

## **The Perceptual Constraints of Adult Learners on the Implementation of Adult Basic Education Programs in Kenya**

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**Abstract:** The objective establishes the perceptual constraints of adult learners on the implementation of adult basic education programs. The study used descriptive survey research design and was based on the conceptual framework embracing four main theories namely: - Adult learning theory, Mezirow's Theory of Perspective Transformation, Systems Theory and Reference Group Theory. The units of analysis were 424 Adult Education Learning Centres. The study population was 7104 adult education Learners. The targeted populations were 2304 Learners. The researcher used both Stratified and saturated random sampling to pick out a corresponding sample. The instruments of data collection were questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. Reliability of the instruments was addressed through piloting in one adult education centre and reliability co-efficient of 0.745 which indicated that the instruments were reliable were obtained by subjecting the instruments to a Split-half Technique and Spearman "Brown Prophecy Formula". Data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings show that if 2.92 (58.40%) of learners were asked to pay for adult education studies, he/she would gladly do so. Adult education programs suffer from stigmatization and hence potential learners find it almost an embarrassment to be involved in the program as attested by the score of 3.35 (67.04%). When an adult learner listens to what others say about adult education the adult learner felt encouraged to continue with the program. Every effort should be done by all the stakeholders in adult and continuing basic education to either reduce or get rid of the stigma associated with adult education since this affects both the learners and those that are charged with its supervision and monitoring.

**Keywords:** Perceptual Constraints, Adult Basic Education Programs, Adult Learners

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the Machakos County Adult Education office 2014 quarterly reports, a part from the inadequate teaching staff, Machakos County also has to contend with unskilled part-time teachers and demoralized part-time teachers due to little or no honoraria. There is also lack of proper learning venues and other facilities; lack of transport for supervisory staff; insufficient funds; low attendance of learners; stigmatization of the programme and also the adult education learners; dilapidated learning venues and furniture, and centres expansively spaced posing a mobility challenge as Adult Education officers can only visit a few centres within a day. This raises a lot of concern since almost all the above challenges pose a direct threat to Curriculum implementation and points to the likelihood of some serious constraints affecting the implementation of the adult education curriculum in the County. This problem is worsened by the fact that adult education programs have little or no funding at all by both the National and County governments. Notably, even the County adult education is not represented in the County Education Board unlike the case with Primary and Secondary education. The objective of the study is therefore to establish the perceptual constraints

of adult learners on the implementation of adult basic education programs.

### **Literature Review**

Learning can be distinguished as three phases namely: *learning as a product* where the emphasis is on the end result or outcome of some learning activity; *learning as a process* where emphasis is on what happens during the course of a learning experience in attaining a given learning product or outcome and *learning as function* which emphasize certain critical aspects of learning such as motivation, retention, and transfer [1]. When appropriate learning takes place, there is :- the discovery of a vocation or destiny; the knowledge or acquisition of a set of values; a realization that life is precious; acquisition of peak experiences; a sense of accomplishment ;satisfaction of psychological needs; the control of impulses and learning to choose judiciously [2].

In the perception of Cross [3], there is a natural tendency of people to learn and that learning will flourish if nourishing, encouraging environments are provided. This means that adult learners and other potential learners are likely to be drawn to a learning

program that provides the right environment. By implication, the intended objectives and goals of the teaching-learning process can only be achieved if the right environment is provided to the learners. In addition to the physical location and appropriateness of the learning facilities, learning environment includes but is not limited to the concern of the teacher, the delivery methodologies employed, the flexibility of the program, and the demands made on the personal life of the student. This particular environment is further enhanced by what Hergenhahn [4] refers to as *Observational learning*. This type of learning is influenced by four processes namely: attention - seeing a model of behavior and adopting it; retention - putting it on file for future use; behavioral rehearsal - comparing own behavior against model observed and retained and motivation - to act on it (model it) at some future point.

According to Lindeman [5], adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities; adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning events are life situations, not subjects. Rarely will adults join and be retained in a learning process that does not have a direct bearing on their needs and interests since adult learning is to a very considerable extent a personal choice and usually high stakes are involved. Consequently, the major emphasis in adult learning is focused more on practice than on academic; on the applied rather than the theoretical; and on skills rather than on knowledge and information [6]. Absence of the above emphasis in any adult education undertaking portends failure of the learning process.

