

LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF ADULT EDUCATORS: A SYNERGE FOR A SUSTAINABLE ACQUISITION OF LITERACY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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©Ontario International Development Agency ISSN: 1923-6654 (print)
ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

Abstract: The main purpose of this paper was to assess the perceptions of adult learners on the adult educators' contribution toward sustainable adult learning. The paper established that cordial relationship that exist between learners and their facilitators will go a long way to facilitate acquisition of literacy education and sustainability of the same for the development of the learners and the community where learners reside. However, it was established that adult educators performance on the other hand is influenced by motivational/incentive they receive from the organiser of adult education programmes, hence, for adequate preparedness of adult educators to perform their duties, teaching professionalism should be effected; prompt payment of honorarium and conducive learning environment should also be encouraged. With adequate incentives put in place, adult educators will perform and rate of literacy acquisition will be ensured.

Keywords: Adult educator, Acquisition, Learner, Literacy Education,

INTRODUCTION

For a successful learning in adult literacy classes, the roles of adult educator sometimes called "facilitators" cannot be underestimated, for he/she is the person who skillfully employs andragogical method to influence the desire changes in the life of adult illiterates. As Malcolm Knowles proposes, to be a successful adult educator, one must recognise that adult learners are self-directed. That is, they know basically what they need to learn at a

given point in their career and seek to engage in the process of their learning through active participation.

However, a variety of terms are used to describe the different forms of adult learning in the different countries of the region. These include "adult literacy", "basic education", "adult basic education and training", "non-formal education", "continuing education" and "community education". Likewise, terms such as "adult educator", "facilitator", "literacy instructor", "grassroots worker", "extension worker", "Community development officer", "community educator", "community trainer", "extension officer", "health educator", "family planning officer", "sanitation officer", and "volunteer instructor" are used to describe the adult education functionary (Tirfe, [9]).

As these terms suggest, each of these people as members of an educational meritocracy, professional adult educators have a clear stake in the field. It is in their professional interest to promote the professionalisation of the field. This problem of definition and concepts affects the conception people have with the discipline. Quite unfortunately, many of those involve in the teaching of adults are not professional and are not doing the right thing to promote adult literacy.

In Nigeria for instance, facilitator is more familiar used to mean adult educator. Just as what operates in the world over, their role differs from the traditional "teacher" or "trainer" where the teacher is seen as: possessing all essential information; filling the minds

of students with knowledge and talking in the front of the room while the participants passively absorb information.

For the purpose of this paper, the most important and relevant roles of the adult educator are as guide, facilitator, teacher and coach. Based on these roles, adult education includes virtually all activities in which the capabilities of adults are developed for specific purposes. The proliferation of adult education has however, inevitably led to an increase in Nigeria the number of adult educators most especially as the country is targeting to achieve Education for All goals in 2015. Those that are in the system are not fully committed to adult literacy, hence, the millipede development experienced in the adult education delivery in Nigeria. For the sake of clarification, it is important to define who an adult educator is.

Adult Educator

An adult educator is someone who skillfully helps a group of people to understand their common objectives and plan to achieve them. From the point of view of adult education, a facilitator is the teacher, the change agent, community development officer or instructor who is specially appointed to co-ordinate the adult learners. In the non-formal education setting, a facilitator is a member of a staff whose contract through renewable, terminates at the end of a programme depending on the duration of such programme which is usually between 6 and 9 months. There is the need therefore for an intensive training for the facilitators in order to make him or her responsive to their functions as teachers of adult.

An adult educator can also be described as anyone who promotes the acquisition of favourable learning environment, including anyone exercising a teaching training supervision or guidance function. Adult educators help the learner develop knowledge and skills by providing guidelines, feedback and advice throughout the learning process" (Cede top in 2003 as quoted in Tissot, [10]).

Becoming a good facilitator or adult educator required time knowledge and experienced. A good facilitator must have the mastery of the learning materials he or she must be able to give valuable suggestions or responses and must be able to find a way to lead the group back to the subject at hand and still figure out how to cover all the materials in the course objectives. Learning by doing has been described as the best way with which to handle the adults. However there are certain qualities which still enable someone to become a good facilitator and there are also conditions which make it impossible or difficult for someone to be a good facilitator.

The personal qualities for a good facilitator are therefore outlined below. Some of the qualities may be inherent or learned through socialization. Others can be improved through experience and others concerted practice. For instance, the handwriting and drawing ability could be improved with certain techniques such as the proper holding of a maker or the use of simple devices to draw curves squares or other shapes especially for adult learners who are of age and could not hold pencil or their pens properly.

