

UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

Changes to adult learning and education (ALE) policy environment in Finland, Korea and the United States: implications for addressing inequality in ALE participation

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7hz5657m>

Journal

Compare A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 51(2)

ISSN

0305-7925

Authors

Lee, Jeongwoo

Desjardins, Richard

Publication Date

2021-02-17

DOI

10.1080/03057925.2019.1610356

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Changes to adult learning and education (ALE) policy environment in Finland, Korea, and the United States: Implications for addressing inequality in ALE participation

Jeongwoo Lee^a and Richard Desjardins^b

^a Pusan National University, Busan, Republic of Korea;

^b University of California, Los Angeles(UCLA), Los Angeles, USA

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in [Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education] on [17/04/2019], available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/03057925.2019.1610356>

Abstract

In conducting a literature review, this article explores changes to Adult Learning and Education (ALE) policies and related processes as well as the context within which those changes have taken place, so as to draw out comparative insights regarding the unequal distribution of participation in ALE. Emphasis is on an analysis of political priorities, political-administrative guidelines, and organizational and administrative dimensions of ALE in Finland, Korea, and the United States. While country-specific differences are identified, several convergences are also of importance: a priority assigned to ALE as a means to support market-driven policy, namely to enhance competitiveness in the globalized market; legislative efforts to support the demands for developing skilled and competent workforce in the labour market; decentralized organizational and administrative structures that relate to ALE; and, a decreasing trend in publicly-funded ALE.

Keywords: adult learning and education, inequality in participation, policy change, policy environment

Introduction

How inequality in the distribution of participation in adult learning and education (ALE) is socially constructed is a critical issue raised by the increased policy interest in ALE (Rubenson 2018). Moreover, the factors involved in determining who participates in ALE are multi-faceted. Individual background characteristics (e.g. gender, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment) are strongly related by providing advantages and disadvantages in realising participation (see Desjardins, Rubenson, and Milana 2006). Structural circumstances (e.g. social inequality and institutional settings) beyond one's control also affect an individual's ability to participate in ALE (Lee 2018). Thus, it is critical to understand how to recognise and motivate the need to lower the individually and/or structurally rooted obstacles to ALE participation, from

a policy perspective, to reduce inequality in ALE participation. ALE refers to the entire range (e.g. formal, non-formal, and informal) of educational activities designed for adult learners.

In regard to this issue, public policy's roles have been discussed in cross-country comparative contexts such as public intervention in the planning of ALE and government support for adult learners (Desjardins et al. 2006) and policy tools (e.g. financial or non-financial incentives for individuals) as an instrument to stimulate ALE participation (Pont 2004). To promote participation in ALE, particularly for adults who are at a socioeconomic disadvantage policy intervention may serve as an effective means to lowering structural barriers to participating, and thus enhance individuals' capacity to participate in ALE. Pont (2004) argues that policies and practices should be designed to promote ALE participation by allowing individuals to combine learning activities to fit their needs. Some countries have practically implemented explicit policies (e.g. the Noste Programme in Finland, Start Qualification in the Netherlands, and the Adult Education Initiative in Sweden) that set specific participation targets to promote ALE participation (OECD 2005a). Cross-national institutions have also taken some strategic policy actions—for example, the European cooperation in education and training called ET 2020—by establishing specific benchmarks and indicators, such as increasing participating in lifelong learning (LLL) of adults to 15% by 2020 (EC 2013).

Given this understanding, this article explores the relevant historical, socioeconomic and political contexts of ALE (i.e. the environment within which ALE policies and related processes have occurred). The purpose is not to provide direct evidence of and explanation of inequality in ALE participation but to shed light on the possibility that broader policy and environmental changes serve as an insightful and valuable source to more comprehensively understand inequality in ALE participation and, on this basis, to address structural barriers to ALE participation. The specific assumptions underlying these intentions are that policy changes are either incremental revisions of existing policies or new and innovative ones (Bennett and Howlett 1992), and that policy formulation is multifaceted, involving political, administrative, economic and organisational inputs (Hill 2010). Through an ongoing interactive process, different policies are expected to be formulated and implemented in different political and economic systems, and consequently, different policy outcomes are produced. It is thus important to note that policies are subject to change in accordance with changes in the environment surrounding them.

Some efforts have been made to explore changes in policies and related processes in education, including the policy-making process and the development of different areas of education from policy perspectives (see Hake 1999; Hillier 2009). The changing functions of ALE within historical, cultural and political contexts have also been discussed (e.g. Olesen 2010). However, little attention has been paid to an analysis of inequality in ALE participation in relation to changes in policies and related processes, which is important because it may help comprehend the latent structures and processes related to inequality in ALE participation. It is also vital to note that, as Olesen (2010) argues, ALE performs different functions in the modernisation process. This argument implies that the patterns and degree of inequality in ALE participation may vary because they are contingent upon the circumstance and context within which ALE is valued. Consequently, as Pont (2004) argues, it is necessary to recognise differences in policy

contexts related to inequality in ALE participation, policy priorities and objectives, and political structures.

A literature review is conducted from a comparative perspective to ascertain whether there are any differences in the ALE policy environment that may serve as an underlying mechanism causing cross-national differences in inequality in ALE participation. Therefore, the review draws on the extant research concerning the changing discourses and perspectives surrounding ALE since the 1970s, when participation in ALE started to increase in industrialised countries and, as Harvey (2005) notes, when there began to be a shift towards the ideology of the marketplace in political, economic practices and thinking.