Curriculum content is another determinant for effective adult learning. Unlike children where the teacher decides what is to be learnt and how it shall be learnt, adults decide what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. The "what" here refers to the content in the Curriculum and even though they (adults) are rarely consulted or actively involved in the development of the Curriculum, the onus of the success or failure of the Curriculum is on them since they can easily decide to reject or accept the Content without any further reference to anyone else. When developing Curriculum Content it is imperative to think it through carefully and thoroughly within the content area. Content of any subject or topic is logically interdependent and to understand one part it is important to determine its relationship to other parts of the content under examination. It is impossible to learn something with lasting utility and application by memorization without understanding the connection among and between its component parts. This involves

thinking and rationalizing about the component parts and their relationship to one another [7].

The use of diverse teaching approaches and strategies is of great essence to the adult teacher since any negative variance in the teaching process might adversely affect the entire teaching-learning process. One of the most ancient but commendable approach to adult learning is what is popularly known as the Socratic Method. Socratic teaching is centered on giving students questions, not answers, about subjects and/or topics. This creates an inquiring and probing thinking process about a subject, rather than a passive listening and self-selection about entering into a conversation or not.

Questions can be raised on goals and objectives, the nature of a problem or issue, if there is relevant data available to analyse key concepts and ideas, question assumptions, and consider alternative points of view. This leads to new understanding and applications [8]. The principles and practices of the Socratic Method appear to have great semblance to what is today referred to as andragogy, the art and science of teaching adults. The effectiveness of this method is borne from the fact that adult psychology recommends the use of enquiry and problem-solving dynamics that are central in dealing with adults, a thing recognized and adopted by both the Socratic and andragogic approaches.

Successful Socratic questioning includes keeping the questions focused; keeping the discussion intellectually responsible; stimulating the discussion with probing questions and periodically summarizing what has and has not been dealt with or resolved. Questioning ability is a science that can be learned and becomes a natural teaching skill with practice. Students are forced to get out from behind restrictive borders and think more deeply into areas that are subject related, extending thinking and problem solving skill.

Commenting on 'Questioning', Richard Paul [9] argues that reasoning goes beyond fact and opinion. It delves deeply into all relevant information and concepts, it distinguishes between opinion and empirically sound information, and it causes the individual to think extensively about an issue, seeking all possible avenues to arriving at a conclusion. The decision of a Judge, for example, is reasoning that includes relevant evidence and valid legal guidelines and findings. Paul further observes that Critical thinking includes three different kinds of questions:-those with one right answer (factual questions); those with better or worse answers (well-reasoned or poorly reasoned answers); and those with as many answers as there are different human preferences (where mere opinion does rule). As noted above the third question requires an

opinion, the second calls for reasoned judgment while the first is just plain fact. It should be noted that supporting evidence and solid reasoning is deemed much better in the educational process than accepting something stated as fact as being true without question or probing.

Concerning Curriculum content, Lumb (n.d) advises that Course design incorporate methods and techniques that include the learner in the learning process. Understanding emerges from inquiry, probing, and looking for relationships among the items of interest. Students should be guided into the routine of analyzing key concepts and ideas, questioning assumptions, and seeking alternative points of view about specific topics or proposals. Forcing students to think more in-depth about something is a challenging and difficult process that requires well-developed instructor skills. The results, however, are most rewarding.

### **Constraints of Adult Learners**

According to Kroger [10], people tend to define themselves and others in comparison terms, to judge themselves according to some standards or to see themselves as better or less privileged than others. They often think that they do not live up to the required standards and this might lead to a low self-esteem. Some respond to this inadequacy with depression, anger and social withdrawal while others accept their situation as it is. Defining a situation as critical, for example, is to shape whatever solutions are possible to members of that world. For instance, in using reference group theory, members of certain groups will be sensitive to issues they believe are important to them. On the other hand, if adults are convinced that the learning activity is not relevant to their issues at hand, their behaviours will reflect an indifference to that activity.

