CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A PANACEA FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING AMONG ADULT LEARNERS

C.O. Madu and Ogechi R. Obiozor

Abstract

Conducive learning environment in adult education depends heavily on the preparation and readiness of the facilitators on one hand and the participants (learners) on the other. While the facilitator prepares in advance in terms of intellectual development, and the right skills, the participants must be physically prepared and ready to participate in the learning activity. These can be achieved if the environment is made conducive for learning. This paper discussed the concept of conducive learning environment as viewed by different authors, elements of conducive learning environment and objectives of making environment of the learners conducive for learning. It went further to discuss the factors to be considered when making the learning environment conducive for effective learning among adult learners. At the end, implications of the study, conclusion and recommendations were given.

Conducive learning environment is crucial to the success of learning of the adult learners. Conducive environment of the adult learners can be viewed from two perspectives, the learning environment and the learning interaction. The learning environment refers to the environment the adult learners undergo in their learning. While the learning interaction refers to the relationship that exists between the adult learner and the adult educator (facilitator). Learning interaction is one of the cardinal factors that dictate the outcome of learning among adult learners. Jegede (2003) opined that the facilitator needs to be conscious of the characteristics of the adults and let that dictate what takes place in the classroom or in the process of learning interaction. The author further stated that adult learners come into a learning situation with experiences, many of which may be directly or indirectly related to the issues being discussed. The facilitator should create room for friendliness in the classroom for effective learning to take place during interaction in the class.

Khalid (2008) rightly observed that the issue of conducive learning environment among adult learners cannot be addressed without referring to the andragogical assumptions on which Adult education is based. These assumptions include self -concept, experience, readiness to learn and orientation to learning. The concept of andragogy according to Ugwoegbu (2003) refers to the art and science of helping adults to learn. The central focus of this

theory is on why attention should be paid to the adult learners in a learning situation. The concept of andragogical learning according to Rogers and Knowles as cited by Khalid (2008), is a concept of self-directed learning in which the learners are involved in diagnosing their educational needs, choosing their priorities, planning their goals and executing the programme to their mutual benefits. However, no adult learner will ever learn under conditions incongruent with his self concept. The self-concept of an adult is pivotal in any learning situation. The second assumption of Malcolm Knowles is the role of experience. This assumption entails that as an individual matures, he accumulates a reservoir of experience that provides him with a broadening base to which to relate his new learning.

Malcolm Knowles holds that the varied experiences make the adult. The adult educator should recognize the experience of the adult as a source of learning situation.

The third assumption is readiness to learn. This implies that as adult learner matures, his readiness to learn shifts from learning for learning sake to learning in order to accomplish social roles. An adult is therefore ready to learn only those things that have meaning and relevance to him.

The last assumption is orientation to learning. An adult learner tends to have a problem-centre orientation to learning. An adult learner therefore engages in any learning activity because he or she is experiencing inadequacy in coping with life situation. The adult learner therefore wants to learn something for immediate use (Aderinoye, 2004). As a person learns new knowledge, he or she wants to apply it immediately in problem solving. The above assumptions by Malcolm Knowles point to the fact that for conducive learning environment to be enhanced in an adult learning, the educator should take these assumptions with all amount of seriousness. It has also been observed that the learning environment of the adult learners is not appropriate for effective learning to be enhanced among adult learners. The researchers visited some adult education centres in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra state and found out that many adult learners study in dilapidated buildings without adequate seats and ventilated classrooms. Some adult learning centres make use of seats and benches meant for children which are not comfortable for learning. For example, in St. Mary's adult learning centre in Awka, the learners were learning in the dark at about 7pm in the evening. No electricity was provided. Teaching materials were grossly inadequate. On the part of the government, the adult population has been neglected in the scheme of formal education in many developing countries like Nigeria. Adults are not remembered when formal education scheme is planned (Ani,2003).For instance, in Nigeria, there is no serious provisions made for education of the adults formally, there are also no schools built for adults any where for educating

them formally as is provided for children. It is on the basis of this that the study identifies conducive learning environment as the bedrock for effective learning among adult learners.

