepreneurship, "... there is a significant degree of uncertainty about what exactly institutional entrepreneurs do when they propagate new organizational forms" (Perkmann & Spicer 2007, 1101). In particular, Perkmann and Spicer (2007) single out that there is lack of clarity as regards the projects institutional entrepreneurs engage in, the skills they need as well as the way the fields they act in are shaped.

As regards the field, Perkmann and Spicer (2007) point out that institutional entrepreneurship is influenced by the field context. In particular, the degree of institutionalization has an impact. The more institutionalized, understood as stable sets of norms, rules and cognitive schemas, the less the chance for change. However, the fact that there is evidence of successful action of entrepreneurs within institutionalized fields indicates "... the existence of differing strategies of institutional entrepreneurship that have so far remained unexplored" (Perkmann & Spicer 2007, 1104).

Referring to the projects the institutional entrepreneurs engage in, Perkmann and Spicer (2007) differentiate between interactional, technical and cultural projects.

As regards interactional projects, political strategies such as network building or co-operation are of importance. “They engage in coalition building, bargaining and incentivizing other actors to gather support for their project, thereby mobilizing and leveraging resources for their operations” (Perkmann & Spicer 2007, 1103).

In contrast to this, technical projects understand institutional entrepreneurs as engaged in ‘theorization’ and finding abstract categories. As an example, a study by Greenwood et al (2002) on the transformation of Canadian accounting firms is referred to. “This change was precipitated by a professional association identifying pressing problems, offering abstract solutions and providing moral justifications” (Perkmann & Spicer 2007, 1103).

Finally, cultural projects imply the framing of institutions so they connect to popular debates and discourses and thus gain in acceptance of wider audiences. Often the connection is made to discourses on “... efficiency, scientific analysis, rationality and impartiality” (ibid.).

Regarding skills, Perkmann and Spicer differentiate between political analytical and cultural skills. Political skills refer to the ability to network, bargain or mediate differing interests as well as to reflect on settled proceedings and to conceive of alternative aims (Perkmann & Spicer 2007, 1103 f). However, this also “... involves the use of analytical skills, such as developing abstract models of an institution” (Perkmann & Spicer 2007, 1104). Similar to cultural projects, cultural skills refer to framing issues by abstract values as well as creating shared identities (ibid.).

Based on their study, Perkmann and Spicer (2007) develop a chart, which summarizes the relations between projects, activities, skills and outcome (see Table 1).

Table 1: Projects and Skills in Institutional Entrepreneurship (Source: Perkmann & Spicer [2007, 1117])

Project	Activities	Skills	Outcome
Interactional	Networking Resource mobilization Organization building	Political	Innovative organizational form
Technical	Studying Analyzing Designing	Analytical	Theorization of organizational form
Cultural	Framing Propagating Advising Teaching	Cultural	Diffusion of organizational form

In the following, we will employ this theoretical approach as an analytical heuristics for approaching adult basic education networks. We will focus on the field of adult basic education and how institutional entrepreneurs engage with the field. We then shed some light on what types of projects institutional entrepreneurs undertake in

establishing adult basic education networks. And finally, we will take a closer look at the skills institutional entrepreneurs need to accomplish their tasks in adult basic education.

3 Methodical Approach

As indicated above, we carried out a secondary analysis of data collected in a research project aiming at identifying governance regimes and forms of coordination of action in adult basic education. In the following, we will characterize the design of this ‘main’ study before outlining the setup of the secondary analysis.

The secondary analysis is based on the data of a *multiple case study*. Within this study *guided interviews* were conducted with *experts from adult basic education*. Yin (2009) identifies four different types of case studies, which differ in structure (see p. 46). A case is considered to be embedded if it comprises several objects of analysis (here: adult education centers, three associations, social work association, political actor). Within an embedded multiple case study design, analyses can be conducted with respect to the individual case as well as across cases. As part of the multiple case study, a total of 12 interviews were conducted in the context of two cases. These twelve interviews are the basis for our secondary analysis.

The basic condition for the selection of the interviewed experts is their activity in the investigated field (literacy and adult basic education). The interviewees are considered functionaries within their field of action because they have a special responsibility and “privileged access to information about groups of people or decision-making processes” (Meuser & Nagel 1991, 443). Thus, adult education program and project managers, management staff of three organizations and one actor from the field of education policy were interviewed. As defined in the interview guideline, the activities of the interviewees within the field, organizational structures of the network at the regional level, financing conditions and the cooperation with other actors were addressed.

The material was analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2018). In the light of educational governance, the focus of the main analysis was on the constellations of actors that can be found, the cooperation and the forms of coordination of action as well as the range of adult educational offers. The category system used for this purpose was created in a multi-step procedure combining deductive and inductive category formation (Kuckartz 2018, 100). To check the category system, the intercoder reliability was calculated (Krippendorff 2004), which can be classified as satisfactory at 0.65.

As regards our secondary analysis of the data, the categories ‘*actor constellation*’, ‘*forms of action coordination*’ and ‘*structural field conditions*’ were re-analyzed against the background of the concept of institutional entrepreneurship (Perkmann & Spicer 2007). We formed deductive subcategories and coded the selected data. The focus lies on the characterization of the field, the different forms of projects (*interactional*, *techni-*

cal and *cultural*) and the skills (*social, cultural, political* and *analytical*) that the actors use. The results are presented and discussed in the following. As all the interviews and the coding were carried out in German, the quotations in the presentations of the findings were translated into English by the authors.

4 Findings on the Field, Projects and Skills of Institutional Entrepreneurs

The following section presents the findings of the re-analysis of the expert interviews based on our formulated research interest. The focus lies on the analysis of the field (4.1) as well as on the projects and the skills, which will be presented in one subchapter and related to each other (4.2).

4.1 Characterization of the Field

Before analyzing the projects and skills that institutional entrepreneurs use to advance the institutionalization, this section focuses on the characterization of the field of literacy and adult basic education. It can be stated that the field is characterized by fragility and constant change as regards funding, thematic orientation and the actors' self-concepts.

Considering the significance of adult basic education in the context of policy there is an extreme disparity between political significance within the talk and the actual political action.

The political actors interviewed describe the important position that adult basic education holds in the current political debate. The topic seems to be omnipresent and is addressed in almost every speech of politicians. However, this relevance is not reflected in the actors' actual political actions.

“When you see what really happens there, you are a bit disappointed that everyone knows how important this topic is and how crucial it is for a career or for participation in society. And yet, a lot of things are still being realized through project funding” (I05_Pos. 4).

The marginal role that adult basic education plays in policy action is also reflected within educational funding. Especially as regards project funding, the topic occupies a marginalized place compared to e.g. early childhood education or elementary school education. While it is relatively easy to tap funding in these areas, this is not the case in adult basic education. Here, “if we are lucky, every three years a call for tenders is published on the federal level [...], which you should then also win” (I01_Pos. 22). At the same time, one interviewee addresses that attracting funding is becoming increasingly difficult because “the field is also evolving” (I01_Pos. 22). While the number of actors increases, the funding pots remain on the same level. The result is “competition at the level of funds” (I07_Pos. 18). All in all, funding of adult basic education is perceived as rather fragile by the interviewees.

Currently, developed funding lines are also considered to have such fragile aspects. For example, as part of the amendment to the Continuing Education Law in North Rhine-Westphalia in January 2022, the government created the option for adult education organizations to carry out outreach education work. However, the financial resources for this work are not designed for the long term, which counteracts both content and demand of this work. The organization of one interviewee thus finds itself in the situation of “building a structure that may [...] come to nothing two years later because the question of financing has not been resolved” (I11_Pos. 40).

The increasing professionalization on the part of educational practice is thus countered by a stagnation of funding in fragile and temporary structures. Actors must therefore “always start over again, thinking about the same things” (I07_Pos. 16).

4.2 Projects and Skills

The previous section showed that the field of adult basic education is rather fragile and still in a state of emergence. The focus now is on the analysis of projects in which institutional entrepreneurs engage in for supporting the institutionalization of the field. It becomes clear that the interviewees are engaged in *interactional* as well as *technical* and *cultural projects*. In addition, it is of interest which different skills can be identified within the projects and constellations of actors. Depending on the project, *cultural*, *analytical* or *political skills* become important.

4.2.1 Interactional Projects

The actors are engaged in *interactional* projects for the development of adult basic education offers or formats for public relations and sensitization. The consolidation of referral and network structures is another focus of *interactional projects*. While new connections are forged in the context of joint service development and public relations, efforts in referral and network structures aim to intensify and consolidate existing relations.

The collaborative development of adult basic education course offers has the advantage that the actors can benefit from the different resources and skills of the partners involved. These constellations become particularly relevant in the context of life-oriented adult basic education. In this area, one organization in particular cooperates with social work actors. These actors have “access to target groups that we would like to address” (I01_Pos. 28). An interviewee describes the relationships between partners in this area as “barter transactions” (I01_Pos. 75). The resources that his organization brings to the barter are *political skills* that he can use to successfully represent the goals of the organization to funders. Secondly, the organization has numerous contacts with teaching staff in the field of adult basic education. In turn, the organization can benefit from organizations in the neighborhood, which can establish diverse access to potential participants. By “matching” (I01_Pos. 28) the respective resources, offers can finally come about and be carried out. Accordingly, success depends on everyone pulling in the same direction: “There are very good opportunities to say that we are all on each other’s side and can manage this together” (I12_Pos. 27).

In order to maintain links to the cooperating partners in the city districts, the organization benefits from another actor. City district coordinators established by the council are strongly connected with the organizations in their area. They function as “a link between providers or activists and the council” (I02_Pos. 34). Thanks to them, the organization gets contacts and access to networks within the city districts at whose meetings it introduces itself and presents “what possibilities we have to cooperate” (I04_Pos. 16). These collaborations may also aim to jointly plan promotional events to raise awareness. In order to make itself known in a city district, for example, the organization organized a “pumpkin contest” (I02_Pos. 30) as part of a neighborhood festival. The seedlings were distributed to the people in the spring and eaten together at another festival in the fall. In this way, the organization was able to draw attention to itself and its offerings: “But through this offer, so to speak, we made ourselves known and could then also offer language courses, [...] which were accepted actually” (I02_Pos. 32).

In addition to advertising specific basic education offers, the content of public relations activities can also be of a sensitizing nature. Here, cooperation is worthwhile for the actors because they can draw on each other's networks and accordingly generate broader attention. For example, in the case of a jointly developed event, the contacts of one of the actors involved make it possible to “bring political actors on board” (I07_Pos. 24). Accordingly, *political skills* can also enable access to fields or groups of people to be sensitized.

Public events can also be used to maintain and strengthen existing relationships. First, these relationships can take the form of referential structures. In this case, the goal of the *interactional project* is to place “low-literate individuals who would like to learn to read and write better in courses near them” (I07_Pos. 4). If these contacts are maintained regularly, “you are actually a permanent fixture, so many people simply know your number” (I12_Pos. 31). Secondly, relationship management can refer to already existing networks. In this case, the goal of the *interactional project* is to establish formats for exchange of information. The actors inform each other about “new developments in the field and studies, research results, publications” (I11_Pos. 24). The primary idea is not the development of adult basic education offers, but the mutual benefit from the field knowledge of the participants. Two actors located in particular regional proximity have each appointed a “permanent contact person” (I06_Pos. 14) for this purpose in order to perpetuate the connection and underline its relevance.

4.2.2 Technical Projects

In the context of *technical projects*, the actors generate new knowledge or verify assumptions about cause-effect relationships. The actors' interest in knowledge refers either to structure-related questions of adult basic education, new possibilities of recruiting participants or to the development of teaching materials and methods.

Technical projects of a structural nature can, for example, address the question of how adult basic education can be anchored within regional educational offerings. One project in the context of life-oriented adult basic education was concerned with the

question of how “literacy and basic education services can be established in socio-spatial structures” (I01_Pos. 16). The project partners involved were an association, an adult education center and the local university. While the association and the adult education center developed and implemented adult basic education programs, the university provided scientific support. The added value that the university was able to bring to the project was its *analytical skill*, through which new insights could be generated with regard to future adult basic education offers and their continuation. Using these *analytical skills* is a fundamental part of the association’s self-image. The goal is “to generate knowledge through projects, to try things out [...] or also to test new structures” (I01_Pos. 18). Consequently, the development of the field is an everyday part of the interviewee’s work.

The association carries out similar projects in work-oriented adult basic education. Here, scientific support for the offerings is provided by a research institute. However, the central focus in this area is on “branch targeting” (I02_Pos. 52). The actors pursue the hypothesis that there are particularly suitable sectors in which “adult basic education can be established quickly” (I02_Pos. 52). In addition to branch targeting, a second focus is on strategies that can be used to attract businesses to basic education programs. In this area, “many strategies have now been identified, and there have also been some initial successes” (I01_Pos. 59).

In addition to projects that focus on the structural framework of basic education, *technical projects* can also aim to gain insights into new strategies for recruiting participants. A research and development project in the field of basic political education is dedicated to the question of how low-literate people can obtain information in easy language via an app. In a further step, it is analyzed how to “get low literalized people to learn [...] or support learning” (I09_Pos. 2) via the app. The *analytical skill* in this case is again brought in by a university that offers “very good technical solutions to look in a research context, which ways do we still have to go” (I09_Pos. 16).

