

Teachers and Trainers in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

Professional Development in Asia and Europe

29-30 June 2009 in Bergisch Gladbach/Germany

Atanacio Panahon II

ADULT EDUCATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE NEED TO PROFESSIONALIZE THE RANKS OF STAKEHOLDERS: THE ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung
German Institute for Adult Education

URL: <http://www.die-bonn.de/asem/asem0910.pdf>

Published: 10.06.2009

State of information: June 2009

This document is published with the following [creative commons](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/de/) licence:



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/de/>

Contents

1. Asia: A Great Diverse Culture In Great Need of Adult Education.....	4
2. Need to Address Basic Issues Affecting Adult Education in East Asia.....	4
3. Europe and Asia: Areas of Divergent Emphasis	6
4. Professionalising Asian Adult Education: A Formidable Challenge	7
5. Developing Strategic Approach to Professionalise Adult Education Practitioners.....	7
6. Adult Education in a Learning Society in Asia	10
REFERENCES	11

It is an honor and privilege for me to address this conference of distinguished academics and observers from Asia and Europe, who all share a common interest on a topic of high impact and relevance to both continents. Within the context of lifelong learning, the extension of education and training opportunities to “second-chance” adult learners as well as those seeking to enhance their post-school knowledge and skills is deemed crucial in attaining the noble goal of Education for All and achieving respectability, if not competitiveness, in the global community. Being both a practitioner and a teaching professional in a leading university in the Philippines, I take this profound principle to heart and its effective implementation as a matter of advocacy and opportunity.

1. Asia: A Great Diverse Culture In Great Need of Adult Education

Nowhere is adult education in its broad context deemed more critical than in Asia, where high population growth with significant level of adult illiteracy still exists. The great continent is home to a wide diversity of cultures, languages, and socio-political beliefs. It is the continent where five of the most populous countries (i.e. Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan) in the world are located. These countries alone account for almost half of the planet's population and contribute to three-quarters of non-literate adults in the world (Ahmed, 2009). Without access to proper education, a greater number of people in this part of Asia stand to be socially and economically excluded in the long run.

In east Asia, the area where I come from, globalization, labor migration, economic structural shifts (from farming to industry to services) and generally higher pace of economic activity are some of the issues that justify and call for a more responsive adult education policy. Such policy should, among others, stipulate the upgrade of skills and competencies of teachers and trainers in adult education in the light of the aforesaid developments. The growing competitiveness of the east Asian economies should not be stalled by any weakness of the educational system to match the knowledge and skills demanded by new industries in the global economy.

2. Need to Address Basic Issues Affecting Adult Education in East Asia

One of the most contentious issues in adult education pertains to how the term "adult education" is understood by different societies, in Asia, Europe and elsewhere. In the Philippines, for instance, adult education is historically linked to popular education, suggesting a notion that teaching non-literate adults at grassroots level, who are unable to enter the formal education system, is the empirical representation of the term. In fact, prior to the 1986 People's Power Revolution, the years of struggle against a dictatorial regime witnessed the proliferation of the leftist intellectuals effectively handling the teaching (indoctrination) of peasant farmers in the countryside (De la Torre, 2007). For a while then, the Philippine version of adult education had taken a character that is progressive and liberal in the mold of Paulo Freire's education philosophy.

Up to the present, an accurate definition or classification of adult education for policy and academic research is generally considered tentative, if not elusive, for most countries in Asia. To my understanding, this fundamental debate on what constitutes adult education prevails in the academic circles of Europe as well. This phenomenon essentially stems from the fact that areas where adult education is obtaining are patently diverse and pervasive: schools, local communities, corporate sector, government agencies, churches, or even tribal areas. There is a high level of diversity with respect to policies, goals, strategies, program methodologies largely tailored according to the target learners. To this extent, all attempts placing adult education under one common denominator remain quite a big challenge (Przybylska, 2008).

The terms “adult education”, “adult literacy”, “continuing education” and “adult learning”, among others, have been used interchangeably in actual discourse and various literature. I do not intend to belabor on the conceptual distinction between and among these terms. Suffice it to say, however, that the term “continuing education” has come out as the preferred category to describe the education of adults in most countries, including the Philippines (Edralin, 1999). In the Asian context, adult education is more clearly understood for what it is not. It is a learning activity that does not fall under the structured curriculum-based primary, secondary and tertiary education leading to an academic degree. In a lifelong learning continuum, adult education, in its varied form and context and depending on the context and object of application, may then be considered as a support, substitute, supplement or complement to formal education. Teaching the Mangyans, the indigenous tribal people of Mindoro (Philippines) about communication skills under coconut trees and training Makati-based young professionals on Six Sigma quality improvement method in the swank lecture halls of our Makati campus are perfunctorily considered as adult education activities, although their respective pedagogy, learning premise, teacher qualifications/credentials, content and quality are decidedly made different so as to achieve the “right fit” according to learning objectives and target learners.

