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The Impact of Education on Social Inclusion Among Vulnerable Adults: An Approach for Future Research

Abstract: The group of vulnerable adults is growing. Taking the ongoing development of the knowledge-society, the individualisation and globalisation into account this group of vulnerable adults risks social exclusion. (Adult) education can prevent social exclusion and enable vulnerable adults to cope with problems in daily life. More research is needed in order to understand more clearly how adult education programs can enhance the increase of social inclusion among vulnerable. Firstly in order to explore learners' perceptions, a phenomenographical research could provide insights in the meaning of learning-outcome in terms of social inclusion. Secondly, regarding the lack of evidence-based research on learning-outcome of adult education development of an instrument in measuring the outcome of adult education is needed. It can be expected that social inclusion among vulnerable adults will increase after joining education and that the learning-environment (based on the transfer of training model) will influence this increase. In short this article will provide a research-agenda (based on desk research and literature-study) concerning the outcome of adult education in terms of increasing social inclusion among vulnerable adults.

Key words: adult education, learning-environment, andragogical study, social inclusion, transfer.

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Background

Present day society can be defined as an ongoing risk-society (Schedler, 1998) increasingly leading to social exclusion among vulnerable adults. According to Schedler (1998) ongoing developments like globalisation, individualisation and privatisation makes it more and more difficult for vulnerable adults to join (activities and life) in society. Moreover the group of vulnerable adults is growing. Still 22 per cent of the population in the industrialised countries is illiterate (UNICEF, 2008). Besides this according to The Alliance for Health & The Future (2005) an estimated 35 per cent of the European population will be over the age of 60 in 2050 instead of the 20 per cent at present. Regarding to these two figures one can say that European society is confronted with an increasing number of vulnerable people who risk social exclusion.

Meanwhile Europe is also changing into a knowledge-society. In this perspective one of the most important means of production is knowledge, produced by “human capital” on the labour market. Next to participating in the labour market, individuals should be able to cope with the growing responsibility of making life decisions in our complex individualised society (Verschelden, 2005). As to our present day risk-society, there is a lack of competencies for vulnerable people in their ability to make their own decisions, for example in contacting official organisations or in managing their own finances. Consequently they risk social exclusion.

Levitas et al (2007: 25) defines the process of social exclusion as “a lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services and the ability to participate in normal relationships and activities”. It is well known that education can prevent social exclusion in society (Christian, 1974; Schedler, 1998). In this context the Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging (2008) states that low educated people (regarding their lower social-economical status) run a bigger risk in having poor mental health or depression. Likewise the OECD confirms that learning has to be seen as one of the basic needed services in society enhancing social inclusion among its inhabitants (Christian, 1974). According to Christian (1974) the OECD prefers to facilitate learning to stimulate possibilities of individual development to cope with daily life.

In this respect, the European Commission (2000) ensures possibilities for adult education by the Treaty of Lisbon. In order to ensure social inclusion among vulnerable adults the Life Long Learning Program in Europe provides educational programs and projects. At any rate the additional value of educational programs for vulnerable adults can be formulated as a guidance in “human actions” to increase understanding, decision-making, participation, literacy and

numeracy (Crittenden, 1968) as well as an increase of self-confidence (Tunström, 1999). Due to the ongoing modernisation of technology it is essential that vulnerable people can increase their competencies through education in order to cope with new social demands in our knowledge-society. The elderly need for example to learn how to cope with social problems in daily life using internet or a cell-phone, to manage their financial administration or becoming a member of a new association. Moreover they have to learn to use the opportunities available to them in order to fully participate in nowadays society (Department of Work and Pensions, 2008).

Considering education as an effective intervention to increase social inclusion, regular schooling-systems do not counter for vulnerable adults. Given prior negative school experiences among most of them different approaches in learning are necessary. According to Jarvis and Griffin (2003) one has to develop a learning-process to enhance the quality of life instead of only focussing on employment as the principal goal of adult education. More concrete according to McClusky (1970) and Serrano-García and Bond (1994) a main goal is to support vulnerable adults in pursuing a decrease of marginalisation and an increase in empowerment to survive in modern European society. Instead of cognitive gains and employment, the outcome of adult education for vulnerable people can be seen as an increase in social inclusion (Main, 1979; Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 1998). In order to gain a better life-standard vulnerable participants learn to cope with problems in daily life. As a result they endeavour a kind of empowerment (Serrano-García and Bond, 1994).

