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David Addae & Kofi Quan-Baffour

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THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF THE LECTURE METHOD: THE CASE OF A NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN GHANA

David Addae

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9479-6991>

University of South Africa

addaed@unisa.ac.za

Kofi Quan-Baffour

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7290-8590>

University of South Africa

quanbkp@unisa.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Adult learning rests on the foundation of learner experience and involvement in the teaching and learning process. The methods employed in facilitating adult learning have to a large extent sought to place the learner at the centre of the entire teaching and learning encounter. The lecture method is one of the many methods used to facilitate learning in many educational programmes. This article reports on a study that posed the question: *How effective is the lecture method in facilitating learning in non-formal adult education programmes?* The case study design was used for the study. The National Functional Literacy Programme of Ghana was purposively selected for this investigation. Two classes in the programme comprising 10 adult learners and one facilitator each were purposively selected as sample for the study. It was found that the lecture method was ineffective in promoting learning in non-formal adult education programmes in Ghana since it failed to stimulate the comprehension of subject-matter and learner involvement in class activities.

Keywords: constructivism; learner; lecture method; pedagogy; teaching methods.



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INTRODUCTION

Teaching adults encompasses many decisions; paramount among them are the methods to employ in facilitating learning. Teaching methods offer the educator the opportunity to help adult learners achieve the desired learning outcomes. Research into teaching methods for adult learners is not conclusive on the most effective method for teaching adults as reflected in their strengths and weaknesses (Barnes and Belvins, 2003; Maphosa and Ndebele, 2014 Morgan, Whorton and Gunsalus, 2000). It can be argued that the choice of a specific teaching method is informed by the educator's orientation, teaching style, and the nature of the content to be taught; as well as the size of the class. In spite of these factors, Theall and Franklin (2001) assert that evidence from research shows that students are the most qualified persons to report on the extent to which a learning experience was productive, informative, satisfying or worthwhile. While opinions on these matters are not direct indicators of instructor or course effectiveness, they are legitimate measures of student satisfaction; and there is enough research linking student satisfaction to effective teaching. Fry, Medsker and Bonner (1996) cited in Badu-Nyarko and Torto (2014, 226) are of the view that when selecting methods of teaching for adults, one must take into consideration "adult learning theory, which emphasises involvement, interaction, facilitation and participation". They are however quick to add that there is a need for teaching methods to fit "specific content, objectives, audience and personal preferences". This means that while learner involvement is an imperative in adult learning, educators can also consider other factors when selecting suitable teaching methods for adults.

Lecturing is one of the many methods available to the educator when deciding on appropriate teaching methods for adults. As a method of instruction, the lecture method is informed by transmission models of instruction, the prime purpose of which is to transmit knowledge to students (Quinn, 2000 in Maphosa and Ndebele, 2014, 543). However, the lecture method defies the "law of adult learning" which encourages learner participation in the entire teaching and learning encounter. As a consequence, the use of the lecture method in promoting learning among adults has been largely neglected. Many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of the lecture method to promote learning (Brockbank and McGill, 1998; Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Edlich, 1993). It is against this backdrop that this paper sought to examine the pedagogical value of the lecture method in adult learning. The study reported on set out to answer the question: *How effective is the lecture method in facilitating learning in non-formal adult education programmes?* As adult educators, the researchers undertook this empirical study to either confirm or refute the assumption that the lecture method is as effective as any other method of teaching adults.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by the constructivist theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky (1962). According to Brooks and Brooks (1993, vii), “constructivism is not a theory about teaching...it is a theory about knowledge and learning... the theory defines knowledge as temporary, developmental, socially and culturally mediated, and thus, non-objective”. The theory is premised on the assumption that learners have to construct their own knowledge – individually and collectively. Each learner has a toolkit of concepts and skills with which he or she must construct knowledge to solve problems presented by the environment. This means that the methods employed to teaching adult learners should ideally help learners to construct meaning from varied information and stimuli presented to them; starting with the question of how knowledge is constructed by individuals. Driver et al. (1994, 7) posit that knowledge in the constructivist sense is “constructed when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems or tasks. Making meaning is thus a dialogic process involving persons-in-conversation, and learning is seen as a process where individuals are introduced to a culture by more skilled members”. As such a teaching method used in adult non-formal learning should encourage maximum interaction between learners where knowledge is not the preserve of the teacher but is socially constructed. In support of this view, Candy (1991, 275) asserts that

becoming knowledgeable involves acquiring the symbolic meaning structures appropriate to one’s society, and since knowledge is socially constructed, individual members of society may be able to add to or change the general pool of knowledge. Teaching and learning, especially for adults, is a process of negotiation, involving construction and exchange of personally relevant and viable meanings.