The network of agencies, institutions and individuals involved in adult education with their own policies, programmes and methodologies impacts significantly on the character and trajectory of lifelong learning in general and adult learning in particular in any given society. In certain instances, these institutions and agencies can work at cross purposes due to possible “turf” protection and/or as a result of political dictates. In the Philippines, the continuing education requirements of licensed professionals are under supervision and control of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), while the extension of learning opportunities for non-literate children and adults to achieve basic and functional literacy is the primary concern of the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems (BALS). On the other hand, all activities related to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) remain the responsibility of an agency called Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Another issue that needs to be settled is the differing contexts and priorities that characterize adult education across Asia. In low literacy countries, the focus is with respect to addressing basic literacy, despite the Jomtien 1990 declaration of a broadened vision that includes cultural expressions, human rights and responsibilities and equipping for active citizenship and links adult education as a key component of lifelong learning. On the other hand, countries that have attained advanced basic education such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have already begun to diversify the scope and range of adult education in their respective territories.

3. Europe and Asia: Areas of Divergent Emphasis

While Europe has taken adult education in the context of lifelong learning as a major policy thrust to ensure its knowledge-based competitiveness in the 21st century, the Asian region is just now grappling with the significance of the concept – albeit taken in different degree of intensity in terms of policy and program implementation. Being largely catch-up economies in contrast to the more developed European counterparts, most of these countries have yet to take a strong policy shift towards the realization of lifelong learning society where people display competencies in knowledge, skills and attitudes benchmarked to global standards.

The European adult education has largely assumed the nature of continuing education that supplements or enhances early education, while in Asia, the undertaking continues to focus itself by and large on eradicating, if not, mitigating basic adult illiteracy. Strategies and programs in Europe are geared towards equipping the adult population to meet the requirements of a competitive global knowledge economy. On the other hand, a large part of Asia continues to pursue adult education activities along the line of basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Just the same, there is a need to upgrade adult education programmes in Asia in the context of lifelong learning. Basic literacy which has been the traditional mark of Asian adult education should be integrated with knowledge, skills and attitudes that would make adult learners more productive and competitive members of society. Such fundamental reform calls for a policy shift at national and regional levels and realignment of institutions working in the field of adult education. The degree of sophistication in policy shift does not have to emulate the European formula, but Asia will gain a lot from benchmarking some elements of reform and looking at best practices documented by European research.

A great hurdle against upgrading adult education in terms of content, methodologies and objectives lies in the fact that in East Asia alone, some 124 million adults still lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, of which 71 percent are women (Ahmed, 2009). It is a stark figure that the region has to contend with made more worrisome by implied bias against the female population in the delivery of education services. The immediate need of overcoming this problem to meet the goals of Education For All (EFA) by 2015 coupled with funding constraints can drag down any good intention to broaden the scope, content and goals of adult education and bring them close to or at par with adult education system already prevailing in developed countries.

The good news, however, is that East Asia as a whole has already notched great strides in improving literacy rate: from 82 percent in 1985-1994 to 92 percent in 1995-2004. China, having contributed largely to this improvement with increased primary education enrolment, focused adult literacy campaigns, and installation of more learning facilities throughout the country, ironically serves as home to more than 85 million illiterates (Ahmed, 2009).

4. Professionalising Asian Adult Education: A Formidable Challenge

The professionalisation of teachers and trainers in the field of adult education is of utmost concern in the Asian lifelong learning landscape. Even in the absence of adult education program upgrade, UNESCO observes that professionalisation of key adult education personnel remains neglected (Ahmed, 2009). In another study on the professional development of teachers and trainers in Asia-Pacific region, lack of support is quite apparent in the adult and pre-school sub-sectors of education, where limited professional development opportunity is given to teachers, trainers, facilitators and specialists (International Reading Association, 2008). This issue stems from an array of factors which in some areas are mutually reinforcing. For instance, the lack of coherent government policy makes adult education “secondary” only to formal education. In turn, what the sector attracts are personnel who devote their full time in adult education profession but do not have the competence, much less the necessary qualifications, to handle the requisite tasks or activities. Those competent and qualified move to other professions or to some upscale private learning centers lured by the prospects of higher prestige and better compensation. To exacerbate this situation, the bar of qualifications is made lower so as to bring in teaching personnel to accommodate more adult learners. The irony is not lost in this instance, as the skills in teaching adults in any case should be considered similar to, if not even higher than, those demanded in primary or secondary education.