Concept of Conducive Learning Environment

According to Encyclopedia Britanica (2010), conducive learning environment is an environment that allows one to learn more easily. In the same vein, Longman English Dictionary Online (2010) defined conducive learning environment as an environment that provides conditions that make it easy for the participants to work. Khalid (2008:152) defined conducive learning environment as:

> *the environment that satisfies the needs of its participants, not only in the acquisition of numeracy and literacy skills, but is also able to link the economic and occupational needs of the group to literacy with their learning activities.*

Conducive learning environment in the writers view is an environment that allows a free flow of communication between the learners and educators, on one hand and on the other, the classroom management is adequate

Onus of a Conducive Learning Environment

An environment that is conducive for learning must possess the following elements:
1. There should be adequate classroom management, interaction and aclimate of innovation.

2. The environment should be participatory in nature. This has to do with active involvement of the learners in the classroom situation.

3. The environment of the adult learners should be free from stress. The adult educator should strive to avoid unhealthy competition among the learners. This is because a competitive environment will create tension. Those that are less endowed will feel marginalized while the vocal ones will dominate the class.

4. The adult educator should incorporate a range of teaching strategies. Different strategies should be adopted by the adult educator to enhance effective teaching and learning.

5. The environment should be one that the adult learner is allowed to learn in a way that suits him best. The adult learner should be giving opportunity to learn at his own pace. Any task that involves high speed should be discouraged.

6.   The learning environment should be one that the learner feels respected, relaxed and learning something that is relevant to him (i,e the content).

7.   The environment must be friendly, informal and humorous. This means that the adult educator should be flexible enough as to accommodate learners' individual differences in the classroom.

8.   The environment should be such that the adult learner can have option to ask questions without fear of embarrassment.

Objectives of Making Environment of the Adult Learners Conducive for Effective Learning

According to Khalid (2008:153), the objectives of making environment of the adult learners conducive include to:
1.   Make learning pleasurable and meaningful to the adult participants
2.   Build on the positive experiences of the learners
3.   Enhance the learning achievement of all learners
4.   Decrease the drop-out rate of learners
5.   Promote good health, hygiene and sanitation practices
6.   Make learning activities more practical
7.   Improve the economic standard of learners.

Factors to Consider in making the Learning Environment Conducive for Effective Learning Among Adult Learners

There are a number of factors the facilitator will bear in mind when he intends to improve the learning environment of the adult learners in any literacy centre. Some of these factors include the following:

Location of the Centre

The place a centre is located determines largely how it will be patronized or accessed by the learner. Adults are very busy people, when they consider the time it will take them to move from their locations to the learning centre that is too far, frustration may set in. Therefore, in order to promote retention of learners and increase the completion rate, proximity of the centre to the target population is very important.Ugwoegbu (2003) also opined that the location of an adult education centre may determine the timing of the programme.If the centre is far from the participants, the time should be such that will enable them to get there on time and equally go back home before it is dark.

Learning Environment

The learning environment should also be carefully considered in facilitating the adult learner. Some of the learners may have hearing

problems; the environment should therefore not be noisy. Jegede (2003) averred that majority of the adult learners have many things occupying their minds because of many social roles they perform. The adult learners are therefore easily distracted. Noise will reduce their concentration and make learning tedious, the room should also be airy in order to make breathing easy. It should be spacious and well lit, to avoid straining of the eyes of the adult learners. It is essential therefore that these learners are made comfortable and the atmosphere both cordial and relaxed.

Seating and Classroom Layout

For learning to be effective for the learners, it is important to make sure all tables and chairs are in good condition. The classroom should be arranged such that learners should be able to clearly see all visual aids including blackboard, presentations and displays from where they seat. Seating should be arranged so that the educator can move easily among learners to monitor their work and behaviour. Placing the learners in small groups can provide opportunity for them to become more actively engaged in learning. Omolewa (1981) asserted that group discussions will help the adult learners to feel at home among themselves, and to rediscover themselves. A circular arrangement of seating, with the teacher seated on one of the available and vacant seats, possibly in the middle has been advised by Omolewa.

Age of the Learners

It is not ideal to find a 14 year old learner in the same class with 50 years old adult. This can affect free flow of communication among learners. In an ideal learning situation, participants in a literacy class can be grouped based on their age range in order to encourage peer learning among the learners and to create an atmosphere for free interaction among the adults.

Occupation of the Target Group

Occupation of the target group should be considered before deciding on the time a programme learning activity should take place. For instance a learner in an urban area is quite different from that in a village where many of them are farmers. In order to make learning interesting and effective, the time for a learner must not conflict with the time he/ she goes to work.