When participants have been successfully recruited for adult basic education courses, questions from *technical projects* relate to the further development of course materials and the didactics applied. The goal of one project was to develop a “starter kit” (I04_Pos. 28) for volunteer course leaders. The starter kit contained general information as well as materials for native or second language German speakers. In addition, the field has become increasingly digitized, opening up opportunities for participants to learn online. In this area, “new apps have come along, new categories, and that’s quite a good development” (I06_Pos. 35). For *technical projects* related to teaching and learning, teachers’ *analytical skills* become relevant in the form of practical and experiential knowledge.

4.2.3 Cultural Projects

The goal of *cultural projects* in our particular case is to connect the topic of adult basic education to broader norms and values. This brings the topic to broader attention. In the interviews, the actors report on *cultural projects* with which they intend to increase the importance of adult basic education on the structural level or on the part of poten-

tial cooperation partners. Adult basic education should thus become more integrated into the thinking of these actors. Part of this effort also involves changes in the narrowness or breadth of the concept of adult basic education ensuring connectivity with the objectives of potential collaborators or funders.

The significance of the narrowness and breadth of the concept of adult basic education becomes clear when actors believe that “pure literacy is not goal-oriented” (I05_Pos. 10). Due to the negative experiences with school-based learning settings on the part of many participants, “the educational offers [...] should be linked to other skills and qualifications” (I05_Pos. 10) building bridges to adult basic education. This broad understanding of adult basic education, which also includes political or health knowledge, has to be accepted and discussed within the field. The next step for the actors is to make funding instruments connectable to this understanding.

The target objects of *cultural projects* in this case are the funders and the funds at their disposal. The responsible ministry at the state level was persuaded through the intervention of an association to “open up certain funding instruments for further education [...] for the topic of literacy and adult basic education” (I01_Pos. 53). The organization achieved this success due to “know-how” (I01_Pos. 53). The projects that have been successfully implemented so far can function as leverage with which the organization can “prove that I’m not just blathering, but that the offerings actually work” (I01_Pos. 53). One interviewee also demonstrates a high degree of *political skill* at this point as his practical knowledge and success give him an advantageous position in negotiating situations with powerful actors.

The association acts similarly in connection with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, which it advises on the catalog of topics in life-oriented basic education. Due to these impulses, the catalog of life-oriented basic education has been expanded over the years. Through this expansion the association is “more connectable [...] to certain structures” (I01_Pos. 53). The *political skill* of the association opens up the possibility to shape the structural framework in his favor.

Another objective of *cultural projects* is to anchor basic education in the mindset of the cooperation partners. The more basic education is accepted as a natural part of the education offered, the more opportunities for cooperation arise for the actors. In order to achieve this, the actors have to connect the topic to the values of the respective cooperation partners. In the area of work-oriented basic education the actors must “argue in the logic of the market economy” (I01_Pos. 59) in order to be able to successfully place offers in the context of companies. An important factor is *cultural skill* with which the topic is integrated into the system of values and norms of the cooperation partners: “So you shouldn’t think that you’re part of [...] the corporate culture or the neighborhood culture but you have to be able to understand what these people are talking about” (I02_Pos. 16).

Further opportunities arise for players when former employees take up important positions at cooperation partners. Former employees of I07 “are now working for adult education centers, for example, running them or working as department heads” (I07_Pos. 20). New network or public relations activities are not necessary in this case

because the connections already exist and the relevance of the topic is already part of the mindset. I09 also reports of a former employee who now holds five different positions in the field of basic education – involvement in two networks; course instructor; honorary employee at an association; editor of a magazine (I09_Pos. 18). Because of this former employee's various contacts, diverse opportunities for collaborations or networking contacts are opening up for I09.

5 Discussion

The findings provide new insights into how actors in the field of literacy and adult basic education are attempting to advance the field. It became clear that they engage in *interactional*, *technical*, and *cultural projects* to ensure their continued existence and success. Depending on the form of the project, different skills of the actors become relevant. Connecting the development of the field described by the actors to the type of projects they carry out, *interactional projects predominate* at the beginning of the engagement in the field before *technical* and finally *cultural projects* become significant.

At the beginning, *interactional projects* in particular are engaged in to make the offerings known and anchor them within the regional structures. Especially in the area of life-oriented adult basic education, where many offers are planned in cooperation with actors from social work, first contacts to the organizations in the city districts and new connections have to be established. In order to be able to place the first offers within the regional service structure, the connection of different resources within interactional projects is indispensable. In addition, those actors involved in the field must first get to know each other, build networks and develop a common understanding of their tasks and a common mindset. In this phase, *political skills* are of particular importance for the actors in order to reach participants and gain access to networks and collaborations. The institutional entrepreneurs have to mediate between the different interests, know the competences of the individual actors and be able to combine them.

Once the first reliable connections have been established, the actors have the time resources to advance the professionalization of the field through *technical projects*. The first successful offers act as a basis for identifying conditions for success. The reliable relationships give the actors the security to try out new approaches and to evaluate them with the help of scientific support. On the other hand, the professionalization efforts within the *technical projects* focus on strategies for recruiting participants and the didactic methods used in the courses. This raises the quality of the offerings to a higher level. In the context of *technical projects*, the primary focus is on actors with *analytical skills* who can draw conclusions and make assumptions about cause-effect relationships. Depending on the objective of the project, these can either be universities, research institutes or teaching staff.

The ongoing professionalization ultimately puts the actors in a position to make the topic of basic education connectable to the system of values and norms of powerful

actors by engaging in *cultural projects*. Successfully completed projects and practical knowledge can act as a pressure tool with which the actors can influence the structural conditions of the field. The goal of the effort here is to expand the scope of funding guidelines to include basic education. The focus is particularly on the *cultural* and *political skills* of the actors.

6 Conclusion

All in all, it can be pointed out that the field of adult basic education is characterized by fragility and constant change regarding its funding, thematic orientation and the actors' self-concepts. There is also a significant disparity between talk and action. Thus, adult basic education is considered an important field within the political debate. This is, however, not reflected by systematic funding and a stable policy concept.

What is more, the paper made clear that the employed perspective developed by Perkmann and Spicer (2007) proves to be fruitful when analyzing the processes and actors of institutionalization of adult basic education on the regional level. Differentiating the concept of institutional entrepreneurship into the field characterization, the analysis of the projects and the skills needed made a significant contribution to the debate on adult basic education in two ways. On the one hand, it helps analyzing the processes on the regional level and lightens up this so far less researched level. On the other hand, it introduces a theoretical perspective to the debate that will serve to be fruitful when applied to the other levels and the relevant actors, projects and skills. Thus, the perspective might also be helpful when analyzing the institutionalization of adult basic education e. g. on the level of companies.

In terms of transfer to the field of action the identified projects and more importantly the identified skills open up important perspectives since they are also useful for the professionalization of the staff and the design of further education and training programs.

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Quality Management in Adult Education Organisations

Modes of Integration in Different Organisational Fields

MARTIN REUTER

Abstract

The manifold discourses on the quality of continuing education organisations are closely related to processes of social change. However, it is unclear to what extent the effectiveness or integration of quality management systems in continuing education organisations in Germany is influenced by organisational contexts. This study used the neo-institutional concepts of organisational fields and loose coupling as a theoretical basis to address this research gap. Based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey, this study examined and differentiated effectiveness attributions by their organisational springs with a variance analysis. The results showed tighter couplings for the “organisation” impact factor, medium couplings for the “pedagogy” impact factor and rather weak or loose couplings for the “personnel” and “economy” impact factors. The fields for the “organisation” factor significantly differed from each other. There were no significant differences for the “pedagogy”, “personnel” and “economy” factors.

Keywords: Quality management; new institutionalism; organisational fields; effects of quality management; variance analysis

Abstract

Die vielfältigen Diskurse rund um Qualität in Weiterbildungsorganisationen stehen in engem Zusammenhang mit gesellschaftlichen Wandlungsprozessen. Weitgehend ungeklärt ist bisher jedoch, inwiefern die Wirksamkeit respektive Integration von Qualitätsmanagementsystemen in Weiterbildungsorganisationen in Deutschland durch den organisationalen Kontext beeinflusst ist. Theoretisch wird hierzu an das neo-institutionalistische Konzept des organisationalen Feldes und der losen Kopplung angeschlossen. Auf Basis der wbmonitor Umfrage 2017 werden Wirksamkeitszuschreibungen differenziert nach organisationalen Feldern mithilfe einer Varianzanalyse betrachtet. Im Ergebnis zeigen sich engere Kopplungen bei dem Wirkfaktor „Organisation“, mittlere bei dem Wirkfaktor „Pädagogik“ und eher schwache bzw. lose bei den Wirkfaktoren „Personal“ und „Ökonomie“. Dabei unterscheiden sich die Felder bei dem Faktor „Or-

ganisation“ signifikant voneinander. Bzgl. den Faktoren „Pädagogik“, „Personal“ und „Ökonomie“ zeigen sich keine signifikanten Unterschiede.

Keywords: Qualitätsmanagement; Neo-Institutionalismus; organisationale Felder; Effekte von Qualitätsmanagement; Varianzanalyse

1 Introduction

As in other countries, adult education (AE) in Germany has a rich history with varied discussions of its quality. The topics of these discussions have ranged from the orientation towards relationships in the sense of the “voluntariness of participants” and “institutional freedom” in the 1950s (Tietgens 1999, p. 10) to the criterion-oriented, systematic and continuous correlation of various quality factors with the help of quality management systems (QMSs) in the present (Hartz & Meisel 2011). This development is interwoven with processes of social change. Some processes are characterised by the increased importance of general AE, by the increased economisation and by shifted control of the state (Nittel 1996; Schrader 2011).

The literature has already found evidence of the effectiveness of QMSs in AE. For example, recent empirical studies reported descriptive evidence that these systems work at different levels. The strongest effectiveness was observed at the organisational level, especially in improving organisational processes. The cost-benefit ratio was judged to be overall negative from an organisational perspective (cf. Ambos et al. 2018, p. 31). Käßplinger (2017) pointed out that quality management (QM) seems to bolster the control of the management level, whereas its effects on other staff groups are characterised more by additional work. In connection with professionalization, Käßplinger, Kubsch and Reuter (2018) proposed that the relevance of staff professionalization varies depending on the QM model. Namely, the staff training practice seems to shift its emphasis from external to internal training. With reference to the Learner-Oriented Quality Development in Adult Education (LQW; Lernerorientierte Qualitätsentwicklung in der Weiterbildung) QMS, Hartz (2011) highlighted the need to consider factors aside from the QM model that influence the effectiveness of QMSs. Ultimately, she concluded that LQW would barely reach the targeted teaching-learning interaction level (cf. p. 283). However, following her cluster analysis of the effects, her results also showed that one of the four clusters comprising about a quarter of the organisations was explicitly constituted by strong effects in the “teaching-learning interaction” dimension (p. 323).

Within the free text portion of the 2017 wbmonitor survey, continuing education organisations emphasised that QMS effectiveness is influenced by the conditions under which a given system is introduced. Thus, when QMSs are introduced under coercion from the environment, non-intended consequences become apparent. In effect, they are only introduced formally and with the least possible effort, thus limiting their potential impact. The following quote illustrates this dynamic: “As long as QMS[s] are

only introduced, because some client demands it, they are useless. There is a manual that is only opened once a year because another audit is due" (ID 772, own analysis).

Overall, QMSs and their effectiveness seem to be integrated or interwoven in complex arrangements. However, little information on this topic is available. Against the background of the pluralised continuing education sector in Germany (Reuter, Koscheck & Martin 2020; Schrader 2011), the present study assumes that specific institutional expectations are associated with the context of a continuing education organisation. Hence, different effectiveness attributions can also be observed depending on the context. Notably, Reuter, Koscheck and Martin (2020) showed that QM models can be used with different weights in four identified organisational fields (cf. Table 2).

Against this background, this study examines the extent to which AE organisations integrate QMSs and whether differences can be observed between four organisational fields. In particular, this study applies the theoretical approach of neo-institutionalism (NI) to assess the social interconnectedness of organisations. In this context, the concept of loose coupling is of particular importance. Following Hartz (2015), this study assumes that the strength of the effects attributed to QMSs by AE organisations can be used to infer their integration levels. Consequently, this study addresses its theoretical foundations and central concepts. After specifying the research question, this study then presents the methodological procedure. Subsequently, this study describes the attributions of effectiveness in detail. It concludes with a discussion of the results.

2 Theoretical Foundation

NI in organisational sociology focuses on the interface of organisations with society (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 2009; DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 2009). Thus, organisations and their structures come into focus in a conditional field. Crucially, this field consists of institutions (e.g. norms, expectations and mission statements; cf. Herbrechter & Schemmann 2010, p. 128). In this field, organisations are "influenced by societal expectations in general and by state-political regulations in particular" (Hasse & Krücken 2005, p. 55).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 2009) presented a systematisation of the social environment with the concept of "organizational fields"¹. As such, they referred to "those organizations that, as an aggregate, constitute a recognizable field of institutional life. Central suppliers, consumers of resources and products, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (*ibid.*, p. 59). Notably, NI views the organisational field as its central unit of analysis (cf. Senge 2005), which can only be determined empirically (cf. DiMaggio & Powell 2009, p. 64). Hence, an understanding of the organisational field with a medium complexity offers a certain degree of differentiation without being too complex for empirical operationalization.

