

Linking Positive Psychological Functioning to Adult Learners' Learning Style in English Language

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Abstract

Every learner has distinct positive psychological traits that often align with specific learning styles for learning to take place with minimal efforts and at an accelerated pace. Sequel to this, the paper attempts to link positive psychological functioning to adult learners' styles in English language. In order to achieve this, the paper discussed positive psychological functioning, adult learners and learning styles under conceptual clarifications. Types of learning styles are also extensively discussed. Finally and most importantly, each positive psychological functioning attribute is linked to its appropriate learning styles in English language with relevant instances. Based on the conclusion of the paper, it was recommended that facilitators are potential psychologists and as such, they should have in-depth understanding of the problems and background of every learner in their domain. This will go a long way to create a balance between the psychological traits inherent in the learners and the learning styles adopted by the learners.

Keywords: adult, learners, English, language, learning, styles

Introduction

Learning process requires careful and systematic approach devoid of any sort of disruption. In order to achieve learning, learner's state of mind must be in perfect condition while his/her physical and mental health status must as well be in perfect order. Positive psychological functioning which happens to be an important element in the achievement of adult learning sometimes manifests itself in the way and manner adults learn. Maslow's conception of self-actualization, Allport's conception of maturity and Roger's view of fully functioning person are a collection of theoretical literature that have extensively discussed positive psychological functioning in relation to learning.

As a matter of fact, positive psychological functioning plays an important role in determining the learning styles of adult learners in many core subjects including English language. Cassidy (2004) submitted that there is a general acceptance that the manner in which individuals choose to or are inclined to approach a learning situation has an impact on performance and achievement of learning outcomes. Apart from the fact that English language is a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, it is believed that a good knowledge of the different skills of English language will enhance effective learning of all the other subjects that are taught with the language in the Nigerian educational system (Ogunsola, 2012).

Besides, success in English language is very important to any adult learner that wishes to gain admission and succeed in the different levels of education, especially the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. This is because a minimum of a credit pass in English language is compulsory and considered a strong requirement for admission into Nigerian higher institutions.

Conceptual clarifications

Positive Psychological Functioning

The term positive psychological functioning presents a stable frame of mind devoid of emotional disturbances that could impede the proper functioning of the entire body. It could be regarded as the presence of wellness in humans since it serves as a major factor that influences the pattern of behaviour exhibited by individuals in their various locality. Positive psychological functioning is about lives going well. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), it is conceptualized as a combination of positive affective states such as happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life.

It is pertinent to note that individuals who are characterized by positive psychological functioning may experience feeling of goodness, feeling of happiness, feeling of contentment and that of satisfaction. Huppert (2009) reported that the consequences of positive psychological functioning include better physical health; mediated possibly by brain activation patterns, neurochemical effects and genetic factors.

Positive psychological functioning is evident in the exhibition of some characteristics. The characteristics, according to Ryff (1995), in Bakare 2014, are discussed as follows:

(i) Positive relations with others: This dimension or characteristics of positive psychological functioning describes individuals having good interpersonal relationship with people in their immediate environment. Besides, these individuals are often characterized by strong feelings of affection, love, empathy and ability to make and sustain friendship; coupled with greater sense of identification with others.

(ii) Purpose in life: This characteristic emphasized beliefs that equip individuals with the understanding that life is meaningful and purposeful. Individuals who have purpose in life often display great sense of directedness and intentionality tailored toward attainment of self-fulfillment. More so, such individuals are privy to changes arising as a

result of changes in goals, intentions and directions which are pointers to meaningful and purposeful living.

(iii) Personal growth: This characteristic emphasized ability to discover oneself and also to continue to develop one's potentials and talents for actualizing one's social, political and economic development. The need to actualize oneself is central to self fulfilment; and it is also an indicator of happiness and life satisfaction which are major indices of positive psychological functioning.

(iv) Autonomy: This attribute of positive psychological functioning offers individuals immeasurable confidence, self-determination and independence which make them take decision and stand by the consequences of the decisions made regardless of their magnitude. Individuals who exhibit this characteristic do not look up to others for approval; rather they evaluate themselves based on the set personal standards.

(v) Self-acceptance: The realization of this characteristic rests on self-actualization, optimal functioning and maturity. Individuals who possess this characteristic often accept everything about themselves. They accept their past and present lifestyles without showing any iota of regret and remorsefulness.

(vi) Environmental mastery: This characteristic emphasizes in-depth knowledge of one's environment. Apart from this, environmental mastery equips one with the ability to manipulate and control complex environment to suit their own pattern of living. Individuals who demonstrate environmental mastery are endowed with the ability to manipulate things around them through physical and mental activities.

Adult learners

Achievement of successful adult learning is premised on the extent to which the interest and needs of the adult learners are met. The way and manner adults approach learning situation is quite different from the learning approach adopted by children. Due to the roles played by adults in their family and in their immediate community, they have zero tolerance for time and resources wasting; hence they want to learn subject matters that will offer them immediate benefits in the pursuit of their social, economic and political development. Folajin, Adeyemo and Kuye (2014) argued that the desire for self-actualization is the ultimate goal of some adult learners.

Adult learners refer to individuals whose age and biological state require an expected form of behaviour and a set of social roles after undergoing a particular training over a period of time. Ideally, adult learners are mature, knowledgeable as they must have gained life experiences which often set the pace for learning. They are always very objective in their learning, hence they apply their knowledge to learning with the view that the knowledge they gain afterwards will help them progress in their various fields. According to Knowle in Swanson and Holton (2005), adult learners are those that want to know why they need to learn something before undertaking learning.

Adult learners undertake educational activities with different experiences; hence, there are individual differences in their background, learning style, motivation, needs, interest and goals which create greater need for individualization of teaching and learning

strategies (Silberman & Auerbach, 1998). Consequently, McKeachie (2002) argued that the richest resources for learning reside in adults themselves; therefore tapping into their experiences through experimental techniques like discussion, simulation, problem solving activities, or case method is beneficial.

Learning Style

Learning styles have been described as a sub-set of a much wider range of individual differences affecting the process of learning (Mariani, 1995). Variable like age, aptitude, motivation, intelligence, sensory preferences and socio-cultural conditions are all examples of other important factors influencing the way learners react to classroom instruction. Learning styles are learner's general approach to learning, his or her typical and consistent way of reacting to learning task.

Learning styles are often less concerned about what the learners learn, but rather how they prefer to learn; thus it is described as a learner's consistent way of responding to processing and making use of stimuli in the course of learning. According to Novin, Arjomand and Jourdan (2003), learning style implies that learners learn in different ways; some grasp information best by listening, while others learn better through reading, reasoning, or discovering concepts through experience.

Learning styles are learners' centered because they are different approaches or ways of learning that are peculiar to each learner. Coffield, Moseley, Hall and Ecclestone (2004) affirmed that learners need to be conscious and not denied of the use of their learning style because it can be used to increase their attitude towards learning as well as create self-awareness concerning their strength and weakness as learners.

Learning styles determine how learners process information and this also determines how they interpret it. Hayes and Allison (2004) submitted that assessing, measuring and incorporating teaching and learning styles into classroom interaction and discussion can improve learning and attitude in any field. It is worthy of note that when learners see the implications of their own and other's learning styles, this understanding will help them build better working relationship between individuals, and create functioning team within the class.

Types of learning styles

According to Lane (2008), learning styles were derived from Howard Gardner's 1960s theory of multiple intelligence which stated that we are all able to know the world through language, logical mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, the use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an understanding of other individuals, and understanding of ourselves.

For clarification and better understanding of learning styles, Lane (2008) further highlighted and discussed types of learning styles as follows:

(i) Personal learning style: This type of learning style affords learners the opportunity to either depend on people around them or work without depending on anyone. Personal learning style is further divided into two

(a) Interpersonal learning style: Learners who exhibit this type of learning style prefer to work in groups. According to Gardner (1993), interpersonal intelligence builds on a core capacity to notice distinction among others in particular, contrast in their moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions. Apart from the fact that they love working in groups, they also empathize with others and share in their feelings.

(b) Intrapersonal learning style: Learners in this group perform best when they are left to work alone; they are solitary learners that often show their interest in psychology, philosophy and theology due to their endowment in immeasurable confidence and proficiency in self-reflection.

(ii) Sensory learning style: This category of learning style places premium on the use of senses. Sensory learning styles is further divided into three:

(a) Spatial/visual learners: Learners in spatial/visual category love to work with colours. Mantle (2001) argued that spatial/visual learners are good at working with colours and pictures and using the “mind’s eye”. This form of learning style equips learners with the ability and skills to visualize an object from different angles.

(b) Auditory/Musical learning style: Learners who exhibit auditory/musical learning style receive information through their sensitivity to rhythm and sound. According to Vital (2002), learners in this category have the capacity to discern pitch, rhythm, timber and tone. Auditory/musical learners give immediate response to any music in their vicinity and they tend to be more in tune with nature sounds, and the sounds in their environment than other learners (Gilam, 2001).

(c) Kinesthetic learning style: Learners in this category are naturally endowed with massive energy which they display when carrying out their educational activities. Mantle (2001) maintained that many of the kinesthetic learners are often misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder, usually because they often have more energy than other learners. Kinesthetic learners receive information through their body and touch; hence, they are always physical in their approach to learning. Most often, they combine theory and practical together before arriving at their conclusion.

(iii) Information learning style: This learning style focuses on how the brain processes information. The emphasis is whether the information to be processed is in the form of language or data. The unique characteristic of learners in this category is that they do not depend on the senses and their social surroundings. This learning style is divided into two:

(a) Linguistic learning style: Learners in this group are also regarded as verbal learners. They work best with words by memorizing information through language use. Gardner (1993) submitted that the linguistic intelligence is active when individuals encounter the sounds of a language or when they wish to communicate something verbally to another person.

(b) Mathematical learning style: Learners under the category learn best when working with numbers, structures or when there is room for thinking. Mantle (2001) affirmed that

these learners make the best engineers and work by categorizing and classifying abstract patterns or relationship.

Positive psychological functioning and adult learners' style in English language

Over the years, English language has proved to be the language of the privileged educated Nigerians. Besides, it has played a vital role in the development of the nation. Ugwuanyi and Anifowoshe (2013) submitted that English language serves as the tool through which information, social, political and economics are being transmitted to the people in Nigeria.

A close look at the roles played by English language demands that necessary attention should be accorded the subject in order to for it to achieve its set objectives. At this juncture, it is worthy of note that many factors including positive psychological functioning and learning styles must come to play. Therefore, successful learning of English language by adults requires a perfect blend of various dimensions of positive psychological functioning and arrays of adult learners' learning styles. Hence, the link between dimensions of positive psychological functioning and adult learners' learning style are highlighted and discussed as follows:

(i) Self-acceptance and adults' learning style: Adult learners that are endowed with self-acceptance are known to display high sense of maturity, great sense of self-actualization and optimal functioning in educational activities. The aforementioned unique features are significant indicators of good mental health which happens to be a pre-requisite of achieving optimal learning.

Self-acceptance as an attribute of positive psychological functioning will go well with adult learners that exhibit inter-personal learning style. Due to the fact that these learners are having positive attitude towards the accomplishment of the task at hand, they can easily come together to form a discussion group to trash issues bordering on verbal reasoning, argumentative essay and other related issues. Nwachukwu, Nwizu and Egwuekwe (2020) posited that group discussion allows for free flow of orderly exchange of ideas.

Learners that make use of interpersonal learning style are often given the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with the view of finding solutions to particular problems. However, Nwachukwu, Nwizu and Egwuekwe (2020) further clarified that group discussion is best carried out when working with small group of learners.

(ii) Autonomy and adults' learning style: Learners who exhibit this positive psychological functioning show great determination in all their dealings. They do not depend on people around them for any assistance and their decisions are often regulated within them. This dimension of positive psychological functioning will perfectly match intra-personal learning style which emphasizes solitary learning. Adult learners in this group do not look up to others for approval as they evaluate themselves based on the standards they set personally for themselves. More so, they are very good at discovering new things since they have innate urge to apply their own thoughts and ideas to arrive at new facts, values and viable results.

Learners that are characterized by intra-personal learning style and autonomous nature are likely to perform well in composition writing and writing of literature books since they can always reason or think to arrive at fiction stories that have their originality intact. According to Ryff (1995), solitary learning which involves individualization is perceived as a deliverance from convention, in which a person no longer clings to the collective fears, beliefs and law of the masses.

(iii) Environmental mastery and adults' learning style: Environmental mastery offers individuals the ability to choose or create environment suitable for his or her psychic conditions and general lifestyle. This positive psychological function matches spatial/visual learning which emphasizes that learners love to work with colours. Learners who possess environmental mastery and spatial/visual learning style can easily manipulate their environment by creating visual effects in form of drawings and pictures. Also they are very good at map reading and visualizing objects from different perspectives. Consequently, learners in this category learn best when facilitator compliments theoretical work with catchy pictures, posters, charts, graphs and other colourful learning materials that appeal to the eye. Without any element of doubt, this category of learners will excel in writing children's story books having fascinating pictures that can easily arouse the interest of the children.

(iv) Self-concept/self-esteem and adults' learning style: Self-concept refers to feelings and thoughts one has about him or herself. Learners with positive self-concept are always very confident in their decisions and competences. Such learners are bold, hence, they voice their opinion and express themselves without any difficulty. In contrast, learners with negative self-concept tend to be timid and they avoid expressing themselves due to the fear of criticism (Adedigba, Obafemi & Musa, 2018). Self-esteem is the assessment or evaluation of oneself. Masher (2004) submitted that self-esteem is a sense of self, the value one puts on self and the worth one attaches to self. For clarification and better understanding, Baumeister, Campbell, Knierger and Vohs (2003) categorized self-esteem into two distinct types which are low and high self-esteem.

Adult learners who possess positive self-concept and self-esteem are likely to be energetic in nature. This distinct characteristic often manifests in the way and manner they display their energy; especially during discussion or when demonstrating a particular concept to other learners. This category of learners may likely adopt inter-personal learning style or kinaesthetic learning style that affords learners the opportunity to throw around their energy. In addition, such learners may also be good at verbal argumentative contests, quiz and other subject matters that afford them the opportunity to display their talents.

(v) Life satisfaction/Personal growth and adults' learning style: Life satisfaction presents a situation whereby a learner evaluates his or her present and past conditions. It could also be described as having positive attitude towards one's life. Adedigba, Obafemi and Musa (2018) described life satisfaction as the way a person perceives his/her life presently and how he/she perceives it in the future.

Since this dimension of positive psychological functioning affords learners the opportunity to evaluate himself/herself based on present, past events and future

expectations, positive steps can be taken to correct the mistakes made in the past. More importantly, life satisfaction/personal growth describes a situation whereby one continues to develop his/her potential and expand as a person in addition to the basic characteristics earlier achieved. It is pertinent to note that the need to actualize oneself and realize one's potentials is hinged on life satisfaction/personal growth.

Learners who are characterized by life satisfaction/personal growth have potentials to expand their coast; they are likely to fall into the categories of inter-personal and kinaesthetic learning styles due to their zeal for building friendship, engaging in discussion and interactive sessions and ability to exert a lot of energy within and outside their immediate environment. Such learner may stumble on a comprehension or summary passage that requires logical reasoning before arriving at the correct answers. He or she may decide to find answers to the passage without considering the amount of time and energy expended on such exercise.

Conclusion

Positive psychological functioning plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process. Its dimensions or attributes which include self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-concept, personal growth, environmental mastery and a host of others are linked to different learning styles to actualize optimal learning in English language. Better still, learners may adopt a combination of learning styles in the course of learning depending on his/her psychological stance and the subject matter to learn.

Recommendations

- i. Facilitators are potential psychologists and as such, they must have in-depth understanding of the problems and background of every learner within their domain. This will go a long way to help them create a balance between the psychological traits inherent in the learners and the learning styles adopted by the learners.
- ii. In order to avoid mismatch between the content to learn, psychological traits and the learners' style of learning, facilitators should play the role of a counsellor to the learners especially when they are emotionally stressed. This gesture will help to boost learners' morale, hence, assimilation of subject matter is assured.
- iii. Considering the significance of psychology, facilitators should go for further studies in psychology of human learning in order to broaden their knowledge about human learning and the general existence of humans. This will help to acquaint the facilitators with human nature and the best possible ways to achieve learning.

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