

The Motives and Barriers of Adult Learning in a Junior College in Taiwan: A Pilot Study

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the motives and barriers of adult learners to educational participation in a junior college in Taiwan. In this pilot study, an open-end questionnaire was administrated to 75 two-year evening division college reentry students who enrolled in associated degree program. Data were treated by using description statistics analysis. There are six categories of motives and barriers resulted from the analysis of students' responses to open-end questions.

Introduction

In Taiwan, the current trend of school-based adult continuing education is to educate professionals in both two-year associate degree program and baccalaureate program. The school system has developed an extensive continuing educational programs to update practitioners on ever-changing technology and society. A Further and Higher Education Act has shown that post-compulsory education is requirement in the health professional area in Taiwan.

In this paper, the investigator described what was student motivation for learning in the two-year associate degree program. Also, the study investigated what were the barriers which students encountered during their learning process. The author attempted to discuss the significant elements and outcomes of the investigation to facilitate students' learning and enhance adult educators' understanding of how best to assist students to achieve academic success and satisfying learning.

Background of the Problem

The two-year associate degree program in this pilot study is designed for students who are employed and wish to earn an associate degree. All evening

program courses are scheduled after 6 PM on Mondays through Fridays. There are four different programs including : nursing, early childcare, food science, and cosmetology. The programs can be completed in three years.

Many adult students are enrolled in the evening division college to complete their associate degree. According to this pilot survey, the demographic characteristics of the students were as follows:

1. Female 80% , Male 20%.
2. Approximately 50% of the students were between the ages of 25 and 29 years.
3. Thirty percent of students were married, seventy percent were single.
4. All of the students have graduated from high school.
5. Most of the students (70%) were employed full-time.
6. Most of the students(70%) worked more than 30 hours each week.

To understand adult learners as above, the educators must be aware of the diversity of the student population they seek to serve. What is the purpose of the adult students seeking new learning experience? To answer this question, we need to know what is the students` motivation for learning. During the learning process, we need to find students` learning barriers to educational participation to facilitate students` learning.

Students population in the evening division program in this school are employed part-time or full-time. The age of students, approximately 50% of participants, was between 25 and 29 years. This group of learners is different from the traditional students. As educators attempt to find new ways to deliver the curriculum to these who enter this program, it is important to monitor non-traditional programs by examining factors that contribute to positive academic outcome and student well-being.

In this paper, the author attempted to collect the information about adult students motivation for learning and their barriers of learning by a pilot questionnaire.

Literature Review

The characteristics of adult learners

A recent study by the American Council on Education reported that two-thirds of college students were non-traditional. " These were part-time students over

24 years of age who were financially independent of parents and either did not complete a college degree immediately after high school or returned to college to change careers (O`connor, p.245).

The number of adult learners returning to college has increased largely during the last ten years in Taiwan (Cheng 1994). Reasons which influence adult learners to pursue further education have been studied by Fang (1984). The most of adult motive for learning is to search knowledge. The second is job advancement and the third is social and interpersonal. According to Fang (1985), the characteristics of adult learners in Taiwan were as follows:

1. Adult students were 55.73% female, 44.27% male.
2. The ages of adult students were below 40 years.
3. Most adult students graduated from high school at least five years ago.
4. Many adult students were employed in technical or half-professional area.

In Taiwan, educational options which are responsive to non-traditional students considering a career in the health profession are needed if the profession is to recruit and graduate the large number of associated-degree or baccalaureate prepared employees that will be required well into the next century.

motivations and adult's learning

As the field of continuing professional education developed, it became obvious to educators that was a need for empirical data describing participants in their programs. A study which has come to symbolize empirical investigation into the motivations of adult students was conducted by Houle in 1961. Houle (1961) studied adult students who were highly active in continuing education activities and developed a typology for describing three type of learners: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented (p.29). Following Houle`s study, there were some educators investigating adult students` motivation such as Boshier (1971), Brugess (1971), Morstain and Smart(1974) and Sheffield (1964).

Boshier`s (1991) latest version of the Educational Participation Scale (EPS) defines a seven factors structure of motivation to participants: communication improvement (COM), social contact (SOC), educational preparation(EDUC), professional advancement (ADV), family togetherness (FAM), social stimulation (STIM), and cognitive interest in a particular subject (COG).

Maslin (1978) developed a 70-item Continuing Education Women Motives Questionnaire (CEW Motives Questionnaire) designed to measure motives specific to

this study population. Maslin derived eight general motives and eight motive-types from factor and typical analysis as follows: counteractive, vocational, competence recognition, family advancement, self-actualization, social recognition, humanitarian, interpersonal contact.