Special attention is paid to Finland, Korea, and the United States (US), which are selected in the light of the following understandings. They differ in overall ALE participation rates: Finland has above 60%; the US is between 55% and 59%; and Korea exhibits an OECD average of 48% to 53% (OECD 2014). Varying degrees of inequality in ALE participation have also been identified in all of these countries (see Lee and Desjardins 2018). For example, the odds that tertiary-educated adults (those in skilled occupations) will participate in job-related non-formal ALE is 3.6 (2.2) times larger than the odds for adults with below an upper secondary education (those in elementary occupations) in Korea, 2.9 (4.3) times larger in Finland, and 2.7 (4.3) times larger in the US, respectively. Furthermore, they differ in terms of their political economic systems as they related to models of welfare capitalism (see Esping-Andersen 1990) and varieties of capitalism (see Hall and Soskice 2001), which form the context in which policies and outcomes are produced. Specifically, Finland is an example of sociodemographic welfare state as well as a coordinated market economy and the US is a liberal welfare state as well as a liberal market economy. Although Korea is not classified within the welfare state and varieties of capitalism typologies, its political economic system differs from the other two countries. For example, according to a typology that is made based on how countries deal with a range of social aspects (e.g. inequality and state involvement) discussed by Green, Janmaat, and Han (2009), Korea is classified as 'East Asian,' Finland as 'social democratic' with high equality and high levels of state involvement, and the US as 'liberal' with high levels of inequality and low levels of state involvement, respectively. It may be thus assumed that within different political economic systems, different policy priorities and objectives, and political structures have been established and affected policies and related processes. On the other hand, the countries share some similarities with one another. For instance, Korea is similar with the US in terms of a neoliberal doctrine affecting educational policies and systems (e.g. standardization, privatization, and performance-based assessment), but less so with Finland, whose education system is characterized by less pronounced neoliberal ideology, although, according to (FitzSimmons 2015), Finland has also embraced a neoliberal model of education and schooling.

Accordingly, the comparison presented in this article makes it possible to conduct a synthesis of how countries with or without shared characteristics end up exhibiting different and/or similar patterns of ALE related policies. An objective is to expand the scope of the existing comparative research in ALE participation by providing valuable insights into the drivers and dynamics related to inequality in ALE participation, particularly as policies and related processes unfold over the long term in different political economic systems.

Analytical framework

To the best of our knowledge, there is no agreed-upon analytical framework to explain changes to the ALE policy environment in relation to inequality in participation, although some conceptual models are discussed to understand ALE participation (see Boeren 2016; Desjardins 2017). This is not surprising since ALE participation can be seen as a decision made by individuals through a complex decision-making process in which different factors (e.g. psychological, social, and institutional ones) and stakeholders (e.g. educational institutions and governments) are involved (see Boeren 2016). It should also be noted that this complex decision can be hampered or stimulated by external factors, such as the policy environment (Lee 2018). Desjardins, Melo, and Lee (2016) note that countries with low participation rates in ALE generally lack elaborated policy agendas, as well as active or effective institutions and governance structures related to ALE. Therefore, as Boeren (2009) argues, a shared responsibility between individuals, educational institutions, and governments needs to be considered when exploring inequality in ALE participation.

Thus, with a focus on policy dimensions of ALE participation, we rely on the ALE policy analytical framework proposed by Lima, Guimarães, and Touma (2016), which comprises three different models: the democratic emancipatory model, the modernisation and state control model and the human resources management model (see Table 1). Each of these models can be intertwined to some extent, and all serve as heuristic devices for understanding public policies on ALE (Lima et al. 2016). These models are explicated along with four interrelated analytical categories: (1) political priorities refer to the ends assigned to ALE, the domains that a policy concentrates on, objectives and targets; (2) political-administrative guidelines to the laws, rules and norms (e.g. the legislative apparatus) for public policy adoption and implementation, and the financing and controlling of policy actions proposed; (3) organizational and administrative dimensions to administering and managing public policy adoption (e.g. the procedures and technical processes associated with executing ALE activities); and (4) conceptual elements to the theoretical references underlying the objectives and methods of policy implementation, respectively (Lima and Guimarães 2011; Lima et al. 2016). Lima et al. (2016) indicate that a combination of the three models and four analytical categories needs to be applied to practical situations in connection with the political–educational rationale and the historical and cultural context.

[Table 1 near here]

Specifically, we concentrate on the first three analytical categories into which various conceptual elements are integrated to understand changes to the ALE policy environment that affect inequality in ALE participation. If political priorities can be understood in terms of long-term policy goals and directions, then a reasonable question to ask becomes, “How does one align the former with the latter?” Political priorities can be substantiated in political–administrative guidelines, especially through legislative frameworks and rationales, which are, according to Milana (2015), crucial components of ALE provision and afford important opportunities for it to thrive or shrink. For instance, the Finnish government’s political commitment to ALE is specified in legal regulations and policy instruments, including the Vocational Adult Education Act (VAEA) of 1998 and the Government Decree on the Council for Lifelong Learning of 2009 (FMOE 2012).

Another practical element of political–administrative guidelines is the involvement of the state and other stakeholders in the financing of ALE. Desjardins (2017) considers the extent of financial resources invested in ALE to be a key conceptual element of ALE participation. This view is truly reasonable, as financial unaffordability is a difficult-to-overcome barrier to ALE participation, especially for the socioeconomically disadvantaged. Moreover, applying neoliberal ideologies (e.g. individual responsibility for one’s own education) to ALE policy and practice affects how both the state and individuals finance ALE. Organizational and administrative dimensions, i.e., governance in the policy process, are also fundamental components to translate into action a series of ALE activities corresponding to political priorities within the context of how to bring together the interests in and motivations for ALE participation of diverse stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on state involvement through public and social policies, in addition to stakeholder involvement through social partners, as an important contextual condition underlying effective ALE systems (see Desjardins 2017).

Understanding changes to ALE policies and related processes

Political priorities

During the 1970s, when the redistribution of educational opportunities throughout life was a key policy element, both nationally and globally (Hake 2010), political priorities for ALE could be explained in terms of the humanistic notions of ALE, i.e., education as a right in Finland, Korea, and the US. The societal purposes and functions (e.g. building a democratic and participatory society and personal self-articulation) of ALE were also an overriding concern, thereby non-formal and informal community-based activities were developed for non-vocational ends. In Finland, ALE was integrated into general social policies in an effort to meet individuals’ self-development needs, to provide learning opportunities catering to individuals’ unique interests and preferences and to cultivate citizenship skills, society’s coherence and equality (Heinonen 2001). Finland also began to provide flexible and student-centred education programs for adults through the publicly financed network of liberal education centres (EAEA 2011). In the US, driven by social forces (e.g. liberal education to nurture good citizens and for self-improvement), ALE’s scope and objectives were to alleviate illiteracy by providing government grants for adult literacy education (Johnson 2010). Korea put ALE under the milieu of a social education framework to promote social transformation (Han and Choi 2013) and to establish adult literacy and basic education as a core policy priority for ALE, in association with the development of the country (Kim 1993).

