The Benefits of Lifelong Learning for Wellbeing

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Outline

1. What is lifelong learning?
2. What are the benefits of education?
3. How does education affect our well-being?
4. Why are people engaged in lifelong learning?
5. Why should we care about lifelong learning?
6. Life Wide Learning and Well-being Survey
7. Concluding remarks
1. What is Lifelong learning (LL)?

- Basil Yeaxlee (1929) coined the term → 85 years old
- “all learning activity taken throughout life” ¹
- In general, the concept of LL is used in the context of occupational and economic benefits ²
- Lifewide learning ³:
  (1) formal
  (2) non-formal
  (3) informal
Lifewide Learning Model

Birth

Non-Formal

Formal

Life-wide

Lifelong

Informal

Death
2. What are the Benefits of education?

- Life course: education, work & retirement

- Educational attainment
  → Well-being
  1. Health
  2. Life expectancy
  3. Happiness
Self-rated health by educational attainment

The higher the education, the better the health

- College Degree: 8% Bad, 92% Good
- Some College: 15% Bad, 85% Good
- High School: 20% Bad, 80% Good
- Less than High School: 37% Bad, 63% Good
Self-rated health by educational attainment

The higher the education, the slower the health decline with aging.
Life expectancy at age 25 by gender and education

- Less than High School:
  - Women: 52
  - Men: 46
- High School:
  - Women: 57
  - Men: 49
- Some College or More:
  - Women: 62
  - Men: 57
Education and happiness by metropolitan areas

The higher the education (%), the happier the city is!
3. How does education influence our health?  

- Economic Resources
- Psychosocial Resources
- Health Lifestyle

Education → Health & Well-being
Benefits of continuing education/LL among mid-age to older adults

• Same as formal education ➔ physical and mental health ¹
• Brain health, cognitive function, Alzheimer’s disease, memory ²
• Enhanced social network ³
• Personal development, joy of learning ⁴
• “Ripples on a pond effect” ⁵
4. Why are middle-age to older people engaged in lifelong learning?

Many reasons

• Job-related
• Brain health
• Personal development
• Cognitive interests
• Social network
• Previous learning Experience

Figure 1. Learning motivation of older adults.
5. Why care about lifelong learning?

• Population aging 14% (2013) → over 20% (2050) ¹
• Health and well-being ²
• Formal schooling in youth to lifelong process ³
• Knowledge society ⁴ & economy ⁵
• **However**, motivation for learning declines with aging ⁶
• Research has focused mainly on the **negative aspects** of LL participation → Need to know more about how LL is done and how to continue learning!
Lifelong learning programs examples

• The Elderhostel (since 1975)
• The University of the Third Age (since 1973)
• Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (since 2001)
What is OLLI?

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UNLV

• Designed for retired and semi-retired adults age 50+
• Continuing education
• Opportunity to meet new and interesting peers
• Variety of intellectual classes
6. Life Wide Learning and Well-being Survey

**Purposes:** To better understand the benefits of lifelong learning and to inform the OLLI at UNLV programs

- Longitudinal survey
- Three waves of data (November 2014)
- Health and well-being, social interactions, demographic characteristics, and participation in OLLI at UNLV
Demographics

• Data from Spring 2014
• 330 OLLI participants (N = 1,125)
• Median age: 70
• 69% Women
• 91% White
Marital Status by Gender

- **Women:**
  - Married: 78%
  - Not Married: 22%

- **Men:**
  - Married: 95%
  - Not Married: 5%
Educational Attainment

- Less than high school: 0%
- High school: 6%
- Some college: 22%
- Bachelor's degree: 30%
- Master's degree: 32%
- Doctoral or professional degree: 10%
Health and Well-being

Self-rated health

WHO Well-being Index [0 → 100 = ill → well]
Mean (SD) = 74 (16)
OLLI at UNLV

- 81% participated in OLLI in a previous semester
- 45% have been with OLLI for 1-4 years
- On average, the OLLI participants took 3.1 courses per semester
- Some took 15 courses!!
Why people participate

Motivations

1. Educational purposes (81%)
2. Social opportunities (10%)
3. To fill spare time (5%)

Other motivations: fun, stay active, work-related, ukulele, etc.

Satisfaction with OLLI at UNLV

- Excellent: 55.0%
- Very good: 34.0%
- Good: 10.0%
- Fair: 0.3%
- Poor: 0.3%
Participants Voices

Question: “Do you have any comments or suggestions for the OLLI program?”

Themes:

• Increase social interaction
• Increase extracurricular activities
• Member recruitment
• Invite speakers/lecturers
Research

Data collection, conference presentations, OLLI site presentations, data analysis, manuscript writing, etc.

2013
• Data collection (wave 1 - pilot)
• Two conference presentations

2014
• Data collection (wave 2 & 3)
• Two conference presentations
• One scientific paper (in progress)
Research - Current project and preliminary findings

Results:
1. women (+)
2. number of household members (+)
3. income (+)
4. religious affiliation (+)
5. the number of OLLI classes (+)
6. health (+)

Discussion: Gender difference, non-OLLI social network, resource (e.g., time availability) and health status.
OLLI @ UNLV Survey Project
http://unlvolli.wordpress.com/

UNLV department of Sociology
http://www.unlv.edu/sociology

Osher Life Learning Institute at UNLV
http://olll.unlv.edu/
7. Concluding remarks

- Next steps:
  - Examination of the association between lifelong learning (i.e., OLLI at UNLV program) and well-being with the longitudinal data.
  - Expand the scope of inquiry to the national network of OLLI.

- Lifelong learning
  - health, well-being, social network, life satisfaction, happiness, etc.
Thank you

Contact information

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References available upon request