

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: A PRACTICAL WAY OF SUSTAINING AND TRANSFORMING ADULT LEARNERS

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Abstract: The paper was on transformative learning: a practical way of sustaining and transforming adult learners. It examined the concept of transforming learning and how adult learners learn using transformative learning that is instrumental and communicative. The paper further discussed adult learner, characteristics and expectations. It went ahead and explained the nexus between the adult learner and transformative learner. The paper concludes by highlighting the strength of transformative learning on adult learner.

Introduction

In adult education, learners are expected to dominate the teaching and learning activities. This is because they are the target beneficiaries of the programmes and for them to benefit accordingly, learning must be simplified in such a way they can harmonize the new knowledge and experiences. This will enable them to be more innovative and learn things that would add value to their lives. Being bread winners with huge responsibilities, adult learners want to learn skills and other things that will help their critical thinking in taking wise decisions as they are mostly goal and practically oriented, selves-directed and ready to be transformed.

In teaching adults, facilitators themselves need to understand who they are dealing with, they need to be exposed with the adults' learners' characteristics, process of adult learning, reasons for enrolment and avoid being indoctrinator guiders. By so doing, transformative learning will surely be guaranteed as it is directed towards self-reflection, self-discovery, self-examine, self-redirection and self-actualization. Papastamatis, Panitsides and Boutsou (2014) noted that at the heart of the conceptual frameworks of adult education and learning, there is found centrality of experience along with transformative learning that leads to attaining learning objectives. This is in agreement with Biasin (2022) that asserts the idea of a learner as a reflective and

dialogic thinker appears unrealistic, requiring a world of adults naturally able to think as adults, criticizing their own perspectives of meaning. In contemporary period, teaching and learning in adult education need to be transformed as transformative learning. provides remedies in paradigm-shift and addressing multiple needs of adults.

Transformative Learning

There are many approaches and theories that highlighted ways of supporting adult learners to achieve their learning goals, but transformative learning seems to be among the suitable one. Mezirow is the father of transformative learning. According to Mezirow (1994) it is intended to be comprehensive, idealized and universal model consisting of generic structure, elements and processes of adult learning. The transformative learning's assumptions are constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense of experience or frame of reference is central to make meaning and hence learning. Therefore, in transformative learning learners learn in two ways that are Instrumental and Communicative learning.

Mezirow (1994) opined that Instrumental learning is a metacognitive epistemology of evidential. This involved reflecting critically on the source, nature and consequences of relevant assumptions of our own and those of others. Therefore, instrumental learning is

determining that something is true (is as it is purported to be) by using empirical research methods. Under Instrumental, taking action on our transformed perspective we make a decision and live what we have come to believe until we encounter new evidence, argument or a perspective that renders this orientation problematic and requires reassessment. In a nutshell instrumental learning is more of empirical evidences.

While Communicative learning refers to dialogical reasoning. In this sense, reasoning is understood as the process of advancing and assessing a belief. Communicative learning is arriving at more justified beliefs by participating freely and fully in an informed continuing discourse; acquiring a disposition to become more critically reflective of our own assumptions and of others to seek validation of our transformative insights through more freely and fully participating in discourse and to follow through on our decision to act upon a transformed insight. In a nutshell, Communicative learning empowers learners to a worldview differently as a result of sharing ideas, team work and associating with others.

It is noted that Instrumental learning focuses on learning through task-oriented, problem-solving and determination of cause-and-effect relationships. While Communicative learning involves how individuals communicate their feelings, needs, desires and through engagement with the others (Culatta, 2022). Similarly, Kurnia (2021) submits that instrumental learning is based on instrumental interest, it involves a prediction about observable things or events and the meaning is acquired deductively by testing a hypothetical meaning scheme which will be influenced by a cause-effect relationship to achieve better control over a problem or situation observed. Transformative learning is developed under two assumptions Instrumental and Communicative learning, both the assumptions are directed toward developing human capacity by tasks that are problem oriented. This is why transformative learning is defined as the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) sets of assumption and expectation to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Such frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove true or justified to guide action

(Mezirow, nd). Transformative learning has strong relationship with the adult education due to its dynamic nature of transforming its learners and respecting their autonomy and experiences in the process of teaching and learning.

Adult Learners

Adult learners are homogeneous or heterogeneous persons that engage in learning something that add value to their lives regardless of their age and status. This learning can be in a formal, non-formal or informal setting. This is in line with Kapur (2015) that regards adult learner as any person that is socially accepted as an adult who is involve in a systematic learning process, be it in a formal, non-formal or informal. Adult learners refer to as all those who are matured enough to participate/enroll in any organized adult education programme (Oni, 2017). Everyone has the right to be a learner in adult education, what qualifies him to enrollment into the programme (Jamilu, 2019).

