

NEW STRUCTURES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION CENTERS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine what kind of reform will be provided by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, which was reconstructed in 2011, in their education policy based on theories of adult education in Public Education Centers such as “adult educator qualifications”, “content formation”, selection of methodology in teaching courses” and “achievement evaluation”. This research has questioned some dimensions of education programs, in the Ministry of Education with some of the provinces of Ankara and Mersin Public Education Centers. Open ended question survey was applied to collect the data. The result of the research shows that the content of the program comes from the center as a modular program. There is no training center for adult educators in Turkey. Teachers coming from different academic ranks and instructors specialised in their fields give courses in these institutions. Their teaching methods are compatible with pedagogy. Test type exams are applied. Moreover, like the other newly EU participant countries, Turkey has accepted Life Long Learning programs without preliminary preparations.

Key words: *andragogical model, adult education, public education center.*

Introduction: Background of Adult Education in Turkey

The main focus of the present study, the Public Education Centers aim to educate adults, that is, informal students. In this respect, education given in these centers should be based on the theories of andragogy. Another requirement of this should be the use of constructivist principles. Cross (1980) defines the nontraditional student as an adult who returns to school full- or part-time while maintaining responsibilities such as employment, family, and other responsibilities of adult life. These students also may be referred to as “adult students,” “re-entry students,” “returning students,” and “adult learners.”

In Turkey, there are many banks, private organizations and ministries giving adult education to their own personnel in adult education centers of their own. This education is usually given in the form of in-service training or in compliance with the aims of further education to enhance knowledge base. That is, this education has such aims as helping personnel to work in harmony with the personnel of other institutions, rearrangement of professional knowledge of the personnel in line with the institutional objectives so that the working efficiency of the personnel can be improved, equipping the personnel with new information to enable them to be promoted to higher posts and to be successful in these posts, improving workers’ customer relations and product and service promoting skills. On the other hand, Public Education Centers functioning under the control of General Directorate of Life Long Learning of the Ministry of National Education also provides adult education programs. These Public Education Centers have been established across Turkey to give education to adult groups remaining outside the compulsory education age group. The education programs offered in these centers cover some professions as well as some cultural and hobby-related pursuits.

Knowles's andragogical model posits six assumptions regarding the characteristics of adult learners that differentiate them from child learners (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 1998):

1. In terms of their self-concept, adults tend to see themselves as more responsible, self-directed, and independent.
2. They have a larger, more diverse stock of knowledge and experience to draw from.
3. Their readiness to learn is based on developmental and real-life responsibilities.
4. Their orientation to learning is most often problem centered and relevant to their current life situation.
5. They have a stronger need to know the reasons for learning something.
6. They tend to be more internally motivated.

Problem of the Research

The purpose of the present study is to determine the extent to which the new education policy of General Directorate of Life Long Learning which was founded in 2011 complies with the theories of andragogy based on the opinions of the General Director and the directors of some Public Education Centers. At the second stage, on the other hand, the present study aims to explain the similarities and differences seen between the results of the study "*Exploring the Curriculum Dimension of Theories-Based Adult Education- A Sample Course of Southeast Anatolian Region* (Ultanir & Ultanir, 2010)" carried out by the authors in 2008-2009 in Southeast Anatolian Region of Turkey to investigate the adult education courses given by Public Education Courses and compare the results of the present study.

Methodology of Research

This research is a qualitative study. In this research open-ended survey questions and interview were used. The perception of Life Long Learning Director about "andragogy" was questioned via interview. The opinions of the directors and instructors of the Public Education Centers related to this concept were questioned by means of an open ended survey. (i) In the interview with the Director of Ministry of National Education Life Long Learning, the purpose was to determine the perceptions on the "Political target of the newly founded General Directorate, and the future of Public Education Centers". (ii) In the survey given to the directors and instructors of Public Education Centers located in the provinces of Ankara and Mersin, as Öztürk and his friends (2008) point out the goal was to understand what the surveyee know about this subject (political, social, economy etc) (p.114). In the survey, the goal was "to elicit opinions about the newly established directorate", "qualifications of the instructor working at Public Education Centers", "course contents and teaching methods", "evaluation of achievement", "e-learning", "the ratio of achieving adult population" and "counselling specialists in the Public Education Centers". In both interview and survey questions, the aim was to find out what the surveyee knew about the andragogy. The data collected through the open-ended questions were interpreted by content analysis considering the opinions expressed by John Dewey (1998), Paulo Freire (2010), Jean Piaget (Fatke 2012) and Maria Montessori about constructivism (Korkmaz, 2012) within the context of Knowles' ideas (1984) who was the first person to define andragogy and informal education and andragogical model presented by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, (1998). The ideas related to the opinions of these theoreticians are given on the 'Result of Research' section of this article. In both questioning techniques the aim in the content analysis was to provide descriptive information about the subject. (Öztürk at al., 2008, p. 254). The opinions of the surveyees were explained.

