



**The BeLL Project: Benefits of Lifelong Learning. The Spanish Case.**  
**Serrano, M. Angeles; Pulido, Miguel Angel. Universitat de Barcelona.**  
**[mangelesserrano@ub.edu](mailto:mangelesserrano@ub.edu)**

Summary: Recent studies demonstrated that non-formal adult education can lead to wider benefits (Manninen 2010). However, it does not exist enough empirical data on measurable benefits of participation in adult education across Europe to compare whether these benefits are similar or different. Following up to these situation, it has been carried out the European project “BeLL- Benefits of Lifelong Learning” (2011-2013) that has examined the present situation of liberal adult education in nine European countries through the application of a wide study that combines quantitative data (1000 interviews per country) with qualitative data (10 interviews per country). This paper focus on the situation of liberal adult education in Spain, presenting the relevant data obtained from the national research.

Key words: Lifelong learning, adult education, liberal education, Spanish case

## **1. Aims or objectives:**

---

The BeLL-study examines the complex relationship between participation in educational activities and the concrete benefits this brings for the well-being of the participants and the societies they live in; taking into account both social benefits of learning (i.e. better social cohesion, efficient networks, improved public health and a increased civic involvement) and individual benefits of learning (i.e. improved self-confidence and greater self-awareness) rather than economic benefits of learning in the form of improved earnings and higher revenues from taxes.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

---

Over the last few years political as well as scientific debates have stressed the growing importance of adult education. There prevails a consensus that adult education plays a significant role in promoting personal, social and economic well-being. However, until recently much of the evidence on adult learning’s potential to create personal, economic and social value has been scarce (Motschilnig, 2012).

The BeLL project is based on the results obtained from a Finish study (Manninen, 2010; 2012) that found a connection between several further benefits of adult learning (such as physical and mental well-being, civic and social engagement) and participation in liberal adult education. The results show that liberal adult education has at least some

---

Organizado por:





influence on the learning of certain skills and competencies (e.g. ICT skills, general knowledge), which promote direct benefits (e.g. new aspirations, new networks) or additional benefits (e.g. self-confidence, learning skills). More dated research supported these findings by suggesting that learning plays an important role in promoting specific benefits such as health (Hammond, 2004), parental abilities (Feinstein et al., 2008; Brasset-Grundy, 2004) or civic competencies (Feinstein et al., 2008; Preston, 2004). Additional literature points out that education may have a positive influence on societal cohesion and active citizenship as they promote trust, tolerance, civic co-operation or likelihood of voting and other aspects of active citizenship (Feinstein et al., 2008; OECD, 2007; Preston, 2004).

### 3. Methodology

---

To adequately represent the variety in European adult education landscape, data from 10.000 participants has been analysed. Specifically it has been carried out quantitative interviews (1000 per country), qualitative interviews (10 per country) and an institutional survey-feedback, which guaranteed a broad and excellent base of data.

Related to the Spanish case, it was conducted a total of 10 interviews in two different educational providers for adults, both in the North East of Spain. Participants in the interview were chosen randomly with the only criteria of taking (or having taken) at least one course in a liberal educational program during the previous 12 months.

### 4. Discussion on data

---

The most important benefits of participation in adult education found in each interview are summarized in this section.

#### **Interview 1 - Participant M** (gender, age, education, profession, courses)

- Female (25 years old)
- Student at Universitat de Tarragona/ Practicing in the Red Cross
- English B 2.0 (online course), Catalan D, Intervención en socio-adicciones (online course)

Participant M took 3 courses in the last 12 months and these 2 courses were for her study, which as shown in the analysis career options are found mostly because she looks for better opportunities for work. Also she strongly shows her interest in

---

Organizado por:





communication skills since that is what she needs for her career and tells that she acquired social skills, communication skills, and knowledge. However, as for one of the two online courses she took, she claims unsatisfaction because of lacking of communication.

She carries a sense of self-confidence into further education because she was motivated after taking these courses. Although immediate changes were not seen, she is conscious about the importance of education especially when looking for work and mentions the possibilities of further education with this programme.