A crucial question for adult education programs is: how to organise adult education in order to optimise its effects in term of enhancing social inclusion of its participants? In this article, we answer this question in three steps. Firstly, we elaborate on the construct of social inclusion. Secondly, we present an overview of literature on the elements of the learning-environment that can enhance the outcomes of adult education in terms of social inclusion. Thirdly, we elaborate on the guidelines for further research which is needed to give more insights in features and outcomes of adult education aiming to increase social inclusion.

Towards an understanding of the outcome of adult education defined as social inclusion

In order to describe social inclusion as an outcome of adult education, two perspectives have to be taken into account. First of all, interactionism explains the importance of the individual in its (learning-) environment. Because of the inter-

action between the individual and the changing environment, behaviour can be changed (Bandura, 2001, 2004, 2006; Endler and Magnusson, 1976; Krueger et al, 2008). In this context on the one hand the environment can be a determining factor in behavioural change (Nye and Hargreaves, 2009). On the other hand, the individual is capable of making his or her own choices and determines his or her own future-plans, driven by “the self” (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Likewise the identity process theory (as a possible interpretation of interactionism) states that behavioural change can be possible if a balance between maintaining consistency of the self and changing it in response to experiences can be found (Krauss Whitbourne, 2005). Therefore to change ones behaviour in a productive way in order to increase social inclusion the environment as well as “the self” can play a crucial role.

Secondly Carstensen (1995, 1998, 2006) developed the socioemotional selectivity theory to explain social interactions among (older) people (Santrock, 2008). Due to the process of ageing accordingly to Carstensen (1995, 1998, 2006), elderly focus more on the emotional rewards of social interactions than on gaining knowledge (possibly seen as functional rewards). Accordingly vulnerable people can join adult education programs aiming to increase contacts with others to cope with loneliness (emotional perspective) or, for example, to increase their knowledge about using the Internet (functional perspective). In this context social inclusion can be seen as encountering functional problems (like reading letters) and social problems (like contacting neighbours) in daily life.

Figure 1 shows a possible combination of the theoretical perspectives of interactionism and socioemotional selectivity. In view of the aforementioned perspectives on social inclusion, four processes of social inclusion can be distinguished, namely: (a) activation, (b) internalisation, (c) participation and (d) connection. In this context, activation and participation can be seen as processes to increase functional knowledge, skills and attitude to encounter problems in daily life. An example of activation is organising and reading the post (on an individual level) and of participation is visiting the doctor (in contact with the environment). On the contrary, internalisation and connection are processes describing the increase of emotional rewards with, on the one hand being more assertive (on an individual level) and on the other hand gaining more personal contacts (in contact with the environment).