In this line, Ofsted [11] avers that the perception of adult education and its value has varied greatly among individuals and groups. Some people view adult education only from the perspective of the old aged adult learning only to both read and write. People will have good perception of adult education programs, if they are timely, relevant and innovative and if these programs reflect practical/ real life situation. Appearing to read from the same script, Wlodkowski, [12] submit that adult education programs are associated with failures that could not access formal education hence many current and potential adult learners have a low opinion of the programs. The presupposition here then is, since majority of people view adult basic education

and training programs as inferior compared to formal education and by implication as a sign of degrading oneself, deliberate efforts need to be made to educate people on the importance and need for adult education.

The observations of Rice [13] and Haihambo [14] show that in most African countries, people still believe in their traditions and continue to react along stereo-typed gender lines. This observation is widely experienced in adult education programs in Uganda where the majority of the participants are women. This affects the way men think and since the majority of the participants are women, some men easily connect what is learnt in such programs as women activities.

Murphy and colleagues [15] suggest that lack of qualifications and self-confidence may lead to non-participation. People who lack confidence will always not contribute in a discussion and this might make them give up saying that they cannot manage learning. This normally happens in adult education programmes where learners of different educational backgrounds are put to learn in the same class. Those with little educational background might feel insecure to participate in class. While it has been suggested that adults should be grouped in classes according to their educational backgrounds in order to enhance readiness to learn, this has in many cases been said but practically not done.

### **RESULTS**

The adult education learners were requested by the research assistants to give their views on their perception of adult basic education as a constraint in the implementation of adult basic education Curriculum. Their responses were captured in the Likert scale.

#### **Classification of individual scores:**

When requested by the research assistants to score on the Likert scale (SA (Strongly Agree)= 5, A (Agree) =4, U (Uncertain)=3, D(Disagree)= 2, SD (Strongly Disagree)= 1) their perception towards adult education programmes in Machakos County, the Adult education learners scored an average of 4.35 (87%) on the item Some men connect what is learnt in such programmes as women activities. This means that they strongly disagreed that Some men connect what is learnt in such programs as women activities in the sub-county; scored an average of 4.50 (90%) on the item adult education programs help to eradicate illiteracy, provide knowledge, skills and attitude for work, create self-confidence and foster positive behaviour towards life.

**Table 1. Perception of adult education learners on adult education managers as a constraint in the implementation of adult basic education (n=101)**

Statement	Freq.					Total F	Total Score	Av. Score	% Score
	SA	A	U	D	SD				
Some men connect what is learnt in such programmes as women activities but I don't believe they are right	65	16	12	7	1	101	439	4.35	87
Adult Education programmes help to eradicate illiteracy, provide knowledge, skills and attitude for work, create self-confidence and foster positive behaviour towards life	69	20	5	7	0	101	455	4.50	90
Adult Education has helped me in daily life skills like reading, counting my money and communicating to people who do not understand my mother tongue	90	2	4	3	2	101	478	4.73	94.61
Due to my adult education learning, I am now able to interact well with other people.	58	25	15	3	0	101	439	4.35	86.91
I feel that I have grown emotionally, socially, intellectually and economically since joining adult education	44	20	22	14	1	101	393	3.89	77.79
If I were asked to pay for my adult education studies ,I would gladly do so	21	12	30	15	23	101	295	2.92	58.40
When I listen to what others say about adult education I feel encouraged to continue with the program	35	15	15	21	15	101	340	3.35	67.04
My self –esteem has greatly improved as a result of my learning in adult education	40	30	18	11	2	101	398	3.94	78.75
Because of my adult education learning, I can now face life challenges with confidence	11	20	29	30	11	101	293	2.09	58.02
As a result of my adult learning, the society has now given me a responsibility	4	30	16	38	13	101	279	2.76	55.23
I would recommend adult education to anyone who wants a better life	43	12	9	18	19	101	348	3.44	68.83

Source: Responses from the field

This meant that they strongly agreed with the item; scored 4.73 (94.61%) on the item, an indication that the learners were certain that adult education programs positively affected their lives; scored 4.35 (86.91%) on the item that adult learners were able to interact well with other people; scored 3.89 (77.79%) on the item growing emotionally, socially, intellectually and economically since joining adult education, an

indication that the learners were in agreement that their perception on the item was positive. . The thinking of these adults is supported by Calder [20] who asserts that adults look at learning as something that will heighten their job satisfaction or raise their material standards and to enable them improve their quality of life outside working hours.