Adult education in a broader context that includes continuing professional education (CPE) should not suffer from shortage or lack of standards, criteria, and expertise which in certain instances allow adult learners to backslide into irrelevance or illiteracy. Government policy should never be ambiguous in defining adult education as a crucial element in overall education system of the nation. The case of Thailand should be worth mentioning: The country has initiated several policy measures designed to integrate formal, non-formal and informal education in a lifelong learning continuum. As a concrete expression of this strategic move, the budget support to reform non-formal and informal education as a way to promote lifelong learning has been made comparable to that in the formal education system (Ahmed, 2009).

Indeed, adult education within the overall framework of lifelong learning will have to seek its own respectable position in the educational system of developing countries in Asia. There is no doubt that adult education and its variant, continuing education, serve a critical gap in the lifelong learning continuum. A fundamental element of this thrust towards respectability involves the professionalisation of all stakeholders in this sector.

5. Developing Strategic Approach to Professionalise Adult Education Practitioners

What then should be the context of professionalisation of actors in adult education given the diverse cultures, languages, economic structures, political systems and adult learning programmes themselves prevailing in the East Asian region? How will policy reform be formulated in promoting such efforts at professionalisation,

considering the conflicting forces of globalization going against the call towards individualization and localization? Can implementation of such reform be carried out in the midst of financial constraints and budget priorities?

Similar to that of their European counterparts, the profile of actors in Asian adult education needs to be upgraded. Even as there is no east Asian country yet offering a degree course in adult education or lifelong learning, training modules on the teaching of adult learners delivered both online and under classroom setting may be introduced and continuously upgraded under the auspices of education ministries and leading higher education institutes. Completion of these modules should be acknowledged in a form of certificate issued by the appropriate training agency or institute. The quality of such modules while contextualized to reflect local setting shall be benchmarked to quality standards established in more advanced societies, such as Europe.

Admittedly, no homogeneous professionalisation plan can be made effective across Asia precisely on account of intra-regional diversity. Even within a given country, professionalising the staff working in urban centers for adult learning should be viewed differently from where basic and functional literacy at grassroots level is the primordial consideration. For one, the divergence on demand for teaching sophistication and level of expertise is quite apparent. Any such plan should be reflective of the unique character and requirements of a country's adult education programme and consistent with the latter's role of being a supplement or support to formal education system. What should perhaps be a common element across region covering different types of adult learners would be the inculcation of value system grounded on universal virtues such as honesty, justice, equity, benevolence and the like. Teachers and trainers should first and foremost profess adherence to those values and undergo a workshop on the implied benefits of such values to active citizenship so as to make them better integrators in the learners' gradual transformation into ethical, competent and able citizens of a nation.

The fact of increased globalization at virtually all fronts continues to put pressures, both positive and negative, on a country's education system. Since a policy of economic and political autarky is deemed passé among all countries, meeting the challenges of globalization becomes an immediate concern of adult education programme. While an advocacy to empowering minorities and non-literate adults through learning implies greater emphasis on the individuals and the localization of teaching approach, the same should not negate the importance of benchmarking efforts at adult learning towards a set of national, regional or even international standards. Hence, teachers, trainers and facilitators in adult learning should be adequately equipped in the sharing of knowledge and skills where learners can easily come to grip with threats and opportunities beyond their own parochial setting. At the minimum, adult education practitioners in countries experiencing high labor migration such as Indonesia and the Philippines should have a good understanding of cross-cultural dynamics so as to make outgoing workers adjust easily in host countries and reintegrate themselves seamlessly back in their own country upon return.

Admittedly, TVET programmes in developing countries have enhanced the skills of workers from out-of school youth (OSY) and adult sectors, yet much has still to be done in terms of developing managerial and entrepreneurial skills for those wishing

to further their desired capability. It can be argued that developing economies need a strong and increasing pool of entrepreneurs who can be relied upon to create job opportunities to those joining the labor markets. The case for the Philippines is very evident: returning overseas workers with substantial savings have been confronted now and then with issues on what relevant businesses they can start back home. Equipping these workers through adult learning programs can indeed help them make informed decision and launch a chosen business with the right set of skills and know-how. This then serves as another area where the rank of actors in adult education may enhance their competence and capability. Of particular relevance to Asian adult learners is a learning module that is designed to overcome the apparent timidity and non-assertive tendency among Asians. Leadership and entrepreneurship will only prosper in an environment where assertive, articulate and self-confident individuals are developed.

