

THE ROLE OF COUNSELLING AS A TOOL IN ADDRESSING ADULT STUDENTS' NEED

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Abstract

This paper examined the role counselling plays as a tool in addressing the adult student need. Adult students are faced with challenges, sometimes complex in nature due to the multiple roles they play in life. Coming to education can be scary, the assignments, examinations, sitting in class hours taking lecture notes instead of making money to fend for the dependents, poor study habits skills and exhaustion which impact on their success. Some administrators of adult and non-formal education have for long neglected the application of counselling to their program. The objective of this paper is therefore to highlight these challenges, the role counselling plays in assisting its clients to resolve their needs.

Key words: Adult students, Adult education, Challenges, Counselling.

Introduction

In African traditional system of education, adults have always been in the fore front of education of its citizens, that is why the words of elders are words of wisdom but as Akinpelu (2000) posits our elder's wisdom is relative (not absolute) as it does not exclude new insights from contemporaries in the Elders' council, and direction and guidance from the ancestors. Also it is relative and limiting within the system of life-long education which is the over-arching principle of the African Traditional system of education. The implication is their wisdom is not totally complete so they are free to seek counsel. It is the search for more pleasing ways to improve his life and that of the society leads to man's major needs in his interaction with his ancestors later to the development of formal education system including adult education.

Education is basic human rights as recognized in Human Rights Instruments, ranging from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1940 to the World Declaration of Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. Adult education is now widely seen as a basic human right. So every adult worldwide should have access to educational opportunities. This

implies total focus on the education of adults and adult education as a discipline.

As Adult education develops and educational experiences of students changes, the need to provide adult students with counselling services increases. The changes brought more complex learning situations which pose greater threat for students facing the “physio-psychological, social, and economic changes taking place at the different stages of life’ (Oduaran 2000). This requires counselling services.

Counselling is learning orientated process carried on by a professionally competent counsellor in relevant psychological skills and knowledge, to assist the client with methods within context of the total personnel program to learn more about herself, accept herself, and learn how to put such understanding into effect in relation to more clearly perceived, realistically defined goals, to enable the client become a happier and productive member of society. This is very essential for adult students who need to find themselves by weighing the pros and cons of each need to aid necessary adaptation to their new found role but it is highly neglected.

A counsellor is therefore not in service to alter the needs identified by neither adult students nor the administrators but to assist them to cope with the new psychosocial effects arising from the forces of change, and prepare their mind for the new financial and social problems associated with changes, the preparation of the mind also equips the adult students to develop abilities, interests aptitudes, self-esteem, and self-fulfilment in making appropriate decision.

Adulthood is mostly challenged by sudden increase in responsibilities, physiological, emotional, psychological and social performance. Just as Oduaran (2000) predicted that there will be contending needs and problems to cope with..., He stated that social and economic changes occur so quickly that one barely has enough time to deal with one given change before another one manifests, so in this 21st century, adults are constantly developing and applying a repertoire of concepts, strategies and since education is perceived as an instrument for human development this has increased learner’s interest and interest in learners needs.

Globally there is a great change in education practice, coupled with the pressure arising from the need to meet up with the challenges. The interest of education in learners is to cover the differences that exist between the world of work and gap in education. To achieve these effectively, learning styles which deals with receiving and processing information within a learning environment should be encouraged.

(Zywno, Wadlen 2002). Adult students need effective learning environment, and lack of it affects the distinct goals and expectation in education especially persistence in learning. The objective of this study is therefore to look at the challenges confronting adult students, and ways counselling services can aid adaptation in psychological, emotional, physical and social roles.

Adult Students and the Challenges

Adult education provides to millions of adult all over the world opportunities to continue their education at different levels to acquire new skills so as to fulfil their right to lifelong learning. The learners in these programs are referred to as adult students. They are a diverse group who strive towards differing goals and are unevenly prepared to reach those goals. Oduaran (1991) identified a category of adult students which often dominates the various adult literacy classes provided in the largely illiterate societies. Given to their backgrounds, many are assumed to be displaying restrictive behaviours in learning transaction, which might make or mar their learning. These restrictive behaviours may affect their adjustment, academic and non- academic needs, interest of the learner and time spent on the program.

According to Nzeneri (2005)presently man is seriously being challenged by constant change in technology and rapid increases in new knowledge. This change has effect on adult students in many ways, among them are the following;

Technological Change: Technological change is a complex and huge enterprise and can result in both computer labour substitution and skilled based technological change, depending on the nature of the work and the organizations of the workplace. Technological change in the knowledge based economy has its risk, which can be painful and debilitating. Technological change is causing left handed workers to experience Repetitive strain injury. This is because equipment tends to be designed for right handed users, forcing left handed workers to make demanding unnatural movement. International left Handers, (2002) stated that Right handed design for righted users slows down the ability of left handers to use equipment and tools, as their brains struggle to learn the other way round. Lawerence (2000) reported that everyday things like public telephones, electric hand power tools, keyboard and mouse are all geared for right hand use, leaving left-handed workers at risk of injury. This problem can be very frustrating for adult students as emotional instability associated with struggle to learn to use right handed wares increases in every environment they found themselves. Most of them end up with

residual incapacitating disabilities like finger contractures and loss of limbs.

