COMMUNICATION SKILLS A STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTING ADULT LEARNING PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The trust of this discussion is on exploring the relevance of communication skills for implementing adult learning programmes. For a better understanding of the focus of the discussion a few and necessary conceptual clarification were made to provide our readers a base to actually benefit from the issues raised in the paper. Adult learning as a concept was defined. The meaning of adult learner was also clarified. The concepts of communication and communication skills were also extensively discussed. The relevance of communication skills in implementing adult learning programmes was adequately highlighted and discussed. The paper concluded by making the following suggestion; Government should ensure that training and retraining programmes, workshops and seminars on improving communication skills to form the main thrust of implementing adult learning programmes. Ability to communicate effectively should be made an integral part of recruitment of facilitators. Regular retraining programmes should be organized for facilitators for the purpose of enhancing their communication skills. Supervisory agencies should ensure that facilitators integrate all forms of communication in facilitating adult learning. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of adult learning programmes should incorporate the use of appropriate communication skills.

Keywords: Communication skills, Adult learning, Adult learners, Facilitators.

Introduction

Adult Learning irrespective of type is a process of helping learners acquire knowledge, ideas and skills that are required to improve their individual and the collective wellbeing of the society. Adult learning as a process has attracted and will continue to attract diverse research interests as a challenging enterprise that lubricates and enhances human existence. Learning in adulthood has continued to feature

prominently in educational researches and fora not because of its newness as a discipline but because of the level of ignorance surrounding it and the changing circumstances and events surrounding adult learning (Nke, Obi and Ewe, 2020). The level of ignorance of adult learning is a product of the misunderstanding of the entire process of adult education at different levels and this has grossly affected the practice and implementation of adult learning programmes. It is also imperative to state here that because the circumstances and events surrounding adult learning are continually evolving, the task of helping adults to learn requires an examination of new theories, methods, materials, ideas and skills involved in adult learning in order to make the learning process a rewarding exercise. Adult learning is typified by a variety of programmes that are designed along the diverse educational needs of the learners and because of the variety of learning programmes different methods, approaches and skills are also require to achieve the objectives of the programmes. The focus of this discussion is to explore the relevant and appropriate communication skills needed in adult learning with a view to identifying ways of facilitating the process.

Conceptual Clarifications
Adult Learning

Adult learning is the sum total of all the educational activities man engages in from cradle to death, through which the individual learner develops his abilities, attitudes; acquire new skills and knowledge in a two-fold perspective of full personal and societal development. Ugwoegbu (2003) reaffirms this statement by stating that adult learning is one of the key factors needed for effective development of human potentials, the development of society and the satisfaction of the needs and aspirations of the people. Therefore adult learning programmes are usually accomplished through conventional formal, non-formal and informal systems.

Formal adult learning simply refers to a systematically organized and arranged educational programmes in which learners engage in planned learning activities in institutionalized settings such as universities, polytechnics, colleges, literacy education centres, remedial education programmes, distance education programmes and continuing education programmes (Betiang, 2004). Formal adult learning is also educational activities designed for adults in a formalized setting with the aim of acquiring skills, knowledge and certificates. This type of learning follows a formal learning pattern of public teaching and examinations and also acts as a substitute for adults who are desirous of learning in a formal school system and those who could not complete formal school.

Non-formal adult learning involves learning activities that are planned and usually occurs outside the classroom. This type of learning occurs outside the classroom and it is termed non-formal learning because the learning is planned, but there is no earmarked scheduled examination carried out at the end of the programme. Non-formal adult learning is more of a lifelong process because it spans throughout the life span of

the learner and it is usually acquired at home (Oduaran, 2000). Non-formal learning activity is an individualized learning, hence it is planned.

Informal adult learning refers to unconscious learning as this is basically due to the fact that, learning under this mode is not planned and it is more of accidental learning. Non-formal adult learning is usually through observations, personal interest and imitation. It is characterized by certain features such as absence of classroom settings and set syllabus. It is more flexible and tailored towards a particular need and circumstance of the learner (Nzeneri, 2002). Informal adult learning is basically a process of learning which focuses on skills acquisition and knowledge update through individualized apprenticeship programmes by learners. In order to have a better grasp of the focus of this paper, it is worthwhile to attempt an explanation of who is an adult learner with view to identifying the adult learner in learning programmes.

