

Evaluation of Teachers' Training Procedure and Pedagogical Skills in Adult Literacy

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Abstract

In every educational activity, role of teachers is very unique and pivotal in its successful completion. Teachers of adult literacy programmes also require very special training in order to cope up group of learners having diverse backgrounds and experiences. The present study was conducted to evaluate the procedure of teachers' training in adult literacy programmes and to critically examine the content of teachers' training workshops in Pakistan. Following research questions were also formed to guide the study. What is the procedure of teachers' training in adult literacy programmes? And what is the specified content relevant to the professional skills required for an adult literacy teachers? Sample of the study comprised of 33 adult literacy teachers. The data were collected through specially designed interview schedule comprising two sections; one about the procedure of training workshop and the other about the specified content of training manual. Data of the study were analyzed through constant comparison method. The study revealed that the duration of teachers' training workshops was very short; the teachers did not know about the techniques of classroom management; teachers did not know how to make classroom environment conducive for learners; and the content of training manual was not prepared carefully in the perspectives of professional skill needed to prepare good adult literacy teachers. It was recommended that duration of teachers training workshops may prolong; micro teaching techniques may be applied in training sessions; and topic relevant to the professional skills of teachers of adults (andragogy) may be introduced in teachers' training manuals.

Key words: Adult literacy, Teachers' training, Professional skills, learning environment, workshops.

Introduction

Quality education is the universal objective of educational programme. Quality education mainly depends upon the quality of instructional activity in the classroom setting. Instructional process of education can be evaluated on the basis on quality indicators such as classroom participation, conducive learning environment, individual attention given to the students, classroom facilities, method of instruction, content to be taught, activities, use of audio visual aids, seating arrangement, facilities of water, lavatories, air etc., students' attendance, dropout rate, number of qualified teachers, teachers student ratio, and students performance etc. In adult basic education programmes which are specifically designed for adult illiterates also have the same objective to achieve. Without fulfilling this objective, an observable change in the lives of adult illiterates can not be expected. Adult literacy programmes are generally focus on basic learning skills of reading, writing, numeracy and some income generating skills to some extent. The instructional process of adult literacy programmes is quite different from the instructional process of educational programmes of general education in schools, colleges and universities. In adult literacy programmes learners are illiterates, adults, experienced, self motivated, target oriented, rigid, person who know all, self conscious, etc. Their preference to learn is also quite different from the learners of formal education programmes and hence special training needed to be provided to adult literacy teachers in order to run adult literacy programmes successfully. Present study is designed to evaluate the procedure of teachers' training of adult literacy programmes in Pakistan. Researcher thinks it necessary to highlight concept of adult learning and andragogical application to bring broader understanding of the uniqueness of professional teachers that adult literacy programmes may have.

Characteristics of Good Teachers

According to (Fletcher, 2009), pedagogical problems in our cities are not chiefly matters of injustice, inequality, or segregation, but of insufficient information about teaching strategies.

If we could simply learn “what works” in [the classroom of an exemplary teacher], we’d then be in a position to repeat this . . . in every other system (Kozol, 1991, p. 128). There are many attributes and qualities that contribute to the description of excellent teachers. In addition to this, excellent teachers possess a unique understanding of teaching and learning that allows them to methodologically create spaces that promote academic success. The combination of these characteristics that excellent practitioners use is endless. Perhaps most important to this combination are the knowledge and skills needed to understand when particular combinations are warranted in order to increase achievement. According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom, there are behaviors and techniques that constantly emerge in any examination of excellent teaching. Thernstrom and Thernstrom argue that there are 9 basic characteristics of excellent teaching: (a) good prior academic performance, (b) communication skills, (c) creativity, (d) professionalism, (e) pedagogical knowledge, (f) thorough and appropriate student evaluation assessment, (g) self-development or lifelong learning, (h) personality, talent, or content area knowledge and (i) the ability to model concepts in their content area. While the aforementioned list of excellent teacher qualities is comprehensive, these traits are not exhibited in a systematic order or in a particular combination (2003).

Good Teachers of Literacy

(Moje, 1996, p. 175) defines literacy rather broadly. She used her definition as a construct for the teaching and learning of literacy. Literacy as she defined it was more than reading, writing, speaking, and listening; literacy involved the practices in which these processes were embedded. Based on this socio-cultural perspective, she defined reading and writing, speaking, and listening as tools for engaging in and making sense of social practices. The literature on excellent teachers helped to identify what these teachers actually did, what their classrooms looked like, what strategies they employed, and how their philosophy of education and teaching and learning affected their responsibilities as practitioners. Many researchers have identified characteristics that were indicative of excellent teachers of reading (Needles & Gage, 1991; Pressley, 1989). Hoffman found that effective or excellent teachers focused on academics, had high numbers of pupils on task, and provided direct instruction that included making learning goals clear, asking students questions as part of monitoring their understanding of what was being covered, and providing feedback to students about their academic progress (1991).