Results of Research

The analysis of the responses given to the open-ended questions asked to the Director of General Directorate of Life Long Learning in a face-to-face interview and the directors and instructors of the selected Public Education Centers is given below.

(i) The findings obtained from the interview carried out with the Director of Directorate of Life Long Learning on 01.02.2012 in relation to the question "What is the objective of the Directorate of Life Long Learning and What does its policy encompass?"

"The Directorate of Life Long Learning was established to manage Public Education Centers, Apprenticeship Training and Vocational Education serves the needs of the population aged between 25 and 64 in September 2011. While adult education given in Turkey only involves 2.5% of the target age group, this ratio is 9% in OECD countries. The goal of the Ministry of National Education is to increase this ratio to 8%. Works to achieve this goal first will be started in 43 pilot cities located on the east of Ankara will then be shifted towards western cities. These works will be initiated in 12 pilot cities with Life Long Learning Coordination. These cities are: Kayseri, Urfa, Erzurum, Mardin, Kastamonu, Kars, Malatya, Trabzon, Samsun, Maraş, Van and Gaziantep. The associates in these works will be representatives sent by unions, municipalities and universities.

(ii) Findings obtained from the responses of the directors and instructors of the Public Education Centers located in the provinces of Ankara and Mersin:

Question: "What are the works to be carried out by the Directorate of Life Long Learning?"

Response: "In a meeting where the directorates of Public Education Centers and some specialists coming from foreign countries, the problems of the Public Education Centers were discussed. Moreover, pilot studies will be conducted in some cities and need analyses will be performed for individual cities. Dialogues will be carried on by a special body to be established under the name of Social Associates and Project Group Directorate with non-governmental organizations".

Question: "What are the qualifications of the instructors working in Public Education Centers?"

Response: "As there is no program at universities in Turkey to train adult educators, the instructors working in the Public Education Center become adult educators through trial and error. Instructors from every level of schooling can come here. Moreover, educators proving their qualifications in some private organizations may work here as "expert educators". Nearly 50% of them are high school graduates. The others are graduates of two-year degree programs at tertiary level or university graduates. Expert educators do not have pedagogy education. Depending on the field of training, the ratio of the expert educators to all the instructors working in Public Education Centers varies between 15% and 80%".

Question: What are the contents of the courses given in Public Education Centers and what are the methods used to instruct?"

Response: "The content comes from modular programs. As teaching methods, besides project-based applications, lecturing is commonly used.

Question: "How is the achievement evaluated in these courses?"

Response: "Almost in all the courses apart from the based on cultural and hand skills, achievement is evaluated through tests".

Question: "Are there project-based courses?"

Response: "These courses can be initiated depending on the approval of the projects prepared".

Question: "What is the student numbers in these courses?"

Response: "There are 15-20 students on average in each class. In vocational courses where professional knowledge given can be turned into money, the number of the students can be up to 30".

Question: "Are there works in progress to improve self-learning by means of internet use and access to related sites on the net (e-learning) through computers and mobile phones?"

Response: "They have various contents depending on the wishes of the participants" (Word, Excell, Power-Point, AutoCAD, hardware, information technologies, use of e-mail etc.)

Question: "Is it possible to find opportunities for practice in public places?"

Response: For example; hairdressers and textile industry in Ankara; souvenirs produced from glass in İskilip; silver works in Beypazarı; hand-made souvenirs and similar products in Tarsus etc.

Question: "What is the ratio of the adult population benefitting from the training given by Public Education Centers in each province?"

Response: It varied between 10% and 80%".

Question: "Are there counselors in Public Education Centers?"

Response: "In some cities and towns, there is no such post". However, the Public Education Center functioning in the province of Ankara stated that they have a counselor but there is no job description for this person and he works between 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock. This counselor has developed a satisfaction questionnaire and administered it. "In fact, the number of the trainees was 26000 last year. Just one counselor is not enough for so many people".

