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Social Purpose and Neoliberal Policies of Lifelong Learning in Germany and Singapore

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Abstract

Nowadays, it is observed that more adults are taking part in Lifelong Learning for various reasons. Some find it as a tool for a prosperous career path from experienced worker to retiree. On the other hand, many stakeholders achieve the prosperity of the country in many social spheres as a result of high participation rates of adults in Lifelong Learning. The cases in Germany and Singapore illustrate vividly the domain areas that are influenced by Lifelong Learners.

Keywords: *Lifelong learning, Adult, Education, Sociology, Retirement, Neoliberal, Aging, Citizens, Upskilling, Labor market*

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1. Introduction

Lifelong Learning is considered to be autonomous and self-controlled learning for a personal interest throughout life from birth to adulthood. German National Educational Panel Study NEPS (2019) pinpoints that successful participation of Germany in Lifelong Learning (LLL) is influenced by the demographic changes that result in a gradual shift from school-work-retirement progression to nonfixed learning patterns. Likewise, Maulod and Lu (2020) indicate that Singaporeans lifespan is considered to be around 83 years in current years and more old adults are interested in learning for pleasure or “learn for learning’s sake” (p. 629). At the same time, both countries are driven by the neoliberal aspect of LLL and its positive influence on the economy. Singapore’s main policy Skills Future conveys motives for economic stability and prosperity through LLL (Freebody, 2017), whereas German National Educational Panel Study NEPS (2019) underlines that the objectives are set in accordance with digitalization, skill-biased technological change, and development of knowledge-society (p. 327). In this paper, I aim to examine two discourses around Lifelong learning: social discourse, primarily active citizenship, and neoliberal discourse: work-related learning supported with the analysis of the above-discussed practices in Germany and Singapore. This comparison illustrates features of approaches of two leading countries of the continent that have gone through all stages of social transformation and are now considered to be the top practitioners of Lifelong learning.

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The paper is organized in two sections. Firstly, I present strategies and objectives implemented around the discourse of social participation and active citizenship in Lifelong learning. The paper continues to specify the economic realm of LLL with the main focus on global market needs.

Gewirtz (2008) manifests the social purpose of Lifelong learning in citizenship education. In other words, how learning contributes to an individual's understanding of his rights and duties as a member of society (p. 415). In the context of Singapore, globalization brought novelty both into social life and in the economic sphere of the country. In order to stay cohesive with the latest changes, the concept of LLL with "survival" ideology was introduced in Singapore (Neoh, 2017, p. 31). The main direction of this concept is to make education open for all allowing everyone to become competent in community development. Neoh (2017) outlines: "The latest reform in Singapore began with the introduction of the 21st-Century Competencies (21CC) framework in 2009, which underpins holistic education in schools" (p. 33). According to this reform, moral values are emphasized such as empathy, responsibility, care, appreciation, and help others to become active citizens by being socially responsible (p. 33). He highlights the importance of not only perceiving knowledge but to develop one's ability to link individual competence to the challenges that humans face in democratic citizenship. The spirit of being one notion is being promoted within the society through Lifelong Learning which is inclusive of both men and women, welcoming the diversity of all backgrounds and ages. Ministry of Education (2014) summarized expected outcomes of these reforms with such phrases as "confident person", "self-directed learner", "active contributor" and "concerned citizen" (Neoh, 2017, p. 33). If in the 20th century, the main aim of promoting Lifelong Learning was entirely directed to the economic rise of the country, in the 21st century Ministry of Education (2011) shifted the strategies to an individual-centered and "values-driven" phase (p. 33). To achieve the goals, Singapore ratifies the "Total Curriculum Approach", where all subjects are interrelated for the united purpose of making students socially active and proficient citizens (p. 34). Opposite to the Singaporean approach that addresses the issues of social unity of the nation and strengthening of moral qualities within an individual, in Germany learning is much concerned with raising personal qualities to meet the changing grounds of the democratic country.

