

# Philosophy Statement Adult Learning and Education

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## Abstract

Adult learning and its evaluation have a long history and have divergent opinions. Adult learners differ from the young children and therefore the pedagogical learning cannot be effective in their learning. The characteristics of adult learners form the basis for the foundation of the principles which govern their teaching and learning process. Unlike the case of children, adults are propelled and intrinsically motivated to learn hence many theorists have tried to explain the manner in which adult learners experience learning and the influences of such learning. It is worth appreciating the fact that the concept of adult learners extends to the society since they are employees, employers, parents and with other societal obligations. The purposes of adult learning are worth evaluating.

**Keywords:** adult learning; societal obligations; children

## Introduction

Adult learning and its evaluation have a long history and have divergent opinions. Adult learners differ from the young children and therefore the pedagogical learning cannot be effective in their learning. The characteristics of adult learners form the basis for the foundation of the principles which govern their teaching and learning process. Unlike the case of children, adults are propelled and intrinsically motivated to learn hence many theorists have tried to explain the manner in which adult learners experience learning and the influences of such learning. It is worth appreciating the fact that the concept of adult learners extends to the society since they are employees, employers, parents and with other societal obligations. The purposes of adult learning are worth evaluating. Specifically, there is need for the analysis of concepts as they are applied in adult learning taking into consideration the characteristics of such adults. This leads to the question of the roles played by adult educators and learners with the influences of the context of learning determining the nature of adult learning. Consequently, the application of adult learning is linked to its purposes and is worth evaluating as a means of assessment of the process and its contribution to the learners, education system and society as a whole.

## Purposes of Adult Education

Jarvis (2004) points out that adult learners are very unique in terms of their characteristics. He points out that they are usually self directing and with the desire to control their learning process. Further, they are intrinsically motivated to learn and the learning is based on the importance it gives to the adult learner particularly in its application in solving daily tasks hence their desire for a problem-centered approach.

This means that the purposes of adult education to the learner are based on the extent to which such learning can help them in their lives (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005). This is mostly linked to job responsibilities or aspirations and other daily task management. Such purposes however differ from one learner to another depending on their learning requirements, objectives, age and other socio economic factors. However, it is worth noting that some adult learners engage in education to achieve their dreams or advance their careers while others engage in education to make their lives better. For example, Londell (2009) asserts that his purpose of learning was linked to getting to understand his job responsibilities. Adult education in the setups of training programs especially at the work place is designed to make employees more knowledgeable thus more effective in their job duties (Wlodkowski, 2008). Due to their desire to be self directed, adult learners use education to become enlightened. For example, adult learners may take up financial literacy classes to manage their finances better, or health training to improve their lives and those of their children.

## Concepts in Adult Education

Adult education is based on various principles of adult learning one of which is that assessment should not be based more on grades but on coaching and guidance to ensure success in the tasks involved (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). This elicits the need for evaluating concepts such as knowledge and value which for pedagogical learning are assessed through evaluation of learning topics and issues such as morality. Children are perceived to be tabula rasa thus the instructor imposes the knowledge and explains it to them. Unfortunately, this is not applicable to adult learners since they are independent and have their own set of opinions, beliefs and value systems (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007).

## Knowledge in Adult Education

Despite the unique characteristics of the adult learners, it is my personal opinion that learning is a continuous life-long process. The fact that one has vast past experience does not limit his/her acquisition of new knowledge. Thus, knowledge based on adult education in my opinion as an adult educator is the overall result of a learning process which enlightens a learner, challenges beliefs and is applicable to help the learners achieve their goals for the learning process (Wlodkowski, 2008). For example, in the training of employees, knowledge is the result of their ability to apply the content learnt in their operations. It may range from acquisitions of skill, new content, a different perspective to content or overall general knowledge acquired from a learning process (Pratt, 2002).

