During the 20th century, a number of countries introduced university programs in adult education. This phenomenon gave rise to the development of a new academic (sub)discipline. The newly established academic faculties and their graduates had to build up a new identity for this new field. This leads to the research question: What are the differences and similarities in the discipline’s self-concept on the subject of adult education in Germany and the US?

This comparative research question seeks, firstly, to establish differences and similarities in the self-concept of adult education in Germany and the US. Secondly, it researches the reasons for these differences and similarities. Thirdly, it examines the consequences of these differences and similarities for adult education in the countries covered by this research. Within the methodology of comparison, it is important to be aware that it would not be sufficient to merely identify and present the differences and similarities. It is also necessary to provide a detailed analysis of why these similarities and differences occur and an understanding of their meanings for the field of research (Reischmann, 2008).

Document Analysis

The first step will be to carry out an analysis of relevant literature in order to establish the differences and similarities. Two basic handbooks have been selected, each representing the “state of the art” and generated by the academic field of adult education in Germany and the US respectively. The literature chosen to be analyzed for the American perspective is the Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education, which is representative of the subject matter in the field; three different editions will be considered. The literature used for the analysis of the German perspective is the Handbuch der Erwachsenenbildung/Weiterbildung (Handbook of Adult Education/Continuing Education), which is also representative of the subject matter in the field; two different editions from approximately the same period of time will be considered. A new edition of the American handbook is published every ten years, whereas the first edition of the German handbook was published in 1994 and another revised edition in 2010. The American handbook is published by the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). The AAACE published the first handbook, at

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41 In the following, the term “adult education” is used to include both adult and continuing education.
that time called *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States*, in 1934. Every edition has a different group of editors. The German handbook, however, was first compiled in 1994 by a scholar from the field and the second, revised edition was edited by the same person with the help of another scholar.

The reasons for choosing these two handbooks are to find a detailed overview of the field of adult education. The task was to find publications that explore the heterogeneous perspectives in adult education in both countries. These handbooks represent the perspectives and opinions of scholars of the discipline from both theoretical and practical backgrounds in order to gain a deep insight into the field. Another reason for choosing these handbooks was the possibility of comparing them. The handbooks were both written out of the same contexts and for the same reasons.

For the American perspective, the 1989 edition of *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, edited by Sharan B. Merriam and Phyllis M. Cunningham, the 2000 edition edited by Arthur L. Wilson and Elisabeth R. Hayes and the up-to-date edition from 2010, edited by Carol E. Kasworm, Amy D. Rose and Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, were chosen to be analyzed. As mentioned above, these handbooks represent a state-of-the-art overview of the field. The aim of the handbooks is to identify and analyze all the major issues and problems facing the field of adult education and “to provide a reference that both defines and interprets the field from the viewpoints of a cross section of leaders within the profession” (Merriam & Cunningham, 1989, p. xvi). The authors contributing to the handbook are both theorists and practitioners, all scholars from the field with a high level of expertise.

For the German perspective, the 1994 edition of *Handbuch Erwachsenenbildung/Weiterbildung* (Handbook of Adult Education/Continuing Education), edited by Rudolf Tippelt, and the up-to-date 2010 edition, edited by Rudolf Tippelt and Aiga von Hippel, were chosen to be analyzed. The aim of the German handbook is very similar to that of the American handbook. It sets out to give a systematic representation of the field of adult education and to gather the up-to-date knowledge of the discipline in one volume. A set of authors were chosen: scholars representing different fields of the discipline from both theoretical and practical backgrounds in order to gain a deep insight into the field. Another reason for choosing these handbooks was the possibility of comparing them. The handbooks were both written out of the same contexts and for the same reasons.

