

A decorative border at the top of the cover features a repeating pattern of orange map outlines of Africa and blue spiral motifs on a dark blue background with wavy lines.

**AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON ADULT LEARNING**

# The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa

A decorative border at the bottom of the cover features a repeating pattern of orange map outlines of Africa and blue spiral motifs on a dark blue background with wavy lines.

**Thomas Fasokun • Anne Katahoire • Akpovire Oduaran**

African Perspectives on Adult Learning

The Psychology of  
Adult Learning in Africa

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African Perspectives on Adult Learning

# The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa

Thomas Fasokun • Anne Katahoire • Akpovire Oduaran



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## ADINKRA SYMBOLS

For the icons in this series, we have chosen Adinkra symbols that are associated with learning and community in some way. These striking and expressive symbols are used by the people of Ghana and the Ivory

Coast in textile and jewellery design, architecture and wood carvings, and represent one of a number of writing systems found in Africa.

| Symbol  | Meaning       | Interpretation              |  |
|---|---------------|-----------------------------|--|
|  | bese saka     | sack of cola nuts           | abundance, plenty, affluence, power, unity, togetherness |
|  | dame-dame     | name of a board game        | intelligence, ingenuity, strategy, craftiness            |
|  | dwennimmen    | ram's horns                 | humility, strength, wisdom, learning                     |
|  | mate masie    | what I hear I keep          | wisdom, knowledge, learning, prudence, understanding     |
|  | nkonsonkonson | chain link                  | unity, human relations, cooperation                      |
|  | nsaa          | hand-woven fabric           | excellence, authenticity, genuineness                    |
|  | sesa woruban  | morning star inside a wheel | life transformation                                      |

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# The authors

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Thomas Fasokun is Professor of Adult Education, Department of Continuing Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He obtained a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and was later granted a Commonwealth Fellowship Award that was utilised at the Department of Adult and Higher Education, University of Manchester, United Kingdom, between 1979 and 1980. He was a Visiting Professor and Scholar at the Department of Adult Education, University of Botswana, Gaborone between 2001 and 2002. He was a Senior Consultant to the UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg, Germany in 2003. He is an active researcher who has published in national and international journals. His special areas of interest and expertise include administration of adult education agencies, literacy, continuing education and psychology of adult education. He wrote Chapters 2, 7, 8 and 9.

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## **Akpovire Oduaran**

Akpovire Oduaran took his first degree in Education from the University of Benin, Benin City, the Master's degree in Adult Education from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and the doctoral degree in Adult Education from the University of Ibadan. He started his university teaching career in 1981, and was promoted to Professor of Adult Education at the University

of Benin in 1993. He has been teaching the Psychology of Adult Learning for almost 21 years. He has also published nationally and internationally in this area. He has served on the editorial boards of many journals and continues to serve in the capacity of reviewer to several journals. He is currently Professor and Head of the Department of Adult Education at the University of Botswana. He wrote Chapters 3, 4 and 6.

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# Foreword

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The remedial strategy of borrowing textbooks conceived in contexts of and for students from developed countries with well-established traditions of adult education is no longer viable. The present textbook series, *African Perspectives on Adult Learning*, represents the outcome of a venture initiated three decades ago by the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (known by its German acronym as IIZ/DVV). Bringing together non-governmental and civil society organisations, the IIZ/DVV turned this venture into a creative partnership with academia, aimed at building the training and research capacities of African universities that serve the adult education community. It has become a means of fruitful cooperation with several leading African universities, all partners being concerned with providing textbooks for university departments and institutes of adult education relevant for the African context.

The abiding interest as well as growing financial support and substantive input of the IIZ/DVV has provided a key ingredient for the success of this project, along with establishing its potential for expansion. The

University of Botswana has been another major contributor right from the beginning. Its Department of Adult Education has given the academic and institutional support needed for such an ambitious undertaking, graciously shouldering the Editorial Secretariat of the Series. The third pillar of this endeavour – and a decisive one – was furnished by the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), an international centre of excellence in adult learning enjoying the full backing of UNESCO and boasting extensive publishing experience in the field. UIE brought in vital international and inter-regional expertise coupled with the vision of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V). The Institute has also mobilised sizeable financial resources of its own, led the Series Editorial Board and assumed responsibility for managing often difficult matters entailed by such a complex venture.

The present series recommends itself through many distinctive features that reflect the unique manner in which it has come about. One of these has to do with the professional guidance and technical advice provided by the competent, sensitive

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and broadly representative Series Editorial Board, whose members have displayed the capability and wisdom required to steer a project of this kind. Their intellectual resources, experience and know-how made it possible for the series to take on its actual form. We wish to express our deep gratitude to all of the members of the Editorial Board for their profound involvement, the optimism they brought to the series and their dedication to its successful completion.

The co-publisher with UIE is Pearson Education South Africa, which has proven to be a partner highly committed to the goals of the project, one prepared to engage in a collaboration of a different order and take risks in exploring new paths in publishing. As a full member of the Series Editorial Board, the co-publisher has offered invaluable assistance, especially in the writers' workshops and in coaching the authors throughout the composition of the chapters. The creative way in which Pearson Education South Africa has integrated the project into its work and its firm dedication to fostering editorial and authorial capacities in Africa deserve special mention. Without this sense of mission, the series would not have seen the light of day.

The authors of the works in this series have themselves been selected on the basis of proposals they submitted. We took pleasure in working with all of these devoted partners, and the project greatly benefited from their combination of individual conviction with teamwork and collective analysis and decision-making. We wish to thank all the authors for their hard work as well as their adherence to a demanding schedule. Their professionalism and competence lie at the heart of this series and were instrumental in its realisation.

Finally, and most importantly, Professor Frank Youngman, the Series Managing

Editor, and his Assistant, Dr Gabo Ntseane, of the University of Botswana, who constitute the Editorial Board Secretariat, deserve special recognition. Frank Youngman initiated the idea for this series in 2001, and the Secretariat has been in the front line at all times, carefully guiding the process, monitoring progress and ensuring the quality of the work at all stages without compromise.

This series addresses the critical lack of textbooks for adult education and the alienating nature of those currently in use in Africa. We have sought to develop a new set of foundational works conceived and developed from an African perspective and written mainly by African scholars. An African perspective, however, is not mere Afrocentrism, although some degree of the latter is required to move beyond the reigning Eurocentrism and general Western domination of all scientific domains and adult education in particular. Injecting a dose of Afrocentrism without prejudice to universal values, elementary scientific knowledge, and other cultures, and without complacency in the face of retrograde and discriminatory values and traditions has proven to be a significant challenge. In essence, the African perspective has revealed itself to be both a renaissance of the continent and its manifold traditions as well as the birth of its own new vision and prospects in the context of a fast-growing, ever-changing and increasingly globalised world.

For the initial volumes in this evolving series, the following five titles were selected: *The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa*; *Foundations of Adult Education in Africa*; *Research Methods for Adult Educators in Africa*; *Developing Programmes for Adult Learners in Africa*; and *The Social Context of Adult Learning in Africa*. We will certainly judge the success of these volumes by taking into account the reactions and responses of their users, and we will make any necessary

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adjustments while striving to widen the scope of the venture to cover other linguistic areas of Africa and to explore new thematic fields for deepening the African perspective. There is no question but that IIZ/DVV and UIE are committed to lending their intellectual and financial support to this endeavour. Furthermore, the University of Botswana is committed to providing the academic and administrative base for the series, while Pearson Education South

Africa foresees the ongoing viability of the project. In opening up new approaches to adult education and learning in Africa, the series meets the needs of governments, non-governmental and civil society organisations, and academia in an area of great importance to UNESCO and the community of nations.

**Adama Ouane**

*Director, UNESCO Institute for Education*

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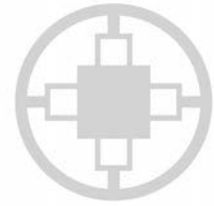
# Preface

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During the 1990s it became clear that adult learning must be an important part of all strategies for development. In a series of world conferences between 1990 and 1996, various agencies of the United Nations addressed the issues of education for all, the environment, human rights, population, social development, the status of women, human settlements and food security. Each of these conferences recognised that progress would be dependent on adult members of society transforming their life circumstances and gaining greater control over their lives. To achieve this change, adults require new knowledge, skills and attitudes. This significant insight was highlighted by the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), that was organised by UNESCO in 1997. CONFINTEA V affirmed that adult learning is potentially a powerful force for promoting people-centred development. It concluded that the education of adults is key to sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

The concept of adult learning articulated by CONFINTEA V is a broad one, embracing formal, non-formal and

informal learning processes in all areas of people's lives. This concept is relevant in African contexts, where the learning of adults takes place across their various social roles, in the home, the community, and the workplace, as well as in formal educational and training institutions. Opportunities for learning are availed by a wide variety of providers. The state has a central responsibility to promote and facilitate adult learning. In some countries this responsibility has been diminished by the impact of structural adjustment policies. But in others the state continues to play an important role, with a wide range of government departments organising programmes that involve adult learning. These programmes are multi-sectoral, including activities as varied as agricultural extension, health education, business training, consumer education, community development and wildlife education. Also, the organisations of civil society are significant sites of adult learning, providing their own educational programmes as well as a context in which adults acquire new competencies through their active involvement in running such organisations. For example, in many



dame-dame

countries the trade union movement is an important source of adult learning. Increasingly, the private sector is a major provider of learning opportunities for adults. Its role has two dimensions. First, companies are expanding their training and development for employees as they respond to the challenges of technological change and global competition. Second, there is a rapid growth of commercial educational institutions, such as colleges, academies, and institutes, which are responding to market demands for learning opportunities, especially in work-related fields such as information technology, tourism and business. These institutions are to be found in all the urban centres of Africa. Public and private universities also cater for many adult learners, especially through their part-time, evening, and distance learning programmes. The education and training of adults in Africa therefore takes place in many settings, embraces many content areas and modes of learning and is provided by many different types of organisations. It is a complex and diverse field of activity.

The successful implementation of adult learning policies and programmes depends in large measure on the availability of

knowledgeable, skilful, and socially committed educators of adults. Because they are key agents in the realisation of adult learning, the quality of their initial and continuing training is crucial. The educators of adults in Africa work in a wide variety of organisational and social contexts, from government bureaucracies to community-based projects. They play multiple roles as programme planners, organisers, teachers, researchers and counsellors. While this diversity of situations and roles reflects the reality of adult learning settings, it presents significant conceptual and practical problems in terms of the training of those who educate adults. One example is that not all those who work with adults in learning activities identify themselves as adult educators. Rather, they identify themselves as health promoters, business advisors or community workers. Nevertheless, whatever the nomenclature of a particular cadre, it is important that they are proficient in their work of helping adults to learn. The development of their expertise includes a body of knowledge, skills and values that is centred on adult education as a field of study and practice.

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The professional training of educators of adults in Africa takes place in institutions of tertiary education across the continent, primarily at diploma and degree level. For example, in every country there are colleges of agriculture that prepare agricultural extension workers, health institutes that train community-based health workers and technical colleges that train vocational teachers. In particular, many African universities have departments or institutes of adult education that train personnel for fields as varied as adult basic education, prison education and human resource development. Although the areas of content specialisation vary from agronomy to literacy, the curricula of the training programmes have many common topics, such as the psychology of adult learning, programme development, communication skills, and research methods. This is because all educators of adults require a common body of knowledge (such as awareness of the historical and philosophical dimensions of adult education practice) and a number of generic skills (for example, in teaching and research). A key learning resource in these training programmes is the prescribed course textbook. However, those who teach these programmes often have difficulty in finding textbooks that are relevant to the work situations and social contexts of their students.

A review of English-language curriculum materials used in the professional training of adult educators in Africa reveals that the majority of textbooks for the courses are published in the United States or the United Kingdom. The content of these books seldom reflects issues of African development or the realities of adult education policy and practice in Africa. The social and organisational contexts, theoretical underpinnings and practical examples are largely derived from the experience of adult education in the advanced industrialised

countries of the West. Hence the textbooks currently being used in the training of adult educators in Africa are at best lacking in relevance and at worst actively promoting inappropriate models of adult education. Furthermore, because of the cost of these books, student access is often limited.

The post-colonial history of adult education as a field of study in African tertiary education institutions shows that very few indigenous textbooks have been produced over the years. Useful individual books, such as the *Adult Education Handbook* (edited by the Institute of Adult Education, Dar-es-Salaam, 1973) and *A Handbook of Adult Education for West Africa* (edited by Lalage Bown and Sunday Hezekiah Olu Tomori, London, 1979), have been one-off publications that were not followed up and were not widely available. When an institution in one country has consistently produced relevant materials, such as the Department of Adult Education at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, they have been difficult to obtain in other countries. The problem of a lack of appropriate and accessible textbooks for use in the training of African adult educators remains.

There is therefore a need to develop relevant, affordable and available textbooks that reflect African social realities, theoretical and cultural perspectives, policies and modes of practice. This is the need that the series *African Perspectives on Adult Learning* seeks to meet. The books in the series put the African context at the centre of their discussions of adult education topics. They take into account the impact of colonialism, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism and globalisation. They show the importance to adult learning of African philosophies, indigenous knowledge systems, traditions and cultures. They demonstrate that the realities of class, gender, race and ethnicity in African societies shape the nature of adult learning activities. They pro-

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vide examples of the policies and practices that characterise adult education across the continent. While referring to international discourses on adult learning, their presentation of issues in adult education is Africa-centred. The series therefore contributes to the endogenisation of education within the perspective of the African Renaissance.

The books in the African Perspectives on Adult Learning series cover important subjects for the training of educators of adults in Africa. They are intended to be course textbooks that will be used in face-to-face teaching environments in a way that encourages interactive learning. Each book is designed to provide an overview of the subject, to introduce appropriate theory and to provide discussion and examples rooted in professional practice, policies and research from African contexts. Each chapter features clear learning objectives, practical examples, activities for the reader to do individually or in a group, a summary and key points, further questions and suggested readings. It is hoped that the use of the books will promote the development of relevant curricula and interactive teaching approaches in adult education training programmes across the continent.

Each book in the series provides an African perspective on an important area of knowledge and practice for the educator of adults. In *The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa*, Thomas Fasokun, Anna Katahoire and Akpovire Oduaran consider the subject of psychology and its significance for the teaching and learning of adults in African contexts. The book is based on the idea that adult learners are different from children and therefore the psychology of adults must be understood if adult educators are going to be effective facilitators of learning. Hence it emphasises that human development is a lifelong process, with physiological, psychological and social

changes taking place throughout adulthood. The book also points out that much of what we know about the psychology of adult learning is based on research and experiences in the Western world. It argues that there is a need for psychology to take into account the cultural factors that influence the characteristics, behaviour and thinking of adult learners. For example, Western approaches to psychology are strongly based on assumptions of individual autonomy, whereas traditional African cultures have a collective emphasis, seeing the self in terms of interdependent relationships within a community. The authors therefore analyse issues of adult learning in the context of African socio-cultural realities, such as indigenous knowledge systems. The book presents psychology as an applied discipline that can help adult educators to be more effective in their work.

The aims of the book are:

- to provide knowledge about the psychology of adults within African contexts;
- to show how the psychology of adult learning can be applied to the practice of adult education, particularly in motivating, teaching and counselling adults.

Chapter 1 introduces psychology as a field of study that focuses on behaviour and mental processes. It describes the goals of psychology and the methods used in psychological studies. It then highlights the importance for adult education of applying psychology to the analysis of the perceptions, cognitive functioning and learning styles of adults. It emphasises the need for African perspectives on adult learning. Chapter 2 examines various concepts of adulthood and how they relate to the characteristics of adult learners. It also considers the diversity and complexities of adult learning in African contexts. Chapter 3



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surveys the different patterns of adult learning and considers some guiding principles of adult learning in Africa, with a special emphasis on problem-based learning. Chapter 4 identifies and explains theories of adult learning, highlighting the significance of indigenous knowledge systems. It discusses the implications of the theories for adult teaching and learning. Chapter 5 explores how life span development is perceived in African societies. It considers the major stages and cycles of life span development from young adulthood to old age and looks at their implications for adult educators. Chapter 6 identifies and discusses some of the major features of motivation and how these influence the participation of adults in learning programmes. It suggests a number of strategies for encouraging participation. Chapter 7 discusses some of the models used to describe the various ways in which adults prefer to learn. It looks at the implication of these learning styles for the teaching and learning process. Chapters 8 and 9 apply the

insights of adult psychology to the practical activity of facilitating adult learning by presenting communication strategies, teaching principles and instructional techniques. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses the concepts of guidance and counselling, and explains why adults in Africa need guidance and counselling services to take better advantage of learning opportunities.

Helping adults learn is at the centre of all adult education activity. The psychology of adult learning is therefore an essential component of the knowledge base of adult education. The ability to apply psychology to facilitate the learning of adults and to provide them with guidance and counselling is a key skill for educators of adults. *The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa* provides an excellent resource for developing this relevant knowledge and skill.

**Frank Youngman**  
*Department of Adult Education*  
*University of Botswana*

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**Thomas Fasokun**  
**Anne Katahoire**  
**Akpovire Oduaran**

African Perspectives on Adult Learning

The Psychology of  
Adult Learning in Africa

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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### OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces the reader to psychology as a field of study and to the psychology of adult learning. Most textbooks that discuss the psychology of adult learning assume that readers already have some basic knowledge of psychology; this, however, is not always the case. This chapter therefore attempts to describe and explain what psychology is, what its goals are, as well as the methods that are used to achieve these goals. It also looks at why adult learning is important and finally why there is a need for an African perspective on the psychology of adult learning.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Define what psychology is.
- 2 List the goals of psychology.
- 3 Outline the methods used in psychology and their limitations.
- 4 Explain why there is a growing interest in adult learning psychology.
- 5 Explain why there is a need for an African perspective on adult learning psychology.



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## KEY TERMS

- behaviour** Any activity that can be observed, recorded and measured. This includes physiological and bodily changes, movement, as well as changes in blood pressure or brain waves.
- case study** A detailed and in-depth examination of a particular problem or situation.
- development** In psychology, it is simply defined as a pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues throughout life.
- experiment** A process in which an object of study is treated in a specific way and then the effects of the treatment are observed.
- hypothesis** A proposition or assertion about the possible relationship between variables.
- naturalistic observation** The careful and accurate observation of an event as it occurs in its own element.
- population** A group or category of human beings with one or more characteristics in common.
- sample** A small proportion of the population selected for research purposes.

- scientific method** A set of systematic procedures used in identifying a problem, gathering data, drawing conclusions and testing the accuracy of these conclusions.
- survey** A method used to study large groups.

## BEFORE YOU START

**Write down what immediately comes to mind when someone mentions psychology.**

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## WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

Psychology tries to answer questions about how and why people think, act and feel the way they do. Psychologists study a variety of human behaviours, experiences and interactions and suggest ways to improve the quality of human life. For example, as will be discussed later in this book, psychology suggests ways of improving human learning and memory, fostering human development and interaction and helping individuals cope with certain types of problems. Although there is no generally accepted definition of psychology, most psychologists would agree that psychology is a science and that it studies behaviour and mental processes. A useful definition of psychology is that 'it is the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes' (Crider et al., 1983: 4). This definition contains three key concepts: *scientific*, *behaviour* and *mental processes*.

The meaning of these concepts within psychology can be analysed as follows:

*Scientific* – Psychology is regarded as a science. By definition 'science is a body of systematised knowledge obtained by observation and verified by experimentation' (Mwamwenda, 1989: 2). This means that psychology is based on information or data collected through a set of systematic procedures. These procedures verify or validate the data collected. Psychology obtains its information by means of careful observation and measurement of behaviour and not through casual observations and conclusions. This information is then formulated into 'theories or a systematised body of knowledge, which is used for both descriptive and predictive purposes' (Mwamwenda, 1989: 2).

*Behaviour* – As used in psychology, this is any activity that can be observed, recorded and measured. This includes the behaviour of human beings or animals, that is, their movements in space and physiolog-

ical or bodily changes, for example, changes in blood pressure or pulse rate.

*Mental processes* – These include thoughts, memories, emotions, motivations, dreams, perceptions and beliefs. The study of these processes presents a special problem in that they cannot be directly observed, recorded or measured. For this reason, some of the earlier psychologists excluded mental processes from the study of psychology. Psychologists have, however, developed methods for studying these processes. Most contemporary psychologists feel that mental processes can be studied by observing changes in behaviour in specific situations and then inferring that a change has also occurred in a mental process. For example, stress can be inferred by measuring changes in blood pressure and perspiration (Crider et al., 1983).



## ACTIVITY

- 1 In our interactions in daily life we often make observations and come to conclusions about how people think and behave. These conclusions are sometimes based on what we have seen, heard or experienced through our interaction with these people. Most of the time these observations are, however, not scientific. Write down four reasons why this is the case.
- 2 In small groups, list other forms of behaviour that, according to you, can be observed, recorded and measured.

## THE GOALS OF PSYCHOLOGY

As previously mentioned, psychologists ask and try to answer questions about how and why people think, act and feel the way they do. In order to be able to answer these

questions, psychologists attempt to describe, explain, predict and modify behaviour and mental processes with the aim of improving the quality of human life.

The first goal of psychology is to describe. To be able to describe, psychologists observe and measure behaviour and mental processes. For example, if you want to study the participation of adult learners in a class, you could begin by just watching the learners and recording their interaction with the adult educator and between learners. You would then observe and record how often they ask questions, give answers and make contributions. You could also time the interaction between the adult educator and the learners and between learners. You would then be in a position to describe the behaviour of the adult learners in that particular class. You can also describe and measure personality and intelligence with the help of specially designed tests. In each case, the primary purpose is to gather data in an objective and accurate manner.

Having gathered data through observation and measurement of behaviour and mental processes, the second goal is to explain what this data means. Psychologists will usually attempt to formulate a theory, that is, a coherent group of assumptions that can explain the data. The formulation of theories in psychology is especially challenging because many factors can influence behaviour and mental processes. For example, learners who are usually very active in class may all of a sudden withdraw from active participation. This could be because they are upset or otherwise preoccupied, or they may be making a deliberate effort to remain silent, or may be annoyed with the adult educator. Any of these reasons could explain the learners' behaviour. Psychologists offer many different theories to explain different types of behaviour and mental processes.

A theory is usually regarded as accurate and useful if it is able to predict behaviour and mental processes. Given a particular set of circumstances, a theory should allow you to meet the third goal of psychology, that is, predicting what will happen in particular circumstances. For example, if all things are equal, adult learners in a literacy class who have been exposed to formal schooling are more likely to perform better in their literacy tasks than those with no previous exposure to schooling. The assumption is that learners who have attended school previously would most likely have been exposed to reading and writing skills, unlike learners who have never attended school before.

The fourth goal of psychology is the application of knowledge to promote human welfare. Knowledge gained through psychological research touches almost every aspect of human life, ranging from the way children are raised and taught to handling social problems and to tests that are taken to gain admission to higher education institutions.

## **ACTIVITY**

**In small groups, discuss four areas of human life where, in your opinion, psychology has made an important contribution.**

## **METHODS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES**

In psychology, topics ranging from the brain and learning to interpersonal attraction and psychological disorders are studied. Different methods are used to study these wide-ranging topics. In this section some of the methods used in psychological studies

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are discussed briefly. In psychology a system of procedures is used to identify a problem, gather data, draw conclusions and test the accuracy of the conclusions. Although the methods of psychology that will be discussed in this section have their own unique procedures, they all have the following essential aspects in common, namely identifying the problem, collecting data and reporting findings.

The methods discussed in this section include naturalistic observation, case studies, surveys and experimentation. These methods are useful in gathering data and in describing, explaining, predicting and modifying behaviour and mental processes.

### **Naturalistic observation**

Naturalistic observation refers to the careful and accurate observation of an event as it occurs in its own element. Naturalistic observation has two general characteristics. The first is that all subjects are observed in their natural environments. For example, to understand the challenges faced by adult learners in a particular learning setting, the learners would have to be observed in that specific setting. The second characteristic is that the observer should not attempt to interfere with the natural behaviour of the subjects. For example, if you want to study power relations between an adult educator and adult learners in a learning setting, you would have to quietly station yourself in a position where you can observe the learning session, but where the learners and the adult educator are not aware of your presence. The best type of naturalistic observation is when those being observed are not aware of it. To be able to draw reliable conclusions, you would also have to consider how often you need to observe them and for what period of time.

Naturalistic observation has some disadvantages. These include the very limited

control over what happens in the natural environment and the fact that only behaviour that happens to take place during observation can be studied. Secondly, in a natural setting, it is more difficult to see the causal relationship among specific variables than in a laboratory where variables can be isolated and controlled. For example, during the course of your observation of a learning session you may notice that most female learners do not ask questions or answer them. While you may be able to conclude, after making several observations, that female participation is somewhat limited in that particular learning setting, you will most likely not be able to draw conclusions as to why this is so. As a result of these limitations, naturalistic observation is often combined with other methods, such as interviews. In the example of the female participants, the observations in the class setting could be combined with follow-up interviews with the educator and learners. These follow-up interviews would be able to clarify the earlier observations made in the learning setting and explain why female participation was somewhat limited in the observed learning setting.

### **Case studies**

A case study involves a detailed and in-depth examination of a particular problem or situation. Lessons learned from this in-depth examination of a particular problem can be applied to similar problems. In psychology, case studies are used in at least three ways. Firstly, case studies are used as an essential part of understanding and helping people with psychological problems. For example, if adult educators are to help adult learners who are anxious about their studies and depressed about their grades, they would need to know what kind of people they are dealing with and the kind of difficulties they are experiencing, as well



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as their previous performance. In addition, they would need to know how these problems developed. They can then compose a case study describing the group's previous performance, how the difficulties arose, how they are coping with these difficulties and what can be done to help them.

Secondly, case studies can also be used to facilitate adult learning as a means of illustrating ideas and relationships. For example, a health educator may want to teach parents about the importance of taking immediate action in case a young child develops fever. The educator could therefore develop a case study about a mother whose child develops fever and who does not take immediate action. In the case study the educator should highlight the consequences of delayed action for the child and for the family as a whole. This case study could form the basis for further discussions on the subject and learners can draw their own conclusions from the case study.

Thirdly, case studies are also important research tools. In research, case studies can be used to suggest hypotheses or propositions about cause and effect relationships. As Crider et al. point out, 'case studies pose questions but they do not answer them and they can generate hypotheses but do not confirm them. In order to test hypotheses, other research methods have to be used' (Crider et al., 1983: 8–9).

## Surveys

While most psychological studies focus on individuals, psychologists sometimes find it useful to study larger groups. In such cases the survey method is used as a way of measuring attitudes and behaviour patterns of a group of people. In conducting surveys, the population or group of subjects to be studied are first identified. A *population* in this context is a group or category of human beings with one or more charac-

teristics in common. Some of the common characteristics used to define a population are age, sex, educational level and geographical location. Ideally, psychologists may wish to collect information from the whole population, but many times, due to limited resources, it is not possible to study the whole population. They could then use statistical methods to pick or select a random but representative sample of that population. A *sample* in this case is a smaller portion of the population selected for research purposes. If carefully selected, the results of the sample should give an accurate picture of the whole population.

Surveys have two important limitations. One is that the survey results can be applied only to the population of persons from whom the sample was drawn. Secondly, surveys depend on verbal reports of attitudes and behaviour of subjects. Examples of such surveys are those conducted to determine people's knowledge, attitudes and practices with regard to HIV/AIDS. It is difficult to determine whether people give completely honest answers to such surveys. One way to deal with this problem is to ask each question in a survey in two or three different ways. The consistency with which people respond is one indication of their honesty.

Data from surveys can sometimes also be analysed to determine the relationships among the variables. For example, an adult educator who studies literacy may want to know whether there is a relationship between literacy levels and the number of children a person has. To see if the two variables are associated or related in some way, the educator can use a statistical technique known as *correlation*. Correlation studies supply important information about the relationship between two variables in the real world. However, remember that two related variables do not mean that one causes the other. For more information on surveys as a research method, refer to

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*Research Methods for Adult Educators in Africa* by Chilisa and Preece (2005) in this series.

## Experimentation

In psychology, experiments are performed on animals and humans. One essential element of experimentation is that it allows the identification of cause and effect. An experiment is a process in which an object of study is treated in a specific way and the effect of the treatment is then observed. The two essential elements are treatment and observation of the effects of the treatment. For example, adult educators can decide to award certificates to one group of adult learners once they have successfully completed the first phase of their literacy classes and no certificates to the second group who have attended similar classes and successfully completed a similar phase. They could then observe the reactions of the two groups. Many of the learning principles used in classrooms today are the result of experiments carried out by psychologists such as Ivan Pavlov, B. F. Skinner and E. L. Thorndike, among others. Their experiments are widely documented in most psychology textbooks.

Experiments, like other methods used in psychology, also have limitations. They are often criticised because they commonly assume a fixed definition of the situation or context. In other words, they do not take cultural and contextual variations into account. Tennant (1988) suggests that psychological experiments that adopt the methods of natural science are characterised by what Egan calls *phenomena insensitivity*. Egan's phenomena insensitivity implies that while the methods used are scientific, they may distort and narrow down the phenomenon being investigated so

much that the results can hardly be applied directly outside the experimental context or the theoretical concerns of the experiment.

Tennant further observes that there are a number of factors that limit the direct practical application of such knowledge. He argues, for example, that there is the problem of operationally defining psychological concepts such as *panic*, *obedience*, *conformity* and *aggression* so that they can be measured in an experiment. He also argues that psychological experiments are conducted under controlled conditions. The experimenter achieves control either directly through laboratory experiments or indirectly through sampling techniques. A commonly perceived problem with applying this knowledge is that in everyday life all other things are rarely, if ever, equal. Moreover, in everyday life the extent of control is somewhat less than in a psychological experiment (Tennant 1988: 156).

Findings from psychological studies and research nevertheless provide adult educators with clues to understanding adult learners and for improving the teaching and learning processes in adult education. Thomas (1981: 92) observes that

*they suggest ways in which the adult differs from the young learner and propose answers to such questions as: Can adults learn? To what extent do adults retain learning ability throughout their life span? What motivating factors lead an adult to undertake a learning activity? And what factors make him or her continue to exert effort to learn?*

Psychological research on adult learning provides a basis of rules and principles that can be applied in practical learning situations involving adults.

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## Cultural limitations of psychological methods

At present, accepted methods in psychology do not include ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews that would enable psychologists to identify either the precise cultural processes behind observed behavioural differences or the meaning of such differences in the lives and value systems of the subjects. Greenfield (1994: XIII-XIV) maintains that

*most psychologists are not trained in cultural analysis, so it is difficult for them to explore cultural factors in socialisation and development. At the same time it can be difficult for developmental and educational psychologists to relate to the work of anthropologists and sociologists because the methods and definitions of data are so different in these fields.*

Cultural psychology, however, has begun to deal with some of these shortcomings by attempting to transform questions concerning cultural influences into questions about psychological processes. This is one of the reasons why it is important to develop African perspectives on the psychology of adult learning.

There is also a growing acknowledgement in psychological research, especially in the field of developmental psychology, that psychologists who study people from cultures other than their own often do so from their own cultural perspective. This often goes unacknowledged. As an insider in one culture, it is often difficult to understand fully the meanings and motives behind group behaviour in other cultures. So the tendency has been to use one's own culture to interpret observed behaviour in another culture. The main problem with this approach is that the observed behaviour

may be misinterpreted or devalued by outsiders who look at the behaviour from their own cultural values. As a result, this calls for the development of more culturally sensitive methods in psychology.

## ACTIVITY

Make a list, in writing, of the difficulties of using each of the methods of psychological research in your community.

## THE NEED FOR ADULT LEARNING

Embedded in the notion of adult education is the belief that adult learners are different from children and that there should be a separate theory that underpins the teaching and learning of adults. Most of the early studies on learning focused mainly on learning among children and adolescents. Adult educators argue, however, that children and adults learn in different ways. The debate as to whether there should be a separate theory of adult learning remains a contentious issue in the field of adult learning. Hanson (1996: 99) points out that

*during the 1970s and early 1980s much debate revolved around the concept of andragogy as the organising framework to substantiate claims about the different characteristics and needs of adult learners. However, despite many exchanges at both the level of theory and practice there was little resolution of the question of differences between pedagogy ('the teaching of children') and andragogy ('helping adults learn') ... However (the debates) were important in raising the consciousness of practitioners to the theoretical field of adult learning.*

Unfortunately, much of what is currently known about the psychology of adult learning is based on research that has been conducted in the Western world – hence the need for research and documentation on the psychology of adult learning in Africa. There is a need to increase our understanding of the characteristics, behaviour and thinking of adult learners in Africa. There is also a need for a more specific examination of characteristics of specific individuals and their contexts with regard to what they are learning, the settings in which they learn and their relationships with their fellow learners and their educators. All these factors influence the way in which individuals learn in different social and cultural contexts. Hanson (1996: 107) argues that ‘we need to remove many of the unsubstantiated assumptions based on almost utopian beliefs about education and training of adults linked to uncontextualised views of learning and empowerment’. There is therefore a need for systematic research and documentation on adult learning and on adult learners’ perceptions, cognitive functioning, learning styles and challenges in Africa.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 In pairs, discuss and write down five ways in which adult learners in your community may be different from adult learners in other communities.
- 2 Give reasons for these differences.

## THE NEED FOR AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

While the goal of psychology is to establish a universal science of human beings, it is constantly in danger of mistaking the particular for the universal. Previous methods

used in psychological research have tended to overlook the role of cultural and social history. As a result, value orientations have been overlooked, yet they are essential for understanding cultural variability in development and behaviour. Greenfield (1994: 3) states that

*Psychology as the science of the individual was born and nourished by the philosophical foundations of individualism. We now discover that the independent individual is not a universal fact, but a culture-specific belief system about the development of a person. There is an important alternative belief system that is held by about 70% of the world’s population (Triandis, 1989); it is called interdependence or collectivism.*

Most Asian and African societies subscribe to the interdependent or collectivist belief system.

Ho in Greenfield (1994: 4) observes that

*there are increasing voices pointing to the need to derive some intellectual nourishment from the Asian traditions. In the West, the social sciences have been encapsulated by their focus on the individual as the unit of analysis ... The Asian contribution would be to refocus the attention on not just the individual, but on relationships.*

In Africa concerns have been expressed since the early 1960s regarding the non-existence of African perspectives in psychological literature. Jahoda (1961: 75) points out that there was ‘hardly any substantial information on what could be clearly labelled an African mind or personality’. Three decades later Markus and Kitayama (1991: 224) expressed similar sentiments when they stated that ‘most of what psychologists currently know about human nature is based on one particular view – the

so-called Western view of the individual as an independent, self contained, autonomous entity’.

Greenfield asserts that all human beings are both individuals and members of a social group. Therefore, no one is exclusively independent or interdependent. However, in focusing on values, one is pointed to the ideals of a society.

*Although no society can eliminate either the separate individual or the interdependent group, the nature of the ideal has important implications for what is responded to, emphasized and sanctioned in the socialisation process and for the character of social relations. By these means, cultural ideals influence individual development. (Greenfield, 1994: 4)*

A particular balance between individual and group, between independence and interdependence, is struck by each society. In most African cultures the individual gains significance from and through relationships with others. Sometimes the cost of interdependence can be experienced as suppression of individual development. Current psychological theories of adult learning, however, do not take cognisance of this. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Nsamenang (1999: 34) points out that while African institutions and social thought differ from those of the Western cultures, most African scholars have little opportunity to learn much about their local ecologies and cultures. He argues that African scholars tend to ignore the subject matter, that is, the theories and concepts through which the owners of the culture see their cultural world. When they apply Western theories and conceptual systems to African societies, however, they discover that these do not fit. The goal of conceptualising and studying psychosocial phenomena in

Africa from an African perspective thus continues to elude scholars on the continent.

*We need to increase our understanding of the behaviour and thinking of the African people from their own, rather than from a Western or European perspective. This is the ambitious search for the consciousness of the African people: their culture, their emotionality, their collectivity, their spirituality and their interaction with the environment and their particular social experiences. (Nokaneng 1999: ix)*

This book attempts to address the psychology of adult learning from an African perspective, but it is only an initial step in this direction. There is an urgent need for more systematic research and documentation that conceptualises adult learning in Africa from an African perspective.

## ACTIVITY

**From your own cultural experiences, reflect in pairs on the different ways in which your culture has shaped who you are and how you behave. Write down your ideas and share them with the rest of the class.**

## SUMMARY

This chapter introduced readers to the field of psychology and how it relates to adult learning. It attempted to give an overview and definition of the different goals of psychology, that is, to describe, predict and to apply knowledge. The methods of psychology, and in particular those of naturalistic observation, case studies, surveys and experimentation, were then reviewed. Finally the need for adult learning in Africa, and specifically for an African perspective

on the psychology of adult learning, was discussed.

## KEY POINTS

The following key points were discussed in this chapter:

- Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes.
- The goals of psychology are to describe, explain, predict and modify behaviour and mental processes.
- Some of the methods used in psychology include naturalistic observation, case studies, surveys and experimentation.
- Findings from psychological studies and research provide adult educators with clues for understanding the adult learner and for improving the teaching and learning process in adult education.
- Unfortunately, most of what we currently know about adult psychology is based on research studies that have been conducted in Western societies. There is therefore an urgent need for more research on African perspectives on adult psychology.



## ACTIVITY

List five reasons why you think psychology is an important component in the training of adult educators in your community.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

Given this brief overview of psychology as a field of study, can you think of some of the different areas of adult learning where it might be relevant?

## SUGGESTED READINGS

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# Chapter 2

## Characteristics of adult learners in Africa

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### OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses how adulthood should be defined in the African context. It examines various concepts of adulthood and their relationships to the characteristics of adult learners. It explores some of the characteristics of adult learners in Africa, based on their cultures, traditions, life experiences, motivation, environment, gender, ethnic group and language. It also explores how each of these factors can affect the learning patterns and behaviour of adult learners.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Describe and analyse the concept of an adult in the African context.
- 2 Indicate some of the ways in which adults are different from children and young people in the way they learn.
- 3 Describe some of the major characteristics of adult learners and their implications for adult teaching and learning in Africa.



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## KEY TERMS

**chronological age** An individual's actual physical age expressed in terms of years and months.

**culture** These are the values, beliefs, artefacts, customs and traditions shared by a group of people or nation within the same geographical area.

**folklore** Beliefs, myths, traditions and customs of a group of people or society passed on verbally or symbolically.

**memory** The ability to retain and recall information and sensations from a distant past or from moments ago, based on experience.

**myths** These are narrative cultural traditions that may be without a factual basis and that concern natural events or deeds of past heroes or heroines.

**perseverance** The tendency to use patience and endurance to continue an activity or tasks after the original stimulus has been removed.

**self-concept** The way in which people perceive themselves.

**self-directedness** A process in which individuals take the initiative in diagnosing

learning needs, formulating learning goals and implementing appropriate strategies by sharing and interacting with others in order to achieve the stated goals.

## BEFORE YOU START

In small groups, discuss the following questions about adult learners in Africa and share your answers with your facilitator:

- 1 When do you consider someone to be an adult?
- 2 How does someone become an adult in an African context?
- 3 What is your experience of adult learners?
- 4 What do you think are the characteristics of adult learners?
- 5 What differences do you observe between adults and children in the way



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they learn?

## THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF ADULTHOOD

The question, Who is an adult?, is more complex than it might seem, especially in Africa, where adulthood is not determined solely by age. The ability of a person to fulfil certain roles and functions in society is also important. Historical, traditional, physical, socio-economic, political and psychological factors determine such roles and functions to a large extent. This may vary from one community to another. Thus, the word *adult* carries different meanings in different situations and circumstances. There are different criteria for categorising a person as an adult in Africa.

### Chronological age

In Africa, as in most parts of the world, age is recognised as one of the criteria for adulthood. By virtue of having lived for a certain number of years, an adult is widely expected to have acquired the necessary experience and maturity to teach younger members of the community how to carry out their tasks efficiently and effectively. Similarly, an adult should be able to select a marriage partner, start a family, rear children, pay school fees and manage a home. An adult, therefore, may be a parent, a worker, an uncle, an aunt, a cousin, an older brother or sister. As Cropley (1978), points out, some kind of initiation ceremony frequently accompanies admission to the adult world on attaining a particular age. According to Braimoh and Biao (1988), society assigns duties and responsibilities to the adult that may be commensurate with his or her growing maturity.

Using chronological age to determine adulthood has its own shortcomings. It is

quite difficult to apply uniformly in the African setting. The tasks assigned to adults vary from one African country to another, and there are even variations between communities within the same country. It is not written down anywhere that, at a certain age, a person is ready to be considered an adult, a status that will enable him or her to take on the corresponding roles, functions and tasks. Chronological age alone is therefore insufficient as a criterion of adulthood.

### Transmission of oral history and tradition

Indigenous societies are predominantly oral ones, even where an established literary tradition exists (Goduka, 2000). Many Africans are rooted in oral cultures and traditions, which include the use of eye-witness accounts, stories, proverbs, idioms, mythology, legends and folklore. Adulthood and the rite of passage in an African context may be achieved through ceremonies such as those among the Masai of Kenya. There is a saying in Kenya that a people denied history is a people denied dignity. Oral traditions, verbal folklore, poetry, songs and their transmission are important tools adults use to inform the younger members of the community. Before the arrival of Europeans in Africa, Africans disseminated knowledge, skills and information orally in an informal manner (Teffo, 2000).

One of the most common forms of oral tradition is the story. Storytelling is an art that is passed down from one generation to the next. In essence, the story is a primary form of oral tradition used in conveying culture, experience, values, knowledge and wisdom. Stories therefore inform, instruct and support the basic tenets of African culture and tradition.

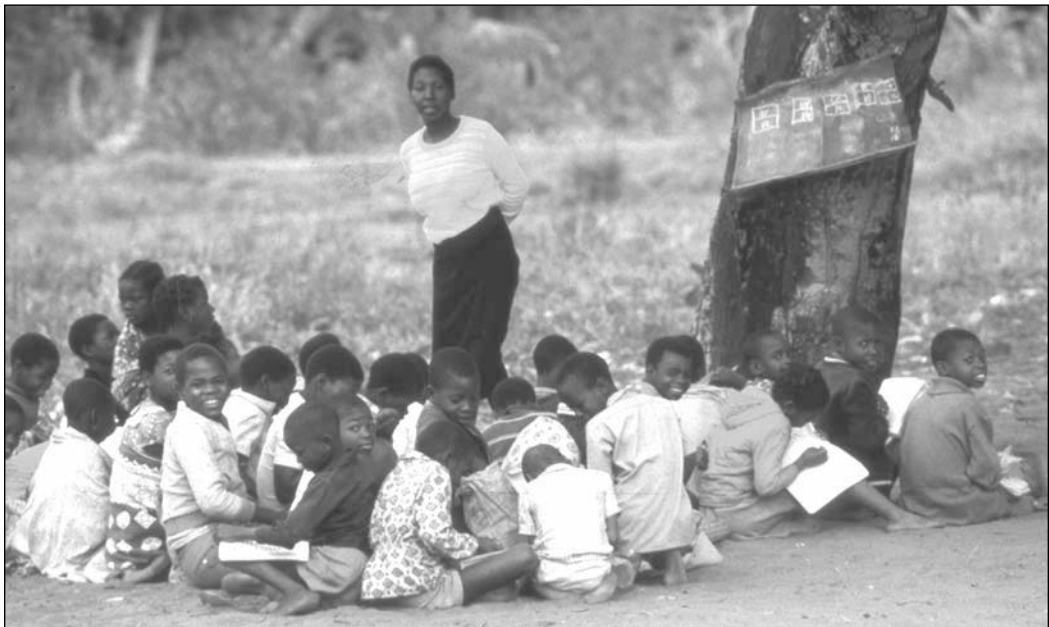
Apart from stories, many Africans also use proverbs extensively. They express these not only in words but also in the language of

the drums and the sound of the horns blown by the attendants of chiefs. A child grows wise with proverbs. They allow children to receive information quickly and memorably. Some of the things that proverbs convey are:

- The importance of treating people with respect and dignity.
- Generosity and empathy.
- Concepts such as faithfulness and unfaithfulness, friendship and enmity, bravery and cowardice, wisdom and stupidity.
- How to approach good fortune and misfortune, troubles and peace.
- How to conduct home life and marriage.
- Warnings of various types (Goduka, 2000: 75–77).

We must, however, note that only those people who are regarded as adults by the community can make use of stories and proverbs in the ways described above.

An adult's repertoire is also likely to include myths and legends. These constitute a rich mixture of history and traditional beliefs – tales of gods, ghosts, spirits, famous ancestors, heroes and powerful kingdoms of the past. They are also used by the adult as a means to convey to younger people the accepted ways of behaving, thinking, feeling and dispensing justice in African society. Above all, the adult has to recall significant events from the accumulated memory of the community. Such events could include the European colonisation of the country, the attainment of independence and the possible civil wars that followed (Braimoh and Biao, 1988). However, many adults may not be able to transmit oral culture in the way described above. For instance, there are many African adults who were born into foreign cultures and who lived outside their countries of birth for many years. On their return to their countries of origin, these adults may not



*An adult teaching children through stories.*

necessarily be able to interact meaningfully with members of their communities and may, therefore, not be able to transmit oral culture in the traditional way. Storytelling is therefore only one possible criterion of adulthood.

### Physical appearance

It may seem to be stating the obvious, but in the African context physical appearance is a significant factor in deciding at a glance whether a person can be regarded as an adult. One would look at hair colour, skin texture and other physical changes to assess age. However, apart from the fact that physical appearance can be deceptive in judging a person's age, there are other factors like malnutrition, stunted growth and diseases that may override age in determining adulthood.



*A child may take care of her younger sibling because of the death of their parents.*

### The socio-economic role

African society expects an adult to perform various social and economic roles. An adult has to be a productive person, contributing in some way to the economic and social standard of living of the family or community. To become an adult, a person may need to perform a certain ritual or undergo a certain ceremony, such as the initiation ceremonies for girls in many Zambian traditional cultures. An adult is furthermore responsible for contributing to public safety, for upholding the culture and traditions of the community and for meeting his or her social obligations. In many African cultures, adults have to attain some economic standing and should contribute towards providing for the needs of the younger ones.

However, on its own the socio-economic role is also insufficient in determining when a person can be regarded as an adult. For example, the various civil wars in Africa, migrant labour and the problem of HIV/AIDS have deprived many children of their parents and elders, forcing them to take on responsibilities and to perform tasks usually assigned to adults. Children who suddenly find themselves in this situation may be fending for themselves and their siblings because they have been orphaned. The question is whether children in these situations should be regarded as adults, or do they become adults only when other conditions are met? In the discussion so far it is clear that more than one condition has to be met before a person is regarded as an adult.

### Political considerations

African adults have to play their part in governing the affairs of their homes and their nation, based on their wisdom in matters of organisation and administration. Again, only adults can participate effectively in politics, and only adults are allowed to vote or

hold political offices. In many African countries, those who have attained the age of 18 have the right to vote, but in some countries, such as Mali, the minimum voting age is 21. The age for holding political offices also varies considerably. For instance, it ranges from 21 years to as high as 35 years in some African countries. On the other hand, there are no age limits for chieftaincy positions that many people inherit. It could therefore happen that a child assumes the position of a parent on the death of the latter.

### Psychological traits

On a psychological level, people can also be regarded as adults when they possess self-concepts that enable them to express themselves in their own way. Self-concepts express how people perceive themselves. It can be one's own opinion about oneself (personal self-concept), such as 'I am a very strong person'. It can be how other people regard the person (social self-concept), such as 'People think I have the ability to do the

work'. It can also be how one would like to be (self-ideals), such as 'I want to be a doctor' (Gale Encyclopaedia of Psychology, 2003). People with well-developed self-concepts will take responsibility for their own lives and will be capable of directing themselves with a degree of autonomy. In other words, the person will move from dependence to self-direction. As a result, adults will be able to build relationships of love, intimacy and friendship with other people.

Other typical qualities associated with adulthood in Africa are confidence, patience, endurance, perseverance, courage and emotional stability. These qualities enable people to contribute to public safety, arbitrate in disputes, motivate younger members of the community, and promote trust, respect, mutual assistance, peace, order and the other conditions essential for society's continued orderly existence. Adults should act as role models for the younger members of the community.



*An adult voting during an election in South Africa.*

Again, these traits in themselves are not adequate measures of adulthood, because adults do not develop these traits to the same extent, and all adults are not capable of fulfilling the roles mentioned above.

There are also differences between rural and urban settings. In rural societies people still perform initiation ceremonies to mark the rite of passage of the individual into adulthood, whereas in urban areas other criteria, such as age, are used.

### Working concept of an adult

In Africa, adults are perceived to be people of 18 years or older, having self-directing images of themselves, and able to relate stories, proverbs and legends from the

collective memory of the community for the purpose of informing, educating and socialising the young. In addition, adults should be capable of performing a range of social and economic roles, from helping to run the home, contributing to food production or income generation to participating in community affairs.

### ACTIVITY

- 1 In pairs, discuss the limitations of chronological age on its own in determining adulthood in your own community.
- 2 Describe different forms of oral history and traditions in your community.



*Adults showing caring relationships with each other.*

- 3 It is possible for a ten-year-old child to look like a teenager or even a young adult. What do you think causes this to happen?
- 4 Discuss in pairs why age limits have to be set for holding political offices in Africa. What benefits can we derive from this?
- 5 Why do you think that not all adults are capable of developing the psychological traits identified?
- 6 Deliberate in pairs on the working concept of an adult and formulate your own.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

With this working concept in mind, it is now necessary to look at the characteristics of adult learners in Africa in contrast to child learners. The statements on this issue will be general statements, because situations will vary in rural and urban settings in different communities in Africa. You will have to determine the extent to which each of the identified characteristics of the adult learners in Africa applies to the rural and urban settings in your own community. In addressing this issue, the work of Knowles (1975) is used as a guideline. The following are the major characteristics of adult learners in Africa:

### Diversity

Adult learners in Africa, both men and women, are highly diversified with regard to age, experience, interest, intelligence, aptitude, attitude, motivation, language, tradition, gender, personality, employment and socio-economic status. They have varying educational levels and different orientations to learning. In spite of this diversity among African adults, there is also unity that often emerges in situations where

Africans come together to undertake a task in a group, for example, in a learning situation. It is part of African cultures and traditions, and this sense of unity is often revealed in African proverbs. For example, Africans believe that 'one does not put a piece of luggage on the head with only one finger'. Africa, according to Asante and Asante (1990), is one cultural river with numerous tributaries characterised by their specific responses to history and environment. They go on to argue that unity in Africa refers to the commonalities among the people. Africans share similarities in behaviour, perceptions and technologies.

Over many centuries, Africans from all parts of the continent have learned the need for working together in unity in order to accomplish tasks that may be difficult for one person. Goduka (2000) points out that for many generations, the indigenous populations understood how to work together through interrelatedness, interconnectedness and interdependence among humans. They have come to understand that nothing exists in isolation because every being relates to every other being or thing. It is therefore not surprising that strong family systems have always been characteristic of Africa.

This is emphasised by Mbiti (1969), who describes the African family system as vertical in that it includes the living, the deceased and the unborn. It is also horizontal in that it includes all living individuals in the ethnic group. This is characterised by strong bonds of kinship, spiritual orientation and work ethic.

Many examples of unity in diversity abound in African societies. These include the age grades and the indigenous apprenticeship systems that are carefully woven into the political, economic, spiritual and physical life of the people (Omolewa et al., 1998). The indigenous apprenticeship system, for instance, is a joint learning

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process in which the apprentice acquires knowledge and skills through both the active support of others and through social interaction.

Another unifying influence is the shared store of mythology, folklore, bestiaries (old collections of moral stories about animals) and stories of heroes and heroines. The underlying principle is that all life is interrelated. In indigenous ways of thinking and knowing, Africans participate in shared beliefs. They believe in traditional education as a lifelong process. It is non-restrictive, non-compartmentalised and participatory in nature. It does not lead to isolation, and people make decisions through consensus. Africans tend to live in symbiosis, that is, they tend to live together in order to derive mutual benefits from one another (Omolewa et al., 1998). Conflict is resolved through certain institutions.

The Yoruba and Ibo in Nigeria, for example, express the principle of unity in diversity through proverbs. There is a saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child.

The proverb emphasises the value of family ties, parental care, self-sacrifice and concern for others to ensure unity among the people and to ensure that the broader community takes care of individuals.

In short, Africans believe that a real family eats the same corn, and that a person is a person because of other persons. All these statements portray the essence of living in unity, one of the major characteristics of the African adult.

When planning their programmes, facilitators should, as far as possible, bear the differences between African adult learners in mind. Facilitators should also ensure that there is unity among the learners. In order to foster unity among the learners, facilitators should use the method of the indigenous apprenticeship system, as described in Chapter 9. This is a joint learning process in which the apprentice acquires knowledge and skills through both the active support of others and through social interaction.



*Adult males and females working together to achieve a common purpose.*

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## Motivation for learning

What motivates adults to learn and continue to learn? This is a particularly important question in adult education. Knowles (1975) is of the opinion that adult learners need inner motivation because there is no external pressure to learn, as is the case with young children. Knowles' findings show that adults feel motivated if they have some degree of control over their learning.

This is in contrast to children, who are dependent learners. External factors, such as parental expectations, teachers' rewards and school discipline motivate children to a large extent. These external factors are largely responsible for deciding the aims, goals, objectives, subject matter, learning and evaluation approaches for children.

In the African context, culture plays an important role in motivation. Culture is a lens of perception, spring of motivation, standard of judgement, basis of identity and means of communication. It makes sense that adults, who have to sacrifice leisure or working time for learning, must have pragmatic reasons for doing so (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000).

Generally, adults are motivated to learn when learning is stimulating, learner-centred and needs-oriented. Adults tend to learn to satisfy certain needs. Generally, they will continue with a learning experience or programme until their needs are fully satisfied.

Knowles (1975) indicates that motivation to learn could also be a response to a life event. Adults in Africa are motivated to learn for various reasons. They may want to learn in order to maintain or establish social relationships, to serve others, to satisfy a personal interest, to advance their careers, to earn more money or to meet external expectations (Fasokun, 1984).

The characteristics of adult learners mentioned above have implications for teaching and learning. Facilitators should determine the target audience's interests, attitudes, perceptions, self-concepts and beliefs. They should understand and appreciate why adults enrol in educational programmes. Dialogue can be used to establish the needs of adult learners and the life events that prompted the needs. Motivating learners, expressing positive expectations and sharing objectives with learners should be the starting point of each learning session.

## Orientation to learning

Adults engage in educational activities for various reasons. Houle (1961) conducted one of the most well-known studies on what motivates learners. According to him, orientation to learning depends on the expected goals of learning. He identifies three types of adult learners, as described below.

### Goal-oriented learners

These adults use education to achieve specific goals, either for themselves or for their communities. For example, an adult may want to attend a literacy class to achieve certain clear-cut objectives. These may include learning to read and write letters, sign bank cheques or acquire better skills to ensure a promotion in the workplace. Facilitators must provide adequate programmes that meet the requirements of goal-oriented learners.

### Activity-oriented learners

Activity-oriented learners are social learners who participate in education for the sake of social contact. They tend to find a high level of social satisfaction in learning activities.



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For example, an adult may attend a literacy programme to interact with others and avoid isolation. Facilitators need to provide programmes that encourage learners to engage in social interaction.

### Learning-oriented learners

Learning-oriented learners enjoy the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. For example, adults may attend adult education programmes because they love learning for the sake of it and because they are used to learning since childhood. Facilitators should provide supplementary reading materials to cater for the needs of learning-oriented learners.

According to Houle (1984) these orientations are not mutually exclusive, independent or unrelated. Rather, they may overlap. Many African adult learners are essentially goal-oriented. In general they show readiness for learning, are self-directed and persevere in achieving their goals. Because of these reasons, the majority of African adult learners tend to fall into the first of Houle's three categories, while a few others will fall in the remaining two categories. As a result, goal-oriented learners will be examined in more detail here.

*Readiness to learn:* Motivation and orientation are the necessary tools that propel adults to start learning in order to achieve their goals. If there is proper motivation and orientation to learning, the community will expect adult learners to take responsibility for disseminating information, knowledge and skills to young people in the community. Unlike children, adults will, however, not need authority figures to give them explicit directives on what to do, how to do it and when to do it.

Prior knowledge makes it easier for adults to learn. According to Hartley (1998), prior knowledge is important because

things must fit with what people already know if they are to learn meaningfully. It follows then that to facilitate meaningful adult learning, new knowledge, skills and values should relate to and be integrated with previous learning. In this regard, part of the prior learning of adult learners may include practical skills, knowledge and safe work practice that they acquired before they enrolled in an adult education programme.

Adults' readiness to learn also depends on the state of their physical health. Poor health, including physical disabilities or debility, may prevent adults from learning in spite of a strong motivation for learning (Gunawardena, 1998). Facilitators should always examine the level of readiness of the adult learners before embarking on any programme.

*Self-directed learning:* Knowles (1975) identifies self-directed learning as one of the most important characteristics of adult learners. Since adults have specific goals they want to achieve, they tend to have the capacity to diagnose their own learning needs. They formulate learning goals, identify human and natural resources for learning, choose and implement appropriate learning strategies and even assess learning outcomes if effectively assisted by the facilitator (Gunawardena, 1998).

Self-directed learning does not necessarily mean that all learning will take place in isolation. It also does not necessarily make someone an independent learner. An independent learner is not necessarily self-directed, because an independent learner may not be the one who chooses learning goals, strategies or assessment approaches. Similarly, self-directed learning can imply interdependent learning, sharing and interacting with others. When interdependent learning occurs, each of the learning partners recognises the contributions of others and capitalises on them.

Children, on the other hand, usually depend on external authorities such as teachers. They depend on them for material and psychological support and for managing their lives. The teacher, for instance, determines the objectives for learning without the consent of the children. Children are often externally motivated to learn with the promise of good grades and praises from their teachers. Children tend to be essentially teacher-directed.

The perception in traditional African education that everyone is a teacher in the learning process is a major component of self-directed learning. The traditional education system makes this possible because of the participatory nature of the process. As Mbiti (1969) observes, to be human is to belong to the whole community and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. In Lesotho, for example, adults believe that they should not be hurried in exercising their self-directed learning. They regard life as too short to hurry the process of learning.

To ensure self-directed learning, facilitators should make sure that learners are involved in diagnosing their own needs, planning their activities, selecting resources and evaluating progress (Brookfield, 1986). Facilitators should understand, appreciate and build upon learners' differences. Furthermore, they should adjust content, process and product in response to learners' readiness, interests and learning profiles. Different forms or styles of learning are required for different learning outcomes. The delivery system must therefore be flexible in order to match the thinking and learning styles of the learners, as discussed in Chapter 7.

*Memory:* Traditional African societies are, by and large, oral ones, and this is true even where an established written literary tradition exists, as in the cases of languages such

as Swahili, Zulu, Xhosa and so on (Reagan, 2000). Retentive memories are common features of African learners, because of widespread oral traditions. Vansina (1985) points out that oral traditions appear only in speech. He observes that they are heard for fleeting moments, but most of the time they dwell only in the minds of people. In essence, a vast untapped knowledge resource exists mostly in the minds or consciousness of the African people.

Africans believe that memory is crucial for adults because of its use in practical daily activities such as talking, understanding issues, socialising and interacting with others in the community. Adults use retentive memory to retrieve events from the distant past or from moments ago. Traditional African adults are capable of remembering detailed events or stories that happened in the past. The Nigerian Yoruba saying that 'the stomach of an elder is deeper than that of a child' confirms this. They believe that adults retain more knowledge and are capable of retaining information for a longer period than children. Facilitators should encourage the use of the retentive memories of adult learners, as described in Chapter 8 of this book.

*Perseverance:* According to a saying in Ethiopia, 'it is by persevering that the egg walks on legs'. In other words, African adults believe that patience, endurance and perseverance will lead to success. There is no doubt that these qualities are all necessary in life because many African adults believe that 'one will only get out of life what one puts into it'.

A saying in Ghana, 'the wasp says that several regular trips to a round pit enables it to build a house', is used to emphasise that persistence yields results. Each effort, no matter how small, brings people closer to achieving their goals. Perseverance can transform a life of failure into one of success. African adults believe that if one

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makes perseverance part of one's life, one will never fail. Facilitators should always encourage adult learners to persevere by making extra efforts to achieve the desired goals.

## **Problem-centredness**

Adults are usually problem-centred or life-centred. They are motivated to learn to the extent that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with real-life problems. They tend to have specific learning needs that are directly linked to fulfilling their roles as determined by their real-life situations. They have many things happening in their lives. Some may be fathers or mothers. Others may be married, single or separated. Some are workers and are concerned about providing food for the children, paying school fees and at the same time ensuring the comfort of the immediate and extended members of the family. In addition, they have to cope with unstable political situations in their countries. They have to cope with social, religious and economic problems, with problems of poverty, corruption, civil wars, crime, prostitution, the increasing number of street children, declining rural standards and so on. They have to solve personal and societal problems that affect their lives.

The situation for children is completely different. Instead of being problem-centred, they are subject-centred. They learn to a large degree what adults want them to learn. This involves the selection of the subject matter for them by external bodies that will lead them to self-sufficiency, determining for them what is significant, valid, interesting, useful and feasible. They complete each course of study in a competitive environment. This is regardless of how such courses relate to their own goals.

Facilitators of adult learning should create a problem-solving environment.

They should encourage adult learners to apply knowledge or skills to current problems or situations. Similarly, facilitators should ensure that problems presented in the curriculum or programmes reflect the concerns and needs learners express (Knowles, 1980).

## **Previous experience**

In many African societies experience is regarded as being more important than knowledge. African adults believe that they are wiser than children. They believe that 'what an old man sees while seated, a youth does not see when standing'. Many African adults therefore equate experience with age. The following Nigerian Yoruba saying confirms this: 'However big the male lizard is, it is the wall gecko that must drink the wine as his senior'. Jarvis (1987) further emphasises the importance of experience when he says that learning always begins with experience.

Compared to children, adult learners bring a relatively larger range of experiences, skills, attitudes, values and knowledge to a particular learning situation. Adults usually know what is important to them and why it is important. They possess more procedural knowledge than children. Through the use of myths, legends and metaphors African adults are able to make sense of their world and they often use these as a means of understanding otherwise incomprehensible problems. They also use stories and proverbs to tell others about their experiences. The Yoruba in Nigeria, for instance, believe that 'if a child has as many clothes as an adult, that child will never have as many rags as an adult'. Thus, they continually come to know more about life by making connections between the past, the present and the future.

To many African adults, knowledge can be compared to a garden. When one cultivates it, one harvests from it. This emphasises

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the need to use the existing knowledge and experience of adult learners in new learning contexts. Adults possess a wealth of experience, gained throughout their lives, and this experience forms a sound foundation for learning (Knowles, 1975).

The facilitator should therefore use the prior knowledge of adult learners as an important resource to facilitate learning. For the same reason adult learners should participate in designing their learning programme. The facilitator should employ strategies such as open-ended questions to extract learners' existing knowledge and experience and to help learners connect existing concepts and skills with current needs, problems and learning experiences. There should be opportunities for dialogue between the facilitators and the learners in order to actualise these processes.

## Indigenous knowledge

African people, especially adults, have evolved sophisticated methods of imparting knowledge derived from experimentation or observation to explain and predict natural phenomena to others. This ability depends on indigenous knowledge that they possess in different areas of human endeavour. We have already mentioned that elders often express themselves through metaphors, proverbs, parables, riddles and puzzles that may have many levels of meanings. According to Grenier (1998), African adults tend to store indigenous knowledge in their memories and activities. They express this knowledge in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths about cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices and animal breeding.

Through an experience-based relationship with family, animals, spirits and the land, African adults, especially those living in rural communities, communicate and

pass on various forms of indigenous knowledge through oral traditions. Examples of the skills and knowledge in different subject areas include medicine and health, agriculture, education, indigenous food preparation, arts and crafts and institutional management.

Facilitators of adult education should build on this indigenous knowledge and African value system. This implies that learning programmes should, as far as possible, draw on indigenous knowledge in relevant, meaningful and useful ways. The conclusions reached at the Sub-Saharan African Conference on Education for All, held in Johannesburg from 6–10 December 1999, support this view. The aim is to liberate children, youth and adults from mental and psychological subservience and, at the same time, equip them with relevant knowledge, attitudes, skills and values for a dignified and fulfilling life.

## Limitations

This chapter would not be complete without highlighting some of the limitations that impair the efficiency and effectiveness of adult learning in Africa. These may be physiological, psychological, sociological, economic and political factors. In this chapter only the first two, that is, physiological and psychological factors, will be discussed. The three remaining factors will be discussed in another book in this series, namely *The Social Context of Adult Learning in Africa* (Indabawa with Mpofo, 2005).

## Physiological limitations

Many adults in Africa find it difficult to fulfil their basic physiological or physical needs. In many communities, there is not enough potable water for drinking or for domestic use. As a result, adults spend a lot

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of time fetching water. In general, there is also a shortage of food as a result of poverty, harsh climatic conditions and unmechanised farming systems. Other physiological needs like shelter, exercise and elimination of body waste are problematic for adults who live in overcrowded shelters. Sanitation in Africa, especially in the rural areas, is very poor. Many villages and even towns in Africa do not have proper toilets. Such living conditions are not conducive to learning. Similarly, there are usually no adequate facilities for exercising the body in order to maintain general physical and mental health. Age-related health problems also act as obstacles to learning. Adults who have to contend with these kinds of problems are not likely to pursue educational activities.

There are differences between male and female adults in their limitations for pursuing learning activities. In Africa, men generally expect women to conform, to serve and to please them. Men also often physically abuse or coerce them into submission, and it is not uncommon that some men rape and harass them sexually. Also, when women get married, they often have more roles to perform and manage than men do. Women also generally spend more hours per day and per week working than men do. They have to do housework, take care of children and are usually responsible for other domestic activities. Particularly significant is the fact that women spend about twice the amount of time doing unpaid tasks than men do. These tasks include doing the laundry, cleaning the house, gardening, as well as fetching water and wood for their own homes. In almost every kind of family situation, women have more domestic tasks than men. Facilitators should therefore always consider how to help adult learners to cope with the challenges of their situations.

## Psychological limitations

Cross (1981) indicates that dispositional limitations also affect adult learners. These refer to the attitude and self-perception of the individuals. Adult learners may approach new learning situations with resistance. For example, the way adults feel about themselves as learners will affect their participation in educational programmes. Adults who think that they are too old to learn or who are self-conscious about being in class with younger people may not feel encouraged to pursue learning programmes.

Facilitators should use their knowledge of the learners' dispositions when teaching. They should continually observe learners' reactions, acknowledge them and modify their teaching as necessary. Facilitators should use a variety of teaching materials and methods to take differences in thinking and learning styles into account. They can, for example, use graphics, illustrations, images and demonstrations where and when necessary or appropriate, and alternate lectures and demonstrations, discussions, group, pair and individual work as appropriate. They should also end each session with a summary of new learning and find interesting ways to anticipate or prepare learners for a following lesson.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 Describe the situations that unite adults in your community.
- 2 Why do you think the illiteracy rate is high in many countries in Africa? Suggest ways to motivate adults to attend literacy classes.
- 3 Meet a group of adults in your community and try and find out what their orientation to learning is.

- 4 Discuss the major problems that adults face in your community and suggest how programmes in adult learning could address such problems.
- 5 Compare and contrast an adult's life experiences with those of a child. How can you use the experience of adults in your teaching?
- 6 Discuss the role of metaphors, proverbs, parables and riddles in communicating and generating knowledge in Africa.
- 7 Discuss the physiological and psychological limitations that adults in your community encounter when they pursue learning activities.
- 8 Why do you think it is important to take the characteristics of adult learners in Africa as a basis for creating their learning opportunities?

- Adults in Africa have many responsibilities towards their society and fulfil many roles.
- Adults are different from children and young people in the ways they learn.
- For effective teaching and learning to take place in the classroom, facilitators should have knowledge of the experience and background of their adult learners.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 Discuss the various methods to determine when someone is an adult in the African context and indicate the extent to which each of the methods is applicable to your community.
- 2 Imagine an adult literacy class in your town, village or neighbourhood and describe a cross-section of the participants, showing how broad the concept *adult* can be.
- 3 Identify characteristics of adult learners in your community that were not mentioned in this chapter. Why do you consider them to be important?
- 4 In pairs, discuss the following for about twenty minutes:

In your community, what constitutes:

- Diversity of adult learners?
- Unity of adult learners?
- Motivating factors in adult learning for particular projects?
- Orientation to adult learning?
- Previous experience in preparing educational programmes for adults?
- Indigenous knowledge?
- Limitations for pursuing learning activities?

- 5 Visit an adult education programme run by any agency for adult education in your town or village. Observe the characteristics of the adult learners

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, the concept of an adult in the African context was analysed, using different parameters such as chronological age, the ability to transmit oral history and tradition, physical appearance, socio-economic roles, political considerations and psychological traits. This resulted in a working concept of an adult. The chapter also considered the characteristics of adult learners in Africa in contrast to child learners. Issues of diversity, unity, inner motivation, orientation to learning, previous experience, indigenous knowledge and the limitations to learning were discussed. Throughout the chapter the implications of these characteristics for adult teaching and learning in Africa were pointed out.

## KEY POINTS

- Africans emphasise the need for children and youth to always respect adults.

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participating in programmes there. Write notes and compare them with what you have learned from this chapter.

- 6 Talk to ten elders in your community and collect ten proverbs and ten stories from them. Show how you can use these proverbs and stories to enhance adult participation in educational activities.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the various criteria used to determine adulthood in Africa.
- 2 Describe four or five characteristics of adult learners that distinguish them from children.
- 3 Explain how each of the characteristics will affect people's attitude towards learning, their ability to learn, understanding and use of new material and their success as learners.
- 4 What are the limitations to learning that face adults in different parts of Africa? How can these be overcome?
- 5 Describe the strategies that you as a facilitator of adult learning could use to make your lessons as effective as possible.

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# Chapter 3

## Patterns of adult learning

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### OVERVIEW

Adult learning in Africa features contexts that are quite different from those in the rest of the world, particularly in the Western world. This chapter attempts to identify and describe forms of adult learning in Africa. Concepts, ideas, complexities, range, principles, hindrances and focus areas are examined as issues related to adult learning in Africa. The chapter concludes with a discussion of problem-based adult learning. The first question to be asked is, How do African adults conceive of learning as a process?

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Describe some of the ways in which adult learning in Africa is similar to and different from adult learning in the rest of the world.
- 2 List the reasons why adults in Africa want to learn.
- 3 Explain the factors that make adult learning in Africa a complex challenge.
- 4 Specify the range of adult learning in specific African contexts.
- 5 Elaborate on the principles that guide adult learning in African communities.
- 6 Sketch the obstacles to adult learning in Africa.
- 7 Discuss problem-based adult learning in the African context.





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## KEY TERMS

**andragogy** The art and science of helping adults learn.

**cultural institutions of learning** The traditional arrangements through which youths and adults are afforded the opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable them to function maximally as individuals and as members of their communities.

**perception** The way people see or perceive things, situations or events.

**problem-based adult learning** A reflective approach in which learners are encouraged to make decisions and judgements based on their own experience, learning needs and obstacles so that they can fulfil these needs.

## BEFORE YOU START

Discuss your ideas and opinions about the following questions with your facilitator:

- 1 How would you define adult learning in Africa?
- 2 Use examples to discuss the reasons why adult learners might be interested in learning.
- 3 List and discuss at least five major learning needs of adult learners in your community.
- 4 Identify and discuss two examples of how adults in your community learn.
- 5 Do African adults generally encounter any problems in the different learning situations you have just described? How do they overcome the problems?

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## ADULT LEARNING IN AFRICA

From your answers to the questions in the activity above it will become clear that adult learning in Africa has existed long before the introduction of formal education. Although this kind of learning is often not easy to classify as a clear instance of formal adult learning, it is still a type of adult learning.

Before the advent of formal education, Africans had ways of imparting or transferring knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, interests and values from one generation to the next. Even with the advent of formal education, some of these traditional methods have remained largely unaltered. For example, storytelling as a way of transferring wisdom is still being used today. African adults can teach their children not to be greedy by telling them the story of the turtle that was invited to a festival in the heavens. Because he could not fly, the turtle asked all his bird friends to donate a feather each so that he could fly with them to honour the invitation. When they arrived at the festival, the host presented them with a delicious meal. Because he wanted to eat all the food himself, the turtle asked the host whom the meal had been prepared for. Earlier, the turtle had told the friendly birds that his name was 'All of you'. When he asked the host for whom the meal had been prepared, the host answered, 'All of you'. So the turtle sat down and ate the delicious meal all by himself, leaving the friendly birds hungry. When it was time to fly back to earth, the birds asked for their feathers back and the turtle was left without a single one. One of the birds, however, agreed to take a message back to earth on behalf of the turtle. The turtle asked that his family collect all soft objects in the house and take them outside so that he could land on them when he fell back to earth. Unfortunately

for the turtle, the bird asked the turtle's family to pile up hard objects instead. When the turtle finally landed, he crashed and his shell cracked and partially split without breaking into parts. That is why the turtle carries an irregularly shaped shell on his back to this day.

The lesson that the elders expect the young ones to derive from this story is that it is unwise and useless to be greedy, because eventually one will pay for such selfish behaviour. Storytelling is therefore one of the methods adults use to teach children how to behave in society.

There are many practical examples of adult learning. These include the planned processes of imparting vocational skills under apprenticeship systems. Omolewa (1981) describes the system of preparing Africans to specialise in different vocations. Under this system, young men may be assigned to traditional healers and young women to midwives. As apprentices, they learn the skills of the respective professions through observation and guided participation. This process continues for some years during which the apprentices practise the skills under close supervision. At a certain stage the apprentices will be asked to do certain things on their own. The efficacy of their performance is then evaluated and reported orally. If the principal healer is satisfied with the level of performance, the apprentices graduate. If not, the apprentices continue with the learning process until they are able to perform satisfactorily. The procedure applies to young people, but also to older people who may want to acquire new skills. This learning process embraces learning about objects, procedures, outcomes and application of principles.

Learning in Africa refers to a process through which an individual acquires knowledge, skills and attitudes through some form of learning experience. It could also refer to a method of being taught and

then applying the outcomes in daily life (Oduaran, 2000: 28–30). In other words, learning in Africa largely involves interaction between a source of knowledge, skills or change in attitude (which may be a facilitator, teacher, master craftsman or craftswoman, or a book or any other practical source), the process of transfer (the teaching-learning situation) and the learner.

For the learner, learning is an inner process that is affected by external factors in the learning environment as the learner tries to acquire and then apply new learning. Learning is a predisposition that leads an individual to the process of acquiring knowledge, language skills or survival skills in a rapidly changing world (Oduaran, 2002: 18). In Africa, adult learning often takes place in the context of practical survival realities such as scouting for new sources of water, food, farming or shelter and developing skills that can be used in the workplace to generate income. Adult

learning may also be applied to fight wars or ward off intruders.

### Informal learning

Before contact with the Arabic or Western world, Africans had indigenous ways of teaching and learning. In most traditional African communities, learning and teaching were organised informally. There were no rigorous curricula that were systematically planned and evaluated, as is commonly done today. Traditionally, learning was always the result of informal teaching. It was not even intentional or deliberate, as most present-day learning psychologists believe it should be.

Omolewa (1981: 20–45) describes how African adults use the apprenticeship system as a way of training for the professions. For example, a herbalist will try and steer his son into the profession by making him observe carefully how to mix different



*A group of African adults learning at the workplace.*



Benin bronze works.

leaves in the preparation of medicines for the cure of ailments. In the same way, traditional midwives will guide future midwives by making them observe how babies are delivered for a certain period of time. After the observation period, the trainee midwife will be expected to participate in delivering babies under careful supervision until she has perfected the skills herself. In the ancient Benin kingdom, bronze casters were specially trained through the same apprenticeship method until they became master craftsmen themselves (Oduaran and Owie, 2002: 224–228).

In all the instances cited, the processes of supervised apprenticeship model relationships are no different to processes of learning elsewhere in the world. As in other parts of the world, informal learning by African adults involves learning through experience under enabling conditions that facilitate the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, values and interests. This is done to enhance performance, bring about change or solve practical problems.

## Formal learning

For adult learning psychologists in the Western world, formal learning is regarded as intentional learning. This is because it is planned, structured and organised within specific time frames and locations and a planned curriculum. It is seen as something that occurs when learners consciously choose what they wish to learn. The learners then pursue this goal with all the determination required until the goal is achieved. The goal may be achieved through a deliberate effort of following a course of study or reading materials relevant to the expressed interests or values of the learners.

Formal learning in Africa is no different, apart from the fact that African adult learners may rely on more structured forms of observation for achieving the goals of learning. For example, elements of formal learning in which the curriculum is more or less hidden can be found in cultural institutions of learning in Nigeria, Uganda and Botswana. In Botswana, for instance, the *bojale* and *bogwera* were important

initiation institutions, designed to prepare youth for adult life. The training in the two institutions was systematised in some ways. The duration of training was specified and there was also an institutionalised process of testing the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Relate an African story that is aimed at imparting some form of wisdom to adults. How is this story linked to informal learning techniques among African adults?
- 2 How is learning viewed in the Western world? How does the African concept of learning differ from the Western concept and why?

## THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNING THEORIES

Since the time of Socrates and Plato, Western thinkers have formulated theories to describe what happens when learning occurs. These theories will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. However, at this point it is necessary to note that learning theories are mental frameworks that enable us to understand and explain what happens in any teaching-learning situation. Five dominant learning theories have influenced approaches to learning, namely the behaviourist, cognitive, gestalt, existentialist and humanist theories. These theories, which apply to all learners to some extent wherever they may be, have been specifically selected for discussion here because most adult learning programmes in Africa are geared towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and interests.

In general, *behaviourist theory* centres on the stimulus-response chain that is

formed when people learn (Morris and Maisto, 1999). Behaviourists are also interested in matters related to the basic positive reinforcement of correct responses. Such theories underpin the acquisition of knowledge (for example, in instances where adult learners are asked to discuss the origin of their villages).