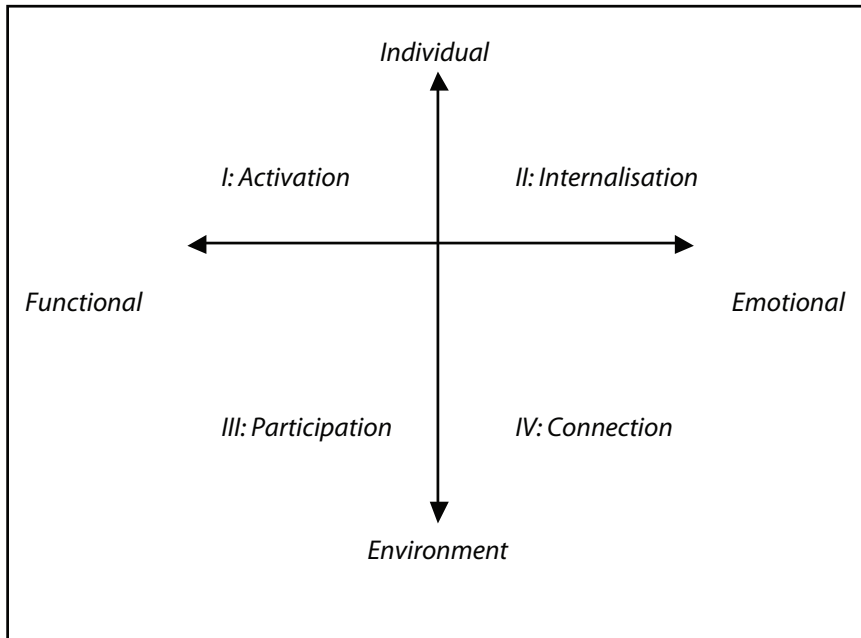


Figure 1: Balance between processes of Social Inclusion

1. Activation

According to Fortuin et al (1997) social inclusion is a process aiming to activate people. Movisie (2009) defines activation as a process of enhancing the ability to function in daily life. Whenever people are activated they are able to manage daily problems in life in order to survive. As for example writing a letter to the housing-company or communicating in different languages abroad. Furthermore Ben-Zur and Michael (2007) argue that in order to be active in daily life, different coping strategies have to be internalised.

2. Internalisation

Internalisation can be defined as a process of feeling happier and safer as well as feeling of being able to cope with problems in daily life. Likewise Mastergeorge (2001) states that internalisation is a process of gaining a higher level of satisfaction and the ability to manage one's own life. In order to be satisfied, personal development and self-regulation of behaviour is needed. Behaviour such as making the right decisions or being assertive when needed, can support the development of an own personality or identity. In this context assertiveness and

decision-making are seen as behaviour concerning internalisation. As a result of internalisation vulnerable adults are able to feel more satisfied with themselves and are able to manage their own lives (Mastergeorge, 2001) and therefore feel more accepted in society (Guildford, 2000).

3. Participation

Buffel et al (2007) state that education can lead to an increase of social inclusion in terms of participation (Guildford, 2000). Accordingly participation can be defined as taking part in society or in a cultural setting (Buffel et al, 2007). In this respect the study of Verté et al (2007) indicates that people participate by taking the opportunity to go out in the evening or visit activities in the community.

4. Connection

Besides being more active and participating more in society and or feeling better and more satisfied in life, connection between vulnerable adults can increase. In this context connection means gaining new or improving existing social interactions or relationships and meeting others (Colley, 1975; Smith, 2007; Huisman et al, 2003; Priemus, 2005; Verté et al, 2007). Consequently establishing relationships can lead to a decrease of loneliness (De Jong-Gierveld, 1987). Likewise Antonucci and Akiyama (2002), Antonucci, Lansford and Akiyama (2001) and Antonucci, Vandewater and Lansford (2000) state that this “social support” can ensure that vulnerable people cope more effectively in daily life.

A perspective of adult education enhancing social inclusion: the need of transfer in a transformational approach

Research of adult education during the last four decades has provided us with a wide diversity of perspectives and insights into educational processes. In order to provide understanding of the possible influence of adult education on the increase of social inclusion, one of the most interesting theories is based on the andragogical perspective of transformational learning. Transformational learning is a learning-process in which the learner experiences events in daily life, reflects on them and tries to improve them by using new knowledge, skills or a changed attitude (Mezirow, 1991). This learning is defined as a transformational process. Likewise Daloz (2003) states that education is a transformational journey. More specifically life is seen as a journey in which we learn by looking back on past experiences and consequently transforming the meaning of it (Daloz, 2003). Hence learning can be seen as an ongoing process of transforming life-experiences. In

fact (behavioural) change occurs not automatically, but is only possible by reflection on (life-)events (resulting in transformation) (Lynch and Field, 2007). Likewise Crittenden (1968) and Tunström (1999) define education as a guide for human action to increase self-confidence, participation, decision-making and understanding. In other words, throughout an educational process, the adult learner tries to change his or her behaviour in order to improve his or her competencies for coping in daily life. To enhance transformational learning, Mezirow (1991) emphasizes the importance of the use of experiences in daily life.