In a nutshell a good adult literacy facilitator should: (a) Be patient and be sound in listening skills (b) Be knowledgeable and be tolerant (c) Trust in other people and their capacities (d) Have good life experience and a good grasp of common sense. (e) Be confident without being arrogant. (f) Have a respect for the opinion of others and should not impose ideas. (g) Be skilled in creative and innovative thinking (h) Be versed in ability to create a conducive atmosphere of learning among the adults. (i) Be skilled in communication skills (j) Be good manager of time. (k) Be knowledgeable in teaching methods and the ability to choose appropriately to suit the need of the learners. (l) Be practical in creative and innovative thinking (m) Have knowledge of group development including the ability to sense a groups' mood and consequently adjust the programme for the realization of the set objectives. (n) Have good sense of arrangement of space and materials in order to create an attractive physical arrangement for the participants. (o) Be skillful in drawing an handwriting (p) Diligent and responsible (q) Be courteous and must be good in counseling activities.

Learners' Perception of Adult Educators' Roles in Learning

Adult learners attend literacy programmes for different reasons, some attend to while away their time; a handful wish to have new friends; some to achieve literacy which they had missed before; their prior intention reflects in their attitude to learning and perceptions they have on their teachers. Many learners do not have enough information on the availability as well as the quality of courses they are to enjoy, the use to which they could make of the experiences gathered later in life. As a result of this, adult educators' proficiency in teaching goes a long way in shaping the attitude learners would have on their learning in one hand relationship they would have with the adult educators.

Adult educators' behaviour, commitment and relationship with the learners therefore go a long way as to help promote acceptance or rejection of adult educators' advances to learners if not well managed. When an adult educator is more homely and friendly with the learners, learners will lean on such adult educators, trust and belief him. This trust and positive

attitude will help to promote sustainability of the learning process.

In another way round, several studies have shown that adult educator' formal qualifications or pedagogical training is less important than their positive attitudes and rapport with the community (Lind and Johnston, [5]), but experiences have shown that adult learners hesitate to actively participate when pedagogical method is emphasised.

When the facilitator is at home and friendly with the learners, it enhances learning activities but hostile and unfriendly facilitators will always drive away learners no matter the level of interest to acquire knowledge. Uncordial relationship may emerge if adult educators fail to understand the principle and practice of adult education; a situation where learners perceive their teachers as been not qualified.

Amusan [1] in her study reports that majority of the respondents (adult educators) 29 (38.8 per cent) out of 76 respondents who handle adult literacy classes have National Certificate in Education while 25 out of the 76 facilitators (30 per cent) had Teacher Grade II certificate, 14 had senior secondary school certificate, while the remaining facilitators 8 (10.5 per cent) had higher education. This result indicate that as majority of the adult educators are not well trained in the theories and practices of adult education, the relationship between the learners and the educators was limited in terms of teaching methods and understanding of psychology of adult learners. Learners on their own see the facilitators as lacking experience necessary for adult education. They therefore failed to attend class regularly and did not take their studies seriously. Amusan [1] therefore concluded that the facilitators need to be regularly trained so as to equip them with all the requisite knowledge of adult literacy.

Gender and age factors also affect learners' perception of adult educators. Majority of literature have shown that more females than males are involved in literacy activities both in teaching and learning (Olojede [7], Amusan [1]). As in teaching, males who are learners are resistive of female teachers. This they count as effrontery when they are been taught by females. The respect is not given and attention in learning is limited. Adult educators need to prepare the minds of their learners ready and disabuse whatever opinion or the mind set of learners on gender differences. In the same vein, when adult educators are young, they might not be experienced on how to handle old people who often constitute majority of learners in adult class. Sometimes, when learners and teachers are of the same age grade, there is likelihood of ego classes, hence the low attitude the learners would have towards learning.

Based on the above submission, it is established that adult learners respect adult educators that actually understand what adult literacy actually entails, those that appreciate and manipulate situation in learning environment and those that accept learners' potential and actively involved them in learning activities.

Some adult educators freely discuss their experience with their learners about irregular payment of their honorarium, adult educators because of them do not attend classes regularly giving on excuse or the other, adult learners are human beings too, manipulating the situation, learners shy away from class while little is done by facilitators to change the situation.