*Cognitive theory* is concerned with the internal mental processes in the mind of the learner. Cognitive theorists are interested in the kind of learning or acquisition of knowledge that is taking place, the processing of information and metacognition (thinking about thinking). Metacognition has to do with the awareness of one's own thinking process, or the stage at which learners begin to ask themselves whether or not they have actually understood what they should be learning.

The *gestalt theory* emphasises the importance of perception or the way in which people perceive things or events using cues. In an adult learning class, for example, the learners may be asked to describe the way in which they see an object. Their descriptions of the same object may differ to some extent because of the differences in the way people perceive things. The facilitator will have to take these differences into account.

The *existentialist theory* focuses on the way in which people search for meaning, especially in the world we live in today. Its area of interest is the way in which people define their purposes in life. In Africa, there is often a strong belief in a Supreme God that people worship through their ancestors. When people become isolated from the source of defining the purpose in their creation, they may experience problems. There is also the belief that people behave differently and sometimes abnormally when they fail to identify the reason for their creation. Such abnormal behaviour may be tolerated in some African communities – for example, among the Yoruba in Nigeria. The Yoruba

would, however, move quickly to correct or even sanction abnormal behaviour. The existentialist theory, as applied to adult learning in Africa, has helped adult learners to develop a sense of identity with their sacred communities.

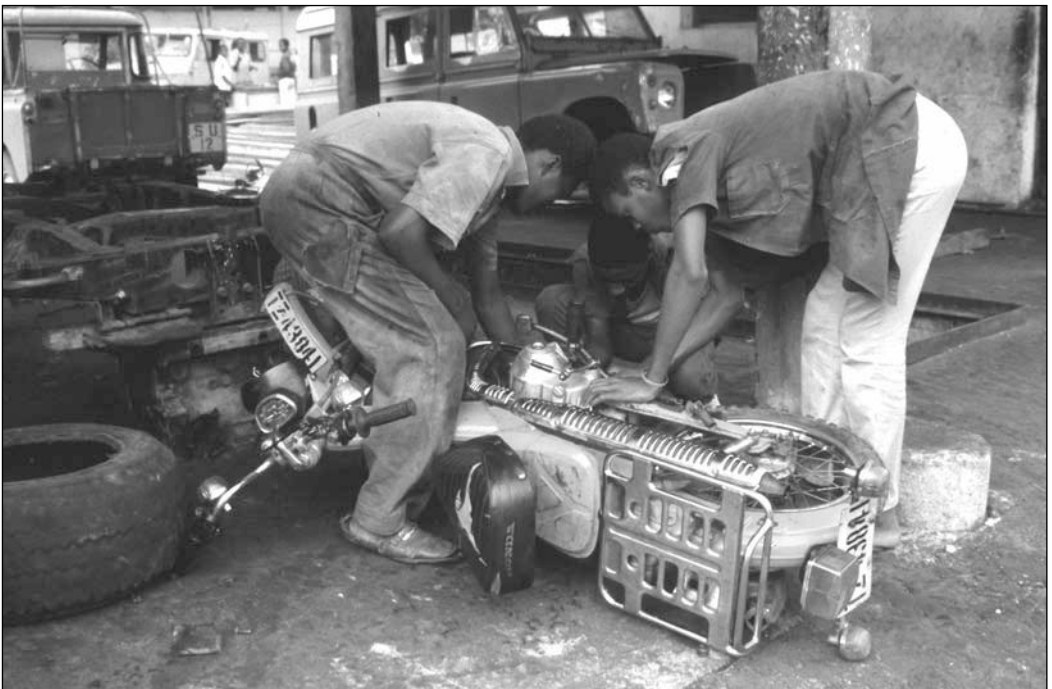
The *humanist theory* deals with the very nature of learners themselves, and in the particular ways they use their knowledge and relate to other people. In this theory the focus is on the perceptions, needs and feelings of the learners. The humanist theory is therefore more concerned with the affective domain of human functioning. Humanists are interested not simply in how learning takes place, but also in the styles used, how information and skills combine and the perceptions of specific adult learners. In Africa, for example, humanists may wish to determine how blacksmiths impart the knowledge and skills needed for beating red-hot metallic objects into desired shapes.

## ACTIVITY

Discuss the appropriateness of the five learning theories to adult learners in Africa. Use relevant examples.

## WHY ADULTS WANT TO LEARN

There are particular reasons why adults in Africa are motivated to learn. The reasons are largely socio-economic, political and psychological. In Chapter 2 it was mentioned that one of the reasons why adults enrol in learning programmes is that they want to relate to other people. It could also be that they wish to engage in learning that is related to their workplace. Workplace-related literacy projects are typical examples. Traditional herbalists, blacksmiths and roadside motor mechanics provide exam-



*A roadside mechanic trainer in a workshop at a street corner.*

ples of knowledge and skills-based learning and training programmes. A study of the training of roadside motor mechanics in Benin City, Nigeria, indicates that young and older adults enrol in the programme mainly because of their desire to generate income for themselves and their families (Oduaran, 1988: 299–310).



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Using examples, give reasons why African adults may want to enrol in adult learning programmes.
- 2 How could participation in adult learning programmes enhance the level of political participation of adult learners in Africa?

## THE RANGE OF ADULT LEARNING

Adult learning in Africa often spans a limited range of needs and interests. This is because many African nations have economies that are still largely tied to primary production processes. Many of these countries remain dependent on the larger global economy. In this section some of the needs and interests that African adult learning programmes incorporate are discussed.

### Social expectations

It has already been mentioned that adults in Africa engage in learning because of the various roles they play in their societies. In traditional societies some women are selected for the role of community midwives and they must serve as apprentices for a certain period of time before they are allowed to practise as professionals. Similarly the *ngaka*, the Setswana word for

a traditional healer, is expected to undergo intensive training before he is allowed to practise. This pattern can be observed in different communities in Africa. In other words, much of adult learning in Africa is contextualised by social expectations, which means imparting not only content but also values that will benefit the entire community.

### Specific purposes

Adults learn for specific purposes. Many adults participate in learning programmes because they want to acquire new qualifications or improve their existing qualifications. Some forms of learning may have nothing to do with the acquisition of certificates or qualifications. For example, many adult women in Africa may want to learn because they wish to enhance their self-confidence, self-concept and self-respect in communities where male dominance is deliberately promoted through many cultural practices. In a recent study in Benin City involving 200 women who live in a context where they are ‘supposed to be seen and not heard’, Okukpon (1998: 132–139) found that the correct methods of instruction led to an increase in women’s self-confidence, self-concept and self-respect. For similar reasons, it is common to find women coming together to form economic interest groups or groups focused on promoting their own welfare and community development.

In many African communities where health promotion is a major focus, health education programmes that are geared towards pre-natal and post-natal care are of immense interest to adults, both for basic health reasons and for reasons related to gender and HIV/AIDS issues.

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## Specific subjects

Adult learning in Africa is often geared towards specific school-based subjects. This is so because many adults who enrol in programmes wish to complete their formal education. There are numerous extra-mural university programmes (that is, secondary school level educational programmes conducted by universities within the communities where they are located) in which adults enrol because of their desire to sit for formal examinations. In these cases, adults have taken subjects like chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, English and French language and other subjects that form part of the school curriculum.

African adults also enrol in vocational-technical subjects such as motor mechanics, plumbing, electrical installations, electronics and interior decorating. They often do this in the hope of sitting for the City and Guilds examinations or some other locally recognised examination.

Although information on these programmes has not been precisely documented in recent literature, some of these programmes have resulted in the upward educational mobility of adult learners, for example, in many cities in southwest Nigeria.

### ACTIVITY

Discuss how the social roles of African adults influence their readiness to learn.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Adult learning and teaching around the world are guided by a variety of principles. These principles are espoused in theories proposed by many Western scholars, including Malcolm Knowles, Jennifer

Rogers, Carl Rogers, Stephen Brookfield, Patricia Cross, and Sharan Merriam and Ralph Brockett. The major ideas that have emerged from these theories in the context of their application to adult learning will be highlighted here.

First and foremost, the facilitator of adult learning must realise that adults come to class with inquiring minds. They are also goal-oriented and activity-oriented. Much of the learning they engage in is geared towards immediate application. In addition, the following basic principles are particularly relevant in the context of adult learning in Africa:

*Learning must be problem-centred.*

Problem-centred learning is geared towards solving specific difficulties that adult learners, either on their own or in collaboration with the facilitator, have identified as hindering the full achievement of set objectives. For example, in an HIV/Aids plagued community, the treatment of issues that are central to the problem are likely to be the first priority for the adult learners.

*Learning must be experience-centred.*

Adult learning has brought to the fore studies that have become known as experiential learning. Experiential learning involves drawing from the memory of adult learners. Consider, for example, a vocational learning programme that specialises in plumbing. Many of the adult learners in the programme may have been working as unqualified plumbers for some years. These learners will not be entirely new to the trade and should be able to bring into the learning situation some of the things they already know and make use of. Such learners should receive some credits based on their prior learning in the field.

Experience-centred learning goes beyond experiential learning and accreditation of prior learning. Most scholars of adult learning agree that the best adult learning programmes aim to build on the advantages

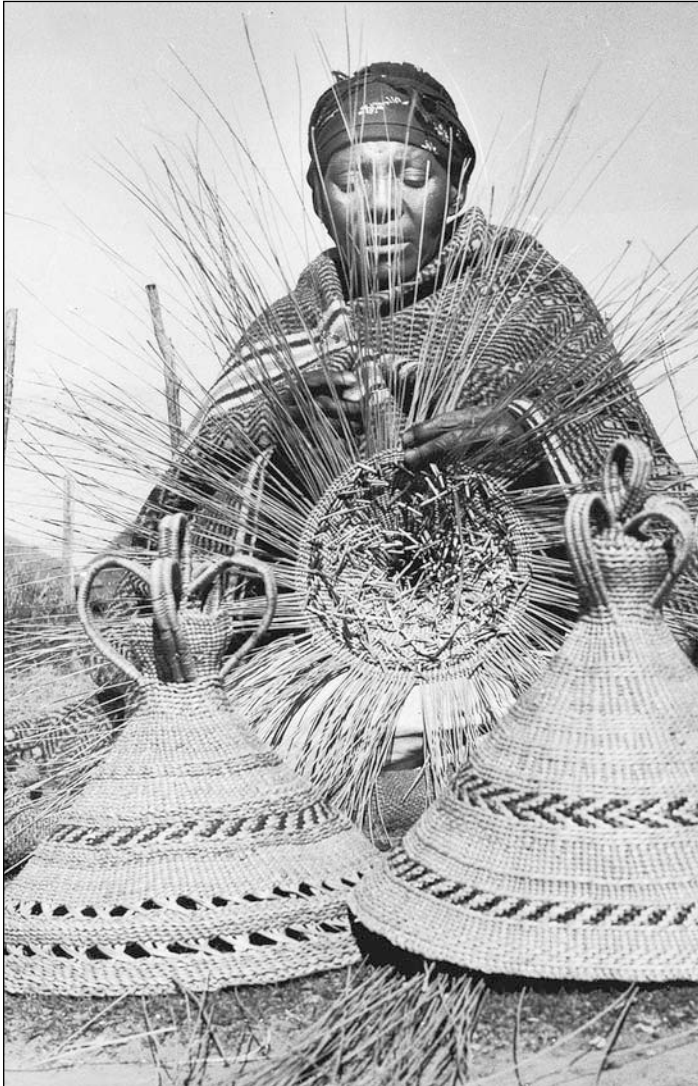


inherent in positive experiences. At the same time it attempts to minimise the negative experiences that adult learners may bring with them.

*Learning must be meaningful to the adult learner.* This principle requires that the learners must find the curriculum meaningful. The implication is that adults welcome content that is well structured in terms of the arrangement of what is to be

learned. The content of the programme should therefore be relevant to the actual needs of the learners.

For these reasons it is to be expected that learners will be most attracted to programmes that will help them to deal with everyday practical problems. For example, many African adults are likely to be interested in programmes that address poverty, nutrition and health issues by helping them



*A woman actively engaged in the acquisition of an income-generating skill.*

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to generate an income, raise children and improve family and social relationships.

*Learning must be interesting and engaging.* Adult learners often need to be motivated and inspired in order to engage actively in learning. Therefore, any facilitator of adult learning must be well versed in the application of the principles of motivation.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 Distinguish between problem-centred and experience-centred learning in the context of any adult learning programme with which you are familiar.
- 2 How would you ensure that an adult learning programme entrusted to your care features characteristics that are likely to interest adult learners?

## MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES

Learning sessions for adults should be preceded by some kind of warm-up activity that aims to get everyone in the mood for learning. In human resource development classes, a concept called *ice-breakers*, or warm-up activities, has been developed. For example, adults in a workshop setting may be asked to divide in pairs and to introduce themselves to each other. Partners are expected to gather as much information as possible from each other. The information is then shared with the entire group. Sometimes participants may be engaged in a simple game of throwing and catching balls. There are many examples of other similar exercises that can be found in relevant books on the subject.

## Goal setting

The setting of goals must precede every learning activity. Goals are intended to give direction and focus to the learning activities and to provide the background against which levels of achievement are measured. For best results with adults, facilitators should collaborate with the learners when setting goals. For example, a group of adults who want to learn about poultry farming in Roma, Lesotho, may be helped to determine how many chickens they would like to have on the farm each year and how this can be achieved. Poultry farming may be of particular interest to adults in Roma, because cool weather almost all year round makes poultry farming an attractive option.

## Feedback

This principle involves the reinforcement of learning. Adults need to be aware of their progress in order to understand how to focus their learning efforts. Nothing can be more frustrating than engaging in a learning activity without getting feedback from a facilitator. Facilitators in adult basic education programmes in Botswana, for example, have been trained in the process of measuring the performance of learners and giving prompt feedback. If a test is taken on a Monday, for example, adults expect their results by the following Thursday. In this way they do not become over-anxious about the results of the test.

## Andragogy

Knowles (1980: 38) defines *andragogy* as 'the art and science of helping adults learn', in contrast with *pedagogy*, which deals with helping children learn. Andragogy is based on the following understanding of adult development:

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As people mature:

- Their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards one of being a self-directed human being.
- They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
- Their readiness to learn becomes increasingly oriented towards the developmental tasks of their social roles.
- Their perception of time changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly their orientation towards learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness (Knowles, 1980: 38).

Andragogy promotes the concept of self-directed learning, which is central to the psychology of adult learning and teaching. The concept of andragogy requires adult learners to be treated with care so that they do not withdraw from learning programmes. This is particularly important because many adult learners expect to be treated as responsible and respectable persons.

### **Pacing and non-competitive approaches**

Adult learners generally prefer pacing that takes the principle of individual differences into account. No two persons are exactly the same. Learners come from different social and psychological backgrounds, and treating them the same is not helpful. Adults are more heterogeneous in nature than children, so care must be taken not to subject everyone to unnecessary time pressure for the completion of tasks. In other words, adults prefer not to be subjected to a competitive approach to learning. For

example, adults may not appreciate situations in which some of their peers are singled out for awards or prizes.

### **Practice**

The successful facilitator is one who breaks down the body of knowledge or skills to be learned into small, logically arranged and manageable parts. The parts should be easy to understand and easy to engage with. There is also a need to build in the practical application of new knowledge or skills. For example, adults who are learning the skill of maintaining a vehicle would want to practise this skill almost immediately. This is done as a way of reinforcing learning and reducing boredom.

### **Interpersonal relationships**

Psychotherapists were the first to draw attention to the role of interpersonal relationships in adult learning. Interpersonal relationships refer first of all to the relationship between the learner and the facilitator and then to the relationships among the learners themselves. On the surface such relationships may seem inconsequential, but for many African learners they can be very important. It is, for example, quite possible to observe some evidence of mistrust and gossiping among learners in an adult education class. This may be the result of failure to provide information promptly. An incident such as this may undermine learning interaction and exchanges. To promote learning, facilitators need to work very hard to develop trust among the learners and between themselves and the learners. The facilitator may, for example, organise informal meetings over drinks or tea. Such meetings allow for some form of interaction that may not necessarily be related to the actual learning in the classroom.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Imagine a situation in which you have been asked to apply some of the principles of adult learning you have just learned in an adult learning class. How would you proceed in a class that consists of adults from Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, South Africa and Botswana who have come together to acquire the skill of livestock keeping?
- 2 Discuss briefly how a teacher has motivated you in a particular learning activity.
- 3 How would you go about motivating a group of illiterate female farmers who are reluctant to learn a new skill in cropping?

## OBSTACLES

The limitations to adult learning in Africa were discussed in Chapter 2. Because of the importance of this topic, it is reviewed here as well. The degree of success that programmes may have depends on how well these hindrances are anticipated with a view to diminishing their effects.

It is important to note that even though a facilitator may have applied all the principles of adult learning discussed in this chapter, the outcomes may still be unpredictable. This could be the result of the problems posed by what one may call interferences or barriers to learning or to participation in adult education. Since 1981 a great deal of research has been dedicated to the barriers to effective learning, including the studies of Cross (1981) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). Unfortunately these studies have not yet fully engaged the attention of scholars in Africa. Even so, an examination of the presence and intensity of the effects of these barriers to learning from the perspective of adult

learners in Africa has shown that there is little or no difference between adult learners in Africa and those in the West (Oduaran, 2000: 46–57).

In general terms, obstacles can be divided into three major categories:

- Personality or psychological obstacles
- Physical or physiological obstacles
- Situational and socio-economic obstacles

### Personality or psychological obstacles

Personality or psychological obstacles refer to the adult learners' emotions and thoughts in relation to how they value learning compared to other endeavours. In some ways these obstacles have to do with learners' perceptions, that is, the way in which they perceive learning or their ability to learn. If, for example, they think that they are 'too old to learn', there is not much any facilitator can do to ensure that these adults do learn once this mindset has developed and has been allowed to flourish. On the other hand, an adult learner may genuinely experience difficulties with mathematics, for example. The frustrations that arise from the inability to learn mathematics may cause the adult learner to feel 'stupid' and to withdraw from the learning activity.

For these reasons it is important that facilitators are able to perceive things from the perspective of individual learners. African adults, many of whom have very little background in formal learning, may well be faced with the kind of challenges just described. They could be unable to express them clearly for fear of embarrassment, for example, among their peers. In situations such as these, the facilitator ought to assist learners to overcome these obstacles as much as possible.

## Physical or physiological obstacles

There are a number of possible physical obstacles that may work singly or collectively to prevent the adult learner from learning or from learning effectively. Physical obstacles include the adult learner's diminishing capacity and capability, declining sensory organs (leading to poor eyesight or hearing) and even reduced physical energy. As an example, an adult learner may have an eye problem that could be the result of an infection or simply poor eyesight. This inability to see properly could make it difficult for the learner to engage in the learning process and may therefore decrease the learner's confidence or motivation. Similarly, a problem may arise from defective hearing or from brain damage as a result of an accident.

## Situational and socio-economic obstacles

These are often, but not always, of a temporary nature. Among the situational and socio-economic obstacles are issues of hunger, poor health, insecurity, tiredness, anxiety about learning and worries about family and commitments. If, for example, adult learners are confronted by extended family problems on a regular basis, it is extremely difficult to settle down comfortably to learn. Their attention will be divided and concentration levels may drop.

The environment in which learning takes place may also be a significant hindrance. It is important that the classroom provides an environment that is conducive to learning. This includes the availability of conveniences such as toilets, ventilation, seats, teaching and learning aids, as well as screening from distractions such as excessive noise, light and passers-by.

Cultural factors are also important. If, for example, adult learners feel that the

content of a lesson or the learning process itself interferes with their belief systems and values, they may withdraw from the learning situation out of respect for their own cultural mores.

It is important to understand the obstacles in order to be able to identify them and take appropriate steps to deal with them before they actually hinder effective learning.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 **Adults do not always learn with ease.**  
Relate your own experience of situations in which you have been unable to learn. How did you overcome the obstacles?
- 2 **Identify the steps you would take to limit the effects of the obstacles to participation in adult learning programmes.**

## PROBLEM-BASED ADULT LEARNING

Problem-based adult learning is a reflective practice that allows adult learners and their facilitators to make decisions based on sound judgements in difficult situations. Such judgements are grounded in the adult learners' experience, their learning needs and the obstacles to fulfilling these expressed needs. In problem-based adult learning, adult learners are allowed to engage in reflective practice by looking for ways to identify problems that they must try and solve on their own or as a member of a group. Such learning is geared towards identifying and dealing with problems that affect the full manifestation of adult learners' potential for effective functioning as individuals and as members of their community.

## Characteristics

In almost all cases some difficulty that affects a group of individuals is the focus of problem-based adult learning. The adult learning group alone may not be able to deal with the identified problem. It then becomes the responsibility of the facilitator to collaborate with the learners to articulate the problem or problems, to design an appropriate learning programme to deal with the problem or the set of problems, to procure the necessary resources, and then finally to implement and evaluate the programme.

It is clear that, in many instances, problem-based adult learning in Africa features contexts of collaboration or partnership. It may also feature resourcefulness, interest generation, manifestation of creativity and ingenuity, equality and equity, as well as respect for one another.

As discussed in a previous section in this chapter, adult learning in Africa is often related to attempts by individuals or groups to apply the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and interests they have acquired

from an adult learning programme to solve specific problems facing them as individuals or as groups in the same community. Oduaran, Okukpon and Omoruyi (1997: 299–304) have studied adult environmental education programmes in Nigeria in the context of environmental pollution. The study showed that adults in the programme had become aware of the need to protect their environments from regular damage by oil prospecting companies. As a result of the application of different community education packages, the adult learners mobilised themselves into units to prevent enormous damage to their environments. Similarly, Raditloaneng's study of women and literacy in Botswana (2002: 15–45) shows how female single parents can be organised and helped to learn how to engage in productive economic activities.

## A model

In situations where adult learning is clearly problem-based, the model in Figure 3.1 may be useful as a guide to developing appropriate learning programmes.

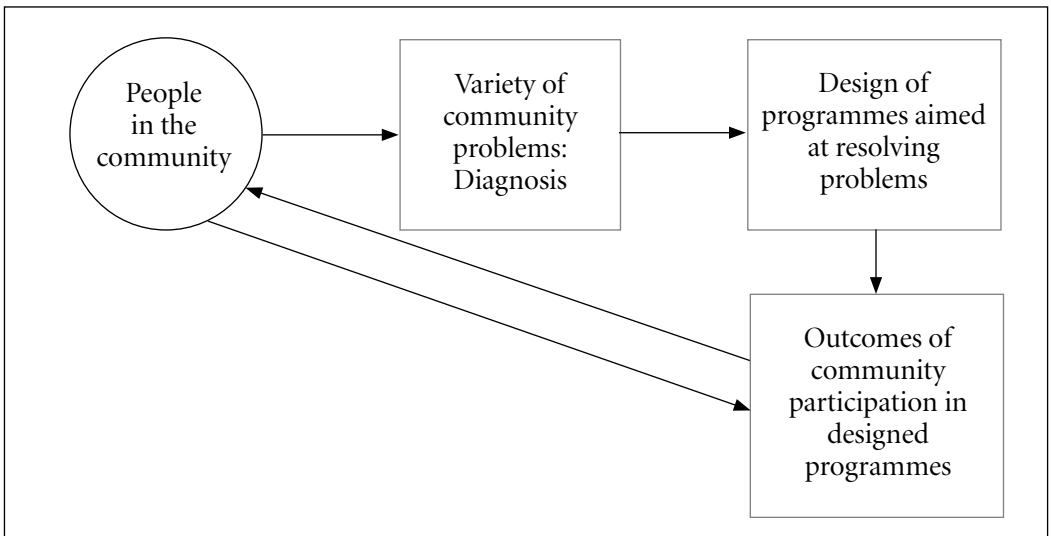


Figure 3.1: A model for problem-based adult learning.

The process is described as follows:

- 1 The group consists of adult learners who live in the same geographical area but who are experiencing different problems.
- 2 There is an adult educator who is assigned to work with the learners and who initiates a needs assessment survey. This survey should be aimed at mapping out all the parameters and features of the problem.
- 3 The adult educator engages with the analysis of the data accumulated from the survey.
- 4 The facilitator articulates the design and resources to be used in solving the problems.
- 5 The next stage is the implementation process.
- 6 The final stage is monitoring and evaluation, based on a pre-determined strategy. This last step paves the way for programme modification or consolidation.

This list is not meant to suggest that there is one universally acceptable pattern of procedure. Each situation should determine what process to follow in meeting the needs of the adult learners involved.

### The challenge

The most obvious challenge in problem-based adult learning is sufficient participation by the adult learners themselves. They may have to be helped to realise that there is a problem in the first place. The next step is for them to commit themselves to deal with the problem. Failure to do so will have an impact on learners' ability to address the identified problem in a significant way.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 Demonstrate how the use of a problem-based approach to adult education could address the problem of learners dropping out.
- 2 How could collaboration help in the design of problem-based adult learning programmes in African communities?
- 3 What challenges does problem-based adult learning bring to adult education methodology?

## SUMMARY

In this chapter the basic features of adult learning in Africa were outlined. In particular, adult learning was defined by referring to some of the major contexts in which it occurs. The reasons why adults learn, obstacles or hindrances to adult learning, the range and principles of adult learning, as well as the way in which they are applied in teaching-learning transactions were highlighted.

## ACTIVITY

Discuss the nature of adult learning in Africa by using examples.

## KEY POINTS

- African adults engage seriously in learning various things throughout their lifetime.
- African adults have ways of imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and interests.

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- Learning in Africa may be informal, non-formal or formal, depending on the needs of the learners and methodology that is most relevant.
  - African adults engage in learning for economic, social, political and religious reasons and for personal improvement.
  - The range of adult learning in Africa reflects the roles adults play in their communities and at home.
  - There are specific principles that guide adult learning in Africa.
  - Adult learners in Africa may be motivated by the setting of goals, feedback, recognition and use of andragogy, pacing and non-competitive approaches, practice and interpersonal relationships.
  - Obstacles to adult learning in Africa can be overcome.
  - Problem-based adult learning holds some prospects for motivating adult learners to assume a degree of ownership of the teaching-learning transaction.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do some adults in Africa engage in learning?
- 2 Enumerate and discuss, with examples, the range of adult learning in African countries of your choice.
- 3 Using examples, elaborate on the principles of adult learning that are relevant in the African context.
- 4 Account for the major obstacles to adult learning in the African context.
- 5 Identify and discuss the operations of a problem-based adult learning programme of your choice.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Daines, H. J., Daines, C. and Graham, B. 1993. *Adult learning: Adult teaching*. Nottingham: Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham.
- Oduaran, A. B. 2000. *Effective adult learning and teaching*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.



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# Chapter 4

## Theories of adult learning

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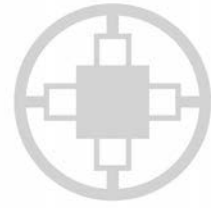
### OVERVIEW

This chapter identifies and examines theories of adult learning. These include learning from experience, developmental psychological theories, critical reflection, constructivism, the theory of margin, Knox's proficiency theory and the learning-process theory. In particular, attention is paid to models, debates and the salient characteristics of these theories in relation to adult learning and teaching in African contexts.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Discuss the major theoretical models and debates in adult learning.
- 2 Outline some of the current theories of adult learning and describe their relevance to adult learners in Africa.
- 3 Apply the learning theories to adult learning in specific contexts.
- 4 Highlight the place of African indigenous knowledge systems in the understanding of adult learning.
- 5 Explore the implications of the theories for adult teaching and learning in Africa.



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## KEY TERMS

**drive** A basic need or impulse that causes an individual to take action aimed at achieving a goal.

**free will** This is a person's ability to decide what he or she wants to do.

**self-actualisation** It is the outcome of people's efforts to realise their full potential in life.

**self-concept** It is the way people see themselves in relation to others.

**self-maintenance** This concept describes people's efforts to protect themselves from absolute danger, failure or afflictions of any kind.

**self-enhancement** It depicts people's efforts to improve themselves and their situation.

## BEFORE YOU START

In small groups, discuss the following questions and share your answers with your facilitator:

- 1 To what extent is it true that there is no structure in adult learning in Africa?
- 2 Identify and discuss any adult learning programme in Africa that is carefully structured into steps or stages.
- 3 Select any two learning programmes in your community that are aimed at helping individuals to develop their full potential.
- 4 Explain how Africans acquire knowledge by using examples.

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## OVERVIEW OF ADULT LEARNING THEORIES

Most literature on adult learning theories is Western. However, Africans have also developed their thoughts on ways of knowing, especially indigenous ways of knowing. In this chapter Western theories are discussed and then African perspectives on theoretical issues are considered. Seven categories of Western adult learning theories are examined in this section. These are:

- Learning from experience
- Developmental psychological theories
- Critical reflection
- Constructivism
- The theory of margin
- Knox's proficiency theory
- The learning-process theory

### Learning from experience

There are two theories that describe how individuals learn from experience. These are the behaviourist and humanist theories.

#### The behaviourist theory

This theory has already been introduced in Chapters 1 and 3, and will be discussed further here. The behaviourist theory has been propounded by a group of psychologists generally referred to as the reductionists. This school of thought includes John B. Watson, its founder, B. F. Skinner, I. V. Pavlov, E. L. Thorndike, E. R. Guthrie and C. Hull, among others. They applied a reductionist approach to the understanding of how learning occurs.

The concern of reductionist psychologists is that learning is a complex activity that can be understood only by studying behaviour that can be observed and measured. Their experiments were therefore designed around applying a stimulus

and then waiting for the commensurate response. For this reason the reductionist psychologists are also occasionally referred to as stimulus-response associationists, 'bond' theorists and behaviourists.

Morris and Maisto (1999: 14) describe how I. V. Pavlov used dogs in laboratories to derive ideas about stimuli and responses, or what other psychologists eventually described as conditioning. The concept of *conditioning* is based on the proposition that the learner's acquisition of knowledge stems from muscular reactions and not just mental processes. Morris and Maisto (1999: 14) describe it as follows: 'All behaviour is a learned response to some stimulus in the environment'.

The belief that people's behaviour can be changed through a process or system of conditioning is based on this idea. When the change in behaviour is further enhanced through a system of reinforcement, as B. F. Skinner explained, the likelihood of changing a person's behaviour is even greater.

The following example illustrates the possible implications of this approach in African contexts. From about 1975 to 1985 the former Bendel State of Nigeria applied this principle in its promotion of community development. The government of the Bendel State discovered that community development was becoming less appealing to the people. The reason was that the government had become obsessively paternalistic in its development programmes because it was deriving revenue from the exploration of petroleum products. It therefore took over development from the people and eventually every community began to look to the government for almost everything. In time, however, government revenue from petroleum products diminished and the government found it problematic to continue the paternalistic approach. Development of communities

slowed down, and the government introduced a system of substantial rewards to the communities that were most active in initiating and completing self-help projects within a development plan period of five years. The result was that communities that had become interested in initiating self-help projects 'woke up' from their 'slumber' and began taking action again.

In the example described above, the government's introduction of rewards was a stimulus, in behaviourist terms, and the communities' revival of the self-help spirit was the response. This simplified illustration of the behaviourist theory should, for example, be easy to apply to adult learning in a literacy programme.

The behaviourist theory has implications for adult learning. For instance, the theory reminds us that adult learning can be promoted and reinforced even better if a system of rewards is introduced, even in a most rudimentary manner. Secondly, adult learners generally expect to put into practice what they have learned almost immediately. Thirdly, the systematic and organised introduction of rewards or reinforcement means that whatever we teach adults should be organised in different components or parts that add up to and make up a complete learning package.

Finally, behaviourist experimentation revealed that the subjects used did not always get everything right at once. The implication for adult learning programmes is that they should make provision for trial and error. If, for example, adult learners fail to give the correct response initially, they must not be scolded. Facilitators are in fact expected to be very patient. Adult learners should be encouraged to solve problems through a system of 'trial' and 'error'. Facilitators should always be aware of the fact that no one is perfect and that learners will make mistakes.

## The humanist theory

The humanist theory is the result of the efforts of humanist psychologists to discover what makes human beings behave in a certain way that is distinct from animal behaviour. If you look around you, you may find that people from different places may respond differently to a specific situation. This difference can, for example, be seen in the different responses by the Batswana and Nigerians to slow banking procedures at commercial banks in their countries. Whereas the Batswana may be very patient in response to the slow banking procedure, the Nigerians could become very impatient in the same situation.

The humanist psychology movement began in the 1950s and was pioneered by Carl Rogers and later Abraham Maslow. The humanist theory simply stipulates that 'human beings are unique in the animal classification or category and that the natural human tendency is to strive towards happiness, love, creativity, goodness and fulfilment' (Morris and Maisto, 1999: 16).

The value of self-fulfilment is often indicated in African mythology and literature. For example, in Chinua Achebe's popular novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the main character, Okonkwo, is constantly driven by the desire to achieve self-fulfilment in everything he does.

Two major concepts are at the centre of the humanist theory: *free will* and *drive*. Humanist theorists emphasise the point that humans, unlike animals, have free will. This could, for example, be the reason why adult learners may choose not to enrol in further or continuing education programmes, no matter how well they are designed. When they do so, their choice is generally based on reasons that are very convincing to them. On the other hand, they may also choose to enrol in such programmes. It all depends on their preferences and decision-making.

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The second concept of *drive* comes in when the choice has already been made. If, for example, adult learners choose to enrol in a programme, they will look for information on how to enrol and eventually get started in the programme. There is clearly a link between free will and drive, where drive can be seen as the action that follows the choice. Morris and Maisto (1999: 642) define drive as a 'state of tension or arousal brought on by biological needs'. In the explanation above, adults' need for achievement may be the drive behind the action of enrolling in an adult learning programme. The end result of most actions induced in this manner is self-fulfilment. In Africa, many adults strive for this kind of self-fulfilment in their respective professions. A palm wine tapper, for example, who wants to be the best among his peers would want to study the best time for tapping and the best techniques. Similarly, a herbalist who wants to excel will take time to study the uses and efficacy of several herbs in the environment. In each case the need to excel will ultimately compel such professionals to be extremely hardworking and committed to their professions.

The humanist theory proposes that it is free will that compels an individual to explore ways of achieving self-actualisation, self-maintenance and self-enhancement. If these three concepts pose any difficulties for you, see the list of key terms at the beginning of this chapter.

Emphasis in the humanist theory is usually placed on how learners, and in our case adult learners, can best be assisted to undertake actions that are aimed at helping them to realise their full potential. This is largely influenced by how people see or perceive and interpret circumstances or events that surround them. Carl Rogers postulated that the way in which people see or perceive themselves (their inner selves) could

influence how they perceive the world and interpret the events around them.

The humanist theory has influenced adult learning. Bello (1988: 95–99) outlines some of the ways in which this theory applies to adult education. The ideas emerging from the theory form the basis for some of the principles adopted in adult education. These principles include:

- 1 *Learning should be based on freedom of choice:* Freedom of choice derives from the idea of free will. It simply requires that we allow adult learners to choose what they wish to learn. Learning activities should not be imposed on them. In other words, adult learners should be free to play active roles in their learning programmes and should therefore be involved in designing these programmes.
- 2 *The learning situation must not be threatening:* This principle emerges from Carl Rogers' concept of *self-theory* that implies that people want to be themselves at all times. This is particularly true for adult learners. Many African adult learners are likely to refuse learning techniques that rely solely on the use of the electronic media.  
The principle here implies that learning interactions must not be threatening if adults are to learn. Adults must be allowed to express themselves freely in open, loving learning environments. In other words, adult learners function best in emotionally supportive instead of threatening environments.
- 3 *Experiences are at the centre of learning and self-actualisation:* Adult learners come to learning programmes with diverse and rich experiences. If their learning is to be enhanced, the kind of activities of the programme should enable learners to tap their experience as they attempt to integrate new

information and ideas.

- 4 *Participation is required:* Adults seek to participate actively in the design and implementation of their learning programmes at all times. They will not tolerate activities in which they are made to be passive recipients of information and ideas. They must therefore be allowed to play active roles.
- 5 *Self-evaluation is desirable:* Adult learning is enhanced when adult learners are allowed to critique themselves, as well as the learning package and procedures. This is what Rogers emphasises in his recommendation of client-centred therapy. In this type of therapy clients or learners are put through different experiences and evaluate their performances at the end of the process. The learners gradually absorb only the relevant experiences that can enhance the development of their full potential in life.
- 6 *Growth and self-actualisation are the adult's motivational forces:* According to this principle an individual's greatest desire is to grow and to reach self-actualisation. Therefore, environmental and cultural hindrances act as stepping stones or driving forces by compelling the individual to succeed. In this case the learning situation should provide diverse experiences.
- 7 *Self-concept and self-esteem should be considered in designing learning programmes:* Self-concept and self-esteem were mentioned earlier in this chapter. The ways in which we see ourselves affect our perception of situations and the world as a whole. If this view is positive, it will help us to strive to do well or even better. If it is negative, it will reduce the level of interest in what we are doing.

The essence of the humanist theory lies in the fact that interpersonal relationships are very important in adult teaching and

learning. These relationships affect adults' expectations and the contributions they are expected to make towards realising the goals of adult learning programmes.

## Developmental theories

These theories include critical social and feminist theories.

### Critical social theory

Over the years research has tried to document the demographic characteristics of African adult learners in the context of the relationship between these characteristics and performance. Research on adult learning in Africa is, however, gradually moving away from the individual to the social environments in which adults learn. In other words, there is a gradual shift from individual learning to community learning.

Critical social theory has its origins in attempts to explore the larger systems in society as they shape adult learning. For example, participation in adult evening classes in typical African villages may partly be influenced by the encouragement or discouragement adult learners receive from other members of the community. The approach of the theory indicates that it was influenced by Marxism and resonating thoughts around critical theory, multiculturalism, postmodernism and feminist theory. Critical social theory states that 'individual learning is shaped by the learner's society, culture, structure and history' (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999: 340).

The theory places emphasis on society as a basic support for construction, acquisition and utilisation of knowledge. Therefore, what society does or does not do is crucial to the success of teaching-learning relationships in adult education programmes. As Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 341) point out, the theory is deemed to be 'critical'

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because it describes how some adult education programmes feature processes in which adult learners are assisted in terms of being able to ask critical questions and even assess basic assumptions. Through this process of personally exploring socially relevant issues, adult learners are empowered in their professions, careers or even in daily life.

Critical social theory has been built into several women's empowerment programmes in Africa. In community development, literacy and health projects designed and implemented by the University Village Association (UNIVA) in Ibadan, Nigeria, women are exposed to critical awareness creation, literacy and economic empowerment. This is done within the women's rural communities where UNIVA has attempted to blend learning with the people's culture. The joy that characterises the celebration by women who enrol in the UNIVA programme is an indication of the degree of its success.

Welton (cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999: 347), states that the aim of critical theory is 'to help people to stop being passive victims who collude, at least partly, in their domination by external forces'. According to this viewpoint, critical theory serves the purpose of liberating people from oppression. Adult learning should help learners to ask questions directed at revealing their social worlds and the causes of their subjugation and then to come to the realisation that they need to recreate their lives. To be able to do this, adult learners need psychological, social and economic power. It is this power that should eventually lead to their empowerment and emancipation. When this happens, adult learners become the subjects, drivers and controllers of their destinies instead of being objects.

