FACTORS AFFECTING ATTRITION IN THE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME: AN EXPLORATION OF TINTO'S MODEL AND ITS APPLICATIONS IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examines the concepts and theory of attrition from empirical studies and aligned its causes to trends in learners attrition in adult education programmes in Nigeria. Using Tinto's model the paper highlighted on the strategies to be adopted by adult education facilitators to reduce the incidence of attrition in Nigeria's Adult and Non-formal education sector.

Key Words: Attrition, Adult Education and Tinto's Model.

Introduction

Education for All (EPA) is a global concern which holds that education is a basic human right. Its history could be said to date back to 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the April 2000 EFA Forum in Dakar, the EFA target year was moved from 2000 to 2015, with the goals listed among others:

> "Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes; and achieving a 50% improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education". (Astin,1999)

However, retention in Adult Education programs has become a serious priority at a time when the need for adult literacy may be greater than at any other in our history. The attrition of learners in adult education programmes is of a significant concern to policy makers and other stakeholders in Adult Education in Nigeria. The trends in learners' dropouts and attrition continue unabated and pose a serious challenge to the attainment of EFA and MDG goals in education. Understanding the patterns and dynamics of attrition is the first step in developing retention programs. The upsurge in the rate of illiteracy calls for dynamic strategies of promoting learner enrolment and retention in adult education programmes (Tinto, 1975). In the light of this, the paper examines the concept of attrition, the theoretical frame and

the factors that contribute to learners' attrition in adult and non-formal education programmes.

The Concept of Attrition

Grissmer and Kirby (1987) argue that there is "in a single appropriate definition of teachers' attrition. Indeed, one cannot define learners/teacher attrition until one defines the policy or research context in which a particular definition will be used". Different studies use different terms for the action of learner/teacher/facilitator attrition. Terms such as leaving, alienation, transferring, burnout, shortage, turnover, dropout and others are widely used in the literature in this regard. Attrition takes place when a learner "drops" from the class role for a course or the learner leaves a course of study (Martinze, 2003).

Tinto (1975) is credited with developing one of the first models for studying learner attrition and persistence in higher education. Based on his Learner Integration Model, he defined learner attrition as

"a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems…continually modify his goals and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout" (95).

Tinto's definition demonstrates how adult learner attrition can involve many interrelated factors. In the context of this presentation, attrition is considered to include all adult learners who leave the learning center and do not continue attending, whether for short or long periods of time, whatever the reason behind it. Some scholars consider attrition to be the number one problem in adult basic education (ABE) programs. The highest attrition typically occurs within the first three to five weeks of enrollment (Gartner, 2005:3).

The Theoretical Framework of Tinto's Model

In 1975, Tinto noted that inadequate attention had been given to the development of theoretical models that sought to explain rather than describe attrition Tinto (1975) presented a model explaining behaviors leading to attrition. In 1982, Tinto again noted that, despite the research over the last decade, more inquiry was needed to move into the realm of grand theory. Tinto (1975) examined how pre-entry attributes, educational goals, institutional experiences, social integration and academic integration affected learner's decisions to stay or leave the institution. This theoretical model has been instrumental in attempting to explain what behaviors lead up to learner's decisions to leave school. This theory, however, was only a beginning and other research was needed to better understand attrition.

In 1982, Tinto discussed the limits of the theory in learner's attrition. Theoretical models only explain a portion of the wide

range of behaviors that influence learner departure from an academic institution. When discussing his own model, Tinto (1982: 688) stated that "what we took to be self-evident in its development has apparently proven not to be". The model explained attributes within the institution but did not take into account the impact of the forces outside the institution, such as financial pressures or the influences of external peer groups.

Building on Tinto's model, Bean (1985) developed a conceptual model of learner's dropout, asserting that exogenous or external variables had an impact on endogenous or internal variables leading to a learner's decision to stay in school. The ten exogenous variables were subdivided into three categories of the academic, the social-psychological and the environmental. The academic category included pre-matriculation, academic performance and academic integration. The social-psychological category includes goals, the usefulness of education, alienation, faculty (teacher) contact and social life. The last category of environmental variables consists of finances, the opportunity to transfer and outside friends. The three endogenous variables were college/school grades, institutional fit and institutional commitment.

