



Credentialism for Adult Education and a Layered Problem — Take Korea and America as Examples

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Abstract: The paper aims at discussing the credentialism for adult education and the side effect of layered problems based on the examples of Korea and America, which are two countries from different continents with different educational problems. They share similar situation that credentialism facilitates educational and social inequality. It is roughly divided into four categories. At the beginning, it will turn to analyze the significance of a focus on credentialism for adult education. Then, it will turn to analyze adult education in a macro perspective from nation states and labor market needs. Though it contributes to professional labor markets, under the degree- oriented framework, people are more likely to regard adult credentials as an instrument instead of learning academically. Following this, it will discuss how and why people from disadvantaged background suffer from educational inequality enlarged by credentialism of adults. Last, but not the least, it will draw a brief conclusion to summarize analyses mentioned above.

Keywords: adult education, credentialism, layered problem

1. Introduction

As rapid development of globalization, adult education has witnessed continuous and rapid changes through decades all over the world. Adult education has developed in increasing relation to social demands and been utilized to cultivate people to solve current social problems. However, gradually increasing expansion of credentialism that is developed from institutionalization as degree system (Fuller & Alison, 2001, p. 240)[4]. Though it improves the overall standard of knowledge and skills of people that the society demands, it also leads to many problems. The emphasis of getting a degree in adult education actually ignores lifelong learning activity and diversity of learning. The more important thing is that credentialism for adult education enlarges the gap between different social classes. People from disadvantaged background are not capable to get continuous education, further, the social gap gradually evolves to educational gaps and inequality becomes more and more serious.

2. Credentialism for Adult Education in Korea

As rapid growth of economy and civilization, competition becomes increasingly fierce and division of labor in society also improved to an unprecedented level. After compulsory education, people tend to take further education when they become adults to make themselves more powerful and capable for climbing corporate ladders or development. An open and lifelong learning system was come up to all over the world. In order to standardize it, credentialism is inevitable. Take Korea as an example. Korean government has restructured its education system since mid-1990s in order to make Korean talents better cater to globalization. By establishing lifelong learning and training system, it aims at cultivating a competitive labor force. The flexible system helps people polish their knowledge and skills in a continuous way after they graduate from compulsory education system, which is often referred as formal one that is credential- based, such as Degree Exam (BDE), the Credit Bank System (CBS), as well as in-company colleges. Moreover, it also established cyber universities. In 2000, it already has nine cyber universities that were recognized and approved by the authority to confer degrees. Sophisticated level of credentialism for adults contributes to high level of workers and further contributes to rapid development of Korean economic. America also takes lifelong learning participation as an important topic. Dominant US ideology believed that educational expansion as well as heightening of occupational entry requirements is inevitable since there are more and more complex needs in workplaces, in other words, there is a need for more skilled labor forces now (Brown, 2001, p. 163) [2]. Besides, accepting higher education has positive contribution to social success and happiness (Jeong- Kyu, 2017)[5]. Therefore, focusing on credentialism for adults is favorable for civil happiness, life quality and social development.

3. Credentialism for Adult Education in America

Nation states offer support adult credentialism in order to encourage more skilled people to participate in labor market and satisfy demands in workplaces for further economic development (Jiang& Wan, 2008, p. 23)[6]. US has established a competitive and decentralized educational system, which is followed by other countries. Most countries imitated and established it in central ways. US's is different. It is much more contest and tournament. In the US, one must finish or win at a stage and then advance to a more advanced one. Different from the US, credentialism in many countries leads students to early stratification into diverse career tracks(Zeng, 2004, p. 14) Zeng. As Rubinson suggested the effects of lower- level educational expansion on economic productivity is not consistent while the expansion of higher education, especially adult education, has no relations to economic growth. Though economic productivity can contribute to mass education, it does not work reversely. The cutting edge of credentialism contributes to educational hierarchies evolvment, with defensive credentialing, middle-level technical- vocational certification, and lower-level mass literacy education follows then, probably because of some factors, for example, an expanding "educational welfare state" that avoids long- term unemployment risks. Weberian scholars also suggested a persuasive illustration related to higher education degrees and the credential inflation. They emphasize interaction between continuous growing credential sequences and capitalist influences upon adult education, especially those at lower level of credential ladders (Brown, 2001, p. 164)[2].

Besides, credential routinization leads to two possible results. On the one hand, it leads to homogeneity and rationalization of adult education. But also, on the other hand, credentialism is favorable to positional advantages in two labor markets, and they are bureaucratic and professional labor markets. Professional employment is often characterized with self- recruitment and self- regulation. Companies that demand professional workers need to control the quality of human resources by recognizing credentials.

4. Layered Problem for Adult Education in Korea

In Korea, the intervention of government in adult education is increasingly strengthened as it wants to increase its competitive power under globalization by continuing vocational education and training. It regards adult education as an efficient way to cultivate its soft power in order to compete in global arena. To develop it in an effective way, Korean government has already changed its role from a monitor to a supporter. It also established related research institutions for better policy making, for example, the Lifelong Education Center and the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET). Its policies help Korean adult education develops and leads to formalization and institutionalization (Sung- Jung, 2002, p. 287)[9].

