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**Atendiendo las Necesidades del Alumno Mayor en Educación Superior
Responding to the Adult Learner's Needs in Higher Education**

**Margaret Cecilia Camilleri Romero
Karla Díaz, Ph.D., Directora de Tesis**

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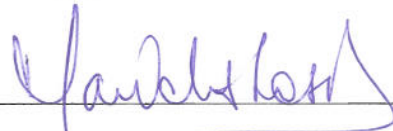
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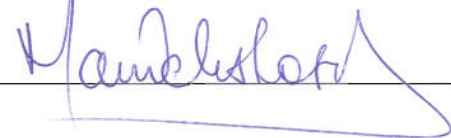
Karla Díaz, PhD.
Director de Tesis



María Dolores Lasso, Ed.M.
Miembro del Comité de Tesis



María Dolores Lasso, Ed.M.
Coordinador Académico Educación



Carmen Fernández-Salvado, Ph.D.
Decana del Colegio de Ciencias Sociales y
Humanidades



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Firma:



Nombre: Margaret Cecilia Camilleri Romero

C. I.: 1706743851

Lugar: Quito, mayo de 2014

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all adult learners wishing to pursue their dreams

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The author expresses her deepest appreciation to family, teachers, co-workers, and friends for their unconditional support.

Above all, she gives special thanks to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for making everything possible.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo investiga las teorías del aprendizaje del adulto y las necesidades específicas de los alumnos mayores en los adultos que estudian una carrera universitaria en el Ecuador. Debido al número creciente de estudiantes adultos o “no tradicionales”, las instituciones de educación superior deben proporcionar apoyo orientado específicamente a dicho grupo. Los tópicos de investigación incluyen la andragogía y el aprendizaje del adulto, los cambios en la educación, las dificultades con la tecnología, el manejo del tiempo y la necesidad de crear centros de apoyo. A pesar de que los adultos mayores están bien recibidos en las instituciones de educación superior, los alumnos adultos son tratados por lo general como los alumnos jóvenes o “tradicionales”. El conocimiento de los obstáculos y dificultades que enfrentan los alumnos mayores beneficiará tanto al adulto que desea terminar o comenzar sus estudios en educación superior, como a las instituciones de educación superior para estar mejor equipadas al brindar apoyo adecuado para que los alumnos adultos logren sus objetivos. Consecuentemente, una mayor investigación sobre el alumno adulto cursando estudios de pregrado proporcionaría recursos valiosos para los candidatos y las universidades.

ABSTRACT

This paper researches theories on adult learning and the specific needs of the adult learner applicable to adults pursuing higher education in Ecuador. Due to the growing number of adult or “non-traditional” students, higher education institutions must provide support geared towards this group. Topics in this research include andragogy and adult learning, changes in education, difficulties with technology, time management, and the need to create support centers. Although older adults are welcomed into higher educational institutions, adult learners are mostly treated as younger or “traditional” students. Awareness of the barriers and difficulties faced by adult learners will benefit both the adult wishing to complete or begin studies in higher education as well as for higher educational institutions to be better equipped to provide adequate support for adult learners to succeed. Therefore, further research on the adult learner in undergraduate studies would provide valuable resources to candidates and universities.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Today, higher education appears more accessible to older adults. Mbilinyi (2006) stated that higher education has become much more attainable to adults in the 20th century, needless to say in the 21st, with the ever-changing aspects in education. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) stated that more adults will be able to attend college due to the enactment of new laws promoting education. Earning a degree at an older age has never been more achievable and many older adults are drawn to returning to school. Flexible class schedules and distance programs have contributed to the growing number of adult undergraduates in context with other changes in higher education by overcoming constraints of time and location for adult students (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). This so called “nontraditional” group of students, classified by Cross (1980) as adults returning to school full or part-time while carrying on with other responsibilities, such as family, work, and other adult life responsibilities, are ever present on campuses and on online or distance education programs.