The adult educator’s task is therefore to create a learning environment which encourages the individual knowledge construction and autonomy of learners in meaning-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW – LECTURE METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

The term “lecture” derives from the Medieval Latin word *lectus* which means to read aloud (Brown, 1987 in Kaur, 2011, 9). According to Hafezimoghadam et al. (2013, 60), “lecturing is one of the primitive and maybe the oldest method of teaching, and it is currently the most conventional educational technique”. Buttressing the contention of Hafezimoghadam et al. (2013) and commenting on the place of the lecture method in higher education, McKeachie and Svinicki (2006, 57) indicate that “the lecture is probably the oldest teaching method and still the method most widely used in universities throughout the world”. Davis (2009, 148) contends that “the classroom lecture is a special form of communication in which voice, gesture, movement, facial expression, and eye contact can either complement or detract from the content”. A lecture has been

defined as a narrative technique of delivering verbally a body of knowledge according to a pre-prepared scheme of action (International Dictionary of Education, 1991 in Rahman et al., 2011, 85). A lecture can also be defined as an oral presentation of information to an audience. According to Walker (2003) cited in Rahman et al. (2011, 86), the lecture method is premised on certain psychological principles. These are:

- The learner should meaningfully react to the stimuli of the teacher's teaching so that learning takes place.
- The teacher should be aware of the needs of the learner.
- Since the attention span of students is not so long, the teacher should keep up their interest by injecting humorous comments, modulating his or her voice, and summarising the topic.
- The teacher should have a realistic idea of his or her own teaching ability and the learning capacities of the students. Learning outcomes are essential for growth and progress in the lecturing process.
- As it is an auditory medium, the concept is converted into mental pictures by the students and then understood. The teacher should take time to build these mental pictures by connecting the new concepts with the known and moving from simple to difficult ideas, banking on his or her communication ability.
- The teacher uses an understandable language; and it depends on factors such as difficulty level of vocabulary, right examples, fluency, pronunciation of words, rate of speaking and so forth.
- The lecture method can be an effective method of instruction due to its versatility. It is virtually limitless in application, either to the situation or subject matter or to student age and learning ability. At the same time, it can be one of the least effective methods if improperly used. The lecture method is more effective when visual aids, models, or some form of group participation is used. Similarly the lecture along with learning material method, when properly used, can develop in the students' higher learning skills. It can give the students increased capability for generalisation and transfer, a sense of the relevance of learning, and the ability to analyse, synthesise and apply what is learned.

The various principles indicated by Walker are supposed to serve as a guide to the teacher on how to use the lecture method in the teaching and learning encounter.

Maphosa and Ndebele (2014) provide an account of the role of the teacher and the learner when the lecture method is employed in the classroom. According to Maphosa and Ndebele (2014, 543), "the lecturer is active and responsible for the transmission of a specified body of knowledge while students are active receivers of knowledge. Students' understanding of internalised knowledge is judged by their internalising of the learnt content". In this method the teacher is seen as a sole repository of knowledge and through oral presentation he or she is able to transmit such knowledge to learners. Maphosa and

Kalenga (2012) cited in Maphosa and Ndebele (2014, 543-544) contend that “to this end, assessment methods consistent with the transmission methods encourage students to cram what is learnt”. The observation by Maphosa and Kalenga about the lecture as a method of teaching raises a number of concerns for adult educators. Adult learning is premised among other things on the element of active participation of learners in the teaching and learning encounter; however, from the preceding, it can be argued that the lecture method does not promote active participation of adult learners in the teaching and learning encounter. The lecture method is not appropriate for higher levels of learning: comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation (Bloom, et al., 1956), and creativity (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001 cited in Cashin, 2010, 2). Newble and Cannon (1994) cited in Maphosa and Ndebele (2014, 544) argue that lectures are not suited in instances where the intended learning outcomes require the students’ application of knowledge and development of critical thinking skills. Ebbinghaus (1913) cited in Maphosa and Ndebele (2014, 544) also states that:

The forgetting curve argues that human beings memory retention declines with time to the extent of losing most of what is learnt in days unless the material learnt is revised. The forgetting curve shows that within the first 24 hours, adults will remember less than 50 percent of what they would have learned within an hour of learning unless they have the opportunity to reinforce and practice it during or immediately afterwards.

Furthermore, Cashin’s observation sums up the limitations of the lecture method of teaching. According to Cashin (2010, 2):

Perhaps equally limiting, in a traditional lecture, the students are mostly passive. This results in learners’ attention waning quickly. If a lecture consists solely of the teacher talking, lack of student feedback can be a big problem. An added constraint is that, while the lecturer may assume students are relatively similar in important ways (rate of learning, cognitive skills, relevant background knowledge, interest in the subject matter), students may actually differ greatly in their level of understanding.

The lecture method is opposed to the constructivist view of learning which places emphasis on the meaning making of learners. Learners should be allowed to construct meaning from the information presented to them in conjunction with their prior knowledge. However, the lecture method, which subscribes to the traditional passive view of learning, involves situations where material is delivered to students using a lecture-based format. In contrast, a more modern view of learning is constructivism, where students are expected to be active in the learning process by participating in discussion and/or collaborative activities” (Fosnot, 1989 cited in Carpenter, 2006, 14).

In spite of the many limitations of lecture as a method of teaching, it has inherent strengths. According to Cashin (2010, 1),

lectures can communicate the intrinsic interest of the subject matter, if the speaker lets his or her enthusiasm for the topic show... Lectures can show how experts in a field think, how they

approach questions, and how they try to solve a problem. A lecture can summarize scattered material, or describe latest discoveries or issues.

In a study conducted by Badu-Nyarko and Torto (2014, 230) about teaching methods preferred by part-time tertiary education students in Ghana,

students were of the view that the lecture method enabled lecturers to complete the syllabi on time taking into consideration the limited time of part-time learners. In addition, it gave extensive information on subjects taught and in the process gave students extensive knowledge and the opportunity to explore other areas of the subject. It also facilitated understanding and research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

While the study reported on sought to examine the effectiveness of the lecture method in facilitating learning among adult learners in a non-formal education programme in Ghana, its other preoccupation was to either confirm or refute the assumption that the lecture method is an effective method of teaching adults.

The study was however designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the facilitators' reasons for the choice of the lecture method in teaching the learners.
2. To examine the effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting subject matter comprehension.
3. To examine the effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting learners' participation in lessons.
4. To identify how the learners preferred to be taught.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was employed for the study. Qualitative research is a type of research that refers to an in-depth study using face-face or observation techniques to collect data from people in their natural settings (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014, 5). In this study the researchers sought to study the participants in their natural setting in order to know how effective the lecture method was in the teaching and learning encounter from the point of view of the participants. The case study research was selected as design for the study. Nisbet and Watt (1984, 72) define a case study as a specific instance that is often designed to illustrate a more general principle. An advantage of using case studies is that they recognise the complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths. By carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent something of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants. The best case studies are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations (Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1980 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, 256). In this study

the National Functional Literacy Programme (NFLP) of Ghana constituted a case for investigation. The NFLP, which is the brainchild of the Non-Formal Education Division (NFED) of the Ministry of Education, is being implemented in response to the need to eradicate illiteracy and its concomitant problems among the people in the country. In this study, two classes made up of 10 adult learners one facilitator from each class, were purposively selected from the Northern Region to make up the sample for the study. According to Palys (2008, 297), “to say one will engage in purposive sampling signifies that one sees sampling as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where, and how one does one’s research”. Therefore, in purposive sampling the research participants are selected based on their relatedness to the objectives of the study. The researchers had the opportunity to visit and observe teaching and learning in eight non-formal adult education classes in the NFLP in the study area. Two classes were then purposively selected from the eight for investigation, because the researchers observed that the facilitators constantly used the lecture method in their lessons. The purposive sampling and the eligibility to participate in the study were based on the following criteria:

- Participants should be enrolled in the National Functional Literacy Programme.
- Participants should be willing to participate in the study.
- Participants should be in a class taught by a particular facilitator.