1 To ensure empirical connectivity, this study uses the concept of the organisational field by DiMaggio and Powell (2009). For an overview of further developments of the concept, see Becker-Ritterspach and Becker-Ritterspach (2006), pp. 118–136.

Neo-institutional research focuses on the analysis of the diffusion of organisation-external social expectations in organisations. As a precursor to NI, bureaucracy theory assumes that the pursuit of efficiency shapes the structures of an organisation and legitimises them (cf. Weber 1972). However, Meyer and Rowan broke with this assumption and emphasised that maintaining legitimacy is the primary concern. Thus, the aspect of efficiency is of secondary importance. Organisations gain legitimacy by connecting with environmental expectations that are considered to be rational (cf. Meyer & Rowan 1977, 2009). Rationality myths are a central concept of NI: "The rules embedded in society have a rational dimension in that social goals as well as means to pursue such goals are established. The mythical dimension follows from the fact that the effectiveness of such means is not proven, but merely believed in their success" (Schemmann 2018, p. 189).

Following Meyer and Rowan (1977), Merkens (2011) described the relationship between organisations and their environment as an "interdependence relationship" (p. 19). In these relationships, behavioural expectations from the environment itself or from the organisations' own claims can contradict each other, making the pursuit of legitimacy ambiguous. Weick (1976, German translation 2009) conducted a case study of schools in the USA, and he determined that organisations deal with such contradictory expectations in certain ways.

Namely, if they are only loosely coupled to them, organisations take up these expectations and formally or superficially correspond to them. In doing so, the respective elements are "somehow interconnected" (Weick 2009, p. 88).

Because each element exhibits a certain degree of identity and autonomy, "their connection can be described as irregular, weak in mutual influence, unimportant, and/or slow in response" (ibid.).

The concept of loose coupling must be understood as an "instrument of sensitization" (Weick 2009, p. 88) with the aim of questioning the self-evident facts of the observer. Distinctively, Weick's coupling concept takes into account the mutual influences in couplings and, in doing so, considers the autonomy and identity of the participants (cf. ibid.). Furthermore, Weick drew attention to the fact that the concept does not necessarily need to be understood normatively. Rather, the function of loose coupling can be both an advantage and a disadvantage (cf. ibid., p. 92).

Importantly, loose coupling can result from poor methodology. Therefore, a methodological approach that strongly emphasises context is fundamental to the analysis of loose couplings. As a context-sensitive method, Weick mentioned comparative studies in which the effects of context variation are examined (cf. ibid., p. 98). Likewise, the conditions of the couplings must be considered: "In response to what kinds of activities or what kinds of contexts does coupling change, and what kinds of environments or situations, when they change, have no effect at all on coupling within an organization?" (ibid., p. 102). To address such issues, the coupling should be treated as a dependent variable (cf. ibid.). The same is true if "the question is pursued under which conditions the emerging coupling[s] will be loose or tight" (ibid.).

The concept of loose coupling has often been used in the pedagogical context because of the apparent fit between the formal structures or bureaucratic organisations and the autonomy of pedagogical professionalism. In this sense, Weick urged that caution should be used when making interpretations, emphasising that “any advantage can also be a burden” (ibid., p. 92). Moreover, the apparent fit also prevents a view of the connections between professionalism and bureaucracy, which is why their dualistic usage should be discouraged.²

This approach makes it possible to analyse couplings between organisations and their environments as well as processes within organisations. Accordingly, this study identified two concrete couplings. Organisations can formally implement a QMS and identify themselves with the outside world according to its expectations, usually through external certification. The consequences of this implementation primarily occur in the formal structures of the organisation. In contrast, the active handling of or firm coupling to these expectations affects the action level of the organisation.

3 Methodology

This study used the data of the 2017 *wbmonitor* survey on “QMS in Adult Education”. This online survey was conducted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and the German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning (DIE) on providers of general and vocational continuing education in Germany. Following the German Education Council (1970), continuing education is understood as an organised educational offering aimed at trained or experienced adults. Continuing education includes further training, retraining and vocational rehabilitation measures as well as general, political and cultural AE. Continuing education consists of offers made to external persons, companies and organisations, not in-house continuing education for employees (cf. Koscheck & Ohly 2017, p. 7). Likewise, it also excludes training, vocational preparation measures and work placement.

While the *wbmonitor* survey focuses on the entire provider landscape in this area, it excludes companies with continuing education courses that are not open to the public or offered to external customers from the target group. It represents the largest provider survey regularly conducted throughout Germany.³ In 2017, its QMS assessment was developed in cooperation with Justus Liebig University in Giessen. 1,755 facilities participated in the survey (9.0 % response rate).

Following Hartz (2015), the effectiveness that an organisation attributes to a system can be used as an indicator of the integration type or coupling form. Since the dimensionality of these effectiveness attributions could not be fully determined in advance, this study incorporated the results of the explorative factor analysis by Reuter,

2 This observation can be compared with recent organisational pedagogical interpretations of professionalism that position themselves against an “antagonistic juxtaposition of pedagogy/interaction and bureaucracy/organisation” (Feld & Seitter 2016, p. 70).

3 For a more in-depth conceptual discussion, see Koscheck and Ohly (2020).

Rüter and Martin (i. P.). This analysis was based on data from the 2017 wbmonitor survey on the question, “What effects does the quality management system have on your institution?” This question contained 27 items.⁴ Each item was surveyed with a 4-point Likert scale (1 “strongly agree” to 4 “strongly disagree”). To begin, all items were factor analysed to systematise the different dimensions of the attributions and extract factors. For this purpose, the complete item battery (27 items) was fed into the factor analysis. To increase data quality, missing values were imputed rather than excluded. The suitability of the variables was tested via anti-image correlations. Finally, 20 variables could be used for further analysis (values > .87).

Reuter, Rüter and Martin (i. P.) conducted a principal axis analysis to determine the factorial structure of the effect dimensions. Both the significant Bartlett test ($\chi^2 = 18607.909$; $df = 190$, $p = .000$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = .937) indicated the very good suitability of the data to explorative factor analysis. Thus, a principal factor analysis with a skewed rotation was performed.⁵ Considering the Kaiser-Guttman criterion ($\lambda > 1$; Backhaus et al. 2018), the result was a four-factor solution with a variance resolution of 63.88 %. The extracted factors proved to be reliable (scale reliability, Cronbach’s α : Factor 1: .89; Factor 2: .85; Factor 3: .70; Factor 4: .85) and could be assigned to the “pedagogy”, “organisation”, “personnel” and “economy” categories in terms of their impact dimensions. Table 1 illustrates the results of the analysis.

Table 1: Results of the factor analysis on the impact dimensions of QMSs (Source: Reuter, Rüter and Martin [i.P.], based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

Pattern Matrix				
Effects of QMSs:	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
	Pedagogy	Organisation	Personnel	Economy
Increased learning success of participants	0.813			
Increased satisfaction of participants	0.805			
Professionalised pedagogical work	0.596			
Increased employee satisfaction	0.502			
Improved quality of teaching/learning processes	0.450			
Improved organisational processes		−0.844		
Improved transparency of organisational structures		−0.787		

⁴ For an overview of all items, consult Ambos et al. (2018, pp. 26–30).

⁵ In the first step, orthogonal rotation was performed, which yields independent principal axes in the result. However, since several items showed cross-loadings between Factor 1 and Factor 2, it was decided to use oblique rotation, which allows a higher reliability within the axes due to the oblique axis arrangement. This is advantageous for further calculations based on the result.

(Continuing table 1)

Pattern Matrix				
Effects of QMSs:	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
	Pedagogy	Organisation	Personnel	Economy
Improved internal communication		−0.624		
Increased control possibilities of the management/executive board		−0.555		
Increased expenditure for further training of staff (incl. honorary staff)			0.630	
More consulting tasks or simple pedagogic tasks for administrative staff			0.492	
Better qualified staff (incl. honorary staff) employed			0.464	
More management tasks assigned to teaching staff			0.443	
Improved infrastructure (rooms, technical equipment, etc.)			0.433	
More new markets				0.778
Increased participants				0.768
Higher revenues				0.730
Strengthened market position				0.701
Bound customers (repeated participations/orders)				0.676
Improved utilisation of the facility				0.428
Extraction method: principal axis factor analysis.				
Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalisation. ^a				
a. The rotation converged in 13 iterations.				

Following the theoretical assumption that organisations are related to and influenced by their organisational field, Reuter, Koscheck and Martin (2020) evaluated the effectiveness attributions according to four AE organisational fields based on wbmonitor data. DiMaggio and Powell (2009) provided the conceptual and theoretical basis for this analysis.⁶ Methodologically, the fields were based on a cluster analysis. Although the four fields cannot be described in detail here, Table 2 illustrates their central features.

6 For a detailed description of the methodological approach, see Reuter, Koscheck and Martin (2020).

Table 2: Structural characteristics of the 2017 organisational fields (clusters imputed) (Source: Reuter, Koscheck and Martin [2020])

Feature	Cluster	VHS (n = 305)	Non-profit/public (n = 662)	Communities (n = 337)	Commercial private (n = 451)
Type of facility		87 % VHS 13 % other	31 % non-profit private 20 % chamber, guild, etc. 15 % technical school 34 % other	74 % establishment of a church, party, trade union, foundation, association or club 26 % other	77 % commercial private 23 % other
QMS available		81 %	82 %	79 %	75 %
Common QM models (frequently used)		29 % LQW 16 % EFQM 16 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 11 % self-developed QMS	48 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 19 % self-developed QMS per 6 % LQW, EFQM, ISO 29990, QM model according to quality-seal associations	29 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 15 % self-developed QMS 13 % quality seal association per 7 % QVB, LQW	41 % DIN EN ISO 9000 ff. 30 % self-developed QMS 9 % EFQM 6 % DIN EN ISO 29990
Financing (mean values)		46 % participants 5 % companies 5 % employment agencies/job centres 39 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 5 % non-public sector/other	31 % participants 22 % companies 18 % Employment agencies/job centres 25 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 5 % non-public sector/other	32 % participants 12 % companies 10 % employment agencies/job centres 28 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 17 % non-public institutions/other	24 % participants 35 % companies 26 % employment agencies/job centres 10 % municipality, state, federal government or EU 4 % Non-public sector/other
Orientation of the offer		91 % general + vocational training 5 % only general education 4 % only vocational training	56 % general + vocational training 41 % only vocational training 3 % only general continuing education	58 % general + vocational training 24 % only general continuing education 17 % only vocational training	49 % only vocational training 49 % general + vocational training 2 % only general continuing education

(Continuing table 2)

Feature	Cluster	VHS (n = 305)	Non-profit/public (n = 662)	Communities (n = 337)	Commercial private (n = 451)
Number of subject areas (mean; max. 15)		11.3	5.8	5.9	4.8
Number of lecturer hours (mean)		23,109 (19,487)*	7,389 (6,231)*	5,085 (3,998)*	12,819 (4,087)*
Number of employees or civil servants (mean/median/SD)		16/9/24	17/8/27	12/5/26	16/4/78
Proportion of salaried employees in total staff (mean)		11%	48%	27%	44%
Proportion of continuing education in total turnover/ budget (mean)		87%	55%	60%	77%

* Values in parentheses exclude central offices responding for the total facility.

Next, an analysis of variance was performed to investigate the extent to which the organisational field is an explanatory factor for specific ways of dealing with QMSs or coupling/integration forms. In contrast to factor analysis, variance analysis is a structure-testing procedure that determines whether groups (e. g. organisational fields) differ significantly from one another. Since variance analysis is not very robust against outliers as a parametric procedure, the outliers were removed. The normality assumption is violated in this analysis, but the analysis of variance proves robust to it (cf. Schmider et al. 2010). Variance homogeneity was tested with Levene's test (Factor 1: $p = .158$; Factor 2: $p = .972$; Factor 3: $p = .104$; Factor 4: $p = .086$). In response, the Tukey test was chosen for the subsequent post-hoc multiple comparison, which centred on a liberal to conservative continuum. Table 3 presents an overview of the sample used for the variance analysis.

Table 3: Description of the sample used in the analysis of variance

Statistics					
		Factor 1: Pedagogy	Factor 2: Organisation	Factor 3: Personnel	Factor 4: Economy
N	valid	1181	1188	1185	1179
	missing	475	468	471	477
mean value		2.4735	2.0048	2.8230	2.8286
median		2.4000	2.0000	2.8000	2.8333
Std.-deviation		0.61928	0.52086	0.52610	0.57471
range		3.00	2.67	3.00	2.80
minimum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.20
maximum		4.00	3.67	4.00	4.00

4 Results

The following section reports the mean values (MVs) of the items underlying the factors, which are differentiated according to the organisational fields, and clarifies the strengths of the effectiveness attributions and QMS integrations. Subsequently, this section presents the results of the analysis of variance based on the factor scores of the differences between the fields.