The older student venturing out to find and enrolling in a suitable program in higher education is faced with many new and unanticipated challenges. These include juggling work, family, and school (Mbilinyi, 2006), acquiring or refreshing study skills (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992), and dealing with “the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the 20th century” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1), amongst others. Although higher education is readily available to the adult learner, the question is whether or not the unexpected or hidden obstacles and complications in becoming a student once again may be too overwhelming to the older student and thus affect their success. Thus, adult learners may need support to confront their specific needs.

Background

Hutchinson (2012) indicated the limited attempts to define adulthood. These definitions typically have been based on biological age, psychological age, and social age. Although the chronological age of an adult begins at 18 and continues until the end of life, adulthood may be categorized into young, middle, until late adulthood. The number of adult students, 25 years of age and older, enrolled in colleges and universities since the 1970s has nearly tripled in the United States (Mbilinyi, 2006). Studies by different authors also confirm the increasing population of older students. Lorenzetti (2003) claimed that almost half of all college students in the U.S. are now 25 or older and enrollment is expected to rise. Donaldson and Townsend (2007) compared the climbing number of undergraduates, age 24 and older in higher education, constituting 43% of all undergraduate students in the U.S., to 27% of all undergraduates in 1979. Ross-Gordon (2011) finds that older adult students make up a significant proportion of the undergraduate student body. Therefore, the typical college student is no longer defined as 18 to 22 year olds (Mbilinyi, 2006).

This increase may also be due to the aging population and demographic changes. The U.S. National Institute of Aging (2007), in its Health and Retirement Study, proclaimed that there is somewhat of an aging crisis and that statistics showed that people in general are living longer. In Ecuador, for example, the average lifespan has increased from the 48.3 years in 1950-55 to 75.6 years in 2010-2015 (Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social, MIES, 2013). Furthermore, not only are people living longer, but are in good and functional health with an increase in the level of educational attainment (Chen, Kim, Moon & Merriam, 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising that the adult population is

seeking higher education, and would like to take advantage of “the value of education” (Mbilinyi, 2006, p. 2).

This large number of adult learners not only represents the need to focus on the “nontraditional” population pursuing higher education, but also is a flourishing market for higher education institutions. Donaldson and Townsend (2007) indicated that although the number and market representation for adult students is growing and must be considered by higher education institutions, higher education research hardly addresses the adult student (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). Therefore, this research attempts to approach the needs of the expanding older adult student body, the lack of information on the struggles faced by older adult learners, which differ from younger adult students, and how awareness of these different challenges will benefit the older student in pursuing a degree in higher education.

Problem statement

Although higher education institutions do provide flexible class schedules and distance and online programs making education more available to the older adults, other stumbling blocks such as time management, adapting to new learning methods, techniques, technology, and specific guidance to this group of learners may not be taken into account. According to Lorenzetti (2003), although online education might be more accessible to adult students by simply accessing a computer either at home or work; this does not imply or resolve other hurdles these students may confront. Mbilinyi (2006) in her survey of 1129 U.S. adults, ages 25 to 60, found that the top two barriers from pursuing higher education included finding the time for school, work, family, and other commitments; and also finding the money for school while providing for other commitments.

Adult students differ from the younger adult student body. They have different needs and run into other types of complications that may or may not be recognized by the

higher education institution. In fact, older adult students must conform on higher education being centered on the younger adult student. In the findings of Donaldson and Townsend (2007), authors portrayed the adult student by employing as a norm the behavior of the so called “traditional-age” students. Retention, academic success, and the collegiate experience are modeled on the traditional-aged student.

Education and the learning processes have evolved over the years, with emphasis no longer on content but on learning. Effective significant learning involves a different approach to learning in terms of change (Fink, 2003). Many older adults may be surprised to find the new way of learning unfamiliar and most likely will need assistance in refreshing study techniques or in current learning trends (Benshoff & Henry, 1992). Being absent from student life, the adult student will encounter changes in education and must adapt to new teaching methods and the continuous updating of technology. Prensky (2001) makes a distinction of today’s generation growing up with technology. This may be the case for younger adults, but not for the older student.

