

## CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS, TEACHING METHOD AND CONTENT IN ADULT LITERACY: PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT LEARNERS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The present study was designed to evaluate the perceptions of adult female learners about teachers, content and method of teaching of adult literacy programmes. The design of the study was qualitative and interview protocols along with focus group discussions were applied as research tools. The sample of the study consisted of 94 respondents including 46 adult female neo-literates, 24 literacy teachers 14 supervisors and 10 community workers selected through random and criterion sampling techniques. The data were analyzed by constant comparison method. The major findings were; teacher should treat adult learners respectfully; content of adult literacy should be developed according to the needs and aspirations of learners and teachers should make the teaching learning process interesting. It was suggested that teachers may be trained in andragogical perspectives and content of literacy programmes may be designed after careful and systematic situation analysis of adults' needs. Present study was conducted to explore psychological considerations which one should keep in mind while implementing adult literacy programmes in Pakistan. Generally the major inputs in adult literacy programmes are; the trained adult literacy teachers and content of basic literacy skills. In order to comprehend the nature of proper inputs for adult literacy programmes it seems necessary to highlight some characteristics of adult learners. Adult learners expect a learning environment e.g., (where they are respected, their opinions are valued; their interests are kept in mind etc.). Scholars and researchers suggest that adults are a group of learners who possess individual, group or situational characteristics that serve to differentiate them from children.*

**Keywords:** Teachers Training, Adult Literacy, Situationl Characteristics.

**Characteristics of Adult Learner:** [1]. cited Brookfield (1986), Rogers (2002) and Cross (1981) who outlined the following characteristics of adult learners: (1) by legal definition or arguing as per their chronological age, adult learners prove themselves as adults; (2) adult learners want to engage in a purposeful exploration of a field of knowledge or a set of skills; (3) adult learners have expectations about accommodating and constructive learning process where their concerns are always taken seriously; (4) they have different and common physiological, social, cultural and psychological characteristics; (5) they quest for knowledge, skills, and experiences and self motivated; (6) they share host of experiences, skills, knowledge and values that influence how new ideas are received; how new skills are acquired and how the experiences of others are interpreted?; (7) prior learning experiences of adults comprise valuable curricular resources, and; (8) transactions among adult learners of familiar groups such as adult female learners will be characterized by a respect for individual member that will be manifested in the teaching process.

According to [2] adult learner is independent and has a need to understand how learning something new will

benefit him, how it fits into his existing knowledge, and reinforces his autonomy to learn in a way that works for him. Similarly [3] stated that the unique contributions of a mature learner include considerable motivation, the ability to take charge of their own lives and experience and cognitive maturity. In adult literacy programmes, adult learners need to be treated with positive and accommodating attitude which is only possible when organizers of the literacy programmes would keep in mind some of the above stated basic psychological considerations of adult learners.

**Literature Review:** The researcher consulted the literature relevant to the psychological consideration in respect of teachers' role, method of teaching and the content of adult literacy programs. [4] said the following premises provide a foundation upon which to establish a discourse of adult educational psychology. The character and quality of learning in adulthood contribute to development across the life span and relationship between teachers and adult learners is necessary. The teachers' ability to motivate the students, the students' sense of attraction to the teacher and mutual trust are the aspects that play their role in relationship.