The score of 2.92 (58.40%) on the item If a learner were asked to pay for adult education studies, he/she would gladly do so, an indication that the learners disagreed with the item. This in essence is a danger signal to the learning process of the adults as attested by Dewey's 1948 philosophy of newer education that stressed the importance of experience in the learning process, the participation of the learner in the learning process, and the importance of perceiving learning as a lifelong process. Rightly put, there is no point in the philosophy of education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process.

The adult education learners scored 3.35 (67.04%) on the item When an adult learner listens to what others say about adult education the adult learner felt encouraged to continue with the programme, an indication that the learners were uncertain with the programmes offered. This means the influence by others on the individual plays a great role in making an adult interested in learning which can motivate him to enrol in learning programmes. The influence by family members, peers and teachers is especially of great importance.

However, peer influence can also be dangerous to participation in learning activities where an individual can also be convinced to drop out of the programme by peers who have already dropped out or those who have never enrolled themselves in any learning programme. Comparative reference groups, give individuals a basis for comparing themselves or their group to other individuals or groups. Comparative reference groups also influence individuals' feelings and behaviour. The reference group theory in this case is applicable to the perceptions that the adults have towards adult education. This is in specific reference to the fact that even adults influence each other through building of particular perceptions.

The score of 3.94 (78.75%) on the item self – esteem has greatly improved as a result of learning in adult education, an indication that the learners agreed that the programmes were good; scored 2.90 (58.02%) on the item with adult education learning, a learner would face life challenges with confidence , an indication that the learners were uncertain that programmes offered were well intended; scored 2.76 (55.23%) on the item with adult learning, the society has given me a responsibility, an indication that the teachers were ambivalent about the programmes offered; scored 3.44 (68.83%) on the item an adult education learner would recommend adult education to anyone who wants a better life, an indication that the learners were uncertain of the programmes being

offered. Generally, the adult education learners scored an average of 3.73 (74.78%) on the Likert scale indicating that they agreed with the programmes offered in adult education centres.

The above findings tie very well with Kroger [16], who opines that people tend to define themselves and others in comparison terms, to judge themselves according to some standards or to see themselves as better or less privileged than others. They often think that they do not live up to the required standards and this might lead to a low self-esteem. Some respond to this inadequacy with depression, anger and social withdrawal while others accept their situation as it is.

When asked about why they chose to do studies on adult education centres one of the adult education learners asserted that:

*Mbikia vau ninitethekete muno ni kisomo kii nundu nindonya kusoma na kuandika Kiswahili na Kisungu nesa, na nindonya kwia kila nzomethetwe akilini ndekulwa. O ta ou kwisila kisomo kii nindonya kuneenanya na kutethyanya na andu nesa vate kuemanwa.* (It was my choice to join adult education so that I may boost my own knowledge in education and also attain my goal in building my future career) (L12).

Yet others gave different perspectives such as “It was my choice to join an adult education so that I may boost my own knowledge in education and also attain my goal in building my future career” (L6) and “To meet my lost vision of education” (L3). This particular admission by the student confirms the findings of the international centre for education statistics, which conducted the recent large-scale international assessment of adults' reading ability in the world by the international assessment of adult literacy [17], that most adults who join adult education are unable to consistently read and understand information at the basic level, or the level at which the average high school graduate reads [18]. This includes information in short, commonplace texts and simple documents, such as news articles, pamphlets, bus schedules and food labels. Many adults at the below basic literacy level have difficulty with even simpler reading tasks like locating specific information in short, commonplace texts [19].

On the concern about benefits that learners have received from adult education, an adult education learner had this to say:

*Wai unyuvi wakwa kusoma kisomo kii kya andu aima no kana nongeleele ui na nitonye kwianisya ndoto yakwa ya kwithiwa na maisha mailu* (So far I have benefited a lot in that I can read and write in both English and Kiswahili and also memorizing what I have been taught by teachers in all the subjects. I have also



learnt more on how to exchange different ideas and views that one has) (L 16).