Critical social theory may lead to a process of critiquing existing economic

and social structures, as well as developing consequent structures and power relationships that arise from reform. The theory, in terms of adult education, brings the awareness that programmes that will attract adult learners are really those that involve reflective discourse and provide knowledge that is culturally, economically and socially relevant and capable of helping learners to deal with challenges. The theory acknowledges that cultural learning institutions, like the media, museums, libraries, archives and so on, are important in enhancing adult learning. These cultural learning institutions respond to social structures, hierarchies and society's problems, needs and interests by creating knowledge. Therefore, when learners are reduced to nothing through the way in which learning is structured and delivered, they must turn to these cultural learning institutions, policies and providers to bring about transformation. This is one reason why adult educators pursue the ideals of quantitative and qualitative provision of access to education and learning by all. Finally, this theory brought the awareness that society should provide systems that are fair to all in terms of the allocation of resources.

## Feminist theory

Concepts such as *gender*, *feminism*, *feminist theory* and *feminist pedagogy* are often heard in everyday language. In this section the influence of feminist theory on adult education programmes is discussed. The feminist theory of adult learning is derived from the understanding of the different feminist perspectives, namely liberal, radical, socialist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial feminist perspectives. It is discussed in full in another book in this series, *Research Methods for Adult Educators in Africa*, by Chilisa and Preece (2005).

- Liberal feminism: Men and women should have equal rights to the same learning opportunities in all societies.
- Radical feminism: Learning opportunities should take account of the values of nurturing, intuition and caring, normally associated with women, as well as aggression and objectivity, normally associated with men.
- Socialist feminism: Since gender is socially rather than biologically constructed to the disadvantage of women, learning programmes for adult learners in Africa should not promote middle class and male-dominated values about knowledge. In addition, learning programmes should avoid oppressive frameworks with class, ethnicity or disability as a basis.
- Post-structuralist feminism: Dominant voices should not be allowed to engage in labelling and naming differences in ways that seem to create imbalance in adult learning transactions in Africa.
- Post-colonial feminism: Learning transactions for adults in Africa should not continue to promote imposed Western patriarchal gender discriminations that nurture power differentials.

What these perspectives have done is to evolve what has become known as feminist pedagogy. The aim of feminist pedagogy is to remove gender-based discrimination in teaching-learning situations. In Africa, feminist pedagogy emerged from feminist theories.

## Critical reflection

In 1938 the famous American educator John Dewey came up with the idea that anything that can be labelled as real or genuine education happens through experience, even though not all experiences are educating. In Africa, however, there is a belief that all

experiences educate, whether such experiences are pleasant or unpleasant. Even before Western scholars popularised the role of experience, experiential learning and now critical reflection in education, African ancestors had based all their so-called informal and non-formal learning processes on experience and critical reflection. The acquisition of skills through the indigenous apprenticeship system in Africa is based on experience, reflection and practice.

In his study of indigenous blacksmith apprenticeship training among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, Obidi (1995: 375–379) points out that learning the craft of the blacksmith begins with rendering personal services to the master craftsman. The services consist of cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house and running errands. When all these duties have been performed, the actual training commences, beginning with learning the names of the tools and how to handle them. The apprentice then moves on to learning the complexities and intricacies of the craft, using observation, experience, reflection and practice under supervision as the main techniques of acquiring skills. In the research of Ekpenyoung (1999: 449–468) on best practice in formal business education, emphasis is placed on the appreciation strategy as propounded by Johans Herbart, gestalt-insight and autonomous learning strategy as proposed by Rousseau and perceptual strategy as propounded by Dewey. Ekpenyoung (1999) explains these strategies as follows:

- The appreciation strategy brings to the fore the fact that ideas are non-physical realities that fill our minds in the subconscious part, and these ideas are brought out when challenges arise.
- Gestalt-insight places emphasis on insightful learning based on the learner's experience and behaviour.



- The autonomous learning strategy is based on the idea that learners should be allowed to explore their natural environment in an unhindered way, as proposed by Rousseau, and should then move on to identify goals and resources to achieve the set goals.
- The perceptual learning strategy states that all external or internal events in learning processes require some kind of response or certain event in the learner's environment.

Ekpenyoung (1999) comes to the conclusion that all these strategies are being applied in learning in Africa. In other words, the acquisition of skills and knowledge in Africa, even to date, requires a great deal of observation, discussion, reflection, analysis and evaluation of experiences.

Contemporary thought on critical reflection cannot be said to have gone beyond this level. Merriam (1994), Brookfield (1986) and Jarvis (1992) all suggest that critical reflection really consists of deep thought about what and how an individual learns. Emphasis in this context is on questioning old and new assumptions, exploring in detail the new knowledge being created, evaluating the self, past choices and future possibilities in the process of applying experiences in learning processes (Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler, 2000: 26). The essence of critical reflection is a repetitive process. The learner learns by building blocks of knowledge and making linkages through the application of experience. This can be found in several skills acquisition programmes in Nigeria, Botswana, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia.

## Constructivism

The theory of constructivism describes how human beings attempt to understand the world around them. This attempt is said to

have originated among the classical Greeks, beginning with Plato. In learning, constructivism is a theory of knowledge in which the facilitator tries to appreciate and form a better understanding of how learners construct, deconstruct and reconstruct ideas and beliefs as they experience the world around them. Constructivism therefore involves the deep reflection of learners on things or events that are happening around them. It not only involves deep reflection, but also perception. Its popularity and growth as a theory has been influenced by philosophical thought and empirical theories espoused by famous thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, Immanuel Kant, Giovanni Battista Vico and the so-called modern constructivists like Piaget, Vygotsky and Kelly. According to Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler (2000: 18–30) these modern constructivists have relied more on empirical data than on philosophical speculation in advancing our knowledge of the theory of constructivism.

Modern constructivists have helped us to gain more insight into constructivism. From their efforts we have learned that the way in which people know and understand is very similar. Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler (2000: 19–20) summarise the main points in the theory of constructivism as follows:

- Knowledge is derived from an individual's interaction with social processes and contexts.
- Knowledge should be seen as a creative construction in which the individual learner is an actor or active participant or subject rather than a passive object.
- The way in which people make or construct meaning can change over time on the basis of prevailing experiences.

These are the main thrusts of constructivism. As a theory of learning it deals with social processes, contexts (especially our

culture and environments) and individual learners as they construe or interpret ideas and events about learning and build frameworks of meanings.

It is important to note that this theory is not new or unknown to Africans. Africans have their own ways of knowing. They have always used environmentally relevant objects in constructing ideas and knowledge. For example, in traditional African communities farmers could tell the time of day by simply listening to the chanting of a particular bird in the bush. They do not have or even need wristwatches to be able to tell the time correctly. Similarly, a traditional healer could tell you which mixture of herbs would be effective in healing certain diseases. Africans' ways of knowing, constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge have not been thoroughly studied and are therefore hardly mentioned in the available literature.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Evaluate the relevance of the critical learning theory in the context of African cultures.
- 2 Discuss the view that the application of the critical learning theory will actually enhance the quality of women's empowerment programmes in Africa.
- 3 To what extent would you agree that critical reflection is not entirely new to African adults?
- 4 How do Africans try to understand the world around them, using things such as storytelling, mythology and religion?
- 5 How would you use the feminist theory in traditional adult learning programmes in Africa?
- 6 What challenges are you likely to face in applying the feminist theory in the often male-dominated African contexts, and how will you handle these?

## The theory of margin

McClusky first espoused this theory in 1963. According to him, the period of adulthood is one of growth, change and integration. During this time the adult tries to strike a balance between the amount of energy required and the actual amount of energy that is available. The concern over the amount of energy available to adults stems from the several roles they have to play and for which they need energy. For adults to play their respective roles they need energy, or what Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 280) describe as the 'power' of life.

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 280), McClusky explains the theory as follows:

*Reducing Load or increasing Power may increase margin, or increasing Load and/or reducing Power may decrease it. We can control both by modifying either Power or Load. When Load continually matches or exceeds Power and if both are fixed and/or out of control, or irreversible, the situation becomes highly vulnerable and susceptible to breakdown. If, however, Load and Power can be controlled, and, better yet, if a person is able to lay hold of a reserve (Margin) of Power, he [sic] is better positioned to take risks, can engage in exploratory, creative activities, is more likely to learn, etc.*

What the theory is saying is that if adults are to learn effectively, care must be taken to ensure that they have enough margin of power. In Africa, this theory cannot be overemphasised because African adults play multiple roles that take up a lot of their time, leaving them with little power to participate in adult learning programmes.

In the oil city of Warri in the Delta State of Nigeria, for example, traders who attended adult literacy programmes were

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unable to sit through a one-hour lesson. Many of them fell asleep halfway through the lesson. In this example, the implication is that many adjustments are needed between Load and Power.

### **Knox's proficiency theory**

In 1980 Alan Knox developed this theory in which reference is made to the life situation of the adult learner. The focus is on the role performances of adult learners and what they do with the knowledge they acquire beyond the level of participation in learning. The point here is that adults need to be proficient in whatever they are doing and any learning that is worthy of attention must help them to become proficient in the different roles they have to play. Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 283) quote Knox as having defined 'proficiency' as 'the capability to perform satisfactorily if given the opportunity'. Performance is also the product of many different factors. It requires the presence or availability of a variety of factors such as the role-player's attitude, knowledge, skills, interests and values. The interaction between these factors and the way in which they are controlled are crucial in enhancing the performance of learners. Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 283) have therefore identified the following basic features from Knox's theory that will influence the performance of learners:

- The learner's general environment
- The learner's past and present characteristics
- Performance
- Aspiration
- Self
- Discrepancies
- Specific environments
- Learning activity
- The role of the facilitator

Although the theory is limited to better performance by the individual learner, Africans value community unity and cooperation highly. This theory may therefore need to be modified to account for the important role the community plays in the learning process.

### **The learning process theory of Jarvis**

Jarvis' theory of adult learning is based on the adult learner's life situation and experiences. The focus is on how experiences in life influence the rate, quantity and quality of learning. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Jarvis proposes that all learning begins with experience. At the start of the learning process these experiences are recovered from the memory and applied to prevailing challenges. Therefore, according to Jarvis, people learn differently because of the discrepancies in their life biographies and experiences. Biography in this case refers to who and what learners are at a given point in time and how their experiences affect their response to learning. Experience is here defined as that which happens to an individual unexpectedly. Therefore, the quality of the responses to the learning stimulus depends on the ability to handle the experiences and apply them in dealing with challenges in life. The relevance of this theory for adult learning in Africa is that it places the emphasis on the social context of learning.

In Africa, the social context of learning is dominated by cultural norms and belief systems. The culture is rich, as can be seen in the artefacts, music, poetry, drama and relationships of the people. Kinship is very important in the African context. In times of difficulty or rejoicing, family members almost always offer support. An extended consideration of the social context of adult learning in Africa can be found in

*The Social Context of Adult Learning in Africa* by Indabawa with Mpofu (2005) in this series.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 What are the possible implications of constructivism for the poverty alleviation aspect of adult education programmes in your country?
- 2 Identify and discuss the thrusts of creative construction of knowledge in any traditional African community with which you have interacted.
- 3 What is the relevance of the learning process theory and the theory of margin for adult learning and teaching in Africa?
- 4 How do African cultural arrangements enhance the theory of proficiency in learning programmes?
- 5 Explain how African life situations in an identifiable ethnic group can be applied to the design and implementation of women's empowerment programmes.

## INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

So far in this chapter the focus and contents of the behaviourist, humanist, critical social, feminist, critical reflection, constructivist, margin proficiency and learning process theories as they relate to adult learning have been discussed. The thoughts that shaped the discussion are mainly Western. This does not mean that Africans have never considered these theories in the design and management of their learning systems. The absence of African ideas in the discussion is probably the result of the prevalence of orality, which does not encourage the written documentation of ideas. Fortunately, research is steadily being done and will soon

reveal African ideas in the area of learning systems and processes. African scholars and leaders are re-emphasising an African Renaissance also with regard to learning theories, especially indigenous learning systems. The search for indigenous learning systems should soon generate information that might be useful in developing original ideas on how Africans learn. Among the Urhobos of the Delta State in Nigeria, research is, for example, being directed at the education and training of traditional healers, as well as at art forms and other cultural traits.

It may be true that there are no experimentally generated theories of adult learning in Africa, but there are indigenous ways of knowing. The study of these ways of knowing is currently gaining a great deal of interest among African scholars (Falebita, 2003: 1–45; Eyzaguirre, 2001).

*Indigenous knowledge*, as a concept, describes local or community knowledge that is commonly generated and transmitted over a period of time in geographic and historic space. This kind of knowledge is generated by local people in response to the different physiological, agricultural, ecological, socio-economic, cultural and political challenges they face. For example, the incidence of snake bites may compel people to think of an ingenious way of dealing with the problem. Indigenous knowledge and its transmission are fairly well developed in some African communities. Indigenous knowledge includes locally relevant or valuable knowledge, based on the collective experiences of a people. This knowledge is usually applied when issues related to health, farming, warfare, education, culture and the environment have to be resolved.

The transmission of the knowledge and skills of bone setting can be used as an example. At Ugbogiebo village, near Benin City in the Edo State of Nigeria, there was

an old man whose specialisation in bone setting has been attracting media attention for several years. When the old man realised that he had to pass on his skill before he died, he decided to teach his male children the skill. He taught them the use of certain herbs under specific conditions. The question to be asked is how the apprentices would know that they had acquired the skill. The old man told them that when they are treating someone with a simple or compound fracture, they should take a chicken and break one of its legs. The chicken's leg should then be treated with the same set of herbs used on the human patient. After treating the chicken, it should be allowed to roam free again. The children were then told that on the day the treated chicken started walking again, the human patient should also be able to start walking. This would be the healer's indication that the human patient had been healed. This test of knowing has stood the test of time and is generally acknowledged among the Edo-speaking people of Nigeria. Other examples include the blacksmith apprenticeship system in Benin.

## ACTIVITY

Give examples of indigenous knowledge systems in your community.

## THEORETICAL MODELS AND DEBATES

It is remarkable that many African nations have committed themselves to the recommendations that emerged from the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) held in Hamburg in 1997. These recommendations have been documented in the *Hamburg Declaration* (1997). CONFINTEA V spells

out several scenarios and strategies on adult learning internationally. CONFINTEA V marked a fundamental change in emphasis from adult education to adult learning. The desire to enhance adult learning through a proper articulation of how learning actually occurs has led to experimentation, criticism and re-experimentation. Africa's commitment to the goals enunciated at Hamburg was prefigured at the 1996 Dakar Consultative Meeting on adult and continuing education. The ideas articulated at the Dakar meeting have been documented in *The Dakar Declaration on Adult Education and Lifelong Learning*. The position paper that informed the declaration itself hinted clearly at the fact that Africans are very much aware that globalisation, together with its resulting interdependence and pursuit of excellence, should naturally compel African people to engage in learning. Delegates at the Dakar meeting therefore endorsed an integrating and self-training system in adult education in order to develop people (UNESCO, 1996: 1–18).

The debates on how learning occurs have been as controversial as the attempts to define learning. Bello (1988: 86), for example, attempts to review different definitions of learning and comes to the conclusion that learning should not be equated with *habituation* and *sensitisation*. He describes habituation as the process of forming a habit of something that possibly results in a change in behaviour that is relatively permanent. Habituation, as a concept, is used in this sense to describe a person's tendency to want to learn from ordinary formation and mastery of habits. This may be done consciously or even unconsciously. For example, an adult learner who has just moved into an apartment near a busy airport may have concentration problems for the first few weeks. However, it may be possible for that adult learner to begin to concentrate a couple of weeks later. This

ability to learn after a few weeks may result in permanent change in behaviour as far as reading in a noisy environment is concerned, but psychologists would generally not regard this permanent change in ability as learning, but rather as habituation.

Similarly, sensitisation may bring about a change in behaviour that is relatively permanent but which may not be regarded as learning by psychologists. Sensitisation, as a concept, describes a situation in which an individual reacts to a particular event, situation or object that induced a change and not to any other situation, no matter how similar they might seem to be (Bello, 1988: 87). If, for example, a snake bites a farmer at a particular place on his farm, the farmer may unconsciously avoid this place in future.

According to Bello (1988: 87), even though habituation and sensitisation may result in some form of change in behaviour that could be permanent, it does not happen as a result of conditioning. If, for instance, a very withdrawn person suddenly becomes friendly and smiles permanently because he has smoked dagga (Indian hemp), it does not mean that this person has learned how to be friendly and interact with other people. On the other hand, habituation describes a process of a change in behaviour that occurs from formation of habits. If a person, for instance, gets used to doing something because of constant contact with that thing, for example chewing bubblegum on a permanent basis, it cannot be said that the person has learned how to chew bubblegum. Those who have tried to describe instances of sensitisation and habituation as changes in behaviour have therefore been severely criticised, because these processes are not necessarily based on conditioned responses.

To the psychologist, learning may be defined as the reorganisation of a series of stimuli and perceptions that allow

the learner to form new associations (for example, between a stimulus and a response), resolve new problems and come to a deeper understanding which leads to a permanent change in behaviour. For example, an illiterate African farmer may be taught modern farming techniques and this could improve his productivity. Learning can therefore be described as a process in which people engage and use all their cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills in an attempt to achieve permanent and desirable changes in behaviour.

It is the concern for a proper understanding and articulation of how people learn that has led to the psychological investigations. These investigations have evolved into what we now know as theories of learning. It is important to discuss briefly how some of these theories relate to issues in adult learning in Africa.



## ACTIVITY

**Give examples of habituation and sensitisation in your own community.**

## AFRICAN ISSUES

It is possible for us to critique some of the theories of adult learning from an African perspective. The procedure here is to identify specific concerns embedded in the theories and then briefly explore them in context.

Nyamnjoh (2002) has criticised Western epistemological exports to Africa as being weak because they tend to limit reality to appearances with which they seek to justify, mostly without explanation, the so-called absolute and irrefutable truth. For Africans, the search for truth goes beyond appearances into some deep understanding of why the truth is truth. Sometimes the search for

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truth may be mystified as recourse may be made to traditional religious performances. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, the *ifa* oracle of divination may be used to determine what the truth is. Magical understanding and interpretation of the truth is accepted in Africa and this is connected to the way in which people know.

Learning in the traditional African context of knowledge and skills acquisition has always been an active process for people, where they were expected to put into practice what they have learned almost immediately. In Africa the motivation for learning comes from within the individual in the first place. No one is allowed to be lazy, for laziness places an unnecessary burden on the family and the community. If, however, the individual fails to be self-motivated, the family and community may impose sanctions. In such a case, the individual would have to be motivated extrinsically.

Anxiety is one issue that dominates the participation of African adults in learning. For learning to take place, the level of anxiety in the learner must be minimised. Adults are quick to react unfavourably to unnecessary pressure on them. This is why learning among indigenous people is sometimes accompanied by music and dancing. For learning to be effective, there should also be a high level of interpersonal relationships between the learners and the facilitator. Facilitators should, in effect, regard themselves as learners as well. This is even more so because in adult learning emphasis is placed on experience. African learners acquire experience widely and freely through interactive meetings, festivals, worship ceremonies and self-help activities. Because facilitators are not the only people with experience, they also do not have exclusive rights to knowledge.

African adult learners have very high expectations of active involvement in

learning and of the gains to be derived from participation in learning. These expectations must be met to prevent learners from withdrawing from the learning programme.

Personality adjustment in Africa is an important issue. A maladjusted person or someone who lives under very stressful conditions cannot be expected to be entirely useful to the community. It can therefore become necessary for the community to offer social support to help restore the equilibrium of maladjusted persons. Similarly, the development of self-concept or self-esteem is always considered a crucial issue in Africa. As mentioned in earlier chapters, self-concept or self-esteem describes the way in which people see themselves in relation to other people. In Africa, the community and family members have devised various strategies to help a person who suffers from a low self-concept or self-esteem. Low self-esteem can be ascribed to different factors, but is often the result of humiliating experiences under a colonialist or apartheid regime. In West Africa, for example, the *sharoo* system of the Fulanis is aimed at strengthening an individual's self-concept. Unfortunately, this system applies to boys only, while girls are placed in the care of their mothers.

Finally, concerns over reinforcement are to be found in attempts by facilitators to introduce a system of reward and sanction in adult learning programmes. Facilitators usually realise that rewarding active learners, for instance, through encouraging words, could spur them on to better participation. Similarly, discouragement, for instance by not providing enough breaks, may have a negative influence on learning and reinforcement. Negative reinforcement may lead to resistance, and the facilitator should manage the teaching-learning situation carefully.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 How would you minimise anxiety among adult learners in your own community?
- 2 Outline and discuss, using examples, some of the African issues that can be derived from any of the modern theories of learning.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has highlighted a number of theories of learning related to the adult learner from the perspective of adult learners in Africa. In particular, the views expressed by behaviourists, humanists and critical social theorists on adult learning were discussed. The views expressed by feminist pedagogists and theorists who are interested in critical reflection and constructivism were also highlighted. These theories were examined in terms of their relevance for adult learning in Africa. The importance of the involvement of learners in designing their own learning programmes was highlighted. Encouragement of learner participation was discussed. The chapter was concluded with a presentation and discussion of learning transactions with adults, drawing profoundly on the theories of margin, proficiency and learning. Finally, the conclusion was that a proper application of the theories should enhance adult learning in Africa.

## KEY POINTS

- Experience plays a major role in adult learning.
- Reductionist psychologists argue that learning is a complex behaviour.
- Conditioning is based on the proposition that the learner's knowledge acquisition system relies on muscular reactions.

- All behaviour is a learned response to some stimulus.
- People's behaviour can be changed.
- Adults are encouraged to learn through a system of trial and error.
- The drive for self-fulfilment is crucial for learning.
- Learning should be based on freedom of choice.
- Participation is very important in adult learning.
- Adult learners are motivated by the desire for growth and self-actualisation.
- Interpersonal relationships are very important in adult teaching and learning.
- The learner's environment, culture and society are very important in the acquisition of knowledge.
- Knowledge is derived from the individual's interaction with social processes and contexts.
- Adult learning in traditional Africa is guided by unwritten theories.
- CONFINTEA V has spelt out sufficient scenarios and strategies around which African scholars can espouse theories of learning relevant to Africa.
- Society should not be structured to oppress anyone who is interested in learning.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 To what extent would you agree that the features and principles of the behaviourist theory are not new to Africans?
- 2 Is it correct to suggest that the whole essence of the humanist theory has always been there in African traditions and culture?
- 3 The success of the application of the critical social theory depends on the tolerance of managers of adult learning programmes. Discuss this with examples.



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- 4 How significant is the role African culture and society play in adult learning?
  - 5 How would you arrange adult learning programmes at the workplace to minimise the effect of the theory of margin?

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 In small groups, arrange a presentation and discussion that will examine any of the theories as it relates to adult learning in Africa.
- 2 Attempt a critique of at least two of the modern theories of adult learning in the African context.
- 3 Using examples, briefly describe the ways of knowing and understanding in Africa.

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# Chapter 5

## Life span development

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### OVERVIEW

This chapter describes and explains what life span development and the adult ageing process involve. It then looks at the way in which life span development is perceived in African cultures. Some of the major stages and cycles of life span development in Africa are highlighted. Finally, it takes a look at some of the implications of life span development for adult educators in Africa.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Explain the psychological concept of life span development and the adult ageing process.
- 2 Discuss how life span development is perceived in some African cultures.
- 3 Elaborate on some of the different stages of life span development identified in Africa.
- 4 Discuss the implications of African perspectives on life span development for adult educators.

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## KEY TERMS

**adult ageing process** The physiological changes that adults experience as they grow older. These changes affect the way they look, but also how they function and respond in daily life.

**crystallised intelligence** The ability to perceive relations and to engage in formal reasoning and abstraction, based on familiarity with knowledge of the intellectual and cultural heritage of society.

**fluid intelligence** The ability to perceive complex relations, engage in short-term memory and abstract reasoning and form concepts. It is independent of experience and education.

**intelligence** The capacity to learn, reason and solve problems.

**life span** The maximum number of years an individual can live. While most development involves growth, it also involves decline.

**life span approach** An approach to the study of human development that emphasises developmental change throughout life.

**physical processes** Changes in the development of the brain, height and weight, changes in motor skills and hormonal changes, among others.

**social-emotional processes** Changes in the individual's relationships with other people, changes in emotions and changes in personality.

## BEFORE YOU START

**Work in pairs and write down your thoughts on:**

- 1 **Human development**
- 2 **Life span**
- 3 **Ageing**

**Discuss your findings with your facilitator.**

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## LIFE SPAN DEVELOPMENT

Development in psychology is simply defined as a pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues throughout life. The human life span can be regarded as the maximum number of years an individual can live. While most development involves growth, it also involves decline, as in dying and death. The traditional approaches to the study of human development in psychology emphasise changes from birth to adolescence, but little or no change in adulthood and then decline in old age. In contrast, the life span approach emphasises developmental change throughout life, including adulthood. Adult educators are interested in developmental changes during adulthood and the ageing process and their implications for learning.

Developmental changes that take place during the human life span are the result of physical, cognitive and social emotional processes. The physical processes include, among others, changes in the development of the brain, height and weight, changes in motor skills and hormonal changes. The cognitive processes include changes in the individual's thoughts, intelligence and language. The social emotional processes include changes in the individual's relationships with other people, changes in emotions and changes in personality. Development does, however, imply growth and progress, not merely change. It is important to take a closer look at the purpose of growth and development.

Tennant (1988: 59) points out that the answer to this question is often the starting point for theories of adult development, and it is the conception of the end point of development, the mature or healthy personality which frequently governs how progress and growth is monitored and explained within a given theory. For Kohlberg, growth

is towards autonomous and principled morality, for Erikson, it is towards inner unity and for Maslow, it is towards self-actualisation with its increased sense of self and autonomy. Many developmental psychologists construe the end point of development with terms like individuality, autonomy and integrated self.

With regard to the individuation process Levinson (1978: 195) states that

*throughout the life cycle, but especially in key transition periods such as infancy, pubescence and the Mid-life Transition, the developmental process of individuation is going on. This term refers to the changes in a person's relationship to himself [sic] and to the external world ... Greater individuation allows him to be more separate from the world, to be more independent and self-generating.*

Tennant (1988) remarks that emphasis on *separateness, independence and self-generation* is the language of the ethic of individualism.

Robert Havighurst identifies critical developmental tasks that occur throughout the life span. He defines a developmental task as 'a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his (sic) happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society and difficulty with later tasks' (Havighurst, 1972: 2). According to Tennant these developmental tasks 'amount to a socially approved timetable for individual growth and development. In a pluralistic society this timetable will differ between social groups' (Tennant, 1988: 54).

End points of development are therefore culturally, socially and historically defined and cannot be regarded as universal. Maturity, for example, is defined differently in

different cultures. While it may be possible to come to an agreement about where physical growth stops, it is more difficult to reach agreement on personality development. Maturity is demonstrated through actions, and what may be appropriate behaviour in one cultural setting or situation may not be in another.

## ACTIVITY

Discuss, in your own words, what you understand by life span development.

## THE AGEING PROCESS

As people age, they undergo a number of physiological changes that not only affect their appearance, but also how they function and respond to everyday life. These changes, that normally take place later during the life span, involve a general slowing down of all organ systems as a result of a gradual decline in cellular activity. Although ageing is a universal phenomenon it is definitely not a uniform process. Individuals experience these changes differently – for some the level of decline may be rapid and dramatic; for others, the changes are much less significant. The effects of these changes also differ widely. Although ageing encompasses a wide spectrum of physical changes, declines in reaction time, eyesight and hearing are the three changes that are most likely to interfere with learning.

As people grow older they tend to become slower. This has an effect on a person's ability to learn effectively. Cross (1981: 155) states that 'in general, it can be concluded that the time required for learning new things increases with age. There are however substantial individual differences and speed of response by itself should not

prevent anyone from learning almost anything he (sic) wants to learn'.

According to Knox, deterioration of the eyesight and the related nervous system gradually reduces the quantity and quality of visual information that is received during adulthood. However, with corrective lenses and satisfactory lighting, most adults engage in almost any activity they want to throughout life without major restrictions caused by visual impairment (Knox, 1977: 276). Hearing loss, as a result of ageing, has also been well documented. Knox observes that the ability to hear very soft sounds and very high frequency sounds starts to decline by adolescence; and the rate of hearing impairments increases gradually until the fifties, when the rate increases abruptly and then climbs even more sharply beginning around the age of seventy (Knox, 1977: 282).

While there is general agreement about the physiological changes that take place during the ageing process, there is some debate about whether intellectual functioning also declines with age. Cattell (1963) makes a distinction between *fluid* and *crystallised intelligence*, contending that the two types of intelligence show different patterns in ageing. Fluid intelligence consists of the ability to perceive complex relations, call upon short-term memory, engage in abstract reasoning and form concepts. It is independent of experience and education. Crystallised intelligence, on the other hand, consists of the ability to perceive relations and to engage in formal reasoning and abstraction based on familiarity with knowledge of the intellectual and cultural heritage of society. Crystallised intelligence is based on acculturation, including formal education and active seeking of information, in which the individual mixes fluid intelligence with cultural knowledge. Together, these two types of intelligence cover many of the learning tasks that adults confront and constitute the global capacity to learn,

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reason and solve problems that most people refer to as intelligence (Knox, 1977: 420).

Research has shown that fluid intelligence, with crystallised intelligence, increases during childhood and into adolescence. However, with the slowing down of the maturation process, fluid intelligence tends to peak during adolescence and declines gradually during adulthood. Crystallised intelligence, on the other hand, continues to increase gradually throughout adulthood. General learning ability does, however, remain relatively stable, but older persons tend to compensate increasingly for the loss of fluid intelligence by greater reliance on crystallised intelligence, substituting wisdom for brilliance (Knox, 1977: 421).

In most African cultures respect is accorded to people who are advanced in age. This is in recognition of their accumulated experience over the years. They are believed to be wiser and are able to call on experience to guide their intellectual decision-making. However, it is also recognised that as they age, they sometimes suffer memory loss and may have problems with tasks that require speed in processing information. Age in itself, however, does not always guarantee people respect among their peers. Individuals must demonstrate their maturity according to local standards. For example, reproductive maturity implies that the person has the expected number of children and grandchildren. In some African cultures a man or woman who has not had children is not considered to be mature. With regard to moral maturity there should be visible adherence to the moral standards relevant to the person's age and stage. In this case a person whose moral behaviour is questionable is likened to a child. Economic maturity, in many African cultures, relates especially to men, where some minimum level of affluence is expected at a given age as an indication that

the person has worked hard and has been able to establish himself.

In most African cultures the idea of intelligent behaviour contrary to or independent of moral norms is treated as a contradiction in terms. In African ways of thinking and knowing a person's abilities are useless unless they are applied for the good and well-being of the social group. If a person is intelligent, he or she will behave according to the moral norms of the community because to do otherwise will antagonise the people with whom he or she has close relations.

Those people who behave according to social conventions are regarded as intelligent in the way that counts most, that is, in maintaining the social relationships that imply long-term security, though this implies normal rather than exceptional intelligence.

Those in the community who are respected for their moral standards are credited with being wisest and most intelligent. Skilled performance is required for adult sex roles and is taken for granted as characteristic of the normal man or women. Those with exceptional skills are admired for them but may not always gain an increment in social rank (LeVine and White, 1986: 40).

## ACTIVITY

**In small groups, reflect on how you define maturity in your own culture and then answer the following questions:**

- 1 Who is a mature person?
- 2 How do mature persons behave?

**Share your opinions with others in the class. As a class, develop a comprehensive list of the characteristics of a mature person.**

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## THE PERCEPTION OF LIFE SPAN DEVELOPMENT

In Africa, as in the rest of the world, there are identifiable transitions and periods of change during the life span. Although human development may be universal, Nsamang and Lamb (1994: 134) rightly point out that it occurs in a specific ecoculture, defined by geography, history, climate and socio-cultural system, with the physical and social environments providing culturally meaningful experiences for their occupants. Socialisation in most African cultures exposes individuals to social realities and sets of experiences that channel their development to different purposes and in different directions. In a typical African community individuals develop in the framework of their own cultures, social competencies and shared responsibility within the family system and ethnic community (Ocitti, 1994).

Nsamang (1999: 32) argues that while Western theories of socialisation tend to place a great deal of emphasis on the promotion of autonomy, African socialisation is more preoccupied with the cultivation of social responsibility and interrelatedness. It is organised to teach social competence and shared responsibilities within the family and ethnic culture. From early childhood children are encouraged to develop these qualities.

Based on his research in Zambia, Serpell states that 'each phase of social development faces certain distinctive core developmental tasks, conceptualised in relation to important transitions between distinctive patterns of social participation that are consistent with the community's perception of the child more than biological indices of maturation' (Serpell, 1993: 11). In order to survive and become acceptable members of their society, children in Africa learn social

knowledge and skills, such as talking and proper behaviour in different situations. In this respect the parents, relatives and others they come into contact with help them with the processes of personality, moral and intellectual development. Group values are developed in the individual as they are prepared for the roles that they have to play in their family, community and society in general.

Traditionally, and to some extent even today, conformity to the social conventions of community life, rather than performance in a role requiring specialised skill, is central to achieving higher status in adulthood. LeVine and White (1986: 40) state that 'such conformity is interpreted as a moral virtue reflecting not the sacrifice of self but the good sense to see that one's personal interests are best advanced through the maintenance and cultivation of reciprocal relationships. This entails avoiding interpersonal antagonism and even overt competition in many settings'.

Concepts of optimal development are quite new to the African context, where the fulfilment of individual aspirations has only recently begun to form part of people's basic assumptions about life. Even then, these individual aspirations are more common in urban settings than in rural ones. In most African societies, the members of a community know the benefits of social and moral order, and through socialisation the majority of African cultures try to foster realistic expectations of reciprocity within a predictable pattern of life span experiences. While most African cultures recognise a place for individual ambition, they limit it to a point within reach of the average person, while at the same time imagining higher ideals that may not be realised by anyone in the community. According to Nsamang (1987: 279), 'West Africans rationalise their subordination of individual interests to those of the group by

reasoning that individuals come and go but the group persists'. LeVine and White (1986) argue that this way of structuring human aspirations is different from one that is centred on an occupational hierarchy for which people in most Western societies are prepared to compete through years of formal schooling.

Most African cultures continue to have ideal models of the good life, maturity and other goals for the life span that motivate adult activities. At the same time, especially through the introduction of Christianity, formal schooling and globalisation, other ideal models and goals are emerging. While some African people continue to conduct their lives according to their local standards of maturity, morality and personal well-being, others are caught up between seeking to optimise their social identities in terms of community standards, while at the same time seeking to fulfil their occupational aspirations.

Several issues emerge when life span development is explored from an African perspective. One is that African people in general perceive human development as a lifelong process. They also perceive it as being multidirectional as well as multidimensional, consisting of physical, cognitive and social emotional dimensions. It is also perceived as contextual, with individuals continually responding to and acting on their contexts. It includes the physical environment, historical, social and cultural contexts.



## ACTIVITY

1 Write down the major stages of human development identified in your own culture. Share these with someone from a different culture. Compare the similarities and differences in your cultures.

2 Write down the factors you think can influence the development of individuals in your society. Discuss these in a group.

## INDEPENDENCE VERSUS INTERDEPENDENCE

In most African cultures the self is believed to develop from childhood through adulthood as a result of people's interaction with their environment, which includes parents, siblings, peers, teachers, other members of the society, as well as the various tasks and responsibilities assigned to people and how well they cope with them. Goduka (2000: 70) argues that 'in indigenous ways of thinking and knowing ... identities are constructed in relation to and at least partially to a set of shared beliefs, patterns of behaviour and expectations as well as cultural practices, spiritual values and nature'. As people interact with other people, they evaluate their behaviour based on the reinforcement from others or lack thereof. If the reactions of others are positive, they are likely to accept themselves as people of worth and thus develop positive self-concepts. However, if the reactions of other people are negative, they are likely to see themselves as worthless and will develop negative self-concepts (Mwamwenda, 1999: 6–7).

Gergen (1990: 577) argues that 'the development of the self, like that of social understanding, occurs throughout the life span ... It is a matter of continuous unfolding, elaboration and adjustment'. As the self develops, so does self-consciousness, particularly the concern with the opinion of others. A growing body of psychological and anthropological evidence indicates that cultural communities the world over differ in their construal of the self. Triandis considers the development of the self in terms



of two types of societies, namely the individualistic and collectivistic.

*Whereas in an individualistic society priority is given to personal goals, self reliance, independence, finding oneself, self actualisation and creativity in rearing children, in a collectivistic society, individual goals are subordinated to collective goals and in child rearing practice emphasis is placed on obedience, reliability, conformity and acceptable behaviour. (Triandis, 1989: 515)*

Clearly, African societies have traditionally been interdependent. Several African psychologists have argued that Africans differ from Europeans and North Americans in their perspective, which is interdependent rather than independent. African scholars also point out that in most African cultures the individual gains significance from and through relationships with others. Mwamwenda (1999) argues that what is prevalent in Africa is the interdependent perspective of the self, with the emphasis on connectedness, relatedness and interdependence. Markus and Kitayama explain this interdependent perspective of the self as follows:

*Experiencing interdependence entails being oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognising that one's behaviour is determined, contingent on, and to a large extent, organised by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings and actions of others in the relationship. The self becomes more meaningful and complete when it is cast in the appropriate social relationships ... Characteristic of this perspective of the self is the tendency to act in harmony with others' wishes and expectations rather than on the basis of personal wishes. (Markus and Kitayama, 1991: 227)*

Goduka (2000: 71) suggests that

*in indigenous ways of knowing, an individual's identity emanates from the interdependence of human beings with one another and with the world environment both natural and human constructed. It is a concept of self that is both abstract and concrete, individually and communally defined, as well as spiritually and nature specific. This is different from the world-view embraced by people of European descent that suggests that the self is abstract and totally individually defined.*

Community life in Africa is so essential that African social systems emphasise the ritual of social incorporation at various stations in life, including naming, puberty, marriage and funerals. People's sense of self cannot be attained without reference to the broader community. The phases of social selfhood or social development in some African cultures are demarcated using social rather than biological signposts.

## ACTIVITY

**In small groups, outline the stages of personality development as defined by your culture.**

## THE MAJOR STAGES OF LIFE SPAN DEVELOPMENT

In this section some of the major stages of life span development that have been identified in Africa will be discussed. Nsamenang observes that Africans view the human life course as cyclical in nature. Infancy, like old age, is an intermediate, transitory stage.

African social thought recognises three basic components of personhood. First, there is an experiential or social selfhood beginning at birth (or more accurately from

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the naming of the child) and extending to death (which is more acceptable in old age). Second, ancestral selfhood follows biological death (and extends perhaps to the ritual initiation of the ancestral spirit into the spiritual realm). Third, spiritual selfhood begins from the ritual incorporation of the ancestral spirit into the spiritual world and ends with birth or more accurately with the naming ritual (Nsamenang, 1999: 25).