Discussion

In light of the findings of the present study, following discussions can be put forward:

"The mission of the Directorate of Life Long Learning": At first Public Education Centers were run under the management of the Directorate of Apprentice Education, as of 2011, they have been functioning under the supervision of the Directorate of Life Long Learning". This is an institution responsible for giving adult education services. In addition to Public Education Centers, Work Development Centers have been entrusted with a similar mission. Because the Work Development Centers are charged with assisting the public in matters of entrepreneurship, they fall under the jurisdiction of the T.R. Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Trade's Small and Medium Sized Business Development Office and Ministry of Support. (Ültanır & Ültanır 2010).

“The instructors working in Public Education Centers” are appointed among elementary of secondary school teachers rather than the ones specially trained for adult education at higher education institutions (Ültanır & Ultanir, 2005). Yet, these instructors are educated at education faculties to teach students aged 6-17/18 and this education is pedagogy. The developmental psychology they are given is limited to this age group. However, since 2004, as constructivism-based approaches have been used at elementary schools, teacher training programs based on constructivism have been incorporated into the curriculums of education faculties since 2007. According to Kiely and Associates, (2004), adult learning theories that draw from critical theory, feminism, and multiculturalism share the view that power, position, privilege, and politics have a significant influence on the shape and direction of education (Cervero, Wilson, and Associates, 2000; Hayes and Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 1998). Therefore, adult educators need to be both cognizant of systemic forces, institutionalized oppression, and dominant norms and practices that affect adult learners differentially and vigilant in ensuring and advocating for greater inclusiveness, safety, and voice, particularly for marginalized groups (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). According to Mezirow (1981), adult educators should redirect their aim toward facilitating perspective transformation, “the learning process by which adults come to recognize the culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them” (p. 7).

The findings concerning the *“Contents of the courses and teaching methods used”* show that pre-designed contents coming together with modular program are taught; yet, in some circumstances, there are project-based applications. The research carried out following the publication of Knowles’ article entitled *“Andragogy is not Pedagogy”* (1968) clearly indicates that the content in such courses should be determined by adult learners (Pratt & Associates, (1998). In his article *“Pedagogy of the Oppressed”*, P. Freire argues by means of the analogy of oppressors and the oppressed that content and teaching methods should not be imposed forcefully. The fact that the learner cannot be filled like a container is emphasized. Moreover, in J. Dewey’s works *“Experience and Education”* (1998) and *“Education in Today’s World”* (2010), it is stated that in compliance with the democracy in education approach, content and teaching methods should be determined based on students’ experiences. For Dewey, it is important that experiences should be lived in a complementary manner. Teaching method is argued to be active. **Adult learners tend to be achievement oriented, highly motivated, and relatively independent with special needs for flexible schedules and instruction appropriate for their developmental level** (Cross, 1980). Adults generally prefer more active approaches to learning and value opportunities to integrate academic learning with their life and work experiences (Benshoff, 1991). Adult learning from a contextual perspective must also take into consideration the extent to which socioeconomic, cultural, and political structures of domination determine the nature of relationships, interactions, participation, and practices within educational contexts (Fenwick, 2000). Those who are afforded power due to their social position often dictate the content, process, and purposes of learning consistent with their own interests (Cervero, Wilson, and Associates, 2000). Looking at the structural component of the context lens means focusing on how relationships of power across race, gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation affect the ability of adult learners who represent these groups to participate actively in learning processes (Caffarella and Merriam, 2000; Cervero, Wilson, and Associates, 2000; Tisdell, 1998).

“Evaluation of the achievement in the courses”, in some courses evaluation is performed by looking at the products, in others, tests are used. Adults learn to do/produce something. They want to evaluate themselves based on the products they have created. **Adult learners would be encouraged to share the responsibility for assessing their level of proficiency, choosing the content and methods of instruction to ensure greater relevancy and ownership, and sequencing learning activities appropriate to their knowledge, skill, and, importantly, their level of self-esteem** (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 1998; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

In many countries, in relation to “*Project-based Courses, Modular Education System and Competencies in Business World*”, “Modular Vocational Education System” is organized together with professional competencies system. The trainees will have the certificates for the modules completed. Adult education equips trainees with competencies by means of on the job training. In this way, those returning to school can complete their education and can improve their living standards in their lives and workplaces in terms of economic and social conditions. In this case, modular education system is incorporated with professional competencies, academic skills and individual skills (Turkish Republic, Ministry of National Education. MEGEP Project, 2006).

“*The number of trainees in courses varies depending on the specialty about which training is given in adult education. The number of the trainees in a class is of importance in terms of group-work techniques to be used in compliance with the principles of “cooperative learning” so that the trainees can share their prior knowledge and experiences effectively*”. Information and skills gained through cooperative learning techniques can be more permanent when compared to those gained through traditional methods (Ünlü & Aydıntan, 2011). Moreover, the groups which are initially heterogeneous can become homogenous as a result of interaction among each other. Adults bring a diverse combination of knowledge, experience, and independence to the classroom, adult educators should work to ensure that adult learners participate as much as possible in the content, delivery, and evaluation of curricula within a climate of mutual respect (Knowles, 1984; Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 1998).

“*Realizing self-learning*”: The use of the Internet (e-learning) is an opportunity brought about by modern life to gain lifelong learning skills. Self-learning activities performed on the net can also be carried out through access to net with mobile phones, which can also facilitate the process. Public Education Centers give courses on the use of computer and internet. For practitioners, situated cognition means finding ways to engage adult learners in more authentic activities that require learning for real-life problems and situations. Communities of practice and learning are important mediums for engaging in situated cognition. Examples include cognitive apprenticeships, Web-based chat rooms, internships, community-based research, service-learning, and other activities that situate learners in practical situations (Hansman, 2001).

“*Opportunities for making practice in public places*”: Though there is no certain information on the extent to which Public Education Centers cater to the needs of the adult population, it seems that almost all of the adults benefit from their services. According to Mackeracher (1996), adult learning is a dynamic and interconnected set of processes that are emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and spiritual.

Another finding of the present study is related to “*the presence of counselors in Public Education Centers*”. The present study revealed that there is not a clear job description for these people in these centres yet, and apart from a few, there is no such post in these centres. In the reports issued by the 13th National Education Council (1990) concerning “Informal Education” stated that there is a need to support counseling activities to improve informal education institutions, to appoint university graduate counselors to Public Education Centers to provide comprehensive and effective education in these centers, and counseling services should not be limited to courses given in these centers but also they should provide guidance to local public to solve unemployment and other problems. To better understand the counseling needs of nontraditional students, researchers and counselors should begin by listening to students’ firsthand experiences (Chao & Good, 2004). The immigrants from rural areas Turkey needed the educational and guidance services for adapting new cultural environment and urban culture, getting urban jobs and solving the problems they have not met earlier. Adult education based on voluntary participation into adult education programs necessities an effective guidance for participating of adults into these programs besides taking into account the needs and interests of adults (Bilir, 2005, 104). Accurate knowledge of adult students /nontraditional students’

issues can enable counselors to effectively advocate for them, making professional services more relevant to their specific needs in personal, vocational and educational area. Thon (1984) found that the student services most often implemented for adults were counseling- and career-related.

The article published in 2010 “*Exploring The Curriculum Dimension of Theories-Based Adult Education- A Sample Course of Southeast Anatolian Region*” also found that adult educators are not properly trained, teaching training programs in education faculties are still conducted based on pedagogy, in the evaluation of achievement, some courses look at the product while some others run exam-based evaluations. At that time, Public Education Centers were run under the management of the Directorate of Apprentice Education, as of 2011, they have been functioning under the supervision of the Directorate of Life Long Learning”. That is the most important change taking place in these centers since then.

Conclusions

In industrialized countries, since the early 19th century, adults have been subject to the vocational training courses designed according to pragmatism. World wars fought in the first half of 20th century interrupted in these educational activities. Yet, with the beginning of the second half of this century, particularly with the effects of labor immigration, adult education courses become popular again. Attempts for intercultural education started in 70s in North Europe. Then this type of education spread all over Europe. In the works performed within the context of intercultural education, rival ethnicities encounter with each other. The main purpose of this group works is peace education. Throughout this process, there were no comprehensive and effective adult education movements targeting large sections of the society in Turkey. However, as stated in the introduction part of this article, there have always been in-service trainings and further education programs carried out by some private and public organizations. With the influences of globalization, the 21st century has created a new human type. The countries who want to be members of the European Union have to adopt Life Long Learning activities. In Turkey, foundation of a directorate under the management of the Ministry of National Education is an important step taken in this direction. In this new organization, participants are not obliged to be limited to face-to-face instruction; they can also be a part of new mobile education through computers, internet and mobile phones. This new human type can himself/herself be determinant of what to learn.

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