From the 1980s onwards, this societal purpose-driven ALE policy focus appeared to be replaced by Human Resource Development (HRD) and market principle-driven ALE to gain strong momentum in promoting vocational capacity and work-skill development through further and continuing education and training in the three countries. This shift in priorities for ALE can be explained by the emphasis on Vocational Adult Education and Training (VAET) to enhance competencies and to tackle the drastic increase in unemployment particularly caused by the economic slump of the early 1990s in Finland (Aho, Pitkanen, and Sahlberg 2006). It can be also explained by a strong economic development strategy reflected in ALE, particularly vocation

and technical education, to construct a modern economy by developing human capital for economic development in Korea; in the US, by ALE that highlights an aspect of HRD and economic development through raising adult literacy levels and helping acquire workforce credentials as well as enhance job skills (Keogh 2009; Smith 2014). The driving forces underlying this shift included the global ALE policy landscape constructed by neoliberal discourses as well as globalization and the knowledge economy that transformed labour demands and increased demand for ALE. In neoliberal times, ALE policies began to shift towards a close alignment between ALE and economic necessities and towards developing a high levels of skills, vocational competencies, and knowledge critical for economic growth and competitiveness within the framework of HRD in a globalized knowledge economy (Boeren and Holford 2016; Smith 2014). Countries responded to this global phenomenon to varying degrees.

This shift is reflected in the higher participation rates in job-related ALE than general ALE throughout all three countries, which is indicative of an emergence of the vocational dimension, continuing training, and professional development of ALE to address the needs of the knowledge economy. It is not that instrumental, economic rationality-driven ALE policies are unacceptable, but that ALE appears to be immoderately reinterpreted as a means of managing the workforce in relation to productivity, adaptability, and competitive advantages. This reinterpretation reflects changes in the economic situation (e.g. transformations in the world of work and constant technological innovations) and the need to acquire competencies to keep pace with the changes being made. Another ensuing issue is the growing competition for ALE opportunities generated by the increasing demand for ALE. Given that the vocational dimension of ALE pays off in the labour market, increasing demand and intense competition for ALE are likely to strengthen the advantages in participating in ALE stemming from individual background characteristics (e.g. educational attainment and financial affordability). This expected phenomenon is referred to as the Matthew effect of accumulated advantage, i.e., individuals who already have, for instance, higher level skills will be able to take advantage of more opportunities to participate. The Matthew effect in ALE participation has been identified in existing studies (e.g. Boeren 2009; Dämmrich, de Vilhena, and Reichart 2014). As a result, inequality in ALE participation may become an unavoidable trend across countries.

Political-administrative guidelines in terms of legislative apparatus

An overview of key ALE legislation since the 1960s is presented in Table 2. The history of ALE legislative frameworks seems to mirror changes in the political priorities for ALE discussed above. In the 1960s and the 1970s, ALE legislation focused on adult literacy, basic education and ALE's societal purposes. In Finland, ALE as an independent entity within the national education system has received legislative support from an early stage. Finland based its ALE policies and political-administrative guidelines on the ideals of solidarity, equality of opportunity, civic education in building up a welfare state, and ALE as a voluntary practice (Koski and Filander 2012). Similarly, the US's early legislative efforts were part of progressive and welfare state policies that sought to address ALE in terms of citizenship and civic involvement, liberal learning goals, adult basic literacy, and training for mobility, particularly for those most in need (Bannon 2016). Recently, ALE legislation (since the 1990s) has supported workforce development and HRD (e.g. VAEA of 1998, 2006 for vocational adult education in Finland and Workforce Investment Act of 1998, 2014 in the US).

These different focuses and changes are justifiable in that ALE policies have been developed in accordance with changes in political, social and economic environments to meet the demands and necessities of society and the economy and/or to strike a balance between social and economic development. Such changes include the development of the welfare state in the 1960s, neo-liberal discourse in education from the 1980s onwards, and the economic recession of the 1990s. Accordingly, certain ALE legislation was revised and new regulations and rules were enacted.

[Table 2 near here]

Comparatively speaking, Finland and the US formulated and implemented most of the principal ALE legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, while Korea did not do so until the 1980s. In Korea, ALE legislation did not appear until 1982, when the first ALE-related legislation (the Social Education Act) was enacted, stipulating national responsibility and strategies for promoting LLL. The difference in legislative support for ALE between these three countries may indicate cross-national differences in legislative structures and pace of progress to support ALE activities and the ALE system. Political-administrative guidelines in the form of legislation can be regarded as an effort to bridge the gaps between policy and practice, thereby serving as a barometer for the degree to which a country commits itself to substantiate policy commitments in ALE, i.e., to ensure that individual adults are allowed to legally and practically make the most of educational opportunities for different types of ALE. Although the impact of ALE legislation on ALE participation is beyond the scope of this article, it is legitimate to argue that, without appropriate legislative arrangements, public support for ALE may be just empty rhetoric and ultimately fail to establish a frame for a more well-constructed ALE system to provide opportunities for all.

Political-administrative guidelines in terms of financing of ALE

The Finnish ALE system is a hybrid one: public funding provides a stable financial resource for ALE without burdening students with high fees, but the prevailing decentralised administration guarantees the largest possible provision of ALE). Because the central government has enormous influence as the foremost stakeholder in financing ALE, a flourishing commercial provision of learning opportunities for adults that occur in many OECD countries does not exist in Finland (Heinonen 2001). A strong state subsidy is considered as contributing to the expansion of participation: more than 50% of the adult population participates in ALE programs (Sahlberg 2009). Education leading to qualifications (except for government-financed Tertiary Education (TE) degrees) and training leading to further or specialist qualifications are mostly publicly funded, though charge moderate fees (FMOEC n.d.b). The state support makes self-financed studies (e.g. Liberal Adult Education, LAE) quite affordable at the current market price. For example, in 2007, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (FMOEC) translated a study voucher scheme into action that provides subsidies for liberal education institutions to lower or completely compensate tuition fees for a particular population (e.g. immigrants, the unemployed and individuals without post-compulsory training) (EAEA 2011). Approximately 5% of public funding allocated to LAE is designated for the study voucher scheme and development subsidy (EAEA 2011). Moreover, adult education allowances are available as a type of financial assistance to support employees' and self-employed adults' voluntary vocational studies leading to a degree or those in vocational further or continuation training. The amount provided per

month during unpaid study leave ranged from about US\$ 1,160 (EUR 1,069.72) to US\$ 2,273 (EUR 2,091.87) in 2017 (Koulutusrahasto n.d.).