Nsamenang (1999: 28) continues the argument as follows:

*The West African conception of a person centres on the image of the unfinished child. With this frame of mind, West Africans regard the newborn as a 'no-body', but with all the potentialities to become a 'somebody' in future. The infant begins the acquisition of social selfhood from the moment of initiation into the community of other humans through naming. The nature of experience largely determines the self that evolves over the life span. The West African concept of being is dynamic and is rooted in the belief that personhood is attained not only as one ages but also in direct proportion to the enactment of one's status roles and embodiment in the community.*

According to Ocitti (1994: 26–27), the life span of each individual in many of the traditional East African societies was divided into life cycle stages that facilitated the process of learning to a great extent, especially the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for successful living as an individual and as a member of the society. This process of learning continues to date, although in some cases it is more common among rural communities than urban ones. Ocitti further states that during each of the several stages of the life cycle, individuals are made aware of their station in life. This means that they learn what is expected of

their sex and status, since each life cycle stage has its own behaviour system that must be acquired by individuals so that they can live a normal or accepted life. The learning of certain behaviour systems is staggered. Each stage of the life cycle carries one or two social statuses, which in turn call for particular skills or competencies. The achievement of these skills or competencies depends on certain formal and informal sequences of learning experiences.

Among traditional societies in which there are well-developed rites of passage, such as the Masai, Kikuyu and Nandi in Kenya and the Bagisu in Uganda, it was normal for individuals to pass from the stage of childhood through a ritual of circumcision straight into the period of social adulthood and later on to that of elderhood (Ocitti 1994: 27). In societies with strong kinship organisations, there is no dramatic change from one stage to another. Development is perceived as gradual, except after the start of puberty in girls, when training for motherhood is intensified.

In some African cultures adults are ranked in a social order in which age group and sex determine positions, though other criteria are also involved. In the life plan for men there is a pre-adult, usually premarital stage that sometimes involves warrior status; a young adult, married stage that involves hard work and provision for young children; and an elder stage, that involves the highest respect, leisure and often a major role in the governing of the community. There is a similar life plan for women. Young married women frequently begin at the bottom of the hierarchy and undergo a sharp improvement after menopause, when they are freed from earlier constraints. They are honoured when they become grandparents, which is a recognised contribution to production and family security (LeVine and White, 1986: 41–42).

In many African cultures life span development is perceived not just as vertical, but also as horizontal. Horizontally, the individual gradually develops competencies in coping physically, emotionally and intellectually. It starts with situations that are familiar and more sheltered within the context of the nuclear family, extended family and village community. It then moves on to the wider and more unfamiliar environment of the society as a whole. This life space dimension not only portrays the evolution of an individual's social space, beginning within the confines of the family and community and extending to the wider context of the society. It also includes the cord of continuity and the relationship between one generation and the next (Ocitti, 1994: 30).

In Africa today, schooling, urbanisation, mass media, religion and social organisations all exert their influence on individual growth and development. There is therefore a need to view development as a more dynamic process.

Tennant (1988: 62–63) suggests

*that development can be perceived as an ongoing dialectical process. The basic notion here is that there is constant dialectic between the changing or developing person and the changing or evolving society. That is the person creates and is created by the society in which he or she lives. The person is construed as a changing person in a changing world. This approach recognises the fact that many of the changes that take place in a person's life are mediated through people interacting in everyday life, and an investigation of developmental change would therefore entail an analysis of common everyday interactions and the dialogues contained in them. Secondly, it recognises that people's social identities are maintained through social interaction and the*

*routines of everyday life serve to confirm the reality of the world and the individual's place in it. It also highlights the fact that in particular the language used in everyday conversations confirms the silent, taken for granted world that forms the foundations of our personal identity.*

As previously mentioned, most Africans perceive life span development as a holistic, lifelong process of learning and change. In the early years of life, through primary socialisation, individuals learn the language and acquire an understanding of cultural norms and values. They also learn to understand and appreciate the ideas and views of others and accept other roles. As they grow to be adults, developmental socialisation, which is a continuous process, enables them to acquire new social knowledge and skills. This process is not just concerned with what society expects, but is also concerned with the individual, the inner worth and richness of personality (Ocitti, 1994: 17). Children and adults are progressively assigned different roles at different stages, depending on their perceived level of social competence rather than on their biological maturation, but it also depends on the sex of the individual.

## ACTIVITY

Work in pairs and write down the major stages of life span development identified in your culture.

## IMPLICATIONS OF LIFE SPAN DEVELOPMENT

Markus and Kitayama (1991: 224) rightly observe that 'most of what we know about human nature is based on one particular view – the so-called Western view of the

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individual as an independent, self contained, autonomous entity’.

The challenge for African adult educators is to do research in the field of adult development in Africa and to contribute to the ongoing discussions in this field.

Allman (cited in Tennant, 1988: 41) states

*that studies of adult life reveal it to be a period of change and development, much like that of childhood and adolescence. The results of such studies serve notice on the prevailing assumptions about adulthood – that it is a long period of stability where previously learned capabilities, skills, attitudes and values are applied to one’s activities at work, in the family, in leisure and in civic life. These assumptions need to be challenged because they clearly affect decision makers in the field of politics, education and social policy. In education they are linked to the conventional view that the period of initial education equips young adults for the remainder of their lives, a view that continues to inform political debate on educational priorities.*

Allman (cited in Tennant 1988: 43) suggests the following:

*There is a need to disseminate knowledge about adult development to the community at large. It is urgent that these ideas begin to permeate the realm of common sense as all adults are continually in the process of making personal life decisions, which may be based on similar highly questionable assumptions about their own potential for growth and development.*

Understanding life span development also has implications for the approaches and methodologies used by adult educators in Africa. There is a need for more critical examination of the underlying assumptions regarding adult development inherent

in the approaches and methodologies used by adult educators in Africa. At the same time we need to develop approaches and methodologies that are responsive to what is known about adult development in Africa. For example, should adult educators in Africa promote more collective learning? Can learning experiences be structured around the daily lives of adults in communities? These are all challenges that adult educators in Africa need to address.

According to Tennant (1988) there is a tension between the ethic of individualism and the spirit of collectivism in contemporary adult education. In the ethic of individualism priority is given to personal goals, self-reliance, independence, finding oneself, self-actualisation and creativity. In the spirit of collectivism, however, emphasis is placed on social interdependency, interdependent selfhood, social goals and acceptable behaviour. Adult educators in Africa have the challenge of developing methodologies and approaches that conform to self-development in Africa. In developing approaches and methodologies adult educators will also need to explore how adult education can contribute to radical social change.

## ACTIVITY

**Write down five implications of development across the life span for adult educators in Africa. Share them with the rest of the class and compile a comprehensive list of implications.**

## SUMMARY

In this chapter the psychological concept of life span development and the adult ageing process were discussed in detail, with specific reference to how both these

aspects are perceived in Africa. It looked at the difference between independence and interdependence in Africa and subsequently explored some of the major stages of life span development identified in Africa. Finally, it looked at the implications of life span development for adult educators in Africa.

## KEY POINTS

- Traditional approaches to the study of human development in psychology emphasised changes from birth to adolescence but little or no change in adulthood and then decline in old age.
- The life span approach to development emphasises developmental changes throughout life including adulthood and the adult ageing process.
- There are differences in world views between Western and African cultures, yet African adult educators continue to draw on theories developed in the West in explaining life span development in Africa.
- Adult educators in Africa need to draw on African perspectives of life span development and the ageing process in developing methodologies and approaches and in advocating for policy changes relating to adult learning.



## ACTIVITY

Discuss in pairs and write short notes about what you consider to be the main contribution of life span development to your understanding of adult learning in Africa.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

What do you consider to be the main lessons that can be learned from the discussion on life span development for adult education practice?

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# Chapter 6

## Human motivation and participation

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### OVERVIEW

In this chapter the major features of motivation and participation of adults in learning programmes are identified and discussed in general, but with a particular focus on how these features manifest in adult learning contexts in Africa. Motivation is at the centre of participation at various levels and in different contexts and capacities. The extent to which adult learners are drawn to participation is largely dependent on motivation. In this chapter the concept and theories of motivation and participation in adult learning programmes in Africa will therefore be addressed. The reasons for participation and non-participation in learning will also be explored. The chapter is concluded with a highlight of the strategies for effective motivation and participation in adult learning in Africa.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Discuss motivation and participation as major concerns of adult learners.
- 2 Examine the four major views on motivation.
- 3 Explore some of the theories that guide motivation and participation.
- 4 Outline the reasons why African adults participate in learning.
- 5 Analyse the reasons for non-participation in adult learning.
- 6 Describe various effective strategies for motivating adult learners to participate in learning.



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## KEY TERMS

**cognition** The mental processes through which we acquire and apply knowledge, using our sense organs.

**conditioning** The process of acquiring specific forms or styles of behaviour under well-defined stimuli.

**motive** Any condition in an individual that affects readiness to initiate or continue an activity. In this case a motive may be a desire, need or want such as achievement, promotion, protection, hunger or thirst.

**motivation** The degree of energy behind an action or behaviour.

**unmotivating facilitator** A facilitator who does not care about the needs and abilities of learners and the environment in which learning takes place.

## BEFORE YOU START

Discuss the following questions in small groups:

- 1 Why do you think Nelson Mandela tolerated the deprivations he encountered under the apartheid system in South Africa?
- 2 List different achievements of respectable African leaders and analyse why they achieved so much.
- 3 Examine some of the reasons why illiterate adults in Africa are unable to enrol in literacy programmes.
- 4 If you were to be appointed as an agricultural extension officer in your community, what would you do to get people to accept the major innovations you really want them to adopt?
- 5 What does the word motivation mean to you?

Your answers to the questions should be an indication to you that several factors influence the behaviour of different groups of people. You were introduced to some of the reasons why adults engage or fail to engage in learning in the earlier chapters of this book.

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## MOTIVATION

*Motivation* among African adult learners can best be described by a common saying ‘that you can lead a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink’. The implication for adult learning is that not much can be done to get anyone who is not ready to learn to engage in any kind of learning if that person is not ready and willing to do so. In Africa, adult learners are highly unlikely to be attracted to any learning activity that is void of motivation. Moreover, their financial resources are usually limited and they are therefore more likely to invest in profitable and motivating programmes. This is a determining factor for the success of facilitators or trainers in the workplace.

A simple test to determine whether programmes or situations are motivating is to identify learning programmes that have failed or those that show low enrolment or attendance. In most of these cases, motivation plays a prominent role. Adult educators should therefore continuously study or explore motivation so that they can aptly predict the likelihood for success or failure of any programme they choose.

Motivation influences behaviour. However, the causes of human behaviour are intrinsically difficult to explain. Even a thorough study of motivation cannot enable us to make accurate predictions about what can or cannot be done. The reason is that motivation, just like any other aspect of human behaviour, cannot be predicted accurately. Humans are complex beings and are not easy to understand.

Understanding motivation and participation begins with an exploration of the mind-body relationship. The philosophers, Plato and Descartes, pursued this mind-body relationship. These famous thinkers postulated that ‘the body which is physical, material, limited in space, time, and size and objectively observable interacts

with the mind which is subjective, directly understood only by the individual having it, unlimited in physical entity and even everlasting to produce possible actions in response to events’ (Beck, cited in Morris and Maisto, 1999: 14).

It is often only the individual who knows for sure what motivates him or her. For this reason motivation and participation cannot be conjectured purely and only in the mechanistic terms of stimulus and response. All we know is that the body and mind are related in complex fashion. Some psychologists believe that this interaction between body and mind originates in the pineal gland in the brain. The gland stimulates the interaction. However, this proposition is opposed by those who believe that the individual is a complex entity driven by many mechanisms and series of multiple or singular events. In spite of opposing views, many psychologists have come to the conclusion that the mind controls the body.

Even though it is difficult to define motivation, it is possible to do so in general terms. Psychologists do not take motivation as a hypothetical concept because it cannot be seen or touched. Many psychologists view human motivation as an invented definition that provides a possible concrete causal explanation of behaviour (Wlodkowski, 1986; Smith, 1998). Therefore, motivation explains how and why people behave in certain ways. Many educational psychologists (Wlodkowski, 1985) use the concept to describe those processes that can do the following:

- Arouse and instigate behaviour.
- Give direction or purpose to behaviour.
- Allow behaviour to persist.
- Lead to choosing or preferring particular behaviour.

Motivation derives from motives, reasons and purposes behind a certain kind of



behaviour. People enrol in adult learning programmes with certain motives in mind.

### What is a motive?

A motive may be defined as any condition in a person that affects that person's readiness to initiate or continue an activity (Morris and Maisto, 1999). Smith (1998: 8), however, defines a motive as the needs and desires that people try to satisfy through goal-directed behaviour. It is clear from both definitions that a motive is the driving force behind an action. This helps to explain people's participation in programmes in many respects. For example, an adult learner in any African community who enrolls in a learning programme will have specific needs and desires that call for attention.

The subject of motivation is receiving considerable attention in the literature about adult learning because facilitators need to know how to promote motivation for learning instead of simply relying on the traditional skills of intuition, common sense, and trial and error.



### ACTIVITY

- 1 Which basic concepts are important to understand human motivation and participation?
- 2 Differentiate between the motivated and the unmotivated adult learner.
- 3 Why would you want to study human motivation and participation?

Discuss your answers with the rest of the class and with your facilitator. What did you learn from their understanding of motivation?

## VIEWS ON MOTIVATION

Before exploring some of the theories of motivation, it is important to examine some views about it. The four major views are the following: mechanistic, cognitive, desire and aversion, and persistence and vigour.

### The mechanistic view

The mechanistic view of motivation states that 'organisms learn specific responses to specific stimuli' (Beck, cited in Morris and Maisto, 1999: 15). This view draws from the stimulus-response (S-R) experiments and analyses led by Pavlov, Watson, Thorndike, Spence and Hull. These behaviourist theorists hold the following views about motivation:

- The appropriate stimulus is sufficient to arouse the response linked with that stimulus (Watson, 1924).
- The learning component in the stimulus-response connection must be energised by the motivational component known as drive (Hull, 1943; Spence, 1956).
- The organism at the centre of motivation does not engage in any behaviour unless the drive is greater than zero. In other words, if a facilitator expects adult learners to engage actively in learning a new skill the learners must, first of all, be ready to learn.
- Internal stimulation (drive) is capable of goading the organism into action. Human motivation is better and more productive when the learner is self-driven, that is, the learner should really be determined to learn. However, when internal stimulation is non-existent or low, external stimulation can be used. For example, an adult who refuses to engage in learning could possibly be motivated to learn by providing

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an incentive such as the promise of a promotion.

- The stimuli linked to particular responses determine the exact kind and direction of the responses. For example, a hungry person is likely to salivate when presented with food.

These theorists hold the view that motivation, to a large extent, deals with encouragement of the individual's behaviour. For example, under normal circumstances a hungry person who craves food will take action to satisfy this need or craving.

### The cognitive view

The cognitive view of motivation states that 'what are learned are relationships among environmental events or between responses and their outcomes' (Beck, 1983: 18). When applied to the example of a hungry person, Beck's view suggests that it is the hungry person who learns expectations related to hunger. In this example the hungry person will gather information about the relationships of responses, things and places instead of just learning automatic responses to specific stimuli (Beck, cited in Morris and Maisto, 1999: 14). A hungry person will, for example, learn that when she is hungry and does something, it will lead to given outcomes. In other words, the situations in which people find themselves help them to generate thoughts. These thoughts become the learning segment in our attempt to determine people's behaviour. E. C. Tolman and others in his school of thought held this cognitive view of motivation.

The cognitive view places emphasis on the major role that central brain processes play, rather than on the stimulus-response perspective emphasised by the behaviourists. To put it simply, a person will perform a given act if he or she expects that it will lead to a valuable outcome. *Value* is, in fact,

a concept in motivation. It is commonly acknowledged that an activity that has value provides an incentive. Unlike the view held by the stimulus-response theory, the value in question here becomes an anticipation that is purposeful. Tolman also called his approach purposive behaviourism.

### Desire and aversion

The choice of behaviour is primarily an issue of motivation. The reason for this is that it is believed that organisms, in other words people, are not inert until they are stimulated. The nervous system is always active, even when we are sleeping.

The desire and aversion view is based on the premise that organisms approach goals, or engage in activities that are expected to have desirable outcomes, and avoid activities that are expected to have aversive outcomes. The entire manifestation of motivation as a concept can, in fact, be viewed from the perspective of desire and aversion. This is also the reason why some scholars try not to define motivation. They rather define a set of variables that are thought to generate motivational behaviour. These theorists would, for example, define motivation by looking at the following:

- The antecedent condition
- The intervening variable
- The consequent condition.

This idea can be represented as follows:

$$X + Y = Z$$

In this equation *X* is the antecedent condition, *Y* the intervening variable and *Z* the consequent condition. The example of a hungry person, used previously, can be used to explain the formula.

The antecedent condition, *X*, in this example is hunger, the intervening variable, *Y*, is food and the consequent condition, *Z*,

is the state of being fed. The longer a person is deprived of food, the more food he or she is likely to consume and the greater the person's preference for food.

This theory implies that every facilitator of adult learning needs to understand how motivation operates in the field of teaching and learning. For example, the facilitator should identify and itemise the desire and aversion propensities of each learning task.

## Persistence and vigour

Beck (cited in Morris and Maisto, 1999: 14) argues that we relate persistence and vigour to choice. In fact, he points out that the more preferred (or desirable) an outcome is, the greater the persistence and vigour with which the organism (in this case, the learner) will strive to achieve it. Conversely, the less preferred (more aversive) an outcome is, the less the persistence and vigour of the organism (learner) to achieve it.

In terms of adult learning, the facilitator needs to discover the preferred or desirable outcomes in each situation to be able to determine the persistence and vigour of the learners.



## ACTIVITY

Discuss the following questions in small groups:

- 1 Discuss the usefulness of the cognitive view of motivation in a professional continuing education programme with which you are familiar.
- 2 How would you apply the desire and aversion view to the explanation of participation in adult basic education programmes in Africa?

## THEORIES OF MOTIVATION

There are several theories of motivation but only those that are relevant to the context of adult learning are discussed here.

### The cognitive theory

This theory emphasises the role of thought processes in bringing about motivation. The cognitive theory of motivation states that individuals do what they want to, based on their rational evaluation of the likely effects of the cause of action. The way in which individuals perceive the usefulness or uselessness of a course of an action arises from the internal rationalisation of the possible outcomes. For every action there must be a motive that precedes the action. For example, a study of adult literacy learners in Senegal, conducted by Fagerberg-Diallo (2002: 45–60), indicated that adult learners enrolled in the programme because they needed to be able to read their letters, apply their knowledge of calculation in everyday life and contribute more effectively to community development.

According to Fagerberg-Diallo, the respondents articulated their motives for enrolling in the programme in terms of its impact on their lives rather than on the mere acquisition of academic skills. Two phrases that emerged from the study were, 'studying woke me up' and 'now I dare to work in a group' (Fagerberg-Diallo, 2002: 51). The research cited here is an indication that the cognitive theory of motivation, arising from the individual's needs structure, actually reflects the importance of the learners' primary and secondary needs. It also means that in planning learning programmes, basic or primary needs such as love, security, food and shelter, all crucial in the African context, should be considered. Secondary items, such as the desire

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to control and influence others, to express themselves or the desire for achievement, should also be considered. All these desires or needs are very important motives.

### The intrinsic theory

There have been many debates in Africa about what the main goals of literacy should be. Omolewa (2000: 221–227) contends that literacy should not be construed and constructed purely as a tool for the acquisition of literacy skills, but that it should be adopted and used as a skill for economic and social advancement. In other words, literacy must reflect learner-determined goals, since these are of great personal importance to the learners. Individuals usually set goals for themselves and these goals generally relate to their desires in life. The achievement of these goals will, in turn, determine the quality and quantity of the pleasure they derive from achieving their goals. The actions individuals take to achieve their goals usually come from within. Many psychologists hold the view that internally determined, purposeful and self-directed goals provide the strongest motivation for behaviour or actions.

The main point of the intrinsic theory is that the explanation of the cognitive theorists, namely that only the psychogenic or psychological needs for achievement motivate behaviour, is inadequate. Horner (1973), in particular, argues that achievement, as a strong motive, seems to apply more to men than to women. Horner argues that even though women may be more motivated to achieve than men, some women will avoid the pursuit of success, because of their fear that achievement could have negative consequences, such as the loss of femininity or competition with men (Obe and Asiedu, 1988: 145). There is, however, no research to support this position in the African context. It is true, however, that African men

have in the past deliberately disadvantaged women, because women were regarded as the ‘weaker sex’. This attitude is being challenged by the current emphasis on women’s empowerment programmes and the mainstreaming of gender balance in African development plans.

### The extrinsic theory

This theory emphasises the point that behaviour is directed or dictated by the amount of rewards or incentives that an individual receives. Another individual or the organisation for which the individual works normally provides the extrinsic or external rewards. The extrinsic theory of motivation actually derives its ideas from experiments conducted by Skinner. These made it clear that the animals used in these experiments were driven to act in a certain way when they knew that the successful performance of a given action would result in a reward. According to Skinner it is not just the reward per se that motivated the action, but the desire by the experimental subject to avoid failure and punishment.

In 1960 Douglas McGregor published his book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, in which he examined theories on the behaviour of individuals at work (Accel-Team, 2003). In this book, McGregor proposes the Theory X assumption that the average human being has an inherent dislike of work, and will avoid it if possible. McGregor (Accel-Team, 2003: 1–6) then proposes Theory Y as a dimension of motivated behaviour. Theory X posits that individuals will not be able to generate intrinsic drives because they are, by nature, lazy and irresponsible. They therefore need incentives such as salary increases or promotions. On the other hand, Theory Y regards workers as responsible individuals who can motivate themselves from within. Modern-day psychologists seem to be

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blending theories X and Y to produce what is commonly known as Theory Z (Accel-Team, 2003: 1–6). Theory Z simply takes the view that we cannot rely completely on either the intrinsic or the extrinsic drives as the basis for motivation. The two components should be combined to create a more effective approach to motivation.

## The process theory

The process theory of motivation is directed at the understanding of the initiation, sustenance or termination of behaviour. The theory states that individuals engage in actions because of what they stand to gain. The process theory highlights valence, instrumentality and expectancy as the factors that drive behaviour. In psychology, the term *valence* is used to refer to the perceived value or worth of attraction to the outcome of an action. On the other hand, *instrumentality* refers to the possibility that a positive outcome will accompany a course of action, and *expectancy* refers to the probability that the action will lead to the attainment of the set goal (Obe and Asiedu, 1988: 146). In the African context it is true that most adult learners enrol in programmes because of what they expect to gain from such a decision. If there were nothing to gain, they would rather stay at home or engage in other pursuits.

## The behaviourist theory

The four theories already discussed emphasise what happens to individuals internally in terms of their willingness to continue with a course of action. However, there are also other events that take place outside the individual, and these should contribute to the totality of the understanding of motivation. Hull (1943) singles out the need for survival. External conditions may, for example, threaten an individual's existence.

It is clear that the individual's environment plays a very important role. As individuals work towards ensuring their survival, they tend to engage more and more in activities and behaviour that will increase their chances of survival. In time, individuals internalise or learn the actions and behaviour that have improved their chances of survival. For example, when an illiterate adult enrolls in an adult basic education programme, she might later enrol in a further education programme as a result of her success in the basic education programme. Hull points out that the relation between incentives or rewards and the fulfilment of a given need is likely to affect a learner's reaction. In literacy classes, for example, the amount of time an adult learner will spend learning will depend partly on the rewards received.

However, all of these are mental explanations of the motives for behaviour.

B. F. Skinner did not accept these interpretations of behaviour. For Skinner, any organism is solely influenced by its environment and the experience of the consequences produced by the environment. The environment therefore controls our behaviour or actions. If, for example, a work environment is hostile, productivity may be low. There could be apathy on the part of the workers because of uncertainty and feelings of rejection. For Skinner, every event in the life of any individual is caused by something in the environment. As a result he does not believe in free will. Skinner and others in his school of thought therefore came up with the concepts of *conditioned* and *unconditioned* responses as explanations for behaviour. For Skinner, there are two major types of behaviour, namely *respondent* and *operant behaviour*. Respondent behaviour is a specific, conditioned, spontaneous and almost unconscious reaction to a stimulus, for example, the blinking of the eyes. Operant

behaviour is learned and determined by the event that follows the reaction (Obe and Asiedu, 1988: 148). The outcome of behaviour is capable of dictating whether the individual should modify or reinforce the given behaviour. Reinforced behaviour tends to be repeated and unrewarded behaviour. If, for example, a facilitator strongly disapproves of the actions of an adult learner, the learner may stop this behaviour.

It may seem as if there is no difference between the cognitive and behaviourist theorists in their understanding of needs as determinants of motivation. This might be the case, but while the cognitive theorists are interested in the role of needs as internally generated motives for behaviour, the behaviourists put emphasis on needs as the creation of environments. For them, the drive that the needs provide is simply an attempt to adapt to prevailing conditions in the environment. The difference in the theories can be explained with the example of a hungry person. For the cognitive theorists looking for food is simply an adaptive behaviour that seeks to satisfy the internal condition of the person who is hungry. However, in the eyes of the behaviourists, looking for food is a response to an existing environmental condition.

## The content theory

This theory considers drives as the actual needs that result from the interaction between individuals and their physical, economic, social and psychological environment. These theorists hold the view that needs can be satisfied only to the extent that the environment allows it. This view is propounded because the individual is considered a social organism that is bound to organise the given needs in the content of the prevailing social environment. This is

why the content theorists are also referred to as humanists.

Among the best known of the humanists are Murray and Abraham Maslow. While Murray can be noted for the exposé of the cognitive theory, Maslow goes down in the history of humanist theory as the one who first highlighted the hierarchy of needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs arranges these in an ascending order of physiological needs, security needs, needs of belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation. Maslow contends that the physiological needs are at the basic level. From Maslow's point of view, human beings are driven by the desire to satisfy one need after the other throughout life. The fulfilment of one need leads to the desire to satisfy yet another need. For example, Maslow (cited in Morris and Maisto, 1999) notes that

*satisfaction of the self-esteem needs leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world. However, the thwarting of these needs produces feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness.*

For Maslow, the elements of independent thought, action, participation and self-directedness, self-esteem, capability and strength are very important in propelling motivation towards achievement.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Examine the prospects for the successful application of the cognitive theory of motivation in African farming communities.
- 2 To what extent is it correct to assume that the intrinsic theory of adult motivation cannot hold for many African

- adults who have been disappointed by the nature of many adult basic education programmes in Africa?
- 3 Does the extrinsic theory of motivation have a chance of success among demotivated female adult learners in Africa?
  - 4 Outline and discuss, using examples, the process and behaviourist theories of motivation.

## PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

In this section the motives for participation in adult education programmes are discussed. This issue was also discussed in Chapter 1, where the reasons why African adult learners enrol in adult learning programmes were highlighted. In this section some of these reasons are briefly summarised.

There is a basic assumption that a society in which adults from different backgrounds can freely and actively explore new ideas, beliefs and practices is better than one in which this does not happen. In Sierra Leone, for example, there is a strong belief that adult education can be applied effectively to motivate ex-combatants on a psychological level to develop positive attitudes about themselves, the world of work and the social order (Sesay, 1999: 221–230). The motivation of ex-combatants, as described by Sesay, relied on the use of adult education empowerment programmes and the outcomes are an indication of the usefulness of learning in African communities.

The second assumption is that societies that promote large-scale participation of adults in learning programmes are likely to gain from the creativity, diversity and regular recreation of society structures. This could happen to the extent that the societies will experience more rapid development. In fact, the study by Obinne and Ozowa

(1997: 237–244) indicates that agricultural information can best be disseminated when built around literacy and indigenous knowledge systems. It is therefore believed that if a given society engages in widespread learning, it could avoid the likelihood of drifting into static existence.

It is, however, also very clear that the reasons why adults learn are often dependent on their characteristics. Adults, especially in Africa, engage in learning because of the need to develop new skills or acquire qualifications that could be useful in the workplace. However, the reasons for engaging in learning are not purely materialistic, even though they may seem so. Some adults learn for the simple reason that learning may result in the acquisition of the kind of knowledge and skills that they lack. Some, for example, may simply want to learn to be able to read the Bible, the Koran or any other interesting religious material.

Some African adults may choose to engage in learning because of life crises or the innate joy of learning. Life crises in Africa are enormous because of the different challenges that African people face. In many African communities there are shortages of basic infrastructure. People may also face serious life crises such as diseases like the HIV/AIDS pandemic in many African communities. Such diseases generally make huge demands on people's ability to acquire sufficient survival skills based on available knowledge. This knowledge is frequently only available in literature in English.

Adults may also engage in learning in response to specific tasks assigned to them by their families and communities. A community may nominate a person for elective positions that require the use of functional literacy. In such a case, the obvious thing to do would be to enrol in an appropriate learning programme. The point is that any African adult learner may have more than one reason for participating in learning

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programmes. It all depends on the circumstances of the individual.

## NON-PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

Non-participation is largely a result of a variety of cultural attitudes whereby formal education is viewed as irrelevant to the life circumstances, crises and anxieties of working-class life (Brookfield, 1986: 7). In Africa, oral communication is common, and since most people can communicate in their mother tongue without necessarily relying on the use of English, formal education often has held very little attraction for them. Several years ago this was indeed the case. In modern times, Africans are, however, embracing formal learning systems to the extent that education has become the biggest investment in the social sector.

Adult learning programmes that are deficient in the way in which they are planned or designed often result in non-participation of learners. When learning programmes are not well planned, potential learners could be discouraged. When adult learners are discouraged because of frustrations they experience, they are likely to tell their relations and colleagues about their experiences and this can have negative effects on marketing adult learning programmes.

Poor management is another reason why adult learners often do not want to participate in learning programmes. If programmes are not monitored and supervised effectively, it is highly likely that objectives will not be achieved. If objectives are not achieved, the programme itself becomes less attractive. One effect is that no one would want to enrol in the programme.

In many African societies, elderly people who enrol in adult learning programmes are sometimes laughed at or scorned. Unfortu-

nately, many African governments seem to have bought into this idea and the existing policies are not really in favour of the development of adult learning.

The use of incompetent and unmotivating facilitators could be another reason why adults do not want to enrol in learning programmes. It is only recently that facilitators with adequate training in adult education as a profession and discipline have been employed to teach adults. Hitherto, most people who served as facilitators were 'back door' adult educators, that is facilitators who came into adult education via the teaching profession. Many of the facilitators in many African countries are retired teachers who take on facilitating adult education classes because they do not have anything else to do.

Adult education has been commercialised to some extent. Some providers charge excessive fees and in situations where most people are struggling to survive, it is unlikely that they will be able to enrol in adult education programmes.

It has already been mentioned that adults are very busy people. If programmes are, for example, scheduled during the time of ploughing, harvesting or fishing, the response of learners could be discouraging.

In Africa, some of the participants in adult education might have been enrolled in formal school programmes. Some of them might have dropped out for one reason or another. Others might have suffered some kind of abuse. Such unpleasant previous experiences with formal schooling could discourage adults from participating in adult learning programmes.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Using examples that are relevant to your context, discuss the reasons for participation and non-participation in adult



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- learning programmes in Africa.
- 2 How can you reduce non-participation in adult learning programmes?
  - 3 What role can motivation play in facilitating learning in the classroom situation?

## STRATEGIES

Strategies differ largely according to the individual adult learner, social contexts and available learning projects. It means that strategies should differ according to the adult learners' needs, problems, circumstances and contexts. The implication is that there can be no specific African strategy as such. The best we can do is to examine the views of two scholars in the field and then suggest further strategies.

Brookfield (1986: 233–260) proposes the theory of structuring programmes around learners' needs and abilities. This theory emphasises the following considerations:

- Engaging in needs assessment is a crucial step. This process may help in ascertaining learners' most common and relevant needs and should help with the design of appropriate programmes.
- Contextualising programmes objectives. All objectives to be achieved should be related to the learner and the contexts within which programmes are developed.
- Developing a clear philosophical rationale to guide practice is a necessity for developing useful programmes. Every programme for the promotion of adult learning needs to have not just a structure but also a clear philosophical base.
- Acknowledging and working towards cultivating enhanced proficiency is another requirement. It is likely to lead to increasing capacity to perform effectively. The programmes must reflect the need to help African adults to become

more proficient in their respective employment situations.

- Evaluating the extent to which programmes contribute to meeting the goals of learners, present and future needs, immediacy of usage of content, and whether or not the programme has a positive or negative effect on meeting other needs.
- Availability of resources to meet the expressed and unexpressed needs. The absence of these resources will endanger programmes.
- Commitment to flexibility and change.
- The quality of the facilitators used. The attraction or marketability of most programmes depends, in part, on the quality of the facilitators.
- Evaluation determines the strengths and weaknesses of programmes and can be used to make amendments.

Another scholar who has devoted much time to examining how we could increase participation is Patricia Cross (1981: 132–151). Cross proposes the following possibilities for those who are interested in increasing the levels of participation of adult learners:

- Raising the self-confidence of adult learners. Many adult learners have low self-confidence and this probably discourages them from taking the first step.
- Building positive attitudes toward education. Among adult learners, there is a tendency to have negative attitudes towards education based on a number of evolving factors.
- Effective strategies for meeting goals and expectations of learners.
- Responding to learners' life transitions. Adults go through several transitions and face many challenges during their lives. Programmes should address these challenges.
- Creating opportunities for interaction.

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Adults generally want to share experiences. Therefore, there should be open forums for discussion and sharing.

- Removing barriers to adult learning.
- Providing accurate information and feedback. This is important, for without this no adult learner will enrol in a programme in the first place. Feedback is necessary to prevent anxiety among learners.

## Application of strategies

The performance of adult learners will differ greatly, because people differ. Even if adult learners have the same abilities and opportunities to achieve a desired goal, some learners in adult education programmes will be motivated, while others will not be motivated. It is commonly acknowledged that when there is no motivation, more often than not, there will be no or very little learning (Walberg and Ugurogin, 1989). In other words, when the motivation for learning is very low, the individual learner's potential to learn effectively will decrease. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between motivation and academic achievement (Boshier, 1977). If this is indeed so, every facilitator should be interested in the subject of motivation.

The second reason why motivation is important is because it tends to mediate, enhance or promote and facilitate learning. Usually facilitators realise that when adult learners are motivated they will be active and learn with ease. The third reason why motivation is important is because it helps the facilitator to prepare programmes and also helps with the teaching itself. If facilitators are aware of the importance of motivation, they can determine when and where to build in motivating skills in the programme ahead of time.

Finally, the motivated learner is generally more cooperative than the unmotivated

learner. Although motivation is important, there are also other, equally important factors to consider, namely:

- Relevance of the content.
- Methods and techniques used.
- Availability of learning materials.
- Preparation on the part of the facilitator.
- Lesson plans and notes.

When learners, however, are asked to learn something that is above their abilities, very little learning will take place, no matter how motivated the learners are. Motivation can therefore only work under certain conditions. These include the following:

- The learner must be physically well or healthy.
- There should be no distractions, such as loud noise.
- Learning material should not be above the learner's level of understanding.
- The facilitator must organise the materials to be learned properly and must be eager and willing to teach adult learning programmes. In other words, the facilitator needs to be determined, prepared and willing to share in the periods of sorrow or happiness that the learner may be going through at different times.
- The quality of instruction is important. The amount of information that the facilitator gives and the order in which it is presented is a serious consideration. If the preparation is poorly done, the learners will probably be discouraged.
- All relevant learning aids must be provided, preferably before the facilitator enters the learning environment.
- Threats and anxiety must be reduced significantly, because adult learners are unlikely to learn under stressful conditions. Moreover, many adult learners are said to be prone to hypertension and all kinds of problems related to anxiety. The

facilitator must then exercise immense caution in dealing with them.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 How would you attempt to motivate an illiterate adult farmer who is unwilling to enrol in a literacy programme?
- 2 Discuss, using examples, the level and kind of communication that may motivate adult learners in a typical African village.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter the meaning and major concerns in motivating adult learners were examined. It took the view that adult learners may or may not be motivated to learn, based on their personal life experiences and the way in which the learning programme is organised. It became clear that the success or failure of programmes depends greatly on the extent to which motivation was integrated into the programme. The views and theories on motivation and participation were examined. In particular, the reasons for participation and non-participation in adult learning in Africa were highlighted. The chapter concluded with highlighting strategies that could be applied in motivating African adults to learn.

## KEY POINTS

- Human motivation is at the centre of the design and implementation of adult learning programmes.
- Adult learning programmes that are well attended and show high enrolment figures are those in which motivation plays a very important role.

- Although human motivation influences human behaviour, its causes are difficult to explain.
- Human motivation is defined to provide causal explanations of behaviour.
- Human motivation, as a concept, derives from driving forces, reasons and purposes behind certain behaviour.
- The four major views on motivation are the mechanistic, cognitive, desire and aversion, and persistence and vigour.
- The cognitive theory of motivation emphasises the role of thought processes in bringing about motivation.
- The intrinsic theory believes motivation is internally determined and places emphasis on purposeful and self-directed goals as determinants of behaviour.
- The extrinsic theory of motivation places emphasis on the fact that human behaviour is determined and directed by the amount of incentives or rewards.
- The process theory of motivation emphasises that individuals engage in actions because of what they stand to gain.
- The behaviourist theory of motivation emphasises that the individual's environment is crucial for motivation. The more the learners achieve set goals, the more motivated they become.
- The content theory of motivation emphasises that needs can only be satisfied to the extent allowed by the environment.
- The reasons why adults do not participate in learning may be found in the individuals themselves, in the environment and the management of the learning programme.
- Strategies for effective motivation and participation differ largely according to the individual adult learner, social context and available learning projects.
- Effective and highly motivating adult learning programmes should be centred on learners' needs and abilities.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 What is motivation?
  - 2 Which of the views and theories on motivation would you apply to the African context?
  - 3 Use your own experiences to discuss the factors that may inhibit effective learning by adults in Africa.
  - 4 Itemise and discuss the physiological factors that may hinder adequate learning by adults in Africa.
- 3 Analyse the factors that may be facilitating or impeding effective participation in adult learning in the African context.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 Examine the reasons why African adults participate in learning programmes. Use examples.
- 2 Analyse the reasons for non-participation in adult learning programmes in Africa.

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# Chapter 7

## Learning styles

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### OVERVIEW

This chapter examines some of the models used to describe the various ways in which different adult learners prefer to learn.

These include information processing patterns, perceptual modes and personality types. It also examines a few dominant models used by adult learners in the African context based on empirical studies.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Identify and describe different ways of learning adopted by adults.
- 2 Categorise the learning styles of adult learners in Africa based on their cultural background.
- 3 Recognise your own learning styles and be aware of how you can help adult learners to discover theirs.
- 4 Understand some of the implications of these learning styles for teaching and learning purposes.



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## KEY TERMS

**accommodator** A learner who is able to adapt to different pressures from the environment in order to achieve the desired objectives.

**assimilator** A learner who is able to learn well from others and to absorb and integrate both old and new experiences.

