



## THE APPLICATION OF ADULT LEARNING THEORY (ANDRAGOGY) BY ADULT EDUCATORS AND ADULT LEARNERS IN THE CONTEXT OF ESWATINI

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### ABSTRACT

Adult learning has been understood differently by different people as it has evolved over the years. The purpose of this paper is to articulate the practical use of adult learning theory (Andragogy) by both adult educators and adult learners in a learning environment of Eswatini. A descriptive research design using a qualitative inquiry was employed by the researcher through an interpretive research paradigm. Purposive and convenience sampling were used to draw seven participants of the study. Unstructured interview guide was used to collect data that was thematically analysed. The findings indicated that the instructional methods used by adult educators promoted learner dependency as opposed to self-directed learning. It was found that what was delivered was basically subject-centred, with little aspect of integrating adult learners' real-life contexts. Accordingly, it was concluded that adult learners lack the self-directedness as they do not push themselves to study hard, have a tendency of late submission of work and come to learning environment unprepared. While it was noted that context shaped adult learning, it was recommended that instructional methods be improved to give adult learners autonomy, and to empower them to be assertive. Again both adult educators and learners are recommended to use andragogy in all learning environments.

**Keywords:** Adult learning, adult education, andragogy, self-directed learning

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## INTRODUCTION

Eswatini (previously known as Swaziland) is a small, landlocked country, which gained political independence from the British in 1968, which has maintained relative peace and stability over the past years. It is a homogenous society, with 98% of the population being Emaswati, with a small heterogeneous population of non-Emaswati residents. The country has been described as a peaceful country with natural biodiversity and a rich traditional heritage. In many respects Eswatini is a modern country with extensive links to the Southern African region and internationally, with a developing infrastructure, a young literate population with a potential to acquire technical and vocational skills to make the country a haven for tourism development. There are challenges posed by poverty, income distribution patterns, HIV/AIDS and gender imbalances. These challenges can be addressed through adult education that requires people who learn throughout their entire lives to change their situation and for further development. Adult education is a multifaceted complex process, which encompasses many subjects and interest areas. It includes continuing education efforts for personal and professional growth, and enrichment activities for the highly educated. Adult education is designed for personal skill development, for enhanced career opportunities, or for enjoyment. It can involve a short duration of time or several years of effort; and it serves diverse of students and includes a varied population of adult teachers. Again, The Ministry of Education and Training (2018) seek for the learner centred approach in teaching and learning as a renewed focus on effective learning.

Therefore, that tallies well with adult education and the manner in which education is delivered to its learners. As such, to facilitate learning with adult learners requires a thorough understanding of how the former learn using andragogy in any learning environment. According to Knowles (1984) andragogy is the art and science of helping adults to learn. However, Kapur referred to andragogy as 'education of equals' (facilitator and learner) as opposed to pedagogy that is a theory of teaching children (2015, p. 52). Hence, the application of andragogy is important to both adult learners and adult educators alike. Adult learners have their own experiences, their own world view and their personal autonomy, which serves as a guide to what they actually want to learn, thus achieving the improvement of home-grown solutions to African educational encounters (Sefotho, 2018).

Likewise, those who teach and facilitate learning with adult learners need to also gain a better understanding of adult learners and find ways on how to motivate them to best learn in any learning environment. This means that it is very important for adult educators to understand the characteristics of adult learners and develop the best instructional methods for them. Additionally, it is significant to use appropriate measures to evaluate how much andragogy and its principles and design elements have applied to adult learning practice. Moreover, adult learners' satisfaction can increase when learning processes and environments meet their expectations. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to assess the validity of andragogy and the extent to which adult learners manifest it from adult educators in the context of Eswatini. The participants responded to the following research questions:



- 1) To what extent do adult learners demonstrate the application of andragogy in their learning experience?
- 2) To what extent do adult educators apply andragogy in a learning environment?

Literature (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Kapur, 2015) suggested that adult learners do not learn the same way children learn, particularly looking at their characteristics, learning styles, and as learners in different levels of educational systems. Therefore, andragogy, which is an “integrated framework of adult learning” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p.58) presents core principles of adult learning that in turn enable those designing and conducting adult learning to build more effective learning processes for adults. Table 1 below illustrates the difference between teaching children (pedagogy) and teaching adults (andragogy).