4.1 Effectiveness Attributions

The MVs were compared to describe the strength of the effectiveness attributions and QMS integrations with regard to the four impact factors: (1) “pedagogy”, (2) “organisation”, (3) “personnel” and (4) “economy”. Since the data were collected using a Likert

scale ranging from 1 (“strongly agree”) to 4 (“strongly disagree”), a mean value below 2.5 was assumed to indicate stronger integration or coupling, whereas a mean value above 2.5 was assumed to indicate weaker integration or coupling.

As shown in Table 4, the results revealed that the strongest effects in all organisational fields were in the organisational processes, with slight differences between the organisational fields. The largest difference was between the “VHS” field (Volkshochschulen; $MV = 1.93$) and the “commercial private” field ($MV = 2.13$). Furthermore, the “pedagogy” factor had rather positive effectiveness attributions ($MV = 2.41$ for “VHS” to $MV = 2.48$ for “communities”), whereas the “personnel” and “economy” factors had rather weak effectiveness attributions across all organisational fields. In addition, the highest standard deviations were always in the “commercial private” field. Accordingly, there was a particularly large heterogeneity in the effectiveness attributions.

Table 4: Effectiveness attributions to QMSs according to the organisational fields of adult education (Source: Own calculation based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

	Organisational Fields														
	VHS (N=218)			Especially non- profit public (vocational) (N=465)			Communities (N=211)			Commercial private (N=287)			Total (N=1181)		
	MV	SD	M	MV	SD	M	MV	SD	M	MV	SD	M	MV	SD	M
Factor 1: Pedagogy	2.41	0.55	2.40	2.44	0.61	2.40	2.48	0.63	2.50	2.57	0.67	2.60	2.47	0.62	2.40
Factor 2: Organisation	1.93	0.50	2.00	1.98	0.51	2.00	1.97	0.50	2.00	2.13	0.55	2.00	2.00	0.52	2.00
Factor 3: Personnel	2.84	0.47	2.80	2.83	0.54	2.80	2.83	0.52	2.80	2.79	0.56	2.80	2.82	0.53	2.80
Factor 4: Economy	2.76	0.52	2.80	2.84	0.61	2.83	2.89	0.53	2.83	2.82	0.59	2.83	2.83	0.57	2.83

1 = “strongly agree”; 2 = “somewhat agree”; 3 = “somewhat disagree”; 4 = “strongly disagree”

4.2 Effectiveness Differences between Organisational Fields

Next, this study assessed whether significant differences existed between the organisational fields. As shown in Table 5, there were significant differences between the respective groups and organisational fields with regard to the “organisation” factor. In contrast, the differences for the “pedagogy”, “personnel” and “economy” factors were not significant, which means that the groups did not differ from each other systematically.

As can be seen in Table 6, a post-hoc comparison was used to identify the groups that differed in terms of the “organisation” factor. In particular, the results showed that the “commercial private” field differed from the “VHS”, “non-profit public” and “com-

munities” fields.⁷ The underlying factor scores were based on standardised regression values. Accordingly, the larger negative MV difference in the factor scores represented a stronger increase in efficacy in the comparison group.

Table 5: Results of the analysis of variance on the impact factors and the organisational fields (Source: Own calculation based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

Robust test procedures to test for equality of means					
		Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
REGR Factor score 1: Pedagogy	Welch	1,581	3	782,008	0.192
REGR Factor score 2: Organisation	Welch	6,280	3	775,307	0.000
REGR Factor score 3: Personnel	Welch	1,184	3	785,951	0.315
REGR Factor score 4: Economy	Welch	1,836	3	788,652	0.139
a. Asymptotic F-distributed					

Table 6: Results of the post-hoc comparison between the “organisation” impact factor and the organisational fields (Source: Own calculation based on the 2017 wbmonitor survey)

Multiple Comparisons							
Tukey-HSD							
Dependent Variable			Mean Value Difference (I-J)	Std.-Error	Sig.	95 % Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
REGR Factor Score 2: Organisation	Commercial Private	VHS	-.22562395*	0.06215954	0.002	-0.3854764	-0.0657715
		Especially non-profit public (vocational)	-.17286886*	0.05079055	0.004	-0.3034843	-0.0422534
		Communities	-.20991627*	0.06068213	0.003	-0.3659693	-0.0538632

5 Disussion

This study explored the extent to which AE organisations integrate QMSs and whether differences can be observed between four organisational fields. The descriptive findings are similar to previous findings (cf. Ambos et al. 2018; Hartz 2011, 2015) in the sense that QMSs seem to have either different impact degrees on different factors or different coupling degrees (Weick 2009). This study found stronger couplings for the

⁷ Further significant differences between additional groups did not exist.

“organisation” factor, medium couplings for the “pedagogy” factor (near the middle of the range) and rather weak couplings for the “personnel” and “economy” factors.

Following neo-institutional assumptions of the importance of organisational fields (DiMaggio & Powell 1983), this study used a variance analysis to investigate whether there were apparent differences between them with regard to the integration or effectiveness of QMSs. Hartz (2011) presented initial results in this area related to LQW. She came to the conclusion “that institutions of different control contexts do not differ significantly in their perceived effects” (p. 300). However, given the constitution of the organisational fields presented here and their differences in model use, this study expected to find differences in their effectiveness attributions. In particular, this study observed differences between the fields related to the “organisation” factor, whereas no significant differences were found between the “pedagogy”, “personnel” and “economy” factors regarding the effectiveness attributions.

Institution size is one explanation for the differences between the “commercial private” field and the “VHS”, “non-profit public” and “communities” fields. If the characteristics of the fields are considered (Table 2), in particular the personnel extent (i. e. the number of employees or officials), then the “commercially private” field clearly differs from the others. Hence, this study included many very small mechanisms (median = 4) and some very large organisations (SD = 78). Due to their size and associated structures, smaller organisations require less organisation and coordination. Therefore, it seems plausible that these organisations may weakly attribute effectiveness to the system.

In addition, the “commercially private” field has the highest share of funding (26 %) from the Federal Employment Agency, which requires certification in accordance with the “Akkreditierungs- und Zulassungsverordnung Arbeitsförderung” (AZAV). This certification also takes into account the use of a QMS, although it can also be self-developed. This makes the high proportion of self-developed QMSs (30 %) plausible.

Following DiMaggio and Powell (1983), another explanation may lie in the operationalisation of the organisational fields. The empirical implementation does not only refer to organisational structures. Rather, it also includes environmental influences by considering supply orientation and funding sources. For example, Hoffmann (2000) emphasised the importance of themes and related social interaction patterns for the constitution of organisational fields:

“Where some may define a field around companies with a common product or market (e. g. SIC classification), I suggest that the field is formed around the issues that become important to the interests and objectives of a specific collective of organisations. Issues define what the field is, drawing linkages that may not have been previously present. Organisations may make claims about being or not being part of the field, but their membership is defined through social interaction patterns.” (p. 6)

Thus, assuming that QMSs are seen as influencing the constitutions of organisational fields, the rather small differences between the fields seem plausible due to the overall

high prevalence of QMSs in all fields (75–82 %). However, Table 2 also shows that the QM models used in the respective fields had different emphases, which indicates that the QMSs must be further differentiated.

This study must draw attention to its limitations and possible biases. Notably, the group of respondents to the 2017 wbmonitor survey consisted primarily of management staff (cf. Ambos et al. 2018, p. 9). Hence, it must be critically examined whether this group can comprehensively and reliably describe attributions of effectiveness, especially against the background of the personnel situation in continuing education in Germany. In particular, many personnel are freelancers and not permanently employed. In response, future studies should examine the extent to which the teaching-learning process can be reliably assessed in this context. It can be assumed that managers are interested in the positive portrayal of the QMS since they increase their power by using it (Käpplinger 2017).

Overall, this study found that the complexity related to the quality within the fields seemed to be quite high, which made it difficult to identify specific differences. Thus, as shown in Table 4, the results of the effectiveness attributions also revealed that the standard deviations within the fields hardly improved their overall values. As emphasised by Hoffmann (2000), social interaction patterns seem to be a fruitful way to further explore and specify the quality conditions in AE organisations. Such studies should not focus on QMSs as a general topic. Rather, they should follow the complexity of discourses and debates, both accounting for competing viewpoints and logics and applying the QMS-immanent logic of the continuous improvement of organisational processes. These studies could determine which topics are discussed with competing logics and how they result in institutional changes. In this context, the theoretical model developed by Reay and Hinings (2005) to explain changes in mature organisational fields also seems promising. The authors emphasised the role of competing institutional logics as part of a radical change process. Ultimately, studying fields in these moments of restructuring should increase the present understanding of how collective rationality is developed (cf. Wooten & Hoffmann 2016, p. 15).

Following Weick (2009), further studies could describe the modes of integration of QMSs in organisational fields. Furthermore, other studies should investigate the inherent question of the function of decoupling processes. Here, Boxenbaum and Jonsson's (2010) comment seems insightful: "The unintended effects of decoupling, such as whether it affects morale and fosters cynicism within the organisation, certainly merits attention as well" (p. 91).

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II Vermischtes/Miscellaneous

Who Publishes What? – A Bibliometric Study of Papers from the Global South in International Journals of Adult Education Research

TIM VETTER

Abstract

On the one hand, the paper follows the approach of mapping the rapidly changing field of adult education research through the quantitative approach of bibliometrics, and on the other hand, it takes up the hypothesis of the underrepresentation of adult education researchers from the Global South in the research field. It focuses on the question of how often adult education researchers from the Global South are able to place their work in indexed international journals of adult education research, what visibility their articles gain, and what topics they address. Methodologically oriented on already conducted bibliometric studies in adult education research, all contributions of authors from the Global South of the years 2000–2020 in nine indexed journals of adult education research were examined for this purpose. The results show, among other things, that perspectives of scholars from the Global South are strongly underrepresented in the renowned journals considered, that the published articles receive less attention than is usual for the journals and that this could also be related to the topics covered.

Keywords: Bibliometrics in adult education research; Global South; Journal Analysis; Open Science

Abstract

Der Beitrag schließt einerseits an den Diskurs zur Kartographierung des sich stetig wandelnden Feldes der Erwachsenenbildungsforschung über den quantitativen Zugang der Bibliometrie an und greift andererseits die Hypothese der Unterrepräsentanz von Erwachsenenbildungsforschenden aus dem Globalen Süden im Forschungsfeld auf. Im Zentrum steht die Frage, wie häufig Erwachsenenbildungsforschende aus dem Globalen Süden ihre Arbeit in indixierten internationalen Zeitschriften der Erwachsenenbildungsforschung platzieren können, welche Sichtbarkeit ihre Beiträge erlangen und mit welchen Themen sie sich auseinandersetzen. Methodisch orientiert an bereits durchgeführten bibliometrischen Studien in der Erwachsenenbildungsforschung wurden hierzu alle Beiträge von Autor:innen aus Ländern des globalen Südens der Jahrgänge 2000–2020 in neun indixierte Zeitschriften der Erwachsenenbildungsforschung untersucht. Die Ergebnisse zeigen dabei u. a., dass Perspektiven von Wissenschaftler:innen aus dem Globalen Süden in den berücksichtigten renommier-

ten Zeitschriften stark unterrepräsentiert sind, die publizierten Beiträge weniger Aufmerksamkeit erhalten als es bei den Zeitschriften üblich ist und dies auch mit den behandelten Themen zusammenhängen könnte.

Keywords: Bibliometrie in der Erwachsenenbildungsforschung; Globaler Süden; Zeitschriftenanalyse; Open Science

1 Framing in the Context of Bibliometric Studies in Adult Education Research

This paper is located in the sub-research area of mapping the field of adult education research. In order to illustrate that in this subfield no attention has yet been paid to the group of authors brought into focus in the present paper, bibliometric studies in adult education research will first be examined.

The emerging cartographies are attempts to map out particular conditions, developments or trends in the rapidly changing research field (Fejes & Wildemeersch 2015, p. 97). Bibliometric analyses mainly use the medium of scientific journals for quantitative access to such overview efforts and are defined by the OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms as “(...) statistical analysis of books, articles, or other publications to measure the output of individuals/research teams, institutions, and countries, to identify national and international networks, and to map the development of multidisciplinary fields of science and technology” (OECD 2008, p. 49). Bibliometric data were first taken up as an object of analysis in adult education research by using the bibliometric indicator of citation analysis by Boshier and Pickard (1979). Without explicitly placing their quantitative study in the context of bibliometrics, the authors evaluated the citations of all original articles in the journal *Adult Education Quarterly* over a 10-year period, determined the influence of individual scholars, and listed the most cited scholars. Field et al (1991) and Gillen (1993) adopt Boshier and Pickard’s methodology for their citation analyses in other journals of adult education research. The main focus of both papers was to explore the opportunities and limitations of citation analysis for measuring quality in adult education research. Both studies come to the conclusion that the evaluation of citation numbers only allows a very limited view of quality.

While the authors are concerned with assessing the evolution of adult education research into a distinct research field, the citation analyses of Gillens (1994) and Robinson (1996) take a geographically narrowed approach with a focus on Canada. In addition, the authors also choose divergent data sources with conference papers and master theses.

In addition to citation analysis, productivity analysis plays a major role in the context of bibliometrics. The number of publications by scholars, institutions or research groups is often evaluated as a productivity indicator in this context. In adult education research, this analysis was first conducted by Rachel and Sargent (1995) focusing on North American adult education research institutions with a focus on five journals

also located in North America. The first author repeated this evaluation for other time periods and different subsegments of adult education research (Rachal et al. 1996; Rachal & William 2005; Rachal et al. 2008) although the North American focus remains.

