



Adult Learning Principles a Strategy for Improving Instructional Delivery in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

Murtala Aknabi Yusuf^{1*#}

¹Department of Adult Education and Extension Services, Faculty of Education and Extension Services, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that an andragogical approach to teaching and learning in higher education in Nigeria has become necessary if the goals prescribed by the National Policy on Education as regards tertiary education are to be achieved. Going by the current practice in some tertiary education institutions, students are seen as passive learners and teachers as "masters" of all knowledge. This posture naturally promotes 'banking learning' which views learners as banks within whom knowledge is deposited to be withdrawn at a later date. Since an approach such as this is inimical to the achievement of the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria, the paper advocates for the adoption of adult learning principles by teachers of higher institution of learning. Adult learning principle which is based on andragogy theory propounded by Malcolm Knowles sees learners as autonomous and self-directed; experienced; goal-oriented; relevancy-oriented; practical-oriented individuals. The paper ends by giving selective examples of how adult learning principles may be applied to higher education teaching to achieve the goals enunciated within the Nigeria National Policy on Education.

*Corresponding author: Email: murtalayusuf2004@gmail.com;

#<https://orcid.org/000-0003-2637-0926>

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1. INTRODUCTION

As captured in the 2013 National Policy on Education [1], tertiary education in Nigeria is to drive national development through the training of high-level and high-quality manpower training and the provision of lifelong learning programmes. The NPE recognizes that the training of high-quality manpower is in turn dependent on quality teaching and learning. The assumption is therefore that effective teaching through effective instructional delivery, usually leads to quality learning and by extension, to the harvesting of quality products. Unfortunately, the quality of the products of Nigeria's tertiary education is currently questioned leading to the accusation that Nigeria's higher education system is yet to live up to the expectation of producing graduates that may positively influence both their immediate communities and the larger society.

Complaints from employers of labour, show that some Nigerian graduates are unemployable despite their qualifications. This is because, the country education system lacks capacity to turnout graduates with generic and essential skills, and hence, the continuous increase in the rate of youth unemployment [2]. Oyesiku [3] once linked the poor quality of educational outputs of tertiary institutions in the country to deterioration in teaching and learning approaches among others. Describing the pathetic situation of Nigeria's university graduates, Mango [4] lamented that a graduate of education can neither protect his educational rights nor can he protect the educational rights of his community; a graduate of political science can neither protect his political rights nor can he protect the political rights of his community; a graduate of law is not only unjust but a collaborator in the abuse and misuse of justice, a graduate of medical science is not only inhuman but suppresses public health; and a graduate of science is always a foreigner in his environment talk less of conquering it to improve his living.

Mango [4], Sodipo [2], and Ibrahim [5] have all linked the poor quality of tertiary education institution products to some factors. Mango [4] observes that the poor quality of Nigeria's universities products could be linked to the repressive nature of teaching. According to him teaching in tertiary institution indoctrinates,

smothers creativity and imagination. It induces conformity and stultifies students into blind and docile conformity and obedience as potential public workers who should not question authority even where it is wrong. Sodipo [2] questions the rationale in producing higher education graduates without requisite skills for sustainable employment. Yusuf and Sholagberu [6] frown at treating tertiary education students as 'banks' into which knowledge is deposited and retrieved when needed as money would in a regular bank. Lastly, Ibrahim [5] questions the wisdom in running a technology illiterate higher institution in the 21st century.

The present article explores the extent to which learning in Nigeria's tertiary education arena may benefit from adult learning principles in the effort to supply society with relevant manpower capable of positively impacting national development in the 21st century.

Second, scholars (Merriam and Caffarella 1999, Biao [7], Holton and Swanson 2011, Usman [8], Javed [9]) have called for a shift in the educational theories and practices towards becoming learner-centred which adult learning principles favour and promote through theories such as andragogy, transformative, reflective and self-directed. The focus of this paper, therefore, is to advocate exploration of adult learning principles embedded in andragogy in improving instructional delivery in tertiary education institutions in Nigeria.

2. INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY AND STRATEGY

Instructional delivery is defined as tactics used by the teacher for the purpose of facilitating learning among learners. It is a process which requires that the teacher engages the learners in the classroom such that the learners learn effectively. The engagement is done in such a way that different instructional strategies are utilized by the teachers to support the learners in learning contents for efficient learning outcomes [10]. It is important to note that learning can take place anywhere not necessarily in the classroom only, wherever, the learning is taking place, through effective instructional delivery, and the teacher must ensure that the learners are productively engaged. From the perspective of conventional instructional delivery system, Egan,

Welch, Page and Sebastian [11] see instructional delivery as a classroom affair where the teacher physically interact with the students with a view to making them learn certain instructions. The key issue in instructional delivery according to Arlington Public Schools cited in Yusuf and Sholaggeru [6] is that the teacher engages the learners seriously such that variety of instructional strategies are employed to meet the individual learning needs. This approach in real sense makes the learning a learner's affairs and the learner is central to the whole process. The learners are given opportunities to create and share knowledge among their peers and groups while the teacher creates an enabling environment using innovative strategies.

Instructional strategy on the other hand, is about decision making by the teacher in order to organise people, materials and ideas for the learners to learn. The decision is concerned about the methods of teaching and materials that are appropriate for certain type of learning and the learning situation [12]. It is imperative, that the teacher chooses the methods that are suitable for the learners' experience, maturity, age, and the learning environment. It is only when the teacher does this, that he would be able to effectively deliver learning instructions that will meet the desire of the learners and the learning goals. Then, what are the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria?

3. GOALS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, higher education, which is also known as tertiary education is defined as the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotchnics as well as those institutions offering correspondence courses [1]. The National Policy on Education [1] has the following as goals of tertiary education in Nigeria:

- i. Contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
- ii. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- iii. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- iv. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;

- v. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- vi. Forge and cement national unity; and,
- vii. Promote national and international understanding and interaction (p.36).

The above goals are achievable only by persons who are not only chronologically adult but persons who may have attained some level of psychological maturity. This leads to suggest that the tertiary education in Nigeria as elsewhere is peopled by young adults. As such, only strategies for facilitating learning among adult persons would be best suited for this category of learners. Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Biao [7], Holton and Swanson (2011), Usman [8] and Javed [9] have argued that the appropriate employment of adult learning principles (equally known as andragogical principles) among adult learners usually ends up equipping learners with transformative abilities, reflective skills and capacity to self-direct. These are the very tools that are needed for the achievement of the goals listed out by the Nigeria National Policy on Education which the higher education sector is expected to actualise. Therefore, only through the adoption of the adult learning principles would higher institutions of learning succeed in churning out graduates that could become solution providers.

4. NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Scholars (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner [13]; Chan [14]; Holton and Swanson, 2011; Sogunro [15]; Javed [9]) have argued that learning as children and adults are different. This understanding was what led to the dichotomy between pedagogy and andragogy [16]. One of the implications of this distinction is that, adults must be treated as independent and autonomous learners as contained in the anragogical principles as opposed to the principles of pedagogy where the teacher's dictates are central to learning. On the other hand, since majority of students in higher institutions of learning are adults, hence, facilitating their learning through andragogical approach will accord them the expected respect as independent and autonomous learners. Unfortunately, andragogy is rarely used by teachers of tertiary education in Nigeria. Most teachers of higher education institutions have not being trained in the art of teaching adults. Rather, they got the little experience of teaching adult learners more on the job [16]. Most of the teachers in higher education today are familiar

with pedagogy, hence a chronic challenge to quality teaching in higher education is an instructor's limited repertoire in andragogical principles. Other than the education received in their content areas, most instructors at colleges and universities lack the skills in teaching adult learners in higher education [15].

Giving a specific scenario of instructional delivery in tertiary education in Nigeria experience has shown that teachers are fond of treating Nigerian university students like basic education pupils instead of being accorded respect as autonomous and independent learners as contained in the principles of andragogy. This treatment has negative consequences for effective teaching and learning for tertiary education learners as learners sometimes resist the attempt of disrespect by their teachers. It is important to note that the attitude of these teachers could be linked to their pedagogical orientation to learning which is more applicable to children teaching and learning at basic education level. Majority of Nigerian university students are adults who understand why they are learning, hence they ought to be seen as co-partners in teaching and learning for meaningful interaction to attain better learning results. Sogunro [15], while reporting the findings of his study, acknowledged that an instructor's lack of andragogical skills often reflects itself in students' expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of instruction delivered. The subjects of his study admitted that some professors teach them like high school students while they are in a college and they were no longer adolescents. They expect professors to use different teaching methods and treat them differently as being more responsible for their learning. Yusuf and Sholagberu [6] have also remarked that it is sad to note that some teachers in Nigerian higher institutions of learning are fond of creating fear in the minds of their learners. An approach to teaching such as this prevents the development of friendly and cordial rapport between learners and teachers. In this situation, learners are not free to express their views and problems with their teachers. This attitude can aid in turning out timid and coward graduates who will not be able to deliver when opportunities are provided. This situation can be linked to "banking education" concept popularized by Freire [17]. 'Banking education' is a process whereby teachers lead learners to cram whatever information they have for them (learners) only for these same learners to be requested to regurgitate the same information at a time later down the line. The