According to theories concerning transformational learning, they give insights in the way in which education aiming increase of social inclusion is organised. However in this field of adult education little research of empirical validation has been done. On the contrary, the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) compiled several studies in order to gain insights in the outcome of adult education (Holton, Chen & Naquin, 2003; Alvarez, Salas and Garafano; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). According to most of these studies, the outcome of adult education has a positive relationship with the possibility of transfer, as is illustrated by Baldwin and Ford (1988) and later on by several other researchers in the field of HRD (Thijssen, 2001; Cheng and Ho, 2001; Holton, Chen & Naquin, 2003; Nijman, 2004; Nijhuis, Segers & Gijsselaers, 2005; Cheng & Hampson, 2008). In the perspective of adult education aiming to increase social inclusion, transfer can be seen as the implementation of learned knowledge, skills and attitude to encounter problems in daily life. According to Baldwin and Ford (1988) the trainee him- or herself, the training-program and the environment in which transfer takes place, are the most important influencing variables on behavioural change. Likewise Nijman (2004) discerns six influencing factors of transfer of training: personality characteristics (1), motivation (2), supervisor support (3), transfer-climate (4), transfer-design (5) general work environment and (6) elements of the learning-environment.

Towards a learning-environment of social inclusion for vulnerable ones

Based on the HRD-studies we can discern three groups of variables: (1) trainee characteristics, (2) transfer design and (3) the participants' environment. To date most HRD-studies (addressing the effect of training programs) try to reveal an explanation for enhancement of transfer of training in terms of enhancing job performance, professional development of the trainees and organisational payoffs

(for recent review studies, see Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009, Alvarez, Salas and Garafano; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Holton, Chen & Naquin, 2003). Contrary to these studies the concept of transfer of adult learning concerning vulnerable adults aims to increase social inclusion instead of improvement of professional development or a better job performance. In this context some changes to the three variables of the transfer-of-training-model of most HRD-studies have to be made.

Regarding the first variable of the transfer-of-training-model, namely trainee characteristics, one important modification has to be made. Due to the fact that adult education aims to increase social inclusion among vulnerable adults, the target-group is low skilled learners (instead of more high skilled learners as the target-group in most research of the HRD-studies). Consequently the ability for self-direction in learning has to be part of the variable trainee characteristics. According to research of Raemdonck (2006) self-direction in learning can be a significant influencing factor for learning-outcome among low skilled learners. At any rate results of her compiled study argues that self-directed learning is a relevant input variable during the learning-process, which is missing in most HRD-studies.

The variable transfer design differs according to learning-process aiming increase of social inclusion. Firstly the context of the transfer-design (seen as part of the transfer design) differs in programs enhancing increase of social inclusion. Whenever the increase of social inclusion has to be pursued, interaction of trainees during the learning process is important as well as the use of authentic learning materials, in order to combine theory and practice. In this context constructivist learning theories can be used (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Van Lakerveld, Van den Berg, De Brabander et al, 2000; Tenenbaum et al (2001); Thijssen, 2001; Holton, Chen & Naquin, 2003; Simons & Bolhuis, 2004; Nijhuis, Segers & Gijsselaers, 2005; Van der Vlerk, 2005;). Secondly the supervisor, an example of Nijman's transfer-of-training-model (2004), has to be replaced by the teacher of the adult education programs who enhances the increase of social inclusion and who ensures support during learning.

Third and lastly the learning-environment is not the same as the variable 'general work environment' of the HRD-studies, but should be seen as the environment of daily life based on life-circumstances, as for example health, feelings of safety and happiness (Andrews & Withey, 1974). Despite the gap of the transfer-of-training-model of most HRD-studies, using life-circumstances as discerned in the study of Andrews & Withey (1974) will bridge the gap to adult education aiming social inclusion.

Trainee-characteristics

According to the trainee-characteristics, background-characteristics as well as self-direction in learning can be seen as important characteristics of vulnerable adults joining education in order to increase social inclusion. Firstly, social inclusion research of Verté et al (2007), age, gender, number of children, marital status, level of schooling, prior diplomas and courses, (un) employment, motivation and racial back-ground are determining characteristics in blocking or stimulating social inclusion (after learning). More specifically the research of Verté et al (2007) tries to define the needs and pathways of social inclusion among 44.000 elderly in Flanders in relation to housing, mobility, spare time, unsafety, care and participation in culture. According to his results, the needs of elderly and their social inclusion are influenced by aforementioned sociodemographic characteristics. If these background-variables can determine the rate and features of social inclusion, there is the possibility that they have an influence on the effects of adult education on social inclusion.