Kenner (2020) points to three competencies as a basic recognition of citizenship education in the context of Germany: analysis and orientation, judgment, and action (p.120). He also adds: "Citizenship education underlines the necessity of (social-scientific) analytical skills and the ability to critically reflect upon the power of judgment of a subject" (p. 120). Democracy with what it brings to society is seen as a fundamental ground for setting the agenda of the learning plan of action. For achieving this, citizenship education promotes one's maturity through experiencing self-responsibility and self-determination (Kenner, 2020). Wohnig (2016) outlines some concepts and projects that are facilitated for social inclusiveness such as learning services, social internships, the "Learning and Living Democracy" program, and dispute settlements. For example, he describes social internship as a way of learning through practice, where learners gain social skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and respect. He summarizes ideas of Reinders and Youniss about how social education influences adults in long-term LLL perspective: "Community service can help adolescents to generate a social and moral point of view, help them to experience effectiveness in prosocial behavior, and prepare the soil for civic engagement in adulthood" (p. 246).

Based on empirical research, it is observed that citizenship education being a part of Lifelong Lifelong learning practitioners perceive continuous learning as an infinite process for personal growth and fulfillment. However, more adults get involved in LLL for upskilling and to stay afloat with new trends within the rapidly changing needs of the labor market. Boeren (2017) mentions: "The reason why adult lifelong learning participation is nowadays high on the policy agenda has thus a strong economic rationale, with strong involvement in lifelong learning debates of international bodies, including the European Commission and the OECD" (p. 163). In Singapore, most of the policymakers see Lifelong Learning as a tool for economic growth and development of the country with the help of educated adults. Maulod and Lu (2020) point skills future policy and National Silver Academy (NSA) as new initiatives that were introduced in 2016 as a resumption of Lifelong learning. If the government aimed to use Adult learners as a tool for the economic prosperity of the country and a way to cooperate with "developed worker" after World Wars in the 20th century, today they outline the same concept but with individual focus on "deep learning, recurrent learning, career building, skills mastery, and inclusive society" (Freebody, 2017, p. 616). Tan (2016) points out that the human capital thesis is closely connected to skill-related training and learning which results in the upskilling of a worker and; thus, affects the economic welfare of Singapore. The whole idea of this direction is eventually to bring in adults with advanced competence and neoteric skills to raise the country to the next level of prosperity.

Similarly, German policy has been conversed to meet the demands of the state, society, and industry ([The Educational System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2016/2017](#)). People need to catch up with the contemporary requirements of the job market in order to be valued and promoted in the career ladder, which is expected to be gained through LLL. The Educational System in the Federal Republic of Germany ([2016/2017](#)) states that in order to raise qualifications, many private institutions, companies, and organizations invest in their employees, assign them into evening schools, which is especially common for migrants; thus, take their workplaces to the upper class with upskilled workers. Federation and the Länder are the main policymakers in Germany that are responsible for the construction and provision of continuing education. For instance, The Educational System ([2016/2017](#)) presents that Länder administrated numerous programs on further education and training with a special focus on underqualified employees, people deprived of education, and older employees with high demand for upskilling. Moreover, it is mentioned that the Federal Government is responsible for implementing continuing vocational training, international cooperation with the European Union, and political education (p. 182). WeGebAU is a program for vocational training that is conducted for older and low skilled workers with the financial support of the companies that meet the training fees and compensate loss for hourly-paid wages in the framework of human capital ([Findsen and Formosa, 2016](#)).

2. Conclusion

To sum up, the paper has investigated discourses around Lifelong Learning in the adult context based on a comparison of Germany and Singapore. Singaporeans adults are expected to remain self-sufficient and competent citizens with a focus on moral qualities that are obtained through Citizenship Education at any stage of the aging process. In Germany, policymakers see power and persistence as more far-reaching characteristics of personality for the current era. Regarding the neoliberal perspective, it is observed that enterprises in both countries invest in the employees for personal gain and more meaningful post-employment aging of adult practitioners.

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