In order to generate data from the learners, the focus-group discussion guide was used while the interview schedule was employed for the purpose of eliciting information from the facilitators. The researchers held two focus-group discussions in each of the classes. Each focus group comprised five participants. The interviews lasted for 40 minutes each. The focus group interviews focused on the reasons behind the choice of the lecture method of instruction in lessons; effectiveness of the lecture method of instruction in promoting subject-matter comprehension; effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting learners’ participation; the learners’ comprehension of subject-matter when the lecture method is employed; the learners’ participation during lecturing and how learners preferred to be taught. Thematic analysis was then employed to analyse the data generated from the data collection instruments. To take a leaf from Braun and Clarke (2006), the researchers agree that thematic analysis allows for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) emerging from data. In this study, the data was first transcribed, coded, and then grouped according the various emerging themes. The data was presented in the form of narratives reflecting the interpretations of the various participants about the phenomenon under investigation.

FINDINGS

The generated and analysed data was grouped under six main themes based on the nature of questions posed to the participants, namely: the reasons behind the choice of the lecture method of instruction in lessons; the effectiveness of the lecture method of

instruction in promoting subject matter comprehension; the effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting learners' participation; the learners' comprehension of subject matter when the lecture method is employed; the learners' participation in lessons when the lecture method is employed in lessons; and how the learners preferred to be taught.

FACILITATORS' VOICES

Reasons Behind the Choice of the Lecture Method

The researchers were interested in determining why the lecture method was employed in teaching the adult learners. During the interview it became apparent that the choice of the lecture method was mainly informed by the size of the syllabus to be covered. For instance one of the facilitators noted that: "I use the lecture method when I want to cover a lot on the topic."

This was the view of the other facilitators when quizzed on the same matter suggesting that the lecture method is the go to method when the content of the subject being taught is significantly large.

Effectiveness of the Lecture Method in Promoting Subject Matter Comprehension

Under this theme the researchers sought to find out from the facilitators about the effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting their understanding of the subject matter being taught.

Specifically, the facilitators were asked to explain the effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting learners' understanding of the content of the subject being taught. The view of one of the facilitators is presented below.

The lecture method is good when I want to cover a lot on the topic. But I don't think after my lessons learners understood what I taught them. This is because they ask me some questions as if I had not even taught them and when I ask them questions it is as if they were not in the classroom when I was teaching. I don't think the method is effective.

The other facilitator could not agree more:

That (lecture) method doesn't help me at all. Learners seem to be paying attention when I teach but after they cannot answer any question I ask them. I have to use the lecture method because we (facilitators) have to teach them (learners) many things in a short period.

The same facilitator added the following:

My learners seem not to understand the topic after I have lectured them. They look confused and can't answer correctly the question I ask them. I can say that it doesn't help my learners to understand the topic taught.

It can be deduced from the views of the facilitators that the lecture method does not facilitate learners' understanding of the subject matter.

The views expressed by the facilitators about the lecture method imply that the method is not very effective in promoting subject matter comprehension in the learners.

Effectiveness of the Lecture Method in Promoting Learners' Participation

The researcher then quizzed the facilitators about the effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting learners' participation in a lesson. Speaking on the lecture method, one facilitator noted the following:

I do all the talking when I use the lecture method. When I ask the learners whether or not they understand they all say yes. But they would not ask me questions or answer correctly the questions I ask them. To tell you the truth, the lecture method does not help the learners to be involved in the lessons I teach.

The same facilitator was quick to add that:

My learners sit and listen to me when I teach them using the lecture method. They don't ask me questions while I teach or after the lesson. To me the lecture method does not promote the participation of my learners in the lesson.

The facilitator's views on the lecture method were not peculiar to her as another facilitator retorted that:

I don't think the lecture method helps learners to participate in lessons especially for adult learners since they require interaction during the lesson. I rarely use the lecture method in the class.

Although the lecture method aims at transmitting knowledge to students (Quinn, 2000 in Maphosa and Ndebele, 2014), the views of the facilitators in this study indicate that in most cases it is ineffective in soliciting learners' participation in class activities.

LEARNERS' VOICES

Learners' Comprehension of Subject Matter when the Lecture Method Is Used in Instruction

The learners expressed mixed feelings about the method; however, their views seem to suggest that the method was not effective in promoting their understanding of the subject. One learner was of the view that:

When our facilitator lectures us, we do not have many chances to ask questions about what he has taught and he doesn't ask us many questions. So mostly we do not understand the topic well.

Another learner could not agree more:

The method does not help me to understand the topic well. All we do is to listen and ask few questions. My brother (researcher) with our background we need methods that explain issues to us in detail.

The views expressed by both facilitators and learners in this empirical study are indications that no particular teaching method is effective all the times. Thus, depending on the context, a facilitator may have to combine the lecture method with another method in order to promote active learning among adult learners. The facilitator should find out what works well for his or her learners before employing a particular method.

Learners' Participation in Lessons where the Lecture Method is Employed

The effectiveness of the lecture method in promoting learners' participation in lessons was also discussed with the learners. The participants however rated the lecture method as a method that promotes a low level of learner participation in lessons. They explained that their educators often use this method at the introductory stages of their lessons; and they often sit back and listen to them. According to them, the only time they participate in the lecture is when something is not clear and they ask questions for clarification. Specifically one learner lamented that:

We don't participate. We just listen and answer a few questions.

This view was shared by another learner when she intimated that:

The facilitator is the only one who talks. We listen and listen till the lesson is over and then after he asks us few question. I don't think that is participation.

The view of another learner is indicated below:

Our facilitator is the only one who talks during the lesson. What we do is to listen and answer some questions when she (facilitator) is done talking. I don't think we are actively involved in the lessons whenever she lectures us.

Another learner could not hide her discontent towards the lecture method:

I don't like it when my facilitator uses the lecture method in the class. This (lecture) method does not make us to participate in the lesson. We just sit and listen to the facilitator.

On the same note another learner remarked as follows:

Sometimes I even sleep in the class. The class becomes very boring when the facilitator uses the lecture method. We don't participate in the lesson.

The views of the learners led to the conclusion that the lecture method was not appropriate for promoting their participation in the lesson. The above views indicate that the lecture method is teacher-centred and undemocratic, because it denies adult learners the opportunity to express their views on what is taught to them. Adult learners in non-formal education programmes should be encouraged to participate in lessons by referring to their lived experiences to enhance learning.

How the Learners Preferred to be Taught

Under this theme the views of the adult learners with regard to their preferred method of teaching are detailed. The learners were asked by the researchers to indicate how they preferred to be taught. This question generated a lot of discussion; however the crux of the discussion centred on the desire of the learners to be actively involved in lessons. The view of one of the learners is captured below:

I think that when we should be able to ask more questions. Sometimes you will find some of us sleeping in the class. If we ask questions all the time, I don't think that will happen.

Another learner expressed the following view:

We (learners) should be allowed to also get involved in the lesson. Most of us are old and so it is difficult for us to follow what she (facilitator) talks about. I think she must also give us a chance to express ourselves.

Another learner could not agree more with this view:

We should be part of everything in the class. We can't just sit and listen when our facilitator is teaching.

By way of summary, the learners opined that they preferred teaching methods that promoted their involvement in class activities. This is in contrast to the lecture method where it was found that there was minimal or no involvement on the part of the learners in lessons taught.

DISCUSSION

It has earlier been noted that effective teaching depends to a certain extent on the appropriateness of the methods employed in the teaching and learning encounter. To this end, the researchers define effectiveness of teaching methods as the ability of teaching methods to promote learners' comprehension of subject matter and their participation in the teaching-learning encounter effectively. The definition provided took two main issues into account – subject-matter comprehension and learner participation in a lesson as the basis of the effectiveness of any teaching method. In any educational programme, every subject or module is guided by specific content which sets it apart from others.

