

ASSESSMENT OF GENDERS DIFFERENCE IN SKILLS USED BY STUDENTS' ON PRACTICAL ATTACHMENT FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF ADULT LEARNING CENTRES IN NIGERIA

ABBAS MAHMUD (PhD)

Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Faculty of Education and Extension Services

Department of Adult Education and Extension Services

E_Mail: abbasmahud35@gmail.com

MURJA BELLO DANKANI

Department of Adult Education and Extension Services

Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Faculty of Education and Extension Services

E_Mail: murjanatubelloumar72@gmail.com

Abstract

The study aimed to assess Gender Differences in Skills Utilized by Students during Practical Attachment for the Effective Management of Adult Learning Centers in Nigeria. It was guided by three hypotheses and sought to identify the skills employed by students in facilitating learning for adult learners during practical attachments and to determine the management strategies implemented by students in controlling the learning centers where they were placed. The research included addressing three specific questions and testing four hypotheses. Employing a Descriptive Survey research design, the study involved a population of 93 students in the Adult Education program during the 2018/2019 academic session. The sample size coincided with the population count, and the sampling method employed was purposive. The study relied on a self-designed instrument for data collection. Analysis was conducted using Descriptive Statistics, and the hypotheses were evaluated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings from the three hypotheses indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female students concerning the skills utilized during practical attachments or the strategies employed to manage adult learning centers in the context of practical attachments. The study's conclusions highlighted the absence of significant differences between male and female students concerning the skills, management strategies, and learned theories applied while facilitating adult learning in various adult learning centers during practical attachments.

Keywords: Practical Attachment, Skills, Management and Learning Centers

Introduction

Practical attachments, or practicums in certain institutions, aim to fulfill graduation requirements by providing a blend of theoretical knowledge and hands-on practice for adult educators. This program benefits institutions, students, and the community alike. During practical attachments, students have the opportunity to hone their skills and apply the knowledge acquired in their coursework. This "real world" experience grants them professional expertise, enhancing their competitiveness in the job market upon graduation. These attachments are meticulously planned and supervised to offer valuable work exposure, contributing to students' educational programs while earning academic credits.

Kingsley and Niroshani (2015) regard internship programs (practical attachments) as pivotal in exposing students to real-life applications of theoretical concepts. Given that industries, schools, and organizations favor graduates with training experience,

internships significantly bolster students' employability. Practical attachments afford students from various higher learning institutions the chance to immerse themselves in authentic work environments and apply their theoretical knowledge gained during their undergraduate years (Hughes, 1998, as cited in Kingsley and Niroshani, 2015).

Classroom-based learning and learning during practical attachments differ significantly. Institutions offer structured learning guided by teaching staff, while work placements foster informal or incidental learning (Brennan and Little, 1996; Hughes, 1998; Johnson, 2000). They argue that classroom interactions are uniform for all students, whereas practical internships present distinct learning environments tailored to individual student needs (Agarwal and Gupta, 2008).

Regarding teaching skills in adult education, UNISA (2015) notes that adult education practitioners often face a myriad of educational approaches, methods, and techniques. Determining the best and most suitable methods for specific contexts and situations can be challenging. While some believe that teaching the subject matter is the primary concern, the method of instruction significantly impacts what is learned. Certain methods may require more time and resources, proving impractical, while research has demonstrated the varying effectiveness of different approaches. Hence, effective adult education practitioners adapt the best-suited approaches and methods for particular learners and situations.

Adult education is unlike conventional type of education it differs in terms of its curriculum, nature of classes and learners, experience of the learners, method used in teaching the learners, mode and duration of the learning and so on. With these differences made the choice of skills or techniques to teach adult learners depends largely on the circumstances that facilitators find themselves during the learning period. UNISA (2015) to teach adult one can make use of these for effectiveness: individual methods (e.g. face-to-face tutorial) group methods (e.g. working in group) mass or community methods (e.g. using radio or TV).

The teacher's displayed skills empower them to effectively manage their learning centers during facilitation sessions. Facilitators who challenge learners can guide them toward their aspirations, fostering deeper understanding through supportive mediation. This underscores the facilitator's crucial role in supporting the learning process. Gagne's cognitive theory within a constructivist framework emphasizes the significant role of facilitators (Mwamwenda, 2004). Cognitive learning theories posit that learners can control their learning activities and possess an inherent capacity to learn (Mwamwenda, 2004). However, this process's development requires structured guidance from facilitators, who must present material, outcomes, and opportunities suitable for learners' readiness. While learners have independent capabilities, facilitators need to carefully plan learning experiences (Mwamwenda, 2004 & Daniels, 2002).

