THE NEXUS OF MIGRATION AND ADULT EDUCATION: CLARIFYING CONCEPTS AND CREATING NEW TRAJECTORIES FOR INTERNATIONAL ADULT EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: The unprecedented movement of people across borders presents complex challenges and opportunities, particularly in the field of adult learning and education (ALE). Despite the scale of migration, there is a critical gap in how existing ALE frameworks address the educational needs of both migrants and host communities. Hence, we explored the nexus between migration and ALE, arguing for a transformative paradigm that goes beyond traditional models of assimilation, multiculturalism, and integration. We proposed Migration Education (MigEd) as a comprehensive approach that equips migrants with essential language, vocational, and life skills while promoting intercultural understanding, social cohesion, and mutual respect between migrants and host communities. After discussing essential migration-related concepts and theories and highlighting the potential of MigEd to facilitate personal and societal transformation, we outlined new trajectories for research, practice, and policy in international adult education. Among others, we called for greater international collaboration and policy alignment to ensure that MigEd programs are responsive, effective, and aligned with global human rights standards.

Keywords: host nationals, inclusion, migrants, migration education, transformation

Introduction

Migration is unprecedented in today's world (Morrice et al., 2017), with the number of international migrants estimated to be 281 million. This accounts for around 3.6% of the world population (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022, p. 114) suggests that "mass migration" is one of the challenges confronting human civilization, resulting in demographic shifts. The complexity of migration is heightened by the diverse motivations behind it—voluntary or otherwise—ranging from marriage and family obligations, educational pursuits, employment opportunities, and humanitarian concerns such as fleeing persecution and forced displacement due to prolonged conflicts, environmental disasters, and extreme poverty (Castles et al., 2014). Morrice and colleagues (2017) argued that the growing global inequalities and the scale of human crises add to the complexity of migration trends. Despite the scale and complexity of migration, there remains a critical gap in how adult learning and education (ALE) frameworks address the ambivalent educational needs of both migrants and host communities (Wildemeersch, 2017). This paper seeks to address this gap by exploring the nexus between migration and ALE, to propose new trajectories for research, practice, and policy in ALE. Although historically ALE has created migration-related learning, these responses to mass migration have been driven by the needs of labor markets (Guo, 2010; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Morrice et al., 2021). We argue that there is a need to conceptualize the nexus of migration and ALE in a holistic manner that acknowledges and addresses the changing needs of migrants and host societies in the current socio-political climate. Hence, in this paper, we

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provide definitions of common terms and expand current theoretical frameworks by proposing a transformative model of inclusion for ALE to facilitate the integration of migrants into new societies and the transformation of host societies. Consequently, we outline future research directions and recommendations for Migration Education (MigEd) in ALE.

Definition of Key Concepts and Terminologies

In this section, we present common terms used related to migration. Although these terms are derived from the International Organization for Migration's *Glossary of Migration* (IOM, 2019), we are conscious that some terms are still debatable while others are settled.

Migration, Types of Migration, and Migration Crisis

According to the IOM (2019), migration is defined broadly as the movement of individuals and groups from one place to another. The topic of migration is vast, encompassing various aspects such as irregular, irregular, legal, and illegal migration, permanent migration, temporary migration, economic migration, forced migration, internal migration, and international migration. Regular migration happens "in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit, and destination" (IOM, 2019, p. 175), whereas irregular migration occurs "outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit, or destination" (IOM, 2019, p. 116). Migration, especially in its irregular forms, is frequently associated with the notion of "crisis," giving rise to what is termed a "migration crisis." IOM defines a migration crisis as arising from "the complex and often large-scale migration flows and mobility patterns caused by a crisis, which typically involve significant vulnerabilities for individuals and affected communities and generate acute and longer-term migration management challenges" (IOM, 2019, p. 137). Such a crisis can be either internal or international and may be triggered by natural or human-induced factors, occurring abruptly or gradually.

Migrant, Emigrant, and Immigrant

Migrant is a broad concept without a specific definition in international law (IOM, 2019). According to IOM, the term migrant encompasses various legally defined categories, including migrant workers, individuals whose movements are legally classified, such as smuggled migrants, and those whose status or means of movement are not explicitly defined under international law, such as international students. This paper is concerned with international migrants—persons who are traveling or have traveled across a defined international border with the intent of residing in the destination country. IOM defines an international migrant as an individual residing outside the country where they hold citizenship or nationality, or in the case of stateless individuals, outside their country of birth or habitual residence. As noted by the IOM, "the term includes migrants who intend to move permanently or temporarily, and those who move in a regular or documented manner as well as migrants in irregular situations" (p. 112). Depending on the perspective of the country of origin or the host country, a migrant may be termed an emigrant or immigrant. From the standpoint of the country of departure (origin), an emigrant is someone who leaves their country of nationality or usual residence to reside in another country. Conversely, from the perspective of the host country, the individual becomes an immigrant. Sub-categories of migrants further include economic migrants—those who move primarily for economic reasons; environmental migrants—individuals who relocate due to sudden or progressive changes in the environment that negatively impact their lives; and refugees—persons who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution, are outside their country of

nationality and unable or unwilling to return (IOM, 2019; USA for UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, 2024).

Adult Learning and Education and Migration Education

Traditionally, ALE has been a means to facilitate the integration of migrants into their new communities, providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate their new environments. For example, during the American Revolutionary War, the focus of ALE switched to civic education; and during the Industrial Revolution, it was vocational education and specialized educational programs for immigrants because there was increased immigration and the introduction of new technologies (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). ALE in the context of migration can help individuals and societies achieve their optimal learning needs, preparing them to deal with today's challenges and facilitating their transformation (Finnegan, 2022; Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022). We argue that given the complexities of the current migration landscape, there is a growing need for a component of ALE that is more intensively and extensively dedicated to migration-related issues and experiences of adults and their communities, in both the origin country and destination country and across global borders; hence, MigEd.

By MigEd, we mean a comprehensive and dynamic process of teaching and learning that supports individuals who are migrating or have migrated, as well as the communities they are moving into, by facilitating social, cultural, economic, psychological, academic, and political integration of immigrant and host communities. It encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal education that equips migrants with essential language, vocational, and life skills while promoting intercultural understanding, social cohesion, and mutual respect between migrants and host communities. MigEd extends beyond "migrant education," which essentially only focuses on the migrant and falls short of addressing deeper issues of power and inequality (Shan & Guo, 2020). Furthermore, we would like to emphasize that IAE as a section of ALE is crucial for the development and implementation of MigEd. IAE can serve as a critical platform for the exchange and dissemination of knowledge through collaborative efforts such as travels, conferences, and publications (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

Theoretical Frameworks

Migration as a multi-faceted topic has been theorized from economic and social lenses. The neoclassical economic theory posits that migration is primarily driven by individual rational decision-making, where people move from low-wage regions to high-wage regions to maximize their economic well-being (Todaro, 1969). The human capital theory suggests that education and training enhance a migrant's productivity and economic potential (Becker, 1993). Meanwhile, the push-pull theory explains migration through the interaction of factors that push people away from their origin (e.g., poverty, unemployment, conflict) and factors that pull them toward a destination (e.g., job opportunities, political stability, better living conditions) (Lee, 1966). Other migration theories include the world system theory (Wallerstein, 1974), the network theory (Massey et al., 1993), and transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Furthermore, a relatively new theory, the aspirations-capacities framework, frames migration as an integral part of social change, where individuals' aspirations to migrate are shaped by their agency, which, in turn, is influenced by the broader social and economic structures (de Haas, 2021).

However, while the above theories are insightful, they largely lack a comprehensive interlinking of migration and ALE. The transformative learning theory (TLT) offers a compelling framework that introduces a critical, human-centered dimension to our understanding of migration and ALE. Migrants often undergo transformative learning as they navigate new cultural contexts, re-evaluating their identities, worldviews, and roles within their home and host societies. TLT focuses on how adults significantly change their frames of reference and interact with the world through rational and extrarational processes (Hoggan, 2016; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Stuckey et al., 2022). This theory highlights the potential for migration to be a transformative experience—not just for the individual migrant, but also for the societies they interact with. It emphasizes the capacity of ALE to foster personal and social transformation, challenge existing power structures, and promote social justice and equity. The next section traces the phases of the interplay of migration and ALE as influenced by the theories and others, and further argues for the place of a transformative paradigm in the social inclusion discourse.

Migration and Adult Learning and Education: Four Models

This section delineates the application of various models of social inclusion within migration contexts, highlighting how the dynamic relationship between migration and ALE has been shaped by evolving societal values and policies. Bauloz et al. (2019) provide a comprehensive summary of three main inclusion models that, historically, have influenced this relationship, delineating the phases of assimilation, multiculturalism, and integration. We propose a fourth model grounded in a transformative paradigm.

Assimilation posits a unidirectional process wherein migrants are expected to relinquish their cultural identities and adopt the host society's norms and values. This model, prominent in the early 20th century, was exemplified by policies such as Australia's White Australia policy (1901-1966), which enforced cultural conformity and excluded non-white immigrants (Bauloz et al., 2019). In the context of ALE, assimilationist policies often manifested in programs designed to instill the dominant culture's language, values, and social norms in migrants, aiming for their complete integration into the host society. Such programs frequently disregarded the cultural capital and diverse experiences that migrants brought with them, focusing instead on molding them to fit the host society's expectations. This approach is criticized for burdening migrants with adaptation while offering little accommodation from the host society.

Multiculturalism emerged as a correction to assimilation, advocating for the recognition and valorization of cultural diversity within the host society. This model, adopted in the 1970s by countries like Canada, emphasizes the coexistence of diverse cultural identities while encouraging full societal participation (IOM, 2019; Bauloz et al., 2019). Under this model, ALE programs have evolved to recognize and integrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of migrants, aiming to enhance intercultural understanding and mutual respect between migrants and the host community. These programs are designed to support migrants in preserving their cultural identities while facilitating their engagement in the broader society. Despite its inclusive aims, multiculturalism has been critiqued for potentially leading to cultural segregation and inadequately addressing deeper structural inequalities. While it promotes cultural preservation, it is criticized for failing to tackle systemic issues and fostering divisions rather than promoting genuine integration.

Integration represents a balanced approach between assimilation and multiculturalism, advocating for reciprocal adaptation by migrants and the host society. The European Union's Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (2016) exemplifies this model,

describing integration as a dynamic two-way process (Bauloz et al., 2019). In ALE, integration-focused policies promote mutual learning and social cohesion, supporting migrants and host communities in navigating diversity and fostering inclusive environments. It emphasizes ALE's role in promoting dialogue and understanding to develop inclusive and safe communities.

Transformation is a newly proposed paradigm that transcends previous models by emphasizing profound personal and societal change. Rooted in transformative ALE practices, this model envisions ALE as a mechanism for critical self-reflection, collective action, and social justice (Formenti & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023; Formenti & Luraschi, 2020; Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2022). We argue that ALE programs based on this would not only address the immediate needs of migrants but also empower them and the host nationals to become active agents of change, challenging existing power structures and contributing to the social, economic, and political transformation of their societies.

Overall, the assimilation, multiculturalism, and integration models have each distinctly influenced the field in past decades. The proposed transformative model introduces a progressive and forward-looking paradigm that emphasizes personal and societal transformation, aiming to foster more inclusive, equitable, and cohesive communities through MigEd. This model advocates for MigEd to extend beyond mere skill acquisition to address deeper issues of systemic inequalities and power dynamics within host societies vis-à-vis the lived experiences of migrants.

Implications: New Trajectories for International Adult Education

The implications of the foregoing analysis for future research and practice in ALE, particularly in the context of migration, are multifaceted and call for a deeper exploration of more humane and inclusive approaches. First, there is a need to advocate for humanistic ALE approaches that prioritize the dignity, rights, and well-being of migrants. This shift toward more humane migration policies and educational practices can contribute to a more just and compassionate global society, where the complex needs and experiences of migrants are acknowledged and addressed. Second, future research should emphasize the transformative dimension of MigEd. Migrants often undergo significant personal and social transformations as they navigate new cultural contexts, and ALE programs should be designed to facilitate this process. By fostering critical reflection and intercultural competency, MigEd can empower migrants to adapt to their new environments while contributing positively to their host communities.

Third, it is essential to educate host nationals and communities about migration. Developing educational programs that promote a better understanding of the causes, challenges, and contributions of migration can help reduce xenophobia, foster social cohesion, and create more welcoming environments for migrants. This approach aligns with the broader goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in education, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of all community members, including migrants, are respected and valued. Furthermore, MigEd must also be integrated with DEI initiatives. By embedding MigEd within DEI frameworks, ALE can be deployed to promote social justice and equity in increasingly diverse societies. This approach supports the recognition and celebration of cultural differences while addressing the systemic barriers that migrants often face.

Finally, future research and practice should consider the preparedness of migrants from and by their origin societies. ALE programs in countries of origin should equip potential migrants with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to navigate the migration process and succeed in

their host countries. This preparedness enhances the potential for successful integration and reduces the vulnerabilities that migrants may face during their journey and settlement.

Conclusion

The IAE is a critical area of focus in the era of global migration. This paper has explored the complexities and dynamics of this intersection, highlighting the gaps in current ALE frameworks. MigEd, embedded in a transformative paradigm, transcends the traditional models of assimilation and integration, fostering personal transformation and social transformation among migrant and host communities. By positioning MigEd within the broader context of IAE, we can better respond to the pressing global issues of migration, ensuring that educational initiatives contribute to creating more resilient and just societies. This requires collective effort, innovative thinking, and a commitment to social inclusion and lifelong learning.

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