EVALUATING THE ADULT EDUCATION APPLICATIONS IN TURKEY FROM AN ANDRAGOGICAL ASPECT

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Abstract:
Recent changes in the world allow educators to transform traditional approaches into multi-dimensional and innovative teaching methodologies. Adult education can be regarded as a cornerstone to transform the society since the needs of the today's world has led people to be trained as wholly-developed individuals. As such, educators working with adults are to be aware of the basic principles of andragogy which has different points of view from pedagogical aspect. The study reflects on the results of research that was designed to identify the awareness of educators on andragogical principles. Depending on the data collected via semi-structured interviews, some suggestions have been proposed to contribute more effective applications in adult education in Turkey.

Keywords: adult education, andragogy, education in Turkey

1. Introduction

The concept of andragogy has been emerged in the last century with the attention of the practitioners of adult education on the process of adult learning. It is clear that adult learners have different features from the learners of younger ages. Many adult educators agree that there are certain differences between andragogy and pedagogy. Whereas the word andragogy comes from the Greek word andr-adult and agogos-guidance, the word pedagogy comes from the Greek word paid-child and agagos-guidance. Since andragogy serves an adult population which is varied in terms of needs, interests, attitudes, etc., there is a complex and multidimensional notion of the teaching-learning practice. Knowles (1980) regarded adult education as a patternless mosaic of pluralistic aims. As such, educators working with adults are to take a lot of dynamics into considerations like aims and objectives, curriculum planning, learning climate, evaluation and assessment procedure.

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Adult education has also many critical roles to path the way of a country's citizens in the social, cultural, international, individual and professional domains. In our ever-changing world, the dilemma of handling constantly changing status of information and technology makes it compulsory for people to keep track of new ideas and development in order to improve themselves. Today adults are need of learning something new continuously to keep up with the sustainable development of the world. To fulfill such an aim institutions or organizations serving for adults ought to pay attention to the needs, preferences, choices or expectations of adult learners. As andragogy has quite different learning principles from traditional pedagogical aspect, it is really important to internalize the principles and apply them in order to attract the adults confront with various challenges from personal to professional settings in their lifespan.

It is significant that adult educators have to know the characteristics of adults before and while planning their educational settings. According to Knowles (1980), adults want to know why they need to learn something before undertaking learning. Facilitators must help adults become aware of their 'need to know' and make a case for the value of learning. Adults want to know the purpose of training and the motivation underlying an organization's training initiative.

Another concept emphasized by Knowles (1980) is self-concept. Adults believe they are responsible for their lives and they need to be seen and treated as capable and self-directed individuals. Moreover, adult learners often take responsibility for their own success or failure at learning. Providing an environment of self-directed learning contributes to the quality of instruction. Adult learners should have the freedom to choose which skills to improve to ensure the highest level of attention. Fidishun (2000) stated that adults with previous schooling have been constructed as "dependent" learners, and it is up to the educator to move students from their old habits, shape them into self-directed learners, and encourage them to start taking responsibility for their learning. To fulfill this aim, an adult educator should actively involve the participants in the learning process and be a facilitator or a guide for this process.

An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999:272). The role of the learners' experience was also described by Knowles (1980) as adults come into an educational activity with different experiences than do youth. There are individual differences in background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals, creating a greater need for individualization of teaching and learning strategies. Since adults need to relate new knowledge to their past experience, the educators help them attach the instructional objectives with available schemata by organizing a democratic, interactive and cooperative learning climates. Adult educators are supposed to make use of incorporating discussions, simulations, problem-solving activities or case methods helps adult learners to grasp the knowledge.

"Adults become ready to learn things they need to know and do in order to cope effectively with real-life situations. Adults want to learn what they can apply in the present, making training focused on the future or that does not relate to their current situations less

effective," explained Knowles (1980). Bergevin (1949) put forth the view that education should focus on the broadening of the horizons of a country's citizens in order to maintain and develop intelligent, healthy citizenry who understand their rights and responsibilities and who are vocationally competent. Namely, adults should confront with activities related to real-life problems in learning process as they are far more interested in developing knowledge and skills that they can apply to their current day-to-day activities.