As in Finland, the government is the primary source of funding for ALE in Korea, particularly for nation-wide LLL projects (e.g. LLL cities). The central government allocates approximately 1.08% of its total budget to LLL, 31.12% of which is taken up by vocational education and training (VET) (Choi 2003). Lower levels of governments are another source of public subsidy for ALE. Metropolitan and provincial offices of education were traditionally primary financial sponsors for LLL, and government offices of cities and districts have emerged as new sources of funding for LLL (Lee and Jo 2008). A difference is that, unlike the central government, local governments spend most of their LLL budget on general education rather than VET because the LLL activities of local governing bodies largely cover liberal arts education. Additionally, personal spending on LLL is an important source of funding. According to the latest available data (KMOE 2017), approximately 33.1% of adults who participated in non-formal education received financial assistance: 18.3% from employers, 10.1% from the government and 4.7% from educational institutions; roughly 67% of adults were self-financed.

Similar to Finland and Korea, ALE in the US is financed through a combination of federal, state, and local governments as well as tuition or fee payments (Foster and McLendon 2012). The Adult Education Basic Grants to States (“the federal funds” hereafter) are distributed primarily in the form of flow-through grants to various programs based on the needs of each state and/or competitions for multiyear grants among eligible institutions or agencies (Moore, Shulock, and Lang 2004). States should meet the following requirements to receive the federal funds: providing a minimum 25% match in non-federal support in the form of cash or in-kind and conformance with a policy instrument (called ‘maintenance of effort’ requirements) that a state should pay out at least 90% of what it spent in the previous year on ALE that is measured by cost per student or total aggregate non-federal support (Foster and McLendon 2012). On the other hand, states play a mediating role between federal and local governments, taking accountability for distributing the federal funds to local institutions and programs (Milana and McBain 2015). States are required to use the federal funds on a designated target population and to distribute, each year, at least 82.5% of their federal allocation to successful local applicants through a competitive process using their own criteria and no more than 17.5% to state-level activities (Moore et al. 2004).

In Finland, Korea and the US, despite public financial support for ALE through a partnership between different levels of government, the low level of and/or a decrease in the public financing in ALE remains a concern, as it directly or indirectly affects inequality in ALE participation. Although public investment in ALE in Korea is currently relatively low, it appears to be on an increasing trend. The Korean Ministry of Education (KMOE) allocated just 0.68% of its total annual operating budget to LLL in 2000 (Baek et al. 2000), which increased by 0.38% (to 1.06%) in 2016 (KMOE 2015). This small proportion seems even smaller when looking at support for LLL for individual adults rather than institutions: only 0.07% of the KMOE’s total budget and 9.69% of the KMOE’s LLL budget (Baek et al. 2000). In 2016, the KMOE allocated approximately 7.6% of its operating budget to LLL programs (1.04% to adult literacy education and 6.56% to VET) and 92.4% to TE institutions for building infrastructure for LLL (KMOE 2015). On the other hand, the KMOE allocated 80.8% and 74.5% of its operating budget to

primary and secondary education, respectively, and 18% and 16.6% to TE in 2000 and 2010, respectively (KMOE 2015; Baek et al. 2000). These differences imply that a relatively high degree of responsibility for financing ALE is imposed on individuals. Low levels of public expenditure on ALE are also identified at the level of local governments: for the governments of metropolitan cities and provinces, an average of 0.11% of their total budget in 2012 and for city governments, an average of 0.39% of their total budget (Choi et al. 2012).

As in Korea, the US also features relatively low levels of public investment in ALE. It can be argued that, historically, adult literacy programs have been underfunded and that growth in funding for ALE has been irregular (Guy 2005). Non-federal contribution to ALE is, in general, higher than federal contributions. 56% of total ALE funding comes from non-federal sources (Foster and McLendon 2012). According to more recent data, National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (2016), on average, across states, 71% of the annual funding for ALE programs comes from non-federal sources (e.g. state and local authorities and individual learners). In comparison with other educational sectors, ALE appears to be financially less supported by the federal government. The US Department of Education (USDOE) spent approximately 1.02% (0.31% for Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) state grants, 0.04% for English literacy and civic education state grants, and 0.67% for Career and Technical Education (CTE) state grants) of its annual funds on state or local education agencies in 2016, which is far lower than expenditures on primary and secondary education (21.5%) and on all post-secondary education programs (18.1%) (USDOE 2016). State expenditure (the State Department of Education) on ALE is also not high, ranging from approximately 1% to 4% on average (Foster and McLendon 2012).

Comparatively speaking, Finland has allocated a higher proportion of government spending on ALE. The FMOEC allocates an average of 12% of its expenditure to ALE, and of this total, approximately 40% is allocated to VAET and apprenticeship training, 25% to ALE offered by TE institutions, 20% to LAE, and approximately 5% to developing staff training, respectively (FMOEC n.d.a). Nevertheless, the economic recession in both Finland stimulated changes in the extent to which ALE is publicly funded. In Finland, in the early 1990s, the traditional state subsidy-based financing model of ALE began to be criticised due to concerns that ALE providers may pervert the education supply and their targeting (Heinonen 2001). For instance, in 2014, the Finnish government decided to retrench the governmental and municipal funding of LAE so that the actual cut budgeted for 2015 was 5% of the government grant for LAE, which would penalise all those involved in LAE, particularly small entities (EAEA 2015). A decrease in the state subsidy for various forms of ALE has forced ALE providers to find alternative sources of revenues to counterbalance this decrease. Currently, approximately 50% of LAE costs are covered by the government, while the rest is primarily funded by student fees and the providing organisations. Indeed, the share of education funded by students has increased in several ALE sectors (Pantzar 2007).

Although public funding for ALE is commonly observed in Finland, Korea, and the US to varying extents, this phenomenon is exhibiting a decreasing trend along with increased responsibility for ALE participation imposed on individuals. Considering that the governments' stance on financing ALE reflect the countries' different political cultures, financing ALE is an ideological and technical issue (Keogh 2009). Milana and McBain (2014) argue that the dramatic

decline in publicly funded ALE provision in recent years, although ALE participation remains high, has generated a system characterized by social inequalities. The government's financial contribution to ALE may thus be a legitimate proxy for its efforts to provide ALE opportunities for all, tackling inequality in ALE participation. In this respect, Finland appears to involve itself in publically financing ALE more intensely than Korea and the US. Kettunen (2004) highlights that Finland is still managing ALE as a significant part of the welfare state, which distinguishes Finland from Korea and the US. Indeed, Finland has claimed to support a capitalist welfare state in which the minimum level of social welfare, including education and employment, is assured (Kettunen 2004). It is therefore imperative to understand inequality in ALE participation within the context of how the costs of ALE participation are shared among stakeholders through certain policy tools, especially within the context of the current knowledge economy, which requires considerable investment in HRD to acquire and update technical knowledge and competitive skills.

