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Motivation of adult degree learners

Pamela Briggs
University of Dayton

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MOTIVATION OF ADULT DEGREE LEARNERS

MASTER'S PROJECT

**Submitted to the School of Education
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education**

by

Pamela Briggs

School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

April 1996

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Approved by:

Official Advisor

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to both my family and colleagues. Without their considerable time and support the completion of this project would not have been possible.

VITA

- November 24, 1965 Born: Cincinnati, Ohio
- 1983 Graduated, Reynoldsburg High School
Reynoldsburg, Ohio
- 1987 Bachelor of Science
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio
- 1987 Teaching Certificate,
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio
- 1987 - 1991 Middle School Teacher, St. Pius X School
Reynoldsburg, Ohio
- 1991 - 1996 Head Women's Volleyball Coach,
Capital University
Columbus, Ohio
- 1995 - 1996 Instructor, Health and Sport Science Department
Capital University
Columbus, Ohio

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
VITA	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER:	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of Study	1
Problem Statement	2
Research Question	3
Limitations	3
Definition of Terms	4
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	5
Motivational Factors and Perceived Attitudes.....	5
Perceived Value in Adult Degree Programs.....	6
Gender.....	8
III. METHODOLOGY.....	10
Population and Sample	10
Design	10
Data and Instrument	10
Analysis	11

IV. RESULTS	12
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS..	20
APPENDICES.....	ix
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	xiii

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Gender.....	12
2. Age.....	13
3. Estimated Time to Complete Degree.....	14
4. Summative Scores: Perceived Motivation.....	15
5. Summative Scores: Perceived Value.....	16
6. Perceived Motivation: Rank Order and Means.....	17
7. Perceived Value: Rank Order and Means.....	18

Chapter I

Introduction

Purpose of Study

Many adult degree programs (ADP) across the United States are searching for the answers to why adults are seeking an advanced degree (Vieshnicki, Bohlin, Milheim, 1990). Some adults will attend simply to challenge their minds. Others are in college for the social atmosphere wanting to escape from work or the pressure of everyday life (Bown, 1989). Many will attend because of the growing need to advance their job performance. Statistics show that by the year 2000, new jobs in service industries will require a higher skill level from employees (Huebner,1990). The need is great for research in this growing field.

Unfortunately colleges spend little time discovering who their students are and what drives them towards success (Clark,1989). If universities could target “the new majority” and uncover their motivation for a degree, then institutions of higher education could reexamine their marketing strategies and compete for this growing population of students (Ashar,Lane,1993).

Motivation affects memory retention, outlook, the ability to think and be creative (Bown,1989). What drives learners to education plays a large role in the

success achieved by the students. These factors provide a purpose for study. This descriptive study researches what motivates adult learners to reenter college. The study reviews the present literature in the field, and conducts an investigation using a survey. The data for the questionnaire was collected from Capital University's Adult Degree Program and played a vital role to the success of the Adult Degree Program.

Problem Statement

Demographics in 1983 show there are more people over the age of 65 than teenagers in the United States. "By 1992, over half of all college students will be over twenty-five and 25 percent will be over thirty-five" (Viechnicki, Bohlin, Milheim, 1990). The population of adult students has risen on university and college campuses in the last ten years. A case study conducted at Kent State University in 1992, states that 43 percent of current college students are over the age of 25. At Kent State in 1992, 3262 students were over twenty-five. These numbers increased from 1988 figure of 2948 students. This is a remarkable increase of learners considering the growth of traditional undergraduates increased from 15,579 to 15,581, only an addition of three students (O'Connor, 1994).

Other research states that there is an “influx of 1.5 million adult students converging on college and universities in this country today” (Pierre, 1989).

This study attempts to clarify three areas of concern for which universities can target and retain Adult Degree Learners(ADL).

1. What is the perceived level of motivational for the non-traditional student returning to higher education?
2. What is the perceived level of value adults place on a higher educational degree?
3. What is the difference between male and female Adult Degree Learners when the following two variables are examined?
 - (A) Motivation
 - (B) Value

Limitation

Time is a major factor to determine the success of this study. Adult students suffer from the dilemma of balancing work, family, and school. Filling out a questionnaire requires time a student may not want to give and effort on the student's part to return the questionnaire.

