

## **Cognitive Restructuring of Adult Learners as a Basis for Improved Productivity and National Development**

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### **Abstract**

*Going by the nature of adult learners, they deserve utmost respect and preference from their facilitators. On many occasions, facilitators need to work on their cognitive make-up in order to actualize learning. This assertion calls for prompt cognitive restructuring of the adult learners since they constitute a large percentage of the nation's workforce. To this end, the paper examined cognitive restructuring of adult learners as the basis for improved productivity and national development. In order to achieve this, the paper discussed the concepts of cognitive restructuring, improved productivity and national development under conceptual clarifications. Factors working against successful cognitive restructuring of adult learning were fully discussed along steps to be taken in cognitive restructuring to change achievement orientation of adult learners. More so, cognitive restructuring in relation to improved productivity and national development was fully discussed. Based on the conclusion of the paper, it was recommended among others that: irrespective of ownership status, whether public or privately owned, literacy and skill acquisition centres should create a guidance counselling unit where adult learners that are experiencing loss of confidence or self-esteem will be adequate taken care of.*

**Keywords:** Adult learners, Cognitive restructuring, Improved productivity, National development, Workforce

### **Introduction**

Learning as a process requires full concentration of the learners before it could be achieved. By nature, adult learners under the tutelage of a facilitator do not have the privilege which children often take for granted. They are sometimes pre-occupied by a collection of activities that range from daily economic routine, personal demands, social demands, attending to health challenges to matrimonial demands. Obuekwe and Obashoro-John (2014) argue that the increase in the age of adult learner has inevitably led to an increase in the range and intensity of their problems and needs.

The joint effects of adult learners' demands, problems and needs are evident in the slow manner in which many of them comprehend their subject matters. Majority of adult learners find learning extremely difficult due to the aforementioned indices; and this sometimes accounts for their low academic performance in class, the way and manner they drop from literacy classes and the nonchalant attitude often exhibited by some adult learners toward learning. Idowu (2021) lamented that as adult learners advance in age, they may start to experience cognitive decline due to problems posed by health, financial, emotional and matrimonial challenges.

Adult learners who find themselves in this situation need cognitive restructuring to learn and perform at the utmost level. Olorunnishola (2014) emphasized that the significance of cognitive restructuring for learners derives its potential in releasing the creative potentials, independence, self-awareness, initiative taking, achievement motivation, analytical ability, interpersonal skills and personal competencies of a large number of learners who would have ended up as indolent and dependent adults. In order to further expose the potentials of adult learners in our society, Olorunnishola (2014) made further clarification by stating that there is need to tap into the natural resources of this class of learners and turn them into goal-oriented and resourceful adults.

### **Conceptual clarifications**

#### **Concept of cognitive restructuring**

Cognitive restructuring can be described as a calculated effort geared towards changing learners' orientation and mindset towards learning. Cognitive restructuring focuses on learners' thoughts and how those thoughts can be transformed from initial irrational state to a more creative and innovative one. In this regard, Baxter (2010) describes irrational thoughts as pre-conceived behaviour that plays a pivotal role in the onset of anxiety.

Cognitive restructuring is described by Baxter (2010) as a technique that can help people identify, challenge and alter anxiety provoking thoughts and beliefs that often discourage learners from learning. In many instances, adult learners do not believe in themselves, hence they lack confidence in writing and passing examinations without being helped. Ellis (1962) in his findings on human thought discovered that human beings have made themselves victims of irrational thinking and can virtually destroy themselves through irrational and muddled thinking.

The reality about false assumption one has about himself / herself is that such assumption often serves as the yardstick for measuring the personality of the character and by implication; it also determines the response pattern of the people around such character. Due to the capacity of cognitive restructuring in changing learners' orientation, it can be employed to re-organize learners' thoughts towards positive transformation which will in turn pave way for factual and logical thinking. In other words, cognitive restructuring is a functional tool for dispelling anxiety, provoking thoughts patterns and replacing them with a more purposeful one characterized by creative and innovative ideas.

For more clarification and better understanding of cognitive restructuring, Ellis (1976) in his experiment treated depressed patients with constructive cognitive restructuring while Akaneme and Ngwoke (2010) employed cognitive restructuring as instrument to change academic status of learners from poor academic achievement to result oriented learners. The use of cognitive restructuring as intervention strategy for change of thoughts in humans has experienced an increasingly diverse research base; thus, supporting the effectiveness of varied approaches with adult learners (Graham, 2005).