Understanding individual adult learners and utilizing appropriate methods are crucial for effectively managing learning centers. Each adult learner enters a learning environment seeking to address immediate needs. Cooperative learning emerges as one of the most effective strategies for managing learning centers. Scholars like Kagan (2001) and Aldridge, Fraser & Sebela (2004) argue that cooperative learning, involving small teams with diverse abilities and learning styles, fosters various

learning activities. This approach not only enhances knowledge, skills, and attitudes but also encourages mutual motivation among team members. Each team member assumes responsibility for both their learning and aiding others, creating an environment of collective accomplishment. The collaborative effort continues until all team members comprehend and complete the assignment successfully. Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members (Kagan 2001) can:

- a. again from each other's efforts (your success benefits me and my success benefits you);
- b. recognize that all group members share a common fate (we all sink or swim).
- c. know that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's team members (we cannot do it without you);
- d. feel proud and jointly celebrate when a group member is recognized for achievement (we all congratulate you on your accomplishment).

Facilitators employ various strategies in learning centers to manage activities impartially. Self-regulated or directed learning stands out as a strategy used to engage learners actively in learning situations. Garner (1987) characterizes it as an interaction between three key variables: the individual, the task, and the repertoire of available strategies. Pint rich (1995) sees learning as an active, goal-oriented process, suggesting that learners must control resources, embodying the strategies Garner mentions, to regulate their behavior effectively.

Adult learners value engagement in learning situations where they have equal participation, although facilitators predominantly control the entire activity. Knowles (1990) and Long (2000) argue that learners need substantial subject matter knowledge for effective self-regulation. They highlight the significance of subject matter expertise and individual interest in self-regulation. Paris and Newman (1990) posit that effective self-regulation fosters active participation and collaboration among learners, advocating for peer tutoring as a facilitator. Through idea exchange, learners develop a personal commitment to strategies, utilizing their talents to support each other's learning, potentially increasing their sense of control and self-efficacy. This approach provides a secure learning environment for facilitators while maintaining control over learning activities. Boyer (2003) stresses that facilitators serve as "mediators," eliciting behavior from learners who engage with the process, fostering a meaningful experience through personal involvement, bridging their intentions and actions.

Employing group instruction is advantageous for facilitators conducting learning activities. UNISA (2015) highlights group instruction as a strategy to achieve learning objectives effectively. Facilitators play a critical role in ensuring optimal group functionality within the learning environment. They organize groups of appropriate sizes, often dividing extroverted and introverted learners to foster balanced discussions and prevent domination. Clear task communication, conflict management, and resolution are integral facilitator responsibilities within these groups. Additionally, facilitators ensure group maintenance, either through the group's natural progression of leadership or via an appointed leader or chairperson.

Statement of the problem:

Tertiary institutions worldwide engage students in rigorous academic activities to expose them to theories and practical learning. These institutions operate under specific guidelines ensuring students fulfill required credit units for graduation. Thus, students undergo theory and practical experiences tailored to their course objectives. In various faculties and departments, students learn theories in classrooms and engage in practical attachments to gain real-world experience and apply theoretical knowledge. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of students' practical attachments in developing skills for managing adult learning centers in the Department of Adult Education at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

Objectives

- i. To identify the skills used by the students in facilitating learning to adult learners in various centers posted during the practical attachment
- ii. To identify strategic management used by the students in controlling the learning centers posted to during practical attachment
- iii. To examine the difference between the theory taught and the practical experience of administrative work assigned to students during practical attachment

Hypothesis

- i. There is no significance difference in the skills used by male and female students in facilitating learning among adult learners.
- ii. There is no significance difference in the management strategies employed by male and female students in facilitating learning among adult learners.
- iii. There is no significance difference in the practical utilization of learned theories used by male and female students in facilitating learning among adult learners.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of 79 male and 14 female students, totaling 93 from the 2018/2019 academic session of the Department of Adult Education and Extension Services, Faculty of Education Extension and Services at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Purposive sampling was utilized to select the entire population of 93 students based on guidance from research advisors, Akuzuilo and Agu (2002), who suggest determining whether to study the entire population or a sample, especially if the population size is not extensive. The questionnaire served as the instrument for the study. Titled "Assessment of Gender Differences in Skills Used by Students during Practical Attachment for Effective Management of Adult Learning Centers in Nigeria," the instrument comprised three segments, each containing ten items aimed at assessing students' skills in managing Adult Learning Centers during Practical Attachment. The questionnaire used a four-point scale—Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed, and Strongly Disagreed (SA, A, D, & SD). Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed for data analysis.

Result Presentation and Analysis

This section deals with results which are the interpretation of findings of the study. It contains statistical tests that were selected from inferential techniques and the data obtained was presented in tabular form.

