


## Chapter-6

# NAVIGATING THE IMPACT OF A SOCIAL JUSTICE CURRICULUM ON ADULT LEARNERS

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### ABSTRACT

*The rising adult learner population attending higher education over the past several decades continues to exceed enrollment expectations. By incorporating social justice courses into the curriculum, institutions of higher education could play a role in transforming adult learner's identities and sense of self. However, the teachings and pedagogical strategies used in such courses are often at odds with neoliberal academia. This research investigated the impact of a social justice curriculum on the identities of adult learners enrolled in higher education and how its implementation defies, and at times aligns with, neoliberal ideologies. Significant findings focus the shared characteristics of the adult learner demographics, adult learner's established sense of self, and the complex connection between the adult learner and the personal and academic connection to social issues.*

**Keywords:** Adult Learner, Social Justice, Curriculum, Transformative Learning, Identity Navigating, The Impact of a Social Justice Curriculum on Adult Learners

### INTRODUCTION

Just 25 years ago, the United States ranked first in the world in attainment of four-year degrees for those aged 24 to 35 years old (Higher Education, 2016). As of 2021, the United States had fallen to 12<sup>th</sup> in the world (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021). According to the Advisory Committee for Student Financial Assistance (ACSFA, 2012), it is a moral, social, and political imperative that a democracy, such as the United States, educates their adult population with credentials, degrees, and certificates from higher education institutions. Economic and political perspectives both indicate the importance of a college-educated workforce, especially for the country's citizens in their pursuit of happiness. The importance of post-secondary education is not debatable when one looks at the correlation between college education and earnings. In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that adults with a college degree made an average of \$59,600 annually and experienced an 86% employment rate. For 24 to 35-year-old members of the workforce who did not have a college degree, they made an average salary of \$36,600 and experienced an employment rate of only 68% (NCES, 2022).

A study conducted by Phipps et al. (2013), correlated the surge in enrollment of adults in higher education with the need for adult learning as an essential aspect of today's world. This is of even greater importance in America where education is viewed as a fundamental right.

**THIS IS A LIMITED PREVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.**

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