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Message from the PIMA President

Suwithida Charungkaittikul, President, PIMA Network

Dear Esteemed Members of the PIMA Network, Colleagues, and Fellow Advocates for Adult Learning and Education,

It is with immense pleasure and a deep sense of honor that I address you for the first time as the newly elected President of the PIMA Network – Promoting, Interrogating and Mobilising Adult Learning and Education. Having dedicated my career to Lifelong Education, Youth and Adult Education, and Non-formal and Informal Education at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, I extend my sincere gratitude for the trust you have placed in me to lead this vibrant and vital community. I cannot lead this network alone; I need your active participation and unwavering support to achieve our shared mission.

As we stand at a pivotal moment for adult learning globally, I am particularly thrilled to introduce this Special Issue of the PIMA Bulletin, dedicated to the critical theme of **Higher Education and Adult Learning & Education (ALE)**. This issue, planned for publication in July 2025, comes at a time when the nexus between higher education institutions and the broader field of adult learning is more dynamic and essential than ever.

I deeply believe in the transformative power of adult education to create a better, more just world for everyone. As the great adult education thinker Malcolm Knowles taught us, "the richest resources for learning are in the learners themselves." It is this fundamental principle—the recognition of the boundless potential within each learner—that guides my vision for PIMA. The articles within this Bulletin explore the multifaceted roles that higher education plays in advancing ALE, reflecting PIMA's commitment to both theoretical interrogation and practical mobilization. You will find compelling insights into topics ranging

from the roles of HEIs in developing ALE to adult learning for democracy and activism, the professionalisation of adult teachers for the digital futures, and the ethical integration of AI in higher education for lifelong learning, a theme explored through insights from focus groups. The issue also provides a broad focus on adult educator preparation in teaching, program planning, assessment, and research, and highlights innovative approaches to evaluation for empowering Learning Cities. Contributions also highlight diverse global experiences, including specific roles of universities in Slovenia, experiences from the Ivory Coast, cooperation between universities and civil society in Ukraine, and universities supporting the training of adult educators for new literacy work in Brazil and Latin America. You will also discover the impactful work of the UNESCO Chair on Global Adult Education in Malta, the development of age-friendly universities in Australia, and community-based and participatory research encouraged by the social responsibility of universities.

My core vision for PIMA is to elevate our network as a true catalyst for global progress and an undeniable beacon of innovation in adult learning and lifelong learning. We live in a world that demands collaboration without borders, and together, we will forge stronger, more impactful global partnerships and drive transformative change.

To realize this vision, we will focus on several key initiatives:

- **The PIMA Global Knowledge Hub:** A dynamic online platform for cutting-edge research, best practices, and diverse perspectives from around the world. This hub will connect us through multilingual resources and virtual conferences.
- **The Global Leadership Development Program:** A program to cultivate the next generation of global leaders through mentorship, cross-cultural exchange, and leadership training.

- **Leading the Digital Transformation in ALE:** A crucial project to explore the evolving role of Digital Learning and AI in Adult Learning and Education, in collaboration with partners like the ASEM LLL Hub and DVV International.

The success of our global mission hinges on your active participation. I urge every PIMA member to share their expertise, contribute unique perspectives, and engage deeply in these initiatives. Let us embrace our diversity as our strength and work together to build a global community where collaboration knows no bounds. This Special Issue is a testament to the rich expertise and commitment within our network, and it serves as a powerful example of how PIMA can contribute to global dialogues and innovative practices in ALE.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the authors who have contributed their valuable perspectives, particularly Balázs Németh and Heribert Hinzen for their leadership on the roles of higher education in ALE, and all contributors to the webinars which underpin many of these insights. A special appreciation goes to the editorial team for their meticulous work in bringing this significant publication to fruition.

I encourage you to delve into the pages of this Bulletin, engage with its ideas, and utilize its findings to further our collective mission. Together, with our shared passion and support for one another, we can continue to promote, interrogate, and mobilise adult learning and education for a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future.

With warmest regards,

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Editorial

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Bios

Heribert Hinzen wrote his doctoral dissertation in comparative studies on adult education in Tanzania at the University of Heidelberg. He joined DVV International in 1977 for almost four decades, working in the leadership of headquarters and in offices in Sierra Leone, Hungary and Lao PDR. He is an Honorary Professor at the Universities of Pécs, Bucharest and Iasi, a Visiting Professor at the University of Glasgow, and teaches comparative adult education at the University of Würzburg. He served as Vice-President of ICAE, EAEA, and PIMA. He is an Honorary Fellow of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and a member of the Editorial Boards of the International Review of Education and CONVERGENCE. In 2006 he was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame.

Dr. habil Balázs Németh is a researcher on European adult and lifelong learning policy development and comparative adult education. He is an associate professor and reader in Adult Learning and Education at the University of Pécs. Research topics of his are: Politics and Adult Education; Comparative Adult Education; History of Modern European Adult Education and Learning City-Region Developments in association with the global network of learning cities programme (GNLC) of UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Balázs Németh is a EUCEN Ambassador and Board member of EAEA and PIMA.

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In 2023 the journal *Adult Learning* featured an Editorial with the title: “But, is it Adult Education? Disciplinary Boundaries of Adult Education and Higher Education”. It was meant to “provide guidance to authors who might be considering submitting”, and came up with an important suggestion: “When conducting work that transcends the boundaries between adult education and higher education, make sure to integrate the perspectives of both fields of study ((Hill et al., 2023).

This came at a time when within the PIMA Committee we had a discussion on the role of higher education (HE) supporting adult learning and education (ALE) as it had been mentioned in the outbreak groups of the Annual General Meeting as an important matter to work on – within the PIMA membership as well as in cooperation with a variety of partners. For us it seemed to be close to the heart and interest of colleagues, many of the them with backgrounds in HE and / or ALE, or both, and at the same time an area that needed follow-up after the 2022 UNESCO World Conferences on Higher Education as well as CONFINTEA VII.

Of course, the topic is wide, and we faced the challenge to narrow it down to a doable size. However, some of the key questions to consider were:

- What are the choices and limitations for HE to support the development of ALE?
- How can HE use its teaching and research functions to strengthen ALE?
- What are potential areas for future networking and project cooperation?

At the time, we started planning for a respective webinar sometime in October 2024, and a PIMA Bulletin Special Issue for early 2025. This turned out to be a moving target as finally we had not one but two rich and well attended webinars in May and June 2025, which delayed publication of the Special Issue as we wanted the presenters of the webinars as authors also.

Rounding the picture, we have to mention that the co-editors were jointly involved in several other activities and commitments which touched open HE and ALE. To mention just a few for better understanding:

- We acted as moderators in the Adult Education Academy 2023 of the University of Würzburg, and organized a respective comparative group on "Higher Education (HE) supporting the institutionalization and professionalization of Adult Learning and Education (ALE)".
- Here we asked other moderators and presenters to join a reflection, which in turn lead to an article on "Higher education supporting the development of adult learning and education: Examples, experiences, expectations" (Fideli et al., 2024) which looked at developments in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Palestine, and Portugal.
- During that period the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame was preparing for a major conference at the University of Florence, where PIMA in cooperation with the European University Continuing Education Network jointly organized a Pre-Conference Webinar, later on the Working Group on "University Lifelong Learning and inter-university partnerships", and ended with a Call to Action towards international cooperation.
- More recently in June 2025, the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP), in cooperation with Springer's *Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*, organized a webinar on "Research Meets Practice" which discussed research findings and reflections following a keynote by Séamus O Tuama, "Taking Forward Perspectives on Reflexivity in Learning: Five Capitals".

Many more initiatives around that time and the theme could be mentioned here. Let us confine to a few close to or by UNESCO which preceded or followed on the earlier mentioned World Conferences on HE and ALE, reflecting "Beyond Limits. New Ways to

Reinvent Higher Education" (UNESCO, 2022), and recommending the „Marrakech Framework for Action: harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education" UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, [UIL], 2023a). Following swift were the two research reports by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) on *Institutional practices of implementing lifelong learning in higher education* (UIL, 2023a) as well as *International trends of lifelong learning in higher education* (UIL, 2023b).

Almost in parallel "Learning from the past for the future: Signposts and landmark anniversaries in adult learning and education" (Hinzen et al., 2024) was published in a Special Issue of the *International Review of Education. Journal of Lifelong Learning.* The global developments of learning cities incorporate universities as well as ALE institutions as strong components on the way towards lifelong learning (Németh, 2022). Identifying important practices, one may want to signal the role of the European University Continuing Education Network (eucen) as a platform of higher education institutions for stakeholders collaboration on the development of lifelong learning. It includes the call for the development of learning cities as learning ecosystems having fairly been discussed within eucen meetings with significant attention to ALE and skills development to promote resilience and agility.
With all this background we felt quite confident that a Special Issue of the PIMA Bulletin would be in good place at the right time. The invitation to potential authors was on the one hand an open call, and additionally we asked colleagues with certain expertise and experiences. The feedback was indeed quite enormous. We are thankful to the authors for their contributions, and to all who joined the many discussions on the way. A big thank you also to those who helped with the editorial work, and we are quite grateful to the new PIMA President who sent a Message to further strengthen the discourse on HE supporting ALE – and vice versa?

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Fostering Value Formation through Lifelong Learning in Higher Education: Strategies for Youth and Adults

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Abstract

The flux of changes in today's world – marked by technological acceleration, socio-cultural shifts, and increasing global interdependence – requires individuals to continuously adapt not only in terms of skills and knowledge, but also in their system of values. In such a dynamic context, value formation emerges as a lifelong process, essential for guiding ethical decision-making, responsible citizenship, and sustainable action. Higher education plays a critical role in this process, serving as a platform for the development of both professional competencies and personal integrity. Learning is no longer confined to the early stages of life; it extends across the lifespan, encompassing multiple transitions, roles, and responsibilities.

Keywords: **e**thical decision making, sustainable development, continuing professional training, value-based learning, framework and model

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Diana Antoci is a Full Professor, Doctor Habilitatus in Educational Sciences at the "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University of Chișinău, Republic of Moldova. Her expertise includes value formation, lifelong learning, and educational innovation. Her current research focuses on developing models and strategies for sustainable education, with a particular emphasis on ethical and emotional development in both youth and adults. Her broader research interests include educational axiology, emotional intelligence, wellbeing, pedagogical action research, and the integration of lifelong learning principles within higher education

Within this continuum, universities are called to create environments that nurture reflective thinking, civic engagement, and meaningful personal growth. Cultivating such values from childhood through adulthood strengthens their capacity to contribute constructively to society, to navigate uncertainty, and to lead with purpose. Lifelong learning, when interwoven with value formation, becomes a powerful tool for shaping personalities and communities prepared for the ethical challenges of the 21st century.

In this global context, UNESCO (2017), as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, has been entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, part of a broader movement to eradicate poverty through the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education being crucial to the achievement of all these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2015). The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides concrete guidance and commitments to implement this ambitious agenda, affirming the central role of lifelong learning and value-based education in sustainable development.

The Role of Higher Education in Value Formation

Higher education plays a multifaceted role in the process of value formation, encompassing not only instructional and pedagogical dimensions, but also scientific research. The continuous interaction between research and teaching enriches the educational process with current, evidence-based knowledge, including in the area of values and value orientations. This integrative function is particularly important given the complex nature of human value development, which requires a structuralist approach, one that considers behavior, emotions, knowledge, attitudes, and convictions as key components of the value orientations system. Despite their centrality, these elements are often insufficiently understood or addressed by educators and parents alike.

The article by Baratov & Hinzen (2024) presents findings from the MFA reflections across Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, emphasizing how Adult Learning and Education (ALE) contributes to lifelong learning and sustainable development. By this approach we understand the importance of integrating values formation at all stages of education from youth to adulthood, especially in higher education institutions, which can act as centers for civic, ethical and lifelong competences. National and regional efforts align with global frameworks like the SDGs and the Marrakech Framework for Action, advocating for

inclusive, holistic education. In Moldova and beyond, strengthening collaboration between universities, civil society, and policy actors is seen as essential for embedding value-oriented learning strategies into lifelong education, with a focus on relevance, resilience, and sustainable transformation.

Broader Contexts in Value Formation

Value formation is deeply embedded in the broader context of lifelong education, which views learning as a sustained, dynamic process that transcends age and institutional boundaries (Knowles et al., 2015). This perspective allows learners to continuously adapt, re-evaluate priorities, and align their actions with internalized values across various life stages. Furthermore, higher education institutions serve as critical links between initial and continuing professional training and pre-university education. This connection positions universities as both formative environments for future educators and as active contributors to shaping the pedagogical culture of earlier educational stages. From another perspective, the existing gaps in understanding and facilitating value formation can be explored through diverse theoretical and praxiological lenses, revealing both the challenges and opportunities inherent in the educational landscape. In this broader context, higher education is called not only to disseminate knowledge but also to lead transformative processes that support ethical, civic, and sustainable development across the entire lifespan in our society.

The Model of Value Orientation Development

The development of The Model of Value Orientation Development in Lifelong Education Contexts (MVODLE) is prompted by the results of theoretical and experimental research initiated more intensively since 2019, which found that we do not know what values are de facto and how we should form them, we highlight certain values that we possess or should have, but in reality, we do not know the methodology for the formation of values and value orientations. The Theoretical Model of Value Orientation (Antoci, 2021) was taken as the basis for constructing the MVODLE, which can be applied to any specific field.

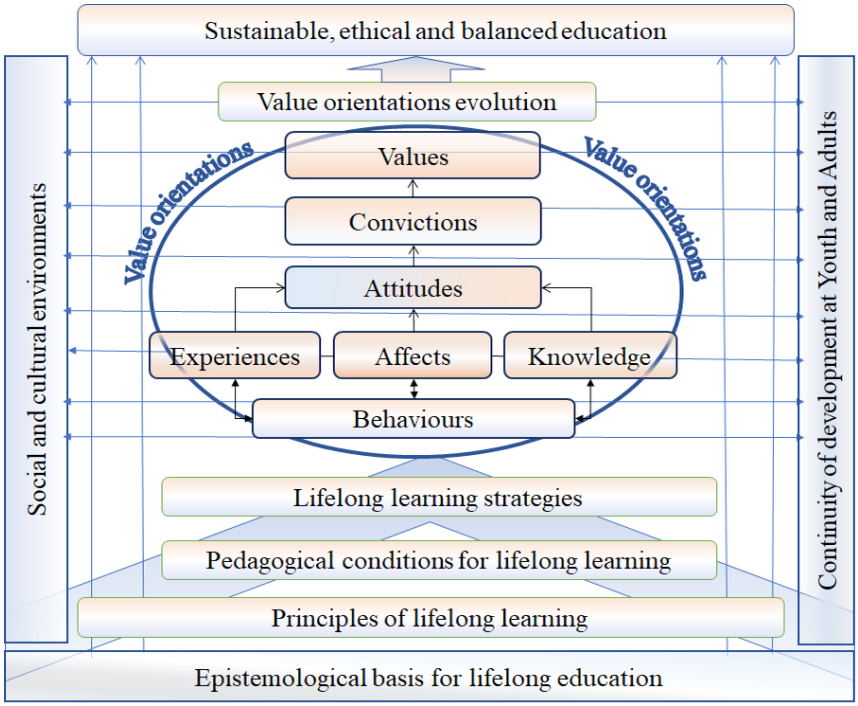
The Theoretical Model of Value Orientation is grounded in key socio-cultural and pedagogical perspectives that explain how the personality's value system is formed. Value orientation emerges as a result of the interaction between educational goals, social influences, and internal psychological processes. Scholars such as Dewey (1992), Cristea (2017), Silistraru (2021), and Pâslaru (2006) etc., emphasize that value orientation encompasses intrinsic values embedded in educational content, shaped through attitudes, knowledge, emotions, and convictions. The personality internalizes and attributes meaning to values through experiences in social contexts, where norms, beliefs, and behaviors are adopted and

validated. Within the educational partnership, value orientation development is influenced by personal aspirations and pedagogical feedback. Attitudes form gradually through psychosocial maturation, being shaped by accumulated experiences, emotional understanding, and the authority of educators. The research conceptualized the term of value as a "central location of the entire personality system constituting the transcendent but not the ultimate finality of the educational process under the impact of the sociocultural environment and coordinating over a long period of time the cognitive, affective, volitional-motivational, behavioral sphere of the subject" (Antoci, 2021, 2022).

To respond to this growing need, the Model of Value Orientation Development in Lifelong Education Contexts (MVODLE) was elaborated to provide a structured, integrative approach to value-based learning. Rooted in theories of humanistic psychology, transformative learning, and educational sustainability, the model proposes a holistic framework that interconnects cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of value formation (Mezirow, 1997; Rokeach, 1973).

Figure 1

The Model of Value Orientations Development in Lifelong Education Contexts (Antoci, 2025)



The MVODLE (see Figure 1) offers a structured framework that illustrates how value orientations evolve through continuous learning and contribute to sustainable, ethical, and balanced education. It is grounded in an epistemological foundation integrating philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives that support lifelong learning. The model builds on core principles such as flexibility, self-direction, and integration of knowledge across life

stages, while emphasizing pedagogical conditions (methodology, quality of content, evaluative approaches etc.) that shape value development.

