

Canadian Social Science

Vol. 6, No. 5, 2010, pp. 88-93

ISSN 1712-8056 [Print]

ISSN 1923-6697[Online]

www.cscanada.netwww.cscanada.org

Evaluation of Adult Literacy Programmes in Psychological Perspectives

EVALUATION DES PROGRAMMES D'ALPHABÉTISATION DES ADULTES EN PERSPECTIVES PSYCHOLOGIQUES

Asaf Niwaz¹Maqsud Alam Bokhari²Tayyab Alam Bokhari³Shaheen Ashraf Tahirkheli⁴

Abstract: Adults are unique group of people to teach and if proper attention is paid they can boost up economical development of the country. Targets of adult literacy programs can be best achieved keeping in mind the psychology of adults. The present study was conducted to investigate the role of adult literacy teachers, content of adult literacy programs and method of teaching in psychological perspectives. The study was qualitative in nature and interviews along with focus group discussions were applied. The sample of the study consisted of 420 respondents including 360 adult female neo-literates, 48 literacy teachers and 12 supervisors randomly selected from six districts out of three geographical regions of the Punjab (Province). The data was analyzed by sorting, coding and categorizing the responses. The main findings of the study were; the adult literacy teachers treated the adult learners harshly in the centers, teachers did not motivate the learners towards study, teachers did not encourage the learners in their progress, teaching method confused most of the learners, the content of adult literacy program was not according to the needs and aspirations of the target group.

Key words: Adult learners; teachers; content; method; psychology

Résumé: L'enseignement vise uniquement sur le groupe d'adultes et si l'attention appropriée est accordée, ils peuvent stimuler le développement économique du pays. Les objectifs des programmes d'alphabétisation des adultes peuvent être mieux réalisés en tenant compte de la psychologie des adultes. La présente étude a été menée pour étudier le rôle des enseignants de l'alphabétisation des adultes, le contenu des programmes d'alphabétisation des adultes et la méthode de l'enseignement dans des perspectives psychologiques. L'étude a été de nature qualitative et des interviews avec des groupes de discussion ont été appliquées. L'échantillon de l'étude consistait en 420

¹ The Author is PhD Scholar (Education) at International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

² Dean/Principal, Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan.

³ Associate Professor, Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁴ Research Associate, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan.

*Received 13 June 2010; accepted 19 August 2010

répondants dont 360 adultes féminines néo-alphabètes, 48 enseignants d'alphabétisation et 12 superviseurs choisis au hasard dans six districts des trois régions géographiques du Punjab (Province). Les données ont été analysées par le tri, le codage et la catégorisation des réponses. Les résultats principaux de cette étude sont: dans les centres, les enseignants d'alphabétisation des adultes les ont traités de façon dure; les enseignants n'ont pas motivé les apprenants vers l'étude; les enseignants n'ont pas encouragé les apprenants dans leurs progrès; la méthode d'enseignement a confondu la plupart des apprenants; le contenu du programme d'alphabétisation des adultes ne correspondait pas aux besoins et aux aspirations du groupe ciblé.

Mots-clés: apprenants adultes; enseignants; contenu; method; psychologie

ADULT LEARNERS

According to Knowles (1998), adult learner is independent and has a need to understand how learning something new will benefit him, how it fits into his existing knowledge, and reinforces his autonomy to learn in a way that works for him. Turula, (undated) reported the unique contributions of a mature learner include considerable motivation, the ability to take charge of their own lives, experience and cognitive maturity.

It is a fact that adults are different from school going children. Scholars suggest that adults are a specified group of learners who possess individual, group or situational characteristics that serve to differentiate them from children. Vodde (2008) cited Brookfield (1986), Rogers (2002) and Cross (1981) who outline the following characteristics of adult learners: (1) adult learners define themselves as adults, whether by legal definition or chronological age; (2) adult learners are in the middle of a process of growth and are engage in a purposeful exploration of a field of knowledge or a set of skills; (3) adult learners have expectations about the learning process; (4) they have different and common physiological, social, cultural and psychological characteristics; (5) they quest for knowledge, skills, and experiences; (6) they share host of experiences, skills, knowledge and values that influence how new ideas are received; how new skills are acquired and how the experiences of others are interpreted; (7) prior learning experiences of adults comprise valuable curricular resources, and; (8) transactions among adult learners of familiar groups such as adult female learners will be characterized by a respect for individual member that will be manifested in the teaching process.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ADULT LITERACY

The researcher consulted the literature relevant to the psychological consideration in respect of teachers' role, method of teaching and the content of adult literacy programs. Smith (1999) said the following premises provide a foundation upon which to establish a discourse of adult educational psychology. The character and quality of learning in adulthood contribute to development across the life span and relationship between teachers and adult learners is necessary. The teachers' ability to motivate the students, the students' sense of attraction to the teacher, mutual trust are the aspects that play their role in relationship.