[5] reported that successful programs of literacy not only require the well design materials for learning but competent teachers also. If teachers regularly teach learners to some extent, about 50% of achievement can be expected. According to [6]., in Nepal, the drop-out rate was low where adult literacy teachers treated the participants respectfully and, where the teachers of adult literacy treated their learners harshly, the drop-out rate was high. The positive behavior of adult literacy teachers can be assured by proper selection procedure of teachers' recruitment, training in positive behavior and monitoring of their practices in class rooms. [7] reported that theories of adult learning focused on active involvement of learners in the process. [8] reported that storage of information for a shorter and longer time decrease at later stage due to little practice, the amount of attentional resources available diminishes with age, making people less able to carry out many tasks at the same time. There attentional resources could affect literacy acquisition in several ways: readers may be unable to process all the cues of a script simultaneously and thereby incur the high error rate and reading comprehension may be affected. In successful literacy programmes peer tutoring and group work method of teaching enhance better acquisition of reading and writing skills. [9] highlights some of the facts that make the literacy programs more effective. These includes when programmes recognize and build on the skills, knowledge and life experiences that learners possess; when programs respond to the needs and aspirations of the target learners; when the learners are encouraged and enabled to play their active role in their learning process; when the programmes are designed in language that can be spoken by the learners easily; and when the adult literacy trainers are well trained, supported and familiar with the context of the learners. [10] argues that participatory pedagogy can yield better results. The adult learners should be treated as adults, with self respect and authority to choose alternatives. The main aim of adult basic education programmes is to build the learner's self confidence and sense of personal efficacy. The participatory pedagogy is the only solution for it with better training of the instructors.

[11] if the content of the literacy skills is according to the needs and aspirations of adult learner, they attended the classes regularly and learn the skills very easily. [12] reported that adult demand income generating skills and basic literacy skills. If income generating skills are provided along with basic skills, learners take keen interest in learning. Poverty alleviation activities should be included in adult literacy programs. He further explained that relevant material for learning decrease the dropout rate in adult literacy programs. In Senegal women literacy program, the learning material was produced in local languages and it covered many areas like social, economic, religious, health, and moral development. For the purpose of creating a learning environment, five quarterly newspapers, one in each region was produced and circulated. Further for consolidating and improving already acquired literacy skills, books, posters and other relevant material was provided. The dropout rate was only 15% and reasons behind were the active involvement of participant and local community in establishing and defining the courses of the study. [13] reported that John Hasting a British citizen developed material in Nijira Shikhi for adult literacy program which was completely in line with the needs and aspirations of the target group. All the adult learners of this programme like the topics to learn because these have their utility in everyday life.

**Objective of the study:** The study was conducted to evaluate the perceptions of adult female learners about characteristics of good literacy teachers, good method of teaching and nature of good content in adult literacy program launched by Department of Literacy Punjab in the hilly rural areas of district Rawalpindi.

**Research Questions:**The following research questions were constructed to get satisfactory answers;

1. To what extent adult literacy teachers follow the psychology of adults in teaching process?
2. To what extent method of teaching is being used according to the orientation of adults to learn?
3. To what extent content of adult literacy programmes fulfils the needs and aspirations of adult learners?

**Methodology:**This study was follow up in nature. All adult female neo-literates, adult literacy teachers, literacy supervisors of National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) and active members of rural communities were the population of the study. Sample of the study was taken in two steps. Firstly, 20 adult female neo-literates, 10 adult literacy teachers, 06 literacy supervisors and 04 active members of community were randomly selected from each of two target union councils. Secondly, criterion sampling technique was applied to select 03 adult female neo-literate, 02 literacy teachers, 01 supervisor and 01 active member of society for focus group discussion in each of the two target union councils. The participants had not to be acquainted with one another but possessed experiences of literacy programmes of same organization (NCHD) at the same time.

Items of interview schedules and themes of Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were framed on three main variables of the study namely teachers' role, content of adult literacy programs and methods of teaching. In interview schedule and (FGDs) teacher's role was evaluated by investigating her personal and professional traits as teacher like punctuality, understanding of her students, respectful treatment or behavior towards learners, motivating and encouraging adult learners in their study, building good rapport with learners, paying individual attention to learners, help in revision of daily lesson, classroom management, teaching techniques and ensuring classroom participation. Content of adult literacy programs was evaluated by investigating about need based content; easy to learn, following principles of learning, based on learners' experiences, having activities and variety of topics to study. Both of the organizations had adopted different methods of teaching so the researcher evaluated method of teaching by raising question about interesting method of teaching, easy to learn how to read and write, participatory in nature, use of A.V.Aids and exercises, group discussions, role playing and activities oriented.