**cerebral hemispheres** These are the two symmetrical halves of the brain that are similar in appearance, but have very different functions.

**converger** A person who knows how to look for the best single answer as the correct solution to a problem.

**diverger** A person who has the ability to find different possible answers to a particular problem in order to arrive at a solution.

**experiential learning** Learning gained by doing and exploring based on experience.

**holistic approach** Learners seeking to obtain an overview of the materials they want to learn or the problems they want to solve before attending to detail later.

**kinaesthetic** The use of body movement by learners who are actively exploring

the physical world around them by practising what they have learned.

**learning style** An approach that individuals apply habitually to learning, based on how they perceive, respond to and interact with the learning environment.

**rote learning** Memorisation aimed at saving knowledge in order to use it again.

**stereotyping** A fixed way of thinking about people which puts them into categories and does not allow for individual variation.



## BEFORE YOU START

In pairs, discuss the following questions and share your answers with your facilitator:

- 1 What is a learning style?
- 2 Why is learning style important?
- 3 How can you recognise your own learning style?
- 4 What do you think should be the role of the facilitator in effecting learners' learning styles?

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## THE CONCEPT OF LEARNING STYLE

Adult learners, as discussed in Chapter 2, are physically, psychologically and culturally different. Because of these differences, adults adopt different learning styles. A *learning style* is an approach that individuals habitually apply to learning. It is essentially the method preferred by individuals in understanding, responding to and remembering learning events as they experience them. A learning style involves the way in which an individual's brain works most efficiently and effectively to process and apply new information or solve problems.

There have been a number of attempts to investigate learning styles. These investigations gave rise to a number of different style labels addressing them in isolation from one another (Curry, 1983). The research has also been criticised by scholars (Hayes and Allison, 1993; Curry, 1990) for a number of reasons, including the objectivity of the studies and the small-scale samples of learners involved in the studies. There is therefore some doubt as to the reliability of the findings and about the general applicability of the findings to all learners in all contexts. It is also significant to note that not much research is available in this field in the African context. However, available studies reflect a number of similarities with the more bureaucratic studies that will be discussed in this chapter. In spite of the tentativeness of the findings of learning style research, it is nevertheless useful to understand current thinking about how adult learners learn, before examining the ways in which adult learners in Africa learn.

Learning styles are categorised in many different ways. Only a few of the most commonly used classifications that apply to adult learners in general are discussed here.

These are:

- Cerebral dominance
- Information processing style
- Perceptual pattern
- Personality type.

### Cerebral dominance

One way of understanding the different learning styles of adult learners is to consider the structure of the brain and the way its different parts function. However, this has always been a controversial issue. The aim here is not to go into the controversy in detail, but to look at the general trends.

When the brain is examined, it shows a symmetrical division into two connected halves that resemble two sections of a walnut. These are the left and right *cerebral* hemispheres. During the 1960s and 1970s, scholars like Sperry (1961), who was awarded a Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1981, and Ornstein (1977) made significant advances in understanding how the brain works. They concluded that each of the separated hemispheres has its own private sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and memories (Bates, 2002). They are similar in appearance, but have very different functions (BBC-h2g2, 2002). The left hemisphere of the brain controls the right side of the body, and the right hemisphere the left side of the body. The two halves also absorb and process information in different ways. The left side is the more technical, linear side of the brain. Its main functions are in speech and writing, along with balance and organisation of movement. The right side is more holistic and more concerned with the emotional and visual aspects of things (BBC-h2g2, 2002).

Research has shown that, although all of us use both halves of our brains, some

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people tend to rely more on one side than the other, resulting in a preferred dominant side. This has resulted in the general classification of people as either left-brain or right-brain dominant. The descriptions below illustrate the points.

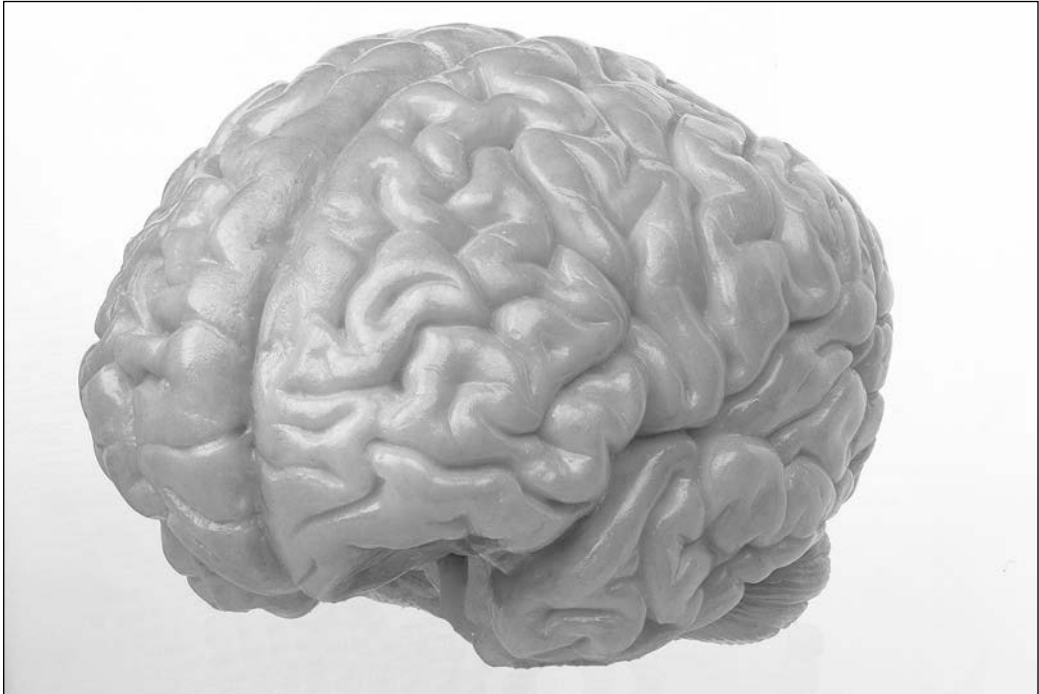
### Left-brain dominant learning styles

Adult learners whose learning styles concentrate on the use of the left side of the brain usually process information from the parts to the whole, linking ideas together. One thought usually follows another in a logical or linear fashion. Such people tend to process information in sequence.

They tend to complete one task before beginning another and take pleasure in ticking or checking them off when they are accomplished. They are interested in linguistic and mathematical endeavours and

tend to be logical. They enjoy processing linear problems that deal with arithmetic and mathematical notations that symbolise meaning. In writing for instance, they pay attention to mechanics such as spelling, agreement and punctuation. Dehaene (1997) affirms that the left hemisphere is better at encoding categorical spatial relations such as above and below or left and right.

They are often verbal and so find it easy to use this side of the brain for verbal memorisation. They use symbols such as letters and words to name, describe and define. They are concerned with linguistic expression and comprehension. They draw conclusions based on reasons and facts. They are interested in knowing and following rules and regulations. They tend to be optimistic. They show positive emotions of happiness, joy, pleasure, and general ebullience (BBC-h2g2 2002).



*The human brain.*



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## Right-brain dominant learning styles

Adult learners whose learning style is to use the right side of the brain usually process information in a holistic manner, from the whole to the parts. They tend to look for wholes and perceive overall patterns and structures before focusing on details.

They tend to process information randomly and to jump from one task to another. They prefer the concrete to the abstract. They process information based on what they can see or touch. They are also intuitive. They are able to have insights, often based on incomplete patterns, hunches, feelings or visual images. They are not as verbal as left brain people are. To them language is more a matter of tone and voice than of words. They process thoughts as pictures with minimal verbal content.

They have a large capacity for fantasy and are imagination-oriented. They process information with creativity. They have a strong spatial sense and are good at dealing with the aspects of mathematics that have a spatial component, like geometry or algebra. They see where things are in relation to other things and how parts fit together to form a whole. They often have difficulty in conforming to rules and regulations. They tend to be pessimistic and have a leaning towards emotions like anger, sorrow, moodiness and bad temper. They do, however, tend to react calmly to the worst of news (BBC-h2g2, 2002).

The foregoing descriptions of the structures of the brain and the way its different parts function have implications for teaching and learning. The brain develops through constant use. It learns optimally when appropriately challenged. There is, therefore, the need to activate it in order to ensure that effective learning takes place. Facilitators of adult learning must ensure that learners are encouraged to process a

range of thoughts, feelings and information through the use of appropriate teaching and learning resources. This will be discussed in Chapter 9.

## Information processing style

The term *information processing* refers to the way in which we sense, think, solve problems and remember information. Each of us has a preferred, consistent and distinct way of receiving, organising and retaining information. Without a way of processing information at multiple levels, the brain would be overwhelmed with a mass of random information.

Between 1976 and 1984, Kolb developed and modified what has become the widely used 'Learning Style Inventory' (LSI) models for looking at ways in which people process information (Atkins et al. 2002; Pilkington and Groat, 2002). The LSI is a self-report inventory that enables individuals to indicate their own preferred learning styles.

The Learning Style Inventory classifies learners as active, reflective, experimental and theorising (Online Tutoring e-Book, 2002). Active learners prefer to learn through concrete experience, by trial and error, and they are always impatient. Reflective learners learn through reflective observation. They tend to adopt a 'wait and see' approach. They tend to think about things before doing them. Experimental learners learn through active experimentation. They prefer to seek new and better ways of doing things rather than repeating familiar patterns. They are impatient and take short cuts in trying to solve problems. Theorising learners learn through abstract conceptualisation. They often question assumptions and make general rules from different experiences.

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## Convergers

Convergers have the ability to find the best single answer to a problem, acquire knowledge by thinking, analysing and applying their new ideas and concepts to real-life situations. They prefer abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. They like to create new theories to explain their observations. They then use these theories to solve problems or make decisions. They perceive information abstractly and process it reflectively. They learn by sequential thinking and are attentive to detail. They prefer dealing with things rather than with people. They like to make decisions and experiment with new ways of doing things. They are task-oriented. They are not emotional in the way they deal with information. They are motivated if there are problems they can solve.

## Divergers

Divergers have the ability to find many possible answers to a particular problem, and acquire knowledge through intuition. They prefer concrete experience and reflective observation. They tend to watch others and then reflect on their experience before acting. They use their imaginative aptitude and can view complex situations from many perspectives. They have the ability to integrate information into meaningful wholes. They perceive information concretely and process it reflectively. They are imaginative learners because they integrate experience with the self. They are good at brainstorming, are people-oriented and emotional. They learn best by not focusing on detail, but on the product. They need time to process information.

## Accommodators

Accommodators adapt to different pressures from the environment. They prefer concrete experience and active experimentation. They want to be involved in new experiences. They are interested in using theories to solve problems before making decisions. They are active participants in learning. They will respond well to a variety of methods of teaching. They learn well when course materials relate to their experience, interests and future careers. They learn best in any situation that encourages independent discovery. They will discard theory if facts do not support them. They like to apply theories to specific circumstances. They approach problems in an intuitive trial and error manner. They obtain information from other people rather than through their own analytic abilities. They perceive information concretely and process it abstractly. They are dynamic learners who relish changes, risk-taking, and flexibility. They like to experience situations and welcome feedback. They are planners and doers.

## Assimilators

Assimilators try to reduce the universe to their own terms. They prefer abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation. They like accurate delivery of information and they tend to respect the knowledge of experts. They learn by thinking. They analyse, then plan, and reflect on issues. They are interested in the development of theories. They often discard facts if they do not support the theory. They perceive information abstractly and process it actively. They prefer information given in an organised manner. They learn well from watching others.



*Adult learners learning by seeing things.*



*Adult learners listening to a lecture.*



*Adult learners learning by doing and touching things.*

Kolb's information processing style has implications for adult learning. The four elements described above are required for effective experiential learning. Learners' experience must therefore be valued and used in teaching and learning. It is important for the facilitator to be aware of the position of the adult learner on these dimensions in order to determine the level and importance of learners' participation in class activities. Through these dimensions, the facilitator will be able to know the learners' involvement in all aspects of the learning process.

### **Perceptual pattern**

The term *perceptual pattern* refers to the primary ways in which we take in information at different physiological levels (which concerns the biological responses of the body to external stimuli such as environmental conditions, lighting and so on). The perceptual

dimension of learning style influences the physical and sensory elements that reflect the body's response to external stimuli. Lockitt (as reported in Online Tutoring, 2002) suggests three perceptual categories of learning styles. These are visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (feeling of movement) perceptual elements.

### **Visual adult learners**

Adult learners whose style of learning is to acquire information when it is presented to them visually and in written language format tend to benefit from facilitators who use the chalkboard, overhead projectors and other visual materials. They like to see the essential points of the lecture listed on the board. They often need to see the facilitator's body language and facial expressions to fully understand the context of the lessons. They tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstruc-

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tions such as people's heads. They learn by using their eyes, seeing words and numbers in printed form. They prefer to learn with visual reinforcements such as diagrams, real-life objects, images and colours, graphs, flowcharts, films, overhead transparencies, videos, handouts and demonstrations. They remember faces, not names, and have difficulty with spoken directives. They tend to study in quiet rooms and often see information in their mind's eye when they are trying to remember something.

### Auditory adult learners

Adult learners whose style of learning is through the auditory mode relate most effectively to the spoken word. They prefer information presented to them orally. They learn best by listening. They process information best through lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. They focus their ears and attention on spoken words. They think in words rather than pictures. They prefer talking to writing and like to discuss and ask questions. They remember names and forget faces easily. They learn best with records, tapes, oral presentations and peer tutoring. They have strong language skills that include a well-developed vocabulary and appreciation of words.

### Kinaesthetic adult learners

Kinaesthetic (feeling of movement) adult learners learn best by doing especially when physically engaged in a hands-on approach. They actively explore the physical world around them. They learn best when they can practise what they learn. They take in information best when moving from place to place and when involved in projects and real-life activities. They have difficulty in sitting still. They are interested in writing,

drawing and taking notes. They learn by using the whole body as much as possible.

### Perceptual pattern based on the multiple intelligence theory

Gardner (1983) established another way of grouping the perceptual dimension of learning styles. He based it on the multiple intelligence (MI) theory, which is a psychological theory about the mind. It is a way of understanding the various ways in which human beings are capable of processing information. In this view, the brain has a number of intelligence centres that should be unlocked in order to enhance effective learning. Gardner identifies different kinds of intelligences that humans possess. Thus far he has identified nine, but he speculates that there may be many more yet to be identified. The type of multiple intelligence that he refers to as existential intelligence is yet to be adequately defined and will therefore not be discussed here. The other eight types are:

- Visual/spatial intelligence
- Verbal/linguistic intelligence
- Logical/mathematical intelligence
- Bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence
- Musical/rhythmic intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence
- Naturalistic intelligence.

Since several of these overlap with learning styles already discussed, they will be discussed only briefly in this section.

### Visual/spatial intelligence

Adult learners who belong to this group are able to visualise objects and create mental images of such objects. They like to see what they are talking about in order to understand. They enjoy charts, pictures,

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graphs, maps, tables, illustrations, puzzles, videos, movies and things that easily catch their eyes. They have the ability to observe and discriminate closely. They are interested in reading, writing, sketching and painting, creating visual images, constructing, fixing and designing practical objects, among other things.

### Verbal/linguistic intelligence

Adult learners who adopt this learning style relate to words and language. They tend to develop auditory skills. They are good speakers. They are interested in reading, writing, listening and telling stories. They have the ability to repeat anything almost word for word. They are capable of remembering information and of convincing someone of their point of view.

### Logical/mathematical intelligence

Adult learners in this category have the ability to use reason, logic and numbers. They are always interested in solving problems. They make connections between pieces of information. They ask many questions and like to carry out experiments. They are capable of performing complex mathematical calculations and working with geometric shapes.

### Bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence

Adult learners who adopt this style of learning learn best through activities like games, movement, hands-on tasks and eye-hand coordination. They have the ability to use their hands or bodies completely and confidently. They maintain balance while walking, running and jumping. They are interested in taking part in sports. They remember what they do rather than what they observe or say. They like to build and express their emotion through the body.

### Musical/rhythmic intelligence

Adult learners in this group learn well through songs, patterns, rhythms, instruments and musical expressions. They are also sensitive to environmental sounds, the human voice and musical instruments. They have the ability to compose songs and they have the ability to produce and appreciate music.

### Interpersonal intelligence

These adult learners have the ability to relate to other people. They are good at verbal and non-verbal communication skills. They understand others, communicate with them and have empathy for their feelings and beliefs. They adapt easily to any type of social situation. They usually do best in a group situation as they compare, share, relate and interview other people. They learn cooperatively in groups or with a partner.

### Intrapersonal intelligence

These adult learners are in touch with their own feelings, values and ideas. They tend to display strong personalities and shy away from team activities. They pride themselves on being independent and original. They are aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

### Naturalistic intelligence

Adult learners with naturalistic intelligence tend to understand, comprehend and explain things encountered in the world of nature. They observe and remember things from their environments. They have a strong affinity for the outside world and for animals. They often enjoy stories that deal with animals or natural phenomena.

The perceptual patterns, if appropriately used by the facilitator, will provide a

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rich and diverse learning environment for the learner. The facilitator will have a wide range of resources to use for adult teaching and learning. In applying Gardner's types of multiple intelligence in a classroom situation, for instance, adult learners will have the opportunity to develop their own particular forms of intelligences, thereby profiting from the learning programmes. These different intelligences will guide the learners towards a career choice related to their intellectual abilities.

### Personality type

Some psychologists use a system that divides people into *personality types* according to emotions, values, personal interaction and other factors. Carl Jung (1923), known for his immense body of work on mental processes, developed a typology using three polarities, to which Myers and Briggs (1975) added a fourth:

- Extrovert versus Introvert
- Sensing versus Intuition
- Thinking versus Feeling
- Judging versus Perceiving.

According to Hedges (2002: 1–6) the first pair (extrovert and introvert) concerns our attitude to the world around us. The second pair (sensing and intuition) focuses on how we take in information from our surroundings and where we focus our attention. The third pair (thinking and feeling) focuses on how we make decisions about how to act on this information. The fourth pair (judging and perceiving) refers to the way in which we evaluate information.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) outlined above is an inventory used to identify and describe an individual's personality type. Each person tends to use certain aspects of his or her personality more readily than others. Our preferences make up our personality pattern or type. The



*Adult learners interacting with one another freely and exchanging ideas and information.*

characteristics of each type will be discussed briefly.

### Extrovert adult learners

Adult learners with an extrovert learning style have a great deal of tolerance for noise and crowds. They talk more than listen and usually they talk first and think later. They communicate with enthusiasm, meeting people readily and participating in many activities. They tend to exhibit good relations with people and direct their energies to the outside world of activity and spoken words. They depend on outside stimulation and interaction to engage in learning. They are willing to take risks and love excitement and change. They hate being idle and like to be the centre of attention most of the time. They prefer oral tests to written tests and learn through concrete experience. They value the breadth of experience, are

practical in nature and often do things with confidence.

### Introvert adult learners

Adult learners who are introverts are usually quiet. They tend to be reserved, sensitive and more comfortable in solitary pursuits. They are shy, self-reliant and value depth of experience. They always like to listen more than to talk and they have the ability to concentrate well. They like to think carefully about what to say before they say it. They are very cautious in meeting people and participate in selected activities only. They are always independent and tend to be self-sufficient. They prefer written to oral tests. Although they like to process ideas in their minds they may not be willing to express their opinions publicly. They draw their energies from the internal world of ideas, emotions and expressions.



*An adult learner learning in a quiet and solitary way.*



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## Sensing adult learners

Adult learners whose style of learning is by sensing tend to be interested in tangible reality. They focus on the present. They like settings that require observation and experimentation for the process of learning. They want to see what is, rather than what might be. They process information in the form of known facts and familiar terms and gather information through the effective use of their five senses. They deal with the world in practical and factual terms. They work systematically, paying attention to detail and observing phenomena closely. They tend to communicate in direct ways and are always interested in having the goals they want to achieve clearly stated.

## Intuitive adult learners

Adult learners whose style of learning is framed by intuition are interested in theories. They like settings that involve problem-solving, creativity, and imaginative work. They like to work on different things at the same time. They place their emphasis on insight and the future, focusing on what might be rather than what is. They like plenty of examples in order to deduce the rules by themselves. They like to grasp general concepts rather than particulars in detail. They prefer meanings, symbols, use their imagination to solve problems and are highly speculative.

## Thinking adult learners

Adult learners in this group tend to be objective, principled, logical and impartial. They are cool, calm, and collected. They find it easy to make difficult decisions, decide with their heads rather than their hearts and can judge situations from an outsider's point of view. They are firm, sceptical and self-disciplined. They use one

or more thinking styles when participating in educational activities.

## Feeling adult learners

Adult learners with a feeling style of learning tend to come to decisions subjectively based on their emotions. They prefer to make decisions based on personal values and decide with their hearts rather than their heads. They are trusting, warm in friendship and value harmony between people. They often show sympathy for one another and are very persuasive.

## Judging adult learners

Adult learners in this category tend to judge the situation and set deadlines for themselves. They do not like things to drag on and on as they are closure-oriented. Hence, they want topics or issues discussed and settled quickly. They like to finish a task before going on to the next. They are goal-oriented and like to plan well in advance. They engage in systematic work and get jobs done. They are rigid and intolerant of ambiguity.

## Perceiving adult learners

These adult learners resist making hasty decisions. They like to have as much information as possible on issues before arriving at conclusions. It takes them a long time to conclude on any issue. They have to be satisfied that they have received all the necessary information before they can take a position on an issue. They are flexible, impulsive and adaptable to change. They like an open-ended approach and tend to feel that there is plenty of time to embark on projects.

The MBTI just described has some implications for adult teaching and learning. If effectively handled, the facilitator could

use it to measure personality differences in the learners. This will assist in learners' self-development and career development. The MBTI is a meaningful device for the facilitator in understanding individual differences between learners.

## Observation on the general learning styles

The psychological typologies and categories discussed above may not always fit the African context. Caution should be used in applying a Western typology, such as Jung's, to the African mind. For example, what may be considered as extreme introvert behaviour among Europeans may be quite normal in certain African contexts and may not mean the person is an introverted type. There is also the need to test these learning styles against the African experience. However, until there is an equivalent African body of psychological research, these theories can provide some useful provisional guidelines. Few, if any, truly confine themselves to only one type of learning style. Most people tend more towards one style than another, but may draw on or shift between styles, depending on the demands of a particular learning activity. There is also a need to be wary of stereotyping people, and in so doing, possibly limiting their learning styles.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 Make a list of the major differences between left and right brain learning.
- 2 Examine the major features of the experiential learning model of Kolb. In small groups, discuss which one applies to each of you the most and why.
- 3 In pairs, consider the merits and the demerits of adult learners using any of

Gardner's multiple intelligence types as their dominant learning style.

- 4 Select key words that seem to divide adult learners into extroverts and introverts.
- 5 In small groups, discuss the relative advantages of having sensing and intuitive adult learners in your class.
- 6 In pairs, discuss the types of thinking styles you possess.
- 7 Discuss the basic differences between adult learners who have judging and perceiving learning styles.
- 8 Discuss in pairs what you consider to be your own learning style based on what you have learned so far in this chapter.
- 9 How do you think you could assist adult learners to discover their learning styles?
- 10 Examine these typologies and debate how true they are in the African context.

## LEARNING STYLE MODELS

A number of researchers have studied African learning systems over the years. They include notable scholars such as Brock-Utne (1994, 2000), Eshiwani (1993), Fafunwa (1982), Fasokun (1981), Ki-Zerbo (1990) Lawuo (1978) and Lumumba-Kasongo (2000). Others are Muyanda-Mutebi and Matovu (1993), Namuddu (1991), Ngulube (1989), Obanya (1980), Ocitti (1994), Odora (1994), Vansina (1981) and Yoloye (1986).

These scholars, at various times, have emphasised the need to use African culture as the basis for determining the learning styles of African learners. This point is emphasised by Lumumba-Kasongo (2000: 145) when he states that

*in Africa, it is customary to transmit knowledge within the Western education context through the institutions associated with capitalism, colonialism and slavery,*

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*such as churches, schools, multinational corporations and international agencies. This does not relate to African metaphysics and social context. The learners and teachers lack confidence and there is little interconnectedness among the elements being learned.*

Every culture has rules for processing information. Although there may be similarities within all cultures, it is important to recognise that there are differences within cultures that may influence differences in learning styles. Merriam and Mohamad (2000), writing about Malaysia, argue that culture, transmitted through symbols, artefacts, heroes and values, shapes the meaning people make of their lives and defines how people experience movement through their life course. Indeed, culture represents the software of the mind.

A few studies that have examined the learning styles of African adults will be examined to determine the extent to which they conform to the general patterns described in the first part of this chapter.

### **Personality/socially initiated learning style**

Ocitti (1988) identifies the patterns of learning in traditional African societies to involve two processes:

#### **Personality-initiated learning styles**

These are learning styles that are characterised by the processes of observation, imitation and practice. For example, the adult learner is involved in the day-to-day activities of the family, the community and the entire society.

### **Socially-initiated learning styles**

These are learning styles that comprise the processes of questioning, demonstration, explanation and task agreements. These learning styles involve the use of folklore, ceremonies, festivals, job performances, symbolic materials, masks and other learning support systems as instructional media.

### **Rote learning**

The African adult learner is like a library. Ki-Zerbo (1990) informs us that ‘when an elder dies in Africa, it is a library that burns’. Brock-Utne (2000) in supporting this statement goes further by saying that an elder’s death is the equivalent of the burning of a unique and living manuscript. She asserts that Africans learn primarily by rote. Rote learning within this framework is memorisation by saving knowledge in order to use it again.

Rote learning, as a learning strategy and style, has not received favourable comments by some scholars from the West. The major argument against it is that it is a surface learning style rather than an in-depth one. The differences between surface and in-depth learning are briefly summarised here.

Surface learning (as its name implies) involves studying a piece of material that does not involve carrying out any in-depth processing of it. Learners who adopt the surface approach to learning tend to:

- Concentrate purely on assessment requirements
- Accept information and ideas passively
- Memorise facts routinely
- Ignore guiding principles or patterns (How students learn: what learning involves, 2003).

Learners who adopt an in-depth approach, on the other hand, make a serious attempt to turn other people's ideas into their own personalised structure of knowledge. They tend to:

- Understand materials for themselves.
- Interact critically with the content.
- Relate ideas to previous knowledge and experience.
- Use organising principles to integrate ideas (How students learn: what learning involves, 2003).

However, a few scholars from the West, like Garrison and Archer (2000), have come out in defence of rote learning. They argue that the categorisation of rote learning as surface learning may give a false impression of the reality of the situation. They conclude that rote learning may have a useful place in constructing knowledge. This is because rote learning is an essential learning style where there is the need for individuals to respond to stimuli in order to back up their understanding. It is saving the knowledge that learners can use again when needed. It does not entail a surface approach to learning.

It is often necessary for adult learners in Africa to establish the details of new subject matter firmly in their minds by rote. For instance, Brock-Utne (2000) observes that rote learning plays a greater role in a culture where there are few books and reference materials, as is the case in African societies. By contrast, rote learning may be ineffective in a society where information is freely available for reference and where good memory does not play an indispensable role in daily life (Eshiwani, 1993).

In the African society, memory is highly developed. People learn to do something by repeatedly doing it through trial and error. As discussed in Chapter 2, indigenous African societies are predominantly oral

ones. Hence, Africans transmit history, culture and traditions orally. They achieve this through prose, verse, proverbs, storytelling, folklore, verbal art, oral literature, epigrams and riddles. The way in which rote learning can be used to facilitate adult learning in Africa will be discussed in Chapter 8.

### **Holistic style based on indigenous knowledge**

In Chapter 2 it became clear that one of the characteristics of adult learners in Africa is that they possess indigenous knowledge through which they acquire and process information holistically. A few studies have been done to confirm this position. Vabi (1996) reports on eliciting community knowledge about the uses of trees through participatory rural appraisal methods. He used examples from Cameroon and the Central African Republic, stressing the use of indigenous knowledge for generating information from village communities based on a holistic approach. He found that by adopting this approach adults participated effectively by learning many things at the same time. In agriculture, for instance, they learn simultaneously the list of the most frequently used trees and shrub species for traditional medicine, construction, human food, handicraft, animal feed, fencing, soil fertility, watershed protection, and so on.

Diallo (1994) also emphasises the fact that African indigenous education is informal and that the process of learning takes place from day to day by experiencing the subject matter as an integral part of the actual living conditions of the people. Odora (1994) asserts that this form of learning is holistic. She cites the example of teaching a person how to build a house. The process would simultaneously involve learning about site selection, strategic location, soil and grass types and wood

types including their resistance to ants. Similarly, the girl learning to cook would learn simultaneously what vegetables to grow, preparatory procedures and so on.

Brock-Utne (1994) holds the view that indigenous education follows the principle of communalism, with an emphasis on unity, cooperation, love and sympathy for fellow human beings. According to her, learning is geared towards lifelong learning and functionalism. This style of learning, in particular, is holistic.

### **Apprenticeship system based on indigenous knowledge**

Williams (1987) emphasises the fact that indigenous education in Africa is very comprehensive, especially when learners learn through the apprenticeship system. Among the common types of indigenous apprenticeship systems are: weaving, hunting, carving, sculpting, painting and decorating, carpentry, building, hair-plaiting, dress-making, boat-making, mat-making, dyeing, food-selling, wine-tapping and a host of other trades and crafts.



### **ACTIVITY**

- 1 **Compare and contrast the specific learning styles of adult learners in Africa with the general pattern presented at the beginning of this chapter.**
- 2 **In small groups, discuss what constitutes the following: On the basis of what you have read in this section, illustrating with examples from your community:**
  - **Personality/socially initiated learners**
  - **Holistic learning based on indigenous knowledge**
  - **Apprenticeship learning based on indigenous knowledge.**

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING**

The different learning styles for adult learners should form the basis for helping them to take part in adult education programmes. Facilitators have a duty to respond to these different learning styles by creating different learning contexts, activities and experiences for different kinds of learners. There is a need to train adult learners how to learn and how to learn in more than one approach to learning, so that they are able to select appropriate styles depending on the available materials and learning activities.

It is important for facilitators of adult learning to realise the distinction between *learning style* and *intelligence*. Learning style is an approach that individuals habitually apply to learning, based on how they perceive, respond to and interact with the learning environment. Intelligence, however, is a generalised measure of overall ability or potential ability (Atherton, 2003). There are four broad areas of intelligence that, under normal conditions, are supposed to be independent of each other and not culture bound. These are verbal reasoning, abstract/visual reasoning, quantitative reasoning and short-term memory. The facilitator should understand that intelligence alone is not sufficient to account for academic achievement. According to Atherton, 'it is certainly necessary, but beyond a certain threshold, it is by no means clear how much. As education progresses, other factors come into play such that the limits are determined by the strength of the weakest link in the chain.'

Some facilitators often find it difficult to identify the learning style groups to which adult learners in their classes belong. This is partly because adult learners do not come into adult education programmes with labels sewn on their foreheads depicting their learning style patterns. One way of

overcoming this initial problem is to make adult learners realise that their learning styles are the way in which they prefer to learn. It has nothing to do with whether or not they are intelligent. It only has to do with how their brain functions most efficiently and effectively to process information. In essence, there is no good or bad learning style. Success can be achieved by using any preferred learning style. Pilkington and Groat (2002) emphasise this point. They argue that all approaches to studying can lead to success. However, the knowledge of a learner's preference for one or another learning style may help in motivating individuals to work to their strengths whilst addressing weaknesses through appropriate learning tasks and materials.

Learning styles are mere preferences. According to Dixon (1986), preferences do not imply that these ways are the only or perhaps even the best ways for the individual to learn a given subject matter. Exclusive reliance on one or the other will not be conducive to an in-depth approach to learning necessary to achieve understanding (Garrison and Archer, 2000).

The facilitator's responsibility is not necessarily to accommodate learning styles of individual learners but to recognise them as possible starting points and only as preferred methods of learning. Being aware of the different ways adult learners go about taking in information helps facilitators in the planning and structuring of classes and in developing different ways of presenting their works. It is therefore important for facilitators to improve their teaching style so that they do not favour only a few learning styles, but include a broad range of styles. The best use of learning style information by the facilitator is to provide learners with insights regarding their learning preferences. It is therefore the responsibility of the facilitators to help learners to understand the limitations of their preferred learning styles.

In addition, they should assist learners to expand their thinking strategies in order to be successful in a variety of learning settings (Garrison and Archer, 2000).



## ACTIVITY

- 1 In small groups, discuss why the different learning styles of adult learners should form the basis for helping to take part in adult education programmes.
- 2 In pairs, describe how you will assist adult learners to understand the limitations of their preferred learning styles and how to assist them to expand their thinking strategies in a variety of learning settings.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter a few of the most commonly used learning styles that are applicable to adult learners in general were discussed. These are the cerebral dominance, information-processing style, perceptual pattern and personality types. A few of the learning style models of adult learners in Africa, that relate to their traditional and cultural backgrounds, were also considered. Some adult learners in Africa could be described as being personality and socially initiated, rote learners and holistic learners based on the indigenous knowledge of the people. The chapter was concluded with a discussion of the implications of these learning styles for teaching and learning purposes in Africa.

## KEY POINTS

- There are many different learning styles and characteristics that help us to understand learners better, and to develop

approaches to facilitation that are sensitive to a range of styles.

- Many learners possess a number of different styles, and all learners have the capacity to develop a range of learning styles. There is therefore the need to avoid stereotyping people so as not to limit their learning styles.
- It is important not to assume that it will always be possible to classify or categorise learners into clear learning style categories.
- Eurocentric notions of learning styles should not be applied uncritically to the African mind.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Based on the knowledge of members of your community, classify yourself and a few adult members according to the following:
  - Cerebral dominance
  - Information processing modalities
  - Perceptual pattern
  - Personality type.
- 2 Explain and justify your classifications.
- 3 In pairs, evaluate, and make a critique of the general and African adult learning styles discussed in this chapter.
- 4 Construct a questionnaire that you can use to identify different learning styles.
- 5 Visit any adult education programme run by any agency for adult education in your town or village. Based on your knowledge of their culture, identify the learning styles favoured by the adult learners. Write down and compare your findings with what you have learned from this chapter.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 Give your own definition of adult learning styles.
- 2 Why do you consider adult learning styles to be important for instruction?
- 3 Explain the principles that support the use of adult learning style models.
- 4 Describe fully the adult learning style you prefer and why.
- 5 Identify and discuss the overlaps that are noticeable in different adult learning styles.
- 6 How would you categorise the adult learning style models of adult learners in Africa based on Western models?
- 7 What are the limitations that facilitators may encounter in adopting the various adult learning styles in a given situation?
- 8 What are the implications of adult learning styles for teaching and learning purposes in your community?

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# Chapter 8

## Facilitating adult learning: Basic principles and techniques

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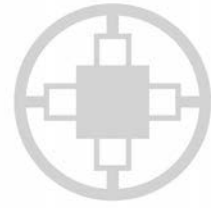
### OVERVIEW

This chapter examines some basic principles that facilitators of adult learning can use in their choice of language of teaching and learning and effective communication. It also addresses an essential instructional technique for teaching and learning by adult learners in Africa. This will build on the working knowledge of the characteristics and the learning styles of adult learners in Africa, discussed in Chapters 2 and 7 respectively.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Determine the choice of language of teaching and learning for adult learners in Africa.
- 2 Identify the effective interpersonal communication strategies for adult learning.
- 3 Understand why it is important for adult learners to participate in all aspects of the learning process.
- 4 Discuss one of the instructional techniques for facilitating effective adult learning in Africa.



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## KEY TERMS

**anxiety** A feeling of apprehension that occurs as a result of fear and frustration.

**assessment** The process by which one measures the quality and quantity of learning and teaching, using various techniques such as assignments, projects and tests.

**mnemonics** The art of assisting the memory by using artificial aids such as rhymes, rules, phrases, diagrams, acronyms and other devices that help with recalling names, dates, facts, figures and so on.

## BEFORE YOU START

In small groups, discuss the following questions and share your answers with your facilitator:

- 1 Which language do you think is suitable for teaching and learning in adult education?
- 2 Why do you think African adults attach great importance to the choice and styles of communication?
- 3 Why do you think it is important for adult learners to participate in all aspects of the learning process?
- 4 Discuss the instructional techniques you think are appropriate for facilitating effective adult learning in Africa.

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Chapters 2 and 7 are important for this chapter, because they form the basis for creating learning opportunities that will facilitate adult learning in Africa. Review them to make sure that you fully understand the salient points discussed before reading this chapter.

## **THE CHOICE OF LANGUAGE**

The use of a learner's mother tongue as the medium of education is a highly complex issue. At this point it is therefore necessary and relevant to discuss briefly the issue of which language is suitable for adult teaching and learning in Africa. Obanya (1980), Fafunwa (1982, 1998), Fafunwa et al. (1989), Yoloye (1986) and a host of scholars from Africa have always argued in favour of using the mother tongue of learners for education. For instance, Fafunwa et al. (1989) argue that the mother tongue is the most natural way of learning and so it should be the medium of education. It enables learners to explore their own natural environment and communicate in a familiar way. Thus, they will acquire self-confidence, initiative, resourcefulness, creative reasoning and adaptability, all of which are necessary for further growth in learning.

The decisions reached at the conference of Ministers of Education in Africa (MINEDAF), held in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1982, buttressed the position of using the mother tongue of learners in education. The Ministers discussed the issue and stressed the urgent and pressing need for the use of African languages in education. They viewed the use of the mother tongue as a living instrument of culture that should be pursued with vigour (ED-82 MINEDAF/REF. 5). Unda (1990) argues that adults who are functionally literate in their first language will generally find it easier to

become literate in a second language.

Roy-Campbell (in Brock-Utne, 2000) also holds the view that, as long as countries continue to educate the future leaders of the continent primarily through foreign languages, they will remain dependent. To her, education for liberation and self-reliance must begin with the use of languages that do not impede the acquisition of knowledge. According to Omolewa et al. (1998), the basis of any process of education is with the use of the local language of the people. Empirical findings carried out in modern educational practice support this view. The use of the mother tongue ensures a wider participation in adult education programmes while it prepares the way for the linguistic and social goals of an empowering literacy process. Diop (2000) is of the view that a person learns better in the mother tongue because of an indisputable accord between the spirit of a language and the mentality of the people who speak it. A further important argument is the fact that the use of stories, proverbs, myths and folklore in learning can only be employed meaningfully if the mother tongue is being used.

As far as possible, the mother tongue, or the language of the immediate environment of the learners, should be the medium of education in adult learning. It is useful in literacy and non-formal programmes at lower levels. At higher levels, adult learners could be introduced to English or any other foreign language that they should learn or study separately for other non-formal education programmes. For example, in the use of technology, adult learners may require the ability to use either English or any other foreign language of their choice. Hence, there is the need to use an appropriate foreign language at that time. Also, it is not uncommon that those who become literate in the mother tongue demand that they also learn English. Although the mother tongue

should always receive priority, the use of a foreign language should also be encouraged.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 In small groups, summarise the characteristics and learning styles of adult learners in Africa.
- 2 In small groups, discuss the benefits of mother-tongue education. Also, discuss what you think might be the constraints to implementing it and how you can overcome these constraints.

