



THE PERCEPTION OF ADULT LEARNER INSTRUCTORS ON THE INTEGRATION OF REGULAR SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN ADULT EDUCATION IN KENYA

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Abstract:

Curriculum integration usually should provide learners with an opportunity for a holistic acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes with no restrictions on subject boundaries and co-curriculum activities. This however may not be the same for Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) which focuses on meeting individual adult needs and integrating adult education in the regular secondary curriculum and may not be forthcoming. ACE is geared towards attaining Vision 2030 of developing the relevant human resource base in Kenya. However, adult learning has faced a myriad of challenges including inadequate instructional materials, inability to balance family and career and the varying perceptions of the instructors on curriculum integration. This paper informed by transformative learning theory sought to assess the perception of adult learner instructors on the integration of regular secondary school curriculum in adult education in Kenya. In order to achieve this objective, data was collected through classroom observations, curriculum review, and interviews with 9 current students, 3 former students, 5 teachers, and the Principal. The results of the study indicated that instructors followed the regular high school curriculum with little adaptation and lacked training about teaching adult learners and self-directed learning approaches. A professional development project for Baraka Adult Learning Center (BALC) instructors was developed to address some of the needs identified in the study. This training could have an impact on the adult learners by better assisting them to gain access to vocational training and higher education.

Keywords: adult learning, school dropouts, secondary school, curriculum, integration, instructors

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1. Introduction

Most Kenyan high school dropouts do not have a school re-entry option, and without a high school diploma, they lack access to tertiary or higher education institutions for training and career development. This paper through a case investigation of how an adult learning center in Kenya educated high school dropouts and helped them to gain access to vocational training or higher education, makes reference to Baraka Adult Learning Center (BALC) assessing how the BALC met students' aspirations, needs, and goals based on the perceptions of teachers and adult learners.

While on a visit to the Department of Adult Learning and Continuing Education in Nairobi, the author was informed that the Kenyan government was dealing with the problem of school dropouts by establishing adult learning centers as a parallel program in public primary schools. The official further explained that adult learners use the same facilities used by primary school children. In that way, many schools could be established because there is no problem with obtaining physical facilities and due to the fact that the public primary schools have already been built (D. Munyi, personal communication, January 21, 2013). According to the official, 50 secondary schools for adults had been established in the country by then.

An adult literacy program has been going on in Kenya for a long time (Team Kenya, 2008). Until 2010, the activities of adult education were administered by the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services (Kenya Country Team, 2010). This meant that there was a notable disconnect between adult education programs being administered by a non-educational ministry and the Ministry of Education, which oversees continuing education. Stakeholders of adult learning noticed this disconnect, considered aligning adult learning education to the Ministry of Education institutions.

Republic of Kenya's (2010) Ministry of Education Report noted that efforts were being made to align adult education with other essential institutions in the Ministry such as Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) to ensure curriculum development and testing of adult students. The Department of Adult Education in Kenya is now under the Ministry of Education. During a visit to Kenya in January 2013, a senior official at the Directorate of Adult Education and Continuing Education, informed the author that for the Directorate to be effective, some policies needed to be passed by the National Assembly (D. Munyi, personal communications, January 2013). If passed, the policies would allow the directorate to have more structured adult education, both at primary and secondary school level.

2. Underpinning Literature

Education plays an important role in socio-economic development and is therefore the backbone to development of individuals and nations. In addition, it is generally accepted as the main exit route from poverty (Julius & Bawane, 2011). If this argument is true, then the fate of high school dropouts in Kenya is sealed. They remain in poverty,

and their children too may not be able to continue with education beyond high school. Julius and Bawane (2011) wrote about financing education in Kenya and noted that high costs of schooling make education less affordable to the poor.

Nonetheless, returning to school for school dropouts poses a challenge to school administrators and education officials all over the world. The United States provides General Education Development (GED) for school dropouts, which enables graduates to join schools of higher learning, as well as the job market. Emphasizing why GED graduates should aim at attending some college, Smith (2010) noted, *“Everyone in the basic education and literacy field understands that adults with GED credentials need to complete at least some college in order to get a daily living wage job”* (p.185). Thus, the GED allows these high school dropouts a second chance to attend college and start earning a livable wage. Kenyan high school dropouts have no clear path for going back to school. The adult education program in Kenya does not have an equivalent of the GED program in the United States. The author’s involvement with the Kenyan population as a teacher created a realization that school dropouts cannot find jobs because they have no access to tertiary institutions where they can develop vocational skills. Most tertiary institutions require a high school diploma for admission. Kenyan adults who want to get a high school diploma therefore go back to regular high schools where they learn in the same classrooms with teenagers. For adults to be in the same class with teenagers should present a challenge to the teacher, the teenage students and the adult learner. It is a challenge because the methods used to teach children are different from the methods used to teach adults; thus using pedagogy approach for children and andragogy approach for adults.