This paper is studied by Tinto's model. This theory is topical to the present day Nigerian situation where a number of students drop out of school system yearly. Authorities and stakeholders need to study and improve the situations that are responsible for the attrition. The theory, however, offers the opportunity to those that do not attend conventional schools at their tender age. It also tries to ensure that everybody is properly educated irrespective of their tribe, race and religion. In Nigeria, a number of agencies explain some of the reasons that prompted a learner to leave or stay in the school. The model informs authorities and their stakeholders to get rid of any factor that would cause a learner to drop out of school. Learner drop-out is a serious defamation of MGD's goals in education.

Who is an adult learner?

An adult learner is a person who enrolls in adult education programmes regardless of age. The intentions of adults to learn have been identified by Knowles (1997) as follows:

i. **The need to know:** Adults need to know why they need to learn something before understanding to learn it.

ii. **The learner's self-**concept: Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction.

iii. **The role of the learner's experience:** Adults come into educational activity with both greater volume and a different quality of experience from youth. These

experiences lead to diverse audiences in any adult group setting.

iv. **Readiness to learn:** Adult learners become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real life situations.

v. **Orientation to learning:** Adult learners are life-centered in their orientation to learning. They are motivated to devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them to perform tasks or deal with problems that they are confronted with in their life situations.

vi. **Motivation:** While adults are responsive to some external motivations (better jobs, promotions and higher salaries), the most potential motivations are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life). Motivation may be blocked by an adult's negative self-concept as a learner, time constraints and programs that violate principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1997).

The Application of Tinto's to Students Integration Models

The publication of Vincent Tinto's (1975) landmark student integration model demarks the start of the current, national dialogue on undergraduate retention. The model theorizes that students who socially integrate into the campus community increase their commitment to the institution and are more likely to graduate (Tinto, 1975). While Tinto's model has been supported, attacked and revised over the last 30 years, it has significantly influenced how researchers and practitioners view undergraduate retention and graduation (Swail, 2004). Tinto's seminal theory created a base from which thousands of studies have proliferated in the ensuing years, making undergraduate retention one of the most widely studied areas of higher education today (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Tinto, 2007).

Tinto's student integration model has changed over the course of the 35 years from when it was originally introduced. Most notably, its more recent versions have included motivational variables, including goal commitment. Over the last decade, motivational theories from multiple fields of study, including educational psychology and social psychology, have been applied to practice, theoretical developments and the study of undergraduate retention. In particular, the attribution theory of motivation has been notable in practice and in the retention literature. Additionally, the expectancy theory, the goal setting theory, self-efficacy beliefs, academic self-concept, motivational orientations and optimism have been used to gain understanding into college student persistence and retention.

The Application of Tinto's Learning Model to Adult Education Programme in Nigeria

Tinto's learning model emphasizes persistence or dropout from the learning environment. It is actually be applicable to adult

education programmes as the programme aims to remedy educational dropping out and encourage learners to endure all educational hardships through its beautiful characteristics, such as:

1. Flexibility
2. Cost effectiveness
3. Andragogical procedure
4. Time
5. Learning materials
6. Use of native language.

Despite these, there are even encouragement slogans that are used to motivate learners to endure and persist all educational challenges, such as "age is not a barrier to learning".

Moreover, when adults happened to dropout from the learning environment, adult education programmes had prepared some certain educational programmes that can help them to come back into the learning environment, such as:

1. Continuing education programme
2. Remedial education programme
3. Vocational education programme
4. Pivotal education programme.

These programmes can actually help the learners to either continue from where he/she stops, remedy his/her educational deficiency or appropriate aims to be given on intensive training for appropriate placement. When the learner is not opportuned to be back to the learning environment, he can be provided with skill acquisition programmes, so as to be socio-economically independent and productive.

Finally, the model could be applied to adult learning for a better understanding of the pre-entry behaviors of adult learners and how this influences their ability to learn and cope with the challenges of the learning environment. It will also help the planners of adult education programmes to take into the organized level of social engagement/commitment of adult learners in the design of an adult educational programme for them.

Empirical Studies on the Factors Affecting Learners' Attrition

Research has shown that attrition cannot and should not be attributed to one factor, as the reasons for withdrawal are complex and interrelated (Bernard & Amundsen 1989, Morgan & Tam, 1999). Barriers to learning and participation can be classified under three headings, such as the situational, institutional and the dispositional (Cross, 1981). Situational barriers include poor learning environment, lack of time due to work or home responsibilities and geographic location. Institutional barriers include cost, problems with institutional procedures, course scheduling, course availability and tutorial assistance; while dispositional barriers include lack of a clear

goal, the stress of multiple roles, time management, learning style differences and psychological, social and economic factors.

