



ENHANCING ADULT LEARNERS' COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Communication is an important process; especially in the lives of humans. In order to make communication more purposeful, there is a need to develop communication skills which will help the sender and the receiver of messages to complete the task before them with minimal level of stress and within the stipulated time frame. Adult learners need communication skills not only for conveying information and idea, but for making progress in their academic pursuit. To this end, the paper focused how adult learners' skills can be enhanced through effective teaching of English Language. In order to accomplish this, the paper discussed the concepts; adult learners, communication skills and English Language under conceptual framework. The discourse also throws light on the common types of communication skills required by adult learners and the relevance of English language to adult learning. Finally and most importantly, the paper highlights and discusses components of English Language in relation to communication skills development. Based on the conclusion of the paper, it was recommended among others that adult learners should minimize the way and manner they communicate in their mother tongue, rather their attention should be focused on how to constantly converse in English language to enhance their communication skills. This is possible when there is an improvement in their pronunciation and phonetic aptitude.

Keywords: Adult learners, Communication skills, English language, Teaching

Introduction

Communication is an old age term, which has been in existence right from the creation of humans. It is a medium through which man and animals pass information to express their feelings, thoughts, concerns and ideas to those concerned within and outside their environment. According to Manu and Chikezie (2020), communication entails sharing of ideas to facilitate understanding among the parties involved.

Going by the importance of communication, it is necessary to develop communication skills which will play a vital role in improving the communication process. Communication skills in this regard refer to those sets of skills exhibited by individuals in the course of conveying information so that it is received and understood. Possession of communication skills is very germane in the life of everyone; including adult learners in their various learning centres across the country. Banabo and Wariowei (2023) posited that communication skills are imperative in the life of

everyone as it influences and permeates virtually every aspect of human endeavour.

When one considers the nature of adult learners; the demands from matrimony, financial constraints, excessive workload and other issues associated with their learning, it will not be out of place to say that acquisition of communication skills will go a long way to help them attend to some of the needs associated with their nature with ease and minimal degree of stress. Besides, many of the adult learners in literacy classes did not have the opportunity of attending formal school system while some drop out of the school prematurely due to financial constraints and other personal problems. This scenario often makes them to be deficient in communication skills and it can in turn denied them a place in the leadership position while learning in class.

Acquisition of reading, writing speaking and listening skills can possibly offer adult learners leadership positions in different groups when learning in the class, and this will greatly help to



improve their communication skills. Being learners under the tutelage of seasoned facilitators, they can acquire relevant communication skills through the English language learnt in their Basic and Post Literacy classes. Apart from the fact that English Language remains a core subject in both Basic and post literacy classes, it can also be used as a medium of instructional delivery to complement the mother tongue used mostly in these classes.

Effective teaching of English language will bring about transfer of knowledge, social integration and interpersonal interactions between learners in different countries of the world. In order to achieve this feat, the facilitator may decide to explore different teaching methods to deliver his/her instruction. Notable among these methods is cooperative learning which base its principles on collective or group work. According to Buzdugam, Oskima, Stryga, Avramenko and Dyshel (2025), the main advantages of collective or group work are to stimulate learners' cognitive activity, increasing the mastery of speech skills, ensuring communication of all group members and discussing communicative situations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Adult Learners

Adult learners are individuals who enroll in adult learning classes in pursuit of the education that eluded them when they were young or those individuals who enroll to continue from where they stopped in order to upgrade their knowledge for the purpose of improving in their chosen career, social and economic development.

Adult learners are mature; hence, they display a great deal of understanding in their approach to learning. This simply explains why they are more interested in the outcome after the completion of their academic pursuit. Radhika (2019) noted that adult learners often enroll in educational institutions to pursue their goals and objectives. Myers, Conte and Rubenson (2014) further substantiated this stance by reporting that adult learners are required to carry out a number of responsibilities in an appropriate manner; and as such, they may need to update their knowledge, abilities, competence and skills by enrolling in literacy classes.

Basically, adult learners' characteristics in relation to learning are distinct when compared to children in classes. These distinct characteristics are evident in adult learners' characteristics listed by Kuhne (2019). These characteristics include:

- (i) adults take more control of their learning;
- (ii) adults draw upon their experiences as resources;
- (iii) adults are motivated in learning situations;

- (iv) adults are pragmatic in learning;
- (v) the role of the adults as learners is secondary;
- (vi) adults lack confidence in learning;
- (vii) adults are resistant to change;
- (viii) adults compensate for aging in learning;
- (ix) adults are more diverse;
- (x) adults need to ensure that learning is productive and useful.

Similarly, in a bid to also describe adult learners, Ya'u (2020) cited in Knowles (1984) established five (5) assumptions about adult learners. These assumptions are self-directedness, adult learners' experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation to learning. In addition to this, adult learners are characterized by challenges that may affect their learning. These challenges must be considered when designing adult learning programmes.

Communication Skills

It is impossible for humans to live in isolation or live without interacting with their immediate environment and the neighbouring communities. For such interactions to be more purposeful and effective, communication skills must be developed by the parties involved in the communication process. The development of these skills is premised on the fact that individuals in the family, organisation or community will not perform optimally without acquiring the necessary communication skills required for anticipated progress.

In order to corroborate this, Abimbola (2014) argued that effective communication skills are significant tools in almost all human endeavours. Likewise, Slyvka and Madzhara (2023) noted that effective communication skills are highly important in today's globalized world, allowing individuals to express themselves, understand others and navigate various social and academic situations. Banabo and Wariowei (2023) listed listening skill, reading skill, showing empathy, non-verbal communication skills, oral communication skill, giving and receiving feedbacks and writing skill as the most commonly used skills in homes and organisations.

Acquisition of the aforementioned skills by adult learners will definitely be a welcome development as it will help them achieve a lot especially in their social and economic lives. Specifically, acquisition of communication skill like writing skill by adult learners will be a thing of joy to them; especially for those that double as traders. This skill can be employed to record all the daily transactions, calculate loss and profit percentage, write business proposals to execute other business plans and



document every other issues associated with their business.

Similarly, communication skill in form of oral communication can be employed to execute public speaking by adult learners. Such skill will manifest in the level of confidence exhibited by the adult learners, the way and manner they pronounce words, the appropriateness of words used, time management and a host of other indices essential for successful public speaking. In a nutshell, communication skills are evident in the ability to give and receive ideas, feelings, thoughts, updates and other sensitive information through the use of written communication, oral communication, active listening, non verbal communication and display of immensurable empathy.

The English Language

The multi-lingual nature of Nigeria is responsible for the premium placed on English language. Obi (2021) submitted that English Language is one of the most important school subjects in Nigeria. English Language is a core subject and a requirement for admitting students into higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Apart from being a core-subject, it is a medium through which all other subjects are delivered to learners in the classroom. According to Obi (2021), proficiency in oral English is a *sine Qua non* for both teachers and learners particularly in maintaining a cordial relationship among learners from different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Besides, English language is indispensable in the promotion of national unity. People of different ethnic groups relate together and trade with English as a common language. Olusoji (2012) noted that a common implication of the adoption of English language on the economy of Nigeria is reflected in the level of educational attainment of the citizens. The scholar further stressed that Nigerians can now access information and compete favourably with the outside world; thereby resulting to economic increase in agriculture, transportation, commerce among others.

Apart from unifying the entire nation, English language also plays a vital role in educational development of the nation, especially in the area of skills and intellectual development, economic, political and religious development. Ushuple, and Iskandar (2019) argued that English language is of great benefit as it can be used in social and cultural communication, government decisions, political debate, media, religious gathering and a host of other gatherings where people of diverse ethnic groups converge.

Common Types of Communication Skills Needed by Adult Learners

Effective communication skills are very important in adult learning as they help adult learners receive and convey messages, ideas and information in learning situation. Besides, these skills are essential to successful comprehension of subject matters during adult learning classes. In other words, such skills are required by adult learners for progression and successful completion of their academic work. According to Ushuple and Iskandar (2019), these skills include:

- (i) **Writing skill:** This type of communication skill emphasizes adult learners' expertise to conveniently convey ideas and information through the use of written communication. Possession of writing skills by adult learners is evident in their ability to write legibly; use correct spellings, use appropriate words, use appropriate tenses and observe all commands in written communication. Adult learners who demonstrate this skill often find learning more interesting and achievable within the possible shortest period of time.
- (ii) **Oral communication skill:** This form of communication skill facilitates the process of conveying ideas and information through the use of spoken language. Good oral communication demands that adult learners must be articulate in their presentation, use correct pronunciations and appropriate tenses to convey messages to their audience. Oral communication skill offers a great deal of proficiency in public speaking. By implication, adult learners who possess this skill can as well become preachers, instructors, facilitators among other professions after obtaining the required academic qualifications.
- (iii) **Reading skills:** Reading skills affords adult learners the opportunity to receive information through reading of texts. This skill requires competence in pronunciation, spellings and adequate knowledge of the use of punctuation marks. Apart from this, reading to the hearing of the audience requires a lot of confidence and high degree of concentration.
- (iv) **Non-verbal communication:** Non-verbal communication skill involves using wordless cues by adult learners to convey ideas and information to their audience. This type of communication skill may manifest in form of eye contact, gestures, body movement, facial expression and many other means of passing information to people without uttering a word.
- (v) **Showing empathy:** Empathy simply explains a



situation whereby adult learners perceive issues in the way and manner the issues are perceived by the people concerned. Ability to understand the plight of people makes such people build confidence and sense of belongingness which may as well contribute to the success of any task under execution.

- (vi) **Listening skill:** Listening skill describes adult learners' ability to grab information by listening attentively to instruction, summarize such instruction and re-present the instruction whenever they are called upon to do so. Listening skill affords adult learners the opportunity to open up their minds, build confidence and trust, avoid mistakes and make amends where and when necessary.

Towards Achieving Effective Teaching of English Language in Literacy Classes

Many facilitators make use of different teaching methods to teach English language in literacy classes. Such methods may include grammar translation, audio lingual method, communication language teaching, situational language teaching, directed practice, direct method, lexical approach and a host of other methods. Although, it is ideal for facilitators to combine some of these methods to make teaching of English Language more elaborate for easy comprehension and retention of subject matter; yet the combination must align with the topic, learners' learning styles, instructional materials assembled for the lesson and the learners' status in terms of age and experiences.

In addition to the use of relevant instructional technique and consideration of other factors, a competent and visionary facilitator must also strive to introduce some class activities with the view to make teaching and learning more interesting, purposeful and achievable. Such activities are itemized as follows:

- (i) Adding relevant effects like film clip, cartoons and a part of documentary to the text to learn is critical to arousing learners' interest towards learning.
- (ii) Explaining words in text using objects. For example, objects like books and grains of rice can be used to teach countable and uncountable nouns in English Language class.
- (iii) Divide learners into groups to analyze texts, rotate their roles every week and make them report their findings or results on structured worksheets.
- (iv) Let learners do the teaching by allowing them to

drill themselves in activities like spelling, pronunciation, giving meanings of vocabularies, reading, e.t.c.

- (v) **Balancing your teaching by making the contents not too simple or difficult in order to avoid boredom and acting out with fear which may result to fidgeting and restlessness on the part of the learners and share wasting of time.**

Factors Working against Effective Teaching of English Language

1. **Lack of qualification and teaching competence among facilitators:** The way and manner facilitators are recruited into teaching profession is worrisome. Sometimes, such recruitment could be based on undue preference arising from man-know-man syndrome, payment of cash among others. Idowu, Sodipe-Lawal and Bada (2024) cited in Famuyiwa (1998) corroborated this by arguing that the standard of teaching profession in Nigeria is affected by the quality of teachers recruited in it.
2. **Poor recognition of English language:** Many households in Nigeria, especially those in rural areas do not recognize English language as the nation's official language. Besides, many of the adult members of these households cannot speak English language and as such, they do not see any reason why their children should speak the language.
3. **Lack of professionalism on the part of facilitators:** Many facilitators are less concerned about the plight of their learners. Some do not even have interest in knowing the areas where their learners need help while many have also failed in getting close to their learners. Such facilitators may find it difficult to ascertain the learners' level of exposure to mother tongue, determine their personality traits or determine the motivation technique suitable for each learner during literacy classes.
4. **Indiscriminate use of mother tongue among learners:** Many learners are too comfortable with their mother tongue. Even while in the class, they find it so difficult to express themselves in English language probably because of fear of being making jest of, lack of confidence or due to inferiority complex syndrome.

Relevance of English Language to Adult Learning

- (i) Outside learning, English Language is a major

tool that unifies the nation. In spite of the fact that Nigeria is a multilingual nation, English language still remains her official language. Daniel and Arulappan (2020) argued that English language is highly regarded in many societies. Besides, it is a global language and a means for international communication. Therefore, for the citizens of Nigeria to connect, interact or communicate effectively, they need to learn how to speak English language. Aside this, no one wants to be cut off from his immediate environment and the entire world. In other words, English language remains indispensable in communication as it has proved to be the fulcrum of social, political and economic development.

- (ii) The relevance of English language in adult learning is premised on the fact that the mother tongue is not suitable for teaching subjects like English language, Mathematics and Sciences. Alqahtani (2015) supported this by stating that the use of learners' mother tongue in English language classes may have adverse effect on the way and manner the learners pick up the language. When a teacher uses the mother tongue as a means of instructional delivery, learners may find it difficult to pick up the proper pronunciation of words; and this can as well result to the development of improper pronunciation techniques among learners (Gutierrez & Franscisco, 2018). In addition to this, Intja, Henda and Kangodi (2022) lamented that the mother tongue often interferes with the teaching and learning of English language.
- (iii) More so, poor academic performance of adult learners is worrisome and it is partly blamed on the lack of proficiency in English Language since many subjects are taught in the mother tongue. This arises from the fact that learners are more exposed to their mother tongue at their early age. According to Intja, Henda and Kangodi (2022), poor performance across a wide range of academic areas is caused by the English Language's weak foundation. In order to tackle this challenge, facilitators are enjoined to get closer to their learners so as to be able to identify their problems as they relate to English language proficiency and the mother tongue. Daniel and Arulappan (2020) supported this view by stating that facilitators who provide expectations and guidelines while bringing learners closer to themselves often set standard to make progress.