Central to the MVODLE is the interaction of key components (behavior, emotion, experience, knowledge, attitudes, convictions, and values) formed and influenced within social and cultural contexts. Through strategies like experiential and intergenerational learning, mentorship, and collaboration, the model promotes dynamic value formation across the lifespan. Ultimately, it aims to support the development of persons capable of contributing to a sustainable and ethically grounded society.

The university is a central agent in the implementation and promotion of value-centered educational content. Through its dual mission (professional formation and scientific research) higher education generates updated data, knowledge and integrates them into instructional and institutional practices. Universities thus play a critical role in designing and disseminating new curricular content and methodological innovations that are aligned with ethical, civic, and sustainable values. This function is vital in facilitating lifelong learning processes and in bridging the pre-university education and adult education by ensuring coherence in the formation of values across educational stages.

Strategies for Youth and Adults in Lifelong Learning

Within the MVODLE framework, fostering value orientations throughout life requires the implementation of strategic directions that respond to learners' developmental stages and sociocultural contexts. These strategies must support not only knowledge acquisition, but also the formation of behaviors, attitudes, and convictions grounded in ethical and sustainable values. The strategies must be institutionally supported, especially by higher education, which acts as a catalyst in designing and disseminating value-based learning experiences.

Youth (in higher education), situated at a formative stage of identity and value development, benefit from educational strategies that emphasize exploration, reflection, and social engagement such as:

- Integrated curricula based on ethical, civic, and sustainable values into all disciplines encourages learners to connect knowledge with real-life responsibilities.
- Experiential learning fulfilled through practice, projects, community engagement etc. promote empathy, collaboration, and responsibility.
- Mentorship and peer learning support emotional and social development, while peer interactions reinforce value reflection through dialogue and example.

Adult learners (engaged in lifelong learning) bring accumulated life experiences and existing value systems, which can be restructured or strengthened through targeted educational interventions:

- Recognition of prior experience presume validating life and work experience which creates a foundation for reflective learning and the integration of values into practice.
- Flexible learning formats embrace modular, self-directed, and blended approaches which accommodate adult learners' needs while supporting autonomy and personal growth.
- Intergenerational dialogue means creating spaces for cross-generational exchange for fostering mutual respect and the transfer of values across age groups.
- Applied ethical learning involves the use of case studies, simulations, and workplace-based experiences that connect abstract values with real-world professional and social issues.

These differentiated strategies contribute to the continuous formation and evolution of value orientations, reinforcing the role of lifelong learning as a dynamic and holistic process. By aligning educational methods with the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components of value development, both youth and adults are better prepared to navigate complexity and act responsibly within their communities.

Implications for Sustainable Education

Fostering value formation through lifelong learning directly advances the objectives of sustainable education by promoting responsible decision-making, inclusive participation, and ethical leadership (UNESCO, 2017). When higher education institutions integrate values such as equity, sustainability, and human dignity into their missions and curricula, they prepare learners not only for the labor market, but also for active, socially engaged citizenship.

This value-centered approach reinforces the university's role as a transformative agent that extends beyond the transmission of knowledge. It contributes to the co-construction of meaning, the cultivation of critical thinking, and the strengthening of democratic life and social cohesion (Dewey, 1992; Mezirow, 1997). In doing so, higher education becomes a driving force for sustainability not only in content, but also in ethos, relationships, and long-term societal impact.

Conclusions

In the context of a rapidly evolving world, value formation has become an essential dimension of lifelong learning and a strategic priority for higher education. The Model of Value Orientation Development in Lifelong Education Contexts (MVODLE) provides a

coherent theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how values are shaped across the lifespan, emphasizing the interplay of knowledge, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors.

Incorporating value formation into lifelong learning strategies represents a critical dimension of higher education's mission. When learning environments are built upon principles of human dignity, equity, responsibility, they cultivate personalities capable of contributing meaningfully to democratic life and long-term societal well-being.

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The Duality of Adult Learning and Education Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Merits and Demerits

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Abstract

The Africa that was birthed after colonialism was dual namely, Anglophone and Francophone. Anglophone Africa has embraced the scientific study of adult education in addition to its practice. Francophone Africa that is yet to tow this path is here encouraged to do so.

Keywords: Adult education policy; Anglophone Africa; Francophone Africa.

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The Duality of Adult Learning and Education Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Merits and Demerits

The slave trade that ran its course between 1526 and 1867 (Mintz, 2025), having no plan for the education of the enslaved, it was colonial education that significantly impacted Africa. Within the context of colonialism, Africa is basically, Anglophone and Francophone, the 1884-85 Berlin West African Conference that facilitated the sharing of the continent having been overseen principally by the British and the French (Asiwaju, 1990). The coloniser having no interest in universalising education within the colonies (e.g. the British colonial education policy labelled *small is best*), only a few African adults were trained as interpreters, teachers and civil servants using adult education, for the purpose of sustaining colonial administration between 1884-1960.

While the 1884-1960 colonial typology of adult education succeeded an earlier 1470-1884 Europe-driven adult education in Africa that was based on Christian religious and vocational education, it was the 1884-1960 typology of adult education that metamorphosed into that which is validly referred to as Africa's modern adult education today. Consequently, modern African adult education derives from the educational policy promoted by the British within colonial Anglophone Africa on the one hand, and from that implanted by the French within colonial Francophone Africa on the other hand.

The purpose of the current article is first to discuss both the British and French policies in respect to adult education and second to highlight the merits and demerits of each of the policies with a view to carving a new path for the profession of adult and continuing education within sub-Saharan Africa.

The Policies

Although both Anglophone and Francophone Africa had enjoyed a fairly impressive amount of practical modern adult education before the 1960s, the period of their political independence, none of these regional blocs elected to discuss adult education in their immediate post-independence

educational policy documents. The 1961 All-Africa conference held in Addis-Ababa with a view to charting ways of effectively africanising education on the continent during the post-independence era, focused entirely on formal/youth education (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1961).

When, as result of a number of post-indepedence challenges (e.g. low economic performance, low participation of women in politics, etc.), studies began to recommend more education to resolve the identified challenges, adult education began to be factored into Africa's national plans as from the 1970s. Such was the case in many Anglophone countries (Brophy, 2020) and in a number of Francophone countries (Biao, 2024; Gomez, 1977)

However, where both Anglophone and Francophone blocs were agreeable on embracing modern adult education going forward, Anglophone Africa conceived of modern adult education broadly(Asiedu et al. 2004; Biao, 2023), while Francophone Africa perceived modern adult education in a rather narrower view (Baba-Moussa et al., 2014; Diemer, 2015).

Additionally, whereas Anglophone Africa has embraced the two ends of the profession of adult education (e.g. practice and theory), Francophone Africa has stayed with the practice of adult education all through its independent life with only a timid nod towards adult education theory. For example, while both blocs have been involved in the practice of modern adult education since independence, only Anglophone Africa has been promoting the scientific study of adult education leading to the award of Bachelor, Masters and PhD/DED in adult education (Biao, 2023).

Merits and Demerits

Adult education is a profession. Like all professions, it is made up of a practical aspect and a theoretical aspect. Theory usually serving as a near infalable guide to practice, it is understood that whichever entity embraces both practice and theory of adult education such as Anglophone Africa is doing justice to the profession of adult education.

However, Francophone Africa has its reasons for toying its path of full practice and half theory. While perceived inablity to mobilise resources for offering adult education at the higher

education sector is a constraint, Francophone Africa identifies two forms of adult education theorising within the bloc. First, the tertiary education personnel learns a few pertinent adult education strategies (community entering strategy, REFLECT, etc.) when preparing to work in community. Second, the interaction between academic personnel and community members does generate theory.

Conclusion

With a bit more innovative thinking, the resource constraint can be overcome and Francophone Africa can come to promote adult education more fully.

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Adult Learning and Education (ALE) for Older Adults: U3A Models in East Asia

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Abstract

Universities of the Third Age (U3As) provide older adults with opportunities to engage in lifelong learning, stay current with digital innovations, and adapt to social change. Rooted in a community-centred, peer-led approach, U3As foster personal growth, social connection, and active participation in society through collaborative, meaningful, and accessible learning experiences.

Keywords: older learners; Universities of the Third Age (U3A); artificial intelligence (AI); conversational learning

Author Bio

Thomas Kuan is the Founder of U 3rd Age, Singapore (www.u3rdagesingapore.org) and Honorary President of the East Asia Federation for Adult Education (EAFAE). He is a member of PIMA (Friends of PASCAL International Association), a Fellow of the Phi Beta Society (USA), and a Certified Qigong Trainer (Taiwan). He has authored several papers on adult learning and education (ALE) in East Asia, with works translated into Thai and Chinese. An active advocate of the University of the Third Age (U3A) movement, he has supported its development in Thailand and Singapore and helps organise U3A conferences across East Asia.

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) for Older Adults:

U3A Models in East Asia

In the 1970s, when the average life expectancy was around 70 years, adult learning and education (ALE) for older persons focused on helping learners manage the emotional, social, and cognitive changes that accompany ageing. Today, with people living well into their 80s and beyond, the paradigm of learning has shifted. The goals of ageing now encompass not only personal development but also the need to address broader societal issues such as financial security, digital inclusion, and meaningful community engagement.

In East Asia, countries with super-ageing populations—including China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore—have been developing national strategies to support older adult learning. Yet despite growing recognition of the value of lifelong learning, only a few countries explicitly prioritise older learners in their ALE frameworks. According to the Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III, 2017), only 13 countries—five of which are in Asia—identified senior citizens as one of the top five priority groups in their national ALE policies (Kuan, 2019).

U3As in East Asia: A Model for Older Learners?

The growing need for lifelong learning has led to the rise of various models of later-life education across East Asia, many inspired by the University of the Third Age (U3A) concept. Originally developed in France in the 1970s and further adapted in the UK during the 1980s, the U3A model has become a global movement, with Asia creating its own culturally contextualised versions.

In Japan, senior colleges offer a diverse range of educational and community-based activities specifically designed for older adults. In Hong Kong, the Elder Academies have become dynamic platforms for learning and social engagement. Nepal and India operate senior centres and informal U3A-style programmes to promote community participation.

Thailand has several active U3A initiatives, such as Chula U3A, Silapakorn U3A, and U3A-Nakorn Chiangrai (which is supported by the municipal council), to encourage active ageing.

In South Korea, these institutions are known as 'Senior Universities' (SUs), offering both formal and informal learning. China has developed the most extensive network of all: U3As known as Senior Citizens Universities (SCUs), with more than 76,000 campuses and over 14 million registered learners nationwide. By 2025, China aims to have at least one SCU in every county and district, demonstrating a strong public policy commitment to lifelong learning.

Other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, have also adopted community-based adult education models inspired by U3A principles, contributing to a growing ecosystem of later-life learning.

Singapore's Approach: Integrating Lifelong Learning with National Policy

Singapore, where one in four residents is projected to be aged 60 or older by 2030, embeds lifelong learning for seniors within the broader SkillsFuture movement. This national initiative offers credit-based learning opportunities to all citizens aged 25 and above, supporting upskilling and reskilling across all life stages—from early careers to post-retirement pursuits.

In 2021, Singapore introduced the Singapore Standard SS 698: Geragogy Guidelines on Training Senior Learners, developed by the Council for Third Age (C3A) and the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), and formally launched in 2023. These guidelines offer practical approaches for engaging older learners, taking into account their cognitive and motivational characteristics (www.c3a.org.sg/geragogy-guidelines). The national policy helps to support older adults in their learning endeavours (Ma & Kuan, 2025). At the community level, organisations also play a vital role in providing learning opportunities for older learners to take up third-age careers.

Older Adults and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has presented both challenges and opportunities for later-life learning. Initially, older adults may find themselves overwhelmed by AI tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and online platforms, especially considering concerns about scams, digital misinformation, and a general lack of confidence in navigating the digital landscape. Yet AI also holds great promise. Technologies such as generative AI, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) offer personalised, immersive learning experiences tailored to individual needs. Some older adults are already using AI to explore new knowledge areas, co-create content, and make better decisions in their daily lives.

AI can also support reflective thinking, encouraging learners to make sense of past experiences and transitions. However, to truly empower seniors, the digital divide must be addressed. Inclusive policies and targeted digital literacy programmes are essential to ensure that all older adults can benefit from AI-enhanced learning environments.

Conversational Learning and Social Connection

Among the engaging modes of learning for older adults is conversational learning. Grounded in the U3A ethos of 'the teacher is the learner, and the learner is the teacher', this approach fosters respectful, cross-generational dialogue. These conversations—whether online or in person—become spaces for intellectual exchange, shared values, and mutual encouragement.

In Singapore, U 3rd Age's Seniors-Meet-Seniors (SMS) platform (www.u3rdagesingapore.org, www.facebook.com/u3rdage) has offered monthly community talks and conversations since 2017. Held in accessible venues like libraries and museums, these gatherings encourage storytelling, reminiscence, and knowledge co-production. Through such engagement, participants form strong social bonds and contribute to collective

wisdom and emotional well-being. Conversation, in this context, becomes not only a method of learning (Kuan, 2023) but also a celebration of life.

Conclusion: U3A as a Pathway to Meaningful Ageing

As East Asia faces the demographic challenge of an ageing population, the Universities of the Third Age offer a suitable, culturally responsive, and highly effective model for older adults. U3As are not defined by rigid academic structures, but by their emphasis on community, creativity, and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. These models reveal that older adults are eager to learn, as a means to enrich their lives, support their communities, and embrace the creative possibilities of later life.

As Katz (2019) noted, the U3A network may now be the largest university in the world. Its flexibility allows for the integration of modern technologies like AI, while preserving the rich traditions of community learning, creativity and collaboration. The development of an 'optimal' model of later-life learning showcases local community efforts of collaborative peer-learning interests (Richards, et al., 2019). As the older population continues to grow, U3As offer a scalable, inclusive, and culturally grounded approach to adult learning. They are inexpensive, locally organised, and socially impactful, serving as platforms for older adults to lead meaningful lives.

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Exploring the Landscape of Adult Learner Success: The Interplay of Motivation, Satisfaction, and Persistence

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Abstract

Adults are a vital and growing undergraduate demographic, yet their unique needs are often underserved. This study explored the interplay between satisfaction, motivation, and persistence among 166 adult learners. Findings revealed that motivation and satisfaction are key predictors of persistence, highlighting the need for actionable, supportive institutional strategies.

***Keywords*:** adult learners, persistence, motivation, higher education, student satisfaction

Author Bio

Dr. Naima Wells is the Executive Director of Operational Impact and Success at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Her work is guided by a core belief: to effectively serve today's students, particularly the growing population of adult learners, universities must achieve genuine institutional excellence.

Through her research and practice, she uses a philosophy of Empathetic & Intentional Design to champion this cultural shift. This approach moves beyond bureaucracy by equipping institutions to use assessment as a strategic tool to uncover student needs, demonstrate tangible impact, and drive continuous improvement that truly matters.

An Exploration of Adult Undergraduate Success

The landscape of higher education has seen a remarkable increase in the enrollment of adult undergraduates, with students over 25 representing a significant portion of the student body. These nontraditional students bring diverse life experiences and expectations, yet they often face unique challenges that can threaten their success, including balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities (Fairchild, 2003). Adult students historically have lower persistence and completion rates than their traditional-aged peers (Kazis et al., 2007). Understanding the intricate relationship between the factors contributing to their satisfaction, motivation, and persistence is therefore essential for any institution committed to serving this vital population.

This study explored these dynamics through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. The primary objective was to examine how adult undergraduates' satisfaction, motivation, and the support or conflict within their personal ecosystems influence their decision to persist toward degree completion.

Research Methodology

This cross-sectional, predictive study utilized a quantitative survey to examine these relationships (Wells, 2024). Data was collected from a convenience sample of 166 adult undergraduate students (aged 23 or older) enrolled at the University of South Alabama. The *Adult Undergraduate Higher Education Experience Survey* (AUHEES) was developed to measure key constructs, including scales assessing academic persistence, motivation, satisfaction, and the influence of family, peer, and work environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Knowles, 1980; Tinto, 1975). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Pearson's correlations, and linear regression (Wells, 2024).

Key Findings

The study yielded several crucial insights into the adult learner experience.

The Resilience of Roles

Contrary to expectations, the study found no statistically significant impact of holding specific life roles (i.e., being married, employed, a parent, or a caregiver) on academic persistence. This finding suggests that adult learners, regardless of their specific life circumstances, demonstrate similar levels of persistence and may have developed effective strategies to manage their various roles (Bradley & Graham, 2000).

Motivation and Satisfaction as Key Drivers

Both academic motivation and satisfaction emerged as strong, statistically significant predictors of persistence.

- **Motivation:** Higher levels of academic motivation accounted for 18% of the variability in academic persistence ($R^2 = .18$, $p < .001$). This confirms that fostering a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is crucial for this population (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- **Satisfaction:** Academic satisfaction was an even stronger predictor, accounting for 21% of the variability in persistence ($R^2 = .21$, $p < .001$). This underscores the importance of positive interactions with faculty and program relevance in retaining adult students (Tinto, 1993).

