

AGEING AND MOTIVATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

The paper is on "Ageing and Motivation: Implication for Adults' Academic Achievement". It generally highlighted some ageing and motivation factors in relation to the academic achievement of adults, such as decline in sensory and motor capacities; physical and psychological changes and other health challenges which cause physical deterioration in the brain and in turn slow down the thinking process of the elderly people, as well as the effect of ageing and motivation among others. Based on the issues and concerns raised in the paper, it recommended that; there is the need for adult educators to make learning relatively easier for the adult learner, bearing in mind that a lot of physiological and psychological changes have occurred in them which have resulted in what might be recognized as a sort of slowing effect on learning, they should for example, ensure that they sit older adult learners in the front of the class, and write boldly on the chalk/marker board, since the eyes of most adult learners cannot accommodate very efficiently as they used to in their younger day, educators should ensure that all adult learning programmes are not only relevant to their needs, but also of interest to the adult learners in order to foster greater understanding in them, among others.

Keywords: *Ageing, Motivation, Adults and Academic achievement*

Introduction

Ageing has become a global phenomenon and indeed a critical policy issue receiving some recognition by governments of developing countries like Nigeria, where it is reflected in the government's vital document of economic and social development strategy (Ajomale, 2007). Globally, rapid increase in the number of older people is occurring in the developing and middle income countries (which are now experiencing rapid shifts from high mortality and high fertility to much reduced fertility and increased lifespan) and Nigeria is not an exception (Ajomale, 2007). While ageing population in developed countries evolved gradually as a result of an earlier declined infertility and improving living standards for the majority of the population over a relatively long period of time after the industrial revolution, it is occurring more rapidly because of rapid fertility decline and an increasing life expectancy (UN, 2010).

Ageing may be considered "as the survival of growing number of people who have completed the traditional adult role of making a living and child rearing". At this stage, there is substantial change in an individual's capacity to learn (Apt, 1977). There is growing appreciation of the fact that, everyone does not age in the same way or at the same rate. Many of the changes that occur from ageing result from a gradual loss. These losses often begin in early adulthood, but the ability of our organs to adjust and maintain health, the actual loss is not experienced until it is fairly extensive. Most organs seem to lose function at about one percent a year, beginning around age 30. Interestingly enough, majority of these changes are not seen until after age of 70 (Dubin, 2010). The biggest difference in the rate of ageing and organ efficiency lies in the presence of disease and /or the ability of the body to adapt to external stress.

Changes that occur with ageing fall into three categories, they are; physical, psychological and social. As changes begin to happen in one area of a person's life (e.g. physical), most likely the other two (i.e. psychological and social) will be affected as well, and this invariably exert effect on the academic achievement of adults in learning situation (Pelmutter, 1990). Motivation on the other hand, is the term that describes the external conditions or internal states that force the organism to act or react to his environment. To be motivated means to do something. Mnyandu (2001) cited in Coetzee (2011), define motivation in learning context as "the willingness to engage in meaningful learning activity". A person who feels no inspiration to act is viewed as a

person who is unmotivated, where as someone who is energized or activated towards an end is considered to be motivated. An emphasis was placed on the goal oriented component, by saying that motivation provides people with drive necessary for channeling and directing their energy or enthusiasm so that it will lead to the realization of self-imposed objectives. The academic achievement of learners is an essential indicator of academic success of learning institutions. Adult learners with higher levels of achievement at institutions are more likely to obtain good employment and salaries. In short, academic achievement is important because it promotes success later in life.

Although , adults academic achievement does not only concern with cognitive factors such as IQ and standardized test scores, there are many other variables that may have influence on learners ability to achieve academically, non-cognitive factors such as motivation, the lecturers, family circumstances, background, previous academic performances, study skills and many more can also serve as determinants of academic achievement. However, the effect of ageing on adults is not limited to physical and/or cognitive ability only; it also affects many aspects of their life including those aspects which are very essential for learning especially formal learning. For example, ageing affects adults motives as well as their approaches to learning, and these in turn influence adults' commitment and of course their general performances and achievement in educational activities.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ageing

Ageing according to Apt (1997) may be defined "as the survival of a growing number of people who have completed the traditional adult role of making a living and child rearing". Vatuk (1980) cited in Apt (1997) described ageing in biological term "as the increasing inability of a person's body to maintain itself and perform its operations as once did". Ageing therefore can best be understood when viewed "as a continuous process of progressive change in all structure and functions of the body: the impact of such changes on a person's quality of life is largely dependent on the social and cultural milieu" (Ageing International, 1995 cited in Apt, 1997).