Therefore, because adults and children are at different intellectual, physical, and emotional developmental levels, it is necessary to apply different teaching methodologies for adults and children (Tolutiene & Domarkiene, 2010). Kenyan programs for high school dropouts returning to school are not fully developed. However, there are few countries in Africa that have established programs for high school completion such as South Africa. According Brown (2009), in South Africa, high school dropouts are allowed to go back to complete their high school diploma. The Malawian government also developed a return to school program for youths who drop out of school (Nampota, 2009).

3. Transformative Learning Theory

The transition of adolescent learners from high school to adult education poses challenges to both instructors and curriculum planners. Most adult learner instructors were trained in pedagogical approach to teaching. Adult learning theories have been developed over time describing adult cognition as it relates to life experience and the variations depending on individual’s social, economic, cultural, racial, and gender background (Goddu, 2012). Transformative learning theory was deemed relevant in this paper as it encompasses cognitive and emotional dimensions (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning theory has two components, which are: (a) habits of mind

habits, and (b) individual's point of view. The habits of mind are characterized by being broad, abstract, and influenced by a set of codes. Ethnocentrism, where an individual could see another group as inferior, could serve as a good example of habits of mind. On the other hand, point of view includes the stereotypes people may have towards individuals or groups (Mezirow, 1997). According to Mezirow (1997) there are four processes of learning.

Explaining the four processes of learning, Mezirow (1997), first elaborated an existing viewpoint where one can seek more evidence in advancing his/her stereotype concerning groups and expanding the range or intensify one's point of view. The second way of learning is developing new set practices. The third way people learn is to have a transformative approach, their point of view. Finally, ethnocentric habits of mind may be transformed by the perspective one has towards other groups which are not his/her own and by checking own biases. Transformative learning therefore advocates for change which is of great importance in adults.

4. Methodology

The study used a qualitative case study to address the study question. Through this method, rich data were gathered from students and teachers of BALC using multiple sources. Data was also obtained from school documents, observations of instructors and students in classroom, interviews from current students, interviews from former students, interviews from instructors, and an interview from the principal (for triangulation). Through understanding the factors that contribute to completion of high school, and having access to vocational training and higher education, the study results may suggest a different approach in methodology for adult learners at BALC.

A qualitative design as opined by Merriam (2009), gives the understanding of how people view and interpret their world. In qualitative research, the researcher does not determine the outcome, and thus all the variables are not known. However, words or terms emerge and later can be classified as themes (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2010). In addition, qualitative researchers seek to find people's meaning in real-life situations and events in which they live, and how that meaning is constructed, as well as, how people understand their lives and their world (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2010; Glesne, 2011). Qualitative design enables the researcher to learn how participants perceive their setting and the way they experience it (Ochieng, 2009). The qualitative design therefore fit the purpose of this study as the author explored the phenomenon of the students in the adult learning center program.

The study was conducted at the BALC situated in an urban setting in central Kenya. The center was started by the Directorate of Adult Learning and Continuing Education, a department of Kenya's Ministry of Education to intervene for the adult learners who would like to go back to school. The center has both primary school and secondary school students with a population of 508 students. This study deals with high school learners enrolled in the school. There were 341 students in the secondary school section with ages ranging from 18 to 55 years.

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain 18 participants. Diversity of gender, age, cultural-background, employment and marital status was factored in. All the men had either their own businesses or they were employed. The participants included the following: nine current students, three former students, five teachers, and the principal. Since the center had more women than men, five women and four men were selected. Five instructors were also selected based on the area (subjects) they taught.

Data was collected using interviews with various groups of participants including current students, former students, teachers, the principal, observations of classes in progress, and the review of documents. In order to enhance validity, triangulation method was used to incorporate multiple data sources (Glesne, 2011). Audio recorders were used during the interviews to ensure that there was no loss of data in case some was missed in the notebook. The time allocated for each interview lasted about 45 minutes. The procedure of data collection was as follows:

- 1) reviewed school documents;
- 2) interviews with both current and former students;
- 3) observations of instructors and students in classrooms;
- 4) interviews with the instructors;
- 5) interviews with the principal.

Observation method was also used for data collection especially during the instructional lessons.

For secondary data, the existing school records were reviewed including attendance, exam performances, disciplinary issues and all the other important documents. The curriculum was also reviewed, records of which were used to provide background and context to supplement the perceptions of the participants.

