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Adult Civic Educators' Educational Needs Assessment in the Context of South Korea

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Abstract

This study measured current and required levels of educational capacities of adult civic educators in South Korea. The pairwise comparisons provided implications for more urgent and important professional development areas.

Keywords: adult civic education, educators' needs assessment, democracy education

South Korean Context

Efforts that jointly respond to community crises, protect the lives of the underprivileged under threat, and build a life of inclusion and solidarity rather than exclusion and hatred, are more important than ever in global crises such as the climate crisis, war, and pandemic. Adult education, especially adult civic education, is historically regarded as a key area for finding new hopes among crises in this era (Glasoton, 2007; Choudry, 2015). The history of adult civic education in South Korea (hereafter, Korea) is in line with the history of democratization. Democracy in Korea has been developed based on the sacrifice and participation of citizens, such as the 4.19 Citizens Revolution, the 5.18 Gwangju Democratization Movement, and the 2016 Candlelight Revolution. In this process, South Korean (hereafter, Korean) civil society became a place for social movement learning and a place for civic learning to acquire citizenship and to learn democracy ideology and knowledge (Heo, 2012).

Adult education for democratic citizenship (AEDC), which is centered on various civic activist groups and non-profit private educational institutions, has recently been carried out in the government domain. According to the Lifelong Education Act of Korea, 'civic participation education' is stipulated as a major area of lifelong education. Local governments are enacting the ordinance on AEDC and expanding AEDC projects and programs (Heo, Kim & Lee, 2021). In the process of institutionalization of adult AEDC, new adult civic educators are emerging in Korean society. In the past, civil society NGO activists were the main actors of AEDC. However, professional instructors, program planners, managers, and volunteers in civic education programs are emerging as new educational entities in adult civic education. They are working as instructors, program planners, and managers in each field of democratic civic education, and are being asked for new capacities as educators according to changes in the political and social environment as well as the institutional environment. In this sense, this study aims to analyze the educational needs and demands of adult civic educators who are newly emerging in Korean society. The results of this study would contribute to our understanding and to defining the core competencies of adult civic educators involved in the education of democracy to adults.

Literature Review

In critical adult education, educators are considered as cultural activists who empower learners as the agent of knowing rather than as a knowledge carrier (Frerie, 1970; Freire & Horton, 1990). In adult civic education, the role of teachers in promoting knowledge and culture creation in the process of civic participation is more stressed (Galston, 2007). According to Ahn et al. (2020), despite the quantitative expansion of adult civic education in Korean society,

professional development opportunities are less accessible, and the existing educational programs mainly consist of lecture-oriented rather than discussion-oriented programs, despite the growth of citizens' democratic capabilities. Despite the fact that adult civic education programs should be organized and operated in consideration of lifelong learning principles over the entire life span (Sim, 2017), efforts to enhance the professionalism of AEDC from a lifelong learning perspective appear to be insufficient (Cho et al., 2016).

Methods

The purpose of this study is to analyze the educational needs of adult civic educators in South Korea. In order to measure emerging civic educators' current and new educational needs, the development of a new customized survey is required. The survey development was processed in the following manner. First, the concept and scope of adult civic education were reviewed from literature research related to education for adult civic educators. Programs for adult civic education activists were analyzed and core competencies of adult civic educators were extracted. Second, a focus group interview (FGI) was conducted with 8 professionals in the field, including lecturers, researchers, and activists at the AEDC Association in Korea. Job duties and training requirements of the AEDC activists were analyzed. Third, a questionnaire was developed based on literature analysis and FGI. The questionnaire consisted of five sections: previous experiences of professional development participation, preferences on future professional development opportunities, current performance levels of 39 capacities of civic educators, the importance levels of the same 39 capacities, and demographics. The core competencies of adult civic educators developed in this study is presented in the findings.

The survey was distributed to adult civic educators, program planners, and volunteers in civil society organizations in A Province through SurveyMonkey between October 15, 2021 and October 21, 2021, with the help of government officials from A Province. Coffee coupons worth \$3 were given to the survey participants. In total, 368 responses were collected. Eight highly suspected repeated submissions were removed and 225 responses with no missing data were used for further analyses. In addition to the demographics, descriptive analysis of the needs assessment scale, cross tabulation analysis, multivariate analysis, analytic hierarchy process (AHP) analysis and importance-performance analysis (IPA) were performed to understand the gaps between the current levels and the ideal levels of each capacity.

Findings

In this section, results from the questionnaire, AHP results of the preferred program areas, descriptive results of the core competencies of adult civic educators, and IPA results depending on the participation roles and participation length in civil society organizations (CSOs) are presented.

AHP Results The researchers classified the areas of the AEDC professional development programs into the following three categories through literature review and FGI results: Learning Democracy (LD), Educating Democracy Citizenship (EDC), and Activist Growth (AG). Respondents were asked about the relative importance of the three areas through a pairwise comparison method on a 10-point scale. Considering the consistency ratio for the response result, cases with a consistency ratio of .5 or higher were excluded from the analysis. As a result of the AHP analysis, the AG area was found to have the highest importance with .44, followed by the DCE area .30 and DL area .26. These results were reflected in determining the number of

programs in each area in program development, and each definition and area was revised in program development as presented in Table 1.

Descriptive Results

The descriptive results of the importance and performance levels of each core competency for adult civic educators are presented in Table 2.

IPA Results

The importance-performance analysis (IPA) considers the degree of importance in performing each competency and the level of the competency already possessed for the same item. This method is useful to identify learning needs with more urgent needs and areas with less urgent or sufficient competence. As a result of the *t*-test, statistically significant differences were found in all items, confirming that the current performance level was lower than the importance level. With respect to educational needs, using the *mean weighted discrepancy scores* (Borich, 1980), high demands were found in *items 23, 22, 30, 20, and 6* in general. Such basic competencies as *items 12 and 1* are ranked with the lowest needs. Depending on the roles of CSO participation, the educational needs were identified differently. For example, CSO activists identified the most urgent need for training on future social issues (*item 39*); adult civic educators, researchers, and public officials in AEDC showed the highest demands on understanding deliberative democracy (*item 6*). Similarly, depending on respondents' length of CSO participation or AEDC involvement, a clear difference was found in the educational needs.

[Due to the limitation of the paper length, full results and discussions will be presented at the conference.]

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Table 1*Definitions, Priority, and Rank of the Competency Areas of Adult AEDC*

Competency Areas	Program Areas	Definitions	Priority	Rank
Learning Democracy	Learning Democracy	Learning to strengthen theoretical knowledge and practical capacity for democracy as an activist in AEDC such as democracy, democratic system, democratic literacy, civil society, and social movements	.26	3
EDC	Educating Democracy	Learning to strengthen the theoretical base and practical competence of AEDC as an activist in AEDC, such as understanding AEDC, methods of AEDC, and the development and operation of AEDC programs	.30	2
Activist Growth	Becoming a Professional Activist in Democracy	Cultivating theoretical and practical perspectives as an AEDC activist and to promote self-growth as an expert	.44	1

Table 2*Importance and Performance levels of Core Competencies of Adult Civic Educators*

Competency Areas	Core Competencies	Performance		Importance	
		M	SD	M	SD
Democracy Learning	1. Basic understanding of democracy	3.45	.793	4.11	.815
	2. Basic understanding of democratic institutions	3.38	.835	4.08	.808
	3. Understanding democracy and local autonomy	3.37	.838	4.12	.827
	4. Understanding of Gender and Democracy	3.31	.848	4.05	.840
	5. Understanding Multiculturalism and Democracy	3.34	.828	4.09	.815
	6. Understanding Deliberative Democracy	3.05	.891	3.98	.872
	7. Democratic resolution of conflicts in everyday life	3.47	.827	4.22	.853
	8. Ability to practice democracy in everyday life	3.5	.811	4.2	.894
	9. Ability to understand and criticize opinion polls	3.37	.885	4.09	.826
	10. Ability to understand and criticize media messages, including media reports	3.39	.902	4.14	.838
	11. Ability to understand and criticize political issues	3.29	.885	4.11	.802
AEDC	12. Basic understanding of AEDC	3.57	.846	4.21	.774
	13. Understanding the meaning, history, and status of the practice of AEDC	3.27	.818	4.05	.808
	14. A general understanding of the role and competency of instructors at the AEDC	3.29	.903	4.1	.789
	15. Understanding of AEDC Learners	3.37	.9	4.16	.777

Competency Areas	Core Competencies	Performance		Importance	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	16. AEDC Learner Management, Counseling, and Support Capabilities	3.23	.898	4.05	.845
	17. Ability to plan AEDC programs	3.22	.932	4.06	.842
	18. Ability to operate AEDC programs	3.27	.953	4.09	.765
	19. Ability to develop lecture plans for AEDC	3.1	.917	3.99	.806
	20. Ability to develop AEDC curriculum, textbooks, and teaching materials	2.98	.984	3.92	.827
	21. General understanding of AEDC methods	3.21	.94	4.11	.788
	22. AEDC Lecture Competency	3.07	1.028	4.07	.806
	23. Ability to conduct debates on AEDC	3.05	.976	4.07	.801
	24. Ability to operate deliberative democracy programs such as facilitators and moderators	3.08	.942	4.01	.809
	25. Competence to operate non-face-to-face online AEDC	3.16	.941	3.93	.826
	26. AEDC Evaluation Competency	3.1	.931	3.98	.776
	27. Understanding of current issues of AEDC (systems, policies, issues)	3.2	.899	4.05	.824
Activist Growth	28. Understanding global democracy	3.07	.882	3.98	.806
	29. Understanding the relationship between social movements (resident autonomy, human rights, peace, labor, environment) and AEDC	3.27	.874	4.08	.802
	30. Experience or understanding of excellent AEDC cases	3.04	.887	4.03	.795
	31. Ability to practice civic movements at the local, village, and neighborhood level	3.28	.897	4.1	.789
	32. Public project planning and operation capability	3.2	.914	3.96	.806
	33. Ability to communicate with citizens	3.43	.906	4.18	.851
	34. Citizen Organizational Competencies	3.28	.897	4.06	.858
	35. Ability to activate current affiliated groups	3.33	.848	4.03	.836
	36. New organizational planning and operation capabilities such as cooperatives and social enterprises	3.13	.917	3.9	.827
	37. Ability to research and study major issues with members or residents	3.24	.897	4.03	.800
	38. Self-growth as a civic activist	3.37	.895	4.16	.823
	39. Understanding future social issues (corona, block chain, big data)	3.21	.834	4.04	.794

Table 3*Top Ten Educational Needs of Adult Civic Educators (N=225)*

Core Competencies	Gap	<i>t</i>	<i>mwdc</i> *	Rank
23. Ability to conduct debates on AEDC	-1.018	-13.776***	0.018	1
22. AEDC Lecture Competency	-1.000	-12.662***	0.018	2
30. Experience or understanding of excellent AEDC cases	-0.996	-13.958***	0.018	3
20. Ability to develop AEDC curriculum, textbooks, and teaching materials	-0.943	-12.448***	0.017	4
6. Understanding Deliberative Democracy	-0.930	-13.679***	0.017	5
24. Ability to operate deliberative democracy programs such as facilitators and moderators	-0.930	-12.699***	0.017	6
28. Understanding global democracy	-0.903	-13.207***	0.016	7
21. General understanding of AEDC methods	-0.899	-12.15***	0.016	8
19. Ability to develop lecture plans for AEDC	-0.890	-12.127***	0.016	9
26. AEDC Evaluation Competency	-0.885	-12.559***	0.016	10

Note: Mean weighted discrepancy scores**Table 4***Top Five Educational Needs of Full-time CSO activists (n=32)*

Core Competencies	Gap	<i>t</i>	<i>mwdc</i> *	Rank
39. Understanding future social issues (corona, block chain, big data)	-1	-6.177***	0.126	1
20. Ability to develop AEDC curriculum, textbooks, and teaching materials	-0.906	-5.326***	0.115	2
22. AEDC Lecture Competency	-0.906	-4.71***	0.114	3
23. Ability to conduct debates on AEDC	-0.875	-3.999***	0.11	4
21. General understanding of AEDC methods	-0.844	-5.003***	0.106	5

Note: Mean weighted discrepancy scores**Table 5***Top Five Educational Needs of Respondents with less than 3 Year Participation (n=139)*

Core Competencies	Gap	<i>t</i>	<i>mwdc</i> *	Rank
23. Ability to conduct debates on AEDC	-1.158	-12.507***	0.037	1
22. AEDC Lecture Competency	-1.122	-10.966***	0.036	2
30. Experience or understanding of excellent AEDC cases	-1.079	-11.459***	0.034	3
20. Ability to develop AEDC curriculum, textbooks, and teaching materials	-1.029	-10.932***	0.033	4
24. Ability to operate deliberative democracy programs such as facilitators and moderators	-1.029	-10.932***	0.033	5

Note: Mean weighted discrepancy scores