Definitions

New Majority: They are individuals who are working full time and also attend college classes (Ashar, Lane,1993).

Adult Motivation (External): Adult learners are externally motivated by factors as better jobs, promotional opportunities, and increased salaries (FERENCE, VOCKELL,1994).

Adult Motivation (Internal): Adult learners are internally motivated by factors as self-esteem, recognition, confidence, career satisfaction and the improvement of their quality of life (FERENCE, VOCKELL,1994).

Traditional Education: A four year based college where students exchange a job in order to attend classes full time (SPANARD,1990).

Nontraditional Education: It allows a student to return to college on a part-time bases and continue to maintain a job or family obligations (SPANARD,1990).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Motivational Factors and Perceived Attitudes

Adult learners are highly goal orientated, pragmatic, and place a high degree of worth on their education. Most have demands on their life other than school, so the motivation driving them back to college is great.

Who are the adults in Adult Degree Programs? Most are individuals whose educational journey strayed away from the traditional path, but at a later age they realize the importance of higher education. Endorf and McNeff (1991) cite five distinct learners in Adult Degree Programs:

1. *Confident* learners are eager to experiment with the learning process. They are highly goal oriented. Their learning style is interactive and experimental.
2. *Affective* learners enjoy the educational process. School is relaxing, and they feel important. They rely on the professor to be the source of knowledge and wait to be called upon to answer questions.
3. *Learners in Transition* are aware of changes in their life. They are not reluctant to learn, but they do not want to sit and be fed the information. The education they receive is essential because these learners are now financially responsible for tuition.

4. *Integrated* learners see school and life as one. They take pleasure from the accomplishments received by their education. School is neither vital to their personal success nor an escape from the pressures of life.

5. *Risk Takers* are students who enjoy setting and meeting goals. They welcome the hectic life of a student and enjoy juggling it with work. They thrive on pressure. Professors are viewed as guides for learning.

Stated differently in Aslanian and Brickell's book *Americans in*

Transition(1961), Knofla cites three learners in transition.

1. Goal-Orientated: Students who accomplish specific tasks.
2. Activity-Orientated: Students who develop social and professional relationships from classes.
3. Learning-Orientated: Students who love to learn new information (Knofla, 1989).

Although Knofla cites only three characteristic similarities, many are found throughout both studies. Life changes are encouraging adults to attend college, and the way the students approach their education has an influence on their success.

Perceived Value in Adult Degree Programs

Time is of the essence for adults working, raising a family and attending classes. The perceived value that they will receive is great if they are willing to allow higher education a major time slot in their day. The usefulness of what they are

learning, and the decision on its worthwhileness is the cornerstone of adult education. The subject matter must have relevance to their “ideal life”. Older students perceive the value of their education at a greater level than traditional students. Learning continues growth (Evans,1989). The growth is one of opportunity, advancement, and self gratification.

Future career goals in fields of human services, education and managerial advancement are replacing low education and income jobs. The mood of students is one of an optimistic outlook. They enjoy working towards a goal and can visualize their life dreams becoming a reality. For many the achievement of power seems to be an important step in developing social and developmental status.

In 1990, Bauer and Mott cite four categories of *ideal life* situations.

1. Family/Children: The well being of the family unit is important.
2. Friends/Other: Friends respect who they are.
3. Self: Personal happiness
4. Career: They want to receive high aspirations from their work.

Some interesting information that could explain why women and men choose the course that they do is stated in a study by Bauer and Mott (1990). Men and women ranked the importance of events in their lives five years ago and today. Men, five years ago, were concerned with exciting lives, pleasures, freedom, and being capable and courageous. Women, on the other hand, valued mature love, loyalty, and true friendship. After the five years have passed, the men and women

seemed to reverse their valued items. Erikson termed it the *intimacy versus isolation*. Women entered the state of marriage instead of the job or college world showing a direct relation to what they valued. After the five years, less importance is placed on others and more emphasis upon themselves. Maybe this is why more women are enrolled in adult degree programs than men (Bauer, Mott, 1990).