Hypothesis

Conventionally, higher education is aimed at the traditional-age student and although older adult students are welcomed to return to higher education, they may not be prepared to face the different challenges that arise.

Due to the availability for pursuing higher education, on campus with flexible hours and online education, the number of older adult learners has increased. Older adults represent a market for higher education institutions, which in some cases need this market in order to remain competitive. Traditionally, typical college students are pictured as 18 to 22 years old. With this new population of older adult students in higher education, administrators in higher education institutions must be aware of the specific challenges

faced by this group in order to address this population's needs. Older adult learners are not necessarily aware of the different challenges they may face in pursuing a degree.

Benshoff and Lewis (1992) believed that the reasons nontraditional students did not continue their education as traditional-age students may range from financial reasons, responsibilities to lack of focus, motivation, and maturity. When the adult learner returns to school, the student may lack knowledge of the different difficulties in studying again and as an older adult student. Chao and Good (2004) proposed that understanding the travails and aspirations of nontraditional students is crucial in order to facilitate their success.

A possible solution to this problem would involve research on the different challenges encountered by older students in order to address their specific needs. The knowledge of these findings would benefit both the adult student and higher educational institutions offering programs to this group. In addition, awareness of these difficulties will contribute to the adult student's wellness, both academically and personally. Personnel working in higher education institutions would be able to provide support to adult learners focusing on their specific needs. Sajiene and Tamuliene (2012) defined student support as a type of service provided by a higher education institution for developing curriculum and for fulfilling the different needs of students such as emotional, academic, and social in preparation of successful academic performance.

According to Myers and Mobley (2004) not much has been written on wellness programs to accommodate the different needs of nontraditional age students. Therefore, further research and knowledge of the struggles encountered by the older adult student and of adequate support from higher education institutions could result in the success of the older adult students obtaining their degree.

Research question

How and to what extent would the creation of a support center provided by higher education institutions in Ecuador benefit adult learners' specific needs?

Theoretic framework and context

The theoretical framework of this study will be based on the findings and analysis of andragogy and adult learning, plus research on the various obstacles encountered by the adult learner due to the adult stage of life. The Knowles' theory, widely known in adult education, will be reviewed as well as writings from other authors analyzing the theory. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will include research on the need of support for continuity and perseverance in undergraduate studies.

These findings will then be evaluated on how this knowledge will serve the older adult student and the type of support higher education institutions should provide to the adult learner.

Definition of terms

For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that the following terms will be defined as follows:

Adult student or learner: Often referred to as "nontraditional" (Ross-Gordon, 2011). For this study, adult student or learner will have the same meaning as nontraditional student.

Andragogy: Refers to adult learning (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2011), distinguishing it from other types of learning.

Digital immigrants: Those not born into the world of technology of recent generations, and who handle aspects of new technology differently than younger generations (Prensky, 2001).

Distance education: As defined by Simonson (as cited by Schollosser & Simonson, 2010) “institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors.”

Nontraditional students: In this study, referred to as students older than the traditional-age student (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007), pursuing higher education while committed to other adult life responsibilities (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992).

Online education: Generic term for educational computer networking (Harrison & Stephen, 1996).

Traditional-age students: Undergraduate students typically defined between 18 to 22 years of age (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

This research begins with the review of literature and documentation on the matter, focusing on the following areas: andragogy and adult learning, changes in education, difficulties with technology, time management, and the effectiveness of support centers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review methodology

This literature review will consist of the research of writings and publications mainly from high quality education journals, literature, and resources, including peer review journals on non-traditional students. In addition, priority will be given to the most recent works when viable.

Following the author's research on the introduction to the problems encountered by older students, together with recommendations from research advisors, further research will be focused on the following topics: andragogy and adult learning, changes in education, difficulties with technology, time management, and the effectiveness of support centers.

Literature review format

The literature review is organized by topics and includes research from various reliable authors on the subject. The topics were placed in a certain order to understand the different learning experiences of older students, the different challenges faced by them, and the need to have higher educational institutions support them.