Organisational and administrative dimensions

Considering the rationale of neoliberalism that the state's roles should be minimised in the social realm (Bowl 2017), the state's role in promoting ALE opportunities (i.e. state intervention to promote public provision of educational opportunities) may be a point of contention when discerning cross-country differences in changes to ALE policies and related processes. In practice, the trends in competition, innovation, and globalisation have led most OECD countries to recognise the need to restructure their ALE systems (OECD 2005b). Centralisation was a basic characteristic of organising and administering ALE before the 1990s, particularly in Finland and Korea. A hierarchic implementation (e.g. bureaucratic formalisation and administrative segregation) that emphasized the role of the central governance was prevalent in the Korean education system (Han 2008), which is also reflected in its institutionalised LLL system. For the US, public ALE is, in various respects, a federal creation (USC-OTA 1993). The prevailing philosophical, ideological and political interests in ALE at the federal level have affected both state and local governments' decisions regarding ALE administration (Milana and McBain 2015).

In regard to centralised organisational and administrative structures of ALE, the roles of played by the government ministry (e.g. the Ministry of Education) are prominent. In Finland, overall responsibility for ALE (e.g. aims, content and methods) rests with the highest, central administrative authority, i.e., the FMOEC, in cooperation with the Finnish National Board of Education (UNESCO 2016). The FMOEC prepares the educational legislation and the state budget, and is thus responsible for general adult education. Moreover, various committees (e.g. , Council for Lifelong Learning in place of the Adult Education Council created in 1984) within the FMOEC were appointed as actors and as institutional arrangements for policy formulation and program delivery within the ALE system (FMOEC n.d.a). The KMOE plays a significant role in organising and administering ALE in comparison with Finland and the US. Under the direction of the KMOE, ALE policies are administered through two tracks – policy deliberation and policy operation as well as administration – at different levels of government (national, metropolitan city and province, and local (city, county and district)) to support ALE. Additionally, different government authorities are involved in administering different types of ALE: for example, the Korean Ministry of Employment and Labour (KMOEL) in charge of

VET, specifically through the training fee support system, long-term student loans at a low interest rate for employees pursuing TE, the paid leave training system to grant paid leave, and the vocational capacity-building aid offered by the government (Kwon 2015). In the US, the USDOE sets ALE policies and administers ALE programs. Specifically, the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education under the USDOE administers and coordinates ALE programs in cooperation with the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) and the Division of Academic and Technical Education (DATE). The DAEL administers ALE programs that are designed to attain the basic skills, AELS delivery, and the deferral funds that are designed to fund local AELS programs to enhance the quality of ALE. The DATE is also responsible for assisting adults in attaining technical and employability skills to ultimately succeed in postsecondary education and in-demand careers. It accomplishes this by managing the state formula and discretionary grant programs and by establishing national initiatives for CTE programs.

However, the organisational and administrative structures of ALE have gradually shifted towards becoming more decentralised since the 1980s, which was, according to Joo and Kwon (2010), affected by the political decentralisation and structural variety of ALE institutions and practices. The role and functions of the state have been modified and redefined in the broad context of governance, while other non-state actors are actively becoming involved at the policy level. Multilevel governance is a marked trend. In Finland, in the late 1980s, as the criticism against bureaucracy and centralised state control in education was raised as a result of a shift towards neoliberalism in education, a decentralised planning paradigm, deregulation and accountability began to gain traction and eventually prevailed throughout the education system (Antikainen and Luukkainen 2008). Globalisation in particular has forced the Finnish welfare state to be transformed in the direction of a competitive state (Kettunen 2004). In recent years, decision-making authority has been delegated to local authorities and other education providers, in addition to the responsibility of running educational institutions (Stenstrom and Virolainen 2014). Regional administration plays a strategic role in promoting the demand-driven approach of VAET and in allocating grants for vocational institutions to develop and provide work-based learning.

As in Finland, understanding that a top-down structure in education system makes it difficult to embrace and coordinate the many needs of different stakeholders (Joo and Kwon 2010), which has led Korea to decentralise its ALE structure. The discretionary authority has been given to the lower level of government to independently manage and promote ALE since 2011 (NILE 2014). The Lifelong Education Act of 1999 was designed to stimulate the establishment of a LLL society and served as a momentum to establish national and locally based LLL systems (Heo and Hong 2016). Provincial, metropolitan and local governments have performed detailed policy tasks specified by the Lifelong Education Division of the Lifelong Vocational Education Bureau within the KMOE. Program networking among provincial, metropolitan and local governments have also played pivotal roles in LLL administration and development (Lee and Jo 2008).

The US is built in another way with decentralisation, which can be understood at two levels: federal and state (and local) government. There has been a sustained partnership between the federal and state governments with regard to ALE over the past decades (Tamassia et al. 2007). However, as the US Constitution does not impose the responsibility for education on the federal

level, education-related federal bills have been indirect in nature (OECD 2005b). Especially, during the mid-1990s, the “Republican Revolution” redefined the functional roles of federal, state, and local governments, emphasising that state and local governments should be more responsive than the federal government for implementing national policies to meet public needs (Milana and McBain 2014). States are given considerable implementation discretion and flexibility to provide ALE programs using the federal funds and to establish ALE delivery systems (Eyre and Pawloski 2013). Cross-state differences in various contexts (e.g. policy, governance structure, delivery system and regulatory efforts) make the decentralised structure of ALE in the US more obvious. For example, there are differences in the agency’s roles in administering ALE, which can affect the general ALE policy directions. Of the 44 states that responded to a survey on state ALE tuition and financing policies, six states administer ALE through the labour and workforce system, 12 states through the postsecondary and community college system, and 26 states through the K-12 education agency, respectively (Foster and McLendon 2012). These differences relate to the different perceptions of ALE: ALE is regarded as a type of postsecondary education by the second group of states and as a remedial program by the third group (Moore et al. 2004). In addition, there are differences in the distributing of federal and state funding for ALE to local ALE providers – a competitive process, or targeted funding for a particular group of people and/or particular ALE programs (Foster and McLendon 2012) – and in budgetary efforts of states to supplement the federal funds to support ALE.