Adults prefer to take part in life-centered learning settings and want to find solutions for the problems they have in their daily life. It is important for them to have concrete and useful outcomes at the result of the learning activity. In problem-based learning classrooms, the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and learners are different from those in more traditional types of school-based learning. Generally, in problem-based classrooms, the teacher acts as a coach for or facilitator of activities that students carry out themselves. The teacher does not simply present information or directly control the progression of work. Instead, the teacher provides students with appropriate problems to work on, assists them in identifying and accessing the materials and equipment necessary to solve the problems, gives necessary feedback and support during the problem solving process, and evaluates students' participation and products, with the goal of helping them develop their problem-solving as well as their language and literacy skills (Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

As Merriam & Caffarella (1999:272) stated adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones. According to Knowles (1980), "adults are responsive to some external motivators (e.g., better job, higher salaries), but the most potent motivators are internal (e.g., desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem). Their motivation can be blocked by training and education that ignores adult learning principles." Adult educators are to allow learners to discuss options for their new roles, plan action strategies and exchange of knowledge and skills for effective and efficient learning (Cercone, 2008:159).

The aforementioned assumptions of andragogy have revealed various touchstones in order to train individuals who are well-developed in personal and professional domains. In this study, it was aimed to identify the awareness of educators on andragogical principles. As the general understanding of the curricula instructed at faculties of education is based on pedagogical assumptions throughout the country, it has been presupposed that adult educators may have different views or applications in teaching-learning process.

2. Method

The study is a qualitative study including in-depth interviews which was carried out carried out with the aim to find out the awareness of adult educators regarding andragogical principles. The study was performed using phenomenology among the qualitative research designs. Phenomenology design is used for the investigation of phenomena (events, experiences, concepts, perceptions, tendencies and situations)

which one recognizes, but has no thorough understanding about. Interview is the basic data collection tool used in such type of researches (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013).

2.1 Study Group
Within the framework of the purpose of study, the sample group was formed by 10 instructors working at the public institutions. The instructors were chosen randomly and they were volunteers to take part in the study.

2.2 Data Collection Tool
The data were obtained through the semi-structured interview form compromising the basic principles of andragogical approach to reveal out the emotions, opinions, beliefs and applications of the participants. The in-depth interview process helped the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon of andragogical principles. In this study, an interview form containing five semi-structured sections were used in order to reveal out the andragogical understandings of participants. In this process, the sub-sections were identified in line with the scale developed by Conti (PALS). Pre-specified questions in the sections were evaluated by two academicians studying educational sciences before it was finalized by modifying the questions according to the opinions and recommendations of them.

The sub-sections of the in-depth interview form included the following basics of andragogy:
- Learner Participation in Instructional Process;
- Experience-Based Learning Atmosphere;
- Learner-Centered Activities;
- Personalizing Instruction.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis
Before starting the interview, each participating teacher was explained the purpose of the research and each interview question was asked one by one after the creation of a sincere communication environment. During the interview, some sub-questions were asked in addition to the basic questions in order to obtain more detailed information to make the participants clarify the issue some more. The interviews were recorded using digital voice recorder. The interview with each teacher took an approximately 30 minutes.

Each digitally recorded interview was turned into written document afterwards. When preparing the written documents, best efforts were given to decipher the interview records exactly. However, the lexical mistakes or deficiencies of the teachers interviewed were corrected, without affecting the sentence structure.

While analyzing the collected data, the codes and the sub-codes separately formed by the researcher. In this study, the validity and reliability measures required for the qualitative research method are taken into account. For this purpose, in order to ensure internal validity, information was gathered during the implementation of the data collection tools by ensuring that participants responded each question sincerely,

thinking about their own practices regarding adult education. In order to ensure external validity, the findings were tried to be presented in a manner consistent with the research questions. For external reliability, the data-analyst researcher's position in the research process, the conceptual framework used in data analysis, the codes and themes were defined; data collection and analysis methods were thoroughly clarified.

3. Findings

The findings in the analysis of the data which were obtained in accordance with the aim of the study were interpreted with tables and descriptions given in line with sub-sections of the study.