#### **Concept of improved productivity**

Productivity is a term used in measuring the efficiency of persons, machines, organizations. It is the total outcome arrived at after converting inputs into useful outputs. Oei, De looze, Have, Van Rhijn and Kuijt – Evers (2012) posited that productivity is basically described as the ratio between outputs and inputs where the inputs comprise all factors utilized to produce the output demand. The input factors may include labour, resources (capital), and land while the outputs may be measured in tons produced or financial indicator or profit and added value.

According to Nwambe and Ede (2019), productivity simply connotes a measure of performance by result. In order to give elaborate meaning, Ezeani (2007) cited in Nwambe and Ede (2019) affirmed that efficiency and performance are fundamental measures of productivity of any economy. It is an essential tool that puts individuals, organization and the entire nation on the path of growth and development.

Improved productivity which is an extension of productivity is measured by an increase in the level of income of employees, consumption and the welfare index of the employees. In addition, improved productivity brings about increased efficiency and enhanced scalability. Improvement in the productivity keeps individuals progressing towards their full potentials. It also indicates that one can effectively manage his work, life, family and other commitment without much hinderances.

At both personal and organizational level, improved productivity is one of the crucial variables that determines the performance rate, the capacity to compete with others and the chance of survival of such individuals and organization.

### **Concept of development**

In spite of the fact that development is very difficult to define, many scholars still managed to offer their definition based on the angle from which they perceived it. According to Kia and Vurasi (2013), development refers to process that raise a nation's standard of living to free its population from a life of subsistence agriculture to improve health and healthcare and to effectively join a world of commercial community while Ogbuagu (2013) argued that development can be viewed from the economic, political and modernization, among other perspectives.

For the purpose of this paper, national development simply implies all kinds of development witnessed by a nation within a specific period of time. In an effort to describe national development, Idike (2014) submitted that national development refers to nationwide development in a nation state. By extension, it implies the absolute wellbeing of the entire nation's population in terms of financial and general economic status. In the words of Nwapi (2018), national development encompasses decrease in all forms of oppressions, inequality levels and the guarantee of security of lives and properties in the country.

Nwapi (2018) further stressed that national development could mean the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. In the context of developed world, Omoyibo and Agbonzeke in Kingdom (2013) reported that Boutrous, B. Ghali, a former secretary of United Nations Organizations in May, 1994 categorized national development into five dimensions which are (i) peaceful atmosphere, (ii) vibrant economy, (iii) habitable environment, (iv) quality social work and (v) laudable democracy.

However, Kingdom (2013) further explained that the attributes of national development mentioned above are lacking in the Nigerian context since the government in power often abuse the rule of law. On many occasions, the dividends of democracy are not delivered to the masses as promised while the democratic process does not create opportunities for opposition parties to operate.

### **Factors working against successful cognitive restructuring of adult learners**

There are many factors working against successful cognitive restructuring of adult learners. These factors include:

- (i) Loss of confidence / self-esteem

Many adult learners have advanced in age; and as such, they may start to lose their confidence and self-esteem due to the challenges they often encounter in the course of learning. Sometimes, the loss of confidence and self-esteem experienced by these learners may be as a result of the shabby treatments received from the people around them. Serem (2011) cited in Idowu (2021) asserted that older persons are portrayed as unimportant, unexciting, inarticulate, flat, un-dimensional, unimaginative, non-creative and boring. The frequent use of these adjectives by the people around adult learner may discourage and harden their minds against any cognitive restructuring strategies preferred. Besides, the feelings of rejection by the younger generation may also go a long way to increase the magnitude of resistance in them.

(ii) Health challenges

Advancement in age is sometimes associated with heightened deterioration of one's health. If this situation is not promptly checked, it may degenerate to illness which one may have to battle with till death calls. Adult learners that are living with age related sicknesses like hypertension, dementia, impairment of the sense organ, partial stroke, weakness of the body tissue and a host of other sicknesses may be experiencing severe pains or cognitive malfunctioning that will stand as barrier between them and the cognitive restructuring strategies employed to change their initial cognitive make up. Waldstein (2000) posited that hypertension can lead to mild or moderate alterations in the brain structure and function, including its ability to effectively process information.

(iii) Psychological / Emotional problem

We live in the world of uncertainties where adult learners can possibly be confronted with the reality of deaths, especially the death of their loved ones. A situation like this may throw adult learners off balance while their cognitive make up may be altered for the rest of their lives. Adult learners who find themselves in this kind of situation may not positively respond to any kind of treatments including the planned cognitive restructuring technique employed to change their orientation and mindset.