Policy and Learners' perception of adult educators' contribution to learning

As earlier said, in Nigeria, adult educators are employed in most cases as voluntary contributor to adult education and as part-time tutors in adult class. Many of the full-time teachers in the normal education set up are often drafted to handle adult literacy with their pedagogical technique. Majority of the sampled population in Olojede [7] were found to have not more than the minimum qualification of National Certificate in Education (NCE) in the two states used for study. Majority of these respondents who are adult educators are not necessarily majored in adult education, an experience that would have helped them equipped with understanding of theories and practices in adult education. To this end, Titmus [11] maintained that determination of the direction and methods of learning in adult education rest as much with the learner as with the educator, hence the need to understand adult educators and the impression the adult learners have on them.

As been established above, inadequate personnel make it possible for flexible entry and exit requirement of qualification for adult educators; hence, all is fit to teach irrespective of the educational advancement (Olojede, [7]). In a study carried out in 2010, Olojede [7] established the fact that openness or freedom of entrance and exit opportunities questioned the quality of services rendered by adult educators. He also established using focus group discussion that the samples of facilitators were disproportionately distributed in terms of their qualifications. The result of which encourage changing of adult educators, this adult learners see as not encouraging as many of these learners perceive organiser of literacy programme as not being serious, hence, irregular attendance was recorded.

Skilled in pedagogical experience militate against service delivery in adult education as many adult educators as indicated above have no training in adult education, as they are formal school teachers, they see adult teaching as opportunity to while away the

time and their own way to share in the national cake, hence, emphasis was not on delivery. Also, lack of social recognition and problems of definition for adult education has serious implications for accreditation and the professionalization of adult education. With regard to accreditation, it is very difficult for the relevant authorities to properly evaluate adult educators' qualification in a field that is not only unclear but on which there was no consensus in respect of meaning and scope. Issues of social recognition, accreditation and articulation have therefore serious implications for the professionalisation of adult education.

Those people who are involved in the teaching are generally reluctant to embark on a professional journey that lacks recognition. Many school teachers that are involved are not committed, and this affects the greatest challenges for the professionalisation of adult education, namely the reluctance of many practising adult educators to identify themselves with the field.

The Need for Training of Adult Literacy Facilitators

With the present situation in some areas, adult literacy facilitators are still professionals that are recruited from manpower that is locally available. In some cases, they are classroom teachers from the formal school settings; hence they are not very familiar with adult learners and their teaching methods. This also shows that most of them are not fully integrated into adult teaching techniques until they might have been trained.

The success of any mass literacy and non-formal education programme for instance depends to a large extent on the facilitators; there is the need therefore for the effective encouragement in form of training facilities that need to be constant in supply for the upliftment of the facilitators whose job would enhance promotion of adult literacy programme in the affected societies. It has therefore been found highly necessary for the adult teachers to be constantly involved in training.

The information gathered from various State Agency for Adult and Normal Formal Education (AANFE) has it that facilitators in the states receive training after they might have been selected for the exercise and the training in some cases range from two to five days workshops or seminar which is not continuous unless there is an important issue at stake that needs to be discussed with them.

They are however regularly supervised by the Local Adult Education Officer of their Local Government Area. This is done during the first few months of the programme and the frequency of the supervision if reduced after it has been established that the

facilitators have gained sufficient teaching experiences.

There is the need for us to note that two things are involved in adult learning, they are: (a) How the adult learns and (b) How he/she should be taught.

Speaking on these two key issues, Merriam and Caffarella [6] express the fact that "to be better learners ourselves and to be facilitators of other people's learning, we need to understand how learning occurs and whether or not adult learns differently from children". In the context of what can provide necessary dues meant to inform applicable methods and techniques in the above regular they submit that "learning in adulthood is like piecing together a puzzle, definitely there are many parts that must be fitted together before a total puzzle. This is no doubt enough reason why the facilitators needs training. Training of the facilitators therefore: (a) Gives room for indepth understanding of the learner, their needs and their peculiarities. (b) Helps to update the facilitator's knowledge. (c) Exposes the facilitators to new ideas and innovations in the discharge of their duties. (d) Encourages competence on the part of the facilitators. (e) Helps the facilitators to plan effectively, draw out relevant programmes and evaluate the relative success of the learning process in terms of objectives achieved and impact of learning teaching on the community at large.