It is only with Larsson's (2010) citation analysis that bibliometric work emerges in the field, both explicitly as such, and adding analytical complexity by broadening perspectives. For example, Larsson (2010) takes a geographical perspective on the citations of three indexed international adult education research journals and intertwines this with an analysis of actor networks. The study can thus not only prove the dominance of anglophone authors, but also a dominant (citation) network of the same. Confirming findings are those by Fejes and Nylander (2014), who focus particularly on the top cited authors in three adult education journals between 2005–2012, and Larsson et al. (2019). Adult education research is thus largely anchored in national or language-bound discourse spaces (Schüßler & Egetenmeyer 2018, p. 1074). More recent studies use sources obtained through bibliometric data collection processes to link qualitative (Fejes & Nylander 2015; Käßlinger 2015) and quantitative content analyses (Nylander et al. 2022). The work with a linked qualitative content analysis is methodologically oriented (content algorithms) to the field-forming work of Taylor (2001) and Long (1983).

All of the bibliometric studies in the field of adult education research have a number of defining parameters in common with regard to the data basis and the findings generated. Thus, all studies focus on publication organs (journals and conferences) whose place of origin and publishing can be assigned to the Global North. The focus (with the exception of Nylander et al. 2022) is particularly on those contributions that are especially successful from a bibliometric point of view. The results show, among other things, that especially authors whose institutional locations can be assigned to Anglophone countries of the Global North dominate the journals and conferences. Fejes and Nylander (2014; 2017) speak of an anglophone bias here: "Knowledge produced in other locations than the Anglophone regions is to a high extent invisible in the wider scientific conversations, either by not being published in these journals in the first place or by not rendering much scholarly attention" (Fejes & Nylander 2017, p. 6). This invisibility is reinforced by the benchmark character that seems to be inherent in bibliometric analyses. In order to be able to generate a more accurate picture of explanatory contexts of the underrepresentation of authors from countries of the Global South, a bibliometric study of this group of authors is needed, with the addition of a content-analytical evaluation of the published contributions of this group. In the neighboring discipline of sociology, such a discourse is already more advanced with the help of a perspective critical of colonialism (e.g. Alatas 2003). More specifically, in the context of academic publishing, the phenomenon of academic colonialism takes hold. The term represents "(...) how states that occupy the center where knowledge is produced, transmitted, and ordered have successfully forced scholars in peripheral states to accept their dominant relations in thought and ideas by standardizing, institutionalizing, and socializing academic disciplines in an inequitable academic division of labor on a global scale" (Shih 2010, p. 44). Papers produced at the center receive

more attention and recognition than papers produced elsewhere (Lengyel 1986, p. 474). Thus, to strengthen the perspective of academic neocolonialism or imperialism in adult education research, this paper can provide helpful supporting indications.

The need for the exploration of the described desideratum is also underpinned by the explorative examination of adult education research articles in potential predatory journals by Vetter and Schemmann (2021). The paper highlights that, in addition to authors from North America, scholars from the Global South, in particular, publish in potential predatory journals, often focusing on issues that are characteristic of countries in this category, such as poverty (especially in rural areas), a high rate of analphabetism, a high infant mortality rate, a low level of democratization, great political instability combined with crime, and a great importance of agriculture (Jaselskis & Talukhaba 1998; Neubacher & Grote 2016; International Fund for Agricultural Development 2021). Thus, if it is true, as indicated by the findings of Vetter and Schemmann (2021) and other research (Kurt 2018; Cobey et al. 2019; Demir 2018), that predatory journals are not only a business model but also a means for scholars, one of which is to meet increasing publication pressures, there is reason to fear that perspectives on adult education research are underrepresented in legitimate OA journals of adult education research. This hypothesis connects to the desideratum of bibliometric surveying of adult education research and thus additionally supports the endeavor of this paper to examine publications by authors from the Global South in internationally focused adult education research journals via a bibliometric and a content analysis approach. The focus is on the question of how and which authors from the Global South are present in indexed international journals of adult education research and with which articles. The question of *how*, the question of *who*, and the question of *what* will be answered as follows. The representation of research on adult education in countries of the Global South in the nine “most important” international journals on adult education research was determined by a manual analysis of the volumes 2000–2020 of all papers, as well as by an analysis of the retrieval and citation numbers. Following Vetter and Schemmann (2021, p. 89 f.), more detailed data on the authors (*who*) were extracted through the generated bibliometric data to get an impression of the academic experience of the authors by evaluating the academic grades at the time of the publications. The question of the topics covered (*what*) in the identified papers is determined via a qualitative approach, methodically taking into account the aforementioned preliminary work.

Thus, this paper is further divided into a section on the methodological operationalization of the described basic questions in the same order, a descriptive explanation of the findings, and a subsequent discussion of the same.

2 General Data Basis and Data Collection

The Journal Citation Report (JCR) and the SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJR) were used to select the most relevant journals in adult education research. Both prod-

ucts aim to map the quality of scholarly journals from different disciplines through different calculation methods. The JCR is a citation-based ranking and uses the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) (Woll 2011, p. 73). This value indicates how often other journals cite an article from the journal under investigation in relation to the total number of articles published there (Kretschmann, Linten & Heller 2013). Due to the implementation of the JCR in the multidisciplinary database Web of Science, which ranks next to Scopus as the largest and most relevant scientific database, the JCR is highly relevant for the assessment of international journals of different disciplines, including educational sciences. The SJR uses the Article Influence Score as a central assessment parameter. It evaluates the influence of a journal on the basis of a network analysis, which assigns a higher weight to citations from highly cited journals than to citations from less cited ones. Thus, this weighting places more emphasis on the prestige of a journal (Kim & Chung 2018, p. 19). The SJR is again implemented in Scopus.

Through the two aforementioned sources, nine journals were extracted in June 2021 that could be classified as adult education or continuing education research through their titles. Not included were journals that deal with other topics or target groups in addition to the relevant topic and target group and make this clear via the title, as well as journals that explicitly focus on continuing education in other disciplines. The journals *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ), *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (IJLE), *Studies in the Education of Adults* (SEA), *Studies in Continuing Education* (SCE), *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL), *International Journal of Adult, Community and Professional Learning* (IJACPL), *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (JFHE), *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (EJRELE), and the *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* (JACE) were thus included in the final analysis since they meet the criteria described and as such represent highly reputable international adult education research journals.

In all journals, volumes from 2000 to 2020¹ were manually screened for articles authored or co-authored by authors from the Global South, and articles that placed countries of the Global South at the thematic center were identified. Only original articles and systematic literature reviews were considered. Editorials, Comments, or Book Reviews were not integrated.

To identify countries of the Global South, the list for developing countries and territories was used. The OECD list of developing countries and territories for the reporting year 2021 was used to determine the countries of the Global South. The classification is based on the countries' per capita income (OECD 2021). Although the OECD uses the evaluative term "developing countries", it offers clear guidelines for classifying individual countries in this group in contrast to the Global South. Analytically, the list therefore offers greater advantages and, with few exceptions, is also congruent with country overviews that work with the term Global South.

¹ The journals IJACPL, EJRELE, and JACE have only existed since 2013, 2010, and 2001. Therefore, they were included from the respective first issues up to incl. 2020.

Finally, only those articles exclusively written by authors from countries of the Global South and not submitted in co-authorship with scholars from developed countries have been included in the final analysis.

As the objective of this study is not to make statements about individual journals and their geo- and science-political conditions, but to generate findings about a specific group of authors within the entire discipline of adult education research, the identified papers are not classified according to journals or analyzed taking into account the publication organ. Rather, the papers are considered as a common data set that allows drawing conclusions about the representation of a group of authors in relation to the entire field of international adult education research.

2.1 Identification and Evaluation of Bibliometric Data on Papers and Authors (*How and Who*)

For all identified papers, data were obtained related to the authors and the contributions themselves. On the author side, the author names, their formal qualifications, and the locations of the research institution where the authors were working at the time of publication were recorded. On the contributions side, the titles and keywords were identified. In order to enable the later evaluation of the content, all relevant contributions had to be obtained in full text form.

In order to get an impression of the visibility and relevance of the examined contributions by authors from countries of the Global South, the respective data on downloads and citations on the homepages of the nine journals are included. The collection of these indicators took place between 09/26/2021 and 10/01/2021. For the journals AJAL, IJACPL, and EJRELE, the information on downloads and citations are not provided or incomplete and are therefore not included in the analysis. Downloads and citations are set in relation to the average of all articles published in the same year of the same journal. To avoid too much bias due to extreme values, the average is replaced by the 10 % trimmed mean. To calculate the 10 % trimmed mean, the top and bottom ten percent of cases are removed. Finally, it can be determined for each article whether it was over- under- or averagely retrieved and cited compared to the whole year.

When evaluating the bibliometric data of the authors, no weighting was made with regard to first and second authorship. For example, if a paper was authored by two or more authors from different countries in the Global South, the locations were included in the evaluation in equal proportions. The formal qualification of the authors was recorded individually for each author and co-author in order to ensure comparability with the corresponding study for potential predatory journals by Vetter & Schemmann (2021).

2.2 Content Evaluation of the Contributions from Authors from Countries of the Global South (*What*)

For evaluating the content-related data of the articles identified as relevant, the inductively developed categories of the bibliometric study of frequently cited articles in adult

education research conducted by Fejes and Nylander (2019, p. 123) were used. This adoption is necessary in the context of the present study as multi-perspective category formation to increase reliability was not possible due to limited resources. Accordingly, the present evaluation captures the respective method underlying the relevant work as well as the study contexts and objects. The broad subcategories in the superordinate segments “method”, “context” and “object” from the named study by Fejes and Nylander (2019) also proved to be largely congruent for the extracted corpus of the present paper. Concerning the method, on the one hand, qualitative approaches were not differentiated and subcategories were still replaced by “historical”, “theoretical formulation”, “descriptive”, “experimental or quasi-experimental”, and “teaching of practice” from Long’s (1983, p. 83) bibliometric study of adult education research conference proceedings, which K  pplinger (2019, p. 162) also draws on in his analysis of conference papers from adult education research. Regarding the evaluation of the objects of study, the analyzed papers in the context of the present study resulted in the need for the addition of the categories “Women” and “Indigenous and rural population”.

In order to do justice to the specificity of the selected sample with regard to particular content in addition to the subcategories added and to reduce the risk of a Eurocentric or neocolonial academic bias, the papers were further evaluated according to topics that are characteristic of countries in the Global South. Since there is no generally shared overview of such characteristics, the individual categories of this evaluation part are to be judged as fragmented and thus unsystematic and not included in table 2. The first category refers to the most common reading of the Global South according to Schneider (2017, p. 21), which emphasizes structural underdevelopment and poverty compared to the Global North. Thus, the first thematic category is “Poverty”. The economic disadvantage of countries in the Global South often also depends on colonization by, or ongoing dependence on, a country that is now classified as part of the Global North (Henningsen 2021, p. 3), so another thematic category is “(De)Colonization”. Since severe population poverty is usually accompanied by a poorly developed health care system (de Carvalho et al. 2020, p. 280), the category “Diseases” is included. From a geographical perspective, it seems characteristic of the Global South, in contrast to the Global North, that a significant proportion of the population lives in rural regions rather than metropolitan areas, and that the proportion of the rural population continues to increase despite the trend toward urbanization (United Nations 2019, p. 13). Therefore, another thematic category is “Rural Population”. “Literacy” was also added as an important category of adult education research.

3 Number of Identified Articles and their Visibility (*How*)

Out of the 3,747 papers in the nine journals studied, 318 papers were identified that were authored (with participation) by authors from countries of the Global South, or

that placed countries of the Global South in the thematic focus. 64.78 % ($n = 206$)² of these papers were written exclusively by authors from the Global South and are therefore also relevant for the in-depth analysis. 21.38 % ($n = 68$) focus on countries in the Global South but are written by authors from countries in the Global North. The remaining 13.84 % ($n = 44$) were submitted by teams of authors based in countries of the Global North and South at the time of publication.

The analysis of the download numbers shows that across journals, of the 168 evaluable articles originating from authors in countries of the Global South, 80.36 % ($n = 135$) had lower download numbers than the calculated trimmed mean of all original articles of the same year in the respective journal. In contrast, only 19.64 % ($n = 33$) received above-average attention.

Looking at the citations, this significant discrepancy is more moderate, since a binary distribution is broken by 14.88 % ($n = 25$) of the contributions that reach the calculated trimmed citation average of the corresponding year, rounded down or up. Nevertheless, 58.33 % ($n = 98$) of the evaluable contributions are below this average. 26.79 % ($n = 45$) are cited more frequently than average.

3.1 Characteristics of Authors from the Global South (*Who*)

The countries of the Global South do not form a homogeneous group (Dawar 2001, p. 138). This refers not only to cultural or historical parameters, but also to the strongly economically narrowed definition of the OECD, which underlies the present work due to clear inclusion and exclusion criteria compared to social science or humanities definitions of the Global South. It distinguishes between Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories (UMIC), Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories (LMIC), Low Income Countries (LIC) and Least Developed Countries (LDC), thus still using the evaluative term “developing countries”. As can be seen in Table 1, most of the contributions have originated in research institutes from UMICs. In the OECD list, UMICs account for 39.44 % ($n = 56$) of all developing countries. Thus, in the case of the present survey, there is a slight overrepresentation of this highest-income group of countries in the Global South.