H0₁: There is no significance difference in the skills used by male and female students in facilitating learning among adult learners.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the scores of skills in facilitating learning to a t-test analysis as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Skills in Facilitating Learning among Adult Learners

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Cal	p-Value	Decision
Male	79	22.33	7.870	.305	0.761	H ₀ Accepted
Female	14	21.64	7.012			

Table 1 presents scores for males (M = 22.33, SD = 7.870) and females (M = 21.64, SD = 7.012), $t(91) = 0.305$, $p > .05$. This suggests that there was no discernible difference in how male and female students utilized skills to facilitate learning among adult learners, as the p-value exceeds the .05 level of significance. Consequently, H0₁, asserting no significant difference in skills used between male and female students for facilitating adult learning, was accepted.

H0₂: There is no significance difference in the management strategies employed by male and female students in facilitating learning among adult learners.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the scores of management strategies in facilitating learning to a t-test analysis as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Management Strategies in Facilitating Learning among Adult Learners

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Cal	p-Value	Decision
Male	79	23.37	7.453	1.343	0.183	H ₀ Accepted
Female	14	20.50	6.802			

Table 2 displays scores for males (M = 23.37, SD = 7.453) and females (M = 20.50, SD = 6.802), $t(91) = 1.343$, $p > .05$. This suggests no significant distinction in how male and female students applied management strategies to facilitate adult learning, as the p-value exceeds the .05 level of significance. Consequently, H0₂, asserting no significant difference in management strategies used between male and female students for facilitating adult learning, was accepted.

H0₃: There is no significance difference in the practical utilization of learnt theories used by male and female students in facilitating learning among adult learners.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the scores of practical utilization in facilitating learning to a t-test analysis as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Practical Utilization in Facilitating Learning among Adult Learners

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Cal	p-Value	Decision
Male	79	24.29	6.555	1.822	0.072	H ₀ Accepted
Female	14	20.86	6.163			

Table 3 displays scores for males (M = 24.29, SD = 6.555) and females (M = 20.86, SD = 6.163), $t(91) = 1.822$, $p > .05$. This suggests no significant distinction in how male and female students practically applied learned theories to facilitate adult learning, as the p-value exceeds the .05 level of significance. Consequently, H₀₃, stating no significant difference in the practical utilization of learned theories between male and female students for facilitating adult learning, was accepted.

Summary of the Findings

The result revealed that:

1. There is no significant difference between male and female students skills used to facilitating adult learners
2. There is no significant difference between male and female students strategies employed in managing adult learning centers
3. There is no significant difference between male and female students on the theory and practical application used during practical attachment

Discussion of Findings

The findings from hypothesis one, which explored the significance of skills used by male and female students in facilitating adult learning, revealed no significant difference in the skills utilized. This study highlighted that adult learners comprehend better when visual aids like pamphlets or charts are incorporated, aligning with Rasmussen's belief that adult learners heavily rely on visual stimuli. For effective communication, utilizing handouts, diagrams, stories, and discussions prove beneficial. Davis's work also supports this, emphasizing the collaborative nature of classroom discussions that require critical thinking and negotiation of meaning, fulfilling the need for relevance in adult learning.

Additionally, the study unveiled the effectiveness of the problem-solving method in adult facilitation, echoed by Lowman, who emphasized its role in cultivating problem-solving skills and fostering independent thinking and creativity among students. The constructivist learning process encourages lecturers to stimulate critical thinking and creativity, supporting the development of problem-solving habits.

Hypothesis two found no significant difference in management strategies employed by male and female facilitators, consistent with Khalid et al.'s study, which

highlighted varied classroom management strategies between male and female teachers. Kyriacou's work emphasized the importance of a conducive classroom environment for achieving educational objectives, noting the classroom as the hub for implementing curricular activities and fostering interpersonal relationships aligned with educational goals.

Furthermore, the study underscored the efficacy of problem-solving methods in encouraging learner participation in adult education programs. Suparno and Supriyanto highlighted its effectiveness in classroom teaching by fostering problem identification, planning, and collaborative problem-solving with learners.

Regarding hypothesis three, it revealed no significant difference in the practical application of learned theories between male and female students in adult learning centers. Clapton and Cree advocated for an integrated approach that combines theory and practice within the social work discipline. They emphasized the need for learning models that seamlessly blend classroom learning with real-world practice throughout the educational journey, not limiting it to a single internship course. Thompson echoed this sentiment, highlighting the disparity between theory and practice, emphasizing the importance of integrating theory into practical experiences.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there is no significant difference between males and females in the skills utilized during practical attachments in various learning centers. These skills were found to be valuable and motivating, fostering active participation in adult learning programs. Similarly, there was no notable distinction between males and females in the management strategies employed to oversee their respective learning centers. This suggests the application of diverse management strategies in adult learning environments. Additionally, the study revealed no significant difference between males and females in the practical application of learned theories within different adult learning centers.

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