The ability of learners to acquire subject matter content is one of the major concerns facing any teacher. In adult education there is an urgency to equip learners with specific knowledge and skills mainly due to the immediacy of their application. In order to achieve subject matter comprehension in the learners, the researchers opine that the educator needs to select appropriate teaching methods. Lecture was a teaching method employed in teaching the adult learners in the NFLP. All the facilitators who used the lecture method in their lessons confessed that the method failed to provide learners with an understanding of the content of the subject being taught. Newble and Cannon (1994) cited in Maphosa and Ndebele (2014, 544) argue that lectures are not suited in instances where the intended learning outcomes require the students' application of knowledge and the development of critical thinking skills. In the lessons observed by the researchers in which the lecture method was used, there was the need for learners to apply the knowledge they acquired. Therefore, the inability of the lecture method to help learners apply their knowledge is a major limitation of the method with regard subject matter comprehension. Despite the apparent limitations of the lecture method, the facilitators interviewed indicated that they employed the method to teach their learners mainly due to the need to cover significant parts of the content of the subjects taught. This finding is corroborated by Badu-Nyarko and Torto's (2014) study of teaching methods preferred by part-time tertiary education students in Ghana where it was found that students viewed the lecture method as enabling lecturers to complete the syllabi on time taking the limited time of part-time learners into consideration.

It also came to light during the interview sessions with the facilitators in both programmes that learners often forgot what the facilitators had taught them as evidenced in their inability to correctly respond to the questions posed to them. This finding is in line with the views of Jarvis (2010, 154) who writes that, a "lecture may not provide sufficient opportunity for the adult students to remember and internalise all the ideas presented, neither may they always have the opportunity to reflect upon the knowledge transmitted after the presentation".

During the study, both the learners and the facilitators conceded that the lecture method was ineffective in promoting learners' participation in lessons. It came to light that the learners became passive listeners and mere spectators when the lecture and demonstration methods were employed during lessons. Since the lecturer is regarded as a repository of knowledge and is tasked with transmitting such knowledge to the learners, little or no room is given for learners to participate in the teaching and learning encounter. Jarvis (2010, 154), commenting on the inherent weakness of the lecture method in promoting the participation of learners in a lesson, argues as follows:

Unless learners have an opportunity to question the lecturer, they never actually interact with the speaker. Even if they are provided with the time to raise queries, individual students may not do so because they may not wish to reveal their ignorance or to hinder the remained of the group. If a student does interrupt the speaker with questions, the rest of the class may become frustrated while they are answered. This is the dilemma that is intrinsic in the lecture method and

it appears to have no resolution that would result in effective learning from every participant. The lecturer may seek to resolve the problems by not taking any question but this may result in reduced learning efficiency.

This observation by Jarvis may be mainly due to the formalised classroom environment which comes with the lecture method. This creates a situation where classroom interaction (between teacher and learners and between learners) is minimised since such learners only receive information without actually interrogating the genuineness of the information provided. In order to sidestep this problem, the study reports that the adult learners hinted that they preferred teaching methods that solicited their participation in lessons. This buttresses the modern view of learning as constructivism where students are expected to be active in the learning process by participating in discussion and/or collaborative activities (Fosnot, 1989 cited in Carpenter, 2006). This makes active learning strategies a crucial element in the adult teaching and learning process.

CONCLUSION

Teaching adult learners is a complex undertaking which entails making several decisions about how best to promote effective learning. It has been argued that the choice of appropriate teaching methods by the educator represents an important step towards ensuring effective learning among adult learners. By their unique social, biological, and cognitive characteristics, the argument has been made that adults require different methods from those that have conventionally been used for young learners. It has been noted that the lecture method of instruction by its nature fails to promote the active participation of learners in lessons; and by so doing hinders learners' subject matter comprehension. The researchers are of the opinion that in order for the lecture method to be effective in promoting learning in adult non-formal education programmes, educators must endeavour to use the method in conjunction with other teaching methods which promote maximum interaction between the educator and learners and also among the learners themselves. For instance, while the educator employs the lecture method for promoting the acquisition of factual information amongst learners, the discussion method could also be used to help engage learners in the lesson.

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