Table 1: Mapping of the identified authors along the OECD-systematics for developing countries

LDC	LIC	LMIC	UMIC
Eritrea (L) (2) Ethiopia (L) (1) Lesotho (LM) (5) Nepal (LM) (1) Uganda (2)	Zimbabwe (2)	Egypt (2) Eswatini (1) Ghana (10,33) India (7) Indonesia (UM) (4) Jordan (UM) (2) Morocco (3)	Argentina (2) Belarus (1) Botswana (19.5) Brazil (7) Ecuador (1) Guyana (1) Iran (3)

2 IJLE=75 relevant articles (9.14 %), JFHE=29 (3.18 %), JACE=25 (9.19 %), AJAL=22 (4.37), AEQ=15 (4.24 %), SEA=14 (5.32 %), IJACPL=13 (14.29 %), SCE=9 (2.34 %), EJRELE=4 (2.72 %)

(Continuing table 1)

LDC	LIC	LMIC	UMIC
		Nigeria (27.5) Philippines (3) Papua New Guinea (0.5) Ukraine (1) Vietnam (2) Kenya (1)	Iraq (1) Jamaica (2) Colombia (1) Lebanon (2) Malaysia (11) Mexico (3) Namibia (3) Serbia (1) South Africa (60.16) Thailand (2) Turkey (8)
11 (5,34 %)	2 (0.97 %)	64.33 (31.23 %)	128.66 (62.46 %)

A total of 259 authors are attributable to the 206 articles. 22 authors appear more than once as authors in the nine journals studied between 2000 and 2020. At the time of publication, 92.58 % (n = 237) authors were employed at universities. For 11 authors, no organizational assignment at the time of publication could be determined.

Considering the formal qualifications of the authors at the time of publication, the high proportion of highly and maximally qualified persons is striking. The distribution shown in Figure 1 makes a rough structural distinction between the rank of professor, the academic title of doctor, and master’s and bachelor’s degrees.

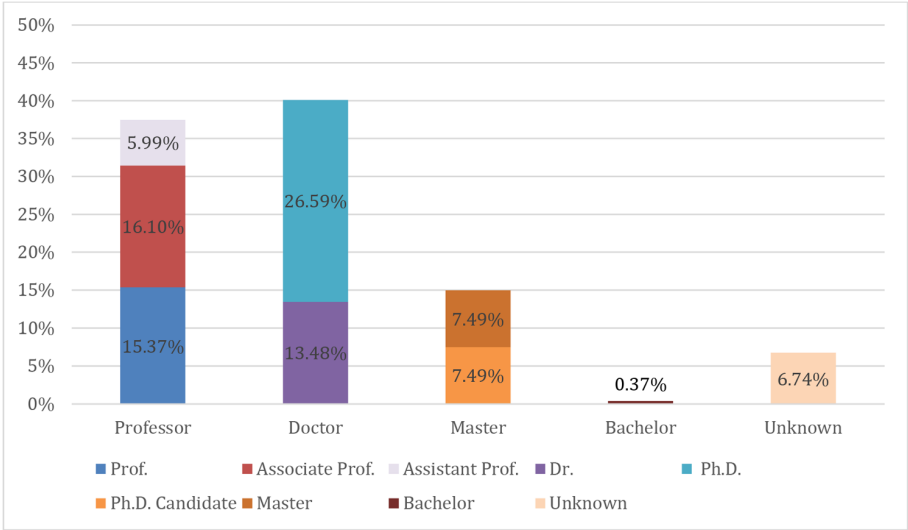


Figure 1: Academic titles of authors identified as relevant in percentages

3.2 Contents of the Contributions by Authors from Countries of the Global South (*What*)

The overview of the contents along the supercategories Method, Context, and Object in Table 2, oriented to Fejes and Nylander (2019, p. 123) and Long (1983), shows that the identified papers predominantly focus on learners in certifying public-formal learning settings by means of qualitative methods. The dominance of classical teaching-learning situations is strengthened by the likewise dominant role of teachers as objects of scientific work.

Focusing on the methods, it is noticeable that qualitative methods clearly dominate the work of adult education researchers from the Global South. Since the Literature Reviews are all not systematic but rather narrative in nature and the category Technique or Practice also includes qualitative contributions, 44.17 % ($n = 91$) can be described as methodologically qualitative. If, as in Fejes and Nylander (2019, p. 123), the conceptually and theoretically oriented articles are also included in this category, this would affect the subcategories Theoretical formulation, Descriptive and Historical in the present study. Thus, the proportion of qualitative papers increased to 72.82 % ($n = 150$) compared to 27.18 % ($n = 56$) that used quantitative methods or mixed methods to generate results. Most quantitative or mixed methods papers were published in the JFHE. Assigning the nine methodological categories to either empirical or descriptive approaches, 54.37 % ($n = 112$) chose an empirical approach and 45.63 % ($n = 94$) chose a descriptive approach. Descriptive contributions are often “country portraits” (Field et al. 2019, p. 188) in which authors provide an overview of the goals and dynamics of national adult education developments. Exemplary contributions include those by Oduaran (2001), Preece & Ntseane (2004), or Hoppers (2013).

Focusing on the contexts of inquiry, Schools & University mainly focuses on formal learning settings in public settings, followed by nonformal learning contexts. Contexts often targeted from the perspective of the Global North, such as the workplace or digital space, on the other hand, are poorly represented at 9.95 % ($n = 20.5$).

The impression of the relevance of formal learning settings is supported by the connective view of the objects of study. The majority of the contributions located in the school or university context focus on learners (students) and teachers.

The separate evaluation of the contributions along typical topics for countries of the Global South shows moreover that 20.39 % ($n = 42$) focus on such topics. Dominant topics are Literacy 35.31 % ($n = 14.83$), Rural Population 18.64 % ($n = 783$) and Poverty 11.50 % ($n = 4.83$).

The following chapter discusses the findings of the three results sections with reference to the discourse around (academic) neocolonialism as well as existing bibliometric studies in adult education research. In addition, the content analysis is linked to the visibility analysis to extract more detailed statements about possible success factors of successful contributions of authors from countries of the Global South in renowned international journals of adult education research.

Table 2: Contents of articles by authors from countries in the Global South in nine indexed international journals of adult education research, 2000–2020

Journals	JFHE (n)	SEA (n)	JACE (n)	AEQ (n)	IJLE (n)	SCE (n)	AJAL (n)	IJACPL (n)	EJRELA (n)	Total
Method (how?)										
Qualitative Study	5	7	6	8	24	5	11	9	2	37,38 % (n = 77)
Quantitative questionnaires	12	0	6	3	4	1	6	3	0	16,99 % (n = 35)
Descriptive	3	1	6	1	15	1	1	0	0	13,59 % (n = 28)
Mixed Method	7	3	2	1	4	1	1	0	0	9,22 % (n = 19)
Theoretical formulation	1	2	2	2	7	0	1	0	2	8,25 % (n = 17)
Historical	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	6,80 % (n = 14)
Review of Literature	1	0	1	0	4	1	1	0	0	3,88 % (n = 8)
Technique of Practice	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	1	0	2,91 % (n = 6)
Experimental or quasi-experimental	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0,97 % (n = 2)
Total	29	14	25	15	75	9	22	13	4	100 % (n = 206)

(Continuing table 2)

Journals	JFHE (n)	SEA (n)	JACE (n)	AEQ (n)	IJLE (n)	SCE (n)	AJAL (n)	IJACPL (n)	EJRELA (n)	Total
Context (where?)										
School & University	27	5	11	4	25,5	4	7	9	0	44,90 % (n = 92,5)
Nonformal education (NGO's, home, etc)	0	6	2	6	10,5	3	10	2	2	20,15 % (n = 41,5)
Policy	0	1	2	0	17,5	0	3	0	1	11,89 % (n = 24,5)
Overviews	1	1	1	4	9	0	0	0	1	8,25 % (n = 17)
Workplace & Workplace transitions	0	0	3	1	4	2	2	2	0	6,80 % (n = 14)
Educational systems	0	1	3	0	8	0	0	0	0	5,83 % (n = 12)
E-learning, ICT & IT	1	0	3	0	0,5	0	0	0	0	2,18 % (n = 4,5)
Total	29	14	25	15	75	9	22	13	4	100 % (n = 206)
Object (who?)										
Student & Practitioners	17,5	2,5	6	4,5	13,5	2	4,5	4	0	26,46 % (n = 54,5)
Teachers & educators	7,5	2	4	1,5	11,5	2	4	4	0	17,72 % (n = 36,5)

(Continuing table 2)

Journals	JFHE (n)	SEA (n)	JACE (n)	AEQ (n)	IJLE (n)	SCE (n)	AJAL (n)	IJACPL (n)	EJRELA (n)	Total
Workers & professionals	1	4	6	1	8	2	7	4,5	0	16,26 % (n = 33,5)
Nation	0	0	3	0	19	1	1	0	0	11,65 % (n = 24)
Research	3	2	2	3	8	0	1	0	2	10,19 % (n = 21)
Indigenous and rural population	0	1,5	3	2	10	1	0,5	0,5	1,5	9,71 % (n = 20)
Women	0	2	1	3	5	1	4	0	0,5	8,01 % (n = 16,5)
Total	29	14	25	15	75	9	22	13	4	100 % (n = 206)

4 Discussion of Findings

The share of 8.49 % representing the Global South in terms of topics or (co-)authorship of all published articles in the nine most influential international journals in adult education research over a period of 20 years has to be considered as very low considering that 80 % of the world's population live in countries of the Global South and that the share will increase in many scenarios until 2100 (Solarz & Wojtaszczyk 2015). Taking into account only those contributions that were exclusively written by authors from the Global South, this share even decreases to 5.5 %. This is also related to the fact that all nine indexed journals examined were founded in the Global North and publish exclusively in English. Even though English serves as the lingua franca in the countries of the Global South, which are most frequently represented in the present survey, and is in this way familiar to the authors in question, the forcible colonial imposition and the associated “dependency culture” that gains significance via the imposition of English as the language of scholarly communication should not be disregarded. For many scientists from the Global South, language is one among other publication obstacles caused by colonial history (Ferguson 2007).

Another reason for the low share of publication volume could be related to the publication funding of OA articles via Author Processing Charges. For example, an analysis of more than 37,000 articles shows that authors from low-income countries prefer to publish in paid journals rather than OA journals because processing charges are often higher in OA journals (Smith et al. 2021). This finding, too, cannot be viewed purely in economic terms, separate from a neocolonial interpretation. Funding opportunities and institutional support for publication in indexed OA journals are significantly better in the academic center (the Global North) than in the periphery (the Global South). APCs provide free access to academic knowledge only for those who can benefit from these funding opportunities, in this way, from the perspective of the Global South, such funding structures tend to revive the vicious cycle of academic colonialism (Sengupta 2021, p. 204). The relevance of the barrier created by APCs is particularly evident in the example of South Africa. With 60.16 contributions, it is the most frequently represented in the present sample. In addition to its colonial history in the British Empire, the financial support provided by the South African government through the Department of Education can also be seen as a reason for this dominance. The department pays its universities a substantial subsidy for each journal article published in journals indexed in the SSCI or SCI (Collyer 2018, p.11). However, such funding systems simultaneously reinforce the dominance of orientation towards neocolonial quality standards in scholarly publishing.

When articles on adult education research from the Global South still manage to be published in the international journals studied, the examination of visibility and citation shows that they receive significantly less visibility and are also cited less frequently by colleagues on average. The weak international actor networks identified by Larsson (2010, p. 108) in the context of citation networks in international journals of adult education research should actually give reason to assume that the identified dis-

crepancy between authors from the Global South and North should be smaller in terms of retrieval and download numbers. One explanation for this could also be found in academic neocolonialism. Sengupta (2021, p. 203) points out that countries of the Global South have come to be considered mostly an area to be studied and not a place from which to speak.

With the help of the differentiation of OECD (see Table 1), the findings on the authors identified in relation to the geographical locations show that the representation of authors from the Global South is unevenly distributed from an economic point of view. For example, the research organizations of 93.69 % ($n = 193$) of the authors identified are located in UMIC and LMIC and thus in the most economically prosperous countries of the Global South group. Of the 11 papers from LDCs, only one achieved more views than the trimmed average of other papers in the same year of the journal.

With South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana, Malaysia, Ghana, the top four countries in the sample are all members of the Commonwealth of Nations where English is the official language. However, from a colonial-critical perspective, this “advantage” of the former British colonies must be seen as the result of the forcible replacement of educational institutions on the part of the colonial masters, which prevented local knowledge production and reception systems from thriving in the Global South. Colonization displaced these local systems in favor of the then emerging science system of the Global North, which has since been institutionalized in practically all countries of the Global South and especially in the former British colonies. This structural overlay, which has hardly been questioned in the Global North, is an example of coloniality (Schmidt 2021, p. 4).