Adult education has been institutionalized and formalized by an authoritative degree system. However, when credentialism continues to develop, inequality of adult education will be strengthened increasingly, which further will lead to a more severe social stratification. For many credentialism of adult education, it demands a large amount of money (VHS DVV International, 2019)[10]. For example, there are a large number of private institutions offering adult education and conferring degrees than public ones supported by the national government. In Korea, the more a person participated in adult education, the more it will participate further and develop better from the perspective of social status and salaries. Surveys have found gender, educational, happiness and provincial gaps between those who have opportunities to get adult education and those who are disadvantaged to get it (Jeong- Kyu, 2017)[5].

5. Layered Problem for Adult Education in America

In the US, expansion of college education has reinforced adult education inequality. College enrollment rates and college graduation rates are now much higher than any time in the past hundred years. However, people with lower educational degrees or people from low- income families are more likely to choose less professional work that does not need higher credentials (Ellen, 2017, p. 172)[3]. Therefore, they are more likely to miss promotion opportunities and are more likely to miss salary improvement in the long term. In the US, race is a big factor that could not be ignored in educational inequality. Many higher adult education institutions make its unwritten that higher credentials are for white elites. According to research, black and Latino's students are 3 times more likely than whites to be in high poverty schools and 12 times as likely to be in schools that are predominantly poor. They are hardly to reach better education when they climb higher credential ladders than white students in the US (Zeng, 2004, p. 12)[12].

According to Boeren, social mechanisms, involving inequality and social classes are significant factor of adult learning and education participation (Boeren, 2016, p. 2)[1]. For example, skill inequality, a workers' skill level affects adult education participation rates, there are around 30% of adults with low literacy skills while about 74% of adults with high literacy skills (Lee & Desjardins, 2019, p. 5)[7]. This can relate to human capital theory that is developed by Mincer and

Becker to analyze persons' decision to invest in education and training and the pattern of their lifetime earnings. The theory suggested that different kinds of human capital investment could be explained from the perspective of one's expected returns from human capital investment. Adult education investment involves tuition and foregone earnings during training time. Therefore, only when the results of the investments can be compensated by sufficiently higher lifetime earnings will they choose to study further and those who expect less salaries or opportunities in workplaces are less likely to invest human capital. These people are more likely to be women, less educated and poverty people. They do not invest and they are more likely to earn fewer lifetime earnings. Credentialism indeed makes gaps wider and wider. In the US, college fees do not seem to be affordable for students from poverty families or low-income families. According to the survey, average fees for private college during 2020- 2021 is \$ 41, 411 and \$ 11, 171 for state residents at public campus. Besides, corporates take advantage of oversaturated labor markets. 60% of all jobs demand higher education (Yakubu, 2021)[11]. Growing population of credentialism can be regarded as a monopoly in labor market. Credentialism grows and educational inflation comes, which means these degrees and qualifications will be increasingly devalued (Olson, 1983, p. 291)[8]. Indeed, companies tend to pay relatively less money for people who are qualified than before and also make the entry rather more competitive as people with disadvantaged background do not even have a chance to compete. Those who have better credentials are more likely to take advantage of good opportunities and socio-economic divide is even much more severe. People at lower level of credential ladder are more likely to choose another way of development instead of getting a higher education degree (Yakubu, 2021)[11].

6. Conclusion

Korea and US have different educational system while they share common problems of increasing credentialism and expansion of education. It is a good thing to develop education at macro level of civilization and economic development as well as at micro level of personal happiness and social achievement, but it still faces a lot of issues concerning educational inequality and social inequality. Dominant US ideology believed that educational expansion as well as heightening of occupational entry requirements is inevitable since there are more and more complex needs in workplaces, in other words, there is a need for more skilled labor forces now. Though main ideology suggests the importance of credentialism of adult education, some critics argues that it is not necessary since links between vocational development and credentialism can lead to diminished academic inclinations for people who just get the degree for instrumental use and cause sheep skin effects in job hunting (Brown, 2001, p. 175)[2]. Besides, least qualified or people have disadvantaged background, such as relatively low educational degree, gender (often referred to females who have burdened more in bearing babies and bringing up babies), racial, low-income families, to just name but a few, are more likely to miss opportunities in job hunting, job hunting and job boosting training and education, which is enlarged by credentialism in adult education. People with disadvantaged background suffer from growing credentialism, which further will lead to a more severe social stratification. People at lower level of credential ladder are more likely to choose another way of development instead of getting a higher education degree. Growing population of credentialism can be seen as a monopoly in labor market. Credentialism grows and educational inflation comes, which means these degrees and qualifications will then be devalued. Therefore, gaps between well educated people and people with disadvantaged background will be larger and larger.

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