The Power of Support and the Strain of Conflict

The study reinforced the importance of an adult learner's personal ecosystem.

- **Microsystem Support:** Perceived family support was a significant positive predictor of academic persistence ($b = .23$, $p < .001$).

- **Mesosystem Conflict:** Conflict between academic and work responsibilities had a statistically significant negative relationship with academic persistence ($R^2 = .09$, $p < .001$), highlighting the need for institutional flexibility (Gopalan et al., 2019).

Student-Voiced Needs Qualitative analysis revealed that the biggest challenges faced by adult learners were a lack of time, financial pressure, and balancing work commitments. Their most frequent recommendations were for more targeted financial assistance, greater flexibility in course access (including online and varied scheduling options), and a more compassionate culture of support from faculty and staff.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirms that to effectively serve the growing population of adult undergraduates, institutions must look beyond traditional retention models. While adult learners are resilient, their success is significantly tied to their motivation, satisfaction, and the support they receive from their immediate environment.

Based on these findings, institutions should focus on creating a flexible, supportive, and motivating ecosystem by:

1. **Enhancing Flexibility:** Offer more online, hybrid, and evening/weekend course options and re-evaluate inflexible policies regarding attendance and deadlines (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999).
2. **Providing Targeted Support:** Develop and clearly communicate financial aid programs, on-campus childcare services, and career counseling specifically for adult learners.
3. **Fostering a Culture of Understanding:** Implement faculty and staff development that promotes greater understanding of the unique challenges adult learners face.

4. **Creating Pathways for the Future:** Acknowledge that many adults are pursuing education for career transitions. Institutions can meet this need by implementing competency-based education (CBE), micro-credentials, and stackable programs that offer flexibility and demonstrate skills acquisition to employers (Johnstone & Soares, 2014; Oliver, 2019).

By intentionally designing programs and services that address these key areas, higher education institutions can move beyond simply enrolling adult learners to truly empowering them to persist and achieve their educational and professional goals (Kazis et al., 2007).

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Supporting Adult Learners in Higher Education

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Abstract

Adult learners have become more present within the higher education landscape during the recent decades. They bring a wealth of personal and professional experience exhibiting diverse needs and expectations in the education process. This paper draws attention to the institutional support needed in higher education specifically for adult students.

Keywords: educational support, socio-economic backgrounds, previous educational attainment, professional status, hybrid course

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Supporting Adult Learners in Higher Education

The increased presence of adult learners within the higher education institutions (HEIs) over the recent decades has challenged the accustomed image of a young, full-time student progressing directly from secondary education. Recognizing and addressing the complexity of students' identities is essential for educational institutions aiming to support their efforts. This paper presents the characteristics of adult learners, the challenges they face and approaches that HEIs can implement to better support them.

Understanding an Adult Learner in Higher Education

Adult learners in higher education – those aged above 25 – enter the education process after a period of personal or work experience bringing in various life roles and responsibilities. They may be motivated by a goal for personal growth or career change and advancement.

The terminology used to describe adult learners in HEIs has evolved alongside their growing participation. In the late 1980s, the OECD (OECD, 1987) introduced the term 'non-traditional student', initially referring to adult learners in HEIs. Over time, the domain of this term expanded to include students from diverse backgrounds, such as immigrant populations, first generation students, working-class individuals and academically underprepared students, which was aligned with the global trend of widening access to higher education (Brennan, 2004). Jarvis (1999) further contributed by using the term 'mature students', emphasizing their advanced life stage and more evolved biographies. Jarvis argued that institutions need to adapt their approaches to meet the specific needs of this group in order to improve access and provide meaningful learning opportunities.

While the term 'non-traditional student' has been disputed as marginalizing and implying deviation from a norm (cf., Spencer et al., 2025), a more acceptable recent term 'post-traditional students' (Soares, 2013; Spencer et al., 2023) reflects the complexity and

plurality of a student identity. Post-traditional students may follow irregular educational paths, take breaks in their studies or engage in part-time or online learning.

One of the defining features of adult learners is their heterogeneity and this holds true also for higher education contexts. Their personal, socio-economic backgrounds, previous educational attainment and current professional status all contribute to the complexity of their educational journeys.

However, there are certain commonalities based on which, Müller et al. (2015) have defined five broad groups of adult learners in HEIs, which can be mutually overlapping:

1. Late learners – adults aged 25 and older who pursue higher education later in life
2. Vocational learners – those with vocational education or work experience prior to entering post-secondary or higher education
3. Alternative learners – students engaged in learning formats different from traditional contact studies, such as distance or blended learning
4. Employed learners – those who work full-time or part-time while studying
5. Caregiving learners – those balancing study with family or caregiving duties.

Challenges Facing Adult Students

Despite their strong motivation and commitment, adult learners often encounter barriers to success in higher education. One of the primary challenges is the mismatch between institutional structures and the realities of their lives. Traditional academic calendars, rigid course schedules and assessment methods may not accommodate those with work or family obligations. Moreover, adult students may lack adequate academic preparation or confidence in their study skills, particularly if they have been out of formal education for a longer period. More recent research (EAB, 2024) shows that institutional environments often do not fully support adult students' needs. Many institutions still operate in a way that may lead to adult learners feeling marginalized or perceived as outsiders. Additionally, adults may have financial constraints, digital skills gaps or health issues that impact their academic

performance. They often must juggle multiple roles and commitments, leading to stress and time-management challenges.

Strategies for Institutional Aupport

The presence of adult learners in higher education requires rethinking traditional pedagogical models to be more participatory, to build on learners' experiences and expand the range of learning opportunities, like part-time, online and hybrid courses that allow students to balance study with work and family responsibilities. As the principles of lifelong learning become embedded within university systems, this requires leaving youth-centered educational models and rethinking access, curriculum, pedagogical strategies, support structures and institutional flexibility. Ways of institutionally supporting adult students may include (Isanović Hadžiomerović, 2016):

- Advising and mentoring services specifically for adult learners, including academic guidance, career counseling and psychological support
- Administrative flexibility, such as rolling admissions, multiple entry points throughout the year, and lenient re-enrollment policies for students who interrupt their studies
- Adapted financial support systems, including scholarships, subsidized tuition, or work-study arrangements
- Inclusive campus culture, where adult students feel valued and integrated into the academic community, rather than treated as anomalies

By these support measures, HEIs can create cultures more sensible and open to diverse groups of students.

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The Adult Education Academy: A Joint Module Advancing Internationalisation and Professionalisation in the Field of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

As an international module of the Julius-Maximilians Universität Würzburg, the Adult Education Academy "International and Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning" welcomes around 100 participants from over 20 countries each year. Focusing on analysing international policies and theories in adult education and lifelong learning as well as using a comparative research approach, the Adult Education Academy module has been a success story over the last 13 years when it comes to bridging theory and practice in adult education.

Keywords: comparative adult learning and education, lifelong learning, internationalisation, higher education, theory-practice transfer

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The Adult Education Academy: A Joint Module Advancing Internationalisation and Professionalisation in the Field of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

The higher education sector plays a key role in the professionalization of the field of adult and continuing education and lifelong learning. Especially, when it comes to academic professionalization of adult educators, internationalisation strategies in higher education support the enabling actors in the field of adult education and lifelong learning not only to respond to the complex demands of a globalized world, but also to actively shape them (Boffo & Giolo, 2017).

The Adult Education Academy exemplifies how strategies of internationalisation in higher education can be effectively implemented (Beu et al., 2023). As joint module study program at the Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg is addresses master's and doctoral students as well as practitioners from the field of adult and continuing education and lifelong learning. It was initiated by the Professorship for Adult and Continuing Education (head: Regina Egetenmeyer). For 13 years it has been aiming to bring the academic sector and the practical field closer together. The module has been developed within a long-standing partnership between several European universities. However, the international network continued to grow also beyond Europe over the years and currently the Adult Education Academy has approximately 15 partners consisting of universities and associations close to the field of adult education (Helmut-Schmidt-University Hamburg, University of Pécs, Delhi University, University of Padua, University of Florence, University of Lisbon, University of Minho, University of Ljubljana, Bayero University Kano, University of Lagos, University of Belgrade, University Duisburg-Essen, International Institute of Adult & Lifelong Education, DVV International, European Association for the Education of Adults). The Adult Education Academy is financially supported by Erasmus + (European Commission) and the Human

Dynamics Centre (Faculty of Human Sciences of the Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg).

Initially, the Adult Education Academy was embedded within the ERASMUS+ strategic partnership COMPALL (Comparative Studies in Adult and Lifelong Learning) from 2015–2018 and was further developed under the follow-up project INTALL (International and Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning) from 2019-2022. The Adult Education Academy is hosted annually by the Professorship for Adult and Continuing Education and pursues multiple objectives:

- to explore and critically discuss theories and policies of international adult education;
- to equip participants with analytical tools to assess and reflect on education policy;
- to connect theoretical and empirical perspectives with practical experiences in adult education;
- to support the development of international professional networks;
- to introduce comparative adult education as a methodological approach and guide participants in conducting their own comparative studies;
- to promote academic publishing in the field of international adult education;
- to offer insights from practice through good practice presentations and field visits, placing them within a broader theoretical framework;
- to provide opportunities for academic recognition of participation through ECTS credits at participants' home universities.

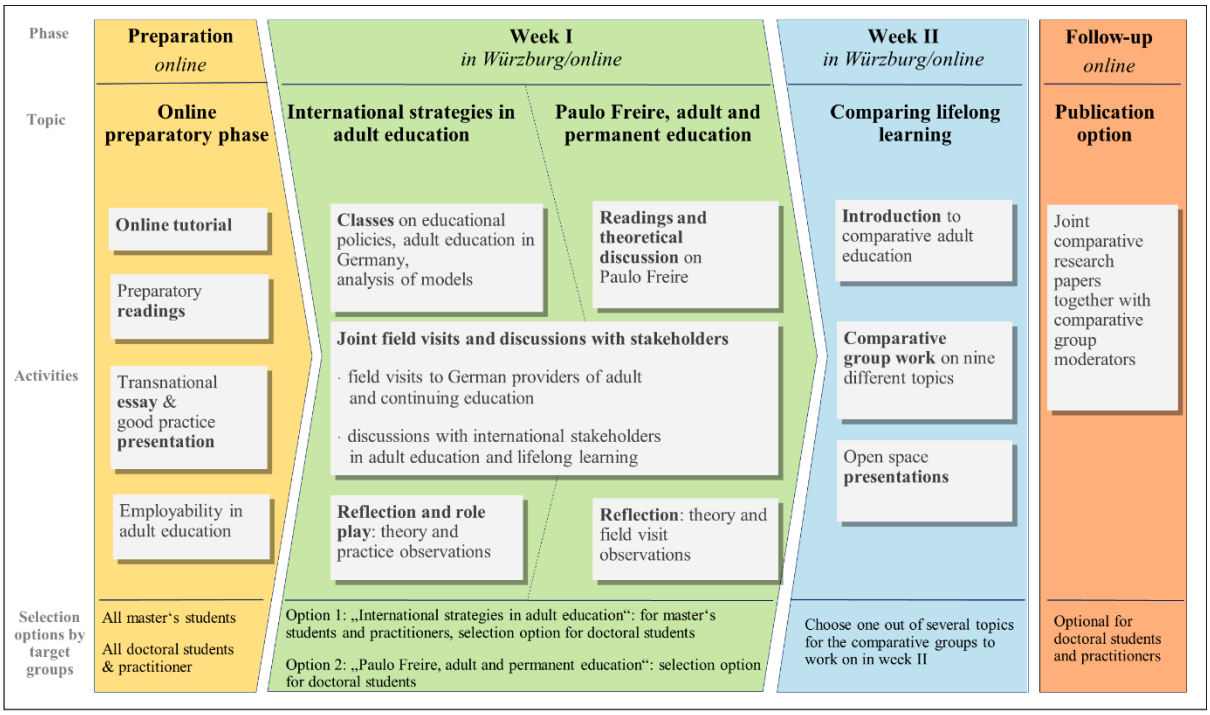
Structure of the Adult Education Academy

So far over 900 participants from more than 70 different countries have joined the module. The programme of the Adult Education Academy can be divided into three phases (see Illustration 1). Starting with an individualised online **preparatory phase** from November

to January, participants gain foundational knowledge on the topics of the Adult Education Academy. This phase is composed of weekly self-directed learning packages and online meetings featuring lectures and reflection sessions.

Illustration 1

Phases of the Adult Education Academy



Note: Figure from University Würzburg – Professur für Erwachsenenbildung/Weiterbildung, 2023, p. 4.

The main part of the programme is a **two-week intensive phase** on-campus at the Universität Würzburg, focusing on lectures, workshops, field visits, and collaborative research. With the changed requirements during the corona pandemic, the possibility of completing the module completely online developed after two exclusively online years of implementation. The two-week intensive phase is implemented since then in a hybrid mode, offering participants who cannot come to Würzburg because of personal reasons for example, the possibility to still profit from the Adult Education Academy (Danquah et al., 2023). During the first week of the on-campus phase, participants are divided into two groups based on their academic level and professional background. Master's students and practitioners, on

the one hand, focus on European and international education policies. They are introduced to an analytical tool designed to examine and critically assess policy on the macro, meso, and micro levels (Lima & Guimaraes, 2011). Doctoral students, on the other hand, engage in an in-depth exploration of adult education theory, with a particular focus on the work of Paulo Freire and his contributions to critical pedagogy and transformative learning. Both groups benefit from practical field visits to adult education institutions located in Würzburg and the surrounding region. These site visits are complemented by lectures and discussions with international stakeholders, including representatives from the International Council for Adult Education, the European Association for the Education of Adults, and DVV International.

During the second week**,** participants join approximately 10 small groups. Each group works on a current and relevant topic in the field of adult education, applying a comparative approach. In preparation for this phase, all participants have completed an assignment during the online preparatory phase: students have written a transnational essay on the respective topic, while practitioners have prepared a good practice presentation based on their professional experiences (Beu et al., 2023). These individual contributions serve as the empirical foundation for the group work, enabling participants to jointly develop and explore a comparative research question. By combining their diverse national and institutional perspectives, participants engage in a collaborative academic inquiry into key challenges and developments in adult education. The week culminates in a final plenary session, during which all groups present and discuss their comparative findings with the broader cohort.

The third and last phase of the Adult Education Academy is the **follow-up**. Participants have the opportunity to be part of a joint publication in a scholarly journal focusing on their comparative group work (e.g., Breitschwerdt et al., 2024; Despotovic & Popovic, 2023; Egetenmeyer, 2016; Guimaraes et al., 2022; Mikulec & Egetenmeyer, 2025). Furthermore, participants receive a “participation appreciation” and can gain academic recognition in form

of an official university examination. Several universities recognize the studies within their Master programmes.

Potentials of the Adult Education Academy

The Adult Education Academy has included a continuous evaluation process since the beginning of the module (Beu et al., 2023). This evaluation not only provides valuable feedback from participants but also supports ongoing quality development. The following selected results stem from the 2025 edition of the Adult Education Academy. Additional evaluation results from previous years can be accessed via the programme's website. In the recent evaluation of the Adult Education Academy 2025 almost 60% of the participants stated, that they have not undertaken an international study mobility prior to their participation in the Adult Education Academy 2025. Furthermore, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest rating) a mean score of 4,43 could be reached when asking the participants how they rate the improvement of their competencies in interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds because of the Adult Education Academy. Besides others, those data exemplify, that the Adult Education Academy contributes to the internationalisation in academic professionalisation in the field of adult education (Beu et al., 2023).

Against this background, it was illustrated how the Adult Education Academy has become a significant element within the higher education landscape - contributing meaningfully to both the internationalisation and the academic professionalisation of the field of adult education and lifelong learning. Yet, this is not the final stage. We see further potential in several areas that will shape the future development of the Academy. On key area of potential lies in advancing the hybrid didactical model of the Adult Education Academy. As the Adult Education Academy was successfully translated to a fully online format during the pandemic (Danquah et al., 2023), it has been carried out for three years in a hybrid setting

which allows not only for a valuable research environment, but also to explore new technical infrastructure and group dynamics. Moreover, tracking individual success stories could provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of the programme. As several former participants have already returned as moderators or even professors, we are optimistic about seeing more such developments in the years to come.

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The International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC)

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of the International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC), an Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree, on global adult learning and education. Drawing on programme data, alumni outcomes, and international collaboration, it highlights how higher education supports inclusive, intercultural, and socially responsive adult education. The programme underscores the transformative potential of international funded programmes in higher education for adult learning and education for social justice.

Keywords: higher education, adult education for social change, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree, global mobility

Author Bio

Bonnie Slade is a Professor of Adult Education for Social Change at the University of Glasgow. She explores how adult education in various contexts (workplace, higher education, community) can drive social change and empower individuals. Her interdisciplinary research spans adult education, labour studies, migration studies, gender studies, and arts-informed research. Since 2001, she has presented at over eighty national and international conferences and published in academic journals and edited books, including “Learner-Centred Education for Adult Migrants in

Europe" (Brill, 2021). She serves on several editorial boards and is the Programme Leader for the International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (Erasmus Mundus).