Gender

Research shows that whether society wants to admit it or not, gender does play a large role in the population of nontraditional students. Women traditionally have bowed down to the pressure of being the figure that raises the children while the husband continues to the work. This trend is changing however, as more and more women enroll in Adult Degree Programs.

The increasing number of female students on college campuses is becoming more prevalent in the United States. Statistics report that in 1981 women composed 32 percent of doctorate awards, 50 percent bachelors and master degrees, and 33 percent Ph.D. recipients. The 1980 census indicated that 975,000 older women were returning to college (Pierre, 1989). Since 1989, nearly 7 million women enrolled in universities consisting of 54 percent of the population on

campuses (Roundtree, Lambert, 1992). At Capital University the enrollment illustrated the difference in male to female ratios. Presently 560 students are involved in the Adult Degree Program, 151 males and 409 females.

Women are returning to college for many reasons. Many are driven by the need to support a family after divorce. Some return due to the maturation of children and the boredom that sets in after the nest is empty. Whatever the reason, both men and women are coming back to adult education. Six reasons that contribute to the increasing numbers of enrolled adults are:

1. Social Relationships: The need to make new acquaintances is important.
2. External Expectations: Their decision is based on outside influences.
3. Social Welfare: To add assistance to the community is important to adults.
4. Professional Advancement: Adults want to progress in their careers.
5. Escape or Stimulation: Adults wanting to relieve boredom enroll in courses.
6. Cognitive Interest: Adults wanting to learn for pleasure (Roundtree, Lambert, 1992).

Women are a unique population with varying motivations. Many times women hesitate to return to college for the fear of inadequacy. Studies show that women's capacity for learning increases while in their 40's (Bown, 1989). This offers encouragement to those who fear failure and who fear the intimidation of their peers.

Chapter III

Methodology

Population and Sample

In 1995-1996 there are approximately 560 adult degree students enrolled at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio. The study was limited to 50 Adult Degree Learners participating in the Adult Degree Program at Capital University.

Design

The design of this study is descriptive research. A survey researched the perceived motivational factors that contribute to the decision to attend higher education and the perceived value the learner placed on that motivation.

Data and Instrumentation

The instrument (refer to Appendix) for collecting data from the students was a survey developed by Roundtree and Lambert and modified by the author. Data was

collected February, 1996. Demographics addressing the student's age, gender, and estimated time to complete degree were collected along with their perceived motivation and value for continuing education. A five point Likert Scale was used to assist in the retrieving of information. Research focused on eighteen questions that divided into three different genres.

1. Professional
2. Cognitive
3. Social

Analysis

The data was transferred from the questionnaires to a disk and analyzed in the Department of Education at the University of Dayton. The computer program used was the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Using descriptive statistics of mean, medium, mode and T-test the analysis was made.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

TABLE 1
GENDER
1996

<u>Gender</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Male	13	34
Female	25	66
Total =	38	100

Table 1 indicates the gender of the students participating in the survey. Of the 38 respondents, 13 (34%) were male and 25(66%) were female.

TABLE 2
AGE
1996

<u>Age in Years</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
under 22	1	2
23-29	9	24
30-39	11	29
40-49	14	37
50 and over	3	8
Total =	38	100

Table 2 illustrates the age range of the participants in the survey who are currently enrolled in the adult degree program at Capital University. Two thirds of students (66%) fell into the 30-49 age bracket, while slightly more than one quarter were under 29, the remaining eight percent were over 50 years of age.

TABLE 3
ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE DEGREE
1996

<u>Time in years</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
0-1	9	24
1.5-2	11	30
2.5-3	3	8
3.5-4	7	19
4.5-5	3	8
5 and over	4	11
Total =	38	100

Table 3 indicates the estimated time students needed to complete their degree . Of the 38 students, 62 percent felt that they would be able to complete their education in three or less years while 27 percent of the students would need up to five years. Only four participants (11%) would require more than five years.