process of 'banking education' cannot assist men and women in confronting the world in rational scrutiny. 'Banking education' cannot help tertiary education learners to learn those technical skills in coping with the complexity of social change and in moving ahead with a sense of direction [18]. If these are facts about situations of teaching in Nigerian higher institution of learning; then it is obvious that something must be done. What should be done? This is the question to be answered next.

5. ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES AS MEANS OF IMPROVING QUALITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

As reported by Perry [19] and Sogunro [15], the effectiveness of instructional delivery has been the object of debate in higher education for centuries with much of the concerns coming from instructors who are neither expert in pedagogy nor highly knowledgeable in andragogy. In other words, over the centuries, college and university instructors have expressed the desire to access best skills and attitudes in teaching. Unfortunately, Nigerian higher education teachers remain for the best part, illiterate in the pedagogical principles of teaching in general, but particularly in the andragogical principles of teaching.

There have been efforts at highlighting the differences existing between how children and adults learn [14]. These efforts have led to the popularization of pedagogy and andragogy [16] among educators. Pedagogy has a long tradition of providing educational guidance in which there is little differentiation between child and adult education. The two groups of learners are assumed to learn under the same philosophy. Conversely, andragogy, advanced by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s, is a more recent approach which seeks to highlight the distinct learning needs of adult learners. Knowles' concept of andragogy has been widely adopted by educators from various disciplines around the world [14]. Although, andragogy faced criticism like all new ideas, scholars have consensus on the fact that it focuses on adult learners only (Knowles [20]; Brookfield [21]; Loughlin [22]; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Chan [14]; Knowles et al. [23]; Javed [9]; Khadka [24]). Andragogy according to Chan [14] is based upon the following assumptions: (a) self-directedness and autonomous, (b) use of experience in learning, (c) readiness to learn, (d) orientation to learning, and (e) internal motivation.

Each of these assumptions which in effect constitute the principles of adult learning can be practically employed in higher education teaching to improve the quality of instructional delivery in colleges and universities.

5.1 Self-Directedness and Autonomy

One of the adult learning principles is that adult learners are autonomous and self-directed. This principle is premised that adults are independent, self-directing persons rather than dependent personalities who are always told what to do and how to think. This is the reason why when adults are put in a situation in which they are being treated like children, resentment and resistant often occur. It is disturbing that students in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria are often found behaving like children. This scenario is likened to what Knowles et al. [23] said about students that students often put on their dunce hats of dependency, fold their arms, sit back, and "teach me". This attitude is linked to pedagogical instruction which students are used to as they expect a lecturer instead of a facilitator in front of the classroom. In contrast, the principle of self-directedness and autonomy of adults allows teachers to help learners to transit from being dependent to self-directing learners. It is expected that the help that will guarantee taking control and to assume ownership of learning will be given to students. This can best be done practically if a lecturer sees himself as a facilitator. Facilitation according to Sandesh [25] is the act of engaging participants in creating, discovering, and applying learning insight. Facilitation is an approach that is based on a philosophy of teaching and learning that puts the learner at a centre-stage. This method emphasizes that effective learning cannot be limited to the delivery of information but that the active participation of the learner is essential [26].

Take, for example, if a lecturer who teaches Instructional Supervision as a Course to undergraduate students sees himself as a facilitator, he would do the following: by involving his students in the teaching through mutually agreed upon chapter and book presentations relevant to Instructional Supervision, evaluating current issues about course contents, and inviting them to bring up topics for discussion. This serious engagement of students will promote responsibility for presentations and group leadership, knowledge creation, autonomy and learning ownership among students.

5.2 Importation of Learner's Previous Experience in Learning

The second principle is that adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences. Adult experiences and knowledge usually come from work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. Repository of an adult's experience according to Chan [14] is a rich resource for learning. Practically, an Economics teacher can facilitate "Market Force" as a topic in Microeconomics Course by exploring learners' previous experience in changes in the price of a commodity as a result of demand and supply. This can be practically done by engaging students to share their experiences in changes in the price of petroleum in recent time as a result of demand and supply forces in the international market as argued by Federal Government of Nigeria. The teacher can use interactional techniques such as group discussions, role-playing, and simulation exercises to relate new knowledge to the learners' already internationalized experiences about the topic under discussion. The teacher needs to recognize without being threatened, that their students have this kind of knowledge and experiences that can be shared with their teacher and among themselves.