Analysis of the Differences and Similarities

The analysis of the literature follows the principles of grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss. Grounded theory is a methodology to develop a theory out of the data rather than review an already existing theory. One of the key concepts in grounded theory is comparison. The ongoing comparison that is necessary within this research method leads to the generation of a new theory. Therefore it is important to follow the principle of theoretical sampling, i.e. using data which is supposed to lead to new knowledge. Before describing the methodological procedure, it is important to make clear that grounded theory is not supposed to be a linear and chronological process of research. Rather, it involves going back and forth in the data and the research findings in order to reach a new and deeper understanding of it. Grounded theory provides guidelines and orientation support during the process of analyzing. The central point of this method is the coding that is done throughout the research process (Kuckartz, 2010).

Nevertheless, the following description of the methodological procedure is described linearly and chronologically.

When analyzing the data in accordance with the principles of grounded theory, the first step is the open coding.

In the beginning, this open coding is done (…) by scrutinizing the fieldnote, interview or document very closely: line by line, even word by word. The aim is to produce concepts that seem to fit the data. These concepts and their dimensions are as yet entirely provisional (…) but thinking about these results in a host of questions and equally provisional answers, which immediately leads to further issues pertaining to conditions, strategies, interactions and consequences.” (Strauss, 1984 cited in Brösemeister, 2008, p.157)

According to this parameter, the first step is to examine each single edition of each handbook independently from each other in order to identify codes. Codes are detecting benchmarks that help to gather the key points of the data. After developing a number of codes, the next step is to find out which codes can be merged. On the basis of these codes, concepts will be developed. In this context, concepts are a grouping of codes with a similar content to merge the data again. These concepts will be reviewed in the following research process. By the end of step one, there should be a list of concepts that can be put together in categories. The categories are groups of related concepts, i.e. a classification of concepts. Strauss sees a category as an independent part of a theory and by comparing concepts to each other the classification will occur. This leads to the concept of higher order, a so-called category. Categories contain characteristics with important theoretical aspects (Kuckartz, 2010, p. 75).

When the open coding has been done, the next step is the axial coding. Axial coding means putting the data together in new and different ways. It is important to create connections between the categories. Axial coding focuses on certain categories and their relations to each other, in order to identify the core categories of the research field (Kuckartz, 2010).

Following the axial coding is the selective coding, which aims to build up a theoretical concept. In this phase, core categories will be put together systematically and put in relation to group the data. While doing this, it is important to only focus on the concepts and categories that are relevant to answer the research question and to develop a theory. The other concepts and

It is important to point out that the procedure described above will be done with the different editions of the American handbook and separately with the editions of the German handbook. The aim is to generate a self-portrayal of the discipline within the historical, cultural, social and disciplinary contexts and the developments in both Germany and the US.

**Interviews**

Having completed this analysis, the second step is to develop a questionnaire in order to conduct interviews with representatives from the academic field of adult education from both countries: firstly, to control the understanding developed in the literature analysis; and secondly, to verify the analysis of the developments that caused the similarities and differences in Germany and the US.

Six representatives from the academic discipline of adult education from each country will be interviewed: two representatives from each country in each of the following age groups, 35–45, 45–60, and over 60; and from each country, three women and three men.

The interviews in Germany will be conducted in German and the interviews in the US will be conducted in English. All interviews will be transcribed and analyzed in the interviewing language.

Finally, the 12 interviews will be analyzed. Again, the analysis of the interviews will follow the principles of grounded theory. The procedure will be the same as described for analyzing the handbooks.

**Expected Outcomes**

Expected outcomes of this research are the identification of similarities and differences within the self-understanding of the discipline between the US and Germany. There will also be an attempt to understand why the differences and similarities occur and what they tell us about adult education in these countries.

A study in comparative international adult education ... must include one or more aspects of adult education in two or more countries or regions ... comparison ... attempts to identify the similarities and differences between the aspects under study ... The real value of comparative study emerges only from ... the attempt to understand why the differences and similarities occur and what their significance is for adult education in the countries under examination ... (Charters & Hilton, 1989 cited in Reischmann, 2008, p. 10).

This will provide an opportunity to widen the view on the discipline and profession of adult education in both Germany and the US.

**References**