Motivation

A study of basic motives which underlie human behavior is of paramount importance. Psychologists are interested in knowing why some people have high motivation. It boils down to the problem of motivation of learners in institutions of learning and workers in industry. A most comprehensive definition of motivation is offered by Ekeruo, Ikediashi, Ekwe, Nmawuo (1989) and Ukpong (2000) as quoted in Ezimah (2004). They define motivation as:

"Any condition which initiates, guide and maintains a response, it has to do with arousal which may be appetitive (conditions which initiates and maintain behavior in an attempt to achieve a goal e.g. food) or (aversive conditions which initiates and maintains responses in an attempt to avoid unpleasant or negative conditions e.g. fear). Motivation as a determinant of behavior refers to the factors which increase or reduce the vigor [sic] of an individual activity. It is the push behind behavior that directs action towards the achievement of certain goals. It refers to the internal conditions that arouse, sustain and direct behavior in response to situations and objects in the environment" (p.94).

Adult

An adult, according to Ezimah (2004) "is a mature and full grown citizen who is so recognized in the group to which he belongs and in the context in which his life find meaningful expression". This understanding of adult has a universal appeal combines biological and historical or chronological parameters. Houles (1972) cited in Ezimah (2004) sees an adult "as a person (man or woman) who has achieved full physical development and expects to have the right to participate as a responsible home maker, worker and member of the society. Okedara (1981) as cited in NMEC (2013), suggest that, an adult is simply "a person who has reached the age of maturity". Maturity here means a stage of ripeness or development. Ezimah (2004) also defined an adult by

social parameter “as a responsible and independent citizen capable of leading a useful life thereby contributing to the development of his community”.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is represented by the actual mark obtained by the participants in an examination. Success is typically defined in terms of performance, and grades represent the most obvious and universally accepted indicator of academic performance in educational contexts (Harackiewicz et al 1998 cited in Coetzee, 2011). Academic achievement indicates the numerical representation of a student's knowledge. It measures the student's adaptation to school work and to the educational system (Baadjies, 2008 in Coetzee, 2011). Howcroft (1991) cited in Coetzee (2011) describes academic achievement in terms of the actual mark or score obtained in an examination or a test.

Ageing and Adults' Academic Achievement

There is no doubt, one of the most complex variable in human is ageing. Ageing brings about physical changes in human being, and the changes results into body weakness, organs deterioration, and sometimes even physical impairment. Physical impairment sometimes causes psychological disorders, especially when they affect sensory organs. Such changes may also affect motor capacities and central information processing functions; which are associated with cognition. Some of the changes may be social and cultural, such as ones which occur in individual position in society, in beliefs, attitudes, personal qualities, behavior and the content as well as the organization of one's experience and change of environment. Ageing is a natural process that cannot be avoided, and the process will reach a stage that makes an adult incapacitated physically and mentally to perform just that which he has mastery over. Studies conducted by scholars like Baltes, Reese, and Lipsitt (1980), have indicated that, age brings about physiological changes and sometimes even impairment. The results of the impairment sometimes lead to psychological disorder to the affected adult. The most prominent of such changes is decline in sensory acuity such as vision and hearing.

Decline in vision: Many people measure age through visual function, and it is generally believed that vision reduces with age, as majority of older people or elderly do not see clearly. As people grow older, there is increasing density of eye tissue, loss of water, accumulation of amount of inert materials in the eye tissue as well as lost of fat and elasticity. Severe visual impairment has both cognitive and psychological effect on adult. It prevents learning and hinders adults' academic achievement in schools. Whitebourne (1985) shed more light on the issue of ageing and visual decline. According to him, “structural changes in pupil and the lens have a decided effect on the ability to receive visual stimulation with age, the pupil, which is the small opening in the centre iris that allows light to enter eyes, get smaller”. Spence (1989) also added that “by the age of 70, the amount of light that reaches the receptors at the back of the eye may be reduced by at least two-third 2/3, so that adult need a good deal of more light in order to see clearly as they once did”.

Decline in hearing: as people grow older, they tend to slow up their reaction to sound. The decline is not only on the ability to hear sound, but in translating the message of the sound and in responding to it. In older person there is considerable lost at highest frequency of about 125 cycles per second or less. People receive information from the environment through the ears. Similarly, Perlmutter (1990) mentioned that:

Sound waves caused by pressure changes in the atmosphere, travel through the ear and strike of the ear drum, causing it to vibrate and transmitted an amplified sound wave, through the bone of the middle ear, and they deep into the inner ear where the sound receptors called the hear cells, produce a signal that passes along the auditory nerves to the brain.