An issue that draws singular attention in the discussion on how to professionalise adult learning pertains to the role of higher education institutes (HEIs). Direct participation of colleges and universities in adult education outside the degree-granting tertiary education program has been rather limited across Asia. There are several reasons to this weak involvement in adult education - some structural, others historical in nature. Yet, a study has shown that HEIs, particularly those in the private sector, can serve as a strong exponent of adult education (Arokiasamy & Fook, 2008). For one, its formal setting can lend prestige to efforts at enhancing the image of adult learners. Likewise, there is a great reservoir of expertise and knowledge that HEIs can make available to backstop any adult learning undertaking. Participation of HEIs in adult education may range from acting as research entities on pedagogical approaches and content design for adult learning, to actively training adult education practitioners, to serving as direct facilities for "second-chance" learners.

Professionalisation of adult learning requires continued innovation in pedagogical approach and delivery system. One area where the Philippines has achieved significant progress is in the area of providing mobile alternative learning systems (ALS). In this system, facilities and service providers of adult learning are brought to where they are needed. Non-government organizations (NGOs), whose personnel are deemed more competent than those from the public sector, are hired by the government to undertake the delivery of adult learning in modules. These mobile learning centers specialize in life skills programs based on a curriculum that contains five learning strands: communication skills; problem solving and critical thinking; sustainable use of resources; development of sense and a sense of community; and expanding one's world vision. The mobile learning delivery system has come to complement the gradual rise of online or distance education system catering. The former caters to the marginalized members of society while the latter is geared towards clientele seeking further education beyond secondary level without leaving their workplace or place of abode.

That most daunting issue on hand for adult education policymakers, administrators and practitioners in developing countries refers to financing. When adult education is not appreciated as playing a crucial role in molding people to active citizenship, public funding support would be difficult to obtain. Admittedly, one of the drivers to professionalize adult education is the provision of adequate funding, whether it comes from public or private sources. A chronic lack of such funding spells an almost

zero leeway by which one can introduce reform, and therefore professionalisation at increasing level of sophistication.

Where public fund is deemed limited, the government should stimulate greater participation of the private sector. Tax breaks to corporations sponsoring specific in-house or external education and training of its employees should be encouraged. Duly-accredited private learning centers that offer skills upgrade program for professionals and technicians and those contracted by the government to reach out to OSY and non-literate adults should likewise receive government fiscal incentives.

In any case, quantity should not substitute for quality. Poor quality of adult learning inputs results in inferior outputs (graduates) – something that is anathema to attempts at professionalisation. Quality control in the Philippine adult learning system is well established and subjects itself to continued improvement. At present, BALS which handles basic and functional literacy programmes for OSY and adults has established an Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) evaluation system, allowing its graduates to possibly get admitted to tertiary education and to appropriate job posting. On the other hand, CHED has a quality control mechanism called Expanded Tertiary Education and Equivalency Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) for adult learners who enter a special programme that a tertiary education institute offers. This allows such schools to grant a degree to applicants based upon documented proof of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes acquired through both learning and work experience.

6. Adult Education in a Learning Society in Asia

Adult education in the long run has to be taken in the context of developing a learning society, consistent with the general notion that human resource development is key to Asian prosperity and sustainable development. The practitioners in adult education enterprise will have to keep themselves abreast with the demands of such a learning society where acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills serves as the primary driver in asserting its global competitiveness.

The collaboration efforts with European counterparts in terms of joint research efforts, idea exchange and best practices cannot be overemphasized. The ASEM Hub on Lifelong Learning is therefore serving the critical needs of Asia for its education reform, human resource development and economic progress.

My congratulations to all the participants of this worthy conference and I look forward to a mutually-rewarding exchange of ideas on the professionalisation of adult education in lifelong learning with those who are here present.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, Manzoor (2009). *The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Asia and the Pacific*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg.

Ariokasamy, Lawrence and Fook, Ong Seng (2008). "The Role of Private Higher Educational Institutions in Promoting Formal Lifelong Education in Malaysia", *The Journal of International Social Research*. Turkey

De la Torre, Edicio (2007). *Organization and Financing of Adult Education in the Philippines*, Education for Life Foundation, Manila.

Edralin, Divina (1999). *Continuing Professional/Technical Education in the Philippines*, De La Salle University, Manila.

International Reading Association (2008). *Status of Teacher Education in Asia Pacific*, UNESCO, Bangkok.

Przybylska, Ewa (2008). "Pathways to Becoming an Adult Education Professional in Europe", *Qualifying Adult Learning Professionals in Europe*, W. Bertelsmann Verlag, Bielefeld.