Data analysis involved a simultaneous analyzing process (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) observed that collecting and analyzing data simultaneously helps the researcher from being unfocused, repetitious and overwhelmed by a large volume of materials needing to be processed. Data was then presented thematically.

5. Results

Adult education instructors at BALC have the challenge of adapting to the regular secondary school curriculum. In the absence of any high school equivalent examination for adult learners, the only curriculum that is available for adult learners to complete high school is the regular high school curriculum which is used in all secondary schools in Kenya. The curriculum in Kenyan primary schools, secondary schools and mid-level colleges is standardized. Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development is charged with the responsibility of developing curriculum for Kenyan schools. The standardization of the curriculum leads to standardized exams that are conducted at end of the final year in primary, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). After KCPE students join high school and start preparing for the final exam during their senior year (Form 4) in high school known as the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

The Kenya secondary education curriculum has a total of 21 subjects. Schools choose subjects to offer depending on their availability of teachers and resources. Students in Forms One and Two are categorized as level A. Students at this level are expected to take 12 subjects selected as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Subjects for Forms 1 and 2

Ten core subjects	Select one subject	Two optional subjects
1. Mathematics	1. Christian Religious Education	1. Business Studies
2. English	2. Islamic Religious Education	2. Agriculture
3. Kiswahili	3. Hindu Religious Education	3. Arabic
4. Biology		4. Home Science
5. Chemistry		5. French
6. Physics		6. Germany
7. Geography		7. Music
8. History and Government		8. Art and Design
9. Physical Education		9. Computer Studies
10. Religious Education		

Source: Kenya School Certificate Examination Subjects Choices, by Kenya National Examination Council, (n.d).

Students in Forms Three and Four are categorized as level B. At this level students take a minimum of seven subjects and a maximum of nine subjects selected as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Subjects for Forms 3 and 4

Core subjects (compulsory)	Selected at least two subjects	Select between one subjects and three subjects
English Kiswahili Mathematics	Biology Physics Chemistry	Other subjects to be selected from any of those a student studied in Forms One and Two

Source: Kenya School Certificate Examination Subjects Choices, by Kenya National Examination Council, (n.d).

Secondary school students in Kenya take 4 years to complete their high school certificate. During this period, the students are expected to take one final standardized exam known as Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. The Kenyan secondary school assessment approach is cumulative whereby students are tested what they have learned in 4 years at the end of the fourth year. This approach is different from formative assessment whereby students are assessed continuously.

Adult students in the secondary school section take the same subjects taken by students in the regular high school. However, due to lack of teachers and resources, BALC center was limited in the number of subjects it could offer to the students. Unlike regular high schools, the students at the center did not take specialized subjects such as Art and Design, Music, Computer studies and Agriculture. In addition, the center did not offer specialized languages such as Germany, French and Arabic. Table 3 illustrates the subjects offered for high school students at the adult learning center.

Table 3: Subjects offered at BALC

Core subject	Select two subjects	Select between one and three subjects
English Kiswahili Mathematics Business	Biology Physics Chemistry	History and Government Geography CRE

Secondary school adult learners in Kenya are required to take the subjects outlined in Table 3, which are meant for young students whose ages range from 13 to 21 years. Adults returning to school are therefore faced with the challenge of adapting to the secondary school curriculum.

The instructors had a challenge of adapting a curriculum meant for regular high school youths to suit the adult learners. Both the instructors and the principal knew that most of the adult learners were not suited for the curriculum. According to the principal, the students faced many challenges as they tried to adapt to regular high school curriculum. The principal highlighted the challenges of the current curriculum as follows:

“There’s need for review of the current curriculum. The adult learners have other responsibilities and therefore have to distribute their time to all these responsibilities: job, education, family, and still have to study and pass exams. They can’t manage to be in class all through. They have other things to attend to. There needs to be a curriculum that suits these adult learners.” (Principal, Personal communication, June 4, 2014)

Apart from the responsibilities which adult learners had, three out of five teachers who were interviewed cited the ability of understanding as a challenge. There was a general consensus that most of the adult learners were struggling with their studies and that they were slow learners. One of the teachers, comparing the regular high school students with adult learners asserted that, *“the adult learners’ understanding pace is slower than that of young regular high school students”* (T2, personal communication, June 3, 2014). The students knew that the curriculum was not meant for them but for the regular high school students. Asked whether there should be any change in the curriculum, they did not know whether change was possible, many admitted that they had not thought of any change of the curriculum. The only problem they voiced was the lack of facilities and hence not being able to have the privileges and the luxury enjoyed by students in regular secondary schools. All the nine current students and the three former students interviewed mentioned lack of facilities as one of the major challenges they faced at the learning center.

