

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

Increasingly aging world population, combined with the changing socio-demographic structure of countries, makes necessary that adult education should continue through lifelong time. Within this period, adults are obliged to face with many different and new dynamics which are both individual and/or social because of changing living and working conditions and these dynamics bring together the new and different learnings as well. However, while adult learners especially women are realizing learning actions, provision of their improving new and different perspectives by integrated not only life and but also work life experiences and vital accumulations gained from these experiences into their learning processes of social empowerment is quite significant. Then, being achieved of these perspectives gathered through questioning the existing experiential knowledge included into the social learning process within the dialogue and praxis with critical reflection and under the leadership of adult educators as organic intellectuals is also significant. Therefore, "Transformative Action Theory" which underlines the realization of learning for social empowerment via transforming the action through with the perspectives obtained in line with the meaning perspectives and schemes of adult individuals in particular to female will be discussed in this study.

Key Words: *social empowerment, women, adult education, critical reflection, praxis*

Introduction

Empowerment is a concept beyond the traditional meanings such as self-confidence, competence, control ownership and is located in the center of the problem of equality since it has individual, social, psychological and economic components as a multidimensional concept. In addition, there are many relating definitions regarding with the concept of empowerment. However, the most general definition of “empowerment”, a dynamic process aims to find out more controlling area to make a change at individual and collective level. On the other hand, empowerment is an oriented and ongoing process, which includes mutual respect, critical thinking, caring and group participation in the heart of local communities and where people who are deprived from sharing of these valuable resources to gain access for these resources and control over them by this inclusion (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989).

In other words, empowerment is a process in which people gain control over their own lives and also democratic participation (Rappaport, 1987: 141-142) into the life of their communities and a critical understanding of their own environment (Zimmerman, Schulz and Checkoway, 1992: 20-21) while Moser states that empowerment is the capacity which increases the self-confidence and cognitive power of the individual (1999: 77-78). When looking at the definitions and evaluations of the international actors, for instance United Nations define “empowerment” as people’s expanding the control over their own lives, gaining control over decisions and factors which shape their lives, increasing their qualifications and resources and building their access capacities to stakeholders, networks and voice to gain control as well. Besides, UNICEF and UNDP (1993) underline that empowerment should be available in five areas as the basic component of. These areas are welfare, access, decision-making, participation and control (Longwe, 1996), and the most critical ones are decision-making, participation and control. However, whatever the definitions are, education emerges as the most significant key to empowerment (Stromquist, 2002).

Batliwala (1994) gives a point to the concepts of power and empowerment and explains “power” as a control over material values, intellectual resources and ideology, and defines “empowerment ” as a challenge existing power relations and having more control over the sources of power. According to Kabeer, empowerment is the development for the ability of making a strategic choice for life by the individuals who are deprived of this choice opportunity before and he declares that making choice is related to access and future decisions and financial, human and social resources (1994 and 1999). Empowerment is defined as determining choices in life and influencing the direction of the change through gaining control over financial or nonfinancial resources by Rowlands (1997) and he also underlines that empowerment is differently experienced and realized within the individual, intimate and group relationships.

Similarly, Monkman (1998) states that collective action and organization is in the centre for the development of empowerment and the affection of change at social level. Mahajan (2012) draws attention to the need for the realization of the individual empowerment together with the social change since maintenance of empowerment would be difficult when there are only slight changes in a wider social environment. According to him, there are diverse interpretations of empowerment in different social, national and cultural contexts because it is a dynamic and ongoing process (2012: 70). At this point, the contribution of adult education for empowerment by providing collective consciousness and solidarity within the social processes and dynamics is inevitable.

Social empowerment of women

Kabeer (1999) states that women's empowerment is close related with gender equality, but beyond that also encompasses to be able to control not only their status than men but also their own destiny and to make choices. When empowerment is taken into consideration as bottom-up process which aims to increase awareness of persons and groups regarding the oppression of women and to transform gender power relations through developing their capability to fight with that, nearly all attitude change activities are organized as for women (Baden and Reeves, 2000). The results coming up through the search for this kind of gaining awareness activities indicate the importance of supporting women for their struggle with the problems limiting their potential and considering the wider social structures, which causes their weakening. Thus, such trainings for legal rights, domestic violence prevention and family planning offered to women through adult education will contribute to increase women's ability to resist.

On the other hand, Stromquist () emphasizes that empowerment consists of four dimensions and these are cognitive, psychological, political and economic dimensions, but none of them is as sufficient as to allow women to act on their own behalf although each step is equally important. For instance, the cognitive dimension refers to understand the secondary status of women and the causes of micro or macro conditions in society. The psychological dimension contains the sense of development, which will play a role at individual or social level in order to improve women's conditions. The economic dimension requires participating in productive activities, which will allow women to increase their autonomy at a certain level.