Problems facing adult educators

There are various problems that are facing adult educators. These among others include: (a) The need to be familiar with the philosophical foundations of adult education (b) A critical perspective of policies and practices of adult education (c) Professional understanding in the development of adult education programmes (d) Organisation and management of adult education programmes (e) Conversant with methods of investigation in adult education.

Many adult education practitioners are not schooled in the theory of adult learning. Consequently, they do not identify themselves with the field of adult learning. The training of adult educators is a neglected aspect of adult basic education programmes; often it is not even included in the planning process of adult education. Many of the training programmes for adult educators are conducted as a mere ritual or formality, so that they contribute only minimally to the professional growth of the personnel involved. This situation has arisen because there is lack of understanding of the importance of training adult educators at various levels. As a result, adult education programmes are often started with inadequate or no training at all.

Adult educator's recruitment and training is, according to most evaluations and review, the

weakest point in literacy programmes. Recruitment criteria are not strict enough, as their background education and experience are either inadequate or their experience, understanding and attitudes are not appropriate. Training is normally very short in relation to the expectations of their performance as facilitators in participatory learning processes, literacy, and empowering or development-oriented skills (Lauglo, [4]) in-service training and teaching material tailor-made for participatory pedagogy the means adopted to maximize pedagogic participation (Lauglo, [4]).

An evaluation study of adult literacy programmes in Uganda (Carr-Hill, [3]) recognized the key role of the facilitators, in spite of findings suggesting that the effectiveness of literacy education did not depend on the educational qualification, training, support or payment of the facilitators.

Suggesting solutions to the identified problems

To promote a ground for sustainable acquisition of literacy education in Nigeria, it is necessary to enforce professionalism in the appointment of adult educators. In the absence of that, induction or in-service training should be emphasised for teachers taking responsibility of teaching adult learners. This is because, the relationship between learners and the adult educators go a long way to determine acquisition of skills and knowledge expected of the learners.

As agent of change, adult educators need to understand the principle and practice of adult education. Professionalism of who teach adult should also be looked at as relationship that exists between adult educators and learners go a long way to determine learners' perception of their teachers and acquisition of basic knowledge desired by them.

Instructors needs to devote more time, effort and study to better develop and effectively utilize essential teaching qualities in their classrooms. Though, each of the qualities could have much discourse on its own, Sisco [8] has pointed out some of the personal attributes that an adult education facilitator should possess. They are empathy, sue of reward, respect for the dignity and worth of each individual, a sense of fairness and objectivity, willingness to accept new things and ideas, patience, sensitivity, humility, and commitment to their own lifetime learning.

Abilities to instantly adapt to situations and to be openly challenged without becoming intimidated are also extremely desirable. Although, those that teach younger students need many of these same qualities, the diverse negative ramifications of not possessing generous qualities of these characteristics become greatly magnified in an adult learner population.

Learners are not only using their money but also with what can be a much more valuable commodity, their time-the mandate for effective instruction therefore becomes consequential.

Facilitators must legitimately be empowered, encouraged and supported/ Post secondary institutions cannot expect instructors to have the flexibility to adapt classes to the degree necessary to meet the need of adult learners if they are not given the authority to do so. There must be a shift from the traditional philosophy that the education of adults is simply adding content or skills mastery to an already developed person. Self-directed learning is more than a form education; it is a component of human development.

Billingham [2] found that in environments where non authoritarian, self-directed learning was evident, there were significant indicators or ego development among students. This, then sets in motion, the energy with which self-direction begins to perpetuate itself. Individuals gain confidence in their ability to learn, which in turn tends to drive them to experience additional learning situations which they might otherwise have avoided or even considered impossible, thereby meting the objectives earlier set for the policy of education the adults.

CONCLUSION

The paper reviews what is considered the perception of adult learners on adult educators. It reviewed various concepts such as adult, and learners, facilitators, their qualities, duties and the like. It was discovered that if much is to be achieved in learners-facilitator's relationship, a little more has to be invested in the training of the facilitators. Impression learners have on their facilitators goes a long way to help in literacy acquisition. It was also found out that based on this factor; there is the need for regular training programme for adult educators to be experienced in theories and practices of adult learning, hence, those to be employed in teaching of adults must have adequate knowledge of psychology of adult learners. Even in a situation where qualified personnel are employed as facilitators, there is still be need for constant training and re-training as it is only through this that new idea could be developed and better services rendered in order to ensure that the objectives behind the programmes is achieved to a highly reasonable extent.

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