(iv) Social Isolation

Social isolation refers to a partial or complete state of lack of contact with one's immediate environment and the larger community. Social isolation cannot just occur in a vacuum but; can be triggered by many other factors ranging from cognitive impairment and other serious ailments, violence among family members, death of spouse and blood relations, physical disability among others. It is pertinent to note that human beings are social creatures that depend largely on the interaction with peers, co-workers, relatives, friends, neighbours, family members and their general environment for survival. Contrary to this, adult learners who experience isolation may not want to entertain anyone; not to talk of submitting himself or herself for any kind of treatment.

**Steps in cognitive restructuring to change achievement orientation of adult learners**

The following steps according to Olorunnishola, (2014) are to be taken if cognitive restructuring of adult learners must be achieved.

- (i) The facilitator must carefully discuss the differences between learners that possess low Intelligent Quotients and high Intelligent Quotients. The facilitator must also discuss possible causes of low IQs and high IQs.
- (ii) The facilitator must also lead adult learners in discussion that borders on their personal problems, negative and irrelevant thoughts that may adversely affect their performance in class.
- (iii) The facilitator must as well lead in discussion to guide the learners identify unrealistic beliefs, values, practices and negative self-statement that keep them in their present condition.
- (iv) The facilitator elaborates more on these beliefs; values etc and discuss how they can contribute to their low performance in class and examinations.
- (v) Through the facilitator, the learners are presented with the role of self-statement, self-belief and positive behaviour in motivation. Learners are taught the adverse effect of emotions and how they can be overcome. Learners are also taught how they can modify their negative self-statement by replacing them with positive self-statement that will add value to their academic pursuit.
- (vi) The facilitator must focus on developing and testing cognitive restructuring techniques to counter false assumption by employing role playing, doing constant cognitive rehearsals, considering alternative explanation to test validity, employing thought stopping techniques and employing additional techniques to dispel irrational beliefs and negative self-statements.
- (vii) Facilitator must focus on the application of the treatment conditions stated above so as to make learners identify their thoughts, feelings and behaviour to help them cope with the situation objectively.

### **Cognitive restructuring of adult learners and improved productivity**

Adult learners can be broadly categorized into two distinct groups: these groups are low and high performing learners. Low performing learners are those learners that perform below an expected level of accomplishment while high performing learners perform well above an expected level of accomplishment. Low performance in adult learners can be attributed to many factors which may include:

- (i) Lack of positive achievement orientation for academic work (Omoje, 2007).
- (ii) False assumption that one cannot succeed in school without being helped or cheating.
- (iii) Lack of readiness in adult learners.

Undoubtedly, learners who exhibit any of the aforementioned attitude towards their classwork often perform woefully in their examination; and if nothing is done to arrest the situation, such learner may end up dropping from their academic programmes.

Having false assumption about oneself as a focus of this paper can only be effectively tackled through planned cognitive restructuring strategy which stands as a powerful tool in changing achievement orientation as one's willingness and effort to succeed in his academic tasks and achieve high standards of education accomplishment. It is a pattern of behaviour that strive to put one on a path of success provided it is being echoed continually to the hearing of the adult learners. Cognitive restructuring is basically geared towards rescuing learners from holding false assumptions about themselves.

Oyovwi (2019) recognized cognitive restructuring as one of the diverse ways through which Guidance Counsellor encourages learners who have phobia for learning and to re-address their minds with positive statements. By rescuing adult learners from holding false assumption about themselves and apparent lack of effort and low value for excellence; it leaves a permanent notion in adult learners that success in their academic work is non-negotiable; hence they must double their efforts to achieve the feat. In a nutshell, application of cognitive restructuring to enhance better productivity in adult learner is imperative as it changes the primordial belief system of the learners.

Moreso, cognitive restructuring has the potential to dislodge all misconceptions and mindsets that bar adult learners from exploring their inherent or innate potentials. According to Baxter (2010), cognitive restructuring as a therapeutic tool is capable of bringing learners back to the realm of consciousness which will further lead them to identify and explore their creative potentials, get acquainted with their personal competencies and interpersonal skills; thus branding them from low performing learners to high performing ones. Besides, such learners will develop capacity to harness their innovative and creative skill with their innate energy to become more productive in the ever-dynamic world.

### **Cognitive restructuring of adult learners and national development**

There is no gainsaying that the educational level of a nation's citizens reflects the dictate of the level of development of such nation. The place of education in national development has been epitomized in the following submissions.

- (i) Clark in Folajin (2011) perceived education to be a powerful means of social progress.
- (ii) Briggs in Folajin (2011) defined education as a long-term investment by the state to make itself a better place in which to live and a better place in which to make a living.