Comparing the findings with the sample of Vetter and Schemmann (2021) ($n = 100$), which is limited to countries of the Global South, it is noticeable that the percentage distribution along the OECD categorization of developing countries is different. Here, 74 % ($n = 74$) of the contributions come from authors whose research institution can be categorized as LMIC at the time of publication, while only 24 % ($n = 24$) belong to UMIC. When authors from developing countries publish in top international adult education research journals, their workplaces are, on average, in more economically prosperous countries in this category compared to adult education researchers from the Global South who publish in potential predatory journals. The organizational location of the authors is comparable in both surveys. The survey by Vetter and Schemmann (2021, p. 89) indicates that the proportion of highly qualified authors is quite high. If one reduces the data set to the contributions that were exclusively written by authors from developing countries, there is a clear difference to the distribution in the present study. If here 77.53 % ($n = 208$)³ of the authors have at least the academic degree of a doctor (or comparable), it is 53.80 % ($n = 92$) of the authors from the Global South in potential predatory journals of which also only 30.43 %

3 The total number of authors identified differs from the number of academic titles evaluated because eight authors who published multiple times in the nine journals examined at different times reported different academic qualifications over time. Thus, these eight statements are additionally included.

($n = 28$) have a professor title. The high proportion of unidentifiable academic qualifications of 26.90 % ($n = 46$) also leaves room for interpretation in this group. After reviewing name overlaps, it is noted that four authors published in both legitimate and probably illegitimate adult education research journals during the time period studied.

The results of the content aspects “method”, “context” and “object” shown in Table 2 roughly reflect findings of the entire research field. The strong focus on qualitative research approaches is also confirmed in the interpretive literature review on the Scientific Field of Adult Education by Rubenson and Elfert (2019, p.23) in reference back to other bibliometric studies in the field. However, with regard to the high proportion of articles that follow a quantitative or mixed method approach, a difference to current bibliometric analyses can be diagnosed. Here, there is an overall lack of mixed method and an almost complete absence of purely quantitative studies (Rubenson & Elfert 2019, p. 23). The high proportion of descriptive papers also seems anachronistic in light of past bibliometric studies. In this context, however, the present paper uses a different definition of descriptive papers than was used in the journal analysis by Long & Agyekum (1974, p. 116), who identified a high proportion of such papers. While the authors here included articles that illuminate relevant fields of adult education from an exploratory descriptive perspective using qualitative and/or quantitative methods, this paper understands descriptive articles to be those in which the authors describe important facts or a fact whose relevance to the scholarly community is argumentative (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991, p. 6).

In summarizing the contexts and objects of inquiry, the strong focus on formal learning settings is striking. A large proportion of the articles, which are in school or university contexts, focus on learners (students) and teachers in them. When comparing the results of both categories with the research of Fejes and Nylander (2019, p. 123), who looked at the top-cited articles in three journals, which are also implicated in the present research, enormous differences emerge in terms of frequency distribution. In terms of contexts, the articles in the sample of Fejes and Nylander (2019) much more frequently take Workplace & Workplace transitions and E-learning, ICT & IT into account. Adding the evaluation of content considered typical for the Global South, it becomes clear that 20.39 % of all contributions deal with topics such as Literacy, Rural Population, Poverty or even HIV. The visibility of these contributions is comparable to that of the entire sample (81.82 % have lower download numbers and 78.79 % are cited less frequently).

Moreover, when the content evaluation and the access and citation figures are considered together, it is possible to draw conclusions about indicators of success by looking exclusively at the articles that are accessed and cited more frequently than average. Among the total of 19 articles that were both cited and viewed more frequently than average, there are only three articles whose results show a strong dependence on the survey location, which always also corresponds to the localization of the authors' university. This finding suggests that international visibility is increased by maximizing the generalizability of the findings. In contrast to the entire sample, this

group of articles is dominated by mixed methods and quantitative research approaches as well as theoretical formulations. Compared to Fejes and Nylander's (2019) study, the findings suggest that authors from the Global South, in contrast to authors from the Global North, need to adopt more quantitative approaches to gain visibility.

5 Conclusion

This paper was able to explore the “terra incognitas” of adult education research in the Global South in excerpts through the bibliometric analysis of the nine most relevant international adult education research journals. It became clear that the perspectives of this group of authors are substantially underrepresented on the international stage of adult education research discourse examined through indexed adult education research journals. The “Anglophone bias” noted by Fejes and Nylander (2017) expands into a *socioeconomic bias* or, more pointedly, a *neocolonial bias* when the present findings are taken into account, and limits the degree of openness of the international discourse of adult education research. With its highly specialized communication, the science system of adult education fulfills a certain function in the world society, namely its supply with new and reliable scientific knowledge. Following Schmid's (2021, p. 3) assumption that researchers thereby represent the interests of the local population at the research location at least to a certain extent, and that the interests of the population in the “Global South” differ more or less from those of the population in the “Global North” because of different cultural and social conditions, it can be assumed that the international adult education research system fulfills its function of representing the majority of interests only extremely insufficiently.

The reasons for this bias need to be investigated in more detail in further surveys. A comparative bibliometric study of rejected contributions by authors from the Global South could also be helpful in this regard. Regardless of this, the dominant Anglophone scholarly community in general and the editors of international open access journals in adult education research in particular should open up further to the group of authors under investigation. This can be achieved, for example, by increasing the number of special issues with a geographical or thematic focus for authors from the Global South, by critically reflecting on the submission criteria from a neocolonial-critical perspective or by entrenchment of collaboration between researchers from the Global South and the Global North as Alordiah et al. (2021, p. 487) call for in their study related to Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Special financial support measures can also reduce the economic hurdle to publication in an open access journal. For example, Sengupta (2021, p. 205) suggests that differentiated varying rates of APC relative to the location of the author should be introduced.

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III Rezensionen/Reviews

Rezension: Erwachsenenbildung und Migration – Internationale Kontexte und historische Bezüge

LENA SINDERMANN

Kloubert, T. (Hrsg.) (2020): Erwachsenenbildung und Migration – Internationale Kontexte und historische Bezüge. Springer VS: Wiesbaden, 215 S.

Der Band „Erwachsenenbildung und Migration – Internationale Kontexte und historische Bezüge“ eint Beiträge aus einer vorangegangenen, gleichnamigen Ringvorlesung, die im Sommersemester 2018 an der Professur für Erwachsenenbildung und Außer-schulischen Jugendbildung der Katholischen Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt veranstaltet wurde. Die Beiträge thematisieren unterschiedliche Herausforderungen, die sich aus Migrationsbewegungen für die Strukturen von (in)formellen Weiterbildungsangeboten ergeben und fokussieren die daraus resultierenden pädagogischen Umgangsformen mit migrationsbedingter Vielfalt. Migrationsgesellschaftliche Strukturen zwingen die Bildungswissenschaften zu neuen Konzepten, um der zunehmenden Heterogenität von Gesellschaften gewachsen zu sein. Für die Herausgeberin Prof. Dr. Tetyana Kloubert kommt migrationsbedingter Bildungsarbeit große Verantwortung zu, wobei insbesondere die Erwachsenenbildung Migrationsprozesse professionell begleiten und bei Fragen der Lebensbewältigung unterstützen sollte. Davon ausgehend versteht Kloubert Migration sowohl als individuellen als auch als institutionellen Lernanlass. Sie skizziert in ihrer Einleitung, dass nur eine „Erwachsenenbildung, die auch einen reflektierten und begründeten gesellschaftlichen Wandel einbezieht, eine gelungene Integration auf lange Sicht sichern kann“ (S. 6). Die Beiträge geben Einblicke in die Komplexität erziehungswissenschaftlicher Migrationsforschung und zeigen, auf wie vielen unterschiedlichen Ebenen Migrationsbewegungen die Erwachsenenbildung durchdringen.

Im Wesentlichen ist der Sammelband in drei Bereiche eingeteilt, die die Schnittmengen zwischen Migration und Erwachsenenbildung unter jeweils unterschiedlichen Zugängen behandeln. Der erste Teil zeichnet sich durch seine interdisziplinären Forschungsansätze aus und beleuchtet das Themenfeld aus den Perspektiven der Erziehungswissenschaft, der Geschichtswissenschaft, der Journalistik und der politischen Philosophie. Im zweiten Teil werden internationale Erfahrungen mit Migrationsbewegungen und ihren Herausforderungen an Beispielen Osteuropäischer Staaten dargestellt, während im dritten Teil die praktischen Erfahrungen einer Einrichtung reflektiert werden.

Dr. Saskia Eschenbacher greift in ihrem Beitrag beispielsweise die Theorie des Transformativen Lernens von Jack Mezirow auf und reflektiert daran Möglichkeiten und Grenzen für die Weiterbildung im Kontext von Flucht und Migration. Dabei analysiert sie das emanzipatorische Potenzial einer Migrationserfahrung für das Lernen des Individuums einerseits und für das Feld der Erwachsenenbildung andererseits (S. 77–92). Anhand eines gendersensiblen Zugangs erläutert sie außerdem die spezifische Situation von (geflüchteten) Frauen, die in diesem Spannungsfeld vor besondere Herausforderungen gestellt werden (S. 84). Eschenbacher legt dar, wie Prozesse des transformativen Lernens in pädagogisches Handeln aufgenommen werden können, um Zugewanderte in ihrem Prozess des Ankommens zu unterstützen.

Prof. Dr. Klaus-Dieter Altmeyen beschäftigt sich dagegen aus kommunikationswissenschaftlicher Sicht mit den Auswirkungen medialer Berichterstattung im Kontext von flucht- und migrationstheoretischen Diskursen (S. 133–152). Altmeyen bezeichnet den Einfluss sozialer Netzwerke auf die öffentliche Meinungsbildung als „digitale Kultivierung“ (S. 135) und zieht Analogien zwischen digitaler Berichterstattung und Populismus. Die Tendenz, komplexe Sachverhalte auf singuläre und problematisierende Erzählungen zu reduzieren, skandalisiert Geflüchtete und Migrant*innen und festigt diskriminierende Stereotypen. Die Logik digitaler Plattformen sieht dabei keine differenzierte Berichterstattung vor, sondern folgt Regeln des kommunikativen Wettbewerbs. Für Altmeyen folgt daraus eine Verantwortung für Wissenschaftler*innen, die sich von politisch aufgeheizten Debatten und hegemonialen Perspektiven auf Migration distanzieren müssen. Diese Herausforderung gilt auch für die Erwachsenenbildung, deren Praxis und Forschungen in soziale Diskurse eingebettet stattfinden.

Prof. Dr. Lionel McPherson und Travis Quigley greifen das Spannungsfeld migrationsbedingter Debatten ebenfalls auf und fokussieren in ihrem Beitrag insbesondere kulturtheoretische Fragen (S. 153–170). Anhand des polarisierenden Konzepts der „Nationalkultur“ (S. 154) diskutieren sie die Legitimation von politischen Einwanderungssteuerungen und -kontrollen in den USA. Sie kommen zu dem Ergebnis, dass die Berufung auf eine vermeintlich einheitliche nationale Kultur eines Staates kein valides Argument sein kann, um Migrationsbewegungen zu beschränken. Um Integration zu fördern und eine Annäherung zwischen Mehrheitsgesellschaft und neu in den USA Ankommenden zu erleichtern, braucht es vor allem bildungspolitische Maßnahmen, die den Zusammenhalt einer Gesellschaft stärken (S. 165). Der Erwachsenenbildung wird in diesem Zusammenhang die Schlüsselrolle gesellschaftlicher Verständigung zugeschrieben, indem sie einerseits Räume für Vielfalt schafft und andererseits Brücken zwischen Akteur*innen baut.

Dass migrationsbedingte Herausforderungen das Weiterentwicklungspotenzial einer Gesellschaft bestärken können, zeigen auch die Beiträge über Migrationsbewegungen in Osteuropa. Am Beispiel von Polen beforscht Dr. habil. Dorota Gierszewski die Auswirkungen von Migrationsbewegungen auf das dortige Hochschulwesen und stellt die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen gesellschaftlicher Transformationsprozesse dar (S. 171–182). Laut Gierszewski hat die (zunehmende) Migration in Polen nicht nur zur

Internationalisierung des Hochschulwesens geführt, sondern sorgt auch auf gesamtgesellschaftlicher Ebene dafür, das Potenzial kultureller Vielfalt zu stärken (S. 173). Ihr Beitrag stellt einerseits die Möglichkeiten einer migrationsbedingten Ausdifferenzierung der Erwachsenenbildungslandschaft dar und macht gleichzeitig auf ihr Konfliktpotenzial im Sinne gesellschaftlicher Aushandlungsprozesse aufmerksam, die diese Transformationen mit sich bringen.

Die ausgewählten Beispiele aus dem Sammelband zeigen exemplarisch die Vielschichtigkeit migrationsbedingter Herausforderungen für die Erwachsenenbildung. Durch die interdisziplinären Zugänge, die internationalen Perspektiven und die Praxisbeispiele gelingt es den Autor*innen nicht nur die Relevanz migrationsspezifischer Forschung zu verdeutlichen, sondern auch die Rolle der Erwachsenenbildung in diesem Kontext zu reflektieren.