Although the decentralised administrative structures of ALE are manifest in Finland, Korea and the US, the state’s roles remain significant, in particular in Finland and Korea. Finland and Korea have executed a government-driven national educational planning: the Education and Research Development Plan to improve the level of education including ALE among the population every five years since 1995 in Finland, and the National LLL Promotion Plan to nurture knowledge-based developments for improving national competitiveness every five years since 2002 in Korea. A subtle difference between Finland and Korea is that ALE is appreciated as second-tier education and supplementary learning in Korea but as a part of universal public education in Finland. Meanwhile, a salient issue aligned to inequality in ALE participation is that decentralisation has both positive (e.g. improvement of administrative efficiency, finance management and the quality and accessibility of services) and less positive aspects (e.g. increasing inequality between regions in financing and quality of education and a protection against privatisation) (UNESCO 2005).

It is therefore legitimate to assume that the less positive aspects of a decentralized administration intensify inequality in ALE participation, particularly considering several prevailing trends in ALE, such as the privatization of ALE provision and personal responsibility for education. Thus, ALE has become increasingly viewed as a personal responsibility, as reflected in, for example, the second wave of the LLL discourse at the OECD in the 1990s (Rubenson 2008). In the US, this prevailing perspective effectively supports a limited role for federal investment in ALE compared with formal schooling and is consistent with the view that support for retraining programs should be funnelled through private industry or independent agencies that are frequently under the control of private industry (Kwon and Schied 2008). A disputable agenda is, thus, the extent to which educational (de)centralisation can appropriately tackle inequality in ALE participation in an era of privatisation and personal accountability for education. Decentralised educational governance structures need to be understood in association with other

relevant conceptual elements (e.g. financing of ALE) to determine whether they mitigate, or rather aggravate, inequality in ALE participation.

Concluding remarks

This article has sought to develop a deeper understanding of the political and socioeconomic environments within which ALE policy and related processes have changed in order to draw out implications helpful to understand better how policy can affect inequality in ALE participation. As previously discussed, the political and socioeconomic environments were explored in accordance with the four analytical categories, which contribute to implicitly explaining inequality in ALE participation in a complementary way. Two implications for how to deal with inequality in ALE participation can be drawn from the analysis. First, since the 1990s, the convergence and global landscape of ALE policy (also known as institutional isomorphism) in Finland, Korea and the US have explicitly occurred despite their different political economic systems: (1) a priority for ALE in support of the contention of market-driven policy to enhance competitiveness in the knowledge economy, (2) legislative efforts to support the demands for developing a skilled and competent workforce in the labour market, (3) decreasing publicly funded ALE, and (4) the decentralisation of governance structures related to ALE. It is reasonable to assume that the economic rationality and decentralized administration of ALE overpowers liberal and humanist ideas of ALE to meet the high demands for job-related ALE and that the gradual disappearance of public funding and policy support for ALE in favour of individual responsibility and partnerships is a legitimate policy choice due to the limited availability of public financial resources to support ALE for all. A series of changes in the political and economic environments triggered by global trends (e.g. globalization and the growing significance of the knowledge economy) serves as a hidden driving force of this policy convergence. These findings imply that the ALE policy field is becoming globalized and that a universalised network of ideas and standards of ALE are consequently being shared. Moreover, this policy convergence is likely to be a stumbling block for attempts to mitigate inequality in ALE participation so that it could be possible to presume that inequality in ALE participation is a globalized phenomenon.

Second, policy approaches to ALE are to some extent different in the three aforementioned countries, regardless of their similar political priorities (e.g. HRD and ALE to enhance employability and competitiveness). The degree of public financial support for ALE and state intervention in the development of the ALE system are examples of different policy approaches. Stemming from country-specific contexts (e.g. policy focus and practices) and different conceptual understandings of ALE-related issues, this difference is likely to determine cross-national differences in the degree of inequality in ALE participation. In other words, although the global knowledge economy is found to be an overriding determinant of national policy directions, globalized ALE policies can be locally re-contextualized and thus develop different patterns. These re-contextualized policies may determine the degree of inequality in ALE participation at the country level. Moreover, given that ALE's roles and objectives tend to change in conjunction with diverse, and occasionally, competing social and political ideas, this difference may determine how to cope with such changes, especially in relation to inequality in ALE participation.

Ultimately, empirical analyses are needed to examine the effect of policy convergence and cross-national differences in the approach to policy convergence on inequality in ALE participation. Also, because this article concentrated on overall policy environments across countries, in-depth country-specific studies will provide further detailed explanation of what this article has discussed at a general level. Specific further research questions, from a policy perspective, may include: “How do the conceptual elements identified in the policy convergence need to be coordinated at the country level if reducing inequality in ALE participation is a policy goal?” and “What specific policy measures will be effective to reduce inequality in ALE participation?” Answering these questions may be the next step to understanding inequality in ALE participation in an increasingly precarious educational environment.