In short, effective teachers provide opportunities for students to learn, have well organized learning environments, understand the content being taught, foster high levels of interaction between teachers and pupils, generate engaging activities, introduce tasks and subject matter enthusiastically, have high expectations, encourage student self regulation, and have excellent classroom management (Pressley, 2004). Literacy practices in urban schools varied widely. Research conducted in these central city schools supported this assertion. Some urban school districts had opted to employ the direct instruction (DI) approach; some had chosen to purchase reading reform programs ; while others had decided to use trade books and leveled readers (Iver & Kemper, 2002). Although most of the approaches mentioned had rendered similar results, in that students of color and urban learners were still well behind their suburban area counterparts, these strategies failed to address immediate concerns present in urban area reading classrooms. Like most supporters of critical literacy, (Tatum, 2000) called for “curriculum that treats reality as something to be questioned and analyzed” with “opportunities for developing strategies and hope for overcoming barriers to economic success in the mainstream.” (Ruddell, 2006) had designed instructional principles aimed at increasing awareness among practitioners, policy makers, and administrators.

The principles had been crafted to direct attention toward our responsibility to create learning environments for diverse learners (Ruddell, 2006). Ruddell presented principles that support literacy instruction for diverse learners: (a) students do not come from inferior cultures, nor do they suffer from language deficits; instead, they may possess a culture, dialect, and language that vary from your own; (b) children’s acquisition of language and literacy abilities is meaning-based as well as developmental and is best facilitated by interactive meaning construction activities; (c) it is important to learn as much as possible about your students’ homes, communities, languages, and cultural backgrounds so that you can incorporate this knowledge into instructional content and interactions in the classroom; (d) it is important to create a context-rich, interactive, supportive classroom environment for language exploration and use; (e) creating a low-anxiety, low-risk language learning setting (low affective filter) is also important; (f) you can help children develop social language skills that facilitate literacy interactions both in and out of school; (g) you must also help them develop academic and content-based literacy skills; (h) you need to provide instructional opportunities in language use that will encourage risk-taking and will develop the understanding that individuals learn from their mistakes as they acquire a new language; (i) you need to help children build positive self-concepts by providing frequent academic and social opportunities for interactive meaning-based language use; and

(j) the same learning principles are at work in all children, e.g., children with all languages and from all cultures as active theory builders and hypothesis testers. They are motivated to make sense of their world. Their language acquisition is greatly enhanced through active participation in meaning construction with their peers, teachers, and other individuals in their school and community (Ruddell, 2006). Ruddell's principles challenge all teachers to evolve into effective practitioners. (Howard, 2002) calls this "establishing culturally connected and caring relationships with students." These eight principles abandon the notion of the deficit model (Ogbu, 1994/1995). Existing literature surrounding effective literacy in urban schools is sparse. Although studies exist, very few studies focus on instructional strategies and best practices in urban schools. These principles can be successfully applied to adult literacy programme easily.

Research Questions

Following research questions were framed to seek their satisfactory answers;

1. What is the procedure of teachers' training in adult literacy programmes?
2. What is the specified content relevant to the professional skills required for an adult literacy teachers?

Methodology

The population of the study was adult literacy teachers of district Rawalpindi. The sample comprised of 33 literacy teachers. Systematic random sampling techniques were applied to select the respondents of this study. Four Tehsils (sub-divisions) (Pothohar Town, Kohuta, Gojar Khan and Kotli Sattian) were targeted to select 33 literacy teachers.

Research Tools

An interview schedule as research tool was constructed to collect data. It was developed and tested on pilot basis. The results of pilot testing were shared with organizers and managers of adult literacy programmes in the district. After getting their suggestions, these were incorporated and research tools were finalized. Interview schedule for teachers was designed on the basis of quality indicators of teaching (duration of training workshops, content of literacy workshops [clarifying the objectives of literacy programmes to the learners, plan of daily lesson, use different methods of teaching basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy skills] peer group activities, question answering in class, provision of feedback, making learning environment conducive, motivational techniques, paying individual attention, manage proper seating arrangement, respecting learners' views, integration of learning to the experiences of learners, motivating learners to apply newly learned skills in everyday life, nature of autonomy for learners to decide and choose, importance of adults' prior knowledge about learning activity etc. In interview schedule from teachers, the data were recorded on tape. The teachers were identified with the help of District Literacy Officers (DLOs) and in-charge of local Non-government Organizations (NGOs) and they were requested to spare their time for interview. The interview schedule was arranged with the help of female research assistants from the same community. Each of the interview schedules lasted for 50 to 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Based on both tape recordings and verbatim transcript, data of interview schedule were sorted, coded and then categorized accordingly. For this purpose, a thematic matrix consisting of major categories of professional skills of teachers (Presentation of content, Healthy interaction between students and teachers, Learner centered approaches, Assessment and evaluation techniques, content of training workshops, duration of training and Classroom management skills) were drawn up using the themes and sub-themes. Serial numbers for individual respondents were entered at the side of the chart of categories. The data from the transcript were then transferred onto the chart under the appropriate headings and against the serial number for the particular respondents. It was also validated through tape recording of interviews. Each of the statement was compared with all others statements of the respondents.