**Data Collection:**Interview from teachers and supervisors was conducted separately by the researcher himself while adult female neo-literates were interviewed with the help of a female research assistant provided by heads of local NGOs. Adult female neo-literates were interviewed applying group interview technique. In a group, 02 to 03 neo-literates were included due to time constraints and cost effectiveness. Interviews from adult neo-literates were properly recorded on tape by research assistant and on paper by the researcher himself. FGDs were conducted in each of the target union councils. The cooperation of the heads of the organizations at local level facilitated to include those who were not acquainted with one another. In FGDs three main areas of the study were discussed in detail. After introduction, firstly, researcher invited the supervisors to share their views on each theme of the study followed by adult literacy teachers and then female neo-literates. Total two FGDs were conducted and each of the FGD was lasted for 80 to 100 minutes. Before leaving the place of interviews and FGDs, researcher discussed the statements with participants in order to validate the data.

**Data Analysis:**Data were analyzed through constant comparison technique. In the first step, transcripts recording of tape were compared and some changes were made on transcripts. Then transcripts of interviews were consulted in order to separate statements which were helpful for answering the research questions. Irrelevant statements were eliminated from analysis. In order to get valid data analysis, a chart was designed and relevant statements were presented. The statements were compared and contrasted in order to generate meaning for better understanding. The answers of the participants were analyzed firstly by each answer of the participant and then each answer of the question across all of the respondents. The researcher moved back and forth to the answers of the participants. The chart was divided into three parts on the basis of research questions and coding and categorizing took place. Each part of the chart was representing different concept and theme. The statements were then clustered by themes. In the final step, the information on the basis of interpretations of each part and cluster were presented. As a result of this activity, major findings of the study emerged which are presented below.

**Results:**This study revealed that adult literacy teachers did not know how to deal (treat/ behave) with adult learners in class. Teachers did not follow the psyche of adult learners to teach them in the class. Content of literacy programmes was not according to the needs and aspirations of the adult female learners. Teachers could not make the learning process interesting for learners in class. These findings provided fundamental support to answer the questions which guided the study.

### **1. To what extent adult literacy teachers follow the psychology of adults in teaching process?**

It was found that most of adult literacy teachers did not treat the adult learners respectfully; most of the respondents reported that adult literacy teachers had harsh behavior with adult learners in the class. Tasleen Begum, one of an adult learner said, "In our adult literacy class Sadia and Riffat were enrolled from our neighboring village, they were more regular than some of us. One day our teacher (Rabeeda) said to Sadia, why you did not do writing practice at home harshly, Sadia stood up and left the class. Due to Sadia, her friend Riffat also left the class and they never entered the class again"

Adult learners were of the view that the teachers perceived themselves more superior than us. The supervisors also supported the statements made by the adult learners. Teachers did not motivate and encourage the adult learners to study well. It was also noted that most of adult literacy teachers did not pay individual attention to the learners. According to majority of adult learners, "Teachers usually supported their friends or relatives in the class, they sat and gossiped with them and told them everything related to reading, writing and numeracy skills. They did not bother to answer many of our questions related to study and blamed us as slow learners".

The study also revealed that teachers did not check the homework of the learners properly. Most of them did not come in the center regularly. They replaced themselves with their sisters or friends in the centers. Fake registration of learners was found as a common practice. Most of them did not spend specified time in the centers while few of them even spent more time in the center than specified for this activity. Views of teachers were contradictory to adult female learners, they said the adult learners did not attend the literacy classes regularly and they were not serious learners; and the venues of the literacy classes were not spacious for all the learners to sit comfortably. Teachers were not able to move around and to give proper individual attention to all the learners. It can easily be concluded that adult literacy teachers were not trained properly and they did not have knowledge and skills to teach adult learners. Congested venues of literacy classes were one of the barriers to involve adult learners actively through individual attention.

### **2.To what extent content of adult literacy programmes fulfils the needs and aspirations of adult learners?**

Majority of adult learners were of the view that the specified content of the adult literacy was not according to their needs and aspirations and they did not take interest to learn how to read and write?