Comings et al (2005) reported that successful programs of literacy not only require the well design materials for learning but competent teachers also. If teachers regularly teach learners to some extent, about 50% of achievement can be expected. According to Comings et al (1992), in Nepal, the drop-out rate was less where adult literacy teachers treated the participants respectfully and where the teachers of adult literacy treated their learners harshly, the drop-out rate was increased. The positive behavior of adult literacy teachers can be assured by proper selection procedure of teachers' recruitment, training in positive behavior and monitoring of their practices in class rooms.

Smith, (1998) reported that theories of adult learning focused on active involvement of learners in the process. Abadzi (2004 p.6) reported that storage of information for a shorter and longer time decrease at later stage due to little practice, the amount of attentional resources available diminishes with age, making people less able to carry out many tasks at the same time. There attentional resources could affect literacy

acquisition in several ways: readers may be unable to process all the cues of a script simultaneously and thereby incur the high error rate and reading comprehension may be affected. In successful literacy programs peer tutoring and group work method of teaching enhance better acquisition of reading and writing skills. DFID, (2008, p. 2) highlights some of the facts that make the literacy programs more effective. These includes when programs recognize and build on the skills, knowledge and life experiences that learners possess; when programs respond to the needs and aspirations of the target learners; when the learners are encouraged and enabled to play their active role in their learning process; when the programs are designed in language that can be spoken by the learners easily; and when the adult literacy trainers are well trained, supported and familiar with the context of the learners. Lauglo, (2001, p.34-35) argues that participatory pedagogy can yield better results. The adult learners should be treated as adults, with self respect and authority to choose alternatives. The main aim of adult basic education program is to build the learner self confidence and sense of personal efficacy. The participatory pedagogy is the only solution for it with better training of the instructors.

According to Oxenham and Aloki (2000), if the content of the literacy skills is according to the needs and aspirations of adult learner, they attended the classes regularly and learn the skills very easily. Bjorn (2004, p.4) reported that the adult demand income generating skills and basic literacy skills. If income generating skills are provided along with basic skills, the learners take keen interest in learning. Poverty alleviation activities should be included in adult literacy programs. He further explained that relevant material for learning decrease the dropout rate in adult literacy programs. In Senegal women literacy program, the learning material was produced in local languages and it covered many areas like social, economic, religious, health, and moral development. For the purpose of creating a learning environment, five quarterly newspaper one in each region was produced and circulated. Further for consolidating and improving already acquired literacy skills, books, posters and other relevant material was provided. The dropout rate was only 15% and reasons behind were the active involvement of participant and local community in establishing and defining the courses of the study. Cawthera, (1997,p.34) reported that John Hasting a British citizen developed material in Nijira Shikhi for adult literacy program which was completely in line with the needs and aspirations of the target group. All the adult learners of this program like the topics to learn because these had their utility in everyday life.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to investigate the psychological considerations in adult literacy programs of National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) and Department of Literacy and Non-formal Education Punjab (DLNEP) in role of teachers, method of teaching and content for adult literacy programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were constructed to get satisfactory answers;

1. To what extent adult literacy teachers follow the psychology of adults in teaching process?
2. To what extent method of teaching is being used according to the psychology of adults?
3. To what extent content of adult literacy programs is according to the needs and aspirations of adult learners?

METHODOLOGY

This study was follow up in nature. Total fifteen districts of the Punjab, where NCHD and DLNEP had launched their adult literacy programs, all adult female neo-literates, adult literacy teachers and concerned supervisors of the year 2006 were the population of the study. Through random sampling technique thirty adult female neo-literates were approached from each organization in each district along with two adult literacy teachers and a supervisor to collect the data. The total sample (420) included 360 neo-literates, 48 adult literacy teachers and 12 supervisors. Due to some social and religious barriers in the society, all the

female neo-literates were hard to reach. The neo-literates were identified with the help of concerned literacy teachers of NCHD and DLNEP.

Specially constructed interviews on three main variables of the study namely teachers' role, content of adult literacy programs and methods of teaching were used. In interview schedule and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) teacher's role was evaluated by investigating her personality traits as teacher like punctuality, understanding of her students, respectful treatment or behavior towards learners, motivating and encouraging adult learners in their study, building good rapport with learners, paying individual attention to learners, help in revision of daily lesson, classroom management, teaching techniques and ensuring classroom participation. Content of adult literacy programs was evaluated by investigating about need based content; easy to learn, following learning principles, based on learners' experiences, having activities and variety of topics to study. Both of the organizations had adopted different methods of teaching so the researcher evaluated method of teaching by raising question about interesting method of teaching, interesting and easy to learn how to read and write, participatory in nature, use of practices and exercises, group discussions, role playing and activities oriented.