Culture of the Participants

Culture of the target group is also crucial when timing an adult education programme. For instance in Akwa Ibom state, there are days women do not come out at night like during their masquerade festival period. As a result, programmes should not be put late into the night during such periods to avoid disrespecting their culture. Any programme fixed on such days will incur the wrath of the people.

Trained Facilitators

In order to encourage effective learning among adult learners, facilitators must be trained especially on andragogical method before being sent to the literacy centres. Any facilitator who is not a trained adult educator cannot handle the adult learners properly. Aderinoye (2004) postulates that adult education requires special teachers, special methods and special philosophy. Refresher courses for facilitators can as well be organized from time to time to enable them update their knowledge.

Motivation

Motivation plays an important role for effective learning to be achieved among adult learners. Motivation can either be intrinsic (internal) or extrinsic (external). Intrinsic motivation occurs when the adult learner is interested and enjoys what he /she learns. While extrinsic motivation depends on rewards. Ugwoegbu (2003) pointed out that for learning to be effective, there must be motivation. He further stressed that it is necessary for an adult educator to sustain the attention and interest of the adult learners.

For any programme to be carried out, the learning situation must be attractive and appealing to the participants. If there is no motivation, there is no learning. The adult educator or instructor has a special responsibility to motivate and sustain the interest of the learner. If the instructor fails in his duty, he may succeed for all time in discouraging the desire and enthusiasm of the learner.

Physical Ability of the Learner

Learners with special learning needs like hearing or eye problems should always be assisted. They can be helped with hearing aids or asked to always sit in front of the class so that they can see the writing on the board and hear what the facilitator is saying during the lesson.

Implications of the Study

The study has far reaching implications for Adult educators (facilitators). Adult Learners and Government.

The implication for adult educator (facilitator) is that conducive learning environment has been identified as the springboard for effective learning among adult learners. As a result of this, the adult educator should strive to make the learning environment appropriate for effective learning to be achieved among adult learners.

To adult learners: The adult learners should create room for the environment to be conducive. This can be done by maintaining a good relationship with the adult educator and their colleagues.

The implication for the government is that, the government should provide adequate funding for the purchase of teaching materials. Teaching and learning can be enhanced effectively when it is accompanied with the use

of instructional materials. Moreover, adult learners learn better with the use of audio/visual aids.

Conclusion

For education of adult learners to be effective, the environment needs to be conducive for learning. Creating and maintaining stimulating learning environment for the adult learners can be achieved through effective classroom organization, interaction and a climate of innovation. Conducive learning environment therefore is the bedrock for effective learning among adult learners.

Recommendations

In line with the above discussions, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government should provide adequate funding to enhance education of the adults. Funding is the key to the development of any programme.

2. The adult educators (facilitators) should strive to maintain good rapport with the adult learners. This will arouse the interest of the learners in the classroom for effective learning to be achieved.

3. Trained and qualified adult facilitators should be employed to handle the adult learners. This will give them the opportunity to use andragogical method in the classroom situation.

4. The essential facilities like blackboard, pieces of chalk, chairs, tables, writing papers and electricity supply should be made available to adult learners. This will enhance learning among them

References

Ani,R.O.(2003). *An introductory approach to the study ofadu.lt education.* Onitsha,Donsinbad communications.

Aderinoye, R.A. (2004/ *Literacy education in Nigeria.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Encyclopedia Britanica (2010). *Concept of conducive learning environment.* Vol.x. New York Encyclopedia Incorporated

Jegede, S. (2003). *The adult learner. A psychological analysis.* Lagos: University of Lagos press.

Khalid, M.U. (2008). Creating a learner-friendly environment in all adult and non-formal education literacy centre. *Journal of Nigeria National Council for Adult Education(NNCAE),16,*151-158.

Longman English dictionary online (2010).*Concept of conducive learning environment.* Retrieved on 7th June, 2012.From http: www.idoceoline.com/dictionary conducive.

Omolewa,M.A(1985). *Adult education practice in Nigeria.* Ibadan: Evans Brothers Limited.

Ugwoegbu, I.T.(2003). *Adult education: Principles and programme design.* Onitsha: Ekumax company Ltd.