“I received so many of them like improving in office skills and writing...you know” (L4). “I believe I shall have K.C.S.E certificate which is very important to the government entry point” (L2).

On the issue of particular benefits an adult education learner would reap from the adult education centres, one of the adult education learners attested that: *Ate o kutumbanya kukwata grade nzeo no kana tulike colleges nzeo, alimu maitu nimatusomethetye kwikalanya na andu nesa na kwoou ngatonya kwikalanya nesa na andu angi. Mwikalile wakwa o ta ou ukavinduka kwithiwe wi mwailu* (Other than this, I think I will benefit more because our teachers teach us on how to socialize and how we can expound our minds in living with others apart from getting the required grades to join the higher colleges. I think I will have a better foundation for my life than I had there before joining the adult education).

The benefits I have received from adult education are uncountable. i.e....I have met teachers who are of great help to me through the subjects they teach us, I have met my fellow students who are cooperative and devoted in studies; the environment is good and conducive for us and may God bless the principal and his staff members for their good work....You know...other benefits which I believe I shall gain from adult education are; Quality education because education is the key to a successful life, Being well disciplined, Being able to acquire knowledge which will help me a lot in life, being able to interact with all types of people (L 9).

On the general view about adult education programmes and education, one of the adult learners contended that:

*Nikulya ala methiwa matatonya kwa nzia imwe kana ingi kukwata kisomo kii, moke malike tusome vamwe nundu ni kisomo kyailu na kitonyethasya andu kuvikia ndoto syoo* (I would wish to encourage each and every one who has not gone through education to join an adult education system because it is a system that leads someone to somewhere as pertains to building your future career in education) (L 11). “I challenge those who want to join adult education to run too fast because it is a very beneficial program which has improved the future of many” (L7).

## CONCLUSION

Results of the study show that, though interested with and willing to learn adult education, most learners are unwilling to pay for the program. This was attested by the 2.92 (58.40%) score by the respondents on the item if a learner were asked to pay

for adult education studies, he/she would gladly do so, an indication that the learners disagreed with the item. The implication is that since there has been very little commitment by both the Central and County Governments to fund adult education programs, with the only other guaranteed source of funding logically expected to come from the learners, then the program has serious challenges. Further, for the learners to be unwilling to pay for a program they are involved in as opposed to other learning programs may be an indicator that they either see it as someone's else responsibility, or they do not quite comprehend the benefits of the program and therefore not a priority or worthy spending on it.

The perception of adult education by the general public is somewhat negative. No one appears to be proud to be an adult education learner. There is very little if any encouragement out there for those who would want to join adult education programs. This was attested by the respondents score of 3.35(67.04%) to the item When an adult learner listens to what others say about adult education the adult learner felt encouraged to continue with the program. There is a marked sense of skepticism in regard to adult education. Adult education learners and possibly the public do not seem to have a lot of faith in the program. They do not see it as being sincere and well meaning for them. This is evidenced by the 58.02% score on the item; with adult education learning, a learner would face life challenges with confidence which was an indication that the learners were uncertain that programmes offered were well intended. By implication, those charged with the implementation of adult education program should make every effort to assure the learners that both the motive and goal of the adult education programs has at its very core the interest of the learner.

Adult education perception is such that few people if any are actually convinced about the benefits of education and will rarely vouch for the program. Consequently, there is very little commitment to the program since not many people sees it as the antidote to a good life. Adult education may be a good thing but few people are willing to take a bet on it as a key ingredient to a better life. The score of 3.44( 68.83%) on the item an adult education learner would recommend adult education to anyone who wants a better life, was an indication that the learners were uncertain on the programmes being offered. The uncertainty of the programs being offered would in effect mean that given an alternative a good number of adult education learners would be reluctant to join the programs. This then being the case, even after joining the program, chances of abandoning the learning at the slightest form of discouragement are very high. Curriculum implementers would thus need to be very careful with the adult learners since the slightest signal

of the program becoming a bother or interference would have adverse effects on the attendance and even the actual learning process of the program.

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