Adult learners are autonomous in the sense that they have their reasons for enrollment. They place emphasis on their learning needs and try all possible best to accomplish their goals. This is in line with Ike-Inegbu (2021) who stressed that adult learners prefer self-control and self-direction because they believe they are responsible for their lives and ready to direct lives towards those responsibilities. In the same vein, for them to be motivated, it requires them to reflect on their lives with this therefore their experiences have to be considered for fruitful result. Similarly, Agboeze, Ugwueze, Agboeze and Agbobo (2021) argued that adult possess greater volume of experiences due to their age and engagement in various activities, they bring these experiences to their working places and learning centre which facilitates their understanding and enables them to come up with new ideas. To sustain adult learners in learning process, their experiences need to be considered during facilitation. This will enable them to gather more information and use their skills for solving the problems. Anyikwa (2019) is of the view that they are autonomous learners that come to the learning centres with a perception of what they want, they need to be free to direct themselves and use their experiences to connect to subject of discussion. Oyebamiji and Olele (2021) stressed that adults are characterized by maturity, self-confident, autonomy, more practical, multi-tasking, less

open minded, resistance to change and more integrative knowledge among others.

Oduaran (2000) maintained that adult learners in general have acquired a lot of personal experiences, which they tend to bring into the learning situation. This would enable them to find learning easier and feel motivated on what they are learning.

Similarly Aderinoye (1997) stated that in teaching adults, learning should be built upon existing knowledge and attitudes, therefore opportunities for practice should be available and learning to be reinforced and make the learners active are needed in adults' class.

Moreover, practically oriented in accordance with the above submissions, Obinna-Akakuru, Ibe, Akakuru and Nelson-Okartar (2021) stated that adult learners tend to be more self-directed, they tend to learn more through discussion and problem solving than through passive listening. Therefore, they always want to apply new skills or knowledge due to their circumstances. Adults want to immediately apply what they learn to real life task to see how newly acquired knowledge is beneficial. Mostly, such learners are skeptical about programme or new knowledge before they enroll. When enrolled also have expectations and set goals. Therefore, in the process if they feel their expectations and goals are not going to be met, they will definitely withdraw from the programme, in another sense learning will not be relevant to them if it is not practically or related to realities. It is noted that adult finds learning interesting and motivating when it is more practical and related to their work, therefore their programmes should be practically oriented (Anyikwa, 2019). As an adult educator, you should prepare learners to team work so as to strengthen their enthusiasm, keep them motivated and develop the transformation procedure.

Adult Learner and Transformative Learning

Whatever adults are learning, it should be noted that they have areas of interest, they know what they want to learn and why they want to learn it. This learning as stated earlier should be practically oriented, this is because adult wants to see the immediate effect of new acquired knowledge on him or his family. Oni (2017) submits that theoretical knowledge that cannot be related to any practical experience or demonstration as theory is less important to most adult learners. As mentioned earlier, transformative learning has two domains,

instrumental and communicative learning. These domains are very crucial to adult learning. In the process of facilitation one can be adopted or both to concretize the teaching and learning activities.

Instrumental learning according to Mezirow (1994) is to engage in reflective discourse to assess the reasons and assumptions supporting a belief to be able to arrive at a tentative best judgement. This supports the empirical evidences on the process of learning. Adults normally rely on realities, hardly for them to depend on just assumptions which may or may not be true. Reasons and evidences are connected in adult learning, what adults want is convincing instrumentally not forcing them to accept or agree with the idea or concept. Therefore, in the facilitation process they need to be guided to discover the truth, by so doing it is difficult for them to disagree with the findings they discovered, this is why they are practically oriented which at the same time make them to reflect on their situation or problem at hand. In the process of reflection, they challenge, disagree and clear the misconceptions and use experiences to take proper action or come up with the strategic ways of addressing the issues. Similarly, it equips them with the comparative skills that enable them to identify the differences, similarities and the gap. This is in accordance with the Mezirow (1991) that stated free and full adult participation in discourse is the one through which learners learned to access evidence effectively, make and understand relevant arguments, develop critical judgement and engage in critical reflection.