3.1 Findings Related to Learner Participation in Instructional Process

The questions were based on the learner participation in instructional process in the first sub-section of the in-depth interview. The results obtained from the responses of participants were shown in Figure 1.
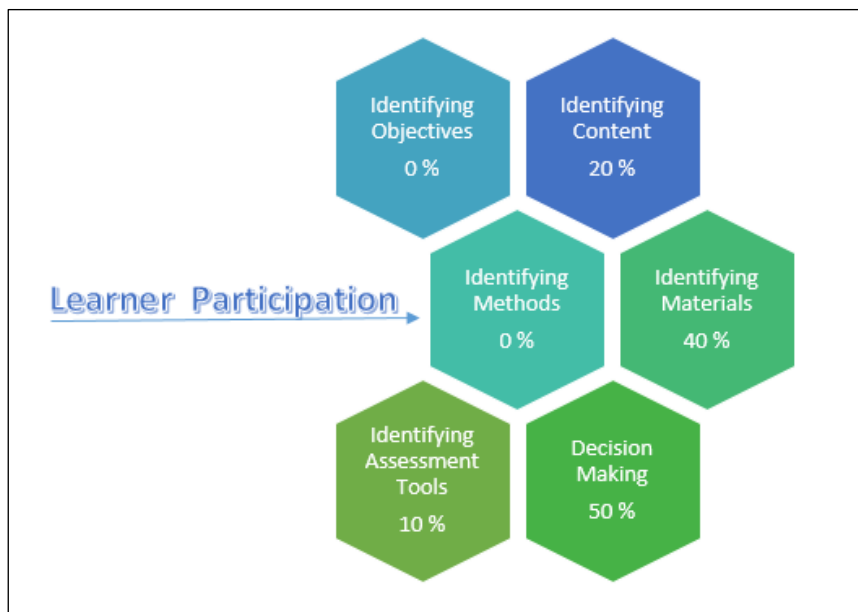
Figure 1: Distribution of Responses Related to Learner Participation

As shown in the Figure 1, none of the participants allows the learners to take part in process while identifying the objectives and methods used in the course. However, 20 % of the participants (f=2) stated that they identify the course content together with the learners in their classrooms. While 40 % of the participants (f=4) agreed to determine the materials used teaching and learning process, half of them (f=5) claimed that they allowed the learners to take part in any decision-making process aroused simultaneously. Only 10 % of the participants expressed that learners' needs, interests or wishes were taken into consideration while identifying the assessment tools.

3.2 Findings Related to Experience-Based Learning Atmosphere

The questions were based on experience-based learning atmosphere in instructional process in the second sub-section of the in-depth interview Figure 2 reveals the results obtained from the responses of participants.
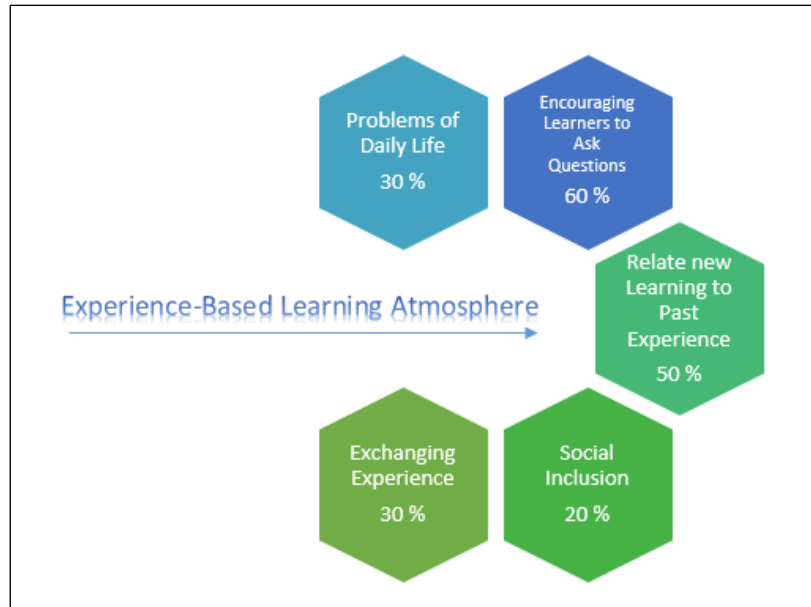

Figure 2: Distribution of Responses Related to Experience-Based Learning Atmosphere

As shown in Figure 2, 30 % of participants (f=3) reflected to make room for problems of learners' everyday life in the instructional process. Furthermore, 60 % of the instructors (f=6) stated that they encouraged the adult learners to ask questions about the nature of their society. While half of the participants said that they helped learners relate new learning to their prior experiences, only 20 % of them stated that they gave importance to social inclusion of learners.