The International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC)

The International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC) was a two-year, full-time Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree (EMJMD), funded by the European Union. From 2016 to 2024, IMAESC was delivered by a consortium of European and international universities, including the University of Glasgow, University of Malta, Tallinn University, the Open University of Cyprus, and Maynooth University. It also collaborated with global partners such as the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (internships) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (summer school), offering students a rich, interdisciplinary, and intercultural learning experience.

As Programme Leader, I was responsible for coordinating the academic and operational aspects of the IMAESC programme. This included overseeing curriculum development, facilitating student and staff mobility, and ensuring academic coherence across partner institutions. The programme was designed to prepare graduates to address global challenges such as inequality, displacement, and climate change through adult education (Benavot *et al.,* 2022). The IMAESC curriculum integrated theory and practice, drawing from the home programmes of each partner university and delivered in English. Students undertook three mandatory mobility periods, studying in different countries to gain diverse perspectives. The pedagogical approach was rooted in critical adult education, emphasizing social justice, participatory learning, and lifelong education. Students engaged with themes such as migration, sustainability, decolonisation, and community development.

With over 150 graduates from more than 75 countries, IMAESC has cultivated a global network of adult educators working in NGOs, government agencies, international organisations, and academia. Many alumni are engaged in policy advocacy, curriculum development, and grassroots education initiatives. The programme has been shown to empower graduates, in both the Global South and North, to challenge dominant narratives and promote inclusive, context-sensitive approaches to adult learning (Slade & Dagar, 2023).

IMAESC exemplifies how higher education can support global Adult Learning and Education (ALE). It aligns with the UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), which calls for stronger international cooperation and professionalisation of adult educators. The programme also reflects the European Union's commitment to lifelong learning, social inclusion, and democratic participation, as outlined in the European Skills Agenda (Marques et al., 2020).

The Erasmus Mundus funding from the European Union was instrumental in enabling IMAESC to offer scholarships, support mobility, and foster innovation in curriculum design. This support allowed the programme to attract a diverse cohort of students and promote international collaboration in adult education.

IMAESC was a transformative journey that empowered educators and graduates to become agents of change. It demonstrated how international higher education programmes, when thoughtfully designed and adequately supported, can contribute meaningfully to the global ALE agenda. As Programme Leader, I am proud of the programme's impact in advancing adult education worldwide through the contributions of the amazing graduates.

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Universities supporting ALE in Jamaica through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition and Micro-Credentials

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Abstract

The acceleration of technological advancements, the rapid change in nearly every industry and the major shifts in nature of work are key factors that are driving an increased interest in continuing education. Within this context, to remain relevant universities once primarily focused on traditional higher education (HE) models centered on degree attainment for young adults, are increasingly repositioning themselves as key drivers of lifelong learning.

Keywords: Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), micro-credentials, tertiary education, Jamaica

Author Bio

Dr. Shermaine Barrett is the author of Chapter 5. Barrett is a Professor of Adult Education and Workforce Development at the University of Technology, Jamaica. She holds a PhD in Work and Human Resource Education from the University of Minnesota, USA and a Master's Degree in Adult Education from the Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Canada. Dr. Barrett has a strong background in academic leadership and management having served in various leadership capacities over twenty years at the University of Technology, Jamaica, where she is the current Acting Deputy President. She has served as Dean of the Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies (FELS) and Head of the School of Technical and Vocational Education (SOTAVE). Her professional experience goes beyond academia as she

has served in a number of other positions of leadership in industry and the not-for-profit sector. Barrett has served as Principal Consultant with SAMBAR Associates a training and development consulting company which she founded. She has also served on a number of local and international Boards. Currently, she is the immediate past Caribbean Vice President of the International Council for Adult education (ICAE) and the President of the Jamaican Council for Adult Education (JACAE). Professor Barrett has been invited as a speaker at various conferences, seminars and other fora, local and international; both face to face and virtual. Barrett is the author of the book "Adult Education, Social Change and Development in Post Colonial Jamaica: Investing in Human Capital." She has also authored numerous journal articles and book chapters on topics related to learning and development.

Universities supporting ALE in Jamaica through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition and Micro-Credentials

Universities, once primarily focused on traditional higher education (HE) models centered on degree attainment for young adults, are increasingly repositioning themselves as key drivers of lifelong learning. This shift reflects a growing recognition that the rigid, time-bound structure of conventional higher education is inadequate to meet the evolving educational needs of diverse populations across the lifespan. The shift echoes a moving towards the values of Adult Learning and Education (ALE), which emphasizes flexibility, relevance, and responsiveness to the changing demands of society and the labour market.

Consistent with this repositioning of university education, The Jamaican National Higher Education Policy (NHEP) outlines the government's strategic vision for a responsive, inclusive, and high-quality tertiary education system that supports national development. Central to the framework is the emphasis on expanding access, improving equity, and ensuring relevance to the labour market and lifelong learning needs of the population. The policy recognizes the role of tertiary institutions not only in academic instruction and research but also in community engagement and adult learning. It encourages institutions to develop flexible learning pathways, including part-time, online, and continuing education options, to accommodate non-traditional and adult learners. Additionally, the framework advocates for enhanced collaboration among universities, technical and vocational institutions, and other stakeholders to strengthen Jamaica's human capital and promote social inclusion (Ministry of Education and Youth, 2023)

In keeping with the strategic vision of the NHEP, universities in Jamaica have expanded their mandates beyond teaching and research to include continuing education, outreach, and community engagement. Institutions are expanding offerings to include shorter courses, micro-credentials, certificates, diplomas, and modular "laddering" pathways,

enabling adult learners to upskill flexibly. These expanded roles enable institutions to provide more accessible, inclusive, and adaptable learning opportunities that support personal development, social inclusion, and economic resilience throughout life. These are values that align with adult learning and education.

In practical ways universities in Jamaica have sought to expand access to adults via prior learning and assessment. For example, The University of Technology, Jamaica (Utech, Ja.) has established a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Unit to support individuals seeking admission to undergraduate and taught graduate programmes based on prior learning experiences, including those involving professional engagements and academic courses such as certificates or diplomas. This Unit assesses the qualifications of prospective students who do not meet the traditional entry requirements, identifies any learning gaps, and recommends appropriate bridging modules where necessary. In addition, the university is exploring the recognition of vocational qualifications and the potential for facilitating transfers from TVET education into academic programmes (Utech, Ja. n.d.). The Unit also facilitates the assessment of undergraduate students seeking to obtain credits for modules whose learning outcomes have already been met through professional engagements and/or academic certification for which credit transfers are not applicable.

The Northern Caribbean University (NCU) has implemented an examination system to accommodate mature applicants who do not meet the formal entry requirements. Applicants over the age of 25 may be granted admission based on their relevant work experience, maturity and performance on the University's Mature Age Entrance Examination. Interviews are done and recommendations from employers are evaluated for these applicants. Students accepted on this basis will be placed on one year's probation and must maintain a minimum overall GPA of 2.50. The Mature Age Examination consists of three (3) sections: English, Mathematics and a General Paper that includes Science and Current Events. This

exam is administered two times a year: Fall and Spring. Candidates may choose the one appropriate to the desired time of entry. A minimum pass mark of 60% on all three sections is required for this basis of entry (Northern Caribbean University, n.d).

At the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC) applicants to the bachelor's programmes who are without traditional matriculation requirements will are asked to submit a Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio. While applicants to Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CEMBA) and the Commonwealth Master of Public Administration (CEMPA) who are without traditional matriculation requirements are asked to submit a Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio. Applicant to their MBA Programme may be eligible for matriculation by Prior Learning Assessment if they have completed an Associate Degree and meet portfolio requirements (UCC, 2024).

Another emerging area of practice among Universities is the implementation of micro-credentials as a means by which adult learners can be certified for small volumes of learning through short courses which attests to knowledge, skills, and competencies in a specific area or field. These micro-credentials can then be stacked for matriculation into longer term programmes of study such as an associate degrees or bachelor's degrees through the university's credit banking policy.

In this regard, the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) the national quality assurance body for tertiary education in Jamaica endorsed micro-credentials at its Annual Quality Assurance in Higher Education Awareness Week Webinar in 2024 under the theme 'Empowering Higher Education Institutions to Respond to Changing Market Needs', with the subtheme, 'Enhancing recognition and lifelong learning in Jamaica: Micro credentials and beyond'. The focus of the webinar was on how tertiary institutions can implement micro-credentials in their programme selections to make their institutions more marketable and meet the greater demand for qualification globally while adhering to the UCJ's standards and

guidelines (Jamaica Information Service, 2024). This move by the UCJ paved the way for universities to develop policies and guidelines for the inclusion of micro-credentials as a part of their portfolio of academic programmes.

Conclusion

The Jamaican tertiary education sector is actively undergoing transformation to become a modern, flexible, lifelong learning ecosystem. Universities are becoming more agile and responsive to the needs of the adult population and in so doing are changing in ways that are much more supportive of the adult learning and education agenda.

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The Pivotal Role of Chulalongkorn University's Department of Lifelong Education in Advancing Adult Learning and Education in Thailand

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Abstract

This article examines the multifaceted contributions of the Department of Lifelong Education (DLE) at Chulalongkorn University to the advancement of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Thailand. It highlights the Department's diverse roles and discusses emerging directions for higher education in enhancing Thailand's lifelong learning landscape.

***Keywords*:** adult learning, lifelong education, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, adult education policy

Author Bios

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suwithida Charungkaittikul is the current full-time lecturer at Lifelong Education Department, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University and the President of the PIMA Network, an organization dedicated to fostering connections and advancing the field of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and Lifelong Learning (LLL) globally. With extensive experience in higher education and a deep commitment to lifelong learning, Suwithida has spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing educational access and quality for adult learners. Her work focuses on promoting collaborative partnerships and advocating for policies that support continuous learning for personal and societal betterment.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wirathep Pathumchareonwattana is a distinguished scholar and educator in

the field of Non-formal and Lifelong Education. He currently serves as the Head of Lifelong Education Department, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University. His research and teaching focus on the intersection of adult education, community development, and educational technology. Dr. Pathumchareonwattana has contributed significantly to academic discourse through his publications and actively participates in initiatives that promote innovative approaches to adult learning. He is committed to empowering individuals through accessible and relevant educational opportunities.

The Pivotal Role of Chulalongkorn University's Department of Lifelong Education in Advancing Adult Learning and Education in Thailand

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is vital for personal development, societal progress, and economic growth, especially in a rapidly changing world. This increasing focus on lifelong learning is driven by several key factors that are fundamentally reshaping the role of higher education institutions, particularly in Thailand.

First, demographic shifts are creating a new reality. The country's population structure is changing, with a growing number of adults and an aging population, while the number of young people entering universities is decreasing. This trend necessitates universities to broaden their focus to serve a wider age range. Furthermore, learner preferences are evolving; many individuals now perceive traditional, multi-year university degrees as too time-consuming and are instead seeking practical, skills-based education that can be directly applied to their work and daily lives. This shift aligns with the demands of the modern labor market, which increasingly emphasizes acquiring specific skills over possessing academic qualifications. The national direction also strongly supports this, with a significant push for upskilling and reskilling the workforce to adapt to technological advancements and economic changes. These macro-level shifts compel universities to adjust their educational management by adopting the principles of adult learning and education to better serve the needs of the adult population (Ministry of Education, Thailand, 2022; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2017).

In Thailand, a prominent institution at the forefront of this movement is the Department of Lifelong Education (DLE) within the esteemed Faculty of Education at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (Chulalongkorn University, 2024). As a leading academic and research center, the DLE plays a multi-faceted and indispensable role in enhancing ALE, shaping policies, fostering practitioners, and empowering learners across the

nation. Chulalongkorn University, Thailand's oldest and one of its most prestigious universities, has a long-standing commitment to academic excellence and social responsibility. The Faculty of Education has been instrumental in training generations of educators and contributing significantly to the national educational discourse. Within this faculty, the Department of Lifelong Education stands as a beacon for adult learning, recognizing that education is not merely a preparatory phase for life but an ongoing, dynamic process that spans the entire human lifespan. The DLE's comprehensive approach encompasses various strategies, from rigorous academic programs to impactful community outreach and policy advocacy, all geared towards strengthening the fabric of ALE in Thailand.

Chulalongkorn University's Department of Lifelong Education

The concept of lifelong learning has become increasingly central in the 21st century, making Adult Learning and Education (ALE) a critical component for national development and individual empowerment. In Thailand, universities play a pivotal and expanding role in driving the advancement of ALE. Beyond traditional youth education, higher education institutions are uniquely positioned as intellectual hubs, offering resources and expertise to cater to the continuous learning needs of the adult population. Their contributions span curriculum development, research, community engagement, professional capacity building, and policy influence. The following details are the main roles of the Department in enhancing ALE.

Academic Programs and Cutting-Edge Research

One of the primary roles of the DLE is its commitment to academic excellence through comprehensive degree programs for adult learning experts. These programs delve into foundational theories of adult education, instructional design, and program development, addressing contemporary issues like digital literacy, active aging, and vocational skill

development. Beyond teaching, the DLE is a vibrant hub for research, with faculty and students exploring critical issues relevant to the Thai context, such as learning needs of specific adult groups and the impact of lifelong learning on national development. The department's publications contribute significantly to the body of ALE knowledge, elevating the quality of adult education provision across the country.

Community Engagement and Outreach Initiatives

The DLE extends its influence far beyond the university campus through robust community engagement and outreach programs. Collaborating with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities, the department develops and delivers specialized training, workshops, and seminars. Examples include literacy programs for marginalized groups, vocational training for reskilling, and health literacy workshops for seniors. These projects are designed to address specific socio-economic challenges, empowering individuals with practical knowledge that improves their quality of life. By taking education directly to the public, the DLE makes lifelong learning a tangible reality for thousands of Thais who might otherwise lack access to formal learning opportunities.

Policy Advocacy and Expert Consultancy

The Department of Lifelong Education serves as a crucial knowledge resource for policymakers and various organizations. Its faculty members are frequently consulted by governmental bodies for their expertise in shaping national ALE policies and frameworks (e.g., the National adult and lifelong education development plan from the Ministry of Education, Thailand, 2022). The DLE provides evidence-based recommendations that influence the direction of adult education at a national level , ensuring that ALE remains a central component of Thailand's human development agenda. The department also offers consultancy services to other educational institutions and corporate entities, helping to disseminate the best practices and contribute to the growth of ALE.

Professional Development for Adult Educators

A critical aspect of enhancing ALE is ensuring that those who facilitate learning for adults possess the necessary skills. The DLE places a strong emphasis on continuous professional development (CPD) for adult educators and trainers. Through specialized courses and certification workshops, the department equips professionals with pedagogical approaches suited to adult learners' unique motivations, experiences, and learning styles. These programs cover topics from adult learning theories to technology integration, ensuring a high standard of instruction across various learning environments and fostering a more capable workforce of ALE professionals.

International Collaboration and Global Benchmarking

Recognizing the global nature of lifelong learning, the DLE actively engages in international collaborations. The department partners with leading universities and international organizations such as UNESCO and ASPBAE, facilitating exchange programs and joint research initiatives. This international benchmarking ensures that the DLE's own programs and research remain at the cutting edge, incorporating global perspectives while adapting them to the local context. This cross-cultural exchange helps position Thailand as a significant contributor to the global lifelong learning movement (UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, 2019).

However, at the university level, Chulalongkorn University also provides "Chula MOOC Flexi and Other Lifelong Learning Initiatives" to encourage lifelong learning. The central online platform, **Chula MOOC Flexi**, offers flexible learning options that allow learners to adapt their study schedules to their individual needs. It provides a range of courses designed to enhance digital literacy and other essential skills for the future workforce, with the added benefit that learners can accumulate credits and potentially transfer them towards general education requirements at Chulalongkorn University. This platform, Chula MOOC

Flexi, is hosted by **CU Neuron**, which promotes a learning society through its various online courses (Neuron, n.d). Beyond these platforms, the university has key collaborative initiatives like **Degree Plus**, a partnership with Skooldio Limited that provides flexible and affordable opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, using technology to connect learners with instructors and course materials (Skooldio, n.d.).

Another initiative, the **CUGS Academy**, serves as a "Lifelong Learning Ecosystem", offering a wide range of courses in diverse areas such as technology, business, and mental health, while also aiming to reduce educational inequality and align with the national credit bank system (Chulalongkorn University, n.d.). Furthermore, a dedicated **Engineering Lifelong Learning Program** is offered by the Faculty of Engineering to provide courses that directly address the changing demands of the modern workforce. These initiatives demonstrate Chulalongkorn University's commitment to providing accessible and high-quality lifelong learning opportunities for individuals seeking personal and professional growth.

Recommendation on Expanding Roles and Future Directions

While the Department of Lifelong Education at Chulalongkorn University has established itself as a cornerstone in advancing ALE, the evolving socio-economic landscape demands that higher education institutions continuously adapt and expand their roles. To further enhance adult learning and education, the DLE and similar departments must proactively address several key areas:

- **Innovation in Pedagogical Approaches and Delivery Modes:** Higher education must adopt flexible, hybrid, and online modalities, leveraging AI, virtual reality, and micro-credentials to create engaging, self-directed learning experiences.
- **Addressing Emerging Skills and Competencies:** The rapid pace of technological change necessitates a dynamic curriculum addressing future-oriented skills, including

digital literacy, "green skills," and socio-emotional competencies. Institutions must identify these emerging needs through foresight studies and industry collaborations.