References

- Aho, E., K. Pitkanen, and P. Sahlberg. 2006. "Policy Development and Reform Principles of Basic and Secondary Education in Finland since 1968." Education Working Paper Series No. 2. The World Bank.
- Antikainen, A., and A. Luukkainen. 2008. "Twenty-Five Years of Educational Reform Initiatives in Finland." Joensuu, Finland: University of Joensuu.
- Baek, E., N. Lee, H. Lee, H. Oh, and G. Ryu. 2000. "Study of How to Expand Financial Resources to Vitalize Lifelong Education. 2000 Policy Research Paper." Seoul: Korean Educational Development Institute.
- Bannon, J. L. 2016. "Emerging Voices: Capitalizing on Adult Education: The Economic Imperative for Literacy in 1960s Federal Policy Discourse." *College English* 78 (4): 314–339.
- Bennett, C., and M. Howlett. 1992. "The Lessons of Learning: Reconciling Theories of Policy Learning and Policy Change." *Policy Sciences* 25: 275–294.
- Boeren, E. 2009. "Adult Education Participation: The Matthew Principle." *Filosofija Sociologija* 20 (2): 154–161.
- Boeren, E. 2016. *Lifelong Learning Participation in a Changing Policy Context: An Interdisciplinary Theory*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bowl, M. 2017. *Adult Education in Neoliberal Times*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Choi, D. M. 2003. "Economics of Adult Education: Adult Education Seen as an Investment." Chap. 9 in *Adult Education in Korea: Review and Agenda for the Future*. Seoul: Korean Educational Development Institute.
- Choi, E., J. Byeon, S. Jo, H. Lee, C. Yoon, Y. Hyeon, J. Heo, and P. Baek. 2012. "A Study of the Third National Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan ('13-'17). Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology Policy Research 2012–13." Seoul: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology.
- Dämmrich, J., D. V. de Vilhena, and E. Reichart. 2014. "Participation in Adult Learning in Europe: The Impact of Country-Level and Individual Characteristics." Chap. 2 in *Adult Learning in Modern Societies: An International Comparison from a Life-course Perspective* (pp. 29-55). Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar.
- Desjardins, R. 2017. *Political Economy of Adult Learning Systems*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Desjardins, R., V. Melo, and J. Lee. 2016. "Cross-national Patterns of Participation in Adult Education and Policy Trends in Korea, Norway, and Vietnam." *Prospects* 26: 149 – 170.
- Desjardins, R., K. Rubenson, and M. Milana. 2006. *Unequal Chances to Participate in Adult Learning: International Perspectives*. Paris: UNESCO.
- EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults). 2011. "Country Report on Adult Education in Finland." EAEA. Accessed June 10, 2017.
http://www.eaea.org/media/resources/ae-in-europe/finland_country-report-on-adult-education-in-finland.pdf
- EAEA. 2015. *Adult Education in Europe 2015 – A Civil Society View*. Brussels: EAEA.
- EC (European Commission). 2013. *Education and Training Monitor 2013*. EC.
- Esping-Anderson, G. 1990. *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Eyre, G. A., and R. Pawloski. 2013. *An American Heritage. Federal Adult Education. A Legislative History 1964-2013*. U.S. Department of Education.
- FitzSimmons, R. 2015. Countering the Neoliberal Paradigm: A Pedagogy of the Heart from a Finnish Higher Learning Perspective. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 13 (1): 210–237.
- FMOEC (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture). n.d.a. “Adult education.” Accessed May 2 2017. http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/aikuiskoulutus_ja_vapaa_sivistystyoe/?lang=en
- FMOEC. n.d.b. “Finance and administration.” Accessed May 2 2017. http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/aikuiskoulutus_ja_vapaa_sivistystyoe/hallinto_ohjaus_ja_rahoitus/?lang=en
- Foster, M., and L. McLendon. 2012. “Sinking or Swimming: Findings from a Survey of State Adult Education Tuition and Financing Policies.” The Center for Law and Social Policy.
- Green, A., G. Janmaat, and C. Han. 2009. *Regimes of Social Cohesion*. London: LLAKES.
- Guy, T. 2005. “The Adult Literacy Education System in the United States.” UNESCO.
- Hake, B. 1999. “Lifelong Learning Policies in the European Union: Developments and Issues.” *Compare* 29 (1): 53–69.
- Hake, B. J. 2010. “Rewriting the History of Adult Education: The Search for Narrative Structures.” Chap. 2 in *Adult learning and education*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hall, P. A., and D. Soskice. 2001. “An introduction to varieties of capitalism.” In *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, edited by Peter A. Hall, and David Soskice, 1–68. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Han, S. 2008. “The Lifelong Learning Ecosystem in Korea: Evolution of Learning Capitalism?” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 27 (5): 517–524.
- Han, S., and S. Choi. 2013. “Adult Education in Korea: Key Issues and Current Challenges.” *Andragoške Studije*: 107–120.
- Heinonen, V. 2001. “OECD Thematic Review on Adult Learning. Finland: Background Report.” OECD.
- Hill, R. J. 2010. “Policy and Adult Learning and Education.” In *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, edited by Carol E. Kasworm, Amy D. Rose, and Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, 103–112. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hillier, Y. 2009. “The Changing Faces of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy: Literacy Policy and Implementation in the UK.” *Compare* 39 (4): 535–550.
- Heo, J., and J. Hong. 2016. “Analysis of Community-centred Lifelong Learning Support System.” *Asia-pacific Journal of Multimedia Services Convergent with Art, Humanities, and Sociology*, 6 (11): 211–220.
- Joo, K. P., and I. T. Kwon. 2010. “Critical Policy Analysis: Investigating ‘Missing’ Values in the Lifelong Education System of South Korea.” The Adult Education Research Conference.
- Keogh, H. 2009. “The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Europe, North America and Israel.” Germany: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- Kettunen, P. 2004. “The Nordic Model and Consensual Competitiveness in Finland.” In *Between Sociology and History. Essays on Microhistory, Collective Action, and Nation-building*, edited by Anna-Maija Castén, Markku Lonkila, and Matti Peltonen, 289–309. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Kim, S. 1993. “The Historical Development of Korean Adult Education and the Problem of the Rights for Learning.” *Korean Journal of Adult Education* 18: 125–128.