## THE CHOICE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

African adults attach great importance to styles of communication. Reverence for those who are older is a common feature among Africans. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, for instance, no one expects a young person to look an elder straight in the eye. People consider those who do so as being disrespectful to elders (Fafunwa, 1974). Again, it is generally not acceptable within the African culture for a younger person to call elderly people by their first names. Adult learners will demand nothing less than that from their facilitator, who should understand the culture, customs and traditions of the learners.

Facilitators need to understand the characteristics of the learners, their learning styles and their interpersonal communication strategies. They also have to know how to recognise and exercise verbal and non-verbal communication strategies and learn how to improve oral communication skills among different adult learners.

In view of the importance of communication to the success of adult learning in Africa, a few of the issues that are pertinent

to effective communication are discussed here.

## Channels of communication

Communication is the essence of the teaching-learning process, but the facilitator has to be aware that there are many other ways of communicating than simply delivering verbal messages to the learner. There are many channels of communication based on the culture, customs and traditions of adult learners. Certain cultures, for example, can use all five senses in learning, that is, not merely those of sight and hearing but also those of touch, taste and smell (Gunawardena, 1998).

In each case facilitators should find the right medium for the message they wish to convey. This can be through prose, verse, proverbs, stories, folklore and literature, verbal art, epigrams and riddles, posters, banners, radio talk shows and television programmes. Boateng (1990), for instance, shows how African grandparents have tested the communicative powers of African proverbs and found them valid and very effective. Facilitators can also use eyewitness accounts, idioms, mythology, poetry, songs and the words of village and town criers.

## Presentation of communication

In any form of communication that will involve adult learners, facilitators must understand how to use their voices and body language and how to present themselves to the learners.

## Voice

The way in which we say words is very important to African adult learners. The human voice is a powerful instrument of communication. While some possess the gift of using the voice to engage, inspire,

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persuade and captivate, facilitators do not always make the best use of their voices in learning environments. Facilitators should pay attention to using their voices in ways that make learners listen, and get their intended messages across effectively.

The voice should be attractive, clear and free from tension and bad habits. The facilitator needs to understand how to captivate the learners using control, modulation, pace, pauses, emphasis, inflection and repetition as well as delivering meaning and expressing emotion (The Power of the Human Voice, 2003). Facilitators who do not have good voices can learn these things by observing people practised in the art of speaking. These may be other facilitators, orators, politicians, radio and television commentators. They may also need to read books on the use of voice.

## Body language

An important form of interpersonal communication is through body language. An understanding of body language can help the facilitator to deal with different learning situations. Body language can express a thousand words. Human beings are capable of using body language to express their feelings. Because of the importance of body language in adult learning, facilitators should be mindful of the following.

In addition to their own body language, facilitators should keep an eye on the learners' body language. They should look out for signs that indicate interest or difficulty. For instance, the learners may be straining their eyes to see the visual aids or may be looking uncomfortable and puzzled. Facilitators should also look out for signs of boredom such as slumping, fidgeting or looking at watches (Oral Presentation, 2003). The facilitator should avoid mannerisms that will distract the attention of the learners and should know how to respond

to adult learners' reactions with humour and smiles when necessary.

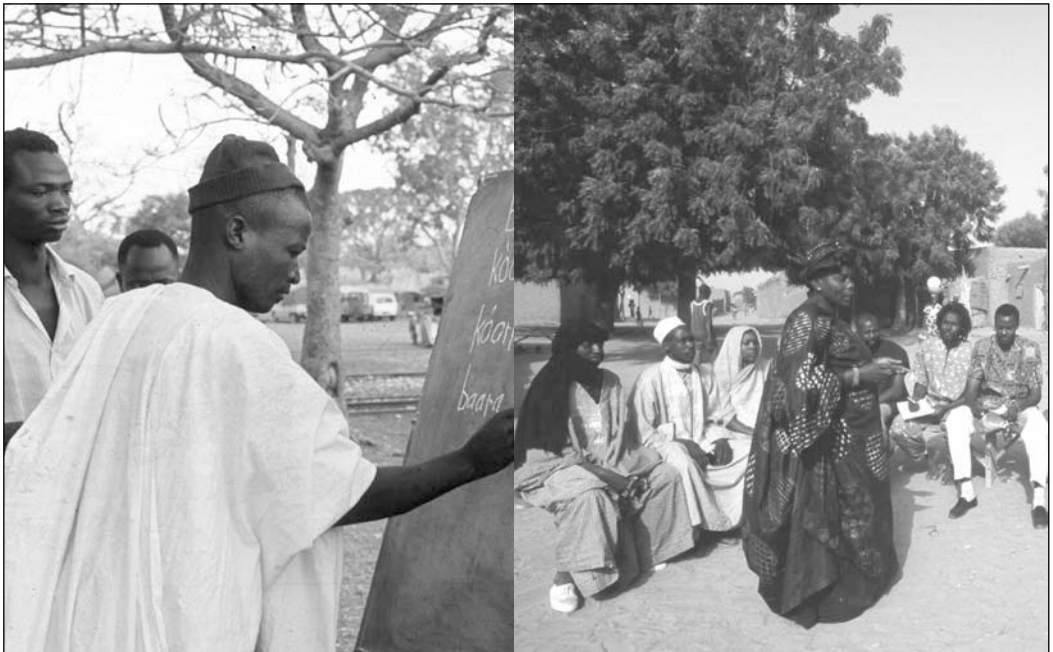
*Posture:* Facilitators need to be mindful of their posture as well as that of the learners. What posture will make the facilitator feel natural in the presence of the learners? Should shoulders be hanging? Should the body be leaning to one side? Should the facilitator be standing or sitting? The answers depend on what the facilitator feels is natural in the company of adult learners.

*Gestures:* The meaning of gestures differs widely both between world regions and within Africa. For instance, in some African cultures nodding the head means 'yes', whereas shaking the head means 'no'. Obviously facilitators need to be aware of this or they may convey a 'no' when they mean 'yes' or vice versa. This is just one example. Facilitators should look for other examples in their communities. Folding the arms, for example, may give the impression that people are trying to defend themselves. There are annoying gestures, such as nail-biting, playing with the hair, playing with the chalk, chewing gum and grinding the teeth. Facilitators should avoid annoying gestures as far as possible and should control the way in which they use their hands to demonstrate or illustrate in the classroom. For example, many African adult learners are not at ease when they see people put their hands on their heads or in their pockets while teaching. Facilitators should use their hands to emphasise points, but should not indulge in too much hand-waving.

*Facial expressions:* Facilitators should be aware that African adult learners are highly responsive to facial expressions. A simple smile can make them feel at ease, while a frown can be unsettling, suggesting aggression or insecurity. Facilitators can also use facial expressions to convey their messages or emphasise their remarks.



*An adult educator who is smiling.*



*Adult educators wearing different styles of dress.*

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*Eye contact:* African adults in certain cultures tend to shun the idea of younger ones looking at their faces when they are talking to them, as they regard this as a sign of disrespect. Facilitators should find a way of using eye contact without offending the norms of learners.

## APPEARANCE

The facilitator's appearance is also important to adult learners. First impressions influence learners' attitudes towards the facilitator. Facilitators should dress according to the norms of the learners. For example, in a Muslim region, it would be appropriate for a female facilitator to have her head covered. This may not be necessary with a Christian audience. Facilitators should know when to wear traditional and when to wear 'Western dress'. Whatever dress is used should not distract the attention of the learners.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Discuss what a facilitator should do in order not to violate the culture and traditions of the adult learners in your community.
- 2 Describe various forms of communication in your community and show how facilitators and the adult learners could utilise them for effective teaching and learning.
- 3 In pairs, describe how facilitators could make use of their voices to engage, inspire, persuade and captivate adult learners to take part in adult education programmes.
- 4 Imagine a teaching situation where you have to convey a specific piece

of information. Demonstrate inappropriate and appropriate body language for what you are trying to convey.

## THE NEED FOR PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

In discussing the need for participation in planning, the focus will be only on the major aspects that concern facilitators. This issue is discussed in detail in *Developing Programmes for Adult Learners in Africa* (Gboku and Lekoko, 2005) in this series.

Adult learners can be motivated more effectively if they are involved in planning their courses in cooperation with the facilitator. Many Africans believe that 'no one can shave a person's head in his or her absence'. This saying emphasises the need and importance of engaging the learners in planning things that will affect them. They should have a say in content, pace, intensity, application and the environment of the course (Gunawardena, 1998). The facilitator should work in a spirit of community mobilisation. Adult learners should identify the needs that may promote community interests and all of them should be engaged in some form of participation in planning that will increase their motivation for learning. The facilitator should understand the adult learner from a holistic perspective. This is particularly appropriate when working with adults who have diverse reasons for participating and who possess a multitude of learning styles (Galbraith, 1991). During the planning stage, facilitators should consider, among other things, the backgrounds, interests, knowledge, attitudes, skills and the conditions of the learners' lives and those of their immediate and extended families (UNESCO, 2001).

## Needs assessment

The needs assessment process identifies learning goals. The facilitator needs to find out what the adult learners already know by using needs assessment tools. These may take the form of interviews, registration forms, analysis of statistics and records, suggestion boxes, informal conversations, needs assessment forms, observation, meetings, reports, newsletters and questionnaires. African adults are motivated to engage in programmes and activities that will benefit the society in which they live. To achieve this, the facilitator can involve local politicians, opinion leaders, church or mosque leaders, traditional believers, market men and women, farmers, health workers, government officials, tradesmen and -women and community representatives to participate in needs assessments. Adult learners are encouraged to contribute to their learning when they realise that they themselves, as well as others, have something to offer (UNESCO, 2001).

A needs assessment should identify the gaps between the adult learner's current and expected proficiencies as perceived by the learners and others (Galbraith, 1991). The facilitator should then identify and prioritise possible activities with the adult learners. A needs assessment should be a continuous process of gathering and analysing data that will allow the facilitator to obtain a unique profile of each adult learner. The assessment assists the facilitator to make wise decisions about the curricula that are suitable for the learners.

## Setting aims and objectives

Objectives may focus on knowledge, skills or attitudes, or a combination of the three desired outcomes. Setting the aims and objectives of a learning programme should be the joint responsibility of the facilitator

and the adult learners who will participate in the educational encounter (Galbraith, 1991). According to Gunawardena (1998), participation of learners in setting objectives and designing the learning strategies is essential in adult learning because the exercise is not for someone to teach but for someone to learn.

Aims and objectives are statements which define the learning that the adult learner intends to achieve in an adult education programme. However, there is a difference between aims and objectives.

### Aims

An aim is a brief statement of what the adult education programme intends to achieve. It focuses on what the facilitator intends to achieve as opposed to what the adult learner will achieve. It describes in general terms the knowledge and abilities the learners will be taught.

### Objectives

An objective is a statement of what the adult learner should be able to do as a result of participating in the adult education programme. Objectives are usually listed or phrased in terms of what the learners will know and do rather than what the facilitator intends to achieve. Objectives are usually observable activities in the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In order to make the objectives specific and observable, the SMART acronym, explained below, may help facilitators to remember how to write programme objectives (UNESCO, 2001). Objectives should be:

|   |   |            |
|---|---|------------|
| S | = | Specific   |
| M | = | Measurable |
| A | = | Achievable |
| R | = | Relevant   |
| T | = | Timely     |



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## Selection and organisation of content

The content of African education is characterised by its concern with the ‘good person’ (Reagan, 2000: 15). Moumouni (1968) also argues that traditional education in Africa has intimate ties with social life, both in a material and in a spiritual sense. The content therefore provides the building blocks to construct knowledge, skills and attitudes that have meaning and usefulness to the learner and the society in order to solve their persistent and significant problems (Bereiter, 1992).

Adults learn what they want to learn and therefore the lessons and contents should appeal to learners’ own needs, interests and values. According to UNESCO (2001: 12), the content of learning should address the following concerns:

- The real and immediate issues affecting adult learners in their community.
- Required technical information on ways to obtain such information.
- The shared experience and ideas of the learners.
- Each learner’s participation, experience and solutions to the issues.

In preparing the content, the facilitator should talk to local experts and find out from the learners themselves what they already know about the topic. Facilitators do not need to teach every topic if they are not proficient in it. Experts may come from outside or from within the community itself to do this. The role of the facilitator is to help adult learners learn from experts, activities and materials.

In indigenous education, the major themes that make up the content are cosmology, philosophy, socialisation, practical knowledge, skills, values and norms (Keynan, 1994). Others include war and peace, aesthetics, contemporary issues,

family, community and gender relations, and relations with the outside world. The effectiveness of this education was possible because of its very close relationship with life (Moumouni, 1968).



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Think of any programme in adult education and, in groups, discuss the major reasons for involving adult learners in planning their programmes. Suggest a suitable composition of a planning committee for the programme.
- 2 Formulate objectives for an adult education programme to address the problems of HIV/AIDS in your community.
- 3 In groups, discuss how you will select the contents of adult learning in your community. Give reasons for your answers.

## SELECTING TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

In Chapters 2 and 7 respectively, the characteristics and learning styles of African adult learners were discussed. The conclusion was that the decision to select any method depends on certain factors. These factors include the needs and preferences of the learner, and the skills and preferences of the facilitator. Other factors include the nature of the content and the related purposes for the educational programme and an array of contextual realities (Beatty, Benefield and Linhart, 1991).

### Rote learning

As discussed in Chapter 7, *rote learning* is memorisation. It is the use of the memory to store and retrieve information (Rote

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Learning, 2003). It is therefore the responsibility of the facilitator to know how to improve the memories of adult learners. The emphasis here is to familiarise facilitators with different aspects of memory to enable them to assist adult learners in learning by rote. Memory, which involves a conscious thought about facts and experiences, has two major types: short-term and long-term (Greenfield, 2000). The short-term or working memory has a very limited capacity, while the long-term memory has a huge capacity.

## Types of memory

### Short-term memory

The short-term memory, requires active concentration and stores information temporarily in the brain. For instance, you may store telephone numbers that you do not have to remember for a long time in the short-term memory. The rehearsal of information often takes place here, too, to avoid decay. It has a limited capacity, hence it transfers information very quickly into long-term memory (Review, 2003).

### Long-term memory

Long-term memory is conventionally understood as memory – the ability to deliberately recall information or experiences from our past (Greenfield, 2000). Long-term memory is the type of memory where information is stored and retrieved over long periods. This memory is infinite. Some people believe that the information is never lost from it but merely becomes less and less accessible. The long-term memory receives information from the working or short-term memory after a few seconds (Human memory, 2003). Unlike in the working memory, there is little decay of long-term memory. However, one is likely

to lose part of the information stored in it if it is not utilised effectively.

There are two types of long-term memory, namely episodic memory and semantic memory.

*Episodic memory:* Episodic memory represents memory of events and experiences in a serial form. It is from episodic memory that we can reconstruct the actual events that took place at a given point in our lives. It relies on time and location as a frame of reference (Human memory, 2003).

*Semantic memory:* Semantic memory is also known as factual memory. Adult learners may store information more permanently here than in episodic memory. The semantic memory, which is a structured memory record of facts, concepts and skills, does not rely on time and location as a frame of reference like episodic memory (Human memory, 2003).

## Activities in the long-term memory

There are three main activities related to long-term memory: storage, deletion and retrieval.

### Storage

Long-term memory stores information from short-term memory by rehearsal.

### Deletion

Deletion occurs when the information that is in the long-term memory is not utilised effectively.

### Retrieval

The memory conducts a search for any information required for retrieval. There are two types of information retrieval, namely recall and recognition.

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*Recall:* In recall, the memory reproduces information. For example, the facilitator can show a list of items to learners and later ask them to recall the items without prompting.

*Recognition:* In recognition, learners confirm information that they have seen before. For example, the facilitator can show them a list of items and then subsequently show them a bigger list and ask which items were on the first list.

## The role of the facilitator

The facilitator has the following roles to perform in rote learning:

### Understanding how to activate the memory

Bá observes that among all the people of the world, those persons who do not write have the most highly developed memory. He further observes that ‘one peculiarity of the African memory is its restoring the recorded event or story in its entirety, like a film that unreels from beginning to end and restoring it in the present’ (Bá 1981: 199). The facilitator should therefore know how to activate the memory for effective functioning.

Two factors determine the level of activation of a memory. One is how recently it has been used. The other is how much it has been practised (Review, 2003). An activated memory can retain a mass of data. For example, facilitators can improve the memory of adult learners through various methods. They should know how to select the parts that are necessary to study and learn. They should know how to organise their learning meaningfully. Adults learn and remember better if they can group ideas into meaningful categories. They should be encouraged to recite what they have learned by expressing ideas aloud.

Learners should also be encouraged to learn by having frequent opportunities to practise in order to consolidate what they have learned. Hence, there is the need to use appropriate visual and audio-visual aids. According to Bá (1981), African memory, in general, records the whole scene. Adult learners should therefore receive new information, events or stories in their entirety and not in disjointed units.

### PQ4R techniques

A technique that promotes elaborate processing of text is the Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite and Review (PQ4R) technique (Review, 2003). It derives its name from the six phases it advocates for studying a chapter in a textbook.

- Preview – Learners survey the chapter and determine the general topics for discussion. They identify the sections for reading as units and apply the next four steps to each section.
- Question – Learners develop questions about each section.
- Read – Learners read the sections carefully and try to answer the questions.
- Reflect – Learners reflect on the texts by thinking about them and trying to understand them. They also think of examples and relate the materials to their prior knowledge.
- Recite – Learners try to recite aloud from memory what they have learned.
- Review – When the learners have finished the chapter, they go through it mentally, recalling its main points by trying to answer the questions.

The central features of the PQ4R technique are the question-generating and question-answering characteristics (Review, 2003).

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## Fundamental principles of mnemonics

*Mnemonics*, which is the art of assisting the memory by using artificial aids such as rhymes, rules, phrases, diagrams, acronyms and other devices, helps with recalling names, dates, facts, figures and so on (Mnemonics, 2003). It is also a method for remembering information that is difficult to recall. The basic principle of mnemonics is to use as many of the best functions of the human brain as possible to code information (Mind Tools, 2003). The human brain is able to code and interpret complex stimuli, images, colour, structure, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, spatial awareness, emotion and language. These can be useful in making necessary interpretations of the environment.

There are three fundamental principles that underlie the use of mnemonics (Mind Tools, 2003). These are association, imagination and location.

*Association:* Human beings remember things by association. Every piece of information in our memory is connected to other pieces in some way or another (How to Improve Your Memory, 2003). Memory works best by association. Association is the method through which learners link two or more things together to facilitate remembering and understanding. For example, the facilitator may make things of different sizes and shapes to help make them funny and memorable. Movements or actions are easier to remember and the facilitator may employ humour to make it easier for the learners to associate one thing with another.

The facilitator should always remember the importance of the properties of memory in making meaningful associations. These include the laws of recency, vividness and frequency (How to Improve Your Memory, 2003). According to the *law of recency*, learners are more likely to remember things

that happened recently better than those that happened a long time ago. According to the *law of vividness*, learners tend to remember the most spectacular or striking impressions rather than those that are more ordinary. The *law of frequency* says that learners tend to remember things that they experience often, rather than those they experience only occasionally.

*Imagination:* Imagination is used to create the links and associations needed for effective memory. Put simply, imagination is the way in which learners use their minds to connect one perception with other possible perceptions. The more strongly a situation is imagined and visualised, the more effectively it will stick in the mind for later recall.

*Location:* Location provides the learner with a coherent context for placing information so that it hangs together, and for separating one mnemonic from another. For example, learners are likely to remember that they use a particular classroom for either group work or demonstration of particular tasks.

## Areas where rote learning may be useful

Facilitators should understand a few of the areas where rote learning may be useful, for example:

*The alphabet:* Adult learners need to know the letters of the alphabet used in writing a language, arranged in order. The words in the dictionary are in alphabetical order. It becomes easier for adults to make use of their dictionaries once they have learned the alphabet by rote.

*Multiplication tables and formulae:* Knowing the multiplication tables by heart helps the facilitator in teaching and learning mathematics. It helps with learning of other mathematical skills such as division,

subtraction, addition, fractions, decimals, etc. (Fantastic Math Trick, 2003).

In addition, learners can memorise certain formulae that can assist them in performing simple multiplication operations. For example, here is an easy formula for multiplying by 11:

If learners were to multiply any two-digit number like 26 by 11, they could perform the following operations in their minds:

Separate the two digits in your mind (2\_\_\_6).

Notice the gap between 2 and 6.

Add 2 and 6 together ( $2+6=8$ ).

Put the figure 8 in the gap between 2 and 6. The answer will be 286. The learner does not need a multiplication table for this.

The use of games often serves to teach and reinforce mathematical concepts. Reagan (2000: 35) cites the Yoruba example of a system of counting. The Yoruba use a variety of human experiences to promote practice in counting, especially among their children, as in the example of counting from one to five below:

| Rhyme       | Translation          |
|-------------|----------------------|
| Eni bi eni  | One is one           |
| Eji bi eji  | Two is two           |
| Eta ntagba  | Three, spin calabash |
| Erin woroko | Four crooked         |
| Arun igbodo | Five pestle pounding |

It is very useful to know these by rote. The adult learner will find them useful when shopping, at home and at work.

*Calendar and date:* It is possible for the adult learner to learn the days of the week, the months of the year, the number of days in each month as well as other important dates by rote.

*Poetry:* The learner may memorise certain numbers or rhymes in order to perform certain operations. This technique is particularly useful in incantations where adults have to pronounce certain words, for

instance, in herbal medicine, where they need to ensure that the medicine works according to prescription.

*Mnemonics for examinations:* Adult learners can use mnemonics for examinations. This will enable them to see the overall structure of the topic and make associations between related bits of information. By using mnemonics, retrieving facts necessary to answer an examination essay question becomes easy. The learner may use appropriate acronyms for memorising lists of things. For example, if the learner wants to remember the basic principles of making objectives specific and observable, the SMART acronym may be useful.

*Remembering names:* The learner can easily remember names through face association and repetition. In the case of face association the learner can examine a person's face discretely by noting any unusual features like the hairstyle, the eyes, nose, mouth and so on. In another vein, when someone introduces learners to someone new, a useful strategy is to ask for the name of that person again. They then practise reviewing or repeating the name in their minds several times to enable them to remember it the next time they see the person (Mind Tools, 2003).

## Memory loss and ageing

It is important for facilitators of adult learning to understand how to handle memory loss that comes with age. Loss of memory is often one of the earliest signs of ageing (Memory loss, 2003). Many older people are likely to remember the distant past more clearly than that which occurred more recently. They may have difficulty in recalling what happened a few moments ago but will often be able to recall details of their lives when they were much younger.

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However, even these long-term memories will eventually decline. People with memory problems find it very hard to take in and remember new information. In order to minimise this situation, facilitators should keep information simple and repeat it frequently. In addition, facilitators should break down any new activities into small stages and avoid extra stress. Learners should be encouraged to continue to do things for themselves by using frequent reminders. There is a need to maintain a regular routine to develop this faculty.

Although variety and stimulation is important, too many changes may be confusing for learners. A regular routine will help learners to feel more secure and make it easier for them to remember what usually happens during the day. Learners should be encouraged to use memory aids such as lists, diaries, and clearly written instructions. These are usually helpful in aiding the memory if a person is willing and able to use them.

### Facilitating reminiscence

*Reminiscence* is a process of freely recollecting one's own life experiences. In the process, people get to know and value each other. They discover the skills, knowledge, and histories that other people have. Reminiscence has the following advantages (Facilitating Reminiscence, 2003):

- It connects the past with the present.
- It encourages sociability.
- It preserves cultural heritage.
- It enhances a sense of identity and self-worth.
- It helps a process of positive life-review.
- It can be an enjoyable activity.

Facilitators should remember that they are merely supporting the process of sharing reminiscences. Therefore, they should work

in partnership with adult learners who have a lot of experience and expertise in their various callings. Facilitators should make a list of factors they think will lead to positive learning and sharing in a reminiscence session. There is always a need to create a relaxed atmosphere for reminiscence and learning.

### Implications of rote learning

The facilitator should encourage the regular use of information by designing the various types of information that the adult learner should remember. This must be meaningful to the individual learner. Each learner needs to acquire the skills to link new information meaningfully with other existing knowledge. Facilitators should therefore use appropriate imagery and concepts. They should avoid technical jargon and encourage verbalisation and rehearsal among learners. They should group information according to meaningful associations and use different audio-visual aids (Long-term memory implications, 2003).

Facilitators should design appropriate information to support the development of mental abilities in learners. The content of basic education programmes can be divided into three phases. The first phase, which is important here, is the oral culture or activation phase. At this level, illiterates should be equipped with tools that enable them to observe, think, reason, express themselves and act. As this stage is one of stimulation, it is unnecessary to teach learners to read and write. This practice was tested in Kita, Mali, where literacy teaching began with practice in weighing, followed by mental arithmetic exercises of addition and subtraction. In Guinea-Bissau, teaching begins with oral concepts of management. After the oral stage learners move to the second and third phases and post-literacy respectively.

In facilitating learning through the use of short-term and long-term memories, facilitators should be mindful of the fact, introduced in Chapter 5, that there is an important distinction between two kinds of intellectual abilities: fluid intelligence and crystallised intelligence. *Fluid intelligence*, the ability that tends to decline with age, is the basic power of reasoning and problem-solving. This allows people to think critically about assertions and to understand relationships between concepts. *Crystallised intelligence* involves specific knowledge gained as a result of applying fluid intelligence. It produces a good vocabulary and familiarity with the multiplication tables. Crystallised intelligence, which represents people's accumulated knowledge and its application, may continue to grow into old age.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Discuss the different subject areas in which you think adult learners could profit from rote learning.
- 2 In pairs, demonstrate the various ways in which the facilitator can activate the memories of adult learners in any programme of your choice.
- 3 Apart from the roles of facilitators in rote learning, discussed in this chapter, what additional roles should they play in facilitating rote learning in your community?

## SUMMARY

This chapter describes some basic principles that facilitators could use to facilitate adult learning. It argues in favour of the use of

the mother tongue in education. It identifies various communication channels based on the culture, customs and traditions of adult learners that are appropriate to facilitate adult learning in Africa. The chapter further discusses how the facilitator can communicate with adult learners through the appropriate use of the voice, body language, posture, gestures, facial expression and eye contact. It highlights the strategies and resources that facilitators could use in planning and implementing learning programmes and it stresses the need for adult learners to participate in all aspects of the learning process. The chapter concludes with a discussion of rote learning as one of the appropriate instructional techniques for facilitating effective teaching and learning.

## KEY POINTS

- The choice of language of adult teaching and learning in Africa should be based on the mother tongue of the learners.
- The choice of effective communication for adult learning in Africa should consider the culture, customs and traditions of the people.
- Adult learners should be involved in the planning of their programmes because they believe that 'no one can shave a person's head in his or her absence'.
- Setting aims and objectives, and selection and organisation of content for adult education in Africa should involve the learners.
- The selection of teaching and learning strategies should be based on the characteristics of the learners.
- The role of the facilitator in rote learning is to understand the implications when adult learners learn by rote.

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# Chapter 9

## Facilitating adult learning: Other instructional techniques

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### OVERVIEW

This chapter examines other instructional techniques that are essential to facilitate adult teaching and learning in Africa. These include the use of holistic approaches to teaching and learning through various methods like the indigenous apprenticeship system, cooperation and brainstorming. It also examines the different human, natural and material resources that can be used to facilitate teaching and learning in Africa. The chapter concludes with the identification of assessment criteria that facilitators could use, based on the needs of African adult learners.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Describe the holistic approach based on indigenous knowledge patterns as a strategy for facilitating effective adult teaching and learning.
- 2 Know and appreciate how adult learning facilitators can use a variety of resources to make their programmes more effective, efficient and attractive to adult learners.
- 3 Identify, describe and justify the assessment criteria that facilitators could use, based on the needs of African adult learners.





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## KEY TERMS

**assessment** The process of gathering information in order to determine the level of achievement of the stated learning aims and objectives.

**brainstorming** A process of bringing learners together to generate new ideas about any specific area of interest in an open and unstructured manner.

**cooperative learning** This involves people learning together and from each other as a team.

**fantasy** Imagining objects or events, for example in daydreams.

**feedback** The process of providing the flow of information back to the learner in order to compare actual performance with expected performance.

**portfolio** This is a progress folder made up of a collection of learners' experiences and achievements during the period of any educational activity.

**role-play** Group learning-teaching technique in which learners spontaneously act out an incident.

**simulation** This is a teaching technique in which learners display real-life situations and values through representation or imitation of reality.

## BEFORE YOU START

In small groups, discuss the following questions and share your answers with your facilitator:

- 1 Considering the rote learning approach discussed in Chapter 8, do you think there are other tools or strategies that a facilitator of adult learning in Africa could use?
- 2 What are these tools and how can the facilitator use them?
- 3 What are the merits or demerits, if any, of the identified tools over the rote learning approach?

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## THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

One of the learning styles of adult learners in Africa is that they acquire and process information holistically, based on indigenous knowledge patterns. Traditional African education is characterised by a holistic approach in which individuals learn through continuous interaction with the community and their environment. The use of this approach in literacy education has led to significantly higher success than programmes that were based purely on formal methods (Bélangier, 1998).

Holistic learning is an approach to learning that engages fully all aspects of the whole person through the use of the mind, body and spirit. The underlying holistic principle is that a complex organism functions most effectively when all its component parts are functioning and cooperating effectively. This idea relates very closely to the concept of *synergy*, with the whole being greater than the sum of its parts (Holistic Learning, 2003). Learning takes place by emphasising the principle of interconnectedness and wholeness. Thus the learner is seen as a whole person with body, mind and spirit (Holistic Education Institute, 2003).

Most indigenous African people process information holistically by experiencing the subject matter as an integral part of the actual living conditions of the people, as discussed in Chapter 7. For example, in a programme about agriculture, adult learners may want to learn about indigenous indicators to determine favourable times to prepare, plant and harvest gardens. They could learn land preparation practice, indigenous ways to propagate plants, seed storage and processing (drying, threshing, cleaning and grading). In addition, the learners could be exposed to seed practice, indigenous methods of sowing

(seed spacing and intercropping), seedling preparation and care, farming and cropping systems, crop harvesting and storage, food processing and marketing, and pest management (Grenier, 1998). Learners may also want to learn about management practices in soil fertility, intercropping processes and selective seeding simultaneously.

Facilitators could use as many strategies as possible to promote the concept of holistic learning. The indigenous apprenticeship system, cooperative learning, brainstorming, problem-solving, role-play, simulations, group discussions, case studies and dialogues can be used.

### The indigenous apprenticeship system

The indigenous apprentice system is one of the learning styles of adult learners in Africa, as discussed in Chapter 7. The indigenous apprenticeship system, where someone learns through serving another for a prescribed period to learn an art or trade, also employs the holistic approach. This is done with the use of many techniques such as observation, imitation, participation, cooperation, problem-solving, role-play, simulations, discussions, dialogue, case studies and so on in order to promote the concept of holistic learning.

The indigenous apprenticeship arrangements are common in Africa for many crafts and professions, as discussed in Chapter 7. Some professional occupations are taught through the indigenous apprenticeship system. They include traditional doctors, traditional healers, herbalists, birth attendants, priests, witch doctors and shrine keepers. In the African context people acquire vocational training through the indigenous apprenticeship system. The apprentice learns through different kinds of methods such as ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and demonstration. Through it, they acquire traditional

knowledge and skills in the chosen area of apprenticeship (Fasokun, 1998).

Bá (1981) observes that crafts learned through the holistic approach are great avenues of oral tradition. Every function has a link with the knowledge transmitted from one generation to another. The traditional healers in training, for instance, learn about obstetrics, sex education, contraception, and edible and non-edible plants. In addition, they learn about character training, courage and the view that education is an integral component of social life. As a result, the strategies of the indigenous apprenticeship systems can be adopted in contemporary adult teaching and learning situations. To this end, facilitators could bring skilled professionals to come and demonstrate some aspects of their professions to the learners, either in the classroom or on site. For example, if adult learners

are interested in any aspect of vocational training, a local person who is proficient in such a vocation can be invited to act as facilitator.

### Cooperative learning

Cooperation is working together in order to accomplish shared goals. Cooperative learning is a generic term for various small group interactive educational procedures that enable learners to help themselves and their colleagues. African adults take pride in working together because of their belief in the proverbial sayings that ‘a bird will always use another bird’s feathers to feather its own nest’ and ‘when spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion’. This implies that people have to work together in order to achieve their desired goals. Many Africans believe that, as an individual, a person is



*African apprentices weaving carpets.*

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weak, but that people are very strong when they work together in a group. In other words, united we stand, divided we fall.

Meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes occur in a cooperative environment where individual students are recognised and supported. In addition, facilitators present and examine a variety of perspectives and misconceptions they observe or experience (Garrison and Archer, 2000). One member of a group cannot complete a task without the contribution of all the other members (Damian, 2003). Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993) therefore list the essential components of cooperation as positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing. These are also applicable to the African context.

In positive interdependence, learners see themselves as linked to others and they must therefore coordinate their efforts

with those of the other members of the group. To promote face-to-face interaction the facilitator should encourage the learners to help one another in order to reach the group's goals. They should be encouraged to exchange information and materials, challenge each other and provide each other with feedback. Learners should also be encouraged to embrace the idea of individual accountability and personal responsibility. They should complete their share of the work and at the same time facilitate the work of other members of the group. The group must be accountable for achieving its goals and each member must be accountable for contributing his or her share of the work. In order to promote interpersonal and small group skills learners must get to know and trust each other, accept and support each other. With regard to group processes, learners must be encouraged to maintain effective working relationships with others and spell out



*Adult learners learning cooperatively.*

the kind of individual actions that will be helpful or unhelpful.

In short, the facilitator of adult learning has a duty to ensure that African adult learners learn in a cooperative manner and not on an individualistic basis. Odora (1994) expresses her unhappiness about the formal school system that is not based on the African tradition of cooperation, but places more emphasis on individualism than on cooperation among learners. She asserts that the moment children go to school, they learn to talk about 'my chair, my homework, my position' and less and less about 'our' and 'we'. Learning is both a personal and social process. This enhances the opportunities for growth through cooperation (Garrison and Archer, 2000).

In using cooperative learning in adult education, for example, the facilitator can ask learners who are attending classes in social studies to determine as a group what constitutes good governance in the state or nation. All the learners should be encouraged to state their personal experiences in the art of governing their homes, extended families, the community and the society.

## Brainstorming

In brainstorming, learners come together to generate new ideas around a specific area of interest (What is brainstorming? 2003). Adult learners can brainstorm ideas to generate a large number of responses on any particular issue. For instance, if adult learners were in the habit of being irregular at classes, the facilitator can organise a brainstorming session to find out what can be done to overcome the problem. Many Africans believe that a lot can be achieved by people coming together to find a solution to a problem, because a group takes a wiser decision than an individual does. Brainstorming should be well organised to

ensure maximum benefits for the learners. The facilitator should identify the issues with the adult learners and then think about them. The issues must have the potential for a number of different right answers. The adult learners generate ideas from the issues, analyse them and later categorise and prioritise them. Learners may then discuss their different answers or solutions with the rest of the class.

In brainstorming, the facilitators should follow these standard rules:

- Postpone and withhold judgements on ideas until the completion of the brainstorming session.
- Encourage all kinds of ideas from the learners.
- Encourage learners to build on the ideas put forward by others.
- Help learners to understand that every person and every idea counts and has equal merit (Rules of brainstorming, 2003).

## Problem-solving

Problem-solving is a rewarding method for learners to apply their knowledge and experience in solving the kinds of problems that they are likely to encounter in life or work situations. Adult learners should be encouraged to solve their day-to-day problems in small groups. These may be personal, social, economic, political, educational, religious or cultural problems. Many African adult learners believe that a 'sparrow is never small around its eggs'. In essence, the facilitator should believe in the abilities of the learners to solve their problems on their own. The facilitator may present the background information and the procedure they may follow. In doing so, the learners should be encouraged to follow a systematic process that involves identification of

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the problem, formulation of objectives, preparation of data collection instruments, collection and analysis of data, producing results, and reaching their conclusions and making recommendations.

## Role-play

Role-play is the spontaneous acting out of an incident by several members of a group (Galbraith and Zelenak, 1991). Role-play, drama and storytelling are often preferred choices for adult learners (UNESCO, 2001). Role-play helps learners to experience an issue directly. It helps to convey human relationships and the interactions noticeable among them. It is a way of improvising a mini-drama to practise skills in interpersonal practice (Exercises: Role-play, 2003). There are a number of steps to follow in using role-play as a strategy for teaching and learning. The following steps have been tested and were found suitable for implementation by UNESCO (2001):

- Choose the subject matter and outline a basic plot.
- Use flash cards of proverbs or sayings that the actors can use at any time.
- Encourage actors to be innovative by making up their own spontaneous dialogue to suit the story line and plot.
- Arrange some time after the role-play to discuss the experience.

The facilitator should ensure that learners have a clear understanding of the objectives of using role-play with the group. For example, if adult learners want to determine how to conduct a good election for selecting members of parliament in the community, the facilitator could use the role-play technique to arrive at a good method. Facilitators must know how to guide the activity, where to set limits and when to let the imagination of the learners soar.

In addition, learners should be free to volunteer for roles. At the end of the role-play, participants should be encouraged to give their reactions first before the facilitator comments.

## Simulations

Simulations are teaching and learning techniques in which learners act out real-life situations and values. Galbraith (1991) supports this view when he asserts that simulations entail setting up situations that approximate reality and then letting learners act out the situations.

In simulations, adult learners physically act out specific scenes or situations. Through this process, they have opportunities to identify, investigate, and possibly challenge long-standing assumptions that influence their thoughts and actions. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that learners understand what they are supposed to do without any form of ambiguity.

## Group discussions

Discussion is a core learning activity when higher order learning outcomes such as critical thinking are valued (Garrison and Archer, 2000). Group discussion is a useful method where adult learners participate cooperatively with others. Learners have the opportunity to come together to share information, knowledge and ideas. This is necessary because Africans believe that 'no one knows if a bird in flight has an egg in its stomach'. Again, 'only the individual who wears a shoe knows where it pinches'. Discussions therefore provide opportunities for learners to air their views, agree and disagree on issues before taking a position on them. Through such discussions they also learn how to have mutual respect for one another.

Group sizes vary according to the nature of the issues for discussion. As far as possible, groups should be kept small to increase the opportunities for meaningful interaction and allow for maximum participation by all learners. If necessary, the facilitator may direct the learners towards achieving the intended goals. In making up small groups, the facilitator should consider the characteristics and learning styles of the learners. Facilitators should also discuss the composition of the groups with the learners. Some adult learners may prefer to work with one another based on their different skills, gender, ethnic relationship, friendship or religious interests. The facilitator should also state the reasons and the goals of the discussion. Such a group should select a moderator and each member should discuss the pros and cons of the topic under discussion.

In discussing issues such as family planning, for instance, both the facilitator and the adult learners should set ground rules for effective discussion. These rules may emphasise the need to respect one another's ideas, the need to listen to one another and the need to give opportunities to everybody to participate in the discussion. The groups may work on identical or completely separate issues.