- **Strengthening Industry-Academia Linkages:** To ensure relevance, institutions must deepen partnerships with industries and businesses. This includes co-designing curricula, offering work-integrated learning opportunities, and facilitating joint research to address real-world challenges.
- **Promoting Inclusivity and Equity:** Institutions have a crucial role in reaching underserved populations, including rural communities and ethnic minorities. This requires developing culturally sensitive programs, providing financial aid, and utilizing community outreach to break down barriers and ensure equitable access.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Alternative Pathways:** Many adults possess valuable skills from informal learning. Higher education institutions should expand mechanisms for the assessment and recognition of prior learning (RPL) , allowing learners to gain credits based on existing competencies and creating agile pathways for advancement.

Conclusion

The Department of Lifelong Education at Chulalongkorn University is a cornerstone in advancing Adult Learning and Education in Thailand. Through its rigorous academic programs, impactful research, extensive community engagement, and influential policy advocacy, the DLE consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to empowering individuals. By embracing innovation, addressing emerging skills, strengthening industry linkages, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing RPL mechanisms, institutions like the DLE are poised to play a transformative role in cultivating a vibrant learning culture essential for Thailand's continued progress in the 21st century. The DLE's efforts ensure education remains a lifelong journey, transforming lives and fostering a resilient nation.

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Empowering Adult Educators for the Digital Futures

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Abstract

As digital technologies reshape work and learning, the urgency to professionalize adult educators and support their continuous development has never been greater. A recent series of studies from the Institute for Adult Learning Singapore sheds light on how professionalization of adult teachers and educators can be a key catalyst in equipping adult educators with the competencies, industry alignment, and digital agility needed for the future.

Keywords: professionalization, human resources, artificial intelligence, industry, practiceships

Author Bio

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Empowering Adult Educators for the Digital Futures

Workforce development and upskilling are critical pillars of Singapore's strategy to remain competitive and inclusive in the digital age. As technology rapidly transforms industries and job roles, continuous learning is no longer optional; it is essential. Singapore's reliance on human capital, changing labour markets, and ambition to be a global innovation hub make it imperative to ensure that workers at all levels have access to timely, relevant, and future-oriented training and lifelong learning.

Within this evolving context, Singapore's training and adult education landscape is experiencing a notable shift: more educators who previously worked in private training organisations are now moving into public and in-house training providers (Chen et al., 2024). This trend signals an increasing involvement of higher education institutions and industries in the delivery of adult education and training.

Rethinking Educator Roles and Skills: The Singapore Context

This shift has profound impacts on their roles, skills and their professional identity. As "first responders" to organisational change, educators can be seen as "frontline professionals", as their role now calls for them to be among the first to react and adapt to change. Rather than serving solely as subject matter experts, educators now take on the multiple roles (Chen et al., 2024) of facilitators, mentors, designers of learning experiences, consultants, lifelong learning role models (Chen, Pavlova, & Tangen, 2024) as well as ecosystem-builders rather than solely subject matter experts. Educators' roles continue to expand in the digital futures, where they guide learners in optimising and navigating AI-driven tools, while fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning and resilience in the face of continuous change.

This shift toward hybridity reflects the growing complexity and diversity of their profession. Our study (Chen et al., 2024) found that effective adult educators need a multifaceted skill set. Technology-enabled learning skills were identified as the most critical (reported by 82.6% of the leaders from the adult education and training organisations), followed by training qualifications remain a top requirement (70.5%), pedagogical innovation (57.2%), current industry experience (50.8%), academic credentials (50.0%), and interpersonal strengths such as confidence and motivation (45.1%). Importantly, critical core skills, up-to-date industry experience, and digital fluency including AI, are now essential. These findings underscore the need for an integrated model of educator preparation, integrating pedagogical knowledge with practical industry relevance.

Industry Currency: A Pressing Concern

A significant challenge lies in ensuring that educators remain up-to-date with the changing contexts of the industries their learners work in. Alarmingly, about 60% of adult educators in Singapore do not possess current industry experience. This disconnect can hinder the relevance and impact of their teaching.

To address this, it requires a strategic focus on deepening ties between education and industry. One important strategy is fostering “dual professionals” who take on teaching or training roles alongside their primary jobs in the industries, allowing them to bring real-world expertise and industry relevance into adult training and education. Other options include incentivising ongoing professional development, facilitating industry attachments or “practiceships” for adult educators, and building knowledge-sharing networks that encourage collaboration through guest lectures, consultancy projects, and shared learning initiatives to

support educators to maintain their industry edge. Stronger partnerships between educational institutions and industry are essential to operationalize these approaches at scale.

The Rise of AI in Adult Education and Training

Across the globe, AI is rapidly becoming a mainstay in the toolbox of adult educators. According to the *International Survey on Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education, Training and Adult Learning,* a collaborative effort of 37 researchers from 22 countries led by the Institute for Adult Learning Singapore (Chen et al., forthcoming), approximately 8 in 10 adult educators internationally have already integrated AI tools into their work. Their perceptions are overwhelmingly positive: AI is seen not only as a productivity booster (as noted by 64% of respondents) but also as a catalyst for innovation in pedagogy and work satisfaction enhancement.

Yet, the survey reveals a notable gap in preparedness. Over 1/3 of educators report no training in the use of AI for educational purposes, while another 1/3 have received only basic exposure. Notably, younger educators are more likely to access advanced training, highlighting potential generational differences in AI readiness.

There is a clear demand for tailored, prompt professional development programmes to support AI adoption in adult education and training. About 8 in 10 educators surveyed expressed a need for professional development in AI, with nearly 30% indicating that such training is needed within the next three months. The implications are profound: educational institutions must act proactively to build AI literacy and support systems, particularly for older educators and those with limited prior exposure.

Empowering Adult Educators for the Future

The findings from these studies illuminate several key strategies for advancing the professionalization of adult educators:

1. **Diversify educator roles and recognitions**

   Traditional notions of trainers and educators must evolve. Adult education and training professionals now require hybrid competencies in pedagogical innovation, industry currency and technological fluency. Institutions should review and revise recruitment, recognition, and reward frameworks to reflect this diversity of contributions.

2. **Strengthen education-industry connection**

   Embedding industry engagement into adult educator development is essential. Educational institutions and industry should work together to support adult educators with both pedagogical expertise and industry currency to embrace new models of training, partnership, and innovation.

3. **Prioritize targeted professional development**

   Professional development programmes for adult educators should be responsive to their changing roles and new demands from the educational institutions and learners, particularly in areas like AI, digital tools, and career pivoting acumen. Micro-credentialing, work-integrated learning, and peer-based models for education development could ensure flexibility and inclusivity.

4. **Build AI capabilities and confidence**

   Educators need both foundational and advanced training to harness AI ethically and effectively. Educational institutions should develop clear frameworks and support mechanisms to scaffold AI adoption and experimentation.

The professionalization of adult educators is a strategic imperative for nations seeking to build resilient, future-ready workforces. As Singapore's experience shows, the future of adult learning depends not just on what we teach, but on who and how teaches it. Let us empower educators not just to keep pace with change, but to lead it.

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Teacher training for literacy and adult education in Brazil: The beginning of a new era?

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Abstract

Brazil continues to face the challenge of relatively low levels of completion of compulsory education but has never implemented a National Policy for the training of adult educators. The Institutions of Higher Education which have been noticeably absent from this field of training have now been charged with the responsibility of implementing the new National Pact launched by the Ministry of Education in 2024.

***Keywords**:* Adult literacy and education; National Pact; Training programmes.

Author Bio

Timothy Ireland was professor of Adult Education and Human Rights, Citizenship and Public Policy at the Federal University of Paraiba, in João Pessoa, Brazil until his retirement in 2023. He is currently coordinator of the UNESCO Chair in Youth and Adult Education and vice-president of PIMA. He is a member of the Brazilian National Commission for Literacy and Youth and Adult Education (CNAEJA) and Vice-Coordinator of the National Training Programme for Adult Educators "Pacto EJA UFPB".

Teacher training for literacy and adult education in Brazil: The beginning of a new era?

The relationship between adult education and institutions of higher education in Brazil has never been a particularly easy or productive one. One may speculate why and clearly there exist different explanations which attempt to understand this lack of rapport. One of the most obvious is that institutions of higher education are for the elite and adult education is for the poor. ALE is not at the cutting edge of science and therefore does not deserve much attention. However, there is one exception to this lack of interest and that is in the field of university extension. Much of what goes on in the field of university extension is adult education although it may not go by that name. Even still, university extension does not have the prestige of research. There is a saying in Brazilian universities that those who do not want to research, teach and those who do not want to research or teach do university extension. It is the poor cousin of the university tripod. A quick look at educational statistics might suggest that this lack of interest is misguided (or short sighted) given the relationship between education and human and social development in general.

In this short piece, I propose to sketch in the dramatic context which the data reveals with reference to literacy, functional illiteracy and enrolment in school-based adult education and as mirrored by the drastic cuts in budget for ALE over the last decade. I then intend to outline some of the recent experiences in the field of ALE before arriving at the focus of this text which is the launching and subsequent implementation of the National Pact for the Overcoming of Illiteracy and the Qualification of ALE by the Ministry of Education in 2024 in partnership with three institutions of higher education, and in particular that part in which I am involved as

coordinator of the UNESCO Chair in Youth and Adult Education in partnership with the Federal University of Paraíba, in the northeast of Brazil.

Most recent statistics indicate that 5,3% of the Brazilian population over 15 years of age, that is around 9,3 million people, are illiterate. More dramatic than this is the fact that 65 million have not concluded basic education (primary and secondary education). And consequently, are highly unlikely ever to enter the hallowed precincts of a university. An equally preoccupying trend shows that between 2018 and 2023 enrolments in adult school education fell by 27%. This reduction in enrolments was mirrored in the budget for ALE which in 2022 represented 3% of what was spent in 2012, or about 0,04% of the national budget for education.

In the last 20 years, the 'golden' age of ALE began in 2003, the beginning of the first Lula Government and ended around 2014 towards the end of the first Rousseff government. Perhaps the most notable investment was in the field of literacy with the Brazil Literate Programme (PBA), initiated in 2003 which in 2005 registered 1.900.000 enrolments. Although never officially extinguished, during the period between 2018 and 2022 it received practically no federal resources. Whilst there were several other important initiatives including PROJOVEM directed at the population between 18 and 29 years of age and PROEJA whose objective was to integrate ALE with professional qualification, PBA could be called the flagship initiative. Whilst recognising the importance of the programme, it is important to point to its principal shortcomings, the lack of a training policy for literacy teachers and the difficulty of articulation between literacy and its continuity in Adult Education. A further indicator of the renewed interest in ALE was the fact that the Brazilian Government hosted CONFINTEA VI in 2009, in Belém do Pará.

After six years of increasingly right-wing governments, in which ALE was decimated, President Lula was elected for a third term in 2022. After a difficult first year due to the lack of budgetary allocations, in 2024 the Ministry of Education launched the National Pact for the Overcoming of Illiteracy and the Qualification of ALE whose focus was the training of literacy and adult education teachers in partnership with three Institutions of Higher Education – a recognition that without a concerted effort to train teachers other investments would be innocuous. In this division of responsibilities, the IFFAR assumed responsibility for preparing and implementing training programmes for primary school teachers (the second stage from 5th to 9th year) and for secondary education. A small group of staff coordinated by the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro was entrusted with the task of designing and implementing programmes for teachers and prison officers working in the prison system. The Federal University of Paraiba and the UNESCO chair were entrusted with designing and implementing a training programme for the trainers of teachers in the first four years of primary education and popular literacy workers without formal pedagogical training working in the revived Brazil Literate Programme. Within the Ministry of Education, this complex operation was coordinated by the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Youth and Adult Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI) which had been summarily extinguished by the former government.

Evidence suggests that the UFPB was chosen to develop and implement this part of the National Pact based on at least four factors. The University has a long history in adult education including offering the first master's degree in Adult Education in Latin America. It is one of the few universities which includes more than a precursory discussion of ALE in its undergraduate pedagogy course. In addition, it has a strong tradition in university extension including the Zé Peão School Project offering literacy

and continuing education to construction workers in classrooms located on building sites. And finally, it hosts the UNESCO Chair in Youth and Adult Education.

The UFPB is charged with designing and offering two courses as well as developing the necessary teaching materials. The first course is designed for the in-service training of regional trainers with the objective of preparing them to consolidate the training of literacy workers, both primary school teachers and popular educators. The second course foresees the offering of an auto instructional distance education course for educators with the aim of contributing to their training as adult educators. The project started in December 2024 and will conclude at the end of 2026.

With presidential elections in the coming year, the future is uncertain. However, the hope is that what is at present a national pact involving all levels of government – federal, state and municipal, will become a national policy for the training of teachers in the field of adult education and literacy and that institutions of higher education will awaken to their responsibility to engage with the education of this marginalised sector of the population.

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The Role of the University in the Professional Development of Adult Educators and the Development of Adult Education in Slovenia

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Abstract

This manuscript presents the role of the university in the professional development of adult educators and the development of adult education in the historical and contemporary context in Slovenia. In addition, the latest developments of universities introducing lifelong learning as a fourth pillar are briefly discussed.

Keywords: adult education, professional development of adult educators, Slovenia, university

Author Bio

Borut Mikulec is Associate professor for adult education in the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. His fields of research are: comparative adult and continuing education, the role of international organisations in education policy, adult education policies, professional development of adult educators, and citizenship education. He is a member of international associations in the field of adult education (ESREA, ISCAE) and since 2017 editor in chief of the scientific journal Studies in Adult Education and Learning.

The Role of the University in the Professional Development of Adult Educators and the Development of Adult Education in Slovenia

Historical Context: Andragogy as a Science and Andragogue as a Professional

From the historical perspective, professional development of adult educators in Slovenia can be traced back to the late 1950s, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia (Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia until 25 June 1991 when declared its independence). The training of the non-qualified adult population, mainly to meet the needs of the economy, and the growth of institutional structures of adult education (AE) created a need for trained adult educators. Consequently, the systematic training of adult educators was first established at the People's and Worker's Universities (1957-59), which organised professional conferences, lectures, workshops and summer and winter schools, with the aim of training adult educators (Krajnc, 2011; Savićević, 1999).

Moreover, in the 1960s, Yugoslavian universities opened the door to systematic theoretical and empirical research in the field of AE and introduced AE study programmes on 'andragogy' at the Faculties of Arts. The first course on andragogy was introduced by the faculty of Belgrade (Serbia) in 1963, with another appearing in Ljubljana (Slovenia) a decade later in 1972, at the Department for Pedagogy of the Faculty of Arts. In Slovenia, andragogy was introduced as a subject in higher education in 1972. From 1976 on, andragogy was one of the three possible fields of study in the study programme 'Pedagogy'; in 1993, an independent study university programme 'Andragogy' was established (Krajnc, 2011; Savićević, 1999).

Because of greater social demand and a helpful social climate, a new profession called 'andragogue' emerged. An andragogue refers to an adult educator qualified to work in the fields of education, culture, economics and the socio-political sphere and able to organise educational processes, prepare programmes and plans, provide counselling and direct and

evaluate educational and cultural work—but not to teach one specific subject. Yugoslav, and thus Slovene, experience therefore points to the 'mutual interdependence of andragogy as a science and the andragogue as a professional' (Savićević, 1999, p. 131). Although this approach was not without constraints, as other professions were also 'covering' the field of AE, the main outcome of this process was the awareness that people working in the field of adult education needed to acquire a certain amount of andragogical knowledge. For this reason, andragogy became one of five obligatory courses in Slovenia in 1981 for graduates of higher education, who are required to possess 'pedagogical and andragogical education' to enter their professions (Krajnc, 2011).

Contemporary Context: Universities and the Professional Development of Adult Educators

AE in Slovenia is one of the areas where the educational requirements for professionals—these being defined as teachers, organisers of AE, counsellors in AE and 'other professionals'—working in formal and non-formal educational programmes for adults, financed by public funds, are regulated by the law. The obligatory conditions that adult educators working in formal and non-formal AE programmes must fulfil are as follows: (i) mastery of the Slovene language; (ii) education acquired through master study programs; (iii) 'pedagogical-andragogical education' (i.e., 60 ECTS training to acquire pedagogical and andragogical competence, including pedagogical, psychological, andragogical, general and specialised didactic knowledge, and pedagogical or andragogical practice; (iv) successful completion of a professional examination in the field of education; that is, graduates who finish higher education studies are obliged to complete a traineeship lasting from 8 to 10 months before employment (Bela Knjiga, 2011; ZIO, 2018).