Educationally, reflection helped learners improve their work, self-evaluation, identify what is missing and identify unclear areas in learning. It also enhances social connections with each other and build strong and mutual relationship (Chang, 2017). In adult class, learner comes with clear objectives on what to learn. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the facilitator assist them as stated by Mezirow (1991) to assist the learners to define his learning needs then facilitate by posing and solving problem including problem associated with implantation of individual and collective action and recognition of the relationship between personal problems and public issues. This instigates the spirit of conducting research and having reliable evidence in the process of learning. It is noted that transformative learning is about transforming people's perceptions, enabling them to see things

differently and act differently in their world (Apte, 2009). This process can transform adult learners in different ways ranging from critical thinking, taking wise decision, problem-solving skill and acquire more knowledge regarding research processes. In accordance with this, Ezimah (2020) has the opinion that adults have lived longer, seen and done more therefore, they have the tendency to link their past experiences to anything new and validate new concepts based on the prior learning.

Communicative learning is the second domain of transformative learning. It involves and encourages learners' full and freely participation in the discourse by enabling them to communicate their feelings through engagement with the others. According Mezirow (1994) communicative learning pertains to understanding what someone means when they communicate with you in conversation, through a book, a poem, an artwork and among others. To validate an understanding in communicative learning, one must assess not only the accuracy or truth of what is being communicated, but also the intent qualifications, truthfulness and authenticity of the one communicating.

Hence, in adult education, learners are expected to contribute in teaching and learning processes. They are always motivated to share their ideas and experiences, this is in accordance with the Hanachor and Needom (2020) that posited adult learners learn more through active participation, when they take part or make contributions in issues, discussions, debating and other problem-solving activities of their concern, the learning becomes effective and meaningful. Participation is very crucial in adult learning because it gives chances of learning from other members which promotes recognition and the spirit of team work. Jamilu and Karami (2021) argued that adult learners love to work in team as they discuss issues coupled with their experiences and wealthy knowledge that empower them to come up with reasonable solutions and learn other techniques of problem-solving from one another. Whatever the topic or content, learners must be given opportunity to dominate it and welcome their contributions, all they need is guidance to ensure they're on the right direction. This will enable the exploration of more ways of accumulating huge knowledge, diverse perceptions and wider networking which at the same time enhances self-transformation.

Communicative learning heartens free and full participation from learners' side, to achieve these, each learner must be given an equal chance, if it is groups there should be same treatment and freedom of contribution. Being free and full participant means involving learner in all the teaching and learning activities but that does not prevent the facilitator to also contribute and redirect all the activities to the central goal. In accordance with this statement, it is noted that learning from each other is not new in adult education, both learners and facilitator learn during the activity (Jamilu & Karami, 2021).

Communicative learning promotes wider understanding, stimulation, recognition, acceptance of membership and lifelong learning among the learners. This is why they need to dominate all the process and have control over what they are learning. In line with this, Adekola (2008) is of the view that adults feel motivated if they have some degree of control in their learning. They are more impatient and less tolerance in the pursuit of learning objectives as they are willing to learn or try new ways of doing things. This cannot be accomplished without their active involvement, there should be free and full freedom in dialog participation and allows them to use their reservoir of knowledge and experience and to reflect on realities. According to Calleja (2014) stated that dialogic communication helps participants reflect on the realities of their practice in light of their new understandings. Therefore, educators should make reference to the process of mentoring and training as one that respected the pace and curiosities of the participants by allowing space for reflection and praxis.

Communicative learning if utilized accordingly can promote the zeal of learning, increase adults' productivity from grassroots to national level and help in achieving and addressing the gender inequality, campaign of war against illiteracy, education for all and quality education under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All they require is competent facilitator to facilitate the procedure, provision of teaching and learning resources for the goal accomplishment and selves' transformation. According to Oladapo (2002) the purpose of adult education is to make individual, society and community at large to develop inherent interest and inspirations for good of their community and nation. Transforming adult learners requires their active participation which at the

same time provides ample opportunity for different categories of people to enroll into the programmes. This accords with the National Policy on Education NPE, (2004) clearly stated under mass literacy, adult and non-formal education goals that is to provide educational opportunities for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills. In the same vein to achieve the national goals of the same NPE that states a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

Conclusion

Transformative learning implies set of conditions for the realization of full potentialities of the adult learner and the quality of the adult education programme, the peculiarities of the learner. There are some inherent logic, ideal and purpose in the process of transformative learning. Transformative learning surely guaranteed adult learners towards self-reflection, discovery, and redirection amongst others. It provides adult learners with the opportunities of enrolling into different programmes and achieving their objectives. It also take cognizance of adult learners peculiarities.

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