Clayton (1987), used the replication CEW Motives Questionnaire of an earlier study by Maslin(1987), to 100 undergraduate reentry women aged 25 and older enrolled in a degree or certificate program in higher education. There were eight motives typologies resulted from analyses: self-improvement, self-actualization, vocational, role, family, social, humanitarian, knowledge.

Although educators like the above tried to identify the motives of adult students, further analysis of motives among other population samples such as culture, race, social-economic status differential, may be studied.

Cross(1990) stated that motivation is based on the "perceived" situation, which may or, may not be the "real" situation (p.119). According to Cross (1990), most people are motivated to participate in education and that the removal of external barriers will permit them to do so (p.119). Roger Boshier (1973) believed that motivation for learning is a function of the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental variables, or at least the participant's perception and interpretation of environmental factors.

Chacko(1991), " Motivation influences one's ability to self-monitor and use study strategies, one's concentration and preparation for class, and one's feeling of self-efficacy (p.268).

These findings indicated the importance of assessing students` motivation to reach their educational goals, as well as providing a plan that maintained and enhanced adults` motivation. Also, it is important to assess students` environmental barriers to educational participation and remove these barriers to facilitate students` learning.

Barriers and adult's learning

Smith(1994) stated that the challenges of students in two-years vocational program faced included: finances, lack of time, difficulties with classes and problems, making changes, obtaining a new job, overcoming negative previous educational experiences and dealing with the college system (Smith, p.224). Marienean &

Klinger (1983) explored the barriers of educational participation, found that including family responsibilities, lack of information, finances, time and motivation.(Long, 1983)

During students` learning process, it is very important that educators assess adult students` barriers to educational participation and facilitate their learning.

Methodology

Subjects

Questionnaire data were obtained from a sample of 20 persons in each group of nursing and early childcare program and a sample of 40 persons in the group of food science.

Instruments

A pilot questionnaire was designed to collect information on students motives for learning and their barriers to educational participation. The questionnaire consists of two sections: (1) a section of demographic data; (2) a section of ten open-end questions.

Procedure

Each subject was given this questionnaire and asked to complete them voluntarily. The subjects were told that their responses on the instruments would be used for helping their learning. This required about fifteen minutes to complete and students were allowed to fill them out immediately and return them. Questionnaires were returned by 75 students totally.

Data Analysis

The data obtained with the survey questionnaire from the sample of 75 persons were analyzed to explore the motives and barriers of adult learning in a two-year evening division college. Performance of these samples on the motives and barriers of learning were described by descriptive statistics of the frequency distributions.

Results

- Demographic Variables

Table 1 contains the percentage distribution of selected demographic characteristics of the sample. The sample, consisting of 75 students included 20

nursing students, 20 early childcare students and 35 food science students. Of the 75 students samples, 15(20%) were males and 60 (80%) females. More females participated than males. Age ranged from 20 to 29 years. Approximately 82% of the students were between the age of 25 and 29 years. 70% of the students were single. Approximately 70% of the students are employed and 60% of the students` working time was 40 to 44 hours per week. The selected demographic characteristics can be found in table 1.

Table 1.

Selected Demographic Characteristics	
Demographic variable	n=75
Gender	
Male	15 (20%)
Female	60 (80%)
Marital status	
Married	22 (29.3%)
Single	53 (70.7%)
Age group	
20~24	32 (42.6%)
25~29	30 (40%)
30~34	10 (13.3%)
35~39	2 (2.6%)
40~45	1 (1.3%)
Employment	
Employed	70 (93.3%)
Unemployed	5 (6.7%)
Work time per week	
6hrs~10hrs	5 (6.7%)
35hrs~39hrs	20 (26.7%)
40hrs~44hrs	45 (60%)
45hrs~50hrs	5 (6.7%)

- Motives of adult learning

The qualitative data were responses to two open-ended questions on students perceptions of their motives of learning and their barriers to educational participation. Responses to the question, " why did you enroll in this program?" fell into six

categories: diploma, learning second skill, promotion, professional advancement, self-improvement, and educational preparation. Many respondents answered more than one item. The greatest number of responses, 70 (93.3%), indicated that students chose their program for "diploma". Promotion and professional advancement also appeared to be important motivator for adult students in this group. Table 2 displays the responses to the question, "why did you enroll in this program?".

Table 2

Analysis of Qualitative data describing " why did you enroll in this program?"