A very young learner Amna said, I left my school when I was in class 2 and then I could not avail the chance of getting education despite of my desire. When literacy programme was announced I decided to learn what I had forgotten. In the class, the learners of old age were disturbing us asking questions time and again from our class teacher. I learnt how to read and write and I was very happy. I wanted to learn more"

Most of adult female learners told that they did not use their learnt basic literacy skills in life. It guaranteed that the content of the literacy had no utility in everyday life to the most of the learners. This study also identified three types of adult female learners; the learners in the age group 16 -24 years showed their interest in learning reading, writing and numeracy skills; the learners of age group 25-32 years showed their interest to learn income generating skills along with reading, writing and numeracy skills; and the learners more than 32 years of age were interested to learn about basics of religion and some income generating skills. Almost all of the learners wanted income generating skills to learn that was missing component in the existing content of the adult literacy programs.

It can therefore be concluded that content of adult literacy programmes was not according to the needs and aspiration of adult learners. Mostly adult learners wanted to learn income generating skills which was not part of these adult literacy programmes. Income generating skills component was announced by DLNEP but it was not implemented. Psychologically the content was not interested for learners; they did not take interest to learn it.

### **3.To what extent method of teaching is being used according to the orientation of adults to learn?**

Phonic teaching method used by NCHD was not found interesting by the learners. The learners did not play active role in learning. Teachers could not involve the learners in the learning process. Frida an adult learner said, "In our class, teacher taught few words in phonic methodology while she taught us remaining words in alphabetic methods. Use of both of the methods confused us"Most of the teachers of NCHD were using mixed method to teach the content of literacy and this technique made the learners confused.

Alphabetical method of teaching was not used properly by adult literacy teachers of DLNEP. The exercises of separating and combining of the words were not properly handled in literacy programs of DLNEP. The uninteresting teaching methods, irregularity of teachers, rude behaviors of teachers, congested space of literacy centers, and uninteresting content of the literacy were found unsuitable according to the psychology of adult learners. Alphabetical method of teaching was not used properly by adult literacy teachers of DLNEP. The exercises of separating and combining of the words were not properly handled in literacy programs of DLNEP. The uninteresting teaching methods, irregularity of teachers, rude behaviors of teachers, congested space of literacy centers, and uninteresting content of the literacy were found unsuitable according to the psychology of adult learners. Problem solving, discussion method and peer tutoring techniques were not being used by adult literacy teachers.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:**As the present study reveals that the adult learners wanted to be treated respectfully. They wanted that their teachers should motivate and encourage them. According to them teachers must know how to help adult learners, how to build good rapport with adult learners. They also wanted that their teachers must know how to make the learning process interesting, how to involve adult learners in the class and how to engage adults in activities. Adult learners wanted to learn something which help them to earn more. In mere literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy, they did not take interest. In any educational activity, psychology of the target learners has its own place and importance. Being diverse group, adult literacy planners, policy makers, practitioners and teachers must know and follow psychology of adults for enjoying more success. Without psychological foundations, our literacy programs would not be proved fruitful. Adult literacy teachers may be trained in andragogy. They may be trained how to treat and work with adult learners. This study identified three types of adult learners, their needs and aspirations are different from one another. It is a fact that in existing resources, it is challenging task to arrange literacy programs according to all the needs and aspirations of adult learners but effort can be made to design the content of literacy interesting for them to some extent. In the present situation there is a huge gap between theory of adult learning and its practical usage. It can be lessened by adopting proper approach; it will definitely increase the unit cost of learner but on the other hand it will also minimize the loss of wastage of educational and human resources.

**Significant Contribution of the Study:**The findings of present study are helpful for planners, policy makers, curriculum developers, managers and teachers to execute the literacy programmes according to the psychology of adult learners not only in Pakistan but to literacy personnel of the most of the developing countries also. They should trained adult literacy teachers in andragogy rather than pedagogy, the content of adult literacy programmes must have economic aspect to attract adult illiterate for learning and participatory approaches should be applied in teaching process.

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