Components of English Language and Development of Communication Skills

English language is a broad subject and as such, it has five major components. These components include phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The aforementioned components are pivotal to the development of communication skills in adult learners. These components are analysed in relation to communication skills:

Phonology and communication skills: Phonology deals with speech structures in English Language. This structure includes both the pattern of basic speech units and the accepted rules of pronunciation. Phonology plays a vital role in the development of oral communication skills and reading skills since it deals basically with sounds. By implication, if adults are well grounded in phonology, their oral communication skill, listening skill, and reading skill will experience massive development which will later manifest in the way and manner they communicate with people around them. Sonu (2020) submitted that learners who are taught vowels' and consonants' sounds and those who listen to radio programmes or watch movies of English Language with different accent tend to experience improvement in their oral communication skill, reading skill and comprehension skill.

Syntax and communication skills: Syntax deals with the way and manner through which words are combined to form sentences. Syntax makes it possible to reframe sentences without altering their meanings. Adult learners who have good knowledge of syntax are bound to be vast in sentence formation and reframing. Proficiency in sentence formation and reframing will undoubtedly lead to acquisition of writing skill by adult learners. Sonu (2020) corroborated this by stating that learners who are vast in word formation, one word substitute and sentence formation will develop their written communication skill within a short period of time.

Morphology and communication skill: Morphology of English language refers to knowledge of affixes, prefixes, suffixes, plurals and past tenses. It also includes base words that have no extra parts. Good knowledge of morphology of English language is critical to vocabulary development, thereby forming basis for successful reading, understanding and answering of comprehension passages. Acquisition of knowledge of morphology of English by adult learners is a welcome development as it forms the basis for good comprehension skill, reading skills, written communication skill and skills of giving and receiving feedback. According to Duffer and Stark (2017), knowledge of morphology of English is essential to building communication skills



such as reading, writing and oral communication skills.

Pragmatics and communication skills: Pragmatics as a branch of linguistics focuses on how meaning is constructed within a given context. Pragmatics deals with the social and emotional aspect of communication which may include the use of appropriate language in different situations, understanding and using non-verbal communication, adjusting language based on the context and the listener and taking turns in conversation (Ariel, 2008). Having a good knowledge of pragmatics offers adult learners a great opportunity to acquire non-verbal communication skill which can also be used to convey ideas and information to their audience.

Semantics and communication skills: Semantics simply describes the way English language convey meaning of words. It refers to the differentiation that people make about the meaning of words. In a nutshell, it is the study of meaning of words. It is pertinent to note that adult learners who have in-depth knowledge of semantics will understand the meaning of different words. Understanding of the meaning of words will ultimately lead to acquisition of written communication skill which is also an indices required for effective communication.

Conclusion

Communication skills are powerful tools that do not only enhance the process of communication but help to improve the quality of ideas and information being conveyed to the other party. Effective demonstration of these skills by adult learners is primarily hinged on the language of expression being used by the sender. English language which is also a focal point of this paper has proved to be a potent language for developing necessary communication skills in adult learners if certain rules are observed and well expressed.

Recommendations

Based on the factors working against effective teaching and learning of English Language, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Qualified and competent English Language facilitators must be employed to teach adult learners in literacy centres across the country. This will go a long way to improve the quality of instructional delivery rendered by the facilitators. Besides, this will also help to produce sound adult learners in English Language.
- (ii) All households are mandated to recognize English Language as the nation's official

language and the citizens' second language. By so doing, many households will see the need to embrace English Language and make necessary effort towards learning the language. This may also give them clues as to start exposing their children to the learning and speaking of English Language right from their early lives in order to a build background strong enough for teaching and learning of English Language to take place.

Facilitators are enjoined to double their efforts in bringing adult learners close to them. This gesture will afford them the opportunity to detect areas that need improvement among the key competencies (writing, speaking, reading and listening). Besides, this will help to accelerate the pace at which transmission of knowledge of English Language is achieved.

Facilitators should try their best possible to delve into adult learners background in order to ascertain their level of exposure to mother tongue, establish their personality traits, establish their level of exposure to English Language and determine the type of motivation technique suitable for each of them during adult classes.

Adult learners should minimize the way and manner they communicate in their mother tongue. Their attention should be focused on how to constantly converse in English Language to enhance their communication skills. This is possible when there is an improvement in their pronunciation and phonetic aptitude.

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