3.2 Findings Related to Learner-Centered Activities

The questions were based on learner-centered activities in the third sub-section of the in-depth interview. Figure 3 reflects the results obtained from the responses of participants.

Figure 3 reflects that 80 % of participants (f=8) expressed to present the learning material themselves. Whilst 40 % of them (f=4) stated to make use of drama or other creative activities, 60 % of educators (f=6) expressed to use skill-based activities because of the notion of the course they have taught (Management in Keyboard, Jewelry Design). 40 % of them (f=4) said that they sometimes used cooperative learning activities. Furthermore, 40 % of the instructors (f=4) stated that they gave importance to evaluate something productive at the end of the course. Interaction among adult learners during the course process was regarded as a crucial dynamic by 60 % of the participants (f=6).
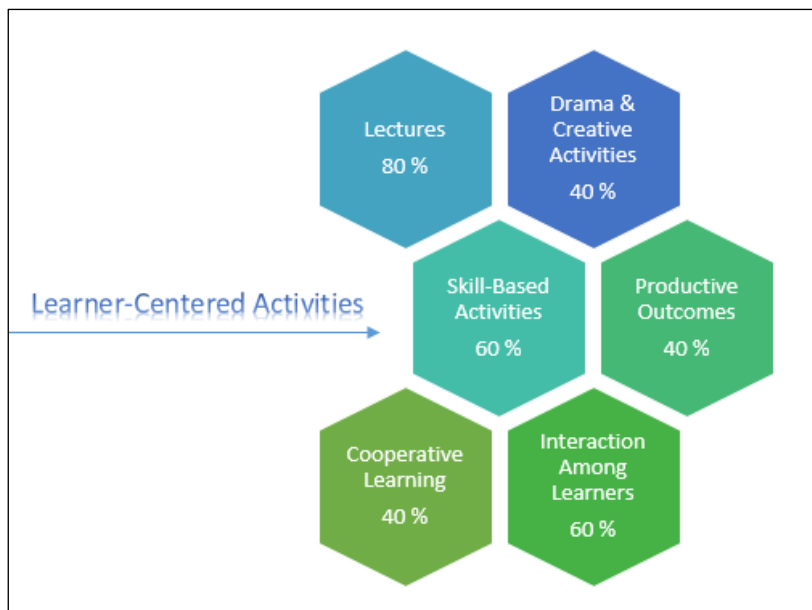
Figure 3: Distribution of Responses Related to Learner-Centered Activities

3.3 Findings Related to Personalizing Instruction

The questions were based on personalizing instruction in the fourth sub-section of the in-depth interview. The results obtained from the responses of participants were shown in Figure 4.
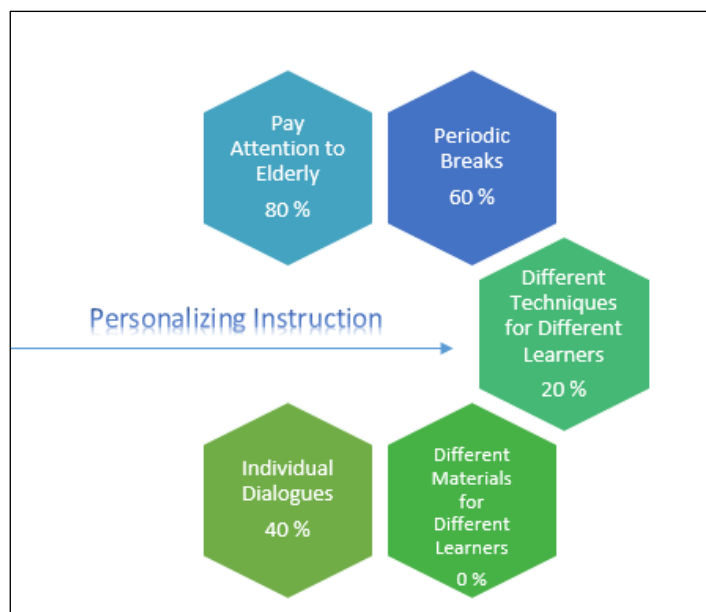

Figure 4: Distribution of Responses Related to Personalizing Instruction

As shown in Figure 4, 80 % of participants (f=8) stated that they allowed older learners more time to complete their assignments when they needed. Learners were allowed to take periodic breaks during the class by 60 % of the instructors (f=6). Whilst only 20 % of participants (f=6) claimed to use different techniques depending on different learners being taught, none of them used different materials with different learners. Besides, 40

% of instructors (f=4) expressed that they had individual conferences to help learners when they needed.