5.3 Readiness to Learn

One of the assumptions of andragogy is that learners are ready to learn when they have some needs to fulfill [23]. Specific events such as the need for further education, better-paid work, loss of a job, yearning for promotion, would often prompt the need for new knowledge. The application of this assumption requires that the teacher stimulates learners' readiness to learn through a self-diagnostic technique to understand the need for students' learning needs. Practically, the teacher can stimulate students' readiness to learn when he invites students to look ahead and imagine how the course contents and materials will be applicable in their lives. He can also group students into learning circles where students with homogeneous learning needs are put together for meaningful interactions.

5.4 Orientation to Learning

Adults generally prefer a problem-solving orientation to learn rather than subject centred learning. It is interesting to note that adults

normally did not pursue learning simply for the sake of learning, but because they needed to immediately apply what they were learning to life situations [27]. They learn best when new information is presented in a real-life situation. A teacher who teaches "Instructional Supervision" as a Course can engage students by asking them to present articles about current Instructional Supervision issues for discussion in the class. This process can trigger students' interest in the course topics. The teacher can explore action-learning techniques such as discussions, simulations, and question-and-answer sessions for interaction between students and the teacher and among students themselves.

5.5 Intrinsic Motivation

The more motivated someone is to participate in learning, the more he or she is likely to learn and retain information. Although adults are motivated by both internal and external factors [28] they are more internally motivated than externally [14]. According to andragogy, adults are motivated by internal incentives such as curiosity, the desire to grow, the need to solve a specific problem and satisfaction of accomplishment. This principle implies that the teacher must allow students to participate in the planning, diagnosis of needs, the setting of objectives, and the design of individualized learning plans and activities. A teacher can create the opportunity to engage his students in a collaborative planning process for their learning. The teacher can practically do this by asking the students on the first class meeting what their expectations for the course are, given the course title and description. Having articulating their wishes and expectations, the teacher can adjust the course description to reflect the students' expectations. Certainly, when the students realize that their wishes and expectations are reflected in the course descriptions and materials as articulated by them, they tend to be motivated to learn.

6. CONCLUSION

The general implication for teachers of higher institutions of learning is that facilitation of learning which reflect principles of adult learning epitomized in andragogy should be embraced as an approach to instructional delivery other than the usual lecturing approach. This approach recognizes the nature of self-directedness of learners towards learning and gets it explored. It also makes teachers export learners' reservoir of

previous experiences and knowledge to learning situations in such a way that learners will feel less inhibited to share their own experiences in problem-solving and out-put enhancing activities in real-life situations. Acknowledging a friendly climate toward their input, these students will, in turn, be more willing to learn from co-students and real-life situations and will be more motivated overall in-and outside of the classroom environment.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The practicality of the principles of adult learning as articulated in this paper lies with the following recommendations:

- i. The teacher must recognize their roles in actualizing exploration of andragogical principles. The role of the teacher is that of a facilitator. Effective learning is possible when the role of the teacher is not that of a controller and deliverer of pre-packed knowledge and the dictator of what the student should learn but that of a facilitator who demands a shift from teacher to student-centred instruction (Kwan, 2004; Johnston & Tinning, 2001). A facilitator is a 'guide who moderates the discussion, asks questions, encourages participation and engages participants in different activities. In facilitation, a facilitator is a learning process expert (Sandesh, 2019).
- ii. The teacher must be honest and open to his/her students in the facilitation process. The attitude of the teacher knows it all must be avoided. The teacher must be ready to learn from his/her students as students do. As suggested by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998), the teacher should believe in the sharing of authority whereby the students' experiences and opinions are incorporated into lecture summaries and materials.
- iii. It is also important that the teacher must make lessons current and up-to-date. He does this by ensuring that students' discussions revolve around hot issues about course contents. This process honestly creates and sustains students' interest in creative and problem-solving learning.
- iv. Students must be respected and be given voice by the teachers in the course of learning.
- v. Exploration of technology in teaching and learning must be given priority by the

teachers, so that learning can take place anytime, anywhere even when the teacher and learners are physically separated.

CONSENT

It is not applicable.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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