- Korean Ministry of Education (KMOE). 2015. "2015 Korean Adult Lifelong Learning Survey." Seoul: Ministry of Education and Korean Educational Development Institute.
- Korean Ministry of Education (KMOE). 2017. "2017 Korean Adult Lifelong Learning Survey." Seoul: Ministry of Education and Korean Educational Development Institute.
- Koski, L., and K. Filander. 2012. "Transforming Causal Logics in Finnish Adult Education: Historical and Moral Transitions Rewritten." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 32 (5): 583–599.
- Koulutusrahasto. n.d. "Adult Education Allowance." Accessed November 1 2017. <https://www.koulutusrahasto.fi/en/adulteducationalallowance/>
- Kwon, I. T. 2015. "Towards a Learning Society: An Analysis of Adult Education Policies and Systems in South Korea. In *Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Learning Policy*, edited by Marcella Milana, and Tom Nesbit, 132–147. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kwon, I. T., and F. M. Schied. 2008. "From the Margins to the Mainstream and Back Again: A Comparison of Lifelong Learning in South Korea and the United States." Adult Education Research Conference.
- Lee, H. S., and S. O. Jo. 2008. "Financing of Lifelong Education." In *Republic of Korea. National Report on the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education*, edited by Dae Joong Kang, Un Sil Choi, and Kyoung Hee Kim, 15–34. Seoul: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
- Lee, J., and R. Desjardins. 2018. "Inequality in Adult Learning and Education Participation: The Effects of Social Origins and Social Inequality." Working paper.
- Lee, J. 2018. "Conceptual Foundations for Understanding Inequality in Participation in Adult Learning and Education Participation for International Comparisons." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37 (3): 297–314.
- Lima, L. C., and P. Guimarães. 2011. *European Strategies in Lifelong Learning: A Critical Introduction*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Lima, L. C., P. Guimarães, and N. Touma. 2016. "Adult Learning and Education Policies in Germany, Portugal and Sweden: An Analysis of National Reports on CONFINTEA VI." Chap. 2 in *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Europe and Beyond*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Milana, M. 2015. "Introduction: A Global Outlook on Adult Education and Learning Policies." In *Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Learning Policy*, edited by Marcella Milana, and Tom Nesbit, 1–12. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Milana, M., and L. MaBain. 2014. "Adult Education in the United States of America: A Critical Examination of National Policy (1998-2014)." *Encyclopedia* 18 (40): 34–52.
- Milana, M., and L. MaBain. 2015. "Adult and Continuing Education Policy in the USA." In *Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Learning Policy*, edited by Marcella Milana, and Tom Nesbit, 44–59. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moore, C., N. Shulock, and D. M. Lang. 2004. *Funding adult education: Does California put the money where the needs are?* Sacramento: California State University.
- NCSDAE (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education). 2016. *The Blue Book. Legislator's Resource Book. Adult Education Services, the Success, the Impact, and the Need 2014-2015*. Washington, D.C.: NCSDAE.
- NILE (National Institute for Lifelong Education). 2014. *2013-2014 Lifelong Learning in Korea*. Seoul: NILE.

- OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). 2005a. *Promoting Adult Learning*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. 2005b. *Thematic Review on Adult Learning: Korea*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. 2014. *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Olesen, H. S. 2010. “Modernization Processes and the Changing Function of Adult Learning.” Chap. 38 in *Adult learning and education*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Pantzar, E. 2007. “Introduction to Lifelong Learning and Adult Education in Finland.” University of Tampere.
- Pont, B. 2004. “Improving Access to and Participation in Adult Learning in OECD Countries.” *European Journal of Education* 39 (1): 31–45.
- Rubenson, K. 2008. OECD and Hegemony. In *The OECD and Transnational Governance*, edited by Rianne Mahon, and Stephen McBride, 242–259. Vancouver: British Columbia University Press.
- Rubenson, K. 2018. “Conceptualizing Participation in Adult Learning and Education: Equity Issues.” In *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning*, edited by Marcella Milana, Sue Webb, John Holford, Richard Waller, and Peter Jarvis, 337–357. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sahlberg, P. 2009. “A Short History of Educational Reform in Finland.” European Union Institution publication.
- Smith, A. N. 2014. “Exploring Human Resource Development: Adult Learning and Education in the U.S.” *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education* 1 (3): 1–7.
- Tamassia, C., M. Lennon, K. Yamamoto, and I. Kirsch. 2007. *Adult Education in America: A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). 2005. *Decentralization in Education: National Policies and Practices*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. 2016. *3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- USC-OTA (U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment). 1993. “Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime. OTA-SET-550.” Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- USDOE (U.S. Department of Education). 2016. “Fiscal Years 2015-2017 State Tables for the U.S. Department of Education.” <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/statetables/17stbystate.pdf>

Appendix

Table 1. Analytical framework for ALE policy changes

	democratic emancipatory model	modernization and state control model	human resources management model
Political- administrative guidelines	Education based on participatory democracy Decentralized control of policy of education Social movements	Education to modernise economy and competitiveness in capitalist democracies State intervention for universal, free public education	Roles of the market, civil society, and individuals Partnerships between state and other institutional actors
Political priorities	Construction of a democratic and participatory society Solidarity, social justice, common good Education as process of empowerment and as a basic right	Literacy programmes and encouragement of functional literacy Second chance education Recurrent education for adults Support of formal education by the welfare state	Education and training as instruments of human capital to foster employability and competitiveness Upskilling, acquisition of economically valuable skills Market logic and individual choice
Organizational and administrative dimensions	Intervention of civil society Local self-organisation, autonomy Collective decisions	School as central organisation in public adult education policies Strongly educational administrative and management procedures Centralised control of policy by the state	Induction and management of human resources Non-state organisation involvement and partnerships State administration with limited scope
Conceptual elements	ALE characterised by heterogeneity and diversity Basic education, popular education Ethical and political dimension of education Basic civic education	Formal education of adults as social right ALE as second-chance education Education for promoting equal opportunities	Production of human capital Skill acquisition and lifelong upskilling Learning and education for employability Trainability, individual responsibility

Source: Lima, Guimarães, and Touma (2016)

Note: Based on relevance to this article, the above elements are selected by the author.

Table 2. Key ALE and ALE-related legislation since the 1960s

	Finland	Korea	The U.S.
	The first Act on vocational adult education (1966)		Adult Basic Education Program in Title II B of the Economic Opportunity Act (1964)
	The second vocational education legislation (1976)		Adult Education Act (AEA) (1966)
1960s –	Decree on the training of the unemployed (1976)		Further Amendments to AEA (1968, 1970, 1978, 1988)
1970s	Act on training centers (1978)		Amendments to Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1974)
			Department of Education Organization Act (1979)
1980s		Social Education Act (1982)	
	Vocational Adult Education Act (VAEA) (631/1998)	Presidential Commission on Education Reform (1995)	National Literacy Act (NLA) (1991)
	Vocational Adult Education Decree (812/1998)	Act on Credit Recognition and Others (ACRO) (1999)	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996)
1990s	Liberal Adult Education Act (LAEA) (632/1998)	Lifelong Education Act (LEA) (1999)	Workforce Investment Act (WIA) (1998)
	Liberal Adult Education Decree (805/1998)		Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of WIA (1998; replacement of AEA and NLA)
	Act on Public Employment Services (2002, amended in 2012)	The third revision of LEA (2007)	Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act (2006)
2000s –	Polytechnics Act (2003)	Revision of ACRO (2008)	Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (2014, reauthorization of WIA)
	Amendment to VAEA and LAEA (2006, 2009)		
	Government Decree on the Council for Lifelong Learning (340/2009)		