Andragogy and adult learning.

Although different authors may question the definition and scope of andragogy, authors Knowles, Holton, and Swanson are referred to in many papers and writings because of their theories, principles, and extensive research on andragogy and the adult learner. In fact, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson's first edition was published in 1973. St. Clair (2002) indicated that the Knowles' theory, by far, is the best known concept in adult education. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) claimed that andragogy refers to the core

principals of the adult learner, and listed six: “1) the learner’s need to know, 2) self-concept of the learner, 3) prior experience of the learner, 4) readiness to learn, 5) orientation to learning, and 6) motivation to learn” (p. 3).

Knowles’ first concept about the learner’s need to know, refers to the adult’s need of being aware of why they should learn certain material. In other words, learning must be purposeful to the adult student. McGrath (2009) added that in her experience, adult students need to know why they are learning new concepts before they are willing to participate in the class. Adults must foresee the benefits to studying.

The second principle, self-concept of learner, refers to how adult learners view themselves. Adults want to be involved and responsible. They need to be able to discuss or present their views (McGrath, 2009). In addition, adults’ maturity level is taken into account.

Because adult students have more life experiences than younger students, they need to be able to relate their experiences to the classroom which is the basis for learning. Under the third principle, it is believed that adult students possess a wealth of lifetime experiences that they want to apply in order to understand what they are learning (McGrath, 2009).

Knowles’ fourth principal on readiness to learn includes immediate relevance. Since most adult learners return to school on their own will, they are likely to be ready to learn (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Orientation to learning deals with the adult learner tending to be problem-centered. McGrath (2009) suggested that based on this principal adult students must be allowed time for problem solving as well as for student interaction.

Motivation to learn is the six principal of Knowles. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) agreed with Knowles in that the primary component of motivation for adult learners tends to be internal.

Knowles' theory on adult learning relates directly to the needs of the adult learner and how the adult learner differs from the traditional-age university student. By taking into account the uniqueness and situation of adult learners, adult learners themselves will be able to understand the distinction in their learning and higher education institutions will be better equipped to support the necessities of the adult learner.

In her examination of Knowles' model of andragogy, McGrath (2009) agreed that adult learners are different. Furthermore, she believed that the conflictive learning theories of andragogy and pedagogy should be of utmost importance to adult educators. She added that Knowles attempted to overcome the negative aspects of pedagogy for adult education by introducing andragogy, where the adult's experience plays an important role. Pew (2007) also made a distinction between pedagogy and andragogy, defining andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. Therefore, andragogical methods may encourage adult learners to return to school.

Other authors, Kenner and Weinerman (2011), believed that much of the theory on adult learning comes from the organizational development field: the workplace. They further indicated that andragogy came about because traditional higher education pedagogical models did not relate well to the adult learning on the job. Adult learners differ from traditional age students; therefore, learning theories differ. Furthermore, adult learners most likely have an established life context that determines their learning.

Kenner and Weinerman (2011) interestingly distinguished how the adult learner acquires metacognitive skills, especially under tacit and informal theories. Under the tacit

theory, which implies acquiring metacognitive skills without any specific framework, adults have skills that are deeply embedded in their conceptual framework making it difficult to change. This may hinder the adult learner's transition to the academic environment. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) also added that under the informal theory in which the learner has some type of recognition of metacognition, the adult student strategies usually develop at the workplace linking their behavior to a reward system such as career advancements. Thus, at the workplace, adult learners acquire practical knowledge that may hinder learning in the academic environment. Therefore, the adult student may resist new learning strategies.

Not being aware of the causes for this possible resistance to studying once again could hinder the adult learner's success. Therefore, the adult learner must be informed of and provided support in these areas in view of the marked differences in adult learning.

Changes in education.