#### **Interview 2 - Participant Jo**

- Male (66 years old)
- No profession (retired)
- English

For participant Jo, this was the third year of learning English. His benefits are found in social interaction, motivation to learn, and mostly language skills in terms of seeking for socialization with foreigners. He appreciates what he is learning and speaks of how much he enjoys having social interactions and new networks generated in classes. He also mentions this brought the family connection by teaching and asking questions about English language.

#### **Interview 3 - Participant D**

- Male (77 years old)
- No profession (retired)
- Literary discussion, ICT resource

With participant D, as most benefits, mental well-being, ICT skills, increased reading practices, joy of learning, social interaction are found. He tells how much he is content with these courses and this is why he has been taking courses for years.

He uses his skills acquired at the course and tries to improve it. Also he tries to keep himself up-dated with technologies and the society by taking these courses and socializing with people from the classes because he concerns about aging.

#### **Interview 4 - Participant No**

- Female (73 years old)

---

Organizado por:





- No profession
- Bobbin lacing

The remarkable benefits found here are social interaction, skills in handcraft, shared experience, and joy of learning. Participant No had taken the same course before and so she was encouraged to take this course again to practice more. She talks about how people socialize in class, what kind of activities they do such as bringing in breakfast and eat together, and how useful she finds exchanging information about the materials, shops and knowledge.

She transmits the idea of “being a part of class means more than just attending a class to learn.” Besides, she really enjoys doing handcrafts. Even though she has grandchildren to take care of, she manages time for this.

#### **Interview 5 - Participant Nu**

- Female (37 years old)
- School dining instructor
- Preparation of entrance exam for the intermediate grade of vocational training

For participant Nu, social interaction, confidence in own skills, self-confidence, self-purpose, self-responsibility, and mental well-being are seen.

Because of her immigration background, she had difficulties in adopting herself in different educational systems from different countries. She was not confident and underestimated herself until she took a course here for the first time with a recommendation of her friend. Then she started taking this course, finding self-confidence, and developing her goals in learning. She has some clear ideas about what other courses can be useful for her job and shows interests in further education. She also mentions, as seen in coping with parental roll, now she is confident when it comes to studying with her daughter.

#### **Interview 6 - Participant E**

- Male (28 years old)
- A worker at a nightclub of public relations
- Preparation of entrance exam for

---

Organizado por:





Participant E has a clear idea for taking this course, which is to get a job that he wants to do (a hairdresser). He feels more confident after started the course. He comments that meeting new people and making friends or finding old friends helps him to feel secure. He delivers sense of staying updated, self-confidence, and social interaction.

#### **Interview 7 - Participant Ju**

- Male (38 years old)
- No profession
- English for adults, IT, Furniture restoration, Early detection of dyslexia,

With participant Ju, self-discovery, self-confidence, social interaction, language skills, and skills in handcraft and arts are strongly observed.

He tells that class hours are not enough to develop friendships with classmates, but he values the social interaction in class, saying that sometimes he learns more with his classmates than with his teacher. And he adds that teachers can provide some job information.

Regarding benefits of career options, even though he is still unemployed, he feels more confident about what he is doing and prepared for a job in this field (early detection of dyslexia). Furthermore, he is taking another course related to this one (psychopedagogy) to be more prepared for the future job.

Respecting English course, he is aware of importance of English language.

Overall these courses have been helpful to him to grow personally and professionally.

#### **Interview 8 - Participant R**

- Female ( 70 years old)
- Retired

Participant R shows especially a sense of self-satisfaction between others, which are self-achievement, writing skills, numerical skills, motivation to learn, and mental well-being.

---

Organizado por:





She insists that there was not much necessity to take courses, but she took this one for her personal satisfaction. After all she learned something that she did not know and some writing skills which she might need, for example, to write a claim letter or to fill in a document... And she confesses that she could take the same course again to complete her study, which she says one time is not enough to learn thoroughly.

#### **Interview 9 - Participant S**

- Female ( 44 years old)
- No profession
- Literature of Catalan

Participant S delivers a strong sense of motivation to learn, quality of life, and well-being in daily life.

She talks about her life back in her hometown where she couldn't receive enough education and how much she enjoys being back in class discovering new categories of books and new things.

Moreover, now she feels more confident when she talks to her children, which allows her to talk with more topics and opinions.