Adult learner

Contextually, the adult learner is seen as a learner who consciously or unconsciously, formally, informally or non-formally engages himself or herself in any adult educational programmes with the intent to solve life problems (Nzeneri, 2002). Part of the problem plaguing a universally acceptable definition of adult education is that of understanding who the adult learner is. Authors have at various instances concluded that the adult learner is anyone who engages in learning at an old age. This understanding of the adult learner has given impetus to the peripheral practice of adult education in many countries and it has also culminated in the poor recognition and funding of adult education programmes (Betiang, 2004). In furtherance of this argument and because adult learning co-terminates with life, which makes it a lifelong process, it is difficult to say in one word who the adult learner is. In as much as adult learning span the entire lifetime of man it is also based on the varying needs of man. Therefore, adult learning varies from man to man and from society to society depending on what their learning needs maybe. Therefore, what may be relevant to a particular learner and motivates him to learn may not be relevant to another learner. Amadike-Ndu and Ubong (2012) stated that the adult learner is one who is biologically, psychologically and socially mature to face life challenges and should be able to take responsibility for his economic, social, religious and political roles effectively.

Furthermore, Nzeneri (2010) summarized the characteristic features of the adult learner, thus; his self-concept usually moves from that of dependency to that of a self-directed personality. He does depend on any person to take decision about his life. The learner has accumulated a rich reservoir of experiences that help to form the basis for future learning. This is to say, his future learning is heavily dependent on what he had already learned. Whatever he desires to learn at any given time must have relevance to his previous knowledge. His readiness to learn is dictated by the performance of developmental tasks. One fundamental character feature of the adult learner is the changing time perspective from that postponed application of knowledge to immediate application of knowledge (Aruma, 2011). The learner does not learn for the purpose of

applying what knowledge and skill acquired in the future, but he put use whatever he has to learned almost immediately and there is a shift from subject centred learning to problem centred learning.

The adult learner is any person who engages in any form of educational activities irrespective of content or scope, but whose target is to identify and solve personal or collective problems (Nke, 2018). It is in the course of identifying and solving these problems that the need to learn continuously through the various adult education programmes becomes inevitable. The adult learner is distinct from other learners because he determines what and where to learn and as such adult learning is based on the learning needs of the learner. The desire to improve his social, economic, religious, intellectual, political and cultural well-being spurs the adult learner to engage in learning activities irrespective of the challenges encountered (Ezimah, 2004). Suffice it to say that the adult learner engages in learning programmes with the sole intention of enhancing his profession, productivity as well as to update his knowledge and acquire new skills.

Engaging in adult learning programmes is most times, propelled by the desire to confront varying life challenges in order to live a fulfilled life and this has contributed in making adult learning a voluntary activity driven by a variety of occupational, social, economic, religious and political needs. These needs therefore determine the type of learning programme the learner engages in (Akpama, 2017). It is therefore against this background that adult learning programmes are designed based on the perceived learning needs of the learners. It is important to note that the successful implementation of these adult learning programmes is largely dependent on the ability to facilitate or deliver instructions using appropriate communication skills.

Meaning of Communication and Communication Skills

Whenever people work together the need for effective communication becomes inevitable and the more effective the communication the higher the probability of effective team work. Communication occupies a central position in our daily lives and as such people cannot interact without communicating with each other for the purpose of sharing ideas and emotions. Communication is therefore the pivot or lubricant of any organization or society and it facilitate the attainment of both individual and collective goals of the people (Ukeje, Oko and Nwagbara, 1992).

Communication refers to a process whereby decisional premises are transmitted from one member of the organization to another. Communication also means the process of sharing information, messages, ideas or attitudes that produce a degree of understanding between the sender and the receiver (Khan, Khan, Zia-Ul-Islam and Khan, 2017). On a general note, communication is the process of transmitting information and ideas from the sender to the receiver through a medium with adequate and meaningful feedback. Communication as a process has four main types namely;

• Verbal communication: This type of communication involves the use of spoken language.

• Nonverbal communication: This type of communication is a way of communicating by way of body language, facial expressions and vocalic.

• Written Communication: This is usually communication through written language, symbols and numbers.

• Visual Communication: It is a way of communicating by way of photographs, arts, drawings, sketches, charts and graphs.

Effective communication involves a process which begins with the sender, the purpose of the communication, the message, the channel or medium of transmitting the message to the receiver and finally the feedback process which is the determinant of effective communication. Effective communication requires some basic skills which determine the effectiveness of the entire communication process (Nwana, 2008). These skills are known as communication skills and it is these skills that make the entire process meaningful.

Communication skills are abilities used when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Communication in a clear, effective and efficient way requires specialized skills to make the process meaningful and result oriented. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathizing. These skills enhance ability to understand the differences on how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversation and digital communication like emails and social media (Ukeje, Oko and Nwagbara, 1992).

Good communication skills come with numerous benefits such as;

● Communication skills foster trust with other people involved in the communication.

● Effective communication skills prevent and resolve problems.

● Communication skills provide clarity and direction in the process of communicating.

● Appropriate use of communication skills create a better relationship among the people who are   involved in the communication.

● It increases engagement as more people will be interested in the communication.

● Appropriate use of communication skills improves productivity by arousing interest and promoting proficiency.

● Effective communication skills promote team work as the participants see each other as a member of a family.