TABLE 4
SUMMATIVE SCORES: PERCEIVED MOTIVATION

<u>Score</u>		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
50 - 41	Strongly Motivated	7	39
40.99 - 31	Motivated	8	44
30.99 - 21	Unsure	2	11
20.99 - 11	Somewhat Motivated	1	6
10.99 - 0	Not Motivated	0	0
Total =		18	100
Mean =36.20		Median =31.90	Mode =38.10

Table 4 represents the summative scores dealing with perceived motivation. Eighty-three percent of the students perceived themselves as motivated to strongly motivated. Eleven percent were unsure, while the remaining six percent indicated they were somewhat motivated. As a group, the mean score (36.20) indicated they were motivated.

TABLE 5
SUMMATIVE SCORES: PERCEIVED VALUE

<u>Score</u>		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
50 - 41	Strongly Valued	7	39
40.99 - 31	Valued	9	50
30.99 - 21	Unsure	1	5.5
20.99 - 11	Somewhat Valued	1	5.5
10.99 - 0	Not Valued	0	0
Total =		18	100
Mean =35.90		Median =39.50	Mode = 44.40

Table 5 represents the students perceived value for returning to higher education. Eighty-nine percent valued to strongly valued their higher education; one student (5.5%) valued their higher education somewhat.

TABLE 6
PERCEIVED MOTIVATION: RANK ORDER AND MEANS

<u>Motivation</u>	<u>Value items</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Means</u>
Strongly Motivating	1. Obtain Credentials	professional	4.44
	2. Renew /Develop skills	cognitive	4.44
	3. Feel enjoyment	cognitive	4.34
	4. Improve pay	professional	4.34
	5. Improve job skill	professional	4.32
	6. Have satisfaction	cognitive	4.23
	7. Become well rounded	social	4.16
Motivating	1. Develop new career	professional	3.95
	2. Learn about area	cognitive	3.92
	3. Learn about self	cognitive	3.82
	4. Obtain credentials	professional	3.82
	5. Gain knowledge	social	3.55
	6. Obtain prerequisites	professional	3.42
	7. Art/Music/ Literature	cognitive	3.37
	8. To participate	social	3.18
Unsure	1. Enhance friends	social	2.79
	2. Belong to a group	social	2.2
Somewhat Motivating	1. Participate in events	social	1.68
Not Motivating			

Table 6 clearly states that the strongly perceived motivation lies in the profession and cognitive realms possessing six of the seven factors. Social

aspects of college life received little interest in the perceived motivation from the participants with four of the six factors receiving little or unsure responses.

TABLE 7
PERCEIVED VALUE: RANK ORDER AND MEANS
1996

<u>Values</u>	<u>Value items</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Means</u>
Strongly Valued	1. Renew/Develop skills	cognitive	4.55
	2. Improve job skill	professional	4.44
	3. Feel enjoyment	cognitive	4.44
	4. Improve pay	professional	4.44
	5. Have satisfaction	cognitive	4.42
	6. Obtain credentials	professional	4.39
	7. Become well rounded	social	4.34
Valued	1. Learn about self	cognitive	4.0
	2. Obtain certification	professional	3.97
	3. Learn about area	cognitive	3.95
	4. Develop new career	professional	3.87
	5. Obtain prerequisites	professional	3.84
	6. Gain knowledge	social	3.71
	7. Art/Music/ Literature	cognitive	3.63
	8. To participate	social	3.36
	9. Enhance friends	social	3.26
Unsure	1. Belong to a group	social	2.5
Somewhat Valued	1. Participate in events	social	1.87
Not Valued			

Table 7 illustrates the rank order and mean scores of the perceived value attached to the motivation for higher education. Clearly the cognitive and professional factors are of a strongly perceived valued to valued for most students, while all categories showed promise in the value factor. None of the questions illustrated a lack of value.

Chapter V

Recommendations and Conclusions

The Adult Degree Program at Capital University boasts an enrollment of 560 adults at the Capital branch. Both men and women are returning to higher education but not at the same rates. Women enrollees outnumber the men 409 to 151 students.

This study set out to uncover the perceived motivation and value adults have in reentering higher education and to see if gender played a role in that motivation.