Another benefit mentioned by her is that being a part of society (in class) helps to stay active, with makeup on, going out for a coffee or taking a walk with people from class instead of staying at home sitting all day long.

#### **Interview 10 - Participant Ma**

- Female (67 years old )
- No profession (retired)
- Literacy, Technology (Photoshop)

Participant Ma transmits really positive senses in self-confidence, social interaction, and well-being in daily life. Even though she is a busy person doing housework and looking after her grandchildren from early in the morning to midnight, she always tries to make time for herself to make her life better by learning and challenging new things. So she found the Photoshop course really interesting (ICT skills), and is willing to take more courses afterwards.

---

Organizado por:





She also comments that life is all about learning. She learns a lot in class from helping each other and this fellowship enriches life in general. (motivating others to learn)

## 5. Conclusiones

---

Los datos obtenidos hasta el momento, en este estudio piloto, parecen apoyar la taxonomía propuesta, al menos en su 'suficiencia'. Sin embargo, aún se necesitan estudios adicionales para evaluar mejor la necesidad y aumentar la validez de la suficiencia del conjunto de categorías propuestas.

Esto resultados son interesantes para los educadores, especialmente en un momento en que se potencia el aprendizaje multilingüe en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Conocer no sólo que obstáculos de comprensión tienen los estudiantes cuando leen en inglés, sino también qué estrategias utilizan para superarlos podría ser de gran ayuda para focalizar mejor la enseñanza de la comprensión lectora en esta lengua.

## 6. Bibliografía

---

- Baker, L. y Anderson, R.I. (1982). Effects of inconsistent information on text processing: evidence for comprehension monitoring. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 17, 281-294. doi:10.2307/747487
- Baker, L. (1985). How do we know when we don't understand? Standards for evaluating text comprehension. En D.L. Forrest-Pressley, G.E. Mackinnon y T.G. Waller (Eds.), *Metacognition, cognition and human performance* (pp.155-205). New York: Academic Press.
- Chinn, C.A. y Brewer, W.F. (1993). The role of anomalous data in knowledge acquisition. A theoretical framework and implications for Science instruction. *Review of Educational Research*, 63(1), 1-49. doi: 10.3102/00346543063001001
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning. Teaching. Assessment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gómez, A., Devís, A. y Sanjosé, V. (2013). Control de la Comprensión micro y macro-estructural durante la lectura de textos científicos en lengua extranjera: ¿Algo más que dominio del idioma? *Revista Signos-Estudios de Lingüística*, 46(81), 56-81. doi: 10.4067/S0718-09342013000100003

---

Organizado por:





- Gómez, A. y Sanjosé, V. (2012). Effectiveness of comprehension monitoring strategies in EFL non-bilingual Spanish university students reading science texts. *RAEL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada*, 11, 87-103. Recuperado de: <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4181452>
- Nelson, T.O. y Narens, L. (1990). Metamemory: A theoretical framework and new findings. En H.B. Gordon (Ed.), *Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, 26 (pp.125-173). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Otero, J. (2009). Question generation and anomaly detection in texts. En D. Hacker, J. Dunlosky y A. Graesser (Eds.), *Handbook of Metacognition in Education* (pp. 47-59). New York: Routledge.
- Otero, J. y Campanario, J.M. (1990). Comprehension evaluation and regulation in learning from science texts. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 27 (5), 447-460. doi: 10.1002/tea.3660270505
- Otero, J., Campanario, J.M. y Hopkins, K. (1992). The relationship between academic achievement and metacognitive comprehension monitoring ability of Spanish secondary school students. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 52, 419-430. doi: 10.1177/0013164492052002017
- Sanjosé, V., Fernández, J.J. y Vidal-Abarca, E. (2010). Importancia de las destrezas de procesamiento de la información en la comprensión de textos científicos. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 33(4), 529-541. doi: 10.1174/021037010793139581
- Wang, M.C., Haertel, G.D. y Walberg, H.J. (1993). Toward a knowledge base for school learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 63(3), 249-294. doi: 10.3102/00346543063003249
- Winograd, P. y Johnston, P. (1982). Comprehension monitoring and the Error Detection Paradigm. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 14(1), 61-76. doi:10.1080/10862968209547435

---

Organizado por:

