

Self-motivated participation in learning activities increases the well-being of adults

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Non-vocational adult education drawing on a person's own motivation comes with a variety of benefits that are also reflected on the person's close friends, family and work. Studying boosts self-confidence and well-being, and expands social networks. Furthermore, motivation to pursue other studies also increases. Thanks to participation in adult education, tolerance towards and confidence in other people grows, and adult learners pay increasing attention to their health. Parents are better able to support the studying of their school-aged children.

All of the above are findings from the Benefits of Lifelong Learning (BeLL) project carried out in ten European countries. The study focused on liberal adult [education](#), i.e. non-vocational courses, which are characterised by voluntariness, self-motivation, and goals related to hobbies. The study investigated the changes experienced by adult learners participating in liberal adult education courses during a course of one year.

In addition to the positive changes described above, some of the participants also identified changes in work and career opportunities, as well as in factors supporting active citizenship, such as increased interest in doing voluntary work. Studying also creates an abundance of new areas of skill and expertise.

Adult education was the most beneficial for learners with a lower educational level. Liberal adult education can bridge the gap between social groups with different educational backgrounds and it can balance

the uneven learning opportunities experienced in childhood and adolescence. The increase in learning motivation and self-confidence increases the probability of those with a lower educational level in particular to engage in adult education also in the future. Learning related to a person's hobby thus serves as a low-threshold opportunity to participate, and may inspire the person to participate in further learning activities.

Adult learning also carries different meanings for different age groups: for younger age groups, liberal adult education serves as a stepping-stone to society by increasing the feeling of being able to control one's life. For older [age groups](#), on the other hand, it softens the transitions related to ageing, such as retirement, losing one's friends or family members, and deteriorating skills.

The study also paints a good picture about how liberal adult education courses are offered and organised in different countries. With the exception of Finland, statistical data on liberal adult education is poorly available and the activities often lack a clear organisation, making the role of liberal adult education in educational policy and academic research less prominent than that of vocational non-formal education. The study puts forward policy recommendations proposing that liberal adult education should be better taken into consideration both in national and EU-level education policy, and that a more systematic approach should be taken towards the utilisation its clear benefits on well-being.

More information: Manninen, J, Sgier, I., Fleige, M., Thöne-Geyer, B., Kil, M., Možina, E., Danihelková, H., Mallows, D., Duncan, S., Meriläinen, M., Diez, J., Sava, S., Javrh, P., Vrečer, N., Mihajlovic, D., Kecap, E., Zappaterra, P, Kornilow, A., Ebner, R. & Operti, F. (2014). "Benefits of Lifelong Learning in Europe - Main results of the BeLL-project." Bonn: DIE. www.bell-project.eu/cms/?page_id=10

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