In Slovenia, the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts offers doctoral and master study programmes on Andragogy (AE), while subjects covering AE can be studied at a

bachelor level in the study programme ‘Pedagogy and Andragogy’. The University of Primorska, Faculty of Education offers a master study programme entitled ‘Andragogy’, while subjects covering AE can be studied at a bachelor level in the study programme ‘Educational Sciences/Pedagogy’. Furthermore, AE as a subject can also be studied through the first- and second-cycle study programme of ‘Pedagogy’ at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts and through some other study programmes as well (e.g., Organisation and Management, Human Resources). Therefore, two out of three Slovenia’s public universities offer study programmes at the master’s level and all three offer AE subjects at the bachelor’s level. Study programmes are aimed at full-time students and prepared in line with the Bologna requirements that took force in 2009. Broadly speaking, master’s programmes in andragogy equip students with generic competencies in the humanities and social sciences, as well as with professional competencies that enable them to comprehend the relations between various AE phenomena and processes, social and cultural environments, and the characteristics and expectations of individual adults (Mikulec, 2019; Mikulec & Kovšca, 2023).

Current Developments at Universities: Lifelong Learning and Micro-Credentials

From 2023 and as part of the mechanism of the European Union (EU) Recovery and Resilience Plan, three public universities have introduced a fourth pillar’ of their educational offer, namely lifelong learning (LLL), which, in addition to the three traditional pillars (undergraduate, master's and doctoral studies), broadens access to university offers to a wider public. This fourth pillar is supported by a new institutional infrastructure, i.e. the Lifelong Learning Centres, which provide information and support to faculties, companies and organisations in designing LLL programmes and shorter education and training courses for micro-credentials (Univerza v Ljubljani, 2025; Univerza v Mariboru, 2025; Univerza na primorskem, 2025). A micro-credential is a public document that records the learning outcomes that a person has achieved in short-term education and training and is assessed

using ECTS. Short-term education and training courses to obtain micro-credentials in the form of a public document are designed to acquire specific knowledge, skills and competences that meet social, personal, cultural or labour market needs and are based on quality assurance. Although they were developed as part of pilot projects, it seems that micro-credentials have a bright future in higher education despite criticism from the academic community (e.g. commercialisation of universities, marketisation of higher education, lack of stable funding), as micro-credentials have been included in the new Higher Education Act (Republika Slovenija, 2025), which is currently being adopted. However, it remains to be seen whether, by widening access to a wider public through LLL opportunities and micro-credentials, the university will achieve a greater democratisation of higher education and become a visible public and not-for-profit provider of AE.

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ALE in Higher Education: 'Fighting for the world we want'

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Abstract

Universities are important platforms for resistance and narrative power. I draw on my years at University of Western Cape (UWC), South Africa, to illustrate the role of radical traditions of adult learning and education, working in 'in-between-spaces' of higher education institutions, to 'fight for a world we want'.

Keywords**:** in-between-spaces**,** radical adult learning and education**,** authoritarianism, struggle for democracy

Author Bio

Shirley Walters. I am an emerita professor of adult and continuing education at the University of Western Cape (UWC), South Africa, where I have worked for forty years towards more just, egalitarian futures. I was founding directors of the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) and the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL). I am the former PIMA president 2019-2025.

ALE in Higher Education: 'Fighting for the world we want'

Universities are important platforms for resistance and narrative power. I draw on my years at University of Western Cape (UWC), South Africa, to illustrate the importance of radical traditions of adult learning and education within higher education towards 'a world we want'.

A vignette: It is 12 October 2010, and the foyer of UWC's library auditorium is crowded with over 250 students, staff, and the public, milling about, eating Tanzanian delicacies which are served by Tanzanian students in traditional dress. The strains of a guitarist lure people into the auditorium, emblazoned with cloths from around Africa; large posters of 'Mwalimu' (teacher) Julius Nyerere exclaim: "Adult educators cannot be politically neutral"; "Adult educators' work is to activate people and arouse their consciousness"; "The purpose of education is liberation of people from restraints and limitations of ignorance and dependency"; "African nationalism is meaningless, dangerous, anachronistic if it is not also pan-African." This event is promoting a pan-African sensibility.

Each participant is handed a pack of printed cards as a memento bearing quotes from Julius Nyerere, other well-known radical educators like Paolo Freire, and speakers who have previously led the Vice-Chancellor's Annual Julius Nyerere Lecture on Lifelong Learning – all of whom were progressive activist-scholars, who emphasised that 'another world is possible'. Tina Schouw, a local feminist musician, performs a beautiful rendition of a song written especially for the occasion, 'Open up your heart,' in which she pays tribute to Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela and many other prominent women and men who have been 'freedom fighters.' In Africa the role of critical adult learning and education are integral to struggles for freedom. The speaker questions what and whose knowledge counts in a global knowledge economy riven by 'knowledge wars'. Intense and lively discussion follows on

local/global concerns, affirming the importance of African scholarly contributions to local/global developments. (Walters, 2018)

This is an example of a small, disruptive initiative, imbued with understandings of feminist popular education in its form and content, that embraces a seriously playful pedagogy challenging the hierarchal, patriarchal institutional culture, bringing university and broader communities together. It was not part of the formal programme but found in the 'in between spaces' of the university.

'In-Between-Spaces'

Ecologists describe a stream and the sides of a stream, where the water creates eddies between and over the rocks and the verges, which allow for different aquatic life to flourish. These areas are less predictable and more turbulent. Both the mainstream and the playful, disruptive eddies are essential for the flourishing of different life forms that inhabit the stream. This metaphor describes in-between-spaces within institutions where qualities of informality, playfulness, turbulence, disruption, unpredictability and relationality exist. These are analogous to the pedagogies of feminist popular education (Hargreaves et al 2025). These spaces exist in the interstices of formal programmes, structures, or funding regimes; they are contested; they are important spaces for exploring other knowledges and ways of knowing outside of dominant mainstream knowledge discourses; and they can and do impact the quality of institutional cultures and social relations within the organisation. Much life in universities happens in these spaces, from student movements, campaigns for decolonisation of curricula, creation of food sovereignty hubs, community engagement projects, street theatre, public education, and much more.

A small caveat, I use 'in-between spaces' with caution. I do not subscribe to the notion that organisational or teaching/learning activities can be neatly compartmentalised or held in discrete containers. Rather, I follow Tara Fenwick's (2010) argument that real

learning processes are complex; they are hybrid, in-determinate, deal with fluid boundaries and messy objects, and their status of formalisation cannot be described through static and subjective definitions of informal, non-formal and formal learning. 'In-between-spaces' permeate the formal programmes and vice versa.

'Fighting for the world we want'

The world and universities are not the same as they were a few years ago. The global order is fractured – the post-World War 11 consensus of liberal constitutionalism is seriously challenged. Seventy percent of the world is now living under authoritarian rule, according to Maria Ressa, the Nobel peace prize laureate. (Ressa, 6 March 2025) She describes the disturbing rise of fake news, where it's difficult to tell fact from fiction. Without fact-based shared reality, it's not possible to have trust. As someone who has lived through the rise of dictatorship in the Philippines, she argues for the urgent need for us to 'fight for the world we want'. As someone brought up in an authoritarian racist regime in South Africa, who spent much of my life as part of the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist democratic future, I can't agree more!

Another disruptor is the pervasive use of social media and the rapid rise of AI which challenge understandings of what and whose knowledge counts when and where, with the authority and roles of professors no longer certain. Higher education is facing existential questions about the meaning of teaching, learning and research, all of which require our urgent attention.

The deep changes in the global order are happening when planetary limits have been reached and the very existence of future life on Earth is questioned. There are those who ask with justification, if higher education is not exploring the kinds of knowledge systems required to repair the Earth, how can it justify its existence? Higher education institutions

cannot be neutral in this instance – how does adult learning and education position itself in these times?

Adult Learning and Education

Radical adult learning and education is driven by participatory, democratic, egalitarian commitments in support of justice for the majority world who are on the margins of society. It is concerned with deep transformation, working against the strong surge towards militarised, authoritarian futures. Higher education institutions have long histories of resistance. One such example is UWC which was intimately part of the anti-apartheid struggle and an intellectual and political force in the ideological push towards a new democratic order. The Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at UWC played an active role in bringing stories to light which placed working class, black women and men at the centre of a new democratic narrative. (Matiwana et al, 1989) Much of this work was in the 'in-between-spaces' on campus and in communities.

Higher education institutions are important platforms for resistance and narrative power. The work in the 'in-between-spaces' is a critical part of disruptive political, pedagogical and organisational transformation where ALE praxis can flourish.

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The DECODE Knowledge Project. Co-Construction, Decolonization and Transformation. Producing Actionable Knowledge for the Challenges of our Times

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Abstract

The DECODE Knowledge Project, co-led by Dr. Rajesh Tandon and Dr. Budd Hall under the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, responds to urgent global climate and sustainability challenges. Through community-based participatory research (CBPR), DECODE foregrounds Indigenous, local, and experiential knowledge systems often overlooked by mainstream academia. Anchored in knowledge democracy and guided by a decolonial and gender-sensitive lenses, DECODE has supported six global case studies that illustrate how arts-based, land-based, and dialogic methods deepen community resilience and enrich collective responses to the climate crisis. This article reflects on key lessons from the project, including the co-construction of knowledge, recognition of women's leadership, and ethical partnership protocols. As the project moves into its second phase, DECODE affirms the transformative power of grounded community knowledge in shaping a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

Keywords: indigenous knowledge, higher education, transformation, decolonizing knowledge, co-construction of knowledge, social responsibility, climate resilience, actionable knowledge

Bios

Dr. Rajesh Tandon: Dr. Rajesh Tandon is the Founder-President of PRIA and Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. An internationally recognized leader in participatory research and adult learning, he has advanced inclusive knowledge systems by promoting community engagement, democratic governance, and social accountability. Dr. Tandon played a key role in shaping India's UGC Guidelines on Social Responsibility in Higher Education (2022) and teaches globally. He has authored numerous- essential works on participatory research, civil society, and higher education's role in democratic and inclusive knowledge creation. He co- leads the DECODE project.

Dr. Budd Hall: Dr. Budd Hall is Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, Canada, and Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. He is a global leader in adult education and participatory research and served as Secretary-General of the International Council for Adult Education (1979–1991). In December of 2022, the Government of Canada awarded him with 'Order of Canada' for his contributions to community-based research, advancing knowledge building and research capacity globally. Dr. Hall also serves as the founding director of UVic's office of community-based research, Canada's first such office on a university campus. He co-leads the DECODE project.

Ms. Saanya Sodhi: Saanya is the Coordinator of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Her research interests lie at the intersection of political ecology, activism studies, and epistemological justice in knowledge production.

The DECODE Knowledge Project. Co Construction, Decolonization and Transformation. Producing Actionable Knowledge for the Challenges of our Times

Our world today is facing multiple crises, with climate change at the forefront. Climate scientists and communities globally are reporting severe environmental and social impacts resulting from drastic climate changes. Reports from the United Nations (UN, 2015) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) reveal alarming conditions worldwide, warning that the sustainability of humanity is no longer guaranteed. In response, the UN has called for new knowledge and transformative partnerships to cope with this challenge (UN, 2015). The DECODE project is a response to this call.

The DECODE Knowledge Project is a community-based participatory research initiative aimed at enhancing the role of locally grounded, contextualised, and actionable knowledge in addressing climate change. Led by the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, the project engages global networks of community and Indigenous-led research practitioners. DECODE seeks to draw and share lessons from these initiatives and their approaches to addressing these modern challenges and developing climate resiliency.

DECODE builds on the foundational work of Dr. Rajesh Tandon and Dr. Budd Hall, who conceptualized “knowledge democracy” to challenge the hegemony of specific academic paradigms. Their work emphasizes that knowledge is created in many ways- in local languages, through oral traditions, embodied practices, and artistic expression. DECODE celebrates this plurality, engaging community-led research practices like arts-based inquiry, land-based learning, and dialogic storytelling.

Rooted in the foundational idea that “knowledge was always systematized,” the project asks vital questions: What knowledge matters? Whose knowledge counts? And how is knowledge produced and shared? Through this, DECODE pursues three overarching

objectives. First, to support the **systemization of knowledge** to deepen collective understandings of how to address contemporary challenges, highlighting how local communities are facing these challenges by drawing on their knowledge and cocreating solutions. The second objective is to contribute to the **decolonization of knowledge** and transform globally how community knowledge and solutions are recognized, co-constructed, and shared. Thirdly, the project is committed to **open knowledge sharing,** through global peer learning opportunities, and open-access platforms that advance knowledge democracy.

In its first phase, DECODE conducted six case studies across the world- exploring how communities are addressing climate resilience through their knowledge systems. These studies included-

1) **Malaysia**: A collaboration between Sarawak's Apong harvesters and UNIMAS supported the modernization of traditional production, with hybrid stoves- preserving local knowledge and mangroves while boosting the Penuak community's economic and social empowerment.
2) **India:** Research in the Himalayan Region examined how traditional knowledge and sustainable practices were used to transform wild edibles into high-value products, empowering women and enhancing climate resilience.
3) **Uganda:** Gulu University partnered with Acholi women to integrate Indigenous herbal knowledge into the University curriculum (medicine certificate program), bridging academic and traditional knowledge systems.
4) **Colombia:** Embera, Yanakona, and Pastos women led efforts to reclaim forest knowledge, underscoring the value of native biodiversity, territory, and Indigenous stewardship.

5) **Inuit Arctic Regions:** 'Nanuk Narratives' captured intergenerational Inuit knowledge and stewardship of polar bears in the Davis Strait, highlighting cultural ties and ecological change through storytelling and film.
6) **Canada (British Columbia):** During the COVID-19 pandemic, research teams collaborated with Tŝilhqot'in and Qwelmínte Secwépemc First Nations through workshops grounded in Indigenous methods, exploring how the pandemic intensified climate change impacts on community health and well-being.

By centering local peoples' knowledge, these initiatives address pressing environmental challenges while fostering long-term resilience by empowering local actors. The comparative analysis of these studies has underlined critical insights of community-based research. Centralizing these is imperative for fostering true social responsibility in higher educational institutions.

The primary lesson is that community-led research, highlighting multiple knowledge systems holds immense potential for generating impactful, actionable and locally grounded solutions for sustainability. A second key lesson is that community and indigenous knowledge are not in opposition to academic knowledge and meaningful collaboration can lead to impactful research outcomes.

DECODE's research highlighted that Indigenous knowledge is deeply spiritual, viewing the environment as a living, sacred whole. This knowledge is more than the know-how and is embedded in a spiritual worldview and ancestral ties, and guides conservation through respect, reciprocity, and spiritual care. For example, in Colombia, Embera and Yanacona elders opened the research process with harmonization rituals to seek permission from ancestral spirits. This case study showed that conventional understanding of terms like "environment" or "climate change" fail to reflect Indigenous understandings of 'territory', which is viewed as a holistic, living universe- encompassing all beings, human and spiritual,

and rooted in deep relationality. This affirms that conservation here, is not just ecological but spiritual, and any meaningful collaboration must honour this.

Crucially, the research methodology matters. DECODE found that arts-based and culturally grounded methods, such as theatre, storytelling, and community mapping- offer inclusive and respectful entry points for community engagement. These help create "safe spaces" for marginalized voices to participate fully in the research process by building trust, fostering dialogue, and respecting diverse ways of being that cannot be understood through mainstream methods.

Furthermore, the practical needs of the community triggers new knowledge production and defines the research question. When institutions co-construct research with communities, rooted in mutual respect and shared goals, they generate knowledge that is relevant and impactful. For such collaboration to be genuine, ethical considerations- like data ownership, benefit sharing, and co-governance- must be addressed transparently, from the outset of the project. Even in the absence of formal institutional arrangements, community-driven protocols can play a crucial role.

Additionally, it is beneficial to employ multiple forms of knowledge dissemination, academic and popular, to reach a diversity of stakeholders. The Arctic project especially highlighted this. Guided by Indigenous protocols and co-designed with the community, it included a community-informed research methods course and led to ‘Nanuk Narratives’, an Inuit-led docuseries. Blending academic and multimedia channels proved vital for honouring Indigenous knowledge and reaching broad audiences.

One central lesson outlined by all the case studies- is the transformative power of women’s knowledge. The India, Colombian and Ugandan case studies powerfully affirmed how women’s leadership is key to sustainable and resilient futures- particularly when their knowledge is acknowledged and legitimized. The lessons learnt from the first phase of the

project critically underscore the imperative and responsibility of higher education institutions to actively integrate and support community-driven knowledge and leadership in their research and engagement efforts to genuinely address the climate crisis and advance sustainability solutions.

Through its novel approach and methodology, the DECODE project questions how to better understand diverse knowledge cultures, participate in open knowledge sharing, and learn from communities and Indigenous-led initiatives to develop climate resiliency. The project has powerfully demonstrated the transformative potential of community-based and Indigenous knowledge systems and has deepened collective understandings of how multiple epistemologies can be shared and utilized to confront local climate realities. It has advanced tangible, contextually rooted solutions and reinforced the value of participatory, culturally grounded research in generating meaningful solutions to complex problems.

Building on the lessons from its initial phase, the project is now poised to commence its second phase, expanding to new contexts in Bolivia, Côte d'Ivoire, Brazil, and Tunisia, further deepening its global commitment to foster community-led actionable knowledge. As the project progresses, data will continue to be compiled, analyzed, and shared, open access, to expand knowledge democracy efforts.