One of the teachers mentioned that there was a proposal with the Education Secretary (cabinet minister for education in Kenya) in which adult education would have a different curriculum and hence a different high school exit exam. The teacher explained that the proposal is a policy matter, which had to be passed as legislation by the two parliaments and ratified by the president. However, the teacher expressed his

doubts that such legislation would come any time soon due the political rivalry between the major political parties in the country.

6. Alternative Curriculum and Assessment

According to the principal, the curriculum was a direct transplant of the Kenyan regular secondary school curriculum. All the five instructors and the principal were of the opinion that KCSE exam and hence the curriculum were not suitable for adult learners. Adult learners have a lot of responsibilities such as their jobs family, and probably their social life. School is not the only thing they do. They go to school either tired or with a lot of responsibilities competing for their time. One of the teacher's commented:

"It is not very good for them because of the kind of study, and the timeframe is putting a lot of constraint and pressure on them, there are people who are very busy, and they come here after attending to several tasks. Some of them come in the evening when they are from work, they are also family people and they have got so many things to attend to. So, I feel there should be a different exam for these people." (T1, personal communication, May 28, 2014)

The same teacher proposed a different approach to assessment of adult learners. He challenged the current cumulative assessment method, where students are tested at the end of their secondary school program. The teacher supported formative form of assessment which in essence is continuous assessment throughout the high school period. The students at the center did not prepare for the exam for 4 years. Most students completed their high school within 2 or 3 years while the curriculum was meant to take four years. Therefore, as a result of shortening the period the adult learners spend in school, the students did not cover the complete syllabus. T3 noted:

"If you compare the responsibilities they have, the curriculum is not fit for them. It is designed in a way that someone must study for four years to complete the KCSE syllabus. Our students complete the program between two to three years. The adult learners want to study something they will practice after their course, but the curriculum requires them to select at least eight subjects for their exam in order to attain Kenyan high school diploma." (T3, personal communication, May 28, 2014)

To sum up, all the teachers believed that the current curriculum was not suitable for adult learners, therefore it should be changed. The principal proposed a change of policy by the ministry of education where adult learners could have a different exam instead of syndicating regular high school curriculum and examination. According to the interviews with the students, teachers and the principal, curriculum adaptation for the adult learners has been a challenge and will remain so as long as adult learners in Kenya continue using a curriculum that is designed for regular high school students. A

change of the curriculum for adult learners is a major national decision which could require a legislation action by the Kenyan parliament. However, until that change is made, providers of adult learning in Kenya will have to do the best they can to assist adult learners adapt to the current regular high school curriculum.

7. Dominant Attitude by Instructors and Students' Passivity

The instructors were cognizant of the fact that adult students are different from young teenage students, and that they should be treated differently. While teachers in primary and secondary schools have the mandate of molding the character of young students, the same could not be said for adult instructors. It is harder for one to discipline an adult student than disciplining a younger student in primary school or high school. During the observation it was noticed that some students who had not completed their assignment were told to leave the classroom, the students stayed outside for the whole lesson. When asked, the teacher in charge said that the students were being punished for not completing their assignment. One student commenting about the teacher's punishment said that the teacher was harsh to students, but they like his teaching. The teachers did not encourage or motivate the students. Words such as "well-done, good, excellent or fantastic" were never used even once as an encouragement and motivation to students. It was however, noted that some of the students who seemed weak were ignored and not encouraged to answer questions. A student who advocated for students' independence and self-directed learning felt that the students were not involved in decision making and was of the opinion that students should be consulted whenever decisions which affect them were being made. The teachers were also aware that the students were different from regular high school students. Teacher (T2), commenting on why students return to school, said that the students know what they want in life and that is why they chose to return to school out of their own volition without coercion from anybody, unlike when they were young, their parents could force them to go to school.

The principal was concerned that the teachers had only regular teacher training which usually focuses either on teaching in primary school or secondary school teacher training. The principal underscored that there is no college in the country which trains adult education instructors. He further said that the establishment of such a college is very necessary. The University of Nairobi, department of education tries to make some efforts towards sensitizing adult education instructors in the country to realize that adult learners are different from young primary school or secondary school students, but there was no curriculum available to be used to train adult education instructors. During the interviews with the teachers, they felt that all the colleges training teachers in the country should have a section for training particularly adult learner instructors where they could specialize in teaching adult learners.