The political dimension includes the ability to be organized and take action for social change.

However, the last two dimensions of empowerment, political and economic ones, could be provided especially in adulthood, so the importance of adult education for empowerment emerges again since the schooling system could build only a base for these dimensions. At this point, the empowerment required should include not only individual awareness and consciousness but also the action with collective awareness and consciousness. It is also accepted that there is a positive relationship with women's participation in income generating employment and their level of general education. Besides, women who are higher education graduates have the chance to be in higher positions within the employment market, particularly in the formal sector with high income and secure status as well and that means accessing better payment and prestigious professions too. Moreover, together with rising levels of human capital of women in labour market, preparation and implementation of anti-discrimination laws depending on marriage and family issues and for other social areas which are all close related with each other will be able to increase women's income level and provide them get better jobs and positions (Blau and Khan, 1997; Golden, 2006).

In this context, the access to employment and other income generating activities bring together economic empowerment of women as one of the most essential dimensions of empowerment, but to what extent all these will influence the other dimensions of empowerment are still controversial since it is seen that the economic independence of women does not strengthen them much desired in other areas such as decision-making, political participation and working for social change. For example; the rates of women's representation in parliament are still too low in many countries of the world. Hence, on condition that adult education and its practices should be designed in a format which will enable the realization for each dimension of empowerment results clearly, the significance of providing women strengthen through with not only a self

confidence and individual empowerment in those four dimensions but also more with a social self-confidence and social empowerment will have been realized.

Transformative action theory

Stromquist (2002) argues that some of the concepts in education should be introduced beginning from the appropriate levels of education for the empowerment issue. Within the existing school system, cognitive and psychological aspects of empowerment might be performed and then the empowerment in primary and secondary education years should provide female students knowledge and talent, which ensure them to questionize and struggle with stereotyped gender roles in society and limitations on their potential of both individual and social empowerment particularly. Whereas Bourdieu (1970) signifies that education system is fulfilled its social reproduction function implicitly but in a more efficient manner, similarly according to Gramsci, schools and other educational institutions are not neutral and reinforce the existing hegemony. Education is the sine qua non condition for the formation of hegemonic relations and their continuity (Gramsci, 1997). Education is at core of Gramsci's concept "hegemony" and here the emphasis on hegemony is not simply through coercion, it is on consensual hegemony, and unless the hegemonic culture prevailing in educational processes is noticed, social transformation will not be able to occur.

In this context, traditional school system serves as a re-producing function for stereotyped gender roles and class culture, so may deepen and reproduce existing inequalities, rather than liberating and empowering women. In many most advanced countries, compulsory education is a period of 12 years (K-12) which comprises primary and secondary education. However, the number of people without accessing to education in the rest of the world is still quite high, and according to data from UNESCO; 17% of the world's adult population are illiterate and two thirds of this number is women. As seen, the most disadvantaged ones to access to education are women. Considering these facts about education, there is a very strong need for adult education, which will enable women's participation in social and cultural processes in terms of empowering and liberating them together with schooling types such as vocational schools, vocational training institutions, colleges and universities, which will facilitate their participation in employment as well.

However, current educational policies are a hegemonic project beyond the analysis of the reality, schooling discussions and the problems of formal education, and since each hegemony relation is an educational relation, Gramsci's cultural hegemony and his organic intellectuals play a central role in politics of all social transformation (Mayo, 2013). Therefore, for the realization of social transformation and the collapse of the hegemonic order, adult education performed effectively is very important and needed (Gramsci, 1997). Furthermore, because the current educational system is not liberating, Freire (1982) asserts that teaching subjects whether they are the values or the empirical dimensions of facts tend to be petrificated and inanimated during the teaching process within the system defined as banking concept of education by him and at this point they block and paralyze the creative power of the learners. Thus, he proposes the problem-posing education, which starts continuous decoding of reality, contains a critical intervention to the reality and conscious management instead of banking concept of education system that serves to drown the consciousness. Then, in this form of education, the concepts "dialogue" and "praxis" as a conscious action, which will be realized between an adult educator who is defined as to be Gramsci's organic intellectual and the learners in share rooms not in classrooms, are noteworthy.

Another important name here is Mezirow and he emphasizes “transformative learning” in adult education and criticizes the traditional educational model that is shaped under the influence of positivism. Within this emphasis, the effects of Freire’s “problem posing education” which is put at the opposite side of traditional system called as “banking concept of education” are noticed. The reason, which leads Mezirow to theorize “transformative learning”, is the conscious-raising efforts emerged through the social movements of the 1970s especially in women's movement (Sayılan, 2008). Therefore, Freire’s “problem posing education” and Mezirow’s “transformative learning theory” come into prominence within sociology of adult education theories, and they shed light on the critical size of adult education based on concientizacion and transformation (Kaya and Altan, 2019).