Going by the beauty and importance of education to the lives of the citizens and in the development of the entire nation; one cannot do otherwise than to agitate for education for all. In spite of this, many Nigerian are still in the categories of non-literates, while some drop out at different levels of education due to financial constraints, family social status, gender inequalities, false assumption about oneself and a host of other factors. The total percentage of the citizens that fall in the category of those having false assumption about themselves may be minute but a significant order that can make a difference in the nation's work force.

For better understanding, let's examine Mathematics as a science subject. Basically, Mathematics deals with the measurement of numbers and quantities. Its importance is evident in the premium placed on it when learners are seeking admission into higher institution of learning. By implication, Mathematics remains the essential pivot around which the whole essence of living resolves. According to Mckee (2002), every new body of discovery is mathematical in nature since variables for indices like time and age must be calculated mathematically. Besides, Mathematics is concerned with symbols which can be tagged as language of science and component instrumental to analyzing scientific and technological concepts.

The phobia associated with Mathematics must be dislodged by restructuring the cognitive pattern of thinking in adults to pave way for better understanding of Mathematical concepts like factorization, simultaneous equations, word problems among others. Okoye (2006) submitted that if Mathematics achievement is not enhanced among learners using appropriate cognitive restructuring techniques, national progress and development would be adversely affected. With the knowledge of the above mentioned concepts, adult learners can conveniently enroll in higher learning to study course like Accounting, Banking, Economics, Meteorology, Mathematics among others to join the nation's economic development process.

Mcmilan (2005) affirmed that human beings are generally rationalist but they can develop irrational belief and neurotic behaviour as a result of the acceptance of biological and social forces exhibited by the people around them. Despite the fact that such behaviour are mostly irrational thoughts, they are still considered as acceptable societal norm by many people in the society. Incidentally, as one grows up, many of these thoughts are imbibed unconsciously; and this may adversely affect the psyche of the child, especially those that are prone to peer pressure influence and those that can easily accept societal beliefs.

This basically accounts for the reason why many of such children grow into adults who do not have minds of their own; but rather prefer to take order from people to perpetrate evil or join deadly terrorist group to disrupt the nation's peace and unity. As cited in Festinger (1957) by Obi-Nwosu (2019), formation of bad behaviour are consequences of cognitive dissonance and manifestation of irrational, illegal, and negative core philosophy among the people, which directly creates distorted value orientation.

When criminals are apprehended, they may likely end up in the correctional facilities which host all manners of criminals. On many occasions these criminals are compelled to attend literacy classes or vocational education classes in in correctional facilities in order to be re-absorbed into the society and live independently after their jail terms. In the course of learning or trainings, such learners will be subjected to cognitive restructuring treatment which may require the collaboration of the facilitators, prison officials and the experts from the Nigerian Psychological Association.

After completing their years of learning or training and jail terms, some of these inmates might have become experts in their various fields of vocation. Then, they are equipped with what it takes to stand and live independent lives that is devoid of criminal tendencies and acts. Better still, such individual, through their cognitive and innovative ideas may decide to join the nation's workforce to fortify and catalyze the nation's economic development which is an aspect of national development. Apart from this, such individuals have automatically brought about reduction in the number of criminals terrorizing the entire nation to pave way for peace and sanity to reign.

### **Conclusion**

Adult learners are special category of learners since they learn on most occasions on voluntary basis, unless required to participate in learning by their employers. Based on this, they don't play with their time as they want learning to take place at a faster rate. In this regard, cognitive restructuring which has been established by the paper to be an indispensable tool in releasing the creative potential, self-

awareness, initiative taking, achievement motivation, analytical ability, interpersonal skills, personal competencies of adult learners remain a viable tool in changing learners' orientation and mindset towards learning.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion of the paper, it was recommended that:

- (i) Irrespective of ownership status, whether public or privately owned, literacy centres and skill acquisition centres should create a guidance counselling unit where adult learners that are experiencing loss of confidence or self-esteem will be adequately taken care of.
- (ii) In addition to employing the services of trained guidance counselling experts, literacy and skill acquisition centres should employ the services of experienced medical personnel to carefully handle cases of health challenges in adult learners, especially those that have advanced in age.
- (iii) Facilitators must be very observant as their duties are beyond traditional classroom teaching. They should be able to detect among other adult learners those that are emotionally or psychologically disturbed in the class. After identifying those learners, facilitators should try his / her best possible to lead them to a qualified and experienced psychological therapist to handle their cases.
- (iv) Governments and all other stakeholders in the provision of adult learning should strive to create awareness to the public through jingles, radio and television programmes among others on the danger inherent in isolating the older adults while coordinators and facilitators in literacy and skill acquisition centres are also enjoined to give adequate and proper orientation to young adults on the nature of older adult and reason why they should not be isolated or rejected whenever they have contact with them.

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