According to King, Bliar, Bild, Dishman, Dubbert & Marcus (1992), factors affecting adult learners' attrition can be divided into three categories: the environmental, the pragmatic and personal. Person-based factors include demographics and individual perception and beliefs about learning and the learning situation. Environmental factors include both the physical and social environment, such as social support from adult education facilitators and the learning environment. Program factors encompass program design, recruitment processes and inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Tinto's model described attrition in terms of a cost versus benefit analysis and included factors that considered a learner's family background, various individual characteristics, past educational experiences and goal commitment levels. Astin (1999) considered adult learner's levels of involvement and the effect involvement had on their retention. Participation in extracurricular activities, job status and several other factors were analyzed to determine which factors could effectively be used by adult education administrators to predict learner retention.

Oztok & Brett (2011) stressed that dropout is a phenomenon caused by learner's characteristics (educational background, personality, motivation, aptitude and so on) and life circumstances (occupation, relationship with family and peer group, health and so on).

Strategies to reduce the rate of Attrition in Adult Education Programmes

Minimizing the rate of attrition in adult education programmes is a key to the attainment of our set goals and objectives in wiping out illiteracy in Nigeria. Studies provided two major strategies that may be used to decrease attrition in adult education programmes. These strategies include learners centered approaches, learner integration and engagement (Dodge, 2009, Giwid, 2004).

a.   the Learner-Centered Approach:- A learner-centered approach starts from the belief that the learner is at the centre of the learning process and not the syllabus and, as such, they are self-directed equals in the learning process along with tutors, organizers and funders. It is holistic in that it attends to the whole person and values their life's experiences as valuable prior learning.

As a result of this definition, it is noticeable that:

i.   The learning atmosphere is welcoming, encouraging, engaging and supportive. The learning is about meeting needs and interests, it is flexible and responsive and based on an assumption that the learner knows best

ii.   There is a real partnership between tutor and learners in designing and delivering the courses

iii.   The tutor, the organizers and funders are open and caring and engage learners. Learners are listened to have an input into content and process and exercise choice

iv.   A learner-centered approach starts where the learners are at and supports them to negotiate content and makes use of self-evaluation (Marra, Camplese & Litzinger 1999).

In adopting a learner-centered approach, a tutor needs to be aware that this is not just about paying attention to the individual learner. The tutor must pay attention to the individual learner, the group and the task or of the content of the course or session (McCombs & Whistler, 1997).

Diaz & Bontenbal (2001) present the differences between the traditional teacher-centered, instructive approach and the learner-centered, constructivist approach. The learner-centered approach "demands more active forms of classroom instruction that engage the learner in the process of learning and that rely on learner input for shaping instructional objectives".

In using the learner-centered approach, facilitators should open lines of communication with learners as early as possible (Minich, 1996). They need to get to know their learners and assess each learner's pre-existing knowledge and cultural perspectives, among others (Anderson, 2004). Learners need the opportunity to get to know each other and feel comfortable before learning can take place (Rovai, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Some tools used to accomplish these tasks are "icebreakers", such as introductions (Anderson, 2004) and informal chat sessions (Carnevale, 2000). Once learners are comfortable, the next step is initiating the learning process.

b. Learner integration and engagement: Adult education facilitators should engage learners early and often, using different learning strategies customized to the class content and the learner's pre-existing knowledge. The goal of effective facilitation is to develop relationships with the learners, such that they feel comfortable in the learning environment. Adult education facilitators should facilitate learner-learner interaction and collaboration, so that they will learn from one another and expand their knowledge base together (Brien, 2002, Yuksefturk & Inan 2006).

Conclusion

Adult education is a key to the attainment of Education For All and MDG goals in Nigeria. Adult Education is a key index of national development. It improves productivity and the empowerment of the citizenry of all ages. However, the rate of attrition and drop out in the system negates its commitments to achieving these noble goals. Therefore, adult education policy-makers and implementers need to pay more attention to addressing the issue of learner attrition in adult education programmes. Finally, adult literacy facilitators should be trained

on the principles and practice of learner centered facilitations. This will go a long way in developing and sustaining adult education programme participation, motivation and interest in attending literacy classes.

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