Many other scholars such as Baltes and Willis (1977), have also opined that, ageing brings about decline in the ability to receive and interpret sounds. The psychological effect of the impaired hearing is more significant than the physical ones. This is because it has influence upon adult confidence and increases his feelings that he cannot cope with new learning and this invariably affect his academic achievement.

Ageing brings about cognitive changes, for example, there are observed changes on psycho-motor speed, memory and attention which are essential parts of cognition. There is also an increase in the time between

sensory input and motor output, and generally in the time required for processing. Decreased processing speed has influence on memory, and that affects cognitive performance and in turn negates adults' academic achievement.

Motivation and Adults' Academic Achievement

The relationship that exists between motivation and academic achievement is complex. Spinach and Steinmayr in Coetzee (2011) maintained that perhaps more than anything else, to be well equipped for lifelong learning, individuals need a high, sustainable motivation to learn. There exists a general consensus, that a distinct learning motivation promotes academic performance in all students. Therefore, it seems that motivation is an important contributor to variance in academic achievement. It is imperative that educators within the classroom setting have a good understanding of the motivational aspects of the learners. Adults who are motivated are enthusiastic to learn, and they are willing to get involved in the activities required to learn. In contrast, adults who are unmotivated to learn are not as systemic in their learning effort. They may be inattentive during lesson, and not monitor their level of understanding, or ask for help when they do not understand what is being taught and this also have effect to adults' academic achievement (Volet & Jarvel in Coetzee, 2011).

Implications of Ageing and Motivation on Adults' Academic Achievement

It is common saying that one is never too old to learn. On the other hand, one also hears that old dogs never learn new tricks. From the physiological and psychological changes witnessed by individuals, the following facts can be deduced. Most cells, tissues and organs as well as functional systems in the body deteriorate with age. The brain and the nervous system degenerate and become less efficient with age; also there is evidence that intelligence decrease, but older individuals or the adult learner should not find it difficult to understand and even participate in selected activities which are moderately physical in nature (Allbrook, Han, & Hellmuth, 1971). The adult learner needs to draw from his or her wealth of experience in life to be able to participate usefully and actively in activities requiring higher levels of brain work and muscle work. The slow reaction time in the adult due to his degenerating neuromuscular system, sensory acuity and his diminishing muscular strength, no doubt force him to be a bit more careful and of course, slow to react to academic issues. It may take a relatively longer time for the adult learner to stand up in the class, adjust or put on his glasses and it may take him a little more time to marshal his points in his brain before attempting to answer a question or make his point. This seemingly slowness on the part of adult learner should be understood to be as a result of the physiological and psychological changes discussed earlier, and thus implicates adults' academic achievement in schools.

It is important to note that, a distinct learning motivation promotes academic performance in all categories of learners. Interestingly, adults who are motivated are enthusiastic to learn and they are willing to get involved in all the activities required to learn. However, adults who are unmotivated to learn because of one reason or the other are not systematic in learning efforts, and achieved less academically. They may be inattentive during the lesson, and not monitor their level of understanding or ask for clarification when they do not understand what is being taught to them. These undoubtedly, have a direct implication to adults' academic achievement in learning.

Conclusion

The paper discussed a number of factors associated with ageing, which affect adults' intelligence, and learning. The factors include: decline in sensory and motor capacities; physical and other health diseases which cause physical deterioration in the brain and in turn slow down the thinking process of the elderly people. It also highlighted the effect of motivation on adults' academic achievement. Consequently upon the above challenges and or effect of ageing and motivation on adult learning, the paper made some recommendations on how to enhance adults' academic achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the key issues and challenges emerging from the above discussion, the paper recommended that:

1. There is the need for adult educators to make learning relatively easier for the adult learners bearing in mind that a lot of physiological and psychological changes have occurred in them which have resulted in

what might be recognized as a sort of slowing effect on learning. Adult educators should, for example, ensure that they sit older adult learners in the front of the class and write boldly on the chalk/marker board, since the eyes of most adult learners cannot accommodate very efficiently as they used to in their younger days.

2. Educators should ensure that all adult learning programmes are not only relevant to their needs, but also of interest to the adults as this will foster great understanding in them. Therefore, activities and learning tasks should be designed putting into consideration the adult learners' felt need.
3. Adult educators should aim at effective teaching by taping from adult learners' wealth of experience and allow them to do most of the talking in the class. That is to say that, they should make sure that at the end of every learning encounter, the adults feel a sense of achievement and fulfillment.

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