In this study 38 out of 50 questionnaires were returned (76%). Of the 38 participants, thirteen were male and twenty-five were female. There was no significant difference in gender with reference to perceived motivation and value.

In researching the perceived motivation and value, the participants were asked to answer 18 questions using a five point Likert Scale with #5 being strongest. The questions targeted three main categories professional, cognitive, and social. The finding illustrated that students responded favorably to both increasing job related learning (professional) and learning for enjoyment (cognitive) motivations. The areas of job and mental stimulation fared well in perceived value also. All three factors received some degree of motivation and value from the 38 participants but the area of social stimulation consistently received unsure to low

value. The students expressed in their scoring a little desire in becoming involved in groups and organizations on campus. This shows that universities need not try to involve adult students mainly due to tight time constraints.

It appears that from this data older students returning to higher education are motivated in much the same way. Having a business society that places a greater demand on their job applicants and current employees to obtain a higher degree or specific credentials will continue to force larger numbers into the adult degree programs.

Universities need to continue to market their programs towards business fields. Having class hours around normal business hours will enable students to continue in their career and attend classes at night and on the weekends. Allowing students to transfer past college courses and to receive credit for work related experience can entice more adults to enroll in colleges and universities.

Efforts from both the management of personnel of these employees and the college programs can assist students in attaining the goal of an advanced degree. Our work force is demanding more education from our employees so both must work together so that our society can be a functional and profitable system.

APPENDICES

CAPITAL
UNIVERSITY
COLUMBUS, OHIO

Hello,

My name is Pamela Briggs, and I am currently working on a research project to complete my master's degree from The University of Dayton. I need a few minutes of your time.

I am studying the motivational factors that encourage adult degree students to return to higher education. The survey is brief but necessary in order to gather both the motivation of returning students and the value placed on that motivation.

Your name was chosen as part of a random sample that is representative of students enrolled at Capital University. The completion of the study depends heavily upon your response. Please take a few moments to complete the survey and return it in the postage-paid envelope. Your prompt cooperation and participation in this survey are appreciated. Thank you for your assistance in helping me finishing the research. Please enjoy a cup of coffee on me.

Sincerely,



Pamela Briggs

x

Directions: This survey is designed to yield more information about adult degree students and their motivation to return to higher education. Please answer the following statements by circling the degree of motivation and the value you place on each statement

Strongly Motivating	Motivating	Unsure	Somewhat Motivating	Not Motivating
5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Valued	Valued	Unsure	Somewhat Valued	Not Valued
5	4	3	2	1

1. To renew and develop personal intellectual skills and abilities.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
2. To develop personal contacts and acquire new friends.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
3. To become apart of and interact with groups on campus.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
4. To increase my appreciation of art, music, and literature.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
5. To improve my job skills and my ability to perform my work.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
6. To obtain the credential which would make me eligible to receive the right pay for the work I am doing.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
7. To learn more about the subject area simply because I am interested in it.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
8. To participate in organized collegiate events such as drama, athletics, and clubs.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1
9. To feel the enjoyment and have the experience of learning.

motivating	5	4	3	2	1
valued	5	4	3	2	1

10. To improve my chances of good pay and /or promotion in my career.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

11. To learn more about myself.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

12. To develop a new career.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

13. To become a well rounded individual able to assist others.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

14. To gain Knowledge which will help me interact with family, friends and associates.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

15. To obtain perquisites for entry into a higher degree program, graduate or professional programs.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

16. To have the satisfaction of having the degree.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

17. To obtain the credential which would qualify me for the kind of job I really want.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

18. To learn how to participate more effectively as a citizen in my community.

motivating 5 4 3 2 1
valued 5 4 3 2 1

Gender:

____ Male
____ Female

Age:

____ under 22
____ 23-29
____ 30-39
____ 40-49
____ 50@ over

Estimated time to complete degree

____ 0 - 1 years
____ 1.5 - 2 years
____ 2.5 - 3 years
____ 3.5 - 4 years
____ 4.5 - 5 years
____ more than 5 years

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