Besides the background-characteristics of Verté et al (2007), studies of self-direction in learning as described in studies of (McGivney, 1992), (Ryan and Deci, 2000), Raemdonck (2006) and Knowles (1975), state the importance of self-directed learning. Specifically Raemdonck (2006, p.13) defines self-directed learning as a characteristic adaptation to influence learning-processes in order to cope for oneself". The research done by Raemdonck (2006) addressed the role of self-directed learning for low-skilled employees. The results of her research indicate that self-directness in learning benefits the learning-outcome of low-skilled learners (Raemdonck, 2006). Raemdonck (2006) developed two scales studying the influence of contextual and individual conditions on self-directness and the level of self-directness in learning and career processes. According to these results both contextual and individual factors influence the self-directness during learning. Besides this, low-qualified learners acquired high scores of self-directness influencing the process of learning (Raemdonck et al, 2006). In this perspective Raemdonck et al (2006) indicates the importance of self-directness among the target-group vulnerable adults by giving insights in the fact that the increase of self-directness will be beneficiary for better results after learning by low-qualified people.

The transfer design

The transfer-design refers to two factors: (1) the teacher-support and (2) the learning contents and process. Concerning teacher-support, Brinkerhoff and Montesino (1995) and Cromwell and Kolb (2004) state that the support of a

trainer or teacher has a positive correlation with the outcome of transfer. For example the teacher gives advice in applying a learned attitude in daily life, or how to implement a plan for improving attitude in daily practice. Hence the role of a teacher can be significant for the increase of transfer (Hutchins and Burke, 2006).

The learning-process, as second factor, is an interactive process which provides knowledge, skills and attitudes by experiencing new activities and contents. Tenenbaum et al (2001) argue it should be a constructivistic process based on seven different components, namely: (1) arguments, discussions, debates among learners (2) conceptual conflicts and dilemmas, (3) sharing ideas with others, (4) the use of materials and measures targeted toward solutions, (5) enhancing learners' reflections and concept investigation, (6) meeting the learners' learning needs and (7) making meaning by addressing real-life examples during the instructional unit. These seven components of the learning-process can be used to define the contents and activities of the learning-process for adult education aiming to increase social inclusion.

The participants' environment

Research on the transfer of training has shown the relevance of the work environment of trainees to improve the transfer effects of training. However, in adult education programs aiming to enhance social inclusion, it can be argued that not the work environment but the daily life-circumstances, like spare time, housing, care and finances influence transfer of learning and increase social inclusion (Caplan and Barton, 1978; Liu, 1974; Andrews and Withey, 1974). For example if one has to raise children, occupy a paid job or has to take care of a relative or friend, time for transfer is limited. Besides these life-circumstances mentioned by Andrews and Withey (1974), barriers in mobility or feeling too old can block transfer (McGivney, 1992).

Research-questions for the future

Regarding the need of gaining insight in the outcome of adult education programs to improve its quality (Partridge, 1999) investigation among vulnerable adults is required. To date hardly any evidence about the outcome of adult education aiming social inclusion based on the aforementioned learning-environment is available. In order to provide insight in learning-outcomes and its possible influences for vulnerable people, three research-questions can guide future study.

Research question 1

First of all adult education aiming social inclusion seems to be a research-field that still has to be explored, beginning with the exploration of learning-outcome in terms of social inclusion. Concerning the theme of social inclusion, the aforementioned literature review shows that little research about the meaning of social inclusion is available. In this context it is interesting what the learner defines as a positive learning-result in terms of social inclusion. Besides this, the learner should give us insight in meaningful influences during his or her learning-process.