Factor	n=75
1. Diploma	70 (93.3%)
2. Promotion	55 (73.3%)
3. Professional advancement	50 (66.7%)
4. Second skill	38 (50.7%)
5. Educational preparation	35 (46.7%)
6. Self-improvement	30 (40%)

Barriers to Educational Participation During Learning Process

Responses to the question, " what are your barriers to educational participation during learning process?" fell into six categories as follows: overloading, teaching style, traffic, balancing between job and study, difficulties with classes, family life. Many respondents answered more than one item. The greatest number of responses, 74(98.7%), indicated that students` barriers to educational participation was "overloading". Students` responses to the category of "overloading" included a lot of homework, lack of time, fatigue, feeling of stress. Students` responses to the category of "teaching style" included boring classes, lack of interaction between students and teacher, and teacher-centeredness.

The descriptions of traffic barriers were that they wasted a lot of time in traffic because of traffic jam, and long distance from home to the school. The description of balancing between job and study were that students couldn't concentrate on both job and study. The responses to the difficulties with classes included lack of entry courses for connecting, hard to understand the contents of learning, lots of quizzes. Some married students response that they could not give

good care to their family because of reentry into the program.

Table 3 displays the responses to the question, " what are your barriers to educational participation during learning process?"

Table 3

Analysis of Qualitative data describing " what are your barriers to educational participation during learning process?"

Factor	n=75
1.Overloading	74 (98.7%)
2.Teaching style	60 (80%)
3.Traffic	58 (77.3%)
4. Balancing job and study	54 (72%)
5. Difficulties with classes	49 (65.3%)
6. Family life	20 (26.7%)

Discussion and conclusion

Questions this study sought to answer were: (1) What are the motives of adult learners? and (2) What are the adult learner's barriers to educational participation during their learning process?

This pilot study revealed the six categories of motives were diploma, promotion, learning second skill, professional advancement, self-improvement and educational preparation. Clayton (1987), studying the motives of the reentry women, found the vocational motive to be most important and role motive least important. The rank order of motive factors by the percentage of subjects are as follows: vocational, self-actualization, knowledge, family, self-improvement, humanitarian, social, role. In comparing Clayton`s study (1987) and the present pilot study, five factors in professional advancement, promotion, self-improvement, family and diploma appeared to be most similar to factors found by Clayton-- vocational, knowledge, self-improvement , self-actualization and family. While the three motives factors identified by Clayton -- humanitarian, social and role-- not evidence in the present pilot study.

The diverse group of students with varying reasons for participating in continuing education was investigated. In this pilot study it was revealed that students of food science intended to diploma-orientation while students of nursing

and early childcare intended to professional advancement orientation. The motives of adult learners are diverse because the characteristics of population, the age, gender, educational background and professional variety have influences on motives of adult learners. The pilot study suggested that grouping adult learners by program might provide a more useful and accurate classification for understanding adult motivational patterns.

Answers to the second question " what are the barriers of adult learners to participation during their learning process?" were split into six categories: overloading, balancing between job and study, teaching style, traffic problem, difficulties with classes, and family life. In the present pilot study, --lack of time, difficulties with classes--appeared to be similar in the challenges students faced which were founded by Smith (1994). The problem of finances did not appear in this pilot study. Most of students can earn money because they have a full time job.

The findings from this question indicated that adult learners` biggest barriers to educational participation are overloading and teaching style. Educators should have an insight into the characteristics of adult learners, and reassess the learners` burden to modify their teaching strategies and facilitate adult learners.

Future studies might focus on exploring the factors outside the classroom and job setting such as families, physical changes and limitations, and assistance of in-service institutions.

Adults have the motivation to succeed but may require greater flexibility and different kinds of services from traditional student serviced to reach their goals. The implications of this study suggested that the motives of most adult students to learn are for utilitarian reasons and responding to job preparation. The barriers of adult learners to educational participation during learning process are overloading and unused to teachers` teaching style, and the traffic problem. The findings from the study suggested that expanding efforts to communicate with adult students, flexibility in scheduling classes and services, providing the entry courses for connecting would enhance the chance of success for adult students in learning.

Also, teaching strategies should be modified to suit adult learner-centered, different from teaching younger students. Therefore, adult educators should assess their own teaching style to discover if it facilitates adult students` learning. Students of the evening division program who have work experience are different from the traditional students. Adult educators should emphasize the trend of practical skill and knowledge

Future studies might focus on exploring educators' perception of their function to facilitate adult learners. The following issues would be explored in Taiwan. (1) How do adult educators perceive their role of an adult educator? (2) Is there any continuing educational programs of adult education which is provided to adult educators? (3) Whether or not adult educators participate in continuing education programs to learn the science of helping adult learners?

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