**Table 1: Pedagogy and Andragogy Differences**

<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>Andragogy</b>
1. Mandatory Attendance	1. Voluntary Attendance
2. Subject or Teacher-Centred	2. Problem or Learner-Centred
3. Dependent Learners	3. Independent Learners
4. Little or Inexperienced	4. Rich Experience
5. Teacher prescribe content	5. Learner prescribe content
6. Learners grouped by age, level	6. Learners grouped by interest or needs
7. Learning for future	7. Learning for immediate application
8. Learners Subordinate to teacher	8. Learners equal to teacher
9. Rigid, traditional structure	9. Flexible, alternative structure
10. Passive Learners	10. Active Learners

Source: Kapur (2015)

Table 1 illustrate the difference between pedagogy and andragogy, which is a theory for adult learning that emphasises self-directedness of adults and expect them to take responsibility of their decisions. Andragogy and pedagogy helps us to understand the difference between an adult learner and the child learner and how they participate in a learning context. In summary, the table outlines assumptions about learners’ self-concept, readiness to learn, learners’ experiences, their orientation to learn as well as their motivation to learn in any given learning environment.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Andragogy

Andragogy was popularised by Malcolm Knowles as the art and science of helping adults to learn as opposed to how children learn (Knowles, 1984). Knowles suggested the following assumptions about adult learners, which were said to be self-directed learning:



1. As a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature—from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem-centred than subject-centred in learning (Knowles, 1980; pp. 44-45).
5. Adults are mostly driven by internal motivation, rather than external motivators.
6. Adults need to know the reason for learning something (Knowles, 1984).

Additionally, Knowles listed several dimensions to the need to know: (a) the need to know how learning will be conducted, (b) what learning will occur, and (c) why the learning is important (Knowles et al., 1998). This means that there is need for adult educators to supply learners with advance information about the content and style of the learning experience, which prepares learners for participation, and assist in the development for their realistic expectations. Andragogy is relevant to the communalism and Ubuntu philosophy of education in Africa whereby experience played a key role as it laid the foundation for self-determination and education. This is where learners are seen to be responsible for their own learning, gain experience to self-determine (Sefotho, 2018) and becoming self-directed and accountable to their own learning. Adult learners engage in learning for purposes such as to fill an educational gap, personal development, acquire basic literacy and work readiness skills; just to mention a few. Therefore, learning that has the most meaning for adults is that which has personal value, one that establish a trusting, mutually respectful, informal, collaborative, and supportive learning climate. Again it is important for adult educators to implement a collaborative approach that incorporates adult learners' experiences to the planning of their learning, which is a rich resource for any learning and couched for real-life context. Furthermore, since adults direct their lives in family, work and civic arenas, they can also often want to direct their own learning hence they are self-directed and independent in nature. The following section discusses self-directed learning. According to Brookfield (1986) when andragogical principles and design elements are adequately considered, andragogy is able to address learning needs of adults and enhance the practice of adult education by using appropriate instructional methods.

### **Self-directed learning**

Self-directed learning emanated from the first assumption that says adults are independent self-autonomous, self-directed human beings. In fact, most adults are engaged in self-directed learning projects, whereby learning occurs as part of everyday life, is undertaken in a systematic way, yet is not dependent upon an instructor or a classroom (Tough, 1971; Kapur, 2015) as displayed in Table 1. This is where a learner is taking control of her or his own learning out of their own free will. Self-directed learning can be found throughout the contexts of adult life, including the workplace, continuing professional education, health and medical fields, higher education, and in online contexts where research suggests that the more successful online learners are those that are more self-directed (Merriam and Bierema, 2014) especially in outbreaks like COVID-19 that requires for social distancing.



Self-directed learning is seen as self-teaching, or where learners are capable of taking control of teaching themselves in a particular subject. This tallies with what Samaroo (2012) states regarding pedandragogy, which means the learners' self-engagement and independence with learning material, while the facilitator of learning also plays a critical role of supporting the learning process. In this case learners' autonomy refers to taking control and ownership of the goals and purposes of one's own learning. However, it should be noted that a person may be autonomous, but choose to learn in a teacher-directed style. Yet just because an adult engages in self-teaching does not mean that the person is autonomous (Knowles et al., 1998). Therefore it should be understood that learning is a function of the context in which it takes place. Furthermore, the richness of the context, the apparatuses and the people in the context and the particular learning activity itself all come together to structure the learning.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used interpretive paradigm and the descriptive research design with qualitative approach. In this design a detailed accurate picture of the situation (Rakotsoane, 2018) and experiences shared by both adult educators and adult learners were described and explained as they were revealed regarding the research questions. The participants of this study were four (two females and two males) adult learners who are above 18 years and enrolled as part-time learners in the institution that offers education to adults, and one female and two males making a total of three adult educators serving in the same institution. All the participants were drawn from the department that deals with adult learners. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling because of being relevant in the field of adult education that uses andragogy. Moreover, convenience sampling was used to suit both the researcher and the participants' availability. The latter were all individually interviewed using unstructured interview guide containing open questions that allowed for sharing of experiences. Inductive thematic analysis was employed by reading the transcripts for several times in order to come up with common ideas and patterns that occur as major themes. Informed consent, confidentiality and free withdrawal from the study were some of the ethics that were considered when dealing with each individual participant.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study were presented according to the emanating themes from the data, reflecting both adult educators and adult learners' views and opinions regarding the key research questions that were guiding the study.

### **Research question 1: To what extent do adult learners demonstrate the application of andragogy in their learning experience?**

For this research question, two themes emerged from the participants' responses: traditional ways of teaching and learning, and low self-directedness of adult learners, which are presented and discussed accordingly.



### Traditional ways of teaching and learning

Both adult educators and adult learners alluded to predominant traditional ways of teaching as well as learning, which reflects the subject-centred approach of pedagogy, as opposed to learner-centred approach that is noticeable in andragogy. Adult educators stated that:

*We push them to do work; we can't do otherwise because if we don't, some [learners] lag behind... They behave like children and [they] want to be deposited with information [course content] and give it back when they write [tests, class-work or assignments]* female educator.

On another note, the first male educator indicated that:

*I have stopped giving them notes....I post things online... They [adult learners] want to reproduce, they don't think out of the given information ... we fail to do group work to cover the materials [content].*

In both instances, adult educators revealed that they treat adult learners just like formal children who need to be pushed in order for them to do their academic work. Both educators indicated that they prepare content to give to adult learners, which in return the learners write it as it is during their assessment times. This means that adult learners depend on the prepared notes and therefore do not go beyond to search for more information other than the one provided by their educators, thus reflecting passive learning. On the same issue, adult learners felt that andragogy was practiced, even though language discourses were noticed on a contrary. They stated that:

*I think Andragogy is being practiced ... [Language discourse]...I am able to interact with my facilitator and have time to come to a formal setting like classroom to have a class, yet Andragogy says that we have to study in our comfortable places; but I prefer to come to class and have a facilitator....[in front of me]* First Female learner.

Another second female learner said *"In class there are concepts that we learn but cannot link to our experiences but in groups we do."*

The above data from adult learners corroborated the data from adult educators, meaning that, adult learners seemingly depend on facilitators for the prepared content to be learned. Adult learners revealed their state of wanting to depend on facilitators by coming to class other than studying on their own. The findings demonstrated that adult teaching and learning in the context of the Eswatini heavily relies on traditional approaches, which confirms what Bates (2015) suggested. Bates indicated that most universities were not build around industrial times and not for the digital age, meaning that universities are faced with unprecedented changes where lecturers and their diverse students have to cope with the ever changing technology. The findings revealed that what was delivered was basically subject-centred, with little aspect of integrating adult learners' real-life contexts, which contradicts what Kapur (2015) outlined in the differences between pedagogy and andragogy. It can be noted that adult educators rely on the teacher-centred approach instead of using andragogy to guide their teaching and learning (Kapur, 2015; Knowles, 1989). The traditional



teaching focuses on the teacher who transfers information to learners, which is likely to be forgotten. The implications thereof are limited participation by adult learners regarding their sharing of experiences and ideas in a learning environment; and memorizing the content with little thinking or understanding of what was taught. It is disconcerting to realize that adult educators compromise adult learning principles when dealing with adult learners to say the least. The findings illustrated that adult learners depend on facilitators for the content and materials to study, thus, compromising the learner-centred and problem-solving approach but presenting low self-directedness in learning. That in itself promoted little or lack of personal autonomy on the side of adult learners who seem to be dependent than taking responsibility for their learning.

### **Low self-directedness of adult learners**

There is a relationship from the traditional ways of teaching and learning and the low self-directedness that is displayed by adult learners. Here, the data speaks for itself as the second male educator stated that:

*In a test they [adult learners] talk about [adult learning] principles very well but [in reality, they] do not practice them.... They [adult learners] always have an excuse for late submission of assignments; they come to class unprepared and want to be taught ... [usually they do] not have questions because they do not read...*

The educator went on and on repeating the same issues as a way of emphasizing how the adult learners are not displaying an element of being self-directed. This was also confirmed by a female educator who said:

*Self-directedness is a problem as some [adult learners] are pushed hard to do something ... they are unable to push them, they do not submit work on time. They are lazy, and [they] want things [certificates] for free, and they are dependent [on both facilitators and technology].*

Adult educators stated the lack of self-directedness of adult learners to be a concern as they alluded that learners depend on facilitators and on doing cut and paste from internet sources whenever they are given assignments to do.

Pertaining to the same issue, a second male adult learner's views were:

*...but I prefer to come to class and have a facilitator... because when I am alone I can't grasp everything and be able to understand what is expected from me.*

The data from adult learners confirmed assertions by adult educators in that adult learners seem to be dependent on their facilitators. This could be linked to the above theme of traditional ways of teaching and learning whereby adult educators spoon-feed adult learners by depositing content, which is in return given back during assessment times. By so doing adult learners' self-directedness is affected, knowing that they will receive ready-made information on a silver platter. Giving adult learners ready-made information is likely to promote dependence as opposed to independent learners thus refuting what Kapur (2015) posit. The findings illustrated that adult learners depend on facilitators for the content and materials to study, thus, compromising the learner-centred approach. This denies what the MoET (2018) aim regarding the introduction of learner centred approach for effective learning. Instead, adult learners presented low self-



directedness in learning. On the latter aspect, the findings counters what Samaroo (2012) stated regarding self-directedness whose focus is learner self-engagement and independence with own learning material. This is a concern because adult learners can be assisted to become more self-directed by helping them realise their potentials, their different personality types, learning styles and encouraging them to explore and express it (Kapur, 2015).

### **Research question 2: To what extent do adult educators apply andragogy in a learning environment?**

The following themes emerged from the participants' responses: blaming the system, encountering challenges, and supportive learning.

#### **Blaming the system**

The female educator blamed the formal environment within which adult education is part therein. She expressed herself as follows:

*We are constraint by the system [formal] where we operate as our students are mixed with the formal ones [students]. We know we are not supposed to treat them like children but we do, we have no choice...Exam time forces us to follow the system.*

This was partly confirmed by some adult learners who stated that:

*We are taught in class and [we] read the notes that are given to us ... coming to class is important because we interact with our teachers and facilitators ... First female learner*  
*Mixing Andragogy and coming to class [formal] –the combination is fine for me [language discourse]*  
*First male learner.*

The data reveals that the institutional formal environment is blamed to have partly influenced some activities that are formally conducted, such as writing of examinations for assessing adult learners. It is disturbing to note that adult educators act passively by being silent if the examination time affects their way of operating. Therefore adult educators' passiveness is likely to result in the lack of applying andragogy in their teaching and learning environment. Both adult educators and adult learners emphasized that formal teaching in classrooms was a result of operating on a formal environment. It is noteworthy to mention that each educator exercised their individual way of conducting teaching and learning activities. What is binding is the strict way of handling examinations at the end of every semester, where strict measures are adhered to. The data revealed that there is little effort done by adult educators to instil andragogy when dealing with adult learners. It is interesting to note that issues of accountability and performance management (Patrick & Rollins, 2016) were not raised by any of the participants under concern. The question is who should be held accountable for learners' academic performance? Should it be adult learners, adult educators or the institution? The environment facilitates learning; therefore for adults to learn best they usually use their own pace in a conducive context for them to obtain maximum results. On the other hand adult educators need to be compassionate and nurture adult learners to build their self-concept thus improve their self-directedness in a learning environment.



### Encountering challenges

The second female adult learner indicated some challenges they encounter as learners. She expressed her concern as follows:

*[We have] multiple roles, clashing times especially at our level... This is because we come to class during the week.... that clash with [our] work schedules...*

Again the first male added:

*We come here when we are supposed to be at work ... we can't pay for our education if we are not working...*

A second male had this to say:

*The lack of financial support from government is a challenge to us*

The data revealed that adult learners are faced with challenges that require them to make proper decision when prioritizing their roles. Adult learners have external responsibilities and situations that impact their learning process such as work and family commitments to name the two. It is purported that they are motivated to learn by choice as literature indicates (Knowles, 1984, Kapur, 2015). However, maintaining their level of motivation can be tricky, as adult learning comes with its own set of challenges, which are balancing work and family commitments while also maintaining some social life. Moreover, money is a challenge to adult learners who have to pay for their tuition fees, bills, and feeding families. There is no doubt that for adult learners, a strong support network is crucial in a learning environment. Consequently, adult learners outlined the importance of meeting and discussing amongst them as that enhanced their supportive learning.

### Supportive learning

The theme was mentioned by adult learners alone. This is what adult learners were agreeing upon:

*We meet other people in the same class and have study groups, which helps us to understand problems that are offered [in class] ... when [we are] in groups we sit down and unpack [what was taught] then we are able to understand ... in groups we discuss freely amongst ourselves ... in groups we explain concepts to each other well so that we understand them.*

It is interesting to realise that adult learners actually see the need for them to study in groups, which is a powerful means of interacting and learning together by sharing their experiences. The data revealed that there is some autonomy amongst adult learners, which they display when they see the need. Supportive learning is a component of andragogy as adult learners learn from one another to problem solve (Kapur, 2015) their concerns and make connections with what they learn to their real lives. It was interesting to note that adult learners felt the need for supportive learning where they established study groups to learn and assist each other by sharing experiences (Knowles, 1984, 1989) as one important principle of andragogy. Adult learners demonstrated that they can be autonomous by being responsible for their own learning, become self-determined (Sefotho, 2018) and become self-directed and accountable to their own learning. Furthermore, what adult learners did, supported Bates (2015) when showing that learners have the ability to learn independently. This is because collaboration and sharing of knowledge with others boost teamwork, which is desired when using andragogy (Knowles et al, 1989; Bates, 2015; Kapur, 2015) with both adult



educators and adult learners and within learners' study groups. Adult learners require the change of mindset for them to get proper direction pertaining to knowledge management that keeps changing with new research.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that both adult educators and learners heavily relied on traditional one way teacher-centred approach in teaching and learning. It was found that adult educators spoon-fed adult learners with ready-made content. That practice created passive adult learners who are likely to memorize the content with little thinking skills and understanding of what they learn. Adult learners demonstrated low self-directedness as they do not push themselves to study hard, have a tendency of late submission of work and come to learning environment unprepared. All of these demonstrated weak application of andragogy by all participants in a learning environment. It was concluded that adult educators applied little effort to instil andragogy when dealing with adult learners in the teaching and learning environment. Instead they blamed the formal environment within which adult education operates. Furthermore, adult learners seemed to be overwhelmed with challenges which affect their learning process. However, through supportive learning in study groups, they managed to get through and apply some andragogical principles to overcome their learning challenges. While it was noted that context shaped adult learning, it was recommended that:

- 1) Instructional methods be improved to give adult learners autonomy, to empower them to be assertive, and to engage them in active participation;
- 2) Adult educators should infuse andragogy and adult learning principles in the courses that they teach by tapping into learners experiences that serve as a rich resource in learning;
- 3) Adult educators should consciously improve their teaching and learning styles and try to be compassionate and act as mentors for adult learners;
- 4) Both adult educators and adult learners should use more educational media materials and technology in a learning process;
- 5) Adult learners should learn how to be empowered for learner-centred and self-directedness aspects by making their own decisions pertaining to the content.

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