Provided that qualitative research is used, the phenomenon of social inclusion and exclusion can be described (Levitas et al, 2007). According to Howitt and Cramer (2008) the “phenomenon” has to be studied in its natural setting. Concerning the vulnerable target-group of low-skilled adults, using the natural setting is preferable to overcome feelings of shame to talk about their problems, and their learning-process in later life in a new setting. Because a phenomenon has to be investigated, the phenomenographical approach seems to be the most suitable method (Tan, 2004). According to Tan (2004) experiences (and its interpretations and meaning for the learners) of a complex phenomenon can be explored by this research-approach. Thus a qualitative research method is needed to define the concept of learning-outcome based on social inclusion and its influences. Central question (also depicted in figure 2) in this first part of the study should therefore be:

Research question 1: “What are the qualitative different ways in which participants of adult education programs for social inclusion experience social inclusion?”

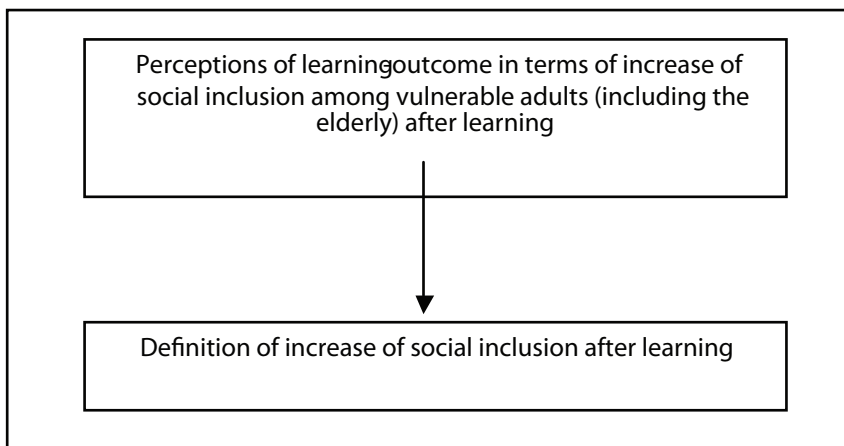


Figure 2: Relation between variables in research question 1

Research questions 2 and 3

To date, hardly any evidence is reported on the effects of adult education in terms of social inclusion and on the variables that might influence these effects. Moreover, no instruments are available to measure these effects and their influencing variables. Therefore, the first step is to develop and validate an instrument which measures social inclusion as an outcome of adult education and the influencing variables.

More specifically, given the aforementioned influencing variables, the instrument has to measure the rate of increase of social inclusion after joining adult education programs for social inclusion. The second step is collecting evidence on which variables of the learning-environment influence the possible increase of social inclusion. This leads to two research questions:

Research question 2: “What is the specific outcome in terms of social inclusion among vulnerable adults after joining an adult education program?”

Research question 3: “What is the relationship between the learning-environment (seen as a combination of life-circumstances and transfer-design) in combination with the background-characteristics and the self-direction of the learner on increase of social inclusion among vulnerable adults?”