  There are also a variety of effective communication skills that are usually employed in a communication process to make it more rewarding. These skills include;

● Active listening: Communicators should develop a good listening culture which enables them to listen to others in the process with keen interest.

● Ability to adapt: Communicators should adapt their communication styles to the demands of their audience.

● Develop friendliness: Communicators should cultivate a friendly disposition as a means of fostering trust and understanding.

● Confidence: Communicators should be very confident while communicating with others as a way of arousing quick responses to ideas presented with confident.

● Giving and receiving feedback: Communicators should be able to give and accept critical feedback as a means of providing constructive inputs to others in the process of communicating. This will enhance ability to answer questions, provide solutions and help strengthen the project at hand (Cohort, 2016)

Relevance of Communication Skills in the Implementation of Adult Learning Programmes

Effective communication skills of teachers are the basic ingredients of learners' academic achievement in the learning programmes irrespective of type and content. Instructional delivery in adult learning programmes like other leaning programmes are usually communicated orally by facilitators more than other means which requires a display of appropriate communication skills (David, 2015). Therefore effective display of communication skills by facilitators and learners promote students learning, while the reverse ultimately has adverse effects on learners learning outcomes. Effective communication skills by facilitators and learners enhance learners ability to compete favourably with other learners and it reduces emotional depression and disorders.

It is important to note that in the teaching-learning situation is both receptive and expressive, therefore it is expected that facilitators should posses the basic rudiments of communication skills in order to develop the ability to give and listen attentively to learners and explain difficult concepts in a simplified manner. Effective communication skills enhance facilitators ability to break complex task into smaller and simpler parts. Facilitators in adult learning programmes need to demonstrate ability to communicate with learners through the use of appropriate tones that will display honesty, tactfulness and avoid the use of inflammatory words in the learning process (David 2015). Facilitators should also make eye contacts when listening to learners and also focus on the speaker without interruptions. Communication skills are relevant to adult teaching and learning programmes because they enhance the facilitators' ability to communicate appropriately with a wide variety of learners while maintaining good eye contacts. Effective communication skills by facilitators enhance ability to use vocabularies that have relevance to the learning situation and learners' background. It is pertinent to emphasis that since adult learning is a voluntary activity it is appropriate to use vocabularies that will not discourage learners from the programme, but such that will arouse their curiosity to learn. Wrong use of vocabulary has the ability to make a caricature of a once interesting learning programme because the adult learner unlike the child learner decides when, where, what and how to learn (Nke, Obi and Ewe, 2020).

The facilitator should also tailor his language to the understanding of his learners as the essence of the learning activities is to transmit knowledge, ideas and

skills to the learners. Facilitators' ability to present ideas logically, writes clearly and concisely promotes learning and stimulates learners' readiness to learn. Adapting communication styles to the needs of the learners is a major area of concern in adult leaning and as such facilitators are encouraged to fashion their communication styles along the lines that will be of immense benefit to the learners in order to promote participation and persistence. The cultivation of a friendly communication style make the learning process more meaningful and attractive to the learners and enhances the achievement of set educational goals (Aruma, 2011).

One major attribute or quality of a good adult leaning facilitator is the ability to develop the spirit of self-esteem and confidence. Ability to communicate effectively enhances facilitator confidence in a learning situation and also promotes learners interest and willingness to learn. Mutual respect is one major characteristic of adult learning; therefore in communicating with learners facilitators should display a high degree of respect for learners by conducting themselves in a manner that will not constitute a nuisance in order not to jeopardize the very essence of the programme (Ezimah, 2004). Integration of verbal, nonverbal, written and visual communication for instructional delivery in adult learning will enable the facilitators take effective control of the learning situation and make it more appealing, meaningful and beneficial to the learners.

Conclusion

Contextually, adult learning is the process of facilitating learning in adulthood for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, ideas, and skills that are relevant in solving personal or collective problems. In whatever form adult learning is the sum total of all the learning experiences learners engage in from birth to death in order to solve problems. Adult learners are those who voluntarily engaged in learning activities with the intent to solve life problems. As a concept communication is the transmission of information and ideas from a sender to the receiver through a defined medium. While communication skills are the abilities or qualities such as listening, speaking, observing and empathizing employed in transmission or reception of information and ideas. It is therefore pertinent that facilitators of adult learning should employ appropriate communication skills in the process of facilitating adult learning for effective implementation of adult learning programmes.

Suggestions

The paper was concluded with the following suggestions.
1. Government should ensure that training and retraining programmes, workshops and seminars on improving communication skills of form the main thrust of implementing adult learning programmes.
2. Ability to communicate skillfully be made an integral part of recruitment of facilitators.

3. Regular retraining programmes should be organized for facilitators for the purpose of enhancing their communication skills.

4. Supervisory agencies should ensure that facilitators integrate all forms of communication in facilitating adult learning.

5. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of adult learning programmes should incorporate the use of appropriate communication skills.

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