## Case studies

The case study is an opportunity to analyse and resolve a realistic dilemma or problem, based on concrete evidence. Case studies provide opportunities for inquiries into real-life problems. The use of case studies in adult teaching and learning is necessary. This is because Africans believe 'it is the person whose child has been eaten by a witch who best knows how to describe the evils of witchcraft'. Preparing a case is a challenging process. Meyers and Jones (1993) suggest several guidelines. They

maintain that the case study should tell a story with well-developed characters. The facilitator should give the learners information about a situation that is either hypothetical or true and make necessary recommendations. The facilitator may follow these guidelines when introducing case studies to the learners:

- Define the problem to the learners.
- Explain the issues involved in the problem.
- Ask the learners to gather relevant data on the problem.
- Let the learners analyse the data, interpret and discuss the issues that arise.
- Let them relate their findings to accepted theories.

The goal of the case study method is to promote action, growth and development. By conducting case studies, learners develop important research skills such as interviewing, questioning, observing, interpreting and discussing important issues that arise within their communities.

## Dialogue

Dialogue gives learners opportunities to challenge the knowledge constructed by others. It can also act as a basis for assessing knowledge claims. There is always the need for a continuing dialogue between facilitator and learner. The dialogue must reveal participants' views and must aim to integrate them into existing knowledge. The dialogue must address all aspects of the learning process including the interplay of presenting, questioning, responding, reacting and structuring information and knowledge.

It is important to solicit opposing views and encourage participation in dialogue. The climate must be one that is open to all opinions. One way to encourage

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participation from a group hesitant to speak out is to put each learner's name on an index card, shuffle the cards and go through them one by one during the class, asking for each learner's opinions.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 In small groups, think of various activities that facilitators of adult learning could embark on to engage fully all aspects of the whole person of the adult learner, using the body, mind and spirit.
- 2 In small groups, evaluate the different apprenticeship programmes that are available in your community. Discuss how you can integrate such programmes into your adult education programmes in order to promote holistic learning among adult learners.
- 3 Make a list of learning activities where adults could learn holistically through the cooperative method.
- 4 Describe different programmes where you can engage adult learners in your community in brainstorming.
- 5 In small groups, demonstrate how you can use role-play to enhance the living conditions of adult learners in your community.
- 6 Discuss how you can tackle the problem of HIV/AIDS in your community through group discussion. Illustrate with concrete examples.
- 7 Identify, describe and justify any other strategies not mentioned which you think facilitators may apply in their different areas.

## RESOURCES

Facilitators of adult learning can use a variety of cheap and locally made resources that are familiar to adult learners. This

becomes necessary in order to enhance teaching and learning. Gunawardena (1998) identifies three major types of resources, namely human resources, natural resources and made objects.

### Human resources

Human resources refer to the adult learners themselves, their family members, friends, colleagues, community members, formal and informal leaders. Others are people who work in different professions. These are teachers, doctors, nurses, traditional healers, lawyers, technicians, traders, artisans, musicians, extension workers, religious groups and a host of others who can be effectively utilised as resource persons for adult learning.

Each of the human resources mentioned above could provide knowledge, skills and attitudes to the adult learners in the areas in which they are most proficient. This implies that the facilitator may not know everything the adult learner needs to learn. Facilitators should tap the appropriate human resources available within the community.

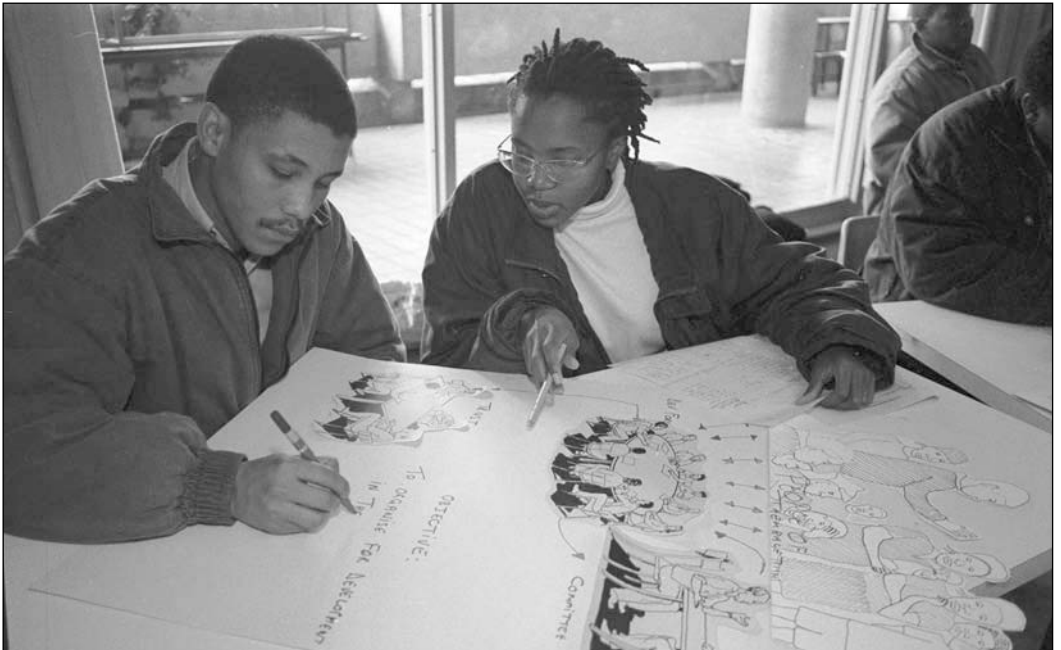
### Natural resources

Natural resources are useful as resources for learning purposes. There are different types of natural resources in Africa that the facilitator can use to enhance learning. There are perpetual resources, such as solar energy and water. There are renewable resources like plants and animals and different types of soil that the facilitator could use to enhance teaching and learning. Non-renewable resources such as mineral resources are good learning aids. There are also potential resources like domestic and industrial waste. When appropriate, personal visits by the learners and facilitators to such sites are desirable. These resources could serve as concrete examples to learners





*Audio aids.*



*Visual aids.*



*Audio-visual aids.*

when teaching and learning involves solar energy, water, plants, animals and soil types, to mention just a few.

## Made objects as resources

Made objects or learning aids are very useful in facilitating adult learning. They can help with class presentation and provide opportunities for variety in presentation. Learning aids can stimulate learners by engaging many senses that enhance learning, hold their attention and ensure that they remember and process the messages, if efficiently and effectively handled by the facilitator. Learning aids consist of audio aids, visual aids and audio-visual aids.

Audio aids include audio cassettes, public address systems or amplifiers, radios, records, record players, and tape recorders (Gunawardena, 1998).

Visual aids include banners, chalkboards and whiteboards, cartoons, diagrams, flannel boards, flip charts, letter sets, magazines, maps, models, actual objects, pamphlets, photocopies, photographs, posters, overhead projectors, slide projectors, stencils, text books and transparencies (Gunawardena, 1998).

Audio-visual aids consist of cinematic films, computer packages, film strips and tapes, televisions and videos (Gunawardena, 1998). In literacy teaching, the creation and maintenance of a literacy environment depends on the reinforcement of supporting services. These include rural libraries, radio, television, films, theatres, dance, arts, rural press, posters, signboards, study circles and tape recorders, to name a few (ED-82, 1982).

With all of these, the facilitator should bear in mind the level of development of the local environment when providing teaching and learning aids. In some cases, the facilitator could use improvised materials instead of real or concrete objects. The

facilitator should only select relevant and appropriate learning materials that suit the teaching and learning situations.

## Purpose of learning aids

Learning aids help learners to focus on points made by the facilitator. They increase clarity and eliminate possible ambiguity. They add stimulus to learners' programmes and are useful in explaining topics. They aid memory because it is easier for adult learners to remember visual explanations than a series of words.

## Principles for choosing learning aids

There are some general principles that guide the choice of learning aids. The facilitator should know the type of adult learners who are to use the learning aids. These aids should appeal to them. They should be readable, familiar, visible, audible and practically useable to the adult learners. In using the overhead projector, for example, the facilitator should limit the text to a few phrases and keep the background as simple as possible. Facilitators should select only relevant learning materials that suit the learning situation. Given the present development situation in Africa, they should select inexpensive and simple learning aids. They should know at what point in the presentation to use learning aids. Learning aids should support teaching and learning, and should not distract the attention of the learners.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 Identify potential human resources for adult learning in your community.
- 2 List natural resources for adult learning that you know of in your community.
- 3 Show how you can improvise some of

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the identified made objects as resources for teaching and learning in your community.

- 4 Indicate the local resources you can use for effective delivery of any adult education programme to a group of adult learners in your community.

## ASSESSMENT

The assessment of learning is discussed in detail in *Developing Programmes for Adult Learners in Africa* (Gboku and Lekoko, 2005) in this series. What is important is to note that assessment of learning refers to a process of gathering information in order to determine the level of achievement of the stated learning aims and objectives.

### The need to assess learning

Assessing learning helps to determine the extent to which the aims and objectives of any programme have been achieved. Facilitators can assess learning activities to verify the extent to which learners have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills and values. They can also use it to identify problems that arise with the teaching and learning strategies used. Through assessment of learning, facilitators determine additional teaching activities to use in order to reinforce or consolidate learning. These will afford them the opportunity to respond to the changing needs of learners as they progress through the programme.

Assessment of learning has at least three main functions. The first is diagnostic, where facilitators identify what learners can do before participating in any teaching and learning activities. The second is formative, where facilitators monitor the progress made by the learners. They indicate to the learners what they are doing well and what they need to improve on. The third is sum-

mative, where facilitators make definite judgements about the progress made by the learners and use the results to predict the future competence of learners based on their present performance. Assessment of learning should take place at different stages in a programme.

### Assessment methods

Facilitators can assess learning using participatory methods, where both learners and facilitators are actively involved. This follows the principle of cooperation among Africans. Both facilitators and learners should be involved in identifying outcomes and assessment criteria, discussing the assessment through feedback and keeping effective records for future reference. Methods of assessment can also involve learners and peers, as well as internal and external assessors.

There is no single way to conduct an assessment exercise because of the variety of information that we are likely to look for. The main sources from which such information can be obtained are:

- Feedback from classroom observation.
- Feedback from learners themselves.
- Feedback from facilitators.
- Feedback from other 'stakeholders' (Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Teaching/Learning Process, 2003).

Each of the main sources from which information can be obtained, listed above, could use application forms, assessment checklists, worksheets and learning journals, written class exercises and assignments to carry out their assessment. The process could also involve the use of conversation, oral questions and answers, practical work, role-play, simulation, exhibition, interviews and discussions, demonstration and oral class exercises. It may be necessary for the

facilitator to discuss this with the learners and decide which methods to use for assessment. This becomes necessary in view of the fact that many Africans believe that for any meaningful assessment to take place both the facilitators and the learners must be involved. Africans believe that 'smoke does not affect honeybees alone'. Honey gatherers are also affected. To illustrate the points, a few of these assessment methods will be examined.

## Interviews and discussions

Facilitators can assess the contributions of adult learners through interviews and discussions. These can range from formal, structured interviews to informal, unstructured discussions. They can also hold such interviews and discussions with either individuals or groups (Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Teaching/Learning Process, 2003). They could observe the activities and contributions of individuals within the group. They could also ask group members to indicate the exact contributions of the individuals. In addition, individuals can indicate what their own contributions have been (UNESCO, 2001).

## Demonstration

The facilitator can ask the learners to demonstrate an activity or event as a way of finding out whether they are capable of doing something. This follows one of the basic principles of African philosophy that emphasises that 'one cannot hide the smoke of the hut one sets on fire'. It implies that if one knows something, one should be able to demonstrate it openly. For example, adult learners may demonstrate how to purify their water before drinking or how to prepare milk from soya beans.

The facilitators should ask themselves relevant questions to assess learners' knowl-

edge, skills and attitudes. Such questions may include how well the learner was able to demonstrate the methods of preparing soya milk and how the learners followed the procedure. The facilitator should also evaluate the extent of cooperation in the group.

## Role-play

The facilitator can assess role-play based on indigenous apprenticeship systems, already discussed in this chapter. This can be done through observation, discussion, conversation, questions and answers. In addition, they can use the following:

- Comments made by colleagues about how well the particular learner understands his or her role.
- Reactions from colleagues about how clearly the learner was able to communicate his or her ideas efficiently and effectively.
- Assessing the creativity levels of the learner as well as how the learner was able to interact with the others in the role-play.
- Determining whether the learner used speech and body language efficiently and effectively.

The facilitator can then build on the points the learners' colleagues have made to summarise their levels of performance.

## Class exercises

The facilitator has the responsibility to assess the performance of the learners in practical aspects of the subject. A class exercise that may be in oral or written form is a useful method for assessing adult learners. Oral exercises could be in the form of oral examinations, seminar presentations, small group discussions, graphics and practical performance or demonstration.

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Oral examinations enable the learners to demonstrate their command of the subject and through them, one can accurately assess oral competencies. In some subjects, the command of oral skills may be of equal or greater significance than writing ability. In seminar presentations learners may lead a seminar by addressing a topic and accept the responsibility to review the context, identify problems and propose solutions for review by the group. In small group discussions learners may design various presentation aids such as graphics.

Written class exercises may be in the form of essays, reports and seminar notes, working papers, dissertations, projects or short answer papers. The evaluation of all these will depend on the agreements between the facilitators and the learners.

## Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of a learner's experiences and achievements during a period of educational activity (Portfolio-based learning, 2003). This folder is a progress portfolio. The progress portfolio records the achievements made by the learner from the start until the end of the programme. Performance portfolios can provide a collection of work that can be used to judge the achievement of learners. It can contain almost all the activities embarked upon by the adult learner. Portfolios are very useful for assessment because they are a record of each learner's accomplishments over time. In this way, a profile of the learner's progress can be built up. These records can be kept in a folder.

This portfolio includes individual learning goals prepared by the learner before and after each session (UNESCO, 2001). Portfolios can be very motivational for learners, because they can display what they have accomplished.

## ACTIVITY

Discuss in small groups how you would assess learning in the following situations:

- a) A weekend workshop on leadership for members of village committees.
- b) A demonstration field day for a group of farmers on the use of new seeds and fertilisers.
- c) A three-month evening class course on book-keeping at a training institute in the city.

## SUMMARY

This chapter describes a number of instructional techniques for facilitating adult learning in Africa. It discusses how facilitators can achieve holistic approaches to learning through various methods such as the apprenticeship system, cooperation, brainstorming, problem-solving, role-play, simulations, group discussions, case studies and dialogue. It further describes how facilitators can use a variety of teaching and learning resources to make their programmes more effective, efficient and attractive. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the assessment techniques and criteria based on the needs of African adult learners.

## KEY POINTS

- Facilitating a holistic approach to learning depends essentially on indigenous knowledge patterns.
- Resources for adult learning must be simple and based essentially on that which will assist learners in learning processes.
- Assessment strategies in adult learning should follow participatory methods

where both the learners and the facilitators are actively involved.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 List the advantages of making learning materials locally. Describe some of the problems you might encounter in making learning materials locally. How would you solve such problems?
- 2 Prepare guidelines for selecting teaching and learning strategies for adult learners in your community.
- 3 How could you use the holistic approaches based on indigenous knowledge patterns of the adult learners in teaching the following topics?
  - Sanitation
  - Export products
  - Dairy farming
  - Mining
  - Carpentry.
- 4 Identify and demonstrate various topics you can teach adult learners through:
  - The apprenticeship system
  - Cooperative learning
  - Brainstorming
  - Problem-solving
  - Role-play
  - Simulations
  - Group discussion
  - Case studies
  - Dialogue.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify a programme in adult education and suggest ways in which you could enhance the holistic approach based on indigenous knowledge patterns.
- 2 Select different types of learning resources that are available in your community. Show how you could make use of them in order to promote effective adult learning in your community.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Garrison, D. R. and Archer, W. 2000. *A transactional perspective on teaching and learning: A framework for adult and higher education*. New York: Pergamon Elsevier.
- Gunawardena, G. 1998. *Learning process: Module 6*. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.
- UNESCO. 2001. *Handbook: Non-formal adult education facilitators*. Bangkok: UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

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# Chapter 10

## Guidance and counselling of adult learners

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### OVERVIEW

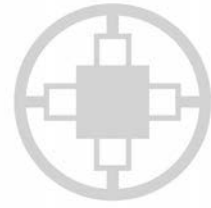
This chapter explains what guidance is and what counselling is, and looks at the differences between guidance and counselling. It also discusses the reasons why adult learners in Africa need guidance and counselling services, and looks at some of the challenges of providing these in an African context.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Explain the concepts of guidance and counselling and the differences between the two.
- 2 Discuss some of the reasons why adult learners in Africa need guidance and counselling services.
- 3 Explain the role of an adult educator in providing guidance and counselling services.
- 4 Discuss some of the challenges in providing guidance and counselling services for adult learners in Africa.





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## KEY TERMS

**advising** Helping learners to interpret information and choose the most appropriate options.

**advocating** Negotiating directly with institutions on behalf of individual learners or groups of learners.

**assessment** Helping potential learners by formal or informal means to obtain an adequate understanding of their personal, educational and vocational development to enable them to make sound judgments about the appropriateness of particular learning opportunities.

**counselling** Working with learners to help them discover, clarify and understand their learning needs and the various ways of meeting them.

**enabling** Supporting potential learners in dealing with administration or in meeting the demands of a particular course.

**feedback** Gathering and collating information on learning needs that have not been met or that have not been met adequately, and encouraging providers to respond to these.

**guidance** Providing information to facilitate informed decision-making and choices.

**informing** Providing information about learning opportunities and related support facilities without discussing the relative merits of different options.

## BEFORE YOU START

In small groups, discuss and answer the following questions in writing:

- 1 What kind of advice and information do adults in your community seek from people outside their families?
- 2 Whom do they turn to for such advice and information?

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## GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

In Africa, as in other parts of the world today, there is a growing demand for learning opportunities for adults. In some African countries more than half of the students enrolled in higher education are adults who have left full-time education to pursue other roles before returning to full-time or part-time studies. A recent report from Namibia suggested that 52% of all Namibians enrolled in higher education were doing so via part-time distance learning (Dodd, 2000). Many of these people are employed. There are increasing demands for learning opportunities, with increasing opportunities to access learning through different modes, including open and distance learning and the commercialisation of education. Adult learners in Africa now more than ever need guidance and counselling services to help them make the right choices and to benefit fully from the opportunities available.

In the course of their daily lives, people are often faced with the need to make significant choices and decisions that not only affect them personally but those around them as well. Traditionally, *guidance* in most African societies is sought from or given by those who are more senior in terms of age and who are more informed and more experienced in specific areas. Depending on the nature of the guidance being sought, different people could be consulted. In many African societies guidance on marital and family matters, for example, is still sought from and provided by couples that have been married for many years. In the same way guidance relating to educational matters is often sought from and given by those who have been through the educational system or from those who are part of the educational system. Many times potential adult learners also seek guidance

from those whom they believe may be more informed about educational matters than they are.

Most choices and decisions that have to do with education in Africa involve not only the potential learner concerned but also members of his or her nuclear and extended family and friends. For example, choices and decisions relating to higher education sometimes involve not just family meetings but also meetings with friends before a decision can be made. During such meetings advice is sought on how best to proceed. Sometimes there is a need to raise funds for tuition fees and other expenses and in cases where adult learners have families, guidance is sometimes sought on how best the potential learner can combine learning with his or her family responsibilities and other related matters. The fact that individual decisions and choices concerning adult education affect not just the individuals concerned but also others around them is the reason why educational guidance is crucial for adult learners in Africa. Guidance in this context is meant to facilitate informed decision-making and choices.

According to Thorpe and Grugeon (1987) adults who study full time or part time need advice and encouragement on a broader basis than only on the content of the course that they are studying.

*They ask themselves questions such as how am I getting on? What are my skills and interests? Where might this course lead me? What shall I study next? In conversations with friends, relatives and acquaintances informal support is sought and given. Adult and community educators are all drawn into providing advice formally and informally to learners that they teach and train'. (Thorpe and Grugeon, 1987: 195)*

While guidance services for adult learners in most developed countries are advanced,

comprehensive and easily accessible, they are non-existent in many African countries and where they do exist they are almost always not as comprehensive as they should be.

Thorpe (1988) has identified seven guidance activities, namely informing, advising, counselling, assessing, enabling, advocating and feedback. She lists *counselling* as being part of guidance. Other adult educators argue against this somewhat narrow definition of educational counselling. Knowles argues that

*adult education will never achieve its full potential, if its institutions limit their educational counselling to guidance. It is only through a sophisticated process of educational counselling that individuals will be able to engage in an integrated, sequential programme of life long learning.* (Knowles, 1980: 171)

Knowles, while making the case for more comprehensive counselling services in adult education, observes that

*in adult education there are no grade levels and the curriculum is a random mosaic of unrelated resources scattered among several institutions. There is no inherent pattern that provides sequence and integration; individuals have to mould their own patterns and the only source of help in this complicated undertaking is educational counselling.* (Knowles 1980: 171)

Knowles further argues that in adult education, educational counselling is really the programme planning process applied to an individual.

*It involves the same steps:*

1) *Establishing a climate conducive for self-analysis and self-direction;*

- 2) *Assessing the needs and interests of individuals for further learning in the light of their models of what they want to become;*
- 3) *Helping them formulate step by step learning objectives;*
- 4) *Helping them identify the resources available to them to map out a sequence of learning experiences;*
- 5) *Helping them continuously to evaluate their progress towards their objectives and to repeat this cycle.* (Knowles, 1980: 171–172)

We need to note, however, that the idea of helping in the formal sense of counselling is largely new in Africa. According to Brammer (1993), it is largely a white American middle-class phenomenon. In most African cultures, helping is informal and is part of daily life. Community members and kin help one another all the time to cope with challenges they face in their daily lives. Helping functions are performed all the time, mostly in informal settings, in families and social networks, and they carry meanings of loyalty and service.

The process of people helping others to grow towards their personal goals and the goals of their society in Africa has been integral to the socialisation process. This is a lifelong process and is performed by different people at different stages of the individual's life span. Most of those who provide this kind of help in the communities do not have any specialised training, but through their experience they are recognised in society as being able to provide counselling. The nature of social and educational challenges faced by adults in Africa today are, however, much more complex and many of them require professional advice and help both at the community and institutional level.

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## ACTIVITY

- 1 Use your own culture as an example and write down in what circumstances guidance is provided and by whom. In which circumstances is counselling provided and by whom?
- 2 Share your responses with someone from a different culture and note whether there are any differences between your cultures.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Woolfe, Murgatroyd and Rhys (1987: 3) suggest that 'guidance and counselling can be conceived as opposite ends of a continuum concerned with the nature of the relationship between helpers and those seeking help'. In this context the helpers are the adult educators and those seeking help are the adult learners or potential learners. 'At one end of the continuum is guidance, which is a relatively directive form of advice and information giving. At the other end, there is counselling, which is relatively non-directive and is concerned with facilitating a process of decision-making by the person needing help' (Woolfe, Murgatroyd and Rhys, 1987: 3). Adult educators in Africa perform these functions both formally and informally as part of their work. The question that arises is whether they are professionally trained to perform these functions.

In many African countries, especially in rural areas, potential adult learners have difficulty accessing information on formal education programmes. Those interested usually have to incur travel and other costs in order to access information that might attract them to further learning. Once information is accessed they generally seek

guidance from those whom they think might be better informed about the educational programmes and also try and meet with facilitators and administrators of programmes. But this is not always possible due to the constraints already mentioned. Very few adult education providers offer guidance by making information about their programmes available. While some adult education providers may have brochures or handbooks with information about the programmes they offer, very few non-formal adult education providers have written information on the programmes they offer. For this reason many potential adult learners are unaware of crucial information necessary for them to make informed decisions and choices.

In Uganda, for example, many adults who dropped out of school before completing the formal cycle often look for bridging courses that could enable them to continue with their education. As a result of a lack of proper guidance services, however, adults end up enrolling in all kinds of irrelevant and poor quality educational programmes. Consequently, they obtain certificates and diplomas that are not recognised for entry into higher education programmes or for career advancement. In other cases adult education programmes are advertised, but because insufficient information is given potential adult learners either miss out on the opportunities available or end up enrolling for the wrong programmes.

Some programmes are offered through other modes, such as distance education, and many working adults often find distance education programmes more attractive since they offer them the opportunity to combine their work with education. The challenges of combining education with full-time employment are, however, not always fully explored by potential learners prior to enrolment in

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the programmes. Where good guidance services are offered, potential learners get the opportunity to discuss what is expected of them and what their own expectations are, the course requirements, costs, content, nature of assignments and exams and other demands such as time with the educational provider. At this stage adult learners also get the opportunity to ask any questions that they might have prior to enrolment.

Once adult learners have enrolled, guidance needs to continue during the learning process. For example, some learners may experience problems during the course of their study and have to stop for a while. They will need guidance on how to go about this process. Sometimes choices of subjects have to be made and here again learners will need guidance. Even after learners have completed their programme and are ready to move on to the next stage they may need career guidance.

Within communities some non-formal adult education programmes offer training that ranges from short courses in basic skills to longer programmes that could be used as foundation courses for more advanced programmes. Many potential adult learners who live in rural areas in Africa are keen to enrol in educational programmes that will enable them to earn more money and to live better lives. They lack the necessary guidance, however, to help them make sense of what is on offer in their communities and how it fits in with their overall educational aspirations.

The provision of guidance services for adult learners in Africa is therefore crucial. Adult learners often report that they learn about educational programmes through friends and sometimes through the media. But in a context where basic infrastructure is unevenly developed, where the majority of people are still poor and the majority of potential learners cannot easily access information, all adult educators must make

deliberate attempts to make guidance services available to as many potential learners as possible.

Counselling takes into account both the emotional and cognitive aspects of adult learners. Many adults who enrol in education are very anxious about their ability to succeed. They perceive themselves as being too old and therefore not able to learn as effectively as the younger learners they sometimes share classes with. These kinds of perceptions lead to a lot of anxiety especially where the educational programme involves assignments and exams. Adult learners that attend literacy classes have expressed similar sentiments. It is important for adult educators to help learners with such anxieties to cope effectively with their learning programmes. Adult educators could set aside time to listen to their aspirations, concerns and problems. They could also discuss their plans and performance with individual learners and then advise them on study skills. Through counselling, adult learners can be helped to build confidence and skills that can help them to appreciate themselves, their creativity and abilities, and thus reduce anxieties and improve performance.

Adults experience changes in their lives all the time and have to find ways to cope with these changes. In the last few decades problems of unemployment and poverty have increased and the HIV/AIDS scourge has added a new dimension to the problems on the continent. In the midst of these uncertainties and dwindling resources decisions with regard to education have to be made. The decision to enrol in education itself can spark off a series of changes in one's life. Some of these changes are expected, others happen unexpectedly. There may be uncertainty concerning the new environment, the likely outcome of the education and other associated challenges. The changes envisaged may include changes

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of location and employment, among others, and adjusting to the new role of being an adult learner. Other changes may include learning new skills, making new friends and adjusting to a new environment. These changes sometimes carry with them the element of risk and may not be easy to cope with. Counselling is necessary in this context to help potential adult learners to cope with some of these changes.

Unlike guidance, counselling does not imply that the counsellor tells the learner what decisions to make and does not issue instructions about how to set off in a new direction or which direction to take. The counsellor helps the learners to do this for themselves. There is no place for phrases such as ‘if I were you I would’ or ‘what you need to do is ...’. If information is given during counselling it is provided in an unbiased way so that people in need are better equipped to weigh a situation and choose between alternative courses of action for themselves.

## ACTIVITY

Write down what you consider to be some of the differences between counselling and guidance. Discuss your list with others in your class.

## THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

Many adult learners in Africa who choose to enrol in either formal or non-formal education programmes face major challenges. Problems discussed previously, such as prevailing poverty, underdevelopment of basic infrastructure, lack of access to basic information and lack of services such as

guidance and counselling aggravate many of the challenges experienced by adult learners in Africa. While some of the problems and challenges are individual, others are institutional and environmental.

There are different categories of adult learners in Africa, ranging from those attending basic adult education courses to those in higher education institutions. Most of them, however, experience some level of anxiety. In many African cultures, an adult is perceived as a person who is knowledgeable and informed. Within this context enrolling in an adult literacy class, for example, can be seen as an acknowledgment that one is not as knowledgeable or as informed as one is expected to be. This is not only embarrassing but can cause some level of anxiety. Whereas enrolment for further learning is admired in the more educated circles, it is an embarrassment and sometimes a barrier to further learning among the less educated. It is therefore not surprising that many adult learners, especially those enrolled in basic education classes, suffer a lot of embarrassment when they give wrong answers. They also worry about studying with younger learners, not performing as well as they would like to and they fear failure. This situation is often made worse by their concerns over how their performance will reflect on their social identities as parents, spouses and community leaders. A study carried out in Uganda by Oketch et al. (1999) revealed that because of these very same concerns male learners preferred not to enrol in literacy classes and instead preferred individual tuition.

In situations of poverty, as is the case in most African countries, it is a challenge for heads of households to take time off for further studies, even when this may be the only way out of their poverty situation. So the decision to enrol in education programmes usually goes hand in hand with many difficulties and sacrifices. In numerous cases

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those choosing to participate in education programmes take these psychological burdens with them into a learning situation. In many cases the situation is made worse by the anxiety of leaving behind a family that needs their supervision and care.

Women in many African cultures are not expected to leave their domestic responsibilities to enrol in educational programmes. So women who do leave home and enrol in educational programmes are put under considerable pressure. They face ridicule, and are perceived by other members of society as irresponsible mothers and wives. These kinds of cultural attitudes serve to discourage women from enrolling in educational programmes. As a result, women are often only able to participate in education programmes when their children are grown up and this is usually after many years.

Sometimes they find themselves in the same classes as their own children. Many women who enrol in adult basic education programmes attend classes irregularly and their progress is slow due to their heavy workload.

In numerous African countries opportunities for adult education are located in urban settings. Enrolling in education programmes therefore often also means relocating. For many this also means adjusting to living without one's spouse, children, relatives and friends. In some cases it also means adjusting to new lifestyles, for example, living in hostels or residences, socialising with other students, many of whom may be younger, adjusting to new timetables and facing other challenges that may have to do with methods of work.

Adult educators need to be sensitive to the challenges that face adult learners. This is particularly important because adult learners frequently try to suppress their problems by not talking about them and by pretending that they are coping. These problems often manifest themselves in

other ways, for example, in poor performance in assigned tasks or absenteeism and in some cases learners develop actual physical symptoms such as continuous headaches and problems with eyesight.

In this respect, counselling is essential for adult learners and counselling services must be made available. Counselling services in most African countries, as previously mentioned, are relatively new and need to be explained to learners so that they are understood and utilised effectively. Learners must also be helped to articulate their individual challenges and problems because they tend to deny their problems, thus making it difficult for the adult educator to help them. In addition, some institutions lack appropriate forums for adults to articulate their problems, while others lack the trained personnel to handle counselling services. Planners and policy-makers in adult and community education need to be made aware of the significance of guidance and counselling services for both potential and enrolled adult learners.

Adult learners continue to face many challenges, even after they have enrolled in programmes. Some of these challenges are the result of inadequate guidance and counselling services. Learners, especially those who live in rural communities, face problems of accessing objective information regarding the educational opportunities available in their communities. Those providing the educational programmes are normally more interested in enrolling as many learners as possible and do not take time off to discuss aspirations, motivations and future plans with individual learners. As a result, adult learners are drawn into programmes only to discover when it is too late that they have enrolled for a programme that will not lead to their advancement.

Other challenges relate to the content, duration and cost of adult education

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programmes. As a result of inadequate guidance, some learners enrol for courses without clearly understanding the demands that the course will have on their time. Others enrol without adequate knowledge about the actual costs. Others underrate the complexity of the content that they are expected to cover as part of the programme. As a result some adult learners are forced to drop out of programmes because they do not have the time, cannot meet the costs involved, or find the content too difficult. These are all problems that could be avoided if potential adult learners are adequately guided before enrolling in programmes.

To overcome these problems there is a need for adult educators to provide detailed information on programmes offered and to provide support to learners to help them stay on track. For example, there should be some kind of orientation that enables potential learners to learn more about the various programmes offered as well as alternative programmes offered elsewhere so that they can make informed choices. Learners must also be helped to understand the rules and regulations in the institution of their choice. In turn, this will help them to avoid clashes between their personal interests and institutional expectations.

One of the major challenges is the attempt to combine social responsibilities with education. For example, some learners enrol as full-time students on programmes but, due to their financial burdens, continue working, sometimes part time and sometimes full time. This puts them under considerable strain and in most cases they end up missing classes, are unable to meet deadlines for coursework and perform poorly. Learners in these kinds of situations need to be helped to recognise the demands of the programmes they want to enrol in and to enable them to weigh them against their other commitments. This will enable

them to make informed decisions on an appropriate course of action in the light of their personal and social responsibilities.

Many adults in Africa wish to enrol in education programmes but cannot do so because their income levels are low or are inadequate to support their education. These kinds of problems have no immediate solutions since potential learners in most cases have no control over them. Counselling, however, could help these adults to explore those options that may be available to them within this context of limited opportunities, such as bursary schemes, sponsorship, scholarships and community support. Guidance and counselling services therefore remain vital at community level.



## ACTIVITY

- 1 List some of the problems or challenges that adult learners experience in terms of gaining access to or enrolling in further education programmes in your communities.
- 2 How can guidance and counselling help to address these challenges?

## CHALLENGES

As discussed in the previous section, guidance and counselling services are a necessity for adult learners in Africa. It is therefore important that all trained adult educators are able to offer these services as part of their work. Adult educators should be able to help the adults they interact with to grow in the directions that they choose, to solve problems and to face crises. The assumptions made here are that learners are not always able to recognise that they need help and are not always willing to seek help from their educators.



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The idea of seeking professional help in the form of guidance and counselling, as mentioned before, is relatively new to many adult learners. Depending on the nature of the problem that they may be experiencing, adult learners sometimes find it difficult to confide in an adult educator who is a complete stranger to them. In African societies adults normally share their problems with members of their own sex and in many cases these are members of their social networks such as close friends and relatives. Rarely do they share their problems with strangers, thus raising the challenge of the best way to make guidance and counselling services available.

Many African societies and their school systems are hierarchical and the nature of the relationships directive. One of the principles shared by a good facilitator of adult learning and a counsellor is the non-directive nature of the approaches used. Both do not tell learners what to do, but instead help learners to gain a better understanding of their own motivations, potentials and aspirations. In a counselling relationship the learner has to accept responsibility for the helping and learning process. The offering of counselling services therefore needs to be accompanied by a shift in attitude of the educators and learners and also calls for specialised training for adult educators.

It is important to note that the extent to which learners can be helped to improve the quality of their lives is constrained by the nature of the resources that they possess and by their environmental circumstances (Woolfe et al., 1987: 35). In Africa the majority of adult learners have low incomes, live in poor conditions, have pressing family commitments and have a multitude of other social problems. As noted previously, these problems often restrict the options available to them. Adult educators need to make it very clear to learners that they cannot work miracles, but they may be able to assist

them to become better equipped to cope more effectively with some of their problems or challenges. For example, an adult educator may be able to point out a talent that a learner has but does not recognise (Woolfe et al., 1987: 35).

In counselling learners, adult educators sometimes assume that learners are aware of the alternatives available to them and are willing to take responsibility for acting on the alternative. This is, however, not always the case. Counselling in such cases will have to involve facilitating awareness of such alternatives and assessing readiness to act. The learners then have to select the goals for their own growth and determine whether or not they want to be helped. For example, learners can approach an educator and ask for information or for assistance in making a decision about their future careers. Or they can ask for assistance in solving a problem, or simply express their feelings about their situation.

In many African cultures men are perceived as being in control of situations in their lives and as being self-sufficient. As a result, in such cultures men seldom feel able to admit directly that they want or need help with a problem they cannot solve on their own. Admissions of this kind can be construed as weaknesses, causing other members of society to question whether the individual is a real man. Even when they admit to themselves that they have problems, the degree of trust they feel towards the adult educator will determine the extent to which they feel free to share their problem. The situation can be made worse if the educator is a woman, since admitting a need to a woman in this context may make them feel even more vulnerable.

Even where help is solicited and given with the best of motives, it sometimes has other effects on learners. The reason is partly that people who are being helped often experience a loss of self-esteem.

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Although appearing outwardly grateful, they sometimes interpret the help as a message that they are incompetent. This interpretation is accompanied by feelings of dependency, helplessness, inferiority and inadequacy. Most African women, unlike their male counterparts, seem to accept help more readily and without much problem. This is partly because women in many African cultures are perceived as being socially dependent on others and thus are less likely to feel the need to carry their burdens alone, as men do.

Adult educators need to be sensitive to cultural and gender differences when dealing with adult learners. They also need to come to terms with questions such as: How can adult educators be supportive without reinforcing learners' dependency? To what extent should adult educators attempt to be helpful when the learner does not seem to want help or appears to be on a self-destructive path?

Social interdependency is integral to many African societies. People need other people in order to give their lives meaning and purpose. Individuals are integral members of families and communities. As a result, the nature of problems that occur in any individual's life is usually the concern of others in the community and people do not usually carry their burdens alone. An important consideration for educators to remember is that when help is requested outside of a friendship setting, it is important that the terms and conditions of the help are agreed upon early.

Adult educators get themselves into difficult situations when the expectations of both parties are not explored and agreed on. Because of their social cultural backgrounds adult educators in Africa sometimes find themselves preoccupied with the notion that they must help the learners, that they must produce some change, and as a result learners sometimes develop a demanding

hold on the educator that can be very manipulative and destructive for everyone. One problem with this kind of relationship, for example, could be lack of resolution, so that the relationship goes on continuously with no apparent change taking place in the learner. Adult educators who fall into this trap reinforce the helplessness of learners, thus preventing them from taking responsibility for helping themselves.

## ACTIVITY

**Based on what you know about people who live in your community, write down some of the major challenges that a counsellor could encounter in trying to provide guidance and counselling services in your community.**

## SUMMARY

This chapter attempted to define and explain what guidance is and what counselling is and also reviewed some of the major differences between guidance and counselling. The reasons why adult learners in Africa need guidance and counselling services were discussed, as well as the challenges faced by adult educators in providing guidance and counselling services in an African context.

## KEY POINTS

- Making decisions and choices is integral to everyday life.
- Guidance is meant to facilitate informed decision-making and counselling is meant to help clarify and understand needs and to explore ways of meeting them.

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- Adult learners in Africa need both guidance and counselling in order to enable them to enrol and participate effectively in adult education activities.
  - Adult educators need to be aware and sensitive to contextual and cultural challenges inherent in providing guidance and counselling services to adult learners in Africa.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

- 1 Discuss why adult learners in your context might need counselling and guidance services.
- 2 What aspects of your culture do you feel may conflict with or complement counselling and guidance services in your community?

- 3 Explain what advice you would give to someone who is trying to set up guidance and counselling services in your community. Keep some of the major challenges in mind.

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- guidance and counselling of adult learners.

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