Ageing Conditions: Ageing conditions occurs as we age, we undergo a number of physiological changes which affect not only how we look, but how we function and respond to daily living...The consequences of these changes can include decreased stamina with shortness of breath and fatigue, which in turn may impair one's ability to perform activities of daily living(Process html 2002).Such emotional disturbances and conditions challenge their mental health, sometimes resulting in loss of interest or pleasure in usual actives, changes in appetite and weight, disturb sleep, motor agitation or retardation, fatigue and loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach or excessive guilt, suicidal thinking or attempts , and difficulty with thinking or concentration. These creates negative health outcomes such as traumatic stress, depression, anxiety phobias/panic disorder, eating disorder, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, high blood pressure, stroke, and other problems which narrows the focus of attention (Easterbrook 1959 and Kahnema 1993 cited in Hall & Crisp 2003), it can lead to an inattention to peripheral details (Heuer & Reisberg, 2000). All these and much more put pressure on adult students making learning difficult and boring.

Changing Family Structure: The changing structure in modern family is not helping issues. Change can be both threatening and life saving, yet a society undergoing rapid and constant social change cannot expect its institution to remain fixed. Some authorities have noted the radical changes that are taking place in the families all over the world. Some events suggest that the family as it is now known will disappear. Communal family arrangement, increasing divorce rate, single parent families, changing family roles and an increasing use of child care facilities are cited as evidence in support of these predictions. (Hiemstra, 2001).This changes will continue to affect the *adult students*, because the farm family of yesterday was a tightly knit living unit often comprised of parents and children as well as other relatives. All members of such extended families contributed to the family's survival requirement. Roles were fairly well fixed, tasks were carried out according to age and status, and learning was based on traditional practices. The urban family, however, does not necessarily fit these sub-traditional functions where mothers are employed outside the home, for example, children often see their parent or parents in different roles. The pressures of urbanization and change have put many strains on family living. The phenomena of

divorce, remarriage and the child with several parents' figures in one lifetime have considerable impact on family life which greatly affects the psychology and emotions of adult students.

Financing Education: Funding the education is another major challenge adult student's encounter; the difficulty may be due to multiple roles most of them play. With the present economic recession, high rate of job layoffs, family responsibilities, and financing have become a big need to adult students as school fees and other dues, writing papers for seminars increases, the demand for internet services for assignments and research, Conditions at home, special child care needs, work demands, transportation, family's health, unsupportive family members, friends or colleagues requires huge finance, this mounts pressure on adult student. Those with complex problem who believe the financial involvement is enormous quit.

Low Self-Esteem: Adult students who have experienced or experiencing abuse which may include attempts to dehumanize or intimidate them, use of verbal and non-verbal act that reduces their sense of self worth or integrity have low self-esteem, great frustration, stress resulting to inability to achieve goals and wishes. This makes some adult students to build fear and anger that affects their personality structure, sometimes destroys the ability to unlearn.

In some adult students, these feelings of threat are expressed by failure to participate, dropping out, resisting examinations, refusing to take part in discussion. Such negative peak experience characterized with confusion and unhappiness may also "intensify pre-existing conflict, emotional pain, and inner confusion and chaos that may potentially lead to intrapsychic depletion, fragmentation, and debilitating anxiety. Adult students with a fragile sense of self or damaged self-image may be in great danger. Knowles (1990) states that educators need to focus on the needs, interest and desires of adult students. However, in fulfilling these attributes educators first, have to understand who these adult learners are, how they learn, why they learn, and why they enter the learning process. While Kerka (2002) maintains that meeting the needs is not a viable guiding principle, at the heart of practice. He stated Andragogical methods which purports to provide a relaxed, trusting, mutually, respectful, informed, warm, collaborative, and supporting learning environment are more conclusive to learning at all ages.

It is clearly obvious that adult students come into the program with numerous challenges, some which are not stated here, battling with

these need without counselling services hinders the development of full potentials and ability to adapt to newer roles.

Adult Students and Counselling

Counselling concern is to assist in the development of education, social, personal and career or occupational choice but adult students have more than the four key areas confronting them. Counselling services therefore to adult students may be performing the following function.

- To assist the adult students to create new, more flexible arrangement that will aid persistence, through prioritization of daily activities, especially assignments, time spent on work, hobbies, family or friends and makes decision how to manage the time well.
- To help adult students to adopt behaviours that is positive through the development of attitudes that build up self confidence.
- To assist adult students to see clearly the aims, goals and ideas of learning situation and be able to know, what has to be done, when to do it and how to do it. It follows up with the client to monitor the progress or attainability of the goals set.
- To assist adult students in making career and occupational decision with methods of measuring knowledge and skills like inventories, questionnaire, and tests to verify or refute any claim.
- To assist in the promotion of advocacy as a tool for raising the profile of adult students and lifelong learning.
- To keep records and prepare reports related to the needs of adult students, which will later form baseline data for further studies.
- To make referral in difficult situation.

Recommendation

Adult education organizations should clearly define and carefully evaluate the needs of adult students and provide counselling services to them. The role of counselling as a tool in addressing adult student's needs should be to focus on specific variables and risk factors that can inhibit learning and a healthy life. Such information will help eliminate subtle and complex situation that hinder learning.

Conclusion

Counselling therefore helps adult student to develop self-awareness, this can also build relationships, improve and change their life. It helps the struggling student's build their strength, be highly motivated. The

learning situation then becomes a multidisciplinary environment where knowledge is acquired, skills developed and attitudes changed.

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