8. Discussion

The high school curriculum in Kenya has 21 subjects. The system of evaluation is cumulative rather than formative. This means that although students are introduced to many different subjects in Forms One and Two, they are expected to drop some of the subjects and remain with at least seven subjects and not more than nine subjects in Form three and four. Students are then examined at the end of their high school period which is normally after 4 years and the final grade determined by that one main exam (Kenya National Examination Council, n.d).

Adult learners do not have a separate exam from high school students. Adult learners were subjected to studying high school curriculum which is specifically tailored for the regular high school students. It was therefore difficult for adult learners to adjust to the curriculum because of their busy schedules and other responsibilities such as jobs and family. One teacher attributed the difficulty of curriculum adaption to slower understanding pace of adult learners compared to younger high school students who are quick to understand. There is however, an ongoing debate among educators on whether younger minds learn better than older minds. Without getting drawn to this debate, suffice it to say that most people train for professions when they are already adults. It was noted that the curriculum was not suitable for adult learners and that there should be a review to delink adult learners' high school curriculum from the regular national high school curriculum.

The preparation for the exit exam (KCSE) was a big challenge for the participants. The students were however, motivated to succeed and become relevant in the society. In their preparations for the exit exam, they were hampered by some physical challenges at the center, such as lack of science laboratory, unfriendly academic environment for adults such as using small desks meant for young children, being in over-crowded in the classrooms, poorly trained teachers and lack of learning materials. Despite the challenges the students were determined to soldier on and prepare for the exam. The school records and former students who were interviewed revealed that the center was succeeding in preparing students for the exit exam. However, the center would be more effective in preparing students for exams if some of the problems highlighted in this paper were addressed.

For adult instructors to succeed in preparing their students for exams, they have to go beyond pedagogy and apply transformative learning theories. Mezirow describes transformative learning as *"learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change"* (Mezirow, 2009). Transformative learning calls for people to change their worldview. Mezirow believed that for people to change their worldview there has to be a disorientation dilemma (Mezirow, 2009). Explaining people's response to disorientation dilemma, Mezirow notes the following, *"When faced with disorientation dilemma, people are forced to consider their beliefs in a way that will fit this new experience into the rest of their worldview"* (Mezirow, 2017). While there could be many ways of applying transformative learning approaches by teachers, Mezirow gives a comprehensive

approach on how teachers can utilize transformative learning by exposing their students to opportunities as follows:

- Providing opportunities for critical thinking: Teachers can create opportunities for critical thinking through providing content that introduces new ideas. The students then need to engage with the new content through journaling, dialoging with other students and, critically questioning their own assumption and beliefs.
- Providing opportunities to relate to others going through the same transformative process: Transformation often happens in a community as students bounce ideas off one another and are inspired by the changes friends and acquaintances make.
- Providing opportunities to act on new perspectives- ...true transformation cannot take place until students are actively able to take steps that acknowledge their new belief (Mezirow, 2017).

These opportunities are essential for adult learners because for them to transition from their worldviews, adult teachers have to deliberately challenge students' existing worldviews to create a disorientation dilemma.

Wanjohi, a Kenyan researcher outlines four effective methods of teaching adults as follows:

- 1) Lectures and assignments- these are lectures which encourage adult learners to participate.
- 2) Demonstrations- Demonstrations are good in providing mental pictures. Teachers could use experiments to demonstrate ideas.
- 3) Group work- Group work increases social integration and encourages collaborative learning. It is argued that social integration has significant positive effect on retention.
- 4) Dialogue- Dialogue is a two way approach through which adult learners are able to interpret and incorporate facts into their own experiences Wanjohi (n.d).

The participants gave a suggestion for an alternative curriculum and a different form of assessing high school adult learners. While this is a noble idea, it is a policy issue that has to be decided by the Kenyan government. The Kenyan government has been involved in providing quality educational and training policies since 1963 (Ochieng, 2013). This study is not dealing with policy issues so the matter is laid to rest until the time when a study on educational policy for adult learners could be undertaken.

Although the instructors were cognizant of the fact that, adult learners are different from young children, most of the times the treatment of the students by the instructors did not reflect that knowledge. The instructors may not be aware that adults are self-directing and therefore they seek their own independence.

9. Conclusion

The curriculum puts the adult education instructors in a difficult situation, because it was not designed for adult learners but for regular high school students. Nevertheless,

the adult education instructors have to adapt the syndicated curriculum and make it work for their adult learners. Despite the hardships Baraka Adult Learning Center goes through, there are stories of students who have gone through the program and completed successfully. Some of the former students have been able to go to college and are pursuing their careers after completing high school successfully. Given that adult education instructors had to adapt a curriculum which was designed for regular high school students, it was evident that an alternative curriculum for adult learners was needed.

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