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Review: Between PIAAC and the New Literacy Studies. What adult education can learn from large-scale assessments without adopting the neo-liberal paradigm

JAKOB BICKEBÖLLER

Anke Grotlüschen; Lisanne Heilmann (Eds.): *Between PIAAC and the New Literacy Studies. What adult education can learn from large-scale assessments without adopting the neo-liberal paradigm*. Muenster; New York: Waxmann. 265pp.

Large-scale assessments provide internationally comparable data on educational levels in different countries. This is linked to the assumption of a benefit for the adult education sector as large-scale assessments promise an overview of the national education situation. In addition, the data offer insights into other countries' education policies and strategies. Apart from this, criticism is directed at PIAAC and similar surveys regarding, for instance, the focus on rankings or labor market outcomes of education. Furthermore, hierarchies are strengthened as the OECD increases its influence over national education policies (Grotlüschen & Heilmann, p.7). Starting from this point, Anke Grotlüschen and Lisanne Heilmann pose the question if further benefits can be derived from large datasets. The aim of the collection is to provide an overview of different questions adult education researchers deal with using PIAAC data. The goal is to demonstrate the benefits of a critical approach to large-scale assessments, as well as the insight potential of big data for further research.

The first part of the collection, "Learning from PIAAC", presents alternative interpretations and perspectives on PIAAC data. By combining a secondary analysis of PIAAC data with the social practices approach of the New Literacy Studies, Barbara Nienkemper and Anke Grotlüschen were able to identify three groups of adults. These three groups are differentiated by using their frequency of skill-related activities as a foundation, not their assessed literacy level. A particularly interesting group consists of adults who are not part of the labor market or are in employment that offers few opportunities for skill use. Members of this group seem to compensate the lack of opportunities at work by using their skills in everyday life (Nienkemper & Grotlüschen, p. 29). This finding challenges the stereotypical image of adults with low literacy skills avoiding skill-related activities. Anke Grotlüschen, Christopher Stammer and Thomas J. Sork focus on the professionalization of adults in teaching positions. They found that teachers have higher levels of digital literacy than expected. The last paper of this part questions the adequacy of PIAAC in assessing competences. Anke

Grotlüschen, Barbara Nienkemper and Caroline Duncker-Euringer suggest additional testing, especially at lower levels.

The papers of the second part deal with different forms of marginalization in and by large-scale assessments. Anke Grotlüschen, Lisanne Heilmann, Gregor Dutz and Svetlana Chachashvili-Bolotin compare the feelings of socio-political participation of recently arrived migrants in Austria, Canada, Germany, Israel and the USA. Their first article points out descriptive statistical differences between migrant populations, language minorities and the rest of the population, while the second article uses regression analyses to show the relation of these three groups to socio-political participation. These two articles demonstrate different types of results that statistical approaches can offer. Speaking of 'southering', Anke Grotlüschen and Klaus Buddeberg describe a re-colonising effect caused by the expansion of international studies into the so-called global South. They state that stereotypical images can also occur in relation to countries and are reinforced by the regional distribution of PIAAC. This process is not an intentional procedure, but a side effect of general data analysis which is initiated by the time pressure resulting from supranational agreements (Grotlüschen & Buddeberg, p. 164). Nevertheless, this article shows that power balances always have to be examined critically when international large-scale assessments are interpreted. The last article of the second part explores consequences of low literacy for adults. Anke Grotlüschen focuses on socially relevant areas of life such as political efficacy, social trust and volunteering. All three indicators show lower results for subpopulations with low literacy skills. According to Grotlüschen, the results might indicate that low-literate adults have fewer opportunities for political participation (Grotlüschen, p. 186).

The aim of the third part is to understand the interrelation of literacy and social participation. The articles focus on the power structures affecting this relation. Using quantitative data, Jana Wienberg and Anke Grotlüschen analyze the role of literacy and language education for refugees and migrants in Germany. They point out that a successful literacy course attendance does not necessarily ensure that the German written language is mastered (Wienberg & Grotlüschen, p. 208). The lack of transitions into the regular literacy system may be a decisive factor in this regard. The second article by Anke Grotlüschen, Klaus Buddeberg, Gregor Dutz, Lisanne Heilmann and Christopher Stammer is based on a nationwide assessment of literacy skills in Germany. The paper gives an overview of different literacy practices and competences along with their links to social participation for the German population. The last paper of the collection examines learning and skill-use situations in the lives of adults with low literacy. Anke Grotlüschen focuses on the PIAAC subpopulations of literacy or numeracy level 1 and below and their relation to adult education and training, to informal learning at work and learning strategies. She describes the paradox that stimulating work environments encourage people to develop, whereas workplace stress can discourage them from doing so (Grotlüschen, p. 257). Grotlüschen hereby directs the focus to the importance of the future design of work environments.

Overall, the anthology offers alternative perspectives on large-scale assessments for researchers, practitioners and political stakeholders in adult education. While giv-

ing reasoned critiques, it also highlights new perspectives, theoretical approaches, interpretations, and future connections to big data. Never losing sight of the underlying power structures, PIAAC and other big data thus become a valuable resource for future research in adult education.

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Rezension: Sozialisation und informelles Lernen

EVA BONN

Tippelt, R. & Schmidt-Hertha, B. (2020). Sozialisation und informelles Lernen. Bielefeld: wbv Publikation, 163 S.

Das vorliegende Lehrbuch „Sozialisation und informelles Lernen“ stellt den Band 5 der Reihe „Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung. Befunde – Diskurse – Transfer“ dar. Sozialisationsforschung fokussiert zunächst die Sozialisation von Heranwachsenden, allerdings stellt insbesondere die biographisch-soziale Situiertheit von Erwachsenen eine bedeutsame Einflussgröße für die pädagogische Arbeit in der Weiterbildung dar. In der Weiterbildungsforschung dominieren eher Konzepte wie Erfahrungslernen, Biographieorientierung oder es werden beispielsweise Teilnahmestrukturen in lebensweltbezogener Perspektive diskutiert. Selten findet jedoch ein konkreter Rückbezug zu Fragen der Sozialisation von Erwachsenen statt, obwohl diese entscheidend die Bedingungen des Lernens Erwachsener prägt, insbesondere im Sinne der (Re-)Produktion sozialer Differenzlinien. Das Lehrbuch greift daher eine forschungs- und praxisrelevante Thematik auf und beleuchtet bedeutsame Zusammenhänge zwischen Sozialisation und informellem Lernen.

Im ersten von vier Teilen des Bandes werden begriffliche und theoretische Grundlagen geschaffen. Hier werden unter Rückgriff auf bedeutsame Theorievertreter (u. a. Emile Durkheim, Pierre Bourdieu) zentrale theoretische Zugänge zu Sozialisation, Lebenswelt und individueller Entwicklung erläutert. Abschließend werden begriffliche und kontextuelle Grundlagen zum informellen Lernen skizziert.

Der zweite Teil bildet den inhaltlichen Schwerpunkt des Bandes, da hier Kontexte von Sozialisation und informellem Lernen im Handlungs- und Forschungsfeld der Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung betrachtet werden. Ausgehend von der Konzeptualisierung von Sozialisation und informellem Lernen als lebenslangem Prozess werden Sozialisationsbedingungen im (früh-)kindlichen Stadium im Kontext von Familie und Institutionen aufgegriffen, wobei insbesondere daraus resultierende, empirisch sichtbare Ungleichheitslinien identifiziert werden. Darauf folgend werden Sozialisationsprozesse und informelle Lernprozesse in Schule und Hochschule fokussiert und eine Annäherung an das Themenfeld der beruflichen Sozialisation vorgenommen, wobei insbesondere Problematiken des Übergangs von Berufsausbildung zum Arbeitsmarkt beleuchtet werden.

Die darauffolgenden Kapitel widmen sich bedeutsamen Feldern von Sozialisation und informellem Lernen, die zusätzlich zu den Stationen der primären, sekundären und tertiären Sozialisation in den Lebenslauf und die Lebenswelt eingelagert sind. So werden Geschlechtersozialisation und Geschlechterdifferenzen im informellen Lernen diskutiert. Dabei werden unter anderem in gesellschaftskritischer Perspektive

empirische Erkenntnisse zu geschlechtsbezogenen Differenzlinien und Strukturen der Bildungsbenachteiligung aufgezeigt. Ausgehend von der Feststellung, dass Medien mittlerweile der Status einer eigenständigen Sozialisationsinstanz zugeschrieben wird, fokussieren die Autoren Mediensozialisation und informelles Lernen mit Medien als weiteres Feld. Sie verweisen dabei auch auf medial induzierte Ungleichheitslinien in der Bevölkerung. In Ergänzung zur Betrachtung des beruflichen Umfeldes gehen die Autoren abschließend der Frage nach, wie Prozesse der Sozialisation und des informellen Lernens im Freizeitkontext ausgestaltet sind.

Aufbauend auf den Vorarbeiten diskutieren die Autoren im dritten Teil soziale Ungleichheit als Herausforderung für die Praxis der Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung. Zum einen werden in lebenslaufbezogener Perspektive soziostrukturelle Rahmenbedingungen betrachtet und die biographisch-lebensweltliche Einbettung von Sozialisations- und Lernprozessen betont, wobei insbesondere Übergangsphasen als bedeutsam herausgestellt werden. Weiter wird der Milieu-Ansatz dargestellt, die einzelnen Milieus portraitiert und Implikationen für die (Weiter-)Bildungsarbeit beleuchtet.

Im abschließenden Teil werden Perspektiven für Forschung und Praxis entwickelt. Die Autoren formulieren hier neun Thesen, in denen die bisherigen Ausführungen zu Sozialisation und informellem Lernen in verdichteter Form zusammengeführt werden. Die Autoren weisen (informelle) Bildungs- und Sozialisationsprozesse als lebenslange Prozesse aus, wobei hier die individuelle Verantwortung durch öffentliche und private Bildungsinstitutionen ergänzt wird. Besonders hervorgehoben wird, dass Lern- und Sozialisationsprozesse als „Projekt[e] *individueller Selbstbestimmung*“ (S. 140, Herv.i.O.) zu betrachten sind, die nicht allein in organisierten, formalen Settings realisiert werden können und zudem maßgeblich durch Kontextbedingungen (z. B. ökonomisch, bildungspolitisch, milieubezogen) geprägt sind. Insgesamt wird herausgestellt, dass Sozialisationsprozesse und Prozesse des informellen Lernens immer in je spezifische historisch-kulturelle Kontexte eingebettet und durch „soziale Lebenslagen geprägt“ (S. 141) sind. Weiterführend verweisen die Autoren auf die Interdisziplinarität des Forschungsgegenstandes ‚Sozialisation und informelles Lernen‘, da hierbei vielfältige Entwicklungsaufgaben an das Individuum gestellt werden bzw. Entwicklungsprozesse stattfinden, die nicht nur eine pädagogische Perspektive erfordern, sondern auch mit psychischen, sozialen, gesellschaftlichen und weiteren Fragestellungen verknüpft sind. Demnach seien nicht nur multidisziplinäre Forschungszugänge erforderlich, sondern entsprechend der Komplexität des Gegenstandes auch multimethodische und multitheoretische Herangehensweisen. Darüber hinaus wird die partizipative angewandte Grundlagenforschung als potentiell vielversprechende Erkundungsmöglichkeit zur „kontrollierten Aufklärung von Ursache-Wirkungs-Zusammenhängen und der Suche nach Gründen für das Handeln“ (S. 142) hervorgehoben.

Die Struktur des Lehrbuchs zeichnet sich durch eine konsequent durchdachte und wertvolle Didaktisierung aus. Merksätze, Beispiele und Definitionen erleichtern das selbstgesteuerte Lesen und Lernen. Ergänzt wird dies um Erschließungs- und Reflexionsfragen nach jedem Kapitel, die nicht auf eine reine Wissensreproduktion zielen, sondern zu einer weiterführenden Auseinandersetzung anregen. Somit eignet

sich der Band sowohl für autodidaktische Lernprozesse als auch für den Einsatz in organisierten Lehr-Lern-Settings. Die Autoren erläutern nicht nur grundlegende Begrifflichkeiten und stellen zentrale empirische Erkenntnisse dar, sondern weisen auch pointiert noch bestehende Forschungslücken aus. Durch die konsequente Orientierung an handlungspraktischen Problem- und Fragestellungen adressiert der Band jedoch nicht nur Studierende und Forschende, sondern bietet auch für Akteure in der Praxis ertragreiche Einblicke.

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Adult Education Research and Neo-Institutional Theory

Volume 45 of the International Yearbook of Adult Education focuses on neo-institutional theory as a multifaceted and fruitful perspective in adult education research. The volume discusses theoretical varieties of neo-institutionalism, sheds light on methodical implications and opens up space for empirical studies that examine various phenomena in the context of adult and continuing education using a neo-institutional theory framework.

Im Internationalen Jahrbuch der Erwachsenenbildung (IJEB/IYAE) werden gegenwärtige und grundsätzliche Fragen der Bildung im Erwachsenenalter in international-vergleichender Perspektive diskutiert. Dabei widmet sich jede Ausgabe einem Schwerpunktthema, das in englischen und deutschen Artikeln verschiedene Aspekte wissenschaftlich betrachtet. Beiträge zu aktuellen Themen und ein Rezensionsteil ergänzen die Ausgaben.

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