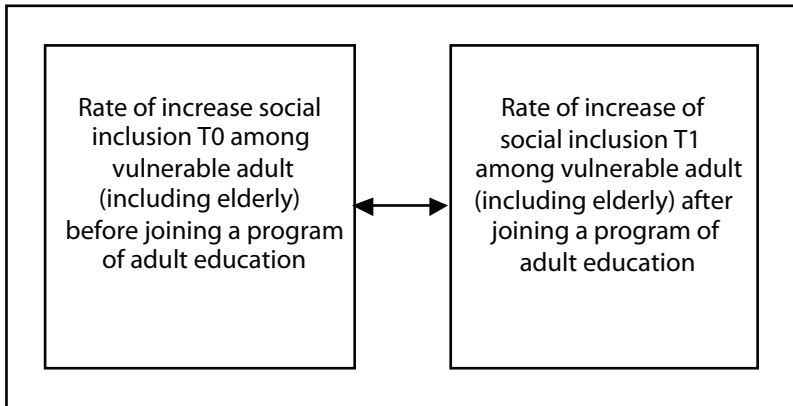


Figure 3: Relation between variables in research question 2

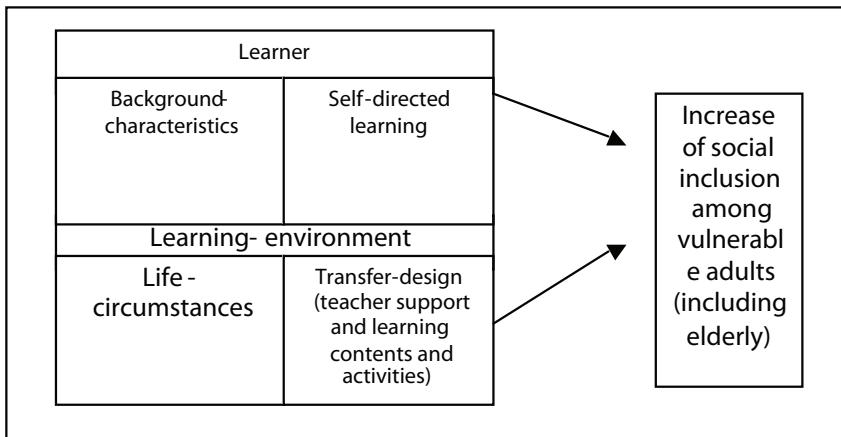


Figure 4: Relation between variables in research question 3

Implications for practice

Answering the aforementioned research questions is of utmost importance in order to gain insight in the value of adult education in order to increase social inclusion among vulnerable adults. In accordance with Schedler (1998) present day society evolves to an ongoing risk-society. Education is needed to ensure possibilities for vulnerable adults to be enclosed in nowadays society. Still hardly any research-outcome concerning the features of adult education programs are available. In order to provide insight in the outcome of adult education of vulnerable adults, development of an evidence-based instrument in describing learning-outcome and its possible influences of adult education is needed. According to Partridge (1999) insight in outcome of social inclusion following adult education and the possible influences of the learning-environment is needed to improve programs of adult education. In this context educational organisations can improve their programs and their learning-process in order to reach better results by their learners, the vulnerable adults.

Concerning the position of vulnerable people, education can help them to encounter problems in daily life. Taking their current position into account, educational assistance is needed to survive in present day society. Most vulnerable adults (for example illiterated adults) lack the competencies to deal with new technologies or individualised services in the community. Therefore they have to

be able to acquire new insights and change their established behaviour to cope in daily life. In this context future research (based on the three research questions) of the educational value regarding social inclusion can confirm the possibilities and needed improvement in adult education programs for the enhancement of social inclusion of vulnerable adults.

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Uticaј obrazovanja na socijalnu inkluziju odraslih koji pripadaju osetljivim grupama: Pristup budućim istraživanjima

Apstrakt: Broј odraslih koji pripadaju osetljivim grupama raste. Imajući u vidu trenutni razvoj društva znanja, individualizaciju i globalizaciju, osetljiva grupa odraslih se približava riziku socijalne isključenosti. Obrazovanje (odraslih) može sprečiti socijalnu isključenost i omogućiti osetljivim grupama odraslih da se nose sa problemima svakodnevnog života. Neophodno je sprovesti još istraživanja kako bi se bolje razumelo na koji način programi u okviru obrazovanja odraslih mogu povećati socijalnu inkluziju osetljivih grupa. Najpre treba istražiti percepcije polaznika a fenomenografska istraživanja mogu pružiti uvid u značaj ishoda učenja kada je u pitanju socijalna inkluzija. Zatim, imajući u vidu nedostatak istraživanja zasnovanog na dokazima kada su u pitanju ishodi učenja u obrazovanju odraslih, razvijanje instrumenta za merenje ishoda je neophodno. Može se očekivati bolja socijalna inkluzija osetljivih grupa odraslih pošto se oni uključe u obrazovanje, a da će sredina za učenje (koja se zasniva na na transferu modela obuka) uticati na na ovo poboljšanje. Ukratko, ovaj članak pružiće program istraživanja (koje se zasniva na proučavanju literature i istraživanju za kompjuterom) kada su u pitanju ishodi obrazovanja odraslih u smislu poboljšanja socijalne inkluzije osetljivih grupa odraslih.

Ključne reči: obrazovanje odraslih, okruženje za učenje, andragoško istraživanje, socijalna inkluzija, transfer.

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