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UNESCO Chair Global Adult Education at University of Malta: Promoting ALE on Global Scale

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the work carried out during the first cycle of the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education which the present writer holds. It reveals accomplishments in resuscitating the Adult Education Flagship Zjournal Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal, in editing a book series on International Issues in Adult Education, in running the University of Malta's first online MA course in Adult Education, in developing numerous webfests on various adult educators and momentous events in the field, and in running three annual seminars and two biennial conferences, the latter two both held at the University of Malta.

Keywords: webfests, conferences, journal, book series, seminars.

Author Bio

Peter Mayo is Professor and UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education at the University of Malta, is Honorary Professor at the University of Nottingham and is GPS Schokar, top 0.5% for Lifelong Education and Pedagogy. He is the author of Culture, Power and Education (Routledge, 2025) and ' Southern ' Europe and Beyond in the Mediterranean Critical Essays on Adult Learning and Education (De Gruyter-Brill, in press).

UNESCO Chair Global Adult Education at University of Malta:

Promoting ALE on Global Scale

The first cycle of the University of Malta ‘s tenure of the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education (UNITWIN programme), with India's University of Kalyani as partner, draws to a close end of December 2025. Ever since its inception in September 2021, this UNESCO Chair in has been actively engaged in promoting Adult Education globally, in keeping with its remit. It revived *Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal*, following its lengthy hiatus, for which the University department housing this Chair is mainly and financially responsible, with support (translation of *Convergence* article abstracts into French and Spanish) from the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). All issues, since the Chair revived the journal, are available on this website: CONVERGENCE - An International Journal of Adult Education

In addition, the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education has been organising numerous other activities. This Autumn/Fall saw the publication, in paperback, of the book of papers from the May 2023 International Conference on Critical Education in general (ICCE XV) which included International Critical Adult Education and Learning. The conference was organised and hosted by the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education and the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education with funds and organisational efforts shared by these two entities within the University of Malta’s Faculty of Education. These two entities were also responsible for editing and producing the book that emerged from the conference, *Stretching Boundaries of Critical Education. Past, Present and Future Possibilities* (Faculty of Education, University of Malta). It contains articles from and about Africa (Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Education for Self-Reliance and Ubuntu), Asia (Lebanon and the Arab World through the Arab House for Adult Education and Development- AHAED), the Caribbean (Popular Education during the Grenada Revolution),

Asia (Older Adults in South Korea), Latin America Nicaragua, Brazil) and Europe (Resistance education in Greece, Popular anti-Neoliberal education in Türkiye, Revolutionary STEM in the Soviet Union, Philosophical insights from Foucault etc).

The outgoing year also saw the launching, under the aegis of the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, of the *international online MA degree in Adult Education*. There are ten participants in this cohort, from Malta, Australia and the UK.

Ever since its inception, the UNESCO Chair has been responsible for holding *annual web fests celebrating momentous events in Adult Education.* In 2021, there were web fests celebrating the Birth Centenaries of Paulo Freire (three days) and Raymond Williams. 2022 saw the celebration of the Birth Centenary of Julius K. Nyerere while similar birth centenary webfests were held in 2023 for Don Lorenzo Milani and in 2024 for Alberto Manzi. A similar 2024 web event was held to mark the third anniversary of the passing away of bell hooks while this same year celebrated, the 50th Anniversary of the 150 hours Italian experiment in Working Class and Women's Adult education. This web fest was held in Italian and English. The different web fests involved Zoom connections with different corners of the earth; some of the most prominent global scholars on the topic participated. All recordings of the different web fests are available on the UNESCO Chair UM website.

Last May's web fest marked the *80th year since Chilean educator, education policy maker and poet, Gabriela Mistral* (Lucila Godoy Alcayaga) was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. There were participants from Chile, Italy and Mexico for this event.
2023 also saw a 'Web Fest on Equality, Democracy and People's Enlightenment: Ideas of Dr B.R. Ambedkar and Dr Paulo Freire for the Uplift of the Underprivileged Community held at the University of Kalyani. Recording is available on website: Access the recording (Passcode: $4kQtG#j). Professor Pransenjit D, responsible for the Chair as

UNITWIN programme at University of Kalyani was convenor and also spoke at the seminar. https://www.um.edu.mt/educ/daocae/unescochairglobaladulteducation/seminartalksrecording/

In 2023, a UNESCO Chair Global Adult Education two-day on-site Seminar started being organised around November. The 2023 seminar invitees discussed challenges and trends in adult education. The participants were from Canada, Italy, Kenya, Palestine (online because of post October 7 blockade) and Spain,

November 2024 saw the organisation of the second seminar, the theme being the International Council for Adult Education on its half century of existence. The seminar involved ICAE personnel, past and present, from Brazil, Germany, Lebanon, Serbia and Italy with two others online from Canada. Papers from the 2023 seminar appeared in previous issues of *Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal*.

On 4th and 5th November 2025, the third intimate UNESCO Chair Malta Global Adult Education Seminar, this time on 'Adult Education and Communities', will be held just before the International Conference (6th and 7th November, UM Valletta Campus)

An *International Critical Adult Learning and Education* (CALE) *Conference*, a follow up to the 2023 one, is being planned for the latter part of 2025, precisely 6th and 7th November 2025. A website with different segments is in place and two keynote speakers have committed themselves, Professor Roberta Piazza from University of Catania and Professor Kenneth Wain from University of Malta. The conference website with the various platforms is available at: Critical Adult Learning and Education Conference 2025 - L-Università ta' Malta

Meanwhile the book series for De Gruyter-Brill is still going strong with around 36 books to date, the last two of which now carrying the UNESCO Chair- UNITWIN logo. There are other books in the offing, one already sent in draft form to the publishers, my *'Southern' Europe and Beyond in the Mediterranean. Critical Essays on Adult Learning and*

Education, a largely single authored volume save for two co-authored chapters. The other two books in the series, since it is connected with the UNESCO Chair and carries its logo, are: *Adult Education in India*, edited by Asoke Bhattacharya and Prasenjit Deb, the latter representing the UNESCO Chair UNITWIN partner institution, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, India; *Adult Education and Difference* edited by Bonnie Slade, from the ERASMUS Mundus International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC) programme, the present Chair incumbent and Thi Boghossian. The series was established by Peter Mayo in around 2008 with Sense Publishers, the latter taken over by Brill and subsequently De Gruyter-Brill.

Lifelong Learning Legal and Policy Frameworks and their Implementation in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam

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Abstract

This article provides the main findings of the upcoming study of DVV's International Regional Office in Southeast Asia on '*Implementation of Lifelong Learning: Case Studies of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam*' to be published in the Autumn of 2025, with a focus on the comparative analysis of the four country case studies and policy recommendations. The study demonstrates that the four countries have shown strong political commitment to advancing lifelong learning through targeted laws, policies, governance and local initiatives, though they are at different stages and face ongoing challenges.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning (LLL) laws and policies, NFE and ALE, flexible learning pathways, LLL implementation.

Author Bio

Margarete Sachs-Israel has over 30 years of experience in education and international development. Before joining UNESCO Bangkok, she was the UNICEF Regional Education Advisor for Latin American and Caribbean. Prior to that, she held the position of Chief Programme Coordinator, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning; and was the UNESCO focal point for the development of the United Nations Education 2030 Agenda at UNESCO Headquarters.

Lifelong Learning Legal and Policy Frameworks and their Implementation in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam

This article provides a summary of the upcoming study of DVV's International Regional Office in Southeast Asia on '*Implementation of Lifelong Learning: Case Studies of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam*' to be published in the Autum of 2025. It presents an overview of the current status of LLL laws and policies in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam, explores their implementation, and offers a comparative analysis across the four countries, as well as selected policy recommendations.

Analysis of LLL Legal and Policy Frameworks and their Implementation

The four country case studies reveal a growing political commitment to LLL which is seen as a strategic lever for inclusive development, human capital formation, and national resilience with the vision of developing inclusive, flexible, and future-ready learning societies. All four countries have made notable strides in either developing dedicated LLL laws or policies or embedding it into legal and policy frameworks and national development plans, aligned with global commitments such as SDG 4. However, despite progress, the institutionalization of LLL varies significantly across countries and implementation remains uneven.

Cambodia has positioned LLL as a core pillar of human resource and socio-economic development through its National Policy on LLL (2019) and draft National LLL Action Plan (2024–2028). LLL has also been integrated in broader education and national development plans. However, implementation is constrained by a continued narrow focus on NFE, limited institutional capacity, and weak financing.

Laos has a legally binding Prime Minister's Decree on Lifelong Learning (2020) and a National Action Plan for LLL to 2030, providing a comprehensive LLL vision and mandate for

cross-sectoral engagement. LLL is also referenced in broader education laws, policies and national development plans. Similarly to Cambodia, Laos is still facing various implementation challenges.

In Thailand, the main legal document on LLL is the National Learning Encouragement Act B.E. 2566 (2023), which includes a dedicated pillar on LLL. It is also embedded in various education policies and the national socio-economic development plan (2023 -2027). However, a stand-alone LLL law or policy is still lacking.

Similarly, while Vietnam references LLL across key legal and policy documents, it has no dedicated LLL law yet—though a Bill is planned to be developed by 2029. Nonetheless, Vietnam has made notable progress toward building a learning society as shown in the 2021 Decision No. 1373/QĐ TTg of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Challenges

The operationalization of LLL laws and policies remains uneven across the four countries, often falling short of policy ambitions. Challenges include misalignment with broader education and development plans, which tend to adopt a narrower focus, and a continued emphasis on traditional NFE and ALE. Thailand has a more advanced LLL framework and supportive policy environment but lacks a dedicated LLL law. Vietnam shows strong political will to shift toward flexible LLL but also lacks a stand-alone LLL law.

One of the most persistent challenges across the four countries is the limited public and institutional understanding and awareness of LLL, including across most line ministries, affecting engagement and demand. While national LLL policies have adopted comprehensive, UNESCO-aligned definitions, the practical interpretation of LLL remains overly narrow—often

equated with NFE. This disconnect between conceptual ambition and practical understanding curtails the transformative potential of LLL.

Governance

Governance, cross-sectoral coordination, and decentralization of LLL vary across the four countries. Cambodia and Laos have established national LLL committees/commissions with broad ministerial representation but face functional and funding challenges. In Thailand, the Department of Learning Encouragement oversees implementation of the Learning Encouragement Act. However, across all four countries, LLL is often viewed as an education sub-sector rather than a national development strategy, limiting inter-ministerial engagement and clarity on roles. While multiple ministries provide LLL activities, weak coordination leads to duplication and inefficiencies. Laos has made the most progress in building an integrated governance and cross-sectoral coordination framework, though it still faces limited buy-in from other ministries and capacity gaps at sub-national levels. Thailand leads in decentralization and community delivery, Cambodia has a strong governance set-up but its implementation capacity requires strengthening, and Vietnam has an effective community model but lacks a defined LLL governance structure per se.

Learning Systems

Open and flexible learning systems that link formal, non-formal, and informal learning are key to effective LLL. While all four countries aim to build such systems, they are at different stages. Equivalency programs exist in all four countries but vary in coverage and recognition, with Vietnam having a well-established, legally backed system. Despite strong policy intent, flexible learning pathways remain limited, restricting transitions between different learning systems. Thailand has the most systemic approach, but practice is still fragmented. Challenges

also include underdeveloped Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) mechanisms, hindering mobility across education and employment, lack of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms, and only nascent credit accumulation and transfer systems. Cambodia and Laos show strong intent but lack fully operational systems to connect learning pathways, limiting system-wide flexibility and learner mobility.

Financing

Financing is a common constraint. Although LLL features prominently in policy rhetoric, plans do not include dedicated budgets for LLL. Project-based or donor-driven funding dominates. Thailand's innovative models through the Equitable Education Fund (EEF) are promising but need greater transparency.

The implementation of LLL is supported by a wide range of stakeholders in all four countries —including education and labour ministries, universities, vocational centers, unions, youth organizations, NGOs, international partners, and the private sector—with education ministries and their LLL departments serving as lead agencies. CLCs, which are in the process of being upgraded to LLL Centres (LLLCs) in Cambodia and Laos, are key providers of NFE and ALE. As part of its LLL strategy, Thailand will develop Learning Encouragement Centers to facilitate traditional knowledge, local wisdom and peer learning. A strong model at the grassroots level are Vietnam's commune-level learning societies. Common challenges include outdated curricular content and pedagogies, limited teacher training, inadequate materials and funding, and the need for stronger monitoring systems across sectors.

Vocational training and re- and upskilling constitute key LLL activities which are delivered by both public and private actors, though coordination remains a challenge. Higher education institutions also contribute to LLL. In Cambodia, the Royal University of Phnom Penh

has played a significant role in policy integration and teacher upgrading. Laos' National University integrates lifelong learning into teacher education programs and in Thailand, universities such as such as Chulalongkorn University offer hybrid courses and micro-credentials, which has scalable potential.

Despite the promise of ICT-supported learning - especially for remote areas or learners with disabilities - digital LLL initiatives remain underdeveloped, with Thailand being the only country offering national digital platforms and hybrid learning models. CLCs and Learning Cities were indicated as best practices by the country case studies. Thailand and Vietnam demonstrate the most effective use of CLCs as dynamic community learning hubs. The cities of Son La in Vietnam and Chiang Dao in Thailand are regionally distinctive examples of how cities can institutionalize LLL across governance, infrastructure, and cultural life. Cambodia has initiated a Learning Cities Initiative as a main strategy to implement its LLL Policy.

Policy Recommendations

While the policy direction the four countries have taken is encouraging and momentum is building, LLL must now move from political aspiration to practical transformation. This means not only strengthening laws and institutions, but cultivating a broader societal culture that values and supports continuous learning.

An overarching recommendation is to work toward system transformation with LLL as the overarching vision and organizing principle of the education system, and in which LLL is not a supplementary policy, but a foundational driver of national development and social progress. For policymakers, the task is to translate policy intent into tangible, systemic change and coordinated, sustained, and inclusive implementation—anchored in a shared understanding of LLL as a right, a value, and a necessity in today's rapidly changing world.

Going forward, countries should ensure a clear and harmonized definition and shared understanding of LLL, legislative clarity, policy coherence, institutional integration, as well as functional governance structures and strengthened cross-sectoral coordination, both vertically (national to local) and horizontally (across ministries and sectors), strengthened decentralized delivery, capacity development, sustainable financing, and robust data and monitoring systems. As a key parameter, flexible learning pathways must be operationalized through robust legal frameworks for RVAs and RPL and learner mobility. Most importantly, access to quality and relevant learning and skilling opportunities for all, at all stages of life, and through diverse learning modalities must be ensured. LLL programs should meet the diverse learning needs and respond to the learning levels of different target groups, using flexible and learner centered pedagogies. Teachers' professional development should be strengthened, digital infrastructure enhanced and ICTs harnessed, and the potential of HE to promote LLL further expanded.

Governments must lead the way—with a long-term vision, and through investment, coordination, and policy coherence, but success ultimately depends on shared ownership among all actors, including individuals, communities, employers, and civil society.

Note: There is a substantial list of References available which could be obtained via m.sachs-israel@outlook.com

Navigating AI Integration in Higher Education: Reflections from European Focus Groups on Ethics, Pedagogy, and Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

This article draws from national focus groups conducted across Europe as part of the IDEAL project to explore how educators and students perceive articificial intelligence (AI) in higher education. Through an interpretative lens, it traces ethical, pedagogical, and lifelong learning concerns, offering grounded insights on the cultural and institional dimensions of AI intergration.

Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI), higher education, ethics, lifelong learning

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Navigating AI Integration in Higher Education: Reflections from European Focus Groups on Ethics, Pedagogy, and Lifelong Learning

AI is entering higher education under the banner of innovation and efficiency, yet the realities experienced by educators and students are far more complex. Institutional narratives often gloss over deeper ethical, pedagogical, and professional tensions. The EU funded project 'IDEAL-Integrating Data Analysis and AI in Learning Experiences' (https://www.project-ideal.eu/) responded to this by organising national focus groups across Europe, offering a rare space for educators, students, and staff to articulate their views on AI and its implications for academic life.

What emerged was not consensus but a mosaic of critical perspectives. AI was seen not simply as a tool, but as a transformative force reshaping the norms, relationships, and values of education. This article summarises the twelve focus group findings under four interrelated themes: ethics, pedagogy, lifelong learning, and governance.

Ethical Concerns and the Question of Control

A strong undercurrent across the discussions was ethical unease. AI systems used in learning analytics, plagiarism detection, or feedback generation were described as opaque and difficult to scrutinise. Many participants worried about how much control was being ceded to automated systems, often without full understanding of how these systems functioned. This concern echoes critiques of AI's "black box" logic, where decision-making is concealed (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Beyond transparency, participants also questioned the values encoded in these technologies. The risks of algorithmic bias, data commodification, and diminishing student privacy were not treated as abstract or speculative—they were seen as present

and pressing. As Floridi et al. (2018) argue, ethics in AI must be lived and operationalised, not reduced to abstract codes. Focus group participants called for educational institutions to embed ethical oversight directly into their governance structures.

