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LITERACY SKILLS, IMMIGRATION AND MOTIVATION TO LEARN AMONG ADULTS IN THE U.S.

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Continuing education and training over the life course, or lifelong learning, has become critical in a fast-changing U.S. society (Feinstein, Budge, Vorhaus, & Duckworth, 2008). However, participation rates in lifelong learning need improvement, as only less than half of adults participate in lifelong learning (Desjardins, 2015). Research suggests that immigrants have lower levels of educational attainment, lower levels of workforce integration and lower opportunities for participation in lifelong learning than U.S. born populations (Toso, B. W., Prins, E., & Mooney, 2013). Foundational skills (e.g., literacy), motivation to learn, curiosity, as well as access to learning opportunities are essential to promote lifelong learning. More specifically, motivation to learn (MtL) maximizes the utilities of existing education and training, and therefore, plays a critical role to promote lifelong learning, both in participation and learning outcomes (Boeren, Nicaise & Baert, 2010). Despite the importance of these promoting factors, empirical research focusing on complex relationships between literacy skills, immigration and motivation to learn (MtL) is scarce. The objective of this study is to examine how literacy skills and immigration (vs. U.S. born) are associated with MtL among individuals in the U.S. Nationally representative data (n = 8,670) of adults aged 18 years and older were obtained from the 2012/2014 Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Structural equation models were constructed to examine the formerly tested and validated latent MtL construct based on four, 5-point Likert-type scale items. In addition, this study used a psychometrically valid, performance-based measure of literacy to understand how literacy skills are associated with motivation to learn among the U.S. adult population. Results showed that higher literacy skills (0-500 points) were associated with greater MtL ($b = 0.159$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, immigrants were more likely to have lower MtL ($b = -0.064$, $p < 0.05$) than those who were born in the U.S. Higher literacy skills may indicate positive experiences in previous adult education and training, and greater readiness for further learning. Lower motivation to learn among immigrants could be due to the lack of English proficiency and culturally appropriate learning opportunities. Findings from this study suggest that immigrants with lower literacy skills may be at the risk of low motivation to learn, and in turn, poor lifelong learning participation. Educators and researchers should consider appropriate literacy levels of adult education programs and cultural sensitivity to promote lifelong learning among immigrants in the U.S. At the same time, regardless of the level of education, education communities need to make continuous efforts to enhance the foundational skills in the general populations. In addition, adult education programs can offer access to local educational opportunities, such as literacy, work-skills, to facilitate ongoing education and training over the life course.

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