4. Discussion

The results of the study indicate that participants do not always pay attention to all basic assumptions of andragogy. As they do not have any qualification or certificate on andragogy or adult learning, they tend to use pedagogical practices. Findings revealed that none of the participants allowed the learners to take part in process while identifying the objectives and methods used in the course. However, 20 % of the participants (f=2) stated that they identify the course content together with the learners in their classrooms. While 40 % of the participants (f=4) agreed to determine the materials used teaching and learning process, half of them (f=5) claimed that they allowed the learners to take part in any decision-making process aroused simultaneously. Only 10 % of the participants expressed that learners' needs, interests or wishes were taken into consideration while identifying the assessment tools. With regard to andragogical assumptions, learner participation in all aspects of adult instruction is an indispensable dynamic. All the elements of an instructional process are supposed to be determined together with learners in adult learners' classrooms such as objectives, content, methods, materials, assessment tools, etc.

It was also found out that 30 % of participants (f=3) reflected to make room for problems of learners' everyday life in the instructional process. Furthermore, 60 % of the instructors (f=6) stated that they encouraged the adult learners to ask questions about the nature of their society. While half of the participants said that they helped learners relate new learning to their prior experiences, only 20 % of them stated that they gave importance to social inclusion of learners. In terms of the basic principles of andragogical practices, adults ought to be confronted with activities related to real-life problems in learning process as they are far more interested in developing knowledge and skills that they can apply to their current day-to-day activities. Tight (2004) supported the idea that Problem-based learning can be seen as an educational approach that makes deliberate use of the learning strategies suggested by theories of experiential learning. In other words, by using realistic problems, the kind the learner is likely to encounter in their current or future workplace—as the basis for learning, practical experience and a deeper understanding of the relation between practice and theory can be developed in the individual.

In the study, 80 % of participants (f=8) expressed to present the learning material themselves. Whilst 40 % of them (f=4) stated to make use of drama or other creative activities, 60 % of educators (f=6) expressed to use skill-based activities because of the notion of the course they have taught (Management in Keyboard, Jewelry Design). 40 % of them (f=4) said that they sometimes used cooperative learning activities. Furthermore, 40 % of the instructors (f=4) stated that they gave importance to evaluate something productive at the end of the course. Interaction among adult learners during the course process was regarded as a crucial dynamic by 60 % of the participants (f=6).

Garrison (1992), it is not contradictory for the learner to assume responsibility for learning and still rely on an outside person for support, access to information, and guidance. Collins (1987:50) states that mediation is inevitable and the role of the facilitator is to develop and encourage the learner's sense of responsibility and regulatory behavior.

The concept of individual difference is one of the core concepts that should be taken into consideration in all educational setting. Because of the complex notion of the adulthood and the distinctive range among adults, it is an undeniable fact that educators working with adult have to respect such differences and organize the setting depending on them. In the study, 80 % of participants (f=8) stated that they allowed older learners more time to complete their assignments when they needed. Learners were allowed to take periodic breaks during the class by 60 % of the instructors (f=6). Whilst only 20 % of participants (f=6) claimed to use different techniques depending on different learners being taught, none of them used different materials with different learners. Besides, 40 % of instructors (f=4) expressed that they had individual conferences to help learners when they needed. As a result of the findings related to personalizing instruction, it is suggested that instructors should be more dedicated to learners' individual differences.

The study has some limitations one of which is the number of participants in a somewhat artificial environment under experimental conditions. It cannot be ruled out that participants may have felt time pressure and thus put less emphasis on checking the quality of adult education practices. It was tried to minimize this by explicitly instructing them to take their time and try to retrieve the correct answer rather than a quick answer. Since answering the questions did not have any direct impact on the participants, people in a real setting with a greater stake in the outcome of the search might care more about quality. Although the instructors in the study gave satisfying responses to the questions, future studies with more participants and greater statistical power could explore whether adult educators adopt different strategies. More observational studies are needed to design and evaluate educational and technological innovations for guiding instructors to high quality adult learning in Turkey.

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