Pedagogical Friction and the Role of the Educator

Educators in the focus groups did not approach AI with hostility, but with caution and reflection. Many expressed frustration at the growing pressure to integrate AI tools without sufficient pedagogical dialogue. The issue was not AI per se, but whether its use was aligned with the core values of teaching—relationality, critical thinking, and openness.

Some described the erosion of dialogue in classrooms, where AI-generated feedback and content risked substituting for genuine human interaction. There was concern that teaching could become a sterile process of content delivery. This resonates with Biesta's (2010) call for education to remain uncertain and dialogic, rather than overly metric-driven.

Still, others saw opportunities for AI to support differentiated learning—provided it was used to supplement rather than replace the educator's role. Across all perspectives, there was a strong appeal for institutional policies that prioritise pedagogical reflection, not just technical upskilling. Teachers need support to engage critically and creatively with AI, not only instructions on how to use it.

Lifelong Learning in the Age of AI

AI's impact extends beyond formal teaching to the broader realm of lifelong learning. Participants framed lifelong learning as a necessity in the digital age—but also as an ideal in need of recalibration. For educators, AI introduced demands for continuous re-skilling and digital literacy. But the landscape was uneven: some

institutions offered meaningful staff development, while others left educators to navigate complex systems alone.

Importantly, lifelong learning was not only seen as skill acquisition. Many reflected on the need for ethical and critical capacities—tools for questioning the systems mediating knowledge. Participants stressed the importance of cultivating digital reflexivity: the ability to interrogate the technologies we use, not merely adapt to them. As UNESCO (2021) notes, digital education must be grounded in inclusion, responsibility, and democratic values. Otherwise, lifelong learning risks becoming an empty slogan, driven by market logic.

Institutional Gaps and the Need for Inclusive Governance

Many participants pointed to institutional deficiencies in how AI is implemented. Commercial platforms were often introduced without prior consultation or pedagogical evaluation. In several cases, key decisions were made without involving teaching staff or students. This technocratic, top-down approach stood in stark contrast to the principles of democratic adult education.

Rather than resist AI altogether, participants called for inclusion in governance. They wanted clear policies, ethical review bodies, and transparent implementation processes. AI integration, they argued, should reflect the values of the academic community—not just administrative efficiency or vendor interests. Selwyn (2021) highlights that AI reshapes institutional authority. The question is not whether we manage this change, but how—and by whom.

Conclusion: From Readiness to Reflexivity

The focus group discussions do not offer easy solutions. What they offer is more valuable: a window into the lived experiences of those navigating AI on the ground. Participants consistently rejected deterministic views of technology. They

asked instead for institutions to slow down, to think more carefully about what kind of education AI is helping to shape.

The message across all themes—ethics, pedagogy, lifelong learning, and governance—was clear: AI is never neutral. Its integration into higher education must be guided by pedagogical integrity, institutional responsibility, and democratic participation. And those most affected—educators and students—must be at the centre of this process.

Adult education, with its long-standing emphasis on participation and dialogue, has much to offer in this moment. As we face accelerating technological change, the principles of democratic learning must guide us—not only in what we teach, but in how we shape the systems that enable teaching and learning to happen.

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Higher Education Developing Adult Learning and Education through Learning Cities as Advanced Forms of Learning Ecosystems

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Abstract

In the Age of learning, universities have a key role in the development of smart and creative urban communities in the frames of learning cities. This paper will analyse the changing roles of universities in enhancing learning cities as part of mission in adult and lifelong learning so as to raise participation of citizens in effective knowledge transfer. We will reflect upon the roles of learning cities in building the learning culture/infrastructure to develop skills for life. The key message will be connected to balancing in between individual and community claims to support urban environments having to change for sustainable, resilient and more equitable ways of cohabitation.

Keywords: learning communities, collaboration, knowledge transfer, ecosystems, civic learning

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Higher Education Developing Adult Learning and Education through Learning Cities as Advanced Forms of Learning Ecosystems

One of the key roles for higher education institutions in the promotion of learning cities/regions and learning communities is the combination of research, development and innovation. When one looks into the planning, achievement and formation of learning cities and their nearby regions, it becomes obvious that universities can initiate, foster the plan and strategy, but also form particular projects so as to strengthen commitment of city leadership to support their selected models best fit for occurring needs referring to community development.

We shall have to understand that celebratory events, based on festivals, days, weeks, etc. of learning are very much import and necessary for universities and other organisations of lifelong learning to support communities of learning to exchange of ideas, values, knowledge and skills in a process of bottom-up work building on local needs to collect and share. Learning cities and regions, therefore, have become well recognised by UNESCO in its 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning (UNESCO 2015) and its recent Marrakech Framework for Action (UNESCO 2022).

Universities are relevant organisations to highlight learning city activities in the scope of intergenerational and intercultural learning, attention to vulnerable groups and sustainability as key issue for public discourse and dialogue. Also, matters of the infrastructure of learning, maintained by providers of formal, non-formal and informal places of learning, together with necessary life skills development through communities of practice can be effectively demonstrated by universities to make these topics appear as influential for learning city charters to describe values, principles of lifelong learning in local and regional settings. Consequently, learning cities and regions need universities to build and develop

lifelong learning, but also to generate local and regional development based on strategic thinking. (Németh, 2020)

How is co-operation and partnership within a learning city fostered between municipalities, formal educational institutions, civic learning organisations, companies, other types of non-learning organisations?

Universities are needed to signal initiation of platform-building in the frame of learning cities and regions with attention to project-based piloting and getting acquainted with examples of good practice. Universities and other respected stakeholders of the learning city can organise workshops and intensive programmes with cities/municipalities having been engaged with learning city orientations. As consequence of this process, public discourse upon the benefits of building a learning city with attention to choices and limitation can be generated so as to legitimise the ways and forms of how learning communities may turn learning festivals and other celebrator events demonstrate the power and joy of learning.

Universities are leading agents of cities by turning attention to learning city collaborations for urban benefits how to make use of own resources and capacities in and around lifelong learning. Not only the ways of joining UNESCO Sustainable Cities Networks, e.g. Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), but also the development of smaller communities of learning within city, like districts, neighbourhoods and families are necessary forms of collecting and sharing knowledge upon urban collaborations of citizens for better life and environment. Collected examples may help in responding to the question above:

- Cork Learning City is a wider umbrella-formation so as to incorporate early childhood learning, primary and secondary education, tertiary and further education, higher education, providers and learners, community education and private sector are brought together into the Learning City Roundtable to discuss, initiate and enhance

learning community developments and balance it with other respected aspects of sustainable urban programmes of learning workplaces, learning neighbourhoods, seminars and conferences and the learning lab, specific platforms where University College Cork has specific roles and responsibilities through university lifelong learning.

- The Espoo Learning City Network is a rather open and inclusive format to involve relevant stakeholders, providers of education and learning in formal, non-formal and informal environment. The City of Espoo has generated specific platforms at municipal level, like City Board, Growth and Learning and City Vitality to generate co-ordinated attention, care through effective management to include Chambers of Commerce and the Association of Entrepreneurs to work with several organisations involved on continuous learning. (Erkkilä, 2020)

Based on a particular partnership approach, Wolverhampton City Learning Region includes a broad range of organisations working in partnership to place learning at the heart of the city to tackle social and economic challenges using education and learning as the focus. This partnership implies platforms like learning organisations and adult education providers, moreover, it also involves U3A and platform of Equality and Diversity Partnerships.

In the Netherlands, regions of Zwolle and Flevoland have recently developed platforms for collaborations. Zwolle has developed platforms of learning region to enhance linkages in between city and schools, to connect with business community and to develop quality-based strategies of education and VET. Flevoland has been promoting platform of libraries engaged in lifelong learning and effective learning in the workplace.

In Pécs, the main focus is on inclusive policies and practices. The Learning City Programme of Pécs was established by 2017 so as to promote both participation and

performance in learning, and also to develop access to formal, non-formal and informal learning supported by programmes based on inclusive policies set by stakeholders involved. Inclusive policy in Pécs means addressing barriers of learning for disabled citizens, namely, socially disabled, mentally disabled and physically disabled. Disabilities may to lead to learning difficulties and lack of participation, therefore, civil society groups involved try to tackle the problem through collaborative actions based on trust, equity with mutual benefits and attention. (Németh, 2020)

What can universities do to stimulate a joint approach to learning within a region/city to acquire skills for life?

Universities are in a position to help learning communities develop through collaborations of local citizens and their organisations and institutions. There are several challenges universities may help overcoming in partnerships with stakeholders in lifelong learning. In such manner and approach HEIs having been involved in the development of learning cities and regions can effectively explain the mutual benefits of learning city developments for urban-based communities. They can also empower communities through collaborations to build trust, better identities and resilience in an age of uncertainties. Universities are seen as strong organisations to bridge learning city developments to effective forms of skills formations and local/regional skills coalitions.

Universities can make municipalities plan and formulate policy, law and better financing to improve participation and performance in adult learning as part of strategic thinking in lifelong learning. Accordingly, universities should accelerate actors/players/stakeholders with practice-based engagement and support efforts of inclusive, equitable and creative actions of learning in sustainable communities so as to leave no one behind.

Examples of the scrutinized cities demonstrate some valuable sources as models and may be used as sources for comparative analysis:

- In Cork, a Memorandum of Understanding on Learning was formulated and signed by four distinguished lead partners and two strategic partners based on agreement to create a culture of learning in Cork City. Therefore, these partners, one of them is University College Cork, established a Steering Group so as to enhance Learning for All, promoting inclusion and to work for prosperity and sustainability.
- In Espoo Learning City, the commitment to inclusion through participation allows learners from vulnerable social groups of adults to participate programmes of continuous learning and also stimulate youngster below the age of 30 with risks to get involved into inclusive learning for skills development.
- In the Netherlands, the City of Groningen tries to build on equal opportunities and Den Bosch advocates programmes for youth and talent development so as to meet the needs of their citizens.
- In Sonderborg, collaboration amongst stakeholders resulted in the formation of a taskforce group around SDGs to help developing roadmap for education, and to keep valuable formal and non-formal learning opportunities.
- Wolverhampton City Learning Region has developed a specific strategic document, called Relighting our City, in order to get Wolverhampton respond to respond in need, create opportunities for young people, generate jobs and learning opportunities, helping vital business to grow and to stimulate vibrate high streets and communities.

Conclusion

Higher Education Institutions should make every attempt to support learning cities in receiving recognition and respect upon their collaborative work to improve learning in urban environments. As for SDGs, lifelong learning in cities and communities are critical

conditions to improve quality education based in equity, inclusion and equalities. Learning cities are appropriate formations to highlight the diversities of learning based on valuable voluntary work and solidarity to provide accessible forms of skills development for vulnerable groups in societies.

In order to fight back illiteracy or the digital divide, we must make use of good practices of cities and regions having been engaged in forming learning communities for a better Europe. Universities have to focus on discovering and researching valuable learning city models across the world in association with UNESCO. They should also rely on the potentials of learning cities to enhance adult and lifelong learning in the member states of the EU.

Finally, it seems obvious that eucen and its members must promote involvement of universities to research and innovate through learning cities and regions for quality learning!

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Note: An in-depth paper on the topic is available from the author; please contact: nemeth.balazs@pte.hu

Book Review

Transition From Pedagogy to Andragogy: An International Perspective

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In today's interconnected world, higher education institutions are no longer simply centers of academic transmission—they are dynamic arenas grappling with the social, economic, and cultural complexities of contemporary life. This book presents a global exploration of higher education and lifelong learning, with contributions from educators across regions including Ireland, Germany, China, South Africa, New Zealand, Jamaica, Canada, and the United States. Through comparative case studies and country-specific insights, the book examines how diverse educational systems respond to both local needs and global trends, particularly in supporting adult learners and fostering lifelong learning.

The book begins by situating higher education at a global crossroads. As adult learners become more central to university populations, institutions must evolve in response to shifting learner demographics, digital transformation, and increasing demands for relevant, flexible, and inclusive learning. Each chapter presents a unique context, enriched with reflective questions to encourage critical engagement, culminating in a new learning framework—Chuoagogy—as a bridge between pedagogy and andragogy.

Highlights from Selected Chapters

Chapter 2, by Linnea Haren Conely, examines how 21st-century young adults experience transitions into adulthood differently from previous generations. Drawing on adult learning theory and social change, Conely emphasizes the need for adaptive educational approaches to support this cohort in becoming engaged, responsible citizens.

In Chapter 3, Sarah Bond and Leslie Cordie provide a detailed overview of U.S. higher education, discussing structural, funding, and policy complexities. They underscore the system's responsiveness to workforce needs and its shifting focus toward lifelong learning and digital engagement, particularly in a post-pandemic context.

Chapter 4, by Michael Wooten, introduces the neuroscience of learning, exploring how biological processes like synaptic pruning, neuroplasticity, and mitochondrial function influence memory and cognition. He links this scientific understanding to instructional practice and calls for evidence-informed strategies rooted in educational neuroscience.

Shermaine Barrett, in Chapter 5, explores problem-based and project-based learning (PBL) in Jamaican higher education. Through examples from business, fashion, and hospitality programs, she demonstrates how PBL nurtures both technical and soft skills, preparing graduates for the modern workplace and instilling lifelong learning habits.

In Chapter 6, Yan Dai, Lingfei Luan, and Xi Lin analyze China’s educational evolution from Confucian teacher-centered traditions toward more student-centered, creativity-driven models. They address challenges like rote learning and call for inclusive practices that blend historical educational values with progressive pedagogies.

Germany’s digital transition is the focus of Chapter 7, authored by Lisa Breitschwerdt, Therese Rosemann, and Jan Schiller. They identify gaps between institutional aspirations and

implementation of digital competencies, sharing results from the DigiTaKS project. The authors argue for more deliberate efforts to embed digital fluency in curricula to prepare students for a digitalized world.

Chapter 8, by Julia Denholm, presents Canada's pluralistic post-secondary system. She highlights the country's efforts to create accessible, diverse pathways through community colleges, universities, and vocational programs. Through case studies, Denholm illustrates the system's role in national economic development and intellectual equity.

In Chapter 9, Colette February reflects on her experience teaching in South Africa, advocating for the redefinition of lifelong learning as an institutional responsibility. She argues for merging pedagogical and andragogical practices to serve the country's diverse student population, especially in contexts with historical and structural inequality.

Stephen O'Brien, in Chapter 10, focuses on Irish learners transitioning from Further Education and Training (FET) into higher education. He emphasizes amplifying learner voice, especially among marginalized populations, and discusses socio-political barriers to equitable participation. The Access Ambassador Group at University College Cork is offered as a model for inclusive practice.

In Chapter 11, Colin McGregor reviews New Zealand's Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, with particular attention to Māori and Pasifika communities. He highlights the importance of government support and face-to-face learning, while arguing for more consistent investment to sustain ACE's community-based approach.

Sarah Bond returns in Chapter 12 to reflect on her work as an instructional designer in the U.S. She discusses the growing influence of hybrid learning and the shift from teacher-led (pedagogical) to learner-driven (andragogical) instruction. Bond reinforces the need for flexible

instructional design responsive to learners' varied needs, emphasizing relevance, accessibility, and autonomy.

Veteran educator Michael Wooten shares his career insights in Chapter 13, reflecting on 36 years in a U.S. land-grant university. He discusses instructional challenges such as teaching large classes and balancing research obligations, advocating for constructivist methods like the "Disorienting Dilemma" to deepen student engagement.

Chuoagogy: A Framework for Transitional Learning

The final chapter, authored by Leslie Cordie, introduces Chuoagogy, a learning framework that bridges the gap between pedagogy (child-focused learning) and andragogy (adult-focused learning) in adult learning and education (ALE). Derived from the Swahili word chuo (college), Chuoagogy captures the transitional phase of young adult learners in higher education. It integrates teacher-led and student-centered strategies, offering a dynamic model for instructional design that adapts to learners' cognitive, emotional, and developmental needs.

Chuoagogy incorporates principles of self-direction, interdisciplinary learning, learner voice, and digital literacy. It encourages educators to create flexible environments that support curiosity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning mindsets. Rooted in foundational adult learning theories and cognitive science, it is especially relevant in the diverse and evolving landscape of global higher education.

Conclusion

This book collectively calls for a reimagining of higher education as a lifelong, inclusive, and globally aware process. From neuroscience to digital transformation, and from PBL in the Caribbean to ACE in New Zealand, each chapter contributes to a holistic vision of postsecondary learning. By centering adult learners and introducing Chuoagogy as a flexible, integrative

framework, the book equips educators, policymakers, and learners to address the challenges—and harness the possibilities—of education in the 21st century.

Leslie Cordie is an Associate Professor of Adult Education at Auburn University and a member of PIMA. You can find more information at https://aub.ie/LeslieCordie. Podcast conversations with the books contributors can be found at: https://ale-virtualcommunity-transitions.blogspot.com/

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We collaborate with PASCAL http://pascalobservatory.org/ and many other bodies, towards greater social, economic, and ecological justice. We contribute to "outside-of-the-box" thinking to address the contemporary local/global crises and issues. We encourage members to work together and in solidarity with one another to bring the expertise of adult learning and education (ALE), within a lifelong learning orientation, to the resolution of everyday issues and problems.

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