Interview schedules were conducted with the help of adult literacy teachers who had identified their best learners of their time of literacy programs. Each interview schedule was conducted separately from learners and recorded with the help of a female research assistant. FGDs were conducted in each sample union council of the district with the help of supervisors and heads of the local organizations. The cooperation of the heads of the organizations at local level facilitated to include those who were not acquainted with one another but were doing the same job. In FGDs three main areas of the study were discussed in detail. After introduction, firstly, researcher invited the supervisors to share their views on each theme of the study followed by adult literacy teachers and then female neo-literates. Data was properly recorded on tape recorder and was written on paper also. The responses of the respondents were sorted and coded accordingly. In the last, the responses were categorized to present the realities prevailing in adult literacy programs.

RESULTS

The adult literacy teachers did not treat the adult learners respectfully; the adult learners were of the view that the teachers perceived themselves more superior than us. The supervisors also supported the statement made by the adult learners. The teachers did not motivate and encourage the adult learners to study well. The teachers and the supervisors were of the view that the learners did not attend the literacy classes regularly and they were not serious learners. The teachers did not pay individual attention to the adult learners. The teachers and supervisors were of the view that the venues of the literacy classes were not spacious for all the learners to sit comfortably. The teachers were not able to move around and to give proper individual attention to all the learners. The learners blamed that the teachers gave individual attention to those who were their relatives or close friends. The teachers did not check the homework of the learners properly. Most of the teachers did not come in the center regularly. The teachers did not respond positively to the questions raised by adult learners in the class. The teachers replaced themselves with their sisters or friends in the centers. The fake registration of learners was found as a common practice. Most of the teachers did not spend specified time in the centers while few of them spent more time in the center than specified for this activity.

All of the respondents were of the view that the specified content of the adult literacy was not according to their needs and aspirations. Most of the learners did not take interest in learning how to read and write? The learners of age group 16-24 were interested in learning 3Rs. The content of the literacy had no utility in everyday life to the most of the learners. Three types of adult female learners were identified in this study; the learners in the age group 16 -24 years showed their interest in learning reading, writing and numeracy skills; the learners of age group 25-32 years showed their interest to learn income generating skills along with reading, writing and numeracy skills; and the learners more than 32 years of age were interested to learn about basics of religion and some income generating skills. Almost all of the learners wanted income generating skills to learn that was missing component in the existing content of the adult literacy programs.

Phonic teaching method used by NCHD was not found interesting by the learners. In teaching learning process, most of the teachers were not able to pronounce every letter properly. Some letters were taught in phonic techniques and some were taught in alphabetic method of teaching. Most of the teachers of NCHD were using mixed method to teach the content of literacy and this technique made the learners confused. Alphabetical method of teaching was not used properly by adult literacy teachers of DLNEP. The exercises of separating and combining of the words were not properly handled in literacy programs of DLNEP. The uninteresting teaching methods, irregularity of teachers, rude behaviors of teachers, congested space of literacy centers, and uninteresting content of the literacy were found unsuitable according to the psychology of adult learners.

DISCUSSION

As the present study reveals that the adult learners are not being treated psychologically. In any educational activity, psyche of the target learners has its own place and importance and when someone has to organize such an activity for a special types of learners like adult its importance increases. Being diverse groups of adults, adult literacy planners, policy makers, practitioners and teachers must know and follow psyche of adults for enjoying more success. Without psychological foundation our literacy programs would not be proved fruitful. Adult literacy teachers should be trained in andragogy. They should be trained how to treat and work with adult learners. This study identified three types of adult illiterates, their needs and aspirations are different from one another.

It is a fact that in existing resources, it is challenging task to arrange literacy programs according to all the needs and aspirations of target illiterate but effort can be made to design the content of literacy interesting for them to some extent. In the present situation there is a huge gap between theory of adult learning and its practical usage. It can be lessened by adopting proper approach; it will definitely increase the unit cost of learner but on the other hand minimize the loss of wastage of educational and human resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on results of the study.

1. Teacher training manual may include the topics like psychology of adults, classroom management, concept of multiple intelligence and different learning styles of learners.
2. Teachers of adult literacy teachers may be trained how to motivate and encourage adult learners, how to engage adult learners effectively in learning process, how to treat adult learners, monitoring and evaluation techniques, importance of learners' experiences etc.
3. Teachers may be trained in using different techniques of teaching like peer group learning techniques, group discussions, activity based learning and use of adult learners as teachers.
4. Content of adult literacy programmes may be carefully selected as per demand and types of adult learners.
5. Apart from basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy skills, adult learners may have opportunity to learn income generating skills as per their taste and ability.
6. Inclusion of integrated curriculum may prove fruitful for learners.
7. Village educational committees may be formed in order to provide community and family support for learners in rural areas.
8. Adult literacy programmes may be design after careful and systematic need based analysis of the target areas.

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The findings of present study are helpful for planners, policy makers, curriculum developers, managers and teachers to execute the literacy programmes according to the psychology of adult learners not only in Pakistan but to literacy personnel of the most of the developing countries also. They should trained adult

literacy teachers in andragogy rather than pedagogy, the content of adult literacy programmes must have economic aspect to attract adult illiterate for learning and participatory approaches should be applied in teaching process.

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