That’s why Freire’s concepts “dialogue” and “praxis, and the effort for the transformation of the current learnings by forming meaning perspectives and schemas through Mezirow’s critical reflection are addressed together inside the “transformative action theory” which is derived from these two core bases. Besides, there exists the individual and social transformative power of action for the starting point of this co-theory, so inside the “transformative action theory”; critical evaluation of life experiences by the adults especially female adults who are more disadvantaged within the social structure and then transforming the learning practices via concientizacion are targeted (Figure 1).

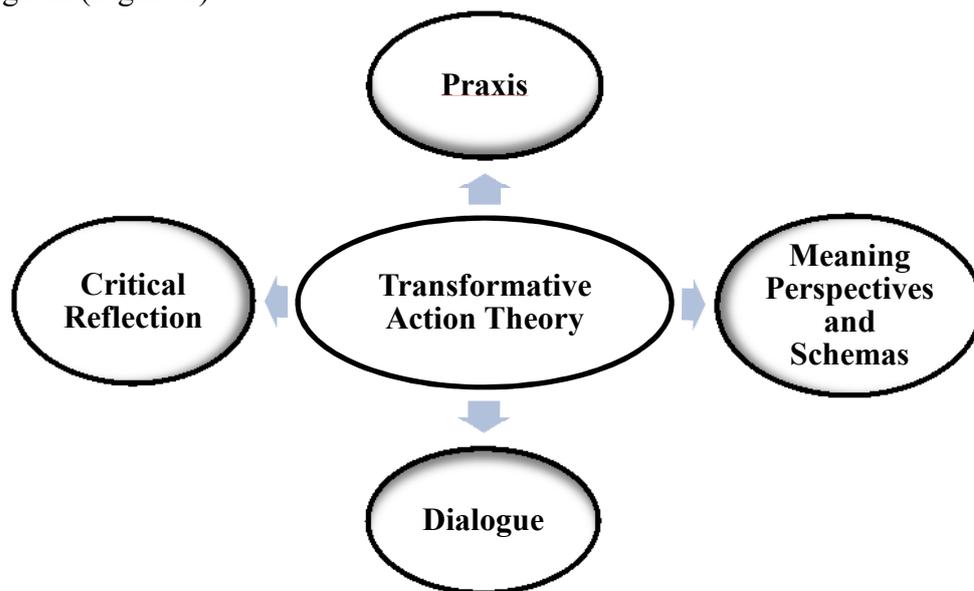


Figure 1: “Transformative Action Theory” Phases

In line with these targets of the “transformative action theory” within an critical adult education model, permanent sustainable empowerment processes will have been realized by providing female adults to get in “political and economic empowerment” which have critical importance in adulthood as the last two phases of the four basic dimensions of empowerment via creating the ability to think differently and multi-dimensional and developing new points of view. Radically, this kind of a reform should start from the rough and the base for each society. Hence, by this figure of empowerment will ensure not only the individual empowerment but also social empowerment together with the collective conscious and solidarity and it is the form of empowerment really needed and desirable for all individuals and societies in the world.

Conclusion

In terms of women's empowerment through education regulation of education policies, which are sensitive to gender equality in primary and secondary school education, the elimination of gender stereotypes in textbooks and a more egalitarian curriculum and process planning, are urgently required. Moreover; teachers, administrators and students' parents should be educated for acquiring gender sensitive perspective by experts of the field. In addition, representations of powerful women as role models for the society should be given more space in media. In addition, the solutions such as daycare and elder care centers should be applied by developing welfare state policies particularly for the child and elderly care responsibilities which are loaded on the shoulders of women and blocking their participation in employment. Besides, political and legal regulations, which will allow women to be involved in, decision making mechanisms and active women's representations should be realized for all institutions and organizations of the society. Since women's empowerment is an ongoing process throughout the life, egalitarian educational programs and policies that empower women should be designed for supporting both formal education and lifelong adult education as well.

At this point, the transforming effort of adults' individual and social actions together with the leadership of organic intellectuals as adult educators and critical reflection based on dialogue and praxis by forming meaning schemas in accordance with the richness of their life experiences through "transformative action theory" has a very significant core. Then, the social empowerment of women via adult education will be possible with their questioning of all life experiences in a critical point of view and getting new perspectives within a collective consciousness and solidarity. Otherwise, in line with the traditional educational practices, the new ones will be added to the existing disadvantages of women whom the capitalist processes already block combined with patriarchal society and will cause them to stay away forever from the all-individual and social empowerment practices in a community under the hegemonic order imposition.

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