Predictors of Adult Education Program Satisfaction among Las Vegas Community-Dwelling Older Adults

Takashi Yamashita, Ph.D., Erick B. López, MA., & Jennifer R. Keene, Ph.D
Department of Sociology, University of Nevada Las Vegas

Abstract

Life-long learning has received growing attention as the American population ages. Both formal (e.g., organized) and informal (e.g., self-learning) education is beneficial for physical health, emotional well-being and social networks in later life. One key determinant of successful learning among older adults is the continuation of learning activities. In general, participants who are satisfied with their educational programs/learning activities are more likely than others to continue their participation over the long term. However, little is known about what factors predict satisfaction with educational programs among older adults in urban communities. Data were collected from 1,075 middle-aged to older adults (age 50 and older) who participated in organized adult education programs provided by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) in Las Vegas. A total of 330 respondents completed an online survey. Partial proportional odds ordinal logistic regression was used to model program satisfaction as a function of demographic, socioeconomic, OLLI program-related and health/well-being variables. Results showed that being female (OR = 2.16, p < 0.05), lower income (OR = 1.93, p < 0.05), religious affiliation (OR = 1.92, p < 0.05) and better health (OR = 2.20, p < 0.05) and greater number of courses taken (OR = 1.35, p < 0.05) were associated with higher satisfaction with the OLLI programs. The findings were evaluated in hopes of providing helpful suggestions for further improvement of the program.

Introduction

• Due to the ongoing population aging (14% of Americans are 65 years and older → projected to be 20% by 2050), lifelong education has received increased attention for nation’s well-being (AOA, 2013).
• Greater numbers of older adults now look for educational opportunities (e.g., lifelong learning) in the so-called knowledge society where new knowledge is generated day-by-day and one’s up-to-date knowledge is more valued than ever in history (Tam, 2014).
• Lifelong learning -- “all learning activity taken throughout life” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p9) but often used in economic/occupational settings -- is considered as any organized adult education programs for older adults in this study.
• Similar to the known positive effects of education (i.e., educational attainment, see Ross & Mirowsky, 1999), lifelong learning is also positively associated with health, well-being and quality of life (Schulter, 2004).
• However, the majority of previous studies focused primarily on initial/short-term motivation and barriers to participate in lifelong learning programs in older populations.
• There is a need to study promoting factors such as satisfaction and positive experience that promote long-term participation in lifelong learning programs (Chang and Lin, 2011).

Key Findings

• Being female, lower household income, religious affiliation, greater self-rated health and the greater number of courses taken were associated with greater satisfaction with the OLLI at UNLV program among older participants.

Table 1: Estimated Odds Ratios of Statistically Significant Lifelong Learning Program Satisfaction Predictors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with the OLLI at UNLV program</th>
<th>Gender (female)</th>
<th>Lower Household income (1st quartile = Less than $50,000)</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation (Yes)</th>
<th>Self-rated health (1-3: Worse health - Better health)</th>
<th>Number of the OLLI at UNLV courses taken</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: the models were adjusted for the covariates (see the Methods section).

Results

• Data were obtained from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UNLV -- an organized adult education program for those 50 years and older -- in Spring semester 2014.
• 330 out of 1,125 active members responded to the online survey. The final sample size was 296 after excluding the invalid cases and missing values in key variables.
• Outcome variable [satisfaction with the OLLI at UNLV program] was measured in 1-3 (poor – excellent).
• Proportional odds ordinal logistic regressions (Allison, 2005) were used to model satisfaction with the OLLI at UNLV program as a function of age, gender, race, number of household members, household income, employment status, religious affiliation, self-rated health, motivation for the OLLI at UNLV, transportation, number of classes taken, years with OLLI at UNLV and whether a respondent attended the OLLI courses with family or friends. All analyses were performed with R 3.1.1 (R Core Team, 2013; Venables & Repley, 2002).
• All estimated coefficients were exponentiated and interpreted as odds ratios.

Discussion

• Women had 2.2 times odds of being satisfied with the OLLI at UNLV program than men.
• Lower household income (OR = 1.9) was associated with greater satisfaction with OLLI at UNLV.
• Individuals with a religious affiliation had 1.9 times odds of being satisfied with OLLI at UNLV than those without.
• Better health (OR = 2.2) was associated with greater satisfaction with OLLI at UNLV.
• Taking one additional OLLI course increased the odds of reporting greater satisfaction with the program by 35%.
• Findings about gender and religious affiliation suggest that social network/support could enhance satisfaction with OLLI at UNLV and those without established social support may benefit from additional social opportunities in the program.
• Lower income may indicate greater appreciation or need of social and emotional support from the lifelong learning peers.
• Greater number of courses taken could be an outcome of previous positive learning experience. Convenient scheduling (e.g., place similar classes in the same time slots) may enhance the participants’ lifelong learning experience and encourage them to take more courses in the future.

References available upon request