Findings and Conclusions

Findings of the data were following:

Saleema, a literacy teacher said,

"They learnt how to teach alphabets, (words), making simple sentences, counting, and solving simple sums of addition, subtraction; multiplication and division through look and say method in 05 days normally. When they started teaching in literacy centres, they faced many problems because the adult female learners were not submissive; the learners usually pointed out many defects of our teaching, they did not like to do work like children, they argued many times, those who were quick learners wanted to teach other fellows like a teacher. They were unable to handle the situation, had learnt to teach three books in very short time, they were already aware of the content but they could not learn how to teach this effectively".

1. It was easily concluded that, the teachers were not told about the difference of children and adult as learners, they were not trained how to involve adult learners in the class, they learnt how to teach learners by look and say method, the teachers were not trained in using peer group learning techniques which proved successful in adult education programmes and they were not trained about classroom management skills.

Another teachers (Shamim) like most of other reported that;

“In training workshops, they were practicing how to teach alphabets only, whereas in literacy classes they did not face any problem in teaching alphabets, the real problems for them were to motivate adult learners in the class, continuously, the learners were leaving the centres, they did not take any interest in learning basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy skills and teachers did not know what to do? Mostly, the learners raising many questions regarding their benefits to learn basic skills of literacy and teachers could not satisfy them in the absence of income generating skills as component of basic literacy”

2- It can easily be concluded that the trainers did not train literacy teachers how to motivate adult learners, who to respond to their questions and who to integrate their present learning to their everyday skills needed to live a more comfortable life. The teachers were not trained in different methods of teaching that can be used in adult literacy programmes easily like question answering techniques or peer group activities. The duration of training workshops was too short to train an adult female teacher having secondary school education. It can also be concluded that income generating skills were preferences of adult learners to learn in literacy classes.

One the respondent, Ms Naeema said:

“Teacher did not respond to our questions and they did not tell us how the learners proceeded in the class? Our teachers were teaching content for single time and they did not teach us if some one was on leave. Our teachers were giving favor to their relatives and friends instead of equal attention to all of us”

3- It was therefore, concluded that, in training workshops literacy teachers were not trained how to respond to the questions of the learners and evaluation techniques. The teachers were not train to make the learning environment conducive for all. Teachers were not trained to behave equally because the adult learners have well developed self concept.

Another literacy teacher representing majority of her colleagues, Ms Rozina said:

“Teachers were treating us like children, they were insulting us as slow learners, teacher did not accept our suggestions and they negated our previous experiences and learning”

4- It was concluded that adult literacy teachers were not trained to treat adult learners respectfully. Trainers did not discussed unique psychology of adult learners with teachers and did not asked teachers to deal with adult learners as experienced, self motivated, target oriented, profit seeking and very talkative learners.

Research Question No. 1

What is the procedure of teachers’ training in adult literacy programmes?

The data revealed the fact that in teachers training workshops of 03 to 05 days, the trainers tried to train teachers how to teach alphabets to the learners through look and say method. Teachers did not learn any other method of teaching basic skills of literacy to the learners. The duration of training workshop was too short to train good adult literacy teachers. The teachers have only books they were supposed to teach in adult literacy classes, they did not have any manual of training. Only papers & pencils were provided to them. They were not trained how to prepare audio visual aids to teach adult learners? They were not trained how to arrange activities in the class? They did not get any training of develop tests and monitor the progress of learning in the centres.

Research Question No. 2

What is the specified content relevant to the professional skills required for an adult literacy teachers?

Adult literacy teachers were not aware about the psychology of adult learners which may become necessary component of teachers training. The content of adult literacy teachers training workshop was only the specified books of reading, writing and numeracy skills. The content relevant to the professional skills like, ability to apply different teaching methods, build up healthy interaction in the class, using question answering techniques to evaluate understanding level of learners, active involvement of learners, classroom management skills, lesson planning, psychology of adult learners, learning preferences of adults, building good rapport with learners, etc were missing components of teachers training workshops.

Suggestions

On the basis of findings and conclusions, following recommendations were made:

- 1- Before conducting teachers training workshops of adult literacy, manuals of training may be developed having topics relevant to the professional skills needed for adult literacy teachers to teach in literacy classes.
- 2- Adult literacy teachers may be trained in using different methods like peer tutoring, learning through activities, etc.
- 3- Adult literacy teachers may be trained how to deal with adults keeping in mind the psychology of adult learners. The teachers may be told about the difference of children and adults as learners.
- 4- Adult literacy teachers may be trained how to deal with adults keeping in mind the psychology of adult learners. The teachers may be told about the difference of children and adults as learners.

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