## Moral Education in Adult education

Morality is quite a subjective topic and requires an evaluation of various opinions and the support and evidence factors that justify such an opinion. While Jarvis (2004) points out that adults have their own founded beliefs, opinions and values concerning such topics as morality, the educator has to respect such opinions and allow for the challenging of such beliefs while ensuring that the adult learners do not judge their counterparts or dismiss their beliefs (Merriam et al., 2007). This would require evaluation from different perspectives such as scholarly, philosophical, religious or personal convictions.

## Value in Adult Education

Value is also subjective but in the context of adult learning, it entails the ability of a learning program to fulfill its objectives (Pratt, 2002). This is a challenge in adult education since the needs of the learners and the expectations of the learning process vary from one party to another. Value is based on the issues of quality through benchmarking to ensure that the learning process meets the required expectations. Value from an individual learner's perspective would mean the ability of the learning process to fulfill the learner's requirements and needs (Jarvis, 2004).

## Role Analysis

### Roles of adult educators

Adult educators are crucial in the adult learning process. While the adult learners are self-directed, they also require coaching especially with issues of age and other factors which limit their learning process (Knowles et al., 2005). Educators thus act as guides to the learners. They set up the instruction plans for learning and objectives and goals of the learning based on the needs assessment of the learners. They also oversee the running of the learning process and act as evaluators at the end of the learning period. They also act as communicators by providing feedback as is needed by the learners especially in evaluation (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

### Roles of adult learners

Adult learners are self-directed and control their learning (Jarvis, 2004). In the learning process, they play the role of learning and take initiatives for their own learning that range from research to doing assignments and other requirements expected of them by the educators and the education system. They take part in the learning process since they are self-directed. With the vast knowledge they are endorsed with, they act as resources in the learning process for the educator to use (Pratt, 2002). Further, they act as negotiators especially in the development of the instruction plan through communication on what they would like included and the learning activities expected.

## Influences of Context on Adult Education

The context of adult learning influences the level of learning, programs in place, objectives of learning and the outcome (Pratt, 2002). The context ranges from socio-economic, political, education, cultural,

and technological factors among others. The socio-economic factors are very crucial in adult education. This is because of the varied responsibilities of the adult learners such as their financial obligations. This determines the level of income that the adult learner is able to generate to join school. Political influences are also represented by such issues as the financing of the education process. In some countries, for example, the state plays a key role in the financing of adult education which to an extent acts as an incentive for the learners. Educational context ranges from such issues as the course requirements, duration, and other prerequisite knowledge among others (Jarvis, 2004). For example, enrolling for a master's degree for an adult learner would require a bachelor's degree thus limiting such learning to that category of adult learners.

Culture influences adults in terms of opinions, beliefs, values, and attitudes as well as expectations (Knowles et al., 2005). This encompasses gender and age among other factors which influence the enrollment and the learning needs. Additionally, cultural context also entails the level of education culturally accepted and past history. Technology plays an important role in adult learning. It not only forms the context of adult learning but also limits its use to literacy in such technology use. Technology has influenced educational programs through such learning as distance learning and e-learning which form different contexts for adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007).

## Application of Adult Education to Practice

The application of adult education depends on the principles of adult learning. In adult training, adult learners in the business-related fields desire to have applications in their own situations at their workplaces. For example, in teaching the influences of the financial crisis and the strategies for countering such crises, the learners prefer discussion based on their fields of work and career. The adult learners also desire to engage in learning that they perceive important, and which can help them in their daily lives. In the educational training field, adult learners enroll for the financial literacy courses which include aspects of financial management, accounting as well as budgeting from all fields with the desire to manage their finances better. Further, adult learning is based on the purposes and objectives of the learning (Pratt, 2002). In the context of offering training programs for employees, the instructions set are based on what is expected of them from the program. However, evaluation is limited and applied to the individual organization for which the training is entailed (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

## Conclusion

Adult education is a broad field that elicits the interests of psychologists, employers, government, and policy makers. This paper has evaluated the purposes, concepts, roles of educators and learners, influences of context and its application to practice. The discussion is based on the characteristics of adult learners as well as the principles of adult learning.

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