Factors Influencing

Adults Participation in Education

EFI KAIMAKAMI
Hellenic Open University
Patras
GREECE

MARIA PANTA
Logistics Department
Technological Institute of Chalkida
1st Km Thiva-Athens National Road, GR-32200, THIVA
GREECE

KAPAROU MARIA
Logistics Department
Technological Institute of Chalkida
1st Km Thiva-Athens National Road, GR-32200, THIVA
GREECE

GEORGE KAIMAKAMIS
Logistics Department
Technological Institute of Chalkida
1st Km Thiva-Athens National Road, GR-32200, THIVA
GREECE

Abstract: - In this paper we present some results from the research concerning questions such as: Why some adults participate in continuing education programs and others don't; which are the barriers to participation; what encourages people to attend; why some adults drop out and others complete a program; whether the reasons for participation and persistence are different for different types of people; what can adult educators can do to encourage adults' participation and persistence in their educational program.

Key-Words: - Adult Education, factors, participation, motivation

1 Introduction

The tendency in the past was to interpret the marginalised individual in terms of deficit. However, research has moved towards considering these persons as active players in their own lives. Participation and non participation need to be understood in relation to other social and cultural practices and the individual's own interpretations of their daily lives. Later studies, however, have attempted to develop conceptual frameworks or models which might help predict and explain certain patterns of participation. One of the early examples of this approach of understanding adult motivation to participate was the notion of "motivational orientation," described by Cyril Houle (1961) in his now classic, *The Inquiring Mind*. He identified three major forms of orientation to participation: a) Goal-oriented;

b) Activity-oriented; and c) Learning-oriented. Goal-oriented adults use education as a means to achieve some other kind of goal. Activity-oriented adults participate in education for the sake of the activity itself and the social aspects of it. Learning-oriented adults seem to enroll in education for the sake of knowledge. Other researchers, such as Roger Boshier, and Morstain and Smart, took Houle's model and developed it further. This work resulted in an Education Participation Scale (EPS), reflecting six factors:

a) Social relationships: meet new friends;

b) External expectations: complying with the directives of those in authority;

c) Social welfare: wanting to serve others or the community;

d) Professional advancement; for job advancement;

e) Escape or stimulation: alleviating boredom or escaping home or work routines;

f) Cognitive interest: engaged for the sake of learning itself.

The main difference between these approaches of understanding the reasons for adults' participation is that Houle was characterizing groups of people, while the latter researchers were identifying clusters of reasons for their participation.

Many studies on adult participation and persistence in educational programs have tried to answer these questions. A number of authors have identified factors that act as barriers or incentives to adult participation. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) used terms such as situational barriers (time, money, child care, transportation, weather), institutional barriers (factors pertaining to the educational service provider), sociodemographic barriers (age, sex, race, income, educational level, and geographical location), and dispositional factors (self-esteem, group participation or one's negative attitudes toward the value or worth of education) in describing adult responses.

In 1981, Cross added a third category, institutional barriers, which reflect on the characteristics of the program concerning the time or day of the week a program is offered, physical access, and content.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) practically added a fourth category, information, which reflers to the lack

of awareness of what is available. Work on conceptualizing barriers to participation may lead to the development of the Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) by Gordon Darkenwald and his colleagues. In general research conducted with this instrument, or some variation of it, leads to the identification of the following factors, as being the major deterrents to participation: a) Personal problems; b) Lack of confidence; c) Educational costs; c) Lack interest in organized education; and d) Lack of interest in available courses.

Burgess (1971) identified several characteristics of adults who were choosen to participate in the learning experience, concerning the fact that: (1) they want to know; (2) they've established personal, social, or religious goals; (3) they're engaged in some activity; (4) they need to meet a formal, work-related requirement; and (5) they simply want to escape.

Boshier (1971) linked the desire to improve one's ability to serve the community, the need to make new friends, intellectual recreation, professional advancement (either job-related or inner-directed), an abhorrence of television, the joy of learning, an introduction or supplementation of understanding, and escape to adult participation.

Other authors, e.g. [7], have identified specific factors related to participation such as involvement with a formal organization that encourages adult participation, broad and diverse leisure activities, and high levels of income. Situational barriers to participation, such as child care, shift or overtime work, lack of transportation, poor health, and lack of time or money are more a problem for low socioeconomic adults and the elderly than the average middle-class adult. Institutional barriers (inconvenient class schedules, full-time fees for part-time study, restrictive locations) often exclude or discourage certain groups of learners such as the poor, the uneducated, and the foreign born. In addition, adults living in certain geographical areas, especially those in small towns and rural areas, are less likely to participate in educational activities. Nevertheless, in [6], [8], a new approach for adult education proposed using network and training center.

2 Application in Hellenic Open University

A 2007 study in Hellenic Open University provided useful information for educators who work with a variety of adult learners and ponder the participation/persistence phenomenon. The relational design of the study provided results that addressed the

following questions:

1. What are the encouragers and barriers to participation and persistence in educational programs?

2. Are those encouragers and barriers different for the decision to participate and the decision to persist?

3. What are the anticipated outcomes of participation and persistence?

4. Can perceived barriers and encouragers to participation and persistence and outcomes be used to predict satisfaction with participation (suggested to be a best predictor of dropout)?

Data were collected using questionnaires.

3 Findings

Four factors emerged from the principal-component factor analysis of responses to items related to participation. They were: low anticipated difficulties with arrangements, anticipated positive social involvement, anticipated high quality of the information, and the possession of high internal motivation to learn. With the exception of medium commitment to EAP, the same factors appeared to motivate persistence. Commitment to EAP was replaced with commitment to the teacher in the persistence question. Participation outcomes fell into three broad categories: previous positive learning experiences, self-improvement outcomes, and positive social experiences.

The data from this study indicated that EAP adult students participate and persist for the same reasons, as are presented below: they can arrange to participate; they're internally high motivated; they believe (most of them) that EAP provides quality information and they enjoy social involvement.

Adults satisfaction with participation was linked to many self-improvement outcomes, liking and respect for the teacher, and being able to take care of arrangements, such as parking, child care, fees for participation, while receiving few negative learning experiences.

4 Conclusions

This study of adult participation may affect the strategy planning, marketing and delivering of the EAP programs. Adults assess whether they'll participate initially using what they know about EAP in general as

well as the specific learning opportunity. Marketing strategies should build on EAP's reputation for quality information.

Throughout the study it is emerged that EAP programs should be designed to incorporate social involvement in educational experiences. Learning experiences should also be structured to stimulate self-improvement and promote adults participation in self-directed learning, beyond learning new information and skills related to a specific topic.

Moreover, when making arrangements for educational programs, convenience should be considered by and clearly marketed to potential students. People make choices about participation based on the information they're given; anticipated convenience is as important as actual convenience.

In conclusion, participation in education has to compete with paid and domestic work, family, friends, hobbies, sports, travel, holidays, TV and cinema. Therefore it has to be seen to have significant personal pay offs to justify expenditure of time, effort and money. It has to be perceived as an accessible, enjoyable and beneficial endeavour from the adults point of view. Talking about lifelong learning and telling people they should be responsible for their own development is not enough.

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