Education now promotes significant learning, entailing the quality of student learning. This new approach as well as other approaches, although are breakthroughs in education, involve new language, terms, and teaching styles that may not be familiar to the non-traditional student accustomed to the old-fashioned or traditional style or content-centered teaching methods. Fink (2003) emphasized that in order to provide significant learning experiences to students that a new language as well as taxonomy must be applied. While emphasis is placed on learning to learn, the adult students may at first be apprehensive and take longer to adjust to the new styles.

Students are expected to think critically, creatively, and practically. Critical thinking refers to analyzing and evaluating; creative thinking includes imagining and creating new ideas, designs or products; and practical thinking is learning how to use and

apply something or problems solving (Fink, 2003). In order for adult students to be able to be prepared to face new teaching strategies and to succeed, they will need some type of training or support in utilizing and applying new thinking in their learning experiences. Furthermore, it is important that adult learners be informed that changes have taken place in education, and that these approaches may not be familiar to them.

The best practices learning principals: student-centered, experiential, holistic, authentic, expressive, reflective, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde & Varner, 1998); provide education reform and a more coherent, organic, and integrated learning experience. Older students may, however, become discouraged with new learning techniques as summarized above by Kenner and Weinerman (2011) since they were most probably taught in a more traditional or content-centered style. Best practices imply active, whole, and authentic learning. Traditionally, subjects followed textbooks and did not allow for the use of other types of intelligences as promoted by Gardner (1999) in his theory of multiple intelligences and used in best practices. Willis (2007) claimed that teaching and curriculum specialists now encourage the use of visual-spatial and bodily-kinesthetic instruction instead of a more traditional verbal-linguistic way of teaching. Also, inquiry, scaffolding, and constructivism may astonish the rote learner.

Again, although these teaching approaches may have been somewhat apparent in the education of older students, emphasis on these new learning experiences may come to a surprise to the non-traditional student. Adult students returning to school after many years away are often ill-equipped for certain learning tasks and certain educational settings (Tovar, 2008).

To better equip adult learners, orientation or support by higher education institutions would be very beneficial, both for the learner as well as for the institution. By not being aware of current teaching strategies and styles, the adult student may become frustrated and discouraged. Effective support to ease the adjustment to the new learning would contribute greatly to the adult student's success.

Difficulties with technology.

Studies suggest that use of technology must be aimed and adapted to suit a new generation of students (Smith, 2012). This new generation, born into a digital era and referred to by Prensky (2001) as digital natives, thinks and acts differently than previous generations because they have always been familiar with the Internet and technology. Rosen (2011) also added that the different generations have different ways and preferences for using technology.

In almost a humoristic way, Prensky (2001) describes the digital era with natives and immigrants, depicting the problems of the immigrants---those characterized by not being born into the digital world. Prensky (2001) indicated that as with all immigrants, most retain their "accent" to some degree. Also, digital immigrants may feel somewhat awkward or handicapped in using technology compared to younger adult native digitals.

Older students do not have the same experience as younger adults with technology. According to Courtney, Vasa, Luo, and Muggy (1999), studies show that older students require more time and training. Although, adult learners may have some knowledge and in fact use technology, they do not have the same ease as those learners who have been accustomed to using technology since they can remember. Thus, they need extra practice compared to younger adults. Furthermore, these authors point out that the adult learner when returning to school enters a "bewilderingly" different learning environment mainly

due to the use of computers (Courtney, Vasa, Luo & Muggy, 1999). Most likely, adult students not dominating the use of technology will experience anxiety with certain assignments and other course requirements.

Time management.

Time management plays a crucial role for the adult learner and is listed by many authors as one of the main barriers of the non-traditional student. Personal and family commitments as well as work and family related activity schedules are a common challenge faced by the older adult (Ritt, 2008). In most cases, work obligations must come before educational goals. Therefore, the time the adult student wishes to spend on education is somewhat limited and must be managed well. Professional barriers typically found at the workplace prevent individuals from fully immersing into their education (Ritt, 2008).

Time constraints, as emphasized by McGrath (2007), affect the motivation of the mature student. In fact, time pressures such as family and full time jobs could lead to failure or not being able to complete a course. Such pressures could cause anxiety and may affect learning since how students feel influence the way they learn (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2010).

Time management is crucial and could be viewed in some cases as an art. It can be quite tough to balance commitments to work, family, and community while trying to pursue a degree (Mbilinyi, 2006). Adult students may not be fully aware of the time implications when they decide to re-enter the school setting. Support in this area is definitely needed and warranted. Knowing how to manage time and to maintain balance is crucial to the success of the adult learner. Higher educational institutions must provide greater support in this area to the adult learner.

Support centers.

Support is a condition that promotes student success and usually focuses on three main areas: academic, social, and financial (Tinto, 2002). Centers, created in the form of support, provide assistance to students and in some cases represent an important condition for continuity and perseverance. Older students as well as younger students need support, although the support may be in different areas and for different reasons. Kasworm (2003) considered that the growing adult student population seeks student services to support complex adult life. Older adults are at a different place in life, and view the world and their future differently than younger adults. Therefore, their needs and goals are somewhat different.

By understanding what makes adult learners different from traditional students, developmental educators can provide specific tools that help adult learners integrate into the college or university environment and increase their chances for success (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Furthermore, Pew (2007) indicated that although adult education assumes that the adult learners are mainly responsible for their own motivation, the external environment must be facilitative to them. Since the role of support centers is to provide for the needs of students, the centers will also motivate adult learners to succeed. According to Tinto (2002), studies have revealed that support is most effective when related to the student's learning environment of the student.

McGrath (2009) stated that it is essential for adults returning to education to find positive experiences that will encourage them to continue with their education. A support center, created to guide and assist the adult learner will make success more accessible to

him. Furthermore, higher educational institutions will become more aware of and be able to respond to the specific needs and obstacles of the adult learner.

CONCLUSIONS

The number of adult learners pursuing a college degree has increased in recent years (Chao & Good, 2004; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Lorenzetti, 2003; Ritt, 2008; Mbilinyi, 2006; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Ritt, 2008). Therefore, the need to address the adult learner in undergraduate studies is apparent.

The older adult student is different from the younger traditional-age college student. Kasworm (2008) indicated that unlike younger college students, most adults continue with their complex lives while adding the challenging role of being a student. This means that the barriers and constraints experienced by the adult student can be overwhelming to the older adult returning to school after a long absence.

Specific aspects of the adult student, such as, adult learning or andragogy, largely examined and interpreted by Knowles' core principles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011), maturity and life experience (McGrath, 2009), and internal motivation (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011) are singular to the adult learner. Adult learning is different than that of younger students mainly due to the unique situation and circumstances of the older student (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Keiner & Weinerman, 2011; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011; McGrath, 2009; Myers & Mobley, 2004). The differences in adult learning along with changes in general in learning and education may suggest that the adult learner will require support or assistance to adjust to current educational settings (Fink, 2003; Tovar, 2008; Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde & Varner, 1998).

Furthermore, older learners may not be as skillful or handy as younger students with technology due to the difference of generations (Courtney, Vasa, Luo & Muggy, 1999; Prensky, 2001). Therefore, adult students will most likely encounter limitations in the learning process due to technology deficiencies if they cannot obtain adequate support or assistance.

In addition, managing time may be one of the strongest constraints of the adult learner. Mbilinyi (2006), McGrath (2009), and Ritt (2008) indicated that time management is the greatest challenge of the adult learner due to adult commitments such as family, work, even community. If the adult student cannot manage time adequately this may hinder the success of the adult student pursuing an undergraduate degree. Consequently, the older student must be aware of unexpected demands and count on support in order to be successful.

The above needs of the adult learner must be cause of concern and cause for additional research by higher educational institutions in order to provide adequate support to the new growing population of adult learners. Wellness programs are lacking for the adult student (Myer & Mobley, 2004), as well as further research focusing exclusively on the adult learner (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). Furthermore, support aimed at identified concerns could improve the well-being of non-traditional students (Myer & Mobley, 2004).

Therefore, more research and focus on the adult learner must be taken into consideration by higher education institutions and to provide adequate support for the well-being and success of the non-traditional student.

Answer to research question

How and to what extent would the creation of a support center provided by higher education institutions in Ecuador benefit adult learners' specific needs? The creation of a support center would greatly benefit the adult learner. If support is available and provided to address the specific needs of the adult learner, the chances of success of the adult learner returning to pursue a degree in higher education in Ecuador, will most likely improve.

As this study has demonstrated, adult learners are different from the traditional-age student, and being absent from the college or university setting warrants support from the higher education institution for the well-being and success of adult learners. Further research and focus on the adult learner will also greatly benefit higher education institutions to adequately address the adult student population.

Summary of the current research status

Donaldson and Townsend (2007), Lorenzetti (2003), and Ross-Gordon (2011), observed the rising increase of adults in pursuit of an undergraduate degree. Chen, Kim, Moon and Merriam (2008) and Mbilinyi (2006) discussed the importance of continuing education and studies have been made on the actual experience of older adult students, with the use of statistics, numbers, facts, as well as qualitative and quantitative studies. Mbilinyi (2006) concluded that "adults returning to school must overcome a different set of educational obstacles than younger students face" (p. 4). In addition, the lack of research on adult undergraduates is apparent and calls for new direction (Donaldson & Townsend , 2007).

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) explained the basis of andragogy and adult learning, while other authors such as Kenner and Weinerman (2011), McGrath (2009), Pew (2007), and St. Clair (2002) provided further research on the theory as well as other factors on adult learning. Furthermore, articles aimed at educators in treating the emerging

adult learner have been published. Kasworm (2003) pinpointed on understanding and serving adult student needs; Kenner & Weinerman, (2011) applied adult learning theory to non-traditional college students; and McGrath (2009) reviewed evidence on how adult students learn.

Donaldson and Townsend (2007) noted the various barriers encountered by adult students and the insufficient support. Challenges of adult learning include adapting to changes in education (Tovar, 2008), which include significant learning (Fink ,2003) and the use of best practices (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde & Varner, 1998). Another hurdle adult learners must cross are the difficulties with technology, as noted by Courtney, Vasa, Luo and Muggy (1999), Prensky (2001), Rosen (2011) Smith (2012), are mainly due to the difference of generations. Likewise, time constraints greatly experienced by the older student, affect the adult learners' motivation (McGrath, 2009), and at the same time their success and well-being (Mbilinyi, 2006; Ritt, 2008).

Tinto (2002) ratified the need of support for students to succeed. Kasworm (2003) concluded that adult learners seek support while Pew (2007) and McGrath (2009) added that environmental and positive experiences are required to succeed.

Significance of study

This study will benefit the growing trend of older students in higher education and open opportunities for others wishing to pursue a degree. In addition, this study will assist the older adult population to learn more about the different complications that may arise in order to be successful in their decision to further their education. This study may also assist older students wishing to return to school and to take advantage of the availability of higher education.

Likewise, this study will benefit higher education institutions to not only welcome the older student, but to create and provide effective support to the adult learner by understanding the differences of the older student compared with the traditional-age college student.

Limitations in the literature review process

This research is based on literature and findings applied mostly to U.S. adult students. It is presumed to be applicable to older students in Ecuador as well as in other parts of the world.

Proposal of possible studies

As further research on the adult learner in Ecuador, it would be beneficial to have actual numbers of successful adult graduates from the different programs offered locally, to create a survey listing the major obstacles encountered by them, and to verify the support offered by the various institutions geared toward the adult learner.

In this manner, greater information will be provided to the adult learner. Higher educational institutions in Ecuador will be cognizant of the needs of the adult learner and support centers may be created to accurately address the needs of the adult learner living in Ecuador. Thus, adult learners in Ecuador will have more realistic views, expectations